# From Face to Facebook: Levinas's Radical Ethics and "Shakespeare Friends"

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## Abstract

In this essay, I employ Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy to examine intersubjectivity in social media and to reflect on the Facebook group "Shakespeare Friends," which I created and administer. Levinas's "face-to-face" theory provides a radical way of thinking about ethics in social media and mediated communication, one that points to their transformative effects while avoiding the now commonplace notions that social media and other computer technologies are either entirely liberating our identities and relationships or completely eroding them. Levinas's theory of communication (the "saying" over the "said") relies on his concept of "substitution" and "proximity" between people, which may be — and has been — applied to analyses of online as well as offline relationships. This theory, I contend, is especially relevant to social media like Facebook, as evidenced in the exchanges on "Shakespeare Friends." I employ Levinas's radical ethics to analyze the group "Shakespeare Friends" as a kind of "walled garden," a community with its own boundaries and dynamics — a "networked public." Levinas's theory seems especially relevant to this group, as many, including Levinas himself, have seen his ethics as deeply implicated in Shakespeare's texts and appropriations of them. Using current social media theory to study the functions and affordances of social media sites in general, Facebook in particular, I focus on "spreadability" and "coaxed affordances," which allow for this active interaction. I observe that "Shakespeare Friends" upsets traditional hierarchies and barriers and crosses geographical boundaries, making it possible for members to exchange ideas with fellow Shakespeare scholars, educators, and practitioners all over the world. In effect, the group is a virtual microcosm of the global nature of contemporary Shakespeare studies, a supportive means of exchange between Shakespearean scholars, educators, or practitioners in theatre or other arts.

*Why does the other concern me? What is Hecuba to me? Am I my brother's keeper? These questions have meaning only if one has already supposed that the ego is concerned only with itself, is only a concern for itself. — Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*

I created the Facebook group "Shakespeare Friends" by mistake — a happy mistake, it turns out — but a mistake nevertheless.[1] I had just recently joined Facebook, after vehemently opposing all social networks for years, and clicked the "groups" button on the left-hand margin, assuming it would allow me to form a list of my friends who were Shakespearean colleagues. So, I added the names of fellow Shakespeareans into the group and labeled it "Shakespeare Friends." I soon discovered that I had not compiled a list for my own use, but rather had created an online collective, a coming together of people with some shared interests — a networked community. Soon after that moment, I realized what opportunity this fortuitous error had provided me, what kinds of interaction and relationships could be facilitated with this tool.

I had come a long way from my initial resistance to social media. I recall proudly announcing that I was not one of the gullible many who had succumbed to the temptation of the Facebook phenomenon while chatting with two colleagues in the hotel bar at a Shakespeare Association of America meeting that previous year. Both of my companions were in agreement, one of them trumping my rejection of Facebook by declaring that not only did he not participate in social media, but also he did not even own a cell phone, the other confessing to having a Facebook account but adding, in defense, that he never used it and, to date, had acquired only six friends.

So, how did I become a regular Facebook user and group administrator? After ignoring some emails requesting me to join, I saw one from a very kind retired co-worker, with an invitation to join Facebook to see pictures of her grandchildren. At that point, I felt rather foolish and mean-spirited not to accept the request. It occurred to me that, perhaps, having a Facebook account would simply make it easier for me to stay connected to her and others; it would not devour my soul, take over my life, or anything of the sort. Consequently, I joined, and since then, I have found that using social media has radically transformed my sense of community and interpersonal relationships. I have used Facebook to reconnect with family, loved ones, and friendly acquaintances whom I had not seen or even contacted for decades. I even recently located and reestablished a relationship with my best friend from high school, whom I had not seen in thirty years. Moreover, I have established new relationships and strengthened bonds with people in my field and with others, some who live near my home, others at long distances, located all over the world. To avoid sounding like an advertisement for Facebook, however, I will note that not all my experiences on it have been positive; there have been a few contentious encounters and uncomfortable moments, as well as a couple of issues concerning boundaries and focus that have arisen in the "Shakespeare Friends" group. Nevertheless, my experience with social media has enriched, rather than destroyed, my relationships. Along the way, I have found administering the "Shakespeare Friends" group to be a

positive undertaking overall; It has been greatly rewarding to watch the community grow and to witness members forge supportive links amongst themselves.

## Radical Ethics and Digital Media

My involvement with social media has also opened me up to new views about technology, communication, and relationships. Since I opened my Facebook account, I have had time to reflect seriously on social media, their effects, and their potential for enabling and fostering interpersonal interactions that are both meaningful and enriching. Interestingly, I have found that the theory of Emmanuel Levinas provides valuable insights into the examination of intersubjective relations, on Facebook specifically and with communication technology more generally. Although Levinas does not speak directly to matters of social media, as his work pre-dates the internet, his philosophy itself implies this kind of connection. As Amit Pinchevski has argued, because Levinas reflects on the role of mediation in the communication of his own ideas, which center on the links between subjectivity, social justice, and communication, Levinas's theory "may thus lead toward a radical ethics of media — radical in the sense that it posits the act of mediation itself as the root of such ethics" (Pinchevski 2014, 48). After reflecting on this point, I believe that Levinas's theory provides a way into thinking about ethics in social media and mediated communication in terms that point to their transformative effects while avoiding the now commonplace notions that social media and other computer technologies are either entirely liberating our identities and relationships or completely eroding them.

Much popular, as well as some academic discourse, presents technology as an anthropomorphized entity that has the potential either to save or destroy us, with the internet and social media depicted as redemptive or destructive agents that promise joy or threaten doom to humanity. Writers such as Richard A. Cohen, Nancy K. Baym, Bernard Stiegler, and Mark B. N. Hansen have analyzed these rhetorical positions, pointing out that this dualistic view of technology as either utopian or dystopian is nothing new. Changes in communication technology — from the invention of the alphabet and writing to the printing press, to modern inventions of the telegraph and telephone, to computer technology — have all inspired exalted hopes as well as deep distrust, distress, and panic. Critics positing deterministic views of computer technology — whether they see it as a liberating force that creates a utopian vision by opening up multiple possibilities in a virtual reality, like Sherry Turkle, or condemn it as a destructive Big Brother that produces a dystopian world by eroding the social fabric and separating people from each other, like Lucas Introna (Turkle 1995; Introna 2002)[2] — grant technology a human-like agency beyond its own

ontological status,[3] as "if it were an evil genius allied against us," as Cohen describes it (Cohen 2000, 32).

In his work on Levinas and computer technology (which he terms "cybernetics"), Cohen dismantles these arguments, revealing a much less glorious or horrific conception of the computer age. Employing Levinas's theory (explained more fully below), Cohen describes communication technologies as tools that enable humans to interact. He claims that the primary issue is "whether computer technology produces a radical transformation of humanity," in the sense of its full liberation or entire destruction; "or whether, in contrast, it is simply a very advanced instrument, a tool or means of communication that is in itself morally neutral" (Cohen 2000, 28). I agree with Cohen that, from Levinas's perspective, technology itself is *morally* neutral — that is, it does not make ethical choices and therefore cannot act upon human beings benevolently or malevolently. "The computers themselves," Cohen notes, "like alphabet letters and telephone, like pencils and books . . . are neither good nor evil" (34). Analyzing the ontology of digital technology — or Web 2.0, as it is called — from a perspective that does not draw from Levinas or deal with ethical implications of technology, Aden Evens describes this neutrality of the digital as "an indifference with regard to particularities of choice. By refusing to favor one choice over another the digital presents itself as an unusually neutral and free surface of inscription" (Evens 2012, par. 24). Importantly, for this aspect of digital media — its reliance on the abstraction of a binary code that does not itself choose — "there is no choice but choice" (Evens 2012, par. 24).

Although digital media are in themselves *morally* neutral — incapable of ethical choice and human agency — the use of them does, most definitely, deeply influence and shape human moral choices and actions. Moreover, Web 2.0 is extremely complex in ways that extend beyond previous technologies, challenging us to examine them, and their effects on us, carefully and critically. Indeed, Web 2.0 has ushered in a new role for media themselves: to disguise or render invisible their associations with the technology that supports them. In other words, the interface of digital media appears to users as disconnected from its technological infrastructure, offering a view that conceals its own technological workings (see Hansen 2010b, 172, 178-84).

As this new kind of technology, Web 2.0 has become so integral to contemporary life that its use has greatly altered the way we think and communicate with others, as addressed fully below, on a one-to-one and one-to-immense audience. Indeed, as Hansen has stressed, it is more the "sheer connectivity, the simple capacity to connect on a massive, one-to-many scale" than the actual content that is "mediated by Web 2.0" (Hansen 2010b, 180). With this ability to connect with countless people world-wide in this age of Web 2.0 come new ethical issues, as digital media now

offer us the "daunting obligations and responsibilities of a *global humanity*," the results of which rest with its users, not with technology itself. How we employ it, how "we wish to use and steer the awesome power of contemporary information technology," in Cohen's words, will determine its moral outcomes (Cohen 2000, 35, emphasis in original).

## Technology, Mediated Communication, and Relationships

Although they have not employed Levinas in their analyses, other media critics and theorists have also examined technology and its complex relationship to the human subject and culture. In analyzing her data on relationships and digital media, Nancy Baym echoes Cohen's claims above, arguing that "mediated communication is not a space"; instead, she asserts, "it is an additional tool people use to connect, one which can only be understood as deeply embedded in and influenced by the daily realities of embodied life" (Baym 2010, 152). As an instrument that we use in everyday interactions, mediated technology greatly shapes how we communicate, how we connect with each other; but in itself, it does not entirely create us or mold our subjectivity, as deterministic perspectives of the computer age would have us believe. Even seemingly artificial identities fabricated online are, in complex ways, related to the self who designs them; they are neither completely distinct, nor virtual realities absolutely divorced from the so-called real world, as Baym's research has shown (Baym 2010, 152-54). Rather, these digital identities and realities are intricately connected, inextricably linked to human beings and their lives in various ways. Digital media affect us on multiple levels for, as Hansen explains, these new media, "by changing the conditions for the production of experience . . . destabilize existing patterns of biological, psychical, and collective life even as they furnish new faculties" (Hansen 2010b, 173). In different terms, Evens points out that Web 2.0 has a profound effect on our lives, in that "[n]ot only our artifacts but our bodies, our schedules, our habits of cognition, our ways of being by ourselves and with others are now thoroughly informed by the digital" (Evens 2012, par. 1). Although Web 2.0 offers new and different challenges from previous media, it is important to keep in mind that technology is, and always has been, intrinsic to and inseparable from human subjectivity and relationships in day-to-day life. Understanding the history of technology and humanity can enable us to grapple with the challenges of life with new media in more informed ways.

Historically, each advent of novel technological advances has ushered in a new wave of panic and distrust, raising issues not only about technology but also about humanity itself, what it means to be "real" or genuine, to connect fully with others. As Baym puts it, in our present "digital age, just as at the dawn of writing, media evoke questions about what it means to be authentically human" (Baym 2010, 154). In his introduction to Stiegler's view of

memory and mediated communication, Hansen traces this history, pointing out that a conception of technological memory as deceptive imitation, which dates back to Plato (in his *Phaedrus*), has informed Western civilization's ambivalent responses to it ever since, as Jacques Derrida has demonstrated in his deconstruction of Western metaphysics of presence in his theories of grammatology, the trace, and *différance*. Plato's notion of the *pharmakon* (both a danger and its cure), which structured early notions of writing and memory, continues to underlie views of new media (Hansen 2010a, 66). Nevertheless, as Hansen illustrates through the myths of Prometheus and Epimetheus, which he interprets as exemplifying the "originary technicity of the human," technology is integral to human life (Hansen 2010b, 177). Hansen adds that, for Stiegler, "human beings, from the very origin of the species, have always been mediated" (Hansen 2010b, 176). Hansen describes technology as fundamental to human existence — not peripheral, adjunct, or supplemental, but rather "essential — *the* essential — dimension of the human" (Hansen 2010b, 64; emphasis in original). For Stiegler, technology has evolved alongside humanity, for "human beings, in their developmental and genetic evolution, are 'essentially' correlated with technical media." In this light, Hansen continues, "mediation forms the very basis of human existence" (Hansen 2010b, 177). I agree with the crucial, vital role that technical media have played and continue to play in human development and subjectivity; however, I do not see it as fully overtaking or displacing the subject. Instead, I would argue that mediation works in and through human beings in their connections to others, in the intersubjective relations that constitute humanity as expounded in Levinas's theory, which I address more fully below.

Focusing specifically on relationships and communication technology, Baym traces the same trajectory of technological advances in human history discussed above, noting how each innovation that has attempted to bridge geographical (and, in some cases, temporal) distance by allowing humans to communicate when not physically present — such as the inventions of writing, the telephone, email — has caused apprehension and distress along with euphoric excitement. New media, she argues, produce tremendous anxiety by exacerbating the fear that the mediation of these technologies makes interpersonal communication "increasingly shallow," thereby "threaten[ing] [the] sanctity of our personal relationships"; at the same time, new media create great promise by offering the possibility for more people to interact, paving the way toward "new opportunities and to stronger relationships and more diverse connections" (Baym 2010, 1). Baym's research counters the former perspective, as she notes that in any instance of mediated communication wherein one has "limited cues" (depending on the type of technology, there may be a lack of cues such as body language, tone of voice, or other contexts), users have a "communication imperative" that motivates

them to use whatever cues are available in imaginative ways to overcome the limitations of that media to connect with one another in meaningful and creative ways (Baym 2010, 70).

Although most of the relationships established and maintained online fall into the category that Baym terms "weak" rather than "strong ties," it does not follow that the internet has deteriorated bonds between people, as commentators such as Introna, cited above, or William Deresiewicz have claimed. Deresiewicz insists that online relationships, particularly those on social media websites like Facebook, have ushered in "faux friendships" in contemporary culture, wherein flesh-and-blood people are reduced to a "simulacra of . . . friends, little dehydrated packets of images and information, no more my friends than a set of baseball cards is the New York Mets" (Deresiewicz 2009).[4] Conversely, Baym demonstrates that the majority of human relationships, in "real life" as well as online, could be described as "weak ties"; that is, they are "limited in [the] range, thoughts, and feelings . . . exchanged." These relationships, she points out, are not inherently bad but, rather, extremely necessary, for they provide people with invaluable resources that help them learn about themselves, garner help when needed, gather and exchange knowledge, and so on (Baym 2010, 125).

Moreover, as her research and numerous personal experiences of users have shown, mediated communication has — and will continue, I would argue, in whatever format it takes — to provide people with instruments to help them forge "strong ties" as well — substantial, significant relationships with one another. Baym herself provides some examples, as can I, for I met my husband of eight years online, which is not at all unusual today. As Baym puts it, in the "millennia after the inventions of the first communication technologies, we remain oriented towards preserving the authenticity of human connection and ourselves. We develop and appropriate technologies as means of fostering meaningful personal connections" (Baym 2010, 155). I see the conclusions of Baym's research as supporting a point of view that is very much in line with Levinas's face-to-face theory, the challenges it poses to traditional notions of selfhood and technology, and the insights it provides into issues of mediated communication.

## Levinas's Radical Ethics and Shakespeare

Levinas's philosophy revolves around the ethics of interpersonal connections, wherein the relationship of the "I" to the other forms the basis of life. Levinas challenges traditional western philosophies, in that he posits that relations with the other pre-exist any kind of being. Rather than assuming that the "I" or ego exists via its own consciousness and then attempts to interact with others, Levinas argues that it is only *through* the other that the "I" emerges at all; this interaction occurs pre-consciousness, pre-ego formation, pre- or "other than" being. Put simply, we "feel"

others before we "know" them. For Levinas, therefore, the human being is not an isolated, contained entity, a subject that has freedom to act except when inhibited by external others who threaten to assault or compromise it, as it is in liberal humanist frameworks of subjectivity inherited from Descartes. Instead, in Levinas's theory, the human being is constituted in, through, by, and for the other — in the face of the other — first and foremost. Being-for-the-other, substituting oneself for the other, being charged with the moral responsibility for the other in an uneven relationship (as one cannot assume that the other is constructed through the self as well) — in other words, putting oneself in the place of the other — is what makes one human to begin with. Marc Santos, who also uses Levinas's theory to examine relationships on Facebook, describes it this way:

> Levinas's ethics stress our debt to alterity for the very formation of our existence; this debt charges us with an infinite responsibility for others. These intersubjective ethics are asymmetrical because I cannot assume that I construct the other as she constructs me. I always owe more than I have to give. The other changes me before a (conscious, thinking, responsive) "I" ever emerges on the scene to make any kind of "sense." (Santos 2011, 10)

For Levinas, then, ethics or moral behavior is not a supplement or an add-on to an already fully-formed subject; conversely, it is the basis upon which the subject is formed, the primary philosophy itself, the foundation of all.

Interestingly, Levinas's ethical philosophy, built on the ideas of the "face-to-face" relationship of the self to the other and of "substitution," or putting oneself in the other's shoes, is the very characteristic that many, including Levinas himself, see as quintessentially Shakespearean. In a radio interview from 1981, Levinas stated that Shakespeare was a major influence on him when he was growing up (Levinas, 1985, 22); and even though Levinas does not discuss Shakespeare at length, he does refer to him at numerous stages of his work, mostly in his writings before World War II. He does not cite Shakespeare as an authority; rather, he employs the plays primarily as illustrative examples of various points.[5] Mainly, Levinas argues that Shakespeare's drama, as well as other great literature, depicts this inextricable link between humanity and ethics: not by aping or tendentiously transmitting philosophical concepts, but by depicting this idea of being-for-the-other. In his early *Time and the Other* (originally published in 1947, Levinas 1987), Levinas states that "it sometimes seems to me that the whole of philosophy is but a meditation of Shakespeare" (Levinas 1987, 72). According to Cohen, this statement means not that the entire history of philosophy deals with Shakespeare but instead, that "the whole of philosophy is a meditation *by* Shakespeare, Shakespeare's meditation" (Cohen 2010, 151; emphasis in original). In this light, Shakespeare's plays can be said to incorporate philosophical concepts, rendering them

into a more tangible register. As Cohen puts it, in Levinas's view, "Philosophy lives in thought, in concepts, in knowledge . . . while Shakespeare presents a world, an artistic rendition of the life-world in its unfinished, temporal, and dialogical character" (Cohen 2010, 151). Cohen explains that, for Levinas, Shakespeare's plays and great literature in general come nearer to the "humanity of the human, to the transcendence"[6] constitutive of the ethical category of the human, than are the abstract reflections of philosophy" (Cohen 2010, 155).

Levinas sees Shakespeare and other writers such as Dostoyevsky not as conventional moralists who advocate poetic justice and the decorous depiction of characters but, more accurately, as writers concerned with ethical imperatives and questions of social justice. In his *Existence and Existents*, Levinas devotes two pages to a discussion of Shakespeare (Levinas 1978, 61-62), in which he comes to the conclusion that, as Cohen puts it, "Shakespeare has already grasped and presented in his own way what Levinas grasps and presents philosophically as the foundation — or the nonfoundation — of signification" (Cohen 2010, 165). In other words, Levinas sees Shakespeare as dramatizing the intrasubjective ethics, the theory of one's moral obligation to the other, before he himself conceptualized it in philosophical terms centuries later. In another example from his *Humanism of the Other*, Levinas points to Shakespeare's *King Lear* to illustrate this main idea of his ethics, "substitution" (Levinas 2003, 3; see Cohen 2010, 166). In his work overall, Levinas indicates a tremendous, deeply rooted respect and admiration for what he sees as the wisdom and the commitment to his notion of ethics — the "face-to-face" and "substitution" in interpersonal communication — in Shakespeare's dramatic universe.[7] Interestingly, Levinas's views on Shakespeare may be linked to applications of his thought in analyses of relationships and digital media.

Beyond the application of these ideas in textual interpretation and exegesis, Levinas's philosophy holds major implications for theories of mediated communication, as it forces one to rethink what it means to communicate or relate to another. Traditional philosophy, working from the model of selfhood noted above, sees the act of communication as thwarted with difficulty, if not complete impossibility. As an insulated "I" or ego, the self may attempt to extend beyond the gulf of its sequestered realm to speak to another, but to no avail, as it instead encounters only a void. If it does connect to another outside itself, the communication is partial, contaminated, false — in Prufrock's words, "That is not what I meant at all; / That is not it, at all" (T. S. Eliot, 1920, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," lines 97-98 [Eliot 1970]). In this framework, because the "truth" cannot be transmitted completely accurately and purely intact from one ego to another, because the

self cannot ever truly break out of its isolated orb, the subject is ultimately locked in its own world — alienated and forever distanced from the other, even in the closest or most intimate relationships.

Levinas's radical refiguring of subjectivity, however, dramatically changes this dynamic. As the self exists in and through the other, it is not sealed in a contained ego, but on the contrary, is open to transcend and embrace the other. Life is about reaching out, feeling, sensing — not wholly comprehending — the other. Indeed, human beings are composed of these interactions with others. For Levinas, the importance in communication lies not in the transmission of absolute truth, the correlation between the signifier and the signified; nor is it to be found in the production of complete knowledge. Communication necessarily entails uncertainty. As Levinas explains, "Communication is an adventure of a subjectivity, different from that which is dominated by the concern to recover itself, different from that of coinciding in consciousness; it will involve uncertainty" (Levinas 1974, 120).

For Levinas, the importance in communication exists in the "saying," or the signifying itself, one's reaching out to the other. It is the *communicating* itself — not the contents of what is communicated — that matters. As Levinas puts it, "The one-for-the-other is the very signifyingness of signification!" (Levinas 1974, 100). In his commentary on Levinas, Cohen sums it up this way: "The source of all signification lies not in signs relating to signs, in the said, but more deeply, more seriously, more painfully, in the moral significance of the face that obligates" (Cohen 2000, 32). Levinas's theory of communication — the "saying" over the "said" — is grounded in his concept of "substitution" — substituting oneself for the other or putting oneself in the other's shoes — which relies on his notion of subjectivity that is based on his theory of the self's one-sided obligation to the other, the concept of "proximity" between people, the "face-to-face" interpersonal connection between them. For Levinas,

> In starting with sensibility interpreted not as a knowing but as proximity, in seeking in language contact and sensibility, behind the circulation of information it becomes, we have endeavored to describe subjectivity as irreducible to consciousness and thematization. Proximity appears as the relationship with the other, who cannot be resolved into "images" or be exposed in a theme. (Levinas 1974, 100)

"Proximity" rather than "knowing" allows for "language contact and sensibility" ("saying") — the reaching out to another without attempting to reduce the other into thingness, an objectified "image" or reductive "theme" (the "said"). This connection happens prior to any kind of consciousness; it forms the basis upon which subjectivity is constituted.

## Face-to-Face and Facebook

In applying Levinas's concepts to mediated communication, it is crucial to understand his definition of this term "proximity." Although in general usage the word denotes physical closeness or lack of geographical distance, in Levinas's theory it means something quite different — a figurative rather than literal sense of "closeness," with a moral imperative. Importantly, as Levinas explains, "the relationship of proximity cannot be reduced to any modality of distance or geometrical contiguity, nor to the simple 'representation' of a neighbor; it is already an assignation, an extremely urgent assignation — an obligation, anachronously prior to any commitment" (Levinas 1974, 100-101).

Consequently, Levinas's notion of proximity may be, and has been, applied to analyses of mediated communication, his "face-to-face" theory employed to examine online as well as offline relationships. In countering Introna's use of Levinas to posit a view of communication technology as a force that corrodes interpersonal relationships,[8] Cohen stresses that Levinas employs the term "proximity" to mean a kind of communicating and a kind of relationship, not a need to be physically present. Cohen rightly points out that the "said" may occur in actual face to face meetings as well, for "[o]ne can lose sight of the ethical face in the very flesh and blood face that faces"; in fact, "one can objectify" or "'interpret' the other's face, 'reading' from it symptoms, ideologies," for "[t]he face can always become a mask" (Cohen 2000, 31-32). Objectification and reduction of the other most certainly can and does occur in online relationships, as the internet to a large extent is the circulation of images and "info bites." But importantly, the opposite may happen, too. Levinas's face-to-face encounter is possible through mediated communication — be it via a letter sent by snail-mail, an email message, or a Facebook comment — just as it is in "physical" face to face situations for, as Cohen writes, "the 'face' ruptures them, pierces them with the alterity of the other" (Cohen 2000, 34). As Cohen stresses, "The ethical dimension of human proximity transpires across communications made possible by computers, just as human proximity takes place across phone calls, letters, artifacts" (Cohen 2000, 34).

I would argue that Levinas's distinction between "saying" and "said" speaks to crucial issues of ethics and communication related to technology in general and to social media like Facebook in particular, as evidenced in the exchanges on "Shakespeare Friends." Most posts on the group page do fit into the category of the "said" — typically, news items or crowd-sourcing; at other times, however, they gesture beyond the "said" to the "saying," to offer personal support or to connect in some way with the emotional well-being of fellow members. Sometimes, even these info-related posts become meaningful gestures that are closer to "saying"; at other times, they lead to contact beyond the group page to personal messages and the establishment of deeper connections. I have

witnessed these kinds of interactions on the group page, and I have also learned about them from member feedback. After posting a request for comments on the group via Facebook messages, I received six substantial responses from users over a wide range, from Ph.D. students to junior and senior faculty members. Besides posts about the group as a resource and way to connect with colleagues on a professional level, a couple of responses indicated that exchanges with group members affected them in more personal or emotional ways. One member commented on recent announcements concerning the deaths of colleagues that had been posted on the group page, noting that although they were "sad," they served to "help foster a sense of community: this is a group I belong to, even if only on the edges at times." In another very touching message, one member expressed how the group not only enabled her to make connections with colleagues, but also provided a way for her to feel as if she were back in her professional community after being physically away from it for an extended time due to a serious accident. She writes that during her long recovery, "I felt so utterly removed from my professional career, that reading posts here somehow made it seem easier to ease back in." She adds that it was "probably the friendliness of all and the genuine interest in our field" that made her feel this way. These accounts, as well as my own experiences, have convinced me that Levinas's face-to-face connection does occur within networked publics, as well as in other modes of communication.

Moreover, the face-to-face interaction is facilitated by a key feature of Facebook and other social media sites — the user's ability to "answer back," to comment on the thoughts of others — which transforms the internet from a machine of the "said," the circulation of info and images, to an apparatus that allows for the "saying," allowing people to relate to each other in a variety of ways. It enables people to connect, support, and validate the feelings and needs of others, just through the effort of "saying" or reaching out itself. Even if "strong ties" do not develop from these gestures, the gestures themselves are meaningful, for "[s]haring the ephemeral — our edges — is what helps define us to each other and, more importantly, to ourselves" (Santos 2011).

Critics of social media, such as Deresiewicz or Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, argue that Facebook and other computer technologies promote a narcissism that is based on its users' infantile need for self-validation. From this perspective, one's postings on Facebook constitute a childish need to be recognized, to have our egos stroked, to cry out, "Look at me!!!" Like Santos, I strongly disagree with this now commonplace point of view and argue that what these critics interpret to be "narcissism" is something quite different, even in the most apparently self-involved statuses on Facebook or tweets on Twitter. These posts come from a need to share the self in order to transcend it, to "touch" another out there in hopes of a connection. And, yes, this effort does come from a desire for validation or affirmation, as that desire is bound up with the

intrinsic need to communicate with the other. As Santos explains, it is only through traditional frameworks of subjectivity that this need for validation or confirmation is considered to be a "weakness." In light of Levinas's radical rethinking of subjectivity and alterity, not only is this need not a failing, but also it is intrinsic to all human beings. In responding to these charges of narcissism on social network sites, especially Facebook, Santos counters with an argument that "digital technologies might awaken desire for something missing from atomistic modern life; they rekindle a desire for others. What might appear as narcissism could be attending to the abyss, and a new, distributed form of loquacious huddling" (Santos 2011). Facebook, and in particular Facebook groups, provide the tools for users to build online communities that foster this "huddling" in more focused, circumscribed contexts.

In order to examine the possibility of the "face-to-face" on social media sites such as Facebook and groups like "Shakespeare Friends," it is important first to look closely at what constitutes a networked public and how it relates to other notions of "community." danah boyd has defined the term "networked publics" as groups that are "restructured by networked technologies," both in terms of "space" and the "imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice" (boyd 2011, 39). In her analysis of networked publics, boyd points out that they share several identical features in common with other kinds of publics: they permit users to come together for "social, cultural, and civic purposes," and importantly, "they help people connect with a world beyond their close friends and family" (boyd 2011, 39). Nonetheless, they do have some unique qualities that one must address in order to examine them closely, for the "architecture" of these networked publics, their "properties, affordances, and dynamics," set them apart from other kinds of "publics," as the way people work with the properties and affordances of a networked public determines its dynamics (boyd 2011, 40-41).

Crucially, networked publics differ from other kinds of publics in their "underlying structure," for "[n]etworked technologies reorganize how information flows and how people interact with information and each other" (boyd 2011, 41). Social media sites like Facebook, as well as other networked publics, share four common attributes: 1) they permit users to create a "profile"; 2) they allow for users to compile a list of other users with whom they communicate; 3) they enable users to see and cross over others in their own list and in the larger website; and 4) they include "stream-based updates" (boyd 2011, 43). Moreover, boyd continues, there are three "dynamics" that figure in the constitution of networked publics: 1) "invisible audiences" (users cannot always see who is viewing their posts or profile); 2) "collapsed contexts" (no clear indicators of "spatial, social, or temporal boundaries"; and 3) "blurring of public and private" (no clear distinction between the two). Although not all of the dynamics that boyd lists above are relevant to Facebook — for instance

the social media network does provide temporal markers and permit one to designate geographical location — some of the features she notes do end up shaping how and in what ways people engage with each other on the network to form communities.

Importantly, despite the limited cues or contexts, online communities still exhibit the five qualities that, according to Baym, are generally considered to be necessary in order for a group of individuals to be considered a "community": they include people who share the same "sense of space," "practices," "resources and support," "identities," and the possibility for "interpersonal relationships" (Baym 2010, 75-89). Of course, not all communities are "positive," as some shared interests of members may include hatred of others, as in online white supremacist groups. It is important to note, however, that these kinds of communities exist offline as well as online; they are not created by or even supposed to be tolerated on Social Media sites like Facebook. Nevertheless, Baym has found through her research that many online communities provide "positive effects of social support," including "emotional," "esteem," and "informational support" (Baym 2010, 83-84). In his personal account, Santos describes the incredible, life-saving support that he and his wife found on Facebook when grappling with their infant daughter's struggle with cancer, support that has helped many others as well.

Moreover, Facebook enables a user like myself to construct a smaller online community from within this larger networked public — a kind of "walled garden," a group with its own boundaries and dynamics. The most challenging and, at times, rather tough part of my role as administrator of this walled garden has been determining where to set its boundaries. Once the group was set up, I had to fine-tune its description and determine who should or should not be admitted as members. Currently, the group has 675 members and is designed for Shakespearean academics (at all stages of their careers), students (mostly graduate level, although there are a couple of advanced undergraduates who are already active in the field, presenting papers at conferences or working with professional theaters), educators (all levels), and professional theater practitioners/performers (of various types). I decided that I wanted the group to bring together scholars, teachers, and other practitioners who work with Shakespeare in other arts and disciplines. I considered making it an open group, but then I realized that, although in principle I liked the idea of a more democratic policy, in practice it would undermine my goal of fostering a community of people with shared, or at least overlapping, interests and backgrounds with Shakespeare. As open forums and other fan groups devoted to Shakespeare already existed on Facebook, I did not see the need to create another one. Instead, I wanted a different kind of group, one that would extend individual horizons without causing members to feel as if they were teachers having to "explain" Shakespeare to the group. Conversely, I wanted members to see themselves as colleagues sharing, interacting, and

connecting with each other. I was uncomfortable being the "gatekeeper," but I realized that it was necessary for me to become one to establish and maintain the group dynamic I sought.

This role is not always easy. Difficulties have arisen when I have received requests from people whose backgrounds do not clearly mesh with the description above. In these cases, I have responded with a Facebook message, asking those who have asked to join how they connect with Shakespeare, as per the group's description on Facebook. Usually, this method works fine. However, there have been a couple of instances when members joined who ended up not being a good fit with the group. One, I think, has worked out, but another posed so many problems that members of the group contacted me to express their concerns. I addressed the issue with this member, who then ended up moving on to a different group that better suited his interests. This instance was unpleasant, but it was also an anomaly. Usually, people are up front with me when requesting to join, and I am more than happy to add them. If this group does not seem right for them, I kindly let them know and send them suggestions for other groups that I think would be a better fit for them, for which they seem genuinely thankful. Besides minor issues, I think that the "Shakespeare Friends" group has become the kind of engaged, supportive community that I envisioned.

## Facebook and "Coaxed Affordances"

The dynamics of this community, of course, are structured by the specific medium of Facebook, in particular that of the Facebook Group. Before focusing on specific features of the group, it is important to examine the characteristics of Facebook itself. Facebook is, according to Aimeé Morrison, "an advertising medium, a public square, a place to play games, a place to nurture and maintain friendships, a digital photo album, a broadcast medium, and a place to document your daily doings" (Morrison 2014, 114). Describing Facebook as a primarily commercial platform, Morrison designates Facebook users as its "product[s]" as opposed to its "customers" (Morrison 2014, 115). In effect, Facebook not only gathers information from its users in order to try and sell them products, but also it partly generates their narratives as "products." Importantly, despite Facebook's pervasive advertising and never-ending privacy issues, many of us, even those who are keenly aware that Facebook is a commercial enterprise, "gleefully database ourselves" (Morrison 2014, 116). Perhaps it is because the positive aspects of Facebook — its effortless functionality and attractiveness of features that enable us to communicate across geographical lines, to share with and to respond to the lives of others — far outweigh the negative. Moreover, most of us have learned to navigate the interface, to work around advertisements, and to deal with the constant changes made to the platform, including those pertaining to privacy controls. To be informed users of Facebook, we must look closely at how its platform affects us and our interpersonal communication.

Although social media networks like Facebook are relatively new, Morrison and others have begun to analyze their functions, emphasizing how their platforms influence the way users construct their own narratives and respond to those of others. In her research, Morrison has combined the notion of "coaxing" (the pressures and conventions from the medium, genre, and social practices that shape narratives) from autobiography studies with the terms "affordances" (the features of an object that direct and configure the way we use it) and "constraints" (the aspects of an object that curtail or restrain the way we use it) from media studies to develop the concept of "coaxed affordances," which she employs in her investigation of how users compose life stories on Facebook. Morrison points out that the affordances and constraints of Facebook — the written and/or visual prompts within the status and comment boxes themselves, along with other users' practices and generic expectations that have emerged over time — guide or "coax" users' responses, greatly influencing and structuring what they post on Facebook. Morrison notes that "we are guided not only by the often implicit discursive precedent of the genre, but also by the material affordances and constraints of the objects through which we structure these stories ourselves" (Morrison 2014, 117).

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that just because users' comments are coaxed does not necessarily mean that they are somehow false or lack genuineness, or that they are only products molded from the structure of Facebook's interface. Morrison points out that users' narratives are not "coerced with such force or duplicity as to deny their ostensible authoring subjects of agency in their composition" (Morrison 2014, 116). As Morrison puts it, "Digital life writing in the status update feature is coaxed, but it is not determined, even as users do not assert unmitigated free will in their authorship" (Morrison 2014, 125). In examining the coaxing affordances of Facebook, especially its status update feature, one must keep in mind that users often resist or write against the grain of the way they are prompted. For instance, the prompt of the status box itself has changed over time,[9] as Morrison points out, but I would add that even when it coaxed a reply — as it did early on in Facebook history when the box prompted a comment that would begin with the user's name, as in "Lisa Starks Estes . . . is happy to announce," or later on when it suggested a more open response with the question, "What's on your mind?" — many users either mocked, ignored, or used the prompt as a springboard. Users often constructed narratives that clearly exceeded or resisted the initial commercial purpose of the feature itself: to provide information for advertisers. Moreover, one point Morrison does not raise is the interesting addition of the automatic comment response box that now appears at the end of a thread of comments following each status update on

Facebook and the reply option nested underneath individual comments. I would argue that these features coax us to reply, to answer back, to join in the conversation.

In my group "Shakespeare Friends," I consciously attempt to focus members' posts not only through the group description, but also in my welcome message for newcomers, thereby adding another layer of coaxing, if you will, within the larger context of Facebook. When someone joins the group, I introduce them to the group and add a comment that typically reads, "Welcome to the group, ____! Feel free to post about your work with Shakespeare"; or, "Welcome to the group, ____! Looking forward to hearing about your work with Shakespeare." I started using these prompts after the group had already been active for quite some time, when I noticed that Facebook had added an easy mechanism for posting the introductions on the group page. I thought that these prompts would help new members by reinforcing what they would glean from observing the posts from others in the group: that the conversation of the group revolves around the shared interest of Shakespeare and related areas, which makes it distinct from what might appear on one's regular Facebook timeline. I was a little worried at first that using this prompt might intimidate new members, but I have found the opposite seems to be the case; in fact, I have noticed more postings by newcomers as well as experienced members since I started the welcome posts and prompts. Perhaps the boundaries indicated by this prompt give users the go-ahead to post about their own experiences, work, and achievements within the subject area of the group, as I had hoped, rather than restricting or censoring their responses.

## "Shakespeare Friends" and Spreadable Media

Even though most of the posts circulated on "Shakespeare Friends" consist of information and images, which would be considered as examples of the "said" in Levinas's theory, they are nevertheless useful to members in significant ways, exemplifying what Henry Jenkins, Joshua Green, and Sam Ford have described as the "spreadability" of social media platforms. They employ this term to describe the "potential, both technical and cultural, for audiences to share content for their own purposes," and the

> technical resources that make it easier to circulate some kinds of content than others, the economic structures that support or restrict circulation, the attributes of a media text that might appeal to a community's motivation for sharing material, and the social networks that link people through the exchange of meaningful bytes. (Jenkins, Green, and Ford 2013, 3)

For Jenkins et al., this concept of "spreadability" opposes the notion of "stickiness," a term used in marketing discourses to refer to the need to create advertising that captures the audience's

interest and keeps its attention as long as possible. "Stickiness" is derived from the distribution model that has always been used in advertising on television and other broadcast media, in which advertisers seek to transmit commercial messages to audiences. "Spreadability," on the other hand, has emerged from a more recent model of circulation and participatory culture, which acknowledges that content users share on the internet moves in multiple directions in a dynamic way, not top down from marketers to passive consumers.

The work of Jenkins, et al. is especially helpful in understanding the active role that Facebook users play in the circulation of information, personal narratives, photos, and so on. Employing the platform's affordances, particularly the ease of using hyperlinks to share various kinds of multimedia content, Facebook users may reshape, mix, and reframe material, fashioning their own content from within the larger platform of Facebook. This kind of participation is exemplified in "Shakespeare Friends." In the group's description, I urge members to "post events, news, information related to Shakespeare studies, Shakespeare in performance, and related fields," encouraging or coaching them to participate in the creation of our group's newsfeed and to actively engage each other in discussion. Besides posting about news and events, members have shared links to clips from stage productions, interviews or podcasts, films, websites, pedagogical materials, and other media. In this sense, the group itself — which could be seen as microcosm of a larger, international Shakespearean community — actively transforms, reshapes, and refigures the field of Shakespearean studies itself, determining which approaches or areas of interest are foregrounded and which are not, forming a kind of grassroots movement from within. As in the model of "spreadability" referenced above, the circulation of information, ideas, and other media moves in various ways — bottom to top and also side to side, crisscrossing horizontally between members, especially through the use of tagging. This feature enables a user to embed another's name as a kind of "hyperlink" that serves as a shortcut connection to notify the person tagged, directing her or him to the post, thereby creating cross-references within status updates. The ease of tagging, along with the automatic appearance of the comment box underneath each post, facilitates engagement and coaxes users to communicate with each other. The only negative aspect of this circulation of material is the potential for one to feel overwhelmed by the amount of information constantly circulating on the group page. Group members may feel pressure to keep up with this ceaseless barrage of posts, to be in constant support of one another, to make sure not to miss someone's status update. As the group administrator, I have felt this pressure probably more than most, but I see it as part of the give-and-take that constitutes bonds between members of a community. Keeping up with the group postings and maintaining these relationships does indeed entail a great deal of effort, but for me, it is worth it.

## Reflections on "Shakespeare Friends"

Although I cannot claim that interactions on "Shakespeare Friends" have saved any lives, as in the cancer support groups that Santos describes, I can provide some feedback that indicates the group has benefited members in meaningful ways. Several of the members who responded to my inquiry about the group spoke positively about it as a resource for information, such as recent publications, calls for papers, upcoming film releases, live performances, and other events. And, all of those who responded to my inquiry wrote that much of the information has been extremely helpful for them. For many, including myself, numerous group posts have proved to be indispensable resources for my research and teaching. As one member has described it, "the threads work as informal or accidental archives of Shakespeare resources and news." Unfortunately, however, the use of group's postings as an archive is severely limited because of constraints built into Facebook itself which, as Morrison notes, functions entirely in the "perpetual present" (Morrison 2014, 120). Perhaps future incarnations of Facebook or another social media platform will provide us with the ability to store and search past threads more easily, so that this potential for the group to create rich and varied archives may be realized.

In their replies, many also mentioned that they find it especially helpful and even "inspiring" when members post about their own accomplishments, as it creates a "sense of optimism," as one respondent wrote, while another commented that she "enjoy[s] seeing what people are working on, the interconnectedness of ideas across the group." A couple of respondents also noted the benefit of being able to distribute their own work to supportive readers. These points were echoed by many members who gave me unsolicited, unprompted comments about the group in person at conferences I have attended since then. As another layer of coaxing, or I should say *coaching*, I make a point of nudging members to post news of their publications and other achievements, reassuring them that as long as they are supportive of others' work, there is nothing wrong with posting about their own, especially if they frame their news in such a way that it motivates others. I am pleased to see that this kind of sharing has proved beneficial to group members.

In addition to comments about content posted, most of those who provided feedback noted the tone or environment of the group. One person did say that he has found some of the comments on posts to be "unpleasantly edgy," a remark that may illustrate Morrison's point about coaxed affordances, how the platform of Facebook itself — in this case, the structure of the response box — influences what is written and how it is read. However, almost all of the others who responded said the opposite, claiming that the "Shakespeare Friends" group has been supportive and "appreciative," less given to the "negative tone" and "endless bickering" that they

have witnessed on another Shakespeare internet site. One member noted that "unlike listservs, where there is an occasional flame war . . . I haven't seen that here," and another described "Shakespeare Friends" as "more supportive," with members "still wanting to debate or discuss issues, to disagree with each other, but without such harshness."

Importantly, in this "walled garden" of our group, we are removed from institutional pressures that dictate who does or does not have a say or stake in the academic, educational, or theatrical worlds of Shakespearean study. In our online community, boundaries and glass ceilings based on gender, race, class, professional status (e.g., high school teacher, professor, actor), and other distinctions are destabilized, constantly shifting. Thus, in our mini-networked public, although we may not be completely free of the hierarchies and barriers that exist outside of the group, we are not as restricted by them. Much less dominated by academic stars or elite institutions, our "walled garden" is comprised of a more diverse community, one that crosses over lines of privilege, areas of expertise, and individual rank or prestige. Notably, in her response to my inquiry, one Ph.D. student remarked that "Shakespeare Friends" has blurred the boundary between emerging and established scholars, changing the way in which she views academia and research. After realizing that many well-respected Shakespeareans not only posted information but also asked questions of the group made her feel less intimidated in relating to them. She noted that she was pleasantly surprised to find that "scholars I admire use social media in similar ways — and actually listen to my responses to their questions." She finds these exchanges to show that Shakespeareans, no matter the rank, have "recognition of and respect for the resources available to us in the expertise of our friends and acquaintances."

There might be a downside to this diverse community, for some graduate students may feel an unconscious pressure to participate competitively in the group, as if they are rehearsing for job interviews and other opportunities. However, I have not detected or had any sense that the posts from Ph.D. students are aiming for that audience or designed with that purpose in mind. In fact, at a previous Shakespeare Association of America meeting, one graduate student told me that although she feels anxious at conferences, as if she were auditioning for jobs, she does not feel that type of pressure within our networked community. In her unsolicited comments, she described her experience with "Shakespeare Friends" as more of a haven from that kind of stressful environment than an example of it.

In addition to upsetting traditional hierarchies and barriers, "Shakespeare Friends" crosses geographical boundaries, making it possible for members to exchange ideas with fellow Shakespeare scholars, educators, and practitioners all over the world. In effect, the group is a virtual microcosm of the global nature of contemporary Shakespeare studies. In one way or another, each

member who responded to my post praised the group for allowing them to reach out to colleagues beyond their own universities or geographical locations. One member remarked that she enjoyed being able to "connect with other scholars outside of [her] home institution." Echoing that response, one member wrote, "I have made many connections that I would not have otherwise," while another explained that the group has enabled him to move outside of the parochial atmosphere at his institution, to avoid being "sucked in" to the "intense neutron star at its center." This member added that the group has helped him to reestablish relationships with colleagues he has known for many years and to stay in regular contact with others whom he has met only recently. Indeed, I have found the same to be the case with me. The active exchange with Shakespearean colleagues and friends both far and near has broadened my own horizons greatly and transformed my perspectives on Shakespeare and other aspects of my work and life, positively affecting my production as a scholar and effectiveness as a teacher. Through the group, I have emerged from a much more isolated life to one that is more actively engaged with others, as it has helped me to strengthen bonds with old friends and to embrace new ones. In the process, I have learned and grown immensely.

This ability to cross over geographical boundaries on Facebook is an invaluable feature, one that, perhaps, cancels out the less attractive aspects of its platform. One member pointed to the limitations of Facebook — that it "doesn't lend itself to longer, more thoughtful posts" — in his response to my inquiry. I would add that at least in comparison to other social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook's affordances do allow for relatively lengthy posts. I have observed a great disparity in the length and the depth of posts on Facebook, as the word count of statuses and comments most likely depends greatly on the social milieu of a particular group or circle of friends involved, along with the personality and writing practices of the individual user. Nonetheless, social media sites in general are not conducive to a fully developed or in-depth analysis of topics, but conversely function as an initiation of a dialogue, an invitation to conversation, a gesture toward more discussion.

In my own experience, when I have had a rich exchange of ideas with someone in the group, we have extended our communication elsewhere, via email or telephone. In their feedback, several members remarked that their participation in the group spilled out into other kinds of interactions. For instance, one member noted how she and I shared resources for teaching after she posted a link to her work on the group page. Many mentioned that they plan to visit with fellow group members in other contexts and environments. As one put it, after interacting with others on "Shakespeare Friends," she now will "look forward to seeing some of these friendly faces at upcoming conferences." I found it greatly rewarding to speak with members of the group I had not yet met in person at a past meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America. At the reception

of this meeting a couple of years ago, following the establishment of "Shakespeare Friends," I was pleasantly surprised when a member of the group — one who, interestingly, has never posted on the page — said to me, "I feel like you are taking care of us all." Although I never set out to do any such thing when I created the group, I am quite happy now to be thought of as a facilitator of an online community that offers a supportive means of exchange between Shakespearean scholars, educators, or practitioners in theater or other arts.

Of course, there will be many alterations to "Shakespeare Friends," Facebook, and Social Media in the future as constant changes are made in the field of digital technology and culture. Facebook is now reported to be increasingly unpopular with young people — although I have not witnessed this trend myself, to be honest, as all my students and young scholars I encounter are active on Facebook — so I suspect that a new version of it or a new type of social media will soon emerge to take its place. Even though Twitter is popular, its features differ from those of Facebook to such a degree that the former could not completely replace the latter. I hope that whatever future platform does supplant Facebook will permit users to move effortlessly from the present to past archives, so that groups like this one can easily access past information and connect with fellow members about earlier posts. I also hope that in the future that there is even a higher level of active user participation in shaping digital media, in exploiting its "spreadability."

Along with these innovations, I am sure that we will continue to analyze the impact of social media on culture, relationships, and ourselves and to grapple with issues of privacy and other matters that we have yet to encounter. At this point in time, we have really just embarked on serious study of the platforms that have become indispensable to and inseparable from our daily lives. In any case, I plan to continue thinking critically about Web 2.0 and to transfer over what I have learned about interacting with mediated technology from "Shakespeare Friends" to whatever new form social media take. Mainly, I will focus on implementing the tools that digital communication offers us to reach out as best I can, to focus on the "saying," to establish face-to-face encounters with others.

## Notes

1. I am grateful to editors Maurizio Calbi and Stephen O'Neill for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article and to Christy Desmet and the editors and *Borrowers and Lenders* for their helpful feedback.

2. Cohen comments on the arguments of these critics, showing how they both begin from a deterministic position, even though they have opposing views of mediated technology as either "good" or "bad." (Cohen draws from an article by Introna that was forthcoming, which was later

published in 2002.) Interestingly, Introna employs Levinas as support for his criticism of the internet, claiming that it separates people, disrupting the face-to-face connection upon which Levinas's theory is based. However, as Cohen explains and I show below, his views rely on a misreading of Levinas, particularly on his concept of "proximity" in this relationship. See Cohen 2000, 22-28.

3. For a full discussion of the ontology of digital media, particularly its binary code as a kind of elemental particle underlying all of its manifestations, see Evens 2012.
4. Santos discusses Deresiewicz's points at length in his article (Santos, 2011).
5. For a full discussion of Levinas's views on and references to Shakespeare, see Cohen, 2010, 150-68.
6. Levinas defines and develops the concept of "transcendence" and the "transcendent" throughout his career (see especially Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence* [1999]). Briefly, Levinas employs the term to refer to the deeply rooted human need and ability to "transcend" the self and connect with the other in this life, not to a move beyond the material world, as in the usual sense of the word. As noted below, Levinas challenges traditional notions of the self that see it as locked in its own consciousness or ego. For more on Levinas's use of the term "transcendence," see Theodore de Boer, *The Rationality of Transcendence: Studies in the Philosophy of Emmannuel Levinas* (1977).
7. Beyond the relevance of his ideas to textual interpretation, Levinas's views on this dramatic universe may be linked to current applications of his thought in Shakespeare and appropriation studies. Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin's recent book collection, *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation* (2014), employs Levinas's "face-to-face" theory, particularly the self's obligation to the other, to refigure ways of thinking about textual appropriation. As Huang and Rivlin aver, Levinas's thought yields "provocative implications . . . for the study of appropriations," for, as they explain, "both Shakespeare and its appropriations can be the actors and the acted upon, the self and the other, sometimes in the space of a single act" (Huang and Rivlin 2014, 4).
8. See note 2, above.
9. For a full discussion of the status box and coaxing performances in Facebook, see Morrison 2014, 120-25.

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