cogent
arts &
humanities

LITERATURE, LINGUISTICS & CRITICISM | CRITICAL ESSAY

"Not stones but men": Publics and pedagogy in Shakespeare's Roman plays

Claire Hansen[1]*

*Corresponding author: Claire Hansen, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia
E-mail: claire.hansen@sydney.edu.au

Humanities Research: Shakespeare and the Public
This article forms part of a collection on "Shakespeare and the Public", commissioned and supported by the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University. This is the first such issue to be published in *Cogent Arts & Humanities*: previous thematic issues of contemporary work in interdisciplinary humanities scholarship have been published in the journal *Humanities Research*, and this connection is preserved in the title of the collection. The Humanities Research Centre brings together scholars from all over the world, housing Visiting Fellows and hosting conferences and symposia to stimulate and publicise new knowledge in all areas of the humanities, creative arts and social sciences. Each individual issue draws on scholarly activities and events enabled by the Centre.

Additional information is available at the end of the article

Abstract: This essay utilises the representation of publics in William Shakespeare's Roman plays to reflect on Shakespearean pedagogy and questions of public value. Through the use of a complexivist framework, this essay demonstrates how distinct areas of enquiry—the publics of Shakespeare's Roman plays and pedagogical theory—can usefully illuminate each other and reflect on questions of Shakespeare as a public good. Peripheral publics in *Titus Andronicus* supply a model for transmission-style pedagogical frameworks; the publics of *Julius Caesar* and the networks of *Antony and Cleopatra* demonstrate the complexity of educational systems; and, finally, the representation of the people in *Coriolanus* interrogates the conceptualisation of the public and problematises notions of public value in Shakespeare and in higher education.

Subjects: Pedagogy; Shakespeare; Public; Education

Keywords: Shakespeare; pedagogy; complexity theory; public value; public good; Roman plays; teaching; education; *Julius Caesar*; *Titus Andronicus*; *Coriolanus*; *Antony and Cleopatra*

1. Introduction

In *Shakespeare among the Moderns*, Richard Halpern notes that:

> Among Shakespeare's works the Roman plays assume singular importance for modern political thought because it is there, and there alone, that something like an urban, public space emerges. (Halpern, 1997, p. 52)

This paper will examine the publics which generate this "urban, public space" of the Roman plays, and more specifically, how these publics can be understood as complex systems. Further, this "complexivist" framing of the publics in Shakespeare's plays will be used to illuminate the complex pedagogical systems in which the plays are now taught. In paralleling analysis of Shakespeare's plays with reflections on Shakespearean pedagogy, this paper will encounter what is often referred to as the "public value" or "public good", or what Shakespeare in *Coriolanus* calls the "public benefit" (Shakespeare, 2013, 1.1.147). Conventional notions of Shakespeare's public and pedagogy will first be explored through *Titus Andronicus*, which offers a baseline from which to compare the increasing complexity of the public's construction in *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, before turning to quantifiable public "values" and the construction of Shakespeare's most challenging public in *Coriolanus*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Claire Hansen is a researcher on the Shakespeare Reloaded Project at the University of Sydney. She is also a sessional lecturer and tutor. Her monograph, *Shakespeare and Complexity Theory*, will be published by Routledge in 2017.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This essay looks at how Shakespeare's Roman plays can illuminate our understanding of the relationship between Shakespeare, pedagogy and the "public" in twenty-first century Australia. It is interested in exploring how we define "publics" and, more importantly, what constitutes the "public good".

cogent·oa

This presentist approach uses complexity theory to understand better the systemic construction of publics in Shakespeare's Roman plays, and to imagine a way to reconceptualise the relationship between Shakespeare, pedagogy and questions of public value. Complexity theory is useful for these purposes because it is interested in how complex systems—whether environmental, political, social or educational—operate. Its framework is applicable for conceptualising the dynamic behavioural patterns of publics in Shakespeare as well as learning processes in Shakespearean pedagogy. Complex systems, while incredibly diverse, all share certain core behaviours—including non-linearity, unpredictability and the ability to self-organise without a leader or controller.

2. Silent publics and transmission teaching in *Titus Andronicus*

Criticism of the public in Shakespeare's Roman plays is haunted by accusations of what is more often than not identified as "fickleness". Nicholas Visser points to a critical tradition in which the crowd (especially in *Julius Caesar*) is understood to be fickle and impulsive (Visser, 1994, pp. 23, 25). In his edition of *Antony and Cleopatra*, John Wilders refers to the "notorious fickleness of the Roman mob" (Wilders, ed. 1995a, 1.4.44n). Gary Taylor also describes the Roman public of *Julius Caesar* in these generic terms, labelling them "fickle and easy to manipulate" (Taylor, 1994, p. 336).

Visser critiques readings of the fickle crowd as deeply implicated in "conventional notions of collective action" and employing a "view from above" perspective on the public (Visser, 1994, p. 23). But in Shakespeare and George Peele's *Titus Andronicus*, it is difficult to afford much agency to the public portrayed. The construction of the publics in this play appears entirely in keeping with orthodox accusations: the Roman public is for the most part voiceless and invisible.

It is, though, the people's political preference which initiates the conflict of *Titus Andronicus*. Communicated via their tribune, Titus' brother, Marcus—whose familial connection positions him less as a spokesperson for the people than as an advocate for the Andronici—we are told that the "common voice" nominates Titus for the Roman empery:

> Titus Andronicus, the people of Rome,
> Whose friend in justice thou hast ever been,
> Send thee by me, their tribune and their trust,
> This palliament of white and spotless hue,
> And name thee in election for the empire[.] (Shakespeare, 1995c, 1.1.182–1.1.186)

However, it is not the "fickle" people who then revolt, but Saturninus. He accuses Titus of trying to "rob me of the people's hearts" (1995c, 1.1.211), although Titus assures him that he "will restore to thee | The people's hearts, and wean them from themselves" (1995c, 1.1.214–1.1.215). Titus' language implies the public's childish malleability, which cannot be contradicted as the public speak only through the mediation of noble voices like Marcus and other unnamed tribunes (who in *Coriolanus* will be made explicitly distinct from the public for whom they speak).

> With voices and applause of every sort,
> Patricians and plebeians, we create
> Lord Saturninus Rome's great emperor,
> And say, "Long live our emperor Saturnine!" (1995c, 1.1.234–1.1.237)

Marcus' rhetoric here serves as a substitute for the actual "voices and applause" of the public; one man stands in for many, in much the same way that *Henry V* asks its spectators to "[i]nto a thousand parts divide one man" (Shakespeare, 1995b, Prologue 23).

The public depicted here is not understood to be complex: it is predictable, controllable and organised by leaders. Pedagogically, this is analogous to the outdated but stubbornly lingering model of transmission teaching, which still resonates despite a general acknowledgement that teachers are, as Roslyn Arnold argues, "no longer expected to simply transmit information" (Arnold, 2004). As John Biggs and Catherine Tang reiterate:

> The view of university teaching as transmitting information is so widely accepted that teaching and assessment the world over are based on it. Teaching rooms and media are specifically designed for one-way delivery. (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p. 18)

As Liam Semler describes, in this model of teaching, "the students are given little room for extensive freedom of thought" (Semler, 2013, p. 43). These restrictive criteria for learning can result in repetition or regurgitation, which is precisely what occurs in Titus' instructions to the "public", who is again voiced by Marcus. Titus declares: "Crown him and say, 'Long live our emperor!'" (1995c, 1.1.233), to which Marcus echoes: "And say, 'Long live our emperor Saturnine!'" (1995c, 1.1.237). Here, Titus "weans" the public through a simple call-and-response.

This transmission model of education is reiterated at the play's end, in one of the numerous instances of symmetry between the first and last scenes of *Titus*. Marcus again speaks for and to the people, and explicitly gives himself the role of teacher. The citizen body, is, he describes,

> By uproars severed, as a flight of fowl
> Scattered by winds and high tempestuous gusts,
> O let me teach you how to knit again
> This scattered corn into one mutual sheaf,
> These broken limbs again into one body. (1995c, 5.3.66–5.3.71)

Marcus describes a dismembered public which can only be made cohesive by the authority of a single teacher. This relatively silent public must be taught how to become "one body", despite the fact that civil unrest is not one of *Titus Andronicus*' many sources of violence. Although Saturninus complains that "disturbers of our peace | Buzz in the people's ears" (1995c, 4.4.6–4.4.7) and fears that "the citizens favour Lucius | And will revolt from me to succour him" (1995c, 4.4.79), the play does not depict and is not interested in the public unrest of the citizen body. The fear or potential of public revolt haunts the edges of the play, but never manifests. This undefined public, characterised by an indirect offstage pressure on the periphery of the narrative, is witnessed only in the anxieties of characters, and exerts more of an imagined or latent potential than an actual force. It is a vague, dreamy, half-known conceptualisation of the public. Indistinct and theoretical, the public of *Titus* is characterised by its lack of individualisation and lack of direct agency in the broader system.

Most importantly, the Roman public is unable to adapt or learn. In a clear demonstration of the ineffectiveness of this transmission model, the public learn nothing by the end of *Titus Andronicus*. They conclude the play with the same request with which they opened it—for an Andronici to take the empery. Again, this request is mediated: Emillius states "for well I know | The common voice do cry it shall be so" (1995c, 5.3.138–5.3.139). By definition, the act of learning requires some form of change in the state of the learner. Change "is what makes the situation *educational*" (English, 2013, p. 130, Italics in original). *Titus Andronicus* thus leaves itself open to accusations of a closed-loop, repetitive pattern of learning. Vernon Guy Dickson believes that Lucius' final actions in the play "raise significant questions about the future of Rome and the precedents he is reiterating" (Dickson, 2009, p. 404). With an utterly unchanged populace, the public of Rome in Shakespeare and Peele's *Titus Andronicus* appears neither complex nor capable of learning.

3. Complex publics and pedagogy in *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*

Unlike the Rome of *Titus Andronicus,* the public of *Julius Caesar* is neither absent nor compliant. It is driven not by any centralised authority or teacher, but by collective and unpredictable shifts in mood and favour. The crowd is unstable, transitioning from celebratory in the opening scene to murderous by the third act, largely by its own whims and never because of any single controller.

This fleeting loyalty, along with the murder of Cinna the Poet, is often given as evidence of the mindless mob mentality of *Julius Caesar*'s public. However, it can also be read as exemplary of complex behavioural patterns: the Roman public is continuously unstable because they are a system perennially in flux. Complex systems like crowds, as Neil Johnson explains, "tend to occupy the middle-ground between order and disorder, making occasional forays toward one or the other and back again without the help of any "invisible hand" or central controller" (Johnson, 2009, p. 67). No agent within the system has full awareness of or control over the system itself (Cilliers, 1998, pp. 4–5). Instead, the systems are structured and maintained by the ongoing interactions of their parts. This is known as self-organisation, which is

> a process in which pattern at the global level of a system emerges solely from numerous interactions among the lower-level components of the system. Moreover, the rules specifying interactions among the system's components are executed using only local information, without reference to the global pattern. (Camazine et al., 2001, p. 8)

As Dirk Helbing describes in his work on modelling crowds as complex systems, collective behaviour on a macroscopic scale emerges from individual human interactions (Helbing, 2012). The broader system is generated by micro-level interactions, which makes self-organisation critical to the generation and maintenance of complex systems. Thus, the public in *Julius Caesar* exemplify a complex system in the inability of any one agent to retain stable control over it.

Not only is the public of *Julius Caesar* driven by self-organising, complex patterns of behaviour, but it is the public which helps to generate the systemic phenomenon of Caesar himself. The tribune Flavius says:

> Let no images
> Be hung with Caesar's trophies. I'll about,
> And drive away the vulgar from the streets.
> So do you too, where you perceive them thick.
> These growing feathers plucked from Caesar's wing
> Will make him fly an ordinary pitch,
> Who else would soar above the view of men,
> And keep us all in servile fearfulness. (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.1.69–1.1.76)

The tribunes acknowledge that the power of Caesar is not generated by the individual himself: Caesar is a phenomenon created by the complex behavioural patterns of the Roman system, and is composed of much more than one individual agent. The people provide Caesar with the "growing feathers" he needs to "soar above" and become more myth than man.

This directly contradicts critical commentary that understands power in *Julius Caesar* as "increasingly centralised under the control of Caesar" (Spotswood, 2000, p. 70). It even contradicts how some of the characters in the play understand the public. The tribune Murellus labels the public as "blocks" and "stones", "worse than senseless things"! (1998, 1.1.36). Antony, though, is more astute in his assessment. He explicitly identifies the public's agency in the construction of the Roman public sphere, telling the people: "You are not wood, you are not stones, but men" (1998, 3.2.143). He realises the active (or reactive) role of the public in shaping the system. The people are not simply objects to be "worked on" but active agents (Visser, 1994, p. 26). It is not an individual who creates the

cogent ••arts + humanities

Caesar phenomenon which lingers long after the physical Caesar's death; as Brutus says, "we put" the power in him (1998, 2.1.16).

The role of the system in generating or "self-organising" the individual is painfully realised by Antony in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Antony—unlike Caesar—realises his dependence upon the broader network of people around him:

> I wish I could be made so many men,
> And all of you clapped up together in
> An Antony, that I might do you service
> As good as you have done. (Shakespeare, 1995a, 4.2.16–4.2.19)

Antony recognises his own incompleteness, fearing himself to be no more than a "mangled shadow" (1995a, 4.2.27) that is only given form and substance through its interaction with others. In his fear, he bids his servitors to "wait on me tonight" (1995a, 4.2.20), "[t]end me tonight" (1995a, 4.2.24) and "stay til death" (1995a, 4.2.30). Later, Antony likens himself to a transient and unformed cloud, as if searching to find a vocabulary to explain the concept of distributed self-organisation:

> [N]ow thy captain is
> Even such a body. Here I am Antony,
> Yet cannot hold this visible shape[.] (1995a, 4.14.12–4.14.14)

Antony's identity is constructed and maintained by the system or network around him. When that system becomes unstable and its parts unreliable, Antony loses his form and identity. He understands himself as a "shadow", "cloud" and shifting "vapour" (1995a, 4.14.3), which "dislimns and makes it indistinct | As water is in water" (1995a, 4.24.10–4.24.11).

It is not only Antony who recognises this: Octavius Caesar also realises that Antony's character is produced by a network of relations. Octavius Caesar identifies and exploits Antony's reliance on those around him, imagining Antony's supporters (who have since defected to Caesar) as an extension of Antony's physical form:

> Plant those that have revolted in the van
> That Antony may seem to spend his fury
> Upon himself. (1995a, 4.6.9–4.6.11)

This suggests that Antony's deserters are like grafted cuttings attached to the body of Caesar's army, but still in some way connected to Antony and capable of causing grief. Both Antony and Caesar are well aware that Antony's power is distributed across his broader network of support, and not in his person.

The sense that an individual or phenomenon is generated by a public or at least a network that extends well beyond the individual self is echoed when, in *Julius Caesar*, Cassius says:

> And why should Caesar be a tyrant then?
> Poor man, I know he would not be a wolf
> But that he sees the Romans are but sheep.
> He were no lion, were not Romans hinds. (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.3.103–1.3.106)

Caesar is only a "wolf" and "lion" because the Romans act as "sheep" and "hinds". He grows "mighty" (1998, 1.3.107) because Rome is full of "weak straws" (1998, 1.3.108). Caesar is only "illuminate[d]" (1998, 1.3.110) thanks to the "trash" of Rome (1998, 1.3.108). Shakespeare's verb choice is telling; he uses this illumination image repeatedly to indicate that Caesar is not a self-lit phenomenon: the light

is projected upon him by the public. It is Rome's perception of Caesar that irradiates him; their acqui-escing weakness acts as a foil to his brilliance. We see this in Brutus' warning that "[i]t is the bright day that brings forth the adder" (1998, 2.1.14), again implying that it is external light which imbues Caesar with power.

This illumination imagery recurs in *Coriolanus*, in which the tribune Sicinius describes how the public's "blaze" could be taught to "darken" Coriolanus:

> This, as you say, suggested
> At some time when his soaring insolence
> Shall teach the people—which time shall not want,
> If he be put upon't, and that's as easy
> As to set dogs on sheep—will be his fire
> To kindle their dry stubble, and their blaze
> Shall darken him forever. (Shakespeare, 2013, 2.1.247–2.1.253)

In *Julius Caesar*, the public's trash enables Caesar to burn bright by reflection, whereas in *Coriolanus* the people's kindled "dry stubble" will consume him. Shakespeare repeats the same image in both plays to illustrate the complex relationship between public figure and the common public.

Shakespeare also repeats the reference to teaching the public in *Titus Andronicus* and *Coriolanus*. Sicinius' notion of "teaching" (2013, 2.1.249) is different to Marcus' in *Titus*: although Brutus and Sicinius—both, like Marcus, tribunes—aim to "suggest" (2013, 2.1.238) that Coriolanus hates the people, what Sicinius believes will *teach* the people is not the tribunes' influence but Coriolanus' own "soaring insolence" (2013, 2.1.248). This is a more effective pedagogical method than Marcus' notion of transmission teaching in *Titus Andronicus*; Sicinius' experiential learning model demonstrates a more developed and complex notion of educational strategy.

In our own modern context, educational systems are increasingly understood to be complex systems. A learner, a classroom and a Shakespeare play can all be identified as complex systems. This means that in secondary and tertiary English classes, "the production of meaning […] can be said to involve 'complex systems of complex systems'" (Lancaster, 2013, p. 1270). Most educators would probably agree with the complexivist concept that learning is what Keith Morrison calls an unpre-dictable "joint voyage of exploration, not simply of recycling given knowledge" (Morrison, 2008, p. 23). This is an almost ubiquitous understanding of the dynamism of learning.

However, there is a difference between "espoused theories" (what we say) and "theories-in-use" (what we do) (see Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978). We may understand that the system is really gener-ated by the distributed agencies of its parts—learners, educators, texts, institutions, environments and so forth—just as the phenomena of Caesar and Antony are not generated by the men them-selves but rather by the systems and publics in which they are situated. However, in practice, system constraints may require educators to behave as if the system is non-complex, with learning out-comes predictable and controllable. As Sharon Zizkovic argues,

> While complex adaptive systems theory has been recognised as an appropriate way
> to address this type of problem, complexity-accepting strategies are difficult for public
> administrations because they are at odds with their current dominant logic. (Zizkovic, 2015)

Complexivist strategies are "difficult for governments", she adds, because governments have needs "that are more easily satisfied when there are clear relationships between cause and effect". We may understand learning as a joint voyage of exploration, but in the restrictive realities of educa-tional institutions, this may be subordinated to the representation of knowledge for assessment. This occurs

in spite of the often-heard claim that the processes of learning are as important as its products. As a result, for example, although students may be encouraged to learn about a novel by musing about circumstances and events that aren't explicitly developed in the text, in the end the teacher would evaluate their learning, not on what *might have* happened but on what *did* happen. (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 205, Italics in original)

There is clear tension in attempting to account for the complex unpredictability of learning within a deterministic and rigid pedagogical framework, just as there is tension between the self-organised, decentralised, complex nature of power in the publics of Shakespeare's Roman plays, and a demonstrated tendency (within and outside the plays) to interpret that power as conversely centralised in one individual. This analogy between complex publics and pedagogy thus illustrates a shared strain between complex behavioural patterns and the inadequate non-complexivist models and frameworks used to understand that behaviour.

Complexity theory thus enables recognition of the self-organisation of the Roman public of *Julius Caesar* and of our educational institutions. However, this also reveals the difficulty these systems have in recognising their complex patterns of behaviour. In this conflict between the complexity of the public in Shakespeare and the varied and conflicting interpretations of that public, the difficulty of interpreting the crowd is made plain. As Ian Munro observes, "what particularly marks the space of the crowd is its *illegibility*, its resistance to being read" (Munro, 2005, p. 10, Italics in original). A similar illegibility and resistance is evident in the public of *Coriolanus*, which provides a final example of the rich parallel between the complexity of publics and pedagogies.

4. Quantifying publics and public value in *Coriolanus* and Shakespearean pedagogy

In Stefan Collini's *What are Universities For?*, he emphasises the limitations of quantifying the "value" of tertiary education:

Any discussion of the place of universities in contemporary society will inevitably be driven to articulate, in however rudimentary terms, some sense of human purposes beyond that of accumulating wealth. Or so one might think. Yet it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the greater part of public discourse about universities at present reduces to the following dispiriting proposition: universities need to justify getting more money and the way to do this is by showing that they help to make more money. (Collini, 2012, p. x)

The public "value" of Shakespeare in this context relates not only to idealistic conceptualisations of the term, but also to questions of economic value. Economistic and individualistic discourse, increasingly prevalent in reference to contemporary educational institutions, is also pervasive in *Coriolanus*; a play similarly concerned with a quantifiable understanding of "value". The play seeks to come to terms with the public, and with Coriolanus himself, through a rhetoric of numbers. The characters understand their world through measurements: *Coriolanus* repeatedly divides, doubles or reduces things to specific numbers, or "arithmetic", in Cominius' words (2013, 3.1.247). In addition to the play's focus on payments, quantification and sharing of spoils, *Coriolanus* revolves around the imagery of halving and doubling—outdoing even *The Merchant of Venice* in references to the word "half".[1] Coriolanus announces that

Were half to half the world by th'ears and he
Upon my party, I'd revolt to make
Only my wars with him. (2013, 1.1.228–1.1.230)

The Roman army is "cloven" (2013, 1.4.22); Cominius promises that the soldiers will "[d]ivide in all with us" (2013, 1.6.87); Coriolanus bemoans that he is "half through" (2013, 2.3.121) the "custom of request" (2013, 2.3.140), and later disparages

This double worship,
Where one part does disdain with cause, the other
Insult without all reason[.] (2013, 3.1.143–3.1.145)

A senator imagines that "our good city | Cleave in the midst and perish" (2013, 3.2.29); in the fourth act, imagery returns to "double bosoms" and friends "who twin" in love "[u]nseparable" (2013, 4.4.13, 4.4.15–4.4.16); and Aufidius offers Coriolanus "half of my commission" (2013, 4.5.140). The third Servingman of the Volscians tells his co-workers that "our general is cut i'th' middle and but one half of what he was yesterday, for the other has half, by the entreaty and grant of the whole table" (2013, 4.5.199–4.5.202). This discourse of quantification and division is pertinent because it relates to the conceptualisation of the public and to what Annabel Patterson calls "the play's most important contrast—that between the many and the one". She identifies how the play registers the plebeians' plurality by "their ordinal numbering" in contrast to Coriolanus' "singularity". Like Visser, in his treatment of *Julius Caesar*, Patterson argues for a re-evaluation of the plebeians in *Coriolanus*. They are not, she argues, "the pathetic nonentities, aimless and inarticulate", that other critics have believed them to be:

> the plebeians themselves (as distinct from their tribunes) are generously represented, and the popular voice, as they themselves speak it, has genuine grievances to express. This was Shakespeare's point of furthest reach in exploring the claims of the many against the few. (Patterson, 1989, pp. 129–130, 132, 11)

However, although Patterson argues for their anonymity, the multitude of *Coriolanus* refuses to stay as one undifferentiated mass—as they do in *Titus*. In complexivist terms, the tension between the parts of the system and the whole system drives the play. This pattern is immediately evident in the complaints of the First Citizen in the opening scene:

> We are accounted poor citizens, the patricians good. What authority surfeits on would relieve us. If they would yield us but the superfluity while it were wholesome, we might guess they relieved us humanely. But they think we are too dear. The leanness that afflicts us, the object of our misery, is as an inventory to particularise their abundance; our sufferance is a gain to them. (2013, 1.1.13–1.1.20)

The citizens are aware of an interdependent relationship between plebeian and patrician. One group must starve so another can surfeit. It is this dangerous argument that is seen in discourse around the value of the humanities, particularly in the spectre of the "two cultures" and the false dichotomy that creates a world in which the humanities must demonstrate its worth against the Goliath figure of the sciences. It is because of this sentiment that critics like Jonathan Bate posit the following hypothetical scenario:

> Imagine a civil servant responsible for the distribution of the research budget. Imagine them saying "I don't lose any sleep at night over the spending of taxpayers' money on medical research, but I do lose sleep over the spending of it on humanities research; I like riding my horse, but I don't expect the taxpayer to pay for me to do so." Imagine, then, that you have the ear of that civil servant, or for that matter the minister to whom they report, for a few sentences. What will you say to help them to rest more easily at night on this matter of the taxpayer and humanities research? (Bate, 2011, p. 7)

This is one small way where the public value of the humanities, and the public good of Shakespeare, comes to the fore: a play like *Coriolanus* provides a model for understanding and critiquing systems which perpetuate these kinds of value-laden discourses that seek quantifiable ways of understanding the world.

Coriolanus repeatedly attempts to segment or dismember both the individual self and the public: Coriolanus—like Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*—becomes increasingly fragmented. In addition to Martius' isolation from the Roman body, the play's language divides Martius even from himself:

> By your patience
> If 'gainst yourself you be incensed, we'll put you,
> Like one that means his proper harm, in manacles,
> Then reason safely with you. (2013, 1.9.54–1.9.57)

Coriolanus is further fragmented when he imagines himself comprising the spirits of eunuchs, virgins, babies, knaves, schoolboys and beggars (2013, 3.2.112–3.2.121). More broadly, the play envisages its people as "shreds" (2013, 1.1.203) and "fragments" (2013, 1.1.217); the Roman power is in "parcels" (2013, 1.2.32). In repeatedly enacting this rhetorical violence upon the holistic idea of a single body and a common people, *Coriolanus* seems to be trying to find an answer to the question: "What is the city but the people?" (2013, 3.1.199).

The actual components and composition of "Rome" become increasingly perplexing. Coriolanus holds a contradictory view, describing Aufidius as "the man of my soul's hate" for "[p]iercing our Romans" (2013, 1.5.10–1.5.11), while simultaneously exhibiting no respect for or enduring loyalty to individual Romans. Coriolanus may have no particular loyalty to specific individuals, but he has created an imagined conception of Rome, much as Michael Werner describes the construction of the "public" as "a special kind of virtual social object". Werner argues:

> When we understand images and texts as public, we do not gesture to a statistically measurable series of others. We make a necessarily imaginary reference to the public as opposed to other individuals. Public opinion, for example, is understood as belonging to a public rather than to scattered individuals. (Werner, 2002, pp. 55, 161)

In *Coriolanus*' tendency to quantify, fragment, dismember and divide into numbers, parts and halves, the play works *against* the ideal construction of a public as unified. It is the reality of the "scattered individuals", as opposed to the romance of the "imaginary" public, which becomes problematic.

This focus on the "scattered individuals" amongst the nameless "public" is evident in the Third Citizen's own description of the multitude not as a cohesive whole but rather as "diverse":

> We have been called so of many, not that our heads are some brown, some black, some abram, some bald, but that our wits are so diversely coloured; and truly, I think if all our wits were to issue out of one skull, they would fly east, west, north, south, and their consent of one direct way should be at once to all the points o'th' compass. [...] We are not to stay together, but to come by him where he stands, by ones, by twos, and by threes. He's to make his requests by particulars, wherein every one of us has a single honour in giving him our own voices with our own tongues. (2013, 2.3.17–2.3.23, 2.3.40–2.3.44)

The Third Citizen echoes the conceptualisation of Rome as a "flight of fowl | Scattered by winds" in *Titus Andronicus* (1995c, 5.3.67–5.3.68). Yet, importantly, *Coriolanus* is the only Roman play in which the public self-identify; they are not only defined by the language of the patrician class.

This dismantles any sense of a unified or common "public opinion" because, as we were reminded by Werner above, the concept of the public does not work if it is revealed as constituted by "scattered individuals". Werner argues:

> The ideal unity of the public sphere is best understood as an imaginary convergence point that is the backdrop of critical discourse in each of these contexts and publics—an implied but abstract point that is often referred to as "the public" or "public opinion" and by virtue of that fact endowed with legitimacy and the ability to dissolve power. A "public" in this context is a special kind of virtual social object, enabling a special mode of address. (Werner, 2002, p. 55)

It is precisely this endowment which the Citizens here consider: "We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power that we have no power to do" (2013, 2.3.4–2.3.5). In this highly self-reflective moment, the Citizens here compare what they perceive to be their real situation with the idea of the "many-headed multitude" (2013, 2.3.15–2.3.16). This distinction between the citizens as a group of individuals and the citizens that comprise a public with its attendant "powers" is made plain.

This can be better understood through the lens of complexity theory. What the Citizens here identify is a difference between the *parts* of the system and its *whole*. A complex system is generated by the interaction of its component parts; this interaction produces or creates the system itself. One cannot simply divide a complex system into parts and understand how those parts produce the whole, because the whole is created only in the interaction of those parts—in their relationships—not by the parts in isolation. This is very different from the conventional understanding of system as "a whole composed of parts in orderly arrangement *according to some scheme or plan*" (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d., My emphasis).

The complex, unpredictable, dynamic interactions of the various parts of Rome generate the "imaginary convergence point", an abstract point—as Werner describes—which we identify broadly as "the public". But, upon dissecting or fragmenting that public into parts, the whole system disappears from view and we cannot locate any semblance of a "public". We find only parts. *Coriolanus* is troubled by this distinction. The play differentiates between the non-specific idea of the city and the specific people who inhabit it. In planning to attack Rome, Coriolanus imagines a whole: Rome, he says, is as "a pile | Of noisome musty chaff" (2013, 5.1.25–5.1.26) which contains only "one poor grain or two" (2013, 5.1.27). It is Menenius who forces the play to again transition from a vague conception of an imaginary "public" to the specifics of the individuals which people it:

> I am one of those; his mother, wife, his child
> And this brave fellow too: we are the grains,
> You are the musty chaff, and you are smelt
> Above the moon. We must be burnt for you. (2013, 5.1.28–5.1.32)

Coriolanus struggles to express how individual people relate to the notion of the public. The Rome in *Coriolanus* seeks to understand how its own people function as a social system, but it relies on outdated "pretty tale[s]" like the belly fable, which even the teller, Menenius, admits is archaic:

> It may be you have heard it,
> But since it serves my purpose, I will venture
> To stale't a little more. (2013, 1.1.85–1.1.87)

The struggles of the public of *Coriolanus* to find a way to understand the complexity of their social interactions is a useful lens for reflection on the discourses which shape a contemporary understanding of the "public". This is exemplified in the play's tension between what is seen as a "public" and "private" good, a question raised increasingly in regard to higher education today (Collini, 2012, p. 14). Leigh Dale points to the assumption "that if education were to be publicly funded it should serve the needs of the state rather than those of the individual" (Dale, 2012, p. 16). But a clear conceptualisation of public or "state" good is highly problematic, not least because of the difficulties in defining what constitutes a "public" and a "value". As John Frow states, the question of value is both "difficult" and "perhaps embarrassing" (Frow, 1993, p. 208). Further, if Shakespeare education is a public good, the question of how it is dispersed to the public remains: is it, as John Bell argues, "up to theatre companies to keep [Shakespeare] alive by performing it"? (Marks, 2014). The role of certain individuals or subgroups in the definition and dissemination of public goods raises further questions regarding the relationship between the public as an imaginary abstract point and the specific persons who comprise it. Addressing the difficulty in shifting between the extremes of "scattered individuals" and the "imaginary" public is essential to clarifying and pursuing these questions.

As *Coriolanus* illustrates, the closer you look at a system, the less you see the bigger picture. As the public in *Coriolanus* comes into much closer view than it does in *Titus Andronicus, Antony and Cleopatra* and even *Julius Caesar*, it becomes harder to comprehend: as does our understanding of the public good. The patricians and the Roman citizens each have a very different understanding of what is "good" for the public. The citizens understand "public good" as the right to be fed; Menenius argues that they will profit indirectly from the "public benefit" transmitted from patrician belly to the body's "mutinous members" (2013, 1.1.143–1.1.150). This is uncomfortably close to Collini's argument, when he points out that

> it is sometimes argued that there is no reason why those who do not themselves go to university should contribute, through their taxes, to the costs of those who do. But this is to treat a university education and whatever flows from it as a purely private good. […] There are a great number of forms of public provision of which I may not be a direct beneficiary but which I believe society collectively should attempt to support. (Collini, 2012, p. 97)

There are echoes of Menenius' argument here: an individual may not benefit directly, but the belly feeds all parts of the system.

Complexity theory offers a different, more precise vocabulary for understanding how publics and educational systems operate. Its further application may also help to refine how the humanities and Shakespearean pedagogy can be supported in public discourse. Complexity theory requires us to rethink how our educational institutions and publics are structured, and steers attention away from a rigid focus on quantifiable benefits, instead understanding educational processes and publics as open-ended, unpredictable and dynamic.

5. Conclusion

This parallel discussion of Roman publics, Shakespearean pedagogy and public value uses a complexivist framework to demonstrate how two distinct topics—publics and pedagogies—can usefully illuminate each other.

An examination of the peripheral publics of *Titus Andronicus* supplied a model for transmission-style pedagogical frameworks, while a reading of distributed agency in *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* demonstrated the complexity of public systems and the decentralisation of Caesar and Antony. In particular, *Julius Caesar*'s difficulty in articulating its self-organisation highlights how the complexity of a system does not necessarily mean that a system's institutions are designed to recognise or support that complexity. Finally, this paper's exploration of the language of *Coriolanus* reveals the vexed boundary between an imaginary public and specific individuals, problematising the concept of "public value". Its preoccupation with quantification and the public good aligns with contemporary concerns surrounding higher education and the public value of Shakespeare and the humanities.

One of the public values of Shakespeare is his ability to aid in interrogating assumptions about the concept of the "public" how we construct our attitudes towards the idea of the public; and how we decide that there is a consensus as to what is "good" or "valuable" for that public. This is perhaps annoying circular, but Shakespeare's construction of publics—and perhaps even more interestingly, how his characters, audiences, readers and critics have interpreted those publics—can be of use in reflecting on our own assumptions and biases about the relationship between Shakespeare, pedagogy and the "public" in twenty-first century Australia.

This idea, of course, is not a new one. Jürgen Habermas, in tracking the "transformation" of the public in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, pointed to "the rise of critical discussion of art, music, and literature" as one of the catalysts for a movement towards a different notion of the public as "composed of private persons exercising rational-critical discourse in relation to the state and power" (Werner, 2002, pp. 46–47). There is a risk here of simplification in assuming that

cogent ··arts & humanities

engagement with the humanities is somehow distinct from or outside of state power or this tricky term, "the public". But if critical discussion of literature can help to formulate different notions of the public, then critical analysis of Shakespeare's constructions of the public through the lens of complexity theory may help to promote a clearer understanding of the relationship between Shakespeare, contemporary publics and their learning patterns, educational systems and values.

Author details
Claire Hansen[1]
E-mail: claire.hansen@sydney.edu.au
[1] University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia.

Note
1. *Coriolanus* includes 11 references compared to *Merchant*'s 9.

References
Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1974). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1978). *Organisational learning: A theory of action perspective*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Arnold, R. (2004, November 29–December 2). Empathic intelligence: The phenomenon of intersubjective engagement. In *Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) International Education Research Conference*. Melbourne. Retrieved October 27, 2011, from http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/secondary/creativearts/assets/drama/pdf/empathic.pdf

Bate, J. (Ed.). (2011). *The public value of the humanities*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for quality learning at university*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Camazine, S., Deneubourg, J.-L., Franks, N. R., Sneyd, J., Theraulaz, G., & Bonabeau, E. (2001). *Self-organisation in biological systems*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cilliers, P. (1998). *Complexity and postmodernism: Understanding complex systems*. London: Routledge.

Collini, S. (2012). *What are universities for?* London: Penguin.

Dale, L. (2012). *The enchantment of English: Professing English literatures in Australian universities* (2nd ed.). Sydney: University of Sydney Press.

Davis, B., Sumara, D., & Luce-Kapler, R. (2000). *Engaging minds: Learning and teaching in a complex world*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Dickson, V. G. (2009). "A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant": Emulation, rhetoric, and cruel propriety in *Titus Andronicus*. *Renaissance Quarterly, 62*, 376–409. http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/599865

English, A. R. (2013). *Discontinuity in learning: Dewey, Herbart, and education as transformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139177825

Frow, J. (1993). Regimes of value. In P. Mead & M. Campbell (Eds.), *Shakespeare's books: Contemporary cultural politics and the persistence of empire* (pp. 207–218). Parkville: Melbourne University Press.

Halpern, R. (1997). *Shakespeare among the moderns*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Helbing, D. (2012). Self-organization in pedestrian crowds. In *Social self-organization: Agent-based simulations and experiments to study emergent social behavior* (pp. 71–99). Berlin: Springer. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-24004-1

Johnson, N. (2009). *Simply complexity: A clear guide to complexity theory*. Oxford: Oneworld.

Lancaster, J. E. (2013). Complexity and relations. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 45*, 1264–1275. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2013.763595

Marks, K. (2014, March 5). John Bell brings to life Shakespeare's rarely staged "Magnificent Fairytale". *The Guardian Australia Culture Blog*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/stage/australia-culture-blog/2014/mar/05/shakespeares-winters-tale-john-bell-magnificent-fairytale

Morrison, K. (2008). Educational philosophy and the challenge of complexity theory. In M. Mason (Ed.), *Complexity theory and the philosophy of education* (pp. 16–31). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781444307351

Munro, I. (2005). *The figure of the crowd in early modern London: The city and its double*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9781403978738

Oxford English Dictionary. (n.d.). *System, N.* (in English). Oxford University Press.

Patterson, A. (1989). *Shakespeare and the popular voice*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.

Semler, L. E. (2013). *Teaching Shakespeare and Marlowe: Learning versus the system*. London: Bloomsbury. http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472538956

Shakespeare, W. (1995a). *Antony and Cleopatra*. (J. Wilders, Ed., 3rd series ed.). London: Methuen Drama. http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781408163245.00000007

Shakespeare, W. (1995b). *King Henry V*. (T. W. Craik, Ed.). London: Methuen Drama. http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781408159910.00000020

Shakespeare, W. (1995c). *Titus Andronicus*. (J. Bate, Ed., Arden Shakespeare 3rd series). London: Methuen Drama. http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781408160121.00000031

Shakespeare, W. (1998). *Julius Caesar*. (D. Daniell, Ed., Arden Shakespeare 3rd series). London: Cengage Learning. http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781408160282.00000040

Shakespeare, W. (2013). *Coriolanus*. (P. Holland, Ed., 3rd series ed.). London: Bloomsbury. http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781408174784.00000039

Spotswood, J. W. (2000). "We are undone already": Disarming the multitude in *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 42*, 61–78.

Taylor, G. (1994). Bardicide. In T. Kishi, R. Pringle, & S. Wells (Eds.), *Shakespeare and cultural traditions: The selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress, Tokyo, 1991* (pp. 333–349). Newark: University of Delaware Press.

Visser, N. (1994). Plebeian politics in *Julius Caesar*. *Shakespeare in Southern Africa, 7*, 22–31.

Werner, M. (2002). *Publics and counterpublics*. New York, NY: Zone Books.

Zizkovic, S. (2015). A complexity based diagnostic tool for tackling wicked problems. *Emergence Complexity and Organisation, 17*(1), 1–12.

Cogent Arts & Humanities (ISSN: 2331-1983) is published by Cogent OA, part of Taylor & Francis Group.

Publishing with Cogent OA ensures:

- Immediate, universal access to your article on publication
- High visibility and discoverability via the Cogent OA website as well as Taylor & Francis Online
- Download and citation statistics for your article
- Rapid online publication
- Input from, and dialog with, expert editors and editorial boards
- Retention of full copyright of your article
- Guaranteed legacy preservation of your article
- Discounts and waivers for authors in developing regions

Submit your manuscript to a Cogent OA journal at www.CogentOA.com