

Will He or Won't He? Shakespeare's Stage Presence in the Media Age

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Andy Warhol better than anyone understood "that to be a star is to be a blank screen" for the projection of someone else's short-lived dreams. The Wooster Group's *Hamlet* (2006) bears out this insight by offering a parallel for his innumerable silkscreens of Elizabeth Taylor in its re-enactment of the digitally treated filmic record of Richard Burton's *Hamlet*. As a result, the intermedial production prolongs Shakespeare's mourning exercise and dramatization of ever deferred identities into a meditation on the ghostliness of fame and the theater.

"I always thought I'd like my own tombstone to be blank. No epitaph, and no name. Well, actually, I'd like it to say 'figment'" (Warhol 129)

Having started its career with several devised theater productions revolving around Spalding Gray,¹ the Wooster Group, the New York based performance company led by Elizabeth LeCompte, soon enough built itself a solid reputation for intermedial confrontations with canonical prose and drama texts (Flaubert, Eliot, O'Neill, Wilder, Miller, Stein). By being cross-cut with interdisciplinary material and fitted into a

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1. Spalding Gray (1941-2004) was a founding member of the Wooster Group whose solo performance style developed out of *Nayatt School* (1978), the third part of the Group's *Rhode Island Trilogy* (1975-79), though he still appeared in later Wooster Group productions. His monologue career officially started with *Sex and Death to the Age 14* (1979), like subsequent pieces, a 1982 retrospective, and his best-known work, *Swimming to Cambodia* (1985), first presented at the Performing Garage, The Wooster Group's New York home in Soho.

larger work-in-progress, these literary texts lose their stability as printed publications and the primordial status they possess in traditional stagings, apart from being re-institutionalized by the attention given. After several, more conventional stagings of playscripts by O'Neill, Chekhov and Racine, which were framed rather than deconstructed, the company's *Poor Theater: A Series of Simulacra* (2003) went one step further by abandoning a central written text and foregrounding theatrical simulation as a paradoxical way of undermining and reaffirming the performers' live presence. In their *Hamlet* (2006) the ironic treatment of text and performer was exacerbated by copying Bill Colleran's "theatrofilm" of John Gielgud's 1964 stage production, starring Richard Burton at the time of his much publicized marriage to Elizabeth Taylor. Live-streaming the film through earphones, loudspeakers and a large upstage screen, and aided by props on casters, the company imitated not just the intonations and tempo of Gielgud's actors but also their blocking and gestures, down to the zooms and pans of Colleran's cameras. This they did in a set which, except for the absent stairway and the added screen and flatscreen monitors, replicated the major features of Ben Edwards's original design—the platform with sidesteps, the clothes rack doubling as arras, the Thonet chair, a stool and table.

What facilitated the Wooster Group's reconstruction, or made it at all possible, was that Gielgud and Burton had abstained from any historical reconstruction, since they decided to stage their 1964 production as a run-through prior to the dress-rehearsal, so as not to detract from Shakespeare's text. Burton wanted the production "to look deliberately unfinished" and the people "to feel that they were seeing the play for the first time" (Morley 343-44), which must have been hard for the star-starved crowds blinded by the hype surrounding Burton and Taylor's relationship. Beyond that Gielgud's apparent reticence in rehearsal, enhanced by a flexible mind, plenty of erudition, and a "trial and error method" (Hume Cronyn qtd. in Morley 345), as opposed to Burton's strong-headed ideas about the role both he and the director knew by heart, also seemed to prevent any singular interpretation from being imposed on Shakespeare's text. The director had played the part from 1934 till 1944 but Burton, too, had been successful in it during the 1953 production at London's Old Vic, directed by Michael Benthall (Bragg 501), and assisted, it should be added, by Burton's adoptive father, a playwright and director himself. In one respect, the Broadway production publicly transferred the title of pre-eminent Hamlet performer from one generation to the next, as symbolized by Gielgud's playing the voice of Hamlet Sr. to Burton's Hamlet. Not without some irony, given the Wooster Group's

avant-garde status, Scott Shepherd² is inscribed into this genealogy: as he is facing the audience during the first apparition, his stage presence is overshadowed by the filmed apparition of Burton, clad in black, and the filmed contour of the helmeted Ghost on the backwall of the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre. In another respect Gielgud's official bestowal of Shakespearean pre-eminence onto Burton was overdue, since Burton's lucrative Hollywood commitments not only interfered with but already remediated any conception one may have had of his less remunerative theater career. Accordingly, his second Hamlet was less a means of "maintaining" his craft (Morley 342) than of "restoring" or recovering it from the onslaughts of the movie industry. For the Wooster Group, long familiar with Eugene O'Neill's family history, Burton's situation must have resonated with that of James O'Neill, another promising Shakespeare performer whose talents were ruined by Alexandre Dumas's money-making star-vehicle, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. LeCompte's interest in Burton's production, however, also ties in with her express commitment to a rehearsal mode. Thus her thirty-year repertoire should be considered one vast work-in-progress, whose different installments keep evolving and therefore steer clear of official "premieres" being called instead previews or open rehearsals. The Wooster Group members' apparent freedom to pause, rewind or fast-forward Colleran's filmic record practically literalizes the rehearsal mode's principle of interruptibility. Insofar, however, as the live-streaming became a technology-assisted means of rehearsing parts in a language with which some Wooster Group members may not have been too familiar, the immediacy of Shakespeare's language is again jeopardized.

What further threatens the immediacy of Shakespeare's text is that the Wooster Group obviously does not just playback Colleran's movie. Even in its restored guise, the movie remains underlit despite the much vaunted new cameras Colleran had at his disposal to register the stage production without special lighting, equipment which obviously fell short of the special lenses Stanley Kubrick could rely on to shoot even candle-lit scenes in *Barry Lyndon* (1975). The poor lighting of Colleran's documentary record, however, was turned into an asset in the Wooster Group's *Hamlet*. To begin, the film was digitally altered to restore the original poetic meter—since Burton, by his own admission, often "mauled and brutalized" the text, much to

2. While he has been an associate member of The Wooster Group at least since the revival of *North Atlantic* (1999), Scott Shepherd (1968) is also a member of the New York-based collective, Elevator Repair Service, founded in 1991.

Gielgud's dislike (Morley 344). Next, Reid Farrington and Anna Henckel-Donnersmarck treated the chiaroscuro image in such a way that Gielgud's cast come and go in an uncanny way, at times fading from Edwards's set to the point of being totally erased. The layered soundtrack—a masterpiece of weird resonances jointly created by Dan Dobson, Joby Emmons, Watt Tierney, John Collins and Jim Dawson—equally adds to the mesmerizing atmosphere, the crackle of static vying with the visual noise which at all times frames the projected image, even infiltrating it through insets.

On the one hand, the treatment of the film materializes the spectral logic of Shakespeare's play. On the other hand, the erasures of the actors function as a complement to the Wooster Group's non-identificatory acting practice by preventing the theater audience's total immersion into the film at the expense of the live actors, whose live presences are nonetheless re-mediated onto the monitors. The distancing effect is similar to that of Warhol's real-time experimental movies in which non-professional actors engage in banal activities for hours on end. At the same time these activities are meant to exert a fascination, even a morbid one, if we realize that his first movie, *Sleep* (1963), showing John Giorno sleeping (probably over several nights), revisits the three-day display of the embalmed body of Andy Warhol's father Andrej in the family residence. The movie thus banks on the association of sleep with death, familiar from Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy, an association which may have inspired Scott Shepherd's final sleeping posture, with its implication that the play is Hamlet's as well as our dream. The illogical dreamlike character of sleep should warn against considering Warhol's experimental movies as simply extended real-time takes, since they are a montage of artistically recomposed and repeated footage. In a similar way Burton at the time vaunted that the filmic record of his *Hamlet* provided "the immediacy of a live production" because no scenes had different takes (DVD insert), when in fact Colleran edited a single performance out of three shootings (Sterne 127). Waxing nostalgic, the Wooster Group in a *New York Times* press release announcing their *Hamlet* (19 October 2006) even presents the filmic record as a high-tech feat shot from seventeen angles, granted that only five cameras were used to do so (Morley 346).

Warhol intended his experimental movies also as subversions of the media's "scopic cult" (Buchloh 28) in which the general public is fed images of celebrities, Burton and Taylor being cases in point. The moments at which the mechanical character of the Wooster Group performance becomes all too obvious should not be condoned, then, by the more magical

instances, if we are to appreciate LeCompte's exposure of film and theater's collusion in the making and maintaining of stars. Nor are we meant to remain blind to Burton's lack of feeling, complained about by many a reviewer at the time and foregrounded in Scott Shepherd's delivery method. Ironically, the technicity of the performance—no matter how consummate—fits the Wooster Group's historicist agenda as acknowledged in the *New York Times* press release. While the copying prevents the members from individualizing and fleshing out their parts, the result approximates the customary typecasting in Shakespeare's day, if the generic categories for characters (like "He that plays the King") and the transmission of an actor's repertory of parts to his successor (as from Richard Burbage to Joseph Taylor) are anything to go by (Stern 71-72). In this regard LeCompte is entitled to call her *Hamlet* an archival or historical reconstruction, inevitably belated, whether conceived of as a run-through before the dress-rehearsal or not. The fractional delays in her company's rendition of the relayed sound and images, as well as the ever-visible remote control icons on the large screen are exemplary of the entire production's citational character. So is Scott Shepherd's well-considered uptake of the tape, after ordering, director-like, the technician to fastforward it to Marcellus's line, "Horatio says, 'Tis but our fantasy.'" (1.1.22) Authorized by Hamlet's delegation of Horatio as the drama's official reporter (5.2.333), LeCompte once again turns Shakespeare's play and its accumulated afterlife—what used to be England's nationalist prerogative—into the world's collective dream, with or without the help of performers, directors and academics as mediators, much as Warhol's blown-up 1984 Rorschach patterns function as projection screens of the viewers' private fantasies. The latter point is worth remembering in order to warrant the resonances of the Wooster Group's *Hamlet* with the company's private history, in keeping with the avant-garde's fusion of the personal with the public.

Obstinate Condolement

Copying or reconstruction is a standard practice for LeCompte, though in her *Hamlet* it is extended to an entire production, thus upping the ante of post-modern recycling. The Wooster Group performers have indeed been miming videotapes, initially unbeknownst to the general public, so as to counter any psychological identification with their dramatic parts. Explicit reconstructions go back at least to *Route 1 & 9 (The Last Act)* (1981), in which the late Ron Vawter mimicked a didactic video by Clifton Fadiman on Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, and sketches by the African-American comedian

Pigmeat Markham were re-enacted. Since Wilder's classic dramatizes human transience, and Markham and LeCompte's father passed away during the making of *Route 1 & 9 (The Last Act)*, that production constituted an act of mourning, compounded by the eventual demise of the company itself, due to the cutbacks in funding caused by the controversial use of blackface. Bringing to mind *Our Town* in the context of *Hamlet* is more than appropriate. Like Shakespeare's protagonist upon his return from England, Wilder's audience at the beginning of the graveyard scene does not know the identity of the person to be buried. That the dead woman in question, Emily Webb, feels haunted by the living, amounts moreover to an interesting doubling of the usual perspective whereby the dead do the haunting, as she does when revisiting her twelfth birthday. Recalling *Our Town* is also to mourn the late Spalding Gray (1941-2004), who played the Stage Manager in Gregory Mosher's 1988 Lincoln Center revival of Wilder's play (filmed by PBS in 1989), and who in his best-known stage monologue, *Swimming to Cambodia* (80) (adapted to the screen by Jonathan Demme in 1987) already referenced *Hamlet* (3.2.224) to mark the divergences between an actor (John Malkovich) and his representations (Puttnam's verbal report of him, his photo). For *Hamlet* to remember the Ghost's call for revenge (1.5.91) is equally to mourn him. By extension Shakespeare through his play has been said to mourn his dead son Hamnet and the Earl of Devereux, as well as those soon to be dead, his ailing father John and the aging Queen Elizabeth. To Stephen Greenblatt (247), the new historicist Harvard scholar whom LeCompte invited to address her company during the rehearsals (Kramer 54), *Hamlet* through the "maimed rites" of the King (1.5.76-79), Polonius (4.5.205-09), and Ophelia (5.1.208), mourns even the Anglican Church's abolishing of purgatory—a means of managing grief for the average Catholic neither too good nor too evil instantly to be sent to heaven or hell. Gielgud's stage production in turn commemorated the four-hundredth anniversary of the dead Shakespeare, just as the 1994 release of Colleran's restored film honored Burton's passing in 1984, the year in which Ron Vawter, one of the Wooster Group members, died of AIDS.

The remainder of this article further explores the underlying rationale and paradox of the Wooster Group's so-called archival reconstruction of Shakespeare's already remediated text. In the interest of space the analysis will focus on two kinds of visual intertexts: the paratextual announcement for the opening of the company's *Hamlet* at the Public Theater, NY, and Andy Warhol's portraits of Elizabeth Taylor, which provide another, contextual means to unpack the production's remediations. Many feel this production to

be a cop-out refraining from any new vision by choosing to remediate, in reverse so to speak, the restored filmic record of an almost artisanal staging. In fact, the Wooster Group's reconstruction constitutes a sustained reflection on the identity question in Shakespeare's play as well as a meta-artistic reflection on the intermedial brand of performance theater it has helped to popularize. As if to confirm Samuel Weber's argument in *Theatricality as Medium* (2004) that the new media exacerbate tensions already inherent in the theater, the Wooster Group's *Hamlet* demonstrates film and theater's combined success and failure at re-presenting Shakespeare's text. To prove my point it is necessary, though, briefly to replay the production's prehistory.

Adestination

The first public run of the Wooster Group's *Hamlet* took place during the Festival GREC at the Mercat de les Flors, Barcelona, from June 27 till July 1, 2006 and lasted approximately three hours, the twenty-minute break included, compared to the three hours and twelve minutes at which Gielgud's production clocked off (Sterne 131). Subsequently the production was given further trial runs in Paris (Centre Pompidou) and Berlin (Hebbel Theater), before previewing in March 2007 at the Wooster Group's alternative New York space, St. Ann's Warehouse, Brooklyn. In the Fall of the same year, after a stop-over in Amsterdam during the Holland Festival but just in time to open on Halloween, the production then moved to the Public Theater, founded in 1954 by the late Joseph Papp as the Shakespeare Workshop and since 1962 producer of the free Shakespeares in the Park at the Delacorte Theater. If the round-about move to this venue signified a belated homecoming of sorts for the Wooster Group's *Hamlet*, it also involved a confrontation of the avant-garde and mainstream, precluding any easy identification.

The postcard by Richard Prince announcing the opening at the Public suggested as much, by showing a stack of books, their not always legible spines turned towards the camera, against what looks like a recycled image from *Nurse Betty* (2000, dir. Neil LaBute, co-written John C. Richards & James Flamberg). The books and poster exemplify a postmodern mix of elite and pop culture, besides anticipating, in the tradition of the early modern emblems, the remediations driving the Wooster Group production. The stack itself features Richard Burton's playscript of *Hamlet* amidst Oxford, Norton, and Arden editions but their combined scholarly authority is somewhat challenged by Erik Bindervoet and Robbert-Jan Henkes's racy Dutch

transposition, illustrated in *style pompier* by the underground artist Aart Clerx, granted that Bindervoet and Henkes also translated the rather canonical *Finnegans Wake*. What looks even more of an oddity in the pile of books, but may well be a piece of personal memorabilia from LeCompte's private past, next to bearing Richard Prince's signature, is the paperback release of *Hollywood Nurse* (1964) by Marguerite Nelson, one of the many pseudonyms of Lee Floren (1910-1995). Nelson's *Hollywood Nurse* should not be confused with Alice Brennan's *Hollywood Nurse* (1966) or with *Nurse in Hollywood* (1965), an installment from Jane Converse's serial novel, launched with *Emergency Nurse* in 1962 and already counting more than fifty volumes. Most nurse novels featuring the city of dreams revolve around the tension between meretricious and authentic pursuits. The installment in question, *Hollywood Nurse* aka *Nurse in Hollywood* (1965), tells the story of a nurse who is offered the self-divisive choice of finishing her training or becoming a star. LaBute's movie resolves this dilemma with a twist, since Betty Sizemore (Renée Zellweger), a waitress from Kansas, is so enamored with the heart-surgeon hero of her favorite soap series, that the trauma of witnessing her husband's murder causes her to lapse into a dissociative state and join the television series' production unit to *become* rather than *play* the doctor's assistant and lover, one fully capable of performing an emergency tracheotomy, if need be.

Through its two nurses the popular novel and Palme d'Or-winning movie speculatively set the scene for the star cult and seduction of images, vehicled by, though far from limited to, stagings and screen adaptations of Shakespeare's most famous text. More in particular, LaBute prepares for the much debated issue of whether Hamlet's voluntary antic disposition gets out of control and the student from Wittenberg should be considered fully accountable for Ophelia's madness and death. The postcard also allegorizes the violence done to the woman by Hamlet and more than one gender-biased scholar, since the piled up criticism practically smothers the face of Zellweger, whose slightly tilting head with nurse cap and surgical mask is further threatened by the teetering barrage of badly spelled graffiti, tagged in capitals onto the left side of the poster: "Battered/ Broken/ Besieged/ Raped on/ Stuffed up/ Lousey/ Sick sick/ Stupid/ Can't hold it/ Migraine/ Fever/ Split in two/ Suicide." Needless to say, the catalogue could be extended, just as the pile of books could be raised with new titles, as suggested by the blank covers of the volumes at its bottom. Of course, Polonius shares the blame for his daughter's dismal end, by forbidding that she see or write Hamlet. The latter's intercepted love letter (2.2.114-21) and returned

“remembrances” (3.1.92) give a Derridean meaning to the postcard announcing the *Hamlet* run at the Public Theater: the possibility of its never arriving (*adestination*), not being understood as intended, or misrecognized, just as the marriage between the lovers which Gertrude had hoped for, was forestalled by Ophelia's irreparable division from her lover, father and self, or just as Hamlet may never fathom himself nor fulfil his princely destiny.

The *adestination* of the Wooster Group's *Hamlet* also pertains to the different guises it has assumed on its way to the Public Theater and will assume in the company's ongoing work-in-progress. This Derridean reading is fed by the Barcelona run, where “in my mind's eye” Lola Pashalinski with her silvery-gray hair and checkered scarf seemed made up to look like the recently deceased Derrida (1930-2004). After all, Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1993) offers an extended spectral reading of *Hamlet* and Pashalinski already impersonated Gertrude Stein next to Linda Chapman's Alice B. Toklas in *Gertrude and Alice: A Likeness to Loving*, directed by Anne Bogart and premiered 4 February 1999, a day after Stein's 125th birthday, at the Edison Theater of Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, where Spalding Gray's brother Rockwell has been a lecturer in English. The script of this bio drama “partly compiles Stein's own words, and partly smoothes them into a new event by a complex blend of editorial compression, clarification, and additions in a matching (but not identical) style” (Feingold). This invites comparison with LeCompte's extended mimicry in *Hamlet*, as well as with Stein's greatest success, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, an act of ventriloquism in which she assumed the voice of her partner. Granted, these are largely retrospective discoveries, but then LeCompte's associative method here, as always in her massive work-in-progress, follows a spectral logic in which “time is out of joint.” After the Barcelona run, the part of Polonius was also “channeled” by Roy Faudree (Paris) and Bill Raymond (New York). These replacements are common enough for the Wooster Group as a repertory company, which in rehearsal often postpones the attribution of parts, to prevent the performers' identification with them. In a production of *Hamlet*, though, the ever-changing cast contributes to the drama's deferred identities and *adestination*, beginning with the play's protagonist, torn between two fathers and mirrored by two other sons in their relationships with their own fathers. Primed by the birth of his twins, Hamnet and Judith, Shakespeare's obsession with the relentless splitting of identity extends to the structural pairings, down to his predilection for the rhetorical figure of the hendiadys, and beyond, to the academics' equally relentless

critical reproduction of these mirror images. Ultimately, the adestation of the Wooster Group's *Hamlet* signals the impossibility of fully re-presenting Shakespeare's text, notwithstanding attempts at retracing its trajectory or that of the Wooster Group production.

Monstrous Divisibility

Apparently Scott Shepherd had been wanting to do Shakespeare's play, a favorite of his ever since his student days at Brown University. Hence Shepherd started "a little afterschool program" in the Performing Garage, "with Kate [Valk], Gary Wilmes and Jim Fletcher—reading through *Hamlet* and having rehearsals [...] a little aimlessly [...] hop[ing] that Liz would take over" (qtd. in Cote). Shepherd's "original idea" had been "to make some kind of statement that Hamlet is the collection of all Hamlets [...] a Hamlet Frankenstein" (Zinoman). The so-called monstrosity of Hamlet, however, can be generalized from the great tradition of impersonators to the dramatic character in Shakespeare's text, and the various forms in which that text exists.

The actorly tradition stretches back to the leading man of the Chamberlain's Men, Richard Burbage but the eighteen-year period during which the theaters were closed (1642-1660) already created a gap in that tradition and each great performer, by reappropriating the role, made for further differences when copying his predecessors' manner or "points" (Stern 11). Shakespeare, too, had his models, which explains, at least to T.S. Eliot, why Hamlet is not always that consistent or convincing. With great acumen, Shakespeare nonetheless thematized these formal problems. From the play's very opening question, through the Ghost's uncertain status and Hamlet's protracted mourning, whose sincerity is questioned by a duplicitous Claudius, to the "distract" Ophelia and the ludicrous exchangeability of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, identity is utterly destabilized—the prince's too, since his antic disposition turns him into another two-faced dissembler, like his stepfather usurping the legitimate heir's place. Having dispatched his two friends, Hamlet with newly found resolve upon his return from England affirms his self-identity, but more madness follows, even if in Shakespeare's version, unlike in Saxo Grammaticus's *Hystorie of Hamblet*, the prince no longer witnesses his own funeral, *in absentia*, as a mark of his ghostly self-division.

Madness also threatens the non-specialist confronted with the confusing textual history of *Hamlet*, in which, for good or bad reasons, fellow playwrights, actors, prompters, scribes, composers, printers, proofreaders

and editors jostle with Shakespeare and usurp his place. Since no authoritative manuscript has surfaced for any of the Bard's plays, the competing copies of *Hamlet*, each existing in different editions, are causing academics to waver between photographic aka diplomatic facsimiles; ideal, corrected versions; and reconstructions of a no longer or non-existing text. Refusing to resolve the matter, Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, the editors of the long-awaited new Arden *Hamlet* included the first Quarto, second Quarto and first Folio in their two-volume edition. The Barcelona opening of the Wooster Group's *Hamlet* "followed hard" upon the Arden's official April 19, 2006 presentation at the reconstructed Globe Theatre in London. As far as I know, no ghost disturbed the book launch to claim his authorial rights and settle the ongoing debate over the identity of the man whose name is variously spelled as Shakespeare or "Shakspere," the contestants being a muddle of Bacons and Earls, not to mention the double agent, Christopher Marlowe, raised from the dead to co-author or even ghost-write *Hamlet* all by himself (Alex; Bolt). Of course, since the demotion of the dramatic text in the 1960s, authorship has increasingly shifted to theater directors, some of them, like LeCompte, radically appropriating the material.

Double Liz

It may therefore come as a surprise that LeCompte, when assuming control over her company's *Hamlet* initiative, seemed to defer to the joint, male authority of Gielgud and Burton (born Jenkins). The former gained pre-eminence as the Shakespeare interpreter *par excellence* in the decade prior to World War II, whereas the latter, the natural son of a Welsh miner, jeopardized his subsequent theatrical pre-eminence, when he allegedly sold his soul to Hollywood, as many a detractor argued on the occasion of Burton's playing the lead in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1966), mesmerized by the ghostly apparition of Taylor's Helen (Johns). Marlowe's classic formed the backbone for *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, Stein's reflection on media fame's splitting of identity into private and public selves, which the Wooster Group in *House/Lights* (1998) cross-cut with Joseph Mawra's underground movie, *Olga's House of Shame* (1964). Prior to that, however, LeCompte had actually seen Burton's 1964 *Hamlet* at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre while she was still a visual arts student at Skidmore, Saratoga Springs, and starting out at the local Caffé Lena as a fledgling actress in a group recruited by Burton's fellow Welshman, John Wynne Evans. The

Broadway production may have been set up to commemorate Shakespeare, but that memorial function was overshadowed by Burton's affair with Taylor, whom he married during the previews in Canada.

Rather than being evidence of Shakespeare's popularity in the US, the record-breaking New York run of Burton's *Hamlet*—outdoing that of Gielgud himself in 1937 and John Barrymore in 1922-23—attested more to the aura of movies. Moreover, their perhaps anecdotal production history further illustrates the complex interplay of accidental meetings and deferred identities, besides explaining some of LeCompte's intertextual references. Burton and Taylor, who would marry each other *twice*, met on the set of *Cleopatra* (1963, dir. Joseph Mankiewicz), by accident, since Burton was hired as a replacement for Stephen Boyd. Famous for his part in *Ben Hur* (1959, dir. William Wyler), Boyd had to pass up that of Mark Anthony because of other commitments. In the New York run of *Hamlet* LeCompte alludes to *Ben Hur* when replacing Gielgud's *Mousetrap* by Kenneth Branagh's staging of it in his 1996 screen adaptation, where the Player King is performed by Charlton Heston, the actor who played Ben Hur opposite Boyd's Messala. In the blockbuster epic *Cleopatra* Burton was meant to outshine both stars, though the movie was a vehicle for Taylor. Hence, when Elizabeth LeCompte and her mother bought tickets for *Hamlet*, the primary reason, as the director confided to Jane Kramer, was to admire Burton and catch a glimpse of namesake Elizabeth Taylor, whom they were lucky enough to spot after the show, "all in pink, like Jackie Kennedy, coming out of the stage door" (54). The combined reference to Taylor and Kennedy sounds like a gossipy throw-away among women but betrays, willingly or not, a central visual arts parallel for the operating principle behind the Wooster Group's *Hamlet*.

Long before Burton's *Hamlet* landed him on the April 24, 1964 cover of *Life* magazine, Taylor had already been glamorized, as a child star of the screen (*Lassie*, *Little Women*, *National Velvet*) and as a ghostly survivor of clinical death during the run-up to the 1961 Academy Awards. On that occasion she also received an Oscar for her role as man-eater, Gloria Wondrous, in *Butterfield 8* (1960, dir. Daniel Mann) (Bragg 144), an honor Burton never enjoyed despite seven nominations (174). That Taylor also contracted pneumonia early into the shooting of *Cleopatra* and was saved through a tracheotomy (144) strengthens the link with *Nurse Betty*, the more since Taylor, then married to Eddie Fisher, in her death throes apparently had been hoping to join her former husband and true love, Mike Todd, who had died in a crash with his private plane, The Lucky Liz. Still, the sudden

food poisoning which brought her down after getting acquainted with Burton, was a suicide attempt with pills to prove how much she loved not Todd but Burton (149).

Taylor's repeated and haunting brushes with death led Warhol, that eminent broker of fame and fortune, to include her in his Death and Disaster Series, next to tin cans with poisonous food, car crashes, empty electric chairs and portraits of Marilyn Monroe (who killed herself 5 August 1962) and Jackie Kennedy (widowed on 22 November 1963). Thus the Death and Disaster series plays variations upon the classical *vanitas* motif, featured in his skull paintings and iconographic representations of Hamlet. In this series Warhol's mechanically reproduced pop art works acquire a critical depth that complicates their apparent consumerist exploitation and dispensability, "by dramatizing the breakdown of commodity exchange" through "instances in which the mass-produced image as the bearer of desires was exposed in its inadequacy by the reality of suffering and death" (Crow 51). By ever replicating Taylor's portrait, Warhol compulsively mourned her near-death while at the same time exemplifying her commodification and dematerialization by the media. Already in the thirteen single Lizzes (an unlucky number) the uniformly colored background creates an auratic double, like the printing out of register in the Marilyns. In *Double Liz*, however, the original can no longer be distinguished from its mirror image, whereas in the silver dyptich, '65 *Liz*, the mirror image remains ominously blank. The copies of Taylor keep accumulating from *Ten Lizzes*, to fifteen-fold *Blue Liz as Cleopatra* and the forty-two teenage Lizzes in *National Velvet*. The numbers notwithstanding, Taylor acquires only a ghostly presence, because of the imperfections in the thoroughly remediated images—the rephotographed film stills, newspaper and publicity photos, transferred to silkscreen and unevenly printed onto paper. In *Blue Liz* that presence seems stubbornly insisted upon by the heavily inked, gradually overlapping images, edging towards the lower left corner. Yet their blurred contours threaten once more with a loss of identity by offering only the negative of the monochrome void on the right-hand side. Blotches and blanks match each other as sublime representations of the unrepresentable death cancelling the desire, physical (blue movies) and platonic (*die blaue Blume*) which the film star channels. In the words of Jerry Saltz, *Blue Liz* "reads like a phantom Photomat strip come to freakish life or a silent film slipping sprockets, moving at erratic speed," and ultimately coming to a stand-still.

By chance, the Barcelona run of the Wooster Group's *Hamlet* coincided with a small exhibit at the Museu Diocesà devoted to Warhol (1928-1987),

an uncanny precursor of the subsequent commemorations of his own death. Warhol's presence therefore may well have been alluded to in LeCompte's cryptic statement, posted on the Ayuntamiento's website a week before the Spanish opening, that her *Hamlet* would "incorporate in some way the spirit of the city." Warhol's presence could definitely be felt in some of the painterly effects on the monitors during the Barcelona intermission, fuelled by LeCompte's interest in "the power of surfaces to deepen and disturb—or, as she puts it, to 'surprise'—reality" (LeCompte qtd. in Kramer 54). And in the depths established by the intermedial crossings of the Wooster Group's *Hamlet* another presence hauntingly hovered, that of Willem Dafoe, who performed a minor part in *Basquiat* (1996, dir. Julian Schnabel), the bio-picture of the New York graffiti artist (1960-1988) mentored by a fatherly Warhol during the final years of their lives. From the perspective of *Hamlet*, it is ironical that all of Basquiat's paintings seen in the movie were made by Schnabel, a painter himself, because he never received the rights to his subject's art work. This raises the question whether these imitations were "true, original copies," to misuse the term by which John Heminge and Henry Condell in their dedicatory epistle tried to legitimize the first folio. Equally important is that after forming a couple for twenty-seven years, LeCompte and Dafoe separated in 2005, the latter to marry Giada Colagrande, as hastily, some might say, as Gertrude remarried Claudius, or Burton Taylor, since the latter two at the time of Gielgud's *Hamlet* first had to divorce their respective partners, Sybil Burton and Eddie Fisher (Bragg 187).

Shows Much Amiss

All of which confirms that the Wooster Group's *Hamlet* is an extended act of mourning, public and private, inspired by the memorial function of the restored tape of a star actor's Broadway appearance in a production commemorating Shakespeare. The *mise en abîme* of the corpse through the repeated memorials augurs the endless deferral of the spectacle, displaced like the people behind the iconic images of Burton and Taylor, which Hollywood's star machine keeps replicating. The obsessive copying within Shakespeare's play, as in Warhol's portraits, betrays a similar inability to "let be," a futile yet relentless attempt at sublimating the traumatic loss by art's capacity to create "figments" of those gone. It does not matter whether the medium resorted to is painting, film or theater, for the Wooster Group's postmodern perspective precludes any prioritizing. Each and every medium promises yet fails to bring back the lost ones, the former Wooster Group members as well as

Gielgud's performers, its artifacts thus becoming like postcards or love letters never reaching their destination. By reconstructing Colleran's theatrofilm the Wooster Group re-members and re-embodies it, as well as stages the inevitable split between the copy and the lost original, thereby installing a spectral logic which always combines the presence of the medium with the absence of the represented, what Derrida in *Spectres of Marx* calls "the spectral spiritualization that is at work in any *tekhne*" (97).

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