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“To Hear and See the Matter”: Communicating Technology in Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet* (2000)

by Mark Thornton Burnett

This essay argues that Michael Almereyda’s film of Hamlet (2000) is a distinctively postmodernist cinematic statement that charts the ways in which the act of film-making allows a release from the pressures of global capitalism at the same moment as it creates a space for the articulation of a coherent subjectivity.

Over the course of the 1990s, Shakespeare enjoyed an unprecedented resurgence in the popular filmic imagination. Films such as Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s “Romeo + Juliet”* (1996) and Kenneth Branagh’s *Hamlet* (1997) pushed at the bounds of conventional conceptions of the Bard, deploying a stylishly versatile cinematography to address the demands of the modern, multiplex-frequenting consumer. Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet* (2000), riding on the crest of a revived interest in things Shakespearean, displays its indebtedness to these recent filmic undertakings on several occasions. But Almereyda’s *Hamlet* is just as powerfully marked by its connections to a commercially more modest and independent Shakespearean cinematic tradition. With a mere fraction of the budgets of its lavishly supported counterparts, Almereyda’s *Hamlet* is the culmination in a series of Shakespeare films produced in an “art-house” format by essentially experimental directors. In this connection, Jean-Luc Godard’s *King Lear* (1987), Aki Kaurismäki’s *Hamlet Goes Business* (1987), and Gus Van Sant’s *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) represent the films with which *Hamlet* most appositely compares. To this trajectory of smaller-scale films, Almereyda brings his own distinctive preoccupations—a fascination with generational alienation, an attention to the effects of urban existence, and a yearning for an unadulterated and authentic subjectivity.¹ By electing to adapt *Hamlet*, Almereyda seizes on opportunities to address peculiarly millennial apprehensions and anxieties.

This essay focuses on the specifically fin-de-siècle features of Almereyda’s mise-en-scène. At every turn, the director reads Shakespeare’s play through the lens of a late-capitalist mindset: Elsinore is figured as the Denmark Corporation, a global empire in turn-of-the-century New York; the city scene is stamped with all the signs of corporate anonymity; and brand names and surfaces communicate a vision of human interaction in thrall to technology. At the same time, Almereyda offers alternatives to this dystopian perspective by investing in images of countermovements

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that throw into relief the seeming dominance of a soulless metropolis. Crucially, it is through Almereyda's filmmaking—a self-conscious representational practice—that Hamlet is allowed to achieve his tragic integrity, a form of felt autonomy.

Most distinctive about Almereyda's adaptation, perhaps, is the extent to which an emphasis on the cinematic idiom facilitates the entertainment of postmodern considerations. His *Hamlet* stands, in many respects, as a playing out of the central components of postmodernism. As Mike Featherstone defines them, these take the form of

the effacement of the boundary between art and everyday life; the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between high and mass/popular culture; a stylistic promiscuity favoring eclecticism and the mixing of codes; parody, pastiche, irony, playfulness, and the celebration of the surface “depthlessness” of culture; the decline of the originality/genius of the artistic producer; and the assumption that art can only be repetition.²

In such a universe, as Almereyda's *Hamlet* also makes clear, it is not surprising that the individual subject should be constructed as disoriented, at the mercy of floating signifiers, simulations, and imitations. For Fredric Jameson, such a sense of dislocation results in a psychological deadlock, a condition in which the “human body” is unable “to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world.”³ Almereyda's *Hamlet* resonates vibrantly with these formulations, centered, as it is, on the situation of a protagonist who agitates to map a place within a proliferation of cultural productions and through a welter of simultaneously enabling and constricting technological appurtenances. This version of *Hamlet*, then, while successfully echoing millennial concerns, also finds a concomitantly animating logic in the communicative virtues of a postmodern aesthetic.⁴

But why New York? By selecting the “Big Apple” as his key location, Almereyda avails himself, first, of resonant psychological/cinematic narratives with which the city is popularly identified. Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), John Carpenter's *Escape from New York* (1981), and Mary Harron's *American Psycho* (2000) established New York both as a metaphorical gaol and as a breeding ground for psychotic neuroses and material acquisitiveness, all of which, as we shall see, are shaping influences in Almereyda's construction of Shakespeare's protagonist.

Second, because of its architectural lineage, New York represents, *par excellence*, a postmodern urban phenomenon. Not only has the city, a structure-and-skin extravaganza of “signature buildings,” coned towers, and disconnected historical references, become associated with anonymity, melancholia, and madness, it has been tarnished with dissimulating and inauthentic characteristics.⁵ Faux Chippendale markers on skyscrapers, the pseudo-real South Street Seaport, and ersatz architectural symbols have resulted in a fragmentary landscape in which the inhabitant can only be angst ridden and isolated.⁶ Jean Baudrillard puts the point forcibly when he says of New York that “there is no relationship” among its citizens except, perhaps, for a “magical sensation of contiguity and attraction for an artificial centrality.”⁷ Thus, despite the survival of its grid system, New York can appear, in Rem Koolhaas's words, as organized only around a “schizoid arrangement.”⁸

Given Almereyda's elaboration of Hamlet as a decentered soul striving through cognitive mapping for a subjective coherence, one can easily see the attractions of New York's cinematographic possibilities.

The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. At the immediate level, Almereyda's *Hamlet* is characterized by its engagement with economic determinants. These take multiple forms in the film but express themselves most obviously through the visualization of market prices. Thus, Hamlet (Ethan Hawke) is seen striding past a supermarket displaying discounted goods, while Claudius (Kyle MacLachlan) is perceived against the backdrop of neon share indexes: the contrast points up both the physical distance between the two men and the prevalence of a monetary imperative. More generally, the film abounds in logos and advertisements, with the prominence of "Boss," "Karlsberg," "Key Food," "Marlboro," and "Panasonic" functioning to indicate a cultural moment defined by the need for product placement. Even noncommercial objects are ensnared in this landscape (such as when Hamlet's love letter to Ophelia is exhibited in a plastic specimen bag, packaged for royal probing), bearing out Baudrillard's contention that in postmodernity "needs, affects, culture, knowledge—all specifically human capacities are integrated in the order of production as commodities, and materialized as productive forces."⁹

Because of the dominance of signs of the corporate world, and the fact that actual commodities are rarely seen (it is never clarified, for instance, what Claudius's empire trades in), Almereyda's *Hamlet* also seems to reflect Guy Debord's thesis that "the image has become the final form of commodity reification."¹⁰ It is as if the visual paraphernalia have a greater exchange value than the materials they supposedly represent.

Even the Ghost (Sam Shepard) is implicated in this process of commodification. When he appears before Hamlet to reveal the "truth" of the skullduggery behind the throne, a TV monitor in the background reveals images of oilfields burning. This multidimensional visual montage demands a correspondingly complex level of interpretation. On the one hand, the image of the oilfields offers a filmic equivalent to the "fires" in which Shakespeare's sulphurous spirit is obliged to "fast"; on the other hand, the image reminds us that, to cite J. Macgregor Wise, because of the recent development of "cable . . . satellite systems . . . TV has become an expanded site of various discursive practices pertaining to the true and to history."¹¹ In other words, the television features as a mode of communication in the narrative precisely at the moment when the veracity of the corporate construction of mortality is about to be tested.

On deeper inspection, however, the televised conflagration activates recollections of the Gulf War, a global conflict precipitated by the disputed ownership of one of the most precious commodities in a capitalist economy, and an apocalyptic realization of "capitalist implosion."¹² If the Ghost is caught up in late capitalism at his appearance, he is also defined by it at his disappearance. Fading into a machine dispensing "Pepsi One Calorie," the Ghost is deployed to make more than a



Figure 1. In Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000), the title character (Ethan Hawke) is pinned against the revolving drums in a laundromat. Courtesy Film Four Distributors.

brand-name joke. The implication is that his dissolution is also a consumption: Hamlet's father is engulfed by the very energies that, as president of the Denmark Corporation, he had earlier commanded.

For Almereyda, perhaps the most potent visualization of late capitalism is found in reflected surfaces. His *Hamlet* is a glasshouse of tinted windows, mirrors, lenses, and screens. The protagonist contemplates his distorted self-image through the bottom of his whiskey tumbler or in the revolving drums of a laundromat, while Polonius (Bill Murray) is first glimpsed through the see-through floor of his sumptuously appointed apartment.

As in Christine Edzard's *As You Like It* (1992), which mobilizes glassy urban appearances to similar effect, Almereyda's collocation of hard transparent materials suggests that communing with the self is directly related to the breakdown of organic social constituencies. Thus, the rigidity of the glass surfaces incarnates the unfeeling quality of the film's human relations. Nowhere is this more graphically demonstrated than in the opening shots of the royal family parading in tense formation down Park Avenue. In this scene, the director favors low camera angles, which reveal the entourage dwarfed by the vertical overload of Manhattan's corporate skyscrapers. To echo Jameson, such buildings, which are primarily characterized by their physical "depthlessness," "repel the city outside" and embody the "waning of affect in postmodern culture"; a resistant architecture stands in, therefore, for a comparably tense and unyielding domestic encounter.¹³



Figure 2. Ophelia (Julia Stiles) goes mad in the Guggenheim Museum in Almereyda's *Hamlet*. Courtesy Film Four Distributors.

Architectural glass also forms an alliance with camera glass, with the specular economy that marks out identity as a transparent property. In general, the camera is an emancipatory vehicle, but it also operates in a negatively invasive capacity. Hence, Hamlet shirks from paparazzi at a movie premiere in a move that in Polonius's dim-witted confidence is later rephrased as the prince is "still harping on my daughter." Addressed to a closed-circuit television, the comment invests the audience with an uncomfortably Orwellian omniscience and ties the spying politician to a culture of surveillance.¹⁴ Here Almereyda brings together some of the postmodern filaments binding a technology of visual intervention with the metropolis.

As Edward W. Soja states, "Every city is a carceral city, a collection of surveillant nodes designed to impose a particular model of conduct and disciplinary adherence on its inhabitants."¹⁵ It might be appropriate, then, that the death knell of Claudius's empire sounds (unleashing the unruliness of his subjects) when his hold on the instruments of surveillance begins to falter. An appositely poetic punishment arguably inheres in Polonius's death, since he is shot in the eye through a mirror, the one occasion in *Hamlet* in which a surface shatters and is seen to be vulnerable.

Michel Foucault has argued that a system of "permanent, exhaustive [and] omnipresent surveillance" finds its realization and its rationale in the panopticon, a prison-like structure of "so many cages, so many small theaters, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized, and constantly visible."¹⁶ Taking his cue from metaphors of incarceration featured in the First Folio version of *Hamlet*, printed in 1623, Almereyda does indeed present a gaol (albeit of a corporate and



Figure 3. Hamlet (Ethan Hawke) and Laertes (Liev Schreiber) contemplate each other before their duel. Courtesy Film Four Distributors.

metaphorical kind) for spectatorial involvement. Plate-glass apartments, the aisles of a video store, and the first-class compartment of an airplane—all are made legible through a cinematic grammar of confinement. As Hamlet says, “Denmark is a prison.”¹⁷ On occasion, a Wellesian reliance on coiling inner locations makes a comparable point about the bridling of the film’s physical bodies. Both the revolving drums of the laundromat (in which Hamlet washes Polonius’s bloody garments) and the swirling architecture of the Guggenheim Museum (in which Ophelia [Julia Stiles] goes insane) are presented as repressive spaces, a fact that the looping rhythms of Carter Burwell’s electronic score serves only to emphasize. Almereyda’s somber suggestion is that one prison is indistinguishable from, and blurs imperceptibly into, another.

Practicing Technology. Both the motif of the prison and the film’s late-capitalist signifiers come together in technology. An overriding preoccupation in Almereyda’s *Hamlet* is the variety of communicative equipment available at the present historical juncture. The director’s Manhattan environment is overwhelmed by listening devices, laptops, cell phones, and recording instruments. As pertinent instances, one can cite the bugging of Ophelia with a wiretap and the duel between Hamlet and Laertes (Liev Schreiber) in which every move is tabulated on an electronic score counter. Indeed, characters are themselves regarded as counters to be reckoned with and calculated; they constitute the inmates of the technological panopticon. Consequently, there is little sense of unified lives or secure psychic states; on the contrary, to adapt one of Jean-François Lyotard’s formulations,

a mechanistic registration of brittle and “splintered” sensibilities is the shattered watermark of the film.¹⁸

Virginia Eubanks has recently argued that the “postmodern/cybernetic period of communications and visualization technology . . . has made permeable the boundaries of old systems and the margins of our culture, resulting in an intense concern with defining the boundaries of the physical body and the body social.”¹⁹ Eubanks’s argument reverberates powerfully with Almereyda’s *Hamlet*—in particular, with the ways in which bodies in the film are made to function as barriers to, and possibilities for, productive liaisons. Notably, it is through physical contact that these concerns are ventilated. We are presented, for example, with an affirmatory connection in the open embraces of Hamlet and Ophelia in her squat (the narrow aspect-ratio two-shots utilized here are picked up again in the embraces of Horatio [Karl Geary] and Marcella [Paula Malcolmsen] toward the end, suggesting that these two companions from Wittenberg are the lovers’ physical inheritors).

By contrast, the relationship between Hamlet and Claudius is marked either by bodily repression (the CEO’s restraining hand pushing against his stepson’s arm) or parodic gestures of affection (the mouth-to-mouth kiss that the prince places on his stepfather’s lips). In this latter scene, coming in the wake of Claudius’s physical assault, Hamlet imitates a homoerotic attraction that reveals, in Jonathan Dollimore’s words, the “contingent fact of” his own “social discrimination.”²⁰ Less ambiguously homoerotic is the shot of the physical proximity shared by Hamlet and Laertes at the close. Once their duel has run its course, the two men come together in a *Pietà*-like composition of revelation and intimacy. Through the eradication of technology, it is implied (the electronic wire shackling the duelists has been broken), the social body begins the process of reparation.²¹ An ultimately homosocial connection is seen as one panacea for the physical derelictions of the corporate order.

Technology might be temporarily eradicated at the conclusion of Almereyda’s *Hamlet*, but more often than not it exercises a dominant influence on the narrative. Crucially, technology is discovered as having a negative impact in relation to the communicative process. Once again, the film shows itself to be sensitive to postmodern debate and, in particular, to Baudrillard’s view that the “mass media . . . fabricate non-communication . . . if one agrees to define communication as an exchange, as a reciprocal space of a speech and a response.”²² *Hamlet* refracts Baudrillard’s theory, first, in that language fragments and (such is the availability of substitutes for one-on-one conversation) exchanges become terminally discontinuous. For example, Hamlet’s “Get thee to a nunnery” speech is divided up between a direct address and a message on Ophelia’s answering machine.²³ Likewise, when Hamlet berates his mother (Diane Venora) for her quasi-incestuous liaison with Claudius, the protagonist is obliged to complete the harangue on a pay phone in the bowels of the Hotel Elsinore.

More disturbingly, *Hamlet* not only is obsessed about the “linguistic fragmentation of social life,” as Jameson describes it, but also entertains the prospect of language escaping as the property of the individual subject: it can be taken over by technology and ventriloquized.²⁴ The point is illustrated when the voice-over of Eartha Kitt intones in a taxi that “cats have nine lives—*meowrr*—but

unfortunately you have only one"; here, a warning about the dangers of riding unbuckled in an automobile are mediated through the disembodied traces of a faded comic strip icon.²⁵

A comparable suggestion of linguistic dispossession occurs in the scene in which the Vietnamese guru Thich Nhat Hanh explains his relational concept of "inter-be" during a television program.²⁶ Initial impressions would suggest that this screen inset delivers a precise anticipation of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" dilemma. In retrospect, however, the monk's cogitations only serve to underscore Hamlet's distance from communal interaction. At an intertextual level, moreover, the protagonist is robbed of monopoly of Shakespeare's most celebrated intellectual deliberation: the famous speech, in this multinational universe, has been both ethnically pluralized and philosophically transformed by the technological sphere of the new media establishment.

Because this is the second occasion on which a television program is featured, the viewer is invited to confront, with a renewed urgency, questions about "truth" and authenticity. One might even go a step further and suggest that one of the chief areas of concern in Almereyda's *Hamlet* is the status of the "real." Throughout the film, images of the natural world are given center stage. To Hamlet's fascination with on-screen flowers opening and closing can be added Ophelia's cradling of a diorama ("a glass-fronted box featuring a view of a gravel road disappearing into a dim forest glade"), her distribution of photographs of plants and herbs, and her handling of a rubber duck.²⁷ What is striking about these moments is the artificiality of the elements involved. We are, in fact, in the Baudrillardian terrain of the "simulacrum" or imitation, a space in which the "lost object" is fetishized and in which "hyperreality" (or "the meticulous reduplication of the real") is permitted to dominate.²⁸

As an occasion on which a natural "reality" figures prominently, the graveyard scene in *Hamlet* harbors a nuanced significance. In this sequence, Ophelia is buried in the world toward which her substitutions and representational devices have been striving: her death becomes an attempt to return both to a location (a landscape unaffected by consumerism) and to a mode of being (an integrated sense of self) that postmodernity has tragically eclipsed. Nature is thus represented, as Albert Borgmann states, as a territory in which there is a "regular interplay of signs and things" that gives order to "time and space . . . information and knowledge."²⁹

However, even in the graveyard scene, Almereyda complicates his film's construction of the extra-urban environment. The graveyard is still a repository for imitations (the Gravedigger's song offers a musical substitute for the material embodiment of Yorick's skull), while Ophelia's simulacra of growth are arguably overshadowed by the physical praxis of decay and her own mortality. Technology, it seems, has the capacity simultaneously to enable and frustrate an authentic kinship with the pastoral, both to disrupt and to foster a relational sense of experience.

The essential difficulty is that in postmodernity nature can only be commodified. As Eric Higgs states, nature "is continually processed through the projectors of cultural institutions" and turned into "a conceptual product."³⁰ It is not accidental, therefore, that Almereyda's *Hamlet* consistently focuses on children and on the ways

in which a culture of the child is mediated through commercial pressures; several episodes of the film, for instance, take place during Halloween, a festival based on natural rhythms that has mutated into a profit-making enterprise.

Children also figure in *Hamlet* as ciphers for the conditions of Hamlet and Ophelia themselves. A common directorial maneuver is to link a child and the central protagonist, as when Hamlet features a boy in his scratch video (a fantasy version of himself) or when, in a scene lost on the cutting-room floor, he watches a “seven-year-old girl” sitting in the chair of a barber’s salon; she is pictured “blowing soap bubbles, waiting as her father mops the floor.”³¹ (Interestingly, this sequence has as its central idea the production of goods innocent of actual material value.)

These structures of identification are part and parcel of a related filmic strategy that involves the infantilization of Hamlet and Ophelia and the attempted robbery of their adult subjectivity. The lovers are, in fact, interpellated permanently at a childlike stage of development. The visual association of Ophelia with a set of small figurines on display in her father’s apartment, the detail of his doing up the lace of her sneaker, and the emphasis laid by the Ghost on Hamlet’s “serious hearing” (which amounts to an accusation of past childish frivolity) testify to this representational procedure.³² The inevitable conclusion is that, while Hamlet and Ophelia infantilize themselves, the unflinching face of postmodern patriarchy also temporally belittles them.

By creating an infantilized space for Hamlet and Ophelia, Almereyda’s film invites us to see them as cast in a similar ideological mold. The *mise-en-scène* invariably alerts the audience to the ways in which the two figures are entwined via points of mutually constitutive contact, whether these be a thrift shop, their East Village appearance, an identification with student bohemianism, an absorption in family film footage and old snapshots, or a predilection for contemplating suicide. Hamlet watches himself on his monitor rehearsing “To be or not to be” with a gun held to his head, while Ophelia peers at her reflection in a penthouse swimming pool in a scene that is a trial run for her later drowning.³³ (Ironically, the waterfall in which her death takes place is an urban simulacrum of a natural original.)

Almereyda’s dovetailing of the lovers is vital in two respects. First, it regenders the Shakespearean convention that the action-oriented Laertes is Hamlet’s ghostly double; in this meditation on the play, it is the dispirited Ophelia who represents the prince’s female *doppelgänger*. Second, because Hamlet and Ophelia are equally constructed as reminiscing in a gloomily self-conscious and narcissistic manner, they come to be read through a nostalgic register. As Elizabeth Wilson states, the “fragmentary and incomplete nature of urban experience generates its melancholy—we experience a sense of nostalgia, of loss for lives we have never known, of experiences we can only guess at.”³⁴

More tellingly, perhaps, Hamlet and Ophelia’s penchant for looking at themselves takes us back to the culture of the child, inviting comparison with Jacques Lacan’s thesis that the “mirror stage” of psychological formation bespeaks the “illusion” that the “subject” enjoys an “absolute . . . autonomy.”³⁵ In this “first stage,” according to Neville Wakefield, the “image that the child sees is also the image of

what the child aspires to be . . . the image of a unified coherent self separated from the rest of the world. . . . In identifying with its own image . . . the child restores to itself the unity and coherence that are absent from its actual experience of the self.”³⁶ In this connection, it is possible to understand the film’s immersion in nostalgia, as it is its reification of the child and its engagement with nature, as an attempt to avoid the dissolution that is symptomatic of postmodernity, to exist independently of incoherent and adulterating institutional relations.

Over the course of drawing cinematic correspondences among Hamlet, Ophelia, and their external environs, Almereyda’s *Hamlet* places heightened focus on the workings of technology. The tragedy of Hamlet and Ophelia, as the film elaborates it, is that the lovers are caught between, and frustrated by, competing older and emergent technological disciplines. Even as they pursue blighted interests in the machinery of visual representation and participate in a system under which words have been replaced by signs, they are drawn to communicate via more conventional methods. This is suggested in the film’s matching of Ophelia’s picture of the waterfall, hastily sketched on the leaf of a notepad, with Hamlet’s love poem, painfully executed on a piece of paper. In episodes such as these, the prince and the politician’s daughter inhabit a mode of symbolic exchange and trade in gifts rather than commodities.³⁷

One could argue, then, that the significance of Hamlet and Ophelia’s transactions resides in a nostalgic yearning for a precapitalist order of experience. This is lent an additional emphasis by the introduction of a specifically cinematic nostalgia. For Hamlet and Ophelia are, in many respects, the millennial descendants of Luhrmann’s Romeo and Juliet in the 1996 film of the same name, lovers who through romantic iconography are elevated above the technological frenzy of their media-saturated surroundings.

Forms of Resistance. This is not to suggest that Hamlet completely opts out of the possibilities afforded by technology. Rather, he is imagined as simultaneously drawn to and divorced from the accelerated revolutions of his generation, never more so than when we see him patrolling the aisles of a Blockbuster video store to the accompaniment of “stentorian music and the sounds of explosions.”³⁸ In this scene, an evocative contemporary context is enlisted to illuminate the eventual delivery of Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” speech. Thus, the “Action Movie” placards operate not only as finely tuned articulations of a protagonist who is himself losing “the name of action” but also as instances of a masculinity in crisis.³⁹ Moreover, the fact that the store contains only films of the “action” genre focuses attention on Hamlet’s intellectual impasse: he is uniquely unable to master “consummation” or “resolution,” unlike the ghostly rock musician who revenges himself on urban hoodlums in Tim Pope’s conflagration-obsessed *The Crow: City of Angels* (1996), the climax of which unfolds in *Hamlet* on an overhead monitor.⁴⁰ (Appropriately, Almereyda chooses not to privilege the original film, Alex Proyas’s *The Crow* [1994], but its follow-up or imitation.) Hamlet appears to be entertaining a psychologically fraught attitude toward the example of twentieth-century popular icons.



Figure 4. Hamlet (Ethan Hawke) patrols the aisles of the Blockbuster video store. Courtesy Film Four Distributors.

Locked in an ambiguated relation with the cinema of his time, Hamlet, as his escape route, decides to become a filmmaker himself. Like Graham Dalton in Steven Soderbergh's *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (1989) or Wes Bently in Sam Mendes's *American Beauty* (1999), he acts as screenwriter, cognitively "mapping" a personal script and either fast-forwarding or rewinding (endlessly rehearsing) on his pixelvision video diary the traces of a lived experience. Thus, Almeredyda's camera dwells repeatedly on Hamlet's eyes, as if reminding us of the film's internal auteur. In addition to screening moments from his own history, Hamlet mobilizes seemingly unconnected filmic sequences involving an appetitive cartoon dragon (a metaphor for consumption) and a stealth bomber from the recent Bosnian crisis (a prelude to the director's exposure of the Gulf War). In other words, this Hamlet practices a markedly postmodern cinematography.

In a recent discussion of postmodernism and popular culture, Angela McRobbie observed that "the ransacking and recycling of culture, and the direct invocation to other texts and other images, can create a vibrant critique rather than an inward-looking, second-hand aesthetic."⁴¹ These dissident potentialities are what we are invited to recognize in Hamlet's fractured directorial undertakings, and it is in his film-within-a-film, Almeredyda's witty reinvention of Shakespeare's play-within-a-play, that the protagonist's critical method comes to the fore.

Before the première of his version of *The Mousetrap*, Hamlet is seen reviewing and compiling clips with cinematic associations. Although they are glimpsed only in fragments, the clips, from Tod Browning's *The Devil-Doll* (1936) and Elia Kazan's *East of Eden* (1955), are on screen long enough to underscore these films'

thematic observations. In the former, a master dollmaker (Lionel Barrymore) shrinks and infantilizes his victims to execute revenge; in the latter, a youthful malcontent (James Dean) comes into conflict with repressive parental institutions. Clearly, both figures function as attenuated projections of Hamlet's wish-fulfillments. Because Hamlet's amputated segments unfold in conjunction with an extract featuring John Gielgud addressing Yorick's skull, the scene arguably enacts Jameson's observation that in postmodernity conventional cultural boundaries no longer have a relevant purchase. Jameson sees "high and mass culture" as "objectively related and dialectically interdependent phenomena, as twin and inseparable forms of the fission of aesthetic production under capitalism."⁴² But a more intriguing interpretive possibility comes into view when we consider that none of these counterparts to the prince appears in the film-within-a-film proper. As in the scene in the Blockbuster store, during which he checks out an inordinately large number of videos, Hamlet is represented as vexed by the prospect of having to settle on a single, definitive role model. In fact, what Almereyda engineers here is a subtle updating, a translation of Hamlet, the character, from the classical creature of indecision to a participant in postmodern schizophrenia.

Theoretical discussions of schizophrenia explain the condition as a breakdown in the syntagmatic chain (a collapse in the synchronic structure) in which all that remains is a mass of seemingly disassociated ideolects and symbols.⁴³ Certainly, this would seem to accord with Hamlet's traversing of a rubble of filmic signifiers, as he endeavors, with varying degrees of success, to find a common denominator that will transmute his pixel-visioned restlessness into an organic narrative. It would be a mistake, however, to see Hamlet's split tendencies in a pejorative light. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue, schizophrenia is a historically specific means of survival, since schizophrenics have the capacity to generate fresh and even revolutionary insights within the limits of a late-capitalist mode of production.⁴⁴ And, for Hamlet, it is a revolutionary aesthetic and ideology that is put into operation when his version of *The Mousetrap* unfolds before a specially invited elite audience.

In the "art of the experimental video," explains Jameson, "we are left with that pure and random play of signifiers that we call postmodernism, which no longer produces monumental works of art of the modernist type but ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of preexistent texts, the building blocks of older cultural and social production, in some new and heightened bricolage."⁴⁵ Hamlet's film-within-a-film is experimental in that it precisely mimes these practices, and even if it neglects to use familiar cinematic icons, it avails itself of more allusive motifs and passages that articulate the protagonist's abrasive confrontation with the contemporary Zeitgeist.

The Mousetrap opens with an image of a globe turning, a self-conscious conceit that simultaneously suggests the prospect of exposure and Shakespeare's Globe Theater, while urging us to reflect on the currents of exchange running between Hamlet's directorial début and the dramatist's theatrical craft. We then see footage from the 1950s of an idyllic family at leisure; because this is presented as a home movie, the implication is that there is no equivalent example of a functional familial unit in the Elsinore of the millennium.

Among other extracts severed from their contexts, *The Mousetrap* yields up a section from an army training film (a militaristic Denmark Corporation, it is suggested, has produced similarly faceless recruits) and a scene from Gerard Damiano's infamous pornographic film, *Deep Throat* (1972). Of course, in the antics of the sexual athletes on screen, the shadowy, premarital activities of Claudius and Gertrude are hinted at. On another level, however, *Deep Throat* is deployed in two contrarily intertextual ways. On the one hand, the film sparked off a crisis in the culture of censorship, which had as a consequence (1) the U.S. Supreme Court's reluctance to convict, (2) a decline in prosecutions against sexual explicitness in the cinema, and (3) the quasi-institutionalization of free-speech jurisprudence.⁴⁶ On the other hand, partly because the "star," Linda Marchiano, described how she was bullied and coerced into appearing in the film, *Deep Throat* was seen as a prime example of cinematic terrorism whose net effect was to oppress women's minds and bodies.⁴⁷ Notions of emancipation, repression, and exploitation are thus inscribed in the *Deep Throat* citation, helping to bolster both the construction of Claudius as an obscene man who is enslaving his wife and the realization of Hamlet as straining at the bounds of permissiveness, testing what is and is not representationally possible within corporate Elsinore.

Seen as a whole, *The Mousetrap* seems to bear out Baudrillard's thesis that referential value has been disarticulated. "The sign," he writes, "released from any 'archaic' obligation it might have had to designate something . . . is at last free for a structural or combinatory play that succeeds the previous role of determinate equivalence."⁴⁸ Unmoored from their original points of reference, Hamlet's filmic snippets become a collage with which he challenges Elsinore's power at the level of its public disciplinary régimes and its covert body politics. The result is a euphorically schizophrenic Hamlet who, in Jameson's words, experiences "intoxicatory" and "joyous intensities," as the prince's feverish questioning of Horatio indicates: "O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound. Didst perceive?"⁴⁹ This is also a briefly empowered Hamlet. Indeed, the similar lettering that accompanies the credits for *The Mousetrap* and for *Hamlet* itself indicates that the film-within-a-film has permitted the protagonist to assume, if only momentarily, a particularized auteurship, to graduate into the ranks of "real-life" directors.

The critical edge displayed in *The Mousetrap* forms a bridge to numerous related sites of transgressive energy in *Hamlet*. Typically, although these forces are communicated only in piecemeal, they occupy a privileged niche because of their anticapitalist flavor. First, visual flashes of Che Guevara and Malcolm X (their images are glimpsed in the photo montage on the wall of Hamlet's apartment) work to implicate the protagonist in revolutionary discourses and to liken him to a liberating yet doom-laden savior. Both Che Guevara and Malcolm X might be seen as embodying qualities that Hamlet only imperfectly possesses—Che spent his life striving against the economic domination of the U.S. in order to establish progressive leftist governments, while Malcolm X was noted for his passionate advocacy of black separatism and violence—and, from the perspective of a radical political agenda, both men bear out Lyotard's contention that postmodernity has, in his words, lost the "metanarrative . . . of [the] . . . great hero."⁵⁰



Figure 5. Hamlet (Ethan Hawke) and Ophelia (Julia Stiles) await the screening of *The Mousetrap*, a film within a film, in Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000). Courtesy Film Four Distributors.

Second, aural snatches of the song “All along the Watchtower,” as sung by the Gravedigger (Jeffrey Wright), recall its composer and first performer, Bob Dylan, and his involvement with the burgeoning civil rights movement; once again, Hamlet is vitalized by the association. As the Gravedigger philosophizes about “too much confusion,” “businessmen” who “drink my wine,” and “plowmen” who “dig my earth,” one is reminded of the original circumstances of the song and, in particular, the rumor that Dylan, following a protracted withdrawal from public life, was the victim of a CIA assassination attempt.⁵¹ It therefore seems as if Hamlet (who returns to Elsinore/New York having frustrated the murderous designs on him) is conceived of as a latter-day folk celebrity; however, because it is the Gravedigger and not the prince who intones Dylan’s lyrics, a complicating dimension is added to the comparison.

The exchange between the protagonist and the Gravedigger, a servant of the state, is often seen as the first moment in the play when Hamlet meets his linguistic match. Taking such a critical commonplace as his point of departure, Almereyda implicitly parallels the Gravedigger’s musical exercises with Hamlet’s filmmaking. Moreover, because the Gravedigger is allowed aural sentiments of an openly political cast, Hamlet’s visual protests are momentarily overshadowed; despite the virtual disappearance of his interlocutor, the prince is still confronted with a wittily destabilizing adversary.

Networks of political implication are also teased out as the relationship between Hamlet and Horatio unfolds. Not only is Horatio revealed to be a collector

of the works of Vladimir Mayakovsky, the ill-fated and geographically restless Soviet poet who (despite pleading for the liberation of the spirit from ideological restrictions) found himself out of tune with his times, but Horatio also boasts a Dublin accent.⁵² Indeed, as the film progresses, it is Ireland (a map of Ireland is posted beside Hamlet's film equipment) that seems to be reified more than Manhattan/Denmark. In an arguably unsophisticated and politically idealistic parallel, Almereyda links Wittenberg, the sixteenth-century breeding ground for radical religion, with Dublin, a twentieth-century seat of radical politics. By implication, Hamlet thus becomes a displaced spokesperson for a history of spiritual strife and national struggle. And because Horatio hails from the south of Ireland and Marcella from the north, political unification is presented, via heterosexual coupling, as one solution to familial conflict.

The question, of course, is whether all these scraps of countermovements amount to a coherent philosophy. Alan Sinfield has remarked that through "involvement in *a milieu, a subculture* . . . one may learn to inhabit plausible oppositional preoccupations and forms . . . and hence develop a plausible oppositional selfhood."⁵³ In some respects, Almereyda's *Hamlet* acts out Sinfield's hypothesis. A black Bernardo (Rome Neal) lends Hamlet and his companions a multiethnic camaraderie, while Rosencrantz (Steve Zahn) and Guildenstern (Dechen Thurman), in their scruffy but *branché* attire, evoke the protesters at the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle. There is also a revealing textual alteration when Hamlet and Horatio commune over "our philosophy" (the 1604–1605 Q2 text, which is favored by most editors, reads "your philosophy").⁵⁴

In other respects, the film falls singularly short of making a shared agenda available. This is because its representatives survive merely in partial allusions, fragments, memories, and nostalgically inspired signs of "stylistic connotation."⁵⁵ Moreover, the film's political heroes stand for quite different imperatives and speak to a past narrative that has already been concluded. Hamlet's role models, with whom he is connected but imperfectly, are outdated. Hence, while Claudius is constructed via a television inset as related to U.S. President Bill Clinton, a contemporary world leader noted for his philandering and corruption, Hamlet is stuck in the groove of identifying with superseded "simulacra of . . . history" and, in Susan Stewart's words, a toothlessly "utopian" ideology.⁵⁶ Consequently, even as it strives to gesture toward new possibilities, Almereyda's *Hamlet* recognizes that late-capitalist society has ruled out as implausible both authentic revolution and genuine social change.

Whatever political negativity is permitted to circulate in *Hamlet* is, however, transcended by the film's finale. In death, Hamlet is pictured reviewing in an accelerated montage the key events of both the film and his life. Through the action of revenge, a movie convention that was earlier rejected, the protagonist is able cognitively to "map" the story that he inaugurated with the film-within-a-film. Now that Hamlet has found in himself and his autobiography a personalized role model, there is no need for iconic equivalents, suggesting that at the close he breaks out of "depthlessness" into depth, assumes adulthood, recuperates the dispersal of his subjectivity (speaking visually as an "I"), puts "schizoid" signifiers into a coherent

narrative, becomes (through a felt nostalgia) a subculture of one, and claims a “heterotopia” of his own mortality.⁵⁷

Because Hamlet internalizes his mental imagery without recourse to electronic equipment, a blow is also dealt to the overarching influence of technology; instead, it is via a “marked” and physically wounded body that Hamlet is permitted to reclaim, in Sally Robinson’s phrase, “disembodied authorship” and “normative masculinity.”⁵⁸ Such a transformation is effected, the film implies, because Hamlet has been empowered to resolve the “To be or not to be” dilemma that has been his psychological bane. “Let be,” he says calmly to the Ghost, who flits briefly through Horatio’s apartment in an interpolated appearance, thereby taking upon himself a new “resolution” (Hamlet’s taking down of the photo montage on his wall is symbolically freighted) and the agency of artistic authority.⁵⁹

In some senses, however, a conception of Hamlet as an ultimately centered subject is an anathema, since there can only be unstable producers and split psyches in postmodernity. Accordingly, Almercyda’s *Hamlet* simultaneously disallows its spectators from maintaining a unitary perspective. The review montage we witness is a *mélange* of Hamlet’s pixilated point-of-view shots and of Almercyda’s more obviously directorial interventions, so that in the end there is a tension between authors. We are reminded that Almercyda’s trademark is his use of the Pixel 2000 video camera (a defunct Fisher Price toy). Its ghostly presence in this scene dilutes Hamlet’s ascendancy and leaves unresolved the question of who is commanding the filmic frame.⁶⁰ Hamlet’s actions, it seems, are still subjected to surveillance; he is yet to assume control over his own show.

The suggestion of a bifurcated point of identification is taken up again in the penultimate shot of the film. Earlier in *Hamlet*, an audience is granted a fleeting glimpse of an imperial statue of a militaristic rider and his horse. Now, in a more leisurely cinematic gaze, this is revealed to be Augustus Saint-Gaudens’s gilt-and-bronze sculpture of General William Tecumseh Sherman, which stands in Grand Army Plaza at 59th Street (just off Fifth Avenue) in New York City.⁶¹ Most notable about the statue is the way in which, according to Marina Warner, it appears to “float just above the passersby, almost at one with them.”⁶² This is complemented by the inclusion of Nike or Victory, who, figured as an ethereal angel, leads Sherman’s horse forward with a sense of triumphant purpose. The immediate point of Almercyda’s deployment of this monument, therefore, would seem to be to situate Hamlet in a historical idiom. Incinerator chimneys belching yellow smoke, the turrets of Tudor City, and the postmodern steel and chrome of Manhattan—all of these urban markers, which punctuate the film at regular intervals, are bypassed in favor of a nostalgically tinted and solidly permanent image of past glories; Hamlet, one might suggest, eventually resolves his vexed relation with the metropolis.⁶³

At the narrative level, Saint-Gaudens’s civic statement gestures back to Horatio’s request that “flights of angels sing [Hamlet] to [his] rest.”⁶⁴ Like Walter Benjamin’s “angel of history,” looking “toward the past” and “into the future,” Saint-Gaudens’s Nike smoothes the way for Hamlet’s spiritual destiny. This is emphasized in the camera’s passing shot of an airplane’s jet trail, a metaphor either for Hamlet as a

“hyper-subject” or for his soul-in-progress. One might even argue that the Saint-Gaudens statue allows the film’s multiple Irish/resistant elements finally to cohere, since the sculptor was born in Dublin and, shortly before his death in 1907, was working on a huge figure of Charles Stewart Parnell, the revolutionary Irish leader.⁶⁵ A rather different reading emerges, however, when we turn to the career of Sherman himself. Sherman is best known for his “Atlanta campaign,” which involved a vengeful march through Georgia to the sea, disciplined destruction, and regimented living off the land. Thus, the Civil War commander suggests not so much Hamlet as Fortinbras, the single-minded Norwegian soldier-statesman who is only hinted at in Almereyda’s film.⁶⁶ The absence of Fortinbras notwithstanding, he still survives in *Hamlet* in television insets of price indexes and newspaper headlines; as a disembodied sign of corporate materialism, he is excellently qualified to be Claudius’s successor. Ultimately, then, the New York landmark embodies the slick transition from one order to another.

But what of Hamlet’s textual afterlife, the “story” that he enjoins Horatio to tell to the “unsatisfied”?⁶⁷ Although Almereyda does not have Horatio reappear to recount Hamlet’s narrative, he does provide a version of it in the final shot of TV anchorman Robert MacNeil (formally of the *MacNeil/Leher News Hour*) reading from an autocue a composite statement, a patchwork of moralities culled from one of the Player King’s speeches, Fortinbras’s concluding address, and an announcement from the English ambassador. On the one hand, the newscaster’s words elaborate the construction of Hamlet as a hyper-subject. In Shakespeare’s play, both the Player King and Fortinbras are conceived as doubles for Hamlet, which suggests that something of the prince’s spirit lives on in Almereyda’s media-inflected epilogue. In addition, because images have here been replaced by words, one suspects further retrospective withdrawal from technological instruments.

On the other hand, the dissemination of Shakespeare’s language among a number of speakers means that still unresolved questions about auteurship and the ownership of speech are allowed to circulate; contrary to what the newscaster states, “Our thoughts” are not “ours.”⁶⁸ Because a television is privileged, we are reminded of Baudrillard’s territory of the “deflective screen,” and because a multiplicity of voices is endorsed, we are returned to Jameson’s terrain of “partial subjects” and “schizoid constellations.”⁶⁹ Hamlet, the individual director manqué, is crushed in this jigsaw of technological surfaces and machinery, defeated by an inscrutable representative of a media-affairs program, and placed in thrall to a filmic bricolage more powerful than his own.

Conclusion. *Hamlet*’s closing moments appear to swing an audience back to the late-capitalist corporate world with which the film began. This is a thesis attractive in its circularity; however, because the ending of Almereyda’s *Hamlet* is so self-consciously layered, one might want to suggest that it is not so much corporate as Shakespearean authority that the director debates. For this is a millennial movie characterized, above all, by its negotiation of Shakespeare as a cultural icon and a multifaceted textual signifier. As ultimate auteur, Almereyda harps repeatedly (in some ways like Hamlet, his alter-ego) on the lineage of Shakespeare, with whose

filmic legacy he of necessity has to wrestle. To the resonant clip of Gielgud can be added, for instance, an invocation of Branagh in the use of grainy 16mm as opposed to epic 70mm film stock, a nod to Lurhmann in the predilection for metaphors of water, and a compliment for Kaurismäki in the deployment of the rubber duck.

This sensitivity to the past of the screen Shakespeare encompasses too appropriations of the Bard, as when we witness Hamlet alighting from a limousine in front of a Broadway theater showing *The Lion King*, the 1994 animated Disney feature that explores such Hamletian themes as filial alienation and paternal ingratitude. One of Almereyda's imperatives would seem to be to alert viewers to the inevitably intertextual charge attached to *Hamlet* in postmodernity, and this extends to his choice of music, since Nick Cave's "Hamlet (Pow, Pow, Pow)" and symphonic arrangements by Niels Wilhelm Gade, Franz Liszt, and Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, all of which were inspired by the play, feature prominently on the soundtrack.

In placing this interpretive lens on *Hamlet*, Almereyda invites his audience to think, first, about notions of "home." By asking us to think about the home that Shakespeare might occupy at the end of the twentieth century, the director encourages speculation about equivalent locations of the *domus* in the postmodern city, in particular, in Manhattan, where, as Jerome Charyn argues, the "word *home* takes on a coloring . . . a philosophical density that it has nowhere else."⁷⁰ More generally, Almereyda directs attention to the ways in which Shakespeare circulates across history as a guarantor of conservatively enshrined ideologies. Presenting Hamlet in terms of auteurship enables the director both to contemplate the authority of the play and to reflect on Shakespeare as an endlessly reproducing and reproducible cultural phenomenon.⁷¹ In short, Almereyda investigates the exchange value of the original *Hamlet* by translating it into a postmodern vocabulary. In effecting such a transformation, Almereyda once more confronts the knotty issue of technology.

All *Hamlet* films are bedeviled by questions of paternity (one thinks of the quasi-biographical relationship shared by Branagh and Derek Jacobi in the 1997 version of the play), and Almereyda's production is no exception to this rule. With his *Hamlet*, however, the connection between Hamlet and his father is spotlighted more pointedly. Because Sam Shepard, who plays the Ghost, is better known as a dramatist, it is possible to assemble a trajectory that links him (the representative of an older technology used to write for the theater) with Hawke (a realization of the new technology of filmmaking). In other words, in the same moment as he indulges in "ghostings" of earlier Shakespeares and Shakespearean traditions, Almereyda imagines Hamlet as a postmodern progeny of a playwright.⁷²

To speak of Almereyda addressing Shakespearean authority, however, is something of a misnomer since Shakespeare, at this late date, is hardly an inviolable category. Now that we have arrived at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is clear that Shakespeare, too, is ensnared in the consumer industry as a corporate product, with his name being used in television advertising, newspaper announcements, cyberspace communications, and, inevitably, cinema. In this respect, it is tempting to maintain that Almereyda's *Hamlet* is ultimately less interested in the reproduction of Shakespeare than in the processes of late-capitalist technology. As

Jameson puts it, the “technology of contemporary society is mesmerizing and fascinating . . . because it seems to offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping . . . the whole new decentered global network of the third stage of capital itself.”⁷³ Put briefly, the argument of this essay has been that the repetitions, rehearsals, circular movements, rewindings, fast-forwardings, doublings, and coilings of Almereyda’s *Hamlet* are most obviously understandable as examples of the globally reproductive disciplines of the postmodern moment. And, of course, a “postmodernist narrative” that is “globally aware” is, in Hillel Schwartz’s formulation, a sublimely “millennial” utterance.⁷⁴

Notes

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1. These preoccupations are voiced by the titular heroine in Almereyda’s *Nadja* (1995), who, reflecting on New York, states: “Here you feel so many things rushing together. . . . Sometimes I need to get away. I want to be alone . . . A tree, a lake . . . sometimes I dream of that. . . . My father . . . he’s a real bastard.” On a later occasion, Nadja adds, “America was getting somehow too confusing . . . too many choices, too many possibilities.” For a useful rehearsal of Almereyda’s earlier work, see Jeffrey M. Anderson, “*Hamlet* (2000): B-Movie Shakespeare” (<<http://www.combustiblecelluloid/hamlet2000.shtml>>).
2. Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Sage, 1991), 7–8.
3. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 44.
4. Despite a limited run, *Hamlet* enjoyed critical success on both sides of the Atlantic. See Scott Athorne, “New York New Hawke,” *Sunday Times Magazine*, November 26, 2000, 33–35; Peter Bradshaw, “Top Ten Films,” *The Guardian: The Guide*, December 19, 2000, 19; Elvis Mitchell, “Film Review: A Simpler Melancholy,” *New York Times*, May 12, 2000, E1, E16; and Kevin Thomas, “Gritty *Hamlet* Gains Fresh Intensity in the Big Apple,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 2000, F14.
5. Glen M. Andres, “Urbanization and Architecture,” in Mick Gidley, ed., *Modern American Culture: An Introduction* (London: Longman, 1993), 202; Jerome Charyn, *Metropolis: New York as Myth, Marketplace, and Magical Land* (London: Abacus, 1988), 228, 234; Philip Cooke, “Modernity, Postmodernity, and the City,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 5, no. 3 (spring 1988): 486; Sarah Bradford Landau and Carol Willis, “Skyscrapers,” in Kenneth L. Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1075; and Sharon Zukin, “The Postmodern Debate over Urban Form,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 5, no. 3 (spring 1988): 438.
6. Charyn, *Metropolis*, 42; Deborah S. Gardner, “Architecture,” in Jackson, *Encyclopedia*, 49; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 66, 82–83; and Douglas Tallack, *Twentieth-Century America: The Intellectual and Cultural Context* (London: Longman, 1991), 134.
7. Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1988), 15.
8. Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1994), 105.

9. Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), 22.
10. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), paragraphs 34 and 36.
11. Michael Almereyda, *William Shakespeare's "Hamlet": A Screenplay Adaptation* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 30, and J. Macgregor Wise, *Exploring Technology and Social Space* (London: Sage, 1997), 97.
12. Tim Edwards, *Contradictions of Consumption: Concepts, Practices, and Politics in Consumer Society* (Buckingham, U.K.: Open University Press, 2000), 179. In that it was experienced through television, the Gulf War has been linked to the "untrue" and the "unreal." See Gabriel Weimann, *Communicating Unreality: Modern Media and the Reconstruction of Reality* (London: Sage, 2000), 279–319. One wonders if Almereyda's repeated use of the Morcheeba song "Who Can You Trust?" was designed as a diegetic correlative to the thematic concern with the perils of representation.
13. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 9, 10, 42.
14. Almereyda, *William Shakespeare's "Hamlet,"* 33.
15. Edward W. Soja, "Heterotopologies: A Remembrance of Other Spaces in the Citadel-LA," in Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson, eds., *Postmodern Cities and Spaces* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 29.
16. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1979), 200, 214.
17. "Hamlet": *Production Information* (London: FilmFour Distribution, 2000), 13.
18. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1984), 41.
19. Virginia Eubanks, "Zones of Dither: Writing the Postmodern Body," *Body and Society* 2, no. 3 (September 1996): 74.
20. Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 40.
21. In an interview, Almereyda remarked that the "swords are wired. They have a wire running through the hilt. And that metaphor of two opponents being on the same wire was really interesting." Jeffrey M. Anderson, "Brushing up Shakespeare: A Conversation with Michael Almereyda and Ethan Hawke," available at <<http://www.combustiblecelluloid.com/inthawke.shtml>>. See also Cynthia Fuchs, "Interview with Michael Almereyda, Writer-Director of *Hamlet*," at <<http://www.popmatters.com/film/interviews/almereyda-michael.html>>.
22. Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981), 169. For similar views, see Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (London: BFI Publishing, 1992), 10, and Robert Mansell and Roger Silverstone, "Introduction," in Mansell and Silverstone, eds., *Communication by Design: The Politics of Information and Communication Technologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.
23. Almereyda, *William Shakespeare's "Hamlet,"* 64.
24. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 17.
25. Almereyda, *William Shakespeare's "Hamlet,"* 71.
26. *Ibid.*, 37.
27. *Ibid.*, 36.
28. Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, 120, 144, 145.
29. Albert Borgmann, *Holding on to Reality: The Nature of Information at the Turn of the Millennium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 25, 26.

30. Eric Higgs, "Nature by Design," in Higgs, Andrew Light, and David Strong, eds., *Technology and the Good Life*? (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 201, 203.
31. Almereyda, *William Shakespeare's "Hamlet,"* 55.
32. *Ibid.*, 29.
33. In an early scene, as Almereyda's screenplay clarifies, Ophelia is seen "looking at a photo of a young Hamlet, a fourteen-year-old holding a still camera" (*ibid.*, 24). The point here is not only that the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia is envisaged as of longer duration than that between Claudius and Gertrude but that the ill-fated lovers are ennobled through their imbrication in history and a past.
34. Elizabeth Wilson, "The Invisible *Flâneur*," in Watson and Gibson, *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, 73.
35. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1989), 5–6.
36. Neville Wakefield, *Postmodernism: The Twilight of the Real* (London: Pluto, 1990), 78.
37. Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, 58, 60, 119.
38. Almereyda, *William Shakespeare's "Hamlet,"* 50.
39. *Ibid.*, 52.
40. *Ibid.*, 50, 52.
41. Angela McRobbie, "Postmodernism and Popular Culture," in Lisa Appignanesi, ed., *Postmodernism: ICA Documents 5* (London: ICA, 1986), 57.
42. Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 14.
43. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 26; Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. David Macey (London: Routledge, 1977), 236; and Wakefield, *Postmodernism*, 75.
44. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London: Athlone, 1984), 340–82.
45. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 96.
46. Donald Alexander Downs, *The New Politics of Pornography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 16, 40.
47. Lynne Segal, "Does Pornography Cause Violence? The Search for Evidence," in Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson, eds., *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power* (London: BFI Publishing, 1993), 16.
48. Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, 125. See also Featherstone, *Consumer Culture*, 15.
49. Almereyda, *William Shakespeare's "Hamlet,"* 70, and Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 28, 29.
50. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiv.
51. Almereyda, *William Shakespeare's "Hamlet,"* 106, and Patrick Humphries, *The Complete Guide to the Music of Bob Dylan* (London: Omnibus, 1995), 37.
52. Archie Brown, *The Soviet Union: A Biographical Dictionary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), 240.
53. Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 37.
54. Almereyda, *William Shakespeare's "Hamlet,"* 34, and Harold Jenkins, ed., *William Shakespeare, Hamlet* (London: Routledge, 1989), I, v.175.
55. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 19.
56. *Ibid.*, 25, and Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 23. It is tempting to wonder if the nostalgia of the film can be traced to Almereyda himself. On a number of occasions, both he and Ethan Hawke have expressed admiration for Holden Caulfield (from J. D. Salinger's 1951 novel, *Catcher in the Rye*), a character quintessentially identified with adolescent anxieties of the 1950s. See Almereyda,

- William Shakespeare's "Hamlet,"* viii, and Ross Anthony, "Interviews with Actor Ethan Hawke and Director Michael Almereyda of *Hamlet*," at <<http://www.rossanthony.com/interviews/hawke.shtml>>.
57. The concept is taken from Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 3 (spring 1986): 22–27.
 58. Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 5, 6, 88.
 59. Almereyda, *William Shakespeare's "Hamlet,"* 118.
 60. See Fuchs, "Interview with Michael Almereyda," and "Hamlet": *Production Information*, 22.
 61. Michele H. Bogart, *Public Sculpture and the Civic Ideal in New York City, 1890–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 86; Kathryn Greenthal, *Augustus Saint-Gaudens: Master Sculptor* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985), 156, 162; and Thomas H. Johnson and Harvey Wish, eds., *The Oxford Companion to American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 701.
 62. Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), 17.
 63. On the incinerator chimneys ringing New York, which are themselves often likened to monuments, see Michael Pye, *Maximum City: The Biography of New York* (London: Picador, 1993), 262.
 64. Almereyda, *William Shakespeare's "Hamlet,"* 127.
 65. Greenthal, *Augustus Saint-Gaudens*, 163, and Johnson and Wish, *The Oxford Companion*, 701.
 66. On Sherman's career, see *ibid.*, 720.
 68. *Ibid.*, 143.
 69. Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, 213, and Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, 5.
 70. Charyn, *Metropolis*, 188. A comment of Gordon G. Brittan's also seems relevant here. Writing on nostalgia, he states: "The etymology of the word has to do with homesickness. . . . Our lives generally have lost their center and focus, symbolized by the family hearth." Brittan, "Technology and Nostalgia," in Higgs, Light, and Strong, *Technology and the Good Life?*, 71.
 71. The director follows in the footsteps of much recent Shakespearean criticism. See, for instance, Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer, eds., *Shakespeare and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 1999); Barbara Hodgdon, *The Shakespeare Trade: Performances and Appropriations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); and Marianne Novy, ed., *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-visions in Literature and Performance* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave, 2000).
 72. This is not to suggest that the familial connection is envisaged merely in male terms. The fact that Diane Venora (Gertrude) had played Hamlet on stage inserts her into a long-established tradition of female Hamlets and provides a space for a specifically feminine interpretation of the role.
 73. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 37–38.
 74. Hillel Schwartz, "Economies of the Millennium," in Charles B. Strozier and Michael Flynn, eds., *The Year 2000: Essays on the End* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 315.