

Elizabeth LeCompte, Kate Valk,
and Maria Shevtsova

A Conversation on The Wooster Group's *Troilus and Cressida* with the RSC

Elizabeth LeCompte and Kate Valk here discuss with Maria Shevtsova The Wooster Group's work with the Royal Shakespeare Company on *Troilus and Cressida* and the challenges posed for them by this joint venture. The project was initially proposed by Rupert Goold, but was brought to fruition by playwright Mark Ravenhill, his first directing experience. *Troilus and Cressida* was part of the World Shakespeare Festival, during which all Shakespeare's plays were performed by different companies from countries across the globe. The Festival, four years in the making and spanning eight months, was part of the cultural programme of the Olympic Games held in London in 2012. *Troilus and Cressida* was first performed at the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon from 3 to 18 August 2012, and then at the Riverside Studios in London from 24 August to 8 September. This conversation took place at the Riverside Studios on 30 August 2012, and pairs with the discussion of The Wooster Group's *Hamlet*, the company's first Shakespeare production, published in *NTQ* 114 (May 2013). Maria Shevtsova holds the Chair in Drama and Theatre Arts at Goldsmiths, University of London and is co-editor of *New Theatre Quarterly*. Her most recent book is the co-authored *Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing* (2013).

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Maria Shevtsova *How did this 'shared' Troilus and Cressida project come up? I believe that Rupert Goold suggested it to The Wooster Group, but how did he approach you and present it to you?*

Elizabeth LeCompte I recall we were doing *North Atlantic* at the Baryshnikov Center in 2010. He came to the theatre and afterwards he asked for an appointment with Cynthia [Hedstrom, producer of TWG] and we met him very briefly in the lobby of the Baryshnikov Theatre. He just said, 'You know, there's this project around the RSC; I'm an Associate Director of this project to do a co-production and co-direct a Shakespeare piece for the Olympics Arts Festival.' So we said we would think about it, and then we kind of forgot about it, I guess, for a while, and then he got back to us about three or four months later. I don't remember the whole sequence.

But, whatever, it kept coming back around and we kept talking about it and saying 'No, we can't do that because it's a long time away from home,' and he had suggested *Coriolanus*, or one of those, and then it turned out somebody else was doing *Coriolanus*, and then I think we met with him and talked about the possibility of doing *Troilus and Cressida*. I didn't know the play but Ari [Fliakos] and Scott [Shepherd] knew it and said it was between two camps, so we could work on it – because we were worried about time – so we could work on it separately and then come together at the end. So, that was when we finally decided we would do it.

Were you in some way apprehensive about the fact that it was the Royal Shakespeare Company, which has a reputation, after all, for creating pretty traditional theatre, and you are anything but traditional?

LeCompte No, but I was apprehensive about the amount of time it would take us, because we felt right away that we wanted to find a kind of analogue to the language that would be a translation for us. Instead of trying to do it as American Shakespearean actors, we wanted to find some kind of, I guess, a metaphor for it, and so Katie – I don't know how you came up with that [*to Valk*] – she just came to me . . .

Kate Valk We were reading the play and I thought what was wrong with our reading this play was that we were pretending that we understood what we were saying. I just said, 'Oh, we should say it like Indians,' because I was thinking of English as a second language. I don't know, it just came to me. It's not like having a problem to solve and wondering how we are going to solve it. It was just in the moment. I guess we all grew up on TV and film, an iconography of a formal relationship where someone has to come and meet not their oppressor, but someone who is more dominant.

LeCompte Has more power.

Valk Has more power, and they have to speak their language, and we, as Americans, are primitive to that language. So it just happened, and we tried it, and it was like 'wow', we were hearing the words and something about that accent, if you want to call it that, lifted the play in a simple way for us.

But how did it help you with the Shakespearean language?

Valk That's what I'm saying – reading the Shakespeare.

LeCompte Yeah, the Shakespeare has a lot of what we call 'flowery' language. It has a lot of metaphors, and the Indian speaks a lot in metaphors, especially metaphors around the earth and nature, and *Troilus and Cressida* is filled with those. So, in some ways, the easiest thing for us, the thing that meshed the most, was the way the Indians talk about nature and God, and the way Shakespeare talks about nature and God, and also about

love – the love affair, the simplicity; some of it seemed to be straight out of some Indian translation or American-Indian translation.

What sort of books were you reading?

LeCompte Folklore, tales, mythology.

Yes, but you did not use them in your production, did you? You used three movies.

LeCompte Yes, but it's all in there. [*Laughs.*] Mainly we went to American-Indian movies, ones that were produced by American Indians and/or had American-Indian actors that we all kind of grew up with in different roles. Sometimes they were the bad guys in the Westerns and sometimes they would make their own films about Indian life, and then, in the 1970s, there was a movement for people to make films about reservation life, so we saw some of those, as well.

Valk That was actually interesting because I think that the iconography that we grew up with was really from older films and television shows where the representation was more stilted, and that's where we went to first. But then we found all these other, more recent movies, where there were more fluid, multiple voices for native Americans because some of the films were made by them, the indigenous people.

And these are, what, from the 2000s rather than the 1950s?

LeCompte The 1990s through to the 2000s.

Valk Late twentieth century.

So those are the movies whose titles you gave me the other day – Smoke Signals (1998), Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner (2001), and Splendor in the Grass (1961).

Valk Right.

And they were essentially Hollywood movies?

LeCompte No, a lot of them were independent.



Above, left to right: Greg Mehrten, Scott Shepherd, Gary Wilmes, Bruce Odland. Below, left to right: Danny Webb, Andrew Schneider, Clifford Samuel, Bobby McElver. Photos: Hugo Glendinning, © Royal Shakespeare Company.



Were you ever worried that you would fall into an exoticism of the American Indians as being foreigners, outsiders?

LeCompte Well, I wanted to fall into that.

Go on. Tell me more about it.

LeCompte That's part of the myth. I wanted both sides, you know, the real Red side and the myth that we all grew up with and that, now, the Indians actually grew up with, too.

Did they?

LeCompte Yes, sure. They were participants in a lot of the rodeo shows and that way of seeing themselves. They were mirrored back. It reminds me of that beautiful thing about the eye of the beholder. They saw themselves *through* the white people, who were interpreting them, as well.

Valk As a means of economic survival.

LeCompte Yes.

Valk So, they start to play themselves.

LeCompte Yes, and Buffalo Bill is just one of the many people who did that. Once the reservations were established, a real interweaving of the two ideas of who they were began, and it went through a lot of changes, ending with the idea of the 'noble savage'. I'm not a historian, but just reading shows that. Two things are in the mix, 'noble' and 'savage'. How can they be together?

But, you know, this image is a very debased image of the American Indian, isn't it?

Valk Not for us.

LeCompte No, not for us. They were always a higher culture.

Valk I don't know, I mean, that gets into the whole question of whether any kind of representation for economic survival is a debasement.

LeCompte Is Marilyn Monroe a debasement of women?

Valk Is MC Hammer in black face, even though he doesn't have any make-up on? If you start playing yourself for economic survival and somebody else has more power . . .

Ah, but there's a difference between the people who play themselves for economic survival and those who make movies about them for economic gain and present them as a kind of 'savage' version of the 'noble savage'. I've seen quite a few 1950s movie, you know, Westerns, and in my memory of that today they offered a very debased image of the American Indian, made by movie makers – not by the American Indians themselves, but by the movie makers.

LeCompte Well, we say the same thing too, but I think it is a very difficult area. As a woman, I would say the same thing about Joan Crawford, and yet she's fantastic, and something wonderful.

Valk I also don't think that's what we are talking about here. We're not making a comment on representation. It's a metaphor for our relationship to another culture, which is Shakespearean British language.

That's the key. We had to get around that, though, for me to ask whether you ever saw it as a problem you had to step over in order to get to Shakespeare; to get to him in a way that did not present Shakespeare as some weird and wonderful 'other' creature. I hate this language of the 'other', whether for Shakespeare or the American-Indian, or anyone else, and the estrangement that this term creates.

LeCompte I think it liberated us from pretending that we were at ease with this language. So, like anything we do, we were looking for a theatrical mask that liberated the language for us. And, of course, there's the part that goes 'Oh boy, how is this going to play in Peoria [Illinois], when we're tarted up like Red Indians, which we are *not* doing. That's why we engaged an artist to make a synthesis of materials and ideas so it wasn't a literal representation but, maybe, like a tribe in the future, in an imaginary future, where people weren't killed off; an imaginary

future that is as mythic as the past where these myths came from. We're not talking in political or representational terms here. It's a theatrical mask that we followed through, like following a beam of light, because it was making the language more alive for us. We could suddenly, with mere simplicity, catch great truth instead of pretending with some craft that we didn't have that we were going to get the ideas in Shakespeare's rhetoric clear. I'm not saying that people aren't going to have some reaction to the costumes and the style, but . . .

Actually, I thought the costumes and general design were just marvellous; and I was trying to second guess you, but would never have imagined that you would choose this Indian imagery, which gave you a degree of difference between the Trojans and the Greeks. Two totally different civilizations.

LeCompte Well, I'm not sure about that. In Shakespeare I think they were the same civilization. What *we* did was take the meta-story, I think you would call it, which involved an American experimental theatre company and a Shakespearean company. So there the language was very different. With Shakespeare, I don't know, I think he was trying to say, in the play, that they spoke the same language, but they still fought.

Valk Well, he even points out, time and again, that they are blood-related – they're cousins. They're dating each other, they're writing each other love letters.

LeCompte So we really took out a little lead that is only about this project. It's about the meeting of two artistic cultures that are very different.

What I saw was how two different artistic cultures made the Trojans and the Greeks sufficiently different to make the cleavage work artistically and, in some ways, also culturally and, perhaps, also ethically.

Valk Yes, very true. Watching it every night I see how it really plays up the style that Mark [Ravenhill] employs with his actors;

how it really plays up the disintegration not only of the morale, but also of the morals of the Greeks in relation to honour and dignity and the reason for fighting.

How far did you get in developing the work in New York before you went to Stratford?

LeCompte Pretty far. We had about two months and a half: we had to develop the structure of working with the predominant films. We had to track a physical language that we could work from, and it took us a while to figure out how to use the TVs.

That's pretty standard for you, isn't it, to work off TV images?

Valk Yes, we've been developing that for a while.

LeCompte Eight years now, since *Poor Theater* (2004) – I mean physically, really strongly, since *Poor Theater*. That was the beginning.

Although you used technology like that before.

LeCompte Yes, but not so completely, where it concerns both your listening and your working off of the TVs. Both.

Valk It makes the *mise-en-scène* have two tracks going at the same time.

LeCompte Before that, we worked a lot of the time off the TVs, where the audience weren't as aware that we were working from them.

Actually this time I was very aware of the fact that you were working from those images, partly because they were facing me. Whereas, in the case of Hamlet (2007), for instance, they were much more hidden.

Valk Yes, the smaller monitors in *Hamlet* serve the actors much better.

And the spectator's eye couldn't catch those images in Hamlet, unless you sat very much to the side. In Troilus and Cressida they are quite

open, visible, and that seems like something new, a kind of turning point.

LeCompte Well, it was out of necessity, at first, because we had to do it at the Swan, and the Swan is a three-quarter theatre, so I just decided to see what it would be like if we just walked them along and used what we needed to use, and imagined that it was just a separate track; and to see how people would see it; how they would take it in. I'm kind of curious to talk to people about it. Some people seem never to look at them, some I see scanning back and forth.

Did anybody tell you other than me? I scanned back and forth, and, of course, because I know your work, I was very aware of the film images: I certainly scanned.

Valk I've had people mention to me that they like to see our representation vis-à-vis something authentic. And authenticity is there, especially in the Inuit film. They said it relieved them from wondering whether we were trying to be authentic or not because there was something more authentic. They could reference the metaphor and the language and the performances from the Native American films.

LeCompte *The Fast Runner*, the main film, was made by an Inuit so it's another example.

And speaking in Inuit, too.

LeCompte Yes.

Valk But this person told me that it even reinforced the naivety of the story and the way that English as a second language gave an almost naive or primitive relationship to Shakespeare.

That's interesting because I saw it as a dialogue – The Wooster Group dialoguing with those images, dialoguing with the Inuits. The whole production introduces a third layer: a dialogue with the RSC with those images that were integral to your own structure. This created the kind of layering that you always work with. It gave another layer to the eye and the ear. Also, in some ways – I don't

know what you think about this idea – it foregrounded the artificiality of the acting. You weren't trying to represent characters.

LeCompte We weren't?

Were you?

LeCompte Yes. I don't think that acting is artificial. [To Valk.] I don't know about you?

Valk Yes.

Okay, perhaps what I should say is that The Wooster Group acting is not within the kind of psycho-realistic style that might normally characterize the Royal Shakespeare Company.

LeCompte Oh, I see. Like what the Greeks are doing, where what they do is completely illustrative of what they are saying.

Yes, where they are trying to enter a character in a kind of psycho-emotional way.

LeCompte Well, we do that, too.

But you do it very differently.

Valk Yes, I think it's very much a style because I know Liz is interested in a kind of cinematic naturalism rather than an illustrative way, which can be helpful to tell a story, but is stolid.

LeCompte This is this – this is this – this is this.

Valk Yes. Ever since I worked with Liz, she has always wanted the whole space: moving, moving, moving, everything's constantly moving, it's like water, it's always changing, and it's an aesthetic that your eye can be totally engaged with and your senses turned on so that the story can come to you in a different way. This is my first time on the outside [Valk does not perform in the production], but I find the story creeps up on me in different ways, all the time as I watch it over and over. I don't see it coming and the actor isn't telling me what to think and feel. I think that's Liz's style.



Above, left to right: Ari Fliakos, Bruce Odland, Scott Handy, Gary Wilmes. Below, left to right: Scott Shepherd, Scott Handy, Zubin Varla, Marin Ireland, Danny Webb. Photos: Hugo Glendinning, © Royal Shakespeare Company.



LeCompte Well, that's all of our styles now.

Valk Yes, but I mean you as a director, which is very interesting for me. I'll tell you: I've been a performer in it and worked off the TVs and had a relationship to the TVs, but I didn't know what the spectators' relationship was. I was astounded by the resonance, the frisson or whatever you call it, between the TV information and the story, and the movement and what was happening on stage. I found it engaged my senses in a way that tweaked my perceptual . . .

Yes, it is very subtle, and, maybe, because of this process of dialogue that I am talking about?

Valk Well, yes, dialogue is right.

You are normally a performer in The Wooster Group productions, and this time you are not. Is there a reason why you were not performing in this Troilus and Cressida?

Valk I think we had to work quickly. I'm still a performer, but I am like the performer on the outside who can help the other performers to work quickly.

But you're not a performer in it, is what I meant. Of course you are a performer.

Valk I mean I think that I am still functioning as a performer from the outside. I can see what the performers need. Liz will say, 'Why isn't that there again?' and because I'm listening to what they are listening to and I'm watching what they are watching I can say, 'Oh because they didn't have that there or they need a different thing, or maybe they could go over there.' So, it's more like I can help on the outside as a performance coach, or something.

It's interesting that you define yourself as a performer and not as a spectator.

LeCompte Yes, that's right, but she's both.

So you can think from the inside and the outside at the same time.

Valk Now I am more of a spectator because we're not in rehearsal; and now I'm just kind of exhausted by not performing. It's exhausting what Liz does and I'm hoping that, when I go back in, I will have learnt something. I mean, I've learnt an awful lot watching these other people, especially Marin [Ireland], who is quite an accomplished actress, coming to our style of working with her skills, which she brought to our style. And other people, too, all the other people who don't normally work with us. It was super-interesting to see it from the outside. I needed a break, too, from performing.

Yes, there was no sense of discomfort, ever, in what they were doing. It just flowed. Has the work changed a lot since you went to Stratford from New York? Much of it was already done, but how much was left to develop in Stratford before you came to London?

LeCompte There was a lot of editing and trying to figure out what the story was, because there were three stories: Shakespeare's story, and then Mark brought in *The Iliad*, so there's another story there, and then there's the story of two companies coming together. A lot of people think collaboration means that the two directors have to get together and agree on everything. Mark was really great with us on that because he found a style that was really interesting to him for this play, as we did, and then we put the two together and tried not to modify or generalize.

Valk As if two different theatre companies had been booked on the same stage for the same night. I mean, it's quite interesting. Mark, when he took over the project, came to New York and watched our rehearsals.

LeCompte He knew what we were doing. Yes, he was there for a week.

Valk So he saw, and at that point we were running scenes. And so, when we came over here it was like, 'Oh, I get it.' He has them doing *big* performances, high performances.

LeCompte Really loud, without microphones.

Valk Because he saw that we had this delicate fluidity with the cinematic naturalism. So he has them do huge things, right to the audiences.

Like high camp?

LeCompte A little bit camp, but it's too serious for camp. It's not really camp, it's really cartoon, American cartoon.

Valk I could almost hear him thinking, 'How do I compete with the miced voices without a microphone?' So, you know, he only had six actors to play a lot of parts. All but four of them double as other characters.

LeCompte So he used a lot of choric work, which I think goes well with our kind of amplified drifting.

Valk Mark uses it especially when the Trojans come to the Greek camp in Act I, Scene iii, and Act IV, Scene v, when all the Greek armies are there. They often say their lines in unison. That's what we call choric.

I don't seem to have been struck by it. Why not?

LeCompte It's just in those two scenes when the Trojans come to the Greek camp. Oddly, other than the battle scene, we do not have many scenes together – only one character at a time.

Valk One character coming to one camp and then another character coming from the other camp.

And Helen coming to the Trojans.

Valk Right.

I think your work with Helen was quite wonderful because you got Scott Handy working in an utterly different style and tone from those I have seen him use in the past.

LeCompte I didn't have to, he did it himself. He's a really fine performer and he

really took to working with us. He also came over early with Rupert [Goold].

Valk I think he actually had to convince Mark to cast him.

My sense of it was that the two different parts of this production actually worked very well together; they dovetail in some sort of interesting, engaging way. This is partly because The Wooster Group is always cool in how it does things and partly because Ravenhill's exaggerated, slightly clichéd, deliberately, what I would call 'camp', plays off of that. I'm thinking especially about the production of Mother Clap's Molly House at the National Theatre in London (2001), which was really very camp. Traces of that were here, which is fine because it did not jar with what you were doing. Maybe that contrast is exactly what worked.

LeCompte That's what I feel. Those scenes when we come together are my favourite scenes now; the two companies negotiate that and keep the essence of what they are doing – watching.

Valk Mine too. That was our challenge because we had to keep the performers from drifting towards that style.

LeCompte They keep drifting, too – they keep drifting towards it, but don't know how to go there because they don't have any of this. They are thinking, like good actors, 'Should I go there? Shouldn't I make a connection here?' But they don't know how to connect. And our people have to watch not to go off of their task or they would get in a muddle, and it would not be good.

Valk And what's interesting, too, is that the way The Wooster Group operates production-wise is more like a tribe, where whoever takes the centre has centre, and everybody is shooting arrows and anybody can cross talk. You know, it's like a circle. The RSC production style is much more regimented, which works well for us.

Not so layered.

Valk But for our metaphor it extends beyond the realm of the play and gets into the tactics that we employ.

LeCompte And the story. It gets into the way the world is organized. It is a political statement because all the Greek side were brought in and paid, and Mark has never directed before. The RSC put all the actors behind him, so there was a hierarchy, but the hierarchy was make-believe: it wasn't established from any real thing like, 'I want to work with this director.'

Valk Well, it's not make-believe at all. It's a structure that exists and they've put people in the positions: this underpins the structure.

LeCompte The Greeks talk about a breakdown in the order, when you don't know where the leader of the hive is.

Valk The centre, yes.

LeCompte They didn't know where the centre was. The centre for the RSC – was it Mark? Whereas we know where the centre is, because we're a tribe. We know who. And the way the American-Indians found the tribe member, it was the person who survived. It was the guy who survived the last battle.

Valk And the people who wanted to ride with the chief.

LeCompte In this case the chief is me. So there is a certain kind of cohesiveness on The Wooster Group side that was lacking on the RSC side.

Valk That served them, and that reality became their metaphor, and it's exactly what the play is about.

LeCompte The Greeks still beat the Trojans because they had more power and more money, even though they had less cohesion. We get beat, in this; we get destroyed.

You as The Wooster Group or you as the Trojans?

LeCompte Both.

Valk Yes. Who took the hit in the press? We did. And we got 'the technology of The Wooster Group' – 'Oooooohhhh, *technology!*' We have the technology on the stage, and we just call to each other; and the performers have to know when they are going to come on because they have to *listen*. But the RSC has all the technology in and around the production: monitors backstage, microphones, everybody's talking to each other on microphones.

LeCompte Lights coming up when people have to go on. You don't have to be on the stage listening because there is a green light that goes on.

Valk So it is the perfect inverse of what is on the stage.

Didn't the RSC give you any of that infrastructure?

LeCompte Yes, they did, but that doesn't really work very well for us.

Valk We had to just sort of fit into that. I'm just saying it's an inverse.

LeCompte We work totally differently, in other ways. They would rehearse a scene and we would go, 'Are they rehearsing? What's going on?', because everyone would be talking over here and over here, and here, and whisper, and I would think 'Are they rehearsing? What are they doing?' Then, when it was our turn to rehearse, everybody was yelling, 'Okay let's do that, what do you think? I don't know . . .' They were, like, appalled at us, and we were confused by them. [*Laughs.*] That's perfect.

Oh, they couldn't have been appalled by you!

Valk We're loud and hysterical and they are, like, polite and British.

Well, you have swallowed all the mythology. . . . But let us come back to the point of how these two very different styles actually managed to gel in some odd way. The fact that Mark Ravenhill saw you rehearsing and spent a week in New York



Above, left to right: Jennifer Lim, Ari Fliakos, Jibz Cameron, Scott Shepherd. Below, left to right: Jibz Cameron, Ari Fliakos, Scott Shepherd. Photos: Hugo Glendinning, © Royal Shakespeare Company.



would surely have helped him to find a way into how to direct the RSC part so that the two did gel. You've been in England since the last week of June, so you've been absorbing impressions unconsciously and in your body just walking around and hearing people. Have you found that any of this 'being in Britain' has changed anything in the production since the move from Stratford to London? Has the production shifted in any way?

LeCompte Well, we made some big cuts.

Okay, can we talk a little about that, since it is important.

LeCompte I think the cuts were mainly around the flow of the story of the two companies. It's such an unwieldy story in the actual text and you have to take four hours to really tell it. The second most important story was that of our two companies. So I tried to make cuts, and I think Mark agreed with me. I tried to make cuts around keeping the two different styles of performing clear and how that resolved itself. We always did everything together. That's why it took so long. Mark would have to go back to his people and talk it over.

Valk Most of the cuts were at the end of the play. When we were still rehearsing in Clapham, Mark did a radical cut, cutting the last scene of Act IV and the first scene of Act V, which saved us a load of rehearsal time. He said, 'I think this should be an hour and a half.'

LeCompte In Stratford, the battle scenes at the end of Act V were the most difficult for the two companies; and they were the real battle.

Say that again. The battle scenes are the battle?

Valk Yes, that's where Liz and Mark had to battle about 'I can't cut that because my actor . . . We need that for our story . . .' So the battle scenes became the only scenes we really had to battle over.

I missed something earlier that you said about The Wooster Group and the RSC not merging or collaborating. I hadn't fully understood that you communicated with each other, nevertheless, about what would be cut or what wouldn't.

Valk Every day! But you should understand, if it's our scene, we took care of it, if it was our turf and a Greek actor came to our turf it was our scene. If it's on Greek soil, like when we sent Calchas down to their rehearsal room, it's their soil. The two camps don't come together until Act IV, Scene v, the last scene of Act IV. In the rehearsal room, finally, we put them sitting together. Mark said, 'We can cut this,' he made the cuts and Liz said, 'Great.' For the first scene of Act V Mark said, 'We can lose this,' and Liz said, 'Great.' Then the battle scenes. They're both ours; they're the scenes we had to duke it out.

And they are the ones that you discussed and negotiated.

LeCompte Yes, and they were hard because, for us, as a tribe, it was easier and we all agreed before we got there. Mark had to go to actors, who –

Valk – aren't used to things changing once you've started showing it. We had already opened to the press in Stratford and we said, 'This is too long' – just like Polonius says in *Hamlet*: 'This is too long' – 'and it's going to be beneficial to the entire production, to the storytelling, to cut this, and this, and this.' Mark was in a very difficult position. He was between a rock and a hard place. We have to hand it to him, he did it.

Because he was with you and his company, which was the RSC.

LeCompte Exactly, and his company was not used to doing that.

Valk With *his* company the director leaves after you open the show!

So, in fact, this talk about you doing completely separate stuff and only coming together here and there is really only a myth.

Valk No, it's not a myth. We did it for a month in Clapham, in the rehearsal rooms in Clapham. We worked upstairs, they worked downstairs.

And you never saw each other?

LeCompte Well yes, it's a small building so we saw each other at lunchtime.

Did you look at each other's material or discuss it?

Valk Yes, we did.

LeCompte The performers did. Afterwards, in the bar, they would discuss what they were doing. They would come up and work for, like, an hour, and we would work with one of them for an hour. They came up and showed us something, off and on, in the first two weeks.

Valk Say the kissing scene, when Cressida goes to the Greeks – this is a good example – we blocked that with Marin, with just some of our actors reading the Greek lines in. We totally blocked that scene vis-à-vis the film. They, without Marin, blocked that scene as if she were there. Okay, we get together, we're going to rehearse it. Both choreographies go on top of each other and we go, 'That's fabulous. How do we maintain the integrity of both blockings and just bring them together enough so that it's not too abstract?'

LeCompte We 'smudged' slowly. We would decide, 'Ah, maybe he should look at her there,' like, in some scenes you'll see that they are looking at something else because they were thinking that Aeneas was out here, when we had blocked Aeneas in the back. But we went, 'Okay, we'll keep that. They're not going to be turning to him, but we'll move our performer up to the front slowly in the piece until he is in the front so that they're finally all dealing with the same.'

Valk And just like a war strategy and war tactics, we would get together and do that and then separate and go, 'Okay, let's change this.'

LeCompte It was constantly shifting in every way.

Valk So it's just like the play, you know. Tonight you're all friends, but tomorrow I'll kill the fella dead. Do you know what I mean? That's just like the play.

So, this smudging or this shifting or this blurring or this toning, or whatever the word we want is, was happening all the time.

LeCompte All the time, whenever we worked together.

But am I right in deducing from what you were both saying earlier that there was a much more open discussion between you regarding the battle scenes of Act V?

LeCompte The battle scenes. Every performer wanted the completion of his or her story, but there were too many stories, so it was like a war of whose story went and whose story stayed.

So there was a hidden, possible battle between the two groups without it ever becoming hostile or aggressive.

LeCompte Absolutely.

Valk It's just like the play. They eat dinner, we gather the night before and then they kill each other the next day. Tonight we'll feast together, tomorrow . . . I'm going to kill you there, and there, and there.

It's truly amazing, and we're going to end on this with just one tiny rider – that you feel good about it, and you're friends, and there's no acrimony, there's no kind of 'I'll never come and see you again.'

LeCompte Are you kidding? No.

Valk It's not over, it's not over.

You've still got a week to go.

LeCompte We've got a week to go and then we have the possibility of doing it in the future.

Valk This is a transformative experience. I don't think we're going to be able to digest it until we can take some time off. It's huge; it's changed everybody.

LeCompte It's changed me unbelievably.

Really? Is there anything we can say in print now about this transformative experience?

LeCompte No, because I think I've got to sit back and get away from it. I know that, for Katie, who wasn't performing, being on the outside for the first time was incredible, and, for me, having to watch something that I wouldn't have done in my wildest dreams and trying to find where I can come into it and how I can make it work for me and for the whole piece was fabulously freeing. I, myself, didn't have to come up with something that would challenge me; somebody else did it!

Are you going to think about doing Troilus and Cressida as a Wooster Group production, without the RSC?

LeCompte Only if we can fund it; it's such an expensive production. It was their most expensive production.

You're kidding me!

LeCompte Oh, it's the most expensive thing they did in the World Shakespeare Festival

and to remount it would to be a major money thing.

But where did all the money go? It's a single production.

LeCompte It went on the salaries, which are quite big, and it went on bringing us over. We're a big company – twenty-six people.

Valk And we've been living here. Just think of the *per diem* and the house.

LeCompte The apartment was amazing. It was just huge. I still can't believe they did it.

Valk I think this is the hardest thing we've ever done, but the hardest things are the best things.

Liz, would you say it is the hardest thing you've done?

LeCompte Yes, definitely.

Valk And challenging. It was so challenging. It becomes harder and harder to challenge yourself the older you get. People want you to keep on doing the same thing you've always been doing. That's what people want. That's what they pay you for. So to have somebody offer us this situation, which is, I think, the greatest challenge, is great.