

NOTES ON THE NET

Ron Willis

Most of the theatre facilities on the Internet, as regular users know, are clearly well suited for ambient questions. USENET services and numerous LISTSERVs offer ready access to countless readers who willingly answer what are often hastily framed queries on such topics as: viable two character scripts, low-cost small musicals, the concept of character in dramatic literature, the intricacies of verse scansion, and interpersonal problems in rehearsals. Announcements of upcoming events, calls for convention and journal papers, and requests for research assistance elicit almost instantaneous (albeit not always well-informed) responses from individuals with widely varied backgrounds. The ease with which the Internet facilitates casual interaction among disciplinary colleagues without regard for intervening distances certainly increases professional interaction. Two recent examples from the Perform-I LISTSERV illustrate this phenomenon.

Late one Thursday afternoon in early September, Phil Auslander <pa2@prism.gatech.edu>, writing from Georgia (USA), posed a question. "Does anyone know anything about the history of double-casting, by which I mean plays written so that one or more actors performs more than one part? (I don't mean just expedient performance practices in which this might have occurred as a practical matter but, rather, double-casting as a conscious choice by a playwright.) What are the earliest examples of this? Are there particular national dramas in which this occurred more than others? (Probably, the parameters of this question need to be narrowed. Would the Greek theatre, for example, qualify, or was that just a question of expedience?) I'm particularly interested in the use of double-casting as a thematic device."

On Friday morning (her time), Sharon Mazer <AMST017@csc.canterbury.ac.nz>, responded from New Zealand. "Phil - This doesn't quite address the question of double-casting in the modern sense, still . . . It's not really a 'known-fact' but there is a fairly common assumption that in the morality play MANKIND (c. 1470) the roles of Mercy and Titivillus would have been played by the same actor. The devil probably appeared with a 'great head' in contrast to the more 'natural' virtue. Then too, multiple roles for tragic actors in ancient Greece was the norm, right? Again, I know this isn't news to you, but I do think the potential meanings produced, even though this sort of double-casting was probably more expedience than signification, are intriguing. Cheers!"

By Friday, at 01:21 am, his time, John Bell <BELLJ@ACFcluster.NYU.EDU> replied from New York. "In terms of Greek tragedy (or Greek comedy as well, I suppose), I question whether it was really expedience that would lead a company to use, say, only three people in all the speaking roles. Isn't it likely that there could have been more performers found if needed, that the decision to limit the number to three (or earlier two?) performers had some other reason behind it besides expedience? (I don't know what that reason would be; perhaps someone who knows Greek theater better would know). Noh theater's limited number of performers (and double casting) is another example of this; again, I think the reasons for the limited number of roles (shite, tsure, waki, kyogen, etc.) have not to do with expedience, but more with the ritual roots of the form. Topeng mask performance also uses one person in many roles; perhaps this is related to the solo puppeteer of wayang kulit and wayang golek manipulating all the figures."

Also on Friday, Rick Jones <RJONES@KUHUB.CC.UKANS.EDU>, wrote from Kansas to focus on John Bell's comment regarding Greek theatre practice. "Well, fact is, we don't know . . . and there's even considerable debate about whether there was or wasn't a 'three-actor rule.' But clearly there were three basic actor-types: protagonist, antagonist, tritagonist. My own personal guess is that there in fact was a convention of sorts, owing partly to 'expedience,' partly as a means of leveling the playing field (and putting a finite limit on expenses) in what was, after all, a completely competitive environment."

Also on Friday, Bruce Kennedy <BWK0148@ACFcluster.NYU.EDU> in New York provided another perspective. "Before hearkening back to ancient theatre, one caveat: while most scholars agree that double-casting was indeed used (not in Greek tragedy as much as in Roman comedy), they tend to write it off as expedient and irrelevant, given that the actors were masked, occluding any intentional 'doubling' effect. I tend to think that the physicality and vocal technique of these masked actors were indeed recognizable through the masks, and certainly in Plautine comedy the intentional use of the same actors (especially when playing twins!) could have been used to great comic effect. Just thought I'd throw in two cents from the Plautine corner . . ."

By Friday afternoon, Jean Brody <BRODY_J%FLC@VAXF.Colorado.EDU> voiced her opinion from Colorado. "What I remember about the Greeks and double-casting is that the Athenian law restricted the number of 'actors' permitted to each playwright. At first it was one, then two, then finally three. All other performers were in the chorus, right? So the availability of more actors really wasn't the question. It was more a matter of being able to work within in set form, like writing a sonnet."

On Saturday afternoon (her time), Sally Goetsch <tssac@csv.warwick.ac.uk> joined in from England. "Greek drama (5th c. BC) used only 3 actors for all the parts. Mark Damen has written a good article on the thematic use of these overlapping roles. (I don't have the exact reference with me at the moment, sorry)."

In a brief time, this interchange allowed seven individuals located on three different continents, to share relaxed observations on a topic of some interest to each of them.

A week later, on Sunday afternoon, David Wiley <DWILEY%UTCVM.BITNET@ACFcluster.NYU.EDU> took mild issue with a point made in an earlier posting. The meaning, use, and origin of 'French scenes' was being discussed. One observer had compared French dramaturgical practice and Shakespeare's, especially in regard to the latter's leaving the stage empty. Wiley commented, "This thread is getting really interesting: I do not really understand why the stage being empty in Shakespeare as opposed to, say, Racine makes the difference. I don't think we should think of the Shakespearian stage as ever being empty for a moment. One scene blends, even overlaps with another. See the discussion of this and like points in Flatter's *Shakespeare's Producing Hand*."

Rick Jones <RJONES@KUHUB.CC.UKANS.EDU> responded to Wiley's observation. "David's point is well taken. The distinction, however, is in the *way* the stage is never left empty. In Shakespeare, there are occasions, at least apparently, in which one entire group of characters exits as another group enters. In neo-classical French theatre, there is always at least one character from scene ii who was on stage in scene i. The only exceptions are at act-breaks, never in scene-breaks."

Jill Mac Dougall <rpsy@asc.upenn.edu> changed the focus slightly when she offered the comment that, "The division into 'French scenes,' which of course is a term French playwrights would not have used, probably dates from the Renaissance and the demands of classical unities of space/time. The divisions by entries and exits do make a more manageable script, since there are not the drastic changes of settings which cut up a Shakespearian text. Contemporary French playwrights don't necessarily use this system, but if they do . . . , I would say as a translator they would most certainly be translated into English as such. Shakespeare was translated into French respecting the scenes divisions according to shifts in time and space. The structuring is part of the written work, although it may have in fact come out of practical performance considerations."

Susan L. Chast <slchas@mail.wm.edu> also sought to position the developing discussion within a larger context. "It is difficult, I think to fully discuss the subject of French scenes without including a discussion of the development of the French academy, the idea and development of verisimilitude,

and perhaps--in addition to production conditions--the desire of playwrights to establish formal rules, to resist them, or to receive 'high marks' in conforming to them."

David Wiley <DWILEY%UTCVM.BITNET@ACFcluster.NYU.EDU> once again commented, but this time in reference to Ms. Mac Dougall's observation. "Your great comment sent me back to my limited French shelf again. I discovered something that I had never noticed before. Looking at de Montherlant's *La Reine Mort* changes of place (or scenery) within acts are called 'Tableaus.' Hence the 'Second Tableau' (yes, the word 'second' is used) begins with scene six! I also looked at Sartre's *Les Main Sales*. Here the word Acte is not used. The play starts with the 'Premier Tableau' at Olga's home. The 'deuxieme Tableau' is now the term for the second major scene. (Well, I looked up 'second' and to my dumb surprise I found that it is a legitimate French word)."

John Emigh <John_Emigh@brown.edu> also reacted to Ms. Mac Dougall's posting. "The relative lack of shifts in time and fictional space within neo-classical practice certainly would have encouraged looking for other ways to break up a text for purposes of rehearsal (and, perhaps, dramatic construction). It might also be helpful to remember the focus on the character of agents within French neo-classical theory. The audience's admiration for or censure of dramatic personae is central within the theoretical writings of Corneille and Moliere (and of their conservative critics). The entrance and exits of major characters bring with them not only possibilities for new information and new actions—hence, metaphorically, a new 'scene'—but, frequently, another ethos to be tested: hence the significance of these entrances and exits. Cf. Kenneth Burke's remarks on agent/scene and agent/act ratios in his *Grammar of Motives*. Of course, this isn't only true of French theatre, and breaking down scripts into 'French Scenes' remains a useful way of tracing the dramatic possibilities (and of managing rehearsals)."

Ross D. Willits <willi053@maroon.tc.umn.edu> then speculated as to the origin of 'French scene' usage and invited comments from other readers. "One reason the custom probably started was that actors were given only 'sides,' the parts of the play that their characters were in. Breaking scenes down in this way would have been a simple way to assure that actors had the proper sides. Also, the unity of action dictates that the action of a play occur within a prescribed period of time (how long depends on who was making the prescription). I imagine, but have not checked, that the division we call French Scenes originated in Italy in the 16th Century. Any takers?"

C. David Frankel <D7BAIAD%CFRVM.CFR.SF.EDU> then weighed in with a cautionary comment. "The idea of 'a scene' is a structural one embedded

in the text and in the working methods of playwrights. That idea is, of course, bound up in the conventions of the time, but also in the conventions of the theatre itself. In Elizabethan plays, the structural pulse is normally bounded by a change of location or a change in time. In French classical drama, the pulse operates more on the level of change in the number of characters on stage. (Note that many Elizabethan scenes contain more than one 'French' scene)."

The discussion may be continuing even as you read this. But a point worthy of note is the fact that modest questions seeking simple information spawned diverse and low-pressure reflection on dramaturgical, editorial, and theatrical practice from colleagues who found it easy to share their conversational comments without regard to the physical distance separating them.

Predictably, as the number of Internet users has increased, so too has the number and kinds of resources serving those users. Some additions are best described as electronic surrogates for familiar non-electronic enterprises; others are more venturesome. All seek to capitalize on the net's particular strengths, wide-spread contact and rapid response. One obvious candidate for inclusion in the surrogate category is the electronic journal. The Internet allows editors to bypass paper publication and surface mail distribution and transmit essays and other journal contents directly to subscribers via e-mail.

One such recent undertaking is *THEATRE.PERSPECTIVES.INTERNATIONAL* which made its debut in Spring 1994. As of this writing, two issues, each approximately 50 pages, have been distributed. *TPI's* editors are David Reifsnnyder (reifsnnyder@ucsu.Colorado.edu) and E. James Zeiger (zeiger@ucsu.Colorado.edu), both doctoral students at the University of Colorado in Boulder. The journal's statement of purpose is succinct but clearly geared to its electronic environment:

To provide international theatre scholars and practitioners with a quarterly journal devoted to history, theory, criticism, reviews and dramaturgy that takes advantage of the immediacy of assembly and economy of delivery made possible by computer technology. The journal will contain articles of high academic quality usually focussing upon a central theme or related group of topics. The journal's secondary purposes include functioning as a central electronic source for dramaturgical and bibliographic information and for timely reviews of international theatrical productions.

TPI is a juried publication with an international Board of Advisors headed by James Symonds, Chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance at the

University of Colorado. Subscriptions are free and can be arranged through e-mail contact with the editors.

As might be anticipated, *TPI* only accepts articles submitted electronically. They are to conform to MLA standards, but only parenthetical notation or endnotes are acceptable (rather than footnotes) owing to the particular nature of e-mail transmission.

The premiere issue of *TPI* contains two major essays. The first, by Robin Breon of the University of Toronto, is entitled "*Showboat's Comin'.*" Breon examines racial (and racist) implications of both the 1927 original production and the recent revival. The second essay, "Forced Entertainment's *Club of No Regrets*" by S. A. Jackson of Sheffield University, England, scrutinizes the most recent production in this innovative theatre troupe's ten year career.

In this same issue is the first installment of an extended interview with Moscow Art Theatre Artistic Director Anatoly Smelianski. A brace of welcoming editorials plus two "angelic" reviews, one of the Iona Pear Dance Theatre production of *The Mythology of Angels* (Robert Peterson, University of Hawaii) and the other (Thomas L. King, James Madison University) which challenges the overall effectiveness of *Angels in America*, rounds out the offerings.

TPI's second issue (Summer 1994) exhibits a thematic unity. It clusters three essays which bear on Russian theatre: "FROM CENSORSHIP TO OPENNESS, FROM SUBSIDIES TO SPONSORS: RESTRUCTURING IN THE RECENT MOSCOW REPERTORY" by the University of Hawaii's Lurana Donnels O'Malley; "'B MOCKBY!' ["TO MOSCOW!"]: ON MOSCOW'S ROLE IN CONTROLLING PERFORMANCE AND AUDIENCE RESPONSE IN CHEKHOV'S *THE SEAGULL* AND *THREE SISTERS*." by Harai Golomb, a faculty member at Tel-Aviv University; and "LYDIA BORISOVNA YAVORSKAYA 1871-1921: A BIOGRAPHY" by Rebecca B. Gauss, a doctoral student at the University of Colorado.

The focus on Russian theatre is extended through editor Reifsnnyder's second installment of his interview with Anatoly Smelianski. Also included in *TPI's* second issue are two production reviews. "YOU ARE THE LUCKY OWNER OF A SENTENCE" by Linda Eisenstein details her enthusiastic response to a production of Peter Handke's *KASPAR* at Oberlin College on May 6, 1994. E. James Zeiger reviews the May 2, 1994 performance of Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* at the Denver Center in "DANCING IN DENVER."

TPI actively employs the speed and ease of access evident in electronic communications to reach its subscribers. Arguably this readership includes only those theatre scholars and practitioners who are also net-wise, although downloaded print copies are easy to generate. The parent journal, though it

shows up first on the computer screen, clearly echoes traditional academic print publishing practice.

Although *TPI* is less than a year old electronic journals themselves are not new. Now in its fourth season of publication, *EJOURNAL* announces itself as an electronic journal for humanists. It claims a distribution of approximately 3000 subscribers in 37 countries. Its articles explore the impact of electronic communications in the professional lives of librarians, scholars, and teachers. Drawing similar attention are questions as to the academic status of electronic journals and their positioning in library and scholarly hierarchies. Not the least of the positive traits associated with electronic journals is the acceleration of normal publishing procedures. From proposal through submission, jury evaluation, author rewrite, and ending in publication, one *EJOURNAL* article was clocked as taking a total of only 114 days.

EJOURNAL is distributed free to subscribers via Bitnet or Internet. Articles are approximately 5000 words. The journal is peer reviewed and inquiries as to the suitability of potential articles are invited. Questions are to go to EJRN@ALBANYVM1.BITNET. The editor is Ted Jennings, Department of English, University at Albany, State University of New York, Albany, New York 12222. Subscription is effected simply by mailing the message "SUB EJRN [Your Name]" to "LISTSERV@ALBANY.bitnet" [without the enclosing quotation marks or square brackets.] Back issues are also available.

Another electronic journal with goals similar to those of *EJOURNAL* is the *ELECTRONIC JOURNAL ON VIRTUAL CULTURE*. Now in its second volume, *EJVC* employs a somewhat different distribution method. Instead of e-mailing entire issues directly to subscribers, *EJVC* sends subscribers a table of contents and a listing of article abstracts. Full articles are then obtainable by one of three retrieval methods: Gopher, anonymous FTP, or *LISTSERV* mailing.

The issue of *EJVC* distributed on February 28, 1994 (V2N1) is devoted to a special topic, the General Dynamics of Virtual Culture. Major essay titles illustrate the journal's thrust: "COMPUTER SUPPORTED COOPERATIVE WORK AND ACADEMIC CULTURE" by Leslie Shade of McGill University; "THE PSYCHODYNAMIC EFFECTS OF VIRTUAL REALITY" by Leslie D. Harris of Susquehanna University; "CONTRADICTORY SPACES: PLEASURE AND THE SEDUCTION OF THE CYBORG DISCOURSE" by P. K. Jamison of Indiana University; and "CYBORGS ARE US" by Andrew R. J. Yeaman of Yeaman & Associates, Denver Colorado.

Also included in the Spring issue of *EJVC* are several poems, a special section devoted to non-refereed opinions and essays called "The VIRTUAL SQUARE," and a section addressing readers' questions about cyberspace called "The CYBERSPACE MONITOR."

EJVC's founders are: Ermel Stepp, Marshall University, Editor-in-Chief (M034050@Marshall.wvnet.edu); Diane (Di) Kovacs, Kent State University, Co-Editor (DKOVACS@Kentvm.Kent.edu); and A. Ralph Papakhian, Indiana University, Consulting Editor (PAPAKHI@@IUBVM). However, it also boasts listings of 16 Consulting Editors and 26 Associate Editors.

The exploration of electronic networks' potential goes beyond the publishing of new electronic journals. At least two innovative initiatives combine Internet capabilities with existing print publications. Johns Hopkins University Press has joined with the Milton S. Eisenhower Library, and Homewood Academic Computing to form Project Muse. It provides net users employing the World Wide Web (WWW) with electronic access to a limited number of print-based scholarly journals via the Milton S. Eisenhower Library server (<http://muse.mse.jhu.edu>). At present, current issues of three journals are available: *Configurations*, *MLN* (Modern Language Notes), and *ELH* (English Literary History). Users have indexes and search capabilities at their disposal.

THE DRAMA REVIEW, the Journal of Performance Studies, has also introduced a service called *_TDR_ FORUM* which exploits the interactivity capabilities provided by the Internet. Subscribers to *PERFORM-L*, the performance studies *LISTSERV*, are provided with an excerpt of an article from the current issue of *TDR*. Users interested in retrieving the full article may do so by downloading it via anonymous FTP or e-mail from the NYU server. The goal of the service is to stimulate discussion about the selected article and to encourage direct exchange with the author. David W. Jiang's article "SHANGHAI REVISITED: CHINESE THEATRE AND THE FORCES OF THE MARKET" is the subject of *_TDR_ FORUM* 142.

The possibility of collaborative interactivity via the Internet also captured the interest of frequent net contributor Steve Schrum (sas14@psu.edu). He established the *LISTSERV* *COLLAB-L* in order to facilitate the creation of new texts and performance works directly through Internet contact. Five projects are described as in process at the present time. They include a music-theatre version of *THE METAMORPHOSIS*, a computer-animation version of Goethe's *FAUST*, an opera libretto, a modernization of a Greek cycle, and computer-generated animations with music. Interested potential participants are invited to contact Schrum by e-mail.

Since February, 1994 the Association for Theatre in Higher Education has maintained the *ATHE NEWS ON-LINE* subscription service on the Internet. Used for posting notices of general interest to theatre people, it lists calls for papers, the creation of new *LISTSERVs*, conventions, symposia, and similar items. Subscription is similar to that used for other *LISTSERVs*. Although the

service is scheduled to be moved to a new computer location, at present one can subscribe by sending the following message to LISTSERV@mailers.fsu.edu:

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SUBscribe ATHE_NEWS [user name]
i.e., SUB ATHE_NEWS Mary Smith
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The list manager is Jim Thomas (jthomas@cms.cc.wayne.edu).

As can be seen, Internet resources multiply rapidly and the overall net landscape changes accordingly. For example, the *GUIDE TO THEATER RESOURCES ON THE INTERNET* announced in the last column has already been thoroughly revised according to Deborah Ann Torres (dtorres@umich.edu) who, with Martha Vander Volk, authored the project. The guide has been updated, made more inclusive, and had its format altered to improve its usefulness. The new version can be obtained in several ways including anonymous FTP and electronic mail. Anonymous FTP procedures are as follows:

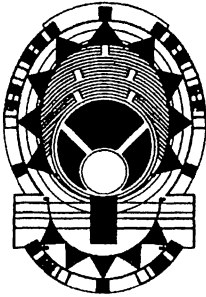
```
host: una.hh.lib.umich.edu
path: /inetdirsstacks/theater:torresmjvk
Login: <anonymous>
Password: <your e-mail address>
```

To retrieve a copy by electronic mail simply send a message requesting the guide to: dtorres@umich.edu.

The highly selective sampling of net resources discussed here only scratches the surface. Once a few simple computer skills are mastered the net user has access to an uncounted number of aids, assists, and personal contacts. I urge you to give it a try.

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Stefan Schütz' *Orestesobsession*, photo by Jean Flamming

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