

WHAT IF ALL THE WORLD WERE A STAGE?
PROBLEMS OF THEATRICAL DISTANCING AND
FRAMING IN INTERNET THEATRE

by

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THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

1998

MAJOR: COMMUNICATION
(Radio-Television-Film)

Approved by:

Advisor

Date

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Introduction

“So you’re writing a Master’s thesis? On what topic?”

“Internet theatre.”

In the many times this exchange was repeated during the period in which I researched this thesis, my response never failed to produce quizzical looks and further confused, if not intrigued, questions. Even those familiar with chat rooms, forums, Multi-User Dimensions (MUDs) or Multi-user domains, Object-Oriented (MOOs), and other, more sophisticated uses of the Internet found my research topic to be rather odd and obscure.

The reasons for my conversation partners’ reactions are not limited to the fact that even now, several years after the first Internet theatre productions, relatively few have actually experienced a performance. These reasons also have a great deal to do with our cultural expectations associated with theatre and the ways in which we have traditionally defined formal, theatrical communication, to set it apart from other modes of communication. Despite the fact that computer-mediated communication is still new enough to be in the initial stages of exploration and definition, we as a society have developed some tentative expectations and conceptual models, which are seemingly confounded by the idea of theatre on the Internet. Is it “theatre” if there is no visible stage, costumes, set or auditorium? How does one discern a character’s mood, attitude or intent when there is no audible voice? How does one distinguish the actors from the audience, particularly if everyday speech on the Internet can be considered performative? These and many other related questions form the basis of this thesis, which attempts to answer the question: Is Internet theatre truly theatre, in any meaningful sense? Can this

new phenomenon fit within existing definitions of conventional theatre (and there are many), and if not, why not?

Computers are being used and experimented with in myriad ways in today's theatre — in everything from computerized light- and sound-boards to computer-generated and/or projected sets, props and even characters, as in The Adding Machine and other productions at the University of Kansas, in which the audience dons special goggles to view computer-generated special effects, and in the Oudeis project, in which actors on separate stages around the world will perform, joined by holographic projections representing their fellow actors on the other stages, all brought together via modem. CU-SeeMe and similar technologies are being used to “broadcast” live performances, offering audiences the opportunity to talk back to the performers, despite the fact that they are physically far apart, and hypertext has been employed to create performance pieces accessible online and in installations.

However, for purposes of this thesis, I have chosen to focus on a particular variety of computer-mediated theatre: text-based, synchronous online productions. These include both Internet relay chat (IRC) productions, namely those of the Hamnet Players, and MOO productions, such as the Crosswaves festival, NetSeduction, MetaMOOphosis, and A Place for Souls. Beyond the fact that broadening my scope to include all forms of computer-mediated and/or -assisted theatre would mean undertaking a much more ambitious project than I have space here to report, text-based, synchronous Internet productions have certain advantages over other sorts of computer-mediated theatre, and indeed, in some ways, seem to be more purely “theatre” than other forms. Being text-based and using somewhat older, more widespread technologies, the types of productions I study in this thesis have (slightly) fewer

bugs to deal with, and are more accessible to viewers with minimal computer equipment, whereas multimedia productions, in addition to still being in the early stages of development, require more sophisticated equipment and knowledge of the viewer. Text-based, synchronous productions also have some characteristics, especially a sense of the presence of all participants, which will be explained in much more depth later on in this thesis, which make them seem more like a traditional theatrical production and less like a written script or book (as hypertext does), and also less akin to a filmed or videotaped event than CU-SeeMe and similar productions do.

The primary method I employ to study these text-based, synchronous Internet productions is textual analysis. While I did experience some performances first-hand, as either an audience member or, in the case of NetSeduction, as a performer, the world-spanning nature of the Internet means that a performance by a group based on a server in Hawaii that takes place on a weekday evening there occurs in the middle of the workday in Michigan, which has hindered my ability to witness performances first-hand. Additionally, some of the Hamnet Players' performances occurred before I was aware of the group's existence, and all of the performances I analyze here occurred before I began research on this thesis.ⁱ Therefore, for many of the productions I examine, my only access has been through performance logs, which are essentially recordings, and through the accounts of participants, such as the work of Brenda Danet and her associates. While reading a log is not the same as witnessing a performance first-hand — a sense of the timing of lines and of the presence of other participants is lost — it is more informative than reading a raw script, because a log of an Internet performance preserves improvised or mistyped lines, actions and character descriptions contributed by the actors, and all of the textual cues used in Internet communication to substitute for the physical and tonal cues

we rely on in face-to-face communication. Performance logs also frequently include post-performance discussions, which I have drawn on, in addition to other extra-performance discussions, to supplement my textual analyses, as they frequently point out the problems encountered in productions.

In a sense, you could say that my research on this subject began several years ago, when I encountered a “flame” (in Internet lingo, an offensive statement, frequently unprovoked) on a Usenet theatre newsgroup, claiming that what the Hamnet Players were doing was not theatre. At the time, I thought it was odd, but I just deleted it like any other piece of unwanted e-mail and didn’t give it another thought until I started to hear more about the Hamnet Players and experienced one of their performances for myself. I started to wonder, what would make someone react in such a negative way to the Hamnet Players? And, of course, I also started to wonder, were there any real grounds for calling the Internet performances theatre?

Even at the beginning of my exploration of Internet theatre, I had a sense that the question of whether or not these productions could truly be considered “theatre” would come down to determining whether (or to what degree) they were able to recreate the audience’s experience of real-life, or “traditional” theatre. (I do not use the term “real-life” here to denigrate Internet theatre or to imply that it is any less significant a cultural expression, but rather to draw the distinction between physical reality and “virtual reality.”) Likewise, I use “traditional” in a very broad sense to denote theatre performed in a physical space inhabited by the physical bodies of actors.) This may seem obvious, but it has been a sticky question ever since someone first set a camera down in front of a stage and filmed a play. It doesn’t take a theatre scholar to notice that “there is something missing” — a sense of the physical presence of the actors — when a

theatrical play is simply recorded by a stationary camera. Film adaptations of plays tend to play better to audiences when they are truly adapted to take advantage of film's special abilities. But such adaptation doesn't revive the lost theatrical sense of presence, it merely makes the production more palatable to the audience by making it fit a different set of conventions or expectations. Would the situation be similar in Internet "theatre"? Would the "special abilities" of Internet communication require such extensive adaptation that plays performed there would no longer resemble theatrical productions in anything but their dialogue, or would that theatrical sense of presence somehow be preserved?

Of course, there are other elements one can add to a definition of theatre, including the (historical) purpose of the medium as a cultural forum, as well as institutional characteristics (the special building, the stage, the set, costumes, masks, etc.) and the clearly defined roles of the audience and the performers in the interaction (emphasized by the physical separation of the stage from the seats in the auditorium). In my textual analyses of the Internet plays, I looked for any sign, deliberately constructed or not, of similar characteristics, in addition to exploring the purposes of these characteristics in the relevant literature, in order to discover any underlying similarities between the characteristics of Internet theatre and those of real-life theatre. In short, I examined how the Internet theatre productions were constructed as instances of social communication, and compared them to the cultural constructions we call traditional theatre.

Several times during the writing of this thesis, I wished I could publish it electronically in hypertext format, because the subject did not seem to lend itself well to a linear discussion; at many points in the following pages, I would have liked to have been able to provide for the reader a link forward or backward to another relevant bit of discussion. However, since this

must conform to a more traditional format, I have manhandled my arguments into what I hope will seem a logical progression, beginning with some basic background on the virtual online “environments” in which Internet theatre has been performed, Internet relay chat (IRC) and MOOs (Multi-user, Object Oriented domains), including the minimum technical information needed to understand the productions. Next I give short descriptions of the productions I studied, including historical material on the groups that performed them as well as explanations of the problems they encountered in performance and any innovations they may have made. From there I step back for a moment to give the reader a brief look at the bigger picture, of the historical links between theatre and computers and their virtual environments, before moving on to the meat of my discussion — the results of my analyses — exploring the construction of the body on the Internet as a substitution for the physical body in the traditional theatre, examining the performative nature of Internet interaction (in general, as well as in Internet theatre performances), and finally applying the concepts of metacommunicative framing and theatrical distancing in an attempt to discover where Internet theatre falls down in its attempt to successfully emulate real-life theatre.

The ABC's of IRC and MOOs

Since Internet theatre takes place (virtually speaking) in online environments foreign to many whose sole contact with the Internet consists of electronic mail or other asynchronous uses, such as mailing lists or newsgroups, some basic information on these environments — IRC and MOOs — may be helpful to this discussion. In the following section I will also briefly introduce the productions studied in this thesis, to give the reader a background to draw on in the subsequent discussion. (For a more in-depth discussion of the mechanics of IRC and MOOs, including the specifics of signing on, there are a number of sources the reader can turn to, including Sean Carton's Internet Virtual Worlds Quick Tour: MUDs, MOOs & MUSHes: Interactive Games, Conferences & Forums and Stuart Harris' The irc Survival Guide: Talk to the World with Internet Relay Chat. Nothing can really substitute for first-hand experience, however, and I urge the reader to try IRC and MOOs out for themselves.)

Internet relay chat (IRC) — the Hamnet Players' arena of choice — is somewhat akin to CB or ham radio. IRC was born in 1988, the creation of Jarkko Oikarinen, an electrical engineering and information technology student at a university in Oulu, Finland (Harris 1995a, 4–5). Given the correct software, one can access hundreds of “channels,” or forums, on any number of topics. As Stuart Harris, founder of the Hamnet Players and author of The irc Survival Guide, a guidebook on IRC use, puts it:

IRC is totally international and multilingual, its topics are unlimited and uncensored by any corporate interest, and it runs twenty-four hours a day. To participate, all you need is Internet access and some simple software — unlike the data services such as Delphi and America Online, there is no per-time charge. (Harris 1995a, 4)

Unlike electronic mail, communication on IRC channels is synchronous; any message

one types is instantly viewed by others on that same channel. The number of channels available for participation constantly changes, since channels are not permanent. Creating a channel is as simple as naming it, and when the last participant leaves for another channel or logs off of IRC, the channel ceases to exist.ⁱⁱ Unlike services such as America Online or Compuserve which have established forums and chat rooms, on IRC there is no authority controlling content or maintaining channels for specific purposes or topics, outside of a few channels one can go to for technical assistance. However, some popular channels achieve a certain amount of permanence by virtue of being re-created over and over again.

As with anything else concerning computers, IRC has its own conventions and lingo, which the Hamnet Players have incorporated in their productions to make them unique expressions of Internet culture. Some conventions and terms useful for this discussion include:

#hamnet, #hottub, #chat, etc. – channel names (these names always begin with the “#” symbol)

/JOIN – the IRC command used to join a channel. For example, “/JOIN #hamnet” would be what you would type to join the Hamnet channel.

This command can also be used to create a new channel, simply by typing in a name not already being used. (All IRC commands, which are executed by the software and not seen by other participants, begin with a forward slash. Anything typed in without a beginning command becomes part of the conversation.)

/NICK – assign a nickname or “nick,” i.e. a username (In the realm of IRC, you can call yourself whatever you like, so long as no one else on that

channel is using the same nickname, and you can change your “nick” as frequently as you like, using this command.)

/MSG – the command to make a message private (If a user types a

message beginning with “/MSG Fletcher,” only the user nicknamed “Fletcher” will see it.)

/ME – the command to express emotion or action (If “Marlowe” typed “/ME

laughs hysterically,” everyone else on the channel would see “Marlowe

laughs hysterically.” /DESCRIBE will send a private emotion or action

line; similar to /MSG, if “Marlowe” typed “/DESCRIBE Fletcher laughs

hysterically,” only the user nicknamed “Fletcher” would see “Marlowe

laughs hysterically.”)

/KICK – the command to literally kick another user off the channel

(generally used only by the “chanop,” or person with control over the

channel, to get rid of obnoxious users)

/LIST – to get a list of all channels active at the moment (this includes a

very brief description of each channel’s topic, which may or may not be at

all informative)

/NAMES – to get a list of active channels and the nicks of their current

participants

/WHO <channel name> – to find out who else is on a specific channel

/LEAVE – to leave a channel (but not the IRC software), to join another

channel

/BYE – to sign off (leaving the IRC software)

See Chapters 2 through 4 of Harris' The irc Survival Guide for more detailed descriptions of these and other IRC commands.

IRC can be enjoyed with knowledge of only a few basic commands but has a relatively complex command set, allowing more sophisticated users a wider range for expression. Currently (although technology is advancing all the time), communication on IRC is practically limited to text; while it is possible to send audible beeps over IRC, it is generally discouraged as an annoying practice. It is also possible to send files (including pictures or audio clips) to others within a DCC, or Direct Client Connection, but this form of IRC connection tends to work best with small groups (Harris 1995a, 133–134).

All messages sent within an IRC channel are displayed beginning with the sender's nickname (i.e., <Shakes> All the world's a stage ...). Additionally, as elsewhere on the Internet, abbreviations for commonly used words and phrases abound (such as "yr" for "your," "BRB" for "be right back," "u" for "you," "rotfl" for "rolling on the floor laughing," etc.). Speed is of the essence in IRC conversation; whereas electronic mail is comparable to sending a letter, and you can take as long as you wish to compose a message, IRC is real-time conversation. If you take too long to respond, your conversation partners may just become bored and pop off to another channel. Since most people cannot type as fast as they can speak, IRC users have developed a whole new lingo, a sort of shorthand, which allows them to converse more rapidly (Werry, 53–56).

In the next section, we shall see how one group of Internet participants, the Hamnet Players, used IRC commands, capabilities and conventions to perform their own versions of

some classic plays.

The Hamnet Players: “This is not your father’s Shakespeare ...”

As stated above, the Hamnet Players are the acknowledged thespians of the IRC universe. Stuart Harris, the group’s founder and a real-life actor and director as well as IRC aficionado, relates the inspiration for the creation of the Hamnet Players:

One day I was noodling around the IRC computer chatnet, probably wishing some thoroughly obnoxious female would shut up, when I suddenly imagined the line ...

***Signoff: Ophelia <drowning>

... appearing on the IRC screens of several hundred people all over the world simultaneously. I knew right then that I had to be the first producer of Shakespeare’s Hamlet for the Internet. (Harris 1995b, 498)

Practically speaking, Harris also realized the real theatrical potential of IRC: “(S)ince all participants in an IRC conversation may choose whatever nickname they wish to be known by ... and since an IRC channel may contain many people who watch but contribute nothing, some of the elements of traditional theater are there” (Harris 1995b, 500).

The world-premiere of Hamnet (Harris’ translation of Hamlet into IRCese) was originally set for Sunday, November 14, 1993, at noon Pacific Standard Time (Harris 1995b, 504). Harris had decided to recruit both performers and an audience from other channels the day of the performance, rather than advertise in advance, and had only managed to assemble a few, less-than-enthusiastic participants when Mother Nature struck. A freak storm knocked out the local access provider, and by the time Harris was able to get back into IRC, his recruits had disappeared (Harris 1995b, 504). This experience convinced Harris that, even given good weather and no technical glitches, on-the-spot recruiting was not going to work. Consequently, the next attempt to premiere Hamnet was better publicized in advance of the new performance date, December 12,

1993 (Harris 1995b, 504).

However, there are many other things that can go wrong besides bad weather, and several did. When Harris attempted to create the #hamnet channel shortly before performance time, he discovered someone had beaten him to it, and thus had control of the channel (with all the privileges of “ops,” or operator status, including the abilities to set the channel topic, reassign ops, change the channel mode and use the /KICK command, all of which were integral to Hamnet as scripted). Fortunately, Harris was able to persuade the person to relinquish ops (Harris 1995b, 505).

The second near-disaster occurred when Harris displayed the opening “set,” a picture of castle Elsinore “drawn” in ASCII characters (see Figure 1). At the beginning of Hamnet, the character “Prologue” must have ops, and the young man cast as Prologue had implemented a special control against “flooding,” the frequently annoying practice of sending fellow IRCers screens full of text. So, when Harris displayed the set, which took up a full screen, he was automatically kicked off the channel, which had been designated “by invitation only.” Harris, who was not only the producer but also the star in this particular performance, had to beg to be let back in (Harris 1995b, 505–506).

Another problem kept the person cast as “Fort_bras” (Fortinbras) from delivering his lines. Because his server did not recognize the channel modes that were being used to send the players their lines and allow them to speak, Fort_bras not only never received his lines, but wouldn’t have been able to speak them if he had. There are several channel modes that can be used to keep audience members from commenting during a performance (such as “+m,” which allows only those with ops to speak, and “+v,” which gives a “voice” only to specified persons),

or to keep “latecomers” from entering the channel, interrupting the performance with

“<nickname> has joined channel #xyz” lines **Figure 1.**

The image is a detailed ASCII art representation of a castle, identified as Elsinore. It is constructed using a variety of characters including asterisks (*), plus signs (+), hash marks (#), and underscores (_). The castle features multiple towers, a central keep, and a base. The text "WELCOME TO ELSINORE!!!" is centered at the bottom in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The entire artwork is set against a white background with a light gray border.

The Elsinore “set” from [Hamnet](#), created with ASCII characters.

announcing their presence (“+i” or “+p” modes, which make the channel “by invitation only” or “private,” effectively keeping anyone from using /JOIN to join the channel without permission of the person in control of the channel) (Harris 1995b, 508).

Despite the problems, the performance was more or less a success; the audience numbered nearly 100 (Harris 1995b, 508), and there was sufficient enthusiasm afterwards to mount another performance of Hamnet. The performance on February 6, 1994, not only benefited from better planning, after several suggestions from participants in the previous performance, but also from the acting talents of a professional Shakespearean actor, Ian Taylor of the Royal Shakespeare Company (Harris 1995b, 509–510). Later productions of PCBeth and An irc Channel Named #Desire (adaptations of Macbeth and A Streetcar Named Desire, respectively) were still more ambitious, making available to the audience files with photographs, costume sketches and, in the latter production, jazz music (depending on their computers’ capabilities, some audience members could actually view or listen to these files without logging off from the performance) (Harris 1995b, 512; Danet et al. 1995).

There are a number of elements characteristic of IRC communication, and Internet communication in general, that the Hamnet Players took advantage of to augment their productions. I have already mentioned the “sets” created from ASCII characters, which are in a sense just an elaboration of the “smiley,” or “emoticon” (i.e., small figures created from ASCII characters used to take the place of nonverbal cues in face-to-face communication, for example, :-) , which, viewed with the head tilted to the left, looks like a smiling face) used in everyday Internet speech. In addition to employing such nonstandard uses of ordinary keyboard characters, in the performances of An irc Channel Named #Desire, the script played

with the Internet convention of using capitalized text to represent yelling: in the original play by Tennessee Williams, the character Stanley yells his wife's name (Stella) at the top of his voice from outside their home. In An irc Channel, this yelling was represented thus:

SSSSS	TTTTTTT	EEEEEEE	L	L	A
S	T	E	L	L	A A
S	T	E	L	L	A A
SSSS	T	EEEEEE	L	L	AAAAAA
S	T	E	L	L	A A
S	T	E	L	L	A A
SSSSS	T	EEEEEEE	LLLLL	LLLLL	A A

and then by similarly created letters, three inches high, running for 57 lines, using both the above-mentioned Internet convention and the concept of ASCII "art" to convey the magnitude of the character's emotion. (Harris 1994a, 2-3)

The general attitude of playful irreverence (frequently to the point of obscenity) that permeates Internet society also influences the productions performed on IRC. Witness the following example, excerpted from the original script for Hamnet:

```

<Hamlet> 2b or not 2b ... [17]
<Hamlet> Hmmmmmm ... [18]
<Hamlet> :-( Bummer ... [19]
<Hamlet> Ooops, here comes Ophelia [20]
**<< Action >>** : Enter Ophelia [21]
<Ophelia> Here's yr stuff back [22]
<Hamlet> Not mine, love. Hehehehehe ;-D [23]
<Ophelia> O heavenly powers: restore him! [24]
**<< Action >>** : Ophelia thinks Hamlet's nuts [25]
<Hamlet> Make that "sanity-deprived," pls ... [26] (Harris 1995b, 502)

```

In addition to such pre-scripted slang, in the actual performances there was plenty of off-the-cuff humor, improvised by the actors:

```

<The_King> THE_QUEEN fancy a bit of nookie?
...
* ThE_QuEeN pinches the King

```

* ThE_QuEeN punches the King

* The_King gropes the Queen (Harris 1995b, 506–507)ⁱⁱⁱ

Not only did the Hamnet Players add humor to their adaptations, they also “translated” the plays into IRC lingo. The line “2b or not 2b” cited above is a good example of the Internet “shorthand” mentioned earlier, but the Hamnet Players also incorporated IRC commands in their scripts:

<Hamlet> re, Ghost. Zup? [11]

<Ghost> Yr uncle's fucking yr mum. I'm counting on u to /KICK the bastard.
[12]

=====GHOST /MODE * +o Hamlet [13]

*** Mode change “+o Hamlet” on channel #Hamnet by Ghost

<Hamlet> Holy shit!!!! Don't op me, man!!!! I've gotta think abt this, + I've got chem lab in 1/2 hr. :((([14] (Harris 1995b, 502)

When the character Ghost says he wants Hamlet to “/KICK” his uncle the king, he is, in IRC terms, telling him to kill the king, since a participant who has been /KICKed off a channel is, for all intents and purposes, “dead” to those who remain on the channel. Also, as explained earlier, a participant who has operator status, or ops, on a channel has responsibility for what happens on that channel. So, when the Ghost attempts to “give ops” to Hamlet using the “+o” command, he is attempting to transfer responsibility for dealing with the king to Hamlet, just as the dead king’s ghost does in the original Hamlet. Additionally, the IRC feature allowing participants to choose any nickname they wish allows for the expression of stage directions, exploiting the /ME command to convey action. To make the direction “Enter King, attended” appear on the screens of the channel’s participants, all one need do is assign a part nicknamed “Enter,” and have that actor type in “/ME King, attended” (Harris 1995b, 500).

The sequential progression of lines in IRC communication (only one person may speak at a time) is also “theatrical”; the Hamnet Players took advantage of this by numbering the

characters' lines (for example, “<Hamlet> 2b or not 2b ... [17]”), allowing for cueing (the “/MSG” command can also be used for this purpose). This was necessary because Harris decided that each player would only be given their own lines in advance of the performance (which, given Harris' method of casting, was frequently only a few minutes before the virtual curtain went up); only the producers would have the entire script, so “that the unfolding of the script in real time [would be] as much of a revelation to the actors as ... the ‘audience’” (Harris 1995b, 500). Therefore, the actors needed the line numbers in order to be able to recognize their cues; sorting out how far the play had progressed and staying at least relatively close to the script would otherwise have been next to impossible given the actors' unfamiliarity with the script as a whole, not to mention the amount of improvisation during the performances.

As the reader should see from the excerpts given above, once the various “tricks” and conventions of IRC communication are incorporated, the Hamnet Players' adaptations of Shakespeare and Tennessee Williams become quite unique expressions of Internet culture. As Stuart Harris himself puts it, “This is not your father's Shakespeare ...” (Harris 1995b, 501).

MUDs and MOOs: Playgrounds for the Imagination

Whereas IRC is akin to CB radio, MUDs, or Multi-User Domains, and their descendants, MOOs (Multi-user domains, Object-Oriented), are comparable to those early computer text-adventure games, like “Oregon Trail.” Considered primitive compared to today’s multimedia CD-ROM extravaganzas with impressive graphics, those early games involved typing in responses to text generated by the computer program that appeared on the computer’s screen or print-out device. Nonetheless, these “primitive” games were engrossing, probably because they required such an investment of imagination, possibly because the player was literally a character in the text, not just the controller of blips on a screen.

The first MUD was created in 1979 by Roy Trubshaw, a programmer at Essex University, with help from Richard Bartle, a student at Essex (Carton, 7–8). The game was essentially a text version of an adventure role-playing game, Dungeons and Dragons, which, unlike games like “Oregon Trail,” allowed for multiple players and, hence, competition, making it more exciting and challenging (Hafner, 58; Bennahum, 22).

Since then, a plethora of new versions of MUD have been developed (e.g. MUSHes, MUSES, MUCKs and MOOs), not only allowing for more socializing amongst players (many, in fact, are devoted solely to socializing), but also, as in MOOs, allowing players to utilize the programming language themselves to build virtual objects and places to add to their virtual environment (Carton, 9; Hafner, 58). Participants are no longer limited to a few, hastily-typed commands, like they were when playing “Oregon Trail”. Now they can converse synchronously with other participants from all over the world; can build virtual edifices for characters to inhabit, explore, or hold virtual parties in; and can create

virtual objects to use (and, unlike an IRC channel, these virtual places and objects won't disappear when they logoff, since they are built into the environment's programming). One can even juggle virtually, or greet another character with an elaborate bow, using the "emote" command, much as in IRC.

When I refer to "virtual" environments, objects or actions, I do not mean virtual reality (or VR) in the popularly imagined sense. Participants in MUDs and MOOs do not utilize special goggles, gloves or any such paraphernalia, other than a simple personal computer with a keyboard and a modem. What makes the environment virtual is the fact that it is constructed entirely out of the imaginations of programmers and users, each contributing text to spark the imaginations of others. Using specialized programming language, an Internet "site" is given some of the characteristics of a physical place or structure, "visible" through textual descriptions, and "manipulable" and "navigable" through special commands. Within the larger "structure" — whether that is described as a house, a city, a spaceship or some other similar space — are many other smaller virtual spaces ("rooms," "buildings," etc.) that the programming language allows to function in much the same way that their real physical counterparts do, separating groups of conversing users, yet allowing them to "wander" from place to place, group to group within the larger virtual space using simple commands.

To quote Brenda Laurel, author of Computers as Theatre and a number of other works on human-computer interaction,

The adjective *virtual* describes things — worlds, phenomena, etc. — that look and feel like reality but that lack the traditional physical substance. A virtual object, for instance, may be one that has no real-world equivalent, but the persuasiveness of its representation allows us to respond to it *as if* it were real. (1993, 8)

The difference between the two types of "virtual reality" is similar to the difference between a

book and a movie — someone who prefers what they can see in their own mind's eye to what the camera's eye can see will probably prefer a MUD over a high-tech set of VR goggles.

In addition to being able to converse as on an IRC channel, using the commands "say" or "page" (for one-to-one communication), participants on a MUD or MOO can use commands like "look" to "see" the virtual space they inhabit, a virtual object or another character; when you type "look" on a MOO, descriptive text, not graphics, pops up on the computer screen. You can also navigate by typing in a direction like "north" or "down," or sometimes by typing in "@go" and the name of the room you wish to go to (different MOOs have different commands, but they are generally similar, and frequently guides are given at the end of a room description). You can also describe your own character (your representation in the MOO), usually by using the command "@describe me as," and frequently can build your own objects and places, either by making a copy of a pre-existing object, using a command like "@dig," or using special programming language (although most MUDs and MOOs require a player receive special permission to do this).

The elements that make MOOs different from IRC also give those who would perform plays on a MOO a wealth of new opportunities and devices for theatrical expression, which I will detail in the following section.

Theatre on a MOO: ATHEMOO Projects

In July of 1996, an interesting project came online at ATHEMOO, the MOO of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, based on a server at the University of Hawaii. ATHEMOO has become a locus of sorts for discussions about Internet theatre, as well as for actual Internet performances.

This project, MetaMOOphosis: A visit to the Samsa home, was created by Rick Sacks, a Toronto musician and theatre artist, and is based on Franz Kafka's surreal, paranoid story of a clerk named Gregor who wakes one morning to discover he has become a giant cockroach.

MetaMOOphosis consists of a textual VR replica of the main characters' house and its grounds, providing several rooms on two floors and an attic through which visitors can wander, exploring and using various virtual items, and interacting with whomever or whatever (there are also "bots," virtual, automated characters, in residence, such as "The Charwoman") they come across. This playspace still exists, even after the formal "grand opening" performances in March 1997, left on ATHEMOO by Sacks for others to explore and perhaps use for their own performances (Sacks 1997b).

Part of what makes MetaMOOphosis different from the earlier Hamnet Players productions was necessitated by something that makes ATHEMOO itself different from other MOOs. Because ATHEMOO is an academic, not a gaming or casually social MOO, members use truncated versions of their own real names, not fanciful names they choose themselves and invest with a character, like on other MOOs. That is not to say that ATHEMOO is completely serious; a good deal of the playfulness of general Internet society does carry over. For example, one prominent participant describes his online self

as being dressed in a uniform reminiscent of Star Trek, and when he signs on to ATHEMOO or enters one of its virtual rooms, other participants see a message saying he is “beaming” in, rather than the customary “JohnD is here.” However, unlike on IRC, participants on ATHEMOO do not have the ability to simply switch “nicks,” or adopt new characters, whenever they wish.

As a result, some way had to be created for actors on ATHEMOO to assume their characters. Sacks, with the help of some more experienced programmers, created “smart costumes” (Sacks 1996a, 1997a). With these, you can not only explore MetaMOOphosis as yourself, but also as one of several characters from the story. In the “Foyer” of the house, there is a closet in which the “smart costumes” are “stored.” To put one on, you first type “look closet” to see which costumes are available, choose one, then type “take [character name] from closet.” This simple command in effect changes your identity in this small part of ATHEMOO by temporarily changing your username, until you take the costume off again (these costumes are designed not to work outside of MetaMOOphosis). The “smart costumes” do not come with their own descriptions, but participants may use the “@describe me as ...” command to give them whatever description they wish (for example, if you were playing Gregor and did not use “@describe me as ...” to give Gregor a description of his own, other participants who typed “look Gregor” would only see your personal character description).

What makes the costumes “smart” are their built-in scripts — each character has their own set of pre-programmed “lines,” intended not so much to produce a performance by themselves as to spur “improvisation ‘in the style of’ a kafka work, complete with paranoia, sexual innuendo, Freudian overtones, etc” (Sacks 1997c, 1). At the time I first visited, each character had 28 lines, one of which was randomly picked and “spoken,” i.e. printed to the

screen, every time the user typed “read [character name].” For example, if you were wearing the smart costume “Gregor,” and typed in “read Gregor,” you might see something like the following appear on your screen: “Gregor gurgles, ‘everything is a gray blur but I sure do love that old cheese’” (MetaMOOpthesis session log). However, in addition to being able to put on a “costume,” take on a role and improvise, one could also suggest new lines to be added to the characters’ preprogrammed scripts (and indeed, Sacks did add some lines over the course of the project) (Sacks 1996b).

Similar to IRC, it is possible on MOOs to create virtual spaces that emulate a real-life theater. For example, as a built-in function of the virtual space occupied by MetaMOOpthesis, only those participants wearing smart costumes may use the commands “say” and “emote”; other participants must use the command “page,” which effectively accomplishes the same end as the commands “+o” and “+v” on IRC, keeping the audience from disrupting the performance with too much chatter (in both cases a social convention is turned into a mechanical function). Also like IRC, with its channels, on MOOs it is possible to create a virtual space set apart for the purpose of theatrical performance. In many MOO productions, this space has merely been a “room,” or a more elaborate virtual structure (MetaMOOpthesis has a virtual house and grounds, NetSeduction had a group of connected “chat rooms,” and A Place for Souls had virtual “atolls”); unlike traditional, real-life theaters, there was no effective separation of actors and audience. This does not mean that such a separation is impossible in MOO theatre, however.

Indeed, ATHEMOO has specially-created virtual areas, including the “Schweller Theatre” in the “Aphra Behn Theatre Complex,” set aside for performance purposes which attempt to

emulate the conditions found in real-life theaters, including physical separation of performers and audience members. Additionally, one early ATHEMOO experiment, an abortive performance of a short, original play during the Crosswaves festival in April 1996, ambitiously attempted to utilize textual VR sets, which were unfortunately erased or otherwise disabled by some unknown bug or human mistake. Juli Burk, the ATHEMOO wizard (roughly, the MOO equivalent of a chanop), tried to construct a bare-bones set at the last minute, but a computer glitch sabotaged the attempt and the performance, leaving the production not only sans set, but also hampered by an annoyingly repetitive error message. An after-performance discussion also brought to light other problems, including the fact that the actors apparently couldn't tell whether their audience was in the virtual auditorium or not (Crosswaves). Perhaps as a result, other ATHEMOO productions have tended to stick to a format similar to MetaMOOpthesis, which, as I shall explain later, has its own problems, mainly that of distinguishing actors from audience members, which was particularly troublesome for the next production I discuss, NetSeduction.

In August of 1996, the following posting appeared on the COLLAB-L mailing list, from Steve Schrum, a professor of Theatre Arts at Penn State:

[I] have written a play called NetSeduction, about internet chat rooms and cybersex (NOTE: Strong language and adult themes!), and it will be performed in the second week of October at ATHEMOO.

This is a general call for participants, of which there are three kinds:

PLAYERS: who interact with each other through the linear play, and
who also interact with:

SUPERS: who hang out in the room, chat, have virtual drinks (and
maybe get involved in cybersex activities of their own!)

LURKERS: the “audience,” who watches but doesn’t participate. (Schrum
1996a)

Seeing the opportunity to find out first-hand what participating in an Internet theatre production was like, I volunteered to become a “player,” and was given the role of “John/Beth,”

a male (or at least initially male-presenting) chat room participant who during the course of the play switches identities and becomes “Beth,” a female-presenting participant, in order to play a trick on an obnoxious, apparently teenaged male participant.

John/Beth’s shenanigans are just a sub-plot of NetSeduction; the main plot concerns the interactions of “Jane,” a newcomer to the sex chat room NetSeduction, and the people she finds there. The script is, as Schrum pointed out in his message, quite raunchy at times, but as he emphasized several times in rehearsal notes and other communications to the players, the point was to make the production seem natural, like a real sex chat room to the audience (Schrum 1996b, 1996c). While the subject matter may make some squeamish, there are valid reasons, beyond titillation, for exploring it within the confines of a play: art tends to reflect the community which creates it, and to be used to explore the issues important to that community. Sex chat rooms are a unique feature of the Internet, and their existence certainly is an issue of some controversy, both on the Internet and off of it. Also, as many others have pointed out (e.g., Bechar-Israeli, 1995; Bruckman, 1993; Reid, 1991, 1995; Rheingold, 1993; Turkle, no date), gender and identity are unusually ambiguous and fluid on the Internet, since communication there lacks the cues we use in face-to-face communication to signal such things. As one might well imagine, questions of gender and identity become much more pointed in the environment of a sex chat room, and in NetSeduction these issues are explored at least in part through the character of John/Beth.

The NetSeduction performance “space” consisted of a group of interconnected rooms on ATHEMOO, including a main room, in which the scripted material was performed, and a number of “specialized” rooms, such as “Women Only,” “The Dungeon,” and the “SexFree

Cafe,” set aside for interaction between the audience and “offstage” actors. These rooms contained a limited number of “props” (including items that functioned as recorders for purposes of logging the performances), and the main room featured a virtual bar, mirror ball and dance floor. There was no attempt made to separate the actors from the audience, or even to silence the audience during the performance, as in the Hamnet Players’ productions or in *MetaMOOphosis*; as mentioned above, Schrum emphasized many times in communications to the actors that their speech and actions should appear as “natural” (in the context of an Internet chat room) as possible, and that they should attempt to interact with the audience (Schrum 1996b, 1996c). The issue of who was “real” was further confused by the presence of “bots,”^{iv} whose automated lines were cued by certain words spoken by the actors, audience members, or even other bots (Schrum 1996b).

Since there was a script, improvisation, although welcome, had a somewhat more limited function in *NetSeduction*’s two performances than it did in *MetaMOOphosis*. It was mainly restricted to kibbitzing and a bit of “offstage” interaction between performers and audience members, and off-the-cuff covering up for technical glitches which kept the script from progressing smoothly. Also, because there was a script, “smart” costumes were not necessary; there were “costumes,” in the sense that the players signed on to ATHEMOO using their characters’ names (and therefore in the MOO sense “became” their characters), and could use “@describe me as” to give their characters a description of their own, but the costumes did not have built-in lines that could be “read.” Instead, a copy of the entire script was e-mailed to each performer, who used simple “copy” and “paste” functions to insert their lines at the appropriate points in the performances. Unlike the Hamnet Players’ productions, the lines were

not numbered, so it was up to the players to study the script and watch the flow of text onscreen for their cues (another consequence of the attempt to make the production seem a “natural” occurrence).

Besides the issues of gender and identity on the Internet, which were built into the NetSeduction script, other questions and problems became apparent during the production process, and were pointed out during the post-performance discussion. The most important ones all seemed to boil down to this: the production did not address the problems inherent in mounting a theatrical performance in what is itself a performative medium — i.e., when everyday communication on the Internet is in some sense performative, how do you distinguish the performance of normal interaction from the performance of a script? Oddly enough, the performances also seemed to suffer from the inverse problem: how do you achieve true, complete actor-audience interaction when the actors have a script to perform?

One of my fellow players in NetSeduction, Twyla Mitchell-Shiner, was at the same time writing an Internet play of her own (in collaboration with her husband, Matthew Mitchell-Shiner), as part of her research for her Master’s thesis (Mitchell-Shiner 1996a). The play, later to be called A Place for Souls, was, like NetSeduction, to explore issues unique to interaction on the Internet; in her own words,

I’m writing a ‘Net play about four women at ATHEMOO and their friendships in the Internet ... These four women have different “disabilities” (some physical, some social) in ‘real’ society, but they can be whoever they want on the Internet. It will explore the differences between how people are on the Internet versus how they are in real life, and the nature and quality of such friendships. (Mitchell-Shiner 1996b)

In November of 1996, Mitchell-Shiner posted a message to the COLLAB-L mailing list, looking for “personal insights” from women on the Internet, asking, for example, whether they

“(t)hink the person they are on the web (chat rooms, newsgroups, etc.) is different than the person they are in real life (good, bad, or just different),” “(t)hink the person they are on the web is more like who they really want to be,” “have very strong, personal relationships only on the net,” and/or “feel their lives have benefited from their time on the net/web” (Mitchell-Shiner 1996c). Mitchell-Shiner stated that she wanted to “make a story based upon real experiences, real life, that shows some of the positives in net worlds — we are creating a space where there isn’t discrimination based upon sex, color, race, orientation, religion, anything. And find that everyone has a soul, which is what we get to know. Also, there is a comment on how fragile the relationships are” (Mitchell-Shiner 1996c).

By the time A Place for Souls was performed, on ATHEMOO in mid-March of 1997, the original cast of four women had expanded to six — three women, Anne, Trish and Carol; two men, Mark and Nick; and one “bot,” Voce (Italian for “voice”), who inserts random phrases from all over the Internet into the conversation, and who was actually played by a human being and not a real bot at all (Mitchell-Shiner 1997, 2). The action of the play included the characters’ discussions of motherhood, personal relationships (both on and off the Internet), the effect the ambiguity of interaction on the Internet has on the relationships there, and the effect a real-life tragedy has on people connected only by words on a computer screen.

Like NetSeduction, the performance “space” used by A Place for Souls consisted of a number of interconnected MOO chat rooms, dubbed “Atomic Atoll,” “Halcyon Atoll,” “Quiescent Atoll,” “Tranquil Atoll,” “Tiki Hut” (which offered virtual refreshments) and “Serene Lagoon”. When audience members entered this pretend-MOO-within-a-MOO, they “saw” a “peaceful sea, with a bright yellow sky, with dollops of white clouds” (Mitchell-Shiner 1997, 1).

The tone of the performance was set by the welcoming message, which told participants they had “found a rest-spot on the info-super-highway, or a calm island in on the cyber-sea”. (Mitchell-Shiner 1997, 1). Also like NetSeduction, the actors intermingled with the audience and the attempt was made to make the performances seem like ordinary, “natural” chat room interactions; the stage directions at the beginning of the script state that Trish, who along with Voce is already in the “Atomic Atoll” room when the audience enters, “is not the center of focus, as none of the performers in the space should be,” and when Anne enters shortly thereafter, the direction reads, “Voce treats her just like any other audience member” (Mitchell-Shiner 1997, 2).

Unfortunately, A Place for Souls also seemed to share some of NetSeduction’s difficulties, according to comments made in the post-performance discussions. Despite the effort made to encourage audience interaction by making the difference — the border — between them and the performers invisible, the audience members were still hesitant to participate; some didn’t want to interfere in the more serious parts of the scripted discussion, and some could sense a “border” anyway, if only because there were moments when the actors became so involved in their lines, they seemed to separate themselves from the audience. Participants in the discussion also debated how the fact that the actors knew the entire script (as actors in real-life theatre do) affected their interaction with the audience (A Place for Souls post-show discussion log).

The difficulties encountered by the Internet productions described above, particularly those with that elusive “border,” involving the concepts of meta- communicative framing and ontological distance in art, will be the main focus of the discussion to follow. First, however, I think it would be worthwhile to take a step back, so to speak, and examine the big picture:

before I examine why the concept of Internet theatre is problematic (for some), it may be worthwhile to ask, what are the elements of interaction on the Internet that make others see it as an appropriate arena for theatrical activity?

Computers and Theatre: Art in the Machine?

At first glance, computers and theatre would seem to go together like anchovies and ice cream. Computers are cold, hard machines made of plastic, silicon, metal and wires, born of logic and science, and theatre traditionally involves the creativity and presence of warm, living human beings, their language and emotion. What could possibly inspire anyone to combine the two? To quote Elizabeth Reid, “A list of technical components cannot explain why users are prepared to accept a simulated world as a valid site for emotional and social response” (Reid 1995, 165).

Brenda Laurel, in her extensive writing on the subject of human-computer interaction, has offered some ideas on just what it is beyond the technical components of computers that inclines people to become emotionally and socially involved in computer activities, including Internet interactions. In particular, in her book, Computers as Theatre, Laurel discusses the concept of computers “represent(ing) action in which humans could participate” (Laurel, 1), with an eye towards improving interface and software design, but what she has to say has important implications for my discussion of Internet theatre.

Laurel is actually so bold as to state that computers *are* theatre. In her own words,

Interactive technology, like drama, provides a platform for representing coherent realities in which agents perform actions with cognitive, emotional, and productive qualities. ... Two thousand years of dramatic theory and practice have been devoted to an end which is remarkably similar to that of the fledgling discipline of human-computer interaction design; namely, creating artificial realities in which the potential for action is cognitively, emotionally, and aesthetically enhanced.” (qtd. in Rheingold 1991, 286)

Of course, for Laurel’s purposes, the definition of theatre is rather broad and simplistic: “whole actions with multiple agents.” (Laurel, 7). In her model of human-

computer interaction, both the human and the computer “act” out their roles in the task at hand on the stage of the computer’s interface (thus, the “multiple agents”). In the same way that a conversation is not simply two people talking at each other (ideally), but rather two people cooperatively working from and building “common ground,” in order to successfully interact, a computer and its user have to share common rules and understandings, and what they cooperatively build on that foundation is what shows up on the computer’s screen (Laurel, 3–7). Of course, a “whole action” becomes a fuzzy concept in this environment of “windows” and multitasking, particularly when it comes to the nonlinearity of IRC and MOO interaction; in fact, in some of the Internet performances I studied for this thesis, the audience had difficulty recognizing the ending, which seems to violate the Aristotelian dictum that all plays must have a distinct beginning, middle and end.

Laurel, however, as stated above, was not studying Internet theatre in specific; she was looking at the big picture of computers, and looking at that, she saw some significant similarities between theatre and human-computer interaction. Just like when a play is successful, the audience becomes oblivious to all of the technical work that went into that production, for the average computer user to be successfully engaged by and involved with a software package, they, in Laurel’s opinion, need to be unaware of all of the “technical underpinnings” making that software work (Laurel, 15–16).

Additionally, when Laurel looks at entertainment media as a whole, she sees computers as just the latest step in a long progression:

If one takes the theatre and the film medium as subsets of a larger category, as representations of action in virtual worlds, then another key similarity between these media and computers is their fundamental elements of form and structure and their purpose. ... The impulse to create interactive representations as exemplified

by human-computer activities, is only the most recent manifestation of the age-old desire to make what we imagine palpable — our insatiable need to exercise our intellect, judgment, and spirit in contexts, situations, and even personae that are different from those of our everyday lives. (Laurel, 29–30)

In her view, it all leads back to the Greeks, the civilization that set the ground rules for theatre as we know it today. For them, theatre was not just entertainment; beyond its roots in serious ritual, the Greeks used the theatre as a public and philosophical forum: “The Greeks employed drama and theatre as *tools for thought*, in much the same way that we employ computers today — or at least in the ways that we envision employing them in the not-too-distant future” (Laurel, 40).

Howard Rheingold shares Laurel’s view of computers and theatre as kindred media, in the sense that they are tools for thought. In his book, Virtual Reality, however, Rheingold gets somewhat closer to the topic at hand: he discusses the roots of virtual reality in ancient theatre.

Rheingold delves even further back than Laurel: all the way back to the Dionysian mysteries which preceded formal theatre. He draws on the theories of paleontologist John Pfeiffer, which posit that “primitive but effective cyberspaces may have been instrumental in setting us on the road to computerized world-building in the first place” (Rheingold 1991, 379). Pfeiffer hypothesizes that novices in the Dionysian rituals were led into caves where, with the strategic positioning of torches and lamps, lifelike images of animals, symbols and humans sprang into view in front of them. In this sensitized state, with their minds ready to be remolded, the novices were taught the society’s technological secrets (Rheingold 1991, 379).

The more intense aspects of these rituals may have been toned down as tribes evolved into city-states, but the basic purpose stayed the same. To quote Rheingold, “In his Poetics, Aristotle stated that drama gives pleasure because it is an imitation of deep needs, feelings, and

ideas and helps people understand the world; entertainment and knowledge came in the same package in Aristotelian drama" (1991, 301–302). When you see a traditional staging of Hamlet, or the latest road company production of Cats, you might not automatically draw the connection, but even today's theatre employs any number of tricks to influence the audience; theatre "is a psychological process that uses language, rhythm, voice, myth, and perception-altering technologies to achieve a specific state of mind in the audience" (Rheingold 1991, 304). Of course, theatre can accomplish this because social convention has conditioned us to allow it to happen (I will discuss this in more detail later, since it has become a pivotal problem in Internet theatre).

Aristotle's term for this process is "mimesis" — "a combination of vicarious participation and suspension of disbelief" (Rheingold 1991, 301). In Rheingold's view, this same process explains the phenomenon associated with games like "Oregon Trail" which I described earlier: "(A)s anyone who has ever played a text-only adventure game can attest, ample mimesis can be triggered by interaction with a well-constructed narrative even in the form of words on a screen" (1991, 308). If one accepts that mimesis is indeed possible in computer interaction, given a well-constructed narrative, Internet theatre potentially has one more argument in its favor. Further arguments, to be detailed in the sections to follow, will stem from issues less philosophical than practical (e.g. how one can have theatre without physical bodies), but probably more difficult to resolve.

Pros and Cons

At this point, any further arguments Internet theatre may have on its side seem to have an equal number of opposing arguments. Transforming Babbage’s “difference engine” into a possible site for mimetic expression was no mean feat in itself, but determining whether certain human-computer interactions (as opposed to others) can truly be considered “theatre” (as opposed to merely “theatrical” or “theatre-like”) is an even thornier problem.

Take, for example, what is perhaps the most basic of questions regarding theatre on the Internet: can there be theatre without physical bodies? Some would argue no, that the physicality of theatre is one of its most basic defining characteristics (Danet et al. 1995); it would seem to have been a part of theatre right from the start, going all the way back to the Dionysian dances, and it has certainly been a key element in some of the most influential dramatic theory of the past century, including that of Stanislavski and Brecht.

Still, even though the presence of the physical body in theatre may have historical precedence behind it, does that mean it is a necessary component of theatre? In Daphna Ben Chaim’s book, Distance in the Theatre, the theorist André Bazin is cited as insisting “that theatre involves the bodily presence of actors *who are aware of the audience’s existence*” [emphasis mine] (Ben Chaim, 62). Admittedly, Bazin is defining theatre in opposition to film, and ignores some aspects in order to highlight others, but his definition still raises some interesting questions regarding Internet theatre. For example, in the case of the Crosswaves performance, in which the actors were apparently unaware their audience was with them in the virtual auditorium, must we necessarily discount that production as being non-theatrical? Similarly, if, like the Hamnet productions, an IRC

production were performed in which only the actors were given a voice (using the +v or +o command), if the actors did not use the command /WHO #<channel name> to find out who else was on the channel “watching” them, would their performance not be theatre? Perhaps we need to look further into the reasons why Bazin defines theatre the way he does.

As mentioned above, Bazin defines theatre in such a way because he wishes to contrast the theatrical experience with that of film. To quote Ben Chaim, “Bazin contends that in the theatre one cannot *imaginatively engage* with the characters because the bodily presence of the actors requires the conscious ‘will of the spectator’ to overcome their physicality” [emphasis mine] (63). In other words, because the audience sees a real, flesh-and-blood person onstage, a person who will walk off that stage into the real world after the performance, it requires a conscious effort on the audience’s part to engage with the story, more so than with film (which is not necessarily a strike against theatre, just a point of difference) (Bazin 1967b, 99). Bazin attempts to argue, as do others, that film generates more “distance” between the actor and the audience, allowing the audience to more easily disregard the real person acting the character on the screen, since all they see is a recorded image of a person, not an actual person in the flesh (Ben Chaim, 63). In more philosophical terms, the person in a film is called an “absent signifier,” his “empty sign” completely open to the audience’s projections; in theatre, the body of the all-too-real actor, just yards away, gets in the way and does not allow for such freedom of projection.

But in that case, what happens when you have actors who are aware of their audience but are not “bodily (physically) present”? If it is true that the bodily presence of the actors in traditional theatre interferes with the audience’s ability to engage, or immerse themselves in the

experience, then, following Bazin's argument, shouldn't Internet actors' lack of true physical presence make Internet theatre the ultimate form of artistic expression?

There can be no argument that textual virtual reality does not involve bodies made of flesh and blood; VR is "primarily an imaginative rather than a sensory experience" (Reid 1995, 165). However, one can (and several have) argue that it does frequently involve a simulated body, "evoked with suggestions of physical actions, even though text is the sole channel of communication" (Cherny, 152).

These "physical suggestions" are contributed using the /ME command (in IRC) or the "emote" command (in MOOs). It takes a bit of getting used to if you are accustomed to conversing electronically through e-mail, newsgroups or mailing lists, but once you know the commands, it becomes surprisingly natural to follow the lead of other, more experienced users and augment your communication with textual descriptions of the physical manifestations of your emotions. As Lynn Cherny notes, the "sense of embodiment [in textual VR] is an entirely constructed feeling, coming largely from the conscious use of physical 'actions' during conversations, like feedback signals that might be used in face-to-face conversation ...: *lynn nods, lynn smiles*" (152). Thanks to the /ME and "emote" commands, emotional expression on IRC and MOOs can go far beyond the simple smiley, and the possibilities for "physical" action are just as great, since it is just as simple to type "/ME stabs Polonius through the arras" or "emote turns and runs from the immense cockroach".

There are a few simulated physical actions that are particularly evocative of the body, and they show up either in Internet plays or in their extra-performance discourse with surprising regularity: eating, drinking and sex. Ever since the first virtual bottle of champagne at the first

performance of Hamnet, hardly an Internet performance has gone by without mention of the imbibing of alcohol of some sort, perhaps because it tends to be popular in the real-life theatre community as well. Participants in Internet theatre also frequently munch on virtual popcorn or other such “snacks”. As for sex, MetaMOOphosis’ Herr Doktor performed some rather extensive “examinations” on Grete and Mrs. Samsa (MetaMOOphosis 1997b, 2; 1997c, 2), NetSeduction was virtually one long VR orgy, with elaborately described virtual bodies and actions; this, for example, was the description my character gave of himself, in his incarnation as “Beth”: “I am 23, 5’3,” 110 lbs, 36D-23-35, blonde hair, blue eyes, and very tan. … I am also very athletic — if you get my meaning” (Schrum 1996d). There was even a bit of netsex between a cast member and a member of the audience after one performance of An irc Channel Named #Desire (the encounter between Stanley and Blanche is, true to the original, not graphically described) (An irc Channel 1994). Additionally, some participants virtually “smoked” (another popular habit of theatre folk — as the second Witch commented before the first performance of PCBeth, “theatre people always smoke! :)”) (PCBeth 1994a) and there was a fair amount of simulated flatulence in the Hamnet Players’ pre-performance activity. All of this seems to indicate a strong desire — whether conscious or unconscious, for humorous purposes or no — on the part of these players to make the virtual bodies they inhabit during their sojourn on the Internet as real as possible — more than just a name and a short description.

Cherny also points out that, in MOOs, one’s own representation is just as much an object as anything else created for the simulated environment. Unlike on IRC, where simulation of the body is confined to descriptions of emotions and actions, on MOOs, you can not only give your

character a description — “physical” characteristics that other users can see using the “look” command — you can also “add verbs” to your character using simple MOO programming language, allowing others to interact with your representation in additional, specific ways. Frequently, if you “look” at an object on a MOO, you will get a list of verb commands you can type to make the object do certain things. For example, if I type “look frisbee” to look at the “Hot Pink Frisbee” on ATHEMOO, I will find that I can type “toss frisbee to fountain,” and this text will appear on the screen of anyone in the room:

MaryA flings the Hot Pink Frisbee into the air.
 The Hot Pink Frisbee whirls and spirals towards a Fountain.
 The Hot Pink Frisbee is carried up on a powerful air current.
 The Hot Pink Frisbee spins around on its axis and shoots straight up.
 The Hot Pink Frisbee performs spectacular aerial maneuvers.
 After a final loop, the Hot Pink Frisbee nose dives to the ground.

Theatrical productions on ATHEMOO have taken advantage of this MOO feature to create props for actors and audience members to interact with, setting the scene with a keyhole that one can look or talk through in MetaMOOphosis, furniture and assorted virtual “playthings” in NetSeduction, and virtual drinks and beach blankets in A Place for Souls.

Since a MOO character is, for purposes of MOO interaction, also an object, you can do the same with it, giving other MOO players not only the “sight” of a body acting and emoting, but also the impression of a body they can interact with in virtual space. You can add any verb or verb phrase you like, from something simple like “shake hands” to something more bizarre, like the player described by Cherny who turned her character into a “human washing machine” that would “fill with water” and jump around “agitating” the clothes inside her when others put coins into her (163–164). This feature of MOOs also allows for the creation of “artificial” characters, or “bots,” MOO objects that emulate human-controlled characters.

Using verbs purposefully attached to your character is not the only way others can manipulate your MOO body, however. Spoofing — creating unattributed or falsely attributed communication — is another way, albeit one that is generally discouraged. Spoofing utilizes some simple MOO programming language to make words appear on players' screens without a username prefacing them (like when you use the “say” or “emote” commands), or with another's username. Lee-Ellen Marvin gives a good example of unattributed spoofing:

Guest says, “whats spoofing?””
 Plate says, “this is spoofing””
 A can of Spam tromps into the room.
 The can of Spam locates it’s target.
 The can begins making noises like it’s gonna hack up a spitwad.
 The can of Spam suddenly spews a stream of unwanted text at Guest, tattoos a knockwurst on its forehead, then floors it out of the room as fast as it can go.
 Plate [to Guest] : Thats spoofing :) (10)

This example is amusing and relatively harmless, but since words are quite literally deeds on a MOO, spoofing can also be used to harass other players, and even commit “netrape” (Cherny, 166–168). This is why MOO guides to online etiquette have strong words to say about the practice (Marvin, 8).

Despite spoofing’s generally bad reputation, it was used to create an amusing effect in one of the MOO plays studied here, A Place for Souls. During performances of Souls, whenever a participant ordered a virtual drink from the Tiki Hut, they became the object of a spoof:

<character name> picks up her Pina Colada and takes a sip.
 ...
 <character name> chugs about half her Pina Colada.
 ...
 <character name> upends her Pina Colada and finishes it off.
 ...
 Uh oh ... That Pina Colada of <character name>’s seems to have been alcoholic.
 ...
 <character name>’s eyes defocus a bit.

...

<character name> mumbles something about cockatoos who can't keep secrets.

...

<character name> tries desperately to hug herself.

...

<character name> recovers from the effects of her Pina Colada.

(A Place for Souls 1997a)

By incorporating an ordinarily frowned-upon MOO device in their play, the Mitchell-Shiners actually contribute to its theatricality in an interesting way, by recalling the “persistent association between performers and marginality or deviance” noted by Richard Bauman (45). In fact, one could say that, in the view of some members of our society, the denizens of the Internet in general share in this association.

Speaking of the Internet in general, we have established that there is some grounds for arguing that human-computer interactions are theatrical in nature, but *Internet* interactions themselves — especially IRC and MOO interactions — can also be considered performative. In the view of a number of scholars, they are “written performance,” an entirely new, hybrid communicative form:

It appears that third-person descriptions by speakers, of their own actions, within their own contribution to a dialogue, are a unique characteristic of computer-mediated communications, and a first in the history of synchronous interpersonal communication. We have previously encountered such forms only in playwrights' directions to actors, or directors in the scripts of plays ... (Ruedenberg, Danet & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 20)

For the first time in the history of human communication, writing has become a mode of live performance. (Danet et al. 1995)

This makes for a rather unusual hybrid, indeed, because “writing” and “performance” not only seem incongruous at first glance, according to conventional theory, they are incongruous. As Marie-Laure Ryan puts it, “while immersion looks through the signs toward the reference world, interactivity exploits the materiality of the medium” (qtd. in Lang, 249). (I will return to

this concept a little later and explore it in more depth, in terms of artistic distancing and theatre.)

This is not to say that “ne’er the twain shall meet,” but generally speaking, the more interactive a text, the less immersive it is (Lang, 249).

In other words, a conventional written narrative “excludes the creator [the author] from the creation [the world of his narrative]” (Ryan qtd. in Lang, 250) — it is the reader who is “immersed,” not the writer. Textual virtual reality, on the other hand, “immerses” the participant (who is a creator as well as a reader) in an interactive, narrative environment — a world of words — turning “language into a dramatic performance, into the expression of a bodily mode of being in the world” (Ryan qtd. in Lang, 250). According to the theory described by Ryan above, this should not be possible: a medium that depends as heavily on interactivity as textual VR does should, theoretically, not be nearly so immersive as it appears to be, by all accounts.

But if we look closely at definitions of “performance” and “performative,” we can see some elements that are definitely present in textual VR. On a very basic level, there is Derrida’s definition of “performative”: it “produces or transforms a situation, it effects” (qtd. in Young, 10). In this sense, IRC and MOO language is certainly performative; nothing happens or exists until it is described, and all descriptions, whether of actions, characters or objects, become part of and advance the collectively-created narrative.

On another level, Bauman, in his essay “Verbal art as performance,” defines performance from the following anthropological point of view:

Performance involves on the part of the performer an assumption of accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content … the act of expression on the part of the performer is thus marked as subject to evaluation for the way it is done, for the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer’s display of competence. Additionally, it is marked as available for the enhancement of experience, through the present

enjoyment of the intrinsic qualities of the act of expression itself. Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of expression and gives license to the audience to regard the act of expression and the performer with special intensity. (11)

It is not difficult to see how interactions on IRC and in MOOs could qualify as “performative” based on such a definition. IRC and MOO participants are notorious for their play with language (including the patois of the Internet) and their contests of words, and they tend to judge one another by their relative skill at such activities (Danet et al. 1995). In fact, this play with language was intentionally incorporated into the IRC and MOO theatrical performances; those auditioning for the Hamnet Players were actually asked to cleverly translate a line from Shakespeare into IRCese (Harris 1995b, 511). There was also a fair amount of impromptu translating; witness this inspired bit of “cyberacting” from the first, aborted attempt to perform Hamnet:

```

<Hamlet> 2B | !2B
<Hamlet> ^ the question
...
<Hamlet> Whether tis nobler to the mind
...
<Hamlet> To suffer the splits and lags
<Hamlet> That net is hair to
...
<Hamlet> Tis a logoffing devoutly to be wished
...
<Hamlet> To lag, to split
<Hamlet> No more ...
<Hamlet> And with a nick to say we ...
<Hamlet> The heartaches and thousand kilobytes]... (Danet et al. 1995)

```

“Splits” and “lags” refer to two of the banes of Internet existence; lags occur when there is a lot of traffic on the net, and are what the name implies: large gaps in the discourse caused by increased computer response time. Splits, or netsplits, actually cut participants off from one

another, interrupting the conversation. They are a clever Internet substitution for the original Hamlet's "slings and arrows." "Logoffing," of course, is the rough Internet equivalent of "death."

Beyond such toying with Shakespeare's language, the Hamnet Players' creator has opined that "If irc actors ever got so [technically, as opposed to verbally] skilled, and the irc audience so tame, that the entire script came out exactly as written, the performance would be a failure by definition" (Danet et al. 1995). Improvisation has been encouraged, if not the central element, in all of the Internet theatre productions examined in this thesis. Ruedenberg, Danet and Rosenbaum-Tamari theorize that the reason for all this play with language is that without

physical cues, it is harder to gauge the response of one's audience. One is forced into a posture of rhetorical persuasiveness, to focus on what one says and how one says it ... players elaborate on textual and typographic art ..., stress the poetic function of communication, and foreground the formal aspects of language (28)

Yet another line of thought in favor of a performative view of Internet communication links us back to the discussion over the representation of the body in textual virtual reality. Obviously, the virtual "body" one inhabits in a textual VR environment is not a true, physical body, no matter how closely it may imitate one. It is a creation of words, not flesh. Therefore, the participant in IRC or a MOO experiences the unusual sensation of having a split identity: as one of Dr. Turkle's interviewees puts it, "You are the character and you are not the character, both at the same time" (1995, 12). The terminology Turkle uses when she talks about characters in textual virtual reality incorporates and illuminates this element of their existence: she refers to them as "personae," a word which comes from the Latin *per sonae*, i.e., "that through which the sound comes" (Turkle 1995, 182) — or, in this case, that through which the voice, soundless though it is, comes. What this term originally described was the theatrical mask,

which is what IRC and MOO characters function as, in effect:

Like material masks at carnivals and masked balls ..., nicknames (and sometimes the userid, or other optional components of an electronic address) not only hide the players' real identity, they call attention to the person through the expressive power and imaginativeness of the mask. (Ruedenberg, Danet & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 14)

(I)n all the arenas where performance is central, nicknames and stage names are designed to call attention to the unique talents of the individual. This is something like the principle of "conspicuous marking" in nature — the male peacock's feathers are designed to call attention to him. But stage names and nicknames can also hide aspects of identity, just as camouflage in nature serves to hide an animal ... (Bechar-Israeli, 10)

This despite the fact that in textual VR, the mask and the corporeal body are physically completely separate — while one participant sits at his or her computer, other participants hundreds or even thousands of miles away may see their "mask" of words, i.e. their character's description, actions and emotions. Only in film and television have we heretofore been able to achieve anything like this effect, yet those media do not share the same degree of interactivity with IRC and MOOs.

In each of the Internet theatre productions examined in this paper, virtual masks of one sort or another have been employed, in addition to (or instead of) the ones "worn" by the actors in their normal Internet interactions. Because of the freedom IRC software allows participants in changing their nicks, the Hamnet Players had no trouble changing from <El_Ingles> to <Hamlet>, <Gazza> to <PCBeth>, or <GreenC> to <Blanche>. It wasn't quite so simple in the ATHEMOO productions, but Rick Sacks and the programmers helping him managed to tweak the code and come up with an acceptable alternative for MetaMOOphosis — one that was so successful, it was used for NetSeduction and A Place for Souls as well. In the MOO plays, the actors not only changed their nicknames, they put on a new description as well; as

MaryA on ATHEMOO, my description is “Youngish, with red-brown hair reaching all the way down her back. Has that terminally frenetic look of a graduate student working on a thesis.” When I played John, one of my NetSeduction characters, however, I put on this mask: “Tall, with shaggy red hair, mustache and beard. With that mischievous glint in his blue eyes, he looks like a big, sexy teddy bear.” The former mask may resemble my real self more or less, but the “John” mask was a complete fabrication, starting with the fact that it was the opposite gender. In the case of the IRC plays, a member of the audience could use the /WHO command to find out the Internet address of the person behind <Ophelia> or <Stanley>. In MetaMOOphosis, NetSeduction and A Place for Souls, there really was no way for an audience member to find out who was behind the masks, since the actors were signed onto ATHEMOO as their play-character, not as their normal character.

Just as putting on a mask in real life signals a “play” or “performance” situation, putting on one’s IRC or MOO character-mask (by signing on) also signals entry into a world of make-believe and performance, where there is “reduced accountability for action” (Ruedenberg, Danet & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 2). Of course, the ambiguity over whether “your character is or is not you” does cause some trouble here; some matters, such as netrape or, on the positive side, net friendships and net marriages, do tend to be taken seriously (Turkle 1995, 224–225, 229, 252–253). As if that measure of ambiguity were not enough, if everyone you meet in IRC or on a MOO is “wearing a mask,” how do you distinguish between the masks of actors in Internet theatre and the masks of ordinary IRC or MOO participants?

“All the world’s a stage ...”: Framing Performance on the Internet

Shakespeare obviously could never have predicted the Internet, but his famous line, from Act II of As You Like It, “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players” (227), seems to be an apt description of IRC and MOO activity; so apt, in fact, that it too has been translated into IRCese:

-> *prlogue* All the world's a Unix term.... [3]
-> *prlogue* ...and all the men & women merely irc addicts.... [4]
(Hamnet 1993)

(“Unix” is a computer operating system, akin to DOS or Windows; “Unix term” in this case means “Unix terminal,” so in other words, all the world is a virtual environment running on a computer.)

However, when Shakespeare wrote his famous metaphor, he didn’t have to worry about it being taken as anything but a metaphor; the average Elizabethan didn’t put on a costume and greasepaint and mount the boards. On today’s Internet, the metaphor is close enough to being the truth that it actually creates problems for Internet theatre, as I have alluded to several times already. These problems seem to have quite a bit to do with the concept of “framing,” or the lack thereof. Just how is it that we know how to react when we go to a conventional, real-life theatre performance? Why don’t we run up on stage, or out of the theatre, when Hamlet stabs Polonius?

Victor Turner, in his essay “Acting in everyday life and everyday life in acting,” begins his inquiry into the differences and similarities between real life and theatre by analyzing the word at the root of it all: acting. This, Turner says, is where the confusion starts (and he is only speaking of regular theatre, not the peculiarities of Internet theatre!), for we give two, seemingly completely

opposite meanings to the same word:

(I)t can mean doing things in everyday life, or performing on the stage or in a temple ... It may be the essence of sincerity — the commitment of the self to a line of action for ethical motives perhaps to achieve ‘personal truth,’ or it may be the essence of pretense — when one ‘plays a part’ in order to conceal or dissimulate ... (102)

To confuse things further, when someone is carrying out an important duty, we say they are “playing a role,” and we look for deep human truths as a sign of great acting (Turner, 102).

Although “acting” is an Anglo-Saxon word, this is not a solely modern, Western phenomenon; Turner found the same sort of conflation and confusion even in pre-industrial societies, leading him to conclude that the distinction between “ordinary” and “extraordinary” roles was “mainly a matter of framing and quantity, not quality” (Turner, 115).

Quantity should be obvious — “extraordinary” roles such as theatrical ones are only performed occasionally, and generally only by a small subset of persons — but the concept of framing requires a bit more explanation. Gregory Bateson, the scholar who developed the idea, defines a frame as “a defined interpretive context providing guidelines for discriminating between orders of message” (Bauman, 9). There are many orders of message — literal and non-literal, serious and playful. In the case of performative language, “there is something going on in the communicative interchange which says to the auditor, ‘interpret what I say in some special sense; do not take it to mean what the words alone, taken literally, would convey’” (Bauman, 9). What that something, or somethings, is depends on the society as well as the specific genre of performance, because these guidelines are culturally dependent. For example, there are stories of early filmgoers who were so terrified by the image of a moving locomotive on the screen that they ran out of the auditorium, evidence of the fact that these bits of

metacommunication are culturally created and not inherent in the medium (Bauman, 16). The medium was so new, the culture hadn't yet completely developed and disseminated the guidelines instructing viewers how to receive and interpret the message.

There are a wide variety of metacommunicative guidelines that key performance in different cultures, including special codes, like poetic language; figurative language, or metaphor; parallelism, or repetition of certain structural elements; special paralinguistic features, such as pitch, tone, loudness, etc.; special formulae (e.g. "Once upon a time ..."); the appeal to tradition (establishing past performances as a standard for purposes of evaluation); and disclaimer of performance, the most commonly known example of which in our culture is the phrase "I'm a poet and don't know it" (Bauman, 17–22). Western theatre has used most of these, at various times and in various plays; one can find nearly all of them in Shakespeare's works, for example, and while modern playwrights tend not to employ such things as iambic pentameter anymore, actors are still taught to speak in a certain manner (mostly so they can be heard and their speech understood), and the majority of their lines are delivered as if that famous "fourth wall" existed between them and the audience. Beyond letting the audience know that what is being communicated is not "real" and should not be taken at face value, these formal cues help establish the relationship between the performer and the audience, "fix(ing) the attention of the audience more strongly on the performer, bind(ing) the audience to the performer in a relationship of dependence that keeps them caught up in his display" (Bauman, 16).

Of course, there are different types and degrees of performance; a joke told at work and a performance on Broadway may share similar metacommunicative cues, but we perceive them as being vastly different cultural situations. In addition to the guidelines within the text of the

performance, we have other physical and temporal guidelines that key formal, cultural performances: “They are, as a rule, scheduled events, restricted in setting, clearly bounded, and widely public, involving the most highly formalized performance forms and accomplished performers of the community” (Bauman, 28). We arrive at the theatre on a specific, advertised date, at a specified time, we walk into a special room and are seated facing an area defined, either by curtains and a raised platform, or at minimum by a lack of seats, and when the lights go down, the curtain rises and the actors appear, we know to sit quietly and watch them, expressing our approval through applause (or disapproval through boos) at the end of the performance, after the actors have broken character and stepped to the front of the stage to take their bows.

These guidelines are firmly ingrained in our cultural consciousness; I witnessed particularly striking evidence of this at a street theatre performance not long ago. The performance was in the middle of a park, with nothing to define the performance space at all, but when the performer began to give signs of starting his act, the crowd milling around him immediately formed a circle, and any festival-goers oblivious or obnoxious enough to walk through that circle became the target for the audience’s jeers and disapproval, as well as the performer’s. In one sense, they were being punished for violating a cultural convention; in another, they, by virtue of entering the performance space, became part of the performance. The audience in this instance, however, had the advantage of other cues — the performer’s actions, and the fact that the park had been set aside that weekend for such performances — which told them a performance was about to take place.

Frame analyses of various Internet interactions, including the Hamnet Players’

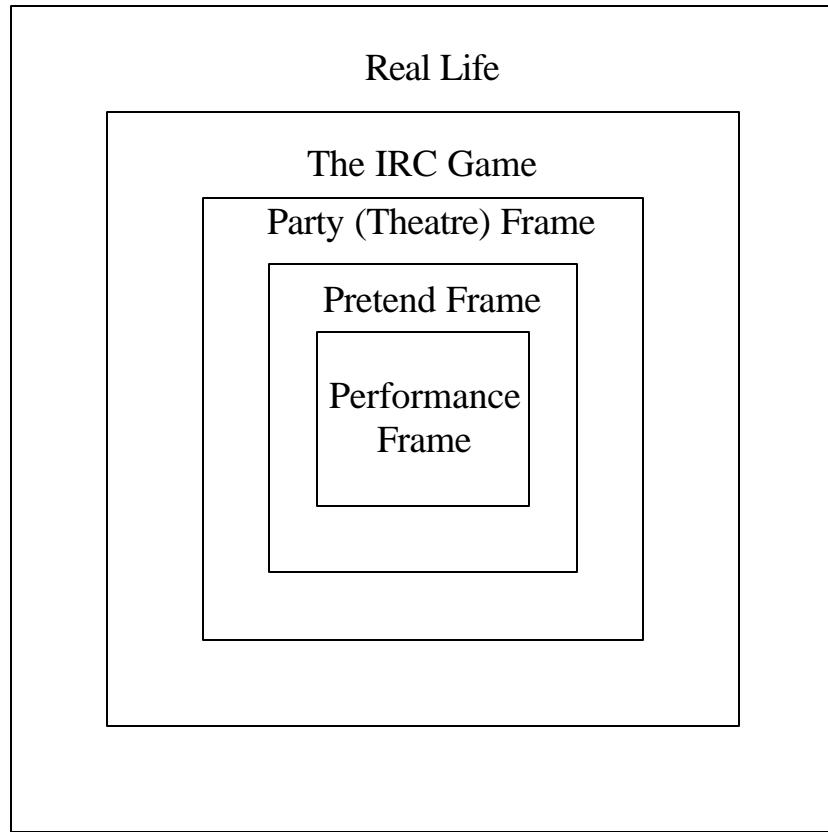
productions, have been done before by Brenda Danet and her colleagues (Danet et al. 1995; Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 12–19). However, one important consideration has been left out of these analyses: how do the participants in the interactions, particularly the audience members in the case of Internet theatre, perceive these frames, if they perceive them at all? Are there sufficient guidelines to assist the audience in interpreting Internet performances as performances? To what extent do these guidelines emulate those that cue conventional theatre (to what extent *can* they emulate them)?

Danet and her fellow researchers into the nature of IRC performance have “identified five frames of interaction, or meta-communicational frames of reference … which are activated while participants are engaged in online encounters” [these can be applied to MOO performances as well as the IRC ones]:

- (1) Real Life
- (2) The IRC Game
- (3) A Party Frame (or, in the cases of the Internet plays, a Theater Frame)
- (4) The Pretend Frame
- (5) The Performance (or Stage) Frame (Danet et al. 1995)

These frames are not exclusive; Danet et al. describe their interaction, or “nesting,” in terms of “multi-tasking” — in the same way that I can work on this paper in my word-processing software and switch to other documents to copy and paste bits I need to quote, or switch to the communications software I have running “in the background” to locate a relevant web page (Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 11–12). They depict this “nesting” graphically, something like the representation in the figure below (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.



The “five frames of interaction.”

The “Real Life” frame, as defined here, is exactly what its label implies: it is the frame in which Internet participants conduct their everyday, “serious,” off-line lives, in which the metacommunication is that they are “grounded in physical space and time; actors are accountable for their physical and verbal actions, for the well-being of their bodies, and for their social commitments” (Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 12). This frame is not generally active once one logs onto IRC or a MOO; like my communications software in the example of multi-tasking above, it runs in the background (in this case of the participant’s mind), creating that unusual sensation of being the character and not the character at the same time, of being a physical body in front of a computer and an imaginary being of words simultaneously. Occasionally, however, “Real Life” will come to the foreground in Internet interactions, like when Internet actors mention how nervous they are — “<Lady_R> ohhhh! 5 minutes to curtain time; I’m SO nervous....” (PCBeth 1994b) — which occurred in virtually every production (An irc Channel 1994; An irc Channel 1995; Hamnet 1993; Hamnet 1994; NetSeduction 1996; PCBeth 1994a); or like when an actor “backstage” before a performance of NetSeduction commented that she had “peed 4 times in the last half hour” and then realized, after that comment, that “everyone will have to pee” (NetSeduction 1996).

Ordinarily such expressions are accompanied by the abbreviation “rl,” or “irl,” meaning “real life” or “in real life,” which serves as a metacommunicative guideline to let other players know one is talking not about one’s online character, but about one’s offline, real self. This convention was not used in the instances cited above, but given my own emotional reaction to performing on the Internet, and the prevalence of such comments, I am inclined to take them as expressions of real emotion, not play-acting. Interestingly enough, when “rl” and “irl” were

used, in the scripted portions of NetSeduction, generally accompanying physical descriptions, the expressions were completely fictional — when my character “Beth” (who was “really” John pretending to be a female) described her “rl” self, a real-life female actor (me) was playing a fictional character (John), fabricating the description of another fictional character (Beth). This sort of “con” — presenting one’s character as one’s real-life self — is not uncommon in the real online sex-chatrooms NetSeduction was modeled on, which points out that one cannot always depend on metacommunicative guidelines on the Internet; you might think someone is communicating through the “Real Life” frame, but they actually are using the “Pretend” frame.

The second-level frame, “The IRC Game,” is entered by logging onto IRC (or a MOO). According to Danet et al., there is not necessarily any “fooling around” at this level, just talk (Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 13). The metacommunication is “Anything may be said in this frame; participants enjoy reduced accountability if they choose to communicate in a playful mode” (Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 13). Like the “Real Life” frame, this frame sometimes runs in the background of Internet interaction; just as one participates in the “Real Life” frame by virtue of being physically alive, one participates in the “IRC Game” frame by virtue of being “virtually alive” through one’s character. However, this frame is also foregrounded when participants are “just talking,” for example:

RickS exclaims, “hey Steve!”
 RickS sits down on the beach blanket.
 SteveS says, “Thought I’d piggy-back and join you.”
 RickS exclaims, “loved your scene in Grete’s bedroom. Classic!”
 SteveS exclaims, “Thanks!” (A Place for Souls 1997a)

or when netlag or a netsplit (Hamnet 1994; PCBeth 1994a) or another technical problem temporarily affecting their online existence occurs.

The second frame is largely identified through its content in IRC and on MOOs.

Participants conversing in the “IRC Game” frame simply talk as one would in a face-to-face conversation, with none of the playfulness or conscious wit of some of the later frames. This frame, too, has been toyed with in Internet theatre, however. Both NetSeduction and A Place for Souls actively attempted to create the impression in the audience that the actors were “just chatting,” not performing a play, by modeling their scripts on the sort of subject content that could be found in a normal MOO conversation.

The third frame, the Theatre frame, is the one in which “‘actors’ and producers go about the business of running a production” (Danet et al. 1995). Danet does not suggest a “meta-message” for this frame; perhaps “Anything said within this frame will concern the technical details of mounting a theatrical production” will do. There was a considerable amount of this type of communication immediately before the Hamnet Players’ productions, since even after the first disastrous attempt to perform Hamnet, a great deal of the casting, mostly of smaller roles, continued to be done on the spot. There also were numerous mode changes to be made (to give ops to those who needed it and a voice to all of the actors), actors needed to be reminded to change their nicks, lines needed to be distributed to new cast members, and the ASCII sets (in addition to the castle Elsinore in Hamnet, there were “blasted heath” and “banquet room” sets for PCBeth) needed to be created and displayed. There seemed to be less of this sort of communication just before the MOO plays, perhaps because scripts (when they were used) were e-mailed to pre-cast actors, rehearsals were held days prior to performance, and many of the technical details were taken care of in advance (for example, the smart costumes were created in advance, so actors didn’t have to change nicks; they either

signed onto the MOO as their characters, or put on a costume when they entered the playspace). There was also some communication in this frame during IRC and MOO performances. During NetSeduction, our producer and director Steve Schrum also served as prompter, messaging actors to warn them of their entrances, and letting “onstage” actors know when they needed to fill time with improvisation to cover for a late entrance or an actor who had been accidentally kicked off the MOO (NetSeduction 1996). The Hamnet Players’ also employed a prompter, to ensure (as much as possible) that forgotten lines didn’t disrupt the performance, and the later productions included “stage managers,” so Harris didn’t have to monitor every detail himself (Harris 1995b, 509).

The third frame is also generally identified through its content in IRC and on MOOs. Messages sent in the third frame, the “Theatre” frame, tend to be brief and matter-of-fact. They also frequently are sent as private communication (for example, “<_Producer> beek:please put on yr cozzie (i.e. change yr nick)” (Hamnet 1993), or typed all in capital letters (the Internet convention used to represent “yelling”), “called out” like an announcement made to an entire group (e.g., “> QUIET PLEASE!!! CURTAIN GOING UP”) (An irc Channel 1994). Plays have been written for the traditional theatre, such as “Our Town,” or “An Actor’s Nightmare,” that incorporate the Stage Manager as a character onstage and play with this frame; the “Prompter” in Hamnet also had a line to speak in addition to his regular duties (“<_Prompter> Psst! Thou hast thy father much offended [47]”) (Hamnet 1994). In a sense, I suppose one could also say that the Hamnet Players’ creation of characters called “Scene,” “Enter” and “Exit” toy with the “Theatre” frame; in an ordinary script, these would be straightforward directions for the actors, but in the IRC plays, they were “performed” by actors,

who had all the opportunity for improvisation that the actors playing “regular” roles had (e.g. “*
 Scene 4: The castle entryway. Early morning. A man pushing a shopping cart passes by, calling,
 “Bring out yer dead! Today is Double Coupon day...two buried for the price of one!” [44]”
(PCBeth 1994b).

The next two frames, the “Pretend” frame and the “Performance” frame, are the ones that seem to cause the most difficulty — because they are the most difficult to isolate — when it comes to deciphering metacommunicative guidelines in Internet theatre. Danet et al. seem to imply that the “Performance” frame is actually more of a “subframe” of the “Pretend” frame. In both, the meta-message is “let’s make-believe,” but in the “Performance” frame, the make-believe is less casual, aimed at “showing off” by displaying a greater level of communicative competence (Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 16–17). In terms of Internet theatre, they define the “Pretend” frame as consisting of “the actual performance of the planned show” and the “Performance” frame as consisting of the non-scripted contributions of the actors and the audience members (Danet et al. 1995).

Ruedenberg, Danet and Rosenbaum-Tamari admit that

The nesting of experiential frames of existence is such that an action within one frame can also have meaning within the larger frame that incorporates it ... We should be careful of reifying the frame ... frames are fluid, dynamic, highly contingent, and need constantly to be ratified. (18)

Although it may work well for analyzing non-theatrical Internet communication, and is a good place to start when it comes to analyzing Internet theatre, there are a number of problems with this classification scheme, some of which I have already pointed out, but all of which seem to stem from either the unreliability, or sheer lack of meta- communicative guidelines. For example, it may be easy to tell what is scripted in an Internet theatre performance and what is

not when you have seen the script, or when you know who the actors are, but if you are an ordinary audience member without such inside information, it can be difficult to tell the difference between Internet theater and the “normally” playful and performative everyday IRC and MOO interactions. Granted, the beginning of the Hamnet Players’ performances were announced, but if you joined the channel late, you might not know a play was going on; there are numerous instances in the logs of the Hamnet performances of people joining the channel in mid-performance and asking what is going on, e.g.,

```
<Crawl> Why line numbers?
<witch2> /msg Crawl we're in the midst of a performance of PCBeth
<Crawl> oh, I see. (PCBeth 1994b)
```

Likewise, the lines in the IRC plays were numbered, but if an audience member were unaware of that convention, they might not notice any difference between the scripted lines and lines of ordinary conversation (as in the example quoted above). Even the fact that the actors had changed their nicks to names of characters from the plays wouldn’t necessarily clue in a casual observer; it has been observed that IRC users have no qualms about changing their nicks for spur-of-the-moment games (Bechar-Israeli, 24), and the playful transformation of Shakespeare’s lines, together with all of the improvisation in the Hamnet Players’ productions, could easily be taken for a clever IRC game.

The MOO productions complicated matters even more. There were no announcements of the beginning of performances and no numbers at the end of lines, and although the play-characters’ names didn’t exactly match the format of regular ATHEMOO characters’ names (regular character names on ATHEMOO follow the format “real first name + last initial,” e.g. “MaryA,” while characters in the MOO productions were named “Laura,” “Trish,” “Mrs.

Samsa," etc.), this difference probably wouldn't be immediately apparent to someone unfamiliar with ATHEMOO's practices.

In choosing not to classify the scripted portions of the productions as "performance," Danet et al. have, perhaps unwittingly, stumbled across not only a point of controversy in real-life theatre but also yet another complication to frame analysis of Internet theatre. In real-life theatre, the question of how much (if anything at all) the playwright contributes to the performance of his or her plays is age-old. However, ironically, it may be easier to argue for the Internet playwright's contribution to performance than the conventional playwright's. To the casual observer of conventional theatre, it would seem obvious that the playwright's contribution ends once the script is written — long before the actors take the stage. But in Internet theatre, in which it is nearly impossible to tell who is typing in the words you see on your screen, and in which the means of expression are unusually constrained, the distinction becomes much more difficult to make because it is much more difficult (if not impossible) for the observer to determine who is speaking and whether what they are saying is scripted or not (particularly in the cases of some of the MOO plays, which attempted to emulate natural Internet speech as much as possible). Admittedly, the scripted parts of the Internet performances seem to offer the least in the way of creative expression for the *actors*; all one need do is type, or copy and paste from a copy of the script. For them, what they add to the script to enhance it through improvisation or reinterpretation in Internet lingo is the most important part of their performance. But the playwrights, when they create their scripts, are "showing off" just like the actors. When Stuart Harris wrote "All the world's a UNIX term ... and all the men & women merely irc addicts ..." (Harris 1993), he did it with the same intent to impress that inspired his actors'

performances. While those observers privy to the script prior to performance (mostly the actors and others directly involved in the performance) may be able to tell the difference between the actors' and the playwright's contributions, there really is nothing to clue in the audience.

Then there is the question of, how do Danet and her colleagues determine which bits of communication are "just fooling around, for the sake of fooling around" (i.e. in the "Pretend" frame), and which are active attempts to prove communicative competence (i.e. in the "Performance" frame)? This appears to me to be what Bauman would call a "text-centered" definition of performance, in which one "begin(s) with artful texts, identified on independent formal grounds and then re-injected into situations of use, in order to conceptualize verbal art in communicative terms" (Bauman, 11). This definition ignores the concept of intent and opens the door wide for cultural and personal biases in identifying verbal art. How can one know whether the communicator of an Internet text means for his communication to be perceived as performance, without some widely agreed-upon, cultural clue to signal this intent? Is a performance really a performance without that intent? Although they incorporate the concept of metacommunicative guidelines to framing in their work, Danet et al. do not devote much space to describing what these guidelines actually are, which is hardly surprising: the people directly involved in Internet productions do not seem to be able to agree on what these guidelines are, or should be [NetSeduction (Post-Performance Discussion) 1996].

Despite what I have said above about the unreliability and scarcity of meta-communicative guidelines in Internet theatre, they do exist. The Hamnet Players and the ATHEMOO productions have made some attempt to recreate the cultural conventions of real-

life theatre. All of these groups have attempted, with a reasonable amount of success, to create a “space set aside” for cultural performance, whether that space is a specific IRC channel or specially created MOO rooms. [It is interesting that Harris resisted making the #hamnet channel private — to the point of provoking an obnoxious reaction from one audience member (Hamnet 1993) — to keep anyone and everyone from wandering through and disrupting the performance. Perhaps this was out of a desire to preserve the sense of freedom on the Internet — choosing one cultural element over another?] The abortive Crosswaves performance even tried to recreate a traditional auditorium with a stage and a curtain (the facility actually still exists on ATHEMOO).

In addition to creating special spaces for their performances, the Internet theatre groups have devised other ways of emulating conventional theatre's guidelines. For instance, as I have shown earlier, the Hamnet Players attempted to create sets out of ASCII (keyboard) characters, and even offered files with programs, sketches of costumes, photographs of artistic interpretations of scenes (PCBeth 1994a), and thematically-appropriate music (An irc Channel 1994). They also in later productions created “make-believe” seats and refreshments in the “lobby” for the audience (these didn't exist as virtual objects, the way they would in a MOO, with their own independent descriptions; the Players and audience alike simply pretended they existed) (PCBeth 1994a). In addition to the virtual costumes employed by the ATHEMOO productions, MetaMOOphosis also experimented with announcing the entrances of actors; whenever an actor entered a room, everyone else in that room would see something like “An entrance: RickS portraying Gregor” (MetaMOOphosis 1997b).

Most of the IRC and MOO theatre groups were given an object lesson in the importance

of well-defined frames at some point in their productions. During a performance of An irc Channel Named #Desire, some members of the audience became completely confused when the play-character Stella “de-opped” all of the other play-characters. The intent was to imitate a scene in the original play in which Stella kicks her husband and his friends out of the house, but the audience members saw all the play-characters leaving and thought the performance was over (An irc Channel 1994). In the discussions after the performances of NetSeduction and A Place for Souls, the same problem kept coming up: the audience members were confused and didn’t know how to react [NetSeduction (Post-Performance Discussion) 1996], or whether to try interacting with the performers. As some audience members commented,

Nick says, "No, me too, I felt that as the script got serious, we could've let more of the dialog go by"

MonikaW says, "and often too lovely to "break""

...

BorisK says, "I agree with Anneke - sometimes I wouldn't have wanted to imagine this kind of audience participation in a traditional theatre - I was not sure whether to disturb or to contribute" ("A Place for Souls — The First Post-Show Discussion" 1997)

Suggestions were made for possible solutions to these problems; one participant suggested that “maybe the text/room/bots needed to draw more attention to the interface of it” [NetSeduction (Post-Performance Discussion) 1996], while several others were of the opinion that some introductory text, such as a program, or a character serving as a guide to let the audience know what was happening and was expected of them would help [NetSeduction (Post-Performance Discussion) 1996]. The problem could be solved in a similar way on IRC, by making entrance to the channel by invite only (which is possible through another mode change), to ensure people wouldn’t enter the channel halfway through the performance, and by using a program (which the Hamnet Players were distributing during their performances anyway) to instruct the audience on

what to expect. Still, while the consensus on ATHEMOO seemed to be that a new set of conventions for framing theatre on the Internet needed to be established, there remained a strong impulse to preserve the free, interactive, experiential nature of Internet communication [NetSeduction (Post-Performance Discussion) 1996], just as the Hamnet Players' Stuart Harris seemed to resist putting restrictions on the #hamnet channel (Hamnet 1993).

Distance and Theatre

Unfortunately, this impulse to reflect the freedom and high degree of interactivity found on the Internet in the plays produced on IRC and MOOs seems to be at odds with another essential element of theatre: distancing. Internet theatre may have found ways to reproduce or emulate other essential characteristics of traditional theatre (physical actions, the performance space, performative speech, costumes, sets, etc.) but it still has problems with distancing — separating the actors and the audience. These problems have something to do with the framing problems mentioned above, but they are also related to the simulation of the body in textual virtual reality.

Intuitively, it seems obvious that to have theatre, one must have two groups of participants: the performers and the audience. Without an audience, a performance is like the proverbial tree falling in the forest. Theatre scholars have argued much the same: “Theater comes into existence when a *separation* occurs between audience and performers. The paradigmatic theatrical situation is a group of performers soliciting an audience who may or may not respond by attending” (Richard Schechner, qtd. in Turner, 112). According to Schechner, this separation distinguishes aesthetic drama from ritual drama; both work to transform, but the former works to transform the audience’s consciousness, while the latter works to transform its participants into different persons. (Schechner, 124). The difference as he defines it is between witnessing and participating actively; Ben Chaim suggests that perhaps a better way of defining it would be as between belief (in the case of ritual), and suspension of disbelief (in theatre) (43). Either definition poses real problems in Internet theatre; on IRC or in a MOO, as we have seen, sometimes it is impossible to discern who is “witnessing” and who is “participating”

actively,” in the sense that Schechner means it. On the other hand, Ben Chaim’s definition is awkward as well; the general playful attitude and lack of the normal cues we use to judge veracity on the Internet seem to eliminate the opportunity for real belief, which leads us back to the “all the world’s a stage” problem.

Distancing is ultimately what keeps us from responding to a theatrical performance as if it were real. To quote Ben Chaim,

Many dramatic theorists have suggested that a fundamental difference between reality and drama is that the psychological protection from the event is a condition of our experience in the theatre ... We may be shocked when the Duchess of Malfi is presented with what she thinks are the dead bodies of her husband and children, yet we perceive ironies, images and thematic implications of the scene which she, were she a real human being, probably could not. Our engagement during the theatrical experience may be intense, but it is not the kind of engagement that occurs in life experience. The difference is a function of distance. (ix)

In other words, “It is only when it is ‘seen as’ something else ... that an existent object can at the same moment ‘be’ a nonexistent object” (Ben Chaim even suggests that the term “distance” may refer to this philosophical “space” between the real object and the imaginary one) (Ben Chaim, 50). If we are given the correct guidelines, and we perceive them in the correct way, we can maintain a certain amount of “disinterestedness” — a concept that goes all the way back to Aristotle — that keeps us from reacting inappropriately (Ben Chaim, 1–2).

Distance is not as simple as that, however. Scholars have been trying for centuries to determine the optimal balance of disinterestedness and emotional engagement, with limited success. The audience cannot be completely disinterested in the performance, or at best, the performers won’t succeed in their goal to entertain and possibly inform the audience, and at worst, the audience will simply stay away altogether. Others, focusing on the origin rather than the degree, argue over whether the audience must be aware of the fictional nature of the event

to experience distance, whether they must know it is a theatre they are going to (Ben Chaim, 44) — a suggestion which fits nicely with the concept of framing — or whether that is putting the cart before the horse, and there is some other, mysterious cause of the phenomenon (which no one has been able to satisfactorily describe) (Ben Chaim, 10).

Beyond all of this arguing lies yet another argument: the aesthetic ideal of “the least amount of distance without its disappearance,” first put forward by Edward Bullough (Ben Chaim, 49) and adopted by a number of other scholars, especially film scholars like Christian Metz and Andre Bazin, tends to favor film over theatre as the “ideal medium.” The argument goes that since film is just “empty” images,

The impression of reality we get from a film does not depend at all on the strong presence of an actor but rather on the low degree of existence possessed by those ghostly creatures moving on the screen, and they are, therefore, unable to resist our constant impulse to invest them with the ‘reality’ of fiction … a reality that comes only from within us, from the projections and identifications that are mixed in our perception of film. The film spectacle produces a strong impression of reality because it corresponds to a ‘vacuum, which dreams readily fill.’” (Metz, qtd. in Ben Chaim, 51)

Ironically, according to Sartre, “filling that vacuum with one’s own imagination makes that imagined reality one’s own, and therefore more real to one (the only reality being the one that each of us owns)” (Ben Chaim, 54). The problem with theatre is that there are real people and real objects up on the stage in front of the audience. Their physicality obstructs the audience’s ability to imagine the nonexistent, fictional object; to “see as” rather than to “see” (Ben Chaim, 52). Since film requires less exertion to achieve the desired effect, it is ipso facto the superior medium, following this line of thought. Of course, there are those in the pro-theatre camp, including Jerzy Grotowski, who would argue that “the closeness of the living organism” is theatre’s “special virtue,” a virtue that should be exploited (Ben Chaim, 41–42). It also could

be argued that if theatre requires a greater exertion of the imagination, that is not necessarily a strike against it.

I suggested earlier in this thesis that if one adopts this ‘least amount of distance without disappearance’ principle as a goal in performance (cinematic, rather than theatrical), then perhaps performance on the Internet comes closer to achieving this goal even than film. After all, all one has on the Internet is words, not so much even as images, to stand between the audience and their imagination; Turkle has remarked that in Internet relationships, there is a marked propensity to project, to see what one wants to see (Turkle 1995, 207). But then there is that problem with ‘disappearance;’ even if IRC and MOO participants do not tend to take other characters at their word (which is not entirely true — there would have been no fodder for A Place for Souls’ exploration of Internet relationships if that were so, and the Internet ‘scandals’ over participants purposely and egregiously deceiving others would never have occurred) (Turkle 1995, 228–230), there is the extra level of distinction between ‘Internet theatre actor’ and normal participant to make.

Conclusions: On the Brink of a New Culture

Performance ... constitutes ... the nexus of tradition, practice, and emergence in verbal art. (Bauman, 48)

Perhaps the reason why Internet theatre seems such a mass of problems and unanswered questions is that the culture that has spawned it is still in its infancy itself: it is a new medium within a new medium.

Running up against problems is hardly new to the citizens (or “netizens”) of IRC and MOOs. What Elizabeth Reid has to say about MUDs applies equally to IRC and MOOs:

Users of MUD systems are commonly faced by the problems inherent in the medium’s reduction of experience to pure text and its annihilation of conventional models of social interaction based on physical proximity. The measures that users of MUD systems have devised to meet their common problems are the markers of their common culture ... and this common culture allows MUD users to engage in activities that serve to bind them together as a community.” (Reid 1995, 173)

Internet theatre can be seen as one of these activities. It is emerging as a form of “social metacommentary,” a ““story a group tells about itself” or in the case of theatre, a play a society acts about itself — not only a reading of its experience but an interpretive reenactment of its experience” (Turner, 104). In each of the Internet theatre productions there were attempts to preserve and depict elements and issues of Internet culture. The general desire to promote improvisation and active audience participation, despite the problems it created, is emblematic of the value placed on freedom of speech and action on the Internet, and the inclination towards democracy (which can be seen even in the MOO software, which allows anyone to help build the MOO). Steve Schrum chose to base his play, NetSeduction, on real sex-chatroom interaction, because when he “discovered chat rooms, it seemed like a natural place to start since much of what goes

on is like NetSed" [NetSeduction (Post-Performance Discussion) 1996], and he could hardly have chosen a more controversial topic from Internet life. Twyla Mitchell-Shiner deliberately chose to tackle two other significant topics in online culture: the fluidity of identities on MOOs, and the strength of the Internet relationships based on those identities. Like the Greek comedies and tragedies, these plays were like

‘mirrors held up to nature’ … *active* (that propulsive word again!) mirrors, mirrors that probed and analyzed the axioms and assumptions of the social structure, isolated the building blocks of the culture, and sometimes used them to construct novel edifices, Cloud Cuckoolands or Persian courts that never were on land or sea, but were, nevertheless, possible variants based on rules underlying the structures of familiar sociocultural life or experienced social reality. (Turner, 103–104)

There are no easy answers to the question: “is Internet theatre truly theatre?” In some respects it has managed to replicate real-life theatre admirably; in other respects it seems to face hopeless philosophical conundrums. Its creators have used the somewhat meager means at their disposal to devise more or less well-defined playspaces, sets, programs and “smart” costumes. They have enriched the sensory experience of their productions, using files containing photos, sketches and music as well as elaborately described characters and manipulable environments. The IRC productions solved the problem of cueing by numbering the lines, and the problem of “making visible” entrances, exits and other stage directions by turning the directions into speaking characters. All of the Internet productions, in one way or another, attempted to make their “theatre” an expression of their society, by “translating” the language of existing plays into the slang and technical terminology of the Internet, or by somehow incorporating elements or issues (open sexual speech, the value put on freedom and democracy in general, the strength of relationships, whether one can believe other s’ self-representations,

etc.) that are important in the Internet community. When faced with the dilemma of the lack of real, physical bodies (which many would argue are essential to theatre) on the Internet, the productions employed references to bodily functions and verbal descriptions of emotions and actions, and (on ATHEMOO) created characters that were in essence manipulable virtual objects, to create simulated bodies. Unfortunately, so far, the medium has had difficulty in establishing a set of concrete, generally accepted metacommunicative frames to help the audience distinguish between Internet theatre performances and the unusually performative, everyday speech on the Internet. While some possibilities have been suggested (using modes on IRC to keep people from wandering in mid-performance or from speaking during the performance, announcing actors' entrances, explaining what is going on to audience members upon their entrance to the playspace, via a virtual program or a special host character), they have only been used sporadically and have yet to become societal conventions audience members can count upon to guide them. Perhaps an even more difficult and troubling problem is the lack of distancing — a lack of a sense of separation between the actors and the audience — which is ironically exacerbated by those very desires mentioned above that make Internet theatre an expression of Internet society: the desire to portray natural Internet interaction, and to preserve the freedom and interactivity that seem so integral to Internet life. Historically, theatre has not been the most interactive of the arts, at least not since it left its Dionysian roots behind (although there have been experiments, including the “happenings” of the sixties and seventies and more recent productions such as Tony ‘n Tina’s Wedding). If, on the one hand, Internet theatre bends too far in the direction of traditional scripted, non-interactive theatre, it runs the risk of seeming completely out of place on the Internet. On the other hand, if it becomes too

interactive, it runs the risk of becoming completely unrecognizable as theatre.

The productions that seem to have succeeded the best are the ones like MetaMOOphosis and the Hamnet Players' performances, perhaps because they retained enough elements of traditional theatre for attentive audience members to grab on to and use to guide them through the more innovative elements of the experience (in the case of the Hamnet Players, the well-known original plays their scripts were based on as well as a more or less sufficiently defined playspace; in the case of MetaMOOphosis, an active attempt to identify the actors by marking their entrances and a very well-defined playspace).

However, the other productions — Crosswaves, NetSeduction and A Place for Souls — should not be disregarded. Excepting the technical difficulties, where these productions encountered the greatest difficulty was where they tried the hardest to innovate, to make their performances not just theatre, but *Internet* theatre, a unique expression of the culture of IRC and MOOs. Based on the post-performance discussions, those involved in Internet theatre are fully aware that there are problems they need to solve, and that after those problems there likely will be more waiting. Perhaps what evolves through the process of solving these problems won't resemble what we call traditional theatre much at all — but then again, what we call theatre today doesn't resemble what the ancient Greeks knew as theatre much either.

ⁱ To the best of my knowledge, the production I witnessed a performance of, An irc Channel Named #Desire, was the last Hamnet Players production. Since then, there have been no announcements or any other indications of further performances, either on their web page (<<http://www.sandiego.com/hamnet>>) or on the theatre newsgroups on Usenet.

ⁱⁱ To give an example of this transience, the Hamnet Players created the channel "#Desire" for purposes of performing An irc Channel Named #Desire. Prior to the performance, a confused observer asked what was going on; apparently, a friend of his had "a bulletin [sic] board named desire" and he joined the Hamnet Players' channel thinking it might have been created by his friend (An irc Channel 1994).

ⁱⁱⁱ All quotes from online interactions are verbatim; any errors in spelling or grammar occur in the original.

^{iv} A “bot” (short for robot) is a short program designed to operate independently of its creator and to respond to certain words or actions in a specified way and/or to perform certain tasks. While bots are generally reviled elsewhere on the Internet, they have a special place in MUDs and MOOs; all virtual objects in those environments are, in some sense, bots. Bots can also be designed, as they were in the case of NetSeduction, to mimic real participants.

APPENDIX A. HAMNET SCRIPT

"HAMNET" ===== Shakespeare's play adapted for irc

First performed 12 December 1993 20:00 GMT on #Hamnet

copyright 1993 The Hamnet Players, San Diego, CA

all enquiries to: hn2563@handsnet.org

A horizontal wavy line representing a spring or a series of connected segments.

THE COMPLETE SCRIPT.....OFFICIAL SOUVENIR EDITION

A horizontal wavy line consisting of approximately 20 small, evenly spaced zig-zags, representing a spring or a series of connected segments.

<audience> rhubarb...

<< Action >> : _The CURTAIN RISES to reveal the stage set...

<_Set> :

```

<_Set>   _____ *
<_Set>   <   |   <   |   >   |   >
<_Set>   <_____|   <_____|   |____>   |____>
<_Set>   |   |   |
<_Set>   ^^^^^^^^^^   ^^^^^^^^^^   ^^^^^^^^^^   ^^^^^^^^^^
<_Set>   | + |   | + |   | + |   | + |
<_Set>   | + |_____| + |_____| + |_____| + |
<_Set>   |
<_Set>   | +   +   +   +   +   +   +   +   |
<_Set>   |_____
<_Set>   |   +   +   +   +   +   +   |
<_Set>   |
<_Set>   |   +   +   _____   +   +   |
<_Set>   |   |#####|   |
<_Set>   /|   +   +   |#####|   +   +   \|.
<_Set>   /|   |   |   |   |   \| \
<_Set>   /|_____| |||||| |_____| . \.
<_Set>   / . . . | ||||| . . \|.
<_Set>   _____ | ||||| _____ | . \.
<_Set>   W E L C O M E   T O   E L S I N O R E ! !
<_Set>   ~~~~~
<_Set>   [0]

```

<audience> Clap,clap,clap.... etc.... [1]

=====PROLOGUE /TOPIC World_Premiere _irc_Hamlet_in_Progress [2]

*** PROLOGUE has changed the topic on channel #Hamnet to "World_Premiere _irc_Hamlet_in_Progress"

<PROLOGUE> All the world's a Unix term.... [3]

<PROLOGUE> ...and all the men & women merely irc addicts.... [4]

<PROLOGUE> This show is Copyright 1993 The Hamnet Players [5]

<PROLOGUE> Enjoy our show + no heckling plz [6]

<PROLOGUE> Script should not be re-staged w/out permish [7]

<< Action >> : SCENE 1: THE BATTLEMENTS [8]

<< Action >> : _Enter Hamlet [9]

<< Action >> : _Enter Ghost [10]

<Hamlet> re, Ghost. Zup? [11]

<Ghost> Yr uncle's fucking yr mum. I'm counting on u to /KICK the bastard. [12]

===== GHOST /MODE * +o Hamlet [13]

*** Mode change "+o Hamlet" on channel #Hamnet by Ghost

<Hamlet> Holy shit!!!! Don't op me, man!!!! I've gotta think abt this, + I've got chem lab in 1/2 hr. :-(((([14]

<< Action >> : _Exit Hamlet [15]

<< Action >> : SCENE 2: AFTER HAMLET'S CHEM LAB [16]

<Hamlet> 2b or not 2b... [17]

<Hamlet> Hmmmmmm... [18]

<Hamlet> :-(Bummer... [19]

<Hamlet> Ooops, here comes Ophelia [20]

<< Action >> : _Enter Ophelia [21]

<Ophelia> Here's yr stuff back [22]

<Hamlet> Not mine, love. Hehehehehe ;-D [23]

<Ophelia> O heavenly powers: restore him! [24]

<< Action >> Ophelia thinks Hamlet's nuts [25]

<Hamlet> Make that "sanity-deprived", pls.... [26]

<Hamlet> Oph: suggest u /JOIN #nunnery [27]

<Ophelia> :-([28]

*** Signoff: Ophelia (drowning) [29]

<< Action >> : SCENE 3: INTERIOR [30]

<< Action >> : _Enter R_krantz [31]

<< Action >> : _Enter G_stern [32]

<R_krantz> re [33]

<G_stern> re [34]

<Hamlet> re, guys... :-\ [35]

<R_krantz> zup? [36]

<Hamlet> Fucked if i know. brb... [37]

<< Action >> : _Exit Hamlet in a sulk. [38]

<G_stern> fuckza matter w/him? [39]

<R_krantz> Guess he must be lagged. Let's lurk [40]

<< Action >> : R_krantz lurks [41]
 << Action >> : G_stern lurks [42]

<< Action >> : SCENE 4: THE QUEEN'S CLOSET [43]

<Hamlet> Ma: what the fuck's going on? [44]

<Queen> Don't flame me, i'm yr Ma! [45]

<Queen> Er.... [46]

<Prompter> Psst! Thou hast thy father much offended.. [47]

<Queen> Oh, right.... Yr dad's pissed at u [48]

<< Action >> : Hamlet slashes at the arras [49]

<Polonius> Arrrghhhh!!! [50]

===== HAMLET /KICK * Polonius [51]

*** Polonius has been kicked off channel #Hamnet by Hamlet

<Queen> Now look what u've done u little nerd. :-([52]

<Hamlet> Wrong man..... Bummer... [53]

<< Action >> : SCENE 5: GRUESOME FINALE [54]

===== QUEEN /TOPIC DEATH [55]

*** Queen has changed the topic on channel #Hamnet to "DEATH"

<< Action >> : _Enter Hamlet, Queen, King, Laertes, R_krantz, G_stern [56]

<< Action >> : Queen takes a drink [57]

<< Action >> : King gives Ham & Laer swords [58]

<King> Go for it, lads! [59]

<< Action >> : Laertes stabs Hamlet [60]

<< Action >> : Hamlet stabs Laertes [61]

<< Action >> : Hamlet stabs King [62]

<Queen> Holy shit this Danish vodka is like poison :-@ [63]

<Hamlet> and u always thought i was just wasting my time in chem lab, hehehe [64]

<< Action >> : Queen dies in agony [65]

<King> Aaaaarrgghhh! [66]

<< Action >> : King dies [67]

<Laertes> Aaaaarrrrrhhhhh!!!! [68]

<< Action >> : Laertes dies [69]

<Hamlet> AAAAaaaaarrrrrhhhhh!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! [70]

<< Action >> : Hamlet dies [71]

<< Action >> : R_krantz + G_stern GULP!!!! [72]

<< Action >> : _Enter Fortinbras + drum + colours + attendants [73]

<Fort_bras> EEEEEEEuuuuuuucchhhhhh!!!!!! What's been hpng here? [74]

<Drum> Like, rat-a-tat, man [75]

<Colours> Hmmmmmmmm..... [76]

<Atndts> Holy sheeeeet!!!! [77]

===== FORT_BRAS /NICK_King [78]

** Fort_bras is now knwn as _King

<< Action >> _The CURTAIN SLOWLY FALLS. {{{{{--THE END--}}}}} [79]

<audience> hmmmmmmmm..... [80]

APPENDIX B. EXCERPT FROM SECOND PERFORMANCE OF HAMNET

<_Producer> HERE WE GO HUSH
<R_krantz> CAn we get rid of the +i please?
<Ophelia> :I
*** Mode change "-i" on channel #hamnet by Ghost
*** Mode change "+v attndts" on channel #hamnet by au
(_Enter/#hamnet) let's get the play started

*** Prologue has changed the topic on channel #hamnet to +ircHamlet_World_Premiere_In_Progress

* _The CURTAIN RISES to reveal the lavish sewt...

/nick set

*** _The is now known as set

1 Newcastle

*** Darkside (csc002@cent1.lancs.ac.uk) has joined channel #hamnet

```

<set>   _____ *   _____ *   * _____   * _____
<set>   <   |   <   |   |   >   |   >
<set>   <_____|   <_____|   |_____>   |_____>
<set>   |   |   |   |   |
<set>   ^^^^^^^^^^ ^^^^^^^^^^ ^^^^^^^^^^ ^^^^^^^^^^
<set>   | + |   | + |   | + |   | + |
<set>   | + |_____| + |_____| + |_____| + |
<set>   |           |           |
<set>   | + + + + + + + |           |
<set>   |_____|           |_____|
<set>   | + + + + + + |           |
<set>   |           |           |
<set>   | + + _____ + + + |           |
<set>   |           |#####|           |           |
<set>   / | + + |#####| + + + | \.
<set>   / |           | |           | | \.
<set>   / |_____| |####| |           |
<set>   / . . . |####| . . | \.
<set>   _____ |####| _____

```

<set> WELCOME TO ELSINORE!!!

<sel>

On_ (on@Mk.lsmehn)

-> *audience* GO LINE 1
*** act 1 scene 1 Page 1

*** set is now known as _Producer

*** audience: No such nick/channel

<Prologue> ...and all the men & women merely irc addicts.... [4]
<Prologue> This extravaganza is Copyright 1993 The HamNet Players [5]
<Prologue> Enjoy our show + no heckling plz [6]
<Prologue> Script should not be re-staged w/out permish [7]
*** _QUEEN (lorenz@olymp.wu-wien.ac.at) has joined channel #hamnet
* _Enter Hamlet [9]/me Hamlet [9]ccDO> *** On SERVER_NOTICE from "KILL" do
* +ni \$3 [SILENT] <0>
(_Enter/#hamnet) DO>
*** attnnts has left channel #hamnet
(_Enter/#hamnet) me Ghost [10]/me Hamlet [9]/me Hamlet [9]/me Hamlet
+[9]/me Hamlet [9]/me Hamlet [9]/me H
*** Shakespea is now known as Spaceboy
*** attnnts (ac3w@faraday.clas.Virginia.EDU) has joined channel #hamnet
(_Enter/#hamnet) argh
(_Enter/#hamnet) lagged
*** Mode change "+v attnnts" on channel #hamnet by aurra
<G_Stern> ?
* _Enter Hamlet [9]
* _Enter Ghost [10]
-> *hamlet* GO LINE 11
<hamlet> re, Ghost. Zup? [11]
<Ghost> Yr uncle's fucking yr mum. I'm counting on u to /KICK the bastard.
+[12]
*** Mode change "+o hamlet" on channel #hamnet by Ghost
/invite tyree
*** Inviting tyree to channel #hamnet
<hamlet> Holy shit!!!! Don't op me, man!!!! I've gotta think abt this,
<hamlet> + I've got chem lab in 1/2 hr. :-(((([15]
<_Prompter> ATDT 1-412-481-4644
*** tyree (TYREESGT@192.80.63.1) has joined channel #hamnet
*** Signoff: Darkside (Error 0)
*** Polonius is now known as SCENE
(_Enter/#hamnet) telnet sugar-bombs.gnu.ai.mit.edu
* SCENE AFTER HAMLETS CHEM LAB [16]
*** Signoff: SP (Leaving)
<hamlet> 2b or not 2b... [17]
<hamlet> Hmmmmmm... [18]
<hamlet> :-(Bumm-errr!! [19]
<hamlet> Ooops, here comes Ophelia [20]
* _Enter Ophelia [21]
<Ophelia> Here's your crap back, babe: your Mac, your WP 51.a, amd your dirty
+mags [22]
<hamlet> Not mine, love. Hehehehehe ;-D [23]
*** SkinnyPup (zens@ucsu.Colorado.EDU) has joined channel #hamnet

<Ophelia> Oh Heavely powers!! Restore his manhood andletr him do bad things
 +to me! [24]
 -> *ophelia* GREAT!!!!
 * Ophelia thinks Hamlet is a fucking goober.
 <hamlet> Make that "sanity-deprived", purleez.... [26]
 <hamlet> Oph: suggest u /JOIN #nunnery [27]
 <Ophelia> :o
 *** Signoff: Prologue (Error 0)
 *** SkinnyPup is now known as SP
 <Ophelia> :(:([28]
 -> *ophelia* drown, baby, drfown
 * Ophelia is drowning in a sea of her archelogy of the soul...amnd the damn
 +water. SHIT!
 <Ophelia> [29]
 * SCENE INTERIOR.....[30]
 * Ophelia is dead
 * _Enter R_Krantz [31]
 *** Ophelia has left channel #hamnet
 * _Enter G_Stern [32]
 -> *aurra* loved oph's perf
 *** aurra is away: the show has begun...please do not enter
 <R_krantz> re [33]
 <G_Stern> re [34]
 *** aelphO (~Vgrey@apm-b337-7.ucsd.edu) has joined channel #hamnet
 <hamlet> re, guys... :\
 <R_krantz> yup? [36]
 <hamlet> Fucked if i know. brb... [37]
 *** Clive (~ch@surreal.dircon.co.uk) has joined channel #hamnet
 /nick _exit
 *** _Producer is now known as _exit
 /me Hamlet in a sulk [38]
 aurra yer cue go!
 * _exit Hamlet in a sulk [38]
 aurra sorry...
 /nick _Producer
 <G_Stern> fuckza matter w/him? [39]
 *** _exit is now known as _Producer
 <R_krantz> Guess he must be lagged. Let's lurk [40]
 * R_krantz lurks [41]
 * G_Stern lurks [42]
 *** Signoff: Melisha (I've been killed by my master :)
 *** Clive has left channel #hamnet
 * SCENE THE QUEENS CLOSET [43]
 <hamlet> Ma: what the fuck's going on? [44]

/w queen

*** aelphO is now known as ailehpO

*** queen: No such nick/channel

/w _queen

*** _QUEEN is lorenz@olymp.wu-wien.ac.at (Bernhard Lorenz)

*** on channels: #hamnet

*** on irc via server olymp.wu-wien.ac.at ([137.208.8.30 6666] Vienna, +Austria)

*** _QUEEN is an IRC Operator

*** Mode change "+v _QUEEN" on channel #hamnet by aurra

*** Signoff: Badil (stork.doc.ic.ac.uk dismayl.demon.co.uk)

<_QUEEN> Don't flame me, i'm your Ma! [45]

<_QUEEN> Er.... [46]

<_Prompter> Psst! Thou hast thy father much offended [47]

*** s-mac (smacdoug@halifax-ts2-18.nstn.ns.ca) has joined channel #hamnet

<_QUEEN> Oh, right...Yr dad's pissed at u [48]

*** SCENE is now known as Polonius

* hamlet slashes at the arras [49]

<Polonius> Arrrrrrrrrgh!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

*** _Prompter is now known as _Drums

<Polonius> [50]

*** Polonius has been kicked off channel #hamnet by hamlet (hamlet)

*** hamlet has been kicked off channel #hamnet by Duck9 (Duck9)

> [51]

*** SCENE (smiguel@lonestar.utsa.edu) has joined channel #hamnet

<_QUEEN> Now look what u've done u little nerd :-([52]

*** Inviting hamlet to channel #hamnet

*** Mode change "+o SCENE" on channel #hamnet by Duck9

/w hamlet

*** hamlet is ~mark@dismayl.demon.co.uk (Mark Turner)

*** on irc via server stork.doc.ic.ac.uk (Dept of Computing, Imperial College, +London UK)

*** Mode change "+o _QUEEN" on channel #hamnet by aurra

/invite hamlet

*** Spaceboy is now known as Charlie

*** Inviting hamlet to channel #hamnet

R_krantz I do think that line needs to change... pissed should be pissed off +with I think...

*** Mode change "-sm" on channel #hamnet by _Producer

* SCENE GRUESOME FINALE [54]

<Charlie> drgdf

*** _QUEEN has changed the topic on channel #hamnet to DEATH

<_QUEEN> [55]

-> *hamlet* come back

* _Enter Hamlet, Queen, King, Laertes, R_Krantz, G_Stern [56]
 * _QUEEN takes a drink [57]
 * _King gives Ham and Laer swords [58]
 <_King> Go for it, Lads! [59]
 Ghost -m ??????
 /w laertes
 *** hamlet (~mark@dismayl.demon.co.uk) has joined channel #hamnet
 *** laertes: No such nick/channel
 /nick Laertes
 *** _Producer is now known as Laertes
 /me stabs Hamlet....Woooof!!!!!! [60]
 * Laertes stabs Hamlet....Woooof!!!!!! [60]
 *** Erdor (~daemon@dismayl.demon.co.uk) has joined channel #hamnet
 * hamlet stabs Laertes [61]
 * hamlet stabs King [62]
 <_QUEEN> Holy shit this Danish vodka is like poison :-@ [63]
 <hamlet> and u always thought i was just wasting my time in chem lab, hehehe
 +[64]
 * _QUEEN dies in agony [65]
 <_King> Aaaaarrgghh!!!! [66]
 * _King dies [67]
 *** Signoff: SP (Leaving)
 /me VAAAAAAaaaaaaaaaaaaarrrrrrrrggggggggggg
 *** Signoff: Charlie (Error 0)
 * Laertes AAAAAAaaaaaaaaaaaaarrrrrrrrgggggggggggHHHHHH!!!!!!
 /nick _Producer
 *** Laertes is now known as _Producer
 *** klor (cumcl@uxa.ecn.bgu.edu) has joined channel #HAMNET
 /nick Laertes
 *** _Producer is now known as Laertes
 /me dies [69]
 * Laertes dies [69]
 /nick _Producer
 <hamlet> AAAAaaaaAAAaaaaaaaaaaaaarrrrrhhhhhh!!!!!!
 +[70]
 * hamlet dies of overacting :) [71]
 *** Laertes is now known as _Producer
 * R_krantz and G_Stern.....
 GULP!!!!!!
 [72]
 * _Enter Fortinbras + drums + colours + attendant [73]
 *** SCENE is now known as The_
 *** _Butthead (irc8013@irc.nsysu.edu.tw) has joined channel #hamnet
 Ghost :) *hehehee*

*** klor has left channel #hamnet
/w fort_bras
* The_ CURTAIN SLOWLY FALLS {{{{{{{[---THE END----]}}}}}}} [74]
*** fort_bras: No such nick/channel
<_Butthead> huhuhuh huhuh.. you SUCK. [75]
<ailehpO> :I
<Colours> Hmmmmmm... [76]
<The_> oops
<atndts> Holy sheet!!!! [77]

APPENDIX C. EXCERPT FROM METAMOOPHOSIS PREVIEW

This transcript is of the foyer just inside the front door. This is where the performers first find costumes and begin to get into character. It is also the intersection of paths between all downstairs rooms and the hallway upstairs.

read foyertape

As you leave the front yard you see:
You open the front door, take a deep breathe and step inside.

-- Start: Saturday, February 1, 1997 10:47:14 am ATHEMOO time (HST)

RickS turns a picture on. (preshow preset- camera now on)

RickS goes north.

RickS goes upstairs. He seems preoccupied and doesn't look back.

RickS arrives and glances this way and that.

RickS goes out.

LeeG comes in and shuts the door behind him.

LeeG removes Herr Doctor (Costume) and easily slips the costume on.

LeeG teleports out

An entrance: LeeG portraying Herr Doctor.

LeeG comes in and shuts the door behind him.

MonikaW comes in and shuts the door behind her.

GeorgL comes in and shuts the door behind him.

TwylaM-S comes in and shuts the door behind her.

GeorgL removes the journalist (Costume) and easily slips the costume on.

RickS comes in and shuts the door behind him.

The Foyer

The entrance to the home has a closet for coats and costumes (type 'look closet' to see if any costumes are available). A corridor extends (n) to the kitchen and a livingroom (e) opens up on the east side of the house where Grete sometimes entertains on her violin. A set of stairs goes 'up' to the second floor.

----- NOTICE -----

Only those wearing costumes will be able to speak and emote here.

All others must use the page command to communicate.

ie. 'RickS Hello or page RickS Hello instead of say.

Herr Doctor, MonikaW, the journalist, and TwylaM-S are standing here.

You see the costume closet, a picture (recording), and applecore here.

Obvious exits: up to The Hallway, Front_Door to The Samsa front yard, north to Kitchen, and east to the Sitting Room

You enter the house and shut the door behind you. An usher rushes by and whispers, "Improvise. Use the scripts built in to the costumes as idea generators..."

MichaelY comes in and shuts the door behind him.

MonikaW removes Grete (Costume) and easily slips the costume on.

TwylaM-S removes Mrs. Samsa (Costume) and easily slips the costume on.

look closet

This is the costume closet. Taking a costume will give you that character's name.

You will then be able to 'describe as' to tailor your character.

The costumes also have built-in scripts which can be used to generate a moo theatre Metamorphosis BUT improvisation should be the primary technique.

Type 'look in closet' for a brief description and a help text.

Type 'take from closet'. (don't type the word 'costume')

---Important---

Once you have a costume, type look or help to see what you can do.

Contents:

an observer (Costume)

Mr. Samsa (Costume)

Gregor (Costume)

MichaelY comes in and shuts the door behind him.

MonikaW removes Grete (Costume) and easily slips the costume on.

TwylaM-S removes Mrs. Samsa (Costume) and easily slips the costume on.

Here is where the show starts to take shape---

Herr Doctor says, "Hello Grete, how's your brother this morning?"

Grete is nestling on her clothes

Mrs. Samsa says, "Grete, not in front of company!"

Herr Doctor says, "That's all right. I've given Grete a thorough examination."

Mrs. Samsa has no doubt of that.

Mrs. Samsa says, "I'm tired and need to rest." She tries to take a deep breath

Herr Doctor says, "Grete is in very good health...now about that brother of hers"

RickS removes Gregor (Costume) and easily slips the costume on.

Grete has assured that the clothes fits right on her

Herr Doctor says, "I believe the examination tired Grete"

Grete sighs

Gregor spits at the doctor and runs up the wall

Gregor opens his mouth. A disgusting ooze dribbles out, "Screeeeeeeeeeee!"

Mrs. Samsa shakes her head sadly, "I can't believe it's him."

Herr Doctor says, "I see Gregor is active today"
 MichaelY removes Mr. Samsa (Costume) and easily slips the costume on.
 the journalist takes out a small notzepafd.
 Gregor drools something vile toward the doctor.
 Mr. Samsa says, "I must get something to eat before this goes any farther."
 Mr. Samsa goes north.
 Herr Doctor says, "Hmmmm....what is this?"
 Gregor says, "What ARE YOU WRITING THERE!!!"
 Gregor says indignantly, "One can be temporarily incapacitated, but that's just the moment for remembering former services."
 Herr Doctor hears strains of Wagner coming from outside of the house
 the journalist continues to write down ...
 Grete says, "We've tried to look after ..it."
 Gregor looks nervously at the journalist
 Gregor smiles and drools
 The reporter writes feverishly in a notebook.
 Grete would like to pat on Gregor's shoulder but thinks he is disgusting
 An entrance: MichaelY portraying Mr. Samsa.
 Mr. Samsa comes in from the Kitchen surrounded by the smell of strudel.
 Mr. Samsa munches on a piece of bread.
 Mr. Samsa stands like a statue
 Gregor gags at the strudel smell from the kitchen
 Gregor goes upstairs. He seems preoccupied and doesn't look back.
 Herr Doctor wonders if Prague is currently Austrian, German or Czech
 the journalist merges with the shadows of the wall...
 Mr. Samsa sniffs, realizing he's left the toast on the stove.
 Mr. Samsa goes north.
 Mrs. Samsa thought that was The Shadow.
 Mrs. Samsa goes north.
 Grete goes upstairs. She seems preoccupied and doesn't look back.
 the journalist draws a sketchy map of the house and enters the exits...
 Herr Doctor goes north.
 the journalist goes upstairs. He seems preoccupied and doesn't look back.
 An entrance: RickS portraying Gregor.
 Gregor arrives and glances this way and that.
 An entrance: MonikaW portraying Grete.
 Grete arrives and glances this way and that.
 Gregor goes north.
 Grete says, "gregor I am sorry!"
 Grete goes north.
 An entrance: GeorgL portraying the journalist.
 the journalist arrives and glances this way and that.
 the journalist goes north.
 An entrance: TwylaM-S portraying Mrs. Samsa.

Mrs. Samsa has arrived.

Mrs. Samsa goes north.

An entrance: MichaelY portraying Mr. Samsa.

Mr. Samsa comes in from the Kitchen surrounded by the smell of strudel.

MichaelY puts Mr. Samsa (Costume) in the costume closet.

MichaelY goes home.

An entrance: TwylaM-S portraying Mrs. Samsa.

Mrs. Samsa comes in from the Kitchen surrounded by the smell of strudel.

An entrance: RickS portraying Gregor.

Gregor has arrived.

Mrs. Samsa says, "I sent Grete to play for you."

RickS puts Gregor (Costume) in the costume closet.

RickS removes Mr. Samsa (Costume) and easily slips the costume on.

Mr. Samsa moves into the sitting room.

Mrs. Samsa moves into the sitting room.

Ho comes in and shuts the door behind him.

Ho removes Gregor (Costume) and easily slips the costume on.

Gregor moves into the sitting room.

An entrance: Ho portraying Gregor.

Gregor has arrived.

An entrance: TwylaM-S portraying Mrs. Samsa.

Mrs. Samsa has arrived.

Gregor says, "Mother what will I doooo!"

Mrs. Samsa says, "Gregor, if I have to tell you again about the spitting ...

Well, son just try to control it."

Gregor nods vigorously

Mrs. Samsa says, "That's my sweet boy."

Mrs. Samsa pats Gregor gingerly on the antennae.

Gregor smiles and a load of fluid escapes from his mouth

Mrs. Samsa says, "Now come join the rest of the group. And mind the puddle."

Mrs. Samsa moves into the sitting room.

Gregor moves into the sitting room.

An entrance: Ho portraying Gregor.

Gregor comes in from the Kitchen surrounded by the smell of strudel.

Gregor moves into the sitting room.

An entrance: GeorgL portraying the journalist.

the journalist comes in from the Kitchen surrounded by the smell of strudel.

the journalist goes north.

An entrance: Ho portraying Gregor.

Gregor has arrived.

The Gregor costume disappears with a bright flash of light.

The costume for Gregor has just been returned to the closet.

Ho tries to drop Gregor (Costume) but fails!

Ho has disconnected.

Ho has disconnected.

An entrance: RickS portraying Mr. Samsa.

Mr. Samsa has arrived.

RickS puts Mr. Samsa (Costume) in the costume closet.

RickS removes an observer (Costume) and easily slips the costume on.
an observer moves into the sitting room.

An entrance: GeorgL portraying the journalist.

the journalist has arrived.

the journalist goes upstairs. He seems preoccupied and doesn't look back.

An entrance: TwylaM-S portraying Mrs. Samsa.

Mrs. Samsa has arrived.

The costume for the journalist has just been returned to the closet.

An entrance: RickS portraying an observer.

an observer has arrived.

RickS puts an observer (Costume) in the costume closet.

RickS goes upstairs. He seems preoccupied and doesn't look back.

GeorgL comes in and shuts the door behind him.

An entrance: LeeG portraying Herr Doctor.

Herr Doctor has arrived.

Mrs. Samsa says, "Hi Georg, Where's your costume?"

RickS comes in and shuts the door behind him.

The usher arrives to escort Ho out of ATHEMOO.

GeorgL [to Mrs.]: Samsa "I got lost and accidentally left the house!

RickS removes an observer (Costume) and easily slips the costume on.

GeorgL removes the journalist (Costume) and easily slips the costume on.

Mrs. Samsa says, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I'll be upstairs when you want to join me."

Mrs. Samsa goes upstairs. She seems preoccupied and doesn't look back.
the journalist goes upstairs. He seems preoccupied and doesn't look back.

An entrance: MonikaW portraying Grete.

Grete comes in from the Kitchen surrounded by the smell of strudel.

an observer says, "mmmm I love strudel"

Grete goes upstairs. She seems preoccupied and doesn't look back.

Herr Doctor moves into the sitting room.

RickS puts an observer (Costume) in the costume closet.

RickS removes Gregor (Costume) and easily slips the costume on.

An entrance: LeeG portraying Herr Doctor.

Herr Doctor has arrived.

Gregor says, "doctor come with me"

Gregor goes upstairs. He seems preoccupied and doesn't look back.

Herr Doctor follows Gregor

Herr Doctor goes upstairs. He seems preoccupied and doesn't look back.

An entrance: GeorgL portraying the journalist.

the journalist arrives and glances this way and that.

the journalist goes north.

An entrance: GeorgL portraying the journalist.

the journalist comes in from the Kitchen surrounded by the smell of strudel.

the journalist moves into the sitting room.

An entrance: GeorgL portraying the journalist.

the journalist has arrived.

the journalist goes upstairs. He seems preoccupied and doesn't look back.

An entrance: GeorgL portraying the journalist.

the journalist arrives and glances this way and that.

GeorgL puts the journalist (Costume) in the costume closet.

GeorgL goes out.

An entrance: MonikaW portraying Grete.

Grete arrives and glances this way and that.

An entrance: RickS portraying Gregor.

Gregor arrives and glances this way and that.

-- End: Saturday, February 1, 1997 12:25:59 pm ATHEMOO time (HST)

APPENDIX D. A PLACE FOR SOULS SCRIPT

[The space is defined in a chat-room/moo site as an island, an atoll, in peaceful sea, with a bright yellow sky, with dollops of white clouds. As people enter, they are welcomed by a message telling them they have found a rest-spot on the info-super-highway, or a calm island in on the cyber-sea.]

[Also welcoming them is the compu-spirit Voce, a masked creature that is the Ariel of the island. Voce, although played by a human is intended to be a bot in this world, coming out with one of several pre-programmed sayings to engage in silly, pointless dialogue. We also find here Trish, the woman who is very at home here, who also engages in conversation [chat] with the audience. She is not the center of focus, as none of the performers in the space should be.]

[Anne enters at this time. Voce treats her just like any other audience member.]

[Following her, Mark enters, and is also treated by Voce as any other audience member. Mark will be rather quiet ... for a while.]

[At the appropriate time, Carol enters the space, Trish hugs Carol, and Carol returns the hug to Trish.]

Trish:

Hello Carol, cyber-sister.

Carol:

Trish, hello. Why is it every time you say hi to me, you make us sound like we are Internet rebels.

Trish:

Aren't we?

Carol:

[laughs]

I didn't think so, but I could be wrong.

Trish:

[finishes comment with an audience member]

Carol:

[comments with audience member]

Seems crowded in here today.

Voce:

The Internet is growing rapidly. In fact, 20% of American households are connected to the Internet.

Trish:

Sorry, it cruises the Web looking for pointless pieces of trivia.

What are you doing on the 'Net today?

Carol:

I'm supposed to be working on my Master's thesis. Anything but that right now.

Trish:

What *are* you doing?

Carol:

Downloading Sesame Street lyrics to sing to Patrick.

Trish:

Your kid?

Carol:

No, my husband.

[laughing]

Don't ask.

Trish:

[laughs]

[laughs]

[laughs]

[laughs]

Carol:

Stop that.

If it wasn't for the Internet, I don't know what I would do to procrastinate.

Trish:

I used to read women's magazines.

I knew more about how I was supposed to orgasm, please a man, and bake those little cupcakes with witches' faces.

Thank the gods for the Internet.

Carol:

You know Cosmo is on line.

Trish:

PLEASE!!!

Carol:

www.cosmomag.com

Trish:

I'm afraid.

That's what the world needs. Insipid women's magazines at the touch of our keyboard.

Carol:

Yeah - like the world needed the Internet.

Sometimes I imagine huge vast libraries empty and people locked in dark rooms typing away.

What reason do I have to leave my house?

Trish:

There's sex.

Carol:

That's on the web too.

Besides, you forget I'm married and in grad school.

Sex and grad school rarely happen together.

Trish:

Have you tried singing O is for orgasm?

Voce:

Where do you want to go today? - Microsoft

Carol:

What?

Trish:

To the tune of C is for cookie?

[sings] O is for orgasm . . .

Carol:

Stop it.

[pause]

How's work going?

Trish:

Ten hours a day in a cube . . .

[sighs]

I feel like Dilbert, but my hair's not so funny.
I hope.

Carol:
Yeah, but just think you're making the word a safer place for . . .
for . . .
what do you do again?

Trish:
Edit code.
[Yawns.]
Boooooring . . . I'd rather be shopping, or dancing, or lying in the sun, or, hell, anything else.
[Sighs.]

Carol:
Well, you said it . . . not me.

Voce:
[to an audience member] Do you use the web to shop? Answer yes or no?

Carol:
Voce brings back the best little sayings.
[grins]

Trish:
[grins]
Yeah, Voce just downloads random thoughts from here and there.
I just have to edit out anything like 'How long do you like your schlong?'"
Otherwise it's pretty harmless.
Voce, hostess of The Atomic Atoll.

Carol:
The Atomic Atoll -- no place like it on the Net!
It needs music.

Trish:
Try singing. Or turn on the radio.

Carol:
[to audience member] Don't you think the place could be lightened up with some music?

Trish:
This is not a democracy.
The Atomic Atoll is my world, and I'll do with what I want.

Everyone make yourself at home, but don't forget who rules here with an Iron Keyboard.

[pause]

Besides you can't put music in a MOO. I tried.

Carol:

Anne?

Anne:

Carol?

Do I know you?

Carol:

Well, we used to chat here quite a bit.

Anne:

Sorry, I was doing something else.

Yes, Carol! How are you?

Carol:

I'm fine. How's everything been with you?

Anne:

Good, really good...

Really hectic, of course, since Samantha was born. I haven't been on line for about three months.

I am either trying to catch up on sleep or taking care of the house, or ...

Well, let's say I've been ... busy.

Carol:

Congrats on Samantha.

Anne:

Thank you.

She's my pride and joy.

Carol:

Wait until she's two.

Pride and joy turns into terror and disaster.

Trish:

Carol, don't be such a cynic. You'll scare her.

Voce:

[to Carol] Why There's a Long Wait for INS Petitions and Applications: You or someone you know may have been wondering: what happened to the petition or application I filed with the INS?

Carol:

Trish, can you turn off Voce?

Trish:

Voce, leave Carol alone.

Voce:

[to an audience member] So, what do you think about that?

Anne:

I was just going through the web, to find ideas to paint Sam's nursery.

Trish:

A nursery . . . you are a mother.

Anne:

I just realized, I have 325 messages sitting in email, and some nasty letters from my server about dumping them.

I'm sifting through them right now, while also trying to catch up on some newsgroups.

Trish:

Hurrah for multitasking.

[grins]

Anne:

[grins]

Carol:

Where's Samantha?

Anne:

She's asleep. She's an angle.

Carol:

She's an angle? Like thirty degrees or what? A right angle?

[giggles]

Anne:

[sighs]

I meant angel.

Typo. :-/

Trish:
Who's an angle?

Anne:
My daughter.

Trish:
How old is she?

Anne:
9 weeks.

Carol:
Does she still have the new baby smell?

Anne:
[smiles]
Yes, she does.
I'm going to be coming in and out. I need to sift through my email.

Carol:
Trish, do you have any children?

Trish:
No, I don't have children.
Jeanette and I have talked about adoption.

Carol:
Jeanette?

Trish:
My lover.

Carol:
How long have I been coming here, to unwind, to chat?
I didn't even know you were a lesbian.

Trish:
Does that bother you?

Voce:
Lesbian existence comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life. It is also a direct or indirect attack on the male right of access to women.

Carol:

Who said that?

Trish:

Adrienne Rich, a poet. Does it bother you?

Carol:

Why would it bother me?

[pause]

I mean, look, here we are meeting in the middle of a cyber-world. Why should your sexuality be an issue?

Trish:

Sometimes it wigs people out.

Voce:

(to an audience member) So, what do you think of that?

What? I can't hear you?

You there, are you on line?

Hello?

Trish:

Voce, give them a break – not everyone wants to talk.

[to the audience member] I'm sorry.

Carol, so what is your master's thesis on?

Carol:

Cajun influences on contemporary popular music.

Trish:

Sounds . . . interesting.

Carol:

Yeah it is, although you seem doubtful.

Trish:

Well . . . I guess I don't know much about it. Are there a lot of Cajun influences?

Carol:

Skip it. At this point the last thing I want to do is talk about that.

[grins]

You're off the hook.

Voce:

[to Mark] So, what do you think about making me cum till the cows home, Stud!

Trish:

VOCE!!!

[to Mark] I am so sorry, I didn't know that was in her vocabulary.

Mark:

[laughs]

Sorry Voce, I only do cyber-sex with my wife! I'm cyber-faithful.

[grins]

Carol:

I think cyber sex would be weird. I mean -- does it compare?

Mark:

Compare to what?

Carol:

The real thing?

Mark:

Carol, it's not quite the same thing.

[winks]

[gives a wicked laugh]

But, with me and my wife, we had cyber-sex before we first had the other kind.

Carol:

Really?

Mark:

I met my wife on line.

Trish:

Romance in the 'Net.

Carol:

It's common.

Ann Landers wrote a whole article on how people cheat on each other on the Net.

Trish:

She's written several, including one about a man who killed his wife because of a cyber-affair.

Carol:

I mean, some people say that cyberspace is actually severing human contact.

Mark:

What about the people on the other side?

Voce:

Hey, people are sometimes over-rated.

Mark:

I mean, we are a huge world, and there is so many people out there, so many points of view. In the Net you can reach out and find someone who has the same interests as you.

Trish:

I-hate-Barney newsgroups abound.

Carol:

Hey! My son loves Barney!

Mark:

It's an amazing world in here.

[He taps on his computer screen.]

Carol:

How did you meet your wife?

Mark:

Internet Sex Room

Carol:

You're kidding!

Trish:

Seriously?

Mark:

Yes, IRC Channel - Serious Sex Chat Only!

Carol:

A story to tell your grandkids.

Mark:

She was the one who didn't say anything.

I sent her a whispered message: "What's a nice girl like you doing in a smut palace like this?"

Trish:

Love at first message?

Mark:

Something like that.

We never would have met -- she lives in Washington D.C.

Carol:

Where do you live?

Mark:

Anchorage, Alaska.

Trish:

Seriously?

Mark:

For the time being.

Nick:

[enters]

Carol:

How you keep in contact?

Mark:

Lots of email. A couple of phone calls here and there.

Tides me over until we see each other again.

Carol:

When's that?

Mark:

Two more months, three weeks, four days

Trish:

And how many hours?

Mark:

Six hours, 32 minutes. If the airplane isn't delayed.

Carol:

Amazing.

Mark:

We couldn't survive without the Internet. I spend two hours on line with her a night.
It's like being there.

Carol:
A way of staying connected?

Trish:
Reach out and e-touch someone.

Mark:
Like that.
For Valentine's Day, we each cooked a small meal and ate at the computer screen.
Every Saturday night, we light candles and have a date.

Trish:
I think I am going to cry.

Mark:
We pass e-wine glasses back and forth.

Carol:
And this marriage works?

Mark:
We stay connected.
Little words of encouragement from a long way away, can do a lot to keep two people together.

Carol:
I e-mail my husband once in awhile at work. ;-)

Mark:
There is nothing like a little dirty email to make a day go by.

Carol:
[Nods in a knowing way.]
Oh yeah.

Trish:
Look, being in the computer industry, I never thought I would say this ...
I think you people spend too much time on the computer.
Aren't there 12-step programs for people like you?

Carol:
I don't have a problem.
Mark, do you?

Mark:
NO! BACK AWAY FROM THE COMPUTER!
NO ONE WILL GET HURT.

Carol:
A computer is the phone of the next century.

Trish:
And we are all just a bunch a teenagers during telephone hour.

Mark:
And chat rooms are just electronic party lines.

Carol:
History is repeating itself.

Mark:
My wife calls the Internet, a net of threads that interconnect souls around the world.
I mean, in the end, that's all this is.
How could the three of us meet otherwise?

Carol:
Good point.

Trish:
But does it replace meeting people in the real world?

Mark:
This isn't the real world?

Trish:
Well, Mark ... no, it isn't.

Nick:
Can anyone join in this little chat?

Mark:
Hello Nick.

[to Trish] It's part of the world . . . part of it that allows us to do things we can never imagine out there.

And remember, whenever I am in here, I am still out here.

Trish:

But Mark, there is a sense of a party, some sort of masquerade in here. I mean, you don't if I am really Trish, if I am really a woman, if I am anything . . . I could be a bot, like Voce.

Voce:

Voce is Italian for Voice.

Mark:

You could be . . . Then of course on the "outside" . . . People are not always what they seem either – living in closets, living lies.

Trish:

True...

On the other hand, there is nothing real in here.

Nick:

Yeah, the potential for deceit is so much greater. There is less chance at being caught.

Carol:

But people lie in the real world.

Nick:

But it's easier here. And besides, relationships forged in the net are fragile.

Mark:

But you missed the story about meeting my wife.

Nick:

For every story of a great relationship on the net, there are 3,000 terrible stories. People being hurt, or ripped off. I have never heard a story of a good relationship.

Mark:

Have you looked?

Nick:

Well, no.

Carol:

And anyway, if the Internet is part of the reality on the outside . . .

Nick:

Is it? Or is it its own reality?

I still think it's easier to live a life of deceit when the truth can be hidden so well.

Carol:

Maybe on the surface, but the soul, the truth is difficult to hide.

A bigot is just a bigot; hate is too hard to hide online. It slips.

Nick:

I don't think so.

Words are able to take on a life of themselves, create a world of their own.

Books do it, and these words do it.

I am creating a Nick for you.

Carol:

Which isn't the Nick at the terminal?

Nick:

Maybe not. You'll never know the difference.

Trish:

What's different?

Nick:

It doesn't matter -- it's different.

Here I am a character, portraying myself as someone else.

It's a drama, a play -- you can never know the reality.

Carol:

But we are real people.

Nick:

I don't think so.

Carol:

No, I'm pretty sure we are.

And I'm quite sure I am.

Nick:

No, you are a portrayal, a shadow of a real person projected through the screen.

Mark:

But there are relationships that ...

Nick:

Listen, if you are trying to say that the relationship made by two people here, in a cyber-world is something to be compared to two people on the outside . . .

That's wrong. There has to be something to bond two humans together.

Carol:

What's that in the "real world?"

Nick:

A touch.

Trish:

That's true, the net can be cold to the touch.

Nick:

A look between two eyes, windows to the soul.

Without that connection, I think there's something hollow about it.

Carol:

Only through sight, can two souls be connected?

Nick:

[Nods.]

Carol:

What about blind people?

Nick:

They do have a difficult time trusting.

They have to rely on someone else.

Carol:

I'm not sure that I believe that.

Trish:

[to Mark] Did you know you were with your wife over the Internet?

Mark:

Yes, of course.

Trish:

But then describe when you first saw each other...
Was there another level of connection?

Mark:

Are you asking if the relationship was different after we met?

Trish:

[Nods.]

Mark:

Yes, it was.

Trish:

So, there is something to the connection that way.

Mark:

Yeah, but it doesn't underplay the value of the Internet relationship.

Nick:

I am saying that every relationship on the Internet runs a huge chance of ringing hollow. A series of ships passing by in the night, and that's it.

Mark:

But the proof I have is real. My relationship is real.

Carol:

[at the same time] Isn't that the case with every relationship, though, not just the ones on the Internet?

Nick:

[to Mark]Is it? I don't know that that relationship is real, that you are real, that your wife is real.

Anne:

Carol . . .

Carol:

Anne, I'm over here. We're philosophizing.

Nick:

Sitting under the cyber-tree, wondering about the existence of us.

[long pause]

Trish:

Anne what is it?

Anne:

When I first found out I was pregnant, I found a mailing list for pregnant women. I mean, when you're pregnant all you want to do is talk about it, and people in my life got pretty sick of me.

[pause]

Carol:

Anne?

Anne:

Anyway, I met this woman named Lisa on line . . .
We had so much in common. I mean, you ever find someone like that on the Net?

Carol:

I have found people I have bonded with. Obviously Mark has.

[grins at Mark]

Probably we all have. Why?

Anne:

She had tried several times to have a child. And then she finally got pregnant. We would stay up to three in the morning, chatting.

Trish:

Three in the morning? You people need to get a life off the computer.
[grins]

Anne:

Then, Samantha was born, and I was off line, just trying to catch up on life . . .
And then I come back, and I have all these messages.
And there was this message titled . . .

Voce:

STILL UPSET ABOUT LISA.

Anne:

And then I was struck with this sense of terror. I knew then she lost her baby.
And I thought, god, this is so terrible. Here I was, with my beautiful child, and she lost hers.

Carol:

Anne, I'm so sorry to hear that.

Trish:

Anne, that's terrible.

Mark:

Poor Lisa. Anne I'm sorry.

Anne:

No, you don't understand.

I scrolled through the messages from Lisa, and they said . . .

Voce:

I WAS SUPPOSED TO GO IN TODAY FOR THE C-SECTION, BUT THERE WAS A STORM. WE RESCHEDULED IT FOR TOMORROW. TOMORROW NIGHT I WILL HOLD MY BABY IN MY ARMS.

Anne:

And then . . .

Voce:

THE STORM IS LETTING UP. IT'S FOUR IN THE MORNING, AND I CAN'T SLEEP. I JUST SIT HERE IN FRONT OF THE COMPUTER AND REST MY ARM UNDER MY BELLY. AND I SING TO MY LITTLE BABY. SING TO IT, AND MY I CAN FEEL MY BABY ROCKING INSIDE ME.

Anne:

Right before she left to the hospital . . .

Voce:

RICHARD IS PULLING THE CAR AROUND! THIS IS IT! I JUST WANTED TO TELL EVERYONE THANK YOU FOR THE SUPPORT! JUST HOURS AWAY!!!!

Anne:

And one message just for me . . .

Voce:

ANNE, I KNOW THAT YOU ARE OFF LINE RIGHT NOW BECAUSE YOU ARE ENJOYING YOUR BABY. I'M ON MY WAY!! YOU'LL HAVE TO EMAIL ME WHEN YOU GET A SECOND. WE'LL HAVE TO MAIL EACH OTHER PICTURES. BLESSINGS, CHILDREN ARE BLESSINGS.

Anne:

And then . . .

Voce:

THIS IS LISA'S SISTER. THERE WERE COMPLICATIONS IN THE C-SECTION. FOR HALF A MINUTE, LISA GOT TO HOLD HER DAUGHTER. THEN SHE PASSED AWAY. LISA DIED ON THE OPERATING ROOM TABLE. I KNOW HOW MUCH THIS LIST MEANT TO HER. I JUST WANTED YOU ALL TO KNOW.

Anne:

And it was like that – how can someone I never knew, make me feel so terrible. How can the loss of someone I never met . . .

[pause]

Carol:

I can't type . . . I'm crying.

[longer pause]

Trish:

Anne, are you all right?

Anne:

Yeah.

Anyway, the rest of the postings were about who in the list lived near New York. They all got together for her funeral.

They made a small quilt for the baby, and presented it to Lisa's husband, and his daughter.

I wish I could have been there.

[pause]

I wish it never happened.

Nick:

Anne, I am so sorry. I don't know what to say.

Anne:

I'm just numb.

That could have been me.

I mean, here I am with Samantha, and Lisa's baby has no mother.

[exits]

Trish:

Anne . . .

[pause]

Carol:

Anne . . .

Trish:

She's off line.

She's gone.

Mark:

I feel a little more human for having cried tonight.

Carol:

Join the club.

Trish:

I need to go . . .

Carol:

Where are you going?

Trish:

I just need to go.

Carol, email me sometime.

Carol:

I will.

Trish:

Take good care of your son.

Carol:

I will.

[Hugs Trish.]

Trish:

[Exits]

Mark:

I guess I should go . . . I need to finish a spreadsheet for work. They're expecting it by this morning.

See ya Nick.

[pause]

Nick?

Nick:

I'm right here.

Mark:

Are you okay?

Nick:

Me, yeah, I'm fine. Just thinking . . .

Carol:

About what?

Nick:

What just happened.

Carol:

What just happened?

Nick:

Was that real?

Carol:

I think so.

Real enough, anyway.

Nick:

Real enough?

Is there such a thing?

Carol:

You can drive yourself crazy asking if life is a dream, or is a dream life?

We have to grab onto "real enoughs".

My soul was touched. Sometimes that's all we have.

Nick:

Real enough? Really?

Mark:

Is that a relationship?

Nick:

I don't know. Maybe.

[shrugs]

I mean, I have a kid, and a wife. If she ever died...

But then again maybe not. I'm not sure I'm convinced.

Carol:

Nick, anyplace where people can come together, people will support, love and cherish each other.

Nick:
Or screw each other up.

Carol:
We're only human.

Nick:
Yeah, only human.

Mark:
Bye Nick.
Bye Carol.

Carol:
See you, Mark.

Mark:
See you.
Are you going to be all right?

Carol:
Me?

Mark:
[Nods.]

Carol:
[smiles]
Yeah, I'll be fine.

Mark:
[Exits.]

Nick:
Bye Carol. It's been ... interesting.
[Exits.]

Carol:
[to an audience member] So, this is it, isn't it.
People just chatting away.
[to another audience member] So, what are you?

[laughs]

I mean, what do you do?

[Starts a conversation with audience member, until she excuses herself to go look after her son.]

Voce:

All it takes is a keyboard, a modem and a person on the other end, to reach out and touch someone.

Where do you want to go?

Who do you want to touch?

APPENDIX E. EXCERPT FROM FIRST PERFORMANCE OF A PLACE FOR SOULS

These are logs lifted directly from the performance. In keeping with a feeling of "being there" (and at some personal requests), I have included all the typos and so forth, for your enjoyment.

Those heading east are going to the Halcyon Atoll; those heading south are going to the Tranquil Atoll; those going in are heading into the Tiki Hut; and those going to the lagoon are traveling to the Serene Lagoon. Without further ado ...

Welcome to the Atomic Atoll!

-- Start: Tuesday, March 18, 1997 9:56:32 am ATHEMOO time (HST)

TwylaM-S turns Coconut Recorder on.

TwylaM-S vanishes with a bright flash and puff of smoke! After her departure you feel a strange void where her warm presence used to be.

Theodora's_Guest teleports in

The usher arrives to remove Theodora's_Guest.

a puff of smoke, an unraveling of cape, RickS appears.

RickS sits down on the beach blanket.

RickS gets up from the beach blanket.

a puff of smoke, a flap of cape, RickS teleports out.

a puff of smoke, an unraveling of cape, RickS appears.

The air next to you begins to glow, and SteveS beams in.

RickS claps

RickS exclaims, "hey Steve!"

RickS sits down on the beach blanket.

SteveS says, "Thought I'd piggy-back and join you."

RickS exclaims, "loved your scene in Grete's bedroom. Classic!"

SteveS exclaims, "Thanks!"
SteveS bows...

RickS says, "mmm serene lagoon. Yhink I'll have a peek"

RickS gets up from the beach blanket.

RickS leaves for the lagoon.

SteveS sits down in the sand.

You hear the distant sound of trumpets blaring. As the fanfare grows louder, you feel the air around you begin to grow warmer. Finally, in grand style TwylaM-S appears beside you.

SteveG teleports in

TwylaM-S steps into the Editing Room and will not hear what you say unless you send a page.

Trish arrives smelling of delicate fragrant flowers and spreading a feeling of peace and comfort all around her.

Trish sits down on the beach blanket.

RickS has arrived.

NinaLN teleports in

RickS sits down on the beach blanket.

Trish invites all to have a seat :-)

RickS says, "Hi Trish"

SteveG sits down on the beach blanket.

JayC teleports in

TwylaM-S steps out of the Editing room and can now hear all that is said.

LeeG teleports in

Trish says, "and don't forget that refreshments are available from the Tiki Hut"
TwylaM-S drops A Place for Souls Program.

NinaLN sit chair

SteveG gets up from the beach blanket.

SteveG takes A Place for Souls Program.

GeorgL teleports in

NinaLN sits down on a beach chair.

Anneke teleports in

GeorgL exclaims, "Hi Twyla! There you are!"

NinaLN gets up from a beach chair.

NinaLN goes in.

Anneke looking for a piece of shade

Trish says, "welcome to the Atomic Atoll, breath the salty sea air"

RickS says, "mmmm ahhhhh"

CatH teleports in

Trish waves to Cat, welcome

Anneke breathes deeply

TwylaM-S says, "Hi Cat."

JayC sits on beach blanket

NinaLN has arrived.

CatH says, "Nice... nice..."

NinaLN sits down on a beach chair.

Trish looks around, so nice to see so many friends here on a warm sunny day

NinaLN picks up her Pina Colada and takes a sip.

Trish asks, "hey everyone, why not have a seat?"

Trish says, "to list the seats here, type @seats"

CatH sits down on a beach chair.

Trish says, "and don't forget that lovely refreshments from the hut are also available"

LeeG sits down in the sand.

Anneke relaxes on a beach blanket in the shade

LeeG gets up off the sand.

RickS pulls a blade of grass and puts it in his mouth.

NinaLN chugs about half her Pina Colada.

NinaLN exclaims, "Tasty!"

Anneke is too lazy to get y pup for a drink

RickS gets up from the beach blanket.

RickS goes in.

TwylaM-S blinks lazily in the morning sun ...

NinaLN upends her Pina Colada and finishes it off.

GeorgL buries his toes in the sand...

TwylaM-S okay the morning - ish sun ... in some places

CatH gets up from a beach chair.

Uh oh... That Pina Colada of NinaLN's seems to have been alcoholic.

NinaLN puts on a large beach hat to protect herself from the sun.

SteveS wriggles deep in and settles his--self--into the sand.

RickS has arrived.

RickS sits down on the beach blanket.
RickS takes a mango juice from the Tiki Hut.

RickS takes a drink from his mango juice.

Nick wanders in casually.

Trish stretches, exhales loudly, grins at all her friends

NinaLN tries to slap herself and misses.

SteveG asks, "I forgot. What does (recording) mean--what do I do?"

You suddenly smell something that reminds you of a fresh brewed coffee. Monika is coming in slowly, trying not to spill her coffee.

Trish [to steve]: oh, it just means that we are recording this performance for historical reasons :-)

SteveS wonders at the odd mixture of sea air and coffee...

NinaLN picks her hat up from the sand, where it fell after she tried to hit herself.

MichaelT teleports in

MonikaW sits down on the beach blanket.

RickS picks up his mango juice and takes a sip.

NinaLN's eyes defocus a bit.

Trish waves at nina

Voce has connected.

Trish grins at rick

NinaLN sees movement somewhere, and groggily waves back.

RickS tastes the rum in his mango juice

RickS says, "this is goooood"

RickS chugs about half his mango juice.

SteveG asks, "Trish, how do you do the [to Juli] brackeet-thing?"
JayC closes eyes

RickS smiles.

NinaLN has a complex conversation with herself.

Trish [to SteveG]: type to juli

JayC listens to the waves.

RickS [to Trish]: din't know that

SteveG [to Trish]: like this?

RickS upends his mango juice and finishes it off.

MonikaW begins to erelax sitting in the smoothing sand

NinaLN mumbles something about cockatoos who can't keep secrets.

BorisK teleports in

Uh oh... That mango juice of RickS's seems to have been alcoholic.

Trish looks around, waving waving, inhaling the negative ions from the sea

CatH asks, "How do you eat or drink?"

RickS stands up, sways, eyes himself warily and says, "I don't trust you!"

MonikaW grins at Lee

NinaLN tries desperately to hug herself.

GeorgL grins in slowmo.

Trish grins at nina

MonikaW waves at Cat - sorry havnt seen him before

LeeG hugs nina

Trish introduces Monika to Cat, an old athemoo friend

NinaLN giggles, Ooooowaaa....

BorisK puts an extra portion of iodinated salt on his egg

MonikaW knows Cat!

Anne arrives looking a little tired, as if from the kinds of late nights only new parents understand.

RickS tries to stand up but can't quite seem to manage it.

RickS paws the sand

Anne waves all around

NinaLN recovers from the effects of her Pina Colada.

Anneke hugs nina

Anneke waves to anne

LeeG says, "I knew Rich couldn't hold his pina coladas"

You hear the sounds of Alaskan wildlife surround you, then suddenly realize that beside you has appeared Mark, King of the Alaskan Business Community.

RickS waves.

NinaLN smiles, "Wow, some kick to those drinks."

Trish [to CatH]: no, it's take whatever from tiki hut

CatH says, "Is that a dolphin or a really big pina colada"

Mark looks around.

Carol arrives in search of something better to do than her Thesis.

RickS's eyes defocus a bit.

Trish says, "hello carol, cybersister"

Carol says, "Trish , hello"

LeeG [to Carol]: it's strange how art imitates life

Carol asks, "Why is it every time you say hi to me you make us sound like internet relbells?"

Anneke [to Carol]: you've come to the right place!

Trish asks, "Aren't we?"

RickS mumbles something about cockatoos who can't keep secrets.

Carol waves at Lee and Anneke

Trish [to CatH]: did you get something to eat, i may have had the wrong syntax there

Voce says, "Welcome everyone to the most beautiful place you will ever find"

GeorgL exclaims, "Hi Voce!"

Carol laughs thinking of her being a rebel

GeorgL grins at Voce.

Voce says, "Greetings! GeorgL..."

Anneke [to cacto]: cockatoo tell us the secrets

Carol looks around

Carol [to LeeG]: Hi Lee everything ok with you this eve?

JayC ponders

RickS tries desperately to hug himself.

RickS exclaims, "Hip hip Mango!"

Carol [to LeeG]: hope its ever where you are

Voce exclaims, "Tis I the insolent yet loveable Voce!!"

Carol hugs Rick helping him

Voce exclaims, "Someone help Rick!!"

LeeG [to Carol]: Better than yesterday and better than the day before

Trish thinks Rick should have another drink

GeorgL [to RickS]: Having a god er good time?

Anneke [to RickS]: you just want hugs from us !!!! hugs him

Carol [to LeeG]: uusps typo: eve

Trish hugs RickS.

RickS says, "thanks Car, I'll just sit down a while"

SteveS greets Voce in pseudo-Latin: "Sotto, Voce!"

GeorgL hugs Rick.

Carol [to Trish]: Seems crowded in here today

Trish nods

Carol grins at Lee

Trish invites all to have a seat

RickS recovers from the effects of his mango juice.

Voce says, "And the same to you sir!! jdi79873930;:/,,"

JayC sits down in the sand.

CatH sits down in the sand.

Voce says, "The Internet is growing rapidly. In fact, 20% of American households are connected to the Internet."

Trish says, "Sorry, Voce cruises the WEb looking for pointless pieces of trivia."

Carol says, "well"

Trish asks, "What are you doing Carol?"

Voce exclaims, "And I find them everywhere! My lot in this life!"

Carol says, "downloading sesame street lyrics to sing to patrick"

Trish asks, "Your kid?"

GeorgL sighs at Sesame street...

Carol says, "No my husband"

Trish laughs

Carol laughs

Trish lol

LeeG says, "I have to admit it. I love Be...Bert and Ernie"

Trish LOL

CatH says, "swish"

Carol says, "if it wasnt for the Internet I dont know what I would do to procrastinate"

Voce says, "I will hum a few bars from the hit show Miami Vice..."

BorisK asks, "does anybody now the telephone sketch, the one with the banana?"

TwylaM-S [to CatH]: Swish?

Trish says, "I used to read women's magazines."

GeorgL [to LeeG]: I have always been afraid of Sesame Street.

Trish says, "Of course, then I knew more about how I was supposed to orgasm."

Trish says, "Thank the gods for the INternet"

Trish grins

LeeG [to TwylaM-S]: I think Cat is expressing his insecurity

Carol says, "You know Cosmo is on line at www.cosmomag.com"

Trish says, "Whooppee -- insipid women's magazines at the touch of our keyboards"

Voce exclaims, "Gadzooks! Is that a Tie Fighter? Where is George Lucas?!!!"

CatH says, "The sea...goes swish"

TwylaM-S exclams, "ooooooooohhhh ... Hurray Cosmo!"

Carol says, "yeah like the world needed the Internet"

Carol looks around

TwylaM-S [to LeeG]: No I think it's Beat poetry

Carol asks, "what reason do I have to leave my house?"

GeorgL [to Voce]: Did you notice that my initials are GL just like George Lucas?

Trish says, "There's sex "

Trish giggles

Carol hms

Carol says, "thats on the web too"

Voce says, "Where do you want to go today? - Microsoft"

JayC says, "A Place for Souls"

Trish says, "Have you tried singing O is for Orgasm? Carol, it'll do wonders for your sex life"

LeeG says, "Somebody give ..Cat a rubber ducky"

Carol says, "besides you forget I m married and in grad school"

TwylaM-S smiles at Jay...

Carol says, "sex and grad schol rarely happen together"

Carol asks, "what?"

Nick exits

Trish says, "To the tune of C is for Cookie"

SteveG says, "or sex and marriage...."

Trish sings O is for ORGASM

Carol covers her ears

BorisK says, "joins in"

Trish sings really LOUD

Carol says, "stop it"

BorisK no, joins in

GeorgL puts some sand in his ears.

Trish sighs happily

Trish is still humming

Carol tries to follow Georgs suggestions

Carol says, "uuahg"

BorisK notices people hissing at him, remains silent

Voce says, "The great Voce notices all initials and all coincidences"

Carol [to Trish]: Hows work going?

JayC asks, "What is the soul of the Internet?"

GeorgL offers to help Craol.

MichaelT is lost in his english dictionnary

Trish says, "ick, Ten hours a day in a cube...."

Trish sighs loudly

Trish stretches languidly

BorisK [to GeorgL]: creol?

GeorgL sympathises with the German speakers.

Carol tries to find her dictionary but there is only thesis stuff on the table

TwylaM-S [to JayC]: It's the souls of the people who make it up. Like everything else.

Trish grins at Georg

RickS tries not to stare at Trish

TwylaM-S [to JayC]: I think.

Trish leans at Rick playfully

Carol [to Trish]: "yeah but just think you're making the world a safer place for

GeorgL [to TwylaM-S]: ...and therefore I am.

Carol asks, "what do you do again?"

JayC says, "Hmmm..."

Trish says, "Edit code"

Trish yawns

Trish says, "Booooooring...I'd rather be shopping, or dancing or HELL, anything else"

Trish sighs

Anneke [to MichaelT]: wünscht dir ein drink (sorry for my german)

LeeG [to GeorgL]: You forgot the I think part

Carol [to Trish]: "well you said it ... not me

Voce asks, "to [an audience member] Do you use the web to shop? Answer yes or no?"

TwylaM-S [to Trish]: Edit code? I always thought that'd be a cool job ... but maybe any job is boring...

Carol says, "voce brings back the best little sayings"

GeorgL [to LeeG]: Wanna hear a Descartes joke?

RickS I have but not often.

CatH asks, "shall we bury the bot in the sand??"

Carol grins

MichaelT [to Anneke]: where can i get one?

Trish says, "Voce, hostess of The Atomic Atoll"

Trish [to TwylaM-S]: it's a job, has it's perks but not many :-)

Anneke says, "an audience member syas no"

Voce says, "Please help yourself at the Tiki Hut, there are many great drinks to refresh you and snacks to nibble on"

LeeG [to GeorgL]: Is that the one with the farmer's daughter?

Carol looks around enjoyinglee

Carol says, "Thea Atomic Atoll - no place like it on the Net"

Carol says, "it needs music"

GeorgL [to LeeG]: No with the bar!

Anneke says, "in the tittiki bar I heard"

CatH [to Voce]: what are they?

Trish says, "Try singing. Or, turn on the radio, maybe one day I'll set this place up to have music"

Trish could use her programming skills on that one

TwylaM-S wonders what the Tiki Hut offered Anneke ...

Anneke strolls to the bar hoping michael will koin h(join her

Voce asks, "What are what?"

LeeG likes being enjoyed by Carol

JayC says, "I brought a guitar"

Carol wanders around a little

Carol asks, "anne?"

CatH says, "the wave sounds are great"

GeorgL grins at Twyla over all those people.

Carol grins at lee and her typos

NinaLN grins, "My radio is playing Wagner."

JayC opens case

JayC rooms guitar

TwylaM-S smiles back at lovely Georg...

MichaelT has taken a cup of wine from Tiki hut and begins to feel comfortable

Carol wants to hear Jays guitar

Shakespeare's_Guest teleports in

Voce grinning and soaking up the warm sun

CatH says, "Wagner on the Beach"

GeorgL [to NinaLN]: Oh which piece?

Anneke orders an beko (berenburg coke, dutch speciality

Carol [to Anne]: Hi Anne

JayC asks, "any requests?"

NinaLN [to GeorgL]: Don't know--just very vocal and militarish.
Anne exclaims, "Hi CArol!"

Trish looks at Anne

Trish grins at Anne

GeorgL [to NinaLN]: Too bad I really loke Parsifal, though.

Anne asks, "I'm sorry, do I know you?"

Voce says, "May I hum a tune for anyone? I am programmed extensively in many areas"

Carol [to Anne]: Hows everything been with you?

JayC hands guitar to TwylaM-S

GeorgL [to Voce]: Would you hum Hey Jude for me?

JayC has disconnected.

Carol [to Anne]: we used to chat here quite a bit, remember?

Anne says, "Good ... really hectic of course, since SAmantha was born. I haven't been online for about three months."

Voce says, "H-m-m-m"

Anneke says, "hey jude"

Anne asks, "Yes, Carol, sorry I'm distracted. How are you?"

Trish coos at the mention of the baby

RickS says, "Seeing what is small is called enlightenment - Lao Tzu"

Carol says, "I am fine. Congrats on Samatha"

Anne says, "I'm either trying to catch up on sleep or taking care of the house, or ... just busy."

Trish joins Carol in teh congratulations

Anne exclaims, "Thank you, she's my pride and joy!"

Carol feels for Anne being busy like this

Carol [to Anne]: wait until shes two - pride and joy turns into terror and disaster
Anne thanks Carol deeply.

Trish [to Carol]: don't be such a cynic. You'll scare her

Anneke [to Anne]: are you taking care of yourself as well?

Trish scowls at carol with a grin

Anne [to Anneke]: Trying to. It's not easy.

BorisK takes a Cuba Libre from the Tiki Hut.

BorisK takes a drink from his Cuba Libre.

Voce asks, "Carol, Why There's a Long Wait for INS Petitions and Applications: You or someone you know may have been wondering: what happened to the petition or application I filed with the INS?"

GeorgL grins a little.

Anne [to Carol]: That's what everyone seems to say.

Carol wonders if Trish relly know about a 2 year old toddler

Trish . o O (lots of my best friends have kids)

Carol . o O (own kids are differnt to friends kids)

Anne didn't want to start a fight...

GeorgL [to Anneke]: Have you learned German ins school?

Carol knwos what she speaks of

BorisK picks up his Cuba Libre and takes a sip.

Carol [to Anne]: So what are you doing on the net today?

Anneke [to anyone]: what does . o) 0 stand for?

Anneke [to GeorgL]: yes in the netherlands

Trish says, "Voce, leave Carol alone"

Voce toGeorgL" So, what do you think about that?

Carol [to Anneke]: this is what thinking people have

Anne [to Anneke]: it's like the thought bubbles on comics.

GeorgL [to Voce]: You must hum louder. I cant hear you!

BorisK chugs about half his Cuba Libre.

RickS . o O (...song and make it be eh eh terrrrr)

Anneke thanks people for explaining

BorisK suggests that GeorgL takes the sand out of his ears

Voce says, "Ok you asked for it...no wait, I will do it telepathicly..."

GeorgL [to BorisK]: Oh, yes! Of course! Sorry...

Trish [to TwylaM-S]: did George Lucas really promise to come today?

Anne says, "I was just going through the web to find ideas to paint Sam's nursery."

JayC gets up off the sand.

The usher arrives to escort JayC out of ATHEMOO.

BorisK upends his Cuba Libre and finishes it off.

Carol [to Trish]: can you turn off voce

GeorgL shakes his head in both directions ...

Trish gives Voce the stink eye, now leave carol alone

TwylaM-S says, "That's what he said ... Could you imagine George Lucas? ..."

GeorgL raises the beach level by one metre.

Voce notices sand flying in both directions

Uh oh... That Cuba Libre of BorisK's seems to have been alcoholic.

GeorgL [to TwylaM-S]: No really?

BorisK thankfully brushes some sand out of his hair

Carol laughs at sams nursery idea - ann must have a lot of time to do that

Anneke exclaims, "shelter !!!"

BorisK's eyes defocus a bit.

Trish wonders when she'll ever get to finish going thru her old email, do y'all have that problem

Anne says, "I just realized I have 325 messages sitting in email and some nasty letters from my server about dumping them."

Carol feels for anne again

CatH turns over

Anne says, "I'm sifting through them right now, while also trying to catch up on some newsgroups."

Trish exclaims, "hurrah for multitasking!"

GeorgL feels Carol a for Carol...

Anne grins.

Trish tosses some sunscreen to Cat

Trish grins

BorisK tries to stand up but can't quite seem to manage it.

Anneke wlalks to the sea for a refreshing dip

Voce asks, "May I serve someone a drink? Perhaps Mango Juice or my specialty Chips on the Rocks?"

RickS says, "ftp em into ur HD"

BorisK laughs

RickS says, "The Mango juice crries a wallop"

Voce exclaims, "So do I!!"

CatH walks to the water and starts to swim

Carol asks, "where is samantha?"

BorisK tries to stand up but can't quite seem to manage it.

Anne says, "She's asleep. She's an angle."
Trish giggles

Shakespeare's_Guest helps Boris up while laughing

Voce tsking

Carol asks, "she is an angle? Like 30 degrees or what? a right angle?"

RickS says, "Hypotenuse"

Trish lol

BorisK says, "notices people are looking at him"

Anne says, "I meant angel. Sorry typo. :-/"

BorisK no, notices people are looking at him

Anne blushes.

Trish raises one eyebrow

BorisK mumbles something about cockatoos who can't keep secrets.

Anne [to Trish]: My daughter.

Trish asks, "ah, How old is she?"

Anne says, "9 weeks."

Voce looking up at Death Star

Trish starts to coo again

Carol grins cynical

Carol tries to find a ruler

Anneke is getting curious about those secrets of cockatoos

Voce . o O (wonder if George Lucas knows how close they are)

Trish ducks

Anne smiles...

Carol asks, "does she still have the new baby smell?"

CatH cat plays with the dolphin

BorisK tries to slap himself and misses.

Anne emote smiles warmly

GeorgL does his Darth Vader oimpression.

BorisK [to Anneke]: Just have a Cuba Libre yourself and you'll all about cockatoos ...

Trish laughs at Georg

Anneke curious enough to interupt her swin, eh swim

Anne says, "Yes, she does."

GeorgL has a Cockney accent today.

Carol [to Trish]: do you have any children?

Shakespeare's_Guest laughs at Boris

Anneke [to BorisK]: i'll have my second beko thank you

Anne exclaims, "I'm going to be coming in and out. I ned to sift through my email. Aaahhh!!!!"

Trish nope, I don't have children, although Jeanette and I have talked about adoption

Carol feels fo anne again :)

BorisK recovers from the effects of his Cuba Libre.

Carol [to Trish]: Jeanett?

CatH bad... shark

Trish says, "My lover"

GeorgL [to Anne]: May the force be with you!

Carol says, "I didnt even know you wer a lesbian"

Trish asks, "Does that bother you?"

LeeG says, "If I were a woman I would want to be a lesbian"

TwylaM-S gets bandages for Cat

Voce says, ""Lesbian existence comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life. It is also a direct or indirect attack on the male right of access to women."

CatH [to TwylaM-S]: calls no need. Some sharks are friendly

TwylaM-S says, "This coming from a straight male."

Carol asks, "who said that?"

Trish asks, "Adrienne Rich, a poet. Does it bother you?"

Carol asks, "why would it bother me?"

Trish shrugs

Anneke [to carth]: the kind without teeth?

Trish says, "sometimes it just wigs people out"

BorisK takes a egg from the Tiki Hut.

BorisK takes a bite from his egg.

Carol asks, "why should your sexuality be an issue, here in cyer-space?"

Carol looks around

Trish shrugs again

CatH [to Anneke]: the kind with a 700lb dolphin standing by

Trish hopes it doesn't bother you, actually

Voce to BorisK" So, what do you think of that? say What? I can't hear you?

GeorgL pulls up his trousers ti his knees and walks a little into the seawater.

Trish [to Voce]: give them a break - not everyone wants to talk

Trish [to BorisK]: I'm sorry

BorisK picks up his egg and nibbles at it.

CatH tries to mediate between the dolphin and the shark

Voce wishes computers could go in the water

MichaelT detects a greenpeace boat on the sea

Shakespeare's_Guest a

Carol eyes at Voce

CatH exclaims, "Voce, come on into the water -- you'll float!"

Anneke always wanted to wswim with a dolphin

Anneke sigh

RickS chews on a blade of grass

GeorgL asks, "Are there any french people wanting to blwow up that ship here?"

CatH exclaims, "Come on in!"

BorisK invites Voce to climb on his arm and take some steps into the warm sea ...

Shakespeare's_Guest offers voce a dip in the water if he doesn't mind his manners

BorisK gobbles about half his egg.

GeorgL looks a little jealous.

Voce exclaims, "to Mark Make me cum till the cows come home, Stud!"

Trish exclaims, "VOCE!!!!"

BorisK blushes

Carol tries to see the greenpeace boat as well

Trish [to Mark]: I am SO sorry, I didn't know that was in her vocabulary

Mark laughs.

Mark says, "Sorry Voce, I only do cyber-sex with my wife! I'm cyber-faithful."

CatH Oh look at the cows on the hill?

Mark grins.

Trish cleans Cat's sunglasses
BorisK scarfs the rest of his egg, finishing it off.

Carol asks, "I think cyber sex would be weird. I mean does it compare?"

TwylaM-S wonders about Cat's obsession with animals.

Carol looks at Mark wondering

RickS wonders if Mark has two phone lines at home.

TwylaM-S looks at Mark too.

Mark asks, "Compare to what?"

Carol asks, "well, the real thing?"

Trish . o O (marrrrk : -))

CatH watches the shark throw up something

Anneke shall i compare thee to a summer's day

Mark says, "Carol, it's not quite the same thing."

Mark gives a wicked laugh.

TwylaM-S thinks that Trish and she are on the same wavelength ..

Mark winks at Carol.

Trish winks at Twyla

LeeG asks, "Carol, how do youlike cybersex?"

BorisK [to Annekle]: thou art more lovely and more tempre, er, temperate

Mark says, "But, with me and my wife, we had cyber-sex before we first had the other kind."

Carol asks, "really?"

CatH says, "Poor baby. It'll be OK"

Trish raises one eyebrow

Mark says, "I met my wife on line."

Carol is astonished

Trish isn't

Anneke is facing a memroy blank now

MichaelT is

Carol says, "I mean, some people say that cyberspace is actually servering human contact"

LeeG says, "Mark's wife turned out to be a 300 pound truck driver"

Voce says, "People ... people who need people ..."

BorisK says, "rough winds do shake the darling buds of may ..."

Trish shakes Anneke to help overcome te memory block

RickS says, "the eyes are the Windows95 of the soul"

TwylaM-S thinks MichaelT is the most profound person here.

CatH removes a piece of fishnet from the shark's mouth

Trish disagrees with Twyla, thinks Twyla is the most profound person here

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ABSTRACT

WHAT IF ALL THE WORLD WERE A STAGE? PROBLEMS OF THEATRICAL DISTANCING AND FRAMING IN INTERNET THEATRE

by

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This thesis examines text-based, synchronous online theatrical productions with the intent of answering the following questions: is Internet theatre truly theatre, in any meaningful sense? Can this new phenomenon fit within existing definitions of conventional theatre, and if not, why not? The answers seem to lie in whether (or to what degree) these online productions are able to recreate the audience's experience of "real-life" or "traditional" theatre, i.e., to employ the special characteristics of textual virtual reality to recreate the sense of the physical presence of the actors.

The online productions studied include Internet relay chat (IRC) productions, namely those of the Hamnet Players, and MOO (Multi-user domain, Object-Oriented) productions, including the Crosswaves festival, NetSeduction, MetaMOOphosis, and A Place for Souls. Textual analysis is the primary method of study, supplemented with some first-hand observation of performances and participation in one play, NetSeduction. The texts, which include logs of

performances and post-performance discussions, as well as extra-performance Internet communications, are analyzed with the intent of discovering similarities between the characteristics of Internet theatre and those of real-life theatre, in order to compare the construction of the Internet productions as instances of social communication with the cultural constructions we call traditional theatre.

The discussion begins with some background on the virtual online “environments” in which Internet theatre has been performed, including the technical information needed to understand the productions. Descriptions of the productions follow, including historical material on the groups that performed them as well as explanations of the problems they encountered in performance and any innovations they may have made. The reader is also provided a brief look at the bigger picture, of the historical links between theatre and computers and their virtual environments, before moving on to the results of the analyses, which explore the construction of the body on the Internet as a substitution for the physical body in the traditional theatre, examine the performative nature of Internet interaction, and finally apply the concepts of metacommunicative framing and theatrical distancing in an attempt to discover where Internet theatre falls down in its attempt to successfully emulate real-life theatre.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Mary L. Anglin received a B. A. (Honors) in Drama from the University of Michigan Residential College in 1990. Since then, she has focused on media studies, studying print journalism, film and television at the University of Oregon and Wayne State University, with a particular interest in the Internet and its impact on older, more established media.