

## Response Page

The following responses were posted on the H-France discussion list in response to Gregory S. Brown's review of Susan Maslan, *Revolutionary Acts: Theater, Democracy and the French Revolution*.

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The original review may be found on the H-France web page at:

<http://www.h-france.net/vol6reviews/Vol6no122brown.pdf>

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10 October 2006

Susan Maslan

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Wow. I certainly did not mean to be "aggressive, "a bull in a china shop," a "mad fury" [a fine Burkean phrase], or "harsh." It seems that Gregory S. Brown can teach me some lessons in aggressivity. He can also teach me some lessons in condescension as the excerpted lines below demonstrate. Perhaps all I lacked was Brown's "guidance"? He cannot, however, teach me grammar: note the grammatical error in the line beginning "One wishes."

"Ultimately, this book disappoints, not for lack of effort or ability on the part of the author--but for lack of guidance. One wishes that one of the many scholars she cites in the acknowledgements would have encouraged her either to engage with the historiography and consider the approaches,"

But seriously, far from feeling hostile to historians, I wrote a book that relies upon and engages with some of the most important and innovative historians of the French Revolution. I have nothing but respect for the work I cite. Brown suggests, for example, that I am disrespectful of Robert Darnton. This is deeply distressing to me since I hold Professor Darnton's work in the highest possible regard. What I in fact wrote, that offended Brown so was, "Darnton argues persuasively that revolutionary intellectuals understood that the literary system of Old Regime France was in fact a power system and that it was by means of this literary-power system that the monarchical state functioned. Moliere, Darnton argues, occupied the system's 'sacred center.' To rewrite and revolutionize Moliere was to remake literary and political culture. Darnton's sociological interpretation does a good deal to advance our understanding of what would seem to be the particularly high level of interest in this most literary *mise en abime* (Fabre rewriting Rousseau rewriting Moliere). Darnton does not, however, offer a literary analysis of Fabre's play, nor does he attend to what is at stake in Fabre's particular conception of how Moliere should be rewritten for revolutionary society."

That is the mad fury at work! It would be pointless and tiresome to go over all the factual errors

Brown makes in his review. I will only point out that I do not have the Ph.D. in the "Humanities" that, strangely, Brown awards me. My Ph. D. is in comparative literature.

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10 October 2006

William Brooks  
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I do rather empathise with Professor Maslan who, it seems to me, presents here a good self-defence to what was, you must admit, a pretty sharply worded review. Of course it is natural for scholars to disagree with each other and the discipline would be the poorer if we did not; but there are ways of disagreeing nicely, and I sometimes wonder about the extent to which reviews in *H-France* are "edited" in the sense of someone going back to the reviewer and saying, in effect, "hey, are you really sure you want to say this in this way?". Does this happen? Should it? I have sometimes thought other *H-France* reviews intemperate, or, should I say, more intemperate than reviews in printed journals.

Not to discourage the good work, of course; but perhaps to encourage a little more taste and decorum? Just a thought from an old soldier.

Bill Brooks.

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10 October 2006

David Kammerling Smith  
H-France Editor-in-Chief

Dear H-France Subscribers:

To answer Bill Brooks' question, all reviews appearing in *H-France Review* are edited by an area editor, who edits the review in consultation with the review author, raising questions to the review author exactly of the type Bill Brooks suggests. Afterwards, reviews are then edited by a production editor.

Can we do better? Certainly so--but then I might also add with a wink, "If our reviewers at times are indecorous, you should see some of the stuff that gets edited out."

We appreciate hearing feedback such as that offered by Bill Brooks, for it helps us to keep in mind appropriate professional standards--and, of course, we appreciate individuals who volunteer to serve as editors and help us sustain those standards.

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11 October 2006

David Bell

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I agree that a few sentences in Gregory Brown's review were strongly worded, although he opened his review by praising Susan Maslan's book as "original and thoughtful." I don't think this strong wording is sufficient reason for Professor Maslan to decline to respond fully to the substantive criticisms Brown made of her work. Maslan herself speaks of "all the factual errors Brown makes." This is a pretty strong charge too, and I'm not sure it's "pointless and tiresome," as she puts it, for her to say what she means. As an example, she notes that she received her Ph.D. in comparative literature, not "Humanities", as Brown said in the review. True enough, but Johns Hopkins University does not have a Department of Comparative Literature. It has an interdisciplinary department called the Humanities Center, to which Professor Maslan belonged during her time here--a fact to which she herself calls attention in the acknowledgments to her book.

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11 October 2006

Elizabeth Propes

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First let me state that I had not had the opportunity to read Professor Maslan's book, but specifically I am responding to the way Professor Brown worded the review.

I had a very different reaction to the review, remarking to myself at several points that I found the review to be balanced in explaining criticism, which sounded reasonable and not based on unreasonable expectations, while simultaneously placing those remarks within the context of Maslan's stated purpose and focus. The concerns that Brown raised seemed to be issues that affect scholarly research and approaches to material in general, and not just a petty rant about this particular book. I actually felt Brown's review provided a model of how to discuss serious concerns about a book in a rational and scholarly way, but perhaps I am jaded by having been exposed to far harsher and more petty complaints from scholars about other people's research during my graduate-school years.

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11 October 2006

David Andress

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On the subject of Maslan's book, I reviewed it [with a very tight word-limit] for the Journal of Early Modern History, and concluded thus:

This book deals so convincingly with the politics of the theatre that it is a real shame that these are not more adequately contextualised. A running theme is the connection between audiences and democracy, but we are never convincingly shown that such audiences sought or advocated truly 'democratic' outcomes. Much of the action seems equally amenable to being read as the struggle of political factions, spilling from assemblies and clubs into the theatre. The book also highlights the glacial slowness of academic publication. Its first chapter appeared as an article in 1995, the whole book ten years later, yet without time to engage fully with Paul Friedland's *Political Actors* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002). Maslan is reduced to noting her disagreement with this work in a single footnote to the introduction, whereas a riper meditation on its themes might have revealed widespread similarities of aim and fruitful inter-relations.

I would thus vouch for the substance of many of Greg Brown's reservations on what he nonetheless acknowledges to be a work of "great originality, creativity, thoughtfulness and erudition".

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11 October 2006

Emanuel Rota  
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Accusing a reviewer of being tasteless and rude (since professor Brooks asks for "a little more taste and decorum") seems rather "sharply worded" to me. A reviewer signs his/her review and, as long as there is a judgement on the work and not on the author, it's up to the readers to judge whether the argument made is convincing or not. In this case, the negative review seemed to come from the fact that Professor Brown did not find in the book a fair representation of the historians' debate, either because the author cites only books written more than six years ago, or because the reviewer thinks that the historical debate was misrepresented. If I have to decide which books to read, this seems like relevant information. The author has the right to respond, and "review" the review, as professor Maslan did. Invoking some form of censorship (or editing) in the name of taste is Professor Brooks' right, but I hope that the editors will continue to treat us as adults who can judge for themselves.

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12 October 2006

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The discussion about the review of Susan Maslan's book reminds me of a stoic passage by Cicero in *De officiis* (I, 136-8) which we are all sometimes guilty of forgetting: that republics of letters, like republics of state, stand on decorum. On the effectiveness of criticism he notes:

"It may sometimes happen that there is need of administering reproof (...). In most cases, we may apply a mild reproof, so combined, however, with earnestness, that, while severity is shown, offensive language is avoided. Nay more, we must show clearly that even that very harshness which goes with our reproof is designed for the good of the person reproofed."

I believe Erasmus liked this passage, master authority on rhetoric that he was.

Cicero, *De officiis*, trans. by Walter Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1913), p. 139.

On the subject of effectiveness of decorum in argument, also see Cicero, *De oratore*, book III in general.

Also see Gary Remer's important and timely work, *The Rhetoric of Toleration* (Penn State, 1996).

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12 October 2006

Paul Friedland  
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I too found Professor Brown's review to be informative and substantive. As David Bell has already pointed out, Brown's sharply-worded criticisms are balanced by more positive statements, not least of which is his general assessment that Maslan's book "offers great originality, creativity, thoughtfulness and erudition by impressively bringing together a wide range of sources .... Not doubt this is a substantial book, well presented by Johns Hopkins University Press."

I'd like to add my voice to those who think that a serious and substantive review deserves a serious and substantive response.

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12 October 2006

Susan Maslan  
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When I read Gregory Brown's bitter and overtly hostile review of my book, I thought its defects and biases announced themselves pretty clearly. However, the recent postings have moved me to

respond.

The most serious and sustained charge Professor Brown makes is that I am guilty of either scholarly negligence that I did not read relevant work of which I was aware, i.e. Paul Friedland's book *Political Actors* (Cornell, 2002) or of an ethical lapse: that I borrowed without attribution from that book. Since many readers of Brown's review will draw the latter conclusion, I must begin by refuting this outrageous insinuation. Here is the argument in question: representative democracy was not perceived by radical revolutionaries as a real form of democracy in 1789 or as Brown quotes Friedland "representative democracy is not democracy." I made that argument explicitly and devoted two dozen pages to developing and supporting it in an article published in 1995 ("Resisting Representation: Theater and Democracy in Revolutionary France" [*Representations* 52 (1995): 27-51]). At the very outset of my article, I clearly state that I will argue against an approach to revolutionary political culture that "obscures the Revolution's defining struggle between direct and representative democracy" (30). In the rest of the article, I develop the claim that "[for] revolutionary politicians, playwrights, and citizens... the very nature of representation constituted a deeply complex and troubling problem. Indeed revolutionary culture as a whole was significantly shaped by a political and cultural activism that, I suggest, can be understood as resistance to representation, or, alternatively, as an attempt to reform and reconfigure the relations instituted by representation" (28); I discuss in detail the ways in which theatergoers, journalists, district assemblies, and Robespierre himself resisted or expressed anxiety about representative democracy because it seemed to them insufficiently democratic. The *Representations* piece makes up roughly 60% of the first chapter of my book. Professor Friedland's book was published in 2002; he did not publish any work prior to 2002. Professor Brown mentions my *Representations* article in his review (where he misleadingly suggests that it is identical to Chapter 1 of *Revolutionary Acts*), cites it in one of his own books, and must know the dates of my article and Professor Friedland's book: it seems bizarre that he would imply that I have borrowed from Professor Friedland. Given that my *Representations* piece came out in 1995, Professor Brown's putative smoking gun Prof. Friedland and I were on a panel together in 1997 is loaded with blanks. And just to set the record even straighter: Professor Friedland was the respondent on that panel; I was one of three participants who presented 20-minute papers (if memory serves, Jeff Horn and Jeffrey Ravel were my co-panelists). My paper for the panel included all of the principle elements of an article on revolutionary theater and surveillance that was published in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* in 2001. Professor Friedland and I had never met before that panel and have had no contact since. Moreover, I regret that I was not able to read his book with more attention before my own book was published. However, by the time Professor Friedland's book appeared in 2002, mine had already been submitted to the Johns Hopkins Press. I apologize for the excruciatingly detailed and wearying chronology that follows, but Professor Brown challenges the veracity of my claim, made in an endnote in *Revolutionary Acts*, that "Professor Friedland's *Political Actors* was published after the completion of this book" (217-218 n. 3). In that note I devote 375 words to a discussion of Professor Friedland's book. I submitted my ms to the press in June of 2001; I received readers reports in the fall and winter of 2001; in response to the reports, I wrote a new introduction and submitted the final ms in early 2002; between the submission of the final ms and receiving the copy edited ms in 2004, the project stalled as I sought to get photographs and permissions from various French institutions for the 15 images in the book two years is a long time too long a time to hold up a book for want of photos and permissions, but, for personal reasons, I was absorbed in family matters

for one full year of that time. I regret that Professor Brown's irresponsible insinuations have forced me to drag Professor Friedland into a public contretemps and forced me to make public matters that I consider private. One further note on this business: the argument that representative democracy is not real democracy is hardly original to me (or Professor Friedland). What is original is how in particular I shape that argument. The relation between direct democracy and representative democracy has been a preoccupation of political theorist and historians since the Revolution. In my book I cite some examples of fine historical scholarship on the revolutionary conceptualization of representative democracy: Roger Barny, "Democratie directe en 1793: Ambiguïté d'une référence théorique"; Maurice Genty, "1789-1795; l'Apprentissage de la démocratie à Paris"; Claudine Wolikow, "1789-An III: Emergence de la démocratie représentative." And, of course, Keith Baker (whom I discuss on p.222, note 5) devotes a great deal of attention to the origin and development of ideas of political representation in *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990).

Lost in the previous paragraph is the fact that Professor Brown never develops a substantive discussion of the relationship between my book and Professor Friedland's: Prof. Friedland and I sometimes work the same plot of historical issues and materials, but we mostly discuss different primary materials and reach very different conclusions about the relation between theater and politics. Prof. Brown never develops a critical juxtaposition of the two books; either because he is interested only in trying to use Friedland's book to discredit me or because he did not understand my book well enough to formulate such a juxtaposition. Let me pursue the second explanation.

Brown writes that I argue that "the relationship between theater, understood as a body of literature defined by genre, and democracy, meaning an ethos of popular participation in government, should be understood as overlapping, culturally determined concepts rather than as institutions or social practices." This is not my argument. I do not consider theater or politics to be "concepts" at all. In my introduction, I write: "By theater I mean Parisian theaters as artistic, social, and public institutions; plays as performances and literary texts; and the reception of plays and performances by audiences, critics, and spectators. By politics I mean the actions and discourses of the newly formed National Assembly, the Parisian neighborhood assemblies, the political clubs, and less organized forms of political action and thought." I argue that "revolutionary theater was no mere extension of politics, nor can revolutionary politics be read as theatrical text or performance.... On the contrary, theater and politics were important to each other during the Revolution because both were distinct and powerful fields that had their own ambitions, dynamics, and history and that, in different ways, created new meanings, new practices, and new possibilities" (1-2). This seems pretty straightforward. I do, indeed, analyse the texts of many plays, but my discussion of dramatic literature always unfolds in tandem with a thoroughgoing analysis of hundreds of printed theater reviews, newspaper reports, pamphlets, private writings about the theaters and what was happening in them; critical and audience reactions to plays; actors' accounts of their theatrical endeavours; police and municipal government reports on the theaters; and the discussion of theater in the National Convention. My arguments about revolutionary politics depend on extensive research in parliamentary archives, newspapers, visual history and on a sustained engagement with the historiography of the Revolution.

I think that some of the misunderstanding here stems from the importance that I attribute to plays. I spend a lot of time in my book analysing plays and analysing the reception of plays (in contemporary newspapers, for example) because I think that plays are of central importance to theater. I do not think we can understand theater as an institution nor audience participation in theater if we do not pay attention to the plays that are at the center of all that activity. To do otherwise is both to negate the experience the thousands of Parisians who expressed, in a variety of ways, passionate opinions and often interesting ideas about the plays they watched in revolutionary theaters, and to treat as incidental or delusional the intense investment of many revolutionary playwrights in their plays as aesthetic creations and social interventions. Revolutionary plays, it seems to me uncontroversial to say, should be seen as full of meaning and as themselves at once cultural agents, cultural effects, and literary evidence. It also seems to me that plays form a (certainly not the only) context for other plays. That is, playwrights wrote plays, troupes performed plays, and audiences understood plays in relation to other plays. In other words, we can look at theater as another context for theater. Context isn't always outside literature. I do not understand what Brown means when he asserts that taking plays seriously as part of a literary-historical investigation is not a "straightforward approach." To argue that plays understood as literary texts are not part of history, did not participate in history, cannot tell us anything about the past this is what it means to say that they should not be the object of historical investigation is to sever violently the aesthetic from the real. This amounts to a retrograde understanding of art and a diminishment of the field of history. And I do not think it is what most historians think or do.

There are many more points to clear up:

Professor Brown complains about footnote 14 on page 246 because it does not refer to Patrice Higonnet's book *Goodness Beyond Virtue*. I discuss that very book along with Lucien Jaume, *Le Discours Jacobin de la démocratie* on p 246, footnote 13. I write: "Two recent excellent works on the Jacobins are Higonnet, *Goodness Beyond Virtue*; and Jaume, *Le Discours jacobin de la démocratie*. Higonnet emphasizes the two groups' [Girondins and Jacobins] commonalities and goes so far as to call the Girondins "Girondin Jacobins." He argues that what distinguished the two was their divergent sense of how far the Revolution could or should go. The Girondins, he explains, wanted to bring the Revolution to a halt earlier than the Jacobins."

Professor Brown entirely misunderstands the relation between my work and Foucault. He writes that my "discussion of 'popular surveillance' seems to be derived from Foucault" and he criticizes what he sees as this reliance for its ahistoricism. In fact, I am arguing in direct opposition to Foucault. Foucault is, of course, my point of departure, but I argue clearly and explicitly that during the Revolution surveillance operated in ways utterly unlike those described by Foucault. Indeed, I argue for a historical study of surveillance that would not assume the uniformity and ubiquity of surveillance. I devote one chapter to Robespierre's construction of surveillance, visual representations of surveillance, and the politics of surveillance, and another chapter to plays about surveillance. I don't understand why Professor Brown entirely disregards the substance of these two chapters detailed discussions of debates in the Convention, readings of plays, accounts of newspaper articles about surveillance, and so on in favor of complaining that I did not read enough recent work on policing, some of which appeared after my book was on the shelves.

Professor Brown implies that I do not discuss Richard Cobb's classic book *The Police and the People*. I discuss Cobb's book in the text (153-4, 157) and in the endnotes (243).

Professor Brown claims that, in general, I did not read adequately in the secondary material. I cannot, of course, reproduce my bibliography here. I can only say that I read very widely and deeply in the historiography of the French Revolution, and I would encourage the curious to verify for this themselves.

Professor Brown writes that I do not mention any secondary literature published after 2000. That is not true.

Professor Brown claims that it is an "old chestnut" and misleading to characterize Albert Soboul as a Marxist historian. This is inexplicable. Does Brown think "Marxist" is a pejorative term? I do not. Does Brown think Soboul is not a Marxist? How is this possible?

Professor Brown also complains about my use of the term Habermasian. My book argues against a position developed by Habermas and historians influenced by him that privileges print as the unique generator of public opinion. I argue that an alternative form of public opinion came into being in the theater, one that was opposed in many ways to the public sphere of print in which ideas are supposed to be detached from persons, in which debate is rational because detached. In the theater, by contrast, the public that is formed and the opinions that are voiced emerge from the presence of audience members to each other. Their opinions are energized by the senses and their judgements are charged with emotions. According to some revolutionaries, the power of plays to form public opinion exceeded that of books and pamphlets. This is not to say that Habermas's argument is wrong; I do not believe it is. Nor do I wish to downplay the critical importance of print culture during the Revolution. Rather, I sought to recover an alternative public sphere whose existence Habermas notes (p. viii of the preface to the English edition) but leaves aside. I mention in my book also that a similar aim was at the heart of Arlette Farge's book *Dire et mal dire*. So I do not understand Brown's objection to the term Habermasian. Rather than note his displeasure with the term, he might have engaged with the argument.

Professor Brown's discussion of my 50-page chapter on the relation between comedy and society immediately before and during the Revolution consists of two points: I mistakenly bought into an old myth that Fabre d'Eglantine won a local poetry contest; and that I fail to note that Fabre allegedly threatened to send soldiers into the theater. These may be interesting points, but they have nothing to do with my argument. Fabre's fabrication if that's what it was--of this youthful triumph, decades before the Revolution, is important to Brown. In *A Field of Honor* (an e-book from Columbia Univ. Press), Brown treats literary artists as if they have no interest in literature as art, in its making and its meaning. For him, writers have a single motivating force: their aspiration for social advancement. Writing is a merely a means, a tool for that advancement. Thus, Brown's book consists in large part of biographical summaries. My argument is that Fabre was writing as much against the comedy of the 1780s as with Rousseau. He was responding to what was widely perceived to be a decline in the quality of French theater in the second half of the century. He sought, I argue, to remake French theater on the basis of

an anti-theatrical aesthetic. That is why he felt compelled to rewrite *Le Misanthrope*--a play that takes for its very subject the theatrical relations of social life. When I argue that he was surprisingly successful in this endeavour, I mean (as I show in my book) that the play was received rapturously by the critics. I explore the serious critical praise he earned from contemporary theater critics and even from enemies such as La Harpe and Germaine de Stael. Brown mentions none of this.

Professor Brown asserts that it is not clear from my argument why theater and democracy have anything to do with each other. I do not understand why this was not clear to Brown, but I will offer a very brief explanation of an argument that the book develops over 275 plus pages. The theater offered a model of direct democracy in opposition to the representative democracy of the National Assembly, I argue, because in the theater audiences rather than representatives held sovereign power. In representative assemblies, representatives exercised power in the name of those who had delegated their authority. But once they voted, those very same people had no standing, no way to voice their judgments within representative political institutions. In the theater, by contrast, audiences did not delegate, they both authorized others and retained their power. They could and did demand plays, suppress plays, demand that lines be changed or added, or that actors appear or disappear. In the theater, audiences made and imposed meaning in relation to theatrical representations. In representative politics, representation dispossessed the represented.

Let me conclude by saying something about Brown's tone and then something about what I take to be the deepest defect of the review. Brown's tone certainly is disturbing and oddly personal, and it's continuous with the personal character of some of the content: for example, his reference to my degree in "Humanities," a "fact" certainly nowhere to be found in my book. I do not in fact, "call attention" to the Humanities Center in my acknowledgements. I make no mention of it at all [why are we even discussing my acknowledgements! ]. But what most distressed me about the review is what I sense to be an anti-intellectualism dressed up as disciplinarity. Thus, Brown complains that my writing is like "German philosophy," laments that my argument isn't more "straightforward," and complains that maybe he and other historians were not "meant" to understand my book. I have never been accused of being a German philosopher before and much as I enjoy it, it seems to me that these comments have the potential to do harm to real interdisciplinary dialogue--the very kind of dialogue that H-France would seem to bring into being when it reviews books written by people who teach in dreaded places like French departments. I wish I could write that I have learned from this experience, that Brown's review raised interesting issues or real questions for me to think about, but it did not: the review seemed entirely destructive in intent and lacking in intellectual content.

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13 October 2006

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The real victim in this dispute appears to be Fabre d'Eglantine. Fabre did, in fact, win a *concours* at the Jeux Floraux of Toulouse—but it wasn't an "eglantine" as his name would indicate. In 1771, he won a "lis d'argent" for a "hymne à la Vierge." It is not clear why he took the surname Eglantine instead of Lis (does anybody know why?). Thus, it would appear that both professors were wrong.

See A. Duboul, *Deux siècles de l' Académie des Jeux Floraux* (Toulouse, 1901).

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13 October 2006

David Address

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Contrary to her concern with 'outrageous insinuation', there is nothing in Greg Brown's review which suggests that Susan Maslan 'borrowed without attribution', i.e. plagiarised from Paul Friedland. At most he suggests that she has avoided engagement with the work because it might seem to render her own argument redundant -- a charge which in itself may be unjust, but which is not one of academic misconduct.

Many reviewers are going to find it unfortunate, and not a little puzzling, that so much time could elapse between the two publications without a more substantive engagement. As she has shown here, there is an explanation, but it is one which, I fear, Susan Maslan is going to have to keep repeating. Accusing people of things they did not say will not help.

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13 October 2006

Jeffrey S. Ravel

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H-France readers interested in a summary of the argument in Paul Friedland's book *Political Actors*, a book that studies some of the same evidence and issues considered in Susan Maslan's work, may wish to consult my H-France review of Friedland at <http://www.h-france.net/vol3reviews/vol3no70ravel.pdf>.

Briefly, one might characterize the differences between the two books by saying that Friedland focuses on the actions of stage performers who took on political roles during the Revolution, while Maslan studies the performance and reception of plays in that period. Friedland comes to the conclusion that both theater audiences and the political voices of citizens had been silenced by the end of 1794, while Maslan argues that both spectators and constituents continued to make themselves heard during the 1790s. But this potted summary does not do justice to the complexity of either argument.

Since Maslan and Friedland did not engage with each other's arguments in their books, perhaps

they might be offered the opportunity to do so in an H-France Forum?

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16 October 2006

Rebecca Spang  
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Following Jeff Ravel's suggestion that a "forum" style discussion between Paul Friedland and Susan Maslan might be in order, I would like to say that I've felt in reading these messages that an important opportunity for dialogue and self-reflection has been missed. It seems to me (\_pace\_ Dave Andress's second message) that Brown's initial review did strongly imply some sort of academic misconduct on Maslan's part--an implication which seems to me unfounded and unnecessary. For at least a dozen years, now, I (and no doubt others) have known that Friedland and Maslan were both working on issues of theatrical and political representation in the period of the French Revolution. I have also, of course, been aware that other scholars of my generation were working on closely related topics: Jeff Ravel and Greg Brown on eighteenth-century theatre; Sophie Rosenfeld and Dan Rosenberg on language and signs in this same period. Moreover, I suspect there are many other relevant projects out there.

In other words, this is a densely populated arena--that the scholars named have all treated these topics in different ways is, I think, testimony more to the richness of the materials than it is to anyone's errors or oversights. One \_real\_ question, worth addressing, hence arises: what does it say about History and Comp Lit grad programmes in the late 1980s and 1990s that they produced such a clustering of scholarship? Was this a real moment of inter/multi-disciplinarity and, if so, how did it arise? What sort of work was made possible in this moment (and what was made less appealing)? Are we now in a different moment, institutionally and intellectually? If so, how has this happened? More generally, one might ask to what extent disciplinary definitions are self-imposed, and to what extent they are tools for "othering" (with all the fascination and revulsion that process involves)? If it makes little sense to predicate arguments or methods of "historians," \_tout court\_, is it really any more meaningful to make claims about "literature scholars" (or, "German philosophers")? Given the anti-Humanities bluster emanating from many state legislatures, etc., today, do we serve our own ends by indulging in turf wars, or are we better positioned if we can form alliances of various sorts? Lurking here, of course, are questions about resources: how jobs are defined, scholarships allocated, and books sold. Might these be issues worth addressing?

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16 October 2006

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As a theatre historian writing about French Revolutionary theatre, I find that Gregory Brown's review of Susan Maslan's Revolutionary Acts only highlights the disciplinary rigidities and

prejudices that undermine constructive conversations between French historians, literary scholars, and theatre scholars. As exclusively a work on the French Revolution her book fails, according to Brown. Judging by criteria that recognize the interdisciplinary nature of her work, Maslan's book to my mind is one of the more successful to have come out of the theatrical turn in French studies. My review of the book appears in the latest issue of *Theatre Journal*. *Theatre Survey* just published Marvin Carlson's review.

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16 October 2006

J.B. Shank on behalf of the Theorizing Early Modern Studies Research Collaborative  
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As a historian, and co-coordinator of an interdisciplinary workshop, who increasingly takes interdisciplinarity to be my intellectual *raison d'être*, I have found the recent dispute on H-France triggered by Susan Maslan's book *Revolutionary Acts: Theater, Democracy and the French Revolution* to be deeply discouraging. In particular, the dispute reflects, I think, a frustratingly common hostility among professional historians to historical work that is not informed by the familiar disciplinary conventions of professional history. I write, therefore, not to question the ethical conduct of my historian colleagues, but rather to encourage them to reflect upon the intellectual basis of their critique.

What we have witnessed on H-France is a major breakdown of communication between a contemporary piece of literature-based cultural studies and an audience of historians unable to find the needed interdisciplinary bridges to make sense of it. Miscommunication of this sort is a common result of interdisciplinary dialogue, and I am inclined to accept that everyone involved made a sincere and diligent effort to transcend these communication barriers. Yet the resulting miscommunication, so natural and familiar to those of us who try to practice interdisciplinarity, produced a discipline-driven assault. Did this have to happen?

Imagine a different scenario. Rather than being quickly dismissed as a historiographical failure, the book is instead queried from within the disciplinary frameworks that produced it. The discursive and evidentiary protocols of professional history are set aside since they are inappropriate for such an analysis, and the book is instead examined in terms of the *habitus* that informs it. What is the value (and the limitations) of this particular disciplinary regime for historians? What interest should historians take in a work of this sort? Rising to the constructive value of such a perspective, the discussion on H-France works toward a deeper comprehension of the book on its own terms. The perceived idiosyncracies of the text are explored with curiosity, and criticized where warranted; however, recognizing the alien disciplinary regime at work in the book, the focus is on trying to fully comprehend the book's particularities, not on racing to a judgment of them. At this point, the author is invited back into the discussion, not to issue a gallows-defense of her own integrity as a scholar, but rather to further clarify her assumptions and agendas in writing the book. Appreciation for the potential historical value and

unquestioned intellectual legitimacy of these different choices is manifest throughout the exchange, and in the end a patient, self-reflexive inquiry leads to a complex evaluation of the work, not to its haughty dismissal. Would this not have been a more intellectually valuable engagement with this text than the one we have witnessed?

Unfortunately, Maslan's work was not treated with this kind of sympathetic, cross-disciplinary patience, and accordingly she is right, I think, to perceive a disciplinary reaction at work here, one that wants to police her presence in the field of history by imposing a particular standard of discursive and evidentiary normalcy on her, and then judging her inadequate because she fails to live up to these standards. Historians should be better than this. Postcolonial scholars have taught us to see the destructive results that follow from a model of cultural integration rooted in the elimination of difference, and interdisciplinarity might be thought of in similar terms. If so, then we historians need to be more self-conscious about the imperialist tendencies within disciplinary history that tend to demote as inferior and illegitimate those pieces of historical scholarship that do not conform with our disciplinary conventions. We also need to learn to appreciate more deeply the value of other disciplinary standards, and to be more self-critical about the pitfalls of our own. Sustainable interdisciplinarity, like sustainable cultural integration, must evolve out of a dialogue across lines of intellectual difference where the reasons for these differences are respected and understood. It also depends on a stance that treats the incommensurability between disciplinary discourses as an opportunity rather than a failing. Perhaps it took an interdisciplinary conflagration to expose these issues most clearly, and if so let us hope that the fields of interdisciplinary dialogue will again grow fruitful on H-France after the ravages of this fire within the disciplines.

PS

As I was preparing to post this to the list, I saw Jeffrey Ravel's suggestion that Susan Maslan and Paul Friedland engage with the arguments of each other's books in the context of an H-France forum. I think this is a terrific idea, but let us hope that Susan Maslan can be persuaded that H-France offers a welcoming space for her different disciplinary perspectives, and an audience interested in learning from them.

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17 October 2006

Jonathan Spangler

On this same subject, I'd like to add a brief plug for a recently completed digitisation project, that was done very much in the spirit of interdisciplinarity.

The University of Glasgow has one of the world's largest collections of Emblem books--a popular genre in the 16th & 17th centuries that combined mottos, images and poetry. 27 of these books--either in French or printed in France--are now online at <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/> ;(click on 'the French Project' or just add /French).

Emblem studies has always been the domain of literature specialists, and to a lesser extent, art

historians. Historians of culture and society, however, will find here a wealth of text and imagery on a variety of subjects, from religion to dress to family values. Political historians will find a great deal of opinions and reactions of early modern jurists (the original emblem writers) about how the state should best be run. Most refer directly or obliquely (often in a vein of fun) to Classical histories and moralizing myths. Some of the later works represented turn to the Bible and are specifically aimed at a Protestant readership (including one by the noted Calvinist Theodore de Beze).

The images themselves range from extremely crude, to quite intricate and beautiful woodcuts. One for example features one of the earliest representations of tennis. Others display costume in great detail. Still others demonstrate the lack of knowledge in the exotic (an elephant with paws?). Many of these books were used as pattern books, for wall decorations or for embroidery patterns (as can be seen in the handiwork of Mary Queen of Scots).

I myself used the emblem books presented here in a course on Mme de Sevigne and the salonnières. They were certainly known in the salons, and many names assumed by members of salon society were derived from the same vogue for classical subjects (like Mlle de Scudery, who used the name Sappho, and called her novel, Clelie). I found that students really enjoyed the games played between visual representation and textual references--for example, calling Medea simply 'the woman from Colchis' and asking the question of whether or not she was a model of female strength or irrational hysteria for 17th-c women.

The emblem books on the website can be read 'as a book', or searched in a variety of ways (some of which are, admittedly, still having kinks worked out). Historical and mythological names are cross-referenced. Words can be searched in modern or contemporary French. Latin is translated. Etc.

Have a look!

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17 October 2006

Paul Werner  
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Immediately after reading Prof. Shank's sensible suggestion I came upon the following, from an article/review by Anthony Grafton in the current New Yorker: [speaking of universities], "Their history follows a Weberian narrative of rationalization, but it also reveals the limits of that rationalization." Come again? I would think it was the Weberian narrative that would be applied to the history of universities, not the other way around. Perhaps it's because I come from Art History, where the tendency to borrow theoretical tools from other disciplines has reached beyond the surreal - see for instance one well-known critic's borrowing from Group Theory to discuss sculpture. Or perhaps it's because I've been amused (as in the case above), by the unthinking adaptation of certain sociological approaches in so much recent writing of History. For those of us more concerned with how historical events happened or works of art work than

with the habitus at bay in our department or discipline, these interdisciplinary feuds are like watching Fafnir taking on Fasolt. By all means let's follow the rules and show some courtesy, everybody. In the meantime: mind if I watch?

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18 October 2006

Julian Wright  
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[This is not a facetious request!]

I would be quite grateful if somebody could collate the complete debate about interdisciplinarity and Theatre studies, including the initial review, in one file. I would very much like to give it to my students! There is a very enjoyable article in this week's TLS about pluralism in British history departments which is germane to the argument.

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18 October 2006

J.B. Shank  
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Were Julian Wright to use the H-France discussion of interdisciplinarity to trigger a discussion with his students, a great framing text for the discussion would be John Law (not the Mississippi schemer, but the professor of sociology at the U. of Lancaster), *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* (Routledge, 2004). In less than 150 pp., Law offers an amazingly insightful, accessible, and wise reflection on the characteristic features of disciplinarity in the modern academy and the reasons for wanting to transcend it.

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18 October 2006

Jeremy Popkin  
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I can certainly understand why the review of Janet Maslan's book set off this thread about interdisciplinarity, but it seems fair to point out that H-France has tried to be open to interdisciplinary approaches to French history and culture, and that many of the other reviews posted here have had a very different tone. I would hope that this one incident would not discourage our colleagues in literature, art history, music history, dance studies and many other

fields from participating in the list.

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18 October 2006

Robert Dawson  
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It seems to me, w/o having read every message on this thread, that considerable concern has been expressed about omissions, and lack of orthodoxy. in a recent message, there was a sort of plea for joining forces and finding common ground (the drift of others too). Importantly, can that book, or another, stand on its own if it ignores or minimalizes 'orthodoxy', or the latest '-ism', or certain studies with which the author chose not to engage? in literature, I remember when structuralism held sway, as incredibly unproductive as that was. finally the emperor was seen as naked. [ptl] (is deridadaism still alive?) it's not quite the same thing, but i do think that scholars ought to be more broad-minded, and inclusive [rather than exclusive]. nonetheless leaving aside or ignoring pertinent scholarship is a no-no. a good press should be connected to good people who should not allow that to happen. i remember a case when an article got a prize, based on an examination of certain works linked by a theme; all the works were mentioned -- thematically -- in a book; the one author omitted from the article was the one that would have led to the scholarly book (not mentioned by the author of the article). but, back to the current debate: a book has to be judged on its own merits. those will be seen differently, by different people, with different backgrounds, and w/ differing points of view, even as to what constitutes a good book, in a general fashion. i've not read the book that led to this thread, but it's a worthwhile one for at least having generated this discussion!

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23 October 2006

Paul Sonnino  
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Professor Dawson makes very interesting points to the effect that "structuralism held sway, as incredibly unproductive as that was. finally the emperor was seen as naked," and then asks, rhetorically I suppose "is deridadaism still alive?" As one of the persons charged in my department with the graduate course on Historiography who still assigns Foucault's *Surveiller et Punir* as the last word, I would be most interested in Professor Dawson's and the lists opinion on who is currently dictating what we should believe and if they feel this current guru has registered any improvement of his avant coureurs.

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23 October 2006

Ralph Kingston  
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I would suggest to Julian Wright and Anne McLaren that they point their students to <https://lists.uakron.edu/sympa/arc/h-france/2006-10/msg00016.html> and let them follow the thread from there. I did so last week, in relation to a MA seminar on 'Archives and Authority' in which I had set Bonnie Smith's AHR article on 'Gender and the Practices of Scientific History'. We made some very interesting realizations about the language of this debate, especially in the early exchanges, which (it could be argued) ranged unconsciously from the patriarchal to the fraternal to the paradoxical (in the Joan Scott sense)!

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