

The Usual Subjects  
by Robert R. Rhodes

The Science Advisor's Review for "DOSTOYEVSKY"

A Play by Maxine Kern

Actors are voices in this play by Maxine Kern talking to the unseen – first addressing the audience beyond in the glare of the lights...and challenging the audience's very presence here, as if all of life were "a stage", and everyone "merely players" (echo: Shakespeare) – and the audience must, by default "suspend their disbelief" (echo: Samuel Taylor Coleridge), because they are, after all, present in the theater. Tilly, the only one physically present (on stage), is then is then questioned by her "free spirit" sister Maureen regarding her own presence, which she deflects with the rhetorical observation that she could not be anywhere else – again challenging the audience, to think her some-"where else." Then as the conversation moves inside Tilly's home, where both Maureen and the audience are invited to "come inside out, from the cold" – a wonderful play on words – thus are the audience introduced to Maureen and Tilly – "who we are now...in the here and now": on stage now as The Usual Subjects.

As Maureen and Tilly continue their conversation, they discuss a number of people not physically present in the play – all the "ghosts of their uncharted journeys", while they wonder how they would react if these ghosts became real. It is no accident that they speak of the characters created by Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy – as experience remembered "too real". But who are the subjects and who are the objects of their imagination ? In fact, when Maureen begins to identify all the characters "out here", who show up only to "be seen", it seems their greatest fear is not death, but to be subjected to "erasure" (=loss of the written: their disappearance from our imagination). Even a "Silent Bob" (Kevin Smith?) makes appearance – as do several more non-talkers, "Bob"-ing in and out. Archetypes abound: Dante; Chekov; Shakespeare; gender is dissolved; every individual identity "outside" becomes anonymous. We, like Alan Watts, are left with the suspicion that we all are "God playing a game of hide and seek" – that there is, in fact, only one "subject" who experiences.