

"Memory of the Whispered Word"

THIS PROJECT BEGAN as a live performance artwork written, built and performed in my studio, located in the Mount Baker neighborhood of Seattle, beginning in the 1980s.

The "Soup Talks Trilogy" was inspired by the START and SALT Arms Talks with the notion that participants in these talks would begin with their respective creation stories: "How did we all get here and why do we have so many weapons?"

In 1996, the trilogy was included in the Jim Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater in New York City.

Back home, the work was revised and presented with a new title "Soup Talks Seattle" inspired by the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in 1999. Presentation was commissioned by Seattle's Center on Contemporary Art (CoCA).

Our nonprofit, Puppet Soup Theater of Objects (PSTOO), was awarded a grant by the former King County Office of Cultural Resources to videotape the work as it was presented in the abandoned brig of a former naval base located in Seattle's Magnuson Park in November 2001.

Seattle artist, Frank Video, captured hours of live footage, plus set-up shots, and I edited the first play, "Voice of the Turtledove" which was produced on VHS. We hosted a required public screening in the Jewel Box Theater in Seattle's Bell Town, and submitted the movie for payment of the grant.

King County paid the full award for the one movie of a promised three. "#1. Voice of the Turtledove" is available on Vimeo. For the longest time I wanted to make the second two movies; but now another twenty years are in the rear view mirror!

This screenplay dates from 2000, when it was called a "Shooting Script," so with this (published) version the guilt diminishes and the dream reaches a moment of completeness.

Warner, March 9, 2022, Snohomish, Wash.

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Dedicated to the memories of my parents
Maxine 1917-2000, Warner (Sr), 1913-1996;
and my younger sister Sara, 1947-2018

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Contents:**Voice of the Turtledove 3**

The Storyteller tells the tale of the gleaming white plane, called the "Turtledove," carrying the Last Symphony Orchestra remaining in the world, that went down in the Arctic Ocean only to be discovered 100 years later -- in our time! The assassination of the Storyteller begins the Trilogy.

Voice of the Hollow Man 23

If our first play is about Creation (and it is), then our second is about war, about Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 and the letters home to his young wife, the mother of his first born; just as it was for my mother and me in 1942.

Voice of the Machine 66

The assumption of the Storyteller by the Assassin, (or was it the other way around?); anyway, the sorrow of Lady Franklin is sung to the tune of a Three Act Opera, titled "The Evening News Continues."

Cast of Characters & Objects in Order of Appearance. 96

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Please Note:

This script is an adaptation of a live performance where the action takes place inside a performance installation which includes a large Table with seating for 12 Guests, a Wall at one end and the head of the Table at the other. And two rows of gallery seating on either side of the Table. Using the software (Slugline) defaults: "INT." is used for action inside the installation or live performance footage; and "EXT." for scenes shot for the screen or outside the performance space.

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#1. VOICE OF THE TURTLEDOVE**EXT. BLACK SCREEN**

Audio of a wooden match striking and bright flame in backness exposes a wedding photograph of my parents. The Host lights 12 votive candles inside the black box during the following.

HOST (Voice Over)

My mother and father are dead.
That's how old I am—old enough to
be left alone now.

Now it's my story to tell. Oh, I
do have a brother and two sisters
but I am the oldest, born during
World War II.

In fact, my first memory is of a
crowded train station, jam-packed
with grown-ups all facing the
train of returning soldiers. For
eighty years now, I have carried
this detailed picture of myself
sitting high on a stranger's
shoulders and looking across all
those people to the train
releasing its uniformed passengers
and the loud clouds of white
steam; but then, the scene fades
and I have no memory of my
father's returning face, or what
he said to me. So it's my
responsibility. Besides, my
siblings, while very supportive,
really don't understand what I am
doing here. I barely understand it
myself.

Why do humans put on shows
for each other in the first place?
Could it be that at some root part
of being human, our strongest fear
is of abandonment and that each of
us secretly longs for a memory of
the whispered word?

A lid of perforated steel is placed on the box of burning
votives, a hook is attached to the handle.

EXT. SIDE VIEW OF THE PERFORATED STEEL BOX OF LIGHT

Audio of American Indian chanting with clouds of sage smoke.

SCROLLING TEXT

When the earth was very new and young it was dark, cold and gray, even the stars were black. There was no light anywhere for Gull kept it in a Box and he guarded it very carefully. His cousin Raven was tired of the dark. He wished for daylight. One day, while Gull and Raven were walking, Raven thought, I wish Gull would run a thorn into his foot. Hardly had he thought so, when in the darkness, Gull stepped on a thorn. "Seqenan! My foot," cried Gull! A thorn, asked Raven Let me see, I will take it out. But it was so dark that Raven could not see the thorn. He asked Gull to open the Box and make it light. Gull opened it, but just a little and the light was very faint. Raven said, You must give me more light! Gull answered, "Seqenan! Seqenan!" So Raven pretended not to see the thorn and instead of pulling it out he pushed it in deeper and deeper, saying, "You must give me more light." "Seqenan! Seqenan! My foot, my foot," cried Gull. Raven pushed the thorn in even deeper until at last Gull opened the Box.

The lid is pulled up, all four sides of the steel box bang to the Tabletop exposing the burning votive lights.
Cut to:

INT. STORYTELLER MONOLOGUE PART I

The Old Blind Storyteller, a life-size puppet in a wheel chair at the head of the Table, opposite the Wall; the operator's left hand controls the head and mouth while the right, white gloved hand is reading from a Braille Book as he speaks.

STORTELLER

And in the light, all the animals could see their differences for the first time; and in fear, they scattered to be with their own kind. And from that day to this day, the animals live separated according to their species.

The Storyteller closes the Braille Book.

STORYTELLER

Welcome, gathered humans. I wish to entertain you with stories about your species. True stories; after all, all you are, are your stories ... and, they begin with my death. You see, I offer the life inside this body for your attention. After all is said and done, this body is just a temporary reservoir for the life held inside. And it's to the life inside of us that attention must be paid. Attention to the direction humanity is taking you ... toward the loss of a collective consciousness ... like too many puppets, dancing to old familiar tunes upon a wooden stage turning into concrete, while mouthing lyrics produced by someone else's hand stuck into the back of our heads ... a post-modern hypothalamic transplant ... we are flying on automatic!

Storyteller puts his white gloved hand to his dark glasses.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

Please excuse the glasses. Ionizing radiation burned my eyes out many years ago. Too much TV. Empty sockets. Clear to the back of my head.... I suppose I did watch it a lot. And now it seems I can remember only the things I've seen on TV. Especially tragic events that interrupts the regular programs ... like the Kennedy assassination during my first year at the University ... or that amazing first attack on American at the turn of the millennium ... And, when the Turtledove disappeared over the Arctic Ocean -- there was not one regular program, or commercial, aired for a whole week. For seven days people mourned and wondered if the Turtledove would ever be rescued.

Hebrew characters for the word "Turtledove" are projected on the Wall at the other end of the Table.

The Assistants enter on either side from backstage, behind the Wall, the Red Assistant holds a Red Rose while the Blue Assistant holds a Blue one. Both are wearing gas masks and walk slowly toward the Storyteller.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

You see, the "Turtledove" was the name of a plane, a spectacular, gleaming white, Boeing 720 jet, the first 720 built and configured to carry the 100 members and staff of the last symphony orchestra remaining in this world. Its name, spelled out along the side of plane in Hebrew, large silver characters, like mirrors, was from the Old Testament:

"The flowers appear on the earth,
the time of the singing of birds
has come, and the voice of the
Turtledove is heard in our land."

The Assistants simultaneously drop their roses which stick in the tabletop on either side of the box of burning votives.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

In time, the last symphony orchestra became known all over the world as the Voice of the Turtledove.

And on the Winter Solstice the plane disappeared over the Arctic Ocean -- in the darkest part of the night.

The next day, the whole world stopped to watch the news, and the next. For two days they searched. At last she was found, all in one piece. The large, white aluminum, bird -- her silver name reflecting the lights of the remote camera in the deep, dark water -- it looked as if the plane was sleeping.

Or waiting, depending upon your frame of reference, at the bottom of the Beaufort Sea, 100 miles north of the Mackenzie River, on the top of the world.

Well, what to do? Talk.

(MORE)

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

Three whole days followed of nothing but talk ... like the Reverend Garrison, a former President of United States for one term. Many referred to him as the Reverend President Garrison, which seemed odd to begin with, but as a former TV evangelist he was very good at talking on TV. He would close his eyes and plead for the human-right to an after-life. However, the plane, the orchestra, was not public property. No. The Turtledove was owned by the Whitepeace Foundation, an international consortium of scientists and artists dedicated to the preservation of the liberal arts and sciences; and the Turtledove, their flagship program, was very popular. I mean, people would gather at airports, crowds of people, waiting for hours to watch the Turtledove land, or take off. It had become a regular part of evening news, for crying-out-loud.

Shot of the Storyteller between the heads of two Guests.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

No, the fate of he Turtledove depended on the directors of Whitepeace, who were not talking, period. What was going to happen to the Turtledove and her hundred plus final passengers strapped to their seats? Their heads were probably still between their knees, with who knows what swimming around inside there with them. Every hour they would show us live pictures of the plane from the remote camera -- shimmering silver Hebrew characters against the cloudy silhouette of the fuselage, and an orderly row of dark windows. So, by the fifth day, the topic of what-it-must-be-like-inside-the -plane-by-now, was strictly avoided, an untouchable subject; just tons of experts expounding technical talk on how to raise the plane all in one piece and the Reverend ex-president

(MORE)

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

egging them on.

That evening, Yai Chee Pi agreed to meet with the press. She was well known as the author of a best seller, written when she was a teenage, called "Plan B," which told of a child's search for knowledge of her ancestors from a country that no longer existed. You see her family came to the states from Vietnam, a small country now part of the Chinese Union of United Nations.

Well, immediately, Yai Chee Pi established eye contact with the row of cameras, and from behind the barricade of microphones, her words were carried around the world -- into rooms of gathered families and friends. She told the story of Sedna, the great sea spirit of the Eskimos, who lives at the bottom the Arctic Ocean. I remember every word.

Storyteller holds an Inuit mask in front of his face.

EXT. WATER PUPPET SHOW

Tight shot of Yi Chee Pi on a video monitor

YI CHEE PI

When Sedna was a young girl she rejected all suitors until a mysterious stranger, visiting the village, seduced her and took her to live with him in a distant land. But, the handsome stranger was in fact a cruel bird, disguised as a man and he held Sedna prisoner in his tent. At last, her parents came to rescue her.

Video footage cuts to the shadow of the bird over a small boat on the water.

YI CHEE PI (CONT'D)

But, no sooner and they set out to sea, than her husband revealed himself as the cruel bird and his huge wings caused a great storm, threatening to drown the whole family.

Close-up of the Yi Chee Pi's eyes.

YI CHEE PI (CONT'D)

To save themselves, the parents cast Sedna overboard. But she held on to the side of boat and her father cut off the first joints of her fingers. She continued to cling to the boat and her father cut off the second and third joints of her fingers.

Even tighter on the eyes, chopping sounds grow faster, louder, finally silent.

YI CHEE PI (CONT'D)

These sank into the sea to become the seal, walrus and whale that the Inuit people depend upon for their food, clothing and fuel. Sedna continued to hold on to the boat with her elbows. In desperation, the father struck her with the paddle, gouging out an eye ...

Fade in on same mask the Storyteller is holding, but this one is under the water.

YI CHEE PI (CONT'D)

... and so she finally sank into the sea, fingerless and with only one eye. And from the bottom of the sea, to this day, she rules all the creatures. It's she who sends forth animals to the hunters who show respect for the slain animal's soul.

Slow rise of the Inuit mask from beneath the water.

YI CHEE PI (CONT'D)

Sedna has become the most feared of all spirits, since she, more than any other, controls the survival of a people living in a world of uncertainty.

INT. STORYTELLER MONOLOGUE PART II

The mask in the water dissolves into the one held by the Storyteller that he now lowers.

STORTELLER

I taped it. You bet. You see, Yai Chee Pi's grandfather was a member of the orchestra; he was the concertmaster in fact, he played first violin.

Well, wouldn't know it -- the very next morning after Yai Chee PI'S worldwide performance, the Whitepeace Foundation finally called a press conference to announce their decision to attempt a full and complete recovery of only -- the flight recorder -- the so called, black box.

Slow close-up of the Storyteller's (puppet) mouth moving.

STORTELLER (CONT'D)

And, leave the plane and her passengers as they were found, at the bottom of the sea!

The statement concluded: "the Foundation believes that to allow the Turtledove and her passengers to rest in peace will be a fitting and proper memorial to an organization that can never be replaced. And, the Foundation wishes to exchange its promise of full disclosure of all details of this tragedy, for the generous outpouring of public sympathy over this great loss."

Corporate Bullshit!

Excuse my French, but the fact was, the Foundation couldn't raise the money to salvage the plane or the remains, they were broke, busted, and no one would lend them the funds. It took three days of secret meetings just to round up enough cash and donations to recover the black box -- of which they proceeded to make a very big deal.

(MORE)

STORTELLER (CONT'D)

They had an icebreaker out there from the US Navy, a ship from the European Union with a remote control diving unit aboard, a floating heliport, and one entire ship just for the media.

Even tighter on the Storyteller's hand and mouth.

STORTELLER (CONT'D)

But ... the weather was impossible, winds were clocked at over 100 miles per hour, operations were placed on hold, now the seventh day since the plane went down, and everyone rested as best they could. But the next morning -- what footage!

Actually, it was more towards mid-day by the time the sun was full above the horizon, just sitting there for about an hour or so before slowly sinking again -- great footage. Long, soft light falling across all the whiteness and the shadows of the ships were a million miles long it seemed, sweeping over all that empty space behind them.

The flight recorder was recovered on the first attempt and proudly displayed before the cameras -- It was bright orange!

The black box was bright orange -- a garish secular icon holding the blackness of death -- it's to the life inside we must pay attention ... Orange! Yes!

Orange ... where was I?

Yes, and this was the real kicker, we waited almost a second week before another press conference was called. This time to announce that they had recovered only the data recorder ... and that the voice recorder was still with the plane at the bottom of the sea.

Data! Only facts. People were confused ... I mean, how many here believe in abstract data produced by a machine, concerning the operation of another machine?

The Storyteller circles his arm while wailing like a siren.

STORTELLER (CONT'D)
 Waaaaaahhhhhhh! Waaaaaahhhhhhh!
 The ambulance can't get through to
 the scene of the accident, its
 siren wails in vain -- the machine
 is stuck in gridlock, as is the
 machine in front of it and one in
 front of it and so on until
 humanity disappears.

Head shot of the Assassin slowly appears on the face of a
 clock with a close-up of the second hand passing 15 seconds.

STORYTELLER
 I mean, who needs a symphony
 orchestra with a home entertainment
 center anyway? CD player with a
 sub-woofer and two tweeters; DVD,
 TV, PC, and a two-door
 refrigerator; cars, planes and more
 cars and planes ... Order now!
 We're growing bigger and bigger
 until our own weight collapses
 inward, spiraling into blackness so
 tight even light can't escape. A
 blackhole's eating our Milky Way!
 And how will the future know us
 when our civilization ends? What
 will they discover in all that
 blackness -- a collection of
 historical facts

Rising a hand gun the Assassin fires point blank.

INT. STORYTELLERS ASSASSINATION

ASSASSIN
 Ladies and Gentlemen -- our time
 here is short ...

Assassin fires two more shots, rose pedals fall, the clock
 stops; cut to Storyteller's head going back, his white gloved
 hand grabbing his mouth.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
 ... and I could see that your
 attention was wandering ...
 please ...

Assassin comes around the table to the slumped Storyteller.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
 I wish to get at the ... at a
 truth!

Assassin removes the head of the puppet, holding it to her shoulder, like a child, and exits.

INT. ENTRANCE OF THE VIOLINIST & OPENING OF THE WALL

The Host, as the puppet operator wearing a black hood stands above the headless object in the wheelchair, removes the white glove on his right hand, leans over to unbutton the Storytellers's dress shirt front, reaches in and slowly removes the marionette bust of a violinist playing Bach's "Partita Chaconne!"

At the other end of the Table, the lower, center Wall Section opens, and moves slowly up the Table, pulling a runner of black velour, the full length of the Table. Sitting on the black velour, on the backside of the Wall Section is an Orange Data Recorder, above it, projected on the paper Wall Section is the wedding photograph of my parents.
 CUT TO:

EXT. UNION OF THE STORYTELLER AND THE ASSASSIN

The Assassin carries the puppet head up a staircase covered in white fabric, at the top the Assassin pauses and turns toward the light and exits right.

ASSASSIN
 Old Woman Nature
 naturally has a bag of bones
 tucked away some where.
 a whole room full of bones!
 A scattering of hair and cartilage
 bits in the woods.
 A fox scat with hair and a tooth in
 it. a shell mound
 a boneflake in a streambank.

Close-up of fingers reading Braille, superimposed on the Braille is a miniature 17th-century Proscenium Arch lowering into view, then White-glove Hands in prayer appear within the arch, and handwritten titles below.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
 A purring cat, crunching
 the mouse head first,
 eating on down toward the tail -
 the sweet old woman
 calmly gathering firewood in the
 moon ...

The Storyteller stops reading the Braille to remove his dark glasses revealing a babyface, wide open eyes fill the screen.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
 Don't be shocked,
 she's heating you some soup.

INT./EXT. "AND THERE WAS LIGHT"

Babyface Eyes cut to White-gloved Hands in prayer superimposed on the pages of Braille as the titles below dissolve into each other.

TITLES
 Beyond 15 Eons ago
 In a Garden of Thought
 Before the Big Bang
 A Mathematical Singularity
 And there was light

The hands in prayer burst into flame, a page in the Braille Book turns to show a slow motion clip of the Box of Light opening, all four sides falling in slow motion and silence, then close-up of the twelve burning votives, the Assassin's hand enters the frame to pick up a votive.

INT./EXT. HOST MONOLOGUE

The Assassin, on the Tabletop, is placing a votive at each Guests' place during the following.

HOST VO
 My play is set in my mind ...
 around a large conference table. I
 play the part of the Host; and my
 Guests, the people seated around
 the table, are the witnesses to my
 confusion. I love the eternal
 question, why is there something
 when there could be nothing? Or to
 put it another way, how did we all
 get here and why do we have so many
 weapons?
 During the cold war arms race and
 talks I imagined the Russian and
 the American statesmen seated on
 either side of a large table, and
 they would begin their negotiations
 by first telling their respective
 creation stories.
 (MORE)

HOST VO (CONT'D)

After all, it was said from the floor of the United States Senate during this time that "...if we have to get back to Adam and Eve, I want them to be Americans and on this Continent!"

But today, evolutionary science speculates that if we went back to Adam and Eve, there's every chance they wouldn't be humans -- they might, just might be huge majestic sea turtles -- as told to us in many ancient stories!

(Cut to close-up)

So my question is this: Would the turtles be American?

INT./EXT. GARDEN OF THOUGHT

Cut to motion picture of a spinning apple projected on the page of Braille with handwritten titles,

TITLES

Left Over Matter

Dissolves to two large turtle puppets belly to belly.

TITLES (CONT'D)

12 Eons Ago Forbidden Fruit

And the turtles slowly separate

TITLES (CONT'D)

6 Eons Ago in the Garden of Thought

Cut to the Host's home movie clip of Easter Dinner, 1940s, then dissolve to close-up of the turtle puppet Adam with the spinning apple core.

TITLES (CONT'D)

5 Eons Ago a Supernova Explosion
Wisdom Struggles to Fertilize ...
An Egg of Compassion 4 Eons Ago
Left Over Matter of the Tasty Fruit

Dissolve to vaudeville routine of two hands becoming four.

TITLES (CONT'D)

3 Eons Ago a Cell Divides in 20
Minutes
Unzipping its DNA to Make a
Twin ...
An exact copy without error

Cut to Home Movie clip #2: Toboggan Ride

TITLES (CONT'D)

2 Eons Ago Small Cells and Large
Cells
Mate With Each Other 1 Eon Ago
A Sexual Revolution 1000 Million
Years Ago.

Braille page turns as the clip ends, cut to small matting
turtle hand puppets (to represent distance) swimming in
blackness trailing a sheer, red cloth as an Astronaut toy
figure floats into view.

ASTRONAUT VO

One and a half million years ago:
Human ancestors shaping bits of
stones like their organs for
stabbing and piercing; women
reproducing their wombs in wet
clay, for giving and receiving.
Over.

Cut to fingers reading Braille, dissolving into Babyface.

BABYFACE/STORYTELLER VO

Ten thousand years ago, wooden-
reaping knives set with flint
blades, used in Palestine ...

Cut to close-up of the movie projector's lens, flickering
light and sound for Home Movie clip #3: Christmas Morning
Shootout, 1950s projected on the Braille pages with fingers
reading.

BABYFACE/STORYTELLER VO (CONT'D)

A Story told of the first murder --
of man killing his brother, taking
his land and sleeping with his
brother's wife, who was in fact his
own sister -- 5000 Years Ago

Movie ends, fingers continue reading Braille.

BABYFACE/STORYTELLER VO (CONT'D)

Homer -- Hero's and Zeus, who is a
god of justice; the kingdom of
Israel -- Hero's and Yahweh, who is
a god of justice; the Phoenicians;
Cyrus of Persia; Xerxes, Sophocles;
Alexander; Hannibal; Plautus;
Caesar;

Audio of baby sounds.

BABYFACE/STORYTELLER
And Jesus -- 2000 Years Ago.

Babyface dissolves to Home Movie #4: Host's First Communion.

BABYFACE/STORYTELLER VO
Nero; Christians; Anthony;
Constantine; Attila the Hun and
Mohammed -- 1000 Years Ago.
Chinggis Khan and Dante --
800 Years Ago.
Leonardo da Vinci; Durer;
Michelangelo; Titian; Raphael; the
Aztec and Inca Empires; the Black
Death and Christopher Columbus --
500 Years Ago.
Luther; Spanish mines in Bolivia;
Shakespeare; Negroes; Galileo;
banks of Amsterdam and Hamburg;
Descartes; Harvard College; and
Anton van Leeuwenhoek discovers the
existence of male sperm with his
microscope -- 400 Years Ago.

Projection of the Babyface is added to the Home Movie clip
and mix of images build during the following.

BABYFACE/STORYTELLER VO (CONT'D)
"Nature and Nature's Laws lay hid
in night; God said, Let Newton be,
and all was Light."
Pope.
Bach.
The Bank of England.
Voltaire; Rousseau, and Franklin.
The Sugar Act; the Currency Act,
the Townsend Acts, the Tea Act and
the Intolerable Acts.
Battles of Lexington and Concord;
the Second Continental Congress;
the Battle of Bunker Hill; Thomas
Paine; Adam Smith and the United
States declares its independence.

Fingers continue reading Braille.

BABYFACE/STORYTELLER VO (CONT'D)

Preliminary Articles of Peace
signed in Paris; the British
evacuated New York City; James Watt
patens a locomotive; first Bank of
the United States established; Eli
Whitney builds a factory for the
mass production of firearms near
New Haven; and Walt Whitman writes,
Leaves of Grass -- 200 Years Ago.

The life-size mating turtle puppets, Adam and Eve, appear within the Proscenium Arch, with a struggle, they are separated by the Host -- Adam on top exposes a rich sunburst design on his underside, while the Host operates the Chorus of Civilization -- twelve miniature figures holding a lace curtain with smeared red hand prints.

Close-up of the Chorus members is accompanied by the ending of Beethoven's Ode to Joy, and the projection of the the First Communion clip fills the Wall as it comes to an end.

A Painted Curtain lowers to rest on the back of Eve, the female turtle puppet, now Mother Earth carrying the miniature 17th-century Proscenium Arch -- cut to a close-up of Eve's face to show her eyes closing.

INT. THE PLEDGE

TITLE

The Pledge

HOST

Please stand for the Pledge.

Wide shot of guests getting out of the chairs to stand.

HOST (CONT'D)

Place your right hand over your
heart and repeat after me,
following the words on the screen.
I pledge allegiance to the soil
of Turtle Island and to the Beings
who there on dwell
one Ecosystem
In Diversity
under the Sun
with Joyful Interpenetration for
All.

Sudden banging from the front of house area, loud whistle and calling of cadence as the Host enters the tabletop and lowers the Foot Soldiers with a thud.

INT. ENTRANCE OF THE FOOT SOLDIERS

BLUE ASSISTANT

Sit down! I am Lieutenant Colonel
Knee.
Sit down! I am someone you cannot
see.
Sit down! And stay down, says me.
I am Lieutenant Colonel Knee,
Me and my feet maintain order
and metaphor security.
I do not act on my own
but under orders from highest
levels where only your thoughts
have flown.

Blue Assistant is circling the Table as the Host operates the
Foot Soldiers performing drills.

BLUE ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

This leftist liberal cynicism is
destroying the ozone ...

RED ASSISTANT

(singing) Liberal libidos rising
like smoke stacks stiff with
freedom of expression and sexual
revolution!
What's next is now ...
Falling, falling, falling like acid
rain, stinking, stinging, soaking
our Evening News!

BOTH ASSISTANTS

Such a position, this human
condition!

The Foot Soldiers arrive at the head of Tabletop and halt.

BLUE ASSISTANT

Sit up straight! Like your were
taught. I am Lieutenant Colonel
Knee, me and my feet maintain order
and metaphor security.
I am someone you cannot see.

The Foot Soldiers are hung from the grid, just in front of
the Flight Recorder. The Host exits the tabletop releasing
binoculars, one for each Guest, they bounce wildly as the
Host exits the tabletop.

INT/EXT. THE PUPPET OPERA

Note: The projected titles are written to time with the singing in excerpts from Verdi's "Macbeth."

TITLES

The Evening News
 A Puppet opera 13 minutes long
 Music by Verdi
 Italian libretto by Piave
 after Shakespeare's Macbeth
 subtitles by your Host

The Proscenium's Painted Curtain opens to reveal a small TV set sitting on the back of Eve, a cutout puppet of Dan Rather is on the TV, its mouth and eyes move during the following; and in front of the TV is a miniature fancy bed with a copulating couple -- it's Napoleon who lost his virginity to a street walker at age 16!

The Newscaster's puppet's eyes are looking down, then move up as the mouth moves to the singing.

NEWSCASTER TITLES

Oh my Children, tonight
 I have sad news from Seattle,
 where a great sea turtle was found
 washed up on the beach, dead.
 Alki Point, West Seattle
 site of the first
 settlement in the Northwest
 by Western People
 Since early native cultures
 did not keep written records
 we can only imagine what they have
 seen over the past 10,000 years
 of life in this place
 but nothing like this has happened
 in the past 200 years.

Video on the TV show a couple in haze-mat suits putting Adam into a large plastic bag as the opera continues.

NEWSCASTER TITLES (CONT'D)

Why this majestic creature, from
 the warm waters of Central America
 would swim against the cold
 currents to did in this place
 is a mystery. I'm sorry my news
 tonight is so sad.

The naked Napoleon marionette rises from the bed and stands center stage.

NAPOLEON TITLES

Where am I? Who am I?

CHORUS OF CIVILIZATION

1787 -- And you are Napoleon in
Paris

NAPOLEON

16 years old! And who are you?
(Referring to Newscaster)

NEWSCASTER

I am the Evening News!

NAPOLEON TITLES

And I am a puppet ... a Puppet of
History!

NAPOLEON/NEWSCASTER

Listen to us,
many voices of the Earth,
We must speak as one!

CHORUS OF CIVILIZATION

Puppets of History --
calling to us in all your tears ...

DUET TITLES

Peace and Prosperity are our Goals!

CHORUS OF CIVILIZATION

Puppets of History --
Fighting and Fucking through the
years ...

DUET TITLES

To be the Greatest Nation
on Earth is our Destiny!

ALL

Puppets of History
On the Evening News talking away --
Singing of All Our Fears!

The Assassin appears on the TV screen, tight shot on just the
lips blowing, Napoleon falls forward, banging his mask.

INT. THE ASSASSIN ENTERS THE TABLETOP

ASSASSIN

Our time here is short ...
your undivided attention please.

(MORE)

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

In part two, these Silver Chains will represent the major rivers of Russia here on the tabletop. To the north, the Divna; to the south, the Dnieper; but most important, is the land between the two rivers, called the Orsha Land Bridge -- the most level, driest route from the west, leading directly into Moscow.

Assistants enter with the miniature French Armies.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

And to the west, is the Nieman River, then Russian's border.

Assassin places the French Armies behind the chain representing the river during the following.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

In 1810, Napoleon began massing the largest army ever assembled on this planet -- the build-up lasted two years so that by 1812 -- close to a half a million men were in formation on the western banks of Nieman River.

Even tighter shot of the Assassins lips on the TV screen.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

Some six months later, only thirty thousand men lived to re-cross the river. In 1942, Hitler also used the Orsha Land Bridge to invade Russia, and he too failed to capture Moscow, he too paid a decent price in human life and suffering. And in 1967, on December 16, 1967, to be exact, Aretha Franklin's "Chair of Fools" will first appear on the Billboards Top 40!

Song plays as the Painted Curtain falls completing the tableau of the miniature armies standing in front of Eve carrying the miniature Proscenium Arch on her back.

. . .

#2. Voice of the Hollow Man

Cross fade on the wide shot of the Table and Wall tableau to Guests mingling in the Front of House Beverage Area.

INT/EXT. MONTAGE OF INTERMISSION FOOTAGE

HOST (Voice Over)

My father loved the military, we entered World War II for men like him. He was sent to Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri for training as an artillery officer in the Army. I came into the world around this time in the small town of St. James, near Rolla, which is near the Missouri Fort. Our second play is about war, about Napoleon's invasion of Russia and the letters home to his young wife, the mother of his first born. Just as it was for my mother and me.

Cross fade to wide shot with all Guests seated.

INT. NAPOLEON'S DIARY

On the left side of the Wall, the Assistant turns on a light backstage throwing his shadow on the Wall, he is playing the part of Napoleon.

BLUE ASSISTANT

Paris, May 3rd, 1786.
Always solitary among men, I am here, within doors, dreaming and giving full vent to all my melancholy. To what will it drive me today? To more thoughts of death? Still at the dawn of life, I may hope for many days to come. What madness, then, drives me to self-destruction? Doubtless it is the hollowness of life.

TITLE PROJECTION

VOICE OF THE HOLLOW MAN

INT. PAGANINI THE VIOLINIST

At the head of the Table, the Host is operating the violinist bust of Paganini with its silhouette playing on the Wall Section above the orange Flight Record and the Foot Soldiers hanging from the grid.

HOST

My Mama would tell me the story of
birth in such detail, that I
believe a sudden wind blew open the
shutters with a bang!
And a white, bright radiant light
filled the Angel's voice, as she
told my Mama that one day I would
be the most famous violinist the
world has ever known.
I am tied to the strings of my
memories.

The music continues as the scene cuts to the bright, white
room at the top of the stairs where the Babyface of the
Storyteller is now an older face of a child proud of his
ability to read.

EXT. STORYTELLER AS A YOUNG BOY (READING FROM "PACO'S STORY")

BOY/STORYTELLER

Let's begin with the first clean
fact: this ain't no war story.

Close-up of fingers reading Braille.

BOY

War stories are out -- one, two,
three, and a heave-ho into the lake
you go with all the other alewife
scuz and foamy harbour scum.
But ... Just isn't it a pity,
because here and there and yonder
among the corpses are some prize-
winning, leg-pulling daisies --
some real pop-in-the-oven muffins,
so to speak, some real softly
lobbed, easy-out line drives.

Cut to the Assassin entering the tabletop.

INT. INTRODUCTION OF THE RUSSIAN ARMIES

ASSASSIN

Have you been watching the wars on
TV? (Beat) War comes from the
Garden of Thought, the source of
all things, when one became two and
time was measured by birth and
death.

Blue Assistant enters house left with the miniature figure of
General Doctorov.

BLUE ASSISTANT
Tic, tock, tic, tock ... this is
the story of Napoleon's invasion of
Russia in the year 1812 --

Assistant hands the miniature army to the Assassin on the
tabletop.

BLUE ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
with the largest force ever
assembled on the planet.

Red Assistant enters house right with the miniature figure of
Alexander, handing it to the Assassin.

RED ASSISTANT
When Alexander the First, the Czar
of Russia, defied Napoleon's
blockade of Britain by re-opening
Russia's ports to ships of all
nations ...

Blue Assistant enters with Prince Mikail Barclay De Tolly,
that he hands to the Assassin for placement on the Tabletop.

BLUE ASSISTANT
Especially to those ships packed
full with the soft cuddly fur of
dead beaver from America.

The following is back-and-forth on opposite sides of the
table.

RED ASSISTANT
The Czar stationed some two hundred
thousand men along the Dvina and
Dnieper Rivers.

BLUE ASSISTANT
For two years now the Russians have
been waiting, expecting the great
Napoleon and his Grand Army!

RED ASSISTANT
On April 21, 1812, Alexander
departed St Petersburg for the
front, to inspect his armies,
arriving at Vilna, the capital of
Russian Lithuania, on the 25th ...
that's a five-day, horse-drawn
coach trip through springtime
Russia!

TOGETHER

This is the story of a ground war.

The Assistants exit as a projection of T. S. Eliot's poem fills the Wall.

I

We are the hollow men
 We are the stuffed men
 Leaning together
 Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
 Our dried voices, when
 We whisper together
 Are quiet and meaningless
 As wind in dry grass
 Or rats' feet over broken glass
 In our dry cellar

Shape without form, shade without colour,
 Paralysed force, gesture without motion;

Those who have crossed
 With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
 Remember us-if at all-not as lost
 Violent souls, but only
 As the hollow men
 The stuffed men.

INT./EXT. ELLIOT'S POEM & PACO'S STORY

Cut to a head shot of the boy's face superimposed on the puppet head of the Storyteller.

BOY

Now, according to some people,
 folks do not want to hear about
 Alpha Company --

Close-up fingers reading Braille.

BOY (CONT'D)

Us grunts -- busting jungle and
 busting cherries from Landing Zone
 Skator-Gator to Scat Man Do
 (wherever that it) humping and
 hauling ass all the way.

(MORE)

BOY (CONT'D)
 But most particularly, people thing
 that folks do not want to hear
 about the night at Fire Base
 Harriett -- when the whole company,
 except for one guy, got killed.
 Fucked-up dead, scarfed up.
 Everybody but Paco got nominated
 and voted into the Hall of Fame in
 one fell swoop.

Cut to:

INT. INTRODUCTION OF THE FRENCH ARMIES

Assassin has entered the tabletop and holds up the Joachim Murat army.

BLUE ASSISTANT
 Joachim Murat, age 42 ...

Assassin places Murat then holds up the Napoleon figure.

BLUE ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
 Napoleon Bonaparte, age 42 ...

Blue Assistant on the other side of the table watches the Napoleon figure as its placed on the tabletop.

RED ASSISTANT
 Napoleon's household and
 headquarters staffs' numbered
 around 25,000.

Assassin places Napoleon and holds up the Ney army.

BLUE ASSASSIN
 Michel Ney, age 43 ...

Red Assistant continues to watch the Napoleon figure.

RED ASSISTANT
 The Emperor's glossy black carriage
 requires a team of eight horses,
 usually white, and out fitted with
 a bed ...

Assassin places Ney and holds up Oudinot's miniature army.

BLUE ASSASSIN
 Nicolas-Charles Oudinot, age 45.

Sill referring to the Napoleon figure.

RED ASSISTANT
 ... and a large table for maps with
 a special chair for his chief of
 staff, allowing him to sleep while
 sitting up ...

Assassin places Oudinot and holds up St. Cyr

BLUE ASSASSIN
 Gouvion St. Cyr age 48 ...

RED ASSISTANT
 Napoleon also traveled with a
 library of some 300 books ...

Assassin places St. Cyr and holds up Beauharnais' army.

BLUE ASSASSIN
 Eugene de Beauharnais, age 29.

RED ASSISTANT
 Including Voltaire's account of
 Charles the XII, the Swedish King
 who was lured deep into Russia ...

Places Beauharnais and holds up Junot.

BLUE ASSASSIN
 Andoche Junot, age 41 ...

RED ASSISTANT
 Where his army was separated from
 its supply train and humbly
 destroyed in the Battle of Poltava,
 in 1709.

Junot is placed and Assassin holds up Poniatowski.

BLUE ASSASSIN
 Jozef Antoni Poniatowski, age 49.

Assassin exits the tabletop, Blue exits house left, tight
 head shot of the Red Assistant.

RED ASSISTANT
 Today, Napoleon sits upon a rather
 small, thoroughbred Arabian horse,
 high on a hill over looking the
 three pontoon bridges -- and from
 where the men can look up and see
 him.

Red exits as the Assassin enters the Tabletop followed by the
 Host who stands behind the Assassin as the "operator."

INT. LAWS OF MOTION

Assassin lip syncs the following, while he moves her arms to gesture.

HOST

It is impossible for the human intellect to grasp the idea of absolute continuity of motion. Laws of motion of any kind only become comprehensible to man when he can examine arbitrarily selected units of that motion. But at the same time it is the arbitrary division of continuous motion into discontinuous units, which gives rise to a large proportion of human error.

ASSASSIN

Tolstoy.

Host exits house right, then the Assassin to the left as the Blue Assistant, backstage, turns a sharp blue light that throws his shadow on the Wall. Assassin exits through the house.

INT. NAPOLEON'S FIRST LETTER

Blue, as Napoleon is reading the letter he wrote, in the background we hear a female voice reading it in French.

BLUE ASSISTANT

Koveno, morning, June 25, 1812 --
 My love, I crossed the Niemen on the 24th, at two o'clock in the morning, I crossed the Vilia in the afternoon.
 I am master of Koveno. No important affair took place. My health is good, but the heat is overpowering. I have just received your letter of the 18th. You can present the University with a collection of books and engravings. This will please the Emperor vastly and will cost you nothing. I have plenty of them. Goodnight, my love one, I'm all yours, always. Nap.

Blue turns the light off. The Host's childhood photos are projected on the Wall through out this oral history interview.

INT. MOM'S FIRST INTERVIEW

MOM

Delivering a baby! I didn't know what to do. I just screamed all the time, I screamed; and so then, the baby was born and your dad said, why is she still screaming? See Grandpa held you. See your dad couldn't hold you when he had his uniform on.

ME

Why?

MOM

It was against the law.

ME

Say that again.

MOM

It was against the military ...

ME

To do what?

MOM

To hold a baby or to hold anything against his uniform. I think he was pretty excited about the whole thing because he loved the army. The challenge ...

Projected images change.

MOM (CONT'D)

Now looking back on it I should have been more aggressive myself, I mean more ...

ME

More aware of your own needs?

MOM

More of my own worth ... that's what I should have done ... you can do it Maxine, you can do it if you have to ... which I didn't prove till later on ... but it took me a long time to get to that point in my life....

(MORE)

MOM (CONT'D)

But never in my wildest dreams did
I imagine that anything would
happen to him because he was very
good about writing to me

MOM (CONT'D)

Are you watching your time on your
clothes?

ME

No, should we do it? Should we take
a break and do it?

The final projected image overlaps with the opening of the
Painted Curtain, three marionette singers in gowns backed
with a shimmering gold curtain as they sing.

INT. SONG #1: THAT'S ENOUGH DOROTHY LOVE COATES

INT. PROJECTED POEM

II

Eyes I dare not meet in dreams
In death's dream kingdom
These do not appear:
There, the eyes are
Sunlight on a broken column
There, is a tree swinging
And voices are
In the wind's singing
More distant and more solemn
Than a fading star.

Let me be no nearer
In death's dream kingdom
Let me also wear
Such deliberate disguises
Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed
staves
In a field
Behaving as the wind behaves
No nearer-

Not that final meeting
In the twilight kingdom

Painted Curtain falls on the ending of song; poem projection
remains. Cut to Boy/Storyteller head shot who is reading from
"Paco's Story"

BOY STORYTELLER VO

The company was night-laggard in a
tight-assed perimeter up past our
eyeballs in a no-shit firefight
with a battalion of headhunter
NVA ...

Fingers reading Braille

BOY

... when all of a sudden--zoom--the
air came alive and crawled and
yammered and whizzed and hummed
with the roar and buzz of a
thousand incoming rounds.

INT. THE MINIATURE CITY OF SMOLENSK LOWERS TO THE TABLETOP

BOY

It was hard to see for all the
gunpowder smoke and dust kicked up
by all the muzzle flashes, but
everyone looked up--GIS and zips--
and knew it was every incoming
round left in Creation, a wild and
bloody shitstorm, a ball--busting
cataclysm.

Red Assistant enters, watching Smolensk lower into view, then
refers to it.

RED ASSISTANT

Czar Alexander was at a Ball given
in his honor by Count Levin August
Bennigsen, age 67, when the message
of the invasion came as a whisper
in his ear.

Assassin is on the Tabletop holding the figure of the Czar.

ASSASSIN

"I will not make peace so long as a
single armed enemy soldier remains
in my country," he said, in French,
to one in particular and returned
to the Ball.

Referring to the figure of the Czar.

RED ASSISTANT

Alexander, age 35, came to power when only 24, practically tripping over the warm body of his assassinated father into the predestined significance of history.

Blue Assistant from the other side of the Table.

BLUE ASSISTANT

He is friendly, usually very graceful and a man of God, in fact, God's man amongst God intoxicated people, living in a God-given ...

Assassin cuts him off holding up the figure of Bagration.

RED ASSISTANT

General Pyotr Ivanovich Bagration, age 47, A Russian Prince in command of Russia's Second Western Army ...

BLUE ASSISTANT

He wants to attack, but is ordered to retreat by Prince Mikail Barclay de Tolly, age 51, Commander of the First Army....

Assassin is holding up the figure of Doctorov.

RED ASSISTANT

General Dimitri Sergeyeveitch Doctorov, age 56, not yet a prince, but in command of an intermediary corps, is left unprotected before getting the word to pull back.

BLUE ASSISTANT

And back at headquarters, the Russian generals are clamoring for an advance into Poland, across Germany, all the way to Paris if need be -- they've had enough of sticking pins into maps! A joke making the rounds is of a Russian officer petitioning the Czar for a promotion to the rank of German.

RED ASSISTANT

Finally, a group of elder statesman advises the Czar, in a delicate letter, to leave the army and return to the capital where he rouse enthusiasm for the war among his people.

BLUE ASSISTANT

Alexander accepts this and departs with his entourage for Moscow.

Both Assistants exit with the figures of Alexander and Bennigsen while the Assassin arranges the armies in a circle around the miniature walled city of Smolensk.

ASSASSIN

So the two Russian Armies, along with Doctorov join forces at Smolensk. This ancient city, one of holiest in Russia, is built on bluffs high above the Dnieper River and encircled by a 17th Century crenulated brick wall four miles long, some 30 to 40 feet high and up to 20 feet thick at its base.

Assassin stoops to light three candles inside the miniature city.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

On August 15th, Napoleon celebrates his 43rd birthday.

Assassin exits the tabletop

INT/EXT. PACO'S STORY AND THE BURNING OF SMOLENSK

Cut to Boy/Storyteller, his young eyes are staring into the camera.

BOY

In another instant everyone within earshot was quiet, and a hush of anticipation rippled through the crowd, like big wind that strikes many trees all at once.

On the Tabletop, the city of Smolensk bursts into flame.

BOY (CONT'D)

Then we heard the air rushing ahead of those rounds the same as a breeze through a cave -- so sharp and cool on the face, refreshing and foul all at once -- as though those rounds were floating down to us as limp and leisurely as cotton wood leaves. We looked one another up and down one more time, as much as to say, "Been nice. See you around. Fucking shit! Here it comes."

Cut to wide shot of the Table and Wall where the Blue Assistant turns on the bright blue light, his shadow fills half of the Wall.

INT. NAPOLEON'S FOURTH LETTER

BLUE ASSISTANT VO

Smolensk, August 18, 1812.
My Love, I am in Smolensk since this morning.

Projected images of the 19th-century battles fill the Wall.

BLUE ASSISTANT VO (CONT'D)

I captured this town from the Russians after have killed 3000 of them and wounded or taken prisoner more that three times that number. My health is very good, the heat excessive. My affairs are going well. Schwarzenberg has defeated the Russians 200 leagues from here. Nap.

Blue turns the light off, cut to the Assassin on the Tabletop placing plastic soldiers in piles around the miniature city and stands to switch on a bare light bulb over Smolensk.

INT. EVACUATION OF SMOLENSK

ASSASSIN

Today we ask, was Smolensk captured or abandoned? History is written backwards isn't it -- from the future -- and so creating its own battle, between truth and fact. In any event, the evacuation of Smolensk began with this -- the removal of the Black Virgin from her altar.

Assassin stoops over the miniature city, removing the icon.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

Ah, it's noon and Napoleon is entering the burnt out city behind the Grand Army Band -- wasted pomp and pageant, I'm afraid, on the carbonized corpses everywhere; charcoal human bodies shrunk to the size of children; and the pigs rooting among them are being caught for roasting and celebration.

Assassin exits the Tabletop as the Host appears at the head of table, stepping away from the A/V equipment.

INT. HOST'S LIVE NARRATION

HOST

The 18th passes with out any orders from Napoleon. And in their hasty retreat, part of Barclay's army becomes lost in the woods, requiring Barclay himself to come up and give the orders necessary to untangle the mess. Barclay is looking for a battlefield where his losses will be minimal. He is still outnumbered by some 50 thousand men; but more important, his heart's frozen by Napoleon's reputation. Meanwhile, Bagration's plans to unseat Barclay now reach all the way to St. Petersburg; meaning that the very last thing Bagration wants to do is to fight a battle under Barclay's initiative.

The Host circles back to the A/V setup during the following.

HOST (CONT'D)

So the next ten days are going to be hot, dry and tense until the arrival of Prince Mikhail I. Kutuzov, age 67, and the new commander-in-chief.

Host plays the sound of crows, Assistants enter house right with Red carrying the Kutuzov figure while Blue walks backward, with a spot light on the figure during the following.

BLUE ASSISTANT

The Prince is so obese he can hardly ride a horse and only then at a walk. He usually rides in a specially built carriage, large and strong enough for the overweight man to stretch out and sleep.

RED ASSISTANT

His appointment is a political necessity since he is a prince and a full-blooded Russian.

BLUE ASSISTANT

But it's said of him that he fire inside has gone out and that his flabby flesh is only good now for carrying the ribbons and decorations of his military memories.

Blue hands Kutuzov to the Assassin on the tabletop.

RED ASSISTANT

He would claim, on the other hand, that the two most powerful warriors are patience and time -- they will do everything!

Assassin places Kutuzov.

ASSASSIN

In other words, a smart soldier will teach himself to sleep while waiting.

The Assassin turns the light off over miniature city of Smolensk and exits the Tabletop; projected images of Napoleon and Marie-Louise appear on the white wall.

INT. NAPOLEON READING #5

Again, Blue turns on his light to read the next letter.

BLUE ASSISTANT

Slavkovo, 27th of August, evening--
My Love, I have received your letter of the 13th, in which I see that my son is slightly ill. I fear that this will cause you anxiety. You see that I am still moving away from you. My health is good ... the heat is very great.

(MORE)

BLUE ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

I hope you will have been satisfied with your journey to Paris and that you will not have had as hot weather as we had here on the 15th of August. Good-bye, my loved one, I am all yours, always. Nap.

He turns off the light, projected images from the 19th-century change to the Hosts' childhood pictures from the 1940s.

INT. MAXINE INTERVIEW #2

MAXINE

Anyway, we had discussed it -- that's what we'd do -- when he went off, we'd go together, with our two little kids ... and her dog. But we did. That was a really fiasco trip.

ME

Back to Minnesota?

MAXINE

Yeah. You've got to be kidding. No. Do I remember that day? No. It was a party you know, and we kind of liked each other you know, but he says, well we both got our companions and we gotta just control ourselves. He was a good guy. Don't you think he used the strength? Let's put it that way.

Projected image changes.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

You loved going to church, you loved to watch everything that went on in church You were very good, very well behaved. You were just fascinated by it ... I didn't take you very often but I would take you once in awhile. It might have been that it was easier to go by myself, I can't remember why ... why I didn't take you all the time ... you were only two years old.

Projected family photo changes.

ME

So it's you and Lucille, and Billy
and me are going to Minnesota, in
the old Plymouth?

MAXINE

Yes ... where is it that the
Mormons are?

ME

Oh, uh, Salt Lake City.

MAXINE

That's where we lost the dog.

Painted Curtain opens on the second act of girl singers.

INT. SONG #2 WITH MARIONETTE GIRL GROUP

"Uncloudy Day" by the Staple Singers, at the end a bell rings
three times.

INT. PART III "HOLLOW MAN"

III

This is the dead land
This is cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star.

Is it like this
In death's other kingdom
Waking alone
At the hour when we are
Trembling with tenderness
Lips that would kiss
Form prayers to broken stone.

Elliot's poem is projected on the Wall, at the other end, the
miniature battle ground of Borodino lowers to the tabletop --
revealing an IV Bag full of red sand -- the Assassin is on
the Tabletop moving the French armies into place.

ASSASSIN

The battleground of Borodino lies
seventy miles west of Moscow on the
Kolock River; it took Tolstoy all
of one day to reach it, today it
takes less than two hours.

(MORE)

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
Concrete bunkers from World War Two
have altered the battlefield's
19th-century appearance.

The Host circles the table carrying a framed miniature
portrait which he hands to the Assassin during the following.

HOST
It's the eve of the battle, August
25th for the Russians, but
September 6th for the French.
Outside the Imperial tent, Napoleon
proudly displays his gift from
Marie-Louise, a portrait of his
son, the baby King of Rome.

Host exits, the Assassin places the miniature portrait facing
the battle ground of Borodino, the Assistants enter from
backstage on either side of the Table.

The following text is from "War and Peace" and plays with
audio of the Russian in the background. The Red Assistant
acts as Narrator reading at a (music)stand house right.

RED/NARRATOR
On this bright evening of August
the 25th ...

BLUE/ANDREI
Prince Andrei lay leaning on his
elbow in a tumble-down shed in the
farther end of the encampment of
his regiment.

RED
Through a gap in the broken wall he
could see, beside the wooden fence,
a row of thirty-year old birches
with their lower branches lopped
off, a field with shocks of oats
lying about it, and some bushes
near which rose the smoke of
campfires, the soldiers's kitchens.

Assassin refers to the miniature portrait.

ASSASSIN
On the Russian side, the icon of
the Black Virgin, rescued from the
fires of Smolensk, was carried in
procession from camp to camp all
day long.

RED

Narrow and burdensome and of no use to anyone as his life now seemed to Prince Andrei, he felt disturbed and irritable on the eve of action, just as he had done seven years before at Austerlitz.

ASSASSIN

So, here on this obscure battleground, deep in the heart of Russia, one of the bloodiest battles of the 19th-century is about to take place between Man and God.

Assassin exits as Blue enters the tabletop.

RED/NARRATOR

The three great sorrows of his life held his attention especially his love for Natasha, his father's death and the French invasion which had overrun half of Russia.

Blue lies on his back, looking at his white death-mask playing the part of Andrei.

BLUE/ANDREI

Honor and glory, the good of society, over for a woman, the Fatherland itself. What grand pictures thy used to seem to me; with what profound meaning the seemed to be filled! And it is all so simple, so colorless and crude in the cold while light of the morning, which I feel is dawning for me.

RED

He pictured the world without himself. And the birches with their light and shade, the curly clouds and the smoke of the campfires -- everything around him suddenly underwent a transformation into something sinister and threatening. A cold shiver ran down his spine. He heard voices outside the shed.

BLUE/ANDREI

Who's there?

The Host enters to play the part of Pierre holding a white death-mask, similar to the one Blue is using.

RED

Prince Andrei looked out of the shed and saw Pierre, who had tripped and almost fallen flat over a pole lying on the ground. Prince Andrei disliked seeing Pierre, who reminded him of all the painful moments of his last visit to Moscow.

The Host has squeezed himself in at the head of the Table.

BLUE/ANDREI

You! What a surprise ... what brings you here? I didn't expect to see you!

HOST/PIERRE

I came ... well ... you know, I came ... it was interesting to me ... I wanted to see the battle.

BLUE/ANDREI

Oh yes, and what do your Freemason brethren say about war? How would they prevent it? (pause) And how's Moscow? How is my family? Have they got to Moscow at last?

HOST/PIERRE

Yes they have. Julie Drubetskoy told me so. I went to call, but missed them. (pause) They had gone on to our estate.

RED

The officers would have retired but Prince Andrei, apparently reluctant to be left alone with his friend, invited them to stay and have tea. Benches were brought in, and tea. With some amazement the officers gazed at Pierre's huge, bulky figure, and listened to his talk of Moscow and the position of our army, round which he had ridden. Prince Andrei sat silent, and his expression was so forbidding that Pierre addressed himself chiefly to Timohin, the kindly battalion commander.

Blue holds the mask in one hand, moving it to relate with the mask of Pierre.

BLUE/ANDREI
So you understand the whole disposition of our troops?

RED
Price Andrei interrupted him.

HOST/PIERRE
Yes ... that is ... how do you mean? Not being a military man I can't say I do fully ... but still ... I understand the general arrangement.

BLUE/ANDREI
Well, then you know more than anyone else.

RED
Said Prince Andrei in French. Pierre looked at him in surprise.

HOST/PIERRE
And yet, don't they say war is like a game of chess?

BLUE/ANDREI
Yes, but with this little difference, in chess a knight is always stronger than a pawn and two pawns are always stronger than one, while in war a battalion is some stronger than a division and sometimes weaker than a company. Success never has and never will depend on position, or equipment, or even on numbers -- least of all on position.

HOST/PIERRE
What does it depend on, then?

BLUE/ANDREI
On the feeling that is in me and in him ...

RED
He pointed to Timohin.

BLUE/ANDREI
... and in every soldier.

RED

Prince Andrei glanced at Timohin, who was staring at this colonel in alarm and bewilderment. Apparently he could not refrain from expressing the thoughts that had suddenly occurred to him.

BLUE/ANDREI

To my mind tomorrow means this: a hundred thousand Russian and a hundred thousand French soldiers have met to fight, and the thing is the side that fights the more savagely and spares itself least will win. And whatever mess those at the top may make, we shall win tomorrow's battle.

HOST/PIERRE

So you think that we shall win a victory tomorrow?

BLUE/ANDREI

Yes, yes. One thing I would do if I had the power, I would not take prisoners. In my opinion they are all criminals and that expresses the feeling of Timohin and the whole army with him. They must be put to death.

HOST/PIERRE

Oh yes ...

RED

Murmured Pierre, looking with shining eyes at Prince Andrei ..

HOST/PIERRE

I entirely agree with you!

RED

Pierre now realized all the import and all the gravity of this war and the impending battle. The latent heat of patriotism, which was present in all these men he had seen was now intelligible to him, and explained the composure and almost light-heartedness with which they were all preparing for death.

BLUE/ANDREI

It boils down to this: the aim and end of war is murder; and the military world is characterized by the absence of freedom -- enforced inactivity, ignorance, cruelty, debauchery and drunkenness. And yet this is the highest caste in society, respected by all. Every monarch in the world wears a military uniform, and bestows the greatest rewards on the man who kills the greatest number of his fellow creatures. Tens of thousands of men meet -- as they will tomorrow -- to massacre one another: to kill and maim, and then they will offer up thanksgiving services for having slain such vast numbers -- they even exaggerate the number -- and proclaim a victory, supposing that the more men they have slaughtered the more credit to them. Think of God looking down and listening to them ... It's not for long!

The Host as Pierre stands and steps back from the Table.

BLUE/ANDREI (CONT'D)

Ah, my friend, life has become a burden to me of late. I see that I have begun to understand too much. And it doesn't do for man to taste the tree of knowledge -- the fruit of good and evil ... Ah, well, it's not for long! However, you're sleepy, and it's time I turned in, too. Get back to Gorky.

The Host moves to bring his mask closer to Blue's Andrei.

HOST/PIERRE

Oh no!

RED

Pierre replied, looking at Prince Andrei with eyes full of scared sympathy.

BLUE/ANDREI

Yes, you ought to be off: before a battle one needs a good night's rest.

A la bise between masks.

BLUE/ANDREI (CONT'D)

Good-bye, be off with you! Whether we meet again ... no, and hastily turning away he entered the shed.

The Host exits.

RED

In the shed Prince Andrei stretched himself on a rug but he could not sleep. He closed his eyes. One set of images succeeded another in his imagination. There was one picture on which he dwelt long and joyfully. It was an evening in Petersburg, and with an eager, excited face Natasha was telling him how she had gone to look for mushrooms the previous summer and had lost her way in the big forest. Incoherently she described the still depths of the forest, and her talk with a beekeeper she met, and every minute she broke off to say:

The Assassin enters the Tabletop to play the part of Natasha.

ASSASSIN

"No, I can't, I'm not telling it properly; no, you won't understand."

Assassin falls on Blue, the couple roll over, Blue pulls away, stands, looking down at the Assassin.

BLUE/ANDREI

I understood her. Not only did I understand her but it was just the inner spiritual force, that sincerity, that ingenuousness -- the very soul of her which seemed to be pinioned by her body -- it was that soul I loved in her -- loved so intensely, so happily

Blue hands the Andrei mask to the Assassin and exits.

RED

Prince Andrei jumped up as though he had been scalded and began pacing to and fro in front of the shed again.

Red turns off her reading light at the stand; cut to the Boy/Storyteller's face.

EXT. BRAILLE READING OF "PACO'S STORY"

BOY

Our man Paco, not dead but sure as shit should be ... lies flat on his back and wide to the sky, with slashing lacerations, big watery burn blisters, and broken, splintered ruined legs. He wallows in the greasy, silken mulch that covers him and everything else for a stone's throw and dries to a stinking sand crust.

Cut to wide shot of the Table and Wall, Blue turns on his reading light, his shadow fills half of the Wall.

INT. NAPOLEON'S LETTER #6

BLUE ASSISTANT

Borodino, September 6th My loved one, I am very tired. Bausset has delivered the King's portrait to me. It is a masterpiece. I much appreciate your kind thought. It is a beautiful as you. I shall write to you more fully tomorrow; I am tired. Goodnight, my loved one. Nap.

Blue turns his reading light off.

INT/EXT. PACO'S STORY ALTERNATES WITH ANDREI'S

Red turns her reading light on at the stand house right.

RED

Prince Andrei's regiment, having already lost more than two hundred men, was moved forward into a trampled oat field where thousands of men perished that day and on which an intense, concentrated fire from several hundred enemy guns was directed between one and two o'clock.

BOY

There was big red cross on the white field on the bottom of the medevac chopper when it came to get him, and nearly the instant he was aboard the chopper rose with a swoop, making speed and altitude swiftly.

RED

Nothing remained of the fabric of thought, which he had so painfully elaborated the day before. He thought of nothing at all.

BOY

Paco's stomach fluttered and he felt mighty dizzy, and he thought he was going to throw up. He remembers the healthy, browned faces of the medics, and their gossip about the filthy debris in Paco's wounds ...

RED

A whizz and a thud! Five paces from him a cannon ball tore up the dry soil and disappeared into the earth. A chill ran down his back. Again he glanced at the ranks.

BLUE/ANDREI

Adjutant! Tell those men not to stand so close together.

RED

(Simultaneously) 'Look out!' cried a soldier in a terrified voice. 'Lie down!' Yelled the adjutant, throwing himself flat on the ground. The Horse's terror infected the men.

BOY

All the while, the other medics soothed Paco, petting him, saying 'Gonna be okay, hey!'

RED

Prince Andrei hesitated. The smoking shell spun like a top between him and the prostate Adjutant

BOY

You gonna be cool in another ten minutes. Okay?

ASSASSIN/ANDREI

Can this be death?

RED

Prince Andrei wondered, casting a fleeting glance of quite unwonted envy at the grass and the thread of smoke that curled upward from the whistling black ball.

ASSASSIN/ANDREI

I can't die, I don't want to die, I love life -- I love this grass, this earth, this air

RED

He did not finish, when there was an explosion, a splintering sound like a window frame being smashed, a suffocating smell of powder, and Prince Andrei was jerked to one side and, flinging up his arm, fell on his face.

The Assassin rolls over, stands, backing away from Andrei's white death-mask on the black velour.

BOY

Can't fuck up a tough motherfucker like you, now can they?

RED

Several officers ran up to him. Blood was welling out from the right side of his abdomen, making a great stain on the grass.

BOY

And all that time Paco kept one thought in his head as distinct as a colorful dream -- I must not die ...

RED

"Well what are you waiting for? Come along!" The peasants came close and took him by the shoulders and legs but he groaned piteously and the men, exchanging looks, set him down again.

BOY

... like the litany of an invocation, as though he felt his body shrink each instant he did say it.

RED

"Pick him up, up with him, it must be done!"

Assassin steps forward to pick up the Andrei mask and exits the Tabletop.

ASSASSIN/ANDREI

Ah, my God, my God!

Blue turns on his reading light.

INT. NAPOLEON'S LETTER #7

BLUE ASSISTANT

Borodino, September 8th, 1812. My Loved One, I am writing to you on the battlefield of Borodino, I defeated the Russians yesterday; their whole army 120,000 men strong were there. The battle was warmly contested: by two o'clock in the afternoon the victory was ours, I made several thousand prisoners and captured 60 guns. Their loss may be estimated at 30,000 men. I had many killed and wounded. I personally was not at all exposed. My health is good; the weather is somewhat cold. Good-bye for now -- I am yours, always. Nap.

Blue turns off his reading light as projected images of 19th-century battles appear on the wall.

INT/EXT. PACO'S AND ANDREI'S STORIES CONTINUE AS THE ASSASSIN DRESSES THE MINIATURE BATTLEGROUND OF BORODINO WITH ITS DEAD.

RED

The ambulance station consisted of three tents with flaps turned back, pitched at the edge of birch grove.

BOY

A triage is the place in the back of a hospital where the litter bearers' line up the wounded brought in from the field.

Blue is reading from house left, opposite Red.

BLUE

In the woods stood the ambulance
vans and horses.

BOY

In extreme emergencies the worst
hopeless cases are drugged, usually
with healthy doses of morphine,
shunted off to the Moribund Ward.

BLUE

Some crows, scenting blood, flew
about among the birch trees, cawing
impatiently.

BOY

And once you are taken into the
Moribund Ward, you are as good as
dead -- no matter how long it
takes.

RED

The doctor, a pasty-faed major
swaggered into the open air triage,
wiping his hands on a mildly bloody
apron like a fishmonger's wife.

BLUE

"All right, come along," he said in
reply to a dresser who called his
attention to Prince Andrei, and he
told them to carry him into the
tent.

BOY

He took one look at Paco and saw
immediately that he was unfit to
take into the operation room.

The Assassin opens the IV Bag hanging over the miniature
battleground and red sand pours over the pile of plastic
soldiers.

RED

The other table was surrounded with
people. A big stout man was
stretched upon it; several dressers
were pressing on his chest to hold
him down.

BOY

The doctor unzipped Paco's body bag -- the sharp raw stench of Paco's wounds, Paco's bowel, rising fully in his face.

RED

The man was sobbing and choking convulsively.

BOY

He turned the bloody zippered flaps of the bag this way and that ...

BLUE

They were silently doing something to man's gory leg.

BOY

... reaching in to lift a scrap of cloth to inspect the festering wounds and the bone fragments that stuck through the skin.

RED

When he had finished, the spectacled doctor came across to Prince Andrei, wiping his hands. He glanced at Prince Andrei's face and quickly turned away.

BOY

"Christ Jesus on a bloody fuckin' crutch," he said under his breath, "how long was this guy left like this? What's his name?"

RED

"Get his clothes off! What are you waiting for?" He cried angrily to the dressers.

BOY

"Almost two days," said the medic with the good hands. "This is that Alpha Company guy and he ain't said who he is yet, sir."

A montage of projected images appear on the Wall through out the preceding, now Blue's reading light creates the silhouette of him reading.

INT. NAPOLEON'S LETTER #8

BLUE/NAP

Mojaisk, September 9th, 1812. My Love, I have received your letter of the 24th. The little King, from what you tell me, is very naughty. I received his portrait on the eve of the battle of Borodino.

RED

His earliest, most distant childhood came back to Prince Andrei when the dresser with sleeves rolled up began hastily unbuttoning and taking off his clothes.

BLUE/NAP

I had it shown to the army; the whole arm though it admirable; it is a masterpiece.

RED

The doctor bent close over the wound probed it and sighed deeply. Then he made a sign to someone and the excruciating pain in his abdomen made Prince Andrei lose consciousness.

BLUE/NAP

My health is very good; you can if you wish receive the Bishop of Nantes if he is in Paris.

RED ASSISTANT

When he came to himself, water was being sprinkled on his face.

BLUE/NAP

Good-bye my love. All yours,
always, Nap.

Blue Assistant turns off his light.

RED

As soon as Prince Andrei opened his eyes the doctor bent down kissed him on the lips without a word and hurried away.

The Red Assistant exits as the Host's childhood pictures appear on the Wall.

INT. AUDIO: MAXINE INTERVIEW #3

MAXINE

No, I don't remember that ... I don't remember ...

ME

... the atomic bomb?

MAXINE

I don't remember that affected me a whole lot ... no, I think everybody else worried but me. I really do. I don't think I worried about that stuff. I really didn't because I always got the letters and

Assassin is speaking from the Tabletop while dressing the miniature Borodino battle ground.

ASSASSIN

In a twenty-four hour period, Napoleon's chief surgeon, Baron Dominique Larrey, performed 200 amputations himself. Larrey developed the procedure of amputating the arm at the shoulder joint and tells of performing the operation on a major who immediately after being dressed, mounted his horse, since he was afraid of losing it, and left for France, arriving four months later with his wound completely healed. Forty-nine French generals, on the other hand, remain in the soil of Borodino to this day; and Napoleon is accused by history of missing an opportunity to destroy the Russians with his reserve forces -- it seems he was suffering from engorged hemorrhoids -- making it difficult to ride.

MAXINE

Of course, when he came home he told me that they followed it. They followed the war really; but what was dangerous as when they went over to New Guinea, and the mines could have been in the ground, that was the dangerous part, that they could have stepped on that injured.

(MORE)

MAXINE (CONT'D)

But luckily they didn't, luckily they didn't.

ASSASSIN

But I imagine being in a landscape littered with 80,000 corpus delicti and over 10,000 fallen horses, that even a man living inside the body of Napoleon would feel the need to stop -- a sense that the earth can hold only so much blood at a time. Besides, tradition dictated that in the absence of a decisive victory, both sides would regroup and continue that battle in the morning; but as happened at Smolensk, by dawn's early light the Russian armies had disappeared. The difference this time is that the road to Moscow is open.

MAXINE

We found a place to live, and then we moved to Excelsior -- we initiated the house. I don't know how we got along.

ME

Wayne's here ... Wayne was born by then ...

Referring to his family photos projected on the wall.

MAXINE

Ya, where was Wayne, I don't know ...

ASSASSIN

Today, the manicured earthen bunker at Borodino holds a memorial to General Bagration who died from a musket shot to the inside thigh of his left leg.

MAXINE

You see I had to keep taking pictures a lot for your Dad.

ME

Oh, you sent these.

MAXINE

Yes. So I took a lot of pictures
and sent them to your Dad, see, I
soon as I got them. Well, you can
see how much bigger you are

ME

Did he bring them back or ...?

MAXINE

Well I don't remember all that
stuff Warner.

ME

When did you put this scrapbook
together?

MAXINE

Well after ... after, when I ...

ME

Yes, I am a lot bigger.

MAXINE

Oh Yes.

Painted Curtain opens with audio.

INT. SONG #3 WITH MARIONETTE GIRL GROUP

"Camptown Meeting"

INT. PART IV, POEM PROJECTED ON THE WHITE WALL

IV

The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley
This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms

In this last of meeting places
We grope together
And avoid speech
Gathered on this beach of the tumid river

Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose
Of death's twilight kingdom
The hope only
Of empty men.

RED/NARRATOR

Moscow meanwhile was empty. There were still people in the city -- perhaps a fiftieth part of its former inhabitants still remain -- but it was empty. It was empty in the sense that dying, queen-less hive is empty.

Blue keeps his reading light on, creating his silhouette, during the following.

BLUE/NAP

September 16th 1812. My Love, I have received your letter of the 31st, in which I read that you had received the letters from Smolensk. I have already written to you from Moscow, which I reached on September 14th.

BOY

The night nurse saw Paco stretching and rustling around, pulling at the sheets gathered in his fists.

BLUE

The city is as large as Paris, there are 1,600 steeples and more than a thousand fine palaces, the city is provided with everything.

BOY

She dropped her paperwork and went immediately to him and sat lightly on the very edge of his bed.

BLUE

The nobility have left, the tradesmen have been compelled to leave as well, the common people have remained.

BOY

At first she reassured him, telling him where he was: "The post-op ward of the evac hospital, and you've had an operation, and you'll have more, but you're okay," she said ...

BLUE

My health is good; my cold has left me. All Yours, always, Nap.

BOY

... and gave him a drink of tepid water, holding the tall Styrofoam cup steady while he sipped deeply through the plastic straw.

RED

The beekeeper opens the upper compartment and examines the top super of the hive. All is neglected and befouled.

BOY

Paco always especially remembered her rich, feminine voice. "What is your name?" she said. "Tell me your name, say your name."

RED

Elsewhere a crowd of bees, squashing one another, fall on some victim, attack and smother it.

BOY

So he told her, though he discovered he could barely speak.

RED

And the debilitated or dead bee drops slowly, light as a feather, among the heap of corpses.

BOY

He wanted to ask her who all these men were; if there was anyone from Alpha Company, anyone else from Fire Base Harriette?

RED

They have almost all of them died unawares, sitting in the sanctuary they had guarded and which is now no more.

BOY

"No," she said clearly, anticipating him, "these are from Fire Base Francesca.

RED

They reek of decay and corruption.
 Only a few of them still, rise up
 and idly fly to settle on the
 enemy's hand, lacking the spirit to
 die stinging him: the rest are dead
 and spill down as light as fish-
 scales.

BOY

"You're the only one from
 Harriette."

RED

The beekeeper closes the hive,
 chalks a mark on it and presently,
 when he has time, breaks it open
 and burns it clean.

Red turns her reading light off and exits.

INT. PART V PROJECTED POEM

V

Here we go round the prickly pear
 Prickly pear prickly pear
 Here we go round the prickly pear
 At five o'clock in the morning.

Between the idea
 And the reality
 Between the motion
 And the act
 Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the conception
 And the creation
 Between the emotion
 And the response
 Falls the Shadow

Life is very long

Between the desire
 And the spasm
 Between the potency
 And the existence
 Between the essence
 And the descent
 Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

For Thine is

Life is
For Thine is the

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

EXT/INT. BOY/STORYTELLER READING PACO'S STORY IN BRAILLE

BOY

The night nurse tended him carefully, talking with him, protecting him from the Red Cross do-gooders and the brigade chaplain. She watched him sleep from her chair at the nurses' station across the room, bathed him every night with that same soft cloth and warm efficiency. Then one night while she bathed him, not long after he arrived, she wiped her hands of soap and encouraged an erection.

His cock, dotted with stitching, rose from between his thighs with quick jerks—a fine, firm hard-on, though all he felt through the dazzling morphine was a peculiar fullness.

The woman took hold of it with one hand and, caressing his belly with the other; leaned down and licked the head (shining like an oiled plum) with her swirling tongue, and gingerly caressed it more and more with her warm fingertips (the stitches stretching, stinging).

He put his hands on her head and worked his fingers into her short hair—astonished, luxuriating in the wonderful pleasure (a sweet toothache pain). A good long time she masturbated him, sucking languorously, and soon enough he felt the pause and urge of terrific inevitability.

She sensed it, too (the muscles of his buttocks hunching under the bandages), reached for a large bandage, and clapped it over the head of his cock. And when he climaxed he went on and on.

(MORE)

BOY (CONT'D)

She cleaned him up, dusted his crotch with talc, and Paco felt fine, considering the stitches-- just fine.

Blue Assistant with the silhouette of him reading.

INT. NAPOLEON'S LETTER #9

BLUE ASSISTANT

November 3rd, 1812. My Love, I have just received your letter of October 20th. I am expecting you to inform me at any moment that my son has cut his teeth and the slight distemper hat has been trying his health is a thing of the past. The weather keeps very fine. My health is perfect; such an autumn is unheard of -- bright sunshine and only 2 Or 3 degrees below freezing point -- makes for marching easy and not fatiguing. Pray write often to your father and to Vienna -- supposing you were to come to Poland, would your father wish to come and see you there for a few days? Goodnight, my loved one -- I am all yours, always, Nap.

Blue Assistant turn his light off.

INT. ASSASSIN FORMS THE LINE OF RETREAT ON THE TABLETOP

BOY

One evening at the hospital in Japan a pasty-faced full bird colonel from Westmoreland's MACV Headquarters in Saigon arrived in Paco's room with a retinue of curious staff doctors and well-behaved nurses to give Paco his medals -- a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star. The colonel leaned over the head of the bed -- the doctors horning in to clear away some of the bandages around Paco's head right and proper -- and a keen startled look came into his eyes as the doctors unraveled more and more dressings and colonel encountered Paco's wounds.

(MORE)

BOY (CONT'D)

The colonel leaned over even father, pressing Paco into the mattress somewhat, and whispered something in his ear. And Paco can never remember what it was the man said, as many times as he has puzzled over it, but always recalls the warm breath on the side of his head and in his hair.

Cut to wide shot of the Table, Wall and Guests, Blue turns on his reading light.

INT. NAPOLEON'S LETTER #10

BLUE ASSISTANT

December 5th, 1812. My Love, I have just received your letter of the 24th. You will have seen in the Army Orders that things have not gone as well as I would have wished, yet affairs are not going badly just now; the weather is bitterly cold. My health, however has never been better. In a few day's time I shall make up my mind about your journey for the purpose of meeting again soon. Live in hope and do not worry. Goodnight, my love -- I am all yours, always, Nap.

Blue light off; cut to video of the Boy/Storyteller reading "Paco's Story" in Braille.

EXT/INT. SNOW FALLS ON NAPOLEON'S RETREAT

BOY

Paco had the distinct memory then of when he was a small boy and his father would come into his darkened bedroom some evenings, in his rawhide slippers and baggy pants, sit down light on the edge of his bed, and sing him to sleep in that whispering, croaking voice of his: Here comes the sandman, stepping so softly, stealing around on the tips of his toes, as he scatters the sand with his sure little hand, in the eyes of sleepy children.

[BEAT]

BOY (CONT'D)

Paco remembered the warm firm caresses of his father rubbing his back, and how the song always provoked yawns, and how his father would lean down and kiss his face when he had finished.

[BEAT]

BOY (CONT'D)

The colonel fumbled with the ribbons and the cases and the tissue-paper citations, a sheen of tears welling in the man's eyes as he straightened up and left the room, saying to Paco, "Goodbye, young Sergeant," with the doctors and nurses right behind.

INT. SEPARATION OF OUR PARENTS & PACO'S STORY ENDS

During the following, Adam, the male turtle puppet gently falls forward to mount Eve, the female turtle puppet holding up the world, in a sexual union, they float up out of view, into a black void.

BOY

That was the reason Paco never threw away the medals, or pawned them as many times as he was tempted and as stone total worthless as the medals were -- the Army gave them out like popcorn, you understand, like rain checks at a ball park.
It is the kiss he cherishes and the memory of the whispered word.

During the following, Eve floats down with the miniature Proscenium Arch and Painted Curtain on her back.

BOY (CONT'D)

He has the medals still, packed in the saving kit of his AWOL bay -- the medal cases smeared with shaving soap and soaked with dime store aftershave and the citations folded up as small as matchbooks.

Cut to a medium shot of the Wall as the Painted Curtain opens on the final of girl singers' group.

EXT/INT. GIRL SINGERS/MONTAGE SONG #4: "CHAIN OF FOOLS"

During the song, the Assassin enters the Tabletop with a Boombox and places in front of the retreating French armies.

BOOMBOX #1

We interrupt this program ...

The singing stops.

BOOMBOX #1 (CONT'D)

... to bring you another live report by satellite phone from a remote village in the Mackenzie river Delta where Chase Roberts is following the amazing discovery of the "Turtledove" -- the Boeing jet configured to carry the members and crew of the last symphony orchestra -- lost and abandoned at the bottom of the Arctic Ocean ...

Assassin adds a second Boombox to the Tabletop.

BOOMBOX #2

Actually I'm in a boat now Peter, rowing -- it's unbelievable -- it's as if we are rowing through the Northern Lights! Just fantastic!

Cut to the kitchen where a large pot of soup is added to a bunsen burner on a cart, and Boombox #3.

BOOMBOX #3

It's like a pale curtain, a thin, thin wall of light ever so gracefully moving inward, folding back on its self, making huge 'S' curves! In fact, the air is very cold, clear and fresh.

Tight shot on the blue flame of the burner under the stainless steel pot, full of soup; following the cart as it moves down the hall toward the performance space.

BOOMBOX #3 (CONT'D)

As I started to say, Peter, I am in a boat made of animal skins. Seal, I think.

(MORE)

BOOMBOX #3 (CONT'D)

I am the passenger and guest of the very friendly, indigenous peoples responsible for finding the Turtledove; and we are on our way to the site of the lost plane! The rowers are two women who have just explained to me that the great Northern Lights are created by torches held by the dead for the living to hunt by ... they are wearing ... Whoa! We are very close to the water in the organic vessel (Static)

Assassin is on the tabletop.

ASSASSIN

Napoleon returned to Paris in December 1812 and the very next month he wrote this memorandum to his chief of staff:

BLUE/NAPOLEON

(Shadow filling the Wall)

I have received your dispatch of the 21st, also your memorandum of actual losses. I will consider it most anxiously. This year's conscription is splendid, I had about 25 or 30 thousand men on parade Sunday.

The Painted Curtain falls on the back of Eve. Assistants enter from backstage on either side of the Table at the Wall.

TOGETHER

Ladies and Gentleman, please follow us to a Soup Supper Intermission.

EXT/INT. SOUP SUPPER INTERMISSON

Tight shot of the Tabletop tableau of the retreating French armies covered in snow as the Assistants exit to the Front of House.

. . .

#3. Voice of the Machine

Montage of Guests receiving a bowl of soup, bread, wine and some returning to their seat, others standing.

HOST VO

The idea to serve soup was inspired by the Bread and Puppet Theater, which serves solid, home-made bread as part of its shows, and thought at the time, wish I had some soup to dunk this bread into!

Cut to close-up of the Host with the intermission footage in the background.

HOST

That's not true, I made it up just for this account. What I was actually thinking at the time is how the heavy, rock solid bread was served with a piece ripped off the large loaf held under the actor's arm -- so germs were on my mind. But I was raised Catholic and understood that the offering of bread was for my soul to whom biological germs are insignificant.

Cut to close-up of the bowl of soup, white in an indigo blue bowl.

HOST (CONT'D)

My current favorite soup is a potato leek with bacon, served with a fresh baguette. Along with a glass of red wine, (he sips) it can't be beat. It puts you in the mood to talk, especially about things ontological. Only the upper crust begin with soup as the first course, while at the other end of the existence spectrum, the whole meal is only soup! It is ontological food. Bread is for the stomach but soup is for the head too. Soup was the first food and when other foods were introduced we needed flatware -- the beginning of the mind/body split. Remember the famous paintings of Campbell Soup cans by Warhol? I rest my case.

INT. REMOVAL OF THE FRENCH ARMIES COVERED IN SNOW.

The action cuts to the performance space with the entrance of the Assassin on the Tabletop who picks up the figure of St. Cyr brings it up to her eye level.

ASSASSIN:
Can you imagine walking all the way
from Paris to Moscow?

Title projection on the Wall:
ST CYR DIED OF NATURAL CAUSES IN 1830, AGE 66.

Assassin hands the figure to an Assistant, picks up the one of Oudinot.

ASSASSIN
I mean really walking ...

Title projection:
OUDINOT DIED AS GOVERNOR OF THE INVALIDES, AGE 82

Handed to an Assistant.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
... with a bunch of men?

Picking up Junot.

Title projection:
JUNOT KILLED HIMSELF JUMPING FROM A WINDOW, AGE 42.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
What kind of power could make so
many men put aside common sense to
do such a thing, Tolstoy asks?

Assassin picks up the figure of Napoleon.

Title projection:
NAPOLEON DIED IN EXILE 1821, AGE 52.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
And then, turn around, loaded down
with loot and begin to walk back to
Paris -- with the Russians in tow!

As if asking the figure, the Assassin hands it to an Assistant and picks up Murat.

Title projection:
MURAT DIED BY IRING SQUAD IN NAPLES, AGE 47

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
 And killing each other along the
 way ...

Hands it off and picks up Eugene.

Title projection:
 EUGENE DIED IN MUNICH OF UNKNOWN CAUSES, AGE 43

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
 In spite of a childhood full of
 teaching -- *thou shall not kill!*

Picking up Davout.

Title projection:
 DAVOUT DIED IN PARIS WITH ALL HIS TITLES, AGE 53.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
 Are there laws responsible for this
 kind of motion?

Handing off Davout and picking up Poniatowski.

Title projection:
 PONIATOWSKI DROWNED IN A COMBAT ACCIDENT, AGE 50.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
 A natural law perhaps that violates
 our notion of free will?

Picking up Ney.

Title projection:
 NEY DIED BY FIRING SQUAD FOR TREASON, AGE 46.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
 Divine will? If Napoleon is part of
 God's plan, then I ask, what kind
 of planner would require all this
 human sacrifice to keep the idea of
 Napoleon alive?
 Is it God's plan that our greatest
 collective effort should still be
 militarism?

Assassin prepares the miniature village of Smolensk, piled
 high with plastic soldiers, and is pulled up into the grid.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
 Perhaps we should think of God, not
 as the pilot of the plane, but
 something more passive ...

Assassin looks up following the miniature village into the grid, then moves to the miniature Borodino battle ground.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

... more like the cockpit voice recorder, continuously recording the latest 30 minutes of our civilization -- over and over again.

Isn't it up to us what's recorded? Tolstoy dismisses Divine Will as the historical reasoning of the ancients. Then points out that Napoleon never actually gave the command to invade Russia ... but in the course of doing his job, day in and day out, found himself marching toward Moscow in the year 1812, with a half a million men cheering him on! "A Puppet of History," Tolstoy calls him.

Close up of the miniature Borodino battle field with the empty blood bag is pulled slowly up into the grid.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

Tolstoy ends "War and Peace" with this thought: if we were to allow that we are free, we would arrive at the end of our lives with an absurd list of individual actions with no meaning or connection between them -- but by admitting our dependence on the external world, on time and on causality we arrive at laws -- just as we do by admitting the motion of the earth, motion we do not feel.

Title projection: PUPPET OF HISTORY dissolves to a close-up of Tolstoy's eyes on the Wall.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

In other words, just as we now accept the idea of earth's motion, motion of which we are not personally conscious -- it is similarly necessary, for us to renounce a freedom that does not exist and to recognize a dependence of which we are not personally conscious.

Assistants enter on the table top with an army footlocker placing it in front the turtle puppet Eve carrying the miniature theater.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

Tolstoy might say then that true freedom is the release from the limitations of history.

The Assassin takes the Foot Soldiers' control and turns to march them toward the Foot Locker during the following.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

Take for example, these Foot Soldiers, who represent the use of force to maintain order, specifically metaphor security because, if you will remember, you all joined the Host in a pledge of allegiance to the soil rather than to our flag. And curiously enough, over the years of performing with this marionette, many of you want to see famous faces in these randomly chosen photos from a high school yearbook. Most often mentioned are the civil rights workers killed in the south during the sixties. And, I am wondering what to make of our need for heroes -- "individuals released from the limitations of history," let's say -- and so leading the way for us common people, us foot soldiers -- who walk from Paris to Moscow and back home, nothing has changed.

The Assassin has wound the soldiers' strings onto its bamboo control and lowers the Foot Soldiers into the foot locker, closes the lid and locks it then turns around facing the Guests.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

And so we lock our frustrations in a footlocker to stow away in the attic, out sight, in a place where we can ignore their pleas for release.

The Assistants carry off the army foot locker to sounds of banging and voices calling "Let us Out!" coming from inside.

EXT. STORYTELLER READING THE BOOK OF BRAILLE

Close-up of fingers reading the braille.

STORYTELLER

Napoleon's second wife, Marie-Louise, returned to Vienna, her home, with their toddler son, but against her will -- she was separated from her son and three years later, having given up all hope of a reunion with Napoleon, bore her lover a daughter and was given her own small duchy to rule with her new mate whom she married after Napoleon's death. Marie-Louise outlived her second husband, taking a third and living to the age of photography.

Projected image changes to a photograph of Marie-Louise.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

This photograph was taken in 1847, the year of her death; and the same year that Sir John Franklin ...

Projected image changes to one of Franklin.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

... and his command disappeared looking for a Northwest Passage across the top of the world.

EXT. EREBUS AND TERROR MINIATURE SAILING SHIPS PLACED ON THE PAGES OF THE OPEN BOOK OF BRAILLE .

Assistants are seated on either side of the Braille Book and are staging miniature model ships on the pages during the following.

BLUE/EREBUS

I am the Erebus -- made of thick wood and pushed by the wind while my men sing to the rhythm of work and loneliness.

RED/TERROR

And I am the Terror -- Britain's sturdiest three-masted bomb thrower known for hurling death from sea to shinning sea.

BLUE/EREBUS

Sheets of iron cover my breast --
ready to nurse the Arctic ice; and
in my belly I hold a steam
locomotive engine adapted with a
screw propeller for an extra push
into the future.

RED/TERROR

I may be smaller, but I've
terrorized my share of savages --
a-white-island-of-fire -- they call
me, so I've been told.

BLUE/EREBUS

I am stuffed with food and fuel,
enough for three years ...

RED/TERROR

Jamaica, Australia, Bengal and
Burma ...

BLUE/EREBUS

Gibraltar and Minorca were taken
from the Spanish; Martinique and
Guadeloupe were taken from the
French ... I'm carrying 1700
books ...

RED/TERROR

... even Napoleon's afraid of me.

BLUE/EREBUS

And the Admiral Sir John Franklin!

STORYTELLER

Erebus is one name for the place
where the newly dead are welcomed
to the underworld! And Erebus
produces the seed impregnating
Night's egg -- and the resulting
daughter is called "Chaos!"

Projected animation ends.

INT. PUPPET OPERA: THE EVENING NEWS CONTINUES

Projected titles:

The Evening News: A Puppet Opera Continues
Subtitles by your Host to "Lucia Di Lammermoor"
Act I, Scene One: Lady Franklins's Letter

The Painted Curtain opens on the Lady Franklin marionette writing a full size letter with a feather quill (using the Assassin's help) and the Newscaster Puppet is on the TV -- and all are on the back of the turtle puppet Eve.

Note: The characters projected titles are written to time with the singing of excerpts from the opera.

NEWSCASTER'S TITLES,
 Three graves found on Beechey
 Island
 Buried deep in the frozen ground --
 From the Arctic cold three souls
 saved --
 This story is just beginning to
 unfold.

LADY FRANKLIN'S TITLES:
 My Dear Sweet John ... who is
 waiting, longing for this
 letter ... stained with my
 tears ...

NEWSCASTER:
 Rescue expeditions increase,
 bearing a sealed letter from Lady
 Franklin to the ... deceased?

LADY FRANKLIN:
 Written with my blood
 now dried black as ink
 and sealed with the heat of my
 Faith & Hope ...for this letter
 to find him & with these words
 bring us together again!

The Assassin folds the letter, music cross fades to solo violin and the Painted Curtain falls on the Lady Franklin marionette collapsed on the back of the turtle puppet.

INT. ASSASSIN ENTERS WITH LADY FRANKLINS LETTER

Assassin enters from backstage with the letter and opens it.

ASSASSIN:
 It's love letter to the lost -- a
 letter of hope to the future;
 but ...

Assassin pauses to look at the letter, cut to a close up.

ASSASSIN: (CONT'D)
 it's addressed to death's other
 kingdom ...

Assassin hands the letter to a Guest.

ASSASSIN: (CONT'D)
 Hold it in your hands for a
 moment ... just long enough to be
 certain it's not addressed to
 you ... and pass it on.

EXT. BRAILLE BOOK TABLEAU OF THE EREBUS AND THE TERROR

STORYTELLER

The Erebus and terror are locked
 in, held fast by the ice like a
 greedy lover and both are drifting
 west. Even through a second summer
 of continuous daylight the ice
 grows thicker. And the day before
 Easter, both ships were deserted,
 and no one can figure out why.

Cut to Projected title:

ACT I, SCENE TWO: FOUR YEARS LATER

Projected title and the Painted Curtain opens on Lady
 Franklin watching the Newscaster on the monitor carried on
 the Eve's back

NEWSCASTER TITLES:

Bad News today! News of silver
 spoons forks and plates bearing
 Franklin's crest purchased by John
 Rae from the Eskimos!

Rae is represented by a flat puppet head with moving eyes and
 mouth, same style as the Newscaster, but mounted on a stand
 for the Blue Assistant to both operate the mouth and eyes,
 and give his voice to the character.

BLUE (AS RAE)

At a later date before the
 disruption of the ice, the corpses
 of some thirty persons and some
 graves were discovered on the
 continent, and five dead bodies on
 the island near it.

(MORE)

BLUE (AS RAE) (CONT'D)
 Some of the bodies were in a tent
 or tents; others were under the
 boat, which had been turned over to
 form a shelter; and some lay
 scattered about in different
 directions. From the mutilated
 state of many of the bodies, and
 the contents of the iron pots, it
 seems that many of men and been
 driven to last choice possible.

LADY FRANKLIN:
 (with the solo voice)
 A fur trader living with cold,
 like a savage, even eating
 his fish raw I'm told.
 He has no place at our table ...
 He is not one of us! Please
 no more of this fable.

BLUE (AS RAE)
 (under the singing)
 There was an abundant store of
 ammunition -- we opened cases and
 kegs of the gunpowder looking for
 food. We have a number of
 telescopes, guns, watches,
 compasses, and so forth all of
 which are for sale!

Cut to McClintock puppet, same style as the others.

NEWSCASTER:
 (puppet eyes looking down)
 Who is this?

LADY FRANKLIN:
 (turning towards the TV)
 It's McClintock, Captain of the
 Fox!

BLUE (AS MCCLINTOCK)
 Early morning of the 30 May we
 encamped alongside a large boat --
 another melancholy relic ... a vast
 quantity of tattered clothing was
 lying in her; and there was that in
 the boat which transfixed us with
 awe ... portions of two human
 skeletons.

Close up of Lady Franklin marionette swooning.

BLUE (AS MCCLINTOCK) (CONT'D)

Near by we found the fragment of a pair of worked slippers ... they had originally been 11 inches long, lined with calf-skin with the hair left on, and the edges bound with red silk ribbon. Close beside it were found five watches

NEWSCASTER:

This just in: A written record from the lost expedition is found!

LADY FRANKLIN:

Oh, God!

NEWSCASTER:

A record left twice -- a year apart ... as if waiting for the ink to thaw -- still black as a moonless night.

LADY FRANKLIN:

Alas! The terrible moment has come for me ...

NEWSCASTER:

The record reads:
"1847, All is well" and in 1848:
"Ships deserted 11 April" and
"Franklin died in June."

LADY FRANKLIN:

No! He is not dead. My love is too strong.

NEWSCASTER:

"Total 9 Officers, 15 men dead, 105 Souls heading south!"

ALL:

The Evening News is never wrong!

The Painted Curtain falls as the Lady Franklin collapses against the TV and slides down to the turtle puppet's back

EXT. STORYTELLER WITH THE BRAILLE BOOK TABLEAU

Close up of fingers reading Braille mixed with head shots of the Storyteller and wider shots of the model ships on the Braille pages used to illustrate the following.

STORYTELLER

Twenty-four dead is not many ... after all, America's first civil war is about to begin ... compare to that, 105 hungry souls marching toward civilization in their finest wool uniforms and leather boots somewhere over the frozen arctic seas is ... well ... let's say, the plan to march south was soon aborted and the ships were remanned. Regular waterborne commerce between ships and shore is established and the natives grew familiar with the location and activities of the white men during 1849-- even hunting together -- and the site of several burials. This place is called, "where the ship's boats usually landed" -- by the Inuit still today; but it's called Erebus Bay by the rest of world. Franklin's grave still has not been found; and yes, people are still looking for it. When the daughter chaos returns clothed in a white arctic gale and pushing an ocean of ice, she throws the Erebus over on its side and the men scramble to set up camp on shore in large tents. With the calm weather thoughts of going for help return and the strongest 40 men or so, under the new leader called Aglooka by the natives, set out for Repulse Bay in 1850. And it will be ten years before another white man shows up asking questions. This time it's a Cincinnati businessman sent by God to find the truth of Sir John's disappearance!

Projected images of drawings of the Arctic scene continue.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

Instead, he finds only the facts of bones, bones white as the snow -- one complete skeleton came home with him causing a great sensation -- but he is remembered most for the stories he recorded -- fantastic stories grow fat from their retelling.

ACT I, SCENE THREE: MORE NEWS

Projected title and the Painted Curtain opens with Lady Franklin watching the news, audio of the opera continues. Cut to the Blue Assistant working the Hall puppet, another explorer, joins the others in the aisle between the Table Guests and the Gallery Guests.

BLUE (AS HALL)

Then he put his hand up to his mouth and lowered it all the way down his neck and breast, as if you say needed something to eat. He spoke to us saying "manniktoome," and also shook hands with each, repeating "manniktoome," several times. He pointed with his hand to the southeast and at the same time repeating the word "iwilik." He then made a motion northward and spoke the word "oomeen," drawing his hand and arm from that direction he slowly moved his body in a falling direction and all at once dropped his head side ways into this hand, at the same time making a kind of combination of whirring, bussing & wind blowing noise -- a pantomime of ships being crushed in the ice.

Cut to the Lady Franklin marionette as the solo voice in the opera builds to a high note.

LADY FRANKLIN TITLES:

This news ... Ah! It's all-American, now this man Hall from Cincinnati....

BLUE (AS HALL)

Aglooka came into the tent where I was and sat down. I gave him water and he me a present of some beads. Aglooka did just as your are doing -- that is wrote much. Aglooka tried to made us stop -- put his hand to his mouth and spoke the word Netchuk (seal). But we were in a hurry -- we did knot know the men were starving ... we never saw anything more of them till some were found starved to death.

LADY FRANKLIN:

Selling bones and stories of our
lost Explorers, and just where is
Cincinnati?

NEWSCASTER TITLES:

We go now to Knud Rasmussen, the
first man to cross the Northwest
Passage by dog sled --
and who is following for us the
lost Franklin Expedition and their
hungry march to civilization!

BLUE (KNUD)

This man who had the watch I sought
seemed to me to have been the last
that died, and his face was just as
though he was only asleep.

All the while I was at work
breaking the ice near the head,
especially the ice about the face,
I felt very bad, and for the reason
had to stop several times. I was
very careful not to touch any part
of the body while pounding with the
sharp stone.

At last, after having pounded away
the ice from around and under the
body, my husband helped me to lift
it out of its icy bed.

Still I was troubled to get the
watch from the frozen garments with
which the body was completely
dressed.

LADY FRANKLIN:

I wonder if God watches the TV too?
What must he think of all we do...?

The marionette collapses again as the curtain falls.

EXT. STORYTELLER WITH THE BRAILLE BOOK TABLEAU

STORYTELLER

The march south to find help
quickly fell out of step in a place
called Starvation Cove where the
white facts of bones are still
being uncovered to this day.

Projections of period illustrations on the Wall.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

The survivors turned around and returned to the Terror, still stuck in the ice pack. Now that the dead outnumbered the living, the bodies were moved to wreck of the Erebus -- the waiting room to the underworld.

Cut to:

ACT II, SCENE ONE: SINGING THE NEWS

Projected title as Painted Curtain opens on the TV Newscaster.

NEWSCASTER:

(puppet mouth and eyes
move with the singing)

And now it's 1983!
The Soviets stopped the START TALKS protesting our missiles in Europe; President Ronald Reagan wants his missiles in space too.
"What's being launched today," he said, "is a search for a plan...."

LADY FRANKLIN:

Ah!

NEWSCASTER:

"If history teaches anything, it teaches that self-delusion in the face of unpleasant facts is folly."

LADY FRANKLIN:

(turning toward the TV)
Who is this man and why does he want his missiles in space?

NEWSCASTER:

Ah, you know so little....

LADY FRANKLIN:

I know that my heart has a hole in it through which a howling wind blows....

NEWSCASTER:

Oh no!

Close up of the Lady Franklin marionette.

LADY FRANKLIN:

Listen to how cold it is --
Like an arctic wind whistling
through the hole in my heart!
Wish you could put your head on my
breast ... and listen to my hollow
heart!

NEWSCASTER:

Then listen to mine beating,
Waiting -- like loaded missiles in
space ... encircling the globe --
aiming to destroy those close to me
-- my heart is ready to explode!

TOGETHER:

Listen to our defenseless hearts
Pumping life in all directions --
only our words keep us apart.
Ok! Ok! On with the News!

NEWSCASTER:

A Canadian researcher searching for
grants for something to do ...
has opened the frozen coffins of
the lost Franklin crew!

The Blue Assistant places the Beattie Puppet in line around
the Table, the TV shows visuals of the corpses.

BLUE (AS BEATTIE)

I found three graves side by side,
In the first was John Torrington --
90 pounds & five foot two -- his
perfectly preserved toes amazed me.
The second face to thaw belonged to
Seaman Hartnell, only 26 years old
when he died. We removed his right
thumbnail and some pubic hair for
analysis. In the third lies William
Braine under carefully placed
stones that we numbered &
remembered -- so to replace them as
if we'd never come to this cold
place-- as if we'd never been here.

NEWSCASTER TITLES:

Ah, the truth is too much for her!

BLUE

This is not Truth -- it's Science

ALL:

Pictures do not lie!
 But what's their meaning ...
 What are you looking for
 that you can't see with your own
 eyes?
 Anyone can rob a grave -- what's
 the purpose of this sacrilege?

BLUE (AS BEATTIE)

There is more to know than the eyes
 can see ... and there is more to
 see than we can know.

LADY FRANKLIN:

Look at me, barely able to stand!
 How long must I endure not
 knowing ... where lies the frozen
 spirit of my Dear dead John his
 stiff arms tied to his side ...
 arms that will never hold me again.

NEWSCASTER:

This just in: Bacteria were found
 still living in the sailors' stool!
 And in the hair they found large
 traces of lead -- leading expert to
 believe that lead poisoning --
 new fangled tin cans packed with
 meat may have caused many deaths.

ALL:

Many deaths brings much grief
 even one needless death
 is a most bitter sorrow.
 A sadness that questions life
 itself and the absence of
 God's breath in your soul!

Lady Franklin marionette reaches her high note and throws
 herself against the TV as it and Chorus flies out and as the
 Painted Curtain falls this single title appears above:

INTERLUDE FOR THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

INT. THE INTERLUDE

Audio of solo violin, the Host is on a platform operating the
 Paganini marionette.

HOST

Oh Mother Earth, I want so to think
of you in the ancient way -- as a
huge majestic sea turtle -- a
breathing organism, giving me life,
and a lift.

The Assistants push/pull the small platform around the Table
and the Host steps to the Tabletop during the following.

HOST (CONT'D)

That we are all carried on your
back, that all of history rests
upon your Mind -- Floating in the
warm currents of Expansion Held
close by Gravity to your Mate, the
Sun, my distant Father -- Longing
for the day of your Reunion, when
your body will melt into his, when
all of the Life between you will be
forgiven. Oh Mother Earth, I want
so to believe in your expanding
Sustenance and Desire.

Recording of the Guests earlier.

AUDIO

"I pledge allegiance to the soil of
Turtle Island and to all the being
who thereon dwell, One ecosystem in
diversity, under the sun, With
joyful interpenetration for all."

The Host exits backstage.

ALL (BACKSTAGE)

This is the time we call the Age of
Enlightenment! Oh, Mother Earth I
want so to believe that you carry
us on your back across the
ontological gap between Birth and
Death.

The Assistants and Host start five boomboxes all playing the
same content, then loaded into the arms of the Host who
enters and distributes the radios around the table.

PETER AUGUST (BOOMBOX A)
 We interrupt this program to bring you another live report by satellite interlink from a remote village in Alaska where Chase Roberts is following the amazing discovery of the Turtledove -- the Boeing jet carrying the members of the last symphony orchestra -- lost and entombed at the bottom of the Arctic Ocean.

ACT III, SCENE ONE: RETURN OF THE UNREAD LETTER

Projected title and the Painted Curtain rises, slowly, to reveal the Lady Franklin marionette, dressed in black with a veil covering her face, and the Assassin holding the unopened letter, audio of the opera resumes.

LADY FRANKLIN TITLES:
 My letter to my Dear Sweet John
 has returned home unopened....

CHASE ROBERTS (BOOMBOX E)
 Peter, the animal skin boat I'm riding in is called a umiak. It's about 10 meters long, often called the women's boat since usually only the women use it to move cargo, children, and in this case, a radio news reporter. I am surrounded completely by ice now, and seem to be gliding deeper into the interior of what I believe is an iceberg -- its translucent walls, looking as much like frozen wind as water, and they glow, filling the night sky ...

LADY FRANKLIN:
 The seal of red wax was unbroken --
 if only my heart was as strong.

CHASE ROBERTS (BOOMBOX D)
 The women rowing our umiak have been explaining to me how they are members of a clan who are relearning and reviving their ancestral ways of living.
 (MORE)

CHASE ROBERTS (BOOMBOX D) (CONT'D)

And they claim that this back-to-the-land movement came from the discovery of a ... well, of what I'm going to call a 'stone age' clan living in a hidden valley meadow, high in the Brooks Mountain Range, in what is now designated as the Gates to the Arctic National Park, only 200 miles from the oil pipeline!

LADY FRANKLIN:

God is giving me the strength to read the words I wrote ... to the dead!

CHASE ROBERTS (BOOMBOX C)

As I understand it, a dozen or so people were discovered still living the ways of the Dorset culture, a culture 2000 years old. They migrated between their winter camps on the coast and their home in the Kuyuktuvuk Valley, which translates into 'many places to make love.' Anyway these are the people who evidently discovered the plane, the Turtledove, frozen in this iceberg

LADY FRANKLIN TITLES:

"My Dearest Love, may it be the will of God if you are not restored to us earlier, that you should open this letter and that it may give you comfort in your trials...."

CHASE ROBERTS (BOOMBOX B)

Now, it's going to be difficult to determine exactly when the plane was discovered because my hosts seem unwilling to use modern measures for the passage of time. Instead, they refer to the number and hames of full moon, and so forth.

LADY FRANKLIN TITLES:

I can read no more ... I hear his heavenly voice to join him

CHASE ROBERTS (E)

But they are very articulate and friendly people and I suspect that this refusal to use conventional time is an act of respect to the 'ancients,' as they refer to their living ancestors here. In other words, I am guessing that rather than teach the ancient peoples our convention they are instead learning theirs.

LADY FRANKLIN TITLES:

Where do we go before death comes?

CHASE ROBERTS (A)

One of the respected elders is actually seated directly behind me in the ... boat ... she has made only, what I would call moaning sounds. I just don't recognize it as a language and I don't dare turn around and look at her. One thing I've been meaning to describe are the beautiful parkas, hooded fur coats, called, 'anoraks'. We're all wearing one including myself. They are made from the light belly skins of the seals and embedded in the lining are small inserts of skin from unborn seals! I understand it gives protection for the journey.

LADY FRANKLIN TITLES:

I am coming my Dear Sweet John,
I am coming....

CHASE ROBERTS (CONT'D)

It's working so far Peter and I must say they are very ...
(interrupting herself) ... oh, my gosh, I don't believe what I am seeing Peter. It is astounding: The huge nose of a Boeing plane is emerging out of the frozen ice ... what an incredible sight! Yes, it is the Turtledove, Peter ... I can see part of the first Hebrew character on the side of the plane now ... the women are singing ... can you hear them Peter?

(MORE)

CHASE ROBERTS (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

The women rowers with me are
singing, hold-on I'll see if I can
get the phone where you can
hear ...
(audio goes static).

LADY FRANKLIN:

I am so alone here.

The solo female voice reaches a climax in the opera, the marionette collapses and the control falls alongside, while the Inuit throat singing continues, when EVE, the turtle puppet, silently floats away with the Lady Franklin marionette and its simple control on her back.

The Painted Curtain falls.

ACT III, SCENE TWO: LEAVES OF GRASS

Projected title as both the Painted Curtain and Proscenium Arch fly out revealing the Assassin holding the Storyteller's puppet head on her shoulder in the black void.

Note: the Player doing the Assassin will also give the Storyteller his voice, which means she will need to put her left hand inside the puppet head to operate the mouth, which best done as in this scene with the puppet head on her shoulder and her back to the Guests; at other times, both of her hands will be visible holding the Storyteller's puppet head in her arms.

STORYTELLER

I Celebrate Myself ... and what I
assume you shall assume, For every
atom belonging to me as good
belongs to you.

The Assassin turns holding the puppet head in her arms.

ASSASSIN:

This is heavy.

STORYTELLER

Have you reckoned the earth much?

ASSASSIN:

Now isn't that just like a
puppet... to start reciting Whitman
at a time like this?

STORYTELLER

I loafe and invite my soul, I lean
and loafe at my ease ... Observing
a spear of summer grass.

ASSASSIN:

A dead American puppet still
talking.

STORYTELLER

I will go to the bank by the wood
and become undisguised and naked, I
am mad for it to be in contact with
me.

ASSASSIN

Remember? This is the stuff
presidents give to their mistresses
-- "I celebrate myself"

BOOMBOX AUDIO

I have heard what the talkers were
talking ... the talk of the
beginning and the end ...

ASSASSIN

And what of the British poet, John
Wain, who wrote: "What of the one
who jerked the strings ..."

STORYTELLER

Urge and urge, and urge, Always the
procreant urge of the world. Always
substance and increase ...

ASSASSIN

... where is this 'self' to
celebrate, anyway? I feel like
there's a committee of voices
inside me ...

STORYTELLER

Always a knit of identity ...
always distinction ... always a
breed of life.

ASSASSIN

So many voices that I'm afraid to
look in a mirror -- it's been so
long, I've forgotten what I look
like.

STORYTELLER

A child said What is the grass? ...
fetching it to me with full hand;
How could I answer the child?

ASSASSIN

Life is an illusion.

STORYTELLER

And what are you?

ASSASSIN

What are you is the question?

STORYTELLER

What am I?

ASSASSIN

Yes, what are you?

STORYTELLER

I am the poet of the body ...

ASSASSIN

Well Mr. Poet, is there a
difference between belief and
faith?

STORYTELLER

And I am the poet of the soul.

ASSASSIN

My feelings cannot escape this
force of gravity.

STORYTELLER

Mad naked summer night!

ASSASSIN

But whose feelings are these?

STORYTELLER

Smile O voluptuous cool breathed
earth!

ASSASSIN

Feelings of a time ... of a
possibility ...

STORYTELLER

Earth of the slumbering and liquid
trees!

ASSASSIN

When all of the armies disappear
from the earth --

STORYTELLER

Earth of the departed sunset!

ASSASSIN

And the music stops ...

STORYTELLER

Earth of the vitreous pour of the
full moon just tinged with blue!

ASSASSIN

Save for the song of the
Turtledove!

STORYTELLER

Earth of shine and dark mottling
the tide of the river!

ASSASSIN

And God, the great white Father up
in the sky ...

STORYTELLER

Earth of the limpid gray of clouds
brighter and clearer for my sake!

ASSASSIN

Falls out of the blue ...

STORYTELLER

Far-swooping elbowed earth! Rich
apple-blossomed earth!

ASSASSIN

And takes Him a very long time to
die

STORYTELLER

Smile, for your lover comes!

ASSASSIN

Today we have the clock!

STORYTELLER

Through me many long dumb voices.

ASSASSIN

It's everywhere -- on your wrist,
in your pockets, on your walls, in
your halls, on your buildings and
in your cars. Small clocks, big
clocks, everywhere a tic-tock ...

STORYTELLER

Voices of cycles of preparation and
accretion,

ASSASSIN

Strange how comforting it is to
'know' the time -- like right now
it's tomorrow in China ... or is it
yesterday?

STORYTELLER

And of the threads that connect the
stars ...

ASSASSIN

All in just 500 years too -- look
at the first clocks in town
squares ...

STORYTELLER

... and the wombs, and the father
stuff ...

ASSASSIN

They have tiny mechanical people
geared to appear every half
hour ...

STORYTELLER

Of fog in the air and beetles
rolling balls of dung.

ASSASSIN

It's not how life-like the puppets
are ...

STORYTELLER

All truths wait in all things,

ASSASSIN

But how puppet-like we've
become ... that should alarm us.

STORYTELLER

They neither hasten their own
delivery nor resist it, they do not
need the obstetric forceps of he
surgeon,

ASSASSIN

Somewhere inside of me, are all
these puppets I'm trying to
control, some are very deep
inside ...

STORYTELLER

The insignificant is as big to me
as any ...

ASSASSIN

Perhaps this is why we outgrow
puppet shows, because only children
can look at themselves and believe
in what they see.

STORYTELLER

What is less or more than a touch?

ASSASSIN

Remember? It changes when you begin
to tell time and are awarded your
first watch, which you wear proudly
on your wrist ...

STORYTELLER

... a call in the midst of the
crowd, My own voice, orotund
sweeping and final. Now the
performer launches his nerve ...

ASSASSIN

And one by one your stories
disappear and you, like me, are
left holding up this picture of
yourself -- watching the clocks!

STORYTELLER

The clock indicates the moment ...
but what does eternity indicate?

ASSASSIN

So, Mr. Puppet poet, is lugging
around our own weight in conscious-
ness the price humans pay for the
gift of words?

The Assassin moves the puppet head to her shoulder and turns around to show his face.

STORYTELLER

I answer that I cannot answer ...
you must find out for yourself.
Long enough have you dreamed
contemptible dreams, Now I wash the
gum from your eyes, You must habit
yourself to the dazzle of the light
and of every moment of your life.

A strong light coming from backstage, through the opening in the Wall, flooding the performance space, and the Wall Section returns down the table during the following.

BOOMBOX AUDIO

Peter, can you hear the music in the background? Very familiar isn't it? And as incredible as it may sound it's coming from the bright orange voice recorder box which has been removed from the Turtledove!

[BEAT]

Let me set the scene for you. Behind the orange fight recorder are maybe a dozen drummers in a half-circle around it, drumming, and looming over them is the gigantic, gleaming white nose of the Boeing plane -- its tiny cockpit windows are high above us and they look down like the two beady eyes of an enormous bird. The rest of the fuselage is still buried in the ice, only its nose has been uncovered and in the process they have created a large room of ice for ... well, for this ritual. I don't know how else to describe what I am seeing here than the word, "worship!" This cathedral of ice is a place of worship no doubt about it ... and I am certain that this is not the first time they have performed this ritual of adoration and celebration.

(MORE)

BOOMBOX AUDIO (CONT'D)

The musicians have been playing for about 30 minutes now, although I'm not sure since I had to leave my watch along with the rest of my personal belongings back at the Native Corporation's Information Center, which is more than ...

[BEAT]

Wait! Hold on Peter

Oh my goodness! One, two ... twelve, thirteen people are climbing an ice path right now and entering a tunnel dug into the ice, on the port side of the plane, which we can only assume leads directly to the passenger cabin! But from where I'm standing, the plane looks to be completely entombed by ice, except for its nose, so I'm not sure where the tunnel leads. Each member of the procession is holding a mask in front of their face, and in the other hand, a lamp burning seal fat animating the masks' elaborately carved, haunting expressions.

[BEAT]

If you just joined us, this is Chase Roberts, reporting live from inside a huge island of ice, floating somewhere off the coast of the northern slope of Alaska in the Beaufort Sea; where the gleaming white plane called the "Turtledove" is entombed in ice. This was the plane carrying members of the last symphony orchestra when it disappeared over the Arctic Ocean. As many may recall, the plane sunk to the bottom of the sea in water so deep only its flight data recorder box was recovered, the so called 'black box' -- but it contained only random, yet regular wave patterns that made no sense to the experts. All efforts to find the voice recorder failed -- until now -- when for the first time outside this ice tomb, we are hearing the recording, the machine that should have contained the last 30 minutes of cockpit conversation -- instead recorded only the

(MORE)

BOOMBOX AUDIO (CONT'D)

beautiful music you hear in the background.

[BEAT]

This is the latest dramatic chapter of a story that has kept many in suspense for nearly a century. How the majestic plane ended up frozen inside an iceberg and then discovered by these aboriginal people still living an ancient way of life cannot be explained. The women I rode with in the umiak are signaling for me to rejoin them on the blanket of furs. Perhaps you can tell how carefully I'm walking, very slowly, taking one step at a time wearing these traditional skin boots, called 'muckluks' ... and to be walking on ice ... it's almost like learning how to walk all over again. I was hoping she would talk with me. The first time I saw her I admit I was taken back ... she has thin, dark lines tattooed around her eyes up into her forehead and down into their cheeks. Oh, yes, hello again ... wait ... she's taking the phone ... here ... please

The Wall Section closes, completing the Wall; the shadow of the Assassin holding the Storyteller grows smaller during the following.

STORYTELLER

I depart as air ... I shake my white locks at the runaway sun, I effuse my flesh in eddies and drift in lacy jags. I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love. If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles. You will hardly know who I am or what I mean, but I shall be good health to you nevertheless, And filter and fiber your blood. Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged, missing me one place search another, I stop some where waiting for you.

The shadow disappears in the video projection of wild grasses blowing in the wind, then opens up to a wide shot of the performance space showing the projection filling the Wall and the Guests around the large table with two rows of gallery seating on either side, the shot freezes, credits roll and fade to black.

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Cast of Characters and Players*

Host Warner Blake
 Assassin Erin Phillips
 Red Assistant Dana Gordon
 Blue Assistant Gabriel C. Baron
 Stage Manager Jacob Hooker
 Front of House Manager Sara Blake

*As performed and videographed in 2001.

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Cast of Performance Objects in Order of Appearance

Table, 16 feet long, 8 feet wide; seating for 12 Guests, six on either side, with three-step units access to the Tabletop alongside the Wall on either side.

Wall, 12 feet high, nine feet wide consisting of six 30 by 40 inch frames covered with white paper, the center lower section opens and travels to the other end of the Table, used as a shadow screen.

Old Blind Storyteller, a life-size puppet built into a wheel chair; the Host as the puppet operator sits behind the wheelchair with his left hand inside the puppet head to manipulate the mouth showing teeth and a tongue; the right hand wears a white glove to gesture for expression.

Braille Book, a surplus lending library book of unknown content, open size: 26 by 12 inches.

Box of Light, 12 by 12 by 8 inches perforated steel box rigged so tha all four sides fall to the Table when the lid is lifted.

Roses, plastic with dart added for sticking on the Tabletop.

Flight Data Recorder, orange shell donated by the manufacturer Honeywell Aerospace.

Inuit Mask, a hand held clay mask fabricated on a bamboo rod.

Paganini marionette, a miniature bust of the famous violinist, with hands to hold the violin in one and the bow in the other, built of polymer clay and controlled with white strings.

Mating Turtle Puppets, Eve, who becomes Mother Earth, and Adam, who becomes Father the Sun; called "body puppets" as the operator's arms are inside the puppet, but it takes the whole body to make the turtle swim.

Chorus of Civilization, The chorus is given birth by the mating turtles, Adam and Eve. The 12 miniature human figures are holding a curtain of blood covered lace.

Miniature 17th-century Proscenium Arch (48"x28"x12"), wood and styrofoam core, covered with polymer clay;

And the miniature Painted Curtain, historically referred to as the Grand Drape.

Foot Soldiers, a marionette consisting of six figures built of baby shoes, random high school yearbook photos, and real rifle shells.

Opera Glasses, plastic binoculars are attached with elastic straps to the grid above the table and are released by the Host to fall at each guest's place around the Table.

Napoleon marionette, three inches tall, nude with visible member and holding a mask in one hand.

And the Whore's Bed, opens the Puppet Opera depicting Napoleon losing his virginity to a Parisian streetwalker.

White Gloved Hands in Prayer, actual size rigged to burn, built for the movie.

Astronaut, commercial toy figure, painted and rigged to a long black wire.

Silver chains, hardware store chains of various sizes and lengths, used to represent rivers in Russia on the black velour.

Napoleon's French Armies, there are nine introduced in the script beginning on page 25.

The Russian Armies are also introduced in the script but on page 23.

Walled City of Smolensk, a miniature model of the actual city but rigged with candles and flash paper to burst on fire.

Borodino Battle Ground, shaped of foam rubber to resemble landscape, and rigged with a real IV Bag, filled with red play sand.

Boomboxes, the show uses five boomboxes that were generously donated by a big box tech store that has since folded.

For pictures, movies and project background visit www.PerformanceObjects.WarnerBlake.net; plus learn which performance objects are available to purchase!

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Literary Sources

Gary Snyder, "Turtle Island," January 1974, published by New Directions; used with permission

Leo Toystoy, "War and Peace," 1889 (translation), excerpts

Larry Heinemann, "Paco's Story," 1989, excerpts; permission requested

Walt Whitman, "Leaves of Grass," 1855 excerpts

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