ZONE

*a performance text by*

Rachel Rosenthal

Introduction

When I wrote and presented ZONE in 1994 at UCLA, a few days after the earthquake, I wanted to comment on the contemporary world of “Them vs. Us” that I felt was a clear and present danger to our society and our species. I used the metaphor of “whiteness and nonwhiteness” and translated it into the historical end of Tsardom in the Russian Revolution of 1917. At that time, my company was composed of six Caucasian players, and I put us in white costumes and whiteface, representing the Romanoff family. I had another 50 players, most of them people of color and wearing multicolored clothes as the Throng. The piece was a meditation on Western society and civilization and its encroachment by other cultures in the 20th century, perceived by Europeans and their descendants as demeaning, threatening, and dangerous. Some segments are specifically illustrative of the “cluelessness” of the Tsar’s family faced with the uprising of the Russian people, but many other segments, still using the Romanoff metaphor, referred to Western civilization’s depredation of the planet, our contempt for other groups, our fear of “the other,” our resistance to inevitable change, and class distinctions still alive and well in today’s world. The structure of the piece is based on chaos theory. It was conceived therefore as a many-layered performance that touched upon issues of racism, class, xenophobia, science, and ecology.

ZONE was presented at the Wadsworth Theatre in Los Angeles, by the UCLA Center for the Performing Arts, as part of their winter 1994 season. I received a Rockefeller Foundation Grant in 1993 to support the production of ZONE, and UCLA provided rehearsal space and other sundries.

I had chosen the members of the Throng carefully (they were all volunteers) and prepared them for possible misunderstanding of the piece as “racist.” Mehmet Sander choreographed the “Throng.” He was extraordinary. Every scene presented the Throng’s movements in a brilliantly simple yet eloquent manner. The arc of the piece featured the mimed creation of a “raft in space” (our planet). First, the raft carried only the “Family” (who barred the Throng from coming aboard). The second time it appeared, the Throng was on the raft, fighting off the Family. At the end, everyone was on the raft, “in the same boat” so to speak, with the ending repeating the initial image, but “integrated.” We were also showing how power, regardless of who wields it, is eminently corruptible. Mehmet worked with 50 people of totally diverse
backgrounds. Some were dancers, some performers, some had nothing to do with the arts. They were also of very different ages, young, old, and middle. None were trained in his kind of spectacular athleticism, and quite a few were out of shape. Yet Sander’s gentle but convincing attitude—which allowed no question or hesitation and instilled total self-confidence—managed to weld this real throne into an enthusiastic, dedicated, and homogeneous “corp” that flew through the air, slammed into each other, took bone-shattering falls, were tossed above heads, and performed other acrobatic and breathtaking moves like old pros. The ensemble looked like a seasoned and disciplined company.

The earthquake of 1994 was devastating. It happened during the rehearsal period at UCLA. The tower above Royce Hall was structurally damaged and deemed out-of-bounds, yellow cordon and all. Our rehearsal hall was right beneath it. We were all jolted, raw, and scared after the earth moved. But I believe that rehearsing ZONE was the best post-traumatic therapy any of us could have wished for! I want to take this opportunity to recognize and thank Mehmet Sander and all the Throng for their priceless contribution to ZONE.

The show was presented twice, Friday and Saturday. By Saturday, it just began to feel good. Another show on Sunday matinee would have clinched it. It needed audience previews, but got none, of course, and had to come together during performance. I had obtained a great deal of publicity for the piece, and the Wadsworth Theatre was sold out, with hundreds more turned away. We could easily have filled a Sunday matinee slot. This was unfortunately not to be. The piece, as it turned out, was very controversial. Many loved and appreciated it. Others misunderstood it. I think that the intricacies of the text were drowned in some places by the spectacle. People who didn’t see past the “color line” began to murmur “racism” when the piece had hardly begun, and quite a few people didn’t like my use of the Romanoffs as metaphor. Lewis Siegal in the L.A. Times gave it a negative and somewhat vicious review (14 February 1994). I was drained and exhausted and knew then that we would not venture it again. Lacking media ammunition, it didn’t seem likely to attract other presenters.

A month or so after the show ended, I convened the players, Company, Throng and all, to my studio for a postmortem. Art historian Moira Roth acted as informal moderator. It was an amazing event. People reported that the process of putting on this performance changed their lives, that it gave them insight into racial politics, into our world, into themselves. I almost wept with gratitude and relief. Little by little, in the course of life, more people from the audience came forward and told me how much they had loved this show. After a long depression, I began to feel differently about it. Years later, as I prepared the text for publication, I felt my affection for it rekindling. I believe today that ZONE was right for the time. And it is both my luck and my sorrow that none of the messages in my pieces seem to grow obsolete. In the year 2000, six years after the performance of ZONE, Russians are waging a terrible war on Chechnya (incidentally, my father was born in Grozny), and the gulf between the “haves” and the “Throng” has only widened. The extremely touchy issues of race and ethnicity continue to beset us. In this respect, not much has changed since ZONE was produced. As a matter of fact, the same issues are even exacerbated. Which leaves the piece as relevant today as it was in 1994.

ZONE is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Mara and Leonard Rosenthal, Russian Jews who fled for their lives from two European upheavals to the United States, a country they loved.

1. Tsaritsa Alexandra (Rachel Rosenthal) and Rasputin (Kirk Wilson) in ZONE, a performance by Rachel Rosenthal. (Photo by Jan Deen, copyright © Jan Deen 1994)
Credits

Conceived, written, and directed by Rachel Rosenthal
Assistant Directed by Kate Noonan
Choreography by Mehmet Sander
Music by Amy Knoles
Lights by Kevin Adams
Wolf Masks by Laura Denny
Holy Icons by Bill Rangel and Gregg Gibbs
“Alexei/Angie’s Window” written by Angie Bray
“Letters and Diaries” section adapted from The Last Tsar: The Life and Death of Nicholas II by Edward Radzinsky (Translated by Marian Schwartz, copyright © 1992 by Doubleday, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. Used by permission of Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc.)

Cast

THE WHITES (THE FAMILY):
Tsar Nicholas
Tsaritsa Alexandra
Tsarevnas Olga and Anastasia
Tsarevna Tatiana and Maria
Tsarevich Alexei
Grigory Rasputin

THE THRONG (Around 50 Multi-ethnic Performers):
Throng Team Leaders: Franc Baliton, Paula Batson, Sarah Carillo, Doug Davidson, Erika Inatsugu, Laura Josephson, Kristy Kang, Ulises Lopez, Michael Morrissey, Fantasia Owens, Robbie Parker, Nancy Taylor, Sonja Toledo, Ileana Vasquez, Annie Word
Throng: Nicki Allen, Juan Barrera, Chelsea Bonacello, A.E. Bunker, Rachel Carstensen, Maru Chuladul, Bertha Corona, Tad Coughenour, Marc del Castillo Morante, Angie Garcia, Adan Gardner, Meaghan Gower, Andre Hudson, Steve Irvin, Kulani Jackson, C. Derrick Jones, Henrik Krogholt, Marian Lina, José Lopez, Victoria Lowe, Sara Moteagudo, Kurt Nishimura, Danny Ontiveros, Ellen Orsa, Rose M. Palma, Zarina Rico, José Rios-Medina, Charissa Saenz, Kathryn Sanders, Stephanie Serna, Christine Soriano, Kevin Spicer, Humberto Terrones, Javier Torres, Hogan Vando, Shakuntala Zakhelm
Changes in the demeanor and costumes of the WHITES indicate when they are the FAMILY and when they are the PERFORMERS or other personae. In the text, this is indicated by their speeches being attributed to their initials as actors, or to their FAMILY identities (e.g., “H” or “Tsar”).

(Blackout)

( SLIDE:)  
“History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.”  
—Maya Angelou

( Long silence. SOUND of wolves howling. LIGHTS up on the “Portrait of the Family.” The FAMILY stands, center, in two rows: the TSAR, the TSARITSA, and RASPUTIN behind; the TSAREVNAS and the TSAREVICH in front. The TSARITSA has her left hand on the TSAR’s arm. JOAN, as her TSAREVNAS, has her hand on the TSAREVICH’s shoulder. All around them, on the floor, are the THRONG, piled up in several heaps, like corpses. The FAMILY is dressed in indescent white except for RASPUTIN who is in indescent black. They are all in whiteface. They carry wolf masks on sticks before their faces. They turn their masked heads suddenly to one side or the other, looking intently in either direction. One by one they move their masks to the side to speak their part of this text. They replace their masks after speaking. This passage is ambiguous because they act as the FAMILY but speak as themselves.)

ANGIE/TSAREVICH: We hailed the 20th century with such valiant expectations. So much promise. We had choices.

HARVEY/TSAR: We overthrew the autocracy of absolute monarchy and could have fashioned a world of peace, equality, mutual help, and compassion, all of us together and none of us taking more than we had need for a satisfying life.

KIRK/RASPUTIN: Instead, we chose the Red Terror, genocide, two global wars, the standoff of nuclear extermination, the bloody establishment of proletarian dictatorships, military dictatorships, economic dictatorships; we emphasized polarization in our sexes, our colors, our beliefs, our pocketbooks.

JOAN/TSAREVNAS: We continued to think of ourselves as separate, superior to, and very different from the rest of creation on Earth, and we tripled our biomass on a planet that could hardly sustain a quarter of our numbers.

CAROL/TSAREVNAS: And now we wonder why we’re committing suicide on a planetary scale.

RACHEL/TSAERITSA: Voracity is a complex system; its attractor is guilt, its feedback iteration a complicated network of pleasure, pain, shame, sensual deprivation, dysfunctional initial conditions, and a vampiristic hunger of cosmic proportions.

(All the masks are held under the faces, revealing them and forming totem poles. The FAMILY executes the “Scream Cantata,” a short sound piece constituted of various types of screams—fear, hysteria, anger, ecstasy, etc. They then continue speaking as if nothing happened.)

RACHEL/TSAERITSA: The millennium happens. We have declared it. We of the Christian Era. What about the other Calendars? The Hebrew, the Mayan, the Fiji, the Peule? What about the other clocks, the biological clocks of the willow, the harpy, the carp? Is there millennium for them too?
And if there is no millennium notch on their almanac, won’t it come to pass anyway because we, the Dominance, have willed it? What will it look like, once we have entered the Zone?

(THUNDER. LIGHTNING. EARTHQUAKE. LIGHTS like mad searchlights over the stage and audience. BLASTS. SIREN ALARMS. The “dead” THRONG, as they lie onstage, begins to whisper. Every person speaks a different monologue, improvised, some in different languages. The whispering intensifies until the combined voices reach a shouting level and then begin to decrease in volume until they are back to a whisper. When the LIGHTS settle back on the WHITES, they are on the “Raft in Space” and the THRONG slowly moves like waves around them. HARVEY holds up a huge tree branch as a mast and it moves back and forth as on the sea. The WHITES undulate and move with the “mast.” Eerie space MUSIC and STARS moving over the entire theatre. The dialogue is syncopated between ROSENTHAL’s, which has continuity, and the others’ short phrases that interrupt the flow.)

R: We’re on a Raft in Space.

J: We are devoted to matter. Nothing else matters.

R: We move, vertiginously.

H: Money doesn’t die!

R: What prevents us from spinning out into nothingness?

A: Shopping is patriotic.

R: It’s that strange attraction we hold for one another, the glue of gravity.

C: Things “R.” Us!

R: In space there is no up and down. There are no railings.

K: Five billion statues of salt have beheld sin...

R: At this speed we could easily slingshot out.

J: Colonize with tobacco!

R: But no, we’re still here, feet down, head up, held in thrall on the massive belly of the planet—

H: Dump toxic waste in the inner city!

R: —circling our star in the correct orbit, the one with the crazy numbers—

K: Burn the Turks!

R: —the irrational ones that staple us into predictability (but for how long?)...

A: Keep that interest coming!

R: And we go about, not even wondering, spoiled brats on the bounteous belly, oblivious to the fact that we’re getting close to the edge.

C: Ten billion served!

R: The Edge of Chaos. The Zone. Spontaneous combustion. Fork in the road. Bifurcation. TO BE OR NOT TO BE.

J: Where are our cosmic mechanics now? Where is the cozy god?

C: There is nothing but a Mother Planet that won’t stay put under our feet,

H: a solar system that may explode,

K: basic matter you can’t count on to fuse and not fission and,
R: on the scale of you and me,
K: the sky falls,
A: the whole world is rioting,
C: the waters rise,
H: frogs are gone,
A: fish are dying,
R: birds are silent,
K: the phone’s disconnected,
C: you remember your father fucked you,
H: other people get the job,
K: no one gets a job,
R: you’ve been rear-ended
ALL: in more ways than one,
A: little kids make babies,
J: little kids hold guns to your head,
A: whole nations are on the move
ALL: (pointing at the audience) coming our way,
R: and all the creative people croak of the plague.

(The THRONG wants to move onto the raft but the WHITES throw the mast at them, killing some. There is a break in LIGHTS and SOUND, and the WHITES revert to their original tableau: the “Portrait of the Family,” while the THRONG carries and drags off their “dead.” The following dialogue borrows from chaos theory and physics jargon.)

TSAR: I am Nicolai Alexandrovich Romanov, Nicolai the Second, last Tsar of all the Russias. A relic. The quintessential Dead White Male. A walking repository. I embody the bygones of political and social fossil years. Where are those years? Here? Here? My body has enfolded them and fed them back on themselves.

TSARITSA: I am the Tsaritsa Alexandra. I too am like the pulled and folded dough. In my body are the iterated years—

ALEXEI: —like raisins in the loaf...

TSARITSA: —and just as the raisins reside in uncertainty and spatial ambiguity, so my years are not found in orderly procession or indexed locations, but strangely tucked into the folds of my flesh, sometimes here, sometimes there, sliding and sidling into niches where least expected, and creating havoc or ecstasy at their whim.

ALEXEI: Where is year 8?

TSAREVNAS (J): Year 23?

RASPUTIN: Year 40? Here? Here?

TSARITSA: They move as you almost grasp them, and disapprove of scrutiny. My identities slip and slide with them, hard to retrieve at will. Yet, my envelope is constant, with some fractal wrinkles added... I am still me.
3. The Family in ZONE, a performance by Rachel Rosenthal. Clockwise from top left: Tsaritsa Alexandra (Rachel Rosenthal), Rasputin (Kirk Wilson), Tsar Nicholas (Harvey Perr), Tsarevnas Olga and Anastasia (Joan Spitler), Tsarevich Alexei (Angie Bray), Tsarevnas Tatiana and Maria (Carol Katz). (Photo by Jan Deen, copyright © Jan Deen 1994)

TSAREVNAS (C): I am the Tsarevnas Tatiana and Maria.
TSAREVNAS (J): I am the Tsarevnas Olga and Anastasia.
TSAREVNAS (J): We scan the topology of our years and find chaos—
TSAREVNAS (C): —and indeterminacy encased within the membrane of our ME-ness.
TSAREVNAS (J): Mine too.
TSAREVNAS (C): Mine too.
TSAREVNAS (J): Mine too. Inside we are steady—
TSAREVNAS (C): —or turbulent.
TSAREVNAS (J): Our years form tornadoes—
TSAREVNAS (C): —or soliton waves. There is disaster—

TSAREVNAS (J): —and the potential for disaster. There are eruptions—

TSAREVNAS (C): —and the catastrophe of desiccation.

TSAREVNAS (J & C): There is love that quenches and love that eradicates.


ALEXEI: I am Alexei, the Tsarevich, the heir and monarch who never reigns. I bleed. My veins contain the blood of the heads of Europe. It circulates under our crowns and tiaras, neither Russian, English, nor German, but Royal. We are the powerful and we are dying. My blood flows in burning arteries and will soon drown Europe and the Old World.

( SLIDE: )

“There’s a price to pay in becoming more complex; the system is more likely to break.”

—Stuart Kauffman

(The FAMILY comes forward and forms a line, becoming the WHITES. Six of the THRONG, as “styled” servants, bring white chairs and place them in a row behind them. The WHITES sit. In the next sequence, the THRONG is watching and doing stylized movements of listening, gossiping, reacting. The WHITES speak the next sequence with very formalized abstract movements.)

H: I remember a time, long ago, when people actually learned manners. Learned to be polite. Really learned. Yes! Like arithmetic...

J: Were we hypocrites?

H: I remember when people said “thank you” and “please.”

C: Were we insincere?

R: I remember when people acknowledged gifts, and even letters. And notes.

K: I remember when cars stopped and gave right of way. They even gave signals.

C: I remember when Orange County had orange groves in it.

A: I remember when kids played with twigs and pebbles and didn’t kill each other.

H: I don’t remember when wars were officially declared. That was before my time.

K: I remember when servants knew their place.

R: When women knew our place.

A: When little children were seen and not heard.

J: Were we snobs?

C: Were we racists?

K: Molesters?

ALL: Were we cads in silk, creeps in velvet, assholes in brocade?

H: Did we ever abuse our daughters?
R: Our sons?
J: Did they dream it all up, as Freud preferred to think?
C: Has our barbarism always been as apparent as now, or was it better draped within the folds and ruffles of exquisite tailoring?
K: Have we never ceased being barbarians? Even with “please”?
A: And “pretty please”?
H: And how can we who are terrified of death deal death without a qualm? On death row, with napalm, with neglect, with the withholding of love?

(\textit{The WHITES’s movements grow chaotic. So do the THRONG’s. The latter’s anger and frustration seem to mount but are contained. The six “servants” take the chairs offstage. The THRONG forms a V-shaped grouping opening downstage, and stand at attention while the FAMILY does the next sequence dancing a Mazurka in the space within the V. They dance and freeze in a pretty tableau to speak their lines, then resume the dance. MUSIC: Mazurka.})

\textbf{ALL:} We are the keepers of Order. The C-word never escapes our lips.

\textbf{TSARITSA:} We are the luminous geometries. We opt for cubes, tetrahedrons, pyramids, and holy icons.

\textbf{TSAR:} Perfectly mathematized, perfectly geometrized, steeped in legitimacy, autocracy, and invariably linear.

\textbf{RASPUTIN:} Our lineage is determined by God. Nature errs. It makes mistakes. We do not.

\textbf{ALEXEI:} The People are children. They make mistakes.

\textbf{TSAREVNAS (J):} We, Keepers of Divine Geometry, are here to rectify them.

\textbf{(MUSIC: Mazurka.)}

\textbf{ALL:} We are the keepers of Order. The C-word never escapes our lips.

\textbf{TSAREVNAS (J):} Death doesn’t touch us. We sing the “Music of the Spheres” and the architectures of Monteverdi.

\textbf{TSAR:} We measure and are the Measure of All Things.

\textbf{RASPUTIN:} When things turn immeasurable, turbulent, unpredictable, we simply close our eyes and measuring tools and trust in God.

\textbf{TSAREVNAS (J):} Light reigns everywhere now, and we have shed it.

\textbf{TSAREVNAS (C):} Light comes from above, from us.

\textbf{(MUSIC: Mazurka.)}

\textbf{ALL:} We are the keepers of Order. The C-word never escapes our lips.

\textbf{(SLIDE:)}

“Any intelligent tool-using species enters a window in time... Can it make it through to a full awakening of the spirit before the side-effects of misguided creativity force the window closed?”  
—Peter Russell

\textbf{(During the last of the Mazurka, the amplified SOUND of a leaky faucet transforms into running water, then a torrent, then crashing waves, then peals of thunder, lightning, and torrential rain. The Mazurka falls apart and slips into chaos—the C-word.)}
The FAMILY picks up white parasols on the apron downstage, opens them, and runs for cover. A sequence of panic, everyone running across the stage, right and left, FAMILY and THRONG, every which way. ANGIE, center, begins her piece, as they all run off.

"ALEXEI/ANGIE’S WINDOW"

A: I am not Alexei
I am not the Tsarevich
I am not what you think
I am not what I think
I am looking
I am hearing (All have run out. ANGIE is alone onstage. The water SOUND fades out.)
I am still.
Sometimes I watch the children playing. They are in a circle. One goes in the center. Anyone he touches stops. The boy feels that one’s head. “Sasha? Misha? Nikita?” (She mimes the game, feeling the boy’s head while blindfolded.) They’re all laughing.
When I was a little girl, we played that game. I hated it. I hated not seeing. I hated not knowing.

We played hide-and-seek on our ponies. When I hid, stillness was all. When I was “it,” seeing was all.

One of our horses, a Clydesdale named Thalmus, was very, very old. Mr. White, the farmer, decided to put him to sleep. You know what that means... He made Mrs. White watch. I don’t know why, Thalmus was her favorite. I watched with her. I don’t know why.

Mr. White led Thalmus out of the barn to the center of a clearing in the woods. Thalmus stood there. He turned his head toward me. The vet patted Thalmus’s head. Then he rubbed his neck. (As she speaks, she mimics all this, playing all the parts, including the horse, but in a subtle way.) He stuck a needle in his neck. He got a syringe full of stuff and screwed it on the needle. He pushed the plunger. Thalmus turned his head toward the vet. He closed his eyes and just stood there. Mrs. White and I stood at the edge of the clearing. I didn’t know what we were waiting for.

The vet shook his head. He unscrewed the syringe and filled it with stuff, stuck it back on the needle and pushed the plunger.

Right away Thalmus falls on his knees. He stays there, bowing. Now he gets up, like stumbling in reverse. He’s standing there again. He turns his head toward me.

The vet pulls out the needle and syringe. He sticks a new needle in. He fills a new syringe with stuff. He screws it on the needle and pushes the plunger. Thalmus crashes down...and up...and down...and up...and down... Thalmus shivers... He opens his eyes.

I’m still watching. I don’t know why. I look up at Mrs. White. She’s covered her eyes with her hands. I don’t know why.

(Water SOUND fades up again. ALL return running and the FAMILY gets back in its “Portrait” pose, holding the parasols high. This third time, the Portrait is separated. Spaces between the people are bigger, but the spatial relationships of individuals within it remain the same.)
ALL: (Screaming) HELP, EARTH! HELP, EVOLUTION! HELP, GODHEAD! HELP, ANYONE! ANYTHING!

(The water SOUNDS recede into drips and then stop. The relieved FAMILY closes the parasols. The THRONG looks up at the sky. Suddenly, a loud BURST of feedback. The THRONG surges forward, pushing the FAMILY before them. ROSENTHAL runs downstage for the next sequence, the rest of the FAMILY behind her, containing the THRONG. As she speaks, she is aware of the rumblings of revolt behind her. It’s as if she is giving a lecture, with revolution raging outside in the streets. The WHITES become a “thin white line,” cordoning the THRONG. They hold their parasols closed between them to lengthen the line. They hold back the surge with all their might, facing forward, as the THRONG presses against the cordon in stylized violence. The FAMILY intersperses ROSENTHAL’s speech with their lines, which spurt out under the effort of containment.)

R: That was the sound of chaos. It’s called “positive feedback.” You’d think something “positive” would be a little more pleasant.

J: Stranglehold!

R: But nowadays, to be “positive” ain’t so hot. And anyway, in chaos, things take on strange meanings, and are never quite what you’d expect.

H: Lethal injection!

R: Take numbers for instance: rational, or irrational numbers. Which would you pick? Rational, of course, you’re all card-carrying members of Western Civ.

K: Phone sex.

R: But listen: if you were a planet, let’s say, you’d be advised to stay away from rational numbers. Choose an orbit that is rational, and you’ll end up tumbling chaotically and out of control, shooting off into deep space where you can say good-bye to everything: day and night, warmth, seasons, family values, zydeco...

C: Junk bonds.

R: Irrational is the way to go. If you’re a planet.

H: Parameters of power.

R: The solar system unstable? Can you believe it? Well yes, now.

A: Degrees of freedom.

R: But when Henri Poincaré first noticed it, he freaked. Poincaré was a very smart mathematician/philosopher/physicist, and my father’s friend.

C: Despair.

R: Imagine that! My Papa and the Papa of chaos theory! Sipping apéritifs together during La Belle Époque! Well.

J: Overdose.

R: Monsieur Poincaré noticed that in Newton’s world there were only twos—a Moon and an Earth, an Earth and a Sun—but that in reality, there were more.

K: Death squads.

R: Like a Moon and an Earth and a Sun, perhaps?

C: Business as usual.

R: Adding a third to the equation meant a humongous surprise down the line. Like the breakdown of the solar system.
H: Holy war.

R: Poincaré didn’t have computers to back him up, so he backed down, re-marking (with heavy French accent): “These things are so bizarre that I cannot bear to contemplate them!”

A: Oh, but Mozart...

R: We do. Have computers...

K: It may only take one quantum and bam!

R: But we still can’t bear to contemplate it. And yet...

(SOUND of GUNS, TANKS. The THRONG screams, people fall. The FAMILY, “world policemen,” shapes the chaotic THRONG to form a cube. They are pressed against each other unnaturally, but in an image of stiff and smooth order, their backs facing out. The FAMILY forms a line, three on one side of the cube, three on the other. They come down in turn to speak their lines and then return to their places. The rest of the FAMILY applauds politely after each one. Each pronouncement is performed with a movement accompaniment that does not relate to the text.)

TSAREVNAS (J): The breath of life swirls. Attachment is stapled to our flesh. All cosmos spirals in and vortices screw labyrinths of wordless understanding.

TSAR: Images abound, effortlessly unfolding cosmos out of chaos, like fluted smoke extending the upright incense path into a winding trail.

ALEXEI: We stroll. Our intestines, tightly packed and folded behind sipapu navels, uncomplainingly toil to cycle life.

TSAREVNAS (C): We circle each other, warily and uncomprehendingly, dazzled by our unpredictable continuity, our absurd cohesiveness and truth.

4. The Death of the Forest. The soft mood is broken by a loud sound of chain saws and bulldozers. All the “trees” crash to the floor from left to right, in a wave of branches, mowed down. ZONE, a performance by Rachel Rosenthal. (Photo by Jan Deen, copyright © Jan Deen 1994)
RASPUTIN: We belong to ourselves and to the stupendous whole. Why buy land? Why rule over others? Why call each other names, why call us by our names?

TSARITSA: Cities are dying of rectilinearity. We weren’t made to turn right angles. We used to sing to each other’s breath.

TSAREVNAS (J): Stop the world! I want to get in!

ALL: Oh Love! Oh Beauty! Oh Earth! Oh Cheetahs! Oh Galaxies! Oh Ecstasy! Oh Unfolding Time!

(Each speaks one of the above exclamations, whirls around the cube, parasols held high, and pirouettes offstage.)

(SLIDE:)

“There’s an eerie stillness, and the light in the sky looks very strange, but nothing definite has happened yet.”

—Terence McKenna

(After the WHITES leave, the cube suddenly sprouts. It’s members of the THRONG, poking their green-gloved hands up and out of the cube like weeds out of asphalt, first sparsely, then as a mass of undulating tendrils, with an acid green LIGHT slicing through the hands. Bristling with their green gloves, they break up the cube and whirl offstage.)

A slow change of LIGHTS and SOUND. The WHITES, except ROSENTHAL, file in up-right, carrying a long piece of purple satin fabric containing something. They kneel or sit behind the fabric laid out on the floor diagonally from up-right toward down-left. When it is opened, it is seen to be filled with tree branches. The THRONG enters, queuing up before the fabric and are each given a branch. They kneel, gradually covering the stage, facing downstage, holding their branches before their faces. They form a grove. Shakuhachi MUSIC. Blue-green LIGHTING with forest gobos. Filtered sunlight. ROSENTHAL enters up-right, walks slowly around the stage, and stops down-right between some “trees.”)

R: In Yosemite, when I was young, I hugged and kissed a wild bear. I didn’t know fear. Neither did the bear, although it seemed a bit surprised. I saw it, slammed on the car brakes, dashed out, came running, and squeezed it in my arms. It was 1960. There were less people then, and we hadn’t yet fallen from grace. Our beloveds had not been assassinated. The rain forests were still standing, or we didn’t hear the saws. Animal lovers were crackpots, health foodies were faddists, vegetarians were nuts, and all the silent springs were just that: silent. Who knew, then? Not the bear. Not I.

When you entered the sacred sites, elementals were calm and sang harmoniously. You could meditate, or simply play. Sunlight through the leaves was so innocent: fairies slid up and down it, and dewdrops plopped on frog heads with little drumming sounds... I was in Yugoslavia in 1988. There were elementals there, at the magic lakes, in 1988. Where are they now?

I remember as a child, I lived my truest life among the tree roots, assembling tiny bouquets, humming to myself. Alone, yet filled with the totality. Happy. The only human who entered my realm: my grown-up half-brother Pierre. He crouched near me without a word and started picking flowers for his little bouquet. Oh! Was Pierre the only one? Ever? In my whole life?

He was killed in the Big War. That was the beginning of the Fall. Now, in the wilderness, elementals sing a different song. They weep. They scream. They lay a guilt trip on you. They say: Where are the sites? The ones you venerated your entire life? The sacred groves, streams, oaks, ravines, caves,
springs? Where are you, who approached us with awe and gratitude? Look now: the six-packs, the cartridges, the butts, the ruins of forests, the filth-filled canyons, the drained wetlands. You spit on us and trample. We are begging you to awaken from your coma. Or blood shall be spilled in floods.

I hear these voices. And I shake. I can feel the shaking of the Mother when there is no epicenter around. The shaking is in my bones. The bones scream. The bones bleed. All the animal throats flooded with bellows, roars, squawks, bleats, howls, screeches, and agonized silence, lodge in my larynx. I suffocate. Suddenly, well-behaved zoo lions eat their trainers. Fires devour prime real estate. Rivers swallow cities. Pet dogs bite. And there is swarming everywhere but not of locusts. The swarms are us.

(ROSENTHAL covers her head with a shawl. She walks slowly from right to left amid the “trees,” and exits. Soft elegiac MUSIC. The THRONG slowly stands, extending their arms up with the branches. It is a forest. The WHITES have lined up behind the “forest,” against the upstage curtain, facing forward. The soft mood is broken by a loud SOUND of chain saws and bulldozers. All the “trees” crash to the floor from left to right, in a wave of branches, moved down, and as straight as tree trunks. The WHITES are discovered standing behind the felled forest. There is a sudden SILENCE. It isn’t spelled out, but the impression is that it is they who have cut it down. CAROL comes down and moves among the felled “trees,” picking up branches.)

C: They say that Earth’s mind is its forests. Look. How fast we are destroying our mind...

(SLIDE:)

“If psychosis is the attempt to live a lie, the epidemic psychosis of our time is the lie of believing we have no ethical obligation to our planetary home.”

―Theodore Roszak

(As CAROL picks up the branches from the prone THRONG, the rest of the WHITES, except KIRK, all pick up branches and carry them off on two stretchers, like the wounded and the dead from a battlefield. KIRK enters from left. On his right shoulder he balances the pole that was the raft mast. A chair hangs from it. He walks a “tightrope” going right, parallel to the audience.)

K: Does anyone of you out there still have your soul intact?
I mean is it whole, complete, no pieces missing?
I don’t.
My soul is like a moth-eaten schmatta.
Shamans, when asked, go on perilous journeys to return with pieces of soul not irretrievably lost.
Soul-loss is dangerous.
The emptiness that the soul-piece filled is vulnerable to infection.
Things unwanted may invade.
Like ultra-violet rays.
Like incurable sadness.
Like intractable rage.

(He drops the pole and the chair, downstage, and faces the audience.)

Old stuff.
Initial conditions long forgotten.
We carry our soul holes like guilty secrets and stuff them with quick fixes.
Instant feel-goods that betray our trust.
Ersatz living—ersatz food—ersatz love—life by proxy—virtual this and virtual that.
We leak our lives like sieves.
As social animals we splash around in a soup of pooled souls.
Our META-SOUL.
Suffering from META-HOLES.
A SPIRITUAL OZONE HOLE.
As above, so below.

(The THRONG, who have been prone on the floor since the felling of the forest, washes up toward KIRK like waves around a rock. A few of them stand, grab him, and mime tying him to the chair. They torture him by drilling into his skull and slowly scooping out his brain with a spoon, putting the yogurt-like stuff in a bowl. You can hear a VOICEOVER of the computer HAL from the film 2001 as he’s being dis-

5. Rasputin’s Apotheosis in ZONE, a performance by Rachel Rosenthal. Rasputin lifts his arms and his gaze upward, and plunges into outstretched hands. (Photo by Jan Deen, copyright © Jan Deen 1994)
H: In Tajikistan, they torture prisoners by scooping their brains out slowly. In China they do that to live monkeys and eat the stuff. A delicacy.

There is no doubt: we’ve lost it.

(HARVEY exits. The THRONG lifts the comatose RASPUTIN in his chair high above their heads. He stands on the chair, lifts his arms and his gaze upward, and plunges into outstretched hands. He is passed, prone, above the heads from hand to hand and the THRONG that touch him fall in a trance on the floor, flapping like fish out of water. He is put down and guides them in a procession. Russian liturgical MUSIC. There is a very holy atmosphere. People move on their knees as the FAMILY enters, like Orthodox patriarchs, holding the “Holy Icons” aloft. The icons are not of religious figures, but of TVs, cellular phones, cars, jet planes, etc. The FAMILY forms a line, center, holding the icons high. The procession moves around them on their knees, forming a circle. RASPUTIN is riding on the back of someone who is moving on all fours. Some of the THRONG try to reach up and touch an icon. Some go into religious trance. Some speak in tongues and flagellate themselves. A very medieval scene. You can discern “I need!” “I want!” “It’s mine!” “My turn!” “More!” etc., among the moans. The MUSIC is a weird combination of Russian Orthodox church music and the sound of machines. The Holy Icons are grabbed by the THRONG and are used as a mast for the “Raft in Space,” a huge raft with tons of people on it. But this time, it’s the THRONG who are on the raft, holding the icons high, trying not to fall off. RASPUTIN is held by some of the THRONG and he sways with the others on the raft. The FAMILY is prone downstream, off the raft and in the ocean, as the THRONG was before, undulating like waves. They try to climb onto the raft but are repelled the way they repelled the THRONG at the beginning. The entire scene dissolves in FOG and DARKNESS.)
“When people talk of ‘saving the planet,’ most are not talking just about assuring the continuation of life on Earth. If this were their aim, our collective suicide would be high on their agenda.”

—Peter Russell

(Everyone forms a line. The icons are handed down the line from right to left and off, as a white box is handed onstage from the right and ends up center. The WHITES and the THRONG all sit randomly on the floor. Six of the THRONG stand up-stage and scan the people as guards. JOAN runs in and leaps up onto the box, center.)

J: (Very bureaucratic, but with self-conscious sexiness) There are too many people. We must cut down on those numbers before it’s too late. No arable land left, no trees, the water table is almost gone, the rest is poisoned, we wear masks when we go out in the unfiltered air. The Northern Hemisphere has reduced its numbers but every baby born here eats up five times more resources than a baby in the Southern Hemisphere. So we ALL have to do our bit. Now. We must decide who lives and who dies. We are cutting back by about 9/10 of the global population. It’s done with justice and equity. No nepotism, no lobbying, no special favors. The questionnaire is simple and clear. Here are the forms. (Some people mime handing out forms to everyone.) I’ll read. All of you have your simultaneous translation earphones (everyone adjusts imaginary earphones). Ready?

1. Are you male or female? Males get 2 points, females 10.
2. Are you fertile?
3. Are you a same-sex-attractor? Same-sex-attractors get 20 points. Remember, you can’t cheat because of the truth implants. If you lie, they’ll beep. So if you’re het, tough.
5. Have you committed other kinds of murder? Do you plan to in the near future?
I hear a beep. Three beeps and you’re eliminated. And I mean for good.
7. How many animals have you rehabilitated to the wild?
8. Do you shower more than once a week?
9. Are you now or have you ever been host to the following afflictions: Poststreptococcal Glomerulonephritis? Myasthenia Gravis? Hashimoto’s Thyroiditis? Systematic Lupus Erythematosus? Human Immunodeficiency Virus? (During this, people are writing feverishly, looking worried, glancing around at others without making eye contact. Many beep. Several people are eliminated. Others look away, embarrassed. The WHITES also beep, but none of them get three beeps, so they aren’t eliminated. But they are very anxious.)
10. Do you bring your own ration bags to your specified market on your specified market day?
11. Have you conceived in the last six months?
(SOUND of firing squad offstage. The questionnaire is filled out. The papers are gathered.)

(SLIDE:)

“Our situation may not only be stranger than we suppose; it may be stranger than we can suppose.”

—Terence McKenna

J: These will be processed. You’ll know in an hour. Just watch for the “L” or “D” on your display (she indicates a miniature wrist computer). For “Life” or “Death.” If it’s “D,” check the place and time.
(ALL begin to file out, desultorily. A few hang back.)

A: Can we appeal?

J: Of course not. This isn’t the Justice Department, it’s the Population Department.

H: If we...er...how long before...er...

J: Twenty-four hours. Don’t try to run. (Indicates her neck) Tracking implant.

K: What’s the passing score?

J: It varies. Depends on the latest population tallies. Nothing etched in marble, ha ha!

C: Who made this up?

J: The questionnaire?

C: Yeah.

J: Don’t worry about that. Just think of it as a Last Judgment.

(LIGHTS down and up on the “Portrait of the Family” as the THRONG brings in five empty screens upstage, sets them in a long line parallel to the audience. All the THRONG run in and crouch behind them, facing forward. The next sequence is played with very exaggerated movement in the Bolshoi Ballet style. The members of the FAMILY and the THRONG act out the events leading up to the assassination of the Romanovs: RASPUTIN’s influence and hold on the women, the people’s revolt, the TSAR’s abdication, the incarceration of the FAMILY, the searches for the jewels, and finally, the night of the murders. MUSIC: Prokofiev’s Lieutenant Kije Suite.)

(SLIDE:)

“LETTERS & DIARIES OF THE TSAR AND HIS FAMILY”

(The THRONG is crouching low behind the screens, intently watching the FAMILY. The TSAR and TSARITSA love each other. They reign, they dance. The TSAREVICH is ill. RASPUTIN heals him. The TSARITSA kisses RASPUTIN’s boots. The TSAR goes to war. This is all mimed like in a traditional Russian ballet.)

TSARITSA: Tomorrow is the anniversary of your reign and my becoming Orthodox! Twenty years! How time has flown, what things we have seen together... When you are away, a part of me is gone—you and I are one. When you return, you bring renewal, as our friend (indicating RASPUTIN) has said. It warms my heart to know he prays for you—heavenly angels follow you.

TSAR: My adored Sunny and sweet Wifey. My beloved, how I miss you—words cannot begin to say...

(RASPUTIN and the TSAREVNAS. The TSARITSA mauls the TSAREVICH with hugs.)

TSARITSA: How awful, they’re dropping bombs on King Albert’s summer palace. Thanks be to God no one was harmed but how can one think of trying to murder a ruler just because he happens to be your enemy at war!

TSAR: My little dove, sweetest Sunny! The train is crossing lovely vistas unknown to me, with picturesque peaks to the right and steppes to the left. I spent the afternoon with the compartment wide open, delightful sun and wind all the way. This country of the Cossacks is splendidly fertile; many fruit trees. I am filled with gratitude for God’s bounty; my expectations are high for the future of our Russia.
(They all mime sipping tea. The TSAR returns to the “front,” left. Tea sipping turns to sewing, which turns to rolling bandages. Hospital scene: a member of the THRONG is a wounded soldier undergoing amputation. The TSAR is having people from the THRONG executed by a firing squad.)

TSARITSA: Baby will take a little drive and later Olga will bring him to the big palace to meet the officers who always love to see him. I don’t think I will go. I am tired and must return to the big hospital at 5:15 for an amputation. We worked all morning; a soldier was operated on and died—such a tragedy. (TSAREVNAS JOAN faints, the amputated leg is brandished, the death squad kills a person.) The girlies behaved well—it was their first death. (TSARITSA wags a finger at cowardly girls. Influence and power: RASPUTIN gives TSARITSA an icon and a comb and uses his influence on her to get to the TSAR and eliminate his enemies. She exerts her power on the TSAR and tries to make him more intimidating.)

TSAR: Not being able to walk after dinner is very hard. I can’t stay indoors when fresh air beckons.

TSARITSA: Ah moy lyubimy. Dzhunkovsky, my enemy, showed that disgusting letter against our friend to Dimitri who then took it to Paul. It is sin-ful; and after you told him you wanted no part of these filthy lies and ordered him mercilessly punished. You see how he twists your commands? It was the slanderers, not he, Rasputin, you wanted punished. Ah, how vile! We must never let our friend suffer, or Russia and our family shall pay for it. Dushka moya, I want you to bang your fist on the table and shout at Dzhunkovsky and the others. They are not afraid of you. They should fear you. Oh druzhok moy, bring them to their knees. Your kindness must stop!

TSAR: More beautiful weather. Misha takes me for a drive in his motor every day. He is a comfortable and cheerful man.

TSARITSA: I have heard that there is talk of sending Guchkov and others from Moscow as a delegation to you. A train derailment where only he would be hurt would be a fitting sign from God! (From a distance, TSARITSA tries to force the TSAR into making a fist to pound tables. He’d rather ride his horse.) Make a fist! Be the lord and master! This is an autocracy and they must feel it! (She gives him the icon and the comb.) Don’t forget to hold the image and to comb your hair many times with this comb before the Council of the Ministers.

TSAR: All my gratitude for your loving thoughts. You have no idea how much I need them in my work, my responsibilities, my worries and all that. (The THRONG, as revolutionaries, begins to stir. The TSARITSA watches them, alarmed.) I have difficulty saying these things and find writing them easier—due to my stupid shyness.

(He mimes smacking the “horse” with his crop. The TSAREVICH has been watching. He denies his anguish. The TSAREVNAS dance, preen, and do repetitive gestures.)


February 14. Breakfast and communion in bed.

February 26. All as usual. Papa went away at noon. Said good-bye.

March 4. All as usual...

April 8. Same. Confession in bed.

April 9. Same. Communion and as usual...

(The TSARITSA describes the riots while the THRONG becomes more and more threatening and RASPUTIN is enjoying an orgy with some THRONG women. Others of the THRONG are coercing the TSAR into signing papers.)
TSARITSA: Zolotoy moy rodnoy, the strikes and riots in the city are unconscionable. It’s a revolt of hooligans, these young people rousing the others and screaming they want bread. Also workers refusing to work, not letting others work. I am sure if it were snowing they’d all stay home quietly. But soon it will be over and go back to normal.

Golupchik nebesnoy, so happy to receive your letter, smothered it with kisses and will kiss it every day. Such rumors about the riots. More than 200,000 they say. Oh but I wrote this in yesterday’s letter—so sorry, how silly! They need only bring a coupon for their bread, such stupidity. All the trouble comes from these bawling people, wounded soldiers, girl students, etc., getting everyone excited.

(The TSAR is forced into abdicating by the THRONG. They rip off his epaulets. He falls to his knees, finally making fists but powerlessly.)

TSARITSA: Of course, the drivers and carters also strike but it’s not at all like 1905 because the people love you and only want bread.

(All freeze and look at the TSAR on his knees. The THRONG yells in triumph. One kicks him and he rolls to take his place in the tea lineup.)

TSAREVNAS (C): Mama was weeping and I was crying too. TSAREVNAS (J): But at teatime we all put on smiles. ALEXEI: If there is no Tsar in Russia, who will rule?

(Suddenly the FAMILY is drinking vodka instead of tea. They smash their imaginary glasses. Their eyes dart around the stage. They turn their heads, looking around nervously, as in the wolf masks of the first scene. They quickly move together, stage left in little dancing steps and form a grouping, three in front, three behind, far left on the apron. The THRONG performs a revolutionary ballet as the FAMILY marks the rhythm in their knees and hands without moving from their places, looking frightened and forlorn. The THRONG—at a wild dance in which they sail through the air to be caught in the arms of others, are tossed up and caught, dropped to the floor, etc.—creates a small prison with the screens down center and carries or pushes the FAMILY roughly inside, one by one. The FAMILY looks out into the audience from behind “windows” and “bars.”)

TSAR: 9:15, arrival in Tyumen; the whole squadron under a bright moon, guarding our carts as we entered the town.

(The THRONG as Bolsheviks, is searching for treasure up the TSAREVNAS’s anus and vagina, out of the TSAR and TSARITSA’s sight.)

TSAR: Enjoyed being on the train although it wasn’t very clean. As for us, we looked horrendously dirty. They searched our effects like at the borders: very strict, every vial and tube in Alix’s medicine chest was opened.

TSARITSA: How insulting!

(The TSAREVNAS return to the FAMILY group. They have been ravaged but are silent. The THRONG is more threatening and derisive. They parade around, some are cleaning their rifles.)

TSAR: They have placed guards in the two rooms next to the dining room, so in order to go to the water closet or washroom we have to go by the sentries. The girls had to sleep on the floor. (The TSAREVICH is hurt and the TSARITSA consoles him.) Alexei fell and his knee made him suffer exceedingly during the night. We slept well, except Alexei. He was in pain continually. The weather was magnificent. Very hot. So frustrating to be indoors and not allowed out.
TSARITSA: They have boarded up every window. We can’t even glimpse the treetops anymore.

(Relationship of the TSAR and TSAREVNAS.)

TSAR: Anastasia darling is now 17. It was terrifically hot outside and inside. The girls learned how to cook: at night they knead the flour and for breakfast bake the bread.

TSARITSA: I cut my Nicky’s hair.


TSAREVNAS (C): We are forbidden to lock our doors at night.

TSARITSA: We overheard last night a guard strictly ordered to spy on our every movement in the window.

TSAR: Will we never hear a word from the outside? A storm last night. The air is cool now.

ALEXEI: It’s boring! Such boredom!

(SLIDE and VOICEOVER:)

“My grandfather called the Romanovs’s execution a ‘kick in the ass,’ asserting that this was in the literal sense: they turned the condemned to the wall, then brought a pistol up to the back of their head, and when they pulled the trigger they simultaneously gave them a kick in the ass to keep the blood from spattering their uniforms.”

—O.N. Kolotov

(Some of the THRONG playing the revolutionaries have roughly shoved the FAMILY before them toward the screens, facing the audience. They push them down through the screens to their knees. Holding guns to their heads, they kick them in the ass. The FAMILY falls forward. They remain on their knees, holding their heads down to the floor, facing front, in a line. The screens are taken out. The THRONG is shouting loudly and getting their lines organized. One can make out “Chaos! Chaos!” shouted rhythmically, but other things are shouted too, intermittently: “Food! Shelter! Justice! Freedom! Rights! Kill!” etc. When the lines are formed, parallel to the audience, one behind the other, demonstration MUSIC begins. They march downstage as the FOG fills the back. The front line of THRONG carries three large banners on poles: a red, a yellow, and a blue, and marches forward, in step. As the first line emerges from the fog, a second line follows. That one carries another three banners. A third line follows that and carries three more. They read:)

RED: The smallest influence

YELLOW: can cause

RED: Decision points can be examined

BLUE: explosive change

YELLOW: in finer and finer scale

BLUE: each scale having further decision points

RED: In far-from-equilibrium turbulent chaos

YELLOW: systems don’t just break down

BLUE: new systems emerge
As each banner-carrying line reaches the apron, it splits with two banners exiting on one side and one banner exiting on the other. The lines alternate as two exit right and one left, while the next line exits left and right. After splitting their line, the banner people march upstage along the wings, and regroup into a new line. They return with the banners in chaotic order, reading the quotes randomly. After a while, they form lines without banners and, as a seemingly endless march, come forward out of the fog, split, returns upstage, and march forward again, the image of feedback and iteration as in chaos theory is suggested. As the MUSIC fades, the line of THRONG downstage goes into slow motion, comes forth behind each member of the FAMILY, and begins to murder them five times. There are two THRONG people for every FAMILY member. They shoot them, beat them, knife them, choke them, slit their throats. It is very stylized and goes into slower and slower motion, like the war scene with the horses in the Kurasawa film *Ran*. Each member of the FAMILY rises after being “killed” and must be killed all over again in another manner. They form a line on the apron, of the many faces of murder. The THRONG’s faces are contorted with anger; they shout and scream and so do the members of the FAMILY, in slow motion with NO SOUND coming out of their mouths. After a while, MUSIC is heard. The dead FAMILY is dragged upstage on the floor by their feet. They rise and exit as the second line begins to murder the first line the way the first line murdered the FAMILY. The same image of violence in slow motion is repeated again and again as each line that is killed is pulled upstage and another takes over the violence. They iterate this way as they did before for the demonstration. After all lines have killed one another, all begin to slowly move into a spiral, which squeezes on itself, still in slow motion. The THRONG, with silent screams now not of anger and violence but of pain and hopelessness, is compressed into a tight ball as they spiral around the center, seemingly imploding with irresistible force.

(VOICEOVER:) If you are wrapped in a wet skin that is slowly allowed to dry, that second skin will suffocate you slowly, like a python. You will die a horrible death. It’s been done before and now, on a world scale, this ancient torture is snuffing out our soul. Can you feel that second skin, slowly tightening its hold on our life? Spirit is tamed. It swells desperately and gangrenously, pushing against the inexorability of the squeeze. What is pushing? Do we even know? Can we recognize our existence, our uniqueness, beneath the crush? Soon our bodily fluids will crack us open and all will ooze out. It’ll be it. And will we wonder then if we get to try again, this time with grace, compassion, unconditional love, closeness to our fellow beings, gentleness toward other creatures, appreciation of life, wonder at the cosmos, enchantment with light and the miracle of sight, soft contours, suppleness of intellect, and having shed fear in an all-encompassing embrace?

(The spiral has become a tight ball. An enormous SCREAM escapes from all the throats together, coinciding with the end of the VOICEOVER. The spiral collapses on the floor. MUSIC ends with the scream.)

(SLIDE:)

“If you do not change direction, you will probably end up where you are going.”

—Old Chinese Proverb

(As the THRONG gets up, they start running and smashing into each other. The collisions are brutal. There is NO MUSIC. Just the sound of bodies crashing together, of air forced out of lungs. Suddenly, a change in LIGHTS and SOUND. All the people are struck blind. They bump into each other and stumble. They walk with arms outstretched. They grope and touch each other’s faces. There is a sense of common calamity and people no longer see who they are touching. They bond. The WHITES come back onstage and join them.)
R: What if we were suddenly struck blind and became like Braille to one another?  
(People help and hold one another regardless of color, etc. The WHITES and the THRONG is now the same.)

(SLIDE:)

“We are in the middle of what appears to be chaos but grace is streaming out of it.”

—Jean Huston

(All find their places as a huge “Extended Family Portrait.” The position of the original FAMILY is similar to that in the first Portrait, but it’s a mix of FAMILY and THRONG. A tall MAN brings in the mast and the image becomes the “Raft in Space.” ALL are on it together, “in the same boat.” It no longer moves laterally but perpendicularly to the audience, coming forward toward the apron. The WHITES speak the following lines wherever they are, intermingled with the THRONG. All are swaying as if on ocean waves.)

R: We are at the edge of chaos. We are reaching the Zone, the no-man’s land between worlds where life becomes death, death becomes life, weather is generated, passion explodes, peace becomes war, laughter becomes tears, a virulent virus flares, a stock market crashes, a creation is conceived, a star is born, another dies.

J: The Zone is the moment when dormant energy awakes and spontaneously combusts.

H: The Zone is the thinnest slice of space-time available. It is the point—

C: one-dimensional...

K: two-dimensional...

R: three-dimensional...

J: four-dimensional...

A: n-dimensional...

H: —at which a static state becomes turbulent or a chaotic state reverts to order.

K: It is the membrane, the slippage between the two realms of being, the dual structure of the universe, the yin and yang of time/space and matter/energy since the Big Bang.

A: It is the Janus-door of everything, without which the cosmos would run down and disintegrate.

C: The Zone is the moment when four eyes meet across a crowded room and two lives are forever transformed.

J: The Zone is the thin line between genius and madness.

R: The Zone hides within the folds of clouds to unleash a hurricane, within a volcano to spew its guts into the sky, within the bowels of Earth to tip rock tension into killer tremor, within an innocent wave that roars up as an end-of-the-world Tsunami.


(They are at the edge, almost at the Zone. Strong change in LIGHTS and SOUND. The Zone is delineated by a special LIGHT on the apron. The mast-bearer walks
slowly forward and deposits the mast on the stage floor just upstage of the Zone LIGHT, parallel to the audience. Everyone moves slowly, approaching the Zone. They stop, hesitating to cross it. They are at the edge and they know it.

(SLIDE:)

“Our intention is to affirm this life, not to bring order out of chaos. Not to suggest improvement in creation but simply to wake up to this very life we’re living which is so excellent once one gets one’s mind and one’s desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord.”

—John Cage

(SOUND of Wind. All except ROSENTHAL whisper the Cage text as the slide is projected. As they whisper, they slowly move backwards toward upstage and group there. ROSENTHAL comes forward as if on a tightrope, perpendicularly to the audience, stopping just before the Zone.)

R: The ZONE is always happening NOW! To be in the present entails perching on the thin line of being, balanced between the chasms of chaos on each side of the wire.

How fragile our life is! How fragile is life! A long long line of living links us to the first cells, in time, and yet is spatially present in our bodies. Under the skin a universe unfolds. We are filled with the precariousness and tenacity of life.

Can we endure? Can we prevail? Can we pull it off?

Can we survive a millennium depleted of air, of trees, of wilderness, of beasts, and suffused with cruelty and the negation of beauty? Do we even want to? (ROSENTHAL turns around to look at the THRONG and WHITES, standing behind her.)

In time, we will all go because everything goes. If we go now, we leave severe pathology in our wake.

A huge sacrifice is in order: the surrender of our infatuation with the lie of exclusivity.

(The SOUND of Wind continues. Five of the THRONG walk forward and form a line downstage with ROSENTHAL. They are of five different ethnicities and colors. Three are men, two are women. They all carry the wolf masks from the beginning under their faces in the totem position, and give ROSENTHAL hers. They look at one another. All six walk toward the Zone LIGHT, cross over the mast on the floor, and enter the Zone. They then form the grouping of the first “Portrait of the Family.” They slowly bring up the wolf masks to hide their faces. WOLF HOWLS are heard. The howls and wind die down as LIGHTS go to black.)

THE END

Rachel Rosenthal has been performing since she was three. In the last 25 years she has presented over 35 full-scale pieces nationally and internationally. She is the recipient of N.E.A., Getty, Rockefeller, and California Arts Council Fellowships as well as numerous awards including the OBIE, the College Art Association Art Award, and the Women’s Caucus for the Arts Honor Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Arts. In 1994 she was chosen by Robert Rauschenberg to represent Theatre in his suite of prints TRIBUTE 21, and in 1995 received the Genesis Award for spotlighting animal rights issues in her work. She performed in the 1987 and 1990 L.A. Festivals, and pre-
sent her 55-performer piece ZONE for the 1993–94 UCLA Center for the Arts Season. In 1995, with her newly formed Company, she revived her acclaimed Instant Theatre of the ’50s and ’60s as TOHUBOHU! which ran from 1995 through 1997. Since that time, with her company she has collaboratively created DBDBDB-d: An Evening, Meditation on the Life and Death of Ken Saro-Wiwa, The Swans, Timepiece, The Unexpurgated Virgin, and Muck. She has toured extensively in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Australia. Rosenthal has taught classes and workshops in performance since 1979, in her L.A. studio as well as around North America and Europe. Her book Tatti Wattles: A Love Story (1996) published by Smart Art Press and a monograph of her work, entitled Rachel Rosenthal (1997), published by The John Hopkins University/PAJ Press, are currently available. A video series and companion book on her teaching methods (to be published by Routledge), and an anthology of her complete texts (to be published by Continuum Publishing) are currently in the works. In 1998, Rosenthal was granted a career achievement award for her contribution to theater in L.A. by the LA WEEKLY and in 1999 she received the Honorary Doctorate from the Art Institute of Chicago. In 2000, Rosenthal received the City of L.A. Cultural Affairs Department’s COLA Fellowship for the creation of UR-BOOR, which will be her final solo performance work and was granted by Mayor Richard Riordan the status of “Living Cultural Treasure of Los Angeles.” Rosenthal’s work centers around the issue of humanity’s place on the planet. She is an animal rights activist, a vegetarian, and companion to two cats and two dogs.