

from Heinrich von Kleist, *Penthesilea*, English version by Joel Agee, with illustrations by Maurice Sendak

There is an overruling wisdom particularly admirable in joining together those things which belong together: Homer with the Trojan War, Raphael with Catholicism, Mozart with Don Juan. There is a wretched unbelief abroad which seems to contain much healing power. It deems such a connection accidental, and sees in it only a lucky conjunction of the different forces in the game of life. It thinks it an accident that the lovers win one another, accidental that they love one another; there were a hundred other women with whom the hero might have been equally happy, and whom he could have loved as deeply.

Søren Kierkegaard, *The Immediate Stages of the Erotic or the Musical Erotic*, 1843

MOONLIGHTING IN *TURANDOT*



# Preludio

## Vorspiel

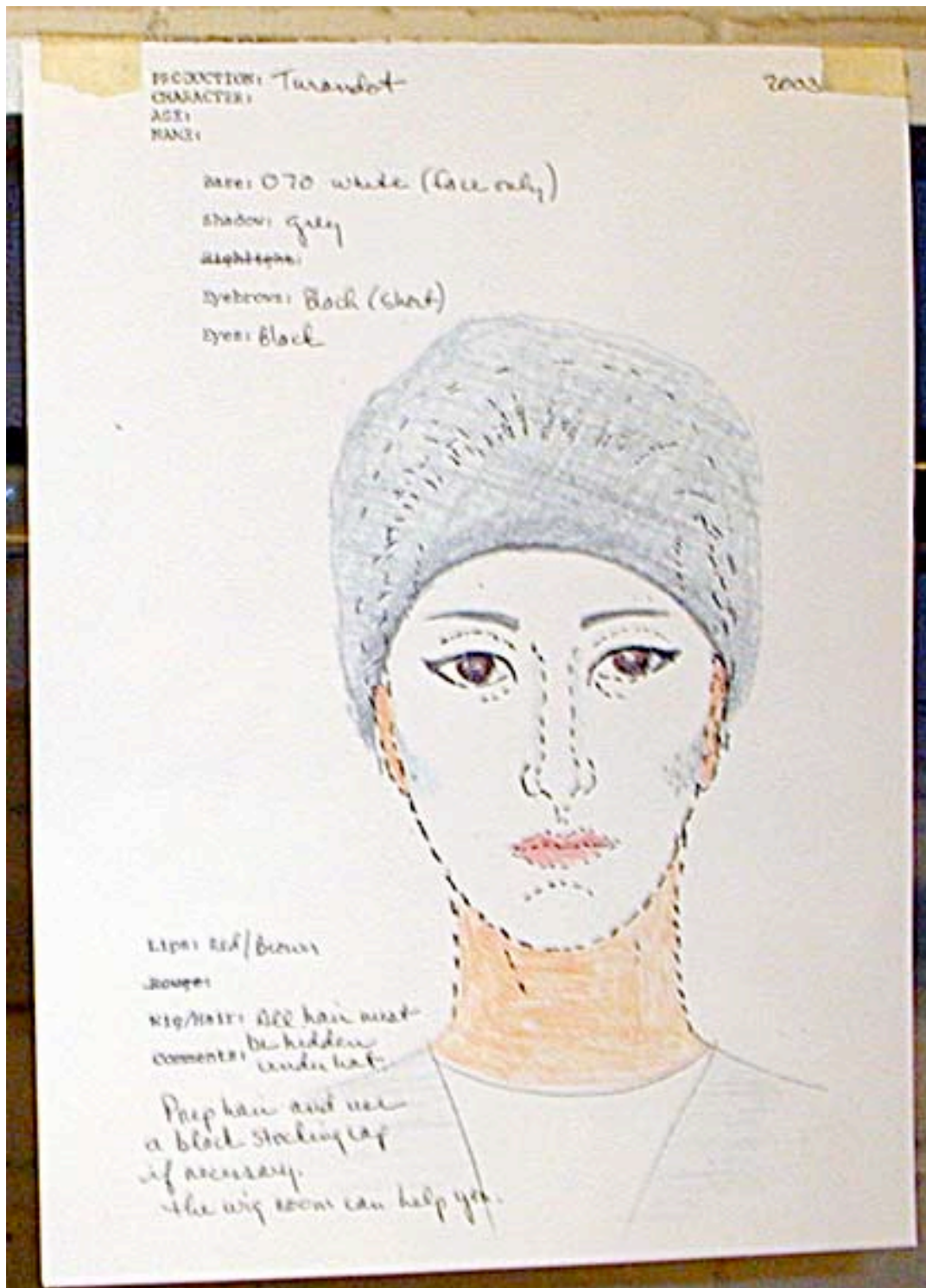
## Prelude

*All around the city is resting. The lit-up lane becomes silent,  
And, adorned with torches, the wagons rush off and away.  
Filled with the day's joys the people go home to rest,  
And, well satisfied, a cagey head weighs profit and loss at  
home.*

*The busy market stands empty of grapes and flowers,  
And takes a rest from the works of the hand.  
But the playing of strings sounds from gardens afar.  
Perhaps lovers are playing, or a lonely man  
Thinks of far friends and his youth; and the fountains,  
Always flowing and fresh, rustle along on the fragrant bed.  
Hushed in the twilight air resound the sounded bells,  
And mindful of the hours the watchman calls their toll.*

Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843), "Brod und Wein" /  
"Bread and Wine" (1801), I

## MOONLIGHTING IN *TURANDOT*



Makeup specifications for the chorus of Peking masses, *Turandot* production by Portland Opera, 2003

## PRELUDIO

**O**PENING NIGHT, 8 NOVEMBER 2003. The streetlights flicker on as I drive through the quiet Saturday downtown. I park my Odyssey in the nearly empty deck across a side street from the hall, and walk past the front façade and the courtyard fountain, around the corner, toward the back.

Call time for auxiliary chorus is 6 p.m. At the stage door

I want at this point to insert myself into this narrative... I was myself attempting an artistic career... But I was also attempting a philosophical career.... I lost interest in doing art and pretty much stopped. From that point on I was single-mindedly a philosopher..."

Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art* (1997)

I show my pass, sign in, and go up to the fifth floor. I finish my mocha and put on the loose, collarless off-white tunic-shirt, the beige-blue coarse linen jacket and baggy pants, and then the formless knitted cap. Makeup takes only ten minutes. It's not the full-body pore-penetrating brown I wore for *Aïda*. Just white-face, with black Chou-En-Lai eyebrows, exaggerated slanted eyes, and crimson lips.

Another ten minutes for dinner, lips stretched away from my prepackaged grocery-case sushi, the "Full Moon Combo." Bathroom. Brush teeth – careful of the lips. I read a few pages of whatever – perhaps Danto again about the end of art (or is it just the end of art history?), or maybe the Roy Chapman Andrews biography with its dinosaurs in the Gobi Desert and its decapitations in post-Imperial China. Then I check some lines and cues. Chorus warm-up is at seven. After that we have ten minutes to straighten costumes, drop off our backstage sandals, and remind each other to remove eyeglasses and watches.

We take our places. I am a late-middle-aged smallish-city minor-league American professor of German, made over in a Western image of an ancient Chinese urban nobody. Very soon I will sing, in Italian, to an audience of 3000 people.

## MOONLIGHTING IN *TURANDOT*

I will barely see them, not because I am all that near-sighted, but because the footlights dazzle me.

Even to me it is a ridiculous picture and an outrageous purpose. Yet for now *Turandot* is the focus of my existence, and for months it has been my object all sublime:

*It seduces my calendar, plays on my emotions, and deliciously dominates my identity. I keep a journal.*

It gives me a professorial assignment: to re-examine my education, my profession, my career, my culture, my life. I write a new sort of “term paper,” about coming to terms.

It insists on dialog with whatever I read and live. Despite its sheer musical beauty, it refuses to serve as my escape from the alarums of war and the clash of civilizations. I write an essay, about the death of art, deaths in war, and what lives after the deaths.

*Bill canta. Bel canto. Cantus belli.*

