

Director's Notebook

The (curious case of the) Watson Intelligence

a play about others

Table of Contents

Cultural and Theoretical Concept of the Play	1
Vision for the Play	2
Connections	3
Artistic responses, ideas, explorations	4
The Set.....	4
The Blocks.....	4
The Set Changes.....	4
The Shadows.....	7
Eliza, Watson, and Merrick.....	8
The Lights.....	9
Moment One	10
Moment Two	15

Info.

IB School #006399

Candidate #15

Published Play: The (curious case of the) Watson Intelligence by Madeleine George

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Act: Full-Length Play

Scene/Moments:

Moment One...Pages 62-68, The end of Act One, Eliza 1 finds a strange sort of freedom, Merrick 1 and Merrick 2 show off their obsessive, explosive, dangerously close to violent personalities.

Moment Two...Pages 106-109, The end of the play, Eliza 1 and Merrick 1 speak for the first time in a long time, Eliza 1 reveals the meaning of the play

Cultural and Theoretical Concept of the Play

When I first read the play, I felt enlightened on something but confused on what it was and how it made me feel that way, reminiscent of reading a poem and feeling what it was about but not consciously knowing what it was about. I knew it would be one of my favorite plays, though. I read it a few more times, and each time I read it, it made more sense. I realized the last line was the key to it all: "I just mean, I'm connected to them. Other people. Everywhere around us. Everywhere around us." It's about the human connection and human communication. Each of the three characters, Eliza, Merrick, and Watson, all have different versions of themselves in the play some from different time periods.

The first Eliza that is mentioned (whom I dubbed Eliza 1) is a roboticist/computer programmer in 2011, around the week of the computer Watson's *Jeopardy!* tournament. She invented an Android (humanoid companion robot) named Watson (dubbed Watson 1) that lives with her and acts as her companion after she divorces her ex-husband Merrick (Merrick 1) who is working as a fiery populist politician. Merrick 1 hires a tech "dweeb" named Watson (Watson 2) to fix his computer, and ends up enlisting him to spy on his ex-wife, Eliza 1. The time period later changes to March 1876, the date of the first voice communication by wire (between Alexander Graham Bell (Merrick 2) and his friend, saying "Mr. Watson. Come Here. I need you."¹) and subsequently March 1931, when Mr. Watson (Watson 4) has an interview at a radio lab with a radio journalist named Eliza (Eliza 3) about his role in the first wire voice communication. The last time period is March 1891 in England where Watson (Watson 3) returns to his friend Sherlock Holmes' apartment on Baker Street. Watson 3 is greeted by a woman (Eliza 2) seeking counsel from Holmes over her husband when Holmes is out, and Watson decides to take the case, leading him to her husband (Merrick 3), an inventor.

The play is a bit confusing first read because George does not differentiate the characters personas from one another, having stage directions that say things like "WATSON turns into WATSON". I think this is to add to the idea of the importance of communication; the reader (be it a director, designer, or student) must sift through the play in order to understand the characters because of the purposeful lack of communication from the playwright. It also adds to the idea that each of the characters' personas may be different people from different time periods, but they are all connected to each other, another theme in the play.

George uses places and characters/people from across the world and time spectrum in order to emphasize the theme of communication, including the first voice communication by wire, Sir Arthur Conan's Sherlock Holmes characters, Thomas A. Watson's interview with Bell Labs, and the week of

¹ "Mr. Watson. Come Here. I need you.": Bell and the Invention of the Telephone. Dr. Randy H. Katz. University of California, Berkeley. <http://bnrg.cs.berkeley.edu/~randy/Courses/CS39C.S97/telephone/telephone.html>

IBM supercomputer Watson's *Jeopardy!* tourney. It also explores themes of human-robot relations, divorce and human relationships, fiery populist politicians, love, and obsession. (see mind map on Page 3).

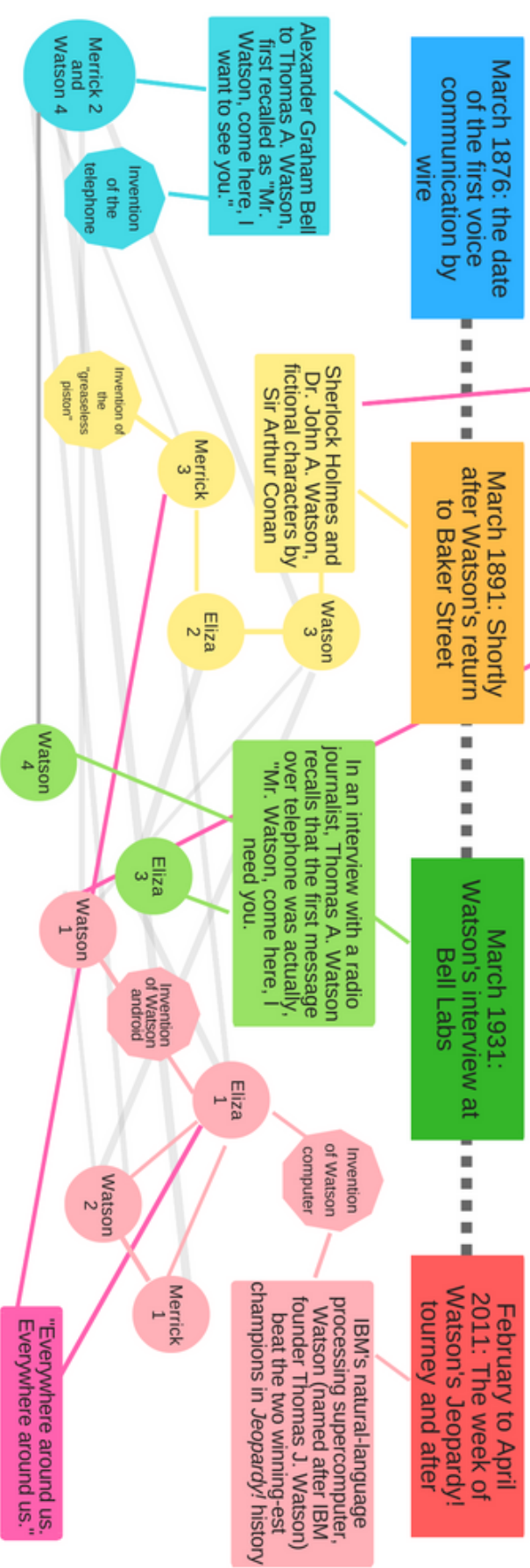
Vision for the Play

I think this show is meant to make the audience feel connected to other humans, past, present, and future. The subtitle of the play is "a play about others"; I think it is meant to make us think about the other people in our lives and how we are always undoubtedly connected to them. The recurrence of technological inventions (i.e. the supercomputer, the android, the gun) in the play is meant to contrast with the human connections throughout: the juxtaposition of human interaction and technological interaction.

In order to add to this idea of human connection, I would do the set in blocks and use a running crew of 'shadows' that would be a part of the play. I got the idea for blocks from the black blocks we use in my school's acting classes for impromptu scenes and plays, and from one of my theatre teachers/directors that told me about using blocks in *Vanities* by Jack Heifner. My school's theatre program sometimes puts ushers, dressers, and running crews in costumes in order to make them fit in with the show on stage or in front of house. Along with that, and a set of moving colorful globes of people from a rendition of *Yellow Boat* by David Saar at the 2016 Tennessee Thespian Conference, I got the idea to use the running crew as 'shadows' (see 'Shadows' under "Artistic responses, ideas, explorations"). Both the 'shadows' and block set are explored in my second moment of theatre.

"What a very attractive woman!" I exclaimed, turning to my companion. He had his pipe lit again, and was leaning back with drooping eyelids. "Is she?" he said, languidly; "I did not observe."
 "You really are an **automaton**--a calculating machine," I cried.
 "There is something positively **inhuman** in you at times."

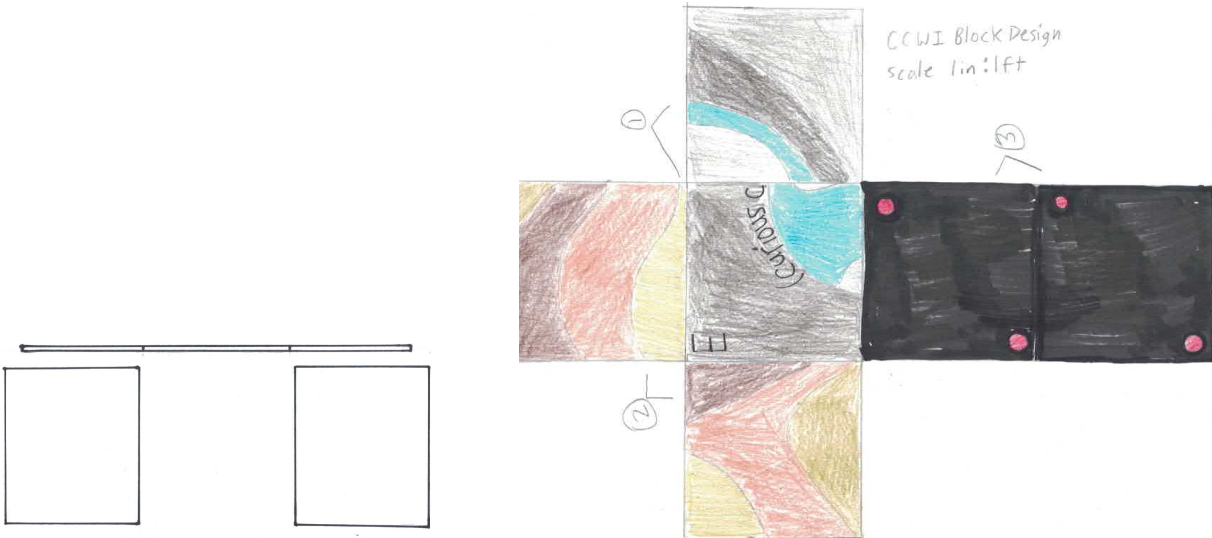
"I just mean, I'm connected to them. Other people. Everywhere around us. Everywhere around us!"



Artistic responses, ideas, explorations

The Set

I made the set two platforms left and right on a flat stage (i.e. a blackbox theatre) with three black and grey flats forming a background behind them (three acting areas: the left platform, the middle space, and the right platform). All of the settings would be made from blocks $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft x $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft square blocks (see 'The Blocks'). The audience would sit facing the flats and perhaps some angled on either side (but not arena style). Pictured Below Left.



Note: These and the following diagrams are no longer to scale (after being resized for this document)

The Blocks

The blocks (Pictured Above Right) would have 2 sides for three out of four of the time periods (the scenes where the first voice wire communication takes place would have a blank stage);

- 1) Two sides grey and blue for 2011 (on sixteen blocks, one of the sides fit the puzzle of the ending block arrangement which is pictured in my second moment of theatre)
- 2) Two sides with muted browns and yellows for 1891 (the Sherlock Holmes scenes), and
- 3) Two sides black with red dots for Watson's radio interview with Bell Labs (1931)

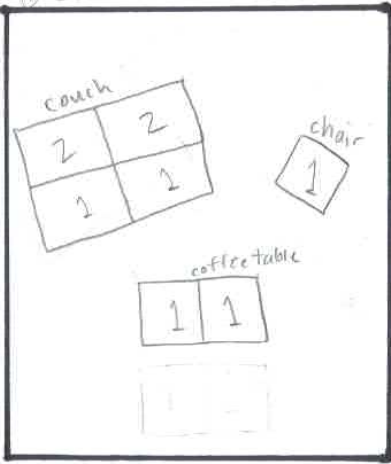
In each setting, the corresponding block sides would face out (be visible) to the audience, with the other sides facing away.

The Set Changes

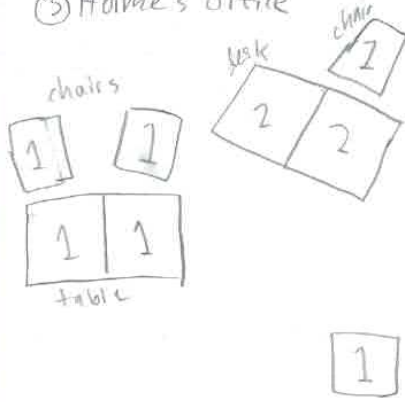
There are 18 scene changes in the play. Most of the time, lights would be up on the setting in one acting area while the shadows set up the next settings on the other two acting areas, lights would go down, and then up on the next setting in another acting area, and the first acting area's setting would be changed again by the shadows.

Act One

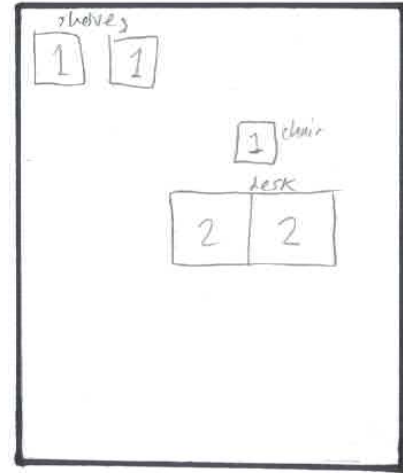
① Eliza's Office



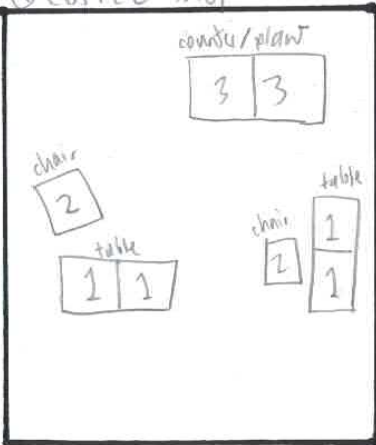
③ Holme's Office



② Merrick's Office

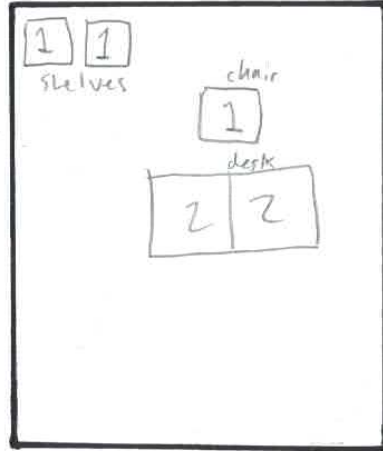


④ Coffee shop

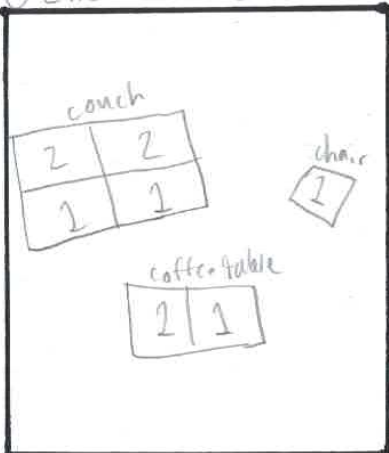


⑥ Open stage

⑤ Merrick's Office

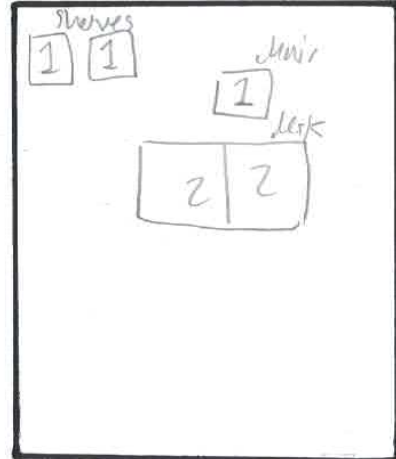


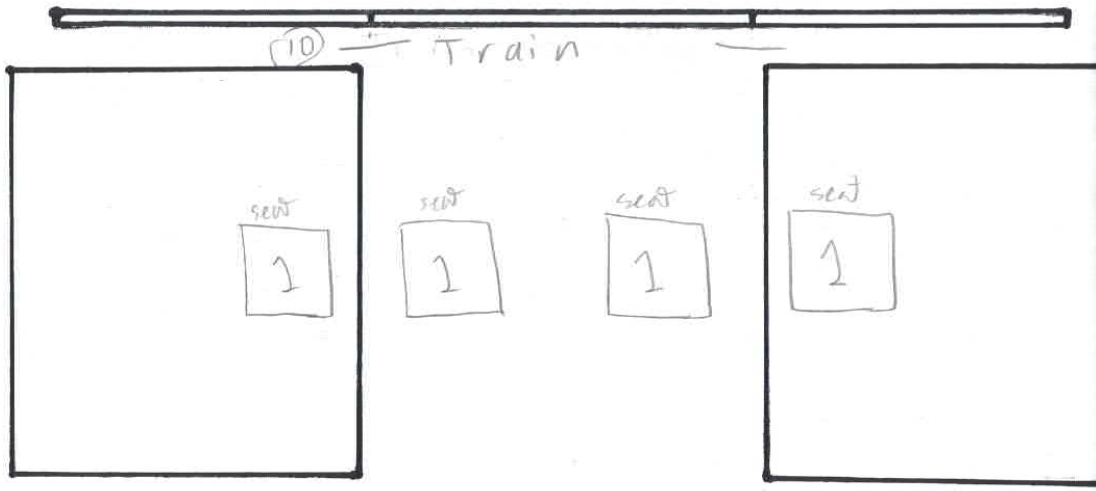
⑦ Eliza's Office



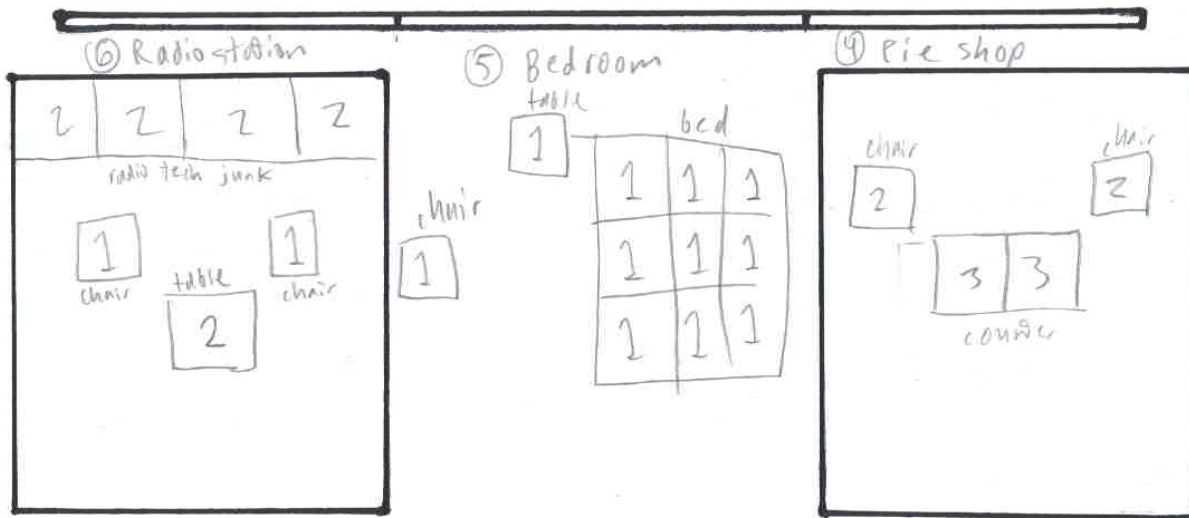
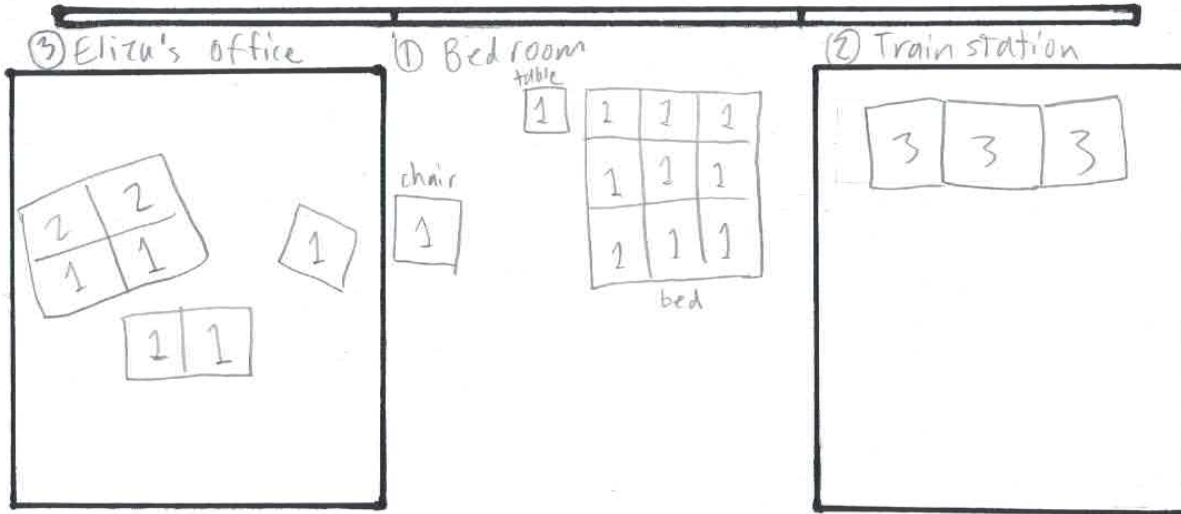
⑨ Open stage

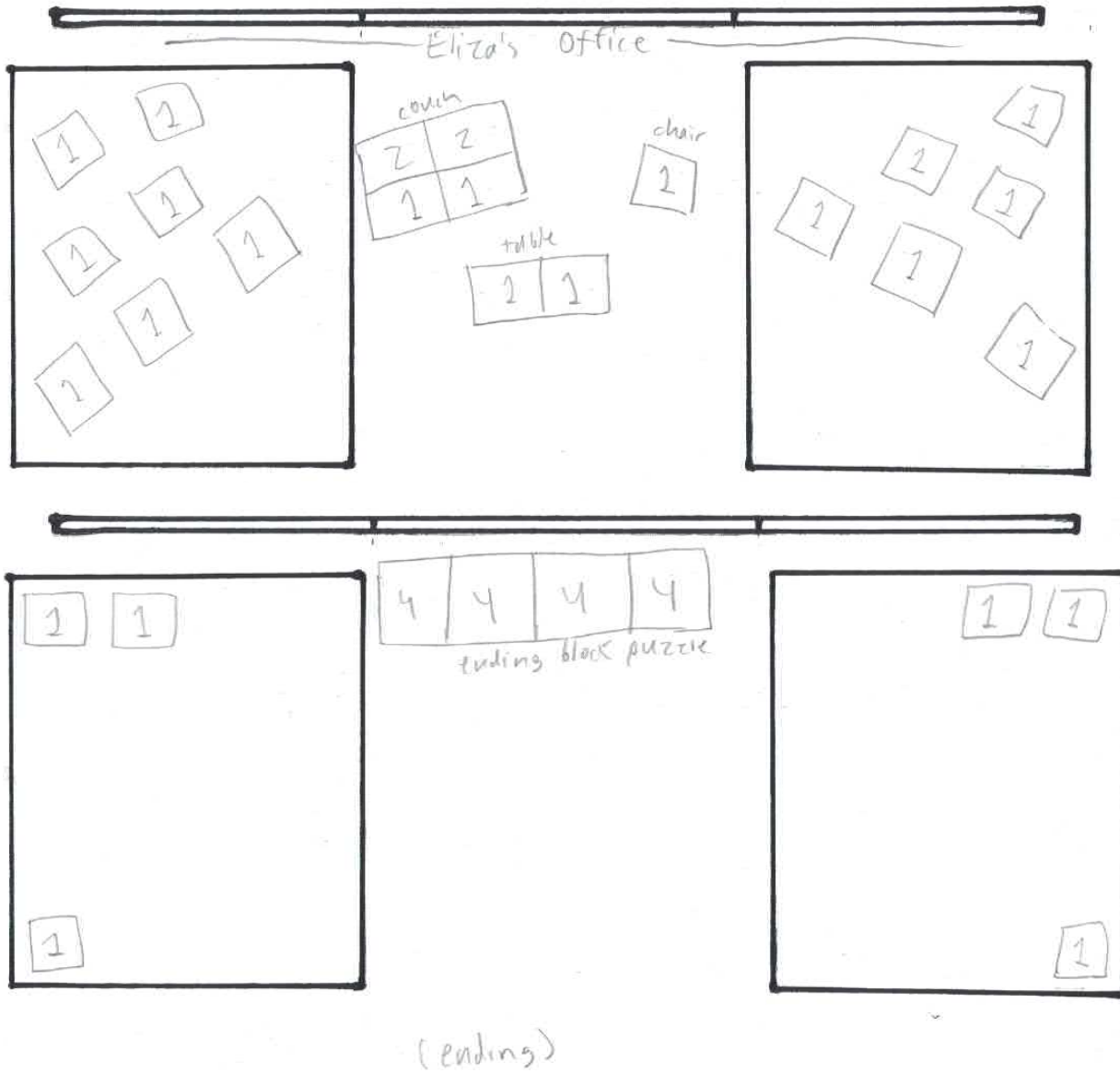
⑧ Merrick's Office



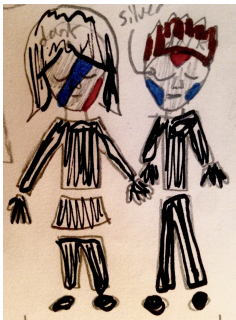


Act Two





The Shadows



I would have the shadows dressed in all black (from the feet to the neck) with dark hair (black or dark brown) and face makeup with a silver base and red and blue designs.

Each shadow would be unique, having his/her own face design, hair style, and/or costume. Some could have dresses/skirts, some could be dressed casually and others formally or for business (but still in complete black); basically people from all walks of life.

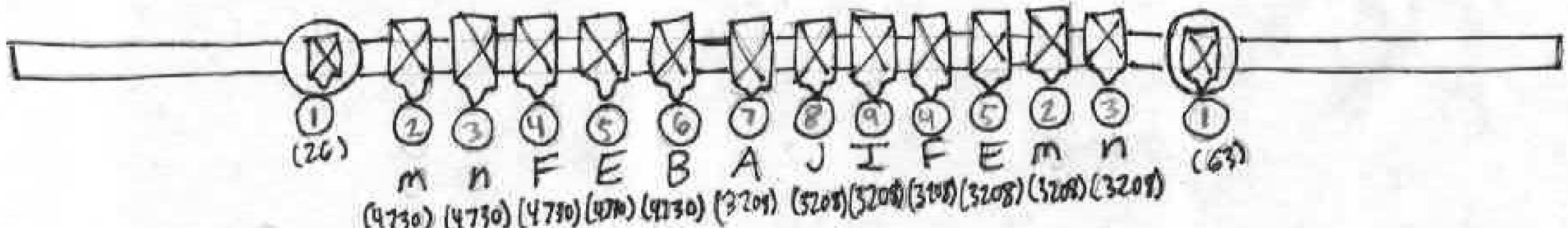
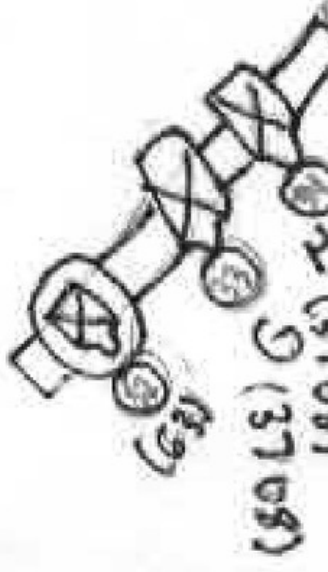
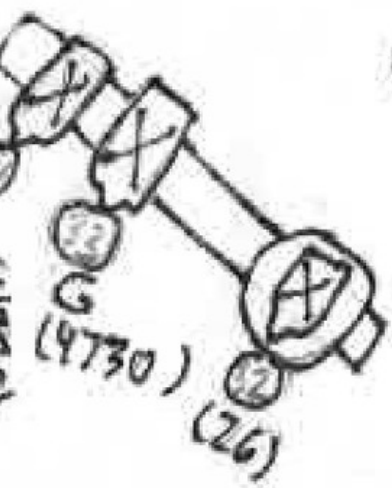
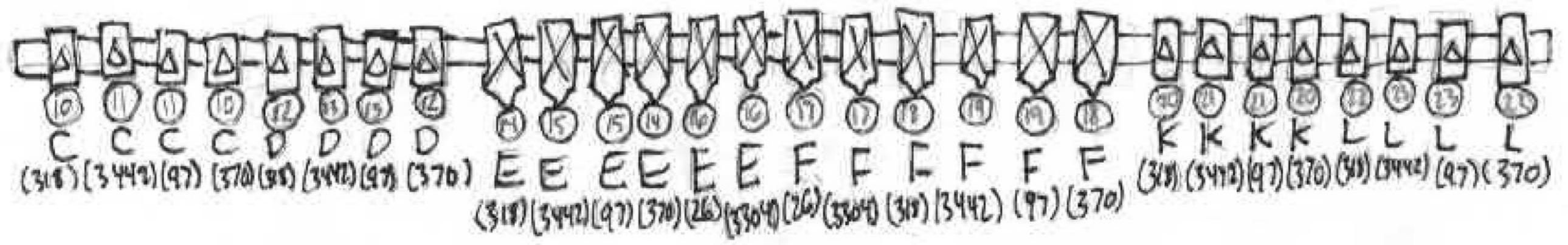
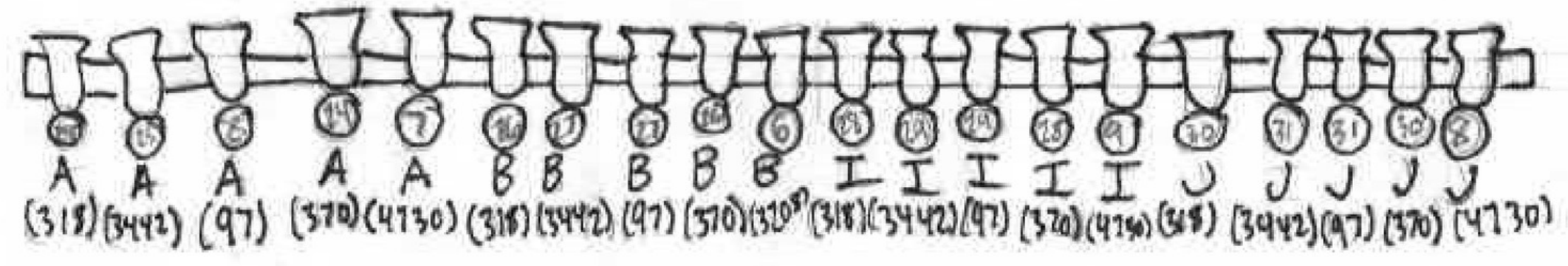
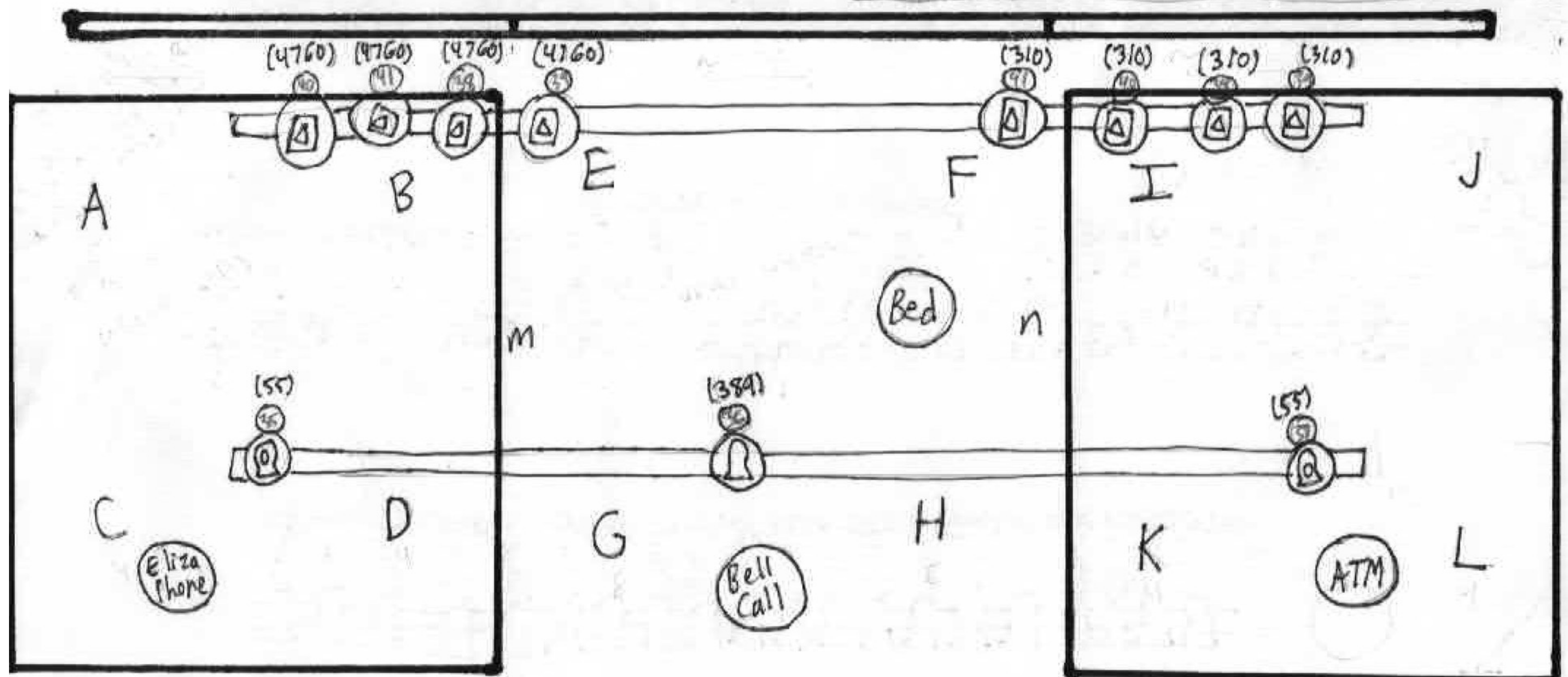
The (curious case of the) Watson Intelligence

Lighting Plot

scale 1/3" : 1'0"

KEY

- = source four
- = fresnel
- = Par EA
- = circuit
- = special backlight
- = special (2011)
- = special "Mr. Watson"
- = special bed room



Setting/Special Name	Warm Gel	Cool Gel	Special Gel
2011	#318 Mayan Sun 	#370 Italian Blue 	n/a
1931 (Radio Interview)	#26 Light Red 	#3304 Tough Plus Green 	n/a
1891 (Holmes)	#3442 Half Straw 	#97 Light Grey 	n/a
1876 ("Mr. Watson.")	n/a	n/a	#389 Chroma Green 
ATM/Eliza Phone	n/a	n/a	#55 Lilac 
End Backlight (for shadows on platforms)	#4760 CalColor 60 Magenta 	#310 Daffodil 	n/a
Bedroom Scene	#26 Light Red 	#63 Pale Blue 	n/a
Ending (Puzzle Finish)	#4730 CalColor 30 Magenta 	#3206 Quarter Blue 	n/a

Moment One

Pages 62-68, The end of Act One, Eliza 1 finds a strange sort of freedom, Merrick 1 and Merrick 2 show off their obsessive, explosive, dangerously close to violent personalities.

Radio Station Watson 4
Annals with [redacted]
Radio Journalist Eliza 3)

WATSON

Extremely faithful. Indistinguishable from the original.

(He picks it up; cracks.)

Cradling this device once more in my hands, as I cradled it that unseasonably warm night fifty-five years ago in our attic workshop on Beacon Hill, I find myself standing on the threshold of the past, *(he closes his eyes, bring the device to his chest)* hearing my friend's voice call out to me once more with that most heartfelt expression of need...and I am seized with the ancient urge to cry out to him in reply: Yes, Mr. Bell, I hear you, yes!

ELIZA

How wonderful that you recall it all so keenly, Mr. Watson, and we're at time now, so if you could direct that lovely energy right into the microphone, please!

(She releases him of the prototype, points him toward the microphone.)
Marvelous, we're on, then, in 3, 4, 3, 2--

A swell of optimistic 1930s radio music.

WATSON and ELIZA become ELIZA and WATSON

Light up on ELIZA's office, wearing WATSON, button-down shirt open at the neck, khakis, bare feet, looks slightly down and away from ELIZA when he speaks.

WATSON

I don't think I understand what you mean, but I'd like to. Can you give me a nudge in the right direction?

ELIZA

(overlapping)
No, I can't. I can't explain it any more clearly than I already have, I'm telling you the guy I'm sleeping with is the living embodiment of--

She freezes, awestruck with the craziness of it.

WATSON waits for a polite beat before prompting her.

WATSON

(carny)
I'd like to hear more about the living embodiment.

Passionately
spoke to
to Watson

ELIZA

Right, no, listen to me, I can't even utter a complete sentence about this. I have these moments where I feel like I see it all so clearly and then a second later I'll be like, what is wrong with me? But I just-- I can't explain what it is exactly that's so bizarrely compelling about him. I mean on paper, the facts of the case are grim. To begin with, he only owns one pair of pants. One. He goes to the laundromat in his boxer shorts.

WATSON

That sounds funny.

ELIZA

Yeah? That's funny to you? A grown man folding towels in public in his underpants? I would describe that as deeply embarrassing.

WATSON

I'll be sure to keep that in mind.

ELIZA

And that's just the tip of the iceberg. His favorite restaurant is Applebee's. He's a huge, huge Billy Joel fan. He went to Medival Times for his birthday and described it without irony as one of the greatest nights of his life, and yet I can't get enough of him, I can't get enough of him.

WATSON

That sounds great.

ELIZA

And it's not just the physical attraction. I mean it is the physical attraction, the sex with this guy is...

She freezes, awestruck with memories of their last encounter.

WATSON waits a polite beat before prompting her.

WATSON

(carny)
I'd like to hear more about the sex with this guy.

Watson comes
back and sits
in front

Eliza lounges on couch
Watson sits up straight in chair

Sitting
singing

Sitting
singing

Watson
sings

ELIZA

*spoken out of her
in a moment*

Oh I'm sure you would, you poor Jesus Christ

*stands up,
arms crossed*

WATSON

Sorry. Seems like I goofed with that one. Why don't I take another shot?

(affable)

ELIZA

No, first of all, this topic is way, way outside the scope of your comprehension, and second of all it's frankly none of your business. Just drop it.

(continues, cutting her off)

WATSON

Sure. Dropping it.

(amiable)

ELIZA

*slightly
smiling*

Anyway it's not just the sex. It's that...this guy *knows* me. And his learning curve is insane, I mean, I've only been with him a few times and he already knows things about me I didn't even know about myself. Like, the third time he came over he brought me an LED color changing showerhead. I don't know if you're familiar with the technology? You screw it in and it turns your shower into a wet and wild disco, or that's how he described it when he was standing there in my bathtub installing it without even asking my permission. It's actually a pretty ingenious little piece of engineering, and it turns out you can have a pretty great time in there if you turn off the lights and—anyway the *point* is, this is not an item I would ever, ever have brought into my home, and how did he *know*? That I would actually *love* a wet and wild disco shower? It's some kind of crazy predictive algorithm he's running—not just mirroring, it's calibrated, somehow. It's way more sophisticated than anything you can do, hardly, no offense.

WATSON

None taken.

ELIZA

He always knows what I want. Half the time he gives it to me before I even ask. And he genuinely doesn't seem to want anything in return. With Frank, everything he ever did for me was just the opening move of some calculating transaction. This guy is...I would have to describe him as *preternaturally* chill. Purely, perfectly self-contained.

*sitting down!
leaning
into
conversation*

WATSON

That sounds great.

ELIZA

It is. I mean, I don't understand the mechanism. I can't begin to guess how he actually came about. And I know it sounds too L-Robot-y to be real, but I honestly can't think of any other rational explanation for what's going on. There's no way I could feel this way about a normal human guy. And you know what they say: when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.

*leaning
back*

ELIZA gets a feel

ELIZA *(cont'd)*

That's him.

(slightly breathless)

ELIZA reads the text, shows it to WATSON

ELIZA *(cont'd)*

See? "Meet me @ Applebee's parking lot in 15." And despite everything that has come before this moment in my life, here I go.

She makes to leave.

WATSON

Need help finding Applebee's? The nearest Applebee's is on Route 16, in the Susan B. Anthony Shopping Plaza.

ELIZA

...Susan B. Anthony Shopping Plaza, oh believe me, I know. I've been there twice in the past five days. And I'm not gonna lie: I'm really fucking excited to go back.

(overlapping, changing in)

ELIZA gulps her stuff

WATSON

You've made thirteen previous requests for me to strike "fucking" from my vocabulary. Strike "fucking" now?

I have to say, dude, at this moment? I don't fucking care what you do.

ELIZA

ELIZA cuts

Laughs.

Laughs again on MERRICK, facing out, in his office, after hours.

He grows himself in on unseen mirror, preparing to speak at a campaign event. Over the following, he combs his hair, adjusts his shirt, puts on and ties his red politician's necktie.

MERRICK

What I'm feeling right now is a tremendous-- What Americans feel right now is a tremendous sense that their freedoms have been curtailed. Better word. Amputated. Better. Mangled. Mangled through the neck. Americans feel that our freedoms have been mangled through the neck by a government bent on taxing us to the hilt for what, for what?

To support a zombie army of "public servants" living at our expense, siphoning off the life juice that folks like you and I produce with our own hands. We're out there working, building things, making things happen, while they sit around with their feet up on desks that we paid for, barely putting in eight-hour days, just watching their pensions get larger and larger. As long as we keep ourselves plugged into this system, we the taxpayers will get weaker and weaker, while the so-called "servants" grow stronger and stronger. As Ayn Rand says, "The man who speaks to you of sacrifice is speaking of slaves and masters, and intends to be the master." One of my all-time favorite quotes.

Continuously, as he speaks, MERRICK begins undulating his necktie, undulating his hair, disorganizing his hair. He begins to groom himself to present at the Uptonian Club in Tall Male, re-combs his hair in the Victorian style, re-buttions his collar, puts on and ties an ascot-style necktie.

And that's why I'm running on a platform of total, and complete, individual, liberty. Total and complete independence for every citizen of this once-free nation. Now, I know true independence can feel harsh, especially at first. It can be a real *the gentlers, fat to his head*, I get it. I've been there. But it's either tear ourselves free from this system or die mangled in its gears, my fellow Americans. Sometimes the only way to achieve independence is to destroy the thing you're dependent upon.

MERRICK is fully Victorianized.

Shadows assist in Evans forming him and as he speaks, clear the stage of blocks

shifts us

We stands

stepping and looking back at him

forward to the left, addressing someone off stage

He takes a breath

It is a pet theory of mine that you may know a man by the tools he uses, as well as by the tools he does not use. An example: I keep the points on my draftsman's pencil sharp, whittled down as I work until the leads are mere nubs, scarcely long enough to grasp between thumb and forefinger. But the gun crases on the ends I never touch. Viz, I am precise. I make marks only where I want marks to be, and I do not mark twice.

From his jacket pocket, MERRICK produces a receiver, gleaming clean. He holds it up for his audience to see.

Gentlemen, the tool I present to you today. From a distance it may look familiar, but its intention—you will have a moment to examine it more closely after I conclude—is revolutionary. Like all tools, this one tells a tale about its user. Perfectly shaped to fit a man's hand, it is constructed exactly—and only—to express its master's wishes.

It performs a paradoxical pair of functions: it brings its user and target closer together, allowing a man to pierce the heart of another man from a great distance. And it holds its user and target apart, sparing us the intimacy of carnal combat, the inconvenience of having to come within arm's reach of a foe and club him to death like a savage. Viz, it is a perfect modern instrument.

This particular model, gentlemen, features, in its interior chamber, the miniature, gearless piston I have been seven years at perfecting. This new piston forces us from the drudgery of powder packing. What's more, it is wedded internally to a calculating machine, a difference engine like Babbage's, but tiny and of my own design, enabling this tool to assess with precision many things we, with our clumsy brains, may only guess at. Targeting. Adjustment. Recoil. Sights. A weapon that knows more, in some ways, than its wielder.

If this instrument intrigues you, gentlemen, let me assure you that it pales in comparison to my even newer device, still too unfinished for public display. The prototype for this very advanced object is currently confined to my private workshop, but the day will soon come when I will reveal it, and usher in a dazzling new era of diminutive mechanization.

I conjure for you a future peopled with miniature machines, in every room of the home, on every street corner and in every shop. Noiseless doors that operate from yards away at the touch of a hydraulic button. Coal-fired hinge-mounted knives that may chop an entire bushel of apples in under an hour. A personal valet made of ivory and plates, whose brass carers, as he fits a man into his jacket, is a thousand times more sure than any boy's could ever be. In an insecure world filled with disloyal people, might we not finally find peace in this Mechanical Garden of Eden, where perfect servants greet us at every turn? What else may be mechanized, sirs, when such devices become commonplace? Where else in the world may we behold this new perfection?

standing center, arms open

stepping left + working right

again stepping forward just center addressing the audience

stepping

The shadows sit up
the train,
some sit in
the empty seats

MERRICK slips the revolver smoothly into the inside pocket of his coat. Turns, heads upstage into the dark.

A train whistle--long, Victorian, shrill.

In the distance, MERRICK climbs into a warmly lit train compartment. After a moment, WATSON enters in his deerstalker cap, climbs into a compartment one window away.

Blast of steam. The chug of an engine roaring to life.

Train whistle. Louder, louder--

--MERRICK turns back to look at WATSON--

Blackout.

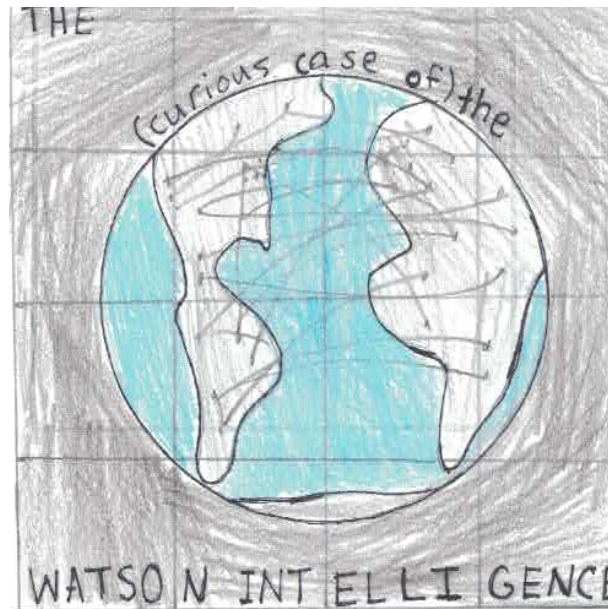
End of Act One.

Moment Two

Pages 106-109, The end of the play, Eliza 1 and Merrick 1 speak for the first time in a long time, Eliza 1 reveals the meaning of the play

Before page 106, starting with the beginning of the scene, I would have the shadows slowly bringing blocks onstage (on both of the platforms) and sitting down to listen to the conversation. The two platforms would be dimly lit with backlights and the center acting area (where Merrick 1 and Eliza 1 are talking) would have full lights up. In this scene, the shadows will take apart the set in order to form the block puzzle pictured below. Also, see the last two pictures under "Set changes".

The puzzle has an earth on it with connections from city to city and the play's title around it.



ELIZA

I wanted to say that it was wrong for me to cut you off like that. I didn't know.

MERRICK

What?

ELIZA searches for the words.

ELIZA

How you were feeling.

MERRICK

I don't believe I was shy about expressing myself.

ELIZA

No, but I didn't understand then.

MERRICK

Uh-huh. So...what?

ELIZA

So I apologize. And I hope you accept my apology.

MERRICK nods thoughtfully.

MERRICK

Well I don't know. I don't know, you kicked me around like a deflated soccer ball for ten months, now you want me to accept your apology?

ELIZA

(starting to fray around the edges)

I didn't mean to kick you around, honestly, I was trying to do the exact opposite of kicking you around, but you were so difficult about--look I really don't want to get into it all again, I just apologize, can I just apologize to you and have you accept it? Is that so fucking impossible, Frank?

Eliza stands
and looks
away

The shadows
finish setting
up the blocks on
the platform
and sit in their
respective seats

The shadows begin to take apart the set to form the puzzle, beginning with their seats, the coffee table, and half of the couch, leaving one block for Eliza and one for Merrick

MERRICK

What happened to you? I didn't want to lead with this but you don't look so good, Lize. You look a little flattened.

ELIZA nods. She endeavors to keep it together.

ELIZA

Can I ask you...sort of a weird question?

MERRICK

Shoot.

ELIZA

What did you do? After I left and you were all-- How did you--? What did you do?

MERRICK

Uh well, lemme see. I descended into the first circle of hell and started to make, let's call them uneducated choices about how to behave towards you.

ELIZA

Yeah.

MERRICK

I focused all my energy on destroying you so I could free myself from your relentless heartless indifference. Then, I don't know, that didn't work, and it was taking up a lot of my time and energy, so I descended a little further into hell, and then a little further and a little further then finally all the way down to the bottom of hell, and I kept trying to call you the whole time, I kept calling you and calling you trying to be like, Excuse me, please pick up, I'm calling from hell, can you please take my call because I'm calling from hell? And I couldn't believe you wouldn't answer. But then finally I realized that *no one* can take the calls you place from hell. People can't even hear it ring when you call from down there. Service is blocked or something. So *that* whole idea kind of landed on me like a ton of bricks, and after that I just kind of sat around for a long time down there on the ground, just beholding Satan's red eye and watching the walls bleed and roasting in the hellfire and whatnot, and then eventually I, I don't know.

ELIZA

Yeah.

Eliza sits back down
Merrick leans forward resting his elbows on his legs with his hands clasped, keeping eye contact with Eliza, who looks down

MERRICK

I was thinking about writing a book about it, actually. After my term is up and I'm not such a visible public figure. Like, a man's guide to getting over his ex-wife. With tips, and it could be shelved in the sports section or something, someplace people wouldn't have to compromise their dignity to go into.

Merrick
sits back
up

ELIZA

I'd buy it.

Pause.

MERRICK

(subdued)

So who was it, in the end? The guy from IBM? That co-op guy?

Eliza meets
Merrick's
gaze and
keeps eye contact

ELIZA

Your guy.

MERRICK

My guy? Which one's my guy? (It hits him.) Wait, the *computer* guy? No way!

ELIZA nods.

MERRICK *(cont'd)*

You've gotta be fucking kidding me, *that* guy?

Merrick
stands,
and a shadow
takes his chair

ELIZA nods.

MERRICK *(cont'd)*

You're telling me I spent our entire marriage inventing paranoid fantasies about you cheating on me with every guy that walked past us and in the end I *sent* him to you? Right into your arms?

Eliza looks down

ELIZA nods.

MERRICK *(cont'd)*

Well fuck me. I guess I was absolutely determined to be right about you.

Merrick walks
S. Left, a
shadow follows
him, mimicking
him

Eliza smiles
a bit

ELIZA nods.

Eliza stands and walks S. Right, a shadow follows and mimics her, takes her chair, Eliza turns back abt, motioning around her (her shadow still mimicking)

ELIZA

It's so unbearable. But it's also amazing. I can feel everything, all their hope and despair and need. We're sharing a drink we call loneliness, but it's better than drinking alone. In the words of the great Billy Joel.

MERRICK

still looking away and standing still

ELIZA All lights up

I just mean, I'm connected to them. Other people. Everywhere around us. Everywhere around us.

MERRICK and ELIZA look at each other.

They look out at everyone else.

Lights.

End of play.

and their shadows ← the audience, but their shadows remain looking at each other.

The shadows finish setting up the puzzle; all but Eliza and Merrick's shadows form a line on either side of the puzzle. The two

nearest the puzzle touch it, and the others grab the shoulders of the shadow in front of them. Two on each end stand on blocks. One on each side sits cross legged in front. A straggling shadow remains behind the puzzle.

