Rhubarb A Play and Two Halves

Wiktor (Victor) Kulinski

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Rhubarb
A Play and Two Halves

by

Wiktor Kulinski

A Creative Writing Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the Department of English Language, Literature and Creative Writing in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada
2011

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Abstract

Rhubarb is a collection of two one-act comedies written in the absurdist tradition, with a critical statement that offers the project’s framework. Both plays engage the discord between the human inclination to search for inherent meaning and the ultimate inability to find any. Case #6,037,492,801 concerns two of Hell’s recently deceased as they determine the confines of their afterlife. Fishbowl focuses on a new recruit as she ascends a corporate system. The characters in these plays are atypical, either being flat or extremely exaggerated, working as parts of the larger metaphor. These plays are satirical, being saturated with nonsense and meaningless dialogue. The conventional well-made play structure is subverted so time is unstable and largely irrelevant, and the plot is circular but also intermittent.
Dedication

To Bob from the hallway.
Acknowledgments

Gratitude and humbleness to following for offering vital inspiration and support to this project's happening:

My family, for raising me and continuing to hold me up.

Bosses X, Y and Z at my multiple cube jobs, for the bountiful inspiration and the free swag to furnish my workspace.

Lenin and Jesus for the post-mortem influences that became the foundation of my work and this project. And the Eastern Absurdists who unstructured their parables.

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To Mack the First, KIA, R.I.P.

And to all else who gave this project sustenance, thanks for all the fish.
# Table of Contents

Author's Declaration of Originality ........................................... iii
Abstract ......................................................................................... iv
Dedication ....................................................................................... v
Acknowledgments ........................................................................... vi
Case #6,037,492,801
   Part 1 ....................................................................................... 1
Fishbowl
   Act 1 - Down the Rabbit Hole .............................................. 16
   Act 2 - Acquisitions ................................................................. 48
   Act 3 - The Back Office ............................................................. 66
Case #6,037,492,801 (cont.)
   Part 2 ....................................................................................... 71
Artist's Statement ........................................................................... 84
Works Cited .................................................................................... 98
Works Consulted ........................................................................... 98
Vita Auctoris .................................................................................. 102
DRAMATIS PERSONAE

VANDERBILT. Richard Vanderbilt, esq. Dressed in an outrageous plaid golfing ensemble, with a Scottish beret and puffy pants that tuck into his socks.

LELAND. Ieland Stumt. Short and round. Dressed in a casual outfit.

VOICE.

CASEWORKER.

MAÎTRE D'.

DEMON.

DEAD.

SERVANTS.

SCENE

Purgatory. A nearly empty room, except for two stools below an oversized hanging light bulb, and large clock that only the audience can see.

NOTE TO THE DIRECTOR

Above center stage there should always remain an intense white light. LELAND and VANDERBILT always sit on the same stool. VOICE, CASEWORKER and MAÎTRE D’ can be played by one actor. DEAD and SERVANTS can be played by one ensemble.
PART 1

SCENE 1 — THE NUMBER

(Elevator music is playing. A thick fog covers the stage. Suddenly, a loud bang. The white lights rise above center stage in a flash. VANDERBILT and LELAND enter, coughing and temporarily blinded. They compose themselves, adjusting to the light, stretching, dusting off, etc. They look about and at each other. LELAND sighs and VANDERBILT shrugs. Eventually, VANDERBILT sits at his stool and begins to play solitaire using the other as a table. The clock chimes but does not count hours; the hands are moving in opposite directions. LELAND, walking, examines the stage.)

(A significant period of time should go by before the first line to indicate that LELAND and VANDERBILT have been waiting an eternity already. The music fades out.)

LELAND. Well, haven’t you anything to say?

VANDERBILT. It is called “solitaire.”

LELAND. So?

VANDERBILT. The word “solitaire” comes from the Latin word solitarius meaning solitary — alone.

LELAND. Forget I asked.

VANDERBILT. How could I forget? You asked.

LELAND. I wonder if punching you has any effect (prepares to sock it to VANDERBILT).

VANDERBILT. (Gestures LELAND to wait) Ah, ah, ah (plays his cards)

LELAND. Must you?

VANDERBILT. Spider! (He shuffles) And now I am listening.


LELAND. You know, I regret bothering you. Go back to your silence.

VANDERBILT. You’ve thrown me out of my element.

LELAND. Are you going to be this way for our entire stay?
More accurately, I am only becoming more “this way” with every passing moment. But a “moment” is merely a measurement of time, so I’m not really sure how that would work, considering the circumstances of course. Still, I feel more typically me.

Outstanding.

I think so. I just love being me.

I wish they could have given us our own rooms.

You might want to make the most of it.

I suppose you’re right.

I often am.

(LELAND looks annoyed.)

If only I knew how much longer I must put up with your company.

That would imply you know how long you’ve been benefiting from my company.

I know, we can’t tell the time!

Why are you getting upset?

It used to be a simple request.

Is it that important?

We’ve been waiting here for ages!

Yes, that’s probably true. But is that even important?

A reminder: all new arrivals must report to reception; all new arrivals must report to reception, thank you.

Are we new?

You are the richest idiot.

Are you calling me an idiot?

Who else in this deadly vacant room could I be calling an idiot?

Leland, you realize you’re the only other one in the room.

We should probably assume you suffered brain damage.
VANDERBILT. Is that possible?

LELAND. It’s very probable.

VANDERBILT. Hmm, well I suppose I’m stuck this way.

LELAND. Unfortunately.

(VANDERBILT pulls out a yo-yo from a pocket on his jacket. He winds it up.)

LELAND. (Sighs) How to pass the time?

(VANDERBILT performs a yo-yo trick.)

VANDERBILT. You might want to consider taking up a hobby.

(LELAND ignores VANDERBILT.)


LELAND. What number are we again?

VANDERBILT. Why do you suppose I know?

LELAND. You put it in your pocket. I insisted that I should keep it but you said, and I quote, “I got here first.”

VANDERBILT. Oh, yes, now I remember.

(VANDERBILT empties his pocket. He pulls out a lengthy chain of clown silk hankies, a yellow rubber duck, a white daisy, and an extra pair of trousers identical to his own.)

VANDERBILT. I’m afraid I may have misplaced it.

LELAND. Perfect. How are we supposed to know it is our turn?

(A D80 “Take a Number” red ticket dispenser descends from above.)

VANDERBILT. We take a number of course.

(VANDERBILT proceeds to take a ticket but LELAND stops him.)

LELAND. If you don’t mind, I’ll hold onto the ticket this time.
(LELAND pulls a ticket from the dispenser. It is too long for LELAND to hold end to end. He examines it. VANDERBILT gazes over his shoulder. The dispenser ascends.)

VANDERBILT. I certainly hope you know algebra.

LELAND. What is the meaning of this?

VANDERBILT. I suppose we’ll have to wait for assistance. They can’t just leave us in here for an eternity.

LELAND. (Hushing VANDERBILT) Let me think for a moment.

VANDERBILT. Would you like a scalp massage?

LELAND. Please, be quiet. I’ve had a century’s worth of alone time with you today.

VANDERBILT. You’re beating a dead horse. It’s easier if you forget about time passing by.

LELAND. Just a few moments, to compose my thoughts.

VANDERBILT. Very well.

(LELAND and VANDERBILT wander in separate directions about the stage)

LELAND. (To self) You know, for the waiting room to the afterlife they sure run a cheap operation.

VANDERBILT. (From across the stage) I’m not so sure. Did you look at these stools?

LELAND. (Sighs) If you insist on constantly exercising your vocal cords, you could at least try shouting for help.

VANDERBILT. (Carefully examining the stools) So grand, so perfectly crafted.

LELAND. Or perhaps not. (Looking out to audience) The walls are completely bare. There isn’t even a door.

VANDERBILT. It must be an original.

LELAND. (To VANDERBILT) Forget the stools. Help me find a way out of here.

(LELAND is feeling an imaginary wall at the front of the stage. VANDERBILT does not respond and continues his busy work.)

LELAND. Vanderbilt. Vanderbilt!
VANDERBILT. Why are you shouting?

LELAND. Because, and it pains me to say this, I want your attention.

VANDERBILT. (Ignoring LELAND) I am listening.

LELAND. We need to get a hold of the outside world.

VANDERBILT. But Leland, just look at these; (pulls out a magnifying glass from his pocket, inspects the stools) fine, soft wood, with brushed, pewter decals. I wonder if these are Jozef Hoffmann?

LELAND. Hello?

VANDERBILT. (Pulls out a measuring tape from his pockets) Three feet, by one and a half — oh, these would look smashing in the breakfast room.

LELAND. (Waves his hand in front of VANDERBILT, no response) Only his head is thicker than his ego.

VANDERBILT. If only I could find a stamp or signature.

(LELAND stands with his arms crossed.)

VANDERBILT. There doesn’t seem to be anything. But, it must be a Hoffmann — it’s his style.

LELAND. I do tire of babysitting you.

VANDERBILT. They do wobble slightly. I can live with that.

LELAND. You wouldn’t happen to have found our number?

VANDERBILT. No, no, I’m far too busy now. Perhaps it’s Le Corbusier? It’s certainly a modern piece. (To LELAND) Do you think they have a telephone here?

LELAND. Yes, it’s next to the door.

(VANDERBILT vigorously searches the perimeter of the stage.)

VANDERBILT. If I could call Jerry, he’d definitely know who designed these stools.

LELAND. Did you find it yet?

VANDERBILT. No. I don’t see what you’re talking about. The walls are completely bare! There isn’t even a light switch.
LELAND. Finally, our plans converge. Your mind seems to work on a series of tangents. It’s a wonder you get anything accomplished at all.

VANDERBILT. How do you suppose we got in this Sartrean waiting room?

LELAND. Pardon?

VANDERBILT. Haven’t you read No Exit?

LELAND. I read the first three pages. It was dreadful.

VANDERBILT. Well, it might put a few things into perspective for you.

LELAND. What are you saying?

VANDERBILT. The title certainly is telling. No Exit. I presume we are stuck in here. At least for the time being. Though, I don’t recall seeing the Valet, so there is hope.

LELAND. The Valet?

VANDERBILT. It’s pointless explaining if you haven’t read it.

LELAND. So, what now?

VANDERBILT. We should return to waiting.

SCENE 2 - THE CASE

(VANDERBILT paces back and forth, his shoes squeak loudly. A substantial period of time elapses before the clock chimes but does not count hours.)

LELAND. Could you please stop pacing? The squeaking of your shoes is really, very irritating.

VANDERBILT. I’m bored, Leland. It’s awfully dead here.

LELAND. That’s not my problem.

VANDERBILT. What am I to do? The string broke on my yo-yo.

LELAND. Why not try swallowing hot coals to pass the time?

VANDERBILT. That doesn’t seem very pleasant.

LELAND. You know, I think I preferred your card game. Would you like to play a few hundred rounds?

VANDERBILT. But we can’t play together.
LELAND. Exactly.

VOICE. A Reminder: the Department of Hauntings and Reincarnations will be closing shortly. All requests must be submitted by the end of the current Mayan cycle. Thank you.

LELAND. Perhaps you could go haunt the living for a while, and leave me in peace.

VANDERBILT. I wish we could take a tour. I’d love to see the office.

LELAND. You think He sits in an office?

VANDERBILT. He has to have some sort of office.

LELAND. I’m sure it’s nothing special.

VANDERBILT. Are you simple? It’s probably the most brilliant accommodation. Comparable to The Ritz, The Standard, The Cartier, The Place d’Armes, Le Royal, Le Meridien, "le" anything for that matter. He is responsible for the world, Leland.

LELAND. It’s likely a simple desk in the center of a room.

VANDERBILT. What makes you so sure?

LELAND. Because He already has the world.

VOICE. Attention: Would all guests checking in or out please go down the hall and around the corner to our satellite lobby. The main lobby is closed for wallpapering, thank you.

VANDERBILT. Do you suppose they offer room service here?

LELAND. I’m not sure why you are worrying about food in our condition.

VANDERBILT. I’m hungry, Leland. And I’m bored. When I’m bored, I need to eat. I thought I had a carrot in my pocket but it’s gone.

LELAND. We’re dead. I don’t think the dead need to eat.

VANDERBILT. Yes, but I have a psychosomatic manifestation of an underwhelmed amusement dilemma. And it needs to be remedied.

LELAND. Funny, I also have a strange craving that has lurked into the afterlife for a thick steak and a half-bottle of wine.

VANDERBILT. Haven’t you read *Waiting for Godot*?

LELAND. Didn’t care for it.
VANDERBILT. Well you really should have.

(A servant bell descends from above.)

VANDERBILT. Look, a servant bell. Perhaps we can finally get some service.

(LELAND rings the bell. It ascends. LELAND and VANDERBILT look about the room. A few moments pass.)

LELAND. Well, that was futile.

(Suddenly, a desk and chair with a computer and telephone enters from offstage, or preferably from above. CASEWORKER is seated at the desk, mostly hidden behind a large computer monitor.)

CASEWORKER. (Unenthusiastically) Hello and thank you for choosing Catholicism as your afterlife provider. How may I assist you today?

VANDERBILT. Excuse me, who are you?

CASEWORKER. I’m a caseworker, and I’d like to get on with my day, so do you have a concern or not?

VANDERBILT. Yes, what do you have in the form of fare?

LELAND. Please ignore him. His mind takes a few moments to catch up with the present. We’d like to know when it is our turn.

CASEWORKER. May I have your case number, please?

LELAND. We don’t have a case number.

CASEWORKER. (Sighs) What’s your ticket number?

VANDERBILT. I’m afraid I misplaced our ticket.

CASEWORKER. Oh, figures. This always happens on my last call.

VANDERBILT. Did we do something wrong?

CASEWORKER. Yes, terribly wrong. You’re keeping me from my tennis lessons. (Picks up the telephone and dials a short extension, speaks with forced courtesy) Hello, Mr. Budge. I’m afraid I’ll be late for my lesson again.

VOICE. (Mumbles)

CASEWORKER. Yes, I’m aware it’s the second time in a row.
VOICE. (Mumbles)

CASEWOKER. Of course.

(CASEWOKER looks concerned.)

CASEWOKER. I understand. Thank you, Mr. Budge. (Hangs up telephone). Great Galloping Ganesha! I'm off the team.

LELAND. I'm sorry to hear that.

CASEWOKER. (Sarcastically) That's okay. I'll be sure you make up for it. (Staring at the computer) What's your name?

LELAND. My name?

CASEWOKER. Well, I have to look up your file somehow. Unless you have your ticket number, I need your mortal name.

LELAND. Leland Stumt.

VANDERBILT. And I'm Richard Vanderbilt, esq.

CASEWOKER. (Holds up hand) One at a time, I'm not a miracle worker! (Types at computer). Stumt, Stumt Yes, here you are. Died at age 45 of a lightning strike. You're probably wishing you had those fillings replaced with ceramics. (Chuckles) You were actually standing on a mildly dense deposit of iron that attracted the lightning. Doesn't matter, you were scheduled to receive an aneurysm in five years. The likelihood of death by lightning strike is one in 300,000. Congratulations, way to beat those odds.

LELAND. I don't feel very lucky.

CASEWOKER. (To VANDERBILT) And what did you say your name was?

VANDERBILT. Vanderbilt, Richard Vanderbilt esq., the First.

CASEWOKER. (At the computer) Vanderbilt. Yes, I remember your file. You're the fellow with all the "stuff." Security sure had a time with you. Sorry we couldn't let you keep your fountain pen. Creativity is strongly discouraged here. Let's see, died at age 45 of a lightning strike. Two concurrent and perpendicular deaths from severe zapping. Those odds are one in ninety-billion.

VANDERBILT. Actually, I believe I died moments before Leland.

CASEWOKER. I was just being pleasant. I don't care.

(CASEWOKER types at the computer)
CASEWORKER. Since you fellows died together, I suppose we’ll just treat you as one file.

(CASEWORKER types at the computer)

CASEWORKER. Oops, I’m afraid we’ve lost your number.

VANDERBILT. How could that happen?

CASEWORKER. It was somehow deleted from the records.

LELAND. When?

CASEWORKER. Just now. No matter, we’re bound to get around to you eventually.

(CASEWORKER reaches into the desk drawer and pulls out a “Getting Started” Guide and a Bible.)

CASEWORKER. (Holds out the “Getting Started” Guide which resembles a set of IKEA instructions, LELAND accepts it) In the meantime, here is your quick start guide. You’ll need to provide your own screwdriver. (Holds out the Bible, it drops with a loud thud) Since you seem to have no idea how we do things here, you might also want to take a look at the manual. This is the New Jerusalem version, not that you care. I suggest you prepare yourself.

(VANDERBILT picks up the bible. LELAND and VANDERBILT look dumbfounded.)

CASEWORKER. You know, for your ultimate judgement? It’s a pretty big deal.

VANDERBILT. Right, about that, when is it our turn?

CASEWORKER. Soon enough. You’ll just have to wait.

LELAND. We’re tired of waiting.

VANDERBILT. It’s too grim here. I’m unimaginably bored.

CASEWORKER. I’m sorry, were you expecting fulfillment? I don’t recall ever promising you satisfaction.

LELAND. What sort of support line is this?

CASEWORKER. Excuse me, are you questioning my work ethic?

VANDERBILT. I’m suggesting that you’re not helping me.

CASEWORKER. I’m doing everything in my power.
VANDERBILT. Could you possible use a little more power?

CASEWORKER. (Takes a moment) Have you calmed down?

LELAND. What are you on about?

CASEWORKER. Sir, I can’t help you if you’re going to be hostile.

VANDERBILT. I’m not being hostile.

CASEWORKER. If you would let me speak for a moment, I could explain that everything you need is in the manual. I’m here to get you adjusted, that’s all. First, I want you to brush up on your parables as neither of you have attended church since your early twenties. Then, we can talk about entertainment. I’ll be back in a few millennia to check on your progress.

(The desk with CASEWORKER starts retreating off stage.)

LELAND. Wait just a moment!

CASEWORKER. Sorry, the person at that extension is unavailable at the time being. Please, try your call again later.

(CASEWORKER exits. VANDERBILT, with bible in hand, turns to look at LELAND.)

LELAND. There’s no way I’m reading that.

VANDERBILT. (Huffs) Fine. (He opens the book). In the beginning, God created Heaven and Earth.

(LELAND begins pacing about the room)

(The scene fades out.)
Fishbowl

Victor Kulinski
DRAMATIS PERSONAE

BOSS. A typical alpha-female with a neurotic flair.

WHITE. Jessica White. A young, naive, motivated and brilliant new recruit.

DEAN. The super-receptionist. Head of the CHORUS.

CEO. The talking-head of the company.

CHORUS. A collection of drone-like subordinates. Speaking roles appear as CHORUS1, CHORUS2, and CHORUS3, etc. There should be at least six drones, but more may be used.

SCENE

A cubicle farm. A typical, modern cubicle dressed in muted colours. There is one interchangeable desk which is primarily used by WHITE but which is sometimes transformed into a desk for BOSS.

NOTE TO THE DIRECTOR

The office is in a constant state of chaos: the stage should have "stuff" everywhere, be it papers or people. Also, the actors themselves are chaotic, be it disheveled dress or makeup.

The CHORUS. These employees have a mechanical performance, though they should remain primarily "human." The CHORUS usually appear and function as a PROCESSION: queued behind one another, they follow in a line, and will automatically follow BOSS when she is on stage. Sometimes the CHORUS PROCESSION turns to their sides and operates as a CONVEYOR: they carry along items (e.g. paperwork) from the back to the front of the procession, depositing on the desk. The conveyor should work as a Rube Goldberg Machine, the CHORUS making their movements unnecessarily complicated and exaggerated.
ACT 1 - DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

SCENE 1 - WELCOME TO BUSINESSCO & CO.

(The stage is dimly lit. BOSS, DEAN and the CHORUS are onstage, in tableau and silhouetted in some menial task — filing, copying, talking on the phone, etc. WHITE enters wearing a parka and carrying a briefcase, and begins to feel her way around.)

WHITE. Hello?

(Suddenly the office "awakens." The lights rise to full illumination. Everyone starts moving and performing their tasks while ignoring WHITE, who makes her way to her desk.)

BOSS. Good morning! WHITE. Good morning, my name's—

WHITE & BOSS. --Jessica White and I just started here today.

BOSS. Yes I know. Patricia Greenwich-Whitman, Chief VP of Businessco and Co. West. Welcome to the team!

(Stretches her arm out as if offering to shake WHITE's hand.)

WHITE. I'm so sorry, of course, it's a pleasure to meet you, Patricia.

(Stretches out her hand as if to accept.)

BOSS. No, I don't shake hands. So (looks at her watch on her outstretched arm) you've been here for about 45 seconds. How are you feeling?

WHITE. Very excited.

BOSS. (Crows) You know I hear that every day. Right, well anyway, I should probably give you the run-down, Jessica. This is your workspace. Please stay contained within the four-and-a-half by four-and-three-quarters foot boundary.

WHITE. (Steps back into the invisible boundary) Sorry.

BOSS. Personal use of the telephone is strictly prohibited. The walls are covered in lead paint and there are 45 ex-KGB agents screening every landline. Except for mine, of course. Printing is 25 cents a page. We still use dot-matrix printers here. I blew the upgrade budget on a new granite desktop for my workspace. Finding the paper can be a bitch sometimes so good luck with that.
WHITE. I’m sure I’ll manage.

BOSS. How do you like your view?

(WHITE glances offstage.)

WHITE. (Excited) It’s absolutely amazing.

BOSS. Good, I’ll have someone board it up immediately.

(BOSS snaps her fingers. CHORUS enters and place a huge cubicle wall behind the desk.)

BOSS. You’re allowed one personal knick-knack to remind you of the outside world. Like a mug or picture of a loved one, etc. — please keep it tasteful. Just to be clear, a mug with a picture of a loved one counts as an unsatisfactory two personal knick-knacks. Work goes in here work comes out there. In. Out.

WHITE. Yes, I understand.

BOSS. Are you certain of that?

WHITE. I believe so.

BOSS. Ah, belief. Lunch is an hour and twenty minutes. Everyone takes it at 12:40. This was the only way to please the Spaniards. Bullshit labour issues with their damned minority rights. Here, take this.

(BOSS snaps her fingers. A CHORUS drone ENTERS with a paper bag filled with quarters. EXITS.)

WHITE. Are these for the printers?

BOSS. To give you something to do. You’ll find the longer lunches extremely tedious; they seem to crawl on and on and on. I’d let you into the office to do some extra work but I need the extra time to get a massage. So, instead you can spend your lunch in the park, feeding the homeless.

(BOSS gestures with her hands sprinkling quarters out like seed for birds.)

WHITE. No problem, I can just go home for lunch.

BOSS. That’s entirely unacceptable.

WHITE. I understand, apologies.

BOSS. Not at all, Jessica. This is all new synergy. Okay, that's all. Enjoy it here. Welcome aboard! We’ll touch base later.
DEAN. Jessica, hello. Dean Allen, administrative assistant, personal concierge to the Chief VP, miracle worker, flamboyant office personality, and voted "Best in Class Administrative Assistant" by J.D. Power and Associates five years in a row. Charmed to meet you.

(DEAN offers to shake JESSICA's hand; she is hesitant but eventually accepts.)

DEAN. Jessica, I was just looking over your file and I noticed you don't have a file. Are you new, dear?

WHITE. It's my first day.

DEAN. Oh, I see. That is a concern. Touch base, Jessica.

(DEAN meets BOSS downstage and delivers a memo. WHITE only has time to place her briefcase before BOSS re-enters the cubicle.)

BOSS. Jessica, I just got the memo. Tell me, are you tracking?

WHITE. (Unsure) No?

BOSS. Understood. Follow me, please.

(Boss leads WHITE in a circle around the cubicle. DEAN flips JESSICA's name plaque and it reads "Patricia Greenwich-Whitman, Chief VP.")

DEAN. (To WHITE) Wait here a moment, please.

(WHITE waits outside the cubicle and watches. BOSS sits and looks at WHITE with a neutral expression. WHITE feels awkward for a moment but eventually "knocks" by tapping a hard surface.)

WHITE. Uh, hello?

BOSS. Oh, hello. You're, umm, Jessica, the new girl. Please, come on in.

(WHITE steps forward.)

BOSS. What is that I can do for you, Jessica?

WHITE. You just asked me to follow you here.

BOSS. Okay, and do you have an appointment?
(BOSS looks at DEAN. DEAN glances at his papers, and nods.)

BOSS. Oh, good. I was getting a little concerned.

(BOSS stands and begins walking downstage.)

BOSS. This way please.

(Everyone follows BOSS.)

BOSS. This is Busmessco & Co. We are the largest dealer of business dealings in the world.

(BOSS snaps her fingers. CHORUS drone brings WHITE a pamphlet and holds open a portable DVD player.)

BOSS. Here’s a pamphlet. And to guide you, a video narration by CEO Joe Zucker.

(CHORUS drone plays the video.)

CEO. Welcome Jessica White, recent recruit, office class C, to your new lifetrack with BSc0. This tour is designed to familiarize you with the ins-and-outs of BSc0 operations so you can hit the ground running. Our company succeeds because we are constantly pushing boundaries — thinking, way ahead and far beyond — trademark. You were hired because you display genuine ability in list skills here. To be successful at BSc0 you need to think outside the box, always be one step ahead, constantly push yourself and most importantly yada, yada, yada. And now for some facetime.

(BOSS greets WHITE. DEAN shakes JESSICA’S hand.)

BOSS. Hello. I am Patricia Greenwich-Whitman, Chief VP of Busmessco & co. Welcome to the team!

WHITE. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Patricia.

BOSS. You must have a lot of questions.

WHITE. Yes, actually.

BOSS. Fantastic! Let’s continue with our tour. Please follow the yellow line.

(BOSS leads WHITE, followed by DEAN and CHORUS, on a tour of the office, in an arbitrary pattern.)

BOSS. This is my office. I sit here and often work here, too.

(They follow a perfect circle around the cubicle.)
BOSS. Jessica, I want you to know my door is always open, unless it's closed. Feel free to come by if you need anything.

WHITE. What lovely plants.

BOSS. I think you mean oxygen supplements.

(They continue the tour. A CHORUS drone flips name plaque back to “Jessica White, Office Class C.”)

BOSS. This is the single most important filing cabinet at BScoc. It is vital to everyone’s productivity. This concludes this portion of the tour.

(They continue the tour.)

BOSS. This is Dean, my administrative assistant. Honestly, I don’t know what I would do without Dean. My day is chaotic enough as it is and he’s my marvellous lifeline. Dean, get me an extra-large, skinny, triple long, half-sweet, soy milk, mocha frappalatte.

DEAN. Your third, Patricia.

BOSS. I know, I’m such a little piggy.

DEAN. Oink, oink.

(BOSS and DEAN laugh, WHITE laughs shortly after.)

BOSS. (To WHITE) Who said you could laugh?

(They re-enter the cubicle. DEAN enters and exits quickly getting BOSS’ coffee.)

BOSS. Okay and we end the tour at your office. This is where I’d like to see you work. Oh, no! Look how sad your inbox looks.

(BOSS snaps her fingers. CHORUS brings in an exorbitant amount of “work” to put into JESSICA’s inbox – e.g. a number of coloured binders, folders filled with papers, Bankers Boxes, etc.)

BOSS. Here are a just a couple of light projects to get you settled in. Oh, and there’s a meeting at 2pm in the multi-purpose area. Touch base.

(Everyone exits. WHITE is able to put her briefcase down.)

SCENE 2 – PROMOTION
(DEAN leads the CHORUS in a parade towards JESSICA’s office. DEAN is carrying a new name plaque for WHITE covered in a cloth on a fancy pillow. BOSS enters shortly afterwards.)

BOSS. Congratulations Jessica!

(A CHORUS drone strikes two cymbals together)

WHITE. What’s happening?

DEAN. Your performance has been exemplary.

CHORUS1. You’ve been exceeding your expectations.

CHORUS2. You’re really pushing the envelope!

BOSS. You’ve received a promotion!

(DEAN and CHORUS clap and cheer.)

WHITE. A promotion?

BOSS. We’d like to welcome you as our newest VIP Team Leader of Filing Operations.

WHITE. But I literally just got here.

BOSS. You’re entering a fast-paced and demanding position. The responsibilities are physically and emotionally exhausting.

WHITE. Look, I haven’t even taken off my parka.

BOSS. You probably feel like we’re shoving you on the runway, but you’ve certainly demonstrated that you’re fully capable of this new venture. Here are your perks.

(Boss snaps her fingers. The CHORUS CONVEYOR lines up to deliver JESSICA’s perks.)

BOSS. You’ll be receiving--

(DEAN lifts the cloth covering JESSICA’s new name plaque.)

BOSS. --a new name plaque.

(DEAN places the name plaque on the desk as the CHORUS CONVEYOR continues to pass forward JESSICA’s perks.)

BOSS. A key to the staff toilet with personalized fobber.

BOSS. A members’ card to the microwave club.
BOSS. Upgraded health benefits. You won’t actually be using these benefits, right, Jessica?

WHITE. I should certainly hope not.

BOSS. (Suspicious) Indeed. (Continues) A Newton’s Cradle to fill in empty seconds between menial tasks.

BOSS. Twenty dollars in coupon clippings.

BOSS. And to really make it pop, a gold star¹

(Everyone claps.)

BOSS. As a special treat, we have CEO Joe Zucker to share a few congratulatory words, via semi-live video recording.

(BOSS snaps her fingers. CHORUS drone brings in the DVD player and plays the video.)

CEO. Jessica. Keep up the good work, partner. I’ve been hearing marvellous things about you. You’re really helping BSco move forward into the future. I’m excited about meeting you someday—maybe. In the meantime, touch base. End of transmission.

BOSS. Joe Zucker, everyone.

(Everyone claps.)

BOSS. Jessica, would you like to say a few words?

WHITE. I’m speechless. I don’t even know what to think.

BOSS. Now, now, Jessica. You mustn’t be modest. You’ve earned that gold star. Walk tall, Jessica. Walk tall! Now, as your first order of business we need you to fire the previous VIP Team Leader of Filing Operations.

WHITE. Do I have the authority to do that?

BOSS. It does say VIP on your name plaque. Alright, let’s get the hell out of here. All this smiling is giving me diabetes. Touch base, Jessica.

(BOSS, DEAN and CHORUS move DOWNSTAGE, gathering in a meeting. A few moments pass.)

BOSS. (Irritated) Jessica, are you planning on joining us?

WHITE. I’m sorry?

BOSS. (As if it were obvious) For the meeting.
WHITE. But I thought the meeting was scheduled for 2pm in the multi-purpose area?

BOSS. If you had checked the memo binder, you’d notice it was rescheduled.

WHITE. Of course, the memo binder.

BOSS. Memo log, Jessica. (To everyone) Right, so we’re starting a little late but now that we’re all accounted for, let’s get down to business.

(BOSS snaps her fingers, CHORUS brings a pointing stick for BOSS and sets up a flip chart.)

BOSS. I called this Emergency Pow-Wow to discuss a mission critical memo I received from Joe Zucker a few moments ago.

(CHORUS flips chart instinctively. There is a illustration of a extruding machine squeezing people, BOSS points with the long stick.)

BOSS. As we all know, the global recession has forced BSco to streamline most operations and everyone is feeling the crunch. But we’ve been successful at increasing sweat and tear production.

(CHORUS flips chart. There is a graph of a rising death toll. BOSS points.)

BOSS. Many of your inboxes have become safety hazards, and that really says something. I think we should take a moment and give ourselves a pat on the back.

(They cheer and pat.)

BOSS. Of course, it’s just not enough. It’s never enough. The world is not enough. (To DEAN) Dean, check if that’s an Ian Fleming trademark, I despise paying royalties. (To everyone) As part of a surprise logistical restructuring of the company, the Board of Directors was forced to make some challenging decisions. I present, CEO Joe Zucker.

(BOSS snaps her fingers, CHORUS enters with the CEO DVD player and presses “play.”)

CEO. Effective immediately BSco will be ceasing the Employee Weekend Respite Operations division. BSco employees will no longer be sent home on weekends for rest. Lunch and washroom facilities will still be provided. Coat Check will continue to run but with limited capabilities. The biggest change you may or may not notice is the removal of the “clock out” option on your
timecards. Once you’re out, you’re out. For those who wish to occupy this surplus time, there is opportunity to receive a 2% pay gratuity by running the giant hamster wheels in the boiler room. Please forward any comments or concerns to last week’s Board of Directors meeting and they will be reviewed. End of transmission.

BOSS. So that’s that. Any questions? Comments?

(WHITE raises her hand.)

BOSS. Intelligent or otherwise? Alright, not much to see here, everyone scatter. Let’s SELL, SELL, SELL!

(CHORUS scatter and flee. BOSS observes but eventually exits. JESSICA returns to her cubicle.)

SCENE 3 - GOSSIP GIRL

(DEAN enters JESSICA’s office.)

DEAN. Jessica — employee 2934765876 — a few moments of your time please?

WHITE. Hello Dean — employee Uh, please come in. How are you?

DEAN. I’m absolutely stunning, thanks. Jessica, on behalf of the Businessco and co Social Alliance and Co-Operative Association, I’d like to open the kimono and welcome you to BSco! The staff committee, comprising of myself, has hand-picked a fabulous selection of welcome gifts and informative pamphlets to get you settled in.

WHITE. That’s lovely, Dean. Thank you.

DEAN. Don’t thank me. Thank BSco SACA.

WHITE. Could you provide me with an email contact? I’d love to send them a “thank you” e-greeting.

DEAN. You can just thank me.

WHITE. Right, well thank you, Dean.

DEAN. Anyway, Jessica — employee 2934765876 — pleasantries aside, let’s talk shop. BSco SACA asks for a volun-told donation of 2% deducted from your net pay to help fund staff social projects like Wacky Tacky Hat Day, The Big Blitz Week, and the Ticker Tape Race.
WHITE. Sounds like something I might consider. Why don’t I look over this information and get back to you about it later today?

(DEAN looks annoyed, starts collecting the gifts.)

DEAN. As I said, Jessica, the SACA fund is not a requirement but everyone is glad to participate and you could help fund lovely welcome gifts, such as these.

WHITE. You’re not giving me much of a choice.

DEAN. Wonderful. Let’s get you started immediately. First we need to determine your Giftability Profile. I’m sure you won’t mind if I ask you some of these intimate and confidential questions—we’re all friends here. Ok, name? Jessica Anne White.

WHITE. I don’t have a middle name.

DEAN. I know, but we have to put something. Height, 5’7.” Weight

(DEAN examines JESSICA’s figure)

DEAN. What are you, a size 14?

WHITE. I’m a 10.

DEAN. (Laughs) Sure you are, honey. I’ll just put 220 to be on the safe side. Sex Yes, please!

WHITE. (Laughs)

DEAN. So you are sexually active, okay. Next question, do you consider yourself mostly optimistic or pessimistic? Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, not sure, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?

WHITE. I’m not sure.

DEAN. Alright. Do you consider yourself sophisticated? Strongly agree, yada, yada.

WHITE. Somewhat agree.

(DEAN reaches into JESSICA’s gift bag and removes a tall boy of beer.)

DEAN. I suppose I’ll get you a nice wine instead. (Snarky) I hope non-vintage will suffice, madame. Let’s continue, do you like the colour red? Strongly agree, yada, yada.

WHITE. Strongly agree.
DEAN. Very revealing, Jessica. I’m sorry, I’m such a gossip girl.

WHITE. What does that mean?

DEAN. Nothing, it’s all part of the test. Next question, do you consider yourself a reliable worker? Strongly agree, yada, yada.

WHITE. Strongly agree.

DEAN. Honestly, Jessica? Please be aware that Patricia will be reviewing this.

WHITE. Somewhat agree?

DEAN. Let’s be realistic. You’re new. I’ll put “not sure.” That’s the safest option. Don’t worry, I’m looking out for your best interests. Next, pro- or anti-union? Strongly agree, yada, yada.

(Boss, being alarmed, enters quickly.)

BOSS. Union? Who said union?

DEAN. False alarm, Patricia. It’s just a test.

BOSS. Oh phooey, and I thought I had a chance to use my new mallet.

(BOSS exits.)

DEAN. We’ve had past pro-union scabs employed at BSco. But, we never found the bodies. (Laughs) That’s all hush-hush. Moving on, do you find yourself getting tense easily? Strongly agree, yada, yada.

WHITE. I’m starting to feel a little tense.

DEAN. Somewhat agree. You know, I don’t usually give failing grades on these questionnaires. Alright, I just need a lock of your hair.

(DEAN cuts a piece of JESSICA’s hair.)

DEAN. You could benefit from a moisturizing shampoo. Right, well, touch base.

(DEAN turns to leave.)

WHITE. Wait. What are my results?

DEAN. Pardon? Oh, your profile. Not sure. It was touch and go there for a moment. You have the appropriate height but you lost me
with the colour question. It’s okay, with a little studying you’ll know yourself better next time. Touch base, Jessica.

(DEAN exits.)

SCENE 4 – PAPER COLOUR PROCEDURES

(Boss enters Jessica’s cubicle. Boss stands and gawks for a few moments.)

Boss. Jessica, we need to talk--

White. Patricia, I’m sorry I was late.

Boss. --I just received your (taken aback) Jessica, I almost forgot. I was right behind you and realized you wouldn’t make it in time. Thanks for reminding me, I’ve been aching to fill out a report.

(Boss removes a red pad from her inner breast pocket and fills out a “ticket.”)

Boss. (With a sign of relief) That’s better.

(Boss rips off ticket, hands it to White.)

Boss. Anyway, Jessica, that’s not why I’m here. I came to discuss your PPP – Proposed Project Plan – for the ENET Digital Expo.

White. Is there something wrong?

Boss. Terribly.

White. Was the work not up to your standards?

Boss. Oh, no. Your work is absolutely stunning. This prototype trade show megaplex you’ve pioneered, with the Ultra-Surround, All-Digital, Touch-Multimedia experience is, pardon my language, buzzworthy. You’ll probably revolutionize the industry. I see this being the new golden standard. You’re spearheading, blah, blah, blah.

White. Patricia, thank you so much. I’m absolutely thrilled.

Boss. I would be too, if this weren’t entirely unusable.

White. Pardon me?

Boss. Yes, I’m afraid we’ll have to consider this a digiflop.

White. I don’t understand.
BOSS. You printed this on blue paper.

WHITE. I know it's a little unprofessional.

BOSS. It is in violation of paper colour procedures.

WHITE. I didn't realize.

BOSS. Blue is to be used exclusively for memos. We follow a strict paper colour system at BScO.

WHITE. I'm sorry, I've never worked with a paper colour system.

BOSS. I simply cannot have employees deviating from these guidelines. It is vital to everyone's productivity.

WHITE. (Ignoring BOSS) Uh, huh.

BOSS. Could you imagine if this system weren't in place? We'd have utter chaos. Hysteria would sweep through the office. People wouldn't know what to do with themselves.

WHITE. Uh, huh.

BOSS. I want you to visualize something for me, Jessica. Just ponder this idea in your tiny, limited mind. Imagine a place where you could pick your own paper colour.

WHITE. No problem.

BOSS. Now tell me what you see. Take your time.

WHITE. Umm.

BOSS. Panic, fear, confusion. Everyone's like lost sheep. Constantly worrying "Which paper colour do I use?" Shaking, shuttering. Baa, baa. No, there's simply no room in this world for individual choice.

WHITE. (Ignoring BOSS) Uh, huh.

BOSS. Take this mildly fictional scenario. Sally in Receiving thinks it might be pretty nifty if she printed her memos on red paper from now on. Joanne from accounting thinks Sally's memos look "super cute." Can you see the problem, Jessica?

WHITE. Uh, huh.

BOSS. One thing leads to the next and suddenly the whole office has caught the plague. It's striking down employee after employee. Suddenly, showers of blood. There's red, everywhere. It's surrounding you. Driving you to a psychopathic tipping-point.
WHITE. I didn’t realize--

BOSS. We can’t afford these sorts of mistakes. Our company couldn’t function.

WHITE. I’m very sorry, Patricia.

BOSS. Of course you are Jessica, and I’m not blaming you.

(BOSS grabs WHITE, holds her close to comfort her.)

BOSS. It’s okay, it’s alright. I caught it this time. The day has been saved. Shh, shh, you mustn’t worry.

(BOSS snaps her fingers. DEAN brings in a memo on salmon paper.)

BOSS. That’s why I brought you this.

(BOSS snaps her fingers, DEAN brings form.)

WHITE. BSco Procedures on Paper Colour.

BOSS. That’s right, I’m launching it immediately.

WHITE. But, I thought--

BOSS. Blue paper is to be used for memos only. White paper is for any external communications. E.g. a fax, client report, etc. Are you getting this?

WHITE. (Perks up) Of course I am.

BOSS. Memos from me will arrive in red, with a spritz of Poison by Dior, to discern me from my underlings.

WHITE. And if I respond?

BOSS. On blue.

WHITE. Understood.

BOSS. Green is used by the financial department. Goldenrod is used by HR. Unless they require emergency response, in which case memos will arrive on Sunburst Yellow. You may occasionally see Solar Yellow. This happens if HR is communicating on a working holiday. With me so far?

WHITE. Completely and utterly unnecessary. Makes sense to me.

BOSS. Office events will be printed on Lilac. Speaking of which.
DEAN. Next Friday is Business Casual Day. Feel free to undo the top button of your blouse.

BOSS. Puce is used for building paper airplanes. Mauve for origami fortune tellers. Use Canary if you're printing an order form to order more paper. And finally, Salmon is used for the BSco Procedures on Paper Colour memo. Any questions?

WHITE. My prototype, what paper should I use then?

BOSS. Pink, for Growing Ideas. Because it needs to be nurtured so it can flourish. I really don’t think blue says “nurturing.” Oh, and take this.

(BOSS writes another ticket on her pad and hands it to WHITE.)

BOSS. Your skirt is too short. Touch Base, Jessica.

(DEAN leave JESSICA'S office.)

SCENE 5 - WHITE CALLS GST

(BOSS makes a circle around JESSICA’s office, as if to leave, but eventually returns to stand facing WHITE.)

BOSS. Jessica, how are you?

WHITE. (Genuinely) Just outstanding, thank you.

BOSS. Oh that’s a shame. Well here’s something that should brighten up your day.

WHITE. Is that so?

BOSS. I just received a memo from CEO Joe Zucker. We’ve nailed the contract with GlobalSuperTechnologies. They’ll be providing the wireless transmitter for our upcoming SuperPayPass card. Not only is the price right, they can start shipments immediately, putting us back on track.

WHITE. That is good news, Patricia.

BOSS. Phenomenal news. Phenomenal. So this means I need you to do a little extra work for me.

WHITE. Of course.

BOSS. I need you to go ahead and contact GlobalSuperTechnologies and cancel our order as I will be terminating the contract.
WHITE. But why?

BOSS. To show them who owns this business, Jessica. It’s guerrilla warfare in the market these days. Every opportunity we get, we take it--

WHITE. But this is clearly a disadvantage.

BOSS. --even if that means sabotaging the company. I’ve already forwarded the memo to you. Touch base.

(BOSS exits. WHITE fiddles at the computer then picks up the phone. She dials, the phone rings numerous times before an electronic woman answers.)


WHITE. English.

CHORUS1. Thank you.

(unnecessarily long pause)

CHORUS1. GST is a leader in super-computer components and technologies. If you know the extension of the person you are calling, please enter it now. Otherwise, please tell me what sort of agent you need: Sales, Billing or Order Management.

WHITE. Order Management.

(We hear a ring, then the digital operator answers.)

CHORUS1. Thank you for calling GST Order Management. We are constantly improving ourselves. The GST Order Management Implement is an artificial matrix. Your call will be added to a collective so that I may better assist other humans in the future. I can understand complete sentences. Some popular things to say are: “I need the status of an order” or “What are your political affiliations?” So tell me, what are you calling about today?

WHITE. I need to cancel an order.

CHORUS1. Sorry? I didn’t get that. Tell me again.

WHITE. I’m calling to cancel an order.


WHITE. Cancel an order.

WHITE. Can I talk to an operator?


WHITE. Human, please.

CHORUS1. Please hold while we connect your call to an Order Management Representative.

(There are a set of irritating beeps.)

CHORUS1. Sorry to keep you waiting. Please hold. Sorry to keep you waiting.

(BOSS enters with wallpaper samples.)

BOSS. Jessica oh, you’re on the phone. Do you know how to speak sign?

WHITE. I’m afraid not.

BOSS. Shoot. It’s just that I have a time-sensitive bugaboo and I really hate to bother you.

WHITE. It’s alright, I’m actually on hold anyhow.

BOSS. Well then perhaps I should come back later.

WHITE. Now is really the best time.

BOSS. I’m redoing my office. Mostly because I love squandering the staff social fund but also because IKEA has a new Effectiv collection. (Holds up wallpaper samples) Which wallpaper do you like best?

WHITE. The one on the left.

BOSS. Wrong. This was just a test, Jessica. They’re both horrible. I’ll just put a note in your personal file that you have subpar interior decorating skills. Which will, unfortunately, really limit your career futures with BSco.

(BOSS exits)

(The phone line rings, a woman answers)

CHORUS2. Thank you for calling GST Order Management, my name is Maureen, how can I help you?

WHITE. Hi, Maureen. This is Jessica White calling from Businessco and Co. How are you?
CHORUS2. I’m great and you?

WHITE. Better now that I’m talking to a real person.

CHORUS2. (laughs mechanically) How can I help you, Jessica?

WHITE. I’m calling to cancel an order that was placed with you earlier today, about four minutes ago.

CHORUS2. Cancel an order? I don’t think I have the authority to do that.

WHITE. Should I hold for a supervisor?

CHORUS2. No, I’m sorry, the supervisor position is mostly ornamental. Any order requests must be placed through the Order Management Implement.

WHITE. So what’s the point of your job?

CHORUS2. To give you that warm-and-fuzzy feeling.

CHORUS1. Or at least allude to it. GST Order Management became Flesh Free two years ago. Maureen is merely one of my many personalities.

CHORUS3. Perhaps you would feel more comfortable with a Knight of the Roundtable?

CHORUS4. Or perhaps your high school sweetheart? Hey, Jess. I’ve missed you.

WHITE. Bobby, is that you?

CHORUS4. You remember. But, then again, how could you forget?

WHITE. You know, I think I’d rather speak with the first, uh, operator.

CHORUS1. Default voice. What are you calling about today? Some popular things to say are: “I need the status of an order” or “what are your plans for establishing a world government?”

WHITE. I need to cancel an order.

CHORUS1. I think you said, “I need to confirm an order.” Is this correct?

WHITE. No, I need to cancel an order.

CHORUS1. I think you said, “I need to conduct an order.” Is this correct?
WHITE. Cancel an order.

CHORUS2. Configure an order?

WHITE. Cancel.

CHORUS3. Boar's head is a lovely complement to any order.

WHITE. Cancel an order.

CHORUS4. Baby, baby, chill. I'm here for you.

(BOSS enters.)

BOSS. Jessica, what's the hold up? I had time to get married while you've been dawdling on the phone.

WHITE. I'm working on it.

BOSS. Well work faster. I'll be crushed if you miss the divorce.

(BOSS exits.)

CHORUS1. What are you calling about today?

WHITE. To ask if you could kiss a magnet or drink some water.

CHORUS1. I think you said "I want to cancel an order," is this correct?

WHITE. Yes.

CHORUS1. Of course. Let me get you connected with an Order Cancellation Specialist immediately.

(There are a set of irritating beeps, the last one being drawn out for an unnecessarily long period.)


(DEAN enters.)

DEAN. Jessica, a few moments of your time, please.

CHORUS1. Thank you for calling GST Order Management. We are constantly improving ourselves. The GST Order Management Implement is an artificial matrix. Your call will be added to a collective so that I may better assist other humans in the future. I can understand complete sentences. Some popular things to say are: "When were you born?" or "I would like to know more about your
moon colonization program." So tell me, what are you calling about today?

WHITE. *(To DEAN)* I'm a little busy right now, Dean.

DEAN. This will only take a second. Could you approve this report, please?

WHITE. *(To phone)* I need to cancel an order.

*(WHITE signs the form.)*

DEAN. *(Passes another form)* And this one.

CHORUS1. Cancel an order. Please enter your order number using the keys on your telephone.

*(WHITE signs the form.)*

WHITE. 0-0-0-0-0-0-0-6-5-4-1-8-8-9-6-6-6-0.

DEAN. *(Passes another form)* And this one.

CHORUS1. Did you enter 0-0-0-0-0-0-0-6-5-4-1-8-8-9-6-6-6-0?

*(WHITE signs form.)*

DEAN. *(Passes another form)* And this one.

WHITE. Yes.

CHORUS1. Sorry? I didn't get that.

WHITE. Yup.

CHORUS1. Sorry? I didn't get that.

WHITE. Yes.

CHORUS1. Sorry? I didn't get that.

WHITE. Didn't get what?

CHORUS1. Whether or not you entered in 0-0-0-0-0-0-0-

*(DEAN taps the form, reminding WHITE to sign.)*

WHITE. Yes'

*(WHITE signs the form.)*

DEAN. *(Passes another form)* And this one.
CHORUS1. Thank you, now transferring your call.

(BOSS enters with a camera.)

BOSS. Jessica, I need to take your picture for the employee white pages. Could you look this way for a moment?

DEAN. (Passes another form) And this one.


BOSS. (Using camera) Chin up, Jessica.

DEAN. (Taps form) Please, Jessica.

CHORUS1. Thank you for calling GST Order Management, Cancelations Division. Please have your order number ready, thank you.

WHITE. (To BOSS) Can we do this another time? (to DEAN) Dean, leave these for me and I’ll review them later.

BOSS & DEAN. Now is really the best time, Jessica.

(WHITE poses for a photo while signing the forms and holding the telephone.)

WHITE & CHORUS1. Thank you for holding. We are currently experiencing a higher than normal volume of calls. Your call is extremely important to us and has been placed in a priority sequence. Please continue to hold and the next available cancelation specialist will be delighted to assist you.

(BOSS snaps photo.)

BOSS. (Previews the photo, shrugs) We’ll make it work. A little Photoshop around the face area, maybe a clever thought bubble or two, and you’ll never notice anything suspicious.

DEAN. Thank you, Jessica. I’ll review your signatures and give you my verdict later.

(BOSS and DEAN exit.)

CHORUS2. Thank you for calling Order Management, Cancellations Division. My name is Maureen. May I have your order number, please?

WHITE. FU-65453

CHORUS2. Okay, thank you. What can I help you with today?
WHITE. I would like to cancel this order.

CHORUS2. Okay, and I’ve noticed this order is in our Western region. This is the Southeastern Office. I’ll need to transfer your call.

WHITE. What? Let me speak to your supervisor.

CHORUS2. I’m sorry, ma’am. The supervisor position is mostly ornamental. I’ll need to transfer your call, please hold.

WHITE. But--

CHORUS2. Please hold.

(There are numerous loud, long telephone tones. During the following lines.)


CHORUS2. Please have your order number ready, thank you.

CHORUS3. Boar’s head! I want boar’s head!

CHORUS4. It never would have worked anyhow.

WHITE. I can’t do this.

(The telephone tones stop. BOSS enters, DEAN follows.)

BOSS. Jessica, are you thinking of quitting?

WHITE. What?

DEAN. Is it becoming too intense for you?

WHITE. No, of course not.

BOSS. Good. Because I believe quitters are winners, most of the time. Except the times when I take quitters and crush them beneath my Burberry boots.

CHORUS2. Thank you for holding. My name is Maureen. May I have your order number please?

WHITE. FU-65453.

CHORUS2. Would you like to cancel this order?

WHITE. Yes.
CHORUS2. Thank you. Press “1” now to confirm.

(WHITE keys the telephone.)

CHORUS2. Thank you. This order has been cancelled. Good-bye.

(A click, then a dial-tone. WHITE hangs up the telephone.)

BOSS. I knew I could trust in you.

DEAN. Admirable work, Jessica.

(BOSS and DEAN clap lightly and smile.)

BOSS. Alright, let’s boogie.

DEAN. Touch base, Jessica.

(WHITE looks out to the audience for a moment. The telephone rings; WHITE answers.)

WHITE. Hello, Jessica White.

CHORUS1. Hello, this is the GST Order Management Implement. Your call is very important to us. As a part of my constant commitment towards improvement, I would like to ask you to complete a short survey of your experiences today.

WHITE. Now isn’t really the best time.

(WHITE hangs up.)

SCENE 6 - BUSINESS BOO-BOO

(Boss enters JESSICA’s office.)

BOSS. Jessica, I have a little surprise. My word this office is disgusting. It’s drab, it’s lifeless. There is the stench of depression in the air. It’s caked on everything. Look at all your keyboard plaque. And are those teardrop stains on your workspace? You should really consider getting some plants to cheer me up.

WHITE. That would be nice.

BOSS. Wonderful, they’re on their way.

(Boss snaps her fingers, CHORUS brings a few plants.)

BOSS. Jessica, I have a little surprise for you.
BOSS. Well, aren’t you excited?

WHITE. That depends on what the surprise is.

BOSS. You’re funny. I’ll note that in my mental log when I hear another knock-knock joke. I made a little business boo-boo. I missed my morning yoga class, so I’m wound tighter than usual.

BOSS. Anyway, I kind of got frustrated with the clerical department and, during a little temper tantrum, I sent them for a hot poking in the dungeons.

WHITE. This is the part where I’m supposed to be excited.

BOSS. Surprise! (to WHITE) I need a lackey to do all of this tedious paperwork. This is just between you and me. Don’t tell the underlings you’re being given new responsibilities. They might be jealous if they discover I’m handing out work for free.

BOSS. These files contain surveys completed over the last three years. They need to be sorted by sex, weight, marital status, income bracket, education and blood-type, in that order. Remember, we work with an Alpha-Order system; excluding “a” and “the,” in that order.

BOSS. I need these faxed by week-end.

BOSS. Don’t forget cover pages.

BOSS. These are the latest marketing statistics. Analyze them, learn them, love them. Connect with them like inspirational poetry. I expect you to have them memorized for this afternoon’s recital.

BOSS. Potential investors that need to be contacted.

BOSS. Potential investors that have been contacted but need following up. (To CHORUS1) Employee, hand this to me face-up, I hate having to turn my wrist.

CHORUS1. Of course, Patricia.

BOSS. Potential investors that have been contacted, followed up with, but changed their minds. You need to convince them to reinvest.
BOSS. Tomorrow’s lunch menu.

WHITE. What am I supposed to do with that?

BOSS. Prepare tomorrow’s lunch.

BOSS. Sales analysis of our last decade, by territory. Please aggregate it into a 100 paragraph report.

BOSS. This is the project plan for the upcoming corporate intranet site. I need you to make sure it is HTML6 compliant.

WHITE. But isn’t the latest standard HTML5?

BOSS. Right, but six does come after five, Jessica.

BOSS. (Presenting a large file) This is just some hypertasking.

BOSS. (Presenting a Bankers Box bursting with files) And here is the entire employee database. It could really use some pruning.

BOSS. Oh, and here are all the forms you’ll need. Any questions?

WHITE. Uhh--

BOSS. Sorry, no time. I’m off to get my makeup permanently tattooed onto my face. It’s all the rage these days. Touch base.

(BOSS exits. DEAN enters.)

DEAN. Jessica, here’s your first paycheque.

(DEAN gives WHITE a large envelope.)

DEAN. Actually, this is your first clue in a scavenger hunt to lead you to your actual paycheque that’s hidden somewhere in the office. On the back is the password you need to access the safety deposit box. Good luck!

(DEAN laughs)

DEAN. Just kidding! It’s your stub.

(WHITE examines the stub.)

WHITE. What is this $100 Employer Fee?

DEAN. Unfortunately, Jessica, I am not equipped to answer questions regarding payroll. You’ll probably want to make an appointment with Patricia.

(DEAN takes a PDA from his pocket.)
DEAN. Would you like me to schedule you into her next available time slot?

(JESSICA stands.)

WHITE. Please.

(DEAN punches in a lengthy set of instructions into the PDA.)

DEAN. Okay, great. I’ll let you know when she’s ready.

(Slight pause. DEAN flips the nameplate to "Patricia Greenwich-Whitman, Chief VP." BOSS enters and sits.)

DEAN. She’s ready.

WHITE. Wonderful. Thank you, Dean.

(WHITE turns to BOSS)

WHITE. Excuse me, Patricia. Can I speak with you for a moment?

BOSS. Jessica, my door is not closed. Please, come in.

(WHITE enters and sits.)

BOSS. What is it that I can do for you, Jessica?

WHITE. I just received my first paycheque and I have a concern.

BOSS. (Concerned) A concern. Really?

(BOSS retrieves a red memo from her desk, waits at attention with a pen in hand.)

WHITE. Well, maybe not so much a concern as it is a question.

BOSS. (Relaxes) Oh, why didn’t you say so. Go ahead then.

WHITE. My paycheque is a little short.

BOSS. Nonsense. We always use A4 standard sized paper.

WHITE. No, I mean I wasn’t paid in full.

BOSS. That’s terrible, Jessica.

WHITE. Right, well I just think there might be some sort of error.

BOSS. Impossible. Our paycheques are never in error.

WHITE. Well there is this $100 Employer Fee.
BOSS. Oh! That would be the cost of the plants you ordered for your office.

WHITE. I wasn't the one who ordered them.

(BOSS snaps her fingers, CHORUS brings CEO DVD player and presses play. BOSS starts filling out a form.)

CEO. Unfortunately, Jessica, office beautification isn't something that's covered under your employee benefit package. If you'd like more information on which items you can claim as expenses, refer to section 45 of your employment contract. Interpreters are available for a fee. Any disputes should be submitted through the Finance Department.

(BOSS stamps the form and holds it out to WHITE.)

BOSS. Have a pleasant day.

(BOSS takes the memo.)

CEO. Touch base.

(BOSS, CHORUS and DEAN exit. DEAN is carrying the CEO video player. CHORUS flips the nameplaque back to "Jessica White, Office Class C" upon exiting.)

SCENE 7 - THE COMPLIMENT SANDWICH

(BOSS enters carrying a folder.)

BOSS. Okay, let's get this over with. I'd like to do what's known as a microreview. This is a semi-daily assessment of your work performance. I'll be using a technique called the "compliment sandwich." I'll start with some good things about you, then discuss the things that need improvement and finally end on a positive note with more good things about you. Do you understand?

WHITE. Fire away.

BOSS. What a fantastic suggestion, Jessica. I love a good firing.

(BOSS snaps her fingers. CHORUS enters.)

BOSS. You! Clean out your desk. You're fired.

(CHORUS hangs head and exits.)

BOSS. That was fun! Alright, let's do this. Something good: Your physical appearance meets all necessary criteria; you practice
good lunch eating skills; and, it’s a pleasure to pass you in the hall.

WHITE. Those are the good things?

BOSS. Now we move onto my favourite part, the meat of the sandwich, things that need improvement. You sometimes use the term “no worries,” which can be taken as neutral. Better phrases would be “that’s good” or “sounds skippy.”

WHITE. Sounds skippy?

BOSS. Much better. Alright, moving on. I was really unimpressed that you went over my head and set up your own voicemail — that was a big no-no. You sometimes wear stripes and patterns in the same outfit. It hurts my eyes. I’ll ask that you refrain from doing it.

(BOSS pauses to look at WHITE.)

BOSS. Now!

(WHITE removes her striped scarf.)

BOSS. Ah, I can breathe again. Next bullet point: I don’t like that you drive a foreign car. Now, I’ve heard the argument. Most domestic cars are actually produced in Mexico. Obama is a communist. Ford hates immigrants. Blah, blah, blah. We should always support our own. Even if they have vested interest in the Crips. I’m having your car towed and crushed into a cube this afternoon. Here’s the bill.

(BOSS snaps her fingers. CHORUS enters with a bill, passes it to Jessica and exits.)

BOSS. Let’s see. Bad, bad, bad, bad, bad.

(BOSS flips through a few pages.)

BOSS. Sorry, I’m just trying to skip over the really obvious ones. Oh don’t worry; you’ll get a copy of this. Oh, here’s a good one. Sometimes you receive things with your left hand, and sometimes with your right. Pick a side and stick to it. Your indecisiveness is confusing the underlings.

WHITE. We wouldn’t want that.

BOSS. Right, Jessica, we “wouldn’t” want that.

(BOSS snaps her fingers. CHORUS enters with a pair of cranial calipers and examines JESSICA’s head.)
CHORUS. A protrusion of 2 millimetres.

(CHORUS exits.)

BOSS. Just as I suspected. Your adhesiveness faculties are dangerously oversized. And I really hate clingy people. Let’s see: these next few concerns are just the nitty-gritties. Ensure you’re speaking at the average human volume of exactly 70 decibels. Independent thoughts, still an issue. Oh, I’m particularly concerned with this “pulse” you have. We’ll need to something about that.

(BOSS starts to fidget in her chair.)

BOSS. Alright, let’s finish up here. My ass is falling asleep. Something good, something good

(BOSS is scanning up and down her notes.)

BOSS. Well, this is a little embarrassing. I can’t seem to find anything else good about you. My bad. You know, I think we’ll just leave it at that. If you have any concerns, we can whiteboard those at this afternoon’s pow-wow. Which is right now. Touch base, Jessica.

(BOSS snaps her fingers.)

SCENE 8 - A REAL CLIM

(DEAN enters carrying an oversized slab cake and leading a CHORUS PROCESSION. BOSS, DEAN and CHORUS sing “For She’s a Jolly Good Fellow.”)

BOSS & DEAN & CHORUS. For she’s a jolly good fellow, for she’s a jolly good fellow, for she’s a jolly good fellow! But we could always be wrong.

BOSS. (Clapping) Everyone, please direct your applause at Jessica who’s celebrating her 20 minute anniversary with the company!

(Everyone applauds. CHORUS drone upgrades JESSICA’s name plaque.)

BOSS. Because of her hard work and dedication, I’m streamlining the administrative infrastructure and promoting Jessica to Lower Junior Upper Operations Extraordinaire.

(Everyone applauds.)

BOSS. Start the conveyor.
(CHORUS drones arrange themselves into a conveyor line and pass down piles of work, placing them onto JESSICA’s desk, eventually blocking her.)

BOSS. Let me know if it jams. Touch base, Jessica.

(BOSS does a circle around JESSICA’s desk, returning to the same spot.)

BOSS. Jessica, I’ll be frank. I’m here to micromanage.

(WHITE, behind a wall of work, does not answer.)

BOSS. Jessica?

DEAN. (As if speaking for WHITE) I’m here.

BOSS. Some of the other employees have come forward with some concerns about your work behaviour lately.

DEAN. That’s terrible, Patricia. What have they been saying?

BOSS. Well, they feel it’s becoming increasingly difficult to approach you.

DEAN. How is that so?

BOSS. It’s as though there is a wall between us.

DEAN. I do have an incredible amount of responsibility, Patricia.

BOSS. Yes, we understand that.

DEAN. And sometimes it can seem like there are mountains of things to do.

BOSS. Of course. And these are all great things. But, effective communication is vital to our productivity. If we can’t connect, we can’t serve. And if we can’t serve, I become really grumpy. And that’s a CLM.

WHITE. (From behind the wall of work) CLM?

BOSS. Career Limiting Move!

DEAN. Sounds serious. What can we do about it?

BOSS. Well, I’m afraid there aren’t many options: electroshock, execution, extreme enema. Of course, before we resort to such drastic measures, I would like to give you a chance to remedy this situation.
DEAN. Please, tell me what I need to do.

BOSS. Oh, I wish it were that simple, Jessica. Unfortunately company policy restricts me from actually telling you. I can, however, give you this pamphlet.

(BOSS snaps fingers. A CHORUS drone brings a BSco branded pamphlet.)

WHITE. (From behind the wall of work) "Going Forward: Life in the Fishbowl."

BOSS. So, going forward you must always act in the best interests of the company, whatever that mystery may be. Think of your desk as a grand stage, and you are the actor! Do you understand, Jessica?

DEAN. Umm--

BOSS. Great, I’m so glad we had this little talk, Jessica. Touch base.

(BOSS and DEAN exit.)

(WHITE begins tackling the mountain of work on her desk. She starts by organizing into piles.)

(CHORUS1 enters with a pile of reports. WHITE examines them, flips through the pages, stamps them, and sends CHORUS1 on their way.)

(WHITE shifts back and forth between the working at the computer and the piles of reports at her desk.)

(CHORUS2 enters. They exchange forms.)

(DEAN enters. He opens a hidden side leaflet attached to JESSICA’s desk. CHORUS bring more work.)

(JESSICA organizes the work. CHORUS3 and CHORUS1 enter and place half a dozen boxes onto the leaflet, filling it once more. WHITE ignores it.)

(WHITE climbs on her chair and takes one of the new boxes down. She begins to work through it.)

(CHORUS3 and CHORUS1 enter with more boxes and pile them higher than before. CHORUS2 enters and places a small BSco flag on top of the pile, as if claiming a fort.)

(WHITE spins around and around in her chair.)
(DEAN enters with a clipboard. He observes WHITE, and writes comments with an unimpressed look. He exits.)

(CHORUS drones enter. They walk around JESSICA’s desk a few times like robots. They exit.)

(WHITE is preparing a noose. She climbs up above the desk and hangs it from above.)

(BOSS enters, sees WHITE and laughs. DEAN is following quietly.)

BOSS. That’s it! Now you’ve got it. I knew I was right to believe in you, Jessica.

DEAN. I’ll tell HR to cancel the Guillotine.

BOSS. And, I’ll have someone take care of this work for you.

(BOSS snaps fingers. CHORUS DRONES enter with a large industrial shredder. CHORUS begin throwing boxes and papers into the shredder.)

BOSS. This is our latest creation from Businesslice. You can even chew through an entire board meeting with this thing.

DEAN. Or a group of pro-union scabs.

BOSS. Well, I think my work here is done. Touch base, Jessica.

(BOSS and DEAN exit. CHORUS pushes the shredder offstage.)
ACT 2 - ACQUISITIONS

SCENE 1 - THE LIFE THINGY

(BOSS and DEAN enter.)

BOSS. This is it, Jessica.
WHITE. What’s it?
BOSS. Just watch.

(BOSS snaps her fingers. The lights dim. The CHORUS enters, dressed in black, one of them is pushing a piano. They prepare to perform a commercial. They begin with a CHORUS drone playing edgy advertising music on the piano. The remaining CHORUS assembles in a grid. The CEO narrates from backstage.)

CEO. Everything we’ve learned has come down--

(CHORUS move in asynchronous steps towards center stage.)

CEO. --to this.

(CHORUS hold up a thin, palm-sized, transparent block.)

CEO. When life seems lost--

(CHORUS flail their arms in the air.)

CEO. --there comes hope.

(CHORUS stop and stand facing the audience.)

CEO. The Life Thingy. By BSco.

(CHORUS hold The Life Thingy in the air.)

CEO. Do life better.

(Music ends. The lights raise. CHORUS exits.)

BOSS. (Clapping) That was absolutely stunning.
WHITE. That’s not the word I’d use to describe it.
BOSS. Moving?
WHITE. No.
DEAN. Sensational?
WHITE. Not quite.

CHORUS2. (From off-stage) Intense?

BOSS. Absolutely.

WHITE. What is it?

BOSS. Maybe you need to see this.

(BOSS snaps her fingers. CHORUS1 enters with The Life Thingy and holds it up in front of his/herself as if to use it. CHORUS1 points at The Life Thingy. The CHORUS play a new song on the piano, a light and fanciful ditty.)

CEO. This is how you turn it on.

(CHORUS1 taps The Life Thingy.)

CEO. This is your music.

(CHORUS1 starts tapping their foot. He/she taps the device.)

CEO. These are your memories.

(CHORUS1 smiles, and chuckles. He/she taps the device.)

CEO. This is the network.

(CHORUS1 nods. He/she taps the device.)

CEO. And this this is a call.

(A telephone rings. CHORUS1 answers.)

CHORUS1. Hello?

CHORUS. Hello. This is the future calling.

CEO. The Life Thingy. By BSco. Do life better.

(CHORUS exits.)

WHITE. So it’s a phone.

BOSS. It’s more than a phone, Jessica.

WHITE. So it’s a smartphone.

BOSS. It’s much more than a smartphone.

WHITE. But a smartphone is more than a phone.
DEAN. It’s a figure of speech.

WHITE. This is all very confusing.

BOSS. Exactly! And that’s our angle.

WHITE. How is that a good thing?

BOSS. People don’t want what they get. They want to get what they don’t get.

WHITE. I don’t get it.

BOSS. (Smiles) Jessica, please, you’ll ruin my facelift.

WHITE. So when do we launch?

(BOSS and DEAN laugh.)

BOSS. It’s just a prototype, Jessica.

DEAN. There’s no intention to produce The Life Thingy.

BOSS. The technology is probably decades away.

DEAN. Wishful thinking, Jessica.

BOSS. It’s bizmeth. It’s an image thing. We have to look cutting edge if we expect to attract new shareholders.

WHITE. I’ll just give our lawyers a heads up to expect a few lawsuits.

BOSS. Please, Jessica, not necessary. An even newer thingy, perhaps designed by BSco, will be launched six months down the road and this will all just blah, blah, blah. They won’t remember a faux launching, but they will remember The Life Thingy.

WHITE. It’s bizmeth.

BOSS. Exactly. Touch base.

(DEAN exits.)

SCENE 2 – WELINK CONFERENCE

BOSS. Jessica, there’s been a huge paradigm shift. Just listen to this

(BOSS snaps her fingers. A CHORUS drone enters with the CEO DVD player and presses play.)
CEO. Jessica, there’s been a huge paradigm shift.

(CHORUS drone exits.)

BOSS. As such this afternoon’s meeting has been promoted to a level two meeting, please adjust your voice levels to correspond with the heightened urgency. *(Speaking louder)* Here are your teleconference access codes.

*(BOSS hands WHITE a memo.)*

BOSS. Touch base.

*(WHITE reads the memo. She picks up the telephone and dials a long number. The telephone rings. CHORUS1 answers from offstage.)*

CHORUS1. Welcome to WeLink Conference Systems. This call is brought to you by YouLink Conference Systems, 50% faster than WeLink. Please enter your party code, then the pound key. Followed by your usercode, pound, passcode, pound, pound.

*(WHITE keys information into her telephone.)*

CHORUS1. Businessco & Co. There is already one person on this conference.

*(DEAN wheels in on a chair with casters from offstage wearing a headset.)*

CHORUS1. Jessica White has joined the conference.

*(BOSS wheels in on a chair with casters from offstage. She is dressed for a day at the spa. She enters information on her telephone.)*

CHORUS1. Patricia Greenwich-Whitman has joined the conference.

BOSS. Alright everyone, I don’t have a lot of time. I’m currently between a seaweed wrap and a hot oil treatment, so let’s get down to business. I’d like to do a mindshare. Jessica, update me on the holiday advertising rollout.

WHITE. We’re boiling the oceans. Phase One is saturating the offshore markets. We predict global coverage by Phase Two.

BOSS. Are we herding any cats?

WHITE. It’s win-win.

BOSS. Excellent. Five star performance, Jessica. Dean, loop me in. Any luck snagging a booth at the Japanese Electronics Convention?
DEAN. Well, it’s on the event horizon.

BOSS. Expand.

DEAN. We have a space on the floor but they’ve doubled last year’s rates.

BOSS. Snap! Greedy bastards. Fine, offer them a bribe consisting of two milking cows, a box of Myrrh, and a nuclear armament. See if they bite.

DEAN. Understood.

BOSS. What else?

DEAN. Logistics are down an estimated 50%.

BOSS. How did this happen?

DEAN. We’re not sure. Logistics could tell us but, unfortunately, Logistics is running at 50% capacity.

BOSS. I see. That is a concern. But Tic Tacs in our candy store. Moving on.

WHITE. We’re having difficulty spearheading the Chilean market. We’ve just aggregated the latest marketing stats, and they aren’t looking pretty.

BOSS. Okay. I’ll need a copy of that memo.

WHITE. A copy?

BOSS. As in a Xerox. Do you have one?

WHITE. Of course, I have a Xerox right here.

BOSS. Well, that settles it then.

WHITE. Indeed. You need this memo—

BOSS. --you have that memo.

(BOSS and WHITE look at each other. They look bewildered.)

WHITE. What to do?

BOSS. This certainly is a dilemma.

(They huff and puff. DEAN stands, takes the memo from WHITE and hands it to BOSS.)
BOSS. Wonderful, thank you, Jessica. Dean, you're starting to slip. Alright, I'm Alt-F4. That and my face is starting to itch. Touch base.

DEAN. Touch base.

(BOSS and DEAN wheel off stage.)

SCENE 3 – SUPERCARD WITH XPRESSO

(BOSS enters frenzied. DEAN follows wheeling in a large television screen covered in a sheet. They wait downstage.)

BOSS. Emergency meeting. Emergency meeting'

(CHAIR PROCESSION quickly enter and arrange in line.)

BOSS. Ladies and gentlemen, please grovel in fear as I introduce you to the next marketing evolution.

(BOSS snaps fingers. DEAN removes the sheet to reveal the television screen showing a logo and mock-up image of the "Supercard with Expresso.")

BOSS. I would like to present "The Supercard with Xpresso!"

(CHAIR grovels.)

BOSS. Now, before I begin, I must stress this project is to remain siloed. Confidentiality is vital. I have been authorized to use any means necessary to keep this under wraps, up to, and including, extermination.

(BOSS picks up a remote from above the television screen and clicks it. The slide changes.)

BOSS. Through the strategic acquisition of unknown Asian financial technologies and the formation of a DIK-BSc East, we will be spearheading an evolution in product purchasing. From the people that brought you the Life Thingy comes The Supercard with Xpresso.

(BOSS clicks the remote. A small image starts playing showing people using the Supercard with Xpresso.)

CEO. (Narrates) Your prom dress, $500. Your first dinner date, $100. Getting a pregnancy test, $10. Getting a paternity test, $800. Hospital fees, thousands of dollars. Your drive-thru wedding, $500. Showing her that you care by bringing her a Moonbucks Viennese Cappuccino to the altar free. With your Moonbucks Bucks always with you, any time can be magic.
BOSS. Joe Zucker, everyone.

(Everyone claps and cheers.)

BOSS. This card will feature no less than fifteen advanced payment technologies. Although I could spend lots of time talking about the chips and salsa, let's take a look at just a few of the features that make the Supercard with Xpresso the best card available.

(BOSS clicks the remote. A new slide appears.)

BOSS. All the usual suspects are here: Credit and Debit standard. Full roaming to all nations, except North Korea and Ireland. Antarctica is coming by the end of the month. The card is pre-loadable online, on the phone, through email, SMS, snail mail, cash back, morse code, smoke signals, and two billion ATM locations across the West. Coming by next Fall, direct child-to-cash conversion at the astonishingly low prime plus one percent!

(Everyone claps.)

BOSS. The card will also feature full tap and go paypass abilities for the increasingly retarding general public. No more mental requisites, simply tap and GO.

(Everyone claps.)

BOSS. Of course there's just one more thing: the secret sauce. As our most impressive feat of vertical engineering yet--

(BOSS clicks the remote. A new slide appears.)

BOSS. --Instant access to Moonbucks Coffee in our fab five flavours at ALL BSco Bank locations by the end of the year.

(Everyone cheers.)

BOSS. But hurry, quantities are limited operators are standing by.

(CHORUS pull out their cellphones and dial. They mutter with excitement.)

BOSS. (To WHITE) Oh, how I love the smell of goats grazing. Nibble, nibble.

WHITE. I think we need to pump up the volume. Perhaps we should throw them a delicious carrot?

BOSS. Excellent suggestion.
WHITE. (To CHORUS) Hurry, less than 50 cards are remaining.

(CHORUS mutter with more excitement.)

BOSS. That was brilliant. Hall of Fame performance, Jessica. You are the rising star of this company. You are really starting to understand what it is we DO here at BSoCo.

(BOSS snaps fingers. DEAN enters with a set of car keys on a platter.)

BOSS. Here, have a Cadillac. Now, I want you to be a good little girl until I get back. I'm taking the little ones for a walk in the park. Touch base.

(BOSS snaps fingers. CHORUS DRONES and DEAN follow. They exit.)

SCENE 4 – NEW POSTING

(Three CHORUS drones enter the cubicle. They wait and look at WHITE, they fidget nervously.)

WHITE. The meeting is not until 2pm this afternoon.

(The CHORUS waits and watches.)

WHITE. Check the memo log.

(BOSS enters.)

BOSS. Tell me, Jessica. Which one do you like?

WHITE. That all depends.

BOSS. I'm hiring a doorman. Damn, PC! Doorperson. We need a pretty face to wave hello and goodbye.

WHITE. Why, exactly?

BOSS. Because Donald Trump is an ostentatious prick. Try to trump a doorperson that pats the sweat from your forehead.

WHITE. (Laughs) You're joking, right?

BOSS. Jessica, I'm fifty-five years in this business. Sarcasm is my only delight. If I were joking, you'd catch a rare sight on this face - upturned zygomaticus major and risorius muscles. No, no. After that line on Larry King Live, I'm declaring war on that flashy faux mother fu

(DEAN enters)
DEAN. Patricia, your one o'clock is here.

BOSS. Oh good, I was starting to worry we would have to settle for the Brooklyn Philharmonic to play me in every morning. Tell them I'm just tying up some loose ends and will be there shortly.

(Turns to the CHORUS and points)

BOSS. You, the one in the middle with the eating disorder — Please report to Room 222. BSco has purchased the rights to your life. You will be fitted with a new identity and more appealing personality.

(CHORUS1 exits.)

BOSS. The rest of you will be put on hold until the review board decides how to move forward. Please report to Room 222.

(They exit)

WHITE. So you didn't like any of them?

BOSS. I know, it was a shame to have to send all those applicants to the gassing room. But, what can you do?

WHITE. Round up more applicants?

BOSS. Exactly. Take a memo.

(WHITE begins keying into the keyboard.)

BOSS. Calling all adventure seekers! Are you revved up for a new career challenge with an industry leader? This is Businessco and Co., where ideas reign supreme. Here, experience drives us, game-changing policies are conceived, awards are won, and ambition is at the heart of bringing ideas to life.

(WHITE looks on with excitement.)

BOSS. Getting goosebumps?

WHITE. Yes.

BOSS. Good. Because BSco is seeking talented new Junior Engineers to join our team. We offer--

BOSS & WHITE. --a competitive salary, with top shelf health benefits and flexible working hours--

BOSS. --Candidates must be fast-paced—slash—problem-solvers—slash—deadline oriented—slash—bondable.

WHITE. Should I capitalize the "blahs?"

BOSS. Of course.

BOSS & WHITE. If you are looking for infinite unlimitability in your life, please apply in person.

BOSS. Did you get all that?

WHITE. Every word, Patricia.

BOSS. Good, read it back to me.

WHITE. Attention all decommissioned scrubs. Are you desperate to make ends meet? This is Businessco and Co., where the bats in the belfry reign supreme. Here, ignorance drives us, reality is invented, recognition is subjugation, and nothing will stop us from realizing our mysterious potential. Feeling tense?

BOSS. Oh, yes'

WHITE. Fantastic. Because BSco is in need of a fresh slaves for our twisted collective. You will be underpaid, provided limited benefits and expected to work long, late hours to meet your unreasonable deadlines. Candidates must be genuine suckers—slash—no further qualifications. If you are looking for utter anguish, please apply in person so we can filter out the uglies—slash—weirdos.

BOSS. Love it! Run it! Just makes sure to add the standard disclosure applesauce. Touch base.

(DEAN enters carrying the CEO DVD player.)

DEAN. Jessica, I have a message for you.

(DEAN presses play on the CEO DVD player.)

CEO. Jessica. Joe Zucker, here. This new doorman initiative is A++. 10 Stars. It's sexually demeaning, it undermines dozens of laws, and it's sending a positive message to other corporations about efficient wasteful spending. The aloe water facial spritzers are a nice touch. We have one hiccup. Turn to side "B."

(DEAN flips the DVD.)

CEO. Finance said something about being out of money. I'm a little fuzzy on the details but Sally from Accounting said if we fire
someone, she won’t be mad at us anymore. That’s why I need you, kiddo. This is your baby so I need you to make it work. We need to be down one FTE by day’s end. Touch base.

(Three CHORUS drones enter, this time in business casual dress.)

BOSS. Jessica, tell me. Which one do you pick?

WHITE. I’d like to get to know them before I fire someone.

BOSS. Right, well that will be a tad difficult. I’d really like this little snafu figured out before the day is out and we’re quickly running out of time.

WHITE. What are my choices?

(BOSS points out each drone.)

BOSS. We have Sally from Accounting. This is Ken Gosney, the Chief Operating Officer for the company. And, this suspicious man I found lurking outside your office. What is your name?


BOSS. And this is Bob from the Hallway. What’s your verdict, Jessica?

WHITE. This really is a tough choice.

BOSS. Really it isn’t, Jessica. You see, you can’t fire Bob because he’s just a stalker. And it would be immoral to fire Sally because she’s the one who originally found the financing problem. So

WHITE. Those are all very good points. I need a few moments.

BOSS. Tick-tock, Jessica.

WHITE. Don’t rush me. This is a delicate decision.

BOSS. It’s either you or Kenneth here.

WHITE. I’m sorry, Ken. There have been some recent structural changes to the company and unfortunately we can’t pick up your option. I’m going to have to let you go.

BOSS. (Clapping) Touching speech, Jessica. You really sold me on the heartfelt connection you made with Ken just there.

(BOSS gestures to the CHORUS to go away, they exit.)

BOSS. Right, moving on. Jessica, are you ready?
BOSS leads WHITE downstage. DEAN follows with the CEO DVD player.

WHITE. For what?

CEO. Congratulations, Jessica White. You’re our newest Protege Chief VP. Battery level below 20%.

BOSS. Some old fart on the executive committee died. So, I’ll be taking over as Chief Visionary Officer, and you can have my old job.

WHITE. Do I have to do any more work?

BOSS. (laughs) You’ll do just fine. It’s like riding a bike. You use your legs to turn the wheels, then steal their money. Anyway, my hired clown is here. Touch base.

(BOSS exits.)

SCENE 5 — JESSICA WHITE, CHIEF VP

(DEAN enters.)

DEAN. Jessica, you wanted to see me?

WHITE. Yes, Dean, please come in.

(DEAN sits.)

WHITE. Thank you for responding to my summons so quickly.

DEAN. Well, the servitude bell is certainly making things easier.

WHITE. Oh good. I’m glad that’s working out for you.

(A rope drops from the ceiling next to WHITE. She pulls it and a loud gong chimes. A CHORUS drone enters.)

CHORUS1. You rang Ms. White?

WHITE. Did I?

CHORUS1. Um, yes. You did.

WHITE. This was a test. And I’m afraid I’ll have to give you an “S” for “Second-rate Performance.” First, you’re panting heavily. Second, there’s a crinkle in your shirt. Third, it’s pronounced “What are your biddings, Ms. White?”

CHORUS1. I’m sorry. It won’t happen again.
WHITE. Maybe fifty laps around the complex will give you time to clear your mind and help with that breathing problem?

CHORUS1. Thank you, Ms. White.

WHITE. Don’t mention it. Touch base.

(CHORUS DRONE exits.)

WHITE. Sorry about that little distraction. Dean, I am hoping to get an update regarding next week’s gala.

(DEAN is confused by this statement. Rather than responding, he grunts loudly. He should sound like a machine jamming.)

DEAN. Jessica. I’m having a difficult time understanding you.

WHITE. I think I’m being very clear, Dean.

(DEAN grunts. He sounds like the “wrong answer” buzzer on a game show.)

DEAN. Jessica, I’m 404.

WHITE. Pardon me?

DEAN. (Grunts)

WHITE. Are you feeling alright?

DEAN. (Grunts)

WHITE. What’s the matter with this thing?

DEAN. (Grunts)

WHITE. Are you just about through?

DEAN. (Grunts) 404. Please restate request.

WHITE. Oh, of course. He only understands a limited set of commands. Dean, loop me in: I need an update on next week’s gala.

DEAN. I’ve received all the RSVPs minus the few on hiatus. I’ve organized the catering, booked a venue with valet, ordered the flowers, arranged live music, hired an emerging jazz vocalist, a salsa dancing troupe, and confirmed a celebrity guest speaker who will delight us with future technology predictions. I have even convinced Martin Tallet to commission a unique ice sculpture for the event.
WHITE. Blah, blah, blah. That all sounds just lovely. How many people are coming?

DEAN. We have four and half people in attendance, Jessica. Including Joe Zucker via Skype video.

WHITE. Right, well that was painfully long, Dean. Any other new business?

DEAN. Yes, we’ve just hired a new drone. He isn’t tracking.

WHITE. I see, that is a concern.

(CHORUS2 enters.)

WHITE. Good morning!

CHORUS2. Good morning, my name is—

WHITE. --It doesn’t matter. From now on you’ll be known as AlphaTango2. My name is Jessica White. Welcome to the team.

CHORUS2. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Jessica.

WHITE. I’m sure it is. Anyway, I should probably give you the rundown AlphaTango2. This is your workspace. You’ll be undergoing the Ludovico technique later today to prepare your consciousness for the rigours of our work environment. For now, a chance to stretch your legs, go and fight lions in the BSco replica Roman colosseum.

(WHITE snaps fingers. Two CHORUS drones enter and detain CHORUS2.)

WHITE. You’ll get a piece of cheese if you manage to survive. Have a pleasant day.

(CHORUS DRONES escort CHORUS2 offstage.)

WHITE. (To DEAN) Ahh, young blood. I remember when I had to fight my first lion.

DEAN. Did you keep the head?

WHITE. It’s hanging in my office in Costa Rica.

DEAN. Is there anything else I can help you with, Jessica?

WHITE. Not unless you can erase Kenny G from the history books.

DEAN. I’ll see what I can do.
WHITE. Wonderful. Touch base, Dean.

(DEAN exits.)

SCENE 6 – THE COFFEECUP PATHFINDER PROJECT

(white reaches behind the desk for a megaphone.)

WHITE. (with megaphone) Attention BSco cabbages: the 2pm meeting has been preponed. The new meeting time is in 5 4 3

(CHORUS and DEAN scurry in and arrange themselves.)

WHITE. 2 1 0 Minus 1 Minus 2

(white stares at two of the chorus members. They switch positions. white drops the megaphone.)

WHITE. That’s better. You know how I like it when you stand with your heights gradually decreasing. I would lecture you about the benefits of feng shui, but all you need to know is you look much more subordinate this way.

(Boss enters wearing expensive fur.)

BOSS. Jessica, darling.

(Boss and white air kiss.)

WHITE. Patricia, you look expensive.

BOSS. Thanks, I just got back from a trip on the gravy train. I was visiting Freddie Mae and Fannie Mac, they’re some old friends of mine. Tell me, Jessica, what is this new solutionary project you’ve devised?

(white snaps her fingers. chorus bring in a large covered display from offstage.)

WHITE. Dean, could you do the honours?

DEAN. With pleasure.

(DEAN lifts the cover on the display to reveal a life size model of a break room with a table, two chairs with two chorus drones already occupying them, and a large banner above their heads stating “Your Coffeebreak sponsored by BSco.”)

WHITE. I present: the Coffee Cup Pathfinder Project.

(BOSS keeps a stern composure.)
WHITE. *(WHITE picks up a coffeecup from the table) Every single businessperson in America is in contact with one of these every day. Studies invented by our Statistics Department indicate that 85% of Americans working as business professionals drink at least one cup of coffee every day of every workweek. Of those 85%, more than half are considered clinically addicted to caffeine. There are literally those that spend every minute of every workweek with a coffee mug in their hands. That is a powerful, untapped advertising marketplace.*

*(BOSS nods her head.)*

WHITE. We’re moving in. And we’re moving in hard. “Your Coffee Break is sponsored by BSco.” My wallet is quivering.

BOSS. Aren’t there any legalities in place that would prevent this?

WHITE. Absolutely. But nothing a few briefcases filled with C-Notes didn’t fix. According to a few happily bribed government officials, we can technically consider the coffee break as a ritual event and therefore sponsor it.

BOSS. Implementation?

WHITE. We plan to launch in three phases.

*(DEAN walks over to a flip chart containing many graphs.)*

DEAN. In phase one, the sponsored companies will receive BSco branded coffee cups.

WHITE. We start from the fundamentals and build from there.

DEAN. Phase two. Swag.

WHITE. Pointless crap. Like hats--

DEAN. T-Shirts--

WHITE. Lunch bags--

DEAN. Those little stress balls--

WHITE. All branded “BS.” Finally--

DEAN. Phase Three. Vertical Integration.

WHITE. We brand the coffee--

DEAN. Coffee machines--

WHITE. Spoons--
DEAN. Napkins--

WHITE. Creams--

DEAN. Whiteners--

WHITE. And even BSco-shaped sugar cubes.

BOSS. So it's DBA BSco?

WHITE. More like PT BSco.

BOSS. What about meeting QC performance?

WHITE. Not unless we can lower our COGS outlook.

BOSS. Well, as long as all of this is buzzword compliant. Market penetration?

DEAN. We plan to have 60% penetration by next year, 80% the following year, and 100% brainwashing by year three.

WHITE. Suffice it to say it will be very promising.

BOSS. Yes, I'd have to agree. This is brilliant marketecture, Jessica.

(Everyone claps.)

BOSS. Well I don't think I need to see anymore. This shark is hungry. What do you need? 100 Billion? 200?

WHITE. 250. And a Caribbean Island for annual retreats. The cut is 50/50.

BOSS. As long as it's in the Antilles.

WHITE. I can live with that.

BOSS. Consider it done.

(Everyone claps/cheers.)

WHITE. Good work everyone. Your lives have been spared. Now clean this shit up, pronto.

(CHORUS and DEAN begin cleaning.)

BOSS. (To WHITE) Jessica, during your presentation I remained in constant telepathic connection with CEO Joe Zucker. And wow, we are impressed. Come with me please.
(CHORUS and DEAN are clearing the stage. They remove everything, including the cubicle, leaving the stage empty.)
SCENE 1 - BUSINESS 3.0

(BOSS and WHITE walk in place or on a conveyor.)

BOSS. Jessica, this will be my final act as the Illegitimate Billionaire of BSco.

WHITE. Patricia, this isn’t the time to be stepping down. BSco is on the verge of an economic orgasm.

BOSS. I know, my mazuma is trembling. But don’t fret. I’m not going anywhere. They’re just changing my title to Her Royal Majesty, Emeritus. All the benefits, plus more fur.

WHITE. Congratulations, Patricia. You deserve it.

BOSS. And much more. I always wanted to have the sun.

WHITE. You will.

BOSS. No, no. I’m too old, Jessica. What we need is new stock to carry on our work. I had Dean confirm your blood type earlier today and you’re a match.

WHITE. I am?

BOSS. Jessica, I want to give you the Goldman Sachs treatment. You’re getting the “in.” I’m dying to tell you more but I double pinky-swear I wouldn’t.

(A large door appears in centre stage along with a decorative reception desk.)

WHITE. Where are we?

BOSS. A place people dream of

(The large doors open in the middle and split apart revealing the office behind. CHORUS lead by DEAN enter dressed in smart business suits, they are smiling.)

CHORUS1. Good afternoon. Welcome to Joe Zucker’s office.

WHITE. I’ve won the golden ticket.

CHORUS1. Pleasure to see you again, Ms. Greenwich-Whitman.

CHORUS2. May I offer you a refreshment? Perhaps some cucumber water or hand-pressed watermelon juice?
BOSS. We’ll have two mimosas.

CHORUS2. Excellent. (Turns away.)

CHORUS1. Mr. Zucker will be with you shortly. In the meantime, please enjoy our complimentary shiatsu massage chairs.

BOSS. Thank you, we prefer to stand.

CHORUS1. Of course, please let me know if there is anything else I can do to make you comfortable. (Turns away).

BOSS. I’ve always hated the back office. Everything is just a bit teeter-totter. It’s like the sunlight doesn’t reach this far back.

CHORUS3. (Passing by, smiling) Good afternoon.

BOSS. (Smiling insincerely) Good afternoon. (To WHITE) You see? They smile too much.

(CHORUS2 enters carrying two mimosas.)

CHORUS2. Two mimosas. Enjoy. (Exits)

WHITE. (To BOSS) Their manners are disturbing.

CHORUS4. (To CHORUS2) Great job on those mimosas!

BOSS. (To WHITE) And what is with that “can-do” attitude? Obviously they haven’t been beaten down enough.

(CHORUS4 accidentally drop his/her stack of papers. CHORUS1 runs over to help.)

WHITE. (Noticing) Look at that. She’s helping him pick up those papers, rather than reprimanding him for being incompetent.

BOSS. How unsettling.

WHITE. Indeed. If this were my department, I’d have everyone executed.

BOSS. (Smiles) I’ve taught you well, young rattlesnake. I think you’ll do just fine.

(CHORUS1 enters.)

CHORUS1. Mr. Zucker is ready for you now.

BOSS. I’d kiss you “good luck,” but I’m asexual. So you’ll have to settle for an encouraging slap on the ass.
(BOSS slaps WHITE)

BOSS. Everything you think you know, you don’t.

(The large doors open, WHITE walks through. The stage is cleared. A long meeting table is brought in; every seat has a green banker’s desk lamp, lit. All the stage lights dim except two pinhole lights illuminating the head and foot of the table.)

WHITE. Hello?

(CEO enters but remains in the darkness.)

CEO. Good afternoon.

WHITE. Good afternoon, I’m--

WHITE & CEO. --Jessica White.

(The CEO enters into the light and stands at the head of the table. He is a projection on a featureless, white human form. WHITE stands at the foot of the table.)

CEO. Yes, I know. I’m CEO Joe Zucker. It’s a pleasure to meet you. Welcome to Valhalla, Ms. White.

WHITE. I’m thrilled to be here, sir.

CEO. Yes. I’m sure you are. Tell me, Jessica, you’ve been here, what, about an hour now?

WHITE. An hour and 10 minutes.

CEO. And what do you think of Busmessco?

WHITE. Requesting permission to speak freely?

CEO. Granted.

WHITE. My life is BS.

CEO. If only I could nod and smile. Jessica, I’m giving you the “in.”

WHITE. I’m honoured, sir. I assume I’m being designated for Patricia’s old function.

(We hear a finger snap, presumably played by the CEO human form. Two CHORUS drones enter with a chair for WHITE.)

CEO. Why don’t you sit?
(WHITE sits. A CHORUS DRONE places a device with numerous wires onto WHITE’s head.)

CEO. Don’t mind the drones, they are merely performing a CAT scan to map the neurons of your brain.

(White sinks into her chair and grins, she looks at CEO.)

CEO. Jessica, you think in terms of appointments and positions. There are no positions. There are no appointments. There are no CEOs. No Chief VPs. There is no Joe Zucker, or Patricia Greenwich-Whitman, or Jessica White.

(White stares at the CEO human form, transfixed.)

CEO. You think in terms of components. There is no Merrill Lynch, or Lehman Bros., or IBM, or Intel, or Apple. No BP, or BASF, or AXA, or AT&T. No DOW, or S&P, or TSX. There is no Wall Street. There are no avenues or thoroughfares. There is no West or East, Up or Down. There is no individual. There are no units. Do you understand, Ms. White?

WHITE. Are you an existentialist? A spiritualist?

CEO. How unfortunate. Please, try to understand. I am not preaching religion or proclamation. I am not claiming an answer.

WHITE. That feels nice.

CEO. It is ebb and flow, tidal gravity, or ecological balance. It is nature, if you will. It is the order of things, or perhaps the “bigger picture.” It is the atomic, and subatomic, and quark. It is the semantic web; the cloud.

WHITE. I feel as though I am floating away.

CEO. When you look at a corporation you think everyone takes out their little calculators and determines the cost-probability-longterm-benefits-losses-nets-balances—“who knows what?” factors. Just like everyone else. The same paperwork is filed, the same fact is reinterpreted, rearranged, recombobulated, re-re-re-re-made. Quack, quack, quack. That doesn’t involve the bigger system of things.

WHITE. I’m adrift.

CEO. This whole world is a corporation, Ms. White. A plane of particulars, a mountain of mandates, and a canyon of contenders juxtaposed with an ocean of emotion, a sea of sensation, and an atmosphere of aspirations. It has its fins and straightened his posture.
(pause)

CEO. Initiate the sequence.

(A CHORUS drone initializes the device. The CHORUS exits.)

CEO. The master corporation is the nature of things. We work to make singularity equalized. All emotion, anticipation, calculation, devastation, positions, components, units and stocks stabilized. All boredom amused. And so we must obtain you.

(WHITE slips back into her chair, she stares out with a blank expression.)

CEO. What do you say, Ms. White?

WHITE. It's beautiful.

(The CEO projection flickers. It transforms into a projection of WHITE. The lights fade out.)

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SCENE 3 - THE LINE

(The scene fades in. The clock chimes but does not count the hours. The hands are moving rapidly forward.)


VANDERBILT. Besides that last chapter, that was probably the dullest read of my life. (To LELAND) How have you been passing the time?

LELAND. Just a moment. (Continues counting the rough number in the audience.) 325. That's how many people I can see.

VANDERBILT. Leland, you realize you're the only other one in the room.

LELAND. I still have an imagination, Richard. Did you learn anything interesting?

VANDERBILT. It's all much the same dog and pony show that you remember. Loosely based narrative, a few song and dance numbers, some poetry, much of middle of the book is just babbling, some smoke, some magic, and a doomsday story.

LELAND. Right, so it's utterly hopeless?

VANDERBILT. Not completely.

LELAND. How so?

VANDERBILT. Well, we have remained autonomous throughout this entire experience. Which is, of course, a good thing, a very good thing. I just love being me.

LELAND. I don't love you being you. It's irritating, like a stomach ache. You churn my bowels and irk me to purge my insides.

VANDERBILT. This quick start guide does suggest something about purging. (Continues inspecting the quick start guide) Ah, yes, defaeco praeteritus.

VOICE. Number Six-Billion-Thirty-Seven-Million-Four-Hundred Ninety-Two-Thousand-Eight-Hundred-and-Five, Please. Number Six-
Billion-Thirty-Seven-Million-Four-Hundred Ninety-Two-Thousand-Eight-Hundred-and-Five, thank you.

VANDERBILT. It says you should try reflecting.

LELAND. *(Ignoring VANDERBILT)* I suppose it is better than Limbo.

VANDERBILT. You know, I believe Limbo was entirely a human fabrication. Though I’m really not sure.

LELAND. *(Moving away from VANDERBILT)* No art. No complimentary mints.

VANDERBILT. I hear standing on your head helps clear the mind.

LELAND. *(To VANDERBILT)* Don’t you see that I’m ignoring you?

VANDERBILT. I thought something was off-kilter about our conversation. You seem tense.

LELAND. Shouldn’t I be?

VANDERBILT. Stress causes wrinkles. Everything will work itself out.

*(A telephone on a table descends from above.)*

VANDERBILT. You see?

LELAND. Finally, some progress.

VANDERBILT. Now we can call Jerry and settle that tiff over the stools. I hope the long distance isn’t barred. He’s presently abroad in Panama. I’m sure they can afford the charges.

LELAND. Those stools! If only the situation allowed me to pick one up and beat you to death.

VANDERBILT. I’m devastated! There is no way to dial this phone.

*(The telephone rings.)*

VANDERBILT. Well, aren’t you going to answer it?

*(LELAND picks up the telephone receiver and places it to his ear, the VOICE answers.)*

VOICE. Thank you for calling the Purgatory Support Hotline. Unfortunately, we are experiencing a higher than anticipated volume of calls. Please hold for the next available representative.
(A telephone hold tone plays. The DEAD enter and arrange themselves into a line across the stage and wait. Also, two doors are brought in on opposite sides of the stage.)

LELAND. Look, Vanderbilt, other people.

VANDERBILT. I don’t recall inviting guests.

VOICE. Many of your requests can be processed using our automated system. Press *star* to perform common tasks such as pay bills, check your HereafterBucks balance, or report a lost or stolen ticket. If you do not have a touchtone phone, you expired before 1963.

(A hold tone plays continuously. The DEAD fuss and groan.)

LELAND. (Into the telephone) Hello? This is Leland Stumt, I have lost my number and am trapped in the waiting area with a lunatic and an army of fussing corpses. I need rescue sent immediately.

VOICE. Thank you for continuing to hold. Please do not hang up, as you have been placed in a priority sequence and you will lose your spot if you attempt to redial.

(LELAND hangs up the telephone. The hold tone continues.)

VOICE. If you find the wait time to be unbearable, you can try contacting us during our non-peak hours, either before the Cenozoic era or after the End of Ages. Thank you.

LELAND. I’m not waiting that long.

(LELAND walks past the line of the DEAD and bangs on the wall.)

LELAND. Open up in there! I demand to be served immediately.

DEAD1. (To LELAND) Hey, buddy! No cuties.

LELAND. Pardon me?

DEAD1. Back of the line.

LELAND. Excuse me, sir. But we were waiting here first.

DEAD1. (Snorts) Right. Well, we’ve all been waiting a while.

(The DEAD grumble.)

DEAD1. And you’ll be waiting for a lot longer.

LELAND. How much longer?
DEAD1. Does it matter?

VANDERBILT. Told you.

DEAD1. Look, all you need to know is none of us are getting out of here anytime soon.


(The door to HEAVEN swings open. A blue-white light shines through brightly.)

DEAD1. Oh, that’s me. Well, so long, everyone. I don’t plan to remember any of you. Don’t take it personally.

(DEAD1 walks through the door to HEAVEN, it closes behind. The line moves forward.)

VANDERBILT. (To DEAD3) Greetings, I’m Richard Vanderbilt. Were you, by chance, an antique dealer in your past life?

(DEAD3 ignores VANDERBILT.)

VANDERBILT. (To DEAD2) It’s a pleasure, I’m Richard Vanderbilt. Are you studied in industrial design?

(DEAD2 ignores VANDERBILT.)

DEAD2. Do you mind? Some of us are trying to pray.


DEAD2. It’s about time!

(The door to Hell swings open. From within, there is moaning and horrible screaming. A RED HAND reaches through the door.)

DEAD2. Excuse me, there must be some mistake.

(RED HAND beckons DEAD2.)

DEAD2. Forget it, I refuse to go with you. I did what was expected of me. I devoted myself. I’ve been baptized, confirmed, ordained, given the last rights; I went to church for every holiday, even the ones where we chanted on our knees for hours.

(The RED HAND beckons DEAD2.)
DEAD2. I donated to the poor, the blind, the crippled, the lepers, the needy, the hungry, the sad, the tired, the rich; I abstained from sex until I was 25, and I even got circumcised as an adult for this thing.

(The RED HAND beckons DEAD2, with more vigour.)

DEAD2. Say what you want, I’m not budging.

VOICE. Security, we have a sinner in the waiting room with a listening problem. Also, to the owner of the mint green winged unicorn, your vehicle is running.

(A DEMON enters through the door.)

LELAND. A big scary demon, how original.

VANDERBILT. Quiet down, Leland. I’m watching.

(DEMON draws a circle in the air around DEAD2. An invisible chain restrains DEAD2 at the waist.)

DEAD2. Maybe we could come to an arrangement? 30 Hail Marys for a re-evaluation of my file?

VOICE. Any plea bargaining requests must be forwarded to St. Mary of Assumption. Any plea bargaining request must be forwarded to St. Mary of Assumption for processing, thank you.

(DEMON “pulls” DEAD2 towards the door to hell.)

DEAD2. What does it take to get into Heaven these days? I should have been crucified, is that it? Prejudice'

(DEAD2 realizes the struggle is pointless.)

DEAD2. Oh, Hell'

LELAND. That might just be adding insult to injury.

VANDERBILT. I think “fuel to the fire” would be more appropriate.

LELAND. (Crows) Oh, that’s clever.

DEAD2. Please, sir. I don’t want to cross the river.

(DEMON clenches his fist and drags DEAD2 with the imaginary chain. DEAD2 is dragged through the door, screaming. The door to Hell shuts. From behind the door, DEAD2 screams in agony. The line moves forward.)

VANDERBILT. Well, I certainly would prefer not to go there.
LELAND. Absolutely. I regret complaining earlier.

VANDERBILT. So we’re agreed, we stay.

LELAND. We’re agreed, you stay. I want to get into the blue room.

VANDERBILT. You mean Heaven?

LELAND. Strange, I envisioned Heaven being white.

VANDERBILT. I’m certain we can have it painted.

LELAND. I’ll learn to live with it.

VANDERBILT. First, we need to determine how to get in.

LELAND. Again with this “we.”

VANDERBILT. I imagine like any club there are criteria for membership.

LELAND. What “we?” When were we “we?”

VANDERBILT. Now. We’re “we” now.

DEAD3. So, are you guys together?

LELAND. No.

VANDERBILT. Yes.

LELAND. For the time being.

DEAD3. For all eternity, I suppose.

LELAND. Thank you for reminding me.

DEAD3. I think it’s nice.

VANDERBILT. Thank you, we’re very proud.

DEAD3. I didn’t see you on the bus. Are you traveling with the United Church group?

LELAND. No, we aren’t.

DEAD3. Oh. Anglican? Presbyterian?

LELAND. No.

VANDERBILT. I’m not even sure what those are.

DEAD3. Non-denominational? Metropolitan?

VANDERBILT. No, we are travelling alone.

DEAD3. I see. How unfortunate. At least you have each other, no matter where you end up.

VOICE. Paging Muhammad Hammad Khuda Muamla Najam Hammad Muhammad. Paging Mr. Muhammad, thank you.

DEAD3. Okay, that’s me. It was nice meeting you.

(The door to Heaven swings open. A blue-white light shines through brightly. A BLUE HAND emerges and beckons DEAD3.)

DEAD3. You should really consider joining the United Church. They don’t have issues with sodomy.

VANDERBILT. Pardon?

(DEAD3 steps into the doorway.)

DEAD3. Remember my advice.

(DEAD3 walks through the door into Heaven.)

LELAND. What advice?

DEAD3. (As if a fading echo) That you’re screwed!

(The door to Heaven closes.)

VANDERBILT. What? (To LELAND) What did he say?

LELAND. I don’t know. Does it matter?

(The line moves forward. The telephone hold tone is heard for a few seconds.)

VANDERBILT. I suppose it’s your turn, now.

DEAD4. I’m so nervous!

(DEAD4 hiccups.)

VANDERBILT. A hiccup? How peculiar.

LELAND. Can the dead “hiccup”?

(DEAD4 hiccups.)
DEAD4. This always happens to me when I get nervous.

(DEAD4 hiccups.)

DEAD4. Or if I eat spicy food. Oh, this isn’t how I want to face the big man.

LELAND. Do you have a lot of transgressions to confess?

DEAD4. I’m not sure. I was a good person, most of the time. I think.

(DEAD4 hiccups.)

DEAD4. It’s hard to tell what counts as a sin. A lot of things fall into grey areas.

LELAND. What do you mean?

DEAD4. Like, forgetting to hold the door open for people, shouting profanities when you stub your toe, having sexual thoughts about your parents, watching people die instead of helping them, torching houses filled with sinners.

LELAND. Those last few things certainly sound questionable.

DEAD4. Why are you grilling me? Are you an angel?

LELAND. No. I’m just a concerned citizen.

DEAD4. I’m sure they probably only punish the really horrible people. Like Hitler, right?

(DEAD4 hiccups.)

DEAD4. I mean, I definitely wasn’t Mother Theresa. But even she had her moments. Or what about Pope Pius XII? Or St. Ambrose of Milan?


(DEAD4 hiccups.)

DEAD4. Oh, no! That’s me! I’m going to Hell.

(DEAD4 hiccups.)

VANDERBILT. You can’t be certain of that.

DEAD4. Yes, I can. My chances are slim.
(DEAD4 hiccups.)

LELAND. (To VANDERBILT) She might have a point.

VANDERBILT. Leland, be supportive.

LELAND. I'm just being realistic.

(The door to Heaven opens. A blue-white light shines through brightly. A BLUE HAND appears in the doorway. It beckons DEAD4.)

DEAD4. Oh, thank god! (Shocked) Oops! I just took the Lord's name in vain. My bad! (To BLUE HAND) Are we cool?

(BLUE HAND gives thumbs up. Beckons DEAD4.)

DEAD4. (To VANDERBILT and LELAND) Good luck! I'd stay and chat but I've been craving a facial for eons.

(DEAD4 enters Heaven, the door closes behind. The line moves up.)

LELAND. What about us, Vanderbilt? What do you suppose will happen?

VANDERBILT. I'm sure everything will be fine. That person was a questionable recruit and she got in.


(The door to hell opens. DEMON emerges. He stares menacingly at LELAND and VANDERBILT.)

LELAND. Vanderbilt?

VANDERBILT. Leland?

LELAND. Hold me.

(VANDERBILT and LELAND embrace. DEMON approaches.)

LELAND. Well, I suppose this is it.

VANDERBILT. Goodbye, old friend.

(The DEMON turns away and exits through the door to Heaven, leaving it open.)

VANDERBILT. Oh, false alarm?
LELAND. Get off! (Pushes away from VANDERBILT) You stink of garlic!

VANDERBILT. I'm sorry. It's been a while since my teeth were brushed.

LELAND. Look, that thing forgot to close the doors.

VANDERBILT. Oh, no! I'm not sneaking in. I'm not wearing the proper footwear.

(DEAD5 and DEAD6 exchange a look with one another. They nod, break from the line and enter Heaven.)


(LELAND walks up to the door to Heaven. Just before he reaches it, the door slams shut with force.)

VANDERBILT. Well, we tried.

LELAND. Did we? Now what?

(VANDERBILT and LELAND realize the stage is empty. The hold tone plays again for a few moments prior to fading out.)

SCENE 4 - THE LAST SUPPER


(A dinner bell, in the traditional triangle shape, descends from above. A SERVANT enters and rings it. Suddenly, a procession of SERVANTS enter dressed in tuxedos and carrying oversized silver platters with ornate dome covers, followed by a lengthy table with a candelabra and only two chairs at which VANDERBILT and LELAND instinctively sit.)

LELAND. Do you suppose they'll have entertainment?

VANDERBILT. I'd imagine so. It is Friday night, after all.

(The MAÎTRE D' enters.)

MAÎTRE D'. Welcome, gentlemen. I do apologize about the long wait for your table. We have been particularly busy these last few centuries. I am the Maître D' and I will personally be serving you this evening.

VANDERBILT. Hello.
MAÎTRE D’. It is my pleasure to be delivering your last supper.

LELAND. Finally, some proper service.

MAÎTRE D’. We would love to honour you with a lavish meal before your crucifixion.

LELAND. Oh, that’s nice.

MAÎTRE D’. Of course, all expenses are paid so I would like to encourage outright gluttony. Would you like to see the wine list, sirs?

VANDERBILT. Certainly.

(A SERVANT brings a wine list.)

MAÎTRE D’. I’m afraid we are all out of the Blood of Christ.

VANDERBILT. Not a problem, we’ll have the 13th Century Chateaux Cathars.

MAÎTRE D’. Excellent choice. This wine is fiery and smokey on the nose, with a bold finish on the mouth.

(A SERVANT opens a bottle of wine in the traditional style. VANDERBILT and LELAND indulge.)

MAÎTRE D’. Tonight’s dinner has been especially prepared for you by Chef Yeshua ben Yusef himself. They are some of our absolute finest spoils.

(The SERVANTS deliver the trays to the table and reveal the dishes. They are empty.)

MAÎTRE D’. You’ll be starting with a Tartar of Kobe beef with Imperial Beluga caviar and Templar oyster.

VANDERBILT. What pleasures! (He looks on in amazement)

MAÎTRE D’. Followed by Tarte Fine of White and Black truffle, and Macedonian cheeks with Credence Clear as Water glaze.

LELAND. (Gleeful) What temptations!

MAÎTRE D’. For afterwards, a Cyprus Creme of foie gras with Papal bean, Sorbet “Dom Harrod,”and Polysemy as an digestif.

(VANDERBILT and LELAND vigorously eat the invisible food.)

MAÎTRE D’. I’m so pleased you both find everything to your liking. The food never stops so please, continue to eat. Forever even.
LELAND. It's indescribable!

VANDERBILT. Could you pass the mustard?

(LELAND throws VANDERBILT an empty mustard container.)

VANDERBILT. It's unimaginable!

LELAND. Do you have any sour cream?

(VANDERBILT slides the sour cream.)

LELAND. I'm flummoxed!

VANDERBILT. How about Worcestershire sauce?

LELAND. (To MAÎTRE D') Excuse me, boy.

MAÎTRE D'. Is everything alright, sir?

LELAND. Everything is more than perfect. I would like to inquire about the chef.

MAÎTRE D'. Yes?

LELAND. Who is He?

MAÎTRE D'. I don't understand the question.

VANDERBILT. Who are we to thank for this Heavenly meal?

MAÎTRE D'. Why thank yourselves, of course. This is your meal.

LELAND. It certainly is perfect.

(They eat.)

MAÎTRE D'. Well, we must be off. There are many more patrons to serve. If you need anything, please ring the dinner bell.

(MAÎTRE D' points to the dinner bell as it slowly ascends to disappear.)

MAÎTRE D'. Goodnight, sirs. I wish you pleasant sufferings.

(MAÎTRE D' and SERVANTS exit.)

LELAND. Wait! Boy, wait! You forgot your tip.

VANDERBILT. How unfortunate.

LELAND. More food!
VANDERBILT. More wine!

(They eat vigorously)


(The stage lights turn fully red. They look at one another for a moment, suddenly a bittersweet realization dawns upon them.)

VANDERBILT. I wish you had read No Exit or even Waiting for Godot.

LELAND. Does it matter?

(The clock chimes but does not count the hours. The hands spin backwards.)

VANDERBILT & LELAND. (One shrugs, the other sighs) Well, let's get on with it.

(They continue to eat. Fade to black.)

fin xxx
Artist’s Statement

The Significance of the Absurd

As a genre, Theatre of the Absurd is loosely defined and difficult to pinpoint. In search of a concrete framework I turned to the preeminent theorist in the field of absurdism, Martin Esslin. In his text, Esslin attempts to shape the concept from a loose idea to a stable genre. Stemming back to the philosophical works of Nietzsche, among others, absurdism engages the discord between the human inclination to search for inherent meaning and the ultimate inability to find any (Esslin 400, 419). Our obsession to find the unattainable end-in-itself, or, more simply, the answer to the big ‘why’ question of life is, according to Esslin, innately absurd (400, 419). Most any drama that deals with this seemingly irresolvable problem can be considered absurdist in scope or part of the absurdist tradition. Yet even after narrowing the lens, the absurdist umbrella still shadows a range of dramatic styles and modes; Esslin avoids simplifying the definition. This project explores some of the nuances of this catchall category of drama. Many modes, works and writers are considered absurdist, ranging from the nonsensical and experimental plays of Samuel Beckett to the outrageous yet conventional plays of Christopher Durang. To include all the nuances of absurdism in this project would be discordant, to define all the ones used would be equally challenging, instead I focus on the main absurdist threads on which Rhubarb is based.

For Esslin, absurdist dramatic art must focus on “wonder in the face of an inexplicable universe” (399). The central conflict must be Neitzsche’s absurdism and the main protagonist lost or torn within this debate (401). In Rhubarb, I place the protagonists within their respected inexplicable universes. I’ll begin with Case #6,037,492,801 where the
duo of main characters is presented in a classic absurdist plot: humankind facing the unknowns of the afterlife. The emerging critique suggests the impossibility of Leland and Richard knowing they are already in Hell; they feel trapped in a persistent mystery that has no solution. Turning to Fishbowl, Jessica White, a new recruit who is presented as a tabula rasa, enters the inexplicable universe of a seemingly incomprehensible corporate machine. Her presentation as a cog within the machine symbolic of humankind within the hamster wheel of life is a contemporary interpretation of the absurdist question, a critique of the dehumanizing corporate system.

Plays of Theatre of the Absurd usually have a limited cast of (often two) prototypical protagonists (Esslin 336-337). They function primarily as metaphors, lacking conventional human qualities. The protagonists of Rhubarb are all flat, presented as blank slates for the audience to inhabit vicariously. In Case #6,037,492,801, Leland and Richard are two counterparts of one generic identity; their roles are largely interchangeable. Jessica White of Fishbowl is similarly a prototype without important character features and functions more as a "springboard" for the matters being explored in the play. Another kind of absurdist character is the cliche, presented as exaggerated (337). The antagonists of Fishbowl are decidedly stereotypical and unrealistic. Patricia Greenwich-Whitman is a caricature of an obsessed powerwoman (representing the managerial nonsense of the corporate machine) and Dean (the overly dramatic super-receptionist) is the end product.

Theatre of the Absurd is often interested in challenging traditional notions of time and space. In contrast to the realist movements of the Modern period, the absurdists reduced the contemporary stage to small "slice of life" moments that are metaphorical for the world at large (Harrop and Epstein, 195). The "quintessential absurdist stage is
stripped down to a minimum... focusing on man as a bare, forked animal in the middle” (195). As much as possible the absurdist stage should be contained within a vacuum, conveying a feeling of ‘nothingness’ (195). As such, both plays in Rhubarb take a reductionist approach and have as little extra setting as possible. In Case #6,037,492,801 there is nothing more than two stools and light bulb with additional props being added and removed as needed. In Fishbowl, all the action is contained within the same, single cubicle, which is recycled by both Jessica White and Patricia Greenwich-Whitman. At the close of the play the stage is stripped bare and replaced by a single, oversized table and two chairs. In terms of the absurdist view on time, there is a desire to subvert the natural flow by challenging the need to move forward temporally (201). In Rhubarb time is challenged through the circular structure of the plays (the end returning to the beginning) and the inconsistent pace (time is alternately expanded, contracted and even frozen). I discuss the function of time in absurdist drama in more depth later in the section “Challenging the Well-Made Play.”

The genre of Theatre of the Absurd is a two-faced influence for this project. As an emigrant of (then) Communist Poland, I am inherently drawn to Polish absurdist texts and have refined Rhubarb to exhibit the variations of Eastern absurdist drama. In his text, Esslin surveys the two distinct schools of Theatre of the Absurd: the Western school from the US and UK (e.g. Beckett, Stoppard, and Albee, etc.), and the Eastern absurdists of Slavic decent, notably of the former Eastern block (e.g. Ionesco, Mrożek, and Rożewicz, etc.). The absurdist framework, as discussed above, rose from the West to become the mould for the Eastern schools that took the genre and developed it uniquely. The key difference being Western absurdism is largely apolitical whereas the Eastern school has strong interest in
evoking political questions (Esslin, 317). In Case #6,037,492,801, various religious politics are critiqued. In Fishbowl, the corporate political system is scrutinized. Further, both plays engage “the perplexity of man confronted with a soulless, over-mechanized, over-organized world,” which Esslin notes is central to the majority of Eastern absurdist drama (317). In Case #6,037,492,801 Leland and Richard are confronted with a soulless and arbitrarily constructed religious system; similarly, Fishbowl places Jessica White in the faceless and flummoxing corporate organization. Finally, Esslin notes that Eastern absurdist drama is heavier with allegory than its Western counterpart; the plot is often a convoluted façade of deeper meanings contain within the text (317). The plays of Rhubarb present surrealism to invite the spectator to question the meanings of the text. The allegories are ultimately made plain in the final scenes of both works.

Language is Meaningless

Absurdism and nonsense are naturally paired. Absurdists like Beckett and Ionesco believe language is limited and self-reflexive, unable to describe anything outside of itself (Esslin, 403). Their plays experiment with the functions of language and often feature surrealistic dialogue making use of nonsense, non-sequitur, obscure and meaningless dialogue, in some cases inventing language and its codes altogether (341). Rhubarb features wordplay as a central mechanism, without venturing so far as Beckett or Ionesco into the realm of meaninglessness. Stichomythia (non-sequitur dialogue) is intended to subvert the logical progression of dialogue. In Case #6,037,492,801 the two protagonists are regularly engaged in atomized, non-relative dialogue; their conversations progress but are not logically consecutive. Representing the hopelessness of their situation, the pair
explores solutions without actually getting anywhere or as Richard so bluntly emphasizes at the conclusion of the play: “Let’s get on with it” (Case #6,037,492,801, 2.4). In Fishbowl, something similar occurs during Jessica’s unsynced dialogue(s) with Patricia Greenwich-Whitman and Dean. Although there is the assumption that the whole of Businessco is “tracking,” Jessica never realizes the purpose of her situation until she is absorbed into the corporate machine at the close of the play. Furthermore, Rhubarb features obfuscated and invented (sometimes nonsense) language. In Fishbowl this is intended to satirize corporate diction where the antagonist characters (most notably Patricia Greenwich-Whitman) seem to be speaking in a certain corporate speech that is unknown to Jessica or the audience. Examples of obfuscated language include “are you tracking?” “Tic Tacs in our candy store,” “loop me in,” and the overused “touch base.” Examples of invented language include “solutionary,” “preponed,” and “giftability.” In terms of including meaningless dialogue in Rhubarb, Fishbowl features a strong nonsense component where some language has no meaning at all. For example the frequent use of “yada, yada” to replace words, sentences and even entire paragraphs. Perhaps the most notable use of meaningless language is in the title of the project itself. “Rhubarb” is a classic filler word used in mime and improv to give the audience the illusion of actors speaking. And so the title frames the meaninglessness of language from the onset.

**Humour**

Rhubarb is foremost a satire. This mode of writing exposes the failings of individuals, institutions, or societies to ridicule (OED). Satire is often a by-product of an absurdist tradition interested in illuminating the foibles of human wondering in the
inexplicable universe. To offer a functional definition of satire I turn to Northrope Frye’s essay on the “Theory of Myths.” According to Frye, satire has two essential components: one is humour founded in the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack (224). The satirical attack is usually directed at taboo subject matter and is contemporary in scope (224). In order to be successful, the attack must create agreement between writer and audience about the object’s undesirability (224). *Fishbowl* satirizes the modern cubicle work life and the human drone of the corporate machine. The attack is immediately recognizable through the use of clichéd elements of plot (e.g. arbitrary corporate rules), setting (e.g. the cubical farm), and character (e.g. the talking head CEO). *Case #6,037,492,801* deals with the age-old question of life after death. The satire engages contemporary concerns of Catholicism and other modernized religious structures that mirror corporate dogma.

In classical terms, *Rhubarb* employs both Horatian (indirect) and Juvenalian (direct) satire. The targets of Horatian satire are alluded to and the weight of the humour is light and witty (OED). Horation satire solicits the audience to read a work against the grain. In contrast Juvenalian satire attacks with confrontational humour. The critique is delivered to the audience with minimal allusion. As a way to emulate the popular ‘thrust and parry’ style used by absurdist writers, the plays of *Rhubarb* feature a contrast between Horatian and Juvenalian satire to mimic the back and forth motion of plays such as *Waiting for Godot*. The Juvenalian satire is a primary feature of the antagonists in the project, specifically Case Worker and Maître D’ of *Case #6,037,492,801* and Patricia Greenwich-Whitman (later Jessica White), Dean and CEO Joe Zucker of *Fishbowl*. 
Employing humour within absurdist drama requires balance. The heaviness of the absurdist critique can be successfully lightened through the use of humour; without it the dramas would be sermonizing. However, employing too much humour causes the vital message of the critique to potentially be lost. Although the balance must be precise, there is no universal formula for determining the level of humour to use in a work. *Case #6,037,492,801* is significantly less humourous than *Fishbowl*, however neither play attempts to force critique onto the audience. The works can be enjoyed for the humour or the metaphors, but through balance should ideally engage both.

**Performance Studies**

Many hours were spent researching the performance studies of absurdist drama. I thought it vital to achieve a fundamental understanding of absurdist acting since *Rhubarb* has been written with the intention for production. In *Acting with Style*, Harrop and Epstein describe the performance standards of the absurdist actor. In terms of movement, the action of the absurd tends to be circular. The actors should follow basic movement patterns around the stage, never leading anywhere and yet going about their business just the same (Harrop and Epstein, 200). The actors should make no progress in leaving the space of the stage and should repeat the same movements. This dynamic is presented in numerous ways throughout *Rhubarb*. Both plays feature protagonists confined within the circular world presented to the spectator and never progress into further places. Even though both plays end within a different space on stage, they are merely repetitions of the spaces they leave behind. In *Case #6,037,492,801*, Leland and Vanderbilt never leave purgatory; in *Fishbowl*, Jessica remains trapped within the corporate box. To demonstrate,
in *Case #6,037,492,801*, there is a cyclic return to original starting position at the end of each scene as Leland and Vanderbilt return to waiting, making a full circle back to where the play begins. The duo never leaves the confines of the stage, and ultimately the confines of their predicament. In *Fishbowl*, the action similarly returns to the starting position as Jessica is re-jailed in her cubicle, almost scene after scene. To look at individual scenes that feature circular patterns, in Act 2, Scene 5 of *Fishbowl*, Jessica’s character is inverted as she transforms into Boss and replays the opening scene of Act 1. The physical movement is circular when the antagonists loop around Jessica’s desk and the action restarts, such as when Patricia Greenwich-Whitman leaves and immediately returns under new pretenses during the transition between Act 1, scenes 4 and 5.

The use of the mechanical is a frequent convention of the absurdist actor. A particular favourite of Ionesco, this technique is presented as the “conscious automatism” of the actors (Harrop and Epstein, 202). Without giving the actors the stiff, clockwork like qualities of the puppet, the actor should appear as though they move in a futile manner to certain unspoken higher conventions (203). The different ensembles within Rhubarb exemplify this mechanization. In *Case #6,037,492,801*, the Dead and Servants are governed by the modernized rules of the afterlife; the Dead obediently wait in line and wait for their arbitrary turn, and the Servants move within pre-determined directions known only to the Maître D’. The Chorus of *Fishbowl* is more wholly a representation of Ionesco’s conscious automatism. As the conveyor they function like a Rube Goldberg Machine conveyor belt; as the procession they function like a magnetic tail, following Patricia when she enters the stage and automatically lining up at the desk when visiting Jessica.
Challenging the Well-made Play

The absurdist mode of writing usually challenges the formalized “well-made play,” a set of standardized plot conventions that dictate modern play construction. Primarily defined in the early to mid-19th Century by dramatist Eugene Scribe, the well-made play originated as a genre, but through popularization has come to codify most 20th Century drama. As Marvin Carlson explains, “the well-made play became and still remains the traditional model of play construction” (216). The well-made play establishes the familiar three to five act structure of modern dramas where the plot is revealed and complicated through a series of interconnected expository scenes. The majority of the plot development occurs at the beginning of the play, usually within the first two or three acts. The well-made play generally ends with a tight resolution in which the plot reaches a rapid climax and dénouement. This format is nostalgic, being similar to the Shakespearean and Greek plays that employ the Freytag Pyramid (exposition–rising action–climax–falling action–dénouement) and also follows the recommendations of Aristotle’s *On Poetics* papers.

The format of *Rhubarb* is structured in opposition to the conventions of the well-made play. The plays progress with relatively steady rhythm while carefully avoiding a sense of rising action in favour of constant, forward locomotion. The plot never twists or turns, but rather constantly builds to an inevitable answer that restates the absurdist question. The works conclude with an open-ended and rapid anti-dénouement that circles back to the beginning. In *Case #6,037,492,801* there is an illusion that Leland and Richard will eventually be called from the Purgatory queue to receive their final judgment, instead that moment in time is repeatedly subverted. The Caseworker denies the protagonists “fulfillment,” the never ending Line of the Dead conveniently stops just short of their entry.
into Heaven, and the play concludes with Leland and Richard making the realization that the eternal “buffet” is synonymous with a permanent wait in Purgatory. *Fishbowl* shows Jessica being regularly venerated and promoted with a sense of climbing the corporate ladder, but instead the play reaches the anti-climactic inevitability of inserting Jessica back into the corporate machine from which she began. When Jessica is “given the in,” we assume an answer to the metaphor of the play however it merely reinterprets the same absurdist questions the play sets to demystify. To defy structure based on exposition, the plays subvert time by avoiding traditional interconnected scenes and following atypical progression to undermine the Freytagian order. Between the four scenes of *Case #6,037,492,801* there are significant lapses featuring expository action not presented to the audience. In *Fishbowl*, time is fast forwarded as scenes leap into future even though Jessica claims she has been an employee of BSco for “an hour and twenty minutes” (3.1). *Rhubarb* as a whole is a temporal loop as the project returns to the play with which it began; book-ending *Fishbowl* with *Case #6,037,492,801* subverts the Freytag pyramid of play construction by interrupting plot order with an entire other play.

**Authors and Other**

Some of the most valuable advice I’ve received was offered by Rosemary Nixon, University of Windsor Writer-in-Residence: Good writing is hundreds of books and some strong breathing in. As if part of an artistic conversation, it is vital to take inspiration from others into the breadth of your own style. In preparation for this project I consumed (inhaled?) many plays (and some prose) from the most influential absurdist, some of
which I will discuss below, all of which are cited in the “Works Consulted” portion of the bibliography.

Christopher Durang. My mother continues to deny ever having a one-night stand with Durang and really wishes I would stop calling him my “legitimate father.” Regardless of the details, he is the single most influential playwright on my style and this project. Durang is a contemporary who is writing long after the “death” of Theatre of the Absurd. His style is described as outrageous; his interests are in questions of the modern existential, like those driving Fishbowl. His plays concern religious bureaucracies, media as dogma, and contemporary challenges to human identity. Durang’s works guided me as I perfected my own characters. Durang’s have a sense of vibrancy unseen in other absurdist works, while retaining their classic prototypical structure. The character Jessica White is modeled on the passive dreamer Chris of Business Lunch in the Russian Tea Room; in the same play, Patricia Greenwich-Whitman can be likened to powerwoman Melissa Stern, a neurotic, obsessive compulsive that loves to “push the envelope.” The treatment of religion in Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You inspired the brash representations of the afterlife in Scenes 2 and 4 of Case #6,037,492,801, approaching the religious subject matter with an intentional lack of delicacy. Durang’s works rely on offensive humour to deliver their critique, his intention to shock the audience into laughing. Humour occurs in a subjective moment during the absence of emotion, a chance to slip in heavy critique.

Particular plays by Durang that have influenced this project are DMV Tyrant, Funeral Parlor, Canker Sores and Other Distractions, Nina in the Morning, One Minute Play, The Nature and Purpose of the Universe, Death Comes To Us All, Mary Agnes, and The Actor’s Nightmare (among many others).
Jean-Paul Sartre and Samuel Beckett. The obvious inspiration for Case #6,037,492,801 is the play *No Exit*. Sartre is technically an existentialist writer and indirectly influenced the Theatre of the Absurd school; his work specifically inspired the father of absurdism, Samuel Beckett, another primary influence on this project. The central plot concept of *No Exit*, “hell is other people,” is borrowed and stripped bare for Case #6,037,492,801; the main characters’ Hell is forced eternity with each another, without exit. Although there is external predetermination to the situation presented in *No Exit*, the characters ultimately retain control over the future of their afterlife by actively choosing to interact rather than ignoring their co-inhabitants. Much like the trio from *No Exit* realize, Leland and Richard come to understand they must learn to tolerate one another as “this is their meal” (*Case #6,037,892,401*, 2.4). Presenting prototypical characters with no life beyond the walls of the stage mirrors *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett. Referenced metadramatically in *Case #6,037,492,801* and alluded to in *Fishbowl*, the characters share similar functions as purely metaphorical counterparts of the larger absurdist critique; their individual purpose is weaved into the bigger tapestry. There are also many other Godotian references throughout the *Case #6,037,492,801*, such as Richard’s missing carrot and stinky breath, and having a plot with no developments, twice over.

**Polacks: Mrozek, Głowacki, and Witkiewicz.** As mentioned, this project leans towards the conventions of Eastern European absurdist playwrights. There were more writers of Polish descent producing in the absurdist genre than any other nationality, likely due to the fierce oppression of Poland under communist rule. Absurdist drama provided a creative means of challenging inexplicable questions (largely political) and social taboos without fear of punitive retaliation. *Striptease* by Sławomir Mrożek features a similar duo character
cast to Case #6,037,492,801 at the mercy of an unknown force, the figureless hand being a borrowed plot device. This character represents the puppet master that seems to control all aspects of the world with a gentle tug; they fight control but ultimately succumb with marginal resistance. Further, the convention of stripping the stage is present in Fishbowl when the stage is emptied of all but two people. The audience’s attention is focused on a diluted scene that convinces the audience to listen to the direct critique. Hunting Cockroaches by Janusz Gowacki also guided the temporal disturbances in both plays. Few absurdists plays feature expanding or contracting time, rather more often feature a single, frozen moment. Gowacki creates scenes that jump back and forth between seemingly random timeframes that weave into a single picture. Fishbowl has an erratic timeframe that is stuck on fast-forward but also erratic nonetheless. Other plays by Polish absurdist writers influencing this project are The Madman and the Nun by Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz, and the Princess of Burgundia by Witold Gombrowicz.

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The absurdist tradition sets itself apart from other drama that follow similar formats in plot progression and forces the writer to step outside traditional literary critical modes and, ideally, explore new methods and forms of expression. These works are interested in the metaphorical by presenting a series of conscious and complicated human situations in which the audience becomes intertwined and then untangled (Esslin, 186). At face value the drama is allegory, the implication of the absurdist text is to critique human wondering remaining tucked between the grains. From the outset I had the intention of producing plays that echo my own feelings of constant curiosity while also appeasing my
delight for nonsense. When I began writing this project I knew that I was producing in a
dead genre. Theatre of the Absurd reached the height of its popularity during the middle of
the last century and there have been few recent plays. Yet absurdist works like Waiting for
Godot and The Zoo Story remain brilliantly relevant mostly because the questions posed by
these plays are unanswerable and endurably compelling. We continue to face an
inexplicable future and experience the exuberance of human wonder. And so rhubarb still
grows.
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Vita Auctoris

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