

OFFICE SPACE

A 10-Minute Play

By Thompson MacKenzie Scribner

Cast of Characters:

OPERATOR

YOUNG

INTERVIEWER 1 & PHONE 1

INTERVIEWER 2 & PHONE 2

INTERVIEWER 3 & PHONE 3

Setting:

Interior office. A cubical, with a phone, a rolling chair, and a wealth of hiding places. The

OPERATOR sits alone.

Note on Casting:

All roles are open to any gender casting, but in the event that the OPERATOR is played by a woman-presenting actor, the role of YOUNG should also be changed to a woman role (altering any lines that refer to YOUNG as “my father” or “daddy”). This is a play about children and their parents, not about men and women.

4351 Peninsula Players Road

Fish Creek, WI 54212

Phone: 801-889-4376

Email: thompsonscribner@gmail.com

[palpable stagnancy]

[the OPERATOR watches a video on their cell phone. The audio is muffled, and played off of a recording. Heard is the sound of several interviewer's shouting for YOUNG's attention. One voice breaks through the crowd.]

INTERVIEWER 1

Dr Young, did you encounter any difficulties on your flight?

YOUNG

Anyone who tells you that flying the space shuttle isn't difficult has clearly never been inside it.

INTERVIEWER 1

Anything unexpected?

YOUNG

All according to plan.

[the interviewers shout again, until a new voice gets chosen.]

INTERVIEWER 2

What is the first thing you're going to do, now that you're back?

YOUNG

I've got three kisses on my list. One for my wife, and one for each of my parents.

[the interviewers shout again, until a new voice gets chosen.]

INTERVIEWER 3

Dr Young, do you have anything to say to the kids watching at home?

[there's a short pause, as he contemplates his message.]
[then faintly, as if further from the audio recorder:]

YOUNG

Bring that thing closer.

[clearly, and deliberately into the microphone.]

The Dream...is ALIVE.

[a short pause, interrupted when the phone rings. It rings twice, then stops. An unseen voice is heard, unintelligibly answering the phone.]

[the OPERATOR rewinds the video, and we hear the ending repeated]

INTERVIEWER 3

—say to the kids watching at home?

YOUNG

Bring that thing closer.

The Dream...is—

[the phone rings again. It rings 3 times, then stops. Another offstage voice is heard, picking up the phone. The OPERATOR rewinds, presses play again]

YOUNG

The Dream—

[the phone rings again, 3 rings, and then the OPERATOR grabs the phone]

OPERATOR

NASA operator. How can I direct your call?

Transferring...

[hangs up the phone]

Is *alive*.

Doctor of Philosophy. Keeping dreams alive.

[a burdened silence]

[the phone rings again, and the OPERATOR throws it across the room. From the other side of the stage, a phone, the same kind, slides across the floor, directly to the OPERATOR's seat.]

For a pure substance, there's a temperature at which the substance transitions from a liquid to a gaseous phase.

This temperature is called the boiling point.

Maybe you remember that from 7th grade science.

[the phone begins to ring again. The OPERATOR sets the phone on their desk, answers it, and immediately hangs up]

Water, H₂O, boils at 100°C at sea level. But the higher the altitude, the lower the pressure. The lower the pressure, the lower the boiling point.

The DREAM...is alive.

[another phone slides in from the other side of the stage, on speaker phone]

PHONE 1

Hello?

OPERATOR

NASA operator, How can I direct your call?

PHONE 1

Yeah, I need Davidson, engineering.

OPERATOR

Transferring...

[the OPERATOR rolls to the phone, but instead of bending down to transfer it, they kick it back offstage. From the same side as the first phone, another phone slides across the floor, settling itself next to the first phone.]

My father was in engineering.

Back before the space shuttle missions.

His father was a mechanic. The blue-suited engineers.

See, daddy was an engineer but he sure wasn't a doctor.

I'm the only doctor in the family.

[the phones ring. The OPERATOR picks one phone up, and the other phone is picked up by an emerging hand. The phone then disappears behind the cubicle as the two speak.]

PHONE 2

I didn't know you were a doctor! Doctor of what?

OPERATOR

Doctor of dreams, it would appear.

PHONE 2

You're funny, does anyone else tell you that?

OPERATOR

Transferring...

[the OPERATOR hangs up the phone. After a moment of confusion, so does the extra hand.]

Organic chemistry.

I wanted to be an astronaut, just like my old man.

My father built his vessels out of cardboard.

I built mine out of sheet metal.

I attached a radio to a baseball helmet, strapped myself into the cockpit. And I would pray.

The dream was alive.

[the new phone rings. The OPERATOR rips the phone off of the chord, and tosses it behind them. A new hand reaches out and grabs the chord, attaching a new phone to it and placing the phone back in place]

The future is limitless.

Your goals are your reality.

The sky is the limit.

The stars...

[the phone rings. It stops. Silence. It rings again, a new tone of ring. Silence. A third tone. The OPERATOR picks it up]

NASA operator. How can I direct your call?

Mathematics or engineering?

College or trade school?

A or B?

Doesn't matter all that much.

Transferring...

[the OPERATOR fully transfers the phone this time. Contemplatively, even gently.]

Water still boils in space. Did you know that?

Actually, it boils *instantly*.

The pressure is almost zero. You have to create artificial air pressure to drink anything.

On earth, when water boils, it starts with a bubble.

The temperature rises until it meets the level of atmospheric pressure and converts some of that liquid into vapor.

One small bubble, and then another, and another.

They rise up in a pattern, following each other toward the surface.

Rising

Reaching

Popping.

In space, there's only ever one bubble.

And it just grows.

It doesn't rise. There's no gravity.

It has nowhere to go.

So it grows. And it boils.

[several phones appear on stage, and different hands all reach to answer it at the same time. The OPERATOR picks up a phone as well]

Dialing out. Give me HQ.

[dial tone occurs, 4 or 5 times, the phones all hang up, except for the OPERATOR phone]

There's no one there. Not unless there's an active mission going on. Which there hasn't been in 4 and ½ months.

[hangs up, dials again]

Dialing out. Give me the cockpit.

[the phones all get picked up, and instantly hung up]

They just don't send up the monkeys like they used to.

When I was 11, I was an astronaut.

[the space changes. We are among the stars. The OPERATOR might leave the chair for this sequence, returning to the chair by the time they 'get to NASA']

I touched the moon. Every night. Except during the new moon. Then I went to Polaris.

Or Neptune.

Or Jupiter

To get stupider.

Went to college.

Got stupider.

Searched for knowledge

Received my doctorate.

Got to NASA.

Picked up the phones.

Asked for the moon.

Got scolded.

[the phones all pick themselves up, and voices come out]

ALL PHONES

IT IS A PRIVILEGE TO SERVE YOUR COUNTRY

[the phones hang themselves up, violently]

OPERATOR

And so it is.

[the phones pick themselves up again]

ALL PHONES

IT IS A BLESSING TO BE EMPLOYED

[the phones hang themselves up, in slow motion]

OPERATOR

And so I am.

During undergrad, I worked nights at a hotel.

[one of the phones picks itself up, and speaks]

PHONE 3

Marriott Suites, would you like a reservation?

OPERATOR

For two whole years, I never saw the stars.

I'd traded them away for fluorescent bulbs.

A part of me hoped they'd disappeared.

That I wasn't the only one who couldn't see them.

For two revolutions, I missed the stars

[all the phones pick themselves up, and speak over each other in a disorganized cacophony]

ALL PHONES

Marriott Suites, would you like a reservation? Marriott Suites, would you like a reservation?
reservation? Marriott Suites, would you like a reservation? Marriott Suites, would you like a reservation?
Suites, would you like a reservation? Marriott Suites, would you like a reservation?
reservation? Marriott Suites, would you like a reservation? Marriott Suites, would you like a reservation?
would you like a reservation? Marriott Suites, would you like a reservation?
reservation?

OPERATOR

I could have forgotten all about them.

Except

At the end of each shift, I made the guests coffee.

And first, I boiled the water.

With every bubble

Every pop

I remembered what I was suffering for

Losing sleep and sustenance for

Losing my religion for

I saw the bubble growing and growing and growing and growing
And I went home, and I went to sleep.

And I went to school

And I went to work.

Knowing one day, the stars would be expecting me.

[the OPERATOR's phone rings. They stare at it, expecting something to happen. It doesn't. It keeps ringing. After far too long, the OPERATOR answers]

*[they listen. There's nothing on the other end]
[into the phone]*

Was I better off then?

A lightyear away from where I am now?

2 years from grad school

29 years from birth.

Where the pressure is so low

Where we boil but never rise.

[the other phones all pick up, listening intently]

I see the stars every day now.

I talk to them on the phone.

And I wonder

Would I be better off never having seen the stars

Knowing now that I'll never touch them?

[one of the phones, far from the OPERATOR's reach, starts to ring. They try picking up their own phone, but the phone continues to ring. They stand and walk to the phone, but it stops ringing just moments before they reach it. Another phone, on the other side of the stage, starts to ring. With more urgency, the OPERATOR reaches for it, but the phone stops again before they can answer. Simultaneously, another phone rings, the OPERATOR lunges, but is too late. This repeats until the OPERATOR pulls every phone off of its chord and throws them all into the wings.]

[the hands appear and replace the chords with new phones].

[the OPERATORs phone begins to ring. They stare at it for a moment, but then the phone ring starts to morph into the sound of water boiling. The recording plays from the beginning]

INTERVIEWER 3

Dr Young, do you have anything to say to the kids watching at home?

YOUNG

Bring that thing closer.

The Dream...is ALIVE.

As the recording plays, from center stage and up out of the ground, a bubble starts to form. It grows, and as it hits its critical size, it begins to float. Before it gets too high, the OPERATOR walks to it and pops it overhead]

End of Play