

A Soft-Boiled Potato

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**Abstract**

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It's about as fun as watching paint dry. This play takes place in the home of aging drag queen Mizz Coral Durant as her borders with reality dissolve along with her relationship with manservant Joey Boy. As the character unravels into the void, the walls between the rooms start to crumble and the psychic barriers that once separated them from their basement dwelling friends quickly fall. Existing in multiple dimensions, overlapping layers upon layers of reality, these characters see the chaos of their home accelerate until a point they all reach a singularity: a point of unity and nothing.

## **A Soft-Boiled Potato**

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### Characters (in order of appearance)

We

(Mizz) Coral Durant

Joey Boy

The Fool

The Lover

The Audience

The Supreme Fried Potato

A Rod Serling Type

### Honorable Mention

The Fat Man

The Good People Outside

## **Act 1**

### Some Context

We fade in from black. We enter from empty space. We look around. We see ourselves in the house of Mizz Coral Durant. We could say the stage is lit, but the stage is only the old queen's living room. There are two chairs in the room. The one chair is staring at a flimsy desk fitted with a mirror for a makeshift vanity. We see the desk is covered in clutter. A calm chaos is falling on the room. Taped to the mirror is a blurry polaroid. We think it might be someone that once meant something to owner, but there's no way for us to know for sure. On the floor is a shag rug, stained from years of abuse and lack of cleaning. We are in the house of Mizz Coral Durant. It's an absolute mess and she waits for us in the rolling chair at her desk.

## Scene I

The play begins with a knock. Suppose that we and the audience are supposed to hear this knock, how will we know that an audience member had heard the knock? Since the audience is invited to move around freely in the space, they might be too far from the door to hear it. Also, considering how we don't ask for medical disclosures before entering this space, one of them might have a preexisting hearing impairment that prevents them from hearing the knock. There is, also, the all-but-too-likely chance that the audience may not be paying attention at the moment of the knock, in which case they will fail to hear the kick-off of the show. Regardless of The Audience's perception, there will be a knock and it will be a good knock, and after that knock, Joey Boy (a full-grown man about 32) will enter the house.

**Coral:** (mildly irritated) God dammit, Joey Boy. Ya left the door wide open again! What would you do if the cat got loose?

**Joey:** She did, ma'am. Last week.

**Coral:** Have you looked for her?

**Joey:** Can't say, ma'am. I did put the posters up like ya asked!

Joey Boy tosses the posters onto Mizz Coral's lap.

**MISSING: STRIPED TABBY. BROWN BUT SOME  
SAY GRAY. DON'T SCARE. SHE'S A GOOD CAT.  
NO REWARD.**

Mizz Coral glances at his work and tosses it in the bin.

**Coral:** Shit. Shit shit shit. How you expect to get my sweet little kitty back like this?

**Joey:** Well, ma'am. I thought the good people outside...

**Coral:** God damn you really are dumber than a box of fucking rocks. (mockingly) The good people outside! The good people outside! What have those tight-assed pricks ever done for us, boy?

**Joey:** Nothing, ma'am.

**Coral:** Damn right they've done nothing. (grabs cigarette from pack and lights it) Now go get me my mail, boy.

Joey goes for the mailbox. Coral take one drag from the cigarette and puts it out. She reaches for the pack of makeup wipes. After removing one wipe, she folds it over twice and slides it down the left half of her face. Her eyeshadow and cream foundation splatter the wipe

like a Covergirl Rorschach test. She kisses her lipstick on the wipe and watches as her lips rapidly lose their volume. Half her face bare, she turns back to the boy.

**Coral:** I get real tired sometimes, ya know.

**Joey:** Should I make you another cup of coffee, ma'am?

**Coral:** No, no. That's fine.

**Joey:** What's *fine*?

**Coral:** It's what we grownups feel when we've finally given up.

**Joey:** Oh?

**Coral:** Yeah. Once you stop fighting the current and just get sucked down the river?

**Joey:** Yes, ma'am. I know.

**Coral:** It's like when you watch TV at night and the show you're watching isn't any good, but there's nothing else to do so you might as well watch another episode. Next thing you know you've watched the entire thing and now there's nothing left but a vague sense of accomplishment and nothing to show for it.

**Joey:** I love when you wax poetic, Mizz Coral.

**Coral:** And I love when you fix me a drink without me asking.

Joey goes toward the kitchen for the drink.

**Joey:** Mizz Coral?

**Coral:** Yes, boy?

**Joey:** You're so beautiful and talented!

**Coral:** Thank you, Joey. But what is it I always say?

**Joey:** (resigning, handing Coral the drink) Words ain't cash...

**Coral:** Perfect. Now quiet that mouth of yours and grab my bags.

Joey approaches Coral's luggage that waits by the front door. He bends over to pick it up, but soon discovers that it's too heavy. Instead of lifting, he drags the suitcases across the floor, nudging them little by little until they finally arrive at Mizz Coral's feet. Coral, swiveling in her chair, pays no mind to the baggage laid out in front of her. Joey unzips the biggest bag and pulls

out a mannequin head. Coral removes the blonde wig from her head and places it on the prop. She is bald, and her one eye still made up. From the other eye, we see bags hanging, as if weights were hung from her lower lid.

**Coral:** It's a real tough world, boy.

**Joey:** Yes, ma'am. I know.

**Coral:** You're lucky you've got me around to take care of ya, huh?

**Joey:** Yes, ma'am. I wouldn't ask for nothing more.

**Coral:** Well you aren't gonna leave me then, are ya?

**Joey:** Mizz Coral!

**Coral:** You gotta promise me, Joey. You can never leave me.

He stares at her. His head doesn't move.

**Joey:** I promise, I promise.

**Coral:** (grabbing the boy by both sides of his head) Good. 'Cus if ya left me. I don't know what I would do. All I know is it'd be drastic.

**Joey:** You say this every day, ma'am.

**Coral:** Then you best believe I mean it!

**Joey:** Mizz Coral, what's drastic mean?

**Coral:** It means what it means, boy. Don't get hung up on definitions...

**Joey:** (rehearsed, as if a mantra) ...or borders or lines.

**Coral:** Good. Good. Now what're we having for dinner?

The room falls silent and we follow suit. Joey Boy is thinking about chicken tenders but he knows that would upset Mizz Coral. Mizz Coral likes fancy foods. The things you see grownups eating in the movies. Joey Boy has no taste for these things. He opts for silence as his response.

**Coral:** Figures your dumb ass couldn't think of anything but goddamn chicken nuggets. I guess we're ordering out.

Coral picks up her phone and opens a delivery app. She scrolls for a few minutes, but ultimately settles for a pizza that she chooses to have delivered to her current address. Meanwhile, Joey Boy is pacing around the room.

**Joey:** Would you like some music, Mizz Coral?

**Coral:** Some music would be nice.

Joey searches through the pile of records near the desk. He chooses the old Bee Bop record Coral has had for years. This one's Joey's favorite. It has a scratch halfway down the A-side which lets the song go on for as long as he wants it to play. He gets really excited when it gets to that section.

**Coral:** HAHHAHAHA... oh Joey Boy...

**Joey:** ?

**Coral:** You little dumbass piece of shit. I love you...

**Joey:** I love you too, ma'am.

**Coral:** I love the way you kiss me. Can you kiss me now?

**Joey:** I'm sorry?

**Coral:** Oh, Joey Boy.

**Joey:** Mizz Coral?

**Coral:** These old lips need some life breathed into them.

**Joey:** But ma'am, you aren't wearing your lipstick!

**Coral:** ...

**Joey:** No, Mizz Coral.

She picks up the picture from the rim of her mirror. She examines it. Coral then turns toward Joey and purses her lips. From the slight hole formed by her lips, she pools saliva and ejects it at Joey Boy's face.

**Joey:** (offended) Mizz Coral!

He pulls his arm back and smacks the made-up half of her face. Coral's head starts to turn at 33rpm as she struggles to her feet, but the intensity of the feeling pushes her face first onto the shag rug. She lies unresponsive. Joey rushes to hover over her still body.

**Joey:** Mizz Coral. Are you okay?

She reaches up and smacks him across the face.

**Coral:** (exasperated) Turn. That record. Off.

He lifts the needle.

**Joey:** I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. Is there anything I can do for you?

She grabs her head. Without a thought, Joey rushes for the bottle of aspirin in the junk drawer. He unscrews the arthritis-easy-open cap and pops four into Coral's mouth. She gulps them down with a dry movement of the tongue.

**Coral:** That's all. You can go to your room now.

Joey Boy exits through the doorway and descends the stairs into the basement. There are webs in all the corners. The little sunlight that finds its way in refract the webs to expose their details. They all begin to dance with the gust of wind Joey Boy brings with him as he speeds to his bed. He lies down and pulls the covers over his head.

In the other room, two bodies are lifeless on their beds. The beds are nothing but aluminum railing with mattresses so old the springs poke through the cotton. We see they aren't sleeping, but they aren't conscious either. There's nothing we can do except wait for them to wake up.

## Scene II

They are both dressed in off-white onesies. Their outfits are worn, as if the performers have worn them throughout the entire process and each time they perform, they get dirtier and dirtier and never get thrown in the wash.

In synch, the two reach under their beds and grab their cloth sacks. They're sacks like the Fat Man brings to the houses of good little children, only the color more resembles their clothes. Mirroring each other's movements, they rummage through the sacks.

**Lover:** Do you want to play blocks?

**Fool:** No.

**Lover:** How about Monopoly?

**Fool:** I don't have that one.

**Lover:** Dolls?

**Fool:** Marbles?

**Lover:** We have to have the same toy to play!

**Fool:** Yes. I know.

**Lover:** What do you have, then?

**Fool:** I have bandaids.

**Lover:** Anti-septic?

**Fool:** How about spin top?

**Lover:** The Fat Man didn't give me that.

**Fool:** How about masks?

The Lover looks in their bag. They have a mask. It's long and made of a smooth plastic that round out to a soft m at the top. Its long ears prove that what they are holding is, in fact, a rabbit mask. The cheap plastic is sharp on the edges, ones that could easily cut the user. The Fool has a mask in their bag as well. It looks like it's time to play!

**Fool:** What kind of mask do I have?

**Lover:** It's not a rabbit.

**Fool:** If I guess it, you have to tell me.

The Fool, unaware of their chicken mask, looks around the room for a mirror. In their search, something disturbs them and they begin flapping their arms.

**Fool:** Ahhhh! Spiderweb!

**Lover:** Just keep flapping, you almost got it!

**Fool:** I feel the webs all over me. Damn this basement!

**Lover:** Yes. Damn this basement.

The Fool flaps their arms until they fall, taking the loosely scattered cans on the bedside table with them. The cans ring an alarm. It shakes Joey Boy in the room adjacent, but he doesn't do anything. It was probably just the cat.

**Fool:** Will he ever let us out?

**Lover:** Will who?

**Fool:** The Fat Man!

**Lover:** What Fat Man?

**Fool:** (scratches head) I'm sorry.

**Lover:** (in normal pace of conversation) We were playing masks. You still need to guess!

The Fool runs their hands over the mask, feeling each crevice and curve as they try to etch its shape in their mind.

**Fool:** Twenty Questions?

**Lover:** Sure.

**Fool:** Am I a mineral?

**Lover:** No.

**Fool:** Am I an animal?

**Lover:** Yes.

**Fool:** Am I aquatic?

**Lover:** No.

**Fool:** Semi-aquatic?

**Lover:** No...

**Fool:** Am I a house cat?

**Lover:** No.

**Fool:** Have you seen the house cat?

**Lover:** What house cat?

**Fool:** (pause) Do I live outside?

**Lover:** Yes.

**Fool:** Do you eat me?

**Lover:** No.

**Fool:** Do I have fur?

**Lover:** No.

**Fool:** Do I have feathers?

**Lover:** Yes.

**Fool:** Am I a pigeon?

**Lover:** No.

**Fool:** Am I a goose?

**Lover:** No.

**Fool:** Duck?

**Lover:** No.

**Fool:** I give up. I have no idea what I am!

**Lover:** You're a chicken!

**Fool:** But you said you don't eat me?

**Lover:** *I'm a vegetarian.*

**Fool:** No fair! That's cheating!

**Lover:** Hehehehe.

**Fool:** The Fat Man won't bring you anything new now!

**Lover:** F...F...Fat Man?

**Fool:** (taking off the mask) I'm tired of playing masks.

**Lover:** But I love playing masks.

**Fool:** I'm too old for it.

**Lover:** What should we play then?

**Fool:** (shrugs) Wanna watch paint dry?

They grab a can of white paint and slash a single diagonal stroke against the wall. They begin their game and stare intently at the wall.

### Scene III

Joey Boy sits in the basement room. Coral has fashioned him quite the dwelling with odds and ends of her previous interior decorating endeavors. The concrete walls are cold and paintless. They insulate the room with a chill that's pleasant in the summer but painful in the colder months. Regardless of the current season, Joey Boy sits shirtless on the bed. There are scratches down his back. He has his belt in one hand and is repeatedly whipping himself with the leather.

**Joey:** (in best Coral imitation) You gotta do this, Joey Boy. It's like the self-checkout at the grocery store. You gotta do it, so these new nails don't chip.

He keeps whipping until he hears a bell ring. It's coming from upstairs. It's Mizz Coral's call bell. She doesn't like to be kept waiting. Back sore, Joey rushes a shirt over his head and onto his bare back and chest. He frantically runs up the steps, stumbling on the top two, nearly hitting his face smack on the floor. He runs to the main room. There, Coral stands with the bell outstretched, one hand on her hip.

**Joey:** Yes, ma'am?

**Coral:** Organize my desk, please.

**Joey:** You got it.

Joey approaches the desk. It is covered in various containers. Lipstick, eyeliner, shadow palettes, mascara, glue sticks, false lashes, empty lighters all scatter the desktop. He starts to place the pieces back in their homes, taking time to evaluate the item before placing it in the proper drawer.

Coral sits in her chair. She is sipping wine from a coffee mug she heated in the microwave. She stares at Joey Boy as he cleans her things. After allowing the air to settle between them, she cuts it:

**Coral:** Joey Boy.

**Joey:** (putting down what he's doing) Yes...

**Coral:** Tell me why you love me.

**Joey:** (not quick to respond) Well... Mizz Coral is the most beautiful lady. She... is so... pretty and... talented. Stunning. Really. And... gorgeous....

**Coral:** No, Joey. Why do *you* love me?

**Joey:** (hesitant) Because Mizz Coral... You give me such a... a... nice house to live in. You give me a bed... and food to eat! I'm so grateful for you, Mizz Coral. I really really am.

**Coral:** That's great, Joey Boy.

She sips her wine, Joey works, a few minutes pass. Coral finishes her wine. Joey is nearly done with the task, adjusting a few things here and there. Coral abruptly throws the coffee mug to the ground, smashing it to ceramic shards. Joey Boy cries a panicked cry.

**Coral:** (angry) It's just great to know that you love ME and not all the SHIT I GIVE YOU.

**Joey:** Of course, Mizz Coral. I love you. I don't care about the stuff.

**Coral:** (calm) That's so good to hear. Well then, I guess it wouldn't be too much to ask you to bring everything of mine out of that little basement room down there and put it on the curb for the Wednesday trash, would it?

**Joey:** But... Mizz Coral...

**Coral:** I thought you didn't care about the stuff?

**Joey:** Of course, Mizz Coral. I don't care about the stuff.

**Coral:** Then put it on the curb.

**Joey:** (pleading) But I need my bed, Mizz Coral. I need my bed if I'm gonna sleep here. I need to sleep if I'm gonna help you around the house. I need my clothes so you don't have to look at the mean things you...

**Coral:** (disgusted) Fine! Keep the shit.

She looks at the floor. She sees the scattered shards of the ceramic mug from which she was drinking wine. The pieces sit at her feet like a train of flowers laid on the aisle for a wedding procession. She stands from her chair and balances on one foot, the other heeled foot outstretched to the boy.

**Coral:** Kiss my feet.

**Joey:** I'm sorry.

**Coral:** Get on your knees and kiss my feet.

**Joey:** But... But... It's gonna hurt.

**Coral:** Do it or I throw you're going on that curb!

**Joey:** Mizz Coral! Please!

**Coral:** I ain't got time for this. Get on your goddamn knees.

Joey Boy kneels on the shards of the mug. They dig deep into the skin of knees, leaving imprints that could last for days. Silently sobbing, he arches his back and begins to kiss her feet. He takes each kiss slowly until Coral finally calls him to rise.

**Coral:** (spitting) Get out of my sight.

Joey runs back to his room. Coral slips her shoe back onto her foot. She looks around. She feels as if she is being viewed, a viewing more like a museum exhibit than the subject of a stakeout. A neutral feeling. She's both unsettled yet entirely unphased. She paces around the room, continuing her role as viewable object. There is no music, but she dances. She dances a happy dance until she falls in to the chair seated at her desk. She looks into the eyes in the mirror. The eyes tear up. She blotches them with tissues on the desk. Before too long, her tears have turned into a sob. The sobbing eyes refuse to break contact with those in the mirror, a staring contest she's determined to win.

**Coral:** (softly) You're not going to beat me.  
(pause, then MUCH louder) YOU'RE NOT GOING TO WIN!

She bangs her fists on the table and stomps her feet. Her force shakes the floor boards of the house causing the dust settled on support beams to shake loose on the inhabitants of the basement. The Lover and The Fool sit facing the wall, awakened.

#### Scene IV

The Fool walks up to the wall and wipes their hand across the freshly dried paint splotch. They walk back to the bed. Once they return, they slap their forehead.

**FOOL:** I guess I lose.

**LOVER:** Oh, I just love playing games! Can we play some more?

**FOOL:** I don't know. My head hurts.

**LOVER:** I love that one!

The Fool is rocking with their head in their hands to nurse the headache. The Lover mimes The Fool's actions.

**FOOL:** (giggling) Stop! It really hurts!

**LOVER:** Ow! Ow! My head! My head hurts!

**FOOL:** For real! Stop!

**LOVER:** Stop! Stop! It hurts! It hurts! My head hurts so much! Stop!

**FOOL:** (laughing hysterically) I don't like this game!

**LOVER:** I don't like it! I don't like it! It hurts! It hurts!

**FOOL:** (hysterically crying) I SAID STOP!

The room falls silent except for The Fool's soft sobs. The Lover stares into space.

**LOVER:** Well this is no fun, is it?

[no response]

**LOVER:** We were having fun?

**FOOL:** ...

**LOVER:** I suppose.

They both twiddle their thumbs and sit on their hands. Their boredom sits on the room like an oppressive humidity. The room tenses with the ever-broadening scope of the situation. The two realize the chains attached to their ankles and wrapped to the bed posts. They realize there isn't a fourth wall in the room, only an empty doorway. The audience is neither standing in

it nor off somewhere else. Nobody can see them. They're too stuck in this moment. A room over, Joey Boy is rubbing his face, feeling the ends of his stubble. The two don't notice him. He's a ghost to them. The room sits still, then a man in a suit appears from the closet of their room.

**SERLING:** You find yourself locked in a room. Your foot is chained to a bed. No one is around but a fellow captive in the same cotton long johns. The room is old and stinks of stale dust.

**LOVER:** (to the doorway) Is someone talking?

**SERLING:** You may think it's a room, but the room does not exist in this world. It exists only in the...

**FOOL:** (cutting off) It's the fat man! It's the fat man!

**LOVER:** ?

**FOOL:** Oh, it must be!

**LOVER:** What is he bringing us?

**FOOL:** Board games?

**LOVER:** I love board games.

**FOOL:** Have you ever played Trouble?

**LOVER:** No?

**FOOL:** I love Trouble!

**LOVER:** ...

**FOOL:** You play it all the time and then you get to win! That's how you win!

**LOVER:** Is it an old game?

**FOOL:** I think so!

**LOVER:** I don't know if I like that.

**FOOL:** What are the rules?

**LOVER:** The first rule is to always listen.

**FOOL:** I'm good at that one!

**LOVER:** Second: DON'T FALL!

The Lover shoves the Fool off the precipice, into the chasm below. The room sits silent. The Lover and the Fool stare deep into each other's eyes in the slow-motion descent. They are still. Not even the slightest ripples run across their clothes. In this frozen moment, they are finally at peace. Since we're paused, if we truly can manipulate time, we should look deeper at this image. If we're stuck on it for this long, then there must be some divine metaphorical meaning lying just beneath the surface. What does it *mean*? Is it everything in nothing? What good is silence but a contrast to noise? When will this narration crawl out of its own asshole?

Next scene...

## Scene V

The narration digresses as Joey Boy walks up the stairs. He's hungry, almost licking the steps as he makes his slow climb toward the kitchen. Upon arrival, he rummages through the cabinets. He stares for a while and decides to grab the loaf of bread. He goes to the fridge and removes a stick of butter and two plastic-wrapped pieces of American cheese. From the freezer, he grabs a bag of frozen tater tots and tosses them on the counter. He tears the bag open in one vicious stroke. The tots fall in slow motion to the microwave safe plate he placed below. Now in their loose pile, it is time for heating.

Joey takes a frying pan from the lower cabinet and places it on the electric-coil. He cranks the knob to Medium-High. With a chef's knife, he slices a small pat of butter and smears it on the bread. He finishes assembling the sandwich only to notice the blood dripping from the tip of his finger. He sprints for the roll of paper towels across the room and applies pressure.

**Coral:** Joey Boy.

...

I know that's you.

**Joey:** What is it, Coral? I'm making a grilled cheese.

**Coral:** Make me one too.

Joey gets more bread and cheese. His sandwich receives a flip before he starts arranging one for Coral.

**Joey:** (aside) Mama make a dollar and the baby get shit.

He removes his sandwich from the pan, blood soaking through the paper towel.

**Joey:** (aside) Baby wake the mama so the baby get hit.

He flips her sandwich. The microwave moans at completion. Joey enters the microwave and retrieves the tots. He places a quaff of sour cream on what can only be the plate's head. He nestles a crown gently into the crisp exterior. He places the plate on the table.

**Joey:** I love food, Mizz Coral.

**Coral:** Have you been listening to your tapes?

**Joey:** Yes, ma'am. Every night. Just like you said.

**Coral:** Good.

Coral gets out of her chair. She hobbles to the kitchen to get her grilled cheese. She grabs a fresh coffee mug from the cabinet. Her attention shifts to the sweet red-blend on the opposite counter. The label reeks of poor graphic design. The bottle is capped with a gaudy rhinestone

stopper. She fills the mug to its brim with the wine. She takes a seat in front of the tater tots. The momentum of her body causes a small splash of wine to stain the off-white table.

She sits and watches the boy cook, looking him up and down and up and...

**Coral:** Joey? What's running in your pants? A rat?!

**Joey:** WHAT? No! No! Ahh!

**Coral:** I... I... I'm sorry. Must've been the wind.

She sips her wine and holds her head in her hands. She saw something moving in those pants. It was there.

Joey finishes his work. He stands above her, looking down at the wrinkles on her face. He feels immense disgust with her, not because of how she looks or even how she smells. She seems different. The boy can't put his finger on it.

**Joey:** Your sandwich, Mizz Coral.

**Coral:** Thanks.

She takes a bite and hangs her mouth open, heaving a cooling blow on the molten cheese that just burned her mouth. The sandwich is hot? THE SANDWICH IS HOT! What an act of treachery! What kind of sociopath would even think of serving this to another human? Was he trying to kill me? Did Joey Boy try to kill her? Is there polonium in the tea pot? Would he deny her? Would he deny her three times? Is this the end?

*Coral sits silently in her chair.*

**Joey:** Do you like it?

*Coral sits silently in her chair. She starts to move.*

**Joey:** I made it the way you like.

*Coral stands silently in the kitchen. She takes a step forward.*

**Joey:** Are you okay, Mizz Coral?

*Coral stands silently in the kitchen. Another step.*

**Joey:** Mizz Coral! Talk to me!

*Coral stands silently taking steps. She reaches the doorway.*

**Joey:** Mizz Coral! This isn't funny!

*Coral stands silently in the doorway.  
Her dancer's legs buckle under weight.  
Coral's unconscious body becomes nothing but a set piece.  
Exeunt Omnes.  
Don't strike the furniture.  
Leave the bag where she lies.*

**BLACK**

## An Intermission (of sorts)

All is black, utter darkness. There is no space being performed. All is quiet in the tense vacuum left in the wake of the first act. Out of the darkness, a plate of tater tots starts to take its first breaths. A face emerges from the pile of fried potato dumplings. Covered in cheese sauce and bacon bits, the being begins to perform its sole function:

**Potato:**       The days are long and yet they still do try  
                  To live their lives as if they won't go down  
                  The road of sorts that brings us all to die.  
                  But not do those who find themselves to drown  
                  In times of times that ring truth like a bell  
                  For nothing makes the mind of men go mad  
                  Like hunting sirens calling them to hell.  
                  But lest we go and take the good for bad  
                  Then everything we made on stage was nil  
                  And in us all it brought The Calming Chill.

                  But have you heard the tales of those who died?  
                  The ones that swept themselves in truth times drift?  
                  They dipped themselves in batter and deep fried  
                  The bits of human that were left to shift.  
                  They served themselves adorned and with sour cream  
                  And claimed to be the wealth of god's great gift  
                  But left when one was called upon obscene  
                  Creating everything within the truth time rift.

I am god, yet he who claims must be  
in charge of greater things than that what we see.

## Act 2

### Some Context

Time has passed in the house during intermission. It's entirely impossible to determine whether or not this has been days or weeks or minutes. The house is unchanged; however, Coral is no longer collapsed in the doorway. She is on the couch. She is sleeping, sprawled like she was after her fall. There is no longer makeup on her face. A bust of her likeness sits on the desk. On the bust, her blonde wig. The false Coral looking out on the room, turning its head from side to side, as if to recognize the audience. The audience might not notice the welcome. It is a bust after all, and they're too busy watching our heroine asleep on the couch. To those of you with drinks: *l'chiam!*

Joey Boy is downstairs in his room. There's a small box TV in the corner that is playing a rerun of his favorite soap. He mimes the lips of the actors but puts no expression on his face. He doesn't even turn his head to indicate the switch between character parts. It's just a script, no made reality. They aren't people or characters, just thoughts on a page. The thoughts that spiral in exponential degradation until all that's left is Joey: sitting on his bed, lifeless mouthing the parts of the show.

The Lover and the Fool have only moved since their final scene to fall asleep on their beds. They lie face up with no blankets. It's unclear how long they've been lying here. The cardboard in the window blocks all of the natural light. They are covered in orange light from the outdated bulbs that decorate the ceiling like nighttime stars. There's a piss bucket in the corner that is getting dangerously close to the brim. They lie lifeless. Their toy bags are under their metal-frame beds. The single rabbit mask hangs slightly out The Lover's bag. On the table between their beds is a plate of tater tots, complete with accoutrements and adornments. We zoom in on the plate once more to begin the act.

**Potato:** And here we find the ones who love and lose  
The ones who hide in shadows underground  
They find their filth, it seeping into snooze  
As they advance the world's going 'round.  
They know not of or how the sickness holds  
Them deep in claws of microbe hex  
Now this not be of flus not even colds  
Nor is it one they got through having sex  
No! No doctor could scan or test or comb  
For what's eating the mirror children in their houseless home.

(now upstairs) And heroes loved and lost in their own time  
Who find themselves in places love has lost  
Try so hard to find their past selves rhyme  
With what they want despite the cost.  
When those they hurt in search of selfish youth  
Come face to face with what to them was done  
They'll stab and tear and eat to find the truth  
Off bones of those who thought they'd won.

Gah! The hatred that flows within this house.  
Most things scurry, but never a mouse.

## Scene I

Coral scratches her balding head as she wakes. There's a coffee mug sitting on the table next to the couch. Next to it is the plate of tater tots, once again inanimate. Her eyes are red and her face is completely makeup-less. She reaches for the mug. It falls to the ground and shatters.

**Coral:** GAHHHH!

From downstairs, Joey Boy hears the bellowing cry. He rushes to his feet, throwing a dirty flannel shirt over his off-white T-shirt. He forgets his pants in the rush as he bolts up the stairs.

**Joey:** Mama! What is it?

**Coral:** Get me a new cup of coffee, boy.

**Joey:** Yes, ma'am.

Joey knows he needs to hurry. Mizz Coral is nasty if she doesn't have her coffee. He opens the fridge and pulls out a can of cold brew. He cracks it and pours some into a fresh mug with a tattoo heart that reads "mom." He puts the mug in the microwave and presses *Time Cook* followed by 3 and 0. He lets it run, impatiently tapping his foot at the inconvenience of the machine. When the alarm chimes, he runs the mug to Coral.

**Coral:** (before Joey even leaves the kitchen) Cream and sugar.

Joey shuffles backward to the two stainless steel canisters on the counter. One has powdered creamer, the other a bulk batch of Sweet 'n' Low.

**Joey:** (in movement) It ain't no Dunkin' Donits!

Coral lifts the mug to her mouth and then lowers it. She brings it to her nose. She swirls the coffee and sniffs it. She takes a small taste into her mouth and swishes it from side to side. She swallows.

**Coral:** Boy, fetch me a palette cleanser.

**Joey:** We're all out of crackers, ma'am.

**Coral:** I don't even want to...

**Joey:** (automatic) I will go and get some.

**Coral:** Yes, go and get some.

Joey nods and exits out the front door. He walks around the block to the grocery store where he purchases a pack of store brand “fancy table crackers.” The audience is welcome to follow him, but they will most likely miss a good chunk of the act in the process. This, of course, would be unknown to them. Their following of Joey is their choice of how they experience this dramatic disasterpiece.

Coral takes another sip of the coffee. Her teeth are stained yellow. Her arm has a discolored patch that suggests the perpetual use of nicotine patches. The dirt under her acrylic nails wad in clumps ripe for the picking. She reaches one of these unwashed hands toward the mirror sitting on the coffee table.

She looks deep into it. The mannequin head on the desk is staring into the big mirror. Nobody noticed it has moved. As she looks into it, she begins to soliloquize.

**Coral:** Huh.

She has a brief coughing fit.

Cigarettes.

She reaches out her hand to summon the pack of Newport Menthols from the coffee table. She scrunches the folds of her forehead harder. She feels the pack in her hand. She pulls one out and sticks it in her mouth.

Of course. I don't have a fucking lighter.

She pulls out her phone to text Joey Boy to grab one from the store, although he will never receive this text. She gnaws on the filter of her cigarette.

These things will kill me.

Pause. She rubs the tattoo on her arm.

I just... really wish...

She takes a drag of her unlit cigarette.

I miss it being fun. I miss the limitlessness. You didn't need followers or success. It was like a game...

She grabs the mannequin head from the table and holds it eye to eye.

How do I distill the most likeable parts? I can play that part of me? Get a script and maybe a coach and I can do it. How hard can it be? How hard to act? This wig, these eyes, this shaved head. God, even the eyeliner I missed with the makeup wipe. It's all a part.

When I was a baby queen, I got it. That was the whole schtick. “Look at that boy! He’s dressed like a girl!” Funny... I was the girly boy. Simple. No illusion. Just playing... fun...

But now it’s not enough to play the part, especially when you’re under 24/7 surveillance like me. I have to play the part even if I’m alone in this room like I am now! Of course, there is no such thing as being alone, especially since this house is a home. With the company I keep, it’s hard to switch it off. I just have to keep acting, playing my part as if everyone is seeing that I know myself. I know myself. I know myself.

(the actor receives a phone call)

(the actor takes the call)

But part of me thinks that’s a lie. I don’t know who I am if not under some kind of eye. I draw on my eye like the eye of a storm swirling and destroying all things. I am being it but I’m also not being. I am doing. Always doing. I am always acting how I think I think I should act. I’m playing the Coral I think the Coral I think is. It’s damn maddening.

What would happen if I stop playing this part? What would that even look like? Would that be being or just another form of doing? What about an undoing? If I start to undo, is that how I dissolve? Is disillusion a performance or an active response? An actor’s character’s response to knowing they’re in a play? It’s like salt in a glass of water or something.

Take a sip.

Pause.

Oh well. Fuck it.

She puts on a record from the collection and sits on the couch smoking her unlit cigarette, making sure to ash it properly in the tray.

God, I need an aspirin.

Meanwhile, we go downstairs to the Lover and the Fool who are laying in their beds. They seem as if they are strapped down, but no restraints are visible. The wiggle and thrash as if they are being held, but once again, there is nothing to indicate this is the case.

Scene II

**Lover:** Ah I hate this! Who did this?!

**Fool:** It was the fat man! It was the fat man!

**Lover:** The fat man isn't real!

**Fool:** It was the fat man! It was the fat man!

**Lover:** You're how old and still believe in the fat man?

**Fool:** It was him! I swear it was him!

**Lover:** Did you see him do it?

**Fool:** It was the fat man!

**Lover:** Prove it!

**Fool:** I know it was!

**Lover:** But how could it?

**Fool:** I was bad. I was very, very bad.

**Lover:** No, you weren't!

**Fool:** No, I was. I was so very bad.

**Lover:** Are you the bad guy?

**Fool:** NO!

**Lover:** I don't think you are the bad guy.

**Fool:** But I've been oh so very bad.

**Lover:** Can you loosen my straps?

**Fool:** Straps?

**Lover:** I want to be out of these straps!

**Fool:** The fat man did it! The fat man!

**Lover:** Is the fat man the bad guy?

**Fool:** No! No! I was bad!

**Lover:** Loosen my straps! Please!

The Fool rolls over on their stomach, almost ignoring the nonexistent leather straps on their wrists and ankles. They pull their onesie down to reveal their back. They scramble to reach under the bed. They pull a riding crop out of their bag of toys and immediately begins flogging themselves with the leather end.

**Fool:** I've been so bad! So bad!

**Lover:** Please stop and loosen my straps!

**Fool:** I can't! I can't! I've been so bad!

**Lover:** They're too tight! They hurt!

**Fool:** I'm sorry! I'm so so sorry!

The beating continues. The Lover flails in the bed crying. The scene continues for a healthy amount of time until they hear a creaking on the stairs.

**Lover:** (choking back tears) Shhh!

**Fool:** (red-backed, in a sobbing whisper) I'm so bad! I'm sorry!

**Lover:** It's the fat man!

**Fool:** No!

**Lover:** Don't let him in! Don't let him in!

**Fool:** I can't do anything! I'm strapped to the bed!

**Lover:** Oh god!

**Fool:** Loosen my straps! Loosen my straps!

**Lover:** I can't move! I've been so bad!

**Fool:** (staring at doorway, sobbing) Please! Please let us go!

**Lover:** I've been so bad!

The two continue screaming at the empty doorway.

The lights cut but screams continue.

### Scene III

Back upstairs, Coral is falling deeper into the couch. Her unlit cigarette sits smashed in the ashtray where she left it. The room stinks of incense harboring a dark secret. All is peaceful in this chaotic moment; the breathless second before an orange explodes in the microwave.

Joey Boy enters through the front door, slamming it behind. He tosses the box of crackers on to Mizz Coral's stomach. He storms past her. **Coral:** Hey, boy! Hey!, but he doesn't pay her any mind, intently walking toward his room. Coral stumbles behind him and descends the stair for the first time.

His room, she takes note, is little more than two old mattresses thrown on rusting metal bed frames. There are springs poking through the cotton which piles on the floor in clumps. Under the beds sit two identical sacks. Coral grabs one of them and peeks inside.

**Coral:** (putting on the rabbit mask) What the?

Through the mask, she scans the cramped room for Joey Boy, but there's no one in the room with her.

There's a cathode tube TV in the room. Coral presses the power button. It's not working. She curls behind the TV and follows the cord to its frayed-wire end. She sits down in front of it and sees herself in the curved-glass reflection.

It flicks on. To channel-less static, Coral jumps back several feet. The static settles to an opaque image of Joey Boy, but it doesn't look like him. There's something wrong with the image. His jaw is hanging unlatched, the bone and blood showing due to the absence of skin around the area. His eyes are red and bulging, the color and pop of which only comes from harboring a deep existential secret. Behind it are the laughs of children, formless and squawking, swirling in patterns of sound upon sound until a wall is formed, blasting any nearby ears to concussion. Through the static, two voices begin speaking.

The noises crescendo until the room's capacity has been met and the excess pressure blows everything out onto the stairs. Coral hits her head on the first step. She picks herself up and staggers punch-drunk up the stairs. She makes it back to the living room and lays her head down on the pillow.

There's incense burning, its purpose only to mask an unsavory scent. There's an unlit cigarette stained with pink lipstick near the filter. As he enters, Joey Boy busts the door off the hinges, so to speak, and slams the door behind. He tosses the box of crackers to her. They bounce off her stomach to the floor. She jumps to her feet and follows him into the basement.

But once again, Joey isn't there, **Coral:** (interior) I honestly don't know how he could have gone anywhere the back door didn't open and there's no way out from here it's like he just disappeared into thin air I don't know where he his is he under the bed? Is he in the closet? What's this?

She pulls the cloth bag from beneath the first bed. Her hand picks the chicken mask before her mind can communicate the choice. She pulls the mask over her head and looks around. She spots the old TV on the floor and sits in front of it. In the glass, she sees the chicken mask that now replaces her face. Coral begins clucking at the TV when it suddenly fires up. It projects a farm of free-range chickens in all their cruelty-free glory. The chickens run around the room as Coral continues clucking at the screen.

In a moment of deep-gut pain, Coral recognizes she's wearing a mask and tries pulling it from her face. The mask, however, won't come off, almost like it was fused to her skin. She stands and struggles with it, tugging the chicken skin taught and flapping it up and down to dislodge it from her skin. She falls backward in her struggle and hits her head on the stairs. She stumbles her way back up to the living room. She lays her head down on the pillow. Joey Boy enters.

He slams the door behind him, rattling the now crooked paintings and mirrors on the wall. He needs to get to his room. He just needs to finally get to his room. In a storming wave, he reaches the basement door and turns the knob. He thrusts the door open and walks through.

Out on the front steps, Joey Boy walks toward the front door with the box of crackers in his hand. He reaches for the key in his pocket. It fits in the lock. He starts to turn it, but the old metal sticks to itself, forcing him to jam the lock from side to side. With his frustration growing, the lock finally gives, bursting open the door to the house. Without thinking, he tosses the box of crackers onto Mizz Coral's stomach. He over shot this time. The potted plant on the coffee table comes crashing to the floor in a shower of dirt and soon-shattered ceramic. He sprints past the soon-furious Coral and goes for the basement. He opens it and descends the stairs.

Back outside, Joey Boy grabs his key from his pocket and approaches the door. He puts the key in the lock and shifts it from side to side until it opens hard. He slams it behind, tossing the box of crackers to Mizz Coral's stomach before descending into the basement.

Shortly after, Scene IV begins with a slam from the basement door. The Lover and the Fool are sitting on scraps of pissed-on carpet. The TV flickers with the combined images from the previous repetitions. A silhouette walks from the left edge of the frame to the right. He then walks around in a circle in the middle of the screen. The dark edges of his shape melt into swirling patterns of black and white welcoming us into the Twilight Zone. The two sit mostly still, only the slight shaking of fear in their bones.

Joey Boy looks at them with calm confusion, name-on-the-tip-of-your-tongue feeling. They turn and face him. Their faces reflect the clear horror of the house. The sight shakes the boy to his core. His expression changes. Their looks are speaking words to him. Their faceless expressions hold a mirror to the only part of him left he can see. He starts to dissolve until there is nothing but the Lover and the Fool at peace in their playroom, ready for games.

**Lover:** Was that the fat man?

**Fool:** It must have been! It must have!

**Lover:** But we've never seen his face look like that.

**Fool:** I swear it was him! I swear!

**Lover:** If it was him, why didn't he leave any toys?

**Fool:** Because we were bad.

**Lover:** But the fat man... He doesn't just come down here and look at us.

**Fool:** Oh! He's going to kill us!

**Lover:** No! I don't think it was him.

The Fool's eyes get wider. They look at the Lover as if to say, "I half understand what you're alluding to." The Lover's look only pressures urgency.

**Fool:** What do we do?

**Lover:** It means there's more of them...

**Fool:** More of who?

**Lover:** There!

They point up to the floorboards. Footsteps are heard and a brief dialogue between characters is exchanged.

**Fool:** Do you think they can get us out?

**Lover:** Out?

A silence falls on the room. The two retreat to their beds. They stare at each other. The Fool reaches for the toy bag under their bed.

**Fool:** Hey! You took my chicken mask!

**Lover:** I did not!

**Fool:** You must've!

**Lover:** But I didn't.

**Fool:** Then where is it?

The Lover raises their arms and shoulders.

So, there are others.

**Lover:** \*vaguely confused grunt\*

**Fool:** If you didn't take my mask, there must be someone else.

**Lover:** Like the not fat man that came down here a few minutes ago?

**Fool:** The fat man doesn't take toys. He only brings them.

**Lover:** There's others...

**Fool:** (putting pieces together in their head) \*grunt\*

**Lover:** Do you think they can get us out?

**Fool:** Out?

**Lover:** \*grunt\*

**Fool:** \*grunt\*

**Lover:** Can anyone hear me?

**Fool:** What?

**Lover:** Hello! Who's there?

**Fool:** What?

**Lover:** I can't see you! It's dark! Who turned out the lights?

**Fool:** What?

**Lover:** If anyone can hear me! Please help! It's so dark!

**Fool:** I can't hear you!

**Lover:** Who?

**Fool:** You!

**Lover:** No! Who are you?

**Fool:** Me!

**Lover:** GET ME OUT OF HERE!

The Lover walks toward the brick wall where the stairs used to be. They feel their way through their darkness until they are nearly kissing the brick. They throw themselves to their knees. Their tongue pokes out from between their otherwise pursed lips. They begin licking slow circles around the brick like a lover's nipples. They start crying.

The Fool follows, getting on their knees in front of the wall. They begin caressing the wall. They feel its curves as it goes from neck to bust to waist to thigh. How good it felt, like kissing an unshaven lover, to have the rough texture running over their face. It was a pleasurable

sandpaper smoothing out the rough edges of the Fool's remaining borders and lines. They begin rubbing up against it.

## Scene V

As the previous scene begins, Joey Boy enters from the front door. He tosses the box of crackers at Mizz Coral. Her hand snaps and catches the box mid-flight.

**Coral:** Stop. Slamming. The. Door.

**Joey:** Excuse me?

**Coral:** I don't understand why you keep opening and slamming the door like that, Joey Boy. I'm trying to sleep here!

**Joey:** Mizz Coral. I just got home from the store.

**Coral:** Yeah and you slammed the door at least fifty times.

**Joey:** I only opened it once.

**Coral:** Oh knock it the fuck off, Joey Boy. You know what happens when you play games with me...

**Joey:** I'm not playing games. I know what happens. I don't want that.

**Coral:** Stop lying to me!

**Joey:** I'm not lying! I swear!

**Coral:** (getting off the couch, struggling to walk toward the closet) Joey Boy. I *really* don't want to hear it.

**Joey:** (in near tears) What are you doing?

**Coral:** I'm sick and fucking tired of your lies and your games. I'm taking care of the problem like I always have to. You don't do SHIT for me.

**Joey:** Mizz Coral. Please...

**Coral:** (rummaging through the cluttered closet) I thought you were better than this Joey Boy. I really did.

**Joey:** (eyes tear-filled) Please!

**Coral:** (finding what she was looking for) But it's become clear in recent actions that you are of absolutely NO USE TO ME! You're a freeloading waste of space. You can't even make my coffee right. Like Jesus, I don't know how you do it. Do I not take good care of you?

**Joey:** (sobbing) You do! You treat me so good! I'm so sorry! I promise I won't again!

**Coral:** I gave you so many chances, Joey.

Coral lifts her arm to reveal the gun she had found in the closet. She unwaveringly aims it at Joey Boy's forehead from across the room. Joey's sobs turn to panic.

**Joey:** Mizz Coral you don't have to do this?

**Coral:** (to audience) Do I have to do this?

**Serling:** (emerging from hallway) You find yourself in a house. A house where love has no hold. It was long abandoned by its occupants, leaving only shells of selves wandering the halls. The walls are collapsing all around. There's no tell which room you are in. You only know that you're in the...

The soliloquy is interrupted by Coral shifting her aim to A Rod Serling Type. At one look of the gun, he disintegrates. Only Joey Boy, Coral, and the audience are left in the room. Coral moves the gun back to Joey Boy's forehead. She stares intently, her finger twitching on the trigger. The time passing feels like hours.

Coral hears a pounding from downstairs. Back downstairs, the Lover and the Fool are beating their heads against the wall. Their heads open like lilies in a warm room. Their blood spills onto the stairs that have reappeared. The walls are gone.

Coral feels a deep stroke of pain in her head. She throws the gun to the middle of the room. She falls to her knees in pain. She looks around. She sees the audience members, Joey Boy, taking stock of the room. There's also record player. There's also the mannequin head with her wig. It all starts to spin like the record she had just put on.

**Coral:** (nauseous; to audience) Can someone stop this, please?

Joey Boy looks down at the kneeling Coral. He shifts his attention to the gun now patiently sitting on the floor. He snatches it from its resting place and lifts it toward Mizz Coral's position. Her gasp rings through the room like air filling a vacuum. Without having to pull the trigger, Mizz Coral collapses. Joey Boy drops the gun.

**Joey:** (in horror) No... No!

He rushes to her. He lifts her head and gently slaps the sides.

Mizz Coral! No! I didn't mean it!

It doesn't matter, Joey Boy. You killed me.

I didn't! I didn't!

Yeah... You kinda did...

Shut up! Shut up!

Joey Boy starts to scream. He starts raving around the space like an animal. His hysterical crying pounds through the room. The cry turns to a scream, then turns to laughter. He throws himself into the chair at Coral's makeup desk.

He looks into the mirror. He doesn't see his own eyes. He looks at the mannequin head. He grabs the brush from the top of the desk. He collects a little bit of the powder and runs it over his eyes. Then, he grabs the liquid liner from next to the eyeshadow palette. He runs one line over his eye and sculpts a rough wing at the end. He repeats for the other eye. He grabs the bright lipstick and roughly smears it on his lips. Finally, he takes the large angle brush and dips it in the blush. He makes small circles on his cheek until he looks properly rouged.

He reaches into his pants and grabs his dick, crudely tucking it between his thighs. He grabs the wig from the mannequin head and places it on his own.

**Joey:** Mizz Coral. I am truly sorry.

**Coral:** It's okay.

**Joey:** Can I try it again?

Joey nods. He grabs the script that is sitting on the left-hand side of the desk. He opens the cover page and begins: [repeat from beginning]

**A Soft-Boiled Potato**  
**A Guide to Audience Conduct**

*stare at the wall until the paint is dry*

some semblance of poetry can be found if you stare long enough

“We see ourselves in the house of Mizz Coral Durant. We could say the stage is lit, but the stage is only the old queen’s living room. There are two chairs in the room.”

An audience member in this production takes on as much a role as the characters that are reading the scripted lines. Their reaction and participation are as much the show as anything I’ve ever written. That’s why we’re staging this in a house. It’s comfortable; there are no signs of stage and seats. The stage here is lit only because someone decided to turn the lamp on. I know Coral Durant is a drama queen but installing fly-lighting is a bit far even for her.

There are two chairs in the room. If one of them isn’t taken, by all means, sit. If it’s taken, sit and see what happens. If you’re sitting where someone needs to sit, I guess you’re the seat now. The stage is seating. Even the desk is a seat if you want it. Or you can stand, as I’m sure most of you will.

YOU ARE A CAMERA. This is a film. Go see what you want. If a character leaves the room, follow them if you are so inclined. If you want to stay in the same spot the entire time, do so. You control how of the show you want to see. You don’t have to see it all. I promise there’s parts worth skipping.

Assume everything is going according to script even if the room’s on fire.

Nobody’s in danger, but some people might be in pain.

Go ahead and text. Even make a phone call. Life’s busy these days. We get it.

Leave from where you came from. Leave at any time. Don’t let the door hit you on the way out.

If you think you’re doing something wrong, you probably are and that’s fine.

## Happy Accidents: A Poetics of Sound Synthesis and Layered Dissonance

*A Soft-Boiled Potato* is a meditation on layers of performance that construct and overwhelm our perceptions of reality. The play, I knew, was always doomed to reach a level of such high derealization that the building the characters was a futile act. This is also due to the chaotic state of the atoms of the characters as they approach the singularity of this literary black hole. It's this exact chaos that is the main driver of the play. The more I dwell, the more I find the logical conclusion of anything I do is the universal chaos accelerating right before the moment of absolute nothingness. It never stops, even as I go deeper into the ideas and I find myself shooting esoteric nonsense phrases that feign intellectualism. I find myself in a negative feedback loop of chaos. The tapes keep looping back over themselves and playing in seemingly infinite streams. Although it's the same loop, my perception of it changes the more I listen. My focus on certain syllables or the very specific tap of the tongue on teeth at the end of a t-based plosive. There're infinite iterations of a single loop, but what happens when three of them play at once? There's obviously an added complication when more are added, but can an already infinite probably become even more vastly infinite? Also, when a space is filled with sound, how does the movement of air and ear position predispose you to hearing certain samples over others? Does this create a space of exponential infinite possibility?

## Randomization, Unpredictability, and the Joy of Tape Loops

During the writing of this piece, I spent a large amount of time studying the music and production habits of George Martin and the Beatles. Once, while listening to *The White Album*, I began focusing deeper on the layers of tape that the band and George Martin had spent hours of work to place in position. Although there was a direct intentionality behind the act of placing these tapes, there is no conceivable way they could have known how exactly it would sound until the tape was played back. On top of that, the group could not have predicted what parts of the buried sounds would be highlighted as the listener explored the soundscapes. As George Martin put it when discussing the song “Tomorrow Never Knows”:

“of all the songs The Beatles did, that could never be reproduced:  
it would be impossible to go back now and mix exactly the same thing:  
the ‘happening’ of the tape loops, inserted as we all swung off the levers  
on the faders willy-nilly, was a random event.” (Schouten)

Although the intention was to create a song from tape loops, they had no control over the final product, a sort of creative surrender that requires the artist to relinquish their control over the work and let it take on a life of its own. In this sense, The Beatles welcomed chaos as a mode of production. They set the stage, so the tapes could eventually unwind themselves. They allowed the variables or accidents to be as much the art as the written lyrics.

As we set the stage to begin a brief look into the life of Mizz Coral Durant and the rest of the cast, we invite the variables to enter the scene as if they were characters in the play. When Coral orders a pizza in the first scene, it is absolutely undeterminable when exactly the deliverer will arrive with the pizza. They might knock on the door during a quiet scene where Coral is sitting in her chair, undisturbed. If the pizza decides to come, however, during a climactic scene,

then the pizza delivery will have to be as much a part of the climax as the events scripted. The unpredicted will have to be shoehorned into the show as it happens. That is why the play is written with so much space. There are stretches where a character sits and reads for twenty minutes or listens to a record. By increasing the amount of time of nothing, the chances of accidental drama happening are greatly increased. The play is made not only to invite these kinds of dramatic moments, but to actively invite them to the party.

In Act 2 Scenes III-IV, we find Joey Boy and Coral reliving the same moment and hitting their heads the same psychic wall until their heads burst for the dissolution of the play. When I listen to the Beatles tape loop pieces like “Tomorrow Never Knows” or “Revolution 9,” what strikes me first is how my ears instinctively choose to hear a different voice in the mess every time I revisit the song. In these scenes, although the tape starts in a similar manner (the slammed door, the box of crackers tossed, Coral following Joey down the stairs) each iteration collapses in on itself before ultimately starting from the top again and repeating in a seemingly infinite manner. To me, this a lot like Martin stacking the loops on top of each other and creating a three-minute song from a collection of fifteen-second loops. Just when you think the loop has decayed and come to an end, the initial sound fires off and starts the cycle over. The story is told only to be forced into a Sisyphean retelling. It creates a feeling of chaotic helplessness, a repeating ad nauseum.

### Additive Synthesis and Frequency Modulation (or Layering for Predictable Accidents)

The stacking of loops also creates new sounds through the addition of competing frequencies. In electro-acoustic music, this is referred to as Additive Synthesis. Overtones are added by the stacking of oscillators to create new timbres that build upon a previously existing tone. One way this is achieved is through the process of Frequency Modulation (FM) Synthesis, where a modulating oscillator is set at a frequency that shifts the timbre of the initial sound. When the modulating frequency is a non-integer multiple of the original oscillator, it creates nonharmonic tones that are incredible dissonant and otherwise would not exist without the pairing of these two frequencies. It's an act of layering that creates something unique solely from the arrangement of the oscillators. Synthesis, however, is as much a science as it is an art form. The output of FM Synthesis can be calculated with equations. The number this equation yields can be put into a measured frequency and simulate the timbre that is created. In my process (both writing and electronic synthesis), however, this is seldom the case. Much like with tape loops, there's a certain amount of intentionality that goes into creating the accidentals that occur when everything happens in a simultaneous moment. I know the more I twist the frequency knob on my modulating oscillator, the closer I get to a non-integer oscillation ratio. I know that I'm approaching the point of distortion, but I'm not entirely sure what that will sound like.

When composing experimental electronic pieces, the act of layering timbres upon timbres is how the piece is constructed. The intrigue from these pieces doesn't come from lyrical content or pleasing melodies. The piece is created by what the clash of these layers form. As the timbres collide in a piece, what frequencies are negated or created by the dissonance that's created by the two competing forces? Is the piece pure dissonance or is it a product of the dissonance to expose something underneath? In *A Soft-Boiled Potato*, the layers of performance are stacked upon each

other in an effort to force some of these dissonance collisions to occur. Let's take the character of Coral and her relationship to performance. Coral is a drag queen, therefore she spends a large part of her time actively performing gender. As Judith Butler states in the essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," "In effect, gender is made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which not only contradicts its own performative fluidity, but serves a social policy of gender regulation and control." (Butler 528). Coral, if nothing else, is a constant reminder of this contradiction. She performs the woman gender role throughout the entire play, even taking the feminine pronoun, despite being a cisgender character. The character of Coral is comfortable enough with the fluidity of gender to perform a gender that is not thrust upon her at birth, but has trouble understanding a spectral view of gender. That is why she either has to be man or woman even though she is technically neither. She has no model for performing anything other than woman or man. She is a contradiction of gender fluidity. She engages in it but refuses to accept the breadth of truth in the fact that it is all a performed thing. That's why Coral is a she, despite identifying as a man that does drag. She needs to draw the line to keep the binary intact and to not think too much about her own contradictions. Doing so would only cause her to see the cracks in the system.

On top of the gendered performance, it's also important to keep in mind (especially in a text as meta as *A Soft-Boiled Potato*) that Coral is being performed by an actor. To return to the analogy to FM Synthesis, let's take the written character of Coral as the initial frequency oscillator. The actor, reading for the written character, would then be acting as a modulating frequency layered on the initial sound, the text. That's why no actors can play the same character even if the script remains unchanged. Each actor brings themselves to the character whether they'd like to acknowledge that or not. This is because the self is a performed act. It's made

apparent here by the actor's performance of selflessness. An actor doesn't *become* their character, they are performing it. The actor must be performing themselves in order to perform the character. These layers of roles modulate and distort each other and create what we can call the performance of the character. The character we see performed in a play is the dissonance between performed roles set to text. Much like the oscillating frequencies, the roles performed contradict each other and it's through these contradictions that we get the piece. Coral is only Coral because the actor playing Coral is playing her. The reality of Coral (therefore the reality of the play) is only real because there is an actor performing it.

## Performing Space and the Real

When considering the ways in which *A Soft-Boiled Potato* acts to create a new theatrical reality, the space in which it is performed is perhaps one of the most important factors of this creative act. The play is set in a residential home in an attempt to deconstruct the ideas of audience and cast. The two are mingled together with limited places to sit. There is no hard border. Also, as the play invites interjections of reality, the use of a residential home makes it easier for these things to happen. If a car alarm goes off outside, the audience will hear and so will the cast. They will be united in this interruption and another piece of reality is thrust into the play. The same goes for when Coral orders food to the house. The delivery of the food is a moment of solidarity in which both the cast and audience share a sense of surprise. It shows how united in a similar reality they all are, as everyone will have to make the mental switch between the reality of the play and the reality of life outside the performing space in these moments. It works to highlight these arbitrary borders between our different forms of reality. What makes one more real than the other? The idea of this is similar to Jean Baudrillard's idea of Disneyland in *The Precision of Simulacra*, whereas the "non-real" entity only exist as non-real in order to enforce what has been agreed to be the real:

"Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America that *is* Disneyland (a bit like prisons are there to hide that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, that is carceral). Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real..." (Baudrillard 12)

What makes a space real is the way in which the space is performed in order to properly construct the reality of the space. It's a similar taxonomy to how something doesn't exist unless

we've given it a name. A performing space isn't a performing space until someone is performing in it. In this sense, every space is a performing space, especially when the phrase is seen as a verb. A living room ceases to be a living room if you suddenly drop dead on the couch. A kitchen isn't a kitchen unless you're performing kitchen actions. It all depends on the context.

Playing with space is what helps layer more dissonance on the text to create the whole piece of the play. Drawing inspiration from the work of Australian noise-artist Lucas Abela, the way space works in a performance is as important as the medium being used. Abela's glass-on-face harsh noise music plays as much with the room as he does with his instrument. As I put it in a review of one of his performances, "At the show, Abela didn't play songs, but the space. Not just the small dive in a Seattle suburb, but the time of the room, the shape of it." Performing the space helps integrate the art into reality, thus creating a more convincing theatrical reality. This is why Disneyland's effectiveness relies so heavily on the actors that create the world. Those performances take it from an architectural feat to an engrossing, alternate reality. This is all because space is a meaningless vacuum, waiting for someone to use it for its intended purpose. It's the difference between a house and home.

That is why I chose to set the place in a residential home. There is the pretense of what the space is because the audience can see that the space is a home when it is not being used for a performance. There also comes a set of expectations of what can and can't be done in the space. In a sense, it's because of these expectations that the most heinous of things in this play are seen as such. First, there's the domestic relationship of Coral and Joey Boy. Home is supposed to be a safe space. It is where you can be protected from the outside world. When violence (both physical and psychic) are brought into the home, these acts of abuse are seen as particularly vile. Violence is what happens outside and by bringing it in, a sense of trust has been violated. With

Coral's abuse of Joey, the degree to which we see the crimes toward Joey's agency and safety are naturally elevated. It is because the space is not being performed to expectation. It is all an attempt to add yet another layer of dissonance to the play. The misuse of space (both the performing space and the home) adds more distortion to the already complicated tone. It brings more questions to the reliability of the piece *and* of the things we expect from our performing spaces. It puts an audience member in a position of questioning, which is where we want them if we're going to get anything done.

Stare at the Inkblot. What do you see?

“Her eyeshadow and cream foundation splatter the wipe like  
a Covergirl Rorschach test. She kisses her lipstick on the wipe  
and watches as her lips rapidly lose their volume.” (Act 1 Scene I)

The purpose of *A Soft-Boiled Potato*, if nothing else, is to make opportunities for accidents to be artistic moments. Although the story is written in a concrete text, once the text is brought into a physical reality, it is subject to the laws that govern that space. The original mission was to write an “impossible play,” a play that would not be able to be performed live due to physical limitations; a play that exists in the theoretical despite it constantly being knee-capped by physical reality. Although the play has the potential to be performed by a live cast with a live audience, there are several segments that simply cannot be performed, at least not to the fullest extent of the text. There will inherently be dissonance present before the performance even begins. Once the play starts, this dissonance will be at odds with the dissonance that is created by the competing frequencies of the character’s conflicts, the space it’s being performed, and the way in which the realities at play are bending and fluid. It’s a poetics of excess, of throwing too much on the canvas, of a Magic Eye puzzle, of colliding tape loops, of additive synthesis. It’s about throwing variables on to a page and letting the audience’s subconscious tell them what they see. It’s the act of creating chaos and watching it spiral. It’s relinquishing control of meaning and letting the crystal ball show what it wants. *A Soft-Boiled Potato* is a series of happy accidents. It’s what drives this play to its chaotic end. It embraces the singularity in the swirling of the black hole, because only at that point does nothingness finally get to take over.

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