

NOTES TOWARDS A DIALECTICAL THEATER, DECONSTRUCTED,  
RECONSTRUCTED, AND ULTIMATELY DISCARDED  
(A Love Story)

By  
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## CHARACTERS

POINT A: A woman of any age; white or black, red, yellow, blue, green. Presents the dialectic. Always addresses the audience unless otherwise noted. PHIL calls her by the name of the actress playing her part.

PHIL: A man, same age, race, qualifications. Addresses POINT A.

SETTING: A stage. A line on the stage physically separates POINT A and PHIL until noted.

TIME: Now.

(At lights up: a stage. POINT A enters and puts up a sign: "Stasis: All the World is Green")

POINT A

Hi. How are you? If you'd take your seats I'd like to begin.

(Beat.)

I'm here to present you with a dialectic.

PHIL

(To A:) Hi. I'm Phil. Phil Bee. I know. Stupid name. It only gets worse.

POINT A

"Present" maybe isn't right.

(Places a sign on stage that reads: "Intrusion: Wherein the Protagonists Meet.")

I want to open up the possibilities of a Dialectical Theater. To turn it on its head.

PHIL

God I hate parties. Everybody just, you know *talks*.

POINT A

I have this fragile little hope that maybe I'll do something new.

PHIL

It's not like anybody ever says anything new.

POINT A

This is what I'm going to do: I'll take a traditional well-made play—as you can see it's already begun. And I'll dissect it using Brecht's idea of theater as a space to present opposing thoughts. A kind of—demonstration of a pure Dialectical Theater.

PHIL

I just never see the point.

POINT A

Actually I have two of them. Tonight you can call me POINT A. And now to begin. In a traditional narrative, we now experience what is called stasis. The true king is on the throne. The grass is green and growing. In the musical version, we sing

"Circle of Life" and everybody feels good. But peace is boring, so, on with the show.

PHIL

I didn't catch your name. . . . That's right. You didn't say it.

(POINT A holds up a sign with the actress' name on it.)

\_\_\_\_\_? Really? That's . . . a fantastic name. Can I get you a drink? I know, kind of a lame opening. But-

POINT A and PHIL

-You have to start somewhere.

POINT A

Oh, I almost forgot about him. Think of him as Point B. But you can call him Phil if you want.

PHIL

Nothing? That's cool.

POINT A

Tomorrow's another matter. Maybe tomorrow, across town, someone will call him Biff. He'll push back the door to reveal his father standing before him. He'll beam in expectation. But then, in that moment, forcing open the door to his father's hotel room, he'll finally realize, this man who he-

PHIL and POINT A

-played football with on the front lawn. This man who came home every day and gave mother a rose-this man-this father-

POINT A

-will have another lover. Biff will finally discover his father is a liar and a cheater. He'll be heartbroken.

PHIL

You're famous, right? I couldn't help noticing, that's all. I thought I recognized your smile.

(POINT A gives him a smile.)

That's it. You're an actress? Or I mean, it's an actor, right? I saw you in something.

POINT A

Tonight we can call him Phil.

PHIL

I know—it was one of those little shows that you go to somewhere downtown or in Brooklyn. I had this friend who was always in stuff like that.

POINT A

In terms of dramatic structure, we would call his interruption into the narrative an intrusion.

PHIL

He would Facebook invite me to everything. And you go to one or two because you feel like you have to but then you realize that most of them are really bad and you would rather have a beer and watch T.V. I mean this stuff was rid—God. Sorry. I'm a total jerk.

POINT A

With good reason.

(POINT A exits.)

PHIL

The thing is I remember you. You played some kind of religious girl who wanted to come out to her father. You were gay. I mean, your character was gay. What I mean to say is—you were good. I believed you were her.

(PHIL exits. A Beat. POINT A re-enters.)

POINT A

Is he gone? I do have a job to do. He was kind of in the way. Narrative does that. Gets in the way of the Epic Theater. The point is pedagogic really. Do you feel educated?

(PHIL re-enters. Takes out a cell phone and calls.)

Oh, boy. Here we go again.

(She puts out a sign: "Wherein the Long, Torturous Process of Dating Begins.")

PHIL

(Calls.) Hey. It's Phil. From the thing the other day? No—I got your phone number from Melinda. Listen—I'm sorry I sounded like such a jerk with what I said about plays. I mean I like theater. I

really liked *Les Miz*. Did you see the movie? I haven't seen the play, but I totally would.

POINT A

In the dialectical Epic Theater art is a vehicle for radical social change.

PHIL

Have you seen it? No? We should. You wanna check it out?

POINT A

It represents life as-is. It does not construct fantasy or rely on nostalgia. You should be aware you are sitting in a probably uncomfortable chair in a probably small theater. Are you? Pinch yourself. You are here. I am here. Isn't that nice? Art serves to de-sentimentalize man. He is not a view of man, but man himself. Man is man. Here, Phil's our man. So obnoxious as to almost be endearing.

PHIL

Also, I'm sorry it seemed like I was picking you up . . . trying to pick you up. . . . No I haven't asked someone "are you famous before." . . . But you do want to be famous right?

POINT A

-Maybe we shouldn't call it "Epic." Who wants Epic?

PHIL

Listen. Do you want to go out sometime? We could go to some theater and I could pay. Is Spider Man still playing? . . . Ontological Hy-what? You want to see who? . . . Flying babies? Is it a musical? . . . Well, . . . OK. 8.

(POINT A places out a sign: "Wherein Things Happen that Happen on a Bad Date.")

See you tomorrow.

(Exits.)

POINT A

I want an hour, *max*. Then I want to go get a drink. This won't go more than fifteen minutes. Cross my heart.

(Holds out her arm. PHIL enters from the other side and takes her by the arm. They stroll.)

Whoops! The narrative already started. Swept us off our feet. Hmm. . . . Where were we?

PHIL

Me? I'm into sports, really. Ok, that was a joke. I'm a botanist. Right, Phil Bee, the botanist—I've heard them all. I study rose sports. They're a naturally occurring genetic mutation on a branch of a bush. I used to make hybrids. Now I just mostly look at them and take notes for pesticide companies. You remember from high school, the whole Double Helix thing?

. . . No. I didn't know that was a band. Their last album? . . . Great.

POINT A

Stasis. . . . Intrusion. . . . Oh, yeah, obstacle.

(PHIL takes two chairs and places them center-stage. They sit.)

In the Dialectical Theater we—

PHIL

Shh!

POINT A

(Whispering:) WE MUST CONFRONT THE AUDIENCE DIRECTLY.

(PHIL pulls the ol' yawn-and-arm-around move and leans in. They loudly whisper throughout.)

PHIL

I DON'T GET IT.

POINT A

THEY MUST BE ALIENATED FROM EVENTS ON STAGE.

PHIL

DO THEY CALL IT 'ABSURD' BECAUSE YOU PAY THIRTY DOLLARS FOR IT?

POINT A

THAT WAY THEY ARE FORCED TO MAKE DECISIONS FOR THEMSELVES. THEATER BECOMES EMPOWERING.

PHIL

LISTEN. CAN WE GO GET A DRINK OR—Oh. Is it over? Ok. Now we clap? Wow. So that's the kind of stuff

you like? I mean, you want people to be entertained, right?

POINT A

The audience is sometimes not ready for the Epic Theater because the audience is not ready for revolutionary change. They want to be whisked away by the narrative. They want fantasy; they eschew confronting reality. But that's the point. To make them ready. Change is hard.

PHIL

Sometime's people don't get hybrids either. They don't understand what it's like to make something new.

POINT A

The audience will fall back on what's familiar to them instead of looking at the argument presented on stage. They miss what's right in front of them.

PHIL

Maybe if people just paid more attention to plants. Plants only do what's necessary. They survive by adapting, by changing when they need to. Adaptation, survival. That's what a plant needs. There's something about it; it's simple.

POINT A

The audience will hide behind anything that provides it protection . . . religion . . . science.

PHIL

The play was different. I didn't get it. Nothing happened. Nothing was necessary.

POINT A

Sometimes the artist-the creator of the dialectic, just needs the audience to listen. That's all they really need. Someone to hear them.

(He exits.)

One obstacle causes characters to change, which creates a complication. This complication leads to another obstacle. Don't worry though—we're already about half way through.

(PHIL re-enters. Takes his phone out. Calls.)

PHIL

Hey, it's me. . . . It's Phil. From the . . . yeah. Hi. How are you? . . . I was wondering—oh . . . you do? You're . . . you're making a play? And you have to—wait. Do you, maybe—

(Hopelessly takes out a *Time Out New York*.)

I saw there was this dance performance someone was staging in a bathroom in Tompkins Square Park. I thought maybe . . . oh. You've seen it. Well . . .

(Searching:) Oh! There's a reading of a li--bretto? about a Bengali Hip-hop artist at The Lion. Do you— it's 15 dollars.

Of course I can pay. . . . It's tomorr—oh. You have a rehearsal tomorrow? What's it— . . . a play about plays? Wow. That sounds . . . interesting.

POINT A

"Interesting": the most overused word in theater feedback. It can mean everything and nothing. Even if you mean it in a nice way, never tell a theater person their work is interesting, because they'll be insulted.

(POINT A places a sign that reads, "Wherein the People Are Raised From the Oppression of Ignorance.")

PHIL

Do you think I could come watch? I could buy you a drink afterwards—yes. And the cast too. . . . Great. See you then. OK. Bye.

(To himself:) She's totally into me.

(PHIL places a chair in the middle of the stage, while POINT A goes into the audience. A pause as he watches POINT A's "performance.")

PHIL

Really? That was your play? Well . . . the truth . . . I didn't get it, but I loved it.

(POINT A considers him for the first time. She re-enters the stage.)

## POINT A

The Dialectical Theater inspires revolutionary change in even the most obdurate and unready factions of the bourgeoisie.

## PHIL

But you know, I get you now. This is what you do. And I think it's really cool, but I also get why you think I might be kinda, well, boring, and if you don't want to go out for a drink then that's OK. I TiVo'd the game and— really? You want to go get a drink? You want me to get the rest of the cas—really? Just us? Well. Great.

(They sit or stand as if at a bar. Obnoxious bar music assaults them.)

## POINT A

Sometimes even the presenter of the dialectic needs a drink.

## PHIL

(Beat.)

Ok . . . think of it this way. Each nucleotide corresponds to a letter. You have your A's, your T's, your G's and your C's. A goes with T. C goes with G.

## POINT A

(Still to audience—but now warming to PHIL:) When I was a little girl, I used to put on plays for my mother in our back yard. Western Connecticut. We had this massive rose garden. When my mom retired she sold it.

## PHIL

Except sometimes when you get a mutation—we call that a sport. You get six different kinds of sports. I study preclinical chimeras, where . . . geez, I'm boring . . . Oh. You like it?

## POINT A

The point of my stage in the rose garden was to foster imagination. To transport myself, pigtails, summer dress and all, to another world.

## PHIL

Those create circular patterns in the petals. I used to breed new ones like that. New roses. It's pretty amazing—

## PHIL and POINT A

—To make something new.

POINT A

That is the point of the Dialectical Theater.

PHIL

It's the one place you can kind of create the world instead of being controlled by it. I haven't made one in years.

(He touches her ever-so lightly.)

POINT A

That's the thing about narratives. They always get in the way of dialectic.

PHIL

There's no money in it, of course. Making roses. Now I mostly research pesticides. That's where the funding is.

POINT A

The Dialectical Theater forces the audience to reason outside the story.

PHIL

But you were trying to make something new tonight. That's the way it was with my roses.

POINT A

Mind the gap. No matter how hard it gets.

PHIL

I think I heard you tonight.

POINT A

The point of the Dialectical Theater is to not be transported. The Dialectical-

PHIL

-I heard you.

(PHIL goes to her. He kisses her. Beat. She returns his kiss.)

Really? Wow.

(PHIL exits, but comes back on soon wearing a white lab coat. He sets up a small botany laboratory on the other end of the stage.)

POINT A

Umm . . . where were we? We have stasis where the world of the play is presented, then we have

intrusion where something happens to disrupt the stasis. Then we have complication and a new, temporary stasis is established. Then we have . . . I don't think I want to go on at this point. Can't we just stop at complication? I like to keep it complicated. This is nice, complicated.

(PHIL clears his throat. This could be merely for the purpose of clearing his throat, but it could also be directed towards POINT A.)

POINT A

OK . . . Then a new obstacle arises. This one is usually more difficult for the protagonist to overcome than the last, which heightens dramatic tension, or so the story goes.

(She holds up a sign that says, "Wherein the age old fight between Science and Art Re-Asserts Itself Between Lovers." She takes out a cell phone. She dials, opens her mouth and then—)

PHIL

—Hello? Oh, hey, you. Listen. This is great! I got up this morning. I went to the lab. I had a report due to Ticked-Off! but instead I picked up this old lab data on my last hybrid. I—I totally found what I was doing wrong! Just like that. I've been working all morning. I— . . . What do you mean it's 9:00? It shouldn't even be—

(Checks his watch.)

Whoa. Did you know it's 9:00PM—ohmygodourdate! I'm sorry. I just. I didn't even eat lunch yet. I've been working all this time. I—ok. We missed the thing—let me just. I'll see you in twenty minutes.

(Exits.)

POINT A

This is the point where—you want to connect. You want to abandon the distance. This is where you tire of *verfremdungseffekt*.

PHIL

Hey. Hey. Sorry—I just got so caught up. I mean. It was so exciting to be making again. I mean, if anyone understands it should be you.

(She turns to him.)

## POINT A

This is where the danger is. The audience wants to connect. The actor wants to connect. The narrative binds us close. We want to live the moment.

## PHIL

It's just. // It's important to me.

## POINT A

(Interrupting. Hands over her ears:)  
/Thedialiecticisblackandwhitepointaandpointbarenotr  
econcileditisthepresentationofopposingideasyouareno  
tphilyouarepointbyouareBiff.

## PHIL

I want it to be important to you.

(He exits back to his lab and his experiments.)

## PHIL

(Picks up the phone. Dials.)

Hey you, it's me. Still at the lab. Getting really close. I just have a few breeds to cross, but almost. . . . Funny to be working on a new one again after so long off—I'm distracted . . . you. You distract me.

## POINT A

The distancing effect weakens while the effects of distancing strengthen.

## PHIL

The fragrance is called "Reminiscence." Yeah. It's . . . well, I know we were on but I can't tonight. I really want to nail this thing. I promise . . . tomorrow. Bye, you.

(PHIL goes back to work. POINT A walks into the audience, begins to set up a projector.)

## POINT A

A confluence of complications. Obstacles abound. The narrative, now closing its deep middle game, moves inward, as vying plot points attempt to converge.

(A phone rings. A voice-over is heard with PHIL'S VOICE.)

## PHIL'S VOICE

Hi, You've reached Dr. Bee at the lab. I'm busy making The Next Best Thing so please leave me a flowery message and I'll get back to you.

## POINT A'S VOICE

Hi, Phil. This is \_\_\_\_\_. Great news! We got a grant for our meta-theatrical exploration of Brechtian dramaturgy! Not a lot, but enough to rent some really neat new high tech sound and theater light equipment.

(At which point, using a beat-up old school-house projector, she projects over the scene the following:

"Wherein Irreconcilable Differences Irreconcilably Differ.")

Very fancy stuff. I wanted to let you know. Talk to you soon.

(Beat. A phone rings. PHIL continues to work.)

## PHIL'S VOICE

Hi, You've reached Dr. Bee at the lab. I'm busy making The Next Best Thing so please leave me a flowery message and I'll get back to you.

## POINT A'S VOICE

Hey. Are you still working on that flower? You haven't been at your apartment. I went by there. Answer the phone, please. We need to talk.

## POINT A

Endgame. The narrative, yearning for an end, searches for a precise point somewhere in the future where the various threads of the story come together. A new stasis. Not better, not worse. New.

(Beat. A Phone rings.)

## PHIL'S VOICE

Hi, You've reached Dr. Bee at the lab. I'm busy making -

## POINT A'S VOICE

-Phil. Where are you? I didn't want to do this over the phone but you never answer.

(PHIL looks up, for the first time interested.)

I can't do this anymore. I just need someone who's,  
I don't know, more there.

PHIL

I almost have it—

POINT A' VOICE

Someone who doesn't spend all day making flowers.  
Someone who has time to make something with me.

(PHIL takes out one of his flowers,  
intently looking at it.)

What I must do at this point—the narrative is—  
besides, what I really want to say is—I need you  
and you're never here. So I can't do this. I'm  
sorry.

(Beat, PHIL smells the flower.)

Good luck, Phil.

(PHIL continues to stare at his  
flower. POINT A goes to projector.  
Changes it to "At which point the  
story concludes. Consider yourself  
educated, kid.")

PHIL

No! No wait. I . . . I have the smell. I have it. I  
wanted them to think of plants when you put on that  
play—as inspiration. I think of theater when I make  
flowers. I think of you when I make flowers. This  
is your flower. It's done.

(She comes to the stage. He hands it  
to her.)

Fantastic \_\_\_\_\_. That's the name. It's  
yours. Now you'll always be famous.

(POINT A crosses to PHIL's side of  
the stage.)

POINT A

(She speaks to him for the first time:) No, Phil. I  
. . . you did this for me?

PHIL

You made me work again. What you made with that  
play . . . it made me want to create again. To make  
a flower for you. Your rose. Your periclinical  
chimera.

POINT A

Do you think you could maybe stop for a bit to smell it with me?

PHIL

I think it's done. I don't have it in me. You never seemed to see me, you can't meet me where I am.

POINT A

I can.

(PHIL crosses to POINT A's side of the stage.)

PHIL

I don't think so.

(Beat.)

Truth be told, you always were a little distant.

POINT A

Can we take a walk?

PHIL

I have to get home. I'm tired.

POINT A

Can I call?

PHIL

It's like your play, that rose.

(He exits.)

POINT A

The narrative . . . that's the thing about narratives, they always get in the way of the Dialectical Theater. It is a theater-

(She smells the rose.)

Reminiscence.

(Lights.)

END OF PLAY.