

THREE PLAYS

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Three Plays
by Deborah Meadows

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Guide Dogs

Characters

Professor A: Philosophy major who became a part-time professor, late 40s to early 50s. She has precise economic evaluation of situation but limited way to earn a living, has sizable student following from local university.

Kurt: Perpetual Day laborer, early 20s, highly educated, sweetly grunge in affect. He is former student of A, does cement work, has lime-dried hands.

Old Hi-Fi: A convincing version of a seeing-eye dog, yet when only Professor A and Kurt are present moves and speaks as a human, comments ironically on various scenes. Called “Old Hi-Fi” or “High Fidelity.” He’s looking for the blind person to whom he was assigned. Sceptic.

Part One:

Setting [near edge of viaduct under crumbling freeway bridge]

[Heard by audience before lights come up]

A: To say X about activism is not to see activism at all.

Kurt: Don't you grasp the geostrategic emphasis here?

[Lights up]

A: A common spirit exists in members of the group.

Kurt: It inspires enthusiasm, devotion, and strong regard for the honor of the group.

A: Language-era. Paleobotany might take up equisetum. At the university, the number of workers can be reduced when they palletize books, laboratory equipment, desks. *[makes gesture of absurdity]* That way just one fork-lift operator can lift up thousands each day sparing our backs if you *mis-think* the situation.

Kurt: I didn't come here. I didn't come here carrying anything.

A: There was no time. Everyone was rushing, pushing, shouting. Too compact. Compressed, then near the edge, I got away. Clothes on my back. And shoes. Good shoes. How long have you been here? What have you done for food?

Kurt: I have a small knife.

A: There were the missile men who carried out another supposed mission with guided missiles. They are not faceless drones. *[makes gesture of grid of missiles]* No, they can even draw on humanitarian work with teams of specialists and cultural diplomats.

Kurt: No one could stop them. Is my breathing shallow? I should change that. You look puzzled.

A: I am puzzled. It doesn't seem like many will make it. People got drawn into some kind of vision.

Kurt: Did it come from how we started to know things are dying off?

A: But, Kurt, isn't this sentimental, a way of reducing cuttlefish to their sepia secretions, a way of sequencing people. Some are here, near the edge where they have been for a time finding their way back. Their return—didn't we imagine their return?

Kurt: Or was it a protected area? Professor A, are we honest clay shaped here? Did they get away—fly, crawl, swim to this spot?

A: They became too numerous, compressed, moved to the edge. Crude, here at the viaduct camp-out processed by the nation's central thought ...

[They begin to tie down flapping tarp.]

Kurt: To steady the motion we can use stays or a long line indexed in a way that *unknown* becomes correlated to references that gum up the guesswork. *[points to drying laundry lines]*

Part Two:

The Argument and the March [street scene]

A: I came from far-flung cities.

Kurt: I came to this view after much deliberation.

A: I marched as a conjugated necklace the entire length of Main Street. [*The two link arms in this line.*]

Kurt: I saw the repeated blazes on trees.

A: I saw the yellow field with black lettering—film location signs.

Kurt: I saw wheat paste news that doesn't stay news.

A: Kurt, how about a change of property without money?

Kurt: Can it make for an electronic trading post, Professor A?

A: A commandeering, a lifting or liberating of materials into the universe.

Kurt: Can it be a free store?

A: Or traditions outside of traffic court where they really have you.

Kurt: What or who will lead?

A: We're led by the heart. *[Through this sequence the actors' gestures are both subtle and overly obvious.]*

Kurt: By experience.

A: By influence.

Kurt: By eros. *[Slightly thrusts forward the pelvis.]*

A: By message.

Kurt: By image.

A: By rhythm.

Kurt: By a strong guitar line. *[Actor twangs a well-known rock line.]*

[Long pause.]

A: Some of this is taking longer than they estimated.

Kurt: It's always like that.

A: The streets that are too ruined to take ... we can stop here.

Kurt: Why? There is nothing here—or too much rubble to continue.

A: We came back with those cameras and some old things that we can replace right now. Lighten the load.

Kurt: It doesn't make sense to do that. Isn't that like throwing away the invention of steel because it's too strong?

A: No, it's nothing like that. Nothing about cultural or technological loss. It's a reduction. A relation to the void.

Kurt: I mean here's the childhood location, and over there, the old memory machine, and over us all is the bureaucracy that runs between.

A: There were some hot days during the summer. I'm sure of that.

Kurt: You mentioned those, but is that a legitimate focus for someone who returns after enduring what you have? Finding what you have?

A: I lost many people. There's no trick to that.

Kurt: But your resolution of the theorem that stumped everyone else ...

A: For a few minutes it was gratifying, and so clear, but like any finding it joins a wave of simultaneity. First me, then two others at the Institute, then four, then sixty-four abroad all hit on it.

Kurt: A seemingly eternal idea?

A: A generational coherence.

Kurt: And we got there despite the news blackout.

A: Despite expense.

Kurt: Despite time.

A: Despite distance.

Kurt: Despite insufficient items.

A: Like gear.

Kurt: But here: here is our slingshot tweeted. *[Actor makes big-little gesture.]*

A: Note the historic marker as you pass. *[Both walking and one gives gesture of faux tour guide.]*

Kurt: Didn't this imply intimate knowledge of the way, and of all its difficulties and dangers?

A: Ah, ground crew at the ready.

[Crowd takes over and two actors disappear in crowd.]

[They re-surface after disappearing in crowd at end of last scene. Old Hi-Fi enters wearing a Seeing Eye dog harness remains unseen by Professor A and Kurt for a few lines.]

A: Planetism having taken over ...

Kurt: Planetism?

A: Yes, planetism, so water and with varying degrees of success all wolfed-down examples of production like these.

Old Hi-Fi: Has anyone seen my blind person? We seem to have gotten separated in the crowd scene.

Kurt: Who are you?

Old Hi-Fi: Old Hi-Fi's the name, leading the blind with honor and dignity for generations. *[says preceding as if an advertising slogan]* Also good in thought, irony, and at naps.

Kurt: I see. Hey, A, what happened to the promise of soft authoritarianism?

A: Or the promise of viable alternatives? *[addresses Old Hi-Fi]* Where was your blind person last seen?

Old Hi-Fi: In the crowd back there...

Kurt: *[ignores Old Hi-Fi]* What happened to renewable self-interest?

A: See? *[Points]*

[All three look.]

Kurt: Where?

A: Over there.

Kurt: Ok, yeah. Now I see where you mean.

A: See those who graze peacefully?

Kurt: But are they ...?

Old Hi-Fi: Are they us?

A: My sip of stuff this morning makes me herded by the thousands in the Long Drive to market, myself a slaughterhouse product.

Kurt: You?

A: Yes, I myself, a slaughterhouse product.

Kurt: A philosopher wants us to cognize the sentient nature of each one so we can be handed over to the amphitheater of rights. *[He pulls a potato from his pocket and the three toss this "hot potato" fashion in the next stretch up to "Their Old World charm."]*

A: Their abrogation. Rights!

Kurt: Their continuity.

Old Hi-Fi: Their origins.

A: The application of Rights.

Kurt: Their exclusions.

Old Hi-Fi: Exceptions.

A: Definitions.

Kurt: Presuppositions.

Old Hi-Fi: Implications.

A: Corollaries.

Kurt: Conclusions.

Old Hi-Fi: And utter beauty. *[puts away potato]*

A: Their Old New World charm.

Kurt: The historic patina of violent commerce in human flesh.

Old Hi-Fi: The circus of the courtroom made solemn by robes.

Kurt: And wigs. Don't forget the wigs.

A: The supporting cast of thousands.

Kurt: Slave drivers and cops.

Old Hi-Fi: Civil Rights lawyers and clients.

Kurt: They wait years for justice.

A: Age to silver-haired fragility before the vindication of their efforts.

Old Hi-Fi: Or some croak un-vindicated, too.

A: Let's test this, rulers and commoners alike.

Kurt: It's only democratic.

A: But let's not fall into some sort of facile causality to understand this as a reaction of billiard balls—there is another frame from which to hang our exploration.

Kurt: Do go on ...

A: By analogy? Or metaphor?

Old Hi-Fi: Why not? If you have to be obvious about it.

A: In the Coso Range the petroglyphs show hunters with atlatls.

Kurt: With?

A: Atlatls. It's a throwing stick that adds one more joint to the arm helping to launch a spear at much greater, and deadlier, velocity than by hand alone. *[makes atlatl-launching gesture]*

Kurt: So that's a technological advance. We really need one right here, right now.

A: Keynes wrote we should prime the pump.

Old Hi-Fi: Do what to the pump?

A: Add water to the water pump. It's a metaphor for the economy.

Kurt: Therefore, we need: 1. a technological answer, and 2. a metaphor. *[counts on fingers]*

A: No, actually it means spending more on the general populace through programs—jobs, bridges, art projects, that kind of thing.

Old Hi-Fi: What about building farms and factories here instead of subdivisions and big box stores for imports?

A: Keynes, John Maynard in his 1936 book, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* wrote that no country should ever run up a trade deficit.

Kurt: I bet Keynes' book concludes it would leave all of us day laborers like me or working for the few rich people waxing their pubic hair or whatever they need.

A: Did you see that? *[points]*

Kurt: Where?

A: The cops put plastic-tie handcuffs on four people over there including that mother and her four-year old boy.

Old Hi-Fi: Are they going to lock up kindergarteners now? Am I next?

A: I don't know. Let's see what happens.

Kurt: Maybe they'll outsource all four of them.

A: Outsource our protestors?

Kurt: And writers?

A: Those puppeteers?

Old Hi-Fi: They can get cheaper ones in rural China or one of those islands off the coast of Florida.

A: Well, not the island of Cuba.

Old Hi-Fi: No, those other ones where they sew pajamas for a noted theme park in southern California.

A: Oh, right. But right here, *we* have natural resources.

Kurt: Like bauxite.

A: *We* have a trained labor force.

Kurt: Maybe too obedient. *We* have unnatural resources.

A: Jackalopes and priests.

Kurt: *We* have an untrained workforce.

A: Gravity of the situation vs. violent hurricanes to defy it.

A., Kurt, & Old Hi-Fi: [*hands folded in prayer*] This is a bountiful nation—for sure. Amen.

Kurt: If they pass out a hot lunch, let's get in line.

A: I shouldn't like the fried food whose smell is wafting over us.

Old Hi-Fi: Food, yes food. [*Old Hi-Fi wanders off.*]

Kurt: It's bad for you.

A: Potatoes especially.

Kurt: Aren't they your downfall?

A: Even so, mashed potatoes are good and more than suffice as filling.

Kurt: They go straight to the hips.

A: I can eat potatoes all day, feel guilt by evening, redeem myself by the next morn.

Kurt: Because they're bad for you? A lack of virtue?

A: True, bad if they're done in hydrogenated vegetable oil like our most famous fast food empire that will go nameless.