

Are revolutions pathetic?

Not having had the experience of a revolution, this is a question I can only approach through the mediations which *do* constitute my experience. Often revolutions are mediated as pathetic, as a surge of hope over reason, or the submergence of reason by mania. I cannot think of a single mainstream (textbooks, popular and even academic historiography, journalism) account which did not couch its account of revolution in these terms, a lexicon imported – however decoratively – from historical reaction, and thus reflecting its/our period absolutely, whatever the overt political standpoint of the account. Revolutions are a matter of regret, historical mistakes, either because they upset a legitimate order or because they lead to a 'worse tyranny'. In that sense, revolutions are uniquely pathetic as historical events since they never get what they set out to accomplish, they just make everything worse. They are, in part or cumulatively, the epitome of the irony of history, which, fundamentally, is the irony of *power*.

To the extent that revolutions are deemed to be wholly historically determined, they are tragic, and so, pathetic. Their incidence is severed from a thinking of contingency in history so that the present itself can be established to be impermeable. The iron laws of historical irony can be deemed to operate backwards and forwards across time and through space, and they do not take human - social - intention into account. The irony of history then becomes a reflection of the impersonal rectitude of the market. Intervention is pathetic.

It is important to situate this account of reaction as the reflex of historical thought on revolution because it establishes a role for pathos which is separate from and orthogonal to politics. We understand revolutions because we empathize with the suffering of the oppressed, we are moved by idealism, we sorrow for the fallen on both sides, we shake our heads at the decomposition of the revolution's hopes. Wondering what else could have been expected. What kind of pathos do we experience here? Pathos as a mediation of the impossibility of revolution. But isn't that simply what pathos is, the mode of the tragic in human affairs, the structure of feeling that allows us to communally undergo and thus understand our fallen condition? Pathos is the feeling of weakness before an awesome power. This is the realism of pathos. When we are encouraged to form deep imaginative sympathies with the vicissitudes of powerless individuals, overlooking the causes of their awe before dark powers, this is the cynical contract of a shared feeling. Pathos is cynicism at its highest moral pitch.

But there is also a revolutionary pathos which departs from the feeling of shared weakness, which is something George Caffentzis puts forward in his account of a nascent debtor's movement. Does this mean breaking with the pathos of identification with power, the awe of dark forces, does it mean identifying with a power generated in shared weakness? It seems like there has to be this kind of abstract reversal happening somehow, that the break has to transpire in the sphere of pathos, if pathos is the feeling of experiencing a condition in common, but, in the mode of weakness and isolation. But this turnaround is still too easy.

A structure of pathos cannot just be reverse-engineered, because the structure grew up according to certain imperatives and thereby against others. A revolutionary pathos might then in fact have to be generated from quite other grounds than a 'universal victimhood', but it is precisely the pathos of the victim that stands in the way of a common affect which moves cohesively, whether in or counter the direction of entropy.

Here it might also be helpful to trace the mutual implication between pathos and realism. In a piece of fiction, or a document, situated, pathos can be activated as a way of collapsing distance, of bringing you in, triggering affect, immersion. Realism is something different however in that it tries to make systems and universals tangible in everyday habits and obscenities, emblematically in Brecht, without immersion – immersion is one of the conditions it might want to stage, to exhibit it in all its cruelty. Here the pathos is located in what kind of contact is possible between frozen reality and its depiction, a pathos of the involuntary, and that *is* involuntary as much as it reflexively stages the circumstances of production. Revolutions are pathetic inasmuch as we experience them as a form of theatre, but not epic theatre . . . Here maybe we could throw a bridge between the involuntary and entropy. We could prospectively say that the involuntary is what acts out determination without knowing it, but the experience of the involuntary is one that has no pre-formed relation to knowledge, that there is no image for what is happening. It is a discourse determined to evade the deadliness of its imperiled hero, a world that succumbs to complexity and expires when there are no more growth opportunities. The discourse of entropy on the other hand, is, as again George Caffentzis reminds of, the doom narrative of capital in which we all die with it, to which he counterposes 'must the molecule fear if the engine dies'? But what is the molecule anyway on its own? Does it have autonomy? Should we be suspicious of a victorious molecule as an analogue for the triumph of workers without capital? We don't know. We don't know which relations a molecule can form.

Is pathos an object or a device?

The whole human history of the concept bears an intimate relationship to the concept of production. Its origin, as a *terminus technicus* in the art of speech, makes the case quite incontrovertibly. For the Greeks, pathos did not precipitate from the sky: but it was undoubtedly *made*, and in the first instance it was made from language, by men whose inimitable ease of speech prevented the work of their preparation from appearing anywhere but in the intense sensations roused up in the breasts of their dumb spectators.

Pathos cannot become an object that we vainly or lovingly wish to *find* until the most advanced conditions of *production* have come to seem repugnant. As Friedrich Schiller wrote in his great plea for moral stupidity, 'On Naive and Sentimental Poetry', "the Greek seems in his love for the object to make no distinction between that which is through itself, and that which is through art and through the human will. Nature seems more to interest his understanding and his curiosity than his moral feeling; he does not adhere to the same with

intimacy, with sentimentality, with sweet melancholy as we moderns." *We moderns* do not taxonomise nature like Aristotle. We yearn with sweet melancholy to take our vacations in it. I would assume this is because we, unlike "the Greeks", have the advantage of experiencing society as the quintessential scene of exhausting, degraded, and unfree labour. This is true whether we have to perform that labour or merely to acknowledge that it takes place.

The point that Schiller was making is difficult for us to grasp, because in the two centuries since he made it the idea of natural sentiment has been banalised into its most repulsive Victorian emblems -- the Cherub fountain in the garden, the mountain top shrouded in fog -- and then still more ruinously corrupted by the reproduction of these as commodity picture postcards for mass consumption: the 7'x9' image of the cherub fountain on top of the mountain shrouded in fog and stuck to the door of the refrigerator. If anything like a nature cult still survives for us, it must be as an instinctive aversion to the idea that feeling should be laborious, overwrought, or contrived. "Real" emotion, emotion raw and true, must be spontaneous. The more work we are forced to perform, the more that proposition comes to appear as a natural law.

One belief which formed itself quite early in the history of bourgeois Romanticism was that pathos can be *found* only in a state of passivity. As a concept hostile to the prevailing concept of activity, passivity can be a state of attunement, vigilance, or receptiveness. It certainly need not be, and for its earliest Romantic proponents it imperatively *must not be*, a condition of blank or intoxicated stupor. And in fact the most ambitious statement of this wish, to *find* pathos rather than to participate in its *making*, was not meant to permit a comfortable retreat from false activity but was intended more boldly to *redeem* the concept of activity in the face of its everyday debasement in the process of modern commercial relations. Can it still do so? When Samuel Taylor Coleridge describes in verse the vision of finding Kubla Khan's palace, he is elevated into the most intense state of feeling, and he knows that what he has encountered is "a miracle of rare device". This assertion may seem to contradict the claim that the pathos of this encounter is *found* and not *made*; but the circumstances under which its production takes place are in fact highly irregular: firstly because this "device" must be miraculous, and thereby an object existing in violation of the laws of nature; secondly because it must be a "rare", which is to say, an *uncommon* miracle; and finally because Kubla Khan's production must have hanging over it the second sense of rarity, that is, the sense of rarefaction, of the ethereal, the vanishing, so that the "device" can be enjoyed only in the sense that it is vaporous, shimmering, barely real, and therefore capable of being *ended* as soon as the imagination demands it.

What is the pathos of this encounter? It is pathos dependent on the fact Kubla Khan's palace is neither happened upon (it is not *a found* object) nor devised. Pathos depends on the fact that the spectacle which induces it is "manufactured" by the poet only to the extent that he can remain quiescent in the face of his own educated instincts towards false activity. If he can succeed in this artifice of self-restraint, the pathos he undergoes will be both *devised* and *passively* received by him. He will own, and he will not be possessed by, the

pathos which he is given. This was an idea sufficiently influential that it was still asserted in the early 1960s by the Situationists.

But it is the possibility of bringing pathos to an *end* which is most decisive. What Coleridge thought of as the rarity of the fantastical “device” in his poem is, in truth, a condition of cessation. That is to say, only where the manufacture of our feelings can plausibly be brought to a close, curtailed, or made to relent, can that manufacture be admired and freely wanted. Only where passivity elicits a production of intense feelings that are capable of being electively *concluded* is it a meaningful opponent to the relentless production of pathos under the pressure of commercial imperatives.

And yet the mass production of cultural goods is evidently incompatible with “rare” devices. We are powerless to make the production of pathos relent. No object of feeling that we dream up or stumble across is capable even of inhibiting the manufacture of the new pathetic devices whose role is to replace whatever came before; and nothing about our existing social relations could be more self-evident or impossible to misinterpret than the demand they asseverate that they *must* be reproduced. The novelty in all this is that we are now caught in an incessant transition *not between activity and passivity but through sensation itself*, as if the pathos of our encounters were just the different areas of pressure in a hurricane in which we move with all the free will and self-determination of the debris that it tears up and scatters. And, so, the question that grits its teeth in the face of this is, how do we learn what it would mean *really and truly* to stop?

If the emotions incident to the idea of poetic justice are associated in turn with the representational economization of humiliation and loss (as the good feelings we are promised in exchange for the damage we are made to suffer); and if this economization is immensely profitable for capitalist culture *in spite of the fact* that its origin is archaic and not capitalistic -- then is the idea of grace artistically reactionary?

Or

Is pathos necessarily damaging?

So, two questions, which will try to imbricate one another even as I for my part try to maintain heuristic distance between them at least for the sake of my own clarity.

I guess first we can try to determine if the question about whether the idea of grace is artistically reactionary is preceded by the question of whether grace is reactionary or not in its own right, and if by 'own right', we are implying something like 'socially/ politically/ philosophically' reactionary, as if those registers were more proper to a concept than

'artistically', or more proper to an attempt to understand it. We can surely think of many examples where 'progress' and 'reaction' have been opposing or mismatched between the political and the artistic, although frequently enough the interpretive attempt is to find a secret harmony between artistic reaction and political reaction, say, between socialist realism and Stalinism, and much of modernism was staked on proving that artistic reaction is de facto political reaction, and vice versa, even if in practice, certainly the modernism embraced by the market and the history books told a very different story.

But it seems to be mainly about the idea of grace as a *neutralization* or *transcendence* of the economization of emotions such as justice and loss (a structure of exchange), and whether or not that can be made to align with poetic justice as the ironized marker of 'fair exchange' transacted beneath the arbiters of power, regulation and normality. 'Grace' is the surplus, and we have no 'right' to it, but then, really, don't we all deserve it? Our unknowability, our potentiality, our singularity that this harsh economized world does not recognize or reward – this is the ambit of grace. To the extent that this is a cornerstone of the 'art religion' in Adorno's sense, a shameless surplus, then we cannot help but pile plaudits of reaction at its feet. But this seems now to equivocate between the religious idea of grace and the artistic inflection of it, art as a repository of secular grace. Then I find myself digging with lackluster brio through a host of widely propounded but personally unread and unknown contemporary theory about economic postulates being barely sublimated religious ones (Agamben, etc.). The phrase '*in spite of the fact* that its origin is archaic and not capitalistic' also brings this line of thought strongly to the forefront. A Marxist impulse is to say that the archaic bears a stronger propensity for reaction than the capitalist if capitalism is deemed objectively historically progressive. Yet, the archaic and the atavistic's admixture with capitalism is exactly what fortifies it. The sacrificial economy of pathos (or as it manifests in austerity, the libidinal reward offered by governments and capitalists that no one in the affected population has to 'buy' in order to enjoy, in distinction from the usual protocols of market exchange. See New York Times on Latvia) is probably one of the clearest examples of this.

Whether pathos is necessarily damaging, or maybe the concept of 'damage' is itself full of pathos. In a simple cosmology, the object is damaged while a subject suffers. The extent to which a person can experience damage is then the extent to which we agree to conditions of experience which are impossible: we feel like objects buffeted about by hostile forces, scattered and helpless - but an object can *have* no experience. Only a subject can own. Because this is what a subject does, many in the field of theory have recently taken to abstract negations of the property-owning principle embodied in the subject (object-oriented ontology) without for a moment taking an interest in the social relations that enforce subjects and objects, up to and including theoretical commodities that asseverate 'flat ontology'. It is the eternal – albeit open to facile critique – academic move of dismissing the grip of abstract value by a shift in focus to different *values*.

We can sustain damage, and the damage detracts or augments from the quality or conditions of experience we can then look forward to, that we have a right to expect, not to mention our most generically and vaguely conceived 'market value'. Grace is the

cancellation of this forecast, it restores to us subjecthood. Of course it is reactionary, like all personal salvations. But then is it the intimation of a personal salvation that makes it possible to conceive of a total social redemption? And does the meaning of redemption or reconciliation change according to how closely it is modelled on personal salvation? And if the economic model can only be transcended by a religious model which is itself economic, where do we go with the mystical or esoteric concept of redemption in materialism at all? Can we, that is, go, that is, anywhere?

My concern with pathos is that what we feel most intensely, experience as most intensely ours and thus incomparable, untranslatable, a particular damage, is exactly the common condition of being objects in a system which we cannot perceive through the pathos of existing within it, and the pathos that redeems us from total oblivion within it. The pathos of capital, if put other than in those terms, is that survival for many is impossible without the destruction of the untold many more. And of course exploitation takes many more baroque forms. Yet those who are destroyed feel the pathos as destiny. Switching over, total social capital is thus rendered total social pathos: the damaged life is systemic reproduction, according to the sacrificial economy you indicate. Pathos as the structural obscuring of the source of the damage, but there can in fact be no source since the pathos of individual damaged lives is too specific and too various to admit of the violence of abstraction that hunting for a source may entail. And yet pathos is the delivery system of real abstraction at its most violent, where it is absorbed as a condition of our simple survival.

Is there a difference between a feeling of experience and a feeling of social experience?

Most of the experience programmed for working adults assumes that they don't have much time in which to have it. Therefore what passes for "news" about social "issues" usually invites its patient to feel strongly about some putative injustice about which she has already made up her mind. You stumble out of the tube station feeling bleary and for the first time certain that your new shoes are pinching at the right toe and a man wearing a blue plastic coat passes to you a paper and, *there*, Commuter Rail Prices Fail To Drop, just like you expected. I use the pronoun "you", but it might as well be "I", or "someone else entirely", In any case certain sensations follow:

1. It's basically what you already expected. If it wasn't, there's a chance that you wouldn't be interested, since – excepting total outliers, *queen falls from bridge, dachshund plays Brahms intermezzo*, etc – any issue about which you can't be expected to have formed expectations is also potentially uninteresting. In other words, not having an expectation is already evidence of disinterest.
2. There is a fine line between desirable and boring familiarity, though where the required aliquot portion of customer attention is very small indeed, the customer may be taught to find that even boredom is desirable.

3. Gradually you learn the names and the relations of four or five variables all of which possess a direct relationship to what you come to feel are your interests, as in a) your pension, b) public spending, c) inflation, d) immigration, e) taxes. You get some satisfaction from anticipating the influence that changes to any one of these variables will have upon the others. In a way this is the *feeling* of knowledge.
4. Familiarity which is boring and not desirable can be avoided by communicating to you whatever it is that you basically already expected only in the form of an extreme, e.g., the welfare queen has been given a controlling share in Microsoft and Scotland as a fief. Residual anxiety about the injustice of assessing a social institution on the basis of its most extreme result can be assuaged by platitudinous slogans to the effect that *this is a new low*, or, *this is the straw that breaks the camel's back*, or, *this is the thin end of the wedge* – splenetic and opprobrious phrases which serve the additional function of reminding you that what you are now readings is news.
5. Wherever a story cannot be made into a new and scandalous extreme, as is the case with the specimen headline I gave above, it can still be guarded against boring familiarity. The only requirement in this case is that it gesture towards *inevitability*. Commuter rail prices *fail* to drop. That word *fail* enters into the consciousness of its reader and lights up a series of latent associations with the other concepts *weakness*, *ineptitude*, and *insecurity*, which, because they bring to mind *impotence*, are nicely judged to rouse up in turn a kind of diffuse fatalism. (It should be added that point (5) is really a subclass of point (4), because even the news of a *minor* worsening of your condition can be a new extreme: namely, a new extreme in the inevitable.)

As a child, later as an adolescent, I often felt that I was incapable of strong feelings. My emotional responses were rigid and unyielding, not the splendid blaze of conviction I saw in other people. I wanted to learn to love and hate spontaneously. I wanted to *feel* that I knew what I believed. How I could I be wholly a person, when my judgments were so much like teeth, when they were sheathed by my body and fixed into its flesh if not quite *irremovably* then at least in such a way that they couldn't be drawn without some conscious exertion of force? I could not often push so hard, I knew this from the fatigue of trying. And yet whatever could cause my feelings to move independently of my will I loved more intensely for that – I loved it recklessly and without reserve, because it vouchsafed for me my personhood. I now think that the racist, extremist, and thuggish propaganda which makes up the main source of “mainstream” knowledge for the majority of ordinary people works on exactly the same principles. The reader who submits to that propaganda feels towards it a barely suppressed gratitude, because the suite of opinions it makes available permit him to behave as if he had learnt to love and hate spontaneously, which is to say, as if he were a person. It must be a tremendous triumph of the commodity producing society that it has managed to distribute so widely among its inhabitants, as a precondition of what I just described, the fantasy of being less than, or somehow not at all, human. And although I write about myself in the *pasttense*, only I can know how intensely I want to pretend that I can provide you with an authoritative explanation.

The feeling of being less than or not fully a person is in my life the same as the feeling of failing socially, though the reversion of that statement is not true: successful social experience affords no integrity to my sense of self. Obviously this idea is quite commonplace. “[W]e probably do mean the leadership of the most/ oppressed and not merely the oppressed”, writes the poet Samuel Solomon, acting out in a poem the fantasy where we say to our friends or to our comrades or colleagues what we *really* mean, and not “merely” the thing which we almost mean – the thing we do say in fact, in fear for the intellectual foundations of our intimacy. And I know another feeling close enough to this one to be ingrown into it, of feeling that I know more than what I have already said, of withholding myself from a conclusion that I believe myself capable of reaching, of exchanging the pleasure of *culminating* an argument for the pleasure of *prolonging* it, in defiance of my conscious need for intellectual progress and in defiance also of the claims of rational cognition itself.

I can only answer your question like this. The sense of being less than a person is perversely resolved by the news commodities which assure you that whatever you currently possess is endangered, fragile, and capable at any moment of being taken away. Selfhood is guaranteed by that assurance because it quite naturally rouses up the passionate conviction in which certainty of selfhood resides, and which mere *possession* is incompetent to sustain. I have a half life with many liabilities mounting up, but my deepest debt is to fear itself, for without it I am nothing. That will sound melodramatic. But melodrama too is something to be afraid of: because it might turn out to be about nothing. The identity of individual and social experience, which is to say, less blandly, the identity of my most passionate convictions with the experiences which this society must want me to have – this identity will never be nothing, never under any circumstance, because no matter how fucked my or any other individual life may be, it will never be entirely destitute: and so the passionate desire to keep what we have will never be entirely abstract. I have to finish this point before I cease to care about it. It is infinitely harder to maintain our *individual* experience in a state of disunity with social experience, in the particular sense in which I am currently using it, because passionate conviction, which is the substance of selfhood, is immensely more difficult to maintain with reference to an object which doesn't *presently* exist. The more that I think about this the more I feel I understand the role of passion in political thinking. It is not enough merely to *know* that people will always feel more passionate about what they *have* than what they don't, or even that they will always feel more passionate about what they might lose than that which they are certain to keep. It is not enough merely to accept the truth of these propositions in the vague hope that they might therefore be overtaken from the conservative thinkers who first advanced them, in the name of radical “lucidity”, or “maturity”, or some other cardinal virtue in which we might believe ourselves to be culpably deficient. Those arguments, meant to wake us up to “ordinary” psychology of “real people”, assume that what we possess is the foundation of passion, whereas in fact it is the insufficiency of property for the production of that effect which causes capitalist culture to work so hard to *induce* in “real people” the belief in the insecurity of what little they have. In our present society, we become people by believing that we will lose that which *in itself* is not enough to make us so. The self is carried into existence under the

intensifying threat of that loss. In circumstances like these, the melodrama of a subjectivity founded in what doesn't exist but may yet be is in fact the more positive condition. This is a fact that must become a source of conviction.

What is the greatest achievement of our feeling?

The greatest achievement of our feeling was making us believe that it didn't exist. No, that's the devil, sorry. The greatest achievement of our feeling is freeing us from ourselves, from the labour it takes to reproduce ourselves and others, and suddenly feeling can make us realize that none of that is real. Where does that feeling come from? It comes from a feeling of reversibility or infinite permeability, a feeling that the future has indeed the power to negate all that came before, even while there must be some reason for everything that has happened to us and formed us, some application for all the painful and boring futility. A stock of experience, its cumulative logic at odds with but preparing us for expansion, or, for 'grace'.

Marx writes that value is an 'automatic subject': "It is constantly changing from one form into the other, without becoming lost in this movement; it thus becomes transformed into an automatic subject. If we pin down the specific forms of appearance assumed in turn by self-valorizing value in the course of its life, we reach the following elucidation: capital is money, capital is commodities. [...] For the movement in the course of which it adds surplus-value is its own movement, its valorization is therefore self-valorization [Selbstverwertung]. By virtue of being value, it has acquired the occult ability to add value to itself. It brings forth living offspring, or at least it lays golden eggs.' The affect of capital is always innocent; it transcends the economization of feeling. Its greatest achievement is our feelings, insofar as our feelings yearn for something more than what its world can give us.

Insofar as it is impossible to get outside ourselves, outside this society, are feelings are couched in the feelings of capital as it yearns for freedom and release from dirty, resentful, back-breaking labour. If we don't like that labour, we can become capital, and we want to. Social freedom, social possibility, is measured by how close we, frail, broken, always tired, frequently alone, can get to capital and its sovereignty. As capital deserts whole countries, for example, everyone is condemned to being unwanted labour, but of course capital is still there in each collected can, each syringe, every abandoned house and destroyed street, just as as it might shine forth in a painting or a lap dance, pumping, groaning, pumping, groaning.

But this is not a gnosis, not a breviary or menagerie even of an irremediably fallen world. I think of this now in that genre:

'The rock beneath my head floated up in the air, as light as a feather. It was croaking and croaking. It cracked open to reveal another rock, croaking and croaking as well. And I understood that this was not the end. That there is no end. And the rocks were not rocks but rather happy frogs, being continually born through their croaking mouths. Photograph in hand, I continued on my way toward the mystery of the blue rabbits, vestiges of history.' (by Aura Estrada, a writer who died at the age of 30 of injuries she sustained in a swimming accident)

But capital feels for you, the market feels for you, as Melanie Gilligan, who will come here to speak in the near future, has written. Our feelings are nugatory, because as a population, as a world population, we are farmed. Our feelings are of residual interest even to each other. But our *feeling* is pathos. The pathos of reduction, of non-existence, of extinction, or just quotidian helplessness and immobility. The pathos of the frozen in ice but in this life. The only way we can understand one another is as nodes of an irreducible pathos, a feeling that can be structurally equated with a *glass partition* or a *sneeze shield*. That which is in place for our own protection. What is the relation between affect and logistics? How does feeling achieve the effect of a force field – please, please, I was just trying to get to where I was going – and precipitates concrete violence when its privations are not respected? This is how we feel about being/having nothing. Or simply taking into account that this is a viable state for many, as you said before about exhausting, degraded and unfree labour. It is monstrous that insofar as we strive for more life, the more we can merely register this. Pathos is the affect of living capital's emotional life, and the acknowledgement that we have no way of knowing what another one might be. This unknowing is perhaps what may become a source of conviction, though still, if pathos is all we have this is the only way we know of exceeding what we have, coming to *have* more feelings. This is hard to set free.

is pathos always and ever a shared helplessness in the face of larger forces?

or

can there be a 'law-giving' and/or a 'law-breaking' pathos?

Is pathos *always* helplessness in the face of larger forces, or, if it isn't, is it *ever*? Liberal societies have a mechanism whose purpose is to unite these extremes. Call it *the excluded middle*. The excluded middle is a television studio situated somewhere in the centre of a major city. The studio is populated with representatives of two positions engaged in what can be regarded in the strangely affectless and neutral language of liberal arbitration as a *debate*. These representatives sit next to experts and public intellectuals whose role it is to pronounce authoritatively on *why* it is that they speak in the way that they do. Occasionally a moderator will invite them to discharge this function. The participant in the debate whose views are most “unorthodox” will quite inevitably be the most poorly dressed. You can expect that his contributions will consist firstly of denials of the accusation that his views are extremist; and secondly of energetic catalogues of reported fact which, he hopes, will be

sufficiently long and resounding to recruit to his views a clear and testimonial authority. His aim, in effect, will be to compensate for the poverty of his arguments with his ownership of facts. Whenever he feels he is being *compelled* to produce arguments for the construction of which he lacks the requisite knowledge – which is to say, whenever he feels that his *kind* of fact is being discredited, neutralised, or rendered unremarkable – he will refer ardently to the great tide of “feeling” among people *like him* which his interlocutors are incompetent to address. Pathos, then, in this case if in no other, is the inalienable possession of those participants in a liberal polity whose access to publicity is dependent on their willingness to engage in a dispute over concepts which have been made, over a long history of social use, to stick in their throat. The concepts of “modernisation”, “toleration”, “integration”, “equality”, “democracy”, and also of “debate” itself, are the separate items of a discursive uniform which far right politicians are forced to put on whenever they wish to receive a polite hearing from what thinks of itself as the moderate centre; and it is a consequence of the tailoring of those concepts to the accents of an establishment bourgeoisie that plebeian fascists look no less ridiculous in their appeals to *modernity* or to whatever other vacuous jargon word than the colonial lackeys in imperial regalia whose function they unwittingly revive. “Feeling” is whatever exists in addition to this masquerade: it is that which is left over for the weaker person once he or she has been reduced to voicelessness, *the dole* in subjectivity, the mere subsistence of animal passions: Rousseau’s cattle lowing in sympathy along the queue to the abattoir.

The talk here of excesses, leftovers and residua is oil to the assembly line for a well known philosophy of history. Its terms are well known and can be set out quite briefly. Economic or civil justice in capitalist societies is grounded in an idea of equal exchange undertaken in conditions of legal equality, and is an advance on those forms of open extortion on which “Feudal” society is established. *Fair* exchange between providentially unequal persons in Feudal society is already a great leap forward from those bad old days before the Zoon *Politikon* where vengeance knew no limits besides the limits of pride and ill-will. Following this ladder of human advance and despoliation all the way to its bottom we find pathos, raw and, as you say, “irreducible”, socially, unnecessary, superfluous, and threatening to sweep away the schemes of abstract formal equivalence which have been built to impound it.

How *true* do we feel to this philosophy of history today? A great number of memorable arguments have been marshalled to discredit it. It is certainly not true that the global circulation of commodities takes place uniformly on the basis of an equal exchange of equivalents, whether or not that *kind* of exchange is a “dominant category” within a global system of production; and it certainly *is* true that the necessitated exclusion of the felt particularity of individual experience in our operative social categories is the undiscontinued and virulent evidence of such atavism, crudeness, and brutality as flourishes, unabated, in the peer review journals of our economists, the humanitarian policy documents of our NGOs, and the scripts of our cultural producers, not to mention in the factories of our capitalists. And from here we might let our attention to wander back to the television debate so as to notice that it is not *only* the plebeian nationalist for whom an unnameable “feeling” is required to offset the humiliation he feels at the hands of his taller, better

dressed, and more well-spoken interlocutors, but that those interlocutors are also compelled by the scene of the debate to communicate mutely and by an attitude of voice and physiognomy the disgust that they feel for the person whose ethics violates the morals of the system from which they benefit. We might think, *they too substitute a merely emotional revulsion for the violence they wish to enact*. And from this we might conclude that submission before the law engenders pathos in all antagonistic social groups; that the dialectic of the universal and particular is more general than any narrative of historically advancing abstraction can accommodate for; and that, if the relationship between pathos and powerlessness is to preserve for itself any credibility at all, it must at least learn to acknowledge that powerlessness comes in many varieties and induces the formation of highly distinct *communities* of feeling, baring their teeth at one another and snarling beneath the tinkling muzak of their inscrutably meaningless “debate”. The history of our feelings is not simple. The most primitive sensation may yet prove to be more advanced than the most refined conceptuality.

But, while turning ideas on their heads has a long and venerable Marxist heritage, there must be *more* to say than this. Snow globes are also capable of being turned upside down. Is there anything else to say? Can this point about the powerlessness of the powerful be used to shake up *our own* politics?

I can only finish with notes. Firstly, language remains the only instrument we can use to combat the idea that pathos is just blank and yearning sensation, the silent beating of the heart, the resentful *sensus communis* of the subordinated, and not a specific response to the contortion, truncation, and impaction of language itself, occurring under the pressures of an official ethos of linguistic use. What the participants in bourgeois media spectacles *feel* is evidently the direct outcome of what they cannot *say*; but this impotence is itself a product of where they choose to speak.

Secondly, these points are not restricted to bourgeois media spectacle. As radical politics moves into the rut of a specialist interest, a hobby or a craft activity, it becomes more and more emotionally stunted. I think this is a maxim with a general historical validity. The more that socialist or communist politics are widely distributed as a basic commitment or an *attitude*, of a kind similar to *liberal* anti-racism, the less those politics are superordinated relative to other personal, affective, social, or sexual dispositions. Wherever the lives of revolutionaries are not strictly expended hunting in the fogs of doctrine and precedent for axes to sharpen and teeth to grind, the claims which pathos makes on revolutionary politics are immensely enlarged.

Perhaps these notes may together define in painfully general terms a task for political writing, namely, to become more and not less vociferous, to speak more freely about sentiment, to resist more openly and with more wit and intensity the self-mortifying conviction that other people’s (and other class’s) experiences will remain perpetually inaccessible. Even our primitive sensations, our archaic instincts, and our appetite for non-equivalence seem to me like the evidence of the imperfectibility of capitalist social relations;

and in a period when critical analysis of political economy continually asserts that capital will rely more and more on what it cannot possess, desire, or reduce into a system, it seems to me that its culture must also reduce to silence more and more of human social experience, as a precondition for the continued plausibility of the concepts with which it defines its justice and its truth. The forcible reduction of experience to silence is equivalent to, because it brings about, the transportation of experience into mere feeling. Radical thinking knows this. It knows also that the rational concepts of liberal debate are really an injunction to silence, and that the “mute” pathos of injustice invoked by extreme nationalists is really the flimsiest conceptual contrivance; and yet the greatest obstacle to its own loquacity is not its misrecognition of the bad politics of the television studio, the centre from which it is excluded, but its pertinacious belief that it has already said everything that there is to say, in such a way that the reason for its marginality must be that its audience is destitute of feeling. But exactly the opposite is the case.