

# On ‘Kiss of Love’

(Note:II)

*“The intellectualization of labor, a major effect of the technologic and organizational transformation of the productive process in the last two decades of the twentieth-century, opens completely new perspectives for self-realization. But it also opens completely new energies to the valorization of capital. The workers’ disaffection for industrial labor, based on a critique of hierarchy and repetition, took energies away from capital, towards the end of the 1970s. All desires were located outside capital, attracting forces that were distancing themselves from its domination. The exact opposite happened in the new info-productive reality of the new economy: desire called new energies towards the enterprise and self-realization through work. No desire, no vitality seems to exist anymore outside the economic enterprise, outside productive labor and business. Capital was able to renew its psychic, ideological and economic energy, specifically thanks to the absorption of creativity, desire, and individualistic, libertarian drives for self-realization.”*

–Franco “Bifo” Berardi

At a time when the social segmentation of spaces is being renewed and intensified in tandem with the recomposition of the working class, we would do well to figure how the dominant strain of left politics, which considers students not workers but a “privileged” social group, envisions working class politics in general and the politics of desire, exemplified by the recent ‘Kiss of Love’ protest, in particular. In the specificity of our campus (JNU), the modality of this kind of politics that sees students as a privileged social group can, broadly speaking, be disaggregated into three concrete tendencies:

1. Those that are uncomfortable with rendering public expression of desire and erotic intimacy forms of political dissent, and who condemn such forms as ‘elitist’ socio-political expressions.
2. Those who wholeheartedly, and without any qualification, affirm such forms of political protest against moral policing as radical/progressive.
3. Those who participate in such protests, albeit with much ambiguity, and thus without fully owning such political forms as their own.

All these three tendencies are, we would argue, rooted in a backward-looking conception of history that is incapable of grasping the political import of neoliberal, and post-Fordist, restructuring of social relations of production and reproduction that defines the current conjuncture.

The first tendency fetishises the Fordist form of capitalist relations of production and, thereby, ends up hypostatizing the working class as such with the sociological figure of the resource-poor industrial worker. It, therefore, rejects as elitist, not just libertarian political forms such as the ‘Kiss of Love’, but also the wholly valid personal-political assertion involved in freely expressing erotic desire in public places. As a result, purveyors of this tendency fail to recognise such transgressive assertions as politically radical, anti-authoritarian acts by a segment of the working class at the personal level. They, therefore, also fail to come to terms with the fact that the Kiss of Love type of political forms, which are derived from such radical personal-political acts, symptomatise the precarity of the cognitive workers, which is indisputably a key segment of the working class in its current composition. To understand such libertarian forms of politics of desire in those terms is crucial if those forms are to be productively critiqued, as they must be.

Now for the second tendency. This fetishises the form that embodies transgressive desire that was radical in the context of Fordist organisation of capitalist relations of production but is no longer so. Today, free expression of desire as a political form -- if we are to analyse the conjuncture we inhabit in terms of its concrete materiality -- already stands subsumed. It is, therefore, no longer outside capital and is, as the Berardi quote above so significantly reveals, no different from the traditional trade unionist forms of working class politics that are available to us now only as forms subsumed by, and accommodated within, capital.

The third tendency, which seeks to ambivalently wedge itself in between those two positions, is, for our purposes, the most crucial. It passively reflects the excessively precarious situation of the working class in all its segmental glory and entirety, and thus accurately symptomatizes the accentuation of the inherent crisis of capital.

The qualitatively new moment of the contradiction, which is always inherent in capital, between the development of the total forces of production, and its reproduction as a system of social relations through renewal and intensification of segmentation is not being fully grasped by the various left tendencies in play. And this is precisely on account of the emergence of a dilemma that Marx had anticipated while discussing the general intellect in *Grundrisse*: “Forces of production and social relations -- two different sides of development of social individual -- appear to capital as mere means, and are merely means for it to produce on its limited foundation. In fact, however, they are the material conditions to blow this foundation sky-high.” It is this dialectic and its antagonistic asymmetry that the three political tendencies in question are unable to grasp together in their separateness. As a consequence, their respective modalities of operation do no more (or less) than reinforce and reproduce the logic of capital. Their so-called radical politics among university students, based as it is on viewing students not as workers but as a privileged social group, becomes an ideological tool through which capital

produces and reproduces the commodity-form. Such modalities of politics, not surprisingly, seek to do no more than culminate the desire for restoration of liberal institutions, rights and ideas that capital itself has rendered decadent.

The question now is: how else can revolutionary politics be envisaged vis-à-vis the context of the university and its community of cognitarians and other working people?

We would want to begin responding to that question with the following assertion: let's stop thinking politics in terms of expiating ourselves of our so-called privilege by indulging in guilt-driven humanist philanthropy. Let's, instead, start thinking politics in terms of class segmentation and its militant unravelling. In other words, let's be completely comfortable, absolutely fearless and radically free while drinking our coffee or beer at upscale cafes, pubs and bars, and in uninhibitedly expressing our desire, sexuality and interpersonal affection in those public spaces; even as we simultaneously think up concrete ways of decimating the economic and attendant socio-cultural barriers that prevent other sections of the working people from accessing those public spaces, and the possibilities of desire they offer.

In more concrete terms, let's envision the form of our anti-authoritarian/anti-capitalist struggle as a mass occupation of the upscale spaces of leisure such as malls, cafes, bars and restaurants even as the occupiers, while enforcing and carrying out the occupation, are able to give full play to the carnivalesque of radical hedonism by uninhibitedly and publicly expressing and asserting their sexuality and erotic desire. Let's think of how young cognitive/intellectual workers, mostly students from our universities and colleges -- whose free expression of interpersonal desire and affection in spaces such as parks, cafes and pubs are policed and menaced by the fascistic footsoldiers of our rightwing political establishment -- can be mobilised together with workers, especially women workers, from Manesar, Gurgaon, Okhla, et al, -- who culturally resent the socio-economic denial of access to those spaces -- to barge in and take over those spaces in, say, Gurgaon, Saket or Nehru Place. All this, while putting such spaces to their best use by indulging their senses together.

To envisage anti-authoritarian/anti-capitalist politics in such a form would mean an effective, constellational mobilisation of diverse anxieties and disaffections of different segments of the internally divided working class to the radical political end of decimating segmentation in a concrete context. A struggle in this form would, for one, go a long way in delegitimising the fascist ideology of RSS-type forces. This is an ideology constitutive of the instrumental mobilisation of the entirely valid material basis of disaffection and cultural resentment among large sections of the working masses for entirely reactionary ends. Such an occupation-driven form of political resistance can be rather effective in jump-starting the process that will significantly erode the ideologically consolidated cultural homogenisation on which such grassroots fascistic forces thrive. This it will tend to accomplish by accentuating and sharpening the material fissures within that cultural homogeneity. In fact, such cultural homogenisation has, in the first place, been possible because militants, intellectuals and organisations with serious claims to various strains of critical and radical politics have failed to seize this initiative. Worse, their conception of solidarity among different segments and strata of the working masses, based as such a conception is on a model of unity (read homogenisation and instrumentalisation) for the supposed building of strong revolutionary organisations, has only served to pave the way for such politics.

In such circumstances, the struggle in this proposed form of occupation of the so-called liberal bourgeois spaces of leisure would also amount to having the wholly desirable effect of emancipating the style and idiom of radical anti-authoritarian/anti-capitalist politics from the cage of liberalism and rights discourse it is currently caught in. That is because such politics in the form of this kind of occupation would mean the occupiers take on, simultaneously and together, the combined might of the fascistic moral police of RSS-type forces and the repressive apparatus of apparently liberal, globalised capital. That would amount to the synchronisation of diverse disaffections and attendant struggles of various segments and sections of the working class -- which in being animated by the logic of capital currently appear as mutual conflicts among identities -- into a perpetually open-ended constellation of anti-capitalism and communisation. Among other things, this would have the crucial effect of rendering the false divide between fascistic machinations and liberal capitalism -- something we have so far only managed to ideologically discern and insist upon -- evident in its materiality.

This then would be the beginning of concrete realisation of revolutionary anti-capitalism of struggle in unity, unity in struggle. To merely insist upon to-ing and fro-ing from 'Kiss of Love' at Jhandewalan to the sundry struggles of Gurgaon and Manesar workers, and back; and to declare how the two kinds of struggles are one, is abstract propaganda and revolutionary phrase-mongering by self-justifying, guilt-driven ascetics of 'radical politics'.

Instead of constellating the diverse disaffections of different segments of the working class, this is a bid to horizontalise and aggregate them. That, in sharp contrast to the mode of struggle in unity, unity in struggle, is the populism of unity of struggles. Now such united frontism is not only philistine, but, in the context of neoliberal late capitalism, perniciously counter-revolutionary because it serves to preserve and reinforce segmentation, and thus the logic of capital. Therefore, in the final analysis, such philistine politics is neither anti-capitalist nor, for that matter, effectively anti-fascist/anti-authoritarian.