

Textwork: **Nooshin Farhid**

A site specific project for Facebook

vis-à-vis

vis-à-vis

It was with great sadness and disbelief that I received your surreal email. I say surreal because I do not understand the picture you drew of the circumstances. Nor do I recognise the motives you have imputed to me regarding yesterday's request.

12 July at 11.37

vis-à-vis

If you don't mean it and use statements like this simply to hurt your opponent for not being convinced by your argument, then should I take on a condescending attitude and indulge you because I trust you, love you and respect you, even more now than when we first met?

12 July at 15.37

vis-à-vis

But I never understood why you are so oblivious to what I am trying to maintain. I have never considered myself as a high priest that brings the strength of my theoretical knowledge to bear on reality. I don't see myself as a medium conveying theory and ideology to foot soldiers.

12 July at 17.29

vis-à-vis

The truth of the matter is that I admire you and I am aware of your strength in dealing with a situation like this. But it is very frustrating for me that when you discuss a serious matter you usually interpret and understand my point of view on the basis of a dichotomy.

12 July at 19.28

vis-à-vis

Regarding the nature of this dichotomy, you construe whether you are completely against or completely for this decision. You as a person whose thought has so many layers and so many nuances, when debating with me, you suddenly forget a multitude of factors and impute positions to me which are, at least for me, the worst of insults.

12 July at 21.51

vis-à-vis

This is not particularly my concern; I am not, by any means expecting this kind of ignorance to be propagated here at all! I believe that you play the same kind of tricks to build up your image. Trickery is tempting when one is having trouble maintaining its ground.

13 July at 09.16

vis-à-vis

No, I don't see her by any means as an intellectual. What she is good at is her organisational abilities. I do not think that she had any leadership abilities or even leadership ambitions. I am totally aware of her weaknesses, the only thing that I like about her is her innocent sincerity and the energy with which she applies herself to political organisation.

13 July at 11.31

vis-à-vis

But what would make her, in your eyes, an interesting candidate for the leadership is ironic, especially due to the fact that I always considered her, despite her left wing political activity, a moral and social conservative.

13 July at 15.33

vis-à-vis

In contrast, why have I become interested in him? The reasons are quite a lot and I do not want to go into the details here. I just mention one, because of the way he treats everyone; he is popular and everyone seems to be very much under his spell.

13 July at 17.36

vis-à-vis

I know he has never been significant for you in any area or by any stretch of imagination. However, it would be wrong if you considered his character as totally devoid of interest. He is interesting;

13 July at 20.20

vis-à-vis

He told me that he comes from a very poor family. This in my eyes, is a positive thing, especially because, against many odds relating to his family background, he was able to enter the best university, passing a difficult examination with high grades.

13 July at 20.53

vis-à-vis

Yes and, while he was able to work hard in routine university subjects, he did not make the same effort to acquire a higher cultural understanding. But he was a very quiet person in the university, the second of his advantages in my eyes, and people did not notice that he didn't have much to say.

13 July at 22.14

vis-à-vis

Here is the ambiguity: his muteness, and detachment in this situation and as a matter of fact in any situation, portray him as balanced and accomplished rather than inadequate or idiotic.

14 July at 09.28

vis-à-vis

Look, you cannot in fact construct a whole new narrative now because this was one of the few incidents in the middle of which I happen to be there, acting as a dumb, mute myself.

14 July at 13.12

vis-à-vis

No, in fact, you despise him because unlike your glamorous, well off, highly educated, insatiable character, he was too ordinary. I am startled about the way you can verbally annihilate someone! It seems that your estimation of him, acquired within a single day, has gone from a laudable zenith to a pathetic nadir.

14 July at 15.13

vis-à-vis

I understand, but It is sad to think that he has become corrupt; of course it is sad to think that, but I cannot be responsible for what he has done. I have to admit that I am upset that you didn't believe me and don't think you can continue with this if you do not re evaluate all the different options. You don't need to get me involved if you doubt my judgment.

14 July at 17.18

vis-à-vis

I consider this to be a conceited and deceitful attitude. Time has proven you wrong. We would have been in a much better position now if we had not been detaching ourselves from the world and into a mystical exercise of theory; a pseudo - religion and a shrill utopian faith.

14 July at 19.22

vis-à-vis

Of course, no one, but you, has given yourself this superior position over the ignorant, biased, blind crowd, to treat them as inferior people who know no better and should be treated differently from you (the enlightened elite who have this privilege beyond all others).

14 July at 21.28

vis-à-vis

You may not believe this, but I was going to write to you, but an excruciating pain in my neck which has made me immobile since yesterday has sapped my will to do so. I believe that the same pain was partially responsible for my short temper yesterday. I don't say this as an excuse, because the manner of my interjection was inexcusable. I simply am expressing a fact.

15 July at 20.22

vis-à-vis

I appreciate, and even can sense, by reading perhaps between the lines of your e-mail, the fact that you have been putting a great deal of restraint on yourself to tone down your criticism of my views. I appreciate this but I would not have minded, I would even have welcomed it, if you had said in your e-mail whatever came to your mind regarding yesterday's conversation.

15 July at 21.30

vis-à-vis

The respect and understanding that I have for your honesty and integrity, the esteem and love that I have for you is so much that I consider any criticism from you as a gift and not an insult.

15 July at 22.44

vis-à-vis

There is something else in your last e-mail, which because it is personal, I can only respond to it with a great deal of hesitation. I tried to remember our discussions as an exercise down memory lane about some slight differences of opinion I had with you, most of them perhaps jocular and not serious.

16 July at 12.04

vis-à-vis

No, I said that you need to suggest some immediate affirmative rights. But even this should be kept to a minimum and be scrutinized for their unintended consequences. Regarding other rights, you are not under any obligation to suggest things which are in danger of abuse by the state or the danger of reification.

16 July at 15.23

vis-à-vis

I have no illusions about this. The preference for negative determination applies to all aspects of human rights, because positive determination is a two-edged sword. It enhances some rights, but it curtails others. We should not advocate the curtailment of any rights by the state. This is why we should avoid positive determination as much as possible.

16 July at 18.48

vis-à-vis

The other thing that you should remember is the immense asymmetry between the individual and the state. This asymmetry should make us very careful when we want to use the state for the revolutionary purposes. The present day state has an immense power to integrate the dissenting individuals into the establishment and thus pacify and even abuse them.

16 July at 21.51

vis-à-vis

It seems that in response to my genuinely thought through e-mail, you decided to answer according to the most stereotypical manner of polemicists. The two most important tools in their tool box are (i)- ignore what has been actually said, and rephrase it, and then attack it. (ii)- draw a caricature of what is said and beat the caricature.

17 July at 09.06

vis-à-vis

Yes, this does take complete care of paragraph 8 of your note and many more things. But in a manner which is not ad hoc (as paragraph 8 is) because it has a transparent and compelling logic based on equality of citizens and the sanctity of individual choice.

17 July at 12.42

vis-à-vis

But in paragraph 14 you emphatically say that “the job of a working class revolutionary is not to say what form or content the national aspiration should have. To do so is to fall into the trap of becoming complicit in the bourgeois state...” and as a corollary of your view, you quote Lenin, in the pamphlet “Under the... False Flag”, regarding “Bourgeois (Liberal) Rights”.

17 July at 14.17

vis-à-vis

However in your paragraph 19 you insist that you must forbid the state to intervene in the realm of any sexual practice between consensual adults. This is clearly in contradiction to your earlier statement.

17 July at 16.04

vis-à-vis

Not exactly, Lenin’s statement is as follows: a revolutionary movement should eschew all positive determinations as far as possible. What they should put emphasis on, however, should be negative determinations.

17 July at 17.38

vis-à-vis

Even if you want to hold religiously onto Lenin’s theory of negative determinations , and use his statement to prove the validity of your views, then one can argue that the phrase ‘as far as possible’ opens up a space to maneuver. You, yourself used the term ‘UNLESS’.

17 July at 19.05

vis-à-vis

Using this quote for your argument is too crude , regarding the methodology of coping with the rights of nationalities and religion within a larger nation state and its application to citizen’s rights: Nationalism and religion , are something that we should not encourage, but concede as rights. Hence the negative determination.

17 July at 20.57

vis-à-vis

But equality between men and women, the rights of children, homosexuals, etc. are things we cannot keep quiet about and if Lenin, God, you, whoever, says that national rights and freedom of religion are identical with and comparable to citizen’s right such as women’s rights, I cannot accept it.

17 July at 22.09

vis-à-vis

I decided not to discuss the matter further. The reason for this is we are both in a very belligerent mood and any communication will make things worse. After your last email followed by your silence I was very angry. I think it would be better for me to hold back my anger and remain silent.

18 July at 10.14

vis-à-vis

I never have said that you are stupid or brainless. I may have said something, which is by some stretch of meaning, similar to these words, but they were said in the heat of the argument. They were rude words but they were simply words showing my frustration and nothing more: they were not meant to be understood literally.

18 July at 11.40

vis-à-vis

Let me tell you categorically that: I do not want to undermine you; I would not be able to undermine you intellectually even if I wanted to do so, and nothing I said in my email is any indication of me trying to undermine you. You have a formidable intellect and I don't even dream of undermining it for the simplest reason that I cannot.

18 July at 13.07

vis-à-vis

Of course, there was no justification for me for saying rude words, no matter how much you had provoked me. So I apologize profusely for saying unmeant rude words to you.

18 July at 14.17

vis-à-vis

But the sad and tragic thing is that you meant the insults that you heaped against me: and for what? Just to defend their argument; that I am a defender of this reactionary idea, you have said this a number of times before, or I lack any sound judgment.

18 July at 15.57

vis-à-vis

Please try to understand what you do. When a third person is involved, you have always attacked me ferociously in order to defend others, as though I am a complete stranger attacking a dear friend of yours.

18 July at 16.57

vis-à-vis

No, it is not correct; you said that this is not a comprehensive decision.

18 July at 18.15

vis-à-vis

Your recollection of what I said is fundamentally wrong, it is evident that your reading of these quotations is caused by the ambivalent nature of any theory that hinges on multiple points of view.

18 July at 18.31

vis-à-vis

But, I have started with those two quotations as they seem so fresh and relevant, not only to our discussion, but to the whole of our strategy and I thought this clears up some doubts as to the theory's usefulness.

18 July at 19.36

vis-à-vis

The main point is that what I said was not tactical. It may be considered as tactically sound or not, but that is just incidental. I, however, couched what I said very explicitly as a tactical advice. So it was not surprising that you misunderstood me because you just thought I meant what I said. So the whole thing was my fault.

18 July at 20.32

vis-à-vis

I did not say this. I said that their analysis is not as comprehensive as it should be, but you even went further and said that it is pure jargon.

18 July at 21.43

vis-à-vis

I do not understand the term 'negative attitude' and 'theory handicap' that you attribute to me; as a matter of fact I believe that theory need not be a strait-jacket, proper dialectical, critical, theory is the antidote to any rigid thinking.

19 July at 10.03

vis-à-vis

Ok, here are the quotations I was referring to: (a) "The metamorphoses of criticism into affirmation do not leave the theoretical content untouched, for its truth evaporates", (b) "Just as prohibition has always offered access to the poisonous product, so the obstruction of the theoretical faculty paves the way for political error and madness."

19 July at 12.50

vis-à-vis

Both quotations are from the "dialectic of enlightenment" by Adorno and Horkheimer.

19 July at 12.52

vis-à-vis

Yes, I agree that every aspect of reality is totally theory impregnated, but you speak of reality as if that is completely given, in a theoretical sense. But my approach to theory is in terms of an analytical understanding of the reality of the present day economic crisis.

19 July at 15.29

vis-à-vis

This is really unbelievable. You compare what I have said to you with what you have said to me. Remember that for me ideology is always a negative concept and therefore when you consider my position as ideological this is another insult.

19 July at 17.43

vis-à-vis

OK, but in order to explain my position seriously I need to discuss a number of concepts in depth; these are the concepts of capital and its logic; contradictions between the capital and many capitals; state and the two main ways it maintains its hegemony: brute force and consent; and finally Ideology.

19 July at 19.46

vis-à-vis

I must admit it is harder to keep this dialogue with you than I thought, partly due to your deficiency of sentiment that makes you so impatient in this multifaceted discussion.

19 July at 21.14

vis-à-vis

More and more I am convinced that it is fundamentally impossible to put you in the loop for the tactical decisions. Perhaps because of your childhood religious background, for you, devotion and loyalty to your ideology is of utmost importance. The situation requires someone who is capable of coping with the ephemeral.

19 July at 22.27

vis-à-vis

Your last email is fantastic in style but it also is literally fantastic: its subject is fantasy. I have clearly mentioned the terms “adult” and “consensual”, I do not want to affirm any kind of sexual practice. We, should consider these matters as personal, and leave it at that.

20 July at 10.26

vis-à-vis

This is why you agreed with me when I was asking them not to go into such details of positive determinations, such as demanding the state to check all the minute details, this is totally wrong: To put the most oppressive organ ie. the bourgeois state in charge of the most intimate part of a woman should be, to say the least, completely repugnant and unacceptable.

20 July at 12.21

vis-à-vis

But you go of course much further and believe that there should not be any positive determinations, in the demands you put forward. This is indicative of the kind of difference of opinion we have.

20 July at 14.35

vis-à-vis

That is what I said to them; the state, its representatives and its adjuncts, nor any other institution have any right to intervene or interfere in any way, including by moralizing in the private, consensual relationship between adult citizens.

19 July at 16..30

vis-à-vis

Yes but there are many unconventional ways of satisfying sexual desire, ways which are literally doubled every year.

20 July at 18.00

vis-à-vis

No, in my view, affirmation of some form of sexual satisfaction leads to reification of the form, something that already has happened with the “gay” movement: gay marriages, pink money, and so forth. It is already bad enough that heterosexuality has reified into marriage and consequently the “family”. We should not be complicit in extending this reification. tains its hegemony: brute force and consent; and finally Ideology.

20 July at 20.00

vis-à-vis

As a continuation in the son of ‘the mother’s penis envy’! I still believe that paragraph 5 in my e-mail is much more radical and appropriate than other things such as your paragraph 8, which may be fashionable, but after some proper scrutiny, it’ll turn out to be manifestly reactionary.

20 July at 22.19

vis-à-vis

From my discussions with you I have this impression, I may be wrong, that you are suggesting that I have a different attitude towards the state and to some extent, at least regarding some countries; I consider the state as partially benevolent.

21 July at 10.21

vis-à-vis

I appreciate sharing your thoughts, but I am not of the opinion that a head of a bourgeois government cannot say something like paragraph 5. After all, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity was the slogan of the French Revolution, quintessentially a bourgeois one.

21 July at 12.36

vis-à-vis

However, what I said to them was by no means personal. I consider the fact that their liberalism (or rather libertarianism) (in my book not a bad thing by any means) has got sometimes an illiberal streak.

21 July at 15.05

vis-à-vis

It seems that you have not carefully read the e-mail I sent you earlier today. In your response you have not taken into consideration many important points I have made. Please read it carefully. Every word I have used is chosen carefully. Do not use your undoubted knowledge of theoretical jargon to dismiss and ignore those very important points in my e-mail which require serious response.

21 July at 18.27

vis-à-vis

Of course you cannot apologize because even now you do not want to see how serious these allegations are. I do not want you to apologize for something that you cannot even recognise as a serious insult. So the first step is to understand the severity of the things you said and then apologize for them and never repeat them. Otherwise I cannot forgive or even forget what you have said.

21 July at 20.52

vis-à-vis

As I said I am irreparably offended by you, and your latest e-mail has added to my hurt rather than reducing it. So I do not expect any more e-mails from you unless you understand the depth of your insult to me and from the bottom of your heart, feel sorry for what you have said.

21 July at 22.17

vis-à-vis

This morning I discovered that nothing more has come from you.

20 July at 17.29

vis-à-vis

Do you really think that I am so naive and superficial in my views about the state that I am oblivious of the different forms that the capitalist state may take, the relative progressiveness of some of these forms vis-à-vis others, and the contradictions within the declared ideology and the practices of the state, and the fact that these contradictions can be positively exploited at some sensitive juncture by the revolutionaries? I assure you that I am not that naïve.

22 July at 18.34

vis-à-vis

So when I said what I said, I was by no means forgetful of what I pointed out earlier. But all these provisos do not alter the essence of the capitalist state, which is the main instrument by which class domination is exerted. It is also important to remember that when hegemonic consensus is about to fail, the state invariably recourse to brute suppressive force.

22 July at 19.33

vis-à-vis

I am not contradicting myself, I believe the main difference of opinion between you and me is in our different views about the nature of the capitalist state.

22 July at 20.37

vis-à-vis

You like all old fashioned Marxists, believe that the state is the most suppressive and the most effective means of domination of the dominant class. Something that by no means can be reformed and therefore the proletariat should smash it. Any hope in the capitalist state by the revolutionary class and the revolutionary individual is but an illusion which should be countered.

22 July at 21.32

vis-à-vis

I appreciate this view but I think it is very nostalgic and unproductive. You have the eternal facts and then you apply them to living pulsating, ever changing, multifarious realities.

22 July at 22.07

vis-à-vis

Another problem with seeing oneself as a theorist in your terms is that, because no political activity meets one's expected standards, then the purist ideology becomes, paradoxically, an obstacle to political action. One becomes forever an observer and a critic, depriving oneself of the possibility of trying to influence reality through political action.

22 July at 22.39

vis-à-vis

It is worse, much worse than I have even anticipated. What it takes to prove me wrong? There is no point of falling flat on your face! You have been making some exaggerated and probably quite fictitious comments to short-circuit our verbal battle.

23 July at 11.11

vis-à-vis

I am too tired to be bothered by the suggestion that I am less radical than you. I just would hope that what I think and say are measured, something in which I often fail. I am not saying we must abandon the eternal for the temporal but what I am trying to maintain is we should neither stop trying to improve the world nor should we detach ourselves from it.

23 July at 13.02

vis-à-vis

First of all the part where you said that it was meant as an insult to draw blood about me being a new born liberal, verging on a neo-con. I'm sure you consider taunts like this as a shaker to warn your opponent of where she is heading, and it's not the first time I've heard similar accusations by you directed at me. ...Is this a new discovery following your statement that I've changed?

23 July at 13.35

vis-à-vis

Now what is irritating in the extreme is the fact that when you ascribe to me positions which I consider very reactionary, and when I want to argue against it, in my view reasonably and soberly, suddenly you become silent.

23 July at 17.26

vis-à-vis

But coming to the points you raise in paragraph 5, prophetic in so many respects of a perverted ideology, but also comical; to see such a display of knowledge (wisdom) and superiority, only to find out that their world is destroyed by such an interpretation. This limits us to a choice between lunatic idolatry of an ideological system with a sense of certainty on one hand, or pure madness on the other

23 July at 18.38

vis-à-vis

Although, I do not believe that it is necessary for one to be entirely conscious of all the elements of the truth that lies within any theory, I have no objection to the construction of myths. It is important, however, not to make idiotic mistakes by creating ineffective and feeble myths.

23 July at 20.39

vis-à-vis

23 July at 20.54

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