

THE PATHOS ECONOMY

ACT I

Curtain opens. The modern passion can be traced all the way back to the Greek word páthos, which literally means to suffer or to be acted on. It hits you. Pathos was a central element for the tragedies of Ancient Greek theatre¹. Tragic drama provided the citizens with an opportunity to reflect on their own social and political values and dilemmas. How pathos appeals to the audience sets the potential for a cathartic experience. Theatre depends on passion management.

Enters Thespian, our hero. A beam of light flickers. His eyes sparkle. He walks to the centre of the stage, anxious to present the results of thoughtful work. This is how he builds knowledge. His curious gaze explores all around, trying to catch the very essence of the theatrical experience. He is moved by passion.

THESPIAN: This is a work of fiction, which is the closest thing we have to reality. The whole world is a stage. This is literal for us, artists, creators. It's everything. It's work, leisure, study, all at the same time. I make my own hours, I set my own terms. This is the dawn of tomorrow, where we are meant to be: the post-industrial society. Machines execute, we create. It's the vanguard of idleness². But don't be fooled, we work so hard! 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration, they say. And what happens when you're caught on inspiration? You work! Can't let that creative juice spill.

Lights flicker again.

¹ Aristotle, *Poetics* (Oxford, 1968).

² Domenico De Masi, *O Ócio Criativo* (Rio de Janeiro: Sextante, 2000).

THESPIAN: It's funny because theatre is as analogical as it can be and yet we are ahead for once. Folks are just now realising how rewarding it can be to work for a purpose you believe in. It has been our fuel for millenia. It's a full circle for humanity. We learn to value what's precious. No more white collars, this is our vocation. We are moved by passion.

Lights flicker, spark and fail.

THESPIAN: Hello?

A frightening blackout is now in place. Thespian must reinvent himself. He has to be where the audience can see him. His new stage is another platform, a luminous stage in the palm of the hand. It is the only thing that illuminates Thespian's face. That's how we reconnect.

Thespian is not short on purpose. Soon, however, he finds himself short on time. What was once the work of many now falls on the same one person, who needs to learn and perform every task: creation, performance, light, sound, editing, sharing. The new and exciting digital adventure is exhaustive. The stage in his hands is now open 24/7.

Digital creation makes Thespian's work available to a much larger audience, true. But it also makes it obsolete so much faster, as time runs differently in cyberspace.³ He has to produce more, otherwise he will lose his relevance, his visibility and thus his followers. His traditional independence is now dependent on the mysterious algorithm that dictates his vehicle and its working rules. He is sweating.

THESPIAN: It is hard, but I am still a creator.

Delusion enters the scene, quietly hovering over Thespian. If at first he believed platforms would help connect his work with

³ Néstor Canclini, Francisco Cruces and Maritza Pozo (Coord.), *Jóvenes, culturas urbanas y redes digitales* (Madrid: Fundación Telefónica, 2012).

the public, now such connection seems impossible. He had to buy equipment to boost his studio, he had to learn new abilities. That massive financial stress is back in place. Monetisation by advertising revenue works just for few, but he has no means to stop and come up with a new model.⁴ He has to keep working, scanning his next challenges. Literally. Creation is now heavily dependent on trends. He's at liberty to innovate and make anything else, but it most possibly won't get the same shares and views.

He looks around and sees the same happening with his friends: music tracks are getting shorter, released as singles instead of the artistically crafted albums. All seems manufactured for a TikTok trend. All compensation is in the hands of Spotify and other large companies just as it used to be. Visual artists don't have it easy, either. Everyone is struggling to find fair and sustainable monetisation models, animating movements such as the platform cooperatives. Meanwhile, other new and less sustainable practices such as NFTs also crop up in the artistic digital markets.

THESPIAN: I don't think I ever got this NFT thing though.

A feeling of total insecurity takes over Thespian. He feels left out of this new reality. All the expectation built around this creative economy is being crushed. He considers giving up.

THESPIAN: No, wait... I do not! There must be a way. Conflict is our creative technology. It's what makes any story interesting. There's always something standing between the hero and his main objective. This is the beginning of an epic journey.

Thespian turns off the screen that illuminated his visage and leaves the scene.

⁴ Thomas Poell, David Nieborg and Brooke E. Duffy, *Platforms and Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022).

ACT II

The stage lights come back to life. A faint penumbra dominates the scene. After a long time of darkness, the stage becomes a possibility again. However, neither the performers nor the audience are the same. This unplanned blackout changed the way they face this experience and the world as a whole.

Thespian steps back confidently into the scene. A spotlight follows him. He looks refreshed, some time away might be just what he needed. As Confucius once said, choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life.

THESPIAN: Actually, I have found this to be misleading. Don't get me wrong, but I am not comfortable romanticising unsustainable work journeys. It's bad for everyone.

It seems that Thespian is now better educated.

THESPIAN: As a matter of fact, I am. I've studied a lot this last year trying to find solutions. A lot of reading and theatre-making, of course, for I realised I had to experiment. In the end, it is clear for me that this digital creator thing is not for everyone. It looks like a step further in our path but they are false cognates. It's just exploitative dynamics fueled by Big Tech. It works for some, but it certainly isn't a sustainable and democratic model for everyone.

And this was Thespian's journey towards learning the limits of a passion economy and how creative artistic work is incompatible with such digital age postulations.

THESPIAN: Wait, no! This is far from a conclusion. While yes, a creators' economy is simply untenable in the long run, I believe we have a lot to learn from the passion economy. There is much to be changed in our professional education, management and production methods to make our lives better.

Such as?

THESPIAN: Well, first it's important to see what we do as work. I know it's hard to face it when we work with what we love, but a job should never claim to be home, family, religion, life or fate for the individual. It must allow space for our personal life. Our ties must be voluntary, not a mystical indissoluble bond.⁵ Artists sometimes forget that. It's dangerous.

Blackout. Another part of the stage is lit up. Two men sit in front of each other. We hear a fragment of their conversation.

INTERVIEWER: If you describe your occupation, would it be "writer"?

DRUCKER: I always say I write.

INTERVIEWER: What, then, has inspired your books more than anything?

DRUCKER: The same thing that inspires tuberculosis. This is a serious, degenerative, compulsive disorder and addiction.

INTERVIEWER: An addiction to writing?

DRUCKER: To writing, yes.⁶

Blackout. A spotlight reveals Thespian again.

THESPIAN: Afterall, from *pathos* also comes *pathology*. It's a sickness, or as Pete rightfully described, an addiction. And among its many symptoms, there is the dangerous practice of hope labour.⁷ We work in expectation of something that often never comes, we are paid in promises. It's exploitative.

⁵ Peter F. Drucker, *The Practice of Management* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁶ Drucker Institute, *About Peter Drucker* (Available on: www.drucker.institute/perspective/about-peter-drucker).

⁷ Kathleen Kuehn and Thomas F. Corrigan, "Hope Labor: The Role of Employment Prospects in Online Social Production", *The Political Economy of Communication*, Vol 1, No 1 (2013): 9-25.

Thespian got an interesting point. What he does not realise as of now is that his diagnosis can only go so far to make a real impact on his problem.

THESPIAN: No, I know that. This is only the first step: awareness. But today the world demands us to go further. As artists, we have rather far-sighted eyes. For our job is to see the unseen outside the window, yet we cannot see the manager that has always lived in ourselves. We are entrepreneurs.

A polemic point is brought up. Thespian's friends squirm and slowly step away as he speaks.

THESPIAN: I know that among us this word is often associated with capitalist businessmen, but it's much more than that! Such characterisation is not even functional for us, as our markets work differently. But we are entrepreneurs somehow, in the sense in which we have always managed our own careers. It's not just a cold management of finances and supplies, it's also a management of the heart: what we choose to do, what we want to stage, who we want to be with. That's management, too, right?

He started stretching it a little.

THESPIAN: No, but we make big management decisions all the time. Our creative decisions have a direct impact over our careers. It's people management, it's dream management. Got it? Looking at the theatre economy money-wise, it seems rather precarious. But our economy is based on so many other capitals. Maybe our main coin is actually social exchange - we are in relation. We manage networks.

Fellow thespians perk up their ears and come back closer.

THESPIAN: Alright, it's not easy, but it ain't complicated either. Theatre is a collective craft with lonely paths. No wonder this is basically a monologue. But cultivating networks is vital to independent agents, as we get in touch with other

people's knowledge and resources. Networks grant us learning and working opportunities, which is essential for career development. And it has a collective impact. Just like a theatre group is affected by actor transit: every individual that joins our organisation contributes with their experience and will learn and share it in another setting when they eventually move on. And the show still must go on.⁸

A blackboard appears behind Thespian. He scribbles.

THESPIAN: And how does that translate to our everyday lives? Well, this is my take on the subject and, with enough practice, everyone should be able to find their own. But first of all, managing oneself is about discovering who you are, your strengths and values. Figure out the best ways for you to learn and perform.⁹ Check? Then make plans. Put these plans in action. Focus on self-reinvention. You have many tools at hand, now it is time you use them to innovate, find partners, develop your relationships, work on your communication. Collaboration is key for individual and collective success. The next step is..

Thespian begins to draft a compelling self-management plan for theatre workers. He aims to share these views with his community, creating debate spaces, thus contributing to the local artistic entrepreneurial environment.

THESPIAN: Yes, and more than that! In the information age, we are seeing productive processes and their resulting goods continually lose their economic value while information, knowledge and other human resources are highlighted.¹⁰ This is what makes the passion economy promising, and also what puts

⁸ Michael B. Arthur, "The Boundaryless Career: A New Perspective for Organizational Inquiry", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (July 1994): 295-306.

⁹ Peter F. Drucker, "Managing Oneself", *Harvard Business Review* (2009): 15-30.

¹⁰ Peter F. Drucker, *As Novas Realidades no Governo e na Política, na Economia e nas Empresas, na Sociedade e na Visão do Mundo* (São Paulo: Pioneira, 1989).

culture in the centre. Better prepared cultural agents will benefit not only their environment, but society altogether.

Thespian starts throwing references in his scribbled plan. His action strategies start to look like a course syllabus. The shadows of his inspirational figures crowd the stage.

THESPIAN: In order to prepare ourselves for this, we have to update our educational model. Culture can and should be brought closer to the managerial and entrepreneurial world. Both still have a lot to learn from each other. As soon as artists and creators start to think like managers, they will be able to make better management decisions. The days of the intuitive manager are numbered.¹¹ It is clear that our labour market is much more about social capital than human capital, but information is power. That's why we should maintain our practice-based roots, so it is still an enjoyable experience for everyone.

DRUCKER: Tomorrow everybody - or practically everybody - will have had the education of the upper class of yesterday, and will expect equivalent opportunities. That is why we face the problem of making every kind of job meaningful and capable of satisfying every educated man.¹²

THESPIAN: Yes, sir! I believe that's why we should stimulate management education for creative professions in a creative manner. And that's a change I want to be a part of. Or as said by yourself, the best way to predict the future is to create it. In every success story, you will find someone who has made a courageous decision.

DRUCKER: I don't think I said that, but it must be on Facebook. Sounds poetic.

¹¹ Peter F. Drucker, *The Practice of Management* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

¹² Peter F. Drucker, *Landmarks of Tomorrow: A Report on the New 'Post-Modern' World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959): 121.

THESPIAN: Anyway, that's the message! As creators, we must engage in creative management. This is the kind of invisible work that should be highlighted in our practices. Once we dominate it and are able to dedicate ourselves to our objectives, we should better understand our business, our market environment and the path to achieving our goals. This is imperative for a more diverse and sustainable environment which should enrich our economy as a whole. All it takes is awareness, preparation, creativity and determination to learn, lead and do. Because entrepreneurship is neither a science nor an art, but a practice.¹³

The lights slowly fade out, this time on cue. Thespian is not again in full control of what he does, in fact he learned he never was, and this has given him the confidence to reinvent the way he saw his role.

EPILOGUE

The stage is consumed by darkness. This does not indicate the end of a story, but the beginning of a journey. The big bang, which starts with a spark just like any other revolution.

Bright lights fade in. Our hero is at the centre of the scene, as was obvious, and around him as scenery lie the numerous pages and authors that are constitutive of his persona and his discourse. Such references, most of them invisible from here, were essential to his intellectual maturation and to help keep him closer to what he thought an academic essay should be like.

THESPIAN: I beg your pardon, but I most certainly did not try to steer closer to an academic format here. I cannot deny it was an ongoing conflict, but in the end I believe we must honour our own epistemologies and employ them to their full

¹³ Peter F. Drucker, *Innovations and Entrepreneurship* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

potential. As an artist, I thrive in telling and enacting compelling stories. This is where my passion lives. These stories always aim to build knowledge. This is my strength, and I would be a pretty lame self-manager if I did not celebrate it in the name of traditional forms. There is no more honest way for me to tackle the passion economy than this. It may be risky, but "defending yesterday - that is, not innovating - is far more risky than making tomorrow."¹⁴ The same is true for my Latin American roots and context. Even when I am more generalist, in favour of a global view, I am still impregnated by my local references. And more than that, by how local researchers read those canonical authors. After centuries of oppressive imperialism, today an innovative view must consider decolonisation tactics. Looking at (and from) the margins may just be what we need to think out of the box.¹⁵

All in all, Thespian now is certain that a passion economy can be a functional inspiration for society, even if it's totally inoperable at scale when centred just around today's digital platform monopoly and its creator economy.

THESPIAN: I wouldn't go that far. This is just my perspective as a theatre maker, it might as well be a marvellous model for other sectors of the economy.

Thespian didn't sound so confident.

THESPIAN: Well, I guess this is it. Let's wrap it up before we run out of creative juice. Word count management!

Thespian walks off the stage as the lights fade out.

CURTAIN

¹⁴ Peter F. Drucker, *Innovations and Entrepreneurship* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985): 139.

¹⁵ Lara Pecis and Karin Berglund, "Hidden in the limelight: A feminist engagement with innovation studies", *Organization*, Vol 28, No 6 (2021): 993-1017.