



# Passions, collective situations and forms of living

*THE SEMIOTICS OF PASSIONS TODAY*

# Introduction

COLLECTIVES ACTANTS  
AND SITUATIONS

CONTAGION AND  
PROPAGATION

# Introduction

- ▶ **Semiotics of passions**

- ▶ from narrativity to existential and anthropological issues
- ▶ from individual reach to collective and mondain ones

- ▶ **Pathemic contagion:**

- ▶ co-esthesia, inter-corporeality
- ▶ two difficulties:
  - ▶ iconic identification of “atmospheric” passions
  - ▶ low predictability of contagious passions contents
- ▶ contagion : either *dissociative* or *associative*.

- ▶ Pathemic contagion may **lie, deceive and disappoint**

# Passions with anthropic propagation

PATHEMIC SCENARIOS AND  
MATRICES,  
IN ORDINARY, MEDIA AND  
POLITICAL METAPHORS,  
IN ANTHROPIC SITUATIONS  
AND SCHEMES.

# Passions with anthropic propagation

*Migratory submersion, waves of migration, invasion of migrants, great replacement, the Mediterranean has become the largest cemetery of migrants, etc.*

- ▶ metaphorical expressions (the sea, the waves, the flooding of the coasts, the sinking ships) which rely on natural feared situations and scenarios.
- ▶ “us” and “them”: “them” belongs here to *nature*, not to culture
- ▶ in any collective anthropological organization: fundamental passions directly associated with the way in which the different types of beings, humans and non-humans, living and non-living, are associated.

# Passions with anthropic propagation

- ▶ “migratory submersion”: a figurative scenario based
  - ▶ on a fundamental pathemic situation,
  - ▶ an anthropological equivalence typical of naturalism between,
    - ▶ the “us”/“them” distinction,
    - ▶ the “culture” / “nature” distinction.
- ▶ *relationship practices schemes carry pathemic scenarios*: gift, exchange, predation, transmission, protection, etc.
- ▶ Viveiros de Castro’s solution: *perspectivist* anthropology
- ▶ Latour’s solution: *symmetric* anthropology
- ▶ Ingold solution: “*inverted ontologies*”
- ▶ My solution: see *below...*

# Passions with anthropic propagation

## ▶ *pathemic integrated matrices*

- ▶ into each practical scheme of semio-anthropological scope,
- ▶ practical schemes of identification and relationship, semiosphere and all anthropic topologies, modes of existence, narrative schemes, etc.

# Passions with anthropic propagation

- ▶ (i) The pathemic character of semiotic situations and practices : ***affect is considered as a fundamental property of the situation*** and of its scenarios of realization. The inversions, symmetries and perspective navigations are conclusive tests of the semiotic relevance of this.
- ▶ (ii) Passions, emotions, affects – whatever the name – are ***sine qua non conditions*** for the ***meaning*** of situations and the ***realization*** of practices.
- ▶ (iii) Thus conceived passions have ***a power of propagation***: they participate in *our way of being in the world, our forms of living*.



**Passions,  
emotions,  
cognitive biases  
and levers of  
influence**

**FROM INDIVIDUAL  
MANIPULATION TO  
COLLECTIVE  
ORIENTATION  
PROPAGANDA IN  
PERSPECTIVE**

# Passions, emotions, cognitive biases and levers of influence

- ▶ For standard economic theory, *homo economicus* only makes his decisions following the comparative calculation of his interests: **expected utility**.
- ▶ Drifts in calculation of interests= **cognitive bias**
- ▶ *Hundreds of cognitive biases* inventoried, documented, tested experimentally
- ▶ The two paths of Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky:
  - ▶ rapid, subconscious, automatic path, **always implemented by affects**
  - ▶ calculation, attention, concentration path, **supposedly without affect**.

# Passions, emotions, cognitive biases and levers of influence

- ▶ Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein's reversal : *cognitive biases are the solution and not the problem.*
- ▶ **Nudges** : **using as a lever** the emotions and passions which trigger the decisions taken via cognitive biases.
- ▶ Manipulation consist here of *channeling an open and heterogeneous passionate state, so as to influence behavior.*
- ▶ How to go from *individual behavior inflection*, to *propagation, accumulation and collective assumption*, and globally, to *reorientation of collective behavior*?
- ▶ By **inscribing elements of pathemic scenarios** in the immediate and public environments of action, of proposed procedures, of any choices.

# Passions, emotions, cognitive biases and levers of influence

- ▶ **Semiosis** of these manipulations:
  - ▶ weakly specific **pathemic contents**, widely distributed between the actants and actors of a practical scene,
  - ▶ **passionate expressions** which are disseminated in the environment, or which mark out the steps of a procedure, or the progress of a trip.

Collective  
passions and  
fundamental  
myth-passions.

POLITICAL PASSIONS AND  
POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS

*MASSIVE PASSIONS*

versus

*FLUIDITY IN AFFINITY  
ENVIRONMENTS*

# Collective passions and fundamental myth-passions.

- ▶ Simone Weil's *Note on the general suppression of political parties* :
  - ▶ Why political parties should be suppressed ?
  - ▶ Because they are only ***machines for manufacturing collective passion***
- ▶ A compositional reasoning :
  - ▶ combinations of the parts movements and those of the whole
  - ▶ into collective sovereignty: *movements and flows are the real source of internal change.*

# Collective passions and fundamental myth-passions.

“Rousseau only thought that most often a desire common to an entire people is in fact consistent with justice, **through the mutual neutralization and compensation of particular passions**. This was the only reason for him to prefer the will of the people to a particular will.

This is how a certain mass of water, although **composed of particles which are constantly moving and colliding**, is in perfect balance and rest[...].

If passionate individuals, inclined by passion to crime and lies, **are composed in the same way into a truthful and just people**, then it is good that the people **should be sovereign.**”

*(Note on the general suppression of political parties, p. 127)*

# Collective passions and fundamental myth-passions.

“It is quite obvious that Rousseau's reasoning fails as soon as there is collective passion. Rousseau knew this well. Collective passion is an impulse of crime and lies **infinitely more powerful** than any individual passion. The bad impulses, in this case, far from neutralizing each other, carry each other to the thousandth power. **The pressure is almost irresistible**, except for authentic saints.

Water set in motion by **a violent, impetuous current** no longer reflects objects, no longer has a horizontal surface, no longer indicates densities.” (p. 128)



# Collective passions and fundamental myth-passions.

- ▶ *pathemic neutralization* and *apathetic sovereignty*
- ▶ “being for” / “being against” = “us” / “them”

“We have come to the point of almost no longer thinking, in any area, except by **taking a position “for” or “against” an opinion**. Then we look for arguments, depending on the case, either for or against. This is exactly the transposition of party membership. [...]

Almost everywhere – and even often for purely technical problems – the operation of **taking sides**, of **taking a position for or against**, **has replaced the obligation to think**. This is a leprosy which originated in political circles, and has spread throughout the country, almost to the entirety of thought. » (pp. 137)

# Collective passions and fundamental myth-passions.

- ▶ *[argumentation > conclusion > political position]*  
inverted into  
*[political position > opinion > supporting arguments]*
- ▶ The underlying problem is that of **anchoring pathemic phenomena in collectives**.
  - ▶ a possible alternative: the *fluidity* in opinions sharing and political positions
  - ▶ *Fluidity* is a property of the *affinity environments* where actors move and where opinions circulate.
- ▶ But informal and provisional groups, even more so crowds, which would be the most appropriate places to guarantee such fluidity, are always threatened by the exploitation of this fluidity for partisan purposes.

# Collective myth-passions.



# Collective passions and fundamental myth-passions.

- ▶ Neutralization VS Mobilization
- ▶ Chantal Mouffe : the process of **mobilization** and **pathemization** of the collective
- ▶ **Associative / Dissociative** modes for “living together”
- ▶ Dissociative mode, polemic-conflict principle: among all the multiple active antagonisms,
  - ▶ First: select the most **cleaving antagonism**,
  - ▶ Second: assume it **subjectively**.
  - ▶ Third: transpose this focus and this subjective assumption in confrontation between **“us” and “them”**.

# Collective passions and fundamental myth-passions.

In this critical sequence collective passions are the main useful **link and strength**:

- ▶ convergence of cumulative ranges of emotions : frustration, resentment, anger, humiliation, among others.
- ▶ coagulation (see above : “fluidity”) in a global, lastingly collective passionate movement, the *pathemic mobilization of “we”*
- ▶ an inseparable mixture of diverse affects converted into a **“passion-myth” leading to a restorative action**

# Conclusion

## **PATHEMIC DIMENSION:**

A RESEARCH DIRECTLY IN TOUCH WITH CRISES, CHALLENGES AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES.

## **RESEARCH ON A LARGER SCALE IS TO COME:**

COLLECTIVE AND SITUATIONAL PASSIONS IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STRUCTURES