

Translation of a few pages of *La Société des affects: Pour un structuralisme des passions* (Paris: Seuil, 2013).

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INTRODUCTION

Motion at work (*Le mouvement en marchant*)

Society moves and works [*marche*] by desires and affects. The social sciences looking for motive forces should be interested in that a bit. The problem is that ... the social sciences have a problem with desire and affects. In their defense, we have to recognize that there's something going on there. The social sciences were constituted as sciences of social facts – and not of states of mind [*d'âme*]. Now states of mind and the interior emotions of individuals are the point where any evocation of desire and affects seems to lead. You can easily see then the long torment of social sciences: confronted by a sort of massive evidence – the obvious presence of emotions in human behavior --, those sciences have nonetheless imposed upon themselves a strict censure, and formal interdiction, of going there. Let's grant that that reticence is not totally illegitimate: it was not absurd to think that returning to the emotions carried with it a serious risk of an inward turn toward a sort of psychologistic spiritualism – from which the very constitutive gesture of social sciences was to extract themselves. If it was a matter of transforming the sciences of the social into sentimental psychology, better to steer clear.

For a structuralism of the passions

But no guardrails [*préventions*] last forever. And certain conjunctures help to bring them. Make no mistake, the time of hesitation [*embarrass*] is past: the social sciences have rediscovered “the emotions.” With delight, perhaps proportional to the time of holding back, they have brought themselves, one-by-one, to that rediscovery. Sociology, political science, history, anthropology, all of them are from now on making the emotions a prime topic, all the way to economics, as always burdened with its impossible epistemological desire, and which, to be sure in its own way, pursues its fantasy of hard science by its current association with neurobiology... But the particularities aren't that important: what counts is that the social sciences, for so long mute on the question, now can't shut up about “the emotions.” The history of the social sciences is thus like a mountain road: one turn follows another; after the linguistic turn, the hermeneutic turn, the pragmatic turn, and now, ta-da, their emotional turn – and for all that, the only thing to make fun of them for is that

it's taken them so long to finally consider what they had for so long ignored and avoided.

....

Holding together what has been separated for a long time requires however entering into the problem of "the emotions" in a particular manner which would not close them up immediately in a sentimental subjectivism preoccupied by the solitary states of mind of the "actor" and cut off from any social determination. Now this "particular manner" is not easy to find so long as the emotions are spontaneously thought as the inner realm [*l'intimité*] of a subject.... and thereby from the start inclined toward a subjectivist view of the social world. We need the resource of a thought as singular as that of Spinoza to resist the fate of such a tendency.

A classical philosopher, and hence preoccupied by the problem of the *passions*, Spinoza proposes nothing less than a conceptualization of the affects as counter-intuitive as it is rigorous – I say that looking at all those works which go on and on about the emotions without ever giving the slightest serious definition of them – and above all as far as possible from any sentimental psychologism. Here's then the Spinozist paradox: a radically antisubjectivist theory of the affects, which are ordinarily thought of as what belongs, par excellence, to a subject. We in effect need to keep the affects *but get rid of the subject* (which had been considered its necessary seat), to go beyond the antinomy of emotions and structures, since, the subject having been evacuated, the support for the affects, certainly individual, but not monadic or self-determined, might thus be turned over to its institutional environments and plugged into a whole world of social determinations. There are indeed individuals and they experience affects. But these affects are nothing other than the effect of structures in which the individuals are plunged. And the two ends of the chain, said to be incompatible, can finally be joined together to give access to something like *a structuralism of the passions*.

For this structuralism of the passions we thus need the strength of the Spinozist point of departure – but also need to not stop there. It would be absurd to ask a 17th century philosopher to give us all by himself a fully worked-out social science. That's why, in this project, the power of the intuitions and concepts of Spinoza are not handed over to us truly without being combined with the best results of the social sciences, at least those compatible with them – which is not always the case. Here it's a matter of what was produced by Marx, Bourdieu, Durkheim, and Mauss, that is, those thoughts constitutionally recalcitrant to the celebration of the subject and attentive to everything that surpasses it – the social in its own force.

There are structures, and in those structures there are people caught up in passion [*des hommes passionés*]; *in the first instance*, people are moved by their passions, while *in the final analysis* their passions are largely determined by structures. They are moved most often in a direction that reproduces the structures, but sometimes

in another direction which reverses them to create new ones: here, essentially, is the order of facts that the particular combinations of a structuralism of the passions should wish to grasp.

Because it undertakes to hold together the two extremes thought to be incompatible – passionate individuals [*les individus passionés*] and impersonal social structures – the structuralism of passions is not content with producing a synthesis of supposed contraries. It equally permits us to fix certain problems internal to a structuralist position in the social sciences where the individualist / subjectivist restoration had believed it saw an unsurpassable deficiency: historical incapacity.

If there are only rigidly encrusted [*minérales*] and inhabited structures – or, let's just say peopled by agents conceived as their passive supports – where are the forces or events going to come from that can escape from the fate of eternal reproduction? "Althusser or nothing," said the May 68 graffiti that saw itself as invalidating, by action, structuralism and its inability to think transformations – indeed the very movement of history. There again, thus, there was a choice to be made – either structures, but without movement, or history but at the price of putting forth the freedom of the subject – because no one could conceive how there could be anything but free will, that is, breaking through structural determinations, in the name of the rupturing impulses [*des élans de rupture*] which make history.

The passional antisubjectivism of Spinoza offers perhaps the only means of radically leaving behind this infernal antimony and of envisioning a world of structures nonetheless peopled by individuals conceived as poles of desiring power [*puissance désirante*], of which the desire can, precisely, sometimes hope to escape institutional normalization, and, in certain conditions, actually arrive at such an escape. Because there is desire and affects, terms whose reintroduction is decidedly strategic, there are motive forces at the heart of structures. Those forces are most often determined to the reproduction of the same, but now and then [*éventuellement*] are capable of making things move in unforeseen [*inédites*] directions that come to break the ordinary run of things, without for all that escaping the causal order of determination. For example, the functioning of structures can come to be seen by individuals as passing the point of acceptability, and that very fact can thus determine them to sedition rather than to further conformity.

It also becomes possible once again to think institutional orders in the regime of their crises, without it being necessary to suppose some magnificent irruption of "liberty" but simply the pursuit of passional causality in new directions.