CHAPTER 04

TARDE AND SIMMEL ON 'ASSEMBLING THE SOCIAL': SOCIETY, LIFE, THINGS

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ABSTRACT

If Tarde's sociology undergoes a justified revival, seen as a forerunner to ANT (Actor Network Theory), then it is worth pondering how Tarde's monadological sociology can gain in explanatory adequacy in conjunction with Simmel's sociology and micro-metaphysics of 'things'. This chapter will focus on Tarde's homologies with Simmel. Both Tarde and Simmel reject dualisms, and both aim to affirm the essential entanglement of society with nature and with the world of objects. It is worth noting that Simmel offered a unitary theory of sociation based on the triptych: sociation –life– things. This proposed affinity is justified, as I argue, first, because Tarde's communicative cornucopia is not dissimilar to Simmel's proliferation of individuated spheres of life (like Weber's incommensurable value-spheres). Yet what separates Tarde and Simmel from Weber is that both are at pains to affirm a relational social ontology; Tarde's monadology and Simmel's interactionism sketched a new research program that found its contemporary formulation in Latour. Second, both Tarde and Simmel ground sociology on naturalistic templates. Whilst Tarde treats natural configurations as social, Simmel's metaphysics of life elicits a systematic deferral of relationism to the ground of Being (i.e. Life). Last, Tarde's pansocial ontology with its contemporary resonance in Latour's sociology of 'hybridity' finds a formidable ally in Simmel's microsociology of things. In Simmel, the fundamental demarcation of things from human interaction is emphatically denied. Thus, Simmel's aesthetic-normative appreciation of the world of objects brings him close to Tarde's pansocial ontology, yet this accommodation of 'things' into sociology entails the possibility of them being seen as non-instrumental containers of 'life' and, thus, as microforms of the latent utopianism in Simmel's metaphysics of society.

Key words: life, Latour, modernity, Simmel, society, Tarde, things

INTRODUCTION: EPISTEMOLOGICAL HOMOLOGIES

Bruno Latour has championed a return to Gabriel Tarde's sociology. Arguing against the Durkheimian hegemonic notion of the 'social' as the collective force over and above individual agency, Latour discerns in Tarde a sociological archaeology of ANT ('actor-netwrok-theory'). For Latour: "Tarde can be said to have invented microhistory many decades before its discoverers, in the same way as he invented ANT long before we had an inkling of what network theory looked like…"[133]

It is not too risky to suggest that what fascinates Latour in Tarde's monadological sociology is the epistemological confirmation of 'hybridity' which has been Latour's clarion call-in science and society studies. Ever since the articulation of a 'stereophonic' view of a Janus-faced science, which contains two irreducible dimensions, namely a 'black box' scientific and technological fact, but also a dynamic opening of such facts to the complex micro-processes of their genesis, prior to their consolidation, Latour has challenged sociological hierarchical explanation and any ensuing normativity (as in Durkheim) and has articulated a novel defense of 'symmetrical explanation' in science studies.[134] In wishing to overcome seminal modernist

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133   Latour, B. 'Gabriel Tarde and the End of the Social', in Joyce, P. (2002). *The Social in Question*, 122.
134   Latour, B. (1987). *Science in Action: How to follow scientists and engineers through society*.

dualisms (such as agency/structure, idealism/materialism, and, above all, nature/society), Latour's project took recourse to networked patterns which ascribe will to non-humans; this move brought him in direct conflict with the Strong Program, to which he and Michel Callon figured initially as its French wing. Part of the intemperate and escalated controversy with Bloor, for example, is Latour's insistence in rejecting any external point of reference in terms of authority-conferring credibility to knowledge and the accommodation he provides to things. This paper has no intention to describe or analyze this controversy; yet for the purposes of the ensuing discussion, Bloor's criticisms of Latour, which ascribe to him obscurity when things are invested with ''interests'[135] and metaphysics[136] are pertinent to the degree of Latour's call to recover Tarde as a precursor to a revised symmetry principle, like the one proposed by Latour's anthropological twist to Science and Society Studies.

If Tarde's sociology undergoes a justified revival, seen by Latour as a forerunner to ANT (Actor Network Theory), then it is worth pondering how Tarde's monadological sociology can gain in explanatory adequacy in conjunction with Simmel's sociology and micro-metaphysics of things. I will thus focus on Tarde's homologies with Simmel. Both Tarde and Simmel reject dualisms, and both aim to affirm the essential entanglement of society with nature and with the world of objects. It is worth noting that Simmel offered a unitary theory of sociation based on the triptych: sociation –life– things. This proposed affinity is justified, as I shall argue, first, because Tarde's communicative cornucopia is not dissimilar to Simmel's proliferation of indi-viduated spheres of life (pretty much in line with Weber's incommensurable value-spheres).[137] Yet what separates Tarde and Simmel from Weber is that both are at pains to affirm a rela-tional social ontology; Tarde's monadology and Simmel's interactionism sketched a new research program that could be seen as a forerunner of the 'symmetry' principle advocated by Latour and the scope it accommodates to things and objects. Second, both Tarde and Simmel ground sociology on naturalistic templates. Tarde's writings are replete with references to cells and other biological entities, while Simmel's late metaphysics elicits a systematic deferral of relationism to the ground of Being (i.e. Life). Last, Tarde's pansocial ontology with its contemporary resonance in Latour's sociology of 'actants' (the network of humans and non-humans within a system) finds a formidable ally in Simmel's microsociology of things. In Simmel, the fundamental demarcation of things from human interaction is emphatically denied. Thus, Simmel's aesthetic-normative appreciation of the world of objects brings him close to Tarde's pansocial ontology, yet this accommodation of 'things' into sociology entails the possibility of them being seen as non-instrumental containers of 'life' and, thus, as micro-forms of the latent utopianism in Simmel's metaphysics of society.

FROM LATOUR TO SIMMEL AND TARDE

Latour's pan-networked view of reality and the assemblages he brings our attention to can, for all its merits, regress to paradoxology. For Latour:

> *Between one network and another, as between one force and another, nothing is by itself commensurable or incommensurable. Thus, we never emerge from a network no matter how far it extends. It is for this reason that one can be Commandant at Auschwitz, an olive tree at Corfu, a plumber in Rochester, a seagull in the Isles of Scilly, a physicist at Stanford, gneiss in the Minas Gerais, a whale in Adelie Land, one of Koch's baccili at Damiette, and so on. Each network makes a whole world*

135 Bloor, D. (1999). 'Anti-Latour', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 30.1, 81-112 (97). For Latour's reply, see: Latour, B. (1999). 'Discussion: For David Bloor…and Beyond: A Reply to David Bloor's 'Anti-Latour', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 30.1, 113-129.

136 Bloor, D. (1999). 'Discussion: A Reply to Bruno Latour', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 30.1: 131-136 (134).

137 For example, see: Oakes, G. (1985). 'Theoretical Rationality and the Problem of Radical Value-Conflicts: Remarks on Simmel, Rickert, and Weber', *State, Culture and Society*, 1.2, 175-199.

for itself, a world whose inside is nothing but the internal secretions of those who elaborate it. Nothing can enter the galleries of such a network without being turned outside in. If we thought that termites were better philosophers than Leibniz, we could compare a network to a termite's nest –so long as we understood that there is no sun outside to darken its galleries by contrast. It will never be possible to see more clearly, it will never be possible to get further "outside" than a termite, and the most widely accepted equivalence might appear, under trial, no stronger than a wall of clay.[138]

Indicative in this dense passage is Latour's explosion of the symmetry principle (i.e. quasi-objects as the starting-point for explaining Nature and Society) to a leveling process of validity in terms of the authority induced by networks. The rejection of the dualism between 'commensurability' and 'incommensurability' aims to generate a liminal space (a wedge, so to speak) beyond hierarchical normativity and radical relativism. Essentially, what the plateau of networks, closed in themselves as Tardean monads, amounts to is a radicalized variant of a hyper-differentiated systems theory (à la Niklas Luhmann[139]), where any claims to some external point of valid meta-observation (the "outside" in Latour's phraseology) of social (and natural) reality can only be claimed by reference to the code (or the "secretions" according to Latour) of each particular system (or network in Latour's theory). Any "outside" force or standpoint loses its allegedly privileged vantage point of observation from the moment it is being processed by the network in question, namely when it enters it. Thus, *pace* Latour, it turns "inside out". As I shall claim shortly, this Latourian move (and its prehistory in Tarde's monadology) derives essentially from a radical reformulation of the neo-Kantian problematic of perspectivism as a condition for the possibility of knowledge. Perspectives on reality draw on contingent relevancies and thus bear on interests. Although Latour would abscond any such rigorism, it is hard not to notice the fact that the networks invoked act as different yet undifferentiated codifications of reality.

The implication of this paradox is that when Latour opts for a quasi-object as the starting-point of explanation[140],as explanation's 'black box' so to speak, he is careful, on the one hand to retain the dual poles 'Nature' and 'Society' but in an act of abstraction towards the quasi-object, he renders the latter the mystified locus of hyper-differentiation (as long as it qualifies as a trope of hybridity). This move is rightly discerned by Bloor as a regress to the Kantian thing-in-itself, [141] although as I shall argue it is better captured as a neo-Kantian residue in Latour's epistemology. Such mystification of the unmarked territory from which binaries emerge (i.e. 'society' – 'nature', 'agency' – 'structure', 'subject' – 'object') can lead, albeit unintentionally, to the reactionary implications to which Bloor alerts Latour.

Given these reservations, it is the Wittgensteinian recourse to conventions and the interest-based validity, which Bloor musters against Latour:

> *Barnes has led the way by reminding us of numerous familiar examples of objects whose identity is given by the uses to which they are put. Tables and chairs and cups and saucers, as well as fertilisers, explosives, vaccines and dyes are all real*

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138   Latour, B. (1988). *The Pasteurization of France*, 171.

139   See indicatively: Luhmann, N. (2012). *Theory of Society. Volume 1*. Here Luhmann points out that the very distinctions used for observation, derive essentially from "the world of modern society" as a "background indeterminacy ("unmarked space") that allows objects to appear and subjects to act." (85). It would seem that the very program of assemblages and the rejection of modernity are possible only within the modern world-project. This would be another sociological surrogate ('unmarked space') for Latour's actants and hybrid configurations or networks. Essentially, a Latourian revision of the 'symmetry principle' would fall, for Luhmann, under science's self-referential spiral of differentiation, namely as a "description of description of description –*ad infinitum*", since the 'quasi-objects', 'actants' and, generally, the 'symmetrical anthropology' proposed by Latour is premised on the (modern) logic of differentiation. For this idea, see Luhmann, N. (1989). *Ecological Communication*, 80.

140   Latour, B. (1993). *We Have Never Been Modern*, 95.

141   Bloor, 'Discussion', 134.

and external things, but things whose identity is defined by their role in the life of a group who create that identity through their practices.[142]

But more importantly, the problems that stem from the pan-networked reality evoked by Latour's politics of hybridity and quasi-objects has to do with the reactionary implications imputed to Latour's vision[143]. Thus, it is not all clear how the network to which the Auschwitz commandant belongs and regards certain ethnic categories as equal to the sub-human status of termites –and thus has the capacity to act and draw on his network, believing that, really, termites, for instance, are worthier than Jewish intellectuals– while the network of termites clearly lacks this capacity. Instead of enabling the human to humanize things, Latour's world of actants projects an unintentional homogenization of the 'human – non-human' network to Tarde.

Before we assess this legacy, it is Bourdieu as well a sociologist who finds such 'symmetries' hard to sustain: "[…] I could also have cited Michel Callon […] who, in his study of scallops, places on the same footing fishermen, scallops, seagulls and the wind, as elements in a 'system of actants'.[144] Among the champions of the de-centering efforts against human and the (normative) hierarchies, the invocation of Gabriel Tarde resurfaces with force and pathos. Now, when the renunciation of a binding force of Nature, Society or merely of conventions reaches its climax, it is being transformed into the rhizomatic standpoint on reality and knowledge. Thus, it is no accident that Deleuze and Guattari invoke Tarde:

> *Tarde countered that collective representations presuppose exactly what needs explaining, namely, "the similarity of millions of people." That is why Tarde was interested instead in the world of detail, or of the infinitesimal: the little imitations, oppositions, and inventions constituting an entire realm of subrepresentative matter. […] Imitation is the propagation of a flow; opposition is binarization, the making binary of flows; invention is a conjugation or connection of different flows. What, according to Tarde, is a flow? It is belief or desire (the two aspects of every assemblage); a flow is always of belief and of desire. […] For in the end, the difference is not between the social and the individual (or interindividual), but between the molar realm of representations, individual or collective, and the molecular realm of beliefs and desires in which the distinction between the social and the individual loses all meaning since flows are neither attributable to individuals nor overcodable by objective signifiers.*[145]

Interestingly enough there is a Hegelian aura ('being'–'essence'–'notion') in the triptych: 'imitation–binarization–conjugation', which is not at all foreign to Tarde's own Hegelian intimations.[146] For one thing, dialectics is not being entirely unmoored from explanatory adequacy, but, as we shall see also with Simmel, it is divested of teleology and of mediations (a not insignificant concession of its force though). Before I return to this motif, the problematization of 'overcoding' by Deleuze and Guattari, which they attribute to Tarde, betrays the fact that some process of coding is at work in the 'molecular' field of beliefs and desires. The "rigid line" invoked implies "an overcoding that substitutes itself for the faltering codes" and its segmental matrix acts like acts of "reterritorializations on the overcoding or overcoded line".[147] Contrasted to this, a "mutant flow always implies something tending to elude or escape the codes; quanta are precisely signs or degrees of deterritorialization in the decoded flow."[148]

142   Bloor, 'Anti-Latour', 109.
143   Latour, 'Discussion', 126-127.
144   Bourdieu, P. (2004). *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, 30.
145   Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari. (1987/2012). *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: A Thousand Plateaus*, 255-256.
146   See Schérer, R. '*Homo, Ludens* des Stratégies Vitales', in Tarde, G (1999). *La Logique Sociale*, 17-56 (36-38); Tarde, G. (1999). *La Logique Sociale*, 166-167.
147   Deleuze and Guattari, *Capitalism*, 256.
148   Deleuze and Guattari, *Capitalism*, 256.

For all its claims to supersede hierarchical epistemologies of the social, the logic of flows does not seem to entail the capacity to dispense binary movements between the molecules and nodes of the network and its flows. Even as 'deterritorializations' and 'decodings', such forces are still tethered to the referent of the code, from which they escape and secrete their desiring streams to the network in question. Dialectically, such reformulations would imply that they reproduce something of the code's special conceptual and symbolic territory: as flows, they are marked by directionality away *from* the code's claims to territorialization.

If this is a part of the contemporary resurgence of Tardean sociology of hybridity, then it is worth reflecting on questions of originality and validity. While both of these questions cannot be pursued in the context of this book chapter in all their ramifications, one way to proceed is to explore any doors being opened towards other traditions of classical sociology or bridges constructed between such traditions with Tarde and with contemporary epistemologies, such as Latour's.[149] Thus, the pivotal point towards such bridge-building (my reference to doors and bridges is not merely rhetorical but substantive, as it will be shown next) is Latour's neglect of Simmel in his formulation of a sociological genealogy of network-theory and actants.

LATOUR'S 'PARLIAMENT OF THINGS' REVISITED: SIMMEL AND TARDE

Strangely enough the Tarde-Durkheim controversy has opened the door to Simmel. David Toews, for example, in reconsidering the notion of 'sociability' as a means of relaxing the tensions between Tarde and the by now patterned contrast to Durkheim, considers Simmel as a helpful participant in the dialogue.[150] Relaxing the tensions between Durkheim and Tarde, Toews opts for problematizing the 'unsociable' aspect of human interaction, beyond the mere conflation of it under unprincipled action or adaptation to societal constraints. Rather, for Toews, both Tarde and Durkheim address the problem of sociation (and association). While on Toews' reading Durkheim posits the sociable as the obligatory aspect of human interaction and its collective permutations, Tarde tilts the emphasis to the 'unsociable' aspect of social life (along also with attention to its antithesis, namely, the hyper-sociable person).[151] A formidable move on Toews' rereading of Tarde is to relax the opposition with Durkheim, highlighting in the latter's apotheosis of the social, elements of the unsociable as essential building-blocks of the Durkheimian edifice. For Toews then, the elements of 'unsociability' shared by Tarde and Durkheim reside in the continuum with which they calibrated sociology's relation to philosophy (thus, even by Durkheim's standards, facts can never be divested of value[152]); the latter is held to reject the rigid division of intellectual labor, to which bland sociologism subscribes to.

It is at this juncture that the Tarde-Durkheim 'dialogue' is enriched with Simmel. Toews' reference to Simmel prepares the ground for further homologies. He understands Simmel to render human sociability a Kantian *a priori,* without which human interaction would be rendered an impossible undertaking. Moreover, it is evident that Simmel's claims to 'sociability', being a 'form' of sociation, play up the Weberian methodology of ideal types. Sociability (or conflict for that matter) can never be 'pure'; if it were, this would imply lack of empirical content (thus, an explanatory vacancy in face of historical reality) or, inversely, a 'perfection' of empirical reality

149   See, indicatively, Haraway, D. 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in Late Twentieth Century' in Haraway, D. (2016). *Manifestly Haraway*, 5-90. On the proposal –except Latour's– to remember and implement Tarde in sociological explanation and methodology, see Sampson, T. (2012). *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks*; Santana-Acuña, A. 'Social Monads, Not Social Facts: Gabriel Tarde's Tool for Sociological Analysis.' in Law, A. and E.R. Lybeck (eds.) (2016). *Sociological Amnesia: Cross-Currents in Disciplinary History*, 141-158.

150   Toews, D. 'Tarde and Durkheim and the Non-Sociological Ground of Sociology', in Candea, M (2015). *The Social After Gabriel Tarde: Debates and Assessments*, 129-139.

151   Toews, D. 'Tarde and Durkheim and the Non-Sociological Ground of Sociology', in Candea, M (2015). *The Social After Gabriel Tarde: Debates and Assessments*, 129-139.

152   Durkheim, É. (1974). *Sociology and Philosophy*, 80-97. See, Toews, 'Tarde', 133-137.

to the status of the pure type; an unjustifiable and haughty idealism. Toews' nuanced reading of Simmel projects an unjustified brand of idealism in his sociology of sociability at odds with Simmel's neo-Kantianism and the historicist heritage in it.[153] In order to accommodate Tarde, Toews downplays the heuristics of Simmel's epistemology and his *Lebensphilosophie*, which introduces, even more emphatically than Tarde, the domain of 'unsociability', 'difference', 'contingency' and 'movement' as a reservoir of vital forces in search for sociable forms, yet always energized to reach beyond sociality.[154] Both Simmel and Tarde reject dualistic categories in sociology –regardless of such rejection's claims to adequacy. For Simmel, the project of a relational sociology aims to curb the rigidity of schemata based on the juxtaposition between 'individual' and 'society'. Simmel saw in Tarde a promising field for rethinking the social through 'form' and 'content'. In what has become the seminal reference point of Simmel's sociology, Tarde's analysis of crowds through the lens of imitation entailed the distinction between 'form' and 'content'.[155] If 'imitation' is the form of countless 'contents' in the multitude of social life's vicissitudes, then it is one among the forms of sociation and one that refracts Simmel's epistemological principle of 'reciprocity' (*Wecheslwirkung*). But Toews is correct when he attributes to Simmel's theme of sociability the search for the *good form.*[156]

In his example of the 'internet', and contra Simmel, Toews is correct in seeing a networked and relatively disorganized and non-hierarchical setting of unsociability that explodes both the Durkheimian fascination with the social and Simmel's transcendentalism of the 'good form' of human sociation. Rather, it is the Tardean paradigm that serves better sociology's description, analysis and evaluation of social media, precisely because it contains the possibility of unsociability's ruse in instantiating 'the future of the social'.[157] Yet, Toews all too easily occludes that 'unprincipled' sociability[158] and pulverizing social structures[159] can be discerned to undermine unsociability's benign contingency and potential.

Finally, Toews' approbation of 'unsociability' tends though, for all its merits, to regress to the neo-Kantian problem of the *hiatus irrationalis*. Advanced by Emil Lask, the problem of the validity of perspectives in interpreting and conceptualizing reality, relied on the paradox that

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153 "Simmel is hinting with his comment that sociability in its pure form has no "ulterior end", that it is futile to search for something such as the philosophical conditions of possibility of sociability. But he has not considered the aspect of those philosophical conditions as a practice. Moreover, Simmel would have to admit that empirically existing sociability never takes this pure form. What this means is that sociability is something that is never fully accomplished but is an empirical experience of striving for good social form. Simmel would like us to believe, in the Kantian manner, that the good social form is a teleological movement of a transcendental concept, an expression or coming into fullness of the pure form of the social, which is taken as an a priori category. But actors who are behaving in a sociable manner, if we accept Simmel's portrait of social reality, cannot do so without a principle or regulative ideal of good form to guide their self-interpretations, their self-recognition as actors who have no ulterior motives. Sociability in ignorance of such a principle would quickly be recuperated by interests and interested behavior and would fall off the track of purity." See Toews, 'Tarde', 136-137.

154 This standing Simmelian trope opens the door to other nuances of 'unsociability', elided by Toews. In fact, Simmel shares with Durkheim the 'unsociable' and ecstatic dimension of 'collective effervescence', which, somewhat paradoxically, necessitates 'unsociability' in order to strengthen and replenish the social. See, Simmel, G. (2010). *The View of Life: Four Metaphysical Essays with Journal Aphorisms*. Moreover, the Bataillean homage to Durkheim, or even the politics of paroxysm and transgression in Roger Caillois demonstrate additional provinces of 'unsociability', at work below the threshold of the social, but also above it. See, for example, Mukherjee, S.R. (ed). (2010). *Durkheim and Violence*.

155 See Borch, C. (2010). 'Between Destructiveness and Vitalism: Simmel's Sociology of Crowds.' *Conserveries Mémorielles*, n.8. Available at: https://journals.openedition.org/cm/744. Simmel's review of Tarde's *The Laws of Imitation* can be found in Simmel, G. 'Rezension: G.Tarde. Les Lois de l' Imitation. Etude Sociologique.' in K.C. Köhnke (1999), *Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe, Band 1*, 248-250.

156 Toews, 'Tarde', 136. For an even more normative reading of Simmel's micro-dialectics (on the *good form*, too), see Gangas, S. (2004). 'Axiological and Normative Dimensions in Georg Simmel's Philosophy and Sociology: A Dialectical Interpretation', *History of the Human Sciences*, 17.4, 17-44.

157 Toews, 'Tarde', 138.

158 See, for example, Levmore, S. and M. Nussbaum (eds.). (2010). *The Offensive Internet: Speech, Privacy and Reputation*.

159 For example, see Fuchs, C. (2017). *Social Media: A Critical Introduction.*

cognitive apprehension presupposes conceptual abstraction from reality.[160] This abstraction creates a hiatus, precisely because we draw on a slice of reality (our intellectual categories) in order to grasp reality and comprehend it in its totality. But this is precisely the irrational aspect in this epistemological move. It posits the 'part' (abstracted reality in our perspectivist concept-formation) as a condition for attaining knowledge of reality (in its totality). For Lask though, this paradox is in fact the *a priori* for knowledge: A complete conceptual apparatus would cancel a meaningful perspective on reality. These problems, Hegelian and Durkheimian sociology sought to surmount but could never fully release itself from their relevance. It is my impression that Toews' re-reading of Durkheim (and Simmel) via Tarde's 'unsociability' accommodates a different version of the *hiatus irrationalis*: the 'unsociable' as a condition of possibility for the 'sociable'.

MEDIATED HYBRIDITY AND MICROSOCIOLOGY'S CONNECTION TO NORMATIVITY: SIMMEL BEYOND TARDE

Is this though the end of what classical sociology can provide to the justified Tardean renaissance? For this to be answered in the Simmel-Tarde affinity I am proposing, it is apposite to briefly revisit Latour. In two of his writings he resorts to 'doors' in order to forge the opening to the non-human and to reorient sociology's attention to the mundane, outside the black boxes of social structures and rational human agents.[161] In both texts, he never refers to Georg Simmel's seminal essay on the 'Bridge and the Door'.[162] In short, Latour's caveat on the door (and similar objects) is that it exercises significant constraints on human action. Thus, we cannot simply denude the authority these exert on us (after all, we all, for Latour, swear at a computer!) by erecting an explanatory and normative even barrier as part of a modernist classification matrix that primes the human. In principle, this is also the attraction Latour feels for Tarde. As he puts it: "Tarde's idea is simply that if there is something special to human society it is not be determined *by any strong opposition* to all other types of aggregates, and certainly not by some special sort of arbitrarily imposed symbolic order which will set it apart from 'mere matter'."[163]

Moreover, this hermeneutic turn is reinforced by Tarde's dictum that to "exist is to differ", where difference is "the truly substantial side of things" because it is "at once their ownmost possession and that which they hold most in common".[164] Such injunctions, which Latour gleans from Tarde's numerous writings lead him to the imperative call addressed to the sociology to avert the scientific gaze from the ladder that moves upwards towards abstractions from the particulars, but, rather to look down, to "be even more blind, even more narrow, even more down to earth, even more myopic" and to install to sociology an "oligoptica" perspective; one that resembles –this is what Latour imputes to Tarde– "the 'flat society' argument".[165] The conservative and obscurantist aura aside, this injunction reminds us of Baudrillard's invocation of Borges' short story on a cartographic project of drawing a map with such precision that it "ends up covering the territory exactly".[166] While Baudrillard has in mind the detachment of the signified from the signifier in the ever-expanding redoublings of simulacra, the implica-

160   For the relevance of Emil Lask and neo-Kantianism, see Beiser, F (2008). 'Emil Lask and Kantianism', *The Philosophical Forum*, 39.2, 283-295; Beiser, F. (2009). 'Normativity in Neo-Kantianism: Its Rise and Fall', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 17.1, 9-27. Tarde's ontology is laden with the heritage of the hiatus, since his symmetry principle posits reality's "inexhaustible stream" with "parts growing smaller almost to a vanishing point". See Tarde, G. (1999). *On Social Laws: An Outline of Sociology*, 95-96.

161   Latour, B. (1988). 'Mixing Humans and Non-Humans Together: The Sociology of a Door-Closer', *Social Problems*, 35.3, 298-310; Latour, B. 'Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artefacts', in Bijker, W. and J. Law (1992). *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Socio-Technical Change*, 225-258.

162   Simmel, G. 'Bridge and Door', in Frisby, D. and M. Featherstone (1997). *Simmel on Culture*, 170-174.

163   Latour, 'Tarde', 120.

164   Tarde, G. (2012). *Monadology and Sociology*, 40.

165   Latour, 'Tarde', 124.

166   Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1.

tion here is that Latour's 'commandments' replace one source of authority for another. What does it mean to be 'blind' and enter the galleries of moles or termites? One plausible –and generous– reading, if Latour (and Tarde with him) are not going to drown in incoherence, is a heuristic use: Act as if you were blind and as if maps were unavailable or as precise as the territory they are drawn to represent! Recover, that is, the mundane perspective of humility and relate to non-human entities as if the fixity of our distinctions did not apply. If this reading is plausible, I shall leave aside the latent socialism (of humans and things) to which such an approach is unwittingly tethered, since by rejecting fixities, it aims to redeem non-humans from a merely subordinate to instrumental reason role. Instead, I shall explore if this path is a way forward to a relational epistemology based on reciprocity or if, *pace* Latour, it leads to the irrationalist straightjacket of having to discard hard-gained distance from the non-human, in order to immerse our perspective in it (like Shelling's Absolute which, as Hegel put it, resembles the 'night in which all cows are black'; so much for the metaphor of blindness).[167] Because Latour runs the risk of substituting one form for an all-encompassing matrix of knowledge with the myopic attachment to 'difference' (a sort of particularistic universality too; namely, the each monad as a universal), it needs to realign some of Tarde's claims to what could possibly balance this admittedly reactionary picture.

Such possibility, I think, is available in Tarde's invocation of 'reciprocity'. For Tarde,

> [u]nilateral possession and reciprocal possession are, likewise, necessarily united. But the latter is superior to the former. It is reciprocal possession which explains the formation of those beautiful celestial mechanisms in which, by the power of mutual attraction, every point is a centre. Reciprocal possession explains the creation of those admirable living organisms whose parts are all united and solidary, and where everything is both an end and a means at once. By reciprocal possession, finally, in the free cities of antiquity and in modern states, mutuality of service and equality of right bring about the prodigious achievements of our sciences, industries, and arts.[168]

In this remarkable excerpt, we discern a metaphysical position not alien to Simmel's accommodation of reciprocity to which I will turn shortly. (Even, 'opposition' –like Simmel's 'conflict'– "implies a relation between two forces, tendencies, or directions".[169])

Rather than limiting Latour's vistas of non-human actants to a Tardean genealogy only, Simmel's systematic consideration of things (bridges, doors, windows, handles, jewels, picture frames, ruins) as entities invested with aesthetic, ethical and metaphysical meaning enriches this discussion and, as I claim in this chapter, attaches to non-humans a redeeming force lacking, or at best occluded, in Latour (and Tarde). Admittedly, the Simmel-Latour rapprochement is rare.[170] A few remarks shall enable us to explore if fruitful bridges can be built.

Simmel's fascination with non-human entities from a sociological point of view reflects various interests: (1) for one thing it is an aesthetic decision, given Simmel's highly refined aesthetic antennae evident through his many writings on architecture, painting, sculpture, poetry and music; (2) secondly, it stems from his *Lebensphilosophie*. This metaphysical neo-romantic standpoint (in Simmel's case soaked with Jewish mysticism) sees Life as a Heraclitean flux that flows through countless forms (human, non-human; social and individual; local and cosmic) and is further is refracted through these countless shapes, which when attempting

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167 Tarde is not absolved of such nuances of irrationalism. He even tells us that the descent from society to matter leads to "the cell, and finally the formless or protean protoplasm, with its sudden whims which no law may grasp. –Here again the alpha and the omega is diversity, in all its vividness." Tarde, *Monadology*, 44.

168 Tarde, *Monadology*, 56-57.

169 Tarde, *Laws*, 45.

170 To my knowledge, it appears on one occasion. See. Kemple, T. (2007). 'Introduction – Allosociality: Bridges and Doors to Simmel's Social Theory of the Limit', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 24.7-8, 1-19 (7).

to seize and immobilize life they become congealed in disenchanted and instrumentalized reifications of it.[171] The focus on non-human objects is part and parcel of this metaphysical principle. (3) The aesthetic and metaphysical dimensions are coupled to an ethical purpose that Simmel consistently pursues. Kantian, Hegelian, and even Marxian motifs lead him to the challenge of having to reconcile 'necessity' and 'freedom', the 'universal' with the 'particular', 'individualism' to 'socialism'. (4) Sociologically, non-human objects function as loci for interaction, which for Simmel is channeled through various social 'forms' (conflict, secrecy, exchange, gratitude) and social types (the poor, the stranger); objects and things are essential reference points in social space, which through Simmel's perceptive lens, acquire a significance (see the previous three 'interests') that extends far beyond, and deeper too, than instrumental value and rationality. (5) Non-human objects crystallize Simmel's convergence between epistemology, metaphysics, sociology and ethics, which is no other than the idea of relational reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*).[172] Beyond the idea that meaning and communication are relational concepts, reciprocity (even as reciprocal causality) stretches from the most metaphysical notions (the reciprocity of 'life' and 'form') to the most detailed (the reciprocity in a human glance, in secrecy's drive towards revelation, in the door's reciprocal function of both limitation and transcendence of limits).

Indicative is Simmel's dialectic of the bridge and the door: "[…] the bridge indicates how humankind unifies the separateness of merely natural being, and the door how it separates the uniform, continuous unity of natural being".[173] If bridge and door are raised to a metaphysical significance, well beyond Latour's own version of the door, this consideration on Simmel's part denotes what these objects say about humans. Particularly for the door, it is both enclosure of space and openness toward freedom that are elevated to Kantian metaphors for necessity and freedom respectively. This kind of reciprocity is another trope to convey Simmel's relationism. His non-dualistic epistemology (an expression of which is interactionist sociology as well as its stretch to the world of objects) is plainly likened to the problem of justice. For Simmel, relationism (ambiguously referred as 'relativism') "strives to dissolve into a relation every absolute that presents itself and proceeds in the same way with the absolute that offers itself as the ground for this new relation".[174] As a heuristic act of dialectical deferral before a sublated synthesis emerges, Simmel's relationism is tantamount to a theory of 'moderation'. It is no accident that he visualizes relationism through the prism of law, where "the objective form of equity and justice" is being attained "through the exchange of claims and restrictions".[175]

Carried by the anti-Durkheimian turn in Tarde, Latour fails to discern such mediations in Tarde. Thus, he underplays strongly relational injunctions like:

> *We must, however, look to the social world to see monads laid bare, grasping each other in the intimacy of their transitory characters, each fully unfolded before the other, in the other, by the other. This is the relation par excellence, […] a kind of tightly knit network which extends indefinitely"* and where *"social elements hold each other or pull each other in a thousand ways, and from their competition the marvels of civilization are born.*[176]

Although non-humans are an essential part of this network, for Tarde –like Simmel's and

171   The sources of Simmel's *Lebensphilosophie* are numerous and contested. I tend to subscribe to a Hegelian and radical reading rather than one that subsumes the trope of 'Life' to reactionary intellectual trends and political standpoints. For my qualified defense of Simmel's *Lebensphilosophie*, see Gangas, S. (2019). 'Simmel, Marx and the Radical Concept of Life: A Hegelian Approach', *Dissonância: Critical Theory and Journal.* Advance Online Publication.

172   The most systematic exposition is: Papilloud, C. (2003). *La Réciprocité: Diagnostic et destins d'un possible dans l'œuvre de Georg Simmel.*

173   Simmel, 'Bridge', 174.

174   Simmel, G. (1990). *The Philosophy of Money*, 117.

175   Simmel, 'Philosophy', 114.

176   Tarde, 'Monadology', 56.

Durkheim's affirmative concepts of 'life'– "life is preferable to non-life".[177]

CONCLUDING REMARK

While it has been plainly suggested that Gabriel Tarde's logic of imitation offers a counterweight to hierarchical sociological reasoning, emblematically compressed in Durkheim's organicism and its explicit moral teleology, the Tardean turn proposed by Latour is not without its own limitations. Latour's reading of Tarde is nuanced but is at risk of obfuscating dimensions in Tarde's thought which point to a different direction than the one with which Tarde's own thought often intimates, namely a post-humanist approach with problematic political and normative bifurcations.[178] I have argued that these, mostly normative, limitations are better captured if we bracket a juxtaposition to Tarde via what constitutes the target of the latter's criticisms, namely Durkheim. Rather, I intimated to the possibility of countering Tarde from within the micro-frameworks he is so attracted to, by opting to examine Simmel's micro-sociology of hybridities, which brings him remarkably close to Tarde, but with a distinctive normative difference.

Thus, *pace* Simmel's relational sociology and its blend of idealism with *Lebensphilosophie*, the question posed would be to consider the possibility of a meta-network, which could sustain the breadth, firmness and vital streams of the nods and knots that constitute non-hierarchical and horizontal networks, as imagined by Latour: free of a fixed *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem*. If the debate on Tarde's relevance for a pan-social society, with ample openings to networks, rhizomas, 'unsociability' and flows, is, however, to have any purchase in the domain of human interests (its condition of possibility, so to speak), then sociological theory should consider it as an adjunct to other similar proposals that played up 'difference' (as in Simmel), but, in order to avoid the reactionary crevices of Tardean socio-politics of conflating the human to the non-human in various continua and, rather, to enrich the capabilities of human agents.[179]

Simmel's means to get round the Tardean dead-ends enable sociologists to consider the shift to pluralism and diversity as essentially modernist challenges (apparently a theme downplayed in Tarde[180] and certainly in Latour), but also as opportunities to rethink the Tardean claims of monads in a differentiated and highly complex (networks are apposite here) world. We can conclude, therefore, with a Simmel extract that incorporates the Tardean problematic but also moves beyond it, both pragmatically and in normative terms, as it reasserts even with *Lebensphilosophie*, the human. For Simmel:

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177 Tarde, 'Monadology', 65. This is also a sharp observation by Karsenti, who aligns Durkheim and Tarde around the metaphor of creativity in terms that bear affinity to vitalism and *Lebensphilosophie*. He points to the social fact's "insistance, its ever-repeated capacity to impose itself against facts of the same order. The sociologist's task thus becomes to apprehend, beneath the regularity of an imitative practice, the irregularity of constant modifications. Or, better, the regularity of that which is imitatively repeated must be read as a continuous process through which the social creates itself, that is to say, modifies even as it reproduces itself." See Karsenti, B. 'Imitation: Returning to the Tarde–Durkheim Debate', in Candea, M. (2015). *The Social After Gabriel Tarde: Debates and Assessments*, 99-113 (112-113). As these lines are written amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, it is worth connecting the motif of life (as a normative ideal) to Latour's posts on the pandemic. Again, Latour seems to want to have the cake and eat it too. On the one hand, humans are horizontally levelled alongside the internet, the virus, the state, the law, the hospitals or the climate, but, on the other hand, the alarming state of looming biopolitics against which he warns readers is premised on highly charged in normative terms allusions to the desirability of human life (for Latour's Macron's idealized and desired hypothetical announcement: "I protect you from life and death, because I maintain the conditions of habitability of all the living people on whom you depend.") in the context of a standing ecological crisis, with far-reaching and deeply intertwined risks for "all humans". See Latour, B. (2020). 'Is this a Dress Rehearsal?' *Critical Inquiry*, March 26, 2020 (Available online).

178 Even writers sympathetic to Tarde recognize this risk. See, for example, Lorenc, T. 'Afterword: Tarde's Pansocial Ontology', in Tarde, G. (2012). *Monadology and Sociology*, 71-95 (93-94).

179 For this normative direction in sociology, see: Gangas, S. (2020). *Sociological Theory and the Capability Approach.*

180 It is not that Tarde neglects modernity. As Clark intimates, he is often very close to Simmel on communicative overlaps and the increasing interdependence and individual freedom. See Clark. T. 'Introduction', in Clark, T (ed.). (1969). *Gabriel Tarde: On Communication and Social Influence*, 55.

That one part of a whole should become a self-contained whole itself, emerging out of it and claiming from it a right to its own existence, this in itself may be the fundamental tragedy of spirit. This condition came into its own in modernity and assumed the leading role in the processes of culturization. Underlying the plurality of relationships that interconnect individuals, groups and social formations, there is a pervading dualism confronting us: the individual entity strives towards wholeness, while its place within the larger whole only accords it the role of the part. We are aware of being centered both externally and internally because we, together with our actions, are mere constituents of larger wholes that place demands upon us as one-dimensional parts in the division of labour. Yet, we nevertheless want be rounded and self-determining beings, and establish ourselves as such.[181]

Simmel is one step ahead because he –unlike Latour, for example– conceives the differentiation tendencies (hybrids, rhizomas, netwroks, monads) to reside, as their condition of possibility, in modernity, which he also subsumes under the tragedy of the spirit, namely the spirit's immanent self-differentiation, despite its restive claims to wholeness.[182] As I have argued, Simmel's sagacity on networks –evident in this extract– is normatively anchored both through the intimation of the reciprocal moderation of different claims and demands (this was, as can be recalled, the kernel of relationism) but, more importantly, it is premised on each 'individual' being worthy and capable to claim self-determination.

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181 Simmel, G. (2007). 'The Philosophy of Landscape', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 24.7-8, 20-29 (22).

182 Ironically, we can claim that in certain respects Tarde sounds more conventionally Hegelian than Simmel, when the former, instead of tragedy's wounds to the Spirit march to Reason, affirms an "imitative diffusion" which accounts for "successive complications and harmonizations of the harmonies" through which "the grand collective works of the human mind are constituted, –a grammar, a theology, an encyclopaedia, a code of laws, a natural or artificial organization of labor, a scheme of aesthetics or a system of ethics.". See Tarde, *Laws*, 95.

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