

# CHAPTER 05

## AFFECTIVE IMITATION OR IMITATIVE AFFECT.

### GABRIEL TARDE'S MECHANISM OF BELIEF AND DESIRE

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#### ABSTRACT

Recently the politics of ontology has taken an affective turn in the framing of the political subject, individual and collective. This turn is fuelled by a growing interest in the work of a series of forgotten thinkers, among them Gabriel Tarde. The recent revival of his approach to the study of human interaction centres on his concepts of belief and desire as the cornerstones of society. His inter-psychology based on monads that interact animated by the elemental forces of belief and desire represents a mapping of the emergence of societies. In his thought, the diverse currents of faith and passion are the materials that configure and transform institutions, groups and individuals. We discuss how Tarde poses the problem of the constitution of values and norms, departing from the government of affects; highlight how this foregrounding of affect is currently used as a way to reanimate social and political theory and a tool explore pressing political problems.

**Keywords:** Gabriel Tarde, belief, desire, society, affect theory.

#### INTRODUCTION

Questions about desire –its inner workings and its role in human behaviour– have a long history in Philosophy, particularly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century discussion of passions, that delineates a specific field of action, and the positive role attributed to certain passions in the cultivation of morality and civic virtue. A topic of philosophical inquiry it has, from the early 19th century onwards, moved from the sole purview of philosophy and theology to attract the more clinical attention of a range of empirical disciplines: Medicine, Neurology, Psychology and Sociology, and even Marketing and Economics.

Such inquiries, however, have never been disinterested. Since desire is central to the formation of human capacities, it has also constituted a nexus of problems in the sense that it has always been a point of entry into conduct that pins particular behaviours under the direction of either secular or religious authorities.

There is currently, an emergence of a semantics of value centred on passions and affects.<sup>183</sup> The most recent and explicit attempts to grapple with the nature of emotions and affects are in Sociology of Emotion and in the relatively new field of Affect Studies. Different theories attribute effects to different bodies or qualities of bodies; but these differences may broadly be categorized in three ways. Firstly, affects and emotions are located within an individual subject or body. Or, secondly, affects are collective or atmospheric forces that operate external to the body. Finally, affects are the effects of the interactions and encounters of individual bodies;<sup>184</sup> These three formulations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Tarde's approach to affects may offer a bridge to the dilemma between them, since he views all bodies as social constructions made out of affective monads who crossover into passionate relations.

183 Barbalet, J. M. (2004). *Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure: Macrosociological Approach*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, p 40

184 Ahmed, S. (2004b). Collective Feelings: Or, the Impressions Left by Others. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 21(2), 25-42. doi: 10.1177/0263276404042133.

Belief turns into a problem, a political and economic one, the moment it stops being a given. Tarde vividly describes the changing technological and social conditions (rise of new communication media, flows of population to urban metropolis, the subsequent cutoff from tradition) that turned the process of producing belief from passive to energetic. This involves a radical permutation in the relationship between man and belief. Since the destabilization of tradition, the new conditions bring up man against new dilemmas and questions.

There is a dark point in desire upon which we usually hesitate to shed light because desire seems ill fitted in every logic system and defies it. Desire bypasses the timeline of causality. We don't always understand its nature because occasionally desire cannot be interpreted by aims and reasons. This constitutes its hidden and subversive nature. It also explains our own 'desire' to tame it. Desire –as many have claimed– constitutes a potential for action rupture and change.

Tarde's conception of the body allows for the incorporation of myriad bodily forms, both human and non-human, that continuously affect and are affected by one another. Thus, the affective environment is constituted by a changing scene or flux of bodily presences that are exploring desires. Tarde had quite accurately captured the dynamics of desire, that is, he recognizes desire as a prime mover of the social.

### GABRIEL TARDE'S INTER-INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY

Social theory, ever since the foundation of sociology as discipline has been interested in affect as a key concept, for instance Emile Durkheim's collective sentiment and ritual effervescence, Max Weber's charisma and Georg Simmel's fidelity and gratitude, Tarde's belief and desire system, to name a few.

Gabriel Tarde was a forefather classic of social thought, an outsider to the academic system, who became a famous professor of Collège de France and was then forgotten.<sup>185</sup> His work, a social theory he called inter-individual psychology (*psychologie inter-individuel*) was scorned as "psychologism,"<sup>186</sup> only to be rediscovered by Deleuze, who used it much more extensively than the few interspersed mentions and footnotes might suggest. Today however, his works are being republished, a growing number of papers cite him, and we see more theoretical and even empirical research drawing on his sociology. The recent revival of his distinctive approach to the study of human interaction focuses on his notions of belief and desire as the cornerstones of society.<sup>187</sup>

For Tarde, everything is a form of society, from rocks to stars, from the liver to the individual.<sup>188</sup> Unlike Durkheim he does not start by viewing society as a pre-existing domain, distinct from the elements that compose it. He states that it is a scientific prejudice to treat unity, structures, and hierarchies as the beginning and end of everything. In his views society was first and foremost the unstable and temporary outcome of social life. He believed in the multiple, heteroclitic, and heterarchical nature of both the natural and social world, and stated that science has to somehow take into account this fact.<sup>189</sup> He and his contemporary Durkheim tried to produce a new scientific discourse sociology and attempted to establish its relative autonomy. But in Tarde's opinion, instead of starting by analysing the actual structure of

185 Cerulo, M. (2021). Gabriel Tarde In Cerulo, M., & Scribano, A. (Eds.), *The Emotions in the Classics of Sociology: A Study in Social Theory* (1st ed.), Routledge, p 40-41.

186 Alliez, E. (1999 re-edition). Présentation. Tarde et le problème de la constitution, in *Monodologie et sociologie*, 9-32.

187 Katz, E. (2018). REDISCOVERING GABRIEL TARDE. In R. Leroux (Ed.), *The Anthem Companion to Gabriel Tarde* (pp. 49–60). Anthem Press.

188 Tarde, G. *Monodologie et sociologie*, 58.

189 Tonkonoff, S. A new social physic: The sociology of Gabriel Tarde and its legacy, *Journal: Current Sociology*, 2013, ISSN: 1461-7064, p 270.

social objects, this science should start by reconstructing the diverse ways in which these structures are produced –a process he calls polygenesis.

His project was neither strictly a sociological, psychological, or economical one, but a complex manifold entanglement of forces which operated according to certain general principles. He also stated that instead of separating society from the individual, Sociology should draw on the distinction between three forms of inter-psychological or inter-mental relation: imitation, invention, and opposition.<sup>190</sup> This does not mean, however, that he sees the individual as the irreducible basis of social life. Rather, the individual is likewise an outcome – and also, in a certain sense, unstable and temporary. Isaac Joseph notes that “*His social theory is not the analysis of systems of social representations as Durkheim would have it, instead, it is the study of currents of beliefs (social logic) in languages, myths, religions, sciences and philosophy, and the study of currents of desire (social teleology) in laws, customs, institutions and industries*”.<sup>191</sup>

In Tarde's work imitation is a type of social bond in which someone offers himself or herself, voluntarily or involuntarily, as a model, and someone else, consciously or unconsciously, copies him or her. It is a form of relationship in which someone influences, suggests, or orders and someone else is influenced, accepts, or obeys. In his words, it is “*the action at a distance of one mind upon another, an action which consists of the quasi-photographic reproduction of a cerebral image upon the sensitive plate of another brain. ... By imitation I mean every impression of an inter-psychical photography, so to speak, willed or not willed, passive or active*”.<sup>192</sup>

It is an asymmetrical, contingent, and reversible relationship. Each time, it can or cannot be reproduced as well as reversed –in which case, the model will become a copy. It is also a ‘contagious’ mode of interaction able to repeat itself, spreading from one individual to another, homogenizing the spaces in which it has been displayed, or rather producing a particular kind of spaces: spaces of similarities and regularities, of social reproduction. In consequence, the social bond would be produced as follows: a way of acting, feeling, or thinking of one individual that is transmitted to another; this individual will repeat the behaviour, serving as an example to a third person, who, in turn, will also be copied. This is what Tarde calls a flow of rays, a wave, or an imitative current. When currents of new examples arise and disseminate, they take the form of fashions, if they take roots and establish themselves, they become traditions.<sup>193</sup>

The concept of imitation allows him to explore the relation between man and creativity. Invention is a key concept in his system as it is the source of all innovation and progress. Tarde emphasizes its social foundations. Every invention is the product of correlations in the minds of creative people, but it depends on knowledge, which works cumulatively in human history. Moreover, invention cannot exist without communication and social ties that facilitate its transmission.

Inventions are diffused into the social systems through imitation. These imitations are spreading - to use one of his favorite images –like the ripples on the surface of a pond, tending to the boundaries of the system until they come in contact with an obstacle. The obstacle, however, is likely to be the imitation of an earlier concept, and when the two collide, their opposition is likely to produce a new product –that is, a new invention– which in turn is mimicked until the moment where also encounters other obstacles and thus continues ad infinitum. Therefore, these three processes form an independent whole that continues to produce and interact in a variety of ways.

190 Tarde, G. (1895) *Les lois de l'imitation*.

191 Joseph, I. Postface. *Gabriel Tarde: le monde comme féerie, Monodologie et sociologie*, 25.

192 Tarde, *Les lois de l'imitation*, 14.

193 Tarde, *Les lois de l'imitation*, xxi.

A really innovative element of his work lies in the fact that he recognizes that society is entirely divisible into monads, and that, in turn, these atoms and molecules can also be decomposed. He understands the world as an entity made out of monads. The phrase “*Everything is a society*” (even the smallest cell is a “*factory*”) means that the world is not made of objects and subjects but rather, it is a grid of relations that combine according to hierarchies established by the institution of a myriad of other individuals (physical, organic or human monads). This universe within universe absorbs spheres of action that interpenetrate and is crisscrossed by flows or currents of belief and desire. He preserves the term monad to capture the simultaneous continuity and discontinuity of flows, for a monad is conceived as a mediation of individualities, as a series of singularities.<sup>194</sup> In his neomonadology<sup>195</sup> the monads are open and act upon each other. Since nothing restricts them, they become “*a sphere of action infinitely enlarged*”.<sup>196</sup>

Monads get built in dynamic fields of passions, desires and beliefs. He chooses monads –“the daughters of Leibnitz”, as he calls them, accrediting the influence Leibnitz exercised in his thought- because they can solve an important issue. Tarde wants to develop a social theory evading the classical individual-society dichotomy and monads permit him to elaborate a theory in terms of fluid physics. The metaphysics, for which they accused him, has a very material foundation.

His general definition of bodies states, that each body has to be taken as a complex body, consisting of various simpler ones, which in turn are also composed from more simple bodies, ad infinitum. This raises the question: what turns a collection of simple bodies into a complex body? Tarde defines a body by its possessive capability (avoir). This particular power is manifested in two ways belief and desire.

Thus, affects are not just ‘produced’ by bodies, they define and ceaselessly constitute and reconstitute the nature of a body. Bodies are defined by their capability to affect or to be affected, by their power to conjoin other bodies or to split up, to be influenced or to deflect. A composite body emerges as an individual body at the moment it becomes affectable by outside influences or has an impact on other things as an individual body (by its ‘power of acting’). This in turn points to the continuous mutual determination of bodies and the effects of their encounters, for each encounter results in a change of the body’s capabilities— a change of the powers of acting and perceiving. Affectio (often translated as the English ‘affection’) is the trace of one body’s effect upon another; affectio is the index of (changing) affective capabilities.

The monads do not exist as atoms without any interaction between each other. In opposition to Leibniz, Tarde’s monads are open for the external world. They penetrate each other by means of the affective powers of belief (croyance) and desire (désir)<sup>197</sup>. The monads are oriented towards the outside world and the psychological forces of belief and desire are central for their motivation. Belief (as assertion) and desire (as will) play within me and with regard to my emotions the same role as space and time play with regard to material elements his dialectics is neither idealistic nor metaphysical, let alone psychological. At the core is the original insight that action is a process based on affects, passions, and beliefs.

For Tarde, affects are rational in the sense that they induce and configure self-knowledge, social positioning, or differentiations in the objective world. The power of belief (force-croyance) has priority over the power of desire (force-désir). Judgement as an act of belief determines the faculty of understanding and of differentiating. Monads penetrate each other in

194 Lazzarato, M. (2004) *Les Révolutions du Capitalisme*, 34.

195 Alliez, *Monadologie et Sociologie*.

196 Tarde, *Monadologie et Sociologie* 56.

197 Tarde, G. (2012) trans. *Monadology and Sociology*, 56.

their desire for imitation. Their radical inequality and lack of resemblance is, so to speak, the precondition for association. Essentially, imitation produces the balance needed to arrive at some degree of sociability, it “*tames*” differences. The monads’ radical difference is the basis for their creative action. Tarde’s argument is not based on an ontology of being, but on an ontology of “*having*”. “*I desire, I believe, therefore I have*”.<sup>198</sup> This radical existential pluralism grounds social and psychological phenomena on the forces of affect and passions as well as on the power relations that express these forces. Each human being desires to penetrate and to appropriate the beings of others.

There is a decisively spinozist resonance to this. Spinoza’s philosophy of inter-corporeality shows us that affect is always social in nature. Each effect always trails behind a train of other effects, and is in turn followed by infinitely many more others. Every affect is simultaneously of at least two bodies. The concept of the affective is meant to capture this social and heteronomous quality of affect and affective bodies. However, Tarde, by his own admission has never read Spinoza. It does explain though the allure his work holds for Deleuze and those who work on the philosophy of difference.

In short, for Tarde individuals are not irreducible and compact elements. Rather, they are open monads almost entirely made up of beliefs and desires. These are the very particles (subatomic, some have argued) that form the internal world of individuals. But also –and this is key– they form the micro-physical matter of which social life is made. This life is nothing but the flowing, converging, clashing, and deferring of currents of convictions and passions that compose and decompose society and its subjects. So, in essence an individual is, mainly, a passage and a sedimentation zone of social flows that are repeated in him/ her in the form of judgments, memories, wills, and habits. Through social interaction, through the imitation of others, ‘metaphysically’ excessive and porous monads acquire a psychic unit of relative coherence and determination. Individuals imitate, but what is important is *what* is imitated. What is imitated are always ideas and wishes, faiths and passions: these are the elemental generative forces of the social field.

*“Can we deny that desire and belief are forces? Do we not see that, through their reciprocal combinations, their passions and designs they are the perpetual winds and storms of history, the waterfalls that make the windmills of politics turn?”*<sup>199</sup>

Both the individual and society are primarily established by affective and evaluative bonds, but here the coincidence of convictions and passions in a large number of individuals does not refer to organic inheritance or to a natural law contract. Nor does it refer to the social fact as Durkheim understood it (coercive and external to individuals). What is imitated is always an idea or a wish, a judgement or a plan, in which a certain amount of *belief* and *desire* are expressed, which is the entire soul of the words of a language, the prayers of a religion, the administrations of a government, the paragraphs of a code of law, the duties of a moral system, the work of an industry, the products of an art.<sup>200</sup> The ultimate ‘objects of imitation’ are our beliefs and desires.

### THE INNER MECHANISM OF BELIEF AND DESIRE

In his seminal work *Belief and desire, the possibility of measuring* (*La croyance et le désir, la possibilité de leur mesure*) Tarde explains that all psychological states are combinations of the following three unique elements: belief, desire and sensation. Although sensation is a

198 Tarde, *Monadology and Sociology*, 87.

199 Tarde, *Monadologie et Sociologie*, 50.

200 Cerulo Gabriel, *Tarde in The Emotions in the Classics of Sociology: A Study in Social Theory*, p 47.



quality, the other two are quantitative.<sup>201</sup> The difficulty lies in distinguishing between the first two elements and the feeling as they appear together.

*So, "The proper task [of statistics] is to measure special beliefs, special desires, and to use the most direct procedures to study as closely as possible these quantities that are so different to get hold of; to count actions that are the most similar to each other".*<sup>202</sup>

Faith and desire are quantitative and therefore measurable, while sensation is qualitative and therefore it cannot be measured. This distinction is fundamental to his theory. Tarde makes some pretty discerning observations about quantification and measurement that are quite innovative to his era. How can one measure behaviors or ideas? He examines the quantification and measurement of social behaviors in various works. A seminal concept of his theory is that of the public, as it emerges in late 19th century Europe and gradually acquires the features that will become emblematic in the 20th century.

After explaining the qualitative nature of the feeling, he deals with belief and desire and their quantitative nature. *"Belief and desire are real quantities whose variations, more or less negative or positive, are essentially –if not practically– measurable, either in their individual manifestation, or –more and more easily– in their social manifestations. Consequently, not only from one condition to another in the same person, but also from one person to another, they remain essentially identical to themselves and can legitimately be summed up..."*<sup>203</sup>

The argument he uses to establish their quantitative character is, that opposition in all its forms presupposes similarity, since it is a form of equation or balancing. The two driving forces of the social are faith and desire. The crossovers of streams of faith and desire form dynamic contrasts that are integrated into each other. For Tarde, opposition is a very special kind of repetition as it includes two identical objects that are overturned because of their similarity. Conversely, opposites always form a duality.

Similarity automatically recalls the concept of reduplication. This term has a numerical connotation. Anything that can be counted is a quantity. *"So, if desire and faith contain uncontested contrasts, they turn out to be quantities. It is obvious that both contain positive and negative attitudes"*.<sup>204</sup> Although individual belief and desire are difficult to measure, the measurement of collective belief and desire is less complex. For Tarde, the measurability of belief and desire "to different individuals in aggregates and massively" is based on a psychological mechanism –what some psychologists call 'ejet'".

Therefore, we can legitimately sum up the distinct individual amounts of belief and desire. The examples he chooses, are the amount of faith in financial credit in the public or private sector and the increase or decrease of religious faith based on contributions to church treasury. A century before the passion of opinions started to dominate political and social discourse; he discovers that statistics when handled skilfully provide strange and interesting measurements of general desire. In his theory, an idea is not a foiled or abandoned act; on the contrary, the act is but the pursuit of an idea, the acquisition of a fixed faith.

201 "All quantitative reality known to us may by its nature have positive or negative values, internal oppositions. But sensation, which is a reality, has no negative values. Hence it cannot be a quantity", Tarde G. (1895a). *Essais et mélanges sociologiques*, 194. "On the contrary, belief and desire are quantities. All opposition is a conflict, an attempted or realized counterbalancing, which supposes a similarity of the opposed terms, their numerical comparability, the possibility of putting them into an equation. Hence no true opposition can be found outside of quantitative realities. So if belief and desire contain undeniable oppositions, it is proven that they are quantities; and it is evident that both of them encompass positive and negative states". Tarde, *Essais et mélanges sociologiques*, 196.

202 Tarde, G. (1903 trans.) *The Laws of Imitation*, 196.

203 Tarde, G. (1890). *La croyance et le désir, la possibilité de leur mesure*, 290.

204 Tarde, *La croyance et le désir, la possibilité de leur mesure*, 196.

When attempting to give definitions, he realises how slippery is the terrain that he is attempting to map, and he limits himself to short judgments on the nature of belief and desire. Tarde, as Hume before him, claims to be unable to define them more exactly and simply suffices to describe their function.

In his system belief and desire perform for the inner self the same role that time and space play for the material element. Belief and desire are existential categories where areas time and space are sensory categories. So, in a bold move Tarde replaces the Kantian pair of time and space with his own pair. He audaciously pronounces that belief and desire are the fundamental faculties of all human functions. Memory perception, imagination cannot exist without them. Belief and desire though their compositions and relations build the forms of human experience from the simplest to the more complex ones. After all, what else is perception but the result of a conjunction or a disjunction of sensation performed by belief? Belief acts directly upon sensory images, which she herself constructs. Then by dismantling these images from sensation belief creates memory. While desire united to sensation becomes pain or pleasure, since there is no sensation per se of the painful or the pleasurable.

Finally, by applying our ability to desire on the images produced by belief desire turns into love, hatred, sympathy or repulsion, in short it turns into passions. And yet still, passion presupposes the element of judgement that is a belief, because we desire to cross from the image, as it is born in sensation, to the image as a confirmed sensation. In other words, we desire to cross from the idea of reality to reality. In Tarde's own words "... *by the simple concepts of pain or pleasure and perception we objectify ourselves incorporating them to what is ours, to what we is, the ability to believe and desire*".<sup>205</sup>

The consequences of the above premise are extremely interesting. According to Tarde, we know ourselves directly and from within not as thinking subjects or cognitive points. Our endoscopic knowledge of the self is constructed in two ways. First through sensation we are cognizant body. The direct knowledge of the body and the self is the only knowledge we can have about beings. Secondly, we are members of a society, speakers of a language, participants of a culture. So, the only way we can know is through relations, the relation of body and spirit, of individual and society, of man and object.

But in Tarde's relational universe the concepts of body and spirit, of individual and society do not pre-exist, instead they are an ongoing project, formed through relations established. Monads understand themselves via the relations they build with other monads. We know the thing in itself because we construct it and we live it. Our knowledge is passionate or to put differently we learn through our passions. It's not just a clear negation of the Kantian theory of knowledge; it is also a total and empowering affirmation of man's ability and potential.

He questions the forms of subjectivity and what the individual and the collective subject are. His answer leads to a denial of the classical dichotomy between micro and macro between the individual and the collective. In his anti- Cartesian doctrine of *habeo-avoir* that is the desire to possess,<sup>206</sup> the monads form relations based on their passion. This fundamental desire decomposes the *cogito* in forces of desire and belief and compels monads to surrender and become part of a relational ensemble or in Deleuzian terms of an assemblage.

His answer to what society is and how do we govern it, is radically different. It implies that society is a political project where monads clash and strive to possess one another. For

205 Tarde, *La croyance et le désir, la possibilité de leur mesure*, 193-195.

206 "So far, all our philosophy has been founded on the verb to be, whose definition seemed to have been the Rosetta's stone to be discovered. One may say that, if only philosophy had been founded on the verb to have, many sterile discussions, many slowdowns of the mind, would have been avoided. From this principle 'I am', it is impossible to deduce any other existence than mine, in spite of all the subtleties of the world. But affirm first this postulate: 'I have' as the basic fact, and then the had as well as the having are given at the same time as inseparable". Tarde, *Monadologie et Sociologie*, 86.

example, in *The transformations of power* (*Les transformations du Pouvoir*) and in *Economic Psychology* (*La Psychologie économique*) he uses his inter-psychological theory to examine other aspects of human activity, respectively politics and political economy. He applies these principles in his study of the political phenomenon which he views as a series of transformations of power in bodies, organisations, institutions that are passionate and contingent.

His political economy is, as Maurizio Lazzarato observed, an economic anthropology.<sup>207</sup> In his criticism he claims that political economy tries to rationalize and explain economy whereas economy is illogical since it is the product of crossovers, clashes and cultivations of passions. Thus, his analysis of stock markets as nothing more than a factory of passionate beliefs.<sup>208</sup>

## ECONOMIC PSYCHOLOGY:

### READING POLITICAL ECONOMY THROUGH THE LENS OF BELIEF AND DESIRE

Tarde applies his bold conception of belief and desire as the cornerstones on society to the examination of various phenomena in his work and proclaims belief and desire as the driving force of the social in every facet of human activity. A striking example is his reading of Political Economy.

We cannot understand human society without the concept of production. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century it was monotonously repeated that production is linked to the economy and there can be no Economy without Economics. Since Economy needs its science, the science of Political Economy is born.

Gabriel Tarde's Political Economy is not a Political Economy in the classical sense of the term.<sup>209</sup> He speaks of Economic Psychology and analyses its principles and function in his *Economic Psychology* that contains a series of courses delivered at the College de France between 1900 and 1901. Tarde was probably the first to use the expression "*Economic Psychology*", stressing the need to analyse economic behaviour from the point of view of Psychology and social theory. As early as 1881, in his book *Essays on social psychology* (*Écrits de psychologie sociale*) he devotes a chapter to Psychology in Political Economy (*La psychologie en économie politique*). In it he criticized Adam Smith for not incorporating in his concept of economy the human psychology insights that were evident in his texts on moral feelings –in particular the Theory of Moral Sentiments.

The question he poses is quite simple. What exactly is this perception of the Political Economy that emerged in the 18th century and whose importance has not ceased to increase in the coming centuries? The question has remained pertinent as currently voices are rising to question the "abolishment" of politics and its total surrender to Economics. For Tarde, it's ideas that guide the world, in particular, the ideas that economists produce from the very material of their science. Thus, he puts forward the term Economic Psychology as a curious intersection where science and politics crossover.<sup>210</sup> What he describes, in his critic, is a phenomenon where ideas, opinions and arguments overturn the existing theory and sidetrack and discard monads and their relations. In Marxist terms, it's an inversion where the super-structure (language, ideology, etc. formed by faith and desires) defines the base, which just comprises the monads in a relational universe. It's not a classical Political Economy theory but rather, as Maurizio Lazzarato put it, Economic Psychology; a crossover between *homo politicus* and *homo economicus* via Psychology.

207 Lazzarato, M. Postface. Gabriel Tarde : un vitalisme politique., *Monodologie et sociologie*, 103-150.

208 Borch C. & Arnoldi, J. (2007) *Market Crowds, between Imitation and Control*, Theory, Culture and Society, 24, 7-8, 169.

209 Valade, B. (2018). ON GABRIEL TARDE'S PSYCHOLOGIE ÉCONOMIQUE. In R. Leroux (Ed.), *The Anthem Companion to Gabriel Tarde*, Anthem Press, p. 72.

210 Barry, A & Thrift, N. (2007) *Gabriel Tarde: imitation, invention and economy*, *Economy and Society*, 36:4, 509-525



He approaches the problem of defining social quantities (values) as a process, departing not from the logic of capital accumulation but from the power of invention. To understand his Economic Anthropology, we must first accept a complete reversal of our conventions. Nothing in Economy is objective, everything is subjective, or rather inter-subjective, and “... *that is precisely why we can treat the economy as quantifiable and scientific*”<sup>211</sup>. In order to quantify the Economics, we must fully reverse it into inter-subjectivity, since the fundamental concepts of value and knowledge as products of belief and desire that highlights point.

*“Hence there are these two great social quantities, which may be termed truth and value, in the broadest sense of these words, or in more concrete terms, knowledge (les lumières) and wealth. The dualities of belief and desire are reflected, although transfigured, in this fundamental duality, from which flow all the different magnitudes, whether or not they are measured by statisticians”.*<sup>212</sup>

Back in his time the field of Economics was a battlefield. It is a time of “... *passions of unprecedented intensity, aspirations, marvellous conquests, with a kind of new religion, socialism, and a proselytizing zeal unknown from the time of the early Church. That is to say, the interests, the passionate interests, which we must coordinate with each other, but also with the equally passionate interests of the militarized capitalist allies, who are no less coloured by the hope of victory, by the arrogance of life, by the thirst for power*”.<sup>213</sup> A description that remains chilling pertinent today.

According to Tarde the error of Political Economy lies in the fact that it tries to rationalize and explain the economy with scientific laws and constructing an economic logic, while the Economy is non-rational as it is produced by the intersection, the conflict and the development of passions. “*Capturing the homo economicus (sic), economists did a double abstraction [...] Never in any time of history have a producer and a consumer, a seller and a buyer been before each other without first having joined each other without some kind of totally emotional relation [...] and secondly without the company of an invisible sequence of colleagues, friends, believers with common faith, whose views were considered when debating the price or salary and was eventually imposed at the expense of their strictly individual interests*”.<sup>214</sup>

He denies the central role of labour. He is equally interest in the fluctuations of the price of bread and those of the prestige of elected politicians that will be counted with instruments which he calls “*Doxometers*” (glorimetres). He does not use typical examples of production, like for instance the industrial production. Instead of a clothes factory, it is the book industry that interests him and the dissemination of both the ideas contained in the pages and the books themselves. He passes quite easily from Darwin to Marx and from Adam Smith to Cournot, never using the usual distinctions of political economy. He is equally interested in luxury, fashions, consumption, quality, pleasures, as well as in the military industry and colonialism. He continuously looks for his examples in the art market, in the diffusion of philosophical ideas, in ethics, in law, as factors in the production of wealth. He establishes science, invention, inventors, the very concept of laziness as the foundation of economic activity.<sup>215</sup>

His starting point is the definition of value. But we can already observe the first diversion for the canon, since value has par excellence a psychological dimension depending on belief and desire. It can be quantified if it has a certain degree of intensity. The concept of value extends to all evaluations of beliefs and desires: “*Every abstract quantity is divided into three major categories that are the original and fundamental concepts of collective life: truth- value,*

211 Latour, B. & Lepinay, V. (2008) *L'économie science des intérêts passionnés*, 17.

212 Tarde, G. (1897) *L'opposition universelle: essai d'une théorie des contraires*, 204.

213 Latour & Lepinay, *L'économie science des intérêts passionnés*, 17.

214 Tarde, G. (1902) *La Psychologie Économique*, 111-116.

215 Latour & Lepinay, *L' économie science des intérêts passionnés*, 10-11.

*utility-value, and beauty-beauty*".<sup>216</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato observes that economic psychology is a theory of creation and institution of values, while political economy and Marxism are theories of value measurement.<sup>217</sup>

For Tarde the basis of cooperation in modern societies resides neither in labour nor in capital, nor in usability, but rather in the activity of the spirit, soul, or memory, from which voluntary action (desire), intellectual action (loyalty) and affective action (sentiments) begin. He raises the human power of creation, that is, the moment people form an affective relation and produce together, as the foundation of economic psychology. He questions the conditions that allow production; the production of innovation, not as energy but as the emergence of new social, economic and aesthetic relations.

Economic Psychology presupposes the autonomous cooperation and the interdependence of people who co-produce by compiling their differences. Tarde examines the conditions of production of this new state that he locates in "co-operation between the minds". Minds interact with each other through desires and beliefs. The "*production of knowledge*" is identified as the actual production of modern societies, which results in an economy of circulation, of flows of desire and belief. Consequently, the science of political economy is not a theory of production but a theory of reproduction.<sup>218</sup>

His explanation of the institution of values is not through labour and production –as it is in the classical economic theory and Marx–, but through the mediation of imagination and imitation, by creating the potential and fulfilling it. Inventions, from the smallest to the largest, are events which in themselves are of no value, but which create a new potentiality and are a prerequisite for any value. An invention is a product of co-operation, a union between streams of belief and desire, a rearrangement of pre-existing flows in new ways. Invention is also a constitutive force, because, through this recomposition, monads can express their full potential and forces meet. Out of this intersection a new force, a new synthesis will come out; thus, activating forces that were simply potential.<sup>219</sup>

Invention derives by the "*co-operation natural or accidental*" of a large number of consciousnesses in transience. Therefore, it is not, according to Tarde, the product of an individual consciousness but that of a multi-consciousness. Invention as an event, as a combination, an interaction, production process of a hybrid, involves an extra dimension than the individual or collective action. For though inventing is always a co-operation, it is at the same time an action that temporarily disrupts, both in the individual and in society, what is already structured, habitual, individual. Invention is a process of creating a difference, which makes the individual and his individuality conditional each time. Every invention is a break with norms, rules, habits that define the individual and society.

Tarde continually highlights the fact that inventing is not only a difference, but also a repetition, a diffusion, a power capable of mobilizing desires and beliefs, defining the new conditions of synthesis and mediation of psychological forces. Therefore, the affirmation of an invention is also a matter of public opinion, an appropriation between brains. In his theory, there is no separation but synergy between science and public opinion, between science and power, between science and Economics. The true value of an object consists of "*the perfect harmonization of the collective judgements surrounding the object*".

This is a theme that permeates all his work. The constitution of the public –as an "agathon" (common good) but also as a dynamic community of interaction and spiritual exchange– which

216 Tarde, *La Psychologie Economique*, 63.

217 Lazzarato, M. (2001). *La Psychologie Économique contre l'Économie politique*, *Multitudes*, 194.

218 Lazzarato, *La Psychologie Économique contre l'Économie politique*, 1.

219 Lazzarato, M. *Les Révolutions du Capitalisme*, 43.

the Marxist theory and the political economy completely ignore. Value is a property that we attach to things. But this property is not an individual preference; it is a collective judgment, a common idea and a collective desire shared by many individuals, shared within a public. Value and measure are social phenomena. Lazzarato writes that Economic Psychology is “*the first theory of the production of values which incorporates mass media as a fundamental mechanism*”.<sup>220</sup> This social judgement: an inter-subjective valorisation of beauty, truth, etc. is necessary elements for a society to function, perhaps even the definition of what one might call a society.

## CONCLUSION

Tarde’s fundamental position is, that collective values, norms, and logics of action have their source and origin in small, de-centralized units. These values, norms and logics derive from the passionate, imitative relations between otherwise disconnected individual beings. In short, the material world of facts is underpinned by the emotional dimension of people’s relations with one another.

In his work we find valuable tools for conceiving the social realm as inevitably open and dynamic. This is due to the fact that what matters to Tarde are not the finished social structures but their generative networks. He asserts that all social structure hides within it a constellation of beliefs and desires, which are open to other equally open social structures. In his Sociology, the diverse currents of faith and passion are the materials that configure –as well as exceed and transform– institutions, groups and individuals.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we consume more than just goods. In fact, we consume varying forms of lifestyle. Even with the limitations applied by factors such as geographical areas or class or gender, this is a universal trend. Through the streams of image, information, knowledge and services in which we have permanent access, we consume tons of subjectivity whilst simultaneously producing just as much. We come to the realization that our world is made out of “*decisions mediated*” through a system of signs. Beneath concepts such as cultural capitalism, intangible economy, Society of the Spectacle, age of bio-politics, economy of attention, lay attempts to describe this new relation between Capital and Subjectivity.

We are faced today what we call capitalism of affection; based on an apolitical consumerism, as Guy Debord so succinctly summed it up. This debate has its origins in the problem of manipulation in the form of mass emotional contamination. Vocabulary that directly refers to Tarde and the ethical epidemics of his time. There is a distinctive link between the flows of desire and belief and the emotional life of a crowd and currently the philosophy of emotion researches the transmission and the production of such collective emotions.

In her seminal work *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed<sup>221</sup> argues that emotions play a crucial role in the “*surfacing*” of individual and collective bodies through the way in which emotions circulate between bodies and signs. Emotions are not simply “*within*” or “*without*” but create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds. Emotions create narratives; an emotion works to animate the ordinary subject, to bring that fantasy to life. Within the narrative, the specific emotion cannot be found in one figure but works to create the very outline of different figures or objects of the emotion, a creation that crucially aligns the figures together and constitutes them as a “*common*” threat. Importantly, then, the emotion does not reside in a given subject or object. Emotions are economic; they circulate between signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement. In such affective economies, emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities –or bodily space with

220 Lazzarato, M. *La Psychologie Économique contre l'Économie politique*, Multitudes, No 7 Dec 2001, 5.

221 Ahmed, S. (2004a) *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

social space— through the very intensity of their attachments. In any “*affective economy*”, the power of emotions accumulates through circulation of texts.

Her account of an emotion (e.g. hate) as an affective economy shows that emotions do not positively inhabit anybody or anything, meaning that “*the subject*” is simply one nodal point in the economy, rather than its origin and destination. This is important as it suggests that the sideways and backward movement of emotions is not contained within the contours of a subject. Ahmed’s argument is not that there is a psychic economy that then becomes social and collective: rather, the individual subject comes into being through its very alignment with the collective. It is the very failure of affect to be located in a subject or object that allows it to generate the surfaces of collective bodies. Emotions are not “*in*” either the individual or the social but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow individual and collective identities to be delineated as if they are objects. Emotions are not simply something “*we*” or “*I*” have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made; the “*I*” and the “*we*” are shaped by and even take the shape of contact with others.<sup>222</sup> Her approach bears very interesting similarities with Tarde’s work.

Tarde’s work vividly demonstrates why modernity is understood in and through the role of belief and desire. Emotions are taken as a social phenomenon. The key is not only the differentiation between individual and collective emotions but the fact that society as a collective is driven by emotions. His work highlights that the government of the fundamental effects, belief and desire, serves as the hidden instrument of power that shapes the very fabric of our being. This foregrounding of affect is currently used as a way to reanimate social and political theory. For example, the multiform manipulations of the spinozist multitude from Deleuze to Negri. There is a difficult question to tackle: How can we today come up with a form of collective subject? If we are not accepting the lethargic emersion into political apathy that plagues western democracy and the post-democratic condition that transforms the social and political field, then we need to come up with an alternative. If we do not wish for the spectre of those who feel unseen and unheard haunt the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have to look for answers to the emerging problems of affect capitalism. Tarde’s work could serve as an answer to the pressing problem of grasping the real passions and energies that run through the modern-day crowds and harness them into social and political action.

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222 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*.

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