

The Social After Gabriel Tarde: Debates and  
Assessments  
2nd Edition

Edited by  
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Pre-Print draft of the Preface and revised Introduction

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Les vivants sont nombreux, mais qu'est-ce  
auprès des morts,  
Des morts accumulés dans les âges des âges ,  
Tous divers, comme nous, d'âmes et de visages,  
Sombre et divin musée aux funèbres trésors?

Et qu'est-ce que les morts auprès des multitudes  
De ceux qui pouvaient naître et qui ne sont pas  
nés,  
Qui passèrent tout près de l'Etre, et, retournés  
Aux Limbes sans espoir des pures certitudes.

*Many are the living, but few beside the  
dead,  
The massed, collected dead of ages immemorial  
Each different, as are we, in soul and face  
Funereal treasures of a dark, divine museum*

*And how few are the dead, beside the multitudes  
Of those who might have been, but were not born  
Who came so close to Being, and rejoined  
The hopeless Limbo of pure certainties.*

From 'Les Possibles' Tarde, G. 1879. Contes et Poèmes. Paris: Calmann-Lévy.  
p. 247

# Preface to the second edition

The present collection of essays emerged from a conference held in 2008 at St Catherine's college, Cambridge, focusing on the work of Gabriel Tarde, and the clash between his and Emile Durkheim's visions of sociology. The volume, originally published in 2010, is intentionally polyphonic: part collective introduction to a lesser-known social theorist and philosopher, part creative reinvention of the history of sociology. Part historical exposition, part critical reassessment, part methodological reconstruction, and part empirical demonstration of the value and limits of thinking with Tarde about a range of concrete cases in anthropology, sociology, geography and cognate disciplines. These are parts that do not seek to add up to a whole, univocal account of what Tarde stood for, let alone of how one might think with him today. A fitting intellectual tribute, then, to the man who claimed that 'to exist is to differ'.

And yet there is an emergent harmony to this book, just as there was, for Tarde, a way in which the diverse elements of society come to possess each other intimately and reciprocally in a myriad of ways (see chapters 1 and 18, this volume). Above and beyond differences in perspective, approach, even contradictory assessments, the same themes, tensions and insights travel between chapters.

One voice, however, was somewhat missing in the first edition of this book, and that was the voice of Gabriel Tarde himself. Paraphrased, quoted, reconstructed, and even revived for a posthumous replay in his own (selected) words, of his 1904 debate with Durkheim (Chapter 3), Tarde himself never quite had the space to expose his own ideas at leisure. The present revised edition seeks to address this lacuna, by including two new translations of essays by Tarde, *Monadology and Sociology* (Chapter 1) and *The Two Elements of Sociology* (Chapter 2).

It is important to note however, that this expansion doesn't change the fundamental aims and nature of this book. Even in this new edition, this volume cannot hope to be a compendium of Tarde's work. The two essays are offered here to whet the reader's appetite, not satiate it. This remains primarily a volume of commentary, rethinking and reconstruction, and in this spirit, given the opportunity to expand, the volume also now includes a further piece by Bruno Latour, elaborating the ways in which Tarde's notion of possession can revolutionise classical notions of social order and coordination (Chapter 18). Nor should the two essays by Tarde be read as the constitutive core around which the rest of the book gravitates, a unifying Ur-text for which the remainder is but a gloss. Partly, for the simple reason that these pieces were selected *post hoc*, and the contributors did not therefore have the brief of commenting on them in particular.

More profoundly, the two essays with which the volume now opens, cannot authoritatively pre-empt or foreclose the discussions which follow because of their very nature. Indeed, one of the key ways in which these pieces are representative of Tarde's thinking, and one of the key motivations for my choice in including them, is precisely in the subtle dissonance between them. These two essays taken together illustrate some of the key difficulties and paradoxes of re-reading Tarde today, which are explored at more length in the now revised and expanded introduction. In other words, the selection of these two pieces is intended to point,

within the work of Tarde himself, to the same productive tensions which the other chapters in this book play upon and amplify.

The decision to include these pieces here also reflects developments in the anglophone publication landscape since the original volume of *The Social after Gabriel Tarde* appeared five years ago. There is the ghost of a different project here. At the time of the 2008 conference, of Tarde's numerous works, only *The laws of Imitation* (Tarde, 1903), *Social Laws* (Tarde, 2000) and fragments of his *Economie Psychologique* (Tarde, 2007) were available in English. In the run-up to the conference, I had begun to translate sections of Tarde's *Monadology* and *Sociology*, for the benefit of non-francophone conference participants. This led to the project of putting together a collection of translations of Tarde's essays as a companion to the present volume.

With the help of Alexis de la Ferrière and James Hale, who were then Masters students at Cambridge University, the translation of *Monadology and Sociology* was completed in late 2010. It is the text of this translation, barring a few minor corrections, which is printed here. Samuel Trainor's new translation of Tarde's *Two elements of sociology*, an earlier version of which had been published in Clark's then out-of-print volume *Gabriel Tarde Communication and Social Influence* (Tarde, 1969) was completed the same year. Also in 2010, however, as the contours of a broader volume were being assembled around these two pieces, Chicago reissued Clarke's collection, which contained a number of the other essays I had considered including. *Monadology and Sociology*, still not available in English, remained a core missing piece around which an alternative collection of essays might be structured. With the publication of Theo Lorenc's translation at RE Press (Tarde, 2012), this project too came to seem redundant.

Rather than a new volume of Tarde in translation then, it seemed fitting to reunite our two completed translations with the other essays in this volume, of which they were always, in a sense, the missing parts. Indeed, these two essays hold a special place in relation to the other contributions of this volume and to the general project out of which this volume had emerged. Indeed, these two essays had profoundly marked my own engagement with Tarde, and had an important influence on the mix of enthusiasm and caution, reinvention and historicisation, engagement and distance, which marks the following pages. *Monadology and Sociology*, my first encounter with Tarde's writing, was read in one long, feverish sitting. That initial impact, the shock of this odd, at times mysterious and yet strangely familiar theoretical object, set in motion the events that led to this volume. Given its centrality to the latest rediscovery of Gabriel Tarde, as discussed in the introduction, and the extensive exegesis of its themes in a number of chapters of the present book, the inclusion of *Monadology and Sociology* here needs little further comment.

The same is not true, however, of *Two Elements*. I myself came to that piece much later, in a more cautious frame of mind. The piece, in which Tarde confronts Durkheimian sociology head-on, had been a major source for the script of the 'reimagined' debate between Tarde and Durkheim (this volume, chapter three). I was struck, however, by the fact that those quotations came mainly if not entirely from the first half of the piece, in which Tarde addressed sociology's intersection with psychology. While that first half seems to speak in a familiar voice, straight to our present concerns, the second half – with its polemical critique of Durkheim's

negation of biology – seems to beg instead for contextualisation and historical exegesis (see also Candea, 2010). Some readers might feel the need to ask, anxiously, whether the Tarde of *Two Elements* should be seen as a precursor of a biologised sociology, or of a socialized biology (cf. introduction this volume)? Others might find a source of unexpected insights in one of the many late 19th century experiments to think outwith a distinction which has ensured so much of the disciplinary division of labour of the past century – just as this division of labour is once again being challenged from a number of different and often mutually incompatible directions. In sum, more than any other of his essays, perhaps, Tarde's *Two Elements* forces us to confront the interweaving of the familiar and the unfamiliar, the enthusing and the troubling, which features as such a strong theme throughout a number of the contributions in this collection.

Finally, in its subtle evocation of, yet partial distance from, the broader metaphysics of *Monadology and Sociology*, *Two elements* also neatly illustrates a question now discussed in the expanded and revised introduction: the question of how, precisely, Tarde's metaphysics and his human-focused sociology fit together. A question which is not merely of antiquarian or historical interest, but which echoes both in the contemporary rediscovery of this work, and in the social sciences and humanities more broadly at the present juncture.

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# 1 Introduction: Revisiting Tarde's house

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I may possibly be told that it would have been quite as well had I first presented as a systematic whole that which I have actually cut up into three separate publications. But [...] why should we wear ourselves out in the work of building up such great structures – such complete edifices? Since our successors will have nothing more pressing to do than demolish these structures in order to make some other use of the materials or take possession of a detached wing, it is surely as well to spare them the task of demolition, by delivering our thought in fragments only.

(Tarde, 1899b: 5)

## A RE-INTRODUCTION

Some theorists have intersected with history in such an odd way that they seem to require an introduction in the form of a thought experiment (cf. Latour, 2002; Latour and Lépinay, 2008: 9): What if Durkheimian sociology had had, from the very beginning, a thoughtful and vocal opponent; one who queried the 'thingness' of the social and the holistic, bounded nature of societies and human groups; one who accused Durkheim of disregarding the contingency of history in the search for scientific 'structure'; one who proposed a radical reversal of the organic analogy, claiming that organisms are societies and not the other way around; one who foregrounded imitations, oppositions and inventions where Durkheim saw conformism to a rule as the key component of the social; one who had already found a way to dissolve the linked contrasts between individual and society, micro and macro, agency and structure, freedom and constraint – Durkheim's main (and for many, troublesome) legacy to twentieth-century social science?

It is in these terms that mainstream social science has recently been re-introduced to the work of a forgotten nineteenth-century thinker: a theorist whose account of circulating energies and minute oppositions had anticipated Michel Foucault's conceptualization of the microphysics of power<sup>1</sup>; a philosopher whose metaphysics of universal difference and creative repetition has inspired philosopher Gilles Deleuze<sup>2</sup>; a sociologist who has been described by Bruno Latour

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<sup>1</sup> As Deleuze argues in *Foucault* (Deleuze, 1986: 31, 119).

<sup>2</sup> Most evidently perhaps in Deleuze (1968) and Deleuze and Guattari (1980).

(2002; 2005) as the forgotten grandfather of Actor-Network Theory. Meet the one they have all been talking about: Gabriel Tarde.

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‘It goes without saying that no introduction of M. Tarde is necessary to English and American readers who are versed in current sociological discussions’ (Baldwin, 1899). Thus wrote psychologist and philosopher Mark Baldwin in his preface to the English translation of Gabriel Tarde's *Social Laws*. A century on, nothing could be less true – to wit, the text you are reading. And yet Tarde has, in recent years, been making something of a ‘comeback’. This thinker has been the focus of a vigorous revival in France, centered around the republication from 1999 onwards of much of his extensive corpus under the editorial direction of Eric Alliez. The very limited availability of Tarde's work in translation<sup>3</sup> has restricted the spread of the Tardean revival in the anglophone world; however, a number of recent publications by prominent scholars has helped to bring the nineteenth-century sociologist back into the limelight (see for instance Latour, 2002; Toews, 2003; Latour, 2005; Barry and Thrift, 2007; Thrift, 2007).

This book engages with this particular theoretical moment: it asks what the social sciences might look like if Gabriel Tarde were belatedly reintroduced into our gallery of ancestors, and subjected to the same critical scrutiny and creative reinvention as Weber, Durkheim, Marx or Simmel. In the chapters that follow, anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers and geographers reconsider aspects of Tarde's extensive and multifaceted work, and experiment with fragments of Tardean theory and method. These chapters do not therefore add up to a painstaking restoration of the Tardean edifice, a work of historical conservation or the creation of a kitsch neo-Tardean monument; rather – as Tarde himself anticipated – the collection is part critical reconsideration and part creative reinvention, inspecting and selectively giving new lease of life to borrowed stones or whole wings of the imposing ruins of Tarde's theoretical house.

In this spirit, the remainder of this introduction does not aim to give a substantive overview of Tarde's theories, as in the floorplan to a reconstruction. Rather, I attempt, in the first half of this chapter, a historical sketch of Tarde's life and of the posthumous rediscoveries of his work. The second half will make a case, in the light of this historical discussion and of some recent critiques, for the value of rereading Tarde today.

## TARDE'S LIFE AND WORK

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3 At the time of the original publication of this book, of Tarde's numerous works, only *The laws of Imitation* (Tarde, 1903), *Social Laws* (Tarde, 2000) and fragments of *Economie Psychologique* (Tarde, 2007) were available in English. Since then, Clarke's 1969 volume has been re-issued by Chicago (2010) and a translation of *Monadology and Sociology* by Theo Lorenc has appeared at RE: Press (2012).

Gabriel Tarde was born in 1843 in Sarlat, to one of the oldest families in the Périgord region. For a number of generations, the Tardes, ennobled to De Tarde at various points in history<sup>4</sup>, had been prominent local magistrates and jurists. Gabriel was a brilliant young man of a somewhat weak physical disposition, who throughout his life was to be plagued with a recurrent ophthalmia leading to periods of near-blindness, and concomitant bouts of depression. After completing his schooling in the local Jesuit college, his initial aspirations towards further scientific studies at the École Polytechnique thwarted by ill-health, Gabriel followed the family path and studied law, taking up his first legal post in Sarlat in 1867, at the age of twenty-four.

Tarde served as a magistrate in the provincial region of his birth for the next twenty-seven years, reading voraciously in his spare time on subjects ranging from criminology to biology, philosophy and sociology. It was only in his late thirties that Tarde began to publish, after some initial dabblings in poetry, scholarly articles situated at the intersection of philosophy, psychology and sociology, principally in the *Revue philosophique* run by philosopher and psychologist Théodule Ribot.

Unsurprisingly, given his profession, Tarde became particularly involved in contemporary criminological debates, gaining notoriety from his vocal critique of the Italian school of 'anthropological criminology', and particularly Cesare Lombroso and Enrico Ferri. In this context, Tarde is often remembered as a sociological critic of Lombroso's biological determinism. This is broadly accurate, since he refuted, in a series of articles and later in his first book, *La Criminalité comparée* (1886), on the sociological relativity of the notion of crime, many of Lombroso's theses about the 'born criminal', about evolutionary progress, degeneration and atavism, and argued for the key role of imitation and social communication in explaining the occurrence and spread of criminal behaviour. However, this 'sociological versus biological' contrast is arguably distorted by a retrospective reading of the debate which imagines sociology – in a Durkheimian vein – as the radically distinct from biology. As we shall see below, Tarde, unlike Durkheim, was in no sense arguing for the separation of biology and sociology, but rather for a rethinking of both terms of that contrast. His sociological critique of Lombroso does not therefore imply a fundamental rejection of all the underlying premises of the Italian school's 'bio-criminology' (for a recent re-evaluation of this debate, see Borlandi et al., 2000). Indeed, Tarde was later equally critical of Durkheim's views on the social normality of crime, as Lukes details (1973:307-310).

In a series of articles published during the 1880s, Tarde laid the bases of his distinctive sociology, which would soon come to collide with that of a younger, up-

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<sup>4</sup> Milet (1970: 11–12) notes that an early distinguished member of the family, the sixteenth-century canon Jean Tarde, appears without the particle. However, the family name appears in the records as De Tarde from the early seventeenth century onwards, until the telltale sign of nobility is dropped at the time of the French Revolution. Although Gabriel Tarde himself never used it, the particle was restored to the family by a state decree in 1885, and Gabriel Tarde's son Guillaume assumed the noble version of the name.



and-coming Emile Durkheim's. In an article entitled 'Qu'est-ce qu'une société?' (1884b), Tarde first posited his definition of society as imitation, which would later form the core argument of his most famous book, *Les Lois de l'imitation* (1890b). In a careful reconsideration of Tarde and Durkheim's later battle over the definition of imitation, Bruno Karsenti (this volume) argues that at the heart of the Tardean account of imitation was a head-on engagement with the central paradox of social action: the indissociability of acting and being acted upon. Whereas Durkheim would resolve this paradox into binaries – structure and agency, causes and reasons, social and individual – Tarde's sociology of imitation proposed a conceptual apparatus for engaging with the paradox itself, since

Nothing could be less scientific than this absolute separation, this radical discontinuity between the voluntary and the involuntary, the conscious and the unconscious. Do we not move, by imperceptible degrees, from a considered volition to a more or less mechanical habit? And does the same action undergo any absolute change in nature during this movement?

(Tarde, 1890b: quoted in Karsenti, this volume)

In 'La croyance et le désir' (1880), Tarde outlined his views about belief and desire as the irreducible quanta of human psychology, and began to consider the possibility of their statistical measurement, a methodological discussion pursued in 'L'archéologie et la statistique' (1884b). Here and elsewhere, Tarde evidenced the influence of philosopher and mathematician Augustin Cournot, whose thinking on infinitesimal calculus and probability had a profound influence on Tarde's methodology and metaphysics (for an extended discussion of Cournot's influence on Tarde, see Milet, 1970: III 44; see Didier, Latour, and Barry, this volume for detailed accounts of Tarde's statistics).

'Darwinisme naturel et Darwinisme social' (1884a) was Tarde's first step in what would become a complex and sustained critical engagement with the theory of evolution. Opinions vary on Tarde's closeness to Darwinian theory, but Milet particularly highlights the fact that Tarde refused the primacy of 'the struggle for life' as a motor of history (Milet, 1970: 183, 245). If anything, as we shall see below, for Tarde it was association, harmonization and conjunction which came first. After all, Tarde argued in his book *La Philosophie pénale*, logically speaking, beings must be held together by internal relations before they can clash externally with one another (1890a: 103). On the other hand, Tarde was a far stricter Darwinist than his contemporary Herbert Spencer in two respects: his refusal to see 'species' (whether biological or social) as anything more substantial than the ephemeral categorization of a bundle of contingent individual variations (Milet, 1970: 245; compare Darwin, 1859 chapter 2); and his rejection of unilineal evolutionism, which he saw as a 'simple determinism' (Tarde, 1899a: ii). Both of these soundly Darwinian points were at the heart of his critique of Spencer's social evolutionism (Milet, 1970: 244–47).

More generally, Tarde deplored the tendency to reduce history, be it natural or social, to a formula, rather than study its 'hydrostatics' (Barry and Thrift 2007: 522).

Tarde's commitment to contingency is evident in the following quote – as indeed is his characteristically informal style of argument, of which more below:

I must admit that it would not spoil for me the spectacle of the starry sky, to think that the heavens are not the deployment of some desperate monotony. For the same reason, I would not dislike, when I read history, to see in it the unexpected constantly springing forth from regular causality, freedom issuing forth from order, fantasy from rhythm, embroidery from the fabric.

(Tarde, 1892: 19)

It is such statements that have led to the recovery of Tarde's thought as a 'metaphysics of contingency' (Milet, 1970: 22ff). And yet this does not stop him from elsewhere articulating a number of prophetic, and retrospectively somewhat chilling, predictions about the future of history (see *ibid.* 358ff)<sup>5</sup>. Nor, indeed, does Tarde refrain from referring repeatedly to social and historical 'laws'. Yet these would be uncommon laws indeed:

We too see the history of societies as subjected to laws, to very precise laws. [However] these laws do not hinder in the least the rich diversity of social evolutions, unlike those narrow formulae which seek to canalize these great rivers, these Rhines, Niles and Mississippis of history, so capricious and wild. Our laws by contrast affirm, so to speak, the necessity of this freedom.

(Tarde, 1893c: 139–140)

Where Durkheim saw a sophistic rejection of any notion of real scientific law (see Chapter 3, this volume), the modern reader might see in this attempt to marry laws and contingency an early parallel to Weber's distinctively non-teleological stance on the history of rationalization, or in biology, to the complex re-historicization of Darwinism by Stephen J. Gould (1989, 2002; cf. Stengers, 2000: 141).

But it was in the 1890s that Tarde's name really came to the forefront of French intellectual life, beginning with the publication in 1890 of both *Les Lois de l'imitation* and his second criminological work, *La Philosophie pénale*. In 1893, Tarde became co-director of the *Revue d'anthropologie criminelle*, founded by criminologist Alexandre Lacassagne. In 1894, as a result of his growing fame as a sociologist and criminologist, this provincial judge was singled out by the government and named director of judiciary statistics at the Ministry of Justice in Paris. In Paris, Tarde met Lucien Levy-Bruhl, René Worms, Henri Bergson and Emile Durkheim, and soon became a renowned public figure, assiduously frequenting the Parisian salons. In 1895, he received the Knighthood of the Légion d'Honneur, the Order of Venezuela and the Order of Wladimir of Russia. The next year, he became an occasional lecturer at the Public School of Political Sciences (now better known as *Sciences Po*) and the newly created Free College of Social Sciences. Finally, in 1900, Tarde was elected to a chair in modern philosophy at the *Collège*

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5 And not only in his one work of science fiction, *Fragment d'histoire future* (Tarde, 1970)

*de France* which he tried, and failed, to have renamed as a chair in sociology. The same year, Tarde was also elected to the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences.

If the 1890s saw the rise to fame of Gabriel Tarde, they were also the decade in which the French public discovered a passion for sociology, as the multiplication of debates over its method, object and definition attest (Fournier, 2007: 209ff). Increasingly, these sociological debates came to gravitate around the crucial contrast between Tarde's and Durkheim's answers to these questions. In 1894, Durkheim publishes *The Rules of Sociological Method* as a series of articles in *La Revue philosophique*. Tarde, then arguably the leading French sociologist, is only cited once, in a note. The latter responds by dismantling Durkheimian sociology piece by piece in a series of articles including 'La sociologie élémentaire' (1895), later republished as *Les Deux éléments de la sociologie* (Tarde, 1898a; Chapter 3, this volume). Durkheim retaliates by refuting at length Tarde's theories of imitation in *Le Suicide* (1897)<sup>6</sup>.

This increasingly vehement argument over the nature of the social culminated in 1903 in an epic debate between the two thinkers at the *École des hautes études sociales*, where both were billed to teach an introductory course in autumn of that year. It is this debate that Chapter 3 of this volume tries to reimagine, by re-creating a dialogue out of extracts of the published works of the two sociologists.

Tarde published prolifically during the final fifteen years of his life, and most of his books date from that period. Besides those which have already been cited, Tarde published *La Logique sociale* (1893a) and *L'Opposition universelle* (1897). These weighty tomes came to complete *Les Lois sociales* (1898b). Tarde also continued to publish on legal matters (*Les Transformations du droit*, 1893c), and extended his purview into the analysis of politics (*Les Transformations de pouvoir*, 1899a), of crowds and media (*L'Opinion et la foule*, 1901) and economics (*Psychologie économique*, 1902).

But it is an article, published during this period, which was central to the recent rediscovery of Tarde, 'Les monades et la science sociale' (1893b), later republished as *Monadologie et sociologie* (1999b; This volume, chapter 1), where Tarde outlines his relational ontology. The recent enthusiasm for this text is perhaps due to the fact that it provides the clearest evidence that, whereas Tarde, as we shall see, has often been dismissed as Durkheim's individualistic opponent, his supposed individualism in sociology is only the tip of a rather more exciting iceberg. In order to clarify this, however, we need to make a detour through the different ways in which Tarde's sociology has been revived during the past century.

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6 Personally, the two men remain, at least initially, in polite if not cordial relations. Indeed, rather amusingly, the data on the geographic occurrence of suicide which were central to Durkheim's refutation of the imitative point of view were obtained by a student whom Durkheim had asked Tarde, as a personal favour, to allow access to the office of criminal statistics of which Tarde was then director (Fournier, 2007: 235).

## THE AFTERLIVES OF GABRIEL TARDE

### *An interrupted sociology*

At the time of his death in 1904, Tarde's fame was at its apex, and he was being compared to Comte, Darwin and Spencer (Milet, 1970: 9). In his 1939 assessment of contemporary French sociology, Durkheim's former collaborator Célestin Bouglé referred to the erstwhile clash between Tarde and Durkheim as the 'famous duel [between] the two thinkers whose busts then towered above sociology' (quoted in Fournier, 2007: 78).

And yet, Tarde's particular approach to the social seemed, on the surface at least, to disappear with him. Outside of criminology, where a 'Gabriel Tarde prize' still rewards, every year, the author of an outstanding early volume, Tarde died without leaving a school or group of followers either in France or in the English-speaking world. In French sociology, his memory was not so much extinguished as enshrined within a canonical doxography within which Tarde played the role of Durkheim's eccentric and unsystematic opponent, whose own account of society was individualistic and psychological and, in the end, failed to make an impact on mainstream sociology. Thus, Durkheim's nephew Mauss dismissively recalled, in a 1935 interview:

Gabriel Tarde was a great success, because he was suggestive, but his Laws of Imitation were of no importance [...] He was a popularizer, and something of a metaphysician, but his work on criminology, in which he was an authority, is important. I attended his lectures. Their content was banal and commonplace, but presented most entertainingly.

(Murray and Mauss, 1989: 163)

After an initial burst of interest by anglophone sociologists around the turn of the century, prompted by the translation of Tarde's *Social Laws* (1899b) and his *Laws of Imitation* (1903), Tarde's name seems to vanish from English and American sociology – although Terry Clark recalls that Park and Burgess' *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921), a volume which has come to typify the 'Chicago School' of sociology (Braude, 1970), contained 'more references to Tarde than to Comte, Cooley, Durkheim, Simmel, Thomas, or Weber' (Clark, 1969: 68). We have to wait until 1969, however, for the first serious attempt in the anglophone world to revive interest in Tardean sociology.

Clark's volume of selected translations of Tarde's work *On Communication and Social Influence* (Tarde, 1969 - reissued 2010), was prefaced by an extensive introduction. Therein, Clark attempts to rescue Tarde from historical oblivion while retaining, in the main, the established account of Tarde as Durkheim's individualistic opponent – which, by the 1970s, however, had become a term of praise, not abuse. In France, criminologist Jean Pinatel (1963) and sociologist Raymond Boudon (1971) were, around the same time, rediscovering in Tarde a forgotten precursor to 'methodological individualism', an unexpected ally in their critique of mainstream holistic, functionalist sociology (cf. Mucchielli, 2000: 162

66). Clark unambiguously placed Tarde alongside Durkheim and Weber in a Parsonian pantheon of 'theorists of action', sociologists whose work examines the five analytical variables: actor, goals, conditions, means and norms. If Durkheim was better on norms, Tarde, Clark felt, was better on actors and goals (Clark, 1969: 19-21).

The next section will suggest some important caveats to this image of Tarde as individualist sociologist. Before moving on to this rereading, however, it is worth pausing to unpick the ways in which the individualist account of Tarde (shared for instance by Lukes 1973:303) could be supported by a number of passages of his work, especially perhaps in his short synthetic essay *Social Laws* (1899; all quotes below are from the essay's republication as Tarde, 2000). This will allow us to highlight the limits of this interpretation, but should also serve as a caveat to further attempts to represent and unify once and for all a canonical account of 'Tarde's system'. I will return to this point below.

At times, and particularly when attacking Durkheim, Tarde seemed to be making straightforwardly individualist claims. He vehemently and repeatedly attacked the notion of supra-individual entities such as societies or nations that constrain or explain the behaviour of individuals:

Beneath the indefinite they, however carefully we search, we never find anything but a certain number of he's and she's which, as they have increased in number, have become mingled together and confused [...] The genius of a people [...], instead of being a factor superior to and dominating the characters of the individuals (who have been considered its offshoots and ephemeral manifestations) is simply a convenient label, or impersonal synthesis, of these individual characteristics; the latter alone are real, effective, and ever in activity; they are in a state of continual fermentation in the bosom of every society, thanks to the examples borrowed and exchanged with neighbouring societies to their great mutual profit.

(Tarde, 2000: 27)

In explicit contrast to Durkheim, Tarde described the elementary social fact as the interaction of two conscious individuals (ibid. 19). In social evolutionary thought as in Durkheimian sociology,

the same error always comes to light, namely, the error of believing that, in order to see a gradual dawn of regularity, order, and logic in social phenomena, we must go outside of the details, which are essentially irregular, and rise high enough to obtain a panoramic view of the general effect; that the source and foundation of every social coordination is some general fact [...] in short, that man acts, but a law of evolution guides him.

(ibid. 75)

Doesn't the author of these lines, who elsewhere criticizes Durkheim for mechanizing history by forgetting the influence of Great Men and heroic inventors, seem a natural champion of individualism?

And yet, when we relate these passages to other parts of Tarde's work, he turns out not to fit the individualist bill very well at all. As Andrew Barry and Nigel Thrift have pointed out, it can convincingly be argued that the real elementary unit in Tarde's account is 'the relation of modification or communication (such as affect, obedience, sympathy or education), not the subject which was modified' (2007: 514). As a result, I would argue that when Tarde foregrounds the relation between two conscious minds, he is not in fact starting from individuals but rather arriving at them. As he notes explicitly, it is this relation of a subject to 'an object which turns out to be a subject', which founds the reality of both: 'This consciousness of a consciousness is the inconcussum quid which Descartes sought and which the individual Self could not give him' (2000: 20).

However, the individual is not simply secondary, as in a structuralist view, in which relations come before entities. Tarde's radical move is to expand the discussion beyond the chicken-and-egg alternation of human individuals and the relations between them, by inscribing this contrast within a much broader multi-scalar, indeed cosmic, perspective. This is most clearly outlined in Tarde's aforementioned essay, *Monadologie et Sociologie* (Chapter 1 this volume), in which he postulates, not so much a Leibnizian sociology, as a socialized monadology<sup>7</sup>, which has provided a different starting point for recent rediscoverers of Gabriel Tarde's thought.

### *Philosophical traces*

The current re-discovery of Tarde differs rather drastically from his first sociological rebirth as an individualist. It centres around the Deleuzian, and later, Latourian rediscoveries of a radically different theorist, for whom the individual is no more of a natural stopping-point for sociology than Durkheim's social facts. This is a Tarde who, as we shall see below, radically upends our scalar assumptions, with the notion that the whole is always less than the sum of its parts (Tarde, 1999b; cf. Latour, 2002). From this new perspective, an individualist account of Tarde, however positively intended, still leaves him in Durkheim's shadow: it only opens up a space for Tarde within a Durkheimian distinction between society and individual, structure and agency, which distinctions Tarde explicitly rejected.

Tracing the afterlife of this 'other' Tarde takes us from the history of sociology to the history of philosophy. An early, and somewhat isolated instance of a serious consideration of Tarde as a philosophical figure was Jean Milet's monograph (1970),

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<sup>7</sup> For a thorough philosophical exegesis on and reconstruction of Tarde's system as presented in *Monadology and Sociology*, see Lorenc (2012). A particularly thought-provoking observation of Lorenc's essay, which goes to against the grain of some recent readings of Tarde is that his metaphysics is not so much bent on resolving dualisms as it is on using them: "These two monolithic dualisms, mind against matter and structure against agency, whose irresolution is the original sin of ontology and social theory respectively, are not resolved by the pansocial theory so much as generalized, and the tension they generate harnessed to the motor of cosmic evolution." (Lorenc 2012:77)

in which he argued that Tarde's work had profoundly influenced Henri Bergson, who in turn became the means whereby Tarde's thinking, unseen, permeated the twentieth century (Milet, 1970: 386ff; see also Born this volume)<sup>8</sup>. And certainly, Bergson, Tarde's successor at the Collège de France, wrote an extremely laudatory introduction to a posthumous edited collection of Tarde's works (Tarde, 1909), in which he hailed Tarde's philosophy of imitation as one of the most eminent and noteworthy instances of nineteenth-century thought (quoted in Milet, 1970: 9). Meanwhile, in the USA, Tarde was positively cited by a number of the leading pragmatist thinkers, including most prominently George Herbert Mead, but also William James and John Dewey (a genealogy carefully retraced in Leys 1993). Dewey went so far as to claim that "Tarde himself was certainly one of the most stimulating and varied of writers, and I do not think we shall ever outgrow some of his contributions" (quoted in Leys 1993: 279)<sup>9</sup>.

More broadly, an increasing body of philosophical commentary on Tarde (see for instance Toews 1999; Montebello 2003; Lorenc 2012) is beginning to paint the picture of a thinker who, for all his undeniable originality, was less philosophically isolated than he might at first appear. In particular Pierre Montebello (2003) offered a thorough contextualisation of Tarde as part of an alternative metaphysical tradition, alongside Schopenhauer, Ravaisson, Nietzsche and, again, Bergson. It is not difficult to extend this alternative metaphysical tradition to take in also Gilles Deleuze, whose influence has been so important on the latest rediscovery of Tarde's works, as noted above.

In much of this work, it is Tarde's essay *Monadology and Sociology* (Chapter 1, this volume) which provides the starting point of the rediscovery. In this peculiar metaphysics, Leibniz's pre-established harmony is replaced by a universalized Newtonian principle of attraction translated as 'mutual possession' (see Chapters 15 and 18, this volume). By recognizing that the gravity of a celestial body is none other than the sum of the gravities of its constituent masses, Tarde argues,

Newton exploded the individuality of celestial bodies, which had theretofore been considered as superior units whose internal relations bore no resemblance to their relations with external bodies. It took an energetic mind to resolve this apparent unity into a multiplicity of distinct elements, tied together just as they were tied to elements of other aggregates.

(1999b: 34)

Tarde extends this insight into a 'universal sociological point of view', in which the resolution of entities into aggregates or societies applies 'all the way down', to solar systems and to planets, to nations and to individual bodies, to organs, to cells

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8 Whereas Milet tended to see in Bergson the culmination and extension of Tarde's project, Georgina Born by contrast, in her contribution to this volume, detects a reduction of Tarde's analytics of temporality in Bergson's vitalism – and therefore in its recent redeployment by social theorists.

9 I am very grateful to Mark Hayward for pointing out this general connection and also this particular quote.

and to atoms: 'every thing is a society and every phenomenon a social fact' (1999b: 58).

It is this radical 'universal sociological point of view' that leads Tarde to conclude that the whole (the whole society, the whole individual) is always less complex and indeed weaker than the sum of its parts, since these parts are always simultaneously part of other wholes which could at any moment request their allegiance:

The internal uprisings which finally destroy all of these great, regular mechanisms – the social mechanism, the vital mechanism, the stellar mechanism, the molecular mechanism – are all due to a similar condition: their constitutive elements, soldiers of these various regiments, temporary embodiment of their laws, only ever belong to the world they constitute by one facet of their being, while by other facets they escape it. This world would not exist without them; they however would still be something without it. The attributes which each element owes to its incorporation within its regiment is not the whole of its nature. It has other tendencies, other instincts, which come from other regimentations ...'

(1999b: 39)

This particular refusal of scale, in which the big is always recast as a simplification of the small, is one of Tarde's most daring philosophical moves, and one which could convincingly be taken to prefigure the specific optic of Actor-Network Theory (see for instance Callon and Latour, 1981).<sup>10</sup>

As Eduardo Vargas and Bruno Latour detail in their respective contributions to this volume, the interesting result of this universal sociological point of view is a switch from the problematic of 'being' and entities, to that of 'having': possession, be it mutual or unilateral, of one entity by a host of others. Vargas shows the potential of the Tardean shift from being to having for an ethnographic exploration of drug use. Latour (chapter 18) shows the revolutionary way in which of thinking of society as possession can refresh classical questions of social order and coordination. Elsewhere, I have suggested that this approach, as an alternative to the Barthian study of contrastive difference, could help anthropologists reshape the ethnographic study of identity, ethnicity and attachments to place (Candea, 2010). Furthermore, Tarde's recasting of subjective and objective knowledge as mutual and unilateral possession, is a particularly fruitful model for anthropologists to think with (see Candea, 2008; Leach, this volume).

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<sup>10</sup> However, the next sentence in the passage reintroduces a distinction between individual substance and mere artificial assemblage which does not sit so neatly with this reading. Indeed, Tarde continues by stating that there are still other tendencies and instincts in each element which 'come from its substrate (fonds), from itself, from its own fundamental substance, on which it can rely to resist the collective power of which it is a part. The latter is much larger, but far less deep, no more than an artificial being, composed of aspects and facades of beings' (Tarde, 1999b: 39). Passages such as these back up Lorenc's suggestion that at the heart of Tarde's metaphysics lies not a hypostasis of the social, but rather an analogical generalisation of the problematic tension between individual and society (2012:74) - cf. note 7 above.



More generally, as I discuss in more detail below, Tarde's appeal for many current readers is in the seamless integration in his work, of nearly unbounded metaphysical speculations which boldly refashion scale, being, relationship and perspective, with proposals for a minute, careful micro-sociology, focusing on singular events of modification (see Barry, this volume). At the intersection of these two seemingly contradictory tendencies in Tarde's writing lies perhaps his most productive legacy for contemporary sociologists, anthropologists and others who would engage in what Born (this volume) terms 'a post-positivist empiricism, in which ethnographic and historical research become the second grounds for conceptual invention' (XX).

### WHY READ TARDE TODAY (AND HOW)?

And yet, amidst the recent chorus of those hailing the return of Gabriel Tarde, some have sounded a warning note. Barry and Thrift have pointed out that while it is right to emphasize the contemporary resonances of Tarde's approach his work is, of course, infused by the preoccupations of late nineteenth century scientific thought. Indeed, it is the peculiar mixture of these preoccupations with the power of foresight into contemporary concerns which we suspect is what now makes Tarde such an attractive figure to so many.

(Barry & Thrift, 2007: 510 n)

The profound correspondences between Tarde's concerns and some recent moves in social science raises the question of how far the rediscovery of Tarde draws on hidden genealogical effects of his work, such as those briefly outlined at the beginning of the previous section, and how much relies on retrospective reinvention. Anthropology is an interesting case study for this. Until recently, as Harvey and Venkatesan (this volume) point out, Tarde was almost entirely absent from anthropology, with the notable exception of the works of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (e.g. 2003). And yet elements of Tarde's thought, as outlined above, seem to prefigure with an uncanny exactitude many central themes of what has recently been termed the 'ontological turn' in anthropology (cf. Henare et al., 2006; Lorenc 2012 makes a similar point): an interest in radical alterity and generative multiplicity, a reformulation of entities as relations which challenges the society/individual dichotomy, a concern with rethinking the relationship between complexity and scale through fractality and holography, the reshuffling of divides between nature and culture, biology and society. Is this neat dovetailing a matter of retrojection of our own concerns on those of a very different scholar? Or could one attempt to trace a forgotten or silent genealogy linking current anthropological theorising back to Tarde? The mere fact that, according to Clark, Tarde's account of diffusion influenced Boas (Clark, 1969: 36), although interesting in itself, would perhaps not get us very far. But an obsessive Tardophile might seek to argue, based on correspondences and similarities, rather than solid evidence that Tarde

somehow 'irradiated' current anthropological theorising through Gregory Bateson (via Tarde's translator James Mark Baldwin), or, via the mediation of Chicago sociology, through McKim Marriott, whose coinage of the term 'dividual' was accompanied by the profoundly Tardean-sounding claim that 'What goes on between actors are the same connected processes of mixing and separation that go on within actors' (1976: 109, quoted in Strathern, 1988: 349, note vii). The later career of the notion of dividuality, via the work of Strathern, takes us straight to some of the roots of the contemporary ontological turn.

I propose the above tentative genealogy precisely to illustrate what this volume is not seeking to do. Rather than attempt to establish or exclude an authentic Tardean pedigree for current concerns, the contributors to this volume are more interested in Tarde's work, either as a productively anachronistic source of new questions, methods and approaches (see for instance Born, Harvey and Venkatesan, Leach), or as an ethnographic terrain for an anthropology of social theory (Corsín-Jiménez).

This approach means that the book needs to confront a potential difficulty raised by Laurent Mucchielli, in a critique of what he termed the new 'Tardomania' (Mucchielli 2000). Mucchielli argued that Tarde's rediscoverers

have appropriated his name without restituting the whole of his thought, [and that] the characteristics of Tarde's philosophical system explain in part the issue of his struggle for prestige with Durkheim and the fact that he has been forgotten by the social sciences.

(Mucchielli, 2000: 174)

We will return to Mucchielli's first accusation – the fragmentary nature of recent readings of Tarde – below. As for the second, he argues that it was, at least in part, the strength of Durkheim's arguments and the clarity of his reasoning that enabled him to turn into disciples men originally opposed to him:

Durkheim managed to embody a certain type of rationality – scientific rationality – which consists in methods, in examples, in logical reasoning, in standard procedures of validation and argumentation; these things cannot be found in Tarde, whose thinking is more an instance of traditional philosophy, indeed sometimes of a style of writing and demonstration closer to journalism. And in the phrase 'social science' there is the word 'science'.

(Mucchielli, 2000: 181)

Mucchielli's broader historical account is careful and convincing. However, in his drive to prove that Durkheim's victory over Tarde, and the latter's disappearance from the social scientific canon, were not due to underhand machinations or foul play, he at times overshoots his mark by seeming to suggest that these historical contingencies were in some profound sense justified, inscribed in the very nature of what a social science itself must be.

At the heart of this volume, by contrast, is the thought that the history of sociology is not, any more than any other history, the unfolding of destiny, and that

another sociology is always possible. As a result, creative and self-conscious anachronism can be as productive and valuable an endeavour as careful historical reconstruction. Some contributors to this volume question and historicize elements of Tarde's thinking, while others selectively revive and reinvent; indeed, some do both. What has happened has indeed happened, but it could always have been otherwise, as Foucault, and Tarde before him, pointed out.

### *Tarde's politics*

But there is another strand to Mucchielli's criticism. Whereas many who read Tarde today describe him as an original and misunderstood thinker who suffered from being ahead of his time, Mucchielli notes that both Tarde and Durkheim were very much in tune with sections of French contemporary opinion: Durkheim with the younger Jauresian socialists, Tarde with a section of the Catholic<sup>11</sup> haute bourgeoisie (Mucchielli, 2000: 179). This contrast is the crux of an implicit warning concerning Tarde's politics, which Mucchielli is not alone in issuing. Indeed Barry (this volume) notes that Deleuze and Guattari's portrayal of Tarde as a theorist of radical politics is seriously misleading.

Unambiguously elitist and an ambivalent democrat, Tarde could well be taken to describe himself, when, in his book *Penal Philosophy*, he exhorted his readers to 'be revolutionary in the social sciences but conservative in politics' (quoted in Fournier, 2007: 76) although of course, one might argue that 'conservative', during the Third Republic, was quite a 'radical' thing to be. Clark, for instance, casts the political opposition between Durkheim and Tarde as one between the official bourgeois ideology of state-sponsored Cartesianism, and the oddly combined anti-bourgeois forces of 'the heirs of the traditional nobility, the rural peasantry, or the urban proletariat', under the banner of 'Spontaneity' (Clark, 1969: 8). Giving us some clues to how those distinctions were perceived by contemporaries, Durkheim's collaborator Gaston Richard, in his review of Tarde's *Economie Psychologique* describes the author, not without a hint of admiration, as an "aristocrat and ideocrat, terrible enemy of democracy" who nevertheless, while eschewing classic schools of socialism managed to "more than any other to condemn an economic policy founded on competition and to enjoin cooperative association" (Richard 1902, cited in Fournier 2007:425; See Latour & Lépinay 2009 for a thorough review of Tarde's economics and its relation to marxism and liberalism).

On the Dreyfus Affair, often taken as the litmus test of french political and intellectual opinion of that period (Winock 1997), Tarde's position was complex. Mucchielli describes him as a faint and reserved supporter of Dreyfus ("un sympathisant du bout des lèvres" - 2000:181). Salmon (2005), on the other hand, provides a nuanced account of Tarde's complex mix of personal distaste for the anti-semitism of the anti-Dreyfusards ("There is no conception more odious or stupid than that which can find its way into the mind of crowds blinded by anti-

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<sup>11</sup> Tarde's actual position on religion is in fact a matter of some debate. See note 14 below.

semitic passion" Tarde, cited in Salmon 2005:7), and of intellectual detachment from practical politics. Explicitly engaged in support of the Drefusards only when the crisis seems to threaten public order, Tarde was first and foremost approaching the Dreyfus affair as a case-study for modelling the operations of public opinion.

A related but nevertheless distinct question concerns the political effects of thinking with Tarde today: Alberto Toscano (2007) characterized Tarde's political project as one of elite pacification, and argued that the greatest value of Tarde's political writings is as a symptom (the anthropologist in me would say, an ethnographic instance) of the type of strategic thinking that is evident in contemporary neo-liberal forms of pacification. By contrast, Toews (this volume) argues that by rereading Tarde alongside and in tension with Durkheim, one can still recover from the former an agentive version of unsociability which goes beyond docility.

Certainly, any evaluation of Tarde's moral and political positions requires some careful unpicking both of the enormous Tardean corpus and of the specific historical juncture at which he was writing. But it does not follow that Tarde must stand or fall as one – or does it? Can Tarde's theories and methods be extricated from his politics and treated in isolation, or is there something profoundly problematic at the very core of Tarde's project?

### *Durkheim's firebreaks*

Some recent readers worry particularly about the element of Tarde's work which has been hailed by others: the obviation of distinctions between the social, the individual, and the biological. This issue deserves closer attention, insofar as it reveals a profound and somewhat unexamined rift in current social theory. In sundering, on the one hand, the social from the individual, and on the other, the biological from the social, Durkheim's sociology contributed to the establishment of two firebreaks that have been central to much twentieth-century political and social theory. For their supporters, the first firebreak guaranteed a space for free will within the constraints of society and structure, whereas the second provided a ready-made argument against any attempts to naturalize social differences, from biological racism to sociobiology.

In recent decades, a number of social theorists, philosophers and anthropologists, while (and this is crucial) being wary of the same deterministic and essentialist pitfalls, have come to consider these firebreaks themselves as part of the problem, rather than the solution. The supposed freedom of the subject within structures of power was denounced by Michel Foucault, in a line of theorizing that led, amongst other traces, to the 'post-humanist' strand in current social theory and philosophy. The aim of these analyses was not to further a drab determinism, but, on the contrary, the pursuance of an anti-essentialist agenda. And yet, read from within the frames of a Durkheimian distinction between free subjects and constraining structures, Mucchielli's assessment of Tarde's theory would be just as true of Foucault's work on power:

fundamentally a sort of global philosophy of the universe, which deduces

the laws of human functioning from those of cosmic functioning (and, in an intermediary step, from the Vital). In this sense, it is even more abstract, systematic and deterministic than that of Durkheim (Mucchielli, 2000: 177).

As for the biological and the social, some would argue that what David Schneider once wrote about the anthropology of kinship holds for the role of the social after Durkheim more generally: 'The focus of the efforts for Durkheim, Rivers, and Radcliffe-Brown was to isolate social kinship as a legitimate subject of study, to distinguish it from its biological aspects, but not to disavow the biological component nor to throw the biology out [...], but simply to set it aside' (Schneider, 1984: 193). In other words, by setting biology aside from the social, some claim, we simply allow it to rebound upon the social with renewed force. A number of very different recent attempts, from all corners of sociology, anthropology and philosophy, to write beyond the nature/culture divide, and to engage with biosociality, have precisely been hacking away at this second Durkheimian firebreak – not of course in the name of some biological determinism, but very much against it.

In other words, the firebreaks set up by Durkheim around social theory have been failing. Some would attempt to restore, patch up, refunction these firebreaks; others gladly go with the flow while retaining a critical eye for how these new mixings are made. Is human agency simply emptied out and replaced by causally determined forces which are themselves not under question, or is the very notion of action and transformation reshaped and remoulded? Are science and biology remaining stable and simply applied to the formerly 'pure' realm of society, to naturalize and enshrine its differences? Or is biology being socialized at the same time as society is biologized, in new theoretical and critically interdisciplinary agendas?

Whether one deplores or applauds these recent challenges to the Durkheimian firebreaks, rereading Tarde today is crucial simply because of his insertion into this debate at its very inception, as these firebreaks were being set up. But where would Tarde himself have stood in this debate? What, in other words, did Tarde really say?

I have detailed above Tarde's complex position vis-à-vis the individual. His position on the precise articulation of biology and the social was somewhat more ambiguous, as Barry and Thrift point out (2007: 522n6). Some have seen in Tarde's account of imitation a precursor of memetics (Marsden, 2000), drawing on passages such as the following:

[A]ny social production having some marked characteristics, be it an industrial good, a verse, a formula, a political idea which has appeared somewhere in the corner of a brain, dreams like Alexander of conquering the world, tries to multiply itself by thousands and millions of copies in every place where there exist human beings and will never stop except if it is kept in check by some rival production as ambitious as itself.

(Tarde, 1999b: 51)

But whereas current meme theory remains resolutely dualist, staking out a claim to explain those cultural and mental phenomena which are left over from the evolutionary explanation of the straightforwardly 'biological' (and, what is more, explaining them in essentially the same terms – see for instance Blackmore, 1999), Tarde was an explicit proponent of a thoroughly anti-cartesian monism in which 'matter is spirit and nothing more' (Tarde, 1999b: 12). Tarde used this assertion, not to negate material realities or scientific discoveries, as in what he terms a 'naive idealism', but to ground the re-spiritualization of the material in a close and at times boldly critical engagement with the most recent findings of astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology – and indeed, as we have seen, of Darwinian evolution itself, which by contrast provides the unquestioned 'mechanism' of current meme theory. Tarde, in other words, imagined a philosophical sociology that would inform and modify the other sciences – perhaps even direct them – not simply operate as a foot-note to them (as in sociobiology or meme theory), or within its clearly demarcated reservation (as in Durkheimian sociology).

And yet a different picture emerges from one of Tarde's most explicit discussions of the links between the biological and the social, in the second half of his article 'Les deux éléments de la sociologie' (Tarde, 1898a; Chapter 2 this volume). There, Tarde pointedly argued against social evolutionist accounts of humanity's progressive shift from biological ties to more straightforwardly social ones (see Kuper, 2005), as well as Durkheim's claim to a radical separation between the two 'levels' of analysis. Tarde counters that there is no reason to suppose social links supersede the 'physiological' links of 'shared blood' which unite 'families'. Rather, he argues, these are merely added to them as another, sometimes cross-cutting strand of associations between individuals. As societies increase in size and complexity, Tarde argues, we see not a shift from one kind of attachment (kinship and 'blood') to a different, more abstract one, but rather the concomitant extension, at different rates and through different transformations, of different kinds of attachments – belief, co-residence, shared activity, and 'blood' (albeit he notes, often 'fictive' rather than 'real'). In support of this argument Tarde points to contemporary examples of nationalism, in which he takes a straightforwardly 'primordialist' position<sup>12</sup>. And yet, this is the same theorist who, as we have seen, vehemently opposed essentialist accounts of national entities, and argued for the radical contingency of races and indeed biological species.

## THE INTERNAL MULTIPLICITIES OF GABRIEL TARDE

In other words, any attempt to 'place' Tarde in terms of our present concerns raises difficult issues of post-hoc contextualization: was he, when the chips are down, a precursor of sociobiology, for whom the biological ultimately determined

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<sup>12</sup> He argues for instance that 'racial' subdivision makes it difficult for the Austrian empire to produce a unified sense of nationality, whereas the 'Polish people' manifest a common purpose even when scattered into different states (Tarde, 1898a: 90–91).

the social, as Mucchielli, for instance, suggests (2000: 177), or an early champion of a metaphysics of contingency, for whom biology could only proceed under the aegis of sociology? How should we reconcile his repeated critiques of teleology, with his own attempts at tracing the future developments of civilization? How does his explicit rejection of racism fit in with his guarded defence of eugenics (see Milet, 1970: 356-58)? It is to reconciling these and other seemingly incompatible aspects of Tarde's work into a coherent 'philosophy of history' that Jean Milet's book for instance, is principally devoted, and the reader occasionally gets the feeling that in rebuilding and completing Tarde's theoretical house, Milet used quite a bit of his own mortar<sup>13</sup>.

This is where the aforementioned contrast between Tarde and Durkheim's argumentative and expository style indeed becomes relevant. As Milet puts it:

At the heart of the disagreement [between Tarde and Durkheim], there was, first of all, [...] a combat between two 'methods'. Tarde is of the intuitive school. He 'senses' things, he guesses them; he uses his imagination as much as his reason. When he meets an obstacle, he tries to avoid it, to go around it; when he meets a contradiction, he attempts to transcend it; for him, as for his master Renan, 'truth is in the nuances'. He knows that truth is a thing to be solicited, begged for, and that man will only ever receive it in crumbs and shreds.

(Milet, 1970: 248)

Tarde's writing is sharply evocative, even mesmerizing, a very model of the generative multiplicity which his metaphysics postulate: on every reading, new ideas bubble up to the surface. The polysemy and internal multiplicity of Tarde's writing was already noted by his contemporaries. In the very speech recommending Tarde's appointment at the Collège de France in 1900, Théodule Ribot noted approvingly that

The works of Mr Tarde are refractory to analysis because of the richness and number of profound, ingenious and unexpected insights they contain. He is, in everyone's judgement, one of the most original minds of our time

(Quoted in Fournier 2007:423)

In the same vein Bergson explained, in a letter read at the inauguration of a monument to Tarde in his home town of Sarlat in 1909, that Tarde belonged to that 'race of thinkers':

who go, without any apparent method, where their fancy takes them, but whose mind is so well tuned to the harmony of things, that all their ideas chime naturally with each other. Their reflection, starting from anywhere, and setting off in any direction, always manages to bring them back to the same

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<sup>13</sup> One example amongst others is Milet's keenness to draw out from Tarde's fragmentary and ambivalent writing on religion, a sense that Tarde lived and died a Christian. Milet (himself a priest and lecturer at the Institut Catholique de Paris) concludes that Tarde 'was certainly closer to the Kingdom than he said, even than he thought' (Milet, 1970: 190n99).

point. Their intuitions, which are anything but systematic, arrange themselves into a system. They are philosophers without having tried to be, without having thought about it.

(cited in Milet 1970:391)<sup>14</sup>

By the same token, however, and unlike Durkheim, Tarde's oeuvre constantly evades totalization and structured restatement. Tarde proceeds by additions and supplements, and always stops short of a total recension of his arguments which would subsume them and mark out once and for all what was central and what was mere flourish. As a result, any attempt to state, on a general level 'what Tarde said', or outline a Tardean 'system', must choose what to prioritize and what to residualize – and more violence is done, in the process, to the teeming matter of Tarde's work than would be done had a similar process been part of the writing itself, as one sees, for instance, in Durkheim.

Therefore, it is not simply that, as Mucchielli argues of Tardean revivalists, '[o]ne can say anything about Tarde or make him say anything. One can put a stress on this and leave out that. One can suggest that Tarde wanted to do or say this or that even if he himself didn't quite manage it' (Mucchielli, 2000: 181). Rather, the nature of Tarde's writing is such that, I would suggest, one must do this kind of selective rereading if – and this is an important if – one is intent on painting a general picture of Tarde's theory. Indeed, this applies to Mucchielli himself, who arguably rather puts the accent on the deterministic aspects of Tarde's 'system' at the expense of Tarde's many explicit defenses of open-endedness and contingency. One could thus say of Tarde, as Antonio wrote of Nietzsche, that his "fragmented, contradictory, and "open" texts welcome diverse interpretations, selective appropriations, and disjunctive fusions" (Antonio 1995:5).

One detailed example of this general difficulty should suffice. In *L'Opposition universelle*, Tarde writes the following:

I gladly agree with Renouvier that the usual opposition between the subject and the object, the self and the not-self, is a dangerous speculative trap. By pitting a single being against all the others, as if it could counterbalance them all, it has contributed to the mirage of subjective idealism. But while the subject and the object are not opposed[1], objectifying and subjectifying constitute a real and fundamental opposition. These two operations, of

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<sup>14</sup> Between the praise of Bergson and Ribot, and the critiques of Mucchielli and Durkheim, there is first and foremost a difference of emphasis and theoretical proclivity. What is at stake here is not simply an author's personal style, but a more basic disagreement about the proper relationship between intuition and system, method and originality, coherence and fragmentation, in sociological and philosophical writing. This tension was already clear to Tarde's contemporaries: it can be read as part of (and contributory to) a broader polarisation of the intellectual scene in turn of the century France, between the republicanist rationalism of the Sorbonne and the mystical, vitalist tendencies of the Collège de France (Fournier 2007:423; 652-653). In sum, the problem of the coherence and partiality of Tarde's oeuvre, of how it should be interpreted, read and used, is already a historical problem.



which the former exteriorizes while the latter interiorizes, are as contrary in this respect as nutrition and generation.

(Tarde, 1999a: 225)

This passage strikes the contemporary reader as fantastically prescient. Here is indeed the thinker, of whom Latour wrote, that 'on a few technical points of horrendous difficulty, Tarde possessed the solution we have been seeking in vain for so long' (Latour, 2002: 118). No subject/object distinction, but rather, opposed processes of subjectification and objectification: Tarde, in this passage, could be seen to prefigure not only Foucault's work on subjectification, but also Deleuzian perspectivism, Isabelle Stengers' reinvention of the subject-object distinction<sup>15</sup>, and the Actor-Network Theory notion of 'translation' (Callon and Latour, 1981: 279).

And yet the corresponding note slightly mars the picture:

1. We can say that they are vaguely opposed, at the beginning of mental life, in children and savages, who project themselves into every external object in a generalized and constant personification, which lies at the root of animism and fetishism. But the progress of thinking renders the object increasingly dissimilar to the subject.

(Tarde, 1999a: 225)

Here is the alternation of prescient and evidently nineteenth-century concerns described by Barry and Thrift. But the problem is not simply that, in associating the child and the savage, Tarde shares the language and assumptions 'of his time'<sup>16</sup>. More profoundly, the link between the passage and the note leaves us with a problem of contextualization. It seems that Tarde, in the note, is not being very ... Tardean! While the main passage, in its reference to generation and nutrition, suggests a vision of objectification and subjectification as constantly repeated processes, the note in its reference to a 'progress of thinking' seems to suggest a predetermined sequence of increasing objectification and subjectification, which seems rather at odds with what Tarde writes elsewhere about the lack of teleology in evolution. Furthermore, having set up objectification and subjectification as processes in the main text, does he not see (or does he not care?) that his own

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<sup>15</sup> 'Once it is a question of science, all human statements must cease to be equivalent, and the putting to the test that must create a difference between them implies the creation of a reference they designate, which must be capable of making the distinction between science and fiction. Thus the distinction between subject and object, insofar as it expresses this relation of putting to the test, cannot be purely and simply eliminated. The question of knowing who must submit to the putting to the test, however, remains an open one' (Stengers, 2000: ch. 8). As Stengers puts it, her reformulation 'preserves the distinction between subject and object, but modifies its meaning: it is recognized not as a right, but as a vector of risk, an operation of "decentring". It does not attribute to the subject the right to know an object, but to the object the power (to be constructed) to put the subject to the test' (ibid.).

<sup>16</sup> Even though this passage suggests by contrast the novelty and power of Durkheim's 'Elementary forms of religious life' (Durkheim, 1995), in which simple evolutionist series and theories of animistic projection are convincingly debunked.

presentation of children and savages must in itself perforce be seen as objectification, rather than description of objects? Ironing out these difficulties into a conclusion about 'what Tarde is saying' requires ignoring one part of this passage: one could present Tarde here as a prescient philosopher of alterity who in some details remained mired in the assumptions of his time. Alternatively, one could present him as a nineteenth-century evolutionist who occasionally struck a chord which resonates with current concerns. But either account is perforce a selection.

## A PARTIALLY CONNECTED METAPHYSICS? TARDE ON SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

*"Philosophy is, in a sense, the alpha and the omega of science"* (Tarde, quoted in Fournier 2007:423)

One could scale this problem up and present it more systematically as the question of the relation between Tarde's metaphysical sociology and his human sociology. As I noted above, both contemporary and current critics of Tarde often accused him of betraying the scientific nature of sociology by mixing in too much metaphysics. Thus Durkheim famously put down his disagreements with Tarde to the fact that "I believe in science and M. Tarde does not" (quoted in Lukes 1975:310). Elsewhere, Durkheim deplored Tarde's election to the chair of modern philosophy at the Collège de France:

I deeply regret, for the sake of both sociology and philosophy, both of which have an equal interest in remaining distinct, a confusion which shows that many good minds still fail to understand what each should be. (letter to Léon, 1900, quoted in Lukes 1973:304)

Accepting as such the image of an unscientific Tarde ignores first of all Tarde's own frequent explicit appeals to science. More profoundly, mapping Tarde and Durkheim's respective contributions in terms of a fixed contrast between philosophical speculation and scientific sociology ignores the fact that it is precisely the nature of that distinction which was at issue in the debate between them. Thus, Latour (this volume, chapter 11) seeks to show that Tarde never abandoned the striving for a scientific sociology, but rather that he went much further than Durkheim in recasting what was specifically scientific about science in the first place (see also Thrift, this volume, for current scientific vindication of some of Tarde's theories).

Broadly however, Durkheim was fairly successful in establishing his version of the contrast between sociology and philosophy, and setting the terms of the debate over what was to be considered scientific and unscientific in the social sciences for much of the 20th century. In recent decades however, the clear lines of distinction between sociology and metaphysics have been brought into question in a number of quarters. Just as I argued above that an individualist Tarde was a powerful ally

for a number of sociologists in the 1970s, a metaphysical Tarde is an attractive play-mate for proponents of a reshuffling of the great divide between sociology and metaphysics. As Debaise puts it:

Does sociology require metaphysics? This question pervades Gabriel Tarde's (1843- 1903) work, and places him in fundamental opposition to the founders of modern sociology, in particular to Emile Durkheim. What Tarde tried to do, and what makes him remarkably relevant today, was to give social sciences the metaphysics they required. (Debaise 2008)

There are, however, some interesting ambivalences to the relationship between sociology and metaphysics in Tarde's work. Theo Lorenc has suggested, following Toews, that on a number of technical points, such as the intelligibility of processes of imitation and the possibility of scientific generalisation for instance, Tarde's metaphysical writing and his sociological work may well be irreconcilable (Lorenc 2012:92; cf. Toews 1999). Similarly, one could think of a number of the disjunctures presented in the previous section, as suggesting a break between Tarde's metaphysical 'voice' and his sociological or historical voice.

Between the 'universal sociological point of view' outlined in *Monadology and Sociology* ("every thing is a society, and every phenomenon a social fact. [...] Every science seems destined to become a branch of sociology"), and the more specific sociology of humans which Tarde outlines, pursues and deploys in many of his other works (such as *Two elements* or *Social Laws*), there is at the very least a methodological break. As I noted above, human sociology in this more restricted sense of inter-psychology, has a very particular object, its elementary particle, the encounter of two (human) minds. This formulation marks Tarde's human sociology off from the broader metaphysical hypotheses of *Mondology and Sociology*. And indeed, the particularity of human knowledge of humans is marked out in *Monadology and Sociology* itself, in a passage, which deserves to be quoted at length here:

According to my point of view, when I enter into verbal communication with one or more of my fellow-men, our respective monads grasp each other reciprocally. At the very least, it is certain that this relation is the relation of one social element with other social elements, considered individually. By contrast, when I observe, listen to or study my natural environment, rocks, water, plants even, each object of my thought is a hermetically sealed world of elements which may indeed know or possess each other intimately, like members of a social group, but which I can only embrace globally and from the outside. All the chemist can do is conjecture the atom, with the certainty of never being able to act individually on it. Matter as he understands it, as he uses it, is a compact dust of distinct atoms whose distinction is erased by the hugeness of their numbers and the illusory continuity of their actions. In

the living, but (apparently) inanimate world, can our monad grasp a less confused ghost? It seems so. Already the element here senses the element; the young girl who tends a flower loves it with a tenderness that no diamond could inspire.

But it is only when we arrive at the social world that we witness the monads grasping each other nakedly, in the flesh, grasping the intimacy of their transitory characters which are now deployed before each other, within each other, through each other. That is the relation par excellence, the typical possession of which the rest is but a draft or a reflection. Through persuasion, through love and hate, through personal prestige, through the community of beliefs and wills, through the mutual chain of contract – a kind of tight network that extends without limit – the social elements hold and pull each other in a thousand ways, and from their struggles are born the marvels of civilisation.

Might not the marvels of organisation and of life be born of similar actions, from vital element to vital element, or even from atom to atom? I am inclined to think so, for reasons that would be too long to explain here. Might it not be the same for chemical creations, for astronomical formations? Newtonian attraction must surely apply from atom to atom, since even the most complicated chemical operations cannot alter it in any way. (This volume p XX)

Passages such as this support Lorenc's reconstruction of Tarde's metaphysics as in effect 'an ontology of ontologies' (Lorenc 2012). This passage also neatly exemplifies the dynamic which Montebello describes as characteristic of the 'other metaphysics', in which knowledge begins from intimate experience and reaches out by a method of 'superior anthropomorphism' which "posits that we can find Man in all things, because he is of the same nature as all things, although he differs from them in degrees which will have to be explained by returning to the process of differentiation, to difference as it happens" (Montebello 2003:13-14). This is congruent with the way Montebello argues

the Other Metaphysics sets itself up on the threshold of science, in dialogue with it, showing an insatiable curiosity for this way of dissecting nature. Nevertheless, it knows that the ultimate condition for not disfiguring our own experience is to overcome the uniform explanation which these sciences impose on the world, an explanation which cancels, by definition, all internal experience." (2003: 75)

A threshold between science and metaphysics can be approached from two sides, however. Tarde certainly wrote at times as a metaphysician who had reservations about the ability of science to explain the totality of human (and other than human) experience. But Tarde also frequently took on the mantle of the social scientist, cautiously distinguishing his positive knowledge from his metaphysical

speculation. Note for instance the way the long passage I quoted above dramatises an epistemic break between human witnessing of human phenomena, and speculative hypothesising. Witness particularly the shift, in this respect, between the second and third paragraphs. We may speculate that atoms, say, encounter atomic society in the same way that we *witness* humans encounter human society. And indeed the whole of Monadology and Sociology is in effect 'bracketed' by two clear indications of its nature as a speculative exercise - it opens with the anti-Newtonian '*Hypotheses fingo*'<sup>17</sup>, and closes with a request to the reader to forgive "these metaphysical excesses".

Tarde elsewhere is even more forthright about the intended relation between his metaphysics and his sociology. Thus in a passage of *Two Elements* (chapter 2, this volume), which rehearses in abridged form the move made in the long quote above, Tarde notes

In Sociology, we have, in our unusually privileged position, an intimate knowledge both of the element in question (which is our individual consciousness) and of the composition in question (which is the combination of consciousnesses) and thus we cannot be made to accept mere words as realities. [...]

In the unique example for which the elements are known to us, we observe that they carry within themselves the entire explanation and the entire existence of their composition. What should we conclude from this? Applying a line of reasoning which is the total converse of our learned adversary's, we should infer that the same thing is true in every other case. And if I too dared to push this idea to its limit, if I ventured to suggest a possible reconception of universal science inspired by Sociology, perhaps I in turn would be led into arcane regions such as the Leibnizian realm of monads, upon which so many avenues of research seem to be converging. Perhaps I would be compelled to say that we must choose between Durkheim's ontological phantasmagoria and our neo-monadological hypothesis; that if the one is rejected then the other must be true. But I don't want to lose myself in such metaphysical flights of fancy. Let's stick to the factual coastline. (this chapter, p XX)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The reference is to Newton's reply to suggestions that he postulate a *cause* for gravity: *hypotheses non fingo* (I do not feign hypotheses). The original passage reads: "I have not as yet been able to discover the reason for these properties of gravity from phenomena, and I do not feign hypotheses. For whatever is not deduced from the phenomena must be called a hypothesis; and hypotheses, whether metaphysical or physical, or based on occult qualities, or mechanical, have no place in experimental philosophy." Newton, I. 1999 (1726). *The Principia: The mathematical principles of Natural Philosophy*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p943.

<sup>18</sup> Similarly, after referring to his monadological hypothesis in *Social Laws*, Tarde adds "Yet, after all, the metaphysical theory that I have just indicated is of slight importance in comparison with the exposé that precedes it, and I merely put forward this hypothesis in parenthesis, with the remark that, even if it be rejected, the more solid and more positive arguments presented above still

Most explicit in this regard, however, is Tarde's response to a critique by Espinas, who, pointing to the former's monadology, had accused Tarde of building a pseudo-sociological theory on the basis of broadly theological bases (Espinas 1901). Tarde's response is unambiguous. Noting that Espinas had dug this passage up from one of his (Tarde's) "youthful essays", Tarde insists that his monads were 'purely hypothetical':

I have never presented them as anything else, and I have taken care to expressly and repeatedly erect an absolute barrier, between this hypothesis and my social theories, which are founded on observed facts; a barrier which my learned opponent insists upon crossing despite all of my recommendations. (Tarde 1901)

Of course, one might choose to read Tarde's own assertions in this matter as post-hoc defenses in a climate increasingly hostile to metaphysical speculation in sociology. And even if they are taken at face value, none of the above should dissuade contemporary readers from boldly crossing that 'barrier' between metaphysics and sociology, as many contributors to this volume in fact do.

But what if we were to stay with those vehement assertions of distance for a moment? They become particularly interesting when read alongside some of Tarde's other and seemingly incompatible pronouncements on the relationship between philosophy and sociology. Thus Tarde's inaugural lecture in the chair of modern philosophy: 'Modern Science' he noted, 'can no more be separated from modern philosophy than a cloud can be separated from its sky' (in Fournier 2007:423). Why, if the two 'cannot be separated', seek to erect 'an absolute barrier'?

The title of Tarde's lecture might give the clue, focusing as it did on the 'mutual utility of scientific activity and philosophical effervescence'. One way of squaring this, in other words, might be through the image of a *partial* connection between sociology and philosophy (cf. Strathern 2002). Reflecting on another (inter)disciplinary debate a century later, Marilyn Strathern (1987) noted the productive nature of the 'awkward relationship' between feminism and anthropology, both perspectives irreducible to one another, both entangled within the same works and the same authors. Perhaps we could think in similar terms, of an irreducible, generative, tension in Tarde's work between the metaphysical hypothesis of a universal sociology, and the experiential specificity of a human sociology? We might at least pause to consider the possibility that the explicitly *partial* connection between metaphysics and sociology, and the refusal to reduce the one to the other, is part of what makes Tarde's work so productive and generative today<sup>19</sup>.

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remain standing." (Tarde 2000:98-99)

<sup>19</sup> Perhaps this is the counterpart, in Tarde's writing, to that powerful and slippery 'as if' in Durkheim's injunction to treat 'social facts as things' (cf. Desrosières, 1998).

## THE CHAPTERS

It should be clear by now that this book does not aim for a complete restoration of Tarde's house, but rather for a creative amplification of the tensions and internal divergences mapped in the previous sections. In order to avoid the symmetrical pitfalls of a hagiographic or uncritical 'revivalism' on the one hand, of retrospective demonization on the other, this volume makes a virtue of that which others might portray as a vice: it is intentionally partial, fragmentary and creative. It makes no claim to 'restituting the whole of [Tarde's] thought', and while it remains historically and critically aware, it also proposes a set of creative reinventions, extensions or continuations of Tardean method. Once we have eschewed the holistic project of saving or damning Tarde, of restoring his system or filing it away, we can begin to engage with the fragments of Tarde's work when and insofar as they are useful: either as evidence of a specific moment in the history of social theory, or as productive starting points for new theoretical and methodological developments.

Far from any mirage of completeness, then, or from any claim to the total revival of 'Tarde the Man and his System', this volume opens with two essays by Tarde (Monadology and Sociology (chapter 1) and The Two Elements of sociology (Chapter 2), which while characteristic and important, can only give a flavour of the breadth of his thought and interests. The remainder of the book consists of comments, rethinkings and appraisals of that wider corpus. There, Tarde alternates between being more and less than one. More than one, insofar as the second part of this volume deals with a hybrid: not Tarde per se, but rather Tarde-versus-Durkheim. It is in the contrast between Durkheim and Tarde that some of the most productive sparks were generated, and revisiting this clash today is less a case of reinventing a new outcome, as of casting new light on both contestants. Steering a course between the canonical account of Durkheim's victory over Tarde, and the over-enthusiasm of some neo-Tardean re-readings of the encounter, these chapters map productive disjunctures but also some unexpected convergences between the two sociologies. They also creatively take off from this contrast in new theoretical and methodological directions. Like Tarde himself, in other words, our starting point here is not the individual but that peculiar event, the interaction of two minds.

Chapter 3, entitled 'The Debate', is an imaginative rerun of the historic debate that took place between Gabriel Tarde and Emile Durkheim at the École des hautes études sociales in 1903, assembled entirely from direct quotations from published works by Tarde and Durkheim, which provides a lively introduction to the main areas of disagreement between the two sociologists: the relationship between sociology and other sciences, the role of comparison, the nature of imitation, the relationship between parts and wholes, the role of contingency and rule in history and science and the moral import of sociology. The chapter is the collective work of Eduardo Viana Vargas, Bruno Latour, Bruno Karsenti,

Frédérique Aït-Touati and Louise Salmon. In Chapter 4, Bruno Karsenti unpacks the notion of imitation as it is deployed in the sociologies of Durkheim and Tarde respectively, showing that this multiplex notion forms a 'shadow zone in which their thinking communicates'. The following chapter, by Karen Sykes, creatively shifts this discussion through an ethnographic reflection on Tardean imitation as against Maussian exchange, grounded in the now classic anthropological topos of the Malanggan mortuary sculptures, where the 'borrowing' of form becomes a means of eliciting new images and relationships.

In Chapter 6, David Toews confronts Tardean and Durkheimian social theory on the question of unsociability. Arguing that Tardean thought is not premised, as Durkheim's is, on the assumption of an a priori, unconscious sociability of the subject, Toews examines the possibility that a Tardean sociology would have to reject conceiving unsociability as anti-social, lacking in, or repressive of sociability. In an anthropological development on the theme of the social, grounded in an ethnography of global pentecostalist movements, Joel Robbins in Chapter 7 puts (neo-)Tardean thought to the test of the anthropological topic in which Durkheim located the key to the social itself: ritual.

Tim Jenkins, in Chapter 8, finds that while many of the differences between Tarde's and Durkheim's thinking are finessed away through time as each sociologist's work develops in dialogue with the other's, the question of comparison remains a stark splitting-point, and one with far-reaching implications. In Chapter 9, Alberto Corsín-Jiménez further unpacks the question of measurement, quantification and scale: by examining the role of (dis)proportion in Tardean and Durkheimian thought, alongside an ethnography of a management consultancy firm's attempts to design a proportionate 'knowledge environment' for an oil company, he interrogates both sociological and managerial attempts to make knowledge and the social take a commensurable form.

In Chapter 10, the final chapter of Part II, Penny Harvey and Soumya Venkatesan take the Tarde-Durkheim contrast as a springboard for an examination of the power and limits of the relational constitution of entities. Focusing on two ethnographic examples of craft practice (the making and consecration of stone images as gods in a Tamil Hindu temple in South India, and the elaboration of appropriate substance from which to build a road through the Andean mountains and Amazonian forests of Peru), they invoke a Tardean move away from meaning and stability towards emergence and movement, and what Thrift (2007) has termed an 'ethics of craftsmanship' oriented towards open-ended futures and the realization of potential rather than proper (normative, established) form. Yet they also draw attention to the importance of disassociating, of 'cutting the network' as a means of imparting a contingent stability to the outcomes of the craftsman's efforts.

In the second part of the book, Tarde emerges as 'less than one', through fragments of Tardean method and theory reclaimed, reread and reconfigured partly for what they can tell us about Tarde, but partly also for the light they can shed on current problems in sociology, anthropology and political economy. In



Chapter 11, Bruno Latour kick-starts this exploration by reassembling Tardean method in light of the new digital terrains available to contemporary social science. Tarde, it emerges, was 'one century ahead of his time because he had anticipated a quality of connection and traceability necessary for good statistics which was totally unavailable in 1900' (Latour, this volume, p.XX). For Latour, the new traceability of the social retrospectively vindicates the scientific aspirations of Gabriel Tarde; he in turn reaches out over the century to provide a methodology that reveals the supposed qualitative/ quantitative rift within social science, as no more than an effect of poor data.

In the following chapter, Emmanuel Didier further deploys Tarde's very particular account of a dynamic statistics which lay at the heart of his sociology of movement, transformation and change. Andrew Barry (Chapter 13) also puts the emphasis on Tarde's methodology, rather than on his metaphysics. He extends the discussion of Tardean statistics by showing Tarde's debt to the experimental phonetics of the Abbé Rousselot, whose attention to infinitesimal variation became one of the models of Tarde's experimental micro-sociology of events. As noted above, Barry warns against any assumption that this Tardean methodology implied a commitment to a micro-politics of radical heterogeneity – however, he notes that we can recover from a careful study of Tarde some crucial points concerning the interplay of social research and the political. Taking up a similar methodological trail, James Leach asks in Chapter 14 what might happen to a Tardean sociology of events in the specific context of anthropological knowledge practices, since these are centrally concerned with events with which the ethnographer can choose to engage (or from which s/he can attempt to disengage). Contrasting different anthropological approaches to 'cargo cults' in Papua New Guinea, Leach uses Tarde to ask how anthropologists 'gather and make knowledge in the presence of others – not as representatives of another culture, but as people with interests as well'. Drawing a different lesson in anthropological method from a different part of Tarde's corpus, Eduardo Vargas (Chapter 15) finds in Tarde's social monadology the key to an approach to drug use which asks what and not why questions, questions which do not predetermine which answers are admissible.

In Chapter 16, Georgina Born proposes an extension of Tardean analytics to history and anthropology, drawing upon Tarde's interest in what she terms the 'elementary structures of process'. Born reconsiders Tarde's relational triad of imitation, opposition and invention, noting its productive collapsing of the distinction between the spatial and temporal dynamics of the social. Confronting Tarde's social theory with ethnographic accounts of media and consultancy industries, she suggests that an extended and critically reformulated Tardean approach would provide a productive counterpoint to some of the recent recensions of vitalism in social theory. In Chapter 17, Nigel Thrift formalizes and builds upon Tarde's interweaving of biological and social explanation, in which he sees an early stage in the crafting of what he terms a 'political economy of propensity'. Finally, in Chapter 18, Bruno Latour returns to a broader reconsideration of the way in which Tarde's focus on 'possession' forces us to reimagine what is at stake in classic

conceptualisations of social harmony.

In her afterword, Marilyn Strathern proceeds to a deft balancing-out of the 'traps' set by Durkheim and Tarde, respectively, for contemporary social science: if the latter allows us to do away with the individual-society apparatus that has become the hallmark of the former's sociological legacy, he in turn springs on us the trap of detail and the infinitesimal, as though things could be singular, particular, infinitesimal on their own. More than a balancing act, Strathern's comment itself acts as a ferment, the productive surplus that emerges – as Tarde himself might have wished it – from the encounter of two different theoretical worlds.

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As noted above, then, this book is different in inspiration from the last two major attempts to revive Tardean sociology: unlike Milet or Clark, our aim is not here to outline Tarde's system as a coherent self-contained thing; rather, it is to launch a discussion. The aim of the volume, in other words, is not to limit the possibilities of interpretation of Tarde's work, but, on the contrary, to open and multiply them. In this Tardean spirit, as my parting shot, I will offer a series of traces, which each reader can follow in order to engage directly with Tarde's work, navigate its hidden gems and its potential pitfalls, its coherences and contingencies. Unlike Milet or Clark, we have the advantage of the Internet (Tarde's vindication?). Much of Tarde's corpus is now freely available, in French, on the website of the University of Quebec ([http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/tarde\\_gabriel/tarde\\_gabriel.html](http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/tarde_gabriel/tarde_gabriel.html)). An exhaustive bibliography was recently assembled by a doctoral student, Pierre-Camille Podvin, and is available online, alongside an extensive bibliography of works about Tarde (<http://bibliographietarde.blogspot.com/search/label/Accueil>). And so, dear reader, read on!

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