12 Intervening with the social?

Ethnographic practice and Tarde's image of relations between subjects

James Leach

> So many other entities are now knocking on the door of our collectives. Is it absurd to want to retool our disciplines to become sensitive again to the noise they make and to try to find a place for them?
>
> (Latour 2005)

How would we think of the practices of ethnographic fieldwork if we were to accept the Tardian premise of 'mutual possession', 'the transmission of something internal and mental, which passes from one to other of the two subjects' (Tarde 2008 [1899]: 20)? Might we need to elide one of the foundations of Durkheimian sociology in our practice of ethnography? That is, does the assumption of a super-organic entity, an over-arching, determining structure of social and conceptual relations (which Tarde argued against) shape our position as ethnographers in a manner whereby not only do we construct culture in order to explain what we see to ourselves (Wagner 1975), but misperceive the actions and requests of our informants as representative of this abstraction, rather than their perception of our relationship?

Early in *The Social Laws*, Tarde writes:

> Sooner or later, one must open his eyes to the evidence, and recognize that the genius of a people or race, 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; …
>
> (Tarde 2008 [1899]: 27)

Working loosely with Tarde's idea (Bateson 1972: 82–6) I look to Tarde's work as impetus in thinking through ethnographic practice and the relationships that constitute anthropological method. What is the alternative to an 'impersonal synthesis' made abstract through the concept of society or culture, one which does approach what is 'real, effective, and ever in activity'?

To this end, and in an exploratory mode, I follow Andrew Barry (2005) in asking
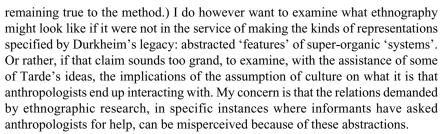
about 'events that matter' (see also Strathern 1990), with the intention of understanding 'matter' not as merely that which causes change (as Tarde may be read), but as that which causes change which is desired, that has recognized value for those involved as subjects. As Tarde says 'The relation of one mind with another mind is, in fact, a distinctive event in the life of each' (Tarde 1999: 20). Tarde's emphasis on micro-interactions, and on tracing change to specific moments in relationships is a spur to ask how we can understand the ethnographer's role with informants as more than just that of collecting data about an entity beyond any of them. This chapter then is an attempt to think about the value of the ethnographic method for its subjects in relation to its users, its effects as an encounter for the people concerned that is not premised on the notion of culture contact or system collision, but specific meetings between specific people.

Attention to the ethnographic method, and to the process of abstraction through distance and inscription is (of course) a perennial one for social anthropology (e.g. Fabian 1983). Recently there have been several convincing arguments for the necessity of distance from one's informants, building on the origin points of this method. David Mosse (2006) writing of the reactions of his informants (people working for international development agencies) tells us that the integrity of anthropological knowledge is given by the fact that we do not have informants with us as we write. His concern follows from an explicit recognition of the receding possibility for other kinds of (geographical/temporal) distance, particularly when studying powerful institutions and groups close at hand. As he writes, 'as other boundaries fade, it is often the detachment of writing that has become the primary mode of exit' (937). And 'exit' is necessary for ethnography as such to happen at all; 'anthropologists have to negotiate a space for their involvement to be more ethnographic and resist institutional pressures' (941). The outcomes of these analytic moments in ethnographic practice are generalized as a result. They are precisely *not* about particular people, or the effects of particular relationships and projects. Rather, '[t]he ethnography explains all these [pressures/contradictions] as general and inherent features of the system of international aid not as failings of one particular project'. To achieve this 'ultimately' requires 'the re-affirmation of the Malinowskian boundary between field and desk' (948).

It was the shock of the rejection of his 'well made' analysis by his informants that caused Mosse to ask 'who anthropological knowledge is for', and examine its construction in contemporary conditions of practice. Mosse's answers come down to the fact that ethnography becomes analysis outside relations with informants by necessity, and that this involves translating personal, real relations with people into knowledge about the wider conditions and systems in which they find themselves. The move is to make 'relationships become evidence' according to Hastrup (2003), in the service of making representations. Mosse agrees that uncomfortable relations with the subjects of ethnography are an almost inevitable outcome as they try to 'unpack' this evidence back into relationships (Mosse 2006: 951).

It is not that I disagree with Mosse's argument, which is a nuanced and brilliantly realized one in defence of the classical separation of responsibility which has made the discipline possible after Durkheim. (Responsibility is best realized through

remaining true to the method.) I do however want to examine what ethnography might look like if it were not in the service of making the kinds of representations specified by Durkheim's legacy: abstracted 'features' of super-organic 'systems'. Or rather, if that claim sounds too grand, to examine, with the assistance of some of Tarde's ideas, the implications of the assumption of culture on what it is that anthropologists end up interacting with. My concern is that the relations demanded by ethnographic research, in specific instances where informants have asked anthropologists for help, can be misperceived because of these abstractions.

I start from the idea that we 'invent' culture while in the field to make sense of our experiences, and the now well-established argument that the legacy of Durkheimian sociological thought, because of its emphasis on the super-organic creation that is society or culture, has been a hindrance (as well as a necessity) to the impetus to understand other's worlds in their own terms (see e.g. Wagner 1975: 32–3 and passim, Strathern 1996 [1989]). And that the work that the notion 'society' does in shaping Euro-American thinking needs to be part of our investigation, not its guiding and shaping force (Strathern 1988; Latour 2005). In a very Durkheimian manner, the concept of a super-organic entity has on the one hand been dictated by some very specific historical conditions, the outcome of a particular (if expansive and colonizing) life world, and, in turn, the concept has dictated how we can come to think about difference (Durkheim 1915: 17–20).[1] Fundamentally, it leaves anthropologists in the position of imagining their relations to be to an abstract entity (Wagner 1975) rather than to other people (Strathern 1990, Strathern 1991). That is, we misapprehend data and interactions as to do with our own categories, and thereby miss the possibility of developing our theory and understanding in relation to other categories based on rather different principles.[2]

In seeming contrast, Barry writes that, 'one could say that Tarde conceives of empirical research itself as a form of inventive activity, one which should never merely confirm what one knows already, but makes a difference'. This could be read in several ways. Perhaps what Barry means is that for Tarde, sociologists should intervene through making information available. This information and the resultant understanding of emergent patterns is not just reporting, but suggestive of modes and possibilities for interventions, thereby tracking and understanding the changes that continually occur in social life (cf. Latour 2005).

But what would a more direct interpretation look like? As we know, the fact of intervention by an ethnographer in the field has only very occasionally been seen in a positive light. And that is a consequence of the way the entry into others' lives has been conceived; that societies and cultures are whole entities, internally consistent and coherent, subject to generalized change, change that at this level is conceived of most easily as loss (of the integrity of meaning) once elements of a more powerful or technologically expansive system come into contact with it. While Tarde is arguing for a sociology that intervenes, anthropology has had to live with a methodology of intervention, which undermines the integrity of its own explanatory abstractions.

The engagement with Tarde then becomes a real chance to grapple with a long-standing puzzle, one that was forcefully brought to my attention while

undertaking long term fieldwork on the north coast of Papua New Guinea. That puzzle is not the puzzle of angst ridden-reflexivity of the colonial or neo-colonial anthropologist. As I will outline, it has remained though fieldwork in other contexts as well. And that puzzle is how one maintains integrity as a social scientist, with the aim of producing knowledge for the academy, having a disinterested, if you like, approach to the phenomena under study, and yet providing something of value for the people one works with and among (an 'interested' position) that does not assume that the contribution to overall public human understanding will satisfy everyone. I am taking as a given that what we hold steady in the different ethnographic relationships we have is this integrity. Put simply, I argue that the knowledge we produce should hold some interest and value not just for ourselves, but for those whose lives we have become involved in. That may not be best served by the Durkheimian legacy.

Tarde was certainly interested in the aspirations and values of the people sociologists study. His focus on imitation and repetition that might have effects in social life revolved around the aims people have: Tarde writes:
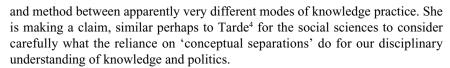
successful imitations are numerous indeed, but how few are they in comparison with those which are still unrealised objects of desire. So-called popular wishes, the aspirations of a small town, for example, or of a single class, are composed exclusively, at a given moment, which, unfortunately, cannot at the same time be realised to ape all particulars of some richer town or superior class (Tarde 1903: 107).

A mixture in other words, of desire to imitate and achieve the same status, inevitably modified by circumstance and history.

Reading this quotation from Tarde, I was put in mind of those extraordinary imitations-cum-innovations that have commonly been called cargo cults in the South Pacific. I am also minded to acknowledge that the ethnographers in two cases I know well (one because it is my own experience that is in question, the other because of a recent film which engages the issue in a very evocative manner) are not observing but participating in the social relations of these phenomena's emergence and development.

I refer here to the work of Andrew Lattas among the Pomio Kiving in West New Britain, and my own fieldwork in Reite on the Rai Coast, both in Papua New Guinea. In my own case, and I suspect in the case of Lattas (more than he admits to in the film at least), the 'aspirations of a small group' are directed through the ethnographer themselves. The imitations and innovations are to have their effect through him. Ethnography is not observation in such instances, but elicitation of a form for social action. As Paul Ricoeur, Marilyn Strathern and James Weiner among others pointed out some time ago, and Hastrup has recently reiterated (2003) it is through social relations that we study social relations.[3] Our subject is also our tool, as Strathern puts it. In other words, I take from Tarde a rejection of the position that 'social scientists tend to stand aloof from events, preferring to analyse what is common to society as a whole, or understand events in what are thought to be more general social processes' (Barry 2005: 8). As Barbara Bodenhorn has recently argued (2008) the idea of ontological separations between world views is challenged in practices whereby relations emphasize the mutuality of interest

and method between apparently very different modes of knowledge practice. She is making a claim, similar perhaps to Tarde[4] for the social sciences to consider carefully what the reliance on 'conceptual separations' do for our disciplinary understanding of knowledge and politics.

Eliciting data and shouldering burdens

A large amount of my time on the Rai Coast of Papua New Guinea was spent in the negotiation and renegotiation of the effects and potentials of my presence. It became very uncomfortable at times. From the very outset of fieldwork, it was clear that, for some members of the villages that welcomed me, there was a hope that my presence might be the recognition they felt they had long deserved. Closely associated with what became known as the Yali movement (Lawrence 1964) these villages have lived with the reputation of being *kago kalt* since the 1940s. Australian colonial officers were still complaining in their reports in the late 1960s that these people had no cash crops and no interest in starting any business enterprise because they considered such activities distractions from the 'work' of imitation: of ritually complex, local versions of Western bureaucratic organization.

Kiap, an old man whose enthusiasm for my presence in the village had been a major factor in my choice of field site,[5] for example, never tired of telling me that Reite deserved recognition as the source of the power which brought national independence to Papua New Guinea in 1975. The fact of their power and centrality had been acknowledged, he told me, by the District Administrator in the 1950s. As a younger man, Kiap had been arrested and threatened with prison for involvement in the meetings and ceremonies organized by the local leader, Yali. Kiap had been released, he said, because of the position of Reite village at the very base of the mountain (Apirela) which dominates that area of the Rai Coast. Having heard the story so often, I can repeat by rote what the district officer is said to have said to Kiap on releasing him from gaol: [Y]ou are the base/foundation of Apirela. You must go back to your village and work for change.' Kiap took this as both an acknowledgement of his vital and powerful position, and of his right to lead others in the movement for development and independence.

Kiap felt that the work he had done ever since – organizing what are called *lo bos* meetings,[6] had not been acknowledged. In addition, he felt that his work had not brought the change he had felt was promised by the District officer either. My arrival presaged another flurry of activity to realize this potential. Kiap was an old though still vigorous and energetic man. My arrival, as he kept saying, was the reason he would undertake *laswok* (the final work), the final piece of ritual organization which would bring about the change to *ful independens* (full independence) so long desired.

Most ethnographers must surely work with some version of this difficulty (see Webster 1982), with negotiating perceptions of their use or aims. I found other people in the village who had, in my terms, more realistic expectations of what my presence and work could bring. It turned out that these people were more careful and detailed in their engagements with my questions and confusions as well. In

the end, I came to actively avoid *lo bos* meetings, as I had come to understand that although I could participate and record what was occurring there, the (to me) confused and confusing elements of those activities were unlikely to be resolved, as my presence, thus implicit endorsement, was a varying element in their continuation.

In one instance, during a three-month return visit I paid to Reite five years after my initial fieldwork, things came to a head. Kiap was impatient. Very. He organized a large 'last work' meeting in a neighbouring village where he had many affinal kin. I demurred at the invitation to attend, but found myself forced to make the trip by a delegation who said they would not leave the house in which I was staying until I came along with them. They had worked hard to prepare for this, and I was not going to refuse them what was their due. It was a nerve-wracking experience, made more so by the long lines of people waiting for my arrival. Many of them smiled, and all shook my hand, standing in lines to do so. As we shook hands, each and every one pressed coins into my palm. I unwillingly gathered a large amount of small denomination coins before being led to a central, elaborately decorated platform from where I was told to address the meeting.

I had been in such situations before, and stuck to my script: I was a student who was there, and had been accepted there, to record *kastom* (local ancestral knowledge and practices), to write down for people in the future and people outside Papua New Guinea things about the way of life and the history of people there. I probably said something about how we can learn from each other, and it was important that people in other parts of the world knew of the beautiful and clever things people on the Rai Coast do.

There was obvious disappointment. In fact, there were some rather demanding and tough questions: how would I use the coins I had just collected to 'open the path' for radical change in their lives to occur? I was told that the valuables I had been given were not for me, but for me to give to The Queen (Papua New Guinea is a Commonwealth country), from whom they expected a return, and so forth. Then, in one of the few instances where I have been happy to be dismissed as useless in public, a man stood up and made a speech to the effect that the audience were not listening to what I had said; that I was a student there to record *kastom*, nothing more. They were wasting their time. I had no power or influence.

'Just a student' sent to record kastom let me off the hook in one sense. (There was a danger, ever present in these movements, of secondary elaboration going on here as well of course – I was not in a position of enough power or authority to have the desired effect. They were wasting their time with *me* but may not be with someone else, etc.). But it did suggest that, for the purposes these 400 people had been brought together, I was useless.

In the course of my extended, ongoing and happy presence in those villages, I made this emergent understanding of my uselessness in this sphere my own, as it were, by never eliciting information on the *lo bos* activities, avoiding the meetings when I could, and thus not encouraging my association, or the association of some hopes of that movement, with my work. My explanations to myself at the time and since have been focused on the fact that the premises on which the actions were occurring were misguided.

Eliciting culture

The very language of my explanation until now has been indicative of a notion of cultural misunderstanding at the foundation of what I was observing. To caricature the position would be to write, 'these movements were bound to fail, and encouraging them by my interest and questioning would only serve to build up an expectation that the "right" approach to me might yield spectacular results'. In this, I was perhaps not taking enough account of the relationship I had to Kiap. (I will come back to this.) Another strategy seems to be to take more interest, however, to gather information on what is occurring. To focus on it, as a chance to focus attention on the meeting of cosmological worlds.

In a recent highly acclaimed ethnographic film, Garry Kildea and Andrea Simon teamed up with Andrew Lattas, an Australian anthropologist who has written extensively on a social movement usually termed cargo cult in New Britain, an island in Papua New Guinea adjacent to the Rai Coast. The film is called *Koriam's Law and the Dead Who Govern* (Kildea & Simon 2005). The film is brilliant, the anthropological analysis it contains first rate, and the evocation of the situation true to my own experiences of being in the field. Although I take elements of the film as material for my argument here, I do so in appreciation of its many successes (described by Deger 2007)

Koriam's Law takes as its subject how members of the Pomio Kivung movement perceive the material inequalities between themselves and white people. The members of this political and religious movement believe that both the church and the government of their region hide the knowledge that has led to the whites' power and technology. Thus, they seek to uncover the knowledge that lead to the whites' standard of living. Part of this involves harnessing money, and bureaucratic practices, to rituals that their charismatic leaders outlined. Activities include confession and attempts to undo the ancestral fault that subjugated them to the whites.

Note how, so far, the explanation is about how Pomio people attempt to use relationships to further their aims. It is *our* tendency to translate this into aspects of 'cultures' and meetings between them. Using the vocabulary of culture then, the Kivung movement marries traditional images of power (the dead) with new images of white power: money and the tools of bureaucracy. The ultimate aim in doing so is to develop their own 'central government', which consists of Koriam and the deceased (Lattas 2006). Money is used to atone for sins. In this the activities are very similar to those of *lo bos*. As interpreters, we are drawn to see these moments as imitations, but specifically as imitations of *cultural practices* adopted as symbols empty of any *real* power.

Tarde, however, offers us a different notion of imitation, as Karsenti (this volume) points out. Tarde insists, against Durkheim, on the fact that imitations go from the inner to the outer, from the core to the surface, and not the other way round. He applies this principle to religion and ritual, for instance, in his *Laws of Iimitation* (Tarde 1903 ch. 6.1), in which he claims that in cases of inter-faith contact, people of different faiths tend to imitate each other's beliefs *before* they imitate each other's rituals, just as Renaissance Italians, he claims, embraced the

spirit of classical paganism before they took on its outer artistic and other forms. This reaffirms the more general point that imitation goes from the heart of things to the outer trappings, because imitation for Tarde is inter-subjectivity and not just mechanical reproduction.
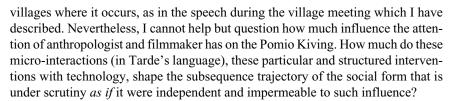
In Pomio Kiving, sins are confessed in front of a bottle in the village square and money is cast into the bottle. More prosaically, the power of money is validated in the fact that it is bribes from the movement that stop the government and the church from intervening with and preventing their practices of 'feeding the dead'. 'Money protects us', claims the main protagonist of the film, 'it shields us while we contact the dead'. In an articulation which echoes complaints familiar to me from Reite he tells us: 'They come and tell us we should plant [tea, coffee, coconuts] … and if we do that we'll get change … a better life and change. But though we do this we just grow old and die. We have the same problems and worries we had before whites came.'

The filmmakers are concerned to be 'reflexive'. That is, they show the presence of the anthropologist, we hear him asking questions, see him sweaty and flumoxed at times, and so forth. Yet there is a lack of acknowledgement, in the film at least, of the effect that the presence of the anthropologist, and then, anthropologist and filmmakers, may be having on the scenes they are capturing. As an old hand, as it were, at such an enterprise, I cannot help seeing the remarkably clean and neat villages shown as conscious effort on the part of villagers in response to the outside presence. I cannot help but imagine that people put more money and more effort into their confessions and payments to the dead with the presence of not only white people (representatives of the dead), but also of a piece of technology (the camera) directly associated with reporting on their activities to others who are not present, who maybe 'govern'.

There is a very poignant moment in the film where an old woman who has been close to the anthropologist for many years, has nurtured and fed him, and whose husband has recently died, questions Andrew about when he is going to give them what they have been asking for, for so long. When, she asks, will he reveal the secrets of the white people and allow her some respite from all the hard work of care, feeding, ritual and so forth, which she has put in all her life? She cries, thinking on all this work and how she is still waiting for the results now her body is old and broken and her life nearly at an end. Andrew, clearly moved by her emotion, gets up and leaves the scene without answering. Now, this is my own interpretation based on my own experiences and reactions, but I think he leaves because he cannot answer her question, cannot and could not give her what she has come to expect white people to possess.

There are differences between *lo bos* activities on the Rai Coast and Pomio Kiving in New Britain. Pomio Kiviung is well established. It has many followers and supporters. The film even shows national politicians attending Pomio Kiving ceremonies in order to gather political support at election time. (The commentary in the film makes clear that they do not go anywhere near these meetings when they are not canvassing for that support!) *Lo bos* meetings and agendas are faltering, small affairs in comparison. *Lo bos* ideas meet internal resistance in the

villages where it occurs, as in the speech during the village meeting which I have described. Nevertheless, I cannot help but question how much influence the attention of anthropologist and filmmaker has on the Pomio Kiving. How much do these micro-interactions (in Tarde's language), these particular and structured interventions with technology, shape the subsequence trajectory of the social form that is under scrutiny *as if* it were independent and impermeable to such influence?

Other contexts for ethnography: other demands for influence

Now Tarde may have been sympathetic to my intuition here. There is something in Lattas's approach that *has to* obviate the possibility that he is eliciting what he sees. And my suggestion is that it is the generalization 'culture', something which Tarde saw as too vague to be useful to sociology, which is the stumbling block. Tarde's answer was to focus on highly detailed studies of minute interactions over time. I am going to ask the reader to follow me to another ethnographic context: one where concerns over having ethnographic relationships, and an analysis based upon them shaped by generalizations, were prominent for me.

A few years ago, a PhD student along with a postdoctoral researcher and myself were commissioned by the European Commission to investigate gender imbalance among Free/Libre and Open Source software (F/LOSS) designers in Europe.[7] Starting from the remarkable fact that in 2001/2, 98 per cent of these software engineers were male, the Commission asked us for an analysis of the phenomenon, and policy recommendations for correcting what they saw as a problematic imbalance. This concern picked up on emergent support groups within F/LOSS for women. Given the ideology of *freedom* which is central to the formation of these production focused groups, and the contexts in which F/LOSS is written, the numbers of women seemed to require explanation (Leach 2009). While the numbers of women in computer science generally is lower than that of men (with 72 per cent of coders who work in proprietary software contexts being male [National Science Foundation 2004] the figures in F/LOSS were remarkable enough to concern those who also wished to promote it as a progressive mode of software production.

The fieldwork for this research was carried out in major European cities, as well of course as in the online discussion groups and forums of software projects themselves. One immediately obvious element was the highly stereotyped views of gender attributes and capacities that emerged in informants statements, whether to us, or among interactions that had nothing to do with our study. People in the developer groups and surrounding them had ideas about gender which appeared to account for the division of labour within the groups. For example, men were supposedly correctly engaged in the edgy, dangerous and risky work of actually making new functions and operations though writing the code while women were in the softer, socializing roles of translation of this technical material into more user friendly formats (Nafus forthcoming; Nafus et al. 2006). They were involved in the documentation. Furthermore, direct questioning about gender produced stark stereotypes: women are more socially minded than men. Men are more aggressive. Women have differently structured brains because of evolutionary pressures on
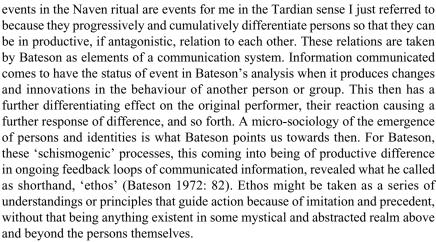
them to multi-task rather than relentlessly pursue a single goal, and so forth. Men were continually cast in the role of making technology work while women were cast as negotiators, as translators, making accessible the valuable creation of the men. We also came across pervasive ideas of 'geeki-ness'. Men in the communities often described themselves, without regret, as poor in social situations. In conducting their work on the projects, they did not see the value of politeness or of consideration of other people's feelings.

OK, so this is all very stereotypical. Clearly, these views and behaviours were part of the data, not part of the explanation of that data. The challenge for us became whether we could produce an analysis which avoided saying 'the reason for so few women in F/LOSS is because these perceptions are inevitable and true (I think they are not) or, that stereotypical, societal images of gender roles direct participants into behaviour which is off-putting to women'. That also seemed unsatisfactory. The resultant policy advice (why we undertook the study) would have to be 'change the culture in which these stereotypes have currency'. I felt that level of abstraction was useless. What we actually needed to try to describe was how stereotypes about gender roles were being made and remade in particular social and technical endeavours. To that end, micro-observations about actual technical activities and their framing in emergent relations of prestige, hierarchy, power and so forth in the developer communities seemed vital (see Holbraad & Pedersen 2009).

I would be hard pushed to claim we were deliberately pursuing a Tardian ethnographic approach here. The ethnography was not *that* well observed, or *that* detailed, but it was also not a straightforwardly Durkheimian approach either. Rather than find social categories that explain behaviour, leaving little chance of changing or influencing them, we looked at the everyday minute interactions in which imitation played a large role – imitation by newer and less well-known programmers of the behaviours and attitudes of prominent ones, the emphasis on the centrality of the technical procedure, not the social context of that procedure, and so on. Rather, then, than look to the super-individual entity 'gender role stereotype' we became interested in the actual emergence and change in gender positions and roles as they came into being alongside significant software objects. As Barry says of Tarde, 'the contingent historical formation of social institutions, galaxies and landscapes could only be understood as a product of a whole series of interactions' (Barry 2005). As I mentioned above, there is clearly this element latent in Tarde's sociological project, a sociology of events, a sociology of the minor modifications and innovations that make a difference in the subsequent trajectory, the social form.

In his seminal and widely read 1936 book *Naven*, Gregory Bateson describes the progressive differentiation of persons from one another through individual events among Iatmul people from the Sepik River region of Papua New Guinea. He noted early on that this was a society with no chieftainship, and thus structural positions were necessarily emergent from individual actions with regard to specific other persons. The Naven ritual complex refers to a series of acts of submission by a mother's brother to their sister's child, in recognition of the achievements of the later (Bateson 1958 [1936]). These acts are elicited by achievement, by progressing through various elements of initiation, or growth and success. The

events in the Naven ritual are events for me in the Tardian sense I just referred to because they progressively and cumulatively differentiate persons so that they can be in productive, if antagonistic, relation to each other. These relations are taken by Bateson as elements of a communication system. Information communicated comes to have the status of event in Bateson's analysis when it produces changes and innovations in the behaviour of another person or group. This then has a further differentiating effect on the original performer, their reaction causing a further response of difference, and so forth. A micro-sociology of the emergence of persons and identities is what Bateson points us towards then. For Bateson, these 'schismogenic' processes, this coming into being of productive difference in ongoing feedback loops of communicated information, revealed what he called as shorthand, 'ethos' (Bateson 1972: 82). Ethos might be taken as a series of understandings or principles that guide action because of imitation and precedent, without that being anything existent in some mystical and abstracted realm above and beyond the persons themselves.

A similar notion was helpful in the research for the European Commission on F/LOSS producers and took us back to relationships in the field as the most significant aspect of our study. We actually made an intervention in that case. We wrote a report on the findings and analysis. And we finished it up with policy recommendations: how one might make small interventions that would change the overall pattern of the communities emergent form so that more women were represented at the highest levels. But that was not the end of the matter. In response to requests from F/LOSS participants we invited the most influential software developers we could find to a meeting to discuss and disseminate our findings and recommendations. It was easy in a way Tarde would have recognized perhaps, as one of the researchers on the project was a free software developer herself. She was in fact already feeding back ideas and suggestions through the specific contacts and relationships she had – not to serve our agenda – but because she found them interesting or pertinent for those interactions.

The workshop we held was a success in so far as we found agreement in general that the picture of the community that emerged from our work was accurate, and also, that we had hit on some of the behaviours being imitated in the actions of aspirant developers, which might be having disproportionate effects on gender balance. One response was particularly telling: in response to a question as to how our research would be perceived by the developers, after making what could only have been seen as some critical observations, one developer replied, 'Oh, don't worry about that. We will take this work and promote it and defend it. It is useful for us, and it is our community!'

All this leads me to wonder whether, for Tarde to be helpful in thinking though what ethnography is and does, we might need to consider two levels of 'event': that is, events which perpetuate, through continual minor replication or innovation, a wider 'ethos' formation, and in contrast, events which come to cause a change of direction or understanding. With Tarde, there is no need to posit a system which the actors may be 'inside' or 'outside' of, a tempting thought habit, but one which makes for problems.

What then of the innovation that is the presence of and engagement with the ethnographer in Papua New Guinea? What Tarde lets us see clearly is that without an imagined culture or abstraction in place which could be disrupted by the seismic shock of contact with another similarly sized and weighty system, the ethnographer's presence produces events – micro-moments of replication and differentiation, ideas and suggestions, associations, and so forth which may well be innovations. But that these (a few emails, a report, a few conversations, presence at a *lo bos* meeting, holding a workshop in Cambridge for software developers) may or may not be events that matter, events that have an influence on the future trajectory of the social form or ethos.[8]

For Tarde, the elementary social fact is inter-subjectivity, and the realization of each individual in relation to that fact:
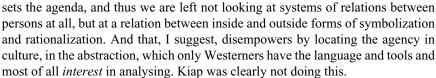
The relation of one mind with another is, in fact, a distinctive event in the life of each; it is absolutely different from all their relations with the rest of the universe, giving rise to certain most unexpected states of mind, that cannot be explained at all according to the laws of physiological psychology. This relation between a subject and an object which is itself a subject – and not a perception in no way resembling the thing perceived – will not allow the idealistic sceptic to call in question the reality of the latter; on the contrary, it means that we experience the sensation of a sentient thing, the volition of a conating thing, and the belief in a believing thing, – the perception, in short, of a personality in which the perceiving personality is reflected, and which the latter cannot deny without denying itself. This consciousness of a consciousness is the inconcussum quid which Descartes sought, and which the individual Self could not give him. Moreover, this unique relation is not a physical impulse given or received, nor is it the transmission of motor energy from the subject to an inanimate object or vice versa, according as we are dealing with an active or passive state; it is rather the transmission of something internal and mental, which passes from one to other of the two subjects, and that, curiously enough, without being lost or in the slightest degree diminished in the first. (Tarde 1899: 19–20)

Culture and rationality

The manifest advantage of allowing the abstraction of system, of 'cultures' meeting to explain the phenomenon of cargo cults is to level the playing field between people like Kiap and myself by acknowledging that we are both subject to irrational interpretations of the world driven by our cultural categories. And, of course, that is the main message of Lattas and Kildea's moving film. They go out of their way to show that we are all operating under cosmological assumptions and beliefs which mask other realities. The film makes us realize that we are all irrational in that we are governed by culture and cosmology. They make it explicit. The Catholic priest in Pomio is shown undertaking rituals and saying things which seem wholly incredible. The message is: we all operate in cosmologies, and are driven by the wide belief systems that we call culture. Cargo then is always seen as a meeting of two cultures, and we are reminded of our own because of the very fact of the apparent irrationality of the other. In many anthropological studies, this approach

sets the agenda, and thus we are left not looking at systems of relations between persons at all, but at a relation between inside and outside forms of symbolization and rationalization. And that, I suggest, disempowers by locating the agency in culture, in the abstraction, which only Westerners have the language and tools and most of all *interest* in analysing. Kiap was clearly not doing this.

Back to Tarde then: he says we must focus on the moments of imitation and difference in social relations. Not starting with the category 'culture', or its emergent corollary (cargo cult). This gives us a chance to start from the relationship in which we are enmeshed when we think about these experiences of ethnographic knowledge making. In a relational frame such as Tarde's there is room to examine exactly what it is that people are doing in their imitations and differences from one another, and how they draw relations such as those to the ethnographer into those projects. Perhaps personal emergence and influence is the real issue in Pomio Kivung and *Lo bos*, not the acquisition of material wealth through symbolic manipulation (see Hirsch 2001); that I was uncomfortable on that trip to Kiap's affinal village not because I was being dragged into an irrational cultural efflorescence that threatened the Rai Coast with irrationality writ large, but because I was being dragged into representing the desire of Kiap to make himself prominent through showing effective organization of me to the detriment of other people. In other words, missing the ethnographic engagement, missing the relationship in which these matters occur, is to misguidedly focus on culture as explanation and miss the scale of what is occurring, a scale of principles of effective action and the emergence of differentiated persons as the key to people's motivations.

Working with Tarde, with the focus on micro-interactions as a refinement of large abstractions, helps us to understand the micro-relations of fieldwork and influence, value and so forth, in a new (old) way. These moments are not about culture, but about people, and about how people change and develop, through their relations to others, be those anthropologists or kinsmen.

Conclusion

Why am I worried by Lattas's approach (and see Jebens 2002)? Because I think it will encourage activity that is a waste of time, that will not achieve the stated desired ends, and so forth. Who can say if I am correct in that thought? What I can say is I would not undertake that study in Reite (Leach 2003: Preface). It seems that such a thing would be far too likely to be an event in Tardian terms.

In her book on scale and anthropological knowledge, *Partial Connections*, Strathern (1991) points out that anthropological authority has always been premised on a scale shift: the anthropologist has a one-to-one relationship with each informant, but also a one-to one relationship to 'the whole culture' which that informant could never have. The observation was in a sense prefigured by Tarde in *Monadologie et sociologie*, where he made a critical distinction between 'mutual possession', that which flows from and in social relations between subjects regarded as subjects, and 'unilateral possession', the possession or apprehension of a whole social world from without.

> When I enter into verbal communication with one or more of my fellows, […] 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
>
> (Tarde 1895 [1999]: 90–1 trans M. Candea).

As David Mosse puts it,

> Anthropology does not have the option (moral or epistemological) of a devolution to science that disregards social relations that are the basis of its knowledge. The right to academic knowledge has to be negotiated among other legitimate claims. And the negotiation of ethnography as a 'situated intervention' rather than a disinterested observation (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 38) requires that its practitioners are clear on their position, perspective and purpose.
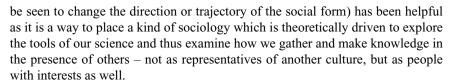>
> (Mosse 2005: 952)

I have suggesting that it is the idea of an abstract entity – society, culture – that prevents us from seeing clearly what that position is. It is not 'society' or 'culture' that is the problem, but what 'it' is: a super-organic, organizing entity to which all necessarily are beholden (society) or subscribe (culture), or is 'it' a series of relationships and interactions?

   This chapter has been a thought experiment. In it I have rehearsed an old dilemma, but have drawn on some of Tarde's words and ideas to illuminate one aspect: the relation between ethnographer as subject and informant as subject. I took up the Tardian emphasis on two core elements of social life, imitation and repetition, and events as causal moments in social innovation. I also took from Tarde his emphasis on micro-observation, explicitly though arguing against the value of emergent *superorganic* abstractions for entering into relations to other people. Tarde considered it essential to identify moments in which the trajectory of particular social processes were given new direction, and considered a concentration on individual encounters, exchanges and interactions to be vital. I turned these ideas to the service of considering something like the responsibility we have to informants and to our discipline, the potential influence of ethnographic relationships to produce something of value to both parties, without suggesting that one must always do what one's interlocutors want. Tarde has proved valuable insofar as many of his abstract and technical sociological/philosophical insights provide a counterpoint to well-established Durkheimian frameworks, which I have attempted to deploy. All of this holds even though Tarde himself is not necessarily a model for anthropological practice or ethics by our current standards.

   The dual emphasis on micro-interactions (on collecting them together to build a picture of continually emergent social forms) and on events (moments which can

be seen to change the direction or trajectory of the social form) has been helpful as it is a way to place a kind of sociology which is theoretically driven to explore the tools of our science and thus examine how we gather and make knowledge in the presence of others – not as representatives of another culture, but as people with interests as well.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1 'If it seems to many minds that a social origin cannot be attributed to the categories without depriving them of all speculative value, it is because society is still too frequently regarded as something that is not natural; hence it is concluded that the representations which express it express nothing in nature. But the conclusion is not worth more than the premise' (Durkheim 1915: 19fn2).

2 '[W]e are at best making prior assumptions about the logic of the system under study, and at worst using symbols of our own as if they were signs; as though through them we could read other people's messages, and not just feedback from our own input' (Strathern 1980: 179).

3 Although as has been pointed out to me (Candea 2009), Tarde relies on a notion of 'intuition' rather than social relation with his subjects. His attempts to understand others are more of an attempt at an intuitive grasp of remote or opaque social objects than an investigation of them through ethnographic relationship.

4 And certainly similar to Latour 'At Context, there is no place to park' (Latour 2005) [because there's no *there* there].

5 I had no idea at that stage what this enthusiasm was based upon, of course.

6 *Lo bos* as in, 'in charge of the law': people who make sure people abide by the laws handed down by Yali, and which would bring about millennial change.

7 See http://www.flosspols.org.

8 Clearly, where I lump together *lo bos* meetings and workshops in Cambridge, I am loosing vital distinctions and subtleties. For one thing, I did not want to change *lo bos* activity, other than perhaps to discourage it in relation to expectations I would have to fulfil. That lack of attention was clearly not an event that mattered to people involved. Rather, it confirmed their suspicions that I was unwilling to aid them as they required. That may in fact have been the event that mattered. In contrast, I had been expressly asked to make policy interventions in the world of software. The influence I might have on *lo bos* activity, having been made central to its revival and effects, was more likely to cause other events than a meeting with a group of software engineers in Cambridge. There are very different power relations and expectations involved in the two scenarios. People are trying to do very different things, and realize themselves as persons in different ways.

13 Tarde on drugs, or measures against *Suicide*[1]

Eduardo Viana Vargas
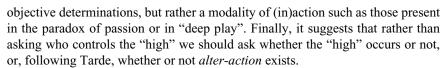*Translated by Maurits Kapenga*

Abstract

One of the most challenging points of the controversy on the status of the social, which Tarde and Durkheim sustained one century ago, concerns the place that each gives in their sociologies to the notions of difference and identity – and, by extension, to the notion of relationship. Whereas, for Durkheim, we begin life in a simple state of sameness and we grow into increasingly complex states of otherness, for Tarde we begin as we finish, as we live, that is, different, since "difference keeps differencing" ("*la différence va différant*"; Tarde 1999a: 69), since difference is something that has the unique capacity to take itself as a target or as an object of change. This point is crucial, directly affecting the ways each thinker has chosen to define society and to practice sociology, the former arguing that the social is a special – that is to say, transcendent – domain, the latter that the social is immanent to relations of association. As Tarde claims, "those final elements at which all sciences arrive, the social individual, the living cell, the chemical atom, were final only to the eyes of their particular science; even themselves are composites" (Tarde 1999a: 36). Against those who take for granted the identity of the collective or the composition of the social – as Durkheim did for example in his *Suicide* – Tarde argues that we must follow the associations, the movements of composition themselves.

This chapter experimentally deploys Tarde's intuition that the social is association, gauging its effect on an ethnographic field in which I have been working for many years: drug use. Trying to articulate Tarde's intuition ethnographically, this chapter suggests that it is not enough to ask "why do people use drugs?" and "what is the meaning of drug use?"; nor can we be content with the answers that are presented when these questions are put forward, answers usually premised on "error," "lack," or "weakness." Following Tarde's intuition, it is possible to propose other questions: "what *happens* with practices like these?," "what kinds of experiments are users and drugs engaged in?" This allows us to consider other answers, answers that point to the existence of events (the "high" of drugs), events that, in turn, bring to the fore paradoxical agencies of self-abandon, for which substances are indispensable mediators. This chapter proposes that the "high" event is neither a by-product of users' subjective fantasies, nor a by-product of substances'
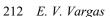
objective determinations, but rather a modality of (in)action such as those present in the paradox of passion or in "deep play". Finally, it suggests that rather than asking who controls the "high" we should ask whether the "high" occurs or not, or, following Tarde, whether or not *alter-action* exists.

Suicide, and Measures Against it

There are several reasons that made *Le Suicide* one of the most important books written by Emile Durkheim, a classic in sociology. The content was one of them: after all, a certain audacity is necessary to affirm that something as intimate as deciding to put an end to one's life results from the inflictions of others or, and I quote, that "each society is predestined to generate a certain amount of voluntary deaths" (Durkheim 1986: 15). The scientific rhetoric and the appeal to method were others: after all, Durkheim never tires of opposing his studies to those that came before, like someone who opposes a scientific work to the works of more or less enlightened amateurs, such as philosophers; besides this he innovates in a decisive way through promoting an unprecedented use of statistics, which had already drawn the attention of many in nineteenth-century France, but, up to that moment, had never been treated as extensively as Durkheim did along many pages in his book. But *Suicide* also became famous for other reasons, noticeably because Durkheim obstinately tried to get even with the man who until then was being acknowledged as the most brilliant French social scientist at the end of the century, Gabriel Tarde. As we know, the polemic between Tarde and Durkheim was long and arduous. It did not start with *Suicide*, neither did it end with it, although Durkheim and those who followed him had adopted this work as the decisive proof of his success. The fact that Tarde had neither finished nor published in his lifetime a direct answer to Durkheim's *Le Suicide* certainly contributed to this.[2] I will not go into detail about this polemic here, having done so on another occasion (Vargas 2005; on the polemic see also Karsenti 2002). For now, I only point out that Durkheim refers, also in *Suicide*, to one of his fundamental arguments against Tarde and in favor of sociology which would consolidate itself in France and beyond in the following decades: to turn a work of sociology into a scientific one, it is, first and foremost, necessary to consider the "social environment," which, as Durkheim accuses Tarde, had not been done by the latter anywhere in his vast work.

In fact, even though Tarde had not published a direct answer in his lifetime, he did not omit to take measures against *Suicide*. Maybe never accepting the notion of "social environment" has been the most important. This notion is to him an "explanatory talisman," "a fetish, a *deus ex machina* which the new sociologists (read Durkheimians) use as an *open Sesame* each time they find themselves confused and lost," a formula with which they intend to explain everything and consequently with which nothing can be explained anymore, a formula "whose illusory profoundness serves to cover up the emptiness of the idea" (Tarde 1898: 78–9). In a few words, what Tarde rejects in the notion "social environment" is that it assumes exactly that what needs to be explained, namely, the proper composition of the social. In Tarde´s terms, "in postulating this grouping the big and first question is

eluded. A question that consists of knowing how it was formed, how this similarity of so many diverse individuals […] was produced in such and such a century, such and such a nation and not somewhere else or in another era" (Tarde 1999d: 312).[3] In other words, for Tarde, it is not possible to consider the social as something given, isolated, as constituting a domain *sui generis*. But, if the social is not given, this is because, according to Tarde, it results from an incessant activity of composition. To Tarde, therefore, the decisive question is the one regarding the composition of the social, and, as he himself indicated, it was "above all this question that I really tried to answer." That is what I will try to show in the following.

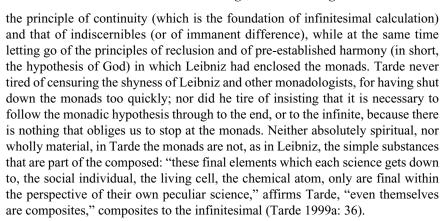### Society as the Reciprocal Possession of Everyone by Each One

Although Tarde and Durkheim disagreed on almost everything, they agreed on the fact that philosophy alone was not enough anymore, that taking into account the internal coherence of statements was not sufficient anymore and that it was necessary to consider more things than just logic, things such as sciences and societies. Nevertheless, this dissatisfaction with philosophy did not provoke the same effects in Tarde as in Durkheim. We all know that Durkheim tried very hard to develop sociology into an autonomous science in radical rupture with philosophy. Tarde did something else: he extracted from philosophy the leading hypothesis of his universal sociological point of view and for this operation he looked for support at the development of contemporary sciences.

This extracting operation resulted in a peculiarly different image of thought[4] from the one that became canonical in social sciences. Contrary to the characteristic line of thinking of identity, the image of thought projected by Tarde operates within the element of universal difference, the different difference. In order to imagine this, Tarde called upon an intricate notion: "the monads, daughters of Leibniz" (1999a: 33). For Leibniz, monads are the elementary particles, the simple substances of which the complex ones are made up: they are, therefore, differentiated (equipped with qualities that distinguish one in relation to the others) and differentiating (animated by an immanent power of continuous change or differentiation). Besides this, or because of this, they pay respect to the nuances, to the infinitely small, to the infinitesimal that makes up all differences. In Tarde, the monads will be all of this and a little more, as will be shown next. For now, we should proceed contra-intuitively and recognize that, for Tarde, the universal can only be reached through mediation of the elementary, the infinitesimal. This is the lesson that Tarde learns from Leibniz, the monadic lesson. This is also the lesson that sciences assimilate from philosophy and were able to take further, whereas the latter stayed put, not because science became more positive than philosophy, but because it demonstrated an incomparable capacity to prodigiously multiply the world's agents (1999a: 33–43).

Even though his debt to Leibniz has remained inestimable, Tarde introduced decisive modifications in the monadic lesson and proposed a "renewed monadology" (1999a: 56), the infinitesimal sociology which he was about to invent. In other words, what Tarde wished for was a social theory which retained from Leibniz

the principle of continuity (which is the foundation of infinitesimal calculation) and that of indiscernibles (or of immanent difference), while at the same time letting go of the principles of reclusion and of pre-established harmony (in short, the hypothesis of God) in which Leibniz had enclosed the monads. Tarde never tired of censuring the shyness of Leibniz and other monadologists, for having shut down the monads too quickly; nor did he tire of insisting that it is necessary to follow the monadic hypothesis through to the end, or to the infinite, because there is nothing that obliges us to stop at the monads. Neither absolutely spiritual, nor wholly material, in Tarde the monads are not, as in Leibniz, the simple substances that are part of the composed: "these final elements which each science gets down to, the social individual, the living cell, the chemical atom, only are final within the perspective of their own peculiar science," affirms Tarde, "even themselves are composites," composites to the infinitesimal (Tarde 1999a: 36).
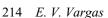
In sum, Tarde broke the seclusion of Leibniz's monads just as scientists had broken the atom: if atoms are whirlwinds, the finite entities do not constitute realities *sui generis*, but integrations of infinitesimal differences, in the meaning of this expression given to it by infinitesimal calculation. Therefore, like elementary infinitesimal compositions that are reciprocally interlinked, the monads opened up by Tarde are not imperturbable like they are in Leibniz, given that they do not limit themselves to expressing the universe. Instead, they are spheres of action which penetrate each other and whose center "is a singular point by its properties, but, even so, a point like any other" (1999a: 57). For Tarde, the monads do not have any essence aside from the activities that they exercise onto one another; each monad, thus, "is completely there where it acts" (1999a: 57). The monad, like the atom, is "a universal means or one that aspires to be one, the universe *in itself*, not merely the *micro cosmos*, as Leibniz wanted, but the entire cosmos conquered and absorbed by one unique being" (1999a: 57; original emphasis).

This formulation is decisive and will be retaken by Tarde on several other occasions and in many other ways. It is this that permits renewing monadology and, simultaneously, liberates it from the danger of precipitate unification, so common to atomism, to sociologism and to individualism. Yes, the monadic lesson is reductive, its proper movement ranging from big to small, although "the pure" or "crude reason" will be "willing to believe in completely pre-prepared divine types *ab initio* that suddenly encircle and penetrate a piece of land from the outside to the inside" (1999a: 39). But it is also about a bizarre reductionism, because it sustains that there is always more in the micro than in the macro, that "there is more logic in a phrase than in a discourse […], in a special rite than in a whole credo" (1999b: 115). However, it is a common mistake to think that Tarde replaces society with individuals like someone who changes the whole for its parts. What he proposes is something quite different: substitute the big by the small; the totalities and the units by crowds; the atoms, the individuals, the societies or other "divine types" precipitately unified as such by infinitesimal actions of an infinity of open monads, each composed by all others. In short, if action is the essence of the monad this is because each monad is already a crowd. For this reason, in Tarde´s renewed monadology the "real *agents* would be […] these little beings that are said to be

infinitesimal, and the real *actions* would be these small variations said to be infinitesimal" (1999a: 40; original emphasis).

If it were like this, what would diversity consist of? What is society if not the reciprocal possession, in extremely varied forms, of everybody by each one? As Latour observed (2002: 120; 2005: 13), social is a term that can be applied to any modality of association; however, it does not indicate, or at least should not indicate, a special ontological domain, nor any other entity which leans itself for serving as the substance to seal off the hollows of a world precipitately divided between men and things; a world from which the agents are removed beforehand; instead, what he indicates is a "principle of connexion." So, as Latour (2002: 128) reminds, "to have or not to have, that is the question" in Tarde; since, if "to have is to be different," it is the possession that leads us from one existence to another, from one difference to another.

Maybe that is Tarde'"'s most audacious proposal, the one that suggests that "we should abandon the irremediably solipsist concept of Being and relaunch metaphysics on the basis of Having (*Avoir*) – with the latter's implication of intrinsic transitivity and an originary opening towards an exteriority," as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2003: 17) observed. In Tarde's words,

> [A]ll philosophy has been founded until now on the verb *To Be* [*Être*], whose definition seemed to have been the Rosetta stone to be discovered. One may say that, if only philosophy had been founded on the verb *To Have* [*Avoir*], many sterile debates, many slowdowns of the mind would have been avoided. Despite all the subtleties of the world, it is impossible to deduce from this principle, I am [*je suis*], any other existence beyond mine; therefore the denial of the external reality. But when "*I have*" [*J'ai*] is postulated in the first place as the fundamental fact, the *have* [*eu*] and the *having* [*ayant*] are given at the same time as inseparable.
>
> (Tarde 1999a: 86; original emphasis)

The verb "to be" concerns identity by default: we are unable to say anything beyond our own existence when we say "we are." In the mode of Being, self-relation is the model of relation; in the mode of Having, relation is *alter-a(c)tion*. In this way, while being does not admit grey areas, as there is only to be or not to be, having enables grading, because you can always have more or less. To renounce the metaphysics of Being – or ontology – in favor of a metaphysics of Having – or, as Jean Milet suggested (1970: 164), of ecology – it is necessary, however, to make a radical change: instead of looking for the identifying essence of objects, we should define them by their different properties and its zones of power, since, if "any possibility tends to become true, [if] any reality tends to become universal," this happens because each monad is avid, any infinitesimal has the infinite as its ambition (Tarde 1999a: 95).

As Deleuze (1988b: 147) wrote, "these avatars of belonging or possession have great philosophical importance" because they permit solving the dead-ends of Being or of attribution through predication, as predication refers directly to having

or to possession. "In fact, this new domain of have does not introduce us into a calm realm determined once and for all as the one of the owner or property. What is being regulated in the domain of have are the moving and perpetually modified relations of monads among themselves," adds Deleuze (1988b: 147–8), since "a monad does not have as its property an abstract attribute, movement, elasticity, plasticity, but other monads, like a cell has other cells or an atom has other atoms," he concludes.

But if the philosophical importance is great, not less important is avoiding from the start the wrong step that consists of considering the philosophy of Having as a bizarre variation of possessive individualism. We notice therefore:

> as a subscriber to a newspaper, I have *my* journalists, who have *their* sub-scriber. I have my government, my religion, my public strength, as well as my specific human type, my temperament, my health; but I also know that the ministers of my country, the pastor of my religion or the local police counts me in as part of the flock they guard, just like the human type, if it were personified somewhere, it would see me only as one of *its* peculiar variations.
>
> (Tarde 1999a: 86; original emphasis)

The solution proposed by Tarde is not individualism but relationism.[5] What Tarde obstinately refuses is intellectual juggling of inestimable political and ontologi-cal consequences, which consists of believing that a simple junction of disparate elements would be able to produce a supra numeric entity. In other words, Tarde rejects the idea that something can exist beyond the relations which constitutes it as such. Properly speaking, in Tarde there is no transcendent society, only immanent association and composition in the act, that is, relations: at the bottom of each impersonal entity, "we will find nothing but a certain number of *he*'s and *she*'s that have blurred and confounded themselves through their multiplications" (Tarde 1999b: 61). So, it is a serious mistake to account for the appearance of a being *sui generis* at each adding of a unit; this error, which repeats itself at "every level of scale from phenomenonic complications of the atom up to me," finds itself in trouble, however, when we reach human societies, since "here we are at home, we are the real elements of these coherent systems of people called cities or states, regiments or assemblies. We know everything that happens here" (Tarde 1999a: 68). And the error finds itself in trouble because, when we consider things from the proper human perspective,

> never do we see emerging *ex abrupto*, in the midst of its astonished associates, a *collective self*, real and not only metaphoric, a sort of marvellous result, of which the associates would be the mere conditions. To be sure, there is always an associate that represents and personifies the group in its entirety, or else a small number of associates […] who, each under a peculiar aspect, individualise in themselves the group in its entirety. But this leader, or these leaders are always also members of that group, born from their own fathers and mothers.
>
> (Tarde 1999a: 68; original emphasis)

And if we do not observe among ourselves the rise of these "marvelous" or "divine types," it is because there is no providence, there is no society beyond or without the processes of association. Equally, there is no need to suppose that they occur in other types of association, no matter if they compose stars or atoms, cells or organisms, since "why then would the agreement of unconscious nerve cells have the ability to evoke daily and out of the blue the conscience in an embryonic brain, while the agreement of human consciences never had this virtue in any society"? (Tarde 1999a: 68)

This does not mean that agreements do not occur, that harmony would not be established, that there would not be order anywhere. It does not mean that the existence of processes of composition is rejected. It means exactly the opposite, that they are treated with all due respect: they are not the first given, but exactly that what needs to be explained: they are not born ready, but exactly that what needs to be constituted. How to deal with their occurrence? For Tarde, there is no mystery: what explains that the monads walk together is that "left alone a monad cannot do anything" (1999a: 66). Finally, if the monads are universal means, it is because there is no agency without others, there is no existence without relation; there is no relation without difference. So, if society is the reciprocal possession of everyone by each one, it is because processes of social composition do not occur independently of micro-politics of possession that constitute them as such and which are immanent to them. As Milet (1970: 158–9) noticed well, what Tarde proposes is a social theory which suspends (and puts in doubt) the antinomy between the uniform continuity and the punctual discontinuity or, more precisely, which considers the finite entities as peculiar cases of infinite processes, the stable situations as movements of blockage, the permanent states as transitory agencies of processes to come (and not the opposite). What is more, the social theory proposed by Tarde establishes that the exercise of social composition is the political activity by excellence, the one which is always (re)made.[6]

Is not all this very bizarre?

For Erroneous Questions the Only Answer is Mistake

Perhaps it gets a little less bizarre if we direct our attention to more concrete questions. Lets us consider the problem of the use of drugs.[7] This social and sociologically glaring problem has produced among us a great variety of responses. Even so, a certain officially upheld moral consensus regarding the issue is noticeable. A consensus according to which the link between drugs and evil is unbreakable. The moral consensus is not, however, the only consensus activated around drugs. It is also possible to notice the existence of other consensuses, for example, analytical, as they are associated, on the one hand, to the questions usually addressed to the use of drugs, and, on the other hand, to the type of answers that specialists on the subject usually give to these questions.

Worried by the wide gap between the evaluation that non-medicinal use of drugs is harmful, if not lethal, and the tenacity of practices of non-medicinal drug use, which continue to exist notwithstanding the vigorous repressive expedients trying

to contain them, we usually put forward the following questions: "why do people use drugs?" or "what does it mean to use drugs?".

At the same time, the answers that specialists usually give to these questions presents a no less impressive regularity which goes well beyond the disciplinary differences expressed within them: the reason and the meaning of drug use are regularly imputed to a flaw or weakness, whether physical and/or moral, psychological and/or cultural, political and/or social. Said more prosaically, we are used to thinking that the uses of drugs are responses to a crisis or to some type of need: drugs are used because of a lack of health, affection, culture, religion, school, information, money, family, work, reason, conscience, freedom and so forth. In other words, most of us consider the problem of illicit drug use as a form of physical defect or psychological flaw, of loss of symbolic reference or moral deviancy, of erroneous information, alienation or failure of social rules. These notions of lack, flaw, error, crisis or loss are so strong and persistent that we encounter the following in the *World Drug Report*:

> a broader justification [for the use of illicit drugs] might be found in the assumption that the addictive properties of psychoactive drugs are such that individuals who consume them lose the status of beings governed by reason – if they are no longer "the best stewards of their own welfare" their behaviour challenges the personal autonomy on which rational-actor models rely. To paraphrase this in Kant's terms, the illicit drug consumer is not a rational agent. It can thus be argued that prohibition is in the interests of the common good because behaviour which undermines self-regulation and self-control is potentially a threat to liberal society.
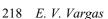>
> (UNODC 1997: 156)

If the era of artificial paradises is no longer ours, if today drugs are hell, as Francis Caballero (1992: 13) said, or the "reenchantment of evil," as indicated by Alba Zaluar (1994), this is so because among us the perception prevails that the continuous non-medicinal use of drugs has harmful effects on the development of societies, and hence of humanity itself, since it produces subjects who, in losing their own will, also lose the proper condition of being someone and become "alienated," "robots," "zombies."

For now, I would like to stress the following point: the questions of "why" or "meaning" of the non-medicinal use of drugs are neither the only ones that could be asked, nor, do I believe, the most relevant, as I will try to show below. I anticipate that they are not the same as the ones put forward by users themselves, who generally show little interest in knowing why they are using drugs or the meaning of their practices, except when analysts or other authorities investigate them. I even anticipate that these questions precondition the type of answers that we are likely to consider, since, as we have just observed, to the questions put forward by considering the practice of the use of drugs as absurd, the answers proposed (which, as a rule, stem from a reduction to the absurd) are only able to present solutions if they come to a conclusion based on error, lack, weakness or any other of its semantic peers.

Other Questions, Different Ways of Problematizing

These type of answers always seemed dissatisfactory to me: it is epistemologically negative and turns the use of drugs into a "mere product of a precariousness created by others", as Janice Caiafa (1985: 17–18) wrote; it is asymmetric and not only supposes the moral divide between legal and illicit drugs as a given fact, but also explains the use of the first by its smartness and that of the second by its error; it disregards what I, inspired by Michel Foucault (1994) and Néstor Perlongher (1987: 3), have coined *dispositive of drugs*, a characteristically ambivalent dispositive simultaneously present in the production of medicinal and illicit drugs;[8] and, finally, it leaves out the type of questions that the users themselves usually put forward.
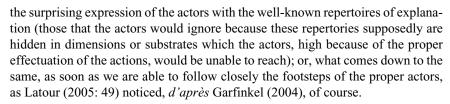
Regarding this last point, Emilie Gomart & Antoine Hennion (1999: 242), like François Dagognet & Philippe Pignarre (2005: 342), have already attested that asking why people use drugs or what it means to use drugs is not putting forward the right questions. Instead, it might be more adequate to ask more pragmatic questions, questions closer to the peculiar ways in which these experiments work. That is why Gomart & Hennion (1999: 242) suggest that we should ask: "what occurs," "what happens" in these types of experiences? Or, as Dagognet & Pignarre (2005: 342) did, "what kind of experiences do the ones that use the substances have?". This last type of questions has, at least, the advantage of being far closer to the ones that users ask themselves, once in a while they ask themselves in their characteristic words: "and so, did it work?" ("*e aí, fez?*"), "did it buzz?" ("*bateu?*"), "what is going on?" ("*o que está rolando?*"), "what is the trip?" ("*qual é a viagem?*"), "what is the wave?" ("*qual é a onda?*"), "it's all right? Are you high?" ("*tudo certo? Tá de barato?*").

Certainly, this new kind of questions is not about inverting the type of answers given to the first kind and saying that the use of drugs is not based on error, but on rightfulness. If it were to proceed in this way, not only do we risk to lose sight of the critique that should be addressed to the first type of answers – since the new answers will only be new as an effect of inversion – but we will also have maintained, although furtively, the same set of questions as before. In this case, nothing would be more out of place than simply inverting the cards in play, while continuing to play with the same deck …

Instead, I consider it more profitable to treat this issue in terms of social logic, as long as this is done in accordance with the acceptation given to this expression by Tarde, that conceives it as "the art of changing yet always maintaining, without increasing nor decreasing, the distance that separates us from the truth or the untruth" (Tarde 1999c: 119). Considered like this, the social logic does not refer to a search for or to a revelation of the truth, but to the management of the assemblages (or the waves of beliefs and desires, said Tarde) which animate the social field.

Treating the issue this way, not only the type of answers will change, without this alteration transforming itself into a mere inversion, but also thought itself will change, as will transform the proper way of problematization of the issue in question. It changes as we become capable of resisting the temptation of substituting

the surprising expression of the actors with the well-known repertoires of explanation (those that the actors would ignore because these repertories supposedly are hidden in dimensions or substrates which the actors, high because of the proper effectuation of the actions, would be unable to reach); or, what comes down to the same, as soon as we are able to follow closely the footsteps of the proper actors, as Latour (2005: 49) noticed, *d'après* Garfinkel (2004), of course.

The Event of the "Wave" and the Formula of Ecstasy

ISMAEL*: the people [that use drug] say: "did it buzz?", "Yeah! It buzzes". They also say: "wave", "there was no wave", "did it connect?" ("*ligou?*") […] When you are able to notice exactly the line between one state of consciousness and another, you call this passage "buzz" or "connect".

MICKEY*: It gives this knack ("*estalo*").

SOL*: That´s it, you keep traveling.

ÁDMA*: […] it is a channel that you tune into; […] you smoke and change the channel.

CIBELE*: High is what takes you away from the centre.

IGOR*: Ah, high is staying […] on the wave. That is what is high, got it? Courting the wave, courting some different weirdness, really.

JULIANA*: It is an alteration […], you really change your senses […], the form of perception …

One of the most confusing points revealed by the use of non-medicinal drugs concerns that which the old type of questions considered to be absurd, in other words, the discordance between the acquired authorized knowledge – according to which drugs are harmful, cause dependency, suffering and death – and the persistence of the users in the practice of these activities. It can be seen, however, that this discordance has led the specialists to disregard what the users say or do in favor of theories that explain their actions as caused by their mistakes, faults or errors. The users, however, do seem to be aware of the risks involved in their practices. Nevertheless, besides, or exactly because of that, they insist on the occurrence of *events*, or on what goes on when the use is effected.

"Did it buzz?" ("*bateu?*"), "did it happen?" ("*rolou?*"), "did it work?" ("*fez?*") are questions that users ask themselves and that validate the occurrence of peculiar events: the "high" ("*barato*"), the "trip" ("*viagem*"), the "wave" ("*onda*") of the drug. But what are the "high," the "wave," the "trip"? It is hard to say, it is difficult to express, it is difficult to represent, since they are events that "happen" ("*rolam*"), which develop throughout the experience, which occur through experimentation. So, when asked to talk about it, the users usually narrate lived through experiences in which "happened," the "high," the "trip," the "wave": "I went to that place," "around that time of the day," "I was with those "mates" ("*chegados*")", and then "arrived the presentation" ("*pintou a presença*") and the drug was consumed, and then "I got (or everything got) changed." It is hard to extract more than this, because there is nothing more to say beyond what happened.