

Sergio Tonkonoff,

*From Tarde to Deleuze and Foucault: The Infinitesimal Revolution*, Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2018; 154 pp.: ISBN 9783319551487

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When I was finally hit by the wave of renewed interest in Gabriel Tarde back in the early 2000s, it soon became obvious that he was of real importance to Deleuze's development as a thinker. Reading Tarde's *Social Laws* made me return to machinic assemblages and approach them from a different position. Certainly, given Deleuze's celebrated preference for creeping up behind his other influences (Nietzsche, Foucault, Bergson, Spinoza, Leibniz, etc.) and giving them a new conceptual baby, it was odd (and disappointing) that he never wrote a book on Tarde. What a wonderful text that would have been. Yet, reading Deleuze closely one soon discovers that some of his books are Tardean in varying degrees. As Tonkonoff makes clear from the start of his book, *From Tarde to Deleuze and Foucault*, Tarde's influence figures writ large on Deleuze's main thesis, *Difference and Repetition*. This influence is also significantly cited in his book on *Foucault* (discussed below), and (with Guattari) there is the somewhat short, but very special homage made in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Indeed, as a book specifically on Tarde's grammar of the infinitesimal, Tonkonoff's effort is a very welcome addition to an ever-expanding homage to Tarde. It is, nonetheless, the ambition of the book to not only map this grammar to Deleuze, but also broaden it to Foucault that promises, and for the most part, delivers so much more.

Tonkonoff begins with the familiar narrative about Tarde apparently losing his famous debate with Durkheim. This debate was only partially recorded at the time and reconstructed later on from Tarde and Durkheim's subsequent texts. Accordingly, aside from some fascinating, albeit brief, re-emergences in Chicago and Latin American sociology schools, for many, Tarde spent the next 100 years or so languishing in the shadow of social facts, structure and collective representation. In short, Tonkonoff points out that Durkheim won the debate because he managed to convince his French audience that Tarde's speculative psychology had no part to play in the science of the social. Tarde was in effect eclipsed by the force of the dominant Durkheim paradigm.

If you already know most of the detail about this famed spat between Durkheim and Tarde, then there is perhaps nothing particularly new to learn from Tonkonoff's account of it. However, what is interesting in this opening section is the author's observation that Tarde's critics perhaps mistakenly thought he was a theorist of the individual (p. 25). This certainly makes him a convenient foil (or strawman) to the dynamic social densities that were supposed to emerge to form Durkheim's social wholes. Maybe this audience, and Durkheim himself, just didn't get what Tarde meant by social multiplicity, or they failed to grasp the importance of Leibniz to his social theory. It would seem that those with their heads firmly stuck in the Durkheimian paradigm could only imagine the social

in terms of supervening part–whole relations, or as the *One* emerging from the *Many*. As Tonkonoff importantly notes (pp. 10–12) Tarde’s syntax of the infinitesimal revolution is all about escaping these micro/macro structures and innovatively grasping how everything that is social occurs as a micro-flow. Indeed, what appears to be whole is just the micro at another scale.

Notwithstanding the looming shadow of the Durkheimian paradigm, Tonkonoff’s contribution to Tarde’s revival actually shows that he never really went away. His influence was maybe dappled by Durkheim in social theory, but he significantly cast his own shadow over the work of a number of intellectuals; two of whom made a dramatic impression on twentieth century thought, and continue, in this century, to shape the debate. So, this book is not just about Tarde’s years in obscurity, nor does it present him as somehow out of step with the paradigmatic undercurrents of Parsons and Althusser, for example. Indeed, Tarde’s lack of visibility has more to do with bad referencing and fleeting homages that really should have been expanded on in a major book or two. Along these lines, Tonkonoff’s book proves to be wonderfully meticulous effort to make amends for Tarde’s disappearance by drawing a fresh, more salient trajectory, which is, virtually expressed in Foucault’s microphysics and more concretely in Deleuze’s machinic diagram, as it is also traced brilliantly to William James!

*From Tarde to Deleuze and Foucault* does an excellent job of articulating a map or diagrammatic of relations. The circuitry that connects Tarde to Deleuze is clearly more actualized than those established with Foucault. Foucault, the cartographer, does not help the mapping exercise. As Tonkonoff notes, he was famously a slacker when it came to listing his sources. Indeed, it is through Deleuze’s book on Foucault that the virtual line between Tarde, the criminologist, and the microphysics of power expressed in *Discipline and Punish*, becomes truly actualized. As Deleuze (cited in Tonkonoff, p. 93) puts it: ‘[Foucault’s microphysics] is precisely what Gabriel Tarde did when he founded micro-sociology: he did not explain the social by the individual, he explained large ensembles by determining infinitesimal relations in them.’

Tonkonoff’s book does have a few significant imperfections that need our attention. To be sure, the very idea of making a clear line of influence, and the familial connotations that suggests, goes against many of the fundamental ideas of the infinitesimal revolution. Tarde, the writer of a new syntax of multiplicity, is forcibly tied to an anti-Hegelian family: ‘from Nietzsche to Deleuze and passing through William James and Bergson’ (p. 27). By making these lines of inheritance between Tarde, Foucault, Deleuze, and others, Tonkonoff risks constructing a father-like figure or original source; the kind of which Tarde’s theory of micro-flows, and mostly accidental imitation, simply would not advocate. Unless, that is, we accept a memetic distortion of Tarde! Tonkonoff is, of course, completely aware of the problem he introduces. On pages 19–20 he makes the point that by constructing a paradigm he does not intend to make Tarde a father or indeed a grandfather of his own revolution. He is, nevertheless, Tonkonoff contends, more like a brother, or the beginning of an inherited ontology of multiplicity, difference, imitation and invention. Yet, if we follow Tarde’s own diagram of collective mimesis (not individual or memetic!), he would be nobody’s relative at all. On the contrary, Tarde is like all other authors who might have imitated a basic grammar of micro-sociology from somewhere

downstream of the micro-flows of social multiplicity. He simply repeats its syntax, and passes it on (or spreads it), with oppositions and alterity, of course.

Another potential problem that crops up throughout the book concerns an account of how to read Tarde today. For the most part this works very well. For example, Tonkonoff maps the contagion theory in Tarde's society of imitation to Deleuze (*and Guattari's*) assemblages (pp. 105–110). This reading of Tardean-Deleuzian contagion today is arguably crucial to understanding how things currently spread on a network, including contagions of far-right populism, hate speech, fake news. etc. The focus on somnambulism (p. 47) similarly draws attention to contemporary issues regarding how certain kinds of docile subjectivity continue to emerge from collective mimesis as they did from Foucault's disciplinary enclosures.

The downside of this aspect of the book is not so much *how* to read Tarde as the question concerning *who* is reading Tarde today. Tonkonoff's book stops short of discussing Tarde's lineage beyond some obvious references to familiar individuals like Lazzarato, Latour and Alliez. There's also an acknowledgement of the oddly implicit Tardean appearance in Delanda's little book on social assemblages. All well and good. Tarde seems to have a lot of esteemed brothers. But where is the difference in these refrains of the infinitesimal micro-flow? Where, for example, is Tarde in the explicit diagrams in Blackman or Terranova's work? Where are his implicit influences in Grosz, Sedgwick and Munster? Does Tarde not have any sisters?

Another contemporary reading of Tarde might better grasp how his syntax has become entangled in the current trend towards interdisciplinary. Indeed, Durkheim et al. created a silo in which structuralisms could pitch camp away from all the other goings on. In this silo, as Tonkonoff notes, sociology could be kept apart from biology and psychology. Ultimately, though, this book picks up on a sense that doing Tarde today means less about following a family line or a paradigm than it is about following a trajectory of flows that are not constrained to lineages of shifts, but point instead toward the infinitesimal as a way out of thinking in structures and representations. Along these line, Tonkonoff notes (p. 39) that what is special about Tarde today is that social life is no longer hypostatized into different poles – society/individual, social representations/individual representations, structure/agency. This is thinking in the nexus. Yes, of course, readers of Tarde will inevitably become caught up in some of these family lines, in the paradigmatics of it all, but the movement of micro-sociology needs to follow Tarde's own freeing up of the social in what Tonkonoff refers to (pp. 101–105) as the lines, flows and *escapes* of an infinitesimal revolution.

### Author biography

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