

**On Theorising the Object:
Insights from Gabriel Tarde**

Christine McLean,^a Paolo Quattrone^b

*^aManchester Business School, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, M13 9PL,
Manchester, UK, Email: christine.mclean@manchester.ac.uk*

*^bSaïd Business School, University of Oxford, Park End Street, OX1 1HP, Oxford,
UK, Email: paolo.quattrone@sbs.ox.ac.uk*

Key words: Objects, Tarde, Difference, Repetition, Alterity.

On Theorising the Object: Insights from Gabriel Tarde

1. Introduction

To be a good sociologist one should refuse to go up, to take a larger view, to compile huge vistas! Look down, you sociologists. Be even more blind, even more narrow, even more down to earth, even more myopic.... Is [Tarde] not advocating what I have called the 'flat society' argument? The 'big picture', the one that is provided by this typical gesture of sociologists drawing with their hands in the air a shape no bigger than a pumpkin, is always simpler and more localised than the myriad of monads it expresses only in part: it could not be without them, but without it, they would still be something. (Latour 2002)

In his recent book *Reassembling the social*, Bruno Latour (2005) takes inspiration from Gabriel Tarde's work by departing from conventional social explanation in which too much explanatory power is granted to heuristic categories normally used in social sciences. These include aspects such as: 'Structure'; 'Agency', 'Individual', 'Context', 'Culture', 'Society' and various combinations of these, the most notorious being Giddens's structuration theory (Giddens, 1984).

Let's use a provocative example to translate Latour's piece of advice into a matter of concern, and consider how often studies on organised crime, and particularly on 'mafia', rely on general and abstract categories to make sense of what happens in Sicily¹. These often describe mafia as an 'organization' and refer to crucial cultural characteristics of its components (the 'mafiosi'). This often happens also with journalist reports on this long-standing problem affecting Sicily and the 'Mezzogiorno'. Mafia is seen as a monolithic and tightly controlled organization, and in so doing, it is reified and depicted as some overarching, dominant and powerful entity (e.g. it kills, bribes judges, requests the payment of 'pizzo' to shops, and thus stops the cultural and economic development of Sicily).

However, with the words of Giovanni Falcone, the judge killed in 1992 in a bomb attack on the motorway linking Palermo to its airport,² 'Mafia is a human phenomenon and like every human phenomenon it has a beginning, an evolution and it will have an end'. Rather than viewing 'the Mafia' as a coherent whole, an apparently unbeatable monster, and seeing it as an organization with precise boundaries, i.e. an organization to which one can either belong or not, he provides a different approach in wanting to focus on the net of associations underlying such an entity.

¹ This example touches the heart for one of the authors whose homeland is Sicily

² Palermo airport is now named 'Falcone e Borsellino' in the name of the two judges killed in that summer of 1992.

We want to be inspired by Falcone's words, but we also wish to rethink both the issues of the 'social' and ideas of 'repetition' with regards to homogenized entities. This involves exploring the 'social' in ways which are more suitable to a performative view of the world and are less human centred. Firstly, it is important that the social is not viewed as an appendage, something to be added to the natural, technical, the primary qualities. For instance, if we stay with the mafia example, this not only is made by humans, but also by guns, corrupted politicians and judges, passive spectators who are indeed active in making it surviving, money which flows in many directions, political elections, lack of alternative businesses, and the list may continue. Secondly, we also wish to avoid the representation of entities such as organizations as matters of fact acting behind the scenes, which exist in some coherent and unified form, and act upon informants who do not appreciate or understand the impact on their behavior and lives. In this way they are seen to exist both as matters of fact and matters of fiction (or fetishes), in the sense that it is only from the privileged position of the researcher that such a distinction can be made. One that adopts the rather incongruous position of assuming that the researchers have the 'key to the universe' while informants are seen as relying on empty, although powerful fetishes (Latour 2005). When considering the issue of such complex objects and relations, if we consider the 'social' as given within a singular reality, as the heuristic solution to the problem of knowing with a focus on humans, we can end up battling with the wrong enemies, and with inappropriate tools. While elements of such a critique are often directed towards Marxist thought and structuralism, we will also argue that in terms of approaches falling into the trap of reinforcing singular versions of reality, even in a constructed form, the web is cast much further in social theory and critical thought.

In contrast to viewing organizations (e.g. the mafia of our example), as some coherent entity existing in some singular reality (e.g. an unbeatable monster), we intend to focus on how we can view such 'entities' as a 'nest of relationships', of 'associations'. For, if we treated this category as super-ordered, the result would be that it maintains a dominate position, while if we follow Latour's and Tarde's suggestion of the 'flat-society' then we can attend to those constitutive, but not necessarily powerful, knots which indeed constitute a 'powerful' network. This heuristic strategy based around the notion that the 'Mafia as organization cannot be beaten, it is too powerful', is conservative and reinforces the status quo. This is different when the Mafia is viewed as an association. In fact, guns can be destroyed, people can be jailed, corrupted politicians can (theoretically) be dethroned, and so forth. Yes, may be an optimistic view but at least a view which does not necessarily paralyses because the 'Mafia kills' (it does not, people and guns situated the complex chains of relations do).

In this paper we want to push Latour's argument on flattening the social further. In addition to 'flattening' social science heuristics in order to avoid giving one term, one explanation (be it 'the social' or 'reality') a greater heuristic power, and thus committing the sin of "ontological gerrymandering"³ (Woolgar, 1988),

³ The process by which one makes some issues problematic by making others unproblematic.

we also wish to speculate on the possibility of redefining the manner in which we theorize the object in the social sciences. Latour's heuristic revolution can be played on a flat space, but can it also be addressed on a singular point. If it is true that we have to look at associations then we also need to account for how these happen between entities. Entities which do not exist as such ('in the mind/out there') but to which people refer, and objects can be attached to, through a complex process. A process that involves the homogeneity (associated with reference and association), and heterogeneity (regarding issues of difference and alteration) which both combine in constituting the object. If we refer this to the notion of organization, we can say, with Nigel Thrift that: 'the problem [...] is to identify the key practices that can allow organizations to minimally cohere in space and minimally reproduce in time such that they are still deserving of the name' (Thrift, 2004), while also escaping simple and established categorizations and definitions.

What might seem an ambitious project becomes more accessible when considering the work of Gabriel Tarde and more recent works in Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Science and Technology Studies (STS) (Dugdale, 1999; Laet and Mol, 2000; Latour, 2005; Mol, 1999; 2002; Singleton and Law, 2005).

Within the next section we will briefly review certain Tardean concepts that have been useful in exploring a range of issues related to the themes within this paper. These include exploring the traps associated with representational forms of knowledge, especially those which reify too quickly 'being' and 'identity' existing in some form 'out-there' or in-here (in the mind/ perceptions), and problematic ideas of singularity, truth, reality, universalism, the social, identity and difference. This focus will be further developed in section three, where we will reflect on how objects have been theorized in ANT and STS. In particular we will focus on how these attempts to provide a way forward with reference to the problems of realism and social constructivism in theorizing objects. This will involve focusing on the problems and benefits of abandoning explanations that place heuristic power in the 'thing' or in the 'mind', and we will consider the range of issues and further questions that emerge out of such a discussion.

2. Insights from Gabriel Tarde

An important aspect of Tarde's work seeks to dismantle the setting up of this distinction between the macro and micro (e.g. a distinction between a law, and what is subject to the law). This requires rethinking of how we view societies, the social, organizations, and issues of agency. For instance, Tarde clearly opposes claims that society is merely human, and the view of 'macro' as simply a multiple replication of micro actions.

Far from being the milieu in which human grow and live, the social is only a tiny set of narrow standardised connections which occupies only some of the monads some of the times, on the condition that their metrology be strictly enforced and upkept before being inevitably broken up by the inner resistance of the pullulation of infinitesimal actants. As soon as you leave those tiny networks, you are no longer in the social, but down in a confusing 'plasma' composed of myriad of monads, a chaos, a brew, that social scientists will do everything to avoid staring in the eyes. (Latour on Tarde, 2002)

Thus, for Latour, Tarde prefigured Actor Network Theory (ANT) in his refusal to view society as a more complex and higher order than an individual monad⁴, and the individual human agent as the basis upon which society is made⁵. Rather than following Durkheim's train of thought, in treating social facts as external things, for Tarde, society can be any form of association and all things are societies (1999:58). For Tarde there is no collective self in the sense of something which exists external of such associations: no macro society and what is considered as macro, bigger, and whole should actually be viewed as a simpler, more standardised version of one aspect, or as possessing a fraction of the properties of the monad - those which manage to make part of its view shared by others (Latour, 2001). The monad is already a universe, one does not need to look elsewhere to explain that it differs, it is already different but in a way which is complexly coupled with an apparent homogeneity which appears in those standardized aspects.

While following Leibniz's notion of the monad, Tarde in contrast creates an opening from inside in order to understand the creation of possibles. Such others within the monad allows a consideration of the production of modes or nodes, and a focus on invention in terms of the adaptation of forces, the combination and/or exclusion of others, and a process of alternation. This resonates with Latour's notion of actor-networks and translation, and again the similarities between both writers become clear.

Thus, 'macro' factors should be viewed as provisional and the picture of order portrayed should be one constantly under threat, as no one component is fully part of it and each monad overflows in the sense that only a tiny part, a facade of itself, is imparted in the partial achievement of 'existence': monads can not be dominated as you can only enroll some sides of the monads. As Latour (2001) states, "Revolt, resistance, break down, conspiracy, alternative is everywhere".⁶ In fact, differences, diversity and alterity enable order particularly as existence, however provisional and partial, relies on engaging diversity, and provides occasions for more differences to be generated. Thus, in addition to noting that smaller parts do not join to make wholes, as no framing can contain all others⁷, the relationship between inclusion and exclusion also relates to the

⁴ Gabriel Tarde proposes that the universe is made of 'monads' which are not merely material entities as they also involve faith and desire, and only parts of monads are enrolled in associations. (Latour, 2001).

⁵ Within the sociology of translation neither humans nor nonhumans are divided from each other in empirical situations. They stand together in heterogeneous assemblages with the general starting point that almost every single action is the result of an association between humans and non-humans. Even a simple door-closer can embody human characteristics (Latour, 1988). As a consequence, entities are not clear-cut and separated, and to know what is relevant in every circumstance is a purely contingent and empirical matter (Law, 1987).

⁶ This clearly resonates with what we said in the Introduction on the need of viewing Mafia in a way which allows this revolt, this resistance, an alternative which, although difficult to achieve, is at least thinkable. Viewed in this way Mafia is potentially beatable.

⁷ For instance, Serres suggests that rather than focusing on that which is loudest, we should widen it to see what all the noise is about, focusing not merely on oppositions or solid

issue of alteration. While for Strathern (1991:37) 'to include is to alter', for Tarde to exist is to differ:

"difference, in one sense, is the substantial side of things, what they have most in common and what makes them most different. One has to start from this difference and to abstain from trying to explain it, especially by starting with identity, as so many persons wrongly do. Because identity is a minimum and, hence, a type of difference, and a very rare type at that, in the same way as rest is a type of movement and the circle a type of ellipse. To begin with some primordial identity implies at the origin a prodigiously unlikely singularity, or else the obscure mystery of one simple being then dividing for no special reason." (Tarde, 1999:73 as cited in Latour 2002)

Tarde highlights the need to avoid subordinating difference to identity, and with difference being the substantial side of things, he calls a greater focus on a 'political vitalism' wherein life is immediately and continually political. This still raises questions on how to explore this issue of alterity as clearly searching for difference tends to lead us back to a focus on identity, essentialism, and existence as relating to 'things in themselves'. To avoid the subordination of alterity, the attention is on the active, but on occasions apparently absent role of the Other: these active traces which 'existence' is seen to rely upon. There is a need to explore as the apparent homogeneity of social phenomena (e.g. an organization) is actually the result of a heterogeneous diversity⁸.

Both the assumptions that man imitates⁹ because he wishes to, or that action simply originates in some external source/object are clearly problematic for Tarde. He thus highlights the need to focus on the ways in which the imitation of acts relates to the desire to imitate, with action being distributed through such imitative rays. The focus is not on some external force acting upon individuals in some Durkheimien sense. Thus by avoiding a priori distinction between self and other, we begin to challenge such notions as identity, unity, the separation of the macro/micro or subject/object in such a way¹⁰, and in doing so this also helps in rethinking ideas of extending and spreading, or fading away. As Tarde illustrates in the following quote this is a particular focus of his work and clearly resonates with the aims of this paper:

boxes (e.g. where the small is contained within the large), but by thinking about cloth bags, in which one may be folded into the other and vice versa (Mol 2002:144).

⁸ The circle to be squared concerns how we can rethink the idea of 'id-entities' (with the emphasis on being 'idem'), through a process of differentiation, rather than simply homogeneization.

⁹ The concept of imitation is key to Tarde's social laws (again noting that social relates to associations and not merely to the role of humans), and in part highlights how the issue of success is seen to depend on compatibility in relation to the process of either substitution (struggles between alternatives), or accumulation (union of imitations) (Marsden 2000).

¹⁰ This also links to considering issues of rational and irrational concurrently and not as separate elements (e.g. as in objective and subjective) – it is not rational man who is suddenly overtaken by irrational drives which require either excluding (for economists) or including (for certain critical theorists). As Tarde suggests rather than assuming a split between rational choice and irrational desire we need to focus on how action relates to such imitation which mingles the two

The problem is to learn why, given one hundred different innovations...innovations in the forms of words, in mythical ideas, in industrial processes, etc. - ten will spread abroad, while ninety will be forgotten (Tarde, 1962: 140 as cited in Marsden, 2000)

This raises further questions relating to an examination of how we can explore these issues of otherness, alterity, stability and multiplicity further?¹¹ Tarde provides a tidy way of partially circumnavigating the metaphysical problem of substance (i.e. by viewing everything as societies), however, he does not address in detail how to examine the different ways of repeating 'oneself' into existence. Even with this focus, there still remain problems relating to ontological issues of 'being' and 'existence', even in some temporary or provisional form. Again Tarde has a possible resolution with his call for a shift from 'being' to 'having', by attending less to identity and more to the various properties associated with such a process. As Tarde states, *"From this principle 'I am', it is impossible to deduce any other existence than mine, in spite of all the subtleties of the world. But affirm first this postulate: 'I have' as the basic fact, and then the had as well as the having are given at the same time as inseparable"* (1999:86). Tarde thus suggests, that one way to bridge the gap and to enable a movement from one difference to another, is by shifting the focus on identity philosophy and identity politics, towards possession, avidity and properties (Latour 1999 on Tarde)¹². Therefore, although we may have a rich vocabulary for discussing certain aspects of translation and mobility, there still appears to be a deficiency in the language, terms, and ways of describing certain issues relating to subsistence, and/or lack of it, in terms of multiplicity, alterity, stability and difference. One that avoids revisiting realism, social construction through interpretations and meanings, and also a reliance on singularity, by attending to multiplicity and alterity (although not through some fragmented state of plurality, or merely multiple frames of representation). In order to explore some of these issues further we will now consider some of the major contributions to this debate from writers in the field of ANT (and after), with particular reference to the ideas of complex objects, ontology and alterity.

3. Theorising 'Objects' through ANT (and after).

This section will begin by considering the ways in which writers from an ANT and STS perspective have explored the ontological questions underlying this paper. For example, Law and Singleton describe the difficulties in defining

¹¹ Clearly there are many ways of multiplying. What we wish to avoid here are those which are based on a perspectival view (multiple social world, perceptions, meanings, etc.), frames, or modes of ordering which reproduce the sense of multiplicity, but through a singular view of reality. For Mol, by decentring the subject, and also the object, we can study enactments and how different realities co-exist through associations, relations and practices (Mol, 2002).

¹² Does a focus on 'having' replace one set of problems associated with 'being' and 'existence' with another. In other words, could difficulties connected with the idea of possession be seen as undermining the relational view of action and agency?

objects and the problems in social science more generally in catering for studies of complex and messy objects (2005, p. 331).

While a realist position may characterize a 'common sense' understanding of reality, there are clear limits when attached to ideas of reality as independent of our actions, that reality precedes any attempt to know it, that things can be clearly defined and represented, and that a singular reality exists 'out-there' (Law, 2003). Alternative approaches have attempted to shift the focus to issues of multiplicity by highlighting several and varied interpretations. One example concerns the ways in which Star and Griesemer (1989: 393) explore how boundary objects are plastic and fuzzy enough to engage alternative communities in which they may mean different things and absorb possible tensions, while robust enough to maintain a common identity which makes them recognisable within these different social worlds. In other words, boundary objects can be seen as a common object shared by various social groups. One which takes a certain shape as they act as boundaries and crossing points between these different groups (although different meanings may exist), but within a single reality (Law and Singleton 2005). In this sense, for instance, Benchy (2003) describes the alternative ways in which different professional communities referred to a machine (e.g. assemblers portraying it dynamically relating to its stage in the production processes, and engineers depicting it as a static entity by describing its components). Despite the different interpretations of the 'object' and the difficulties experienced in reconciling such differences, they still referred to 'it' as if talking about the same thing. These studies therefore rely on what Law and Singleton define as an epistemological strategy, with a focus on multiplicity in terms of human interpretations, and knowing subjects. This relies on a view of objects in relation to a set of different human perspectives, a circle of spectators who collect around the object (even if this is from different social worlds) and it is only through them this object is made and/or known¹³ (Mol, 2002:12).

An alternative to such an approach is by focusing on the internal relations rather than objects or subjects existing 'in themselves', as knowing relies not only on acting, but inter-acting. This also provides a way of rethinking the relationship between constructed and real, as rather than realism being opposed to constructivism, it is seen as a pre-condition. Fabricated or made should not be equivalent to unreal or fake. Thus the shift is from a focus on representation and towards non-representational modes of knowing (Thrift 1996; Crang and Thrift 2001).¹⁴ For example, De Certeau argues that rather than philosophy dominating its object, it is seized by what it speaks of (1983:26) and vision is viewed as becoming an opening to being Other, a field of desire and differentiation in which twining and folding relationships are played out (Crang, 2004:140). This is

¹³ For example, the view that as long as they can disentangle and detach themselves and their methods from many distorting influences, then the astute subject is able to 'know' the object and predict its behaviour (Law, 2004:132).

¹⁴ For Guattari, this involves an attempt to bring together ontologically heterogeneous modes of ordering into play with 'partial enunciators in multiple domains of alterity' (Guattari, 1992: 45). Rather than being self-maintaining, such spaces of knowledge are described by Crang and Thrift (2001:13) as generative of difference.

in contrast to the place of knowledge and representation¹⁵ as viewed under the logic of the Same with a focus on visibility, transparency and intelligibility (De Certeau 1988:333) ‘a space where everything is spread out before the gaze of theory, and differentiated only by location relative to each other’ (Crang, 2004:141). The search for representation is viewed as complete once the correspondence between the state of affair and statement are seen to correspond. This produces a convergence on a single reality, a replication of the original, and a nagging doubt about the faithfulness of such representations.

“In a beautiful case of paradoxical madness, those who imagine statements simply corresponding to the world pursue an aim that is utterly self-contradictory: they want to be silent and tautological, that is exactly repeat the original in the model, which is of course impossible, hence the constant effort and the constant failure, and the constant unhappiness of epistemologists.” (Latour, 2002:3 – normative paper).

In contrast, articulations can proliferate through differences, and mediations and controversies feed articulations, as articulations rely and create differences but also occasions of stability and sameness. Clearly, articulation is not merely a logocentric term. Rather than locating articulations merely in words or things, Latour highlights the notion of propositions to describe what is articulated. The key difference is that rather than saying things are named in ‘words’ by the labeling activity of a human subject, the articulation does something to the ‘things’ themselves: a world made of articulated propositions. Latour attributes the term multiverse to such a world, as the universe freed from its premature unification, by registering the many articulations. When accounting for a multiverse of articulated propositions a major issue concerns differentiating between well and badly articulated propositions (Latour 2002) and we will return to this political dimension later in the paper.

Rather than focusing on measuring and comparing the representational ability of ‘methods’ and focusing on issues of containment, we wish to explore ideas of multiplicity, but also the ways in which some aspects can maintain a sense of subsistence and the ability to ‘travel’ and ‘extend’, while others appear to fade away. For example, an alternative to focusing on multiple human interpretations is by considering difference in relation to the nature of the object itself, and this requires some conjecture around the ontology of objects. Thus, the theoretical puzzle of defining objects from a post-structural, relational perspective is reconciling the homogeneity and heterogeneity of objects without granting too much agency to humans (as with boundary objects), or to objects (as in realism).

¹⁵ This relates to the problems of a ‘cyclops eye of theory’, one that can stand apart from the world (Hetherington 1998) with the knowing subject in some exterior and superior position, and a view of space and time as absolute categories (Curry 1996; Crang and Thrift 2004; Jones, McLean and Quattrone, 2004). Using such a subject-object model often returns us to the question of resemblance, representation and truth, and the assumed separation of primary (real, natural) and secondary (perceived) qualities (i.e. the bifurcation of nature into objective and subjective, whereby the two are set up a priori in opposition to each other (Whitehead)).

In this regard, the concept of relations underlying semiotics has been important in ANT, with the emphasis on how objects are never out-there, but are defined relationally. In the words of Law (2000:3), they are '*an effect of relations with other entities*' (e.g. a word acquires meaning from its relation to other words (see Morin, 1977)). For instance, Latour's (1997) account of a journey in a TGV (the French fast speed train) highlights how this 'immutable mobile' (i.e. an object which is displaced without apparent deformation along the journey) relies on the well alignment of the entire railway system and thus considerable effort and many mediations (Latour, 1997). If this network of relations is effectively aligned then the train may be seen as a working technology - an object. For Latour then, scientific and technical research is most successful when it becomes a 'black box', i.e. its content remains invisible.

When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become (Latour 1999, p. 304).

This concept of immutability can however raise problems especially as the "unity of an innovation [technological or not] is not given by something which would remain constant over time, but by the moving translation of what we call [...] a *quasi-object*" (Latour, 1991, p. 117). Objects are thus never fully black-boxed. The prefix '*quasi-*' is thus appended in an attempt to overcome the ontological problem of defining complex objects that do not exist outside networks of relations, and thus require something *else* to be defined. The prefix symbolises the problematic nature of black-boxes for they leak, thus the box is never hermetically closed (Callon and Latour, 1981).

De Laet and Mol (2000) seek to attend to these difficulties through their concept of the 'mutable mobile':

An object or a class of objects [which] may be understood as a set of relations that gradually shifts and adapts itself rather than one that holds itself rigid. Thus while [ANT's] intuition about the importance of relations was right [...] it got itself too concerned with standardization, with the rigidities of immutable mobiles that, if they exist at all, exist within rather specific networks that try to reach out over long distances and achieve centralised control (Law and Singleton, 2005, p. 339)

Through their analysis of a water pump in Zimbabwe they argue that a complex object such as a pump is made by different performances, enactments¹⁶ (i.e. practices and realities that co-exist in the present). In other words, there is no singular object or reality 'out-there' as objects maintain a fluid existence with the capacity to exist in many different forms - more than one, but less than many

¹⁶ For Law (2004), while construction provides the image of objects with no fixed and given identities, it does imply a process of volatility and contestation that then shifts to stabilization and closure: to produce a single object in some unified form. While this is not the intention of writers such as Latour, the suggestion is that a term such as enactment has less problematic connotations attached. Thus, rather than focusing on something made (e.g. Goffman) the focus is on the performativity of enactments in relation to realities (e.g. the rapport between them), objects being framed through practices - a reality enacted (Mol 2002).

(Strathern, 1991)¹⁷. For Mol, however, this shift to the manifoldness of the multiple objects enacted does not imply fragmentation,¹⁸ as the different versions can overlap, coincide and conflict¹⁹. The fluidity thus seeks to highlight the ways in which boundaries can allow leakage, and may come and go, or may disappear altogether, as relations have the capacity to transform themselves without fracture. Furthermore, Law and Mol (1994:643) suggest that this allows changes in shape both within Euclidean space (each pump looking different from its original design), and network space (in the way it works and the relations embedded in such change). Multiple objects are therefore seen to exist through the different networks of relations. For as the networks of relations change through these specific performances, so do the objects under scrutiny (Mol, 2002; Law, 2004; Law & Singleton, 2005). As Law states (2004:59), rather than realities being explained by practices and beliefs, they are produced in them and have a life, in relations (including our accounts). Thus involves a shift in the word 'is'²⁰ to one which is situated, as it is not possible to say what something is 'in and of itself' as nothing is ever alone (Mol, 2002:54). For Mol then, rather than 'to be or not to be', there is a shift as 'to be is to be related' but also multiple and situated. This involves keeping 'present' the practicalities associated with enacting realities, as it is an ontology that relies both on difference, multiplicity, and a political process of engagement²¹. For instance, when discussing inclusion Mol highlights how this involves 'living as a part of what is other, or of holding what is other inside the self' (Mol, 2002:143). This is about coexistence but one in which those seen as opposed may also depend on one another (which raises questions of inclusion, exclusion, absences and presences), a view which clearly does not fit into Aristotelian logic or Euclidean view of space or time in which discrete positions are taken (Mol 2002:144).

There is a shift therefore from representation where objects are the focus of varies perspectives, to objects as enacted through a variety of practices. Knowledge can no longer be understood solely in referential terms, however, as

¹⁷ Although not in some unlimited many as this would merely fall into the relativist trap of anything goes (Mol 2002).

¹⁸ The idea of fragmentation is criticised by Strathern (1991) for suggesting some regret relating to the explosion or non-achievement of a whole. This also links to the problem with the notion of culture as something discrete, independent, and differs from what is elsewhere (Mol, 2002: 79). The focus is often on layers of reality in a pyramid of objects, however, rather than the natural sciences explaining social phenomena, the arrow is reversed and the social becomes the tool of explanation. Strathern attempts to address some of these issues through the concept of partial connections.

¹⁹ For Mol (2002:4), by avoiding the bracketing off of practicalities and allowing the foregrounding of practices, reality multiplies. This avoids a focus on an object operating in the centre waiting to be seen from a seemingly endless series of perspectives

²⁰ The idea of a self-evident of 'is' or 'thisness' is clearly problematic and requires something more distributed and open to difference and alterity. Responses often focus on issues of mobility associated with embodiment, but also complex objects.

²¹ For Mol, ontological politics is concerned with the ways in which problems are framed, and lives and bodies are pulled and pushed into alternate shapes (Mol, 2002). In the case of the bush-pump this issue of change and fluidity is viewed in a 'positive' sense, although outcomes may not always be viewed in such a 'positive' light, and what counts as good and bad may differ.

practice that interferes with other practices and participates in the enactment of realities (Mol, 2002:152/3). For Mol, the key issues include keeping practicalities unbracketed; treating everything as a practice; considering the many entanglements in every action; avoiding a monist whole, and to focus on ontology in practice as multiple, as practice does not enact one entity but evokes a world of objects and realities.

A focus on objects as made *in* and *by* relations (Law and Singleton, 2005), however, could also be seen to multiply the ontological problem, in terms of a 'thing' made by another 'thing'. So this returns us to the initial question of how to theorise objects as *less* than a reified reality (for the object is a potential infinite set of possibilities) and *more* than a social construction (for the object does constrain although in ways which are complexly coupled with infinite ranges of possibilities). It is in this space left empty by social constructivism and realism that we have to find a way to overcome the problem of theorizing objects.

For Latour (2001), Tarde's 'reverse reductionism' helps by reducing the explanation to a single object, i.e. the 'monad', whose definition is complex "since the smallest entities are always richer in difference and complexity than their aggregates" (ibidem). The monad, like Latour's conception of the object, is complex because the small always contains the big and it differs from itself as *it is already other*. In Tarde's words:

[The monad] is a milieu that is universal or that aspires to becomes such, a universe in itself, not only a microcosmos [...] but the cosmos conquered in its entirety and absorbed by a single being (Tarde, 1999, p. 57, quoted in Latour, 2001, p. 118).

This seeks to replace Euclidean views of objects existing *in* singular spaces with one where they are made *in* and *by* multiple spaces. Following Mol (1999, p.77), an object is not differentiated by multiple features within a single reality, as each feature is a different but inter-related object, which produces a multiple reality. In this milieu, linear time is unnecessary to explain how an object can differ from itself for it is *already* and *potentially* other than itself. Like a fractal²², the monad is an object made of infinite other objects that look similar to each other, but makes an object that differs from all of them. The idea that an object is already and potentially anything else does not however resolve the ontological problem of combining multiplicity and stability for, while the shift from 'to be' to 'to have' proposed by Tarde is useful in understanding how object emerge from heterogeneity rather than homogeneity, it does not explain what prompt this attraction. With the words of Bruno Latour (*ad vocem*), we need to investigate the 'organizon', i.e. those properties, if any, which prompt the organizing process of heteromogeneity (Quattrone and Hopper, 2005), that is, of co-production of that homogeneity, which allows one to refer to the object, and heterogeneity, for this reference is constitutive of a multiverse.

Thus, the theoretical problem is to understand how homogeneity and heterogeneity coincide and what prompts this process of heteromogeneisation, however, we first need to study the implications of seeing objects as intrinsically

²² An image for which any suitably chosen part is similar in shape to a given larger or smaller part when magnified or reduced to the same size (English Merriam-Webster Dictionary OnLine),

other than themselves. As we have argued elsewhere (Jones, McLean, and Quattrone, 2004), viewing these processes as happening in a linear time and a singular space is not what enables us to understand objects and change, but rather a problem to be tackled.

Objectification: exploring ontological politics

For Latour, an alternative (as discussed earlier) when seeking to avoid a focus on a universe, is through the idea of multiverse²³. This produces occasions for coherence and unification to occur alongside multiplicity, heterogeneity and mediations. This then returns us to the notion of repetition²⁴ and alterity in the production of accounts with multiple versions of repetition in which absences overflow. Cooper (1998:108) referred to this as the unknowable and excessive, which can provide sources of energy and possibilities through a 'flux and flow of unfinished, heteromorphic organisms' (Law, 2004:117). For Serres, the endless intersection of the two forms of metaphors for the real (i.e. the solid and the fluid) requires a 'third object²⁵' (Law, 2004), while for Latour modernity (or a-modernity) grows out of the intersection between purity (regarding distinctions and forms) on one hand, and the proliferation of impurities, heterogeneities and hybrids on the other (Law 2004:82) – as with the desire for purity comes hybrids (or with order comes mess). This also involves attending to how 'things' are unable to 'travel' without chains that sustain them and how they require the support of many others and acts of mediation to 'exist' (e.g. laboratories, knowledge, discourses, control, etc.): the proliferation of spacings, timings and actings (Latour, 1997). By gaining an insight into the various interactions and connections (including their strength and fragility) we can explore this continual process of mediation and fabrication, while avoiding an assumption that space and time given in the order of things (Jones, McLean & Quattrone, 2004; Latour, 1998)²⁶.

The assembling of these many other 'local' interactions that are distributed elsewhere (via timings, spacings and actings), occurs through diverse sets of relays and chains of associations. For Latour (2005), these localities are not given in the order of things as they rely on articulators or localizers who engage in this continual process of assembling and redistribution. While localizing enables such dislocated actions to act (through indirect associations and circulations), this also produces instances of multiplying in the sense of creating more openings. Accounting for this fabrication process thus relies on alternative ways of

²³ A term originated by William James.

²⁴ For Deleuze, complex repetitions are variable in the sense that they include difference within themselves. This difference and variability may be hidden and becomes distorted when forced to comply with limitations of representation in which difference is merely a negation of sameness. To actualise is to differentiate it.

²⁵ Thirdness is seen as the space between two entities, where relations are constituted, and which makes identity possible, but also threatens to undo identity (Brown and Lightfoot, 1999). This is the negotiated 'in-between' where it is possible to shift between noun and preposition (a thing or relation).

²⁶ For discussions about space and time in such a view see Jones, McLean and Quattrone, 2004.

conceptualising such orderings and tracing relations and actions. In particular this relates to an avoidance of centring and an excessive desire for coherence in which stability and multiplicity cannot easily co-exist or overlap. Key to our understanding of such issues relates to our view of interactions, circulations, absences, and entities such as localizers. For instance, as Latour notes interactions should not be viewed as isotropic or isochronic, as time and space are always folded, even if they may produce effects of isotropy or isochrony. Secondly, few participants may be 'visible' in a course of action at the same time as interactions are not synoptic. In other words, it is not possible to see everything from one place as this fails to account for the issue of multiplicity and shifting agencies (i.e. there are no homogeneous interactions as actions are never carried out by the same material all along). Rather than viewing interactions as homogeneous they should be viewed as heterogeneous and viewed as exerting different kinds and quantities of pressures (i.e. as interactions are not isobaric). Understanding issues of quality, quantity, and effects are thus important aspects to consider as we need to gain an insight into relations, interactions and shifting agencies which are not always visible in the same time or place, do not exert pressure equally, and can lead to different outcomes in terms of stability and multiplicity (Latour, 2005). By viewing places and entities as 'framed' by actions/agencies coming from 'elsewhere' thus requires an alternative view of otherness and difference: an alternative way of understanding organizing through alterity²⁷.

For instance, Latour describes how, '*scale does not depend on absolute size, but on the number and qualities of dispatchers and articulators*' (Latour, 2005, p. 172) and thus rather than seeing local and global as aspects which are given, issues such as scale and size should be seen as achievements (Callon & Law, 2004). In other words, we should not assume that one place is bigger than another, and in contrast we should focus on how some are seen as benefiting from safer connections with more places than others (Latour, 2005, p. 155) or that some are more able to engage with diversity, and through such difference certain repetitions and differences occur (Jones, McLean and Quattrone, 2004). For as Serres suggests (Serres and Latour, 1995:59) time and space are a multiple

²⁷ This issue of repetition and alterity is also something also explored by Derrida in relation to his notion of iteration (Cooren). This concept attempts to provide some insight into extending and spreading with a repetition being an altered version of that which it repeats (Phillips, 2005). Derrida also plays with the idea of the fold as linked to a certain gathering that is the same time a dissemination (a joining that keeps itself apart, but does not appear as such). For Derrida, a singular fold is never itself one but makes a plurality possible, it differs in itself and opens to the radical alterity of the other. Therefore, traces of incompleteness are discerned in the deferrals of difference (the absences enacted in whatever is present - Law 2004). Alterity however does not just refer to a contrast between two discrete entities, but something missing, which generates further possible contexts and translations, and grants differences to entities and associations (Phillips, 2005). However, Derrida's central concern is with the practices of writing and text as writing is viewed as the prime supplement (with the separation of text and context) seems to lack a sense of the 'sticky viscosity of life' of the friction of movement, as well as movement itself (Crang and Thrift, 2004:20). Thus, rather than focusing on thing itself being repeated/or not in a particular context we could talk of the repetition of properties in a Tardean sense that again both relies on and produces alterity, however, this still neglects the issues of how such engagement and attraction occurs.

foldable diversity²⁸. Thus, size, durability, universality, standardisation all relate to certain mediations and struggles, but in ways that often appear stable. For instance, how does the number and character (e.g. properties such as intensity, quality, etc.) of the many connections and metrological chains relating to something like 'Wall Street' produce outcomes of spreading and extending in which it becomes performed as more 'important' than other localities (Latour, 2005)? Is it the ability of certain object to coexist with its own tensions and struggles that enable 'it' to last (to extend and subsist), rather than the success in eliminating and homogenizing them?

This in part relates to those 'stabilizing' mechanisms involving the partial and temporary transformation of matters of concern into matters of fact, mediators and intermediaries, and a need to focus on the various regimes of enunciation underlying such a process within specific fields of study (e.g. science, law, religion, economics, art). For example, in order to retrieve the dynamics and specificity of politics (particularly the role in the making of collectives with regards to the fragile and temporary construction of social aggregates), part of the solution for Latour lies in studying such regimes

of enunciations (Latour 2002). This includes the unfolding of mediations peculiar to this field of study, such as 'what is at play when one talks to someone about something in a political way'. While acknowledging that politics, law, art, religion to name but a few, simultaneously belong to all enunciation regimes, for Latour, it is necessary to suspend this thought in order to focus on particular 'regimes of talk', 'manners of speech' and the various mediations relating to the many others involved in such a process.

For instance, while talking political may be viewed positively, it is often associated with negative connotations, something that slows things down, evades direct action, produces extra factors to consider and labour over, and involves deviations from faithful information and representation (Latour 2002). There is a need to abandon the assumption of the guaranteed existence of groups (Durkheim), and rather focus on how they are continually formed through re-grasping them (Tarde, Garfinkel), enveloping them in the curve of political talk. The role of enunciations is key to this process and by separating them we no longer see the point of political talk (Latour, 2002:5)²⁹. For example, uttered talk does not belong to those who say it and the identification of origins in terms of which other agents are involved in the process of talk is clearly a political issue. The continuous presence (and absence) of these others in the form of the 'irreducible multiple' or their 'indispensable unification', partly explains the slowness and curvature of political talk, but also the ways in which issues of authorship and authority are consubstantial to political ways of talking especially

²⁸ For Serres, rather than focusing on that which is loudest, we should widen it to see what all the noise is about, focusing not merely on oppositions or solid boxes (e.g. where the small is contained within the large), but by thinking, for instance, about cloth bags, in which one may be folded into the other and vice versa (Mol 2002:144). While this example explores the issue of folding an element of containment remains, as it does not really explore folding in terms of inclusions and otherings, which occurs simultaneously.

²⁹ Although the term performativity is useful to a certain extent, it can also mask some of the particularities of specific performativities.

in terms of identifying in the name of whom we are talking (Latour 2002:13)³⁰. For instance, the delegation of the practices of speech to someone who speaks on their behalf could be seen as a shifting in spacing, timing and acting. In addition to holding the position of the one to whom talk has been delegated, Latour describes how they also occupy:

"the position n^{-1} by prompting the speaker who makes her/him/it talk, to talk. "You don't make me say anything other than what I make you say; it is from this that we draw the possibility of our autonomy and hence our liberty". The "I-me" is thus both the one who delegates and the delegate: s/he has been given the right to speak and s/he gives it. There is nothing less authentic, primitive, natural, indigenous than the person who delegates. Like the "Me, I think" and for the same reasons, it is necessary for an enunciator of the first degree to have "sent her/him to say" something, for her/him to start talking. And, of course, this enunciator ranking n^{-1} is not a unit but a multitude. We now easily see why political talk arouses a feeling of discomfort every time political forms of talk are judged in terms of reasonable reason - which, remember, cannot either account for the real artifice of the sciences, for it always seems outrageous to those who believe they master what they say." (Latour 2003:14)

Political talk thus involves a complex positioning of the delegate and delegated, the enunciator and the enunciated, with much complexity underlying who 'makes' us talk, and for whom we talk. For Latour (2003), resemblance is never possible from these contradictory positions, and neither is transparency, immediacy, nor *mimesis*. However, political talk is similar to other talk in the sense that it is always the effect of engaging others: the multiplicity of many shifts in timings, spacing and actings. What we must avoid, however, is the empty statement that everything is political, or that we continually explain away politics through something else (Latour 2003). We can also relate the issue of engagement or attraction to Latour's notion of articulation (as discussed previously), in terms of that which becomes affected by others and 'put into motion by new entities whose differences are registered in new and unexpected ways' (Latour 2002:3, Normative paper). Rather than talking with authority, this relates to being affected by differences, as differences are generative of meanings and lead to the creation of further spacings, timings and actings.

This still raises the question of how we attend to this issue of good and bad articulations and fabrications, and the issue of objects. For Stengers and Despret (as cited in Latour 2002) in their recasting of the falsification principle (as an alternative to Popper), they provide some interesting reflections on good and bad ways of generalizing:

"The good ones are those who allow to connect widely different phenomena and thus to generate even more recognition of unexpected differences by engaging a few entities into the life and fate of others; the bad ones are those who because they had such a local success try to produce generality, not by

³⁰ While the process of freeing talk from the enunciator is also common and central to other regimes of talk (e.g. the process of delegation and detachment in establishing objectivity and mobility within science).

connection of new differences, but by the discounting of all remaining differences as irrelevant” (Latour 2002:7)

For Latour (2002), this is seen as helping to maintain discussions and controversies open, and avoids the premature simplification of the world (i.e. the scientists defining the primary qualities as the essential elements of the world (‘facts removed from political dabbling’), and the secondary qualities as not referring to what the world is like, but personal and cultural imaginations and perceptions). Furthermore, differences and alternatives does not necessarily lead to constant turmoil as through complex mediations and co-ordinations, tensions often crystallize into patterns of co-existence to induce further enactments (Mol 2002:181), or alternatively certain chains of associations which may fade away.

Thus, while the proliferation of spacings, timings and actings may be seen by some as getting closer to the truth through greater correspondence (in terms of representation and a focus on primary qualities); or alternatively as a problem of reductionism, with the need to add more subjective qualities to the cold and objective representations produced, an alternative would be to view them as adding one more contrast, an additional articulation, something which is added rather than taken away (Latour, 1997; 2002; Jones, McLean and Quattrone, 2004). For example, when a mentally ill person enters the care of psychiatric practice; they are not reduced to a mere ‘object’ but may be affected by a seemingly endless set of agencies (e.g. assessment forms, scans, drugs, nurses, consultant, occupational therapy, risk registers, etc.). As Latour suggests, in addition to the multiverse there is also the issue of the folded body, which is folded in such a way that the many may be seen to act as one, far from being less, there is more. However, this still returns us to the dilemma of good and bad articulations and how in practice they are differentiated (e.g. instances where ‘good management practice’ in terms of completing the written forms takes precedence over the ‘good clinical practice’). This is clearly something relating to the specificity and particularity of the situation, and a process of delving into the details and differences that emanate³¹ especially in terms of the combination of homogeneity and heterogeneity which is both relied upon and serves to constitute the object, through repetition and difference. In fact if existence relates to difference then we need to explore how such subsistence relates to the ability to attract and engage diversity, which can contribute to the sense of co-existence and ‘sameness’. For Mouffe (1993) ‘differences should be taken a lot more seriously in political theory’. Rather than focusing on some form of pluralism that fragments society into isolated individuals, we need to explore the various ways tensions, settlements, conflicts, and distributions underlie the everyday practices and processes of managing and organizing. For as Tarde suggests, it is important to examine how the myriad of local differences are recreated (Tarde 1999:101 as quoted in BC, 2004): and how apparent closings produce openings, and exclusions produce inclusions. This will allow us to begin to explore the great

³¹ Even at the level of the ‘specific’ and ‘local’ this issue of good and bad is a difficult aspect to resolve, partly as what is ‘local’ and ‘global’ become another complicated issue to explore. For instance, Mol warns against celebrating localism but in contrast highlights the need to study that which alters when matters, aims, and terms travel.

deal of effort and the variety of practices, entities, and actions associated with globalising and localizing, including and excluding, and silencing and articulating.

5. Conclusion

Within this paper we have sought to highlight the problems with assuming 'existence' to be 'out there' (whether it is in an essential, natural or in socially constructed form), but we also wish to avoid a process of deconstructing everything until we have nothing. However, how can we understand existence that does not rely on some form of solid entity, or abstract notion of social construction or deconstruction? The definition of organization provides a good example of highlighting the problem of focusing on outcomes of 'homogeneity' and 'order'. It is clearly problematic to define an organization in terms of what it is, but how do we understand it in terms of what it is not, and what it can potentially become (Jones, McLean and Quattrone, 2004). Clearly we wish to avoid the exclusion of diversity in terms of what does not become organized, but we also wish to focus on the specific features of such achievements, through a further understanding of issues of repetition and alterity.

Within this paper we have sought to explore the possibility of reconceiving apparently irreconcilable dichotomies within an alternative heuristic. This includes rethinking the object as emerging from a process of attracting diversity, which paradoxically enables it to exist through difference and repetition, and not as a fixed, independent and immutable entity, or one constructed or known merely through multiple interpretations.

Bibliography

To follow