

# European Cultural Tradition and the New Forms of Production and Circulation of Knowledge

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Not, perhaps, since the printing press's invention has European culture experienced so much upheaval. The very underpinnings of the notion of culture and of its modes of production, socialisation and appropriation are under attack. I am speaking, of course, of culture's integration in the creation of economic value. This integration process has accelerated since the beginning of the 1980s through, on one hand, the globalisation and increasing pervasion of finance in the economy, and on the other, the onslaught of so-called "new technologies".

Many have raised their voices in defence of culture, intellectuals and artists. The strongest and most organised opposition to culture's subordination to economics came together when commercial relations regarding audiovisual production were being renegotiated, and around the issue of "authors' rights" -- the very definition of which is open to discussion once new media are in the picture.

At least in France, the strategy of cultural defence seems to go beyond these first forms of mobilisation against large American communication and entertainment corporations. That strategy tends to involve protecting the "cultural exception".

The artists and intellectuals -- and politicians and governments -- who demand the right to a "cultural exception" see themselves as heirs to a tradition of European cultural autonomy and of art and artists' independence from politics and economics. The strategy of "cultural exception" supports seems to be the reentrenchment of the separation between culture and the economy.

This position -- which, in my opinion, reflects a larger European point of view -- is weak and, once scrutinised, untenable with regard to the new modes of knowledge's production and circulation. The hypothesis I'd like to put forward turns the cultural exception strategy on its head ; it can be summarised like this : the modes of production, socialisation and appropriation of knowledge and of culture are different than the modes of production, socialisation and appropriation of wealth. Georg Simmel's intuition was that it is the modes of production and socialisation peculiar to culture that must be introduced into the economy -- not culture's autonomy. Nor can that introduction be on a volunteer basis, since -- as Gabriel Tarde has it -- "intellectual production" tends to shape the direction and organisation of wealth production, and the "need to know", "love of beauty and greediness for the exquisite" are the main outlets opened to economic development.

I will therefore use these two authors, and particularly the "economic psychology" published by Tarde in 1902 -- nearly a century ago -- to unpack my argument. Let us keep in mind that Tarde's remarkable early insights are not really part of European cultural tradition, since his theory has been largely forgotten. Based on the mode of production particular to culture, and especially knowledge, Tarde proposes a intriguingly contemporary critique of political economy by inverting economic analysis's starting point. Rather than starting from the production of use-value -- that is, "material production" (the famous pin factory which went from the Encyclopédie des Lumières to

Adam Smith's Scottish moral philosophy, therein becoming the incipit of political economy) -- he started from the production of knowledge, that is, books.

"How is a book made ? It is no less interesting than knowing how a pin and a button are made." : an unimaginable opening line for economists of his day -- and, perhaps, of our own -- but far less so for us, since the production of a book may be thought of as a paradigm for post-Fordist production.

Like any other product, "truth-values" (valeur-v=E9rit=E9s), as Tarde calls knowledge, are the result of a production process. As apparatuses develop to make knowledge production and consumption practices more and more reproducible and homogenisable -- Tarde talks of the "press" and "public Opinion", while we might turn to television, computer networks and Internet -- these apparatuses take on a "quantity character that is more and more marked, increasingly apt to justify their comparison with exchange-value." Does this make them merchandise like any other ?

The economy does indeed treat them as it would economic wealth, considering them as utility-value like others. But for Tarde, knowledge is a mode of production that cannot be reduced to the "division of labour" : it is a mode of "socialisation" and "social communication" which cannot be organised by the market and through exchange without distorting its production and consumption value.

Political economy is forced to treat truth-values as it does other goods. This is first because it knows no other method than that which it elaborated for the production of use-value. Second, and more importantly, however, it must treat these truth-values as material products, or else overturn its theoretical, and especially political, underpinnings. In fact, the "lumi=E8res" (beacons), as Tarde sometimes calls knowledge, exhausts political economy's notions of economy and of wealth, founded on scarcity, lack and sacrifice. Like political economy, then, let us start with production -- but of books, not of pins. With the production of books we are immediately confronted with the need, in principle, to switch modes of production and property regimes with regard to what economics theorises and legitimises.

"The rule in the matter of books is individual production, while their property is essentially collective ; for "literary property" has no individual meaning unless works are considered goods, and the idea of the book does not belong exclusively to the author before being published, that is, when it is still a stranger to the social world. Inversely, the production of goods becomes more and more collective and their property remains individual and always will, even when land and capital are "nationalised". There is nothing suspicious about the fact that, in the matter of books, free production is vital as the best means of production. A scientific organisation of labour which would regulate experimental research or philosophic meditation through legislation would produce lamentable results."

The large multinationals of the information economy are prepared to recognise the impossibility of organising production according to "scientific management". They are insufferable, however, regarding property regimes.

Is the notion of property applicable to all formes of value, from utility-value to beauty-value to truth-value ? Can we own knowledge as we own a utility-value ? Perhaps, responds Tarde, but not in the way that economics or legal studies understand it, that is, as "free disposition".

"In this sense, one is no more owner of one's glory, nobility or credit [toward society] than he (sic) is of his limbs, which, as living things, he cannot relinquish to others. He therefore has nothing to worry regarding expropriation for these values, the most important of all, and the most difficult to nationalise."

In order to avoid the necessity of the new mode of organising production and the new property regime implied by the nature of knowledge, political economy is obliged to turn "immaterial products" into "material products" , that is, into goods like others, for book production problematizes the exclusively individual property and disciplinary production upon which the

economy is based.

Let us move to consumption : can the consumption of wealth be compared to the consumption of truth-values and beauty-values ? "Do we consume beliefs by thinking of them, and the masterpieces we admire by gazing upon them ?" wonders Tarde. Only wealth, as political economy defines it, affords a "destructive consumption" which, in turn, supposes trade and exclusive appropriation. The consumption of knowledge, on the other hand, supposes neither definitive alienation nor destructive consumption.

And to deepen the specificity of the "consumption" of knowledge let us analyse the mode of "social communication", truth-value's form of transmission, of which economists cannot conceive except under the form of the "Market". Tarde first tells us that knowledge does not have to be exclusive property in order to satisfy the desire of knowing, and do not require the definitive alienation of the "product". He then adds that the transmission of knowledge lessens neither he who produces it nor he who exchanges it. On the contrary, the diffusion of knowledge, rather than depriving its creator, augments his value and the value of the knowledge itself. It is therefore not required that they be an object of exchange in order to be communicate.

"It is by metaphor or the abuse of language that we say that two people in dialogue are 'exchanging their ideas' or their admiration. Exchange, with regard to beacons [knowledge] and beauty, does not mean sacrifice : it means mutual influence, through the reciprocity of gift, but of a special class of gift which has nothing to do with wealth. Here, the giver deprives himself by giving ; with regard to truths and beauty, he gives and retains at the same time. In the matter of power, he sometimes does the same thing ( . . . ) For the free exchange of ideas, as for religious beliefs, arts and literature, institutions and morals : between two peoples, neither may in any instance be reproached as those engaged in the free trade of goods might be reproached -- of being a cause of impoverishment for one of them."

The statement "the value of a book" is ambiguous, for it has both a venal value as something that is "tangible, appropriable, exchangeable, consumable", and a truth-value as something that is essentially "intelligible, unappropriable, unexchangeable, unconsumable". The book may be considered both as a "product" and as "knowledge". As a product, its value may be defined by the market - but as knowledge ?

The ideas of loss and gain are applicable to knowledge, but here the evaluation of losses and gains demands an ethics, not a market. A book is created for or against other books, just as a product is created for or against other products. Only in the latter case, however, may competition be decided by prices. In the former, an ethics is required. The transmission of knowledge has more to do with gift or with theft, which are moral notions, than with exchange.

"On the other hand, and by its [the free trade of ideas] very nature as a reciprocal addition, not a substitution, it arouses either fertile matings or fatal shocks between the heterogenous things it brings together. It may therefore cause great harm, when it does not do great good. And just as this intellectual and moral free trade inevitably becomes an accompaniment to economic free trade, the reverse is also true. Separated from one another, each would be ineffective and inoffensive : but, I repeat, they are inseparable, and to last indefinitely, a prohibitive tariff must be matched by an Index, that ecclesiastic prohibitionism."

According to Tarde, then, the modes of production and communication of knowledge lead us beyond the economy. We are beyond the necessity of socialising intellectual forces through exchange, division of labour, money or exclusive property. This does not mean that the relations of power between social forces are neutralised - in fact, they show up as fertile matings or fatal shocks beyond the market and the exchange of wealth. This means that that unavowed ethical nature of economic forces resurfaces powerfully as a single mode of "economic regulation" at the very moment in which economic production is subordinated to intellectual production.

Here we find the Nietzschean problem of the "hierarchy of value" and the "great economy", but on

different terrain.

Tarde gives another example, this time on "training", which leads us to a similar conclusion. We may establish a comparison between the production of wealth and the production of truth-value through teaching. We may therefore, for pedagogy, define the various factors through which teaching is produced. Just as economists distinguish labour, land and capital in the production of "beacons", so may we distinguish the activity and intelligence of the student and the knowledge of the professor. "The truth is that these essays are not terribly useful. Above all, the first condition for good instruction - the teacher's and student's psychological conditions having been met - is a good school programme, and a programme supposes a system of ideas, a belief. Similarly, the first condition for good economic production is a moral code to which all agree. A moral code is a programme for industrial production, that is, consumption - for the two are interdependent.

If, as some hold, the "beacons" may be related back to utility-value (they assume consumption and the destruction of forces and costs for their production; they are materialised in the product and have a price), the production, communication and appropriation of thoughts and knowledge differs fundamentally from the communication and socialisation of "wealth".

In capitalism, then, all forms of production, even the most incomparable, can more and more be evaluated in money, yet less and less does knowledge lend itself to this sort of evaluation. Here Tarde opens another hidden door of intellectual production that political economy cannot approach through its principles of scarcity, sacrifice and necessity. The problem posed by "intellectual production" is not only that of defining an "ethical" measure adequate to truth-value, but especially the fact that it tends towards a form of production that is more and more free. Intellectual production exhausts the very *raison d'être* of the economy and its science, economics: scarcity.

"Civilisation's effect is to push into business - that is, into the economist's field - a range of things that were previously without price, even rights and powers. So, too, has the theory of wealth encroached incessantly upon the theory of rights and the theory of power, that is, jurisprudence and politics. But against this trend, through the ever-growing freedom of widely distributed knowledge, the border between the theory of wealth and what we might call the theory of beacons is growing."

These few pages almost seem to have been writing the information economy and intellectual property in an immaterial economy in mind. "Free production", "collective property" and "free circulation" or truth-values and of beauty-values are conditions for the development of social forces in the information economy. Each of these qualities of intellectual production is in the process of becoming a new "contradiction" within the information economy, for which the challenges represented today by Internet are but the premises of opposition to come.

Writing in the same era, Georg Simmel comes to similar conclusions. "Nor does the communication of intellectual goods require us to snatch away from the one what must be tasted by the other; at least, only an exacerbated and quasi-pathological sensibility may truly feel slighted when objective intellectual content is no longer exclusively subjective property but, rather, is thought by others. Generally, we may say that intellectual possession, at least to the extent that it has no economic extension, must in the end be produced by the very conscience of the acquirer. Yet it is clearly a question of introducing this conciliation of interests, which derives here from the nature of the object, into those economic domains where, because of competition in the satisfaction of a particular need, no one enriches himself unless it is at the expense of another."

In Simmel's felicitous phrase, the conciliation of interests which derives from the nature of the intellectual object is a political programme, for the logic of scarcity, the exclusive property regime and the mode of production are imposed upon its products by the new knowledge industries. But if we do not indicate the new oppositions specific to intellectual production, if we limit ourselves to demanding the autonomy of culture and of its producers, resistance to contemporary capitalism's domination of culture remains nothing but a pious vow.

And yet the contemporary production of wealth integrates not only production, socialisation and

appropriation of knowledge, but also beauty-value, that is, aesthetic forces. As long as needs become more and more specialised, aesthetic value is one of the basic elements which stimulate the desire to produce and the desire to consume. This process, which had only just started when Tarde wrote these pages, and which was barely perceptible by the economists of his day, has undergone an extraordinary acceleration, starting with the blossoming of what we may call the information or immaterial economy.

The "cultural exception" strategy's definition of culture presupposes a qualitative difference between industrial labour and artistic labour. Today, following the tendency identified by Tarde, according to which intellectual production subordinates economic production, artistic labour is becoming one of the models for the production of wealth.

We have already seen how the notion of wealth must integrate knowledge, and how intellectual labour sketches out the tendency of the development of "economic progress" according to Tarde. It only remains to see how artistic labour might lead to an understanding of this radical change. According to Tarde, every activity is a combination of imitative and inventive labour, but also of artistic labour, present in quite unequal proportions. Industrial labour does not escape this rule. What relationship between industrial and artistic labour? The clear distinction he establishes between industrial and artistic labour does not rule out the continuity of transition.

The social definition of artistic activity grasped magnificently by Tarde may inspire several reflections on how, by integrating industrial activity, it may change the relationship between producer and consumer. Of Tarde's definition of artistic labour, let us underline two aspects: on one hand, the determining role played by the "imagination"; on the other, the fact that in artistic activity the distinction between producer and consumer tends to erase itself. We need not add that, here too, Tarde's considerations are of great importance in determining the status and function of the "consumer-communicator" of contemporary society". Under post-Fordism, in effect, the client of any industrial production (and notably in all production in the information economy) tends to identify itself with a particular public which, in turn, plays the role of both producer and consumer.

Sensation is the non-representative and therefore non-communicable element which, according to Tarde, is the very object of artistic labour. "We have said it from the beginning: the phenomena of conscience are not entirely resolved by belief and desire, by judgement and intention. Lurking in these phenomena is always an effective and differential element playing the principal role in sensations and which, in the higher sensations - that is, feelings, even the most quintessential - acts in a dissimulated way, which does not make it any less essential. Art's virtue and its characteristic is to regulate the soul by gripping it through its sensational side. As handler of ideas and intentions, it is certainly inferior to religion and to the various forms of government, politics, law and morals. But as an educator of the senses and of taste, it is unequalled."

Does this mean that sensations, too, may constitute themselves as a value that can be measured quantitatively and therefore exchanged? And through what sort of apparatus, involving which sort of activity?

"(. . .) the great artists create social forces just as entitled to the name of 'forces', just as capable of increasing and decreasing with regularity, as the energies of a living creature."

Through works of art, it is the artist who lends social consistency to the most fleeting, most singular and most nuanced of sensations. By combining the psychological elements of our soul, where sensations dominate, artists add a new variety of sensation to the public through their work. Sensation and sensitivity are hence the "products" of artistic labour.

"Yet, in thus building the keyboard to our sensitivity, in extending it for us, and in ceaselessly perfecting it for us, poets and artists juxtapose, even substitute for our natural and innate sensitivity, which is different in each of us, a collective sensitivity, similar for all, impressionable to the vibrations of the social milieu, precisely because it is born in the artist. The great masters of art, in a

word, discipline our sensitivities and then our imaginations, causing them to reflect one another and to be aroused by their mutual reflection, while the great founders or reformers of religions, the sages, the legislators, the statesmen, discipline spirits and hearts, judgements and truths."

For Tarde, then, artistic labour is "productive" labour in that it responds to a production and consumption need concerning pure sensation. We must now analyse how artistic and industrial labour are opposed or in harmony. The difference between art and industry lies above all in the fact that the desire or appetite for consumption met by art is more artificial and capricious than is that met by industry, and requires "longer social elaboration."

The desire for artistic consumption is even greater than the desire for industrial consumption, child of "inventive and exploratory imagination". Only the imagination which brought this desire into this world can satisfy it, for its very origin - unlike the desire for industrial consumption - lies almost exclusively in the imagination.

"The desire which serves industry - shaped, it is true, by the whims of its inventors - shoots out spontaneously from nature and repeats itself daily, like the periodical needs which it translates ; but the taste that art attempts to flatter is attached through a long chain of ideas to vague instincts, none of them periodical, which reproduce only by changing."

The desire for industrial consumption preexists its object and, even when specified or elaborated by certain inventions of the past, asks only of its object to be fulfilled repeatedly ; "but the desire for artistic consumption expects completion from its very object and asks of its new inventions that this object provide it with variations of their predecessors. Indeed, it is natural that an invented desire such as this have as object, too, the very need to invent, since the habit of invention can only give birth to more such habits and increase its appeal." These non-periodic and accidental needs are born of an "unexpected meeting" and require the "perpetually unexpected" to survive.

But another characteristic of artistic labour is of particular interest. In artistic production, it is impossible to distinguish production from consumption, for the artist himself experiences the desire to consume, searching above all to please his own taste, not only that of his public.

"Moreover, the desire for artistic consumption is particular in that it is even more acute and its joy more intense in the producer himself, than in the mere connoisseur. In this, art is profoundly different than industry ( . . . ) In matters of art, the distinction between production and consumption begins to lose its importance, since artistic progress tends to make of every connoisseur an artist, and of every artist a connoisseur."

And yet these differences and opposition between artistic and industrial labour are in the process of falling away, one after another. Instead, a deepening adaptation has developed between these two types of activity. Tarde himself sketches out this tendency : beauty-values must be integrated into the definition of wealth and artistic labour in the concept of labour, for "the love of what is beautiful, the greed for what is exquisite" are part of the "special" needs which exhibit great elasticity and therefore a wide opening for industry. Tarde even foresees that the luxury industry which in his day concerned only the upper classes - this was the only type of consumption which exhibited "special" needs - would, with the development of social needs, be substituted by "industrial art, decorative art, which could very well be destined for a most glorious future." A few decades later, Walter Benjamin would come to the same conclusions, analysing tendencies in industrial development and in productive activity based on cinematic production.

To close, if we wish to safeguard the specificity of European culture and its emancipatory potential, we can no longer rush to the defense of culture and its autonomy, for truth-values and beauty-values have become the motors of the production of wealth. The more we hand off the desire for production and consumption which satisfy "organic" needs to the desire for production and consumption which satisfy increasingly "capricious" and "special" needs - of which one is the need to know - the more economic activities and even goods themselves integrate our truth-values (knowledge) and beauty-values.

"Let us add the the theoretical and aesthetic sides to all goods will become more and more developed - beyond, not despite their useful side."

This conclusion might be read as catastrophic, for it demonstrates the real subordination of cultural and artistic production to economic imperatives. But it is a historical opportunity, even if we do not know to seize it. or here, perhaps for the first time in humanity's history, artistic, intellectual and economic labour, on one hand, and the consumption of goods and appropriation of knowledge and beauty-values, on the other, demand to be regulated by the same ethics.

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