

## Community and mediation

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**T**HE development of new media, particularly the internet, has brought to the spot light the question regarding the relation between community and mediation. Familiar topics such as “virtual communities”, “relation between the local and the global”, “identities”, “community journalism” or “proximity journalism” proceed, more or less directly, from that same question.

However, the way the question is nowadays again placed, resembles, in many ways, the manner in which, during the late XIXth century, Ferdinand Tönnies theorized about the concepts of “community” (*Gemeinschaft*) and “society” (*Gesellschaft*) as forms of social relation characteristic of pre-modernity and modernity; and Gabriel Tarde about the role of the press in the emergence of the new form of sociability represented by “audiences”, so distant from the “crowds” of the past.

Now, as in the time of Tönnies and Tarde, questions such as the following arise: What do we understand as “community”? What kind of communities exist? Can there be communities which are merely “virtual”, deprived of any territorial sharing? Will the growing mediatization of modern day societies lead to the unavoidable destruction of the very own idea of community?

Thus seems justified, concerning the relation between community and mediatization, to “return” to the theorizations of Tönnies and Tarde – without such a “return” signifying, obviously, the mere assumption of the forecited theorizations.

### **Space, number and sociability**

If we admit, alongside Niklas Luhmann, that society is “an autopoietic system, constituted by communications, that itself produces and reproduces the same communications that constitute it, by means of the network of those communications”,<sup>1</sup> we will easily come to conclude that space and number – territory

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<sup>1</sup>Niklas Luhmann, “La différentiation de la politique et de l’économie”, in *Politique et Complexité*, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 1999, p. 52.

and population – have a decisive importance to the form taken by those communications and, therefore, to the society they constitute.

Bearing this in mind, it is no wonder that, at least since Aristotle, the question of knowing if there is a limit in terms of space and number beyond which the *polis* cannot exist and/or function, has been raised.

The stagirite’s answer to this question, as is well known, is that citizenship – the “ability to participate in the administration of justice and government”<sup>2</sup> – requires, as fundamental condition, a limited territory and a limited number of citizens.<sup>3</sup>

Already in the XVIIIth century, Rousseau points out the inexistence of “a very small State, in which the people were easy to summon and in which every citizen might easily know all others” as one of the reasons of the impossibility to transpose to the modern age the ancient model of Greek community and democracy.<sup>4</sup>

This problem of space and number is perfectly made aware by some of the most prominent “founding fathers” of sociology that, in the late XIXth and early XXth century, realize the emergence of a new kind of society, industrial and urban, that cannot, in any way, be described in traditional terms. We’re referring, namely, to authors such as Ferdinand Tönnies (and his *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, of 1887), Émile Durkheim (and his *De la Division du Travail Social*, of 1893) and Gabriel Tarde (and his *L’Opinion et la Foule*, of 1899).

Thus, in his critique essay of 1889, focused on the work of Tönnies, Durkheim regards the question of number as the origin of the essential differences between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*:

“The penetration of consciences presupposed by community was not possible other than in small groups, since only in this condition can there be a mutual acquaintance intimate enough. As social groups increased in volume, society became less heavy on the individual. [...] That is the reason why the composition of the *Gesellschaft* is mechanic, even though the one of the *Gemeins-*

<sup>2</sup>Aristóteles, *Política*, Lisboa, Vega, 1998, Livro III, 1275 a, 20-25, p. 187. As he will add later on, this definition of citizenship “is mainly of the citizen in a democratic régime” (*ibidem*, 1275 b, 5, p. 189).

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Aristóteles, *ibidem*, Livro VII, 1326 b, 10-20, p. 499.

<sup>4</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Contrato Social*, Livro III, Capítulo IV, Lisboa, Presença, 1973, p. 81.

*chaft* was organic. Such is the essential difference from which all others derive.”<sup>5</sup>

And Tarde, when referring, in his forecited work, to the fact that, in all epochs, there has been an Opinion, although differing from what is modernly called so, adds:

“In the clan, the tribe, in the very own ancient and medieval cities, everyone knew each other personally and when, through private conversations or speeches made by orators, a common idea establish itself in the minds, it did not appear like a rock fell from the sky, of no personal origin; and it would have the more prestige, the more each one represented it in connection with the voice, the face and the personality which uttered it, giving it a living physiognomy. For the same reason, it didn’t serve to connect but people who, seeing and talking to each other every day, almost didn’t commit abuse over one another.”<sup>6</sup>

Now, how is it possible to maintain sociability – what Tönnies calls “relations of reciprocal affirmation” – in a situation where men no longer share the same space and their number hinders physical contact and face-to-face interaction? And what kind of sociability? These are the questions that, ultimately, Ferdinand Tönnies sets out to answer in his work *Community and Society*, in which he makes the homonymous distinction.<sup>7</sup> More than following the course of such distinction and, namely, the influence it has had on all subsequent sociology,<sup>8</sup> we are interested in taking it as the starting point to the discussion about the relation between community and mediatization.

<sup>5</sup>Émile Durkheim, “Communauté et société selon Tönnies”, *Revue philosophique*, 27, 1889, pp. 416 to 422. Reproduit in Émile Durkheim, *Textes. 1. Éléments d’une théorie sociale*, pp. 383 à 390. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1975, [http://www.uqac.quebec.ca/zone30/Classiques\\_des\\_sciences\\_sociales/index.html](http://www.uqac.quebec.ca/zone30/Classiques_des_sciences_sociales/index.html), p. 6 (the pages on quote refer to the electronic edition). As we know, to Durkheim, in Tönnies perspective, “community” is characterized by “mechanical solidarity”, while “society” is characterized by “organic solidarity”.

<sup>6</sup>Gabriel Tarde, *L’Opinion et la Foule*, Paris, Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1989 (1901), [http://www.uqac.quebec.ca/zone30/Classiques\\_des\\_sciences\\_sociales/index.html](http://www.uqac.quebec.ca/zone30/Classiques_des_sciences_sociales/index.html), p. 37 (the pages on quote refer to the electronic edition).

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Comunidad y Asociación*, Barcelona, Ediciones Península, 1979.

<sup>8</sup>To a sum on these influences cf. Salvador Giner, Lluís Flaquer, “Prólogo: Ferdinand Tönnies y la ciencia social moderna”, in Tönnies, *ibidem*, pp. 5-22.

## Community and society

*Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society)<sup>9</sup> are, according to Tönnies, the two kinds of “relations of reciprocal affirmation” and “association”: “as organic and real life” the former, and “as imaginary and mechanical structure” the latter.<sup>10</sup> *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* correspond, simultaneously, to two different orientations of will (*Wille*), as orientation towards another human being: i) *Gemeinschaft* corresponds to an orientation of affection – the natural or essential will (*Wesenwille*) –, that makes men treat themselves as ends; ii) *Gesellschaft* corresponds to a rational orientation – the “rational-instrumental will” (*Kürrville*) –, that makes men treat themselves as means.<sup>11</sup> As examples of *Gemeinschaft* we have the family, the village or the nation; as examples of *Gesellschaft* we have a bank, an union or the state itself.

The community, which is rooted in the family, in the relationships between mother and child, husband and wife, and brothers and sisters,<sup>12</sup> adopts three main forms (and degrees): the community of blood, laid on the relation of consanguinity (the family, the relationship, the clan, etc.), and that is the primary form of community; the community of place or “community of physical life”, “based on a mutual habitat” (the village, the small town, etc.); the community of spirit or “community of mental life” (the nation, the religion, etc.) which “merely involves coordinated cooperation and action towards a common goal”, and that, “in union with others”, represents the “truly human and supreme” form of community.<sup>13</sup> As Tönnies summarises it:

The true cement of unity and, consequently, of the possibility of a community lays, firstly, on the narrowness of the consanguineous relation and blood mixing; secondly, on the physical proximity and lastly – to human beings – on the intellectual proximity. One must seek the sources of all kind of understanding in this gradation.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Following the current practices in portuguese usage, we translate *Gesellschaft* by society, avoiding the term “association” also employed by Tönnies spanish translators.

<sup>10</sup>Tönnies, *ibidem*, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Gíner, Flaquer, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-14.

<sup>12</sup>Cf Tönnies, *op. cit.*, p. 33 ss.

<sup>13</sup>Tönnies, *ibidem*, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup>Tönnies, *ibidem*, p. 47.

Besides the ones previously mentioned, the community presents characteristics such as the following: i) It involves a tacit agreement or understanding (*Verständnis*) which displays language as its “real organ”;<sup>15</sup> ii) It implies its own territory, a “homeland” (*Heimat*);<sup>16</sup> iii) In the spiritual sense, it identifies itself with a people’s religion.<sup>17</sup>

As opposed to community, where the association of men has a “natural” basis, in society the association of men is “artificial”, focusing in the possibility of trading goods and services for other goods and services. In that sense, as community is essentially “centripetal”, since individuals “remain together despite all the factors that tend to separate them”, society is essentially “centrifugal”, since individuals “remain essentially apart despite all the factors that tend towards their unification.”. In this last case everyone, as an “individual”, tries to ensure and preserve their “own sphere”, in which they refuse the inclusion and intrusion of each one of the other “individuals” – the “negative attitude of the individual towards the other becomes the first and normal relation”. The gift or the works paid to others are only done so in exchange for a gift or a work considered at least equivalent – the satisfaction of mutual interest is a mandatory rule.<sup>18</sup> Besides these, society displays characteristics such as the following: i) It lays on the contract, which regulates the trade of material assets and so on;<sup>19</sup> ii) It implies de-territorialization and a centrifugal movement, well symbolized by the commerce and money involved in the transition from agriculture to industry;<sup>20</sup> iii) In its spiritual sense, it involves the public opinion, which finds in the press its “real instrument”, endowed with an international and globalizing vocation.<sup>21</sup> As a consequence of its vocation, one may even conceive as final purpose of the press “the abolition of the plurality of states and their replacement by a single worldwide republic, co-extensive with the world market, which would find itself run by thinkers, scholars and writers and that would not wield any method of coercion other than those of psychological nature”.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Cf. Tönnies, *ibidem*, pp 45-8.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Tönnies, *ibidem*, pp. 49-51, 246-7.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. Tönnies, *ibidem*, p. 262.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Tönnies, *ibidem*, p. 67.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Tönnies, *ibidem*, pp. 75-83.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Tönnies, *ibidem*, p. 83.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. Tönnies, *ibidem*, pp. 261-4.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Tönnies, *ibidem*, p. 264.

One of the fundamental questions posed by Tönnies distinction of community and society is to know if these terms name realities which correspond to two different historical periods or, instead, realities that characterize any historical period – ours, for instance. On the one hand, it seems clear that for Tönnies community and society correspond to two different historical periods, an ancient one and a more recent one: “[the] *Gemeinschaft* (community) is ancient; *Gesellschaft* (society) is recent as name and phenomenon”,<sup>23</sup> and, Tönnies adds, “the original collective forms of community have developed until they reached society and the arbitrary will of association. Throughout history, popular culture gave rise to the civilization of the state.”<sup>24</sup> However, on the other hand, Tönnies states that “one must always consider [...] the strict relation among all forms of society and community type basis, in other words, the original natural and historical forms of common life and community shared will”<sup>25</sup>. That is, community and society are not necessarily exclusive, since it is possible to see, in all society, the survival of bonds of community type and, in all community, the emergence of certain tendencies towards society.

Tönnies will therefore fluctuate, in the understanding of Gíner and Flaquer – the translators of his work to Spanish – between two contradictory conceptualizations:

[...] when Tönnies claims *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* are not two stages of history, two distinctive signs of periods following each other, but actually two contrasting aspects found in all societies, he addresses both concepts as analytical tools. But when he states that the tendency of the history of civilization is the expansion of the area of *Gesellschaft* at the cost of *Gemeinschaft*, he deals with the concepts as if they corresponded to solid and empirical realities and, at the same time, defends a linear and inevitable theory of social change. And in this sense he is mistaken.<sup>26</sup>

As one can infer from these words, a correct conceptualization must declare that “*Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* do not materialize in a pure state society, but form mixtures whose relative weight may come to depend on the

<sup>23</sup>Tönnies, *ibidem*, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup>Tönnies, *ibidem*, p. 269.

<sup>25</sup>Tönnies, *ibidem*, p. 265.

<sup>26</sup>Gíner, Flaquer, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

historical period, the society in question, and even the definition of the situation by the actor.”<sup>27</sup> Something that, we add, allows us to regard societies as being more “communitarial” or “societarial”, including in this last type our own, the societies we live in – capitalist, bourgeois, democratic –, and in the first type other societies also found nowadays, in other points of the globe or even among us, in certain specific islands. And, if it is true that, like Marx, Tönnies “sees in the neverending search of the lost community one of the keys to the understanding of the meaning of history”,<sup>28</sup> it is also Tönnies himself who, according to Gíner and Flaquer, points out that “without community there is no morality, but without society there is no progress”, therefore the ideal situation would be “that in which the communism emanating from all solidary and altruistic human community would combine with the socialism, as an associative expression of all collectivity organized institutionally in a civilized and modern way”.<sup>29</sup>

### **From crowds to the audiences – the role of mediation**

In the forementioned critique of Tönnies work, Durkheim, at the same time he admits the existence of the two kinds of “association” pointed out by the german sociologist, as well as the general lines of their description; distances himself from the vision that *Gesellschaft* sets the beginning and the development of an individualism and of a “mechanical society” more or less irreversible and only opposed by a growing effort – increasingly artificial and doomed to failure – by the State.” So, believes Durkheim,

[...] the life of great social groups is as natural as the life of small aggregates. It is neither less organic nor less internal. Outside the purely individual movements, there is in our contemporary societies a collective activity as natural as the one of the once smaller societies. It is surely different; it constitutes a different kind, but between these two species of a same gender, no matter how diverse they may be, there is not a difference of nature.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Gíner, Flaquer, *ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup>Gíner, Flaquer, *ibidem*, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup>Gíner, Flaquer, *ibidem*, p. 14.

<sup>30</sup>Durkheim, *op cit.*, p. 8.

The distinctive “difference” of this “collective activity” that Durkheim grants to contemporary societies is placed by Gabriel Tarde in the emergence of the new form of sociability represented by “audiences”. These audiences, though lacking consanguinity and a communal territory, do not share less with community of a mental and spiritual communion – thus not limiting contemporary societies to the rational-instrumental bond based on interest and in contract that Tönnies emphasised. It is, therefore, no wonder that Tarde underlines the essential similarity that, in this particular, exists between contemporary audiences and the crowds of the past:

Despite all the dissimilarities we found, the crowd and the audience, those two extremities of social evolution, have in common the fact that the connection between the diverse individuals that constitutes them does not consist in harmonizing themselves through their own diversities, their useful specialities, but in reflecting themselves and one another, melting themselves through their innate or acquired similarities, in a simple and powerful unison – but so much stronger in the audience than in the crowd! –, in a communion of ideas and passions that, in fact, gives free room to their individual differences.<sup>31</sup>

The audience is, according to Tarde’s definition, “a disperse crowd in which the influence of minds over each other became an action at distance, and at increasingly greater distances”,<sup>32</sup> or even “a purely spiritual collectivity, a dispersion of physically separated individuals among which exists a merely mental cohesion”, that grows continuously and has an “undefined” extension – making it impossible to be mistaken for a crowd. Therefore, it is only unaccurately and metaphorically one may talk about the “audience” of a theater or of an assembly.<sup>33</sup> Concerning the way audiences are formed, Tarde provides the following example:

[...] they [the men] are sitting, each in their own house, reading the same newspapers and scattered around a vast territory. What bond exists between them? This bond is, along with their belief or their passion, the awareness that this idea or will is shared, at

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<sup>31</sup>Tarde, *op. cit.*, p.19.

<sup>32</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 8.

the same time, by a great number of other men. That knowledge is enough to, even without seeing those men, be influenced by that mass, and not just by the journalist, common inspirer that, invisible and unknown, becomes therefore more fascinating. The reader is generally unaware of this almost irresistible persuasive influence from the usual newspaper.<sup>34</sup>

What explains this “audience contagion” suffered by all the men that form it is not, however, the prestige of “current affairs” offered by newspapers, but quite the opposite: it is actual “all that currently inspires a general interest, even an old fact” – as was the case of Napoleon’s life at the time Tarde wrote.<sup>35</sup> At the base of this “distant suggestion” produced in audiences is, paradoxically as it may seem, “the proximity suggestion” which results from the fact that, since childhood, every one of us “lively feels the presence of the other one’s stare” throughout our attitudes, gestures, ideas, words, judgements and actions. We are, after many years, able to “be impressed even by the thought of the other’s stare, by the idea that we are object of the attention of people far from us”. Identically, “it is after we have known and practiced, for a long time, the suggestive power of an authoritarian and dogmatic voice, that the reading of a statement is enough to convince us, and that the mere knowledge of the approval of that judgement by a great number of our pairs disposes us to judge the same way”. Audiences thus represent a form of sociability much more evolved than the crowd, and could only appear “after many centuries of a more rudimentary and elemental social life”<sup>36</sup>.

In fact, says Tarde, not even in the Graeco-Roman Antiquity or in the Middle Ages audiences existed. In these periods we could find, respectively, auditoriums and fairs. The birth of audiences comes with “the first big development of press”, that takes place in the XVIth century and makes “the transmission of thought at a distance” more important than “the transmission of force at a distance” – as it is well illustrated by the protestant movements that then emerged.

Then it was seen, profound novelty and of unpredictable effect, the daily and simultaneous reading of a same book, the Bible, edited by the first time in thousands of copies, give the united

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<sup>34</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 10.

mass the feeling of forming a new social group, separated from the Church. But that growing audience was yet nothing than a Church apart, towards which it still showed confusion [...]. Audiences *per se* did not gain clear autonomy until Louis XIV.<sup>37</sup>

An important second moment in the emergence of modern audiences matches with the French Revolution of 1789, that “dates the true birth of journalism and, therefore, of the audiences, of which the Revolution was the growth fever”: “what characterized 1789, that the past had never seen, was the swarming of eagerly devoured newspapers that spawn in that time. If many are stillbirth, some provide the spectacle of a never seen diffusion”.<sup>38</sup>

The XIXth century, with the development of “perfected locomotion processes” and of “instant transmission of thought at a distance” – Tarde specifically refers to the railroad, the press and the telegraph –, allowed audiences “the indefinite extension to which they are susceptible and that digs between them and the crowds such a deep pit”, making them “the social group of the future”, while crowds, as well as families, being unable to extend beyond the limits of physical space, become “the social groups of the past”.<sup>39</sup> So it makes perfect sense, against the thesis of Gustave Le Bon, to claim that our time is not the “age of crowds” but the “age of audience or audiences”.<sup>40</sup>

If it is true that the newspaper is fundamental to the definition of an audience, not all contents of the paper contribute to that definition – not “ads” and “practical informations” regarding “private matters” of the readers – and not even all kinds of newspapers are fundamental to that purpose – not, for instance, the “advertising-newspaper” but only the “tribune-newspaper”, since it is only “from the moment when the readers of the same newspaper are won over by the idea or the passion that gave rise to it, that they truly constitute an audience”.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, audiences present other relevant features, from which can be singled-out the following:

<sup>37</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 11.

<sup>38</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>39</sup>As Tarde exemplifies: “The wider audience ever seen was the one of the Coliseum; yet, this auditory didn’t surpassed a hundred thousand people. The audiences of Péricles or Cícero, and even of the great preachers of the Middle Ages, such as Peter the Hermit, or St. Bernard, were undoubtedly inferior. We also don’t see significant progresses from eloquence in the Antiquity or the Middle Ages.” Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>40</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>41</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 21.

i) Belonging simultaneously to various audiences: one of the key differences between audiences and crowds is that one cannot belong, simultaneously, to more than one crowd – but one can belong to, and one in fact does, “several audiences as to several corporations or sects”; hence, precisely, the greater intolerance of nations where the “spirit of crowds” rules, and the progress of tolerance, even scepticism, that comes with the gradual substitution of crowds by audiences.<sup>42</sup>

ii) Homogeneity of audiences: between a newspaper and its audience there is what Tarde calls a “mutual selection” or “mutual adaptation” – the reader chooses the newspaper that best expresses his ideas and passions; the newspaper uses the reader’s ideas and passions to direct him, in a process Tarde considers “the danger of modern times”, since it allows the publicist to exercise his influence over his public.<sup>43</sup> The frequent reading of a newspaper therefore instills, among its readers, “a communion of suggested ideas and the awareness of this communion – but not of this suggestion that is, however, clear”.<sup>44</sup>

iii) Generalization and fragmentation of audiences: the division of society in multiple groups, increasingly mobile, tends to “overlay in a manner more visible and effective to its religious, economical, aesthetic, political divisions, and the division in corporations, sects, schools or even parties”.<sup>45</sup> Each of these entities aspires, in one way or the other, to become audience, to have its newspaper and its readers at a distance.<sup>46</sup> This gradual transformation of all groups into audiences has for consequence that, in contemporary societies, “the clear and persistent divisions between the multiple varieties of human association”, always conflictual, are replaced by “an incomplete and variable segmentation, of unknown limits, in ways of perpetual renovation and mutual penetration”.<sup>47</sup>

iv) Internationalization of audiences: not only certain newspapers and magazines have their audience spread all over the globe, but also audiences such

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<sup>42</sup>Cf. Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>43</sup>“Behold the danger of new times. Far from stopping the publicist’s action to be decisive for its public, the double adaptation that makes the public a homogeneous group, well known to writers and highly manipulable, allows him to act with more strength and security”. Tarde, *ibidem*, p.15.

<sup>44</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>45</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>46</sup>Cf. Tarde, *ibidem*, pp. 17-19.

<sup>47</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 32.

as the religious, the scientific, the economical or the aesthetic are “essentially and constantly international”.<sup>48</sup>

v) The audience’s agreement as (public) opinion: despite their difference and multiplicity, there is a “partial agreement from the audiences on certain important points”, being precisely that agreement that constitutes *public* opinion, “of which its political preponderance grows exponentially”.<sup>49</sup>

## Mediation and conversation

Opinion – that Tarde defines as “a momentary and more or less logical group of judgements that, answering to currently placed problems, are reproduced in numerous people from the same country, same time, and same society”, presenting, each one of them, “a more or less clear awareness of the similarity of their judgements and of the judgements of others” –<sup>50</sup>, distinguishes itself from two other elements of the “social spirit” or “audience” that to it contribute and with it dispute the “boundaries”: the tradition – “condensed and accumulated extract of what was the opinion of the deceased, legacy of sound and necessary prejudices” – and reason – “the personal, relatively rational, yet often unreasonable, judgements of an elite that isolates itself and thinks, stepping outside the mainstream, to stop it or direct it”.<sup>51</sup> Of these three elements of the “social spirit”, the opinion is the last to develop, but “the most ready to grow”, doing so at the expense of the other two, and breaking all resistences opposed to it.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the influence over the public and, consequently, over the formation of opinion that Tarde attributes to the publicists/journalists,<sup>53</sup> the press is just one, and not even the most important, of the causes of that opinion. That role is given, according to Tarde, to conversation:

<sup>48</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 18, nota de rodapé.

<sup>49</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 18.

<sup>50</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 36.

<sup>51</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 35.

<sup>52</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 35.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. Tarde, *ibidem*, pp. 14-16. On the way Tarde refers to the power of publicists/journalists, check the following example: “These, far more than statesmen, even superior, make the opinion and lead the world. And, when they imposed themselves, what a solid throne is theirs! Compare, to the quick worn out of politicians, even the most popular, the prolonged and indestructible regency of highly famous journalists, wich reminds us the longevity of Louis XIV, or the indefinite success of comedians or tragedians. No old age for these autocrats.” Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 16.

The transformation of an individual opinion into a social opinion, the “opinion”, is due to the public speech in the Antiquity and Middle Ages, to the press in our time but, first and foremost, throughout all ages, to private conversations [...].<sup>54</sup>

Thus, one may say that “conversation throughout the times and, currently, that which is the primary source of conversation, the press, are the key factors of opinion, not counting with tradition and with reason, that never cease having its share in it and leaving its mark”.<sup>55</sup>

But what does Tarde understand, specifically, by this “conversation” which he considers not only the primary cause of opinion but also condition for the influence that newspapers have as a factor of opinion – since, he claims, if no one talked about them, what influence could they have over the minds?<sup>56</sup> By conversation, says Tarde, “I understand the dialogue with no direct and immediate utility, when one talks mainly to talk, for pleasure, for amusement, for politeness”.<sup>57</sup> The importance of this gratuitous kind of dialogue comes, fundamentally, from the kind of proximity it instills among men – a proximity centered in a spontaneous, and therefore deeper, attention.<sup>58</sup>

The conversation – “the dialogues amongst equals” is fueled, at all times, by the “dialogues spoken by superiors”: “In all times, those who talk, talk about what their priests or their teachers, their parents or their masters, their

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<sup>54</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, pp. 36-7.

<sup>55</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 36.

<sup>56</sup>Cf. Tarde, *ibidem*, pp. 42-3. This Tarde’s thesis, which represents a kind of anticipation of the theory of the *two-step flow of communication*, explains why Elihu Katz places the beginning of the “one hundred years of research in communication” in the essay “Opinion and Conversation”. Cf. Elihu Katz, “One hundred years of communication research”, in José A. Bragança de Miranda, Joel Frederico da Silveira (orgs.), *As Ciências da Comunicação na Viragem do Século*, Actas do I Congresso da Associação Portuguesa de Ciências da Comunicação, Lisboa, Vega, 2002, p. 21.

<sup>57</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 43.

<sup>58</sup>“With the exception of duel, we never observe anyone with all the force of the attention we are capable of, lest in the condition of talking to that someone. Therein lies the most constant, the most important and the least noted effect of conversation. It marks the highlight of spontaneous attention men pay one another, and by whom they interpenetrate in a way infinitely deeper than in any other social relation. Making them gather, spontaneous attention makes them communicate with one another by an action so irresistible as unconscious. It is, therefore, the most powerful agent of imitation, of propagation of feelings, ideas and modes of action.” Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 43.

speakers or their journalists, taught them”.<sup>59</sup> In what specifically concerns the way press “fuels” conversation, Tarde states:

The press unifies and vivifies conversations, unifies them in space and diversifies them in time. Every morning, the newspaper serves their audience the daily conversation. [...] This growing similarity of the simultaneous conversations in an increasingly broader geographic domain is one of the most important traits of our time, since it explains, for the most part, the growing power of opinion *versus* tradition and reason itself; and this increasing dissimilarity of successive conversations explains clearly to us the mobility of opinion, counterweight of its power.<sup>60</sup>

The character of conversation as “social relation by excellence” explains why ordinary language dubs a group of people in the habit of reuniting and talking among themselves, a “society”.<sup>61</sup> A “mute” society ceases, in its essence, to be a society; and, reciprocally, when for any reason a “civilized people” falls into barbarism, “it becomes relatively mute”.<sup>62</sup>

This social – or “linguistic” – role aside, conversation has a no less important political role. Actually, according to Tarde, the evolution of power depends on the evolution of opinion, and this, in turn, on the evolution of conversation; the evolution of this last depends, in turn, on its sources – the most important of which being, as we have seen, the periodical press, that spreads information regarding what happens worldwide which is “exceptional, amazing, inventive, new”. From these informations, those that refer to the “acts of power”, the “political facts”, are the most relevant. So, a sort of circle is closed: “in the end, the acts of power themselves, grinded by the press, ruminated by conversation, contribute largely to the transformation of power”.<sup>63</sup> To this evolution of power, the private conversations and discussions are more important than parliamentary conversations and discussions, since

It is where power is made, while in the Halls of the delegates and their corridors, power is used and often disrespected. [...] The

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<sup>59</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 47.

<sup>60</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 51.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 58.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. Tarde, *ibidem*, pp. 61-2.

<sup>63</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, p. 64.

coffee houses, the saloons, the shops, anywhere a conversation is held, are the true factories of power. [...] Power comes from there, the same way richness comes from manufactures and factories, the same way science comes from laboratories, museums and libraries, the same way faith comes from catholic schools and maternal teachings, the same way military force comes from steel mills and barrack exercises.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

Not being under consideration here a more or less eclectic – and artificial – synthesis of the views of Tönnies and Tarde, it seems to us, nevertheless, that they involve a certain complementarity; and, at the same time, that this complementarity helps us to better understand the present and, more specifically, the relations between community and mediatization.

In what concerns Tönnies, we regard as fundamental his idea that the modern society cannot be seen as a kind of community (*Gemeinschaft*) broader than those of the past, representing instead the emergence of a “society” (*Gesellschaft*) endowed with a different nature: laying not in the belonging – consanguinity, territory, collective spirit –, but in mutual interest – contract, cosmopolitanism, highlighting of material assets and such; oriented not towards the interior – agriculture and domestic economy – but towards the exterior – industry and commerce; favouring not tradition but innovation. Does that mean that such “society” corresponds to a kind of degenerate stage of the original “community” and, therefore, to a degenerate state of our own human sociability? Or, in other words, does it mean that modern day societies are a sort of lower kind of societies, almost at the verge of desintegration?

It is precisely to answer – negatively – to such questions, that Tarde’s thesis proves to be essential – namely the thesis which states that modern day societies involve a different type of “communities”, deprived of territory, laying upon action at distance and mediatization, congregating individuals who share the same set of interests, ideas and values. To sum it up, values and ideas more or less “imagined” and “virtual”<sup>65</sup> – but no less aggregative and even no less

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<sup>64</sup>Tarde, *ibidem*, pp. 64-5.

<sup>65</sup>It seems clear to us that, with his theorizing about audiences, Tarde anticipates what, later on, Benedict Anderson will call “imagined communities”; and Howard Rheingold “virtual communities”. *Cf.* Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and*

constrictive than “real” communities; or, to put it in Tönnies’ terminology, that society involves a type of sociability that is not “more strong” or “less strong” than that of the “community” – but merely distinct.

However, as Tarde’s emphasis on conversation shows, that does not mean “real” communities are absorbed by the “society” and by “virtual” communities – all of them represent not only different but also complementary types of sociability. In fact – against Tönnies? -, it is mandatory to realize that in contemporary society, the “society”, alongside its “virtual” communities, does not replace community; both will overlap and penetrate each other in a complex and multifaceted manner, as if dividing the universe of each individual into sub-universes and sub-universes of those sub-universes, disagreeing and often antagonistic.

More generically, the views of Tönnies and Tarde can be seen as discoveries of the fact, made clear by theorizations such as the ones of Teillard de Chardin or McLuhan, that human societies are subdued to a double movement: on one hand, a movement of expansion in space that also corresponds to an increase in the number of its members; on the other hand, a movement to compensate such expansion through the creation of more and more powerful and inclusive media, tending to include everything and all of us in their increasingly thicker webs. The phrase “communication society”, glorified in recent times, is nothing other than the explicit acknowledgement of the dialectics found in that double movement.