Chapter Eleven

A Neomonadology of Social (Memory) Production

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On the evening of the 7th of January 2015, a crowd of over 100,000 people assembled in one of the main squares of the city of Naples in southern Italy for the funeral mass of Pino Daniele – a beloved musician who had been overwhelmingly popular with his hybrid and soulful version of Mediterranean blues.\(^1\) His sudden death due to a heart attack at the age of 59 had hit the social networks first, as is increasingly the case with celebrity deaths. A mass sharing of songs, videos, and personal memories had flooded the walls of Italian Facebook starting from the night of the 5th, peaking on the 6th and the 7th, only to quickly peter out when displaced by comments and articles relating to slaughter of the French journalists of Charlie Hebdo in Paris.\(^2\) Standing in the silent and sombre crowd, it was impossible not to notice how, when Daniele’s most popular songs sounded through the loudspeakers, the dark sea of people sparkled with the bright glow of thousands of small screens, which they lifted up to film and record the crowd softly singing along. Sri Lankan vendors criss-crossed the packed square with their latest street wares: extendable stick monopods made in China that allow ‘group selfies’ to be taken from above. The day before the funeral, photos and videos of a ‘flash mob’ immediately summoned through the Facebook event page had also presented the same images of bright blue screens lighting up and filming a vast crowd of guitars and voices singing Daniele’s songs in a spontaneous social memorial.

Watching both scenes, the first one live, the second one through Facebook’s newsfeed, I could not help thinking that these acts of social memorization, of social production and sharing of memories, were producing ‘value’ for somebody else. Undoubtedly they were registered by the corporate owners of the social Internet as a local spike in activity generating views on YouTube, suggesting consumers’ propensities to algorithms, raising the income streams of telecom operators, and providing free content for news outlets.\(^3\) The event, one of many that agitate and animate transnational
digital networks, pointed to the process whereby the generation of a social memory becomes a direct productive force in the economic domain. At the same time, such acts also genuinely produce what Marxists would call ‘use values’ that are not consumed by marketization: a feeling of solidarity, social meanings, a moment of collective reflection, the sharing of memories producing a sense of belonging.\(^4\) These ‘use values’ could be further qualified: a sense of beauty (aesthetic or cultural values such as the sound of Naples as a ‘black’ European city) and of truth (truth values about one’s life to which Daniele’s songs had been a soundtrack or about the city and its history of interrupted modernity)\(^5\). The scene I witnessed is, of course, both unique in its singularity and common, as photographing, filming, recording, and sharing have become, thanks to digital technologies, a daily practice for many, thus constituting a new mode of social memorization. The production of economic value (exchange and utility), cultural and social values, technology and memory are inextricably enmeshed. Remembering and sharing by technological means produce surplus value for netarchical capitalists but also an excess of affects, desires, and beliefs materializing a ‘common ground’.\(^6\) It struck me how this strange effect was enabled by technologies that, while constructing an undoubtedly social experience, would read this event as predicated on the existence of a (social) network composed of individuals and/or ‘dividuals’ but also exceeding both.

**Two tales of social production**

There is a constitutive tension between the network (a diagram composed of nodes and links), the individual (the concept of the autonomous, rational subject), and the ‘dividual’ (its datafied digital shadow) in that strange phenomenon called ‘social production’ or ‘social cooperation’, which both mainstream and Marxist theorists have identified as a key source of the production of value in contemporary societies. Acts of social memorization such as the one presented above constitute just such a case of a larger continuum spanning the extremes of ‘mechanical’ and ‘non-mechanical’ cooperation, which Yochai Benkler calls ‘social’ or ‘p2p production’.\(^7\) Theorists of social and peer-to-peer (p2p) production have registered the efficacy of organizational strategies that enable individual autonomy and voluntary participation in the field of information and knowledge production. They have explained social production as the result of the ‘falling costs of access to the means of production’ coupled with the action of the ‘invisible hand of the social’ enhanced by a peer-to-peer architecture or
scale-free networks somehow harmonizing individual wills activated by ‘social motivations’.

For Benkler, but also more recently Jeremy Rifkin, the key factor at work in social production is internal to the movement of capital, so to speak: the falling costs of access to the capital needed to be an actor in the information economy allow for an amplification of the powers of decentralized individual action. Social production is based on the coordinate effects of non-coordinate actions in as much as one does not need to be consciously cooperating in order to be actually cooperating. Just the act of recording and registering events of daily life and putting them online is enough to be cooperating from the point of view of the creation of economic value in a networked economy. For Benkler, the combination of individual social motivations and efficient coordination resolves the ‘tension between the values promoted by liberal markets and the values of liberal democracy’. A collective or social event that produces value brings together the individual capacity to choose, the social motivations which imply a kind of ‘peer pressure’ on individual choice (such as acquiring social capital or standing with others), the consolidation of a feeling of similarity and belonging which constitutes society, and also the effect produced by a commercial network of smart devices which allows for memories to be registered as traces to be stored, tagged, classified, related, and made available for current and future consumption. Techno-social memory thus starts as a series of actions (recording, uploading, tagging, posting, commenting, storing) that precipitate into digital objects producing value for the market and value for the social in what would appear as a seamless continuum that increases market value while consolidating social order. Post-workerist Marxists, on the other hand, following Marx’s Grundrisse, have instead argued that social cooperation is not simply a new source of value but the specific historical expression of living labour in an economy defined by the hegemony of immaterial value production and financialization. From this point of view, social co-operation is involved at every stage and throughout every layer of value production in post-industrial economies, involving not simply the completion of a task and the reproduction of a template but the production of new values and the socialization of invention. Daniele’s music, emerging out of a proletarianized urban milieu ravaged by a crisis of industrialization, relied on the cooperation of a number of musicians and the re-invention of musical and cultural memories constituted by the social circulation of sounds, instruments, techniques, media, and rhythms in a transnational and transcontinental space spanning Europe, Africa, the Caribbeans and North America. The devices, protocols, platforms, and programming languages
that allow for the storing and sharing of the products of such cooperation are the means through which the productive powers of living labour are appropriated and captured by contemporary capitalism – turning rent and financialization into the new mode of extraction of surplus value.\textsuperscript{12} The relational, linguistic, and technological abilities released by post-Fordism become crucial components in the market-based production of value, but they can no longer be organized within the boundaries of the firm and the form of waged work. In as much as it enacts a reappropriation of portions of fixed capital, this new source of value also retains an autonomous potential that is not exhausted or captured in advance by marketization. For post-workerist Marxists, this potential constitutes the (virtual) engine of a post-socialist and post-capitalist common, a co-poietic production that holds together the collective and the singular.\textsuperscript{13} Here, as in Paolo Virno’s adoption of Gilbert Simondon’s philosophy, the common or social is the pre-individual (such as species-specific expressive capacities) and at the same time that reserve of being which allows the individual to undergo ever new transformations.\textsuperscript{14} It is the social memory of music but also the singularizing tendencies that each one brings to such memory and the new productions that it enables (including the production of new forms of social life). Among the autonomist Marxists, however, nobody has gone as far as Maurizio Lazzarato in posing ‘autonomous and independent’ social cooperation as the ontological and historical presupposition of economic valorization and the division of labour.\textsuperscript{15} Monetization and the creation of social wealth depend on the primary flow of social currents that mobilize ‘mnemonic work’ or the ‘labour of attention’. The creation of value, from this perspective, depends only secondarily on capital and the division of labour while resting primarily on the ‘cooperative dynamics of inter-cerebral psychological forces which are not unilaterally contained in the relation capital-labour. Cooperation, in fact, is social in so far as it is not founded on work or capital, but on the activity of the ‘spirit, soul, or memory.’\textsuperscript{16}

If value is first of all a social production mobilizing the powers of memory, in what way is it reconfigured by the digital networking of the social, by the ubiquitous social activity of recording, storing, and sharing?\textsuperscript{17} Theories of social production or cooperation also need to account for the series of elements included in an event such as the one described above: the individual holding up her digital device and looking at the scene through the mobile screen in a posture that recalls a kind of neo-monadic architecture of subjectivity; the simultaneous process of aggregating a multitude of audiovisual and linguistic digital traces that are recorded and stored in databanks and that constitute her at a micro-scale as a ‘dividual’; the social flow of
currents of values that individuate the ‘common ground’ of the crowd; the relational recursiveness of the network as digital objects are posted, shared, and diffused; the multiplication of agencies at the technological level (screens, interfaces, protocols, programmes, code, algorithms, bots, buttons, etc.); and also the international and ethnic division of labour and the logistical arrangements that assemble the devices and bring Southeast Asian migrants to the streets of Southern Europe.18

While Marxist theorists of social cooperation maintain the common and co-operation as the presupposition of economic valorization, liberal theories tend to emphasize the action of autonomous individuals – even as such actions at a collective level somehow obey a kind of mechanical coordination or even intrinsic social laws. If a networked society presents itself as a ‘society of individuals’, this is possibly also due to the ways in which devices are constructed as first of all ‘personal’. The social life of digital media presents the recurring image of individual users interacting with their devices, so that the networked society comes across as a “society” of individual users connected by an information architecture.19 Devices are constructed for individual use (desktops, laptops, tablets, smartphones), and individuals can be spotted in both public and private spaces staring or talking at their screen, shifting their attention in and out of their physical environment. The design of digital devices and interfaces mobilizes a ‘monadic’ architecture of subjectivity where ‘users’ are individually enveloped by their devices in ways that allow them to abstract themselves periodically from their physical surroundings in order to engage in communicative acts. As Sherry Turkle has put it, digital devices pose ‘being alone’ as a ‘precondition for being together because it is easier to communicate if you can focus, without interruption on your screen’.20 Individual users ‘prehend’ and are ‘prehended’ by their devices including the network as a series of actions and relations (searching, clicking, opening, commenting, liking, posting, sharing, filming, photographing, reading, watching, ‘digging’, blogging, sharing, chatting, listening, following, friending, etc.). As it unfolds itself in the network, the individual ‘monad’ is ‘divided’ in the act of constituting a digital double or ‘dividual’.

Monadology and digital media

This relationship between the irreducible singularity of the agent and the infinite divisibility of the ideal mathematical continuum is crucial to the set of problems that led the Baroque German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm
Leibniz to articulate his strange concept of the monad in *Monadology* (1714). Nominated by Norbert Wiener as the patron saint of cybernetics for his ‘calculus ratiocinator’, Leibniz’s strange hypothesis of the existence of simple substances called *monads*, who are also true agents in the world, stimulates speculation on the nature of social production in a situation such as the one described above.21 It is, of course, thanks to Gabriel de Tarde’s *Monadology and Sociology* (1893) and his lectures on *Economic Psychology* (1902) that Leibniz’s monadology was first turned into a component of an economic theory where the ‘general form of activity’ is no longer the form of work through which a social expenditure of thermodynamic energy transforms nature into an object but rather ‘inter-cerebral or social labour’ involving a relation between agents ‘acting-at-a-distance’. Such labour follows the logic of the multi-form work of the ‘soul’, ‘spirit’, or ‘memory’, which is that of mutual influence rather than unilateral appropriation.22 The domain of production and that of conduct, which Foucault understood as the conduct of oneself as well as others and involving a creative and inventive relation with resistance and counter-conduct, are thus seen as inextricably intertwined.23 Deleuze, of course, dedicated an important book to Leibniz called *The Fold*, which seems to provide a particularly fruitful entry point into the relationship between monadology and digital media. In Leibniz, the monad is an image of ‘enclosure’ or ‘self-envelopment’ and indicates the ‘soul or subject as metaphysical point’. Leibniz had borrowed the term from the Neo-Platonists ‘who used it to designate a state of One, that is a unity that envelops a multiplicity’. If Giordano Bruno’s monad had allowed the Neo-Platonist emanations to give way to a larger zone of immanence (even as formally respecting the rights of a transcendent God or higher Unity), Leibniz, in Deleuze’s view, stabilized the concept of the monad through his ‘mathematics of inclusion, which allowed him to posit the enveloping series of multiples as convergent infinite series – through the metaphysics of inclusion which posits enveloping unity as irreducible individual unity’.24 Far from presenting a self-enclosed, individualistic subjectivity, the monad is a model of networked subjectivity and social production that composes a number of different elements in network culture. ‘Leibniz’s most famous proposition’, in fact, held that ‘every soul or subject (monad) is completely closed, windowless or doorless’, while containing ‘the whole world in its darkest depths’ and ‘illuminating some little portion of that world, each monad a different portion’.25 As a simple substance (without parts), ‘each monad includes the whole series of predicates’ (actions and relations) and conveys the entire world but expressing ‘more clearly a small region of the world, a “subdivision”, a borough of the city, a
finite sequence’.

Deleuze explains well the architectural model that informs Leibniz’s vision of the monad: more than an atom, the monad is a ‘cell’ with its dark background out of which everything is drawn out, ‘like those places which have existed for ages where what is seen is inside (cell, sacristy, crypt, church, theatre, study, print room)’. The Baroque monad is lit by a ‘crushing light’ coming from ‘openings invisible to their very inhabitants’ and presents zones of clarity. The clear region of the monad is, as Deleuze again recounts, extended in the clear portion of another, and in a same monad the clear portion is prolonged infinitely into the obscure zones, since each monad expresses the entire world as convergent infinite series. Deleuze suggested that if the Baroque monad can be read ‘politically and socially’ and represents a mutation of the ‘system window-countryside or window-painting’ with the dyad ‘city-information table’, then it can be also read historically as an architecture of subjectivity. Such architecture then presents a series of historical cases: the system ‘car-windscreen’ (exemplified by Tony Smith’s famous description of his minimalist sculpture in terms of a car speeding along a dark motorway lit only by the car’s headlamps, with the tarmac hurtling by in the windscreen) or ‘a computer screen in a closed room’. But we could also think about today’s ‘hand held screens’ on the interior walls of a subject moving as much in closed rooms as in open spaces. The walls of the networked monads are covered with ‘black mirrors’ or screens through which, in Deleuze’s terms, they ‘read’ the world more than they are actually ‘seeing it’, in the sense that reading is here described as a relation to the concepts of universals and singularities rather than to a thing.

If the monad thus expresses the architecture of the interiority of the ‘node’ or the irreducible singularity that each individual brings to the network experience, in Leibniz this also involves the existence of a material ‘façade’ which corresponds to what contemporary network cultures might call the ‘wall’ or ‘profile’ – a standard component of the architecture of social media. It is through the ‘wall’ or ‘profile’ that the networked monad, which envelops the world through the screen, can be said to first appear. From the wall or profile it emerges as part of an infinitely divisible digital continuum that constructs it as a ‘dividual’ or ‘digital shadow’ – an object among other objects caught up in a continuum of variations (other profiles but also software, algorithms, protocols, plugins, and audiovisual objects in general, etc.). If on the inside, the monad represents the simplicity and closure of the soul that reads the world, its outside corresponds to an infinitely divisible digital ideal, where indivisibility is displaced by an infinitely divisible ‘dividual’ acting like a node or relay in a ‘collective’ represented by the image of the network. For Leibniz, infinite divisibility belonged to the
'mathematical or ideal continuum', while matter as such was constituted by folds. In thinking about the strange materiality of social quantities such as data, for example, one can consider the difference between the ideal mathematical continuum composed of points and what Leibniz called the physical point of inflection or 'the ideal genetic element of the variable curve or fold or the active spontaneous line, the authentic atom'. In Deleuze’s words again, ‘inflection is the event that happens to the point or the line’, thus complicating what Anna Munster calls ‘the foundational cartography of the network as a map of links and nodes that have become the representative image of network design’. As a predicate or event of the point and line, ‘inflection is that which makes a fold from variation and brings it to infinity’: as such, it is a ‘site of cosmogenesis’. In Deleuze’s re-reading of Leibniz, the physical line of inflection ‘cannot be separated from an infinite variation or an infinitely variable curve, passing through an infinite number of angular points and never admitting a tangent, enveloping an infinitely porous world constituting more than a line and less than a surface’. As such, the mathematics of inflection turns the ideal diagram of nodes and lines into the infinitely variable curve of social value production: the local event of a large crowd assembling to mourn a beloved musician (like many other social events of different kinds) are recorded in the network as a series of variations, made continuous by meta-data in relational databases connecting disparate recordings to be stored and shared in large data farms. As in the ‘metacommunities of code’ project, which is analyzing ‘code-sharing practices in free and open source software repositories with a particular focus on GitHub’, variation is the basic form of the production of networked value, and small differences or variations are less subject to division than to various forms of inflection. Leibniz’s monadology establishes a basic relation between variation and point of view – the second component of his reinvention of the Neo-Platonic monad. Leibniz established the problem of point of view on the model of the sections of the cone, leading him to argue that ‘there are as many points of view as inflections in inflections.’ In Baroque mathematics, as Deleuze recounts, the point of view is ‘the point where the lines perpendicular to tangents meet in a state of variation...not exactly a point, but more a place, a position, a site, a “linear focus”, a line emanating from other lines’. This concept of point of view establishes ‘perspectivism’ not as ‘dependence on a pre-given or defined subject but as that which turns the subject into what comes to or remains in the point of view’. Every point of view is a point of view on variation, as it is not what varies for the subject but the condition in which an eventual subject apprehends a variation (metamorphosis) or equivalence
(anamorphosis). For thinkers such as Leibniz, Nietzsche, and William and Henry James, point of view is the condition in which the truth of a variation appears to the subject.\textsuperscript{38} Finally, the metaphysical point, or the point of inclusion, is defined as the entelechia or the \textit{final cause of the fold}. What is folded is the included or the inherent. The monad (which has no windows) is working from a \textit{condition of closure or envelopment} and could hence be posited as a soul or subject.\textsuperscript{39} The mathematics of inclusion helped Leibniz to stabilize the monad by presenting enveloping unity as an irreducible singularity, foreclosing the risk of making individuals relative in the sense that they would simply melt into a universal spirit or soul of the world as seen in the Neo-Platonist monad or contemporary notions of collective intelligence.\textsuperscript{40} Monadology recasts the very distinctions between the dividual, the individual, and the collective that are so crucial for theorizing networked subjectivity. The monad is an ‘agent’ but an ‘infra-individual’ one: it refers to the multiplicity of forces that compose the ‘individual’ and hence the ‘social’. It is neither the ‘dividual’ because it cannot be divided, being without parts; nor is it the ‘individual’ as usually understood, because individuals as such are aggregates of simpler parts, involving complex hierarchies of dominant and dominated monads. Yet the monad, in all its irreducible unity and singularity, is the agent of sympathetic cooperation or, as we might call it today, social production: this is how it is presented in Tarde’s economic psychology. It can be argued that Leibniz’s monad corresponds neither to the definition of the ‘individual’ as a rational subject of choice in theories of social production nor to phenomenological accounts of the embodied (human) subject. In \textit{Monadology}, Leibniz described the monad as a ‘simple substance that enters into composites’: ‘simple means without parts’ or ‘indivisible’; and substance, as he put it elsewhere, ‘is a being capable of action’, which is, however, ‘altogether immaterial’ or a ‘metaphysical point’.\textsuperscript{41} Every monad is thus first of all an \textit{agent}, ‘each different from all other ones while at the same time endowed with an internal principle of change and the internal complexity of that which changes’.\textsuperscript{42} As ‘incorporeal automata’ that are to some extent perfect and self-sufficient, they are ultimately ‘the source of their own internal action’.\textsuperscript{43} Monads are thus not necessarily human, nor do they correspond to the individual; rather they indicate ‘anything that has perceptions and appetites’. What distinguishes souls properly speaking from simple monads is the fact that their perception is more distinct and that they have \textit{memory}.\textsuperscript{44} Every single portion of matter can thus be seen as animated by an infinity of tiny agents or souls, turning the monad into a \textit{posthuman} concept resonating with the contemporary return of \textit{panpsychism} in speculative realism.\textsuperscript{45} Gabriel Tarde, who developed his
own esoteric concept of the monad in his 1895 essay *Monadology and Sociology*, defined the monadologists as ‘monists who believe that all matter is spiritual’ (or subjective) but who, unlike what he called the ‘idealists’, do not think that matter is simply ‘the projection of the mental states of an I’. For monadologists, the whole universe is populated with ‘souls distinct from my own, but fundamentally similar’. Unlike the idealists who claim that ‘one knows nothing of the *being-in-itself of a stone* or a plant, and at the same time stubbornly persist in saying that it *is*’, Tarde described monadologists as those who believe that if this *being of a stone or a plant* ‘in itself is fundamentally similar to our own being, then it will no longer be unknowable, and may consistently be affirmed’.\(^{46}\) Tarde notably ‘opened’ the monad up to ‘action-at-a-distance’ by other monads. He criticized the impenetrability of Leibniz’s monads and their reliance on a ‘pre-established harmony’, arguing instead for ‘open monads which would penetrate each other reciprocally rather than being mutually external’.\(^{47}\) In as much as they act, and act at a distance, they are no ‘points’ but:

> [e]ach element, hitherto conceived as a point, now becomes an indefinitely enlarged sphere of action...and all these interpenetrating spheres are so many domains proper to each element, so many distinct though intermixed spaces, perhaps, which we wrongly take to be a single unique space. The centre of each sphere is a point, which is uniquely defined by its properties, but in the end a point like any other; and besides, since activity is the very essence of the elements, each of them exists in its entirety in the place where it acts.\(^{48}\)

### A neo-monadological model of social cooperation

It is possible to think of ways in which a (neo)monadological concept of the social could make an actual difference in modelling key processes of network culture, introducing a new concept of social memory. Contemporary theories of social or peer production seem like particularly reductive versions of monadic inter-penetration, reducing the monad to the human individual, bracketing off the fact that what we conceive of as an individual is in fact the ‘final term’ of a previous series (physical, biological) which does not stop with it. Such an interpretation downplays the relation with other non-human elements and forces while retaining from Leibniz the closure of the soul within itself and most significantly his notion of harmony. For reasons that are personal and autonomous, we are told, individuals choose
to ‘act together’ or ‘cooperate’ (even when such cooperation involves the simple act of converging on a city square for a celebration). Technology allows such cooperation to become immediately productive of social memories that flow through the timelines and newsfeeds of social network sites, only to be copied and stored more or less permanently in individual devices or on centralized server farms. For a key theorist of social production such as Benkler, individuals—the moral anchor and actual moral agent of political economy—voluntarily and efficiently coordinate with others, driven by social motivations in producing informational goods whose specific characteristics (the marginal cost near zero of information) enables peer production in certain sectors of the economy. Technologies such as digital objects are here just tools that individuals use to cooperate, while agency is allocated exclusively to the human individuals and the value of the products of peer production is defined by utility and exchange. The methodological individualism that is at the core of liberal theories of social production is introduced to make the phenomenon intelligible—or rational—in the eyes of mainstream economists. In explaining how voluntary cooperation is successfully performed without the promise of financial rewards and without the display of command lines within the firm, the notion of utility value is central. To freely and voluntarily cooperate, the individual needs to be motivated, and this motivation can only be linked to the actualization of a satisfaction (hence a pleasurable sensation) such as that induced by the growth of one’s social capital or influence with others. Even if for Leibniz the individual was not the monad but an aggregate of monads, theorists of social production maintain his notion of individuals as closed unities harmoniously cooperating with other closed monads, identifying the social as the combination of the ‘internal’ drive of the individual with the external mechanisms of harmonization (or social laws): the social motivation to gain pleasure by accumulating social capital in one’s circle of peers somehow submits to the laws of social physics. The invisible hand of the social, which supplements the invisible hand of the market in theories of social production, is a model of coordination that poses the origins of value in individual initiatives of exchange and production—the equivalent of the pre-established harmony of Leibniz’s monadology. Tarde objected to the notion of pre-established harmony, arguing that sympathetic cooperation was the far-from-pre-established result of complex processes through which monads unilaterally or reciprocally capture each other’s attention, leading them to follow, adapt, or oppose other monads. Cooperation is not based on exchange but on an asymmetrical relationship of mutual or unilateral capture which presupposes a whole social and psychic economy.
of power. It is difficult to underestimate the importance of the notion of motivations for liberal and mainstream theories of social production — a notion that illustrates a crucial difference with Tarde’s neo-monadology of sympathetic cooperation. For Benkler, motivations are a universal of human behaviour, relaying a utilitarian model of pain and pleasure or utility value. A simple model of human motivation is what gives economics analytical tractability, in Benkler’s words — to the extent that all human motivations can be more or less reduced to something like positive or negative utilities translatable into a universal medium of exchange or money.52 From this perspective, the key to understanding social production is catching the difference between money-oriented motivations from socially oriented motivations, but the difference seems to be only one of orientation: in as much as they are oriented towards social standing or capital rather than economic standing (and ultimately pleasure), social motivations still obey an economic logic (positive/negative utilities) even as they bypass the question of money.53 Motivation is thus closely linked to interest, a concept that Dardot and Laval examine in their critique of neoliberal rationality. Following Foucault, they point out how in classical liberalism, interest is the other name of desire, a principle of action that is endowed with its own principle of internal regulation and whose foundation is the liberal government of the self. To reduce pain and increase pleasure according to the right calculation of the consequences of action, makes the ability to calculate interest the first great secular principle of the regulation of conduct.54

From the point of view of monadology, we might say that the concept of the liberal individual moved by motivations and interests that define its ‘appetite’ for the satisfaction of a certain sensation seems, remarkably enough, to lack the dimension of belief. Liberal theories of the social thus produce what we might call a ‘mutilated’ version of the infinitesimal forces that for monadologists are the truly infra-individual social agents. While they assume a heterogeneity of motivations, they present a univocity of desire (reducible to the sensation of pleasure derived by the act of cooperation) and a homogeneity of beliefs (a presupposed agreement on the goals of cooperation). In as much as social production relies on the principle of utility, which is in turn based on sensation, it thus mobilizes a qualitative element in the monad that, like interest in liberal political and economic theory, is non-transferrable. In contrast, Tarde’s neomonadology pushed him to criticize the exclusive emphasis on sensation in the emerging neo-classical economic paradigm and to argue for the key importance of the transferrable: that is, social quantities
such as desires and beliefs. For Tarde, the qualitative element of sensation was not transferrable and hence not social. What made the monad social was not the drive to acquire pleasurable sensations (and the individual memory of pains and pleasures undergone in the past) but its being constantly immersed in the objectifiable flow of social quantities such as beliefs and desires. Beliefs and desires express the objectification and quantification of the two main virtual mnemonic forces of the soul that belong to every existing monad (inorganic, organic, or human); that is, the static force of belief and the dynamic force of desire (in Leibniz, perception and appetite).  

By the universality of their presence in all psychological phenomena, both human and animal, by the homogeneity of their nature from one end of their immense gamut to the other, from the slightest inclination to believe or to want up to certainty and passion, and finally by their mutual penetration and by other no less striking signs of similarity, belief and desire play exactly the same role in the ego, with respect to sensations, as do space and time in the external world with respect to material elements.

Unlike sensation, belief combined with desire is not only transmittable, it also comprises unconscious states of being and is present in even a protoplasm or a spore. When applied to the field of social cooperation as the source of the production of value, we can say that we do not just join a project, subscribe to a platform, or turn up at a social event advertised on social media because it makes us feel good but because we desire something and refuse something else, because we believe in somebody or something and no longer believe in something else. The actions of believing and desiring re-actualize the forces of time as memory. They are transmittable social quantities of variable intensity that inform the production of value in sympathetic cooperation. They make the difference between success and failure, underpin the reproduction of the existent, and constitute the power of the true event. Tarde’s merit, for some, was not so much to have ‘opened up’ Leibniz’s monad and hence made it ‘social’ but to have inserted Nietzsche’s forces into Lucretius’ atoms, to have disposed of the transcendence guarantee by God and his pre-established harmony in order to grasp the monads as avid and possessive elements driven less by the urge to preserve their being than with a plan to conquer the world and pattern it on itself. To do away with the emphasis on ‘harmony’ as the modality of cooperation and to introduce dissent, conflict, hostility,
and avidity at the core of social cooperation is an operation that does not necessarily lead to the postulation of a need for a new social contract. It is true that every monad – every simple element without parts that brings unity or enfolds a multiplicity – wants not so much to preserve itself as to spread. Every idea, affect, belief, truth, but also digital object, virus, protocol, or image aims for maximum diffusion or to express its power to the maximum. Not a substance like the selfish gene of neo-Darwinism but a force or agent individuated by its milieu, each monad has its ‘design’: it strives to expand and proliferate to the point where it will have become the whole world and have patterned the world after itself. The Nietzschean will to power of Tarde’s monads only come to a halt when it encounters a limit in the resistances and wills emerging from other monads. The complex architectures of physical, biological, and social assemblages are the outcome of these strange subterranean struggles – the oppositions, adaptations, and inventions that constitute monadological production. If this avidity were the only thing that defined a monad, we would in fact find ourselves in a cosmological version of Hobbes’ concept of war as the basis of sociality. But Tarde considers that the sympathetic side of the monad is as important as the hostile or combative side: no single monad is able to carry out such a conquest on its own. By being attracted to the similar in others, they also form bonds with others – that is, form societies. This interdependence of hostility and sympathy, combined with the drive to expand, constitutes the key to understanding the relation between subjectivation and subjection, freedom and domination in the neo-monadological social universe of Gabriel Tarde. The coexistence of sympathy and hostility, like and dislike, and the interplay of autonomy and dependence is essential to social production. ‘[I]n every atomistic or monadologist system, every phenomenon is nothing other than a cloud which depends on actions produced by a multitude of agents which are so many invisible and innumerable gods (polytheism or miriateism), and yet these microscopic gods mostly appear to us as having given up their absolute freedom, becoming ‘prisoners or subjected’.”

In their drive to realize their design, i.e. their particular combination of beliefs and desires, monads are drafted into the projects of other monads. They let themselves be hegemonized and place themselves voluntarily under somebody else’s lead – they ‘follow’ or ‘combat’ others. Since the relation between monads always plays out in the space of freedom afforded by distance, what we have then is not physical combat but a subtle process of mutual suggestion involving an asymmetrical and more or less reversible capture of ‘followers’. It is almost as if the Gramscian concept of hegemony – the
ability to govern by consensus and to wage a war through persuasion that produces the relationship between dominating and dominated, hegemonic and subaltern – is taken to a microscopic (or infra-individual) and social level, making it reversible and unstable. Hegemony is, so to speak, almost ontologized. The engine of voluntary and collective social production is, in fact, a willingness to follow, to copy, to imitate (even one’s own self), to become part of a flow, to join somebody else’s design, all the time hoping to realize one’s own small or great invention.

Conclusions

A neo-monadology of social memory production is a speculative experiment that allows us to understand ordinary events of social memorialization in networked cultures as an expression of social co-operation that breaks with theories of motivation and the harmonization of individual choices entailed by concepts of ‘social laws’ and also of ‘emergence’. Understood in neo-monadological terms, social cooperation rests on a multiplicity of relations of mutual influence and capture: it engages infinitesimal forces and directly mobilizes the capacity of memory to retain time and introduce difference as well as its ability to act at a distance according to a logic of mutual appropriation or unilateral subjection. The social action of memory thus explains the production of values – utility but also truth and beauty – as a force of repetition and difference, where every repetition and difference is also a social action (even when it takes place in the multiplicity that constitutes each individual). Such is the action-at-a-distance in social digital media in which avid yet essentially connective forces are synthesized by new media objects: widgets and plug-ins such as ‘like’, ‘share’, or ‘tweet’ buttons. Societies of monads produce and are characterized by asymmetrical relations of micro-hegemony that are more or less stabilized but always open to internal revolt. Social memory production must therefore be understood in terms of the infra-individual relations that haunt the individual, the capacity of memory to retain time and introduce difference, as well as its capacity to act at a distance according to a logic of mutual appropriation. The human aspects of social memory must therefore be understood in terms of their implication in larger societies of inorganic, organic, and technical forces that constantly reinvent mnemonic actions such as possessing and being possessed, sympathy and hostility, leading and following, and – finally – conducting oneself and conducting others.
Notes

1. On the Mediterranean blues of Pino Daniele, see Cavallo, Chambers, as well as Festa.
2. On the morning of the 7th of January 2015, a commando of three men attacked the offices of the satirical French magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris, killing twelve people, mostly journalists and two policemen. The three men, all of whom were later killed by the French police, hailed Allah while shooting their kalashnikovs, thus placing the massacre under the rubric of 'Islamist terrorism'. The massacre soon became a mass event on social networks, where the twitter tag #jesuischarles was one of the most popular ever in the history of Twitter (see Whitehead).
3. On the political economy of 'propensity', see Thrift.
4. On use values as essential sites of struggle exceeding exchange value and fully investing the production of subjectivity, see Mezzadra.
5. On the 'interrupted modernity' of the Mediterranean, see Chambers.
6. For Kostakis and Bauwens, netarchical capital 'is that fraction of capital which enables cooperation, but through proprietary platforms that are under central control' (2014: 38). On the production of 'common ground' as a political stake, see Gilbert.
7. While postulating that social production is at the core of the production of value in the networked economy, Benkler posed a difference between mechanic cooperation (as that enacted in cases such as Nasa Clickworkers or by corporations such as Google and Amazon) and non-mechanic cooperation, involving deliberative processes such as in Wikipedia (2006: 75).
8. See Benkler 2006: 32-34; On the 'zero marginal cost' revolution, see Rifkin.
9. Benkler, p. 3.
10. Ibid., p. 2.
11. On the biopolitical genealogy of social networking sites as technologies of stabilization of the social, see Terranova.
12. For an account of digital technologies as mechanisms of capture, see Pasquinelli; on rent and financialization as new measures of value, see Fumagalli and Mezzadra.
13. For a political theory of the common, see Hardt and Negri.
14. For Paolo Virno, the 'social' indicates what Simondon calls the 'pre-individual' but also in a 'strong sense' the whole of productive forces historically defined as much as the biological features of the species (2001: 238).
15. Lazzarato, p. 8
16. Lazzarato, pp. 35 and 39.
17. In Lazzarato's account of Gabriel Tarde's *Psychologie Économique* (1902), Tarde is presented as a critic of both the labour theory of value, grounding the latter in the division of labour, and of utility value in neoclassical economics (Lazzarato 2002: 8).
18. On the intrinsic connection between racism and the capitalist process of valorization, see Curcio and Mellino.

19. Munster, p. 11.


21. In his introduction to Cybernetics, Wiener so articulated the importance of Leibniz for his new science: ‘If I were to choose a patron saint for cybernetics out of the history of science, I should have to choose Leibniz. The philosophy of Leibniz centers about two closely related concepts – that of a universal symbolism and that of a calculus of reasoning. From these are descended the mathematical notation and the symbolic logic of the present day. Now, just as the calculus of arithmetic lends itself to a mechanization progressing through the abacus and the desk computing machine to the ultra-rapid computing machines of the present day, so the calculus ratiocinator of Leibniz contains the germs of the machina ratiocinatrix, the reasoning machine. Indeed, Leibniz himself, like his predecessor Pascal, was interested in the construction of computing machines in the metal. It is therefore not in the least surprising that the same intellectual impulse which has led to the development of mathematical logic has at the same time led to the ideal or actual mechanization of processes of thought.’ (1965: 12).

22. Lazzarato, p. 18; Gabriel de Tarde’s Monadologie et Sociology was originally published in 1893 but according to Filippo Domenicali composed mostly in 1875. Domenicali argues for an esoteric Tarde who expresses himself in his monadology as ‘secret metaphysics’ but which he tended not to make so public or central for fear of going against the positivist spirit of the time (See Tarde 2012; Domenicali). For a Tardean reading of digital networks that deploys Tarde’s concept of imitation to think virality, see Sampson; for a perspective on the relation beween Tarde and social psychology, see Blackman.

23. On the notion of conduct and counter-conduct in Foucault, see Davidson.


27. Ibid., p. 27.

28. Ibid., p. 50.

29. Ibid., p. 27.


32. Munster, p. 21.


34. Ibid.

35. ‘Metacommunities of Code’ is a collaboration between Matthew Fuller, Richard Mills, Adrian Mackenzie, Stu Sharples, and Andrew Goffey (see http://metacommunitiesofcode.org/). See their contribution to this volume on pp. 87-101.

Amsterdam University Press
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., pp. 18-19.
39. Ibid., p. 22.
41. Rescher, p. 45.
42. Ibid., p. 71.
43. Ibid., p. 87.
44. Ibid., p. 91.
45. On the post-human and the post-humanities, see Braidotti; on the return of panpsychism in contemporary philosophy and media theory, see Shaviro; on machinic animism, see Melitopolous and Lazzarato.
47. Ibid., p. 26.
49. See Benkler, p. 20.
50. Lazzarato, p. 11.
51. Ibid., p. 92.
52. Ibid., p. 97.
55. Ibid., pp. 24-25.
56. See Tarde 2012, p. 66.

Works cited


