

Title: Actor-Network Theory, Gabriel Tarde and the Study of an Urban Social Movement:
The Case of Can Ricart, Barcelona

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Abstract: This article discusses the possibilities that a deeper engagement with the work of Gabriel Tarde opens for Actor-Network Theory (ANT). It argues that the combination of ANT's methodological and analytical orientation and Tarde's neo-monadology offers an appropriate framework for the study of new forms of political activism. Findings from an ethnographic research on the conflict surrounding the eviction and demolition of the Can Ricart factory in Barcelona are used to discuss: a) how ANT transforms the objects of inquiry into performative, relational entanglements (or monads); and b) how Tarde's neo-monadology helps to re-imagine the political in ANT, moving away from the design of new parliamentary forms and towards a politics of invention. Three key moments of invention in the conflict are discussed: the assemblage of a new activist collective; the fabrication of the very factory the movement was trying to save; and the generation of a bifurcation in the conditions of possibility in which the conflict was taking place.

Keywords: Barcelona; Urban Sociology; Social Movements; Ontology; Ethnography; Monadology

Acknowledgements (if any):

SAVE CAN RICART, DEFEND POBLE NOU. Black uppercase letters printed on white vinyl; six meters wide and almost one meter high. The banner, carried by ten men and women, led the demonstration, and between six hundred and a thousand people, depending on the source, marched behind it. They were singing, chatting, blowing whistles, carrying placards, and playing with beach balls that read “Save Can Ricart.” It was the 28th of April 2005, 7:30 in the evening, at the Rambla del Poble Nou in Barcelona. Among the demonstrators were workers, businessmen, neighbours, squatters, academics, children, senior citizens, politicians, and activists. Many of them carried their own banners: “Property speculation—business as usual;” “34 Families and 250 workers drowned by Plan 22@;” “Fairer compensation payments for everyone.” Several journalists and photographers walked around interviewing people and looking for favourable shooting positions. It was the largest demonstration the neighbourhood had seen in three years.

The protest had been organized by the newly born Save Can Ricart Platform.¹ They were demonstrating against the eviction and demolition of the Can Ricart factory complex, planned as part of the City Council’s “Plan 22@” for the renewal of Barcelona’s old industrial quarter, Poble Nou. As the demonstration crossed the Gran Via Avenue, traffic was blocked for about 20 minutes and a large banner was hung from a scaffolding structure. It read “Stop Plan 22@, Save Can Ricart.”

The march ended outside the District’s Office, where the “Manifesto for Can Ricart” (Plataforma 2005) was read by respected writer and journalist Josep Maria Huertas. The text denounced the violence that urban policy was exerting on the social fabric, the historical heritage and the identity of the neighbourhood. “Real estate developers, with the support of the local government, are planning our future according exclusively to their economic interests, while ignoring the opinions and the needs of the neighbourhood and the city”, said Huertas. The City Council’s plan to demolish Can Ricart—he continued—not only posed a

risk to the survival of 34 companies and 240 workers that could play an important role in the future of the neighbourhood, but would also mean losing the most important example of 19th Century industrial architecture still standing. Huertas talked about the gentrification of the area, the loss of its industrial landscape and identity, and the City Council's broken promises with regards to new jobs, affordable housing and public facilities. Before reading a 10-point list of demands, he concluded: "We [neighbours] want to be *actors* in the economic, social, and cultural future of the neighbourhood and the city." People applauded and cheered.

When the Can Ricart conflict exploded, I was convinced I had found the *perfect case study* for my PhD. My project sought to establish a link between the post-Fordist turn (Amin 1994) and the transformation of Barcelona's Poble Nou neighbourhood. Plan 22@, explicitly aimed at turning this industrial area into a "digital economy" district, provided the spatio-temporal framework. I thought Can Ricart would be the ideal site to *illustrate* the effects of post-Fordism on both the everyday life of industrial workers and the area's built environment. And so, from 2005 to 2007 I conducted an ethnographic study of the conflict based on a combination of participant observation, archival research, the analysis of media coverage and semi-structured interviews.

Within this framework, the demonstration described above played a comforting role. It provided a starting point for my ethnographic narrative, complete with a recognisable *mise en scène* featuring a new social movement, a clear enunciation of the conflict, and an enemy. It took me a while to recognise the extent to which my initial formulation had uncritically deployed each of its concepts, objects and subjects—from "post-Fordism" to "social movement" and even "Can Ricart." A growing involvement with Actor-Network Theory

(ANT) and Gabriel Tarde's monadology made me rethink the conceptual and methodological architecture of my research half way through it. Rather than theoretically conceptualising post-Fordism and then studying empirically its descent upon Poble Nou (and the resistances it generated in the case of Can Ricart), my PhD became an exercise in studying the conflict in the opposite direction: by systematically *opening up* each of its components and delving into their shifting relations. Hence, I engaged in detailed descriptions of many of the actors involved: the workers, the businesses, the buildings, the urban plan, the activist groups, the objects produced in the workshops, the owner, the images used in the protest, etc. As soon as I started working in this fashion, each component became a potentially infinite entanglement of disparate elements in relation—the very definition of a “monad” according to Gabriel Tarde (2012). One of the first consequences of this methodological shift was that instead of taking for granted, as “matters of fact,” the actors and concepts I would have normally started the analysis from, I learned to approach them as “matters of concern,” “gatherings” rather than “objects,” real yet fabricated, and certainly subject to disputes and controversies (Latour 2005, 114). The “solidity” that allowed them to be taken for granted became an object of inquiry in itself.

Instead of a classic introductory scene that frames the narrative and sets it in motion, the April 2005 demonstration became a point of entry into many of the “monads” involved in the conflict—the beginning of an inward and long-winded journey, as it were. The Save Can Ricart Platform, for example, went from being the “activists’ group” (i.e. an actor in the conflict and an explanatory resource) to a heterogeneous assemblage which itself needed to be explained. This implied studying its members and the relationship between them, the nonhuman devices that had allowed forging and sustaining an alliance, the tactics and the materials deployed in their struggle, and the discursive and conceptual repository they drew upon. Instead of a stable object-factory, I also started seeing Can Ricart as a material and

conceptual *accomplishment*. Arduous work (i.e. research, dissemination, lobbying) had been required to transform a collection of industrial workshops into a factory with [great](#) heritage value. Through this mode of engagement, the Post-Fordist transformation that had interested me from the beginning re-emerged, this time embedded and embodied in a myriad of places and practices: in the discursive justification of the need to “renew” the industrial district provided in urban plans; in the workers’ own [conceptualization](#) of how the [globalization](#) of the industry had affected their work and their role in the city; in the activists’ understanding of the City Council’s plan as property speculation; or in the factory’s unplanned transformation into a mixed industry-art-culture hub.

This article addresses the central question raised by this special issue—the usefulness of ANT as a method and as a theory to inform qualitative research—by considering three key moments in the Can Ricart conflict and discussing the effects of approaching them from an ANT-Tarde perspective. “Assemblages” looks at the formation and composite nature of the alliance to save the factory; “Fabrications” investigates one of the movement’s most notorious achievements, the construction of the very factory they were trying to save; “Bifurcations” studies how the movement’s actions and creations managed to crack and shake up the very order of possibilities they were operating in. My aim is twofold: [First](#), I want to show how ANT transforms our objects of study into performative, relational entanglements or effects. Secondly, I want to show how Tarde’s neo-monadology helps to re-imagine the political in ANT, moving away from the terms that have dominated the discussion within the perspective, namely the [conceptualization](#) of new, expanded parliamentary forms with the ability to incorporate nonhuman actors. I will argue that Tarde’s work allows us to redirect the debate towards a politics of invention concerned with the creation of new political collectives, objects, and conditions of possibility.

Actor-Network Theory, Gabriel Tarde and the Study of (Urban) Social Movements

Defining ANT is an elusive task. There is no agreement on what the name actually means—“sociology of translation” (Callon 1986), “actant-rhizome ontology” (Latour 1999) or “sociology of associations” (Latour 2005) have been proposed as better alternatives; some of its most prominent practitioners are not convinced whether it is in fact a theory (Latour 1999; Law 2004); and research done under the ANT umbrella includes a vast array of topics (from scallops to financial markets) and methods (archival, ethnographic, interview-based). In addition, ANT has mutated considerably since its emergence in Paris in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a novel approach to the study of science and technology (Callén et al. 2011), and already in 1999 some of its founding figures were proclaiming the beginning of the After-ANT era (Law and Hassard 1999).

Within this context, I find Blanca Callén et al.’s (2011) strategy particularly useful. They reject the idea of having to provide a *synthetic* definition of ANT and instead give an *analytic* account of what ANT studies actually do. They highlight six characteristic dimensions: 1) An interest in relational semiotics; 2) The intensive description of heterogeneous assemblages; 3) An emphasis on the role that material and non-human components play in those assemblages; 4) An insistence in localized, precarious, performed processes; 5) An interest in the scale and spatiality of phenomena; 6) A certain obsession for understanding *how* things happen in minute detail, rather than *why*.

_____ This description can be further enriched by John Law’s definition of ANT as an approach that

treats entities and materialities as enacted and relational effects, and explores the configuration and reconfiguration of those relations. Its relationality means that major ontological categories (for instance “technology” and “society,” or “human” and “non-human”) are treated as effects or outcomes, rather than as

explanatory resources. Actor-network theory is widely used as a toolkit in sociotechnical analysis, though it might be better considered as a sensibility to materiality, relationality, and process. (Law 2004, 157)

According to Bruno Latour (2005, 8), ANT amounts to a “sociology of associations” (or “associology”) that instead of beginning with social aggregates *ends with them* (i.e. attempts to explain them rather than use them to explain other things), and that instead of defining the social as made of human ties, recognizes that “associations are made of ties which are themselves non-social.” As I will show in the next section in more detail, starting from associations, symmetrically considering human and nonhuman elements, and thinking of objects and categories as performative effects has a great impact in the way one goes about doing ethnography. It directs our attention toward processes, expands the range of actors and actions deemed worthy of study, and produces situated, provisional, and precarious accounts.

The interest of Gabriel Tarde’s (1843-1904) work for ANT has been mainly developed by Bruno Latour (2002, 2005, 2010; Latour and Lepinay 2010; Latour et al. 2012).² It is not difficult to see why Latour has seen in Tarde a (mostly forgotten) precursor of ANT. Tarde did, after all, argue that “society” and “social” were a *universal form of association rather than a substance*: “Everything is a society... every phenomenon is a social fact,” as he put it (Tarde 2012, 28). Tarde argued that science had repeatedly shown us how so-called individual bodies (from cells to stars, both living things and inorganic beings) were in fact *composite* entities. Their apparent indistinctness and homogeneity cracked as soon as scientists delved into them. These assemblages, or “societies” of heterogeneous elements, are what Tarde calls monads. Latour (2003) has argued that their importance from an ANT perspective lies in the fact that, as the very concept of “actor-network” would later do, monads completely bypass the human/nonhuman divide and show that the micro/macro distinction is the wrong approach to unpacking the scale and complexity of social phenomena.

Tarde's ideas in relation to these issues are developed in his 1893 book *Monadology and Sociology*, perhaps describable as the outline of a post-Leibnizian neo-monadology. Contrary to Leibniz, Tarde does not consider monads the simple and irreducible elements that make up aggregates, but composite and relational entities that are in themselves an *infinitesimal aggregation of (also) composite entities*. Monads question the distinction between the individual and the aggregate—and its ontological corollary, the idea that simple entities, through interaction, generate second-order structures with properties of their own (Latour 2012). Instead, a Tardian monad is “a type of navigation that composes an entity through other entities...[It] is not a part of a whole, but a point of view on all the other entities taken severally and not as a totality.” (Latour 2012, 8).

Tardian monads are, therefore, open. In fact they are “avid” and endowed with “belief and desire.” They will attempt to conquer and possess other monads—or will otherwise be taken by them. There is no escape from this never-ending process of coupling and decoupling between and within monads. Contrary to the classic monadological tradition, Tarde's system does not entail a theory of cosmic harmony coordinated by a deity; it rather is a *secular ontology of universal struggle for hegemony*.

Tarde's “reverse reductionism,” as Latour (2002, 123) calls it, consists in arguing that the whole cannot be but a simplification of the relations between its parts—or, more precisely, a reflection of the hegemony of some elements over others, a precarious arrangement subject to change as soon as the equilibrium of forces varies. Consequently, Tarde argues that it is in the infinitesimal that actions originate and where inquiry should be directed: “[I]nstead of thus explaining lesser facts by greater, and the part by the whole, I explain collective resemblances of the whole by the massing together of minute elementary acts—the greater by the lesser and the whole by the part” (Tarde 2000, 35).

I would argue that there are good reasons to deepen the ANT-Tarde connection beyond his vindication as a precursor. Tarde's neo-monadology, especially as interpreted by Maurizio Lazzarato, provides a link to a tradition of radical political philosophy stemming from the work Gilles Deleuze (himself a follower of Tarde). The discussions within this body of work around the composition, [organization](#) and aims of political collectives (see Hardt and Negri 2001, 2005; Virno and Hardt 1996) offer an important alternative political imagination for ANT. Like his post-Workerist peers Toni Negri or Paolo Virno, Lazzarato's project lies in the restitution of multiplicity and singularity as veritable forces of political invention. Marxism, he argues, because of its Hegelian ascendant, relies on a closed system of relations (Capital) in which the whole determines the meaning of the parts. The totalization of singularities within an "absolute unity," without an "outside", would explain the problem Marxist thought has had to [conceptualize](#) "movements which do not revolve directly or exclusively around class relations" (Lazzarato 2006, 29), such as post-Feminism. From an orthodox Marxist standpoint, "their truth is not immanent to the movements themselves; it is not linked to the possibilities of life that they open, but to the capital-labor relation" (Lazzarato 2006, 29).³

_____ Tarde's neo-monadology, on the other hand, offers appropriate tools to apprehend the new modalities of "being together" and "being against" that post-Socialist movements have been experimenting with; [it allows us to conceptualize in their autonomy and independence the ways in which "singularities compose and decompose, unite and separate"](#) (Lazzarato 2006, 24), without surrendering them to an exterior totality,

Movements such as the Anti-[Globalization](#) Movement, or more recently #Occupy, indeed pose a serious challenge to most established analytical categories within the social movements literature. The [heterogeneous](#) and networked character of these movements clash with the literature's traditional emphasis on "collective identity," the assumption of a nation-

State framework, and its ascendant in rational choice theories and political exchange models (Chesters and Welsh 2005). In this context, several authors have developed Deleuzian and ANT-inspired alternatives (see Davies 2012; McFarlane 2009). In a good summary of the appropriateness of this turn, Israel Rodríguez-Giralt (2011, 5) argues that because ANT bypasses the binary oppositions that have tended to structure the explanation of collective action in the social movements literature (i.e. context vs. individual triggers; objective conditions vs. subjective aspects; rational vs. spontaneous action), it can produce new and interesting [conceptualizations](#) of social movements. In [Rodríguez-Giralt's \(2011\)](#) study of the Doñana Ecological Disaster in Spain, for example, he shows how migratory birds travelling from Northern Europe towards Africa, in alliance with environmentalists and the technology of “ringing,” played a key role in re-scaling the disaster and challenging the official definition of the catastrophe as a “[localized](#)” (i.e. minor, controllable) issue. These [traceable](#) geese [globalized](#) the conflict through the air and the food chain, ignoring all geographical boundaries and ontological distinctions. This is a finding that would have been difficult to achieve without deploying ANT's [generalized](#) symmetry and ontological agnosticism.

In the immediate context of my research—the emergence of new forms of resistance against urban renewal in Barcelona—an ANT/Tardian approach was an opportunity to [analyze](#) these practices in their own terms and from the ground-up, without subsuming them under a pre-established analytical matrix. The study of urban social movements has been deeply influenced by Manuel Castells' (1977, 1983) early work, in which these movements are [categorized](#) in relation to their role in articulating the structural contradictions of late-capitalist cities, and their capacity to bring about radical change or reform. Consequently, the literature has tended to focus on the [conceptualization](#) of the movements' effects and the social and political conditions [that](#) underpin [mobilization](#) (Mayer 2009; Pickvance 2003). ANT allowed me instead to [analyze](#) the coming together of a collective entity focusing on the

mundane and often neglected materials and practices that led to its structuration, [stabilization](#) and territorialization—or lack thereof. Much like classic urban ANT studies had done—for example Latour’s (1998) analysis of Paris’ failed guided-transportation system or Aibar and Bijker’s (1997) account of the Cerdà Plan for the extension of Barcelona—my goal was to use the perspective’s “sensitivity towards the active role of nonhuman actors in the assemblage of the world, towards the relational constitution of objects, and the sense that all this calls for symmetrical explanations” (Fariás 2010, 3) as a way of [decentering](#) the issue under study and *navigating* the resulting entanglement.

The Can Ricart Conflict: Assemblages, Fabrications, Bifurcations

Situating the Conflict

The Can Ricart conflict originated in 2004, with the attempt to evict and demolish the factory complex of the same name as part of Barcelona City Council’s “Plan 22@,” [a plan](#) for the renewal of the industrial district of Poble Nou. Once known as the “Catalan Manchester,” the area had been one of Spain’s largest industrial quarters for the best part of the 19th and 20th Centuries. [Its history goes in parallel with developments in industrial production; it started with steam based textile and chemical industries, later replaced by the metal industry with the arrival of electric power](#) (Nadal and Tafunell 1992). Since the mid 1970s, due to a combination of the increasing [expansion of the service sector in](#) Barcelona and the displacement of a great part of the remaining industry to the outskirts of the city, many of the factories were empty or being [utilized](#) as parking depots and storage warehouses (Marrero-Guillamón 2003). From the 1980s on, some of these large and affordable spaces became artistic and cultural venues, as well as squats.

Plans to transform the area [had](#) existed since the late sixties (e.g. the “Copacabana-style” [and](#) “Plan de la Ribera;” see Clavera 1973), but did not [materialize](#) until the late 1980s, with the construction of the beaches and the Olympic Village in the lead up to the 1992 [Olympic](#) Games. This project radically reshaped the coastline from an industrial into a leisure and residential area, but had little impact further inland. In 1995, the process that would eventually lead to Plan 22@ began with a report by the City Council and a study by the Catalan Institute of Technology, which set the conceptual framework for the transformation of the remaining industrial land in Poble Nou—the “Digital City” (Oliva 2003). The idea of a “modern” and “sustainable” district of economic activity based on new technologies became the ethos of Plan 22@.

The plan was passed by the City Assembly in 2000. It allowed the transformation of [just under 500 acres](#) of industrial land into mixed-use land—widely defined to include a vast array of uses including residential, commercial, religious, cultural, sports, “clean” industries, offices and hotels (Ajuntament 2000). It established the general guidelines for the renewal, but left the specifics to smaller-scale sub-plans. The first of those plans (“PERI Lull-Pujades Llevant”) faced some [neighborhood](#) opposition; the second (“PERI Eix Llacuna”) created a huge conflict by proposing a series of high-rises very close to the [neighborhood’s](#) historical [center](#). It triggered the largest demonstrations in decades, generated new activist groups, and produced a split within the [Neighbors’](#) Association. The sub-plan was eventually modified and the number of towers and their height significantly reduced. Therefore, when the plan affecting Can Ricart entered public knowledge, there was already a repository of critical discourses, practices and energies targeting Plan 22@—as well as the experience of having defeated, or at least significantly transformed, one of its sub-plans.

Originally a textile factory built in the mid-19th Century, Can Ricart had by the 2000s been divided into [about](#) 30 workshops that hosted small and medium businesses, employing

approximately 250 people in total. There were various chemical industries and mechanical-metallurgical workshops; a candle factory, glassmakers, carpentries, furniture makers, a printer, a pub, artist studios, and the [publicly funded](#) Hangar Visual Arts Centre. The “PERI Central Park” sub-plan went unnoticed when passed in October 2001. It proposed the demolition of most of the Can Ricart buildings, maintaining, however, an industrial reminiscence via the layout, the chimney and the clock tower. A series of new buildings up to eight stories high would be erected, for a total of 87,600 [square meters](#) of offices and lofts (Ajuntament 2001). Following the approval of the plan, the owner of most of the land, Federico Ricart,⁴ established a limited company to lead the real estate development and attract investors, and hired an architecture studio to work on the project. None of the tenants were notified about any of these plans either by the City Council or the owner until September 2004, after the last component of the intricate planning application procedure had been approved. They all received a letter from Mr. Ricart asking them to leave the premises within thirty days.

Several of the tenants’ leases had expired during the last five years and were never properly renewed—they had just continued making their monthly payments. Without a valid lease contract, however, the Spanish law did not grant them any compensation rights. The situation was different for a small group of companies that did have long-term leases and were entitled to compensation. Mr. Ricart’s strategy was to separate the two groups, and offered to negotiate only with the latter. Most of the businesses (25 of them), however, decided to group together and hire a lawyer to negotiate a collective solution.

Assemblages

The first question I want to address is how the above dispute over compensation payments became one of Barcelona's biggest urban conflicts of the last decades. This process, I argue, was intimately linked to the formation of a new and unusual activist group, the Save Can Ricart Platform (SCRiP hereafter).

When it irrupted in the public life of the city in the spring of 2005, SCRiP was an open group that anybody interested in supporting the struggle to "save Can Ricart" could join. It met weekly at various locations, mainly within the factory complex, and regular attendants included businessmen and workers from the companies affected by the eviction; representatives of the [Neighbors' Association](#), members of the Group for Industrial Heritage and the Poble Nou Historical Archive, activists from Counter-22@ Network, the Poble Nou Young People's Assembly, and squatter-artist collective La Makabra.⁵ Some of these groups (such as Counter-22@ Network) considered the framework for transformation established by the Plan 22@ the origin of the problem and that it should be revoked, while others (e.g. the [Neighbors' Association](#)) felt it was the gateway to a solution—provided it was "interpreted correctly." The differences in tactics were considerable too: the [Neighbors' Association](#) was an official body embedded in formal democracy; the Group for Industrial Heritage (GIH hereafter) was a research and advocacy group lobbying for the systematic study and preservation of the local industrial patrimony; and the Counter-22@ Network and La Makabra had a much younger membership and were engaged in direct action such as occupations.

It is remarkable that SCRiP's first public activity was a meeting [organized](#) at the Can Felipa Civic Centre only three weeks before the demonstration that opens this article. Behind a desk covered with the Catalan flag sat six people, representing the [Neighbors Association](#), the GIH, and the workers and businesses based in the factory. During the meeting, it was argued that in addition to opposing the current plan, SCRiP should make an alternative

proposal that proved that it was perfectly possible to maintain the factory intact by relocating the new buildings.

[Insert Figure 1 about here.]

Caption: SCRiP's first public meeting, 7 April 2005. © Rafa Reina

The meeting was [well attended](#) and the arguments presented convinced Josep Maria Montaner, a well-known architect sitting in the audience and a pioneer in the [defense](#) of Barcelona's Industrial Heritage [whose participation ended up being critical](#), to get involved and help draft [an](#) alternative plan. This was done very quickly, and, twelve days later, on [the](#) 19th [of](#) April, members of the GIH and Montaner presented it at the Tàpies Foundation Museum, together with a document containing a historical study of the factory buildings and a list of the businesses currently in them. The same day, Montaner (2005) published in *El País* (Spain's most read newspaper) an opinion piece entitled "Can Ricart and Plan 22@," which served as a sort of abstract of [these](#) documents.

The following morning, at 9.30 a.m., a judicial commission, backed up by the police, arrived in the factory to evict one of the businesses (Ricson). But they encountered a well-rehearsed response: a group of workers quickly assembled a barricade using a large metal frame, two concrete slabs and several pallets they had set aside for that purpose; others set a firecracker that alerted the [neighbors](#), made calls, and distributed placards and white skull masks. They all sang, "Yes to work; no to eviction" and "The @ steals from us." Within less than an hour, journalists were interviewing people, photographers taking pictures, next-day news being produced. The judge decided to not enforce the eviction.

[Insert Figure 2 around here]

Caption: **Workers stand by a barricade, 20 April 2005.** © Rafa Reina

The infrequent combination of the workers' militant resistance to the eviction and the existence of an alternative plan sanctioned by prestigious people made good news and was not lost [on](#) the journalists. They made the connection between the businesses' struggle and the [defense](#) of the industrial heritage, and in doing so the media started playing a key role in disseminating the conflict in terms which were very close to SCRiP's own.

These events (a sample of the many actions carried out during the Spring of 2005) highlight how the different methods of [organization](#) and action of the groups and individuals that were part of SCRiP were incorporated into its *modus operandi*. Indeed, SCRiP managed to [operationalize](#) this heterogeneity as its political strength, with a remarkable (and hard to counteract) capacity to combine the production of academic reports, traditional [neighborhood mobilization](#), the recruitment of prestigious figures and institutions, the use of mainstream media, the production of alternative urban plans, and direct action.

It is important to highlight how this aggregation of singularities was brought together by a (more or less) common concern, and achieved by a series of (discursive and material) devices and operations. Going back in time helps to illuminate this process. During October-November 2004, the workers had held a demonstration against their eviction, the GIH had [organized](#) the III Industrial Heritage and Innovation Conference *in* Can Ricart, and Platoniq, a group of artists-activists, had [organized](#) a night of film screenings about evictions in the abandoned plot on the factory's doorstep. However, these groups were not in contact with each other yet and the events were attended by largely separate publics. I have analytically distinguished two operations in the process that brought them together: the first was a

conceptual-political coordination, [while](#) the second [was](#) the product of an effective gathering device. I will discuss the first operation here, and the second under the “fabrications” section below.

In the words of one of the workers [I interviewed, an office clerk in the candle factory that was](#) involved in the struggle since the early days, ⁵ “[When we were first discussing actions] I was clear that our opponent, later enemy, was the City Council. But the majority wanted to target the Marquis [the owner, see note 4]. People needed to be educated with regards to this.”⁶ The identification of the “enemy” had a key importance when it came to writing slogans⁶ and deciding on the itinerary of the first demonstration. Eventually, through discussions, the idea of targeting the City Council and the Plan 22@ won over—setting one element of future discursive compatibility with other actors and determining the route of the march, which would in turn have important consequences. The same worker continued⁷:

We hadn’t done flyers nor summoned...Who the hell were we going to summon? We had a problem, and we were going to try to resolve it: we went to the City Council’s Planning Department, the District’s Office, and the 22@ building. We just wanted the issue to be known [so [we](#)] took this route. On our way there we randomly run into Manel Martínez [the [Neighbors’ Association’s](#) president], who got interested in our case and told others. Also the Counter-22@ Network got in touch. It was great.

In February 2005 the collaboration between these groups became public when the [Neighbors Association](#), together with the GIH and the Historical Archive, [organized](#) a guided tour of the factory,⁸ explicitly linking the eviction of the businesses with the risk of demolition of the building. The first foundation for the future SCRiP was now in place: a broadly compatible definition of the problem involving a shared concern (the new joint formulation eviction/demolition) and a common adversary, the City Council and its Plan 22@.

[Insert Figure 3 about here.]

Caption: “**Spaces of politics,**” © the author

SCRiP was formed soon afterwards, in April, with the mission of coordinating actions more effectively and making the conflict public. In the period leading up to the demonstration—the first major action [organized](#) by the group—SCRiP deployed two seemingly contradictory devices when seeking to gain wider support and incorporate more groups. Their motto—“Save Can Ricart, Defend Poble Nou”—established a lowest common denominator, a minimal syntax of consensus. Their Manifesto, on the other hand, operated as a greatest common divisor: an extraordinary amalgam of demands raised by the different groups, including the suspension of the Plan and the elaboration of a new one which took into account the heritage value of the building; provisions for ensuring the viability of the businesses based in the factory; the development of urban plans that respected the identity of the [neighborhood](#); changes to the planning laws to allow “real” citizen participation and better compensations for those displaced by them; the construction of 4,000 affordable flats and public facilities long overdue such as a library; and the denial of [licenses](#) to settle in the area to any company related to the “industry of war” (including those disguised as information technology enterprises). While the motto established a common goal, the Manifesto juxtaposed heterogeneous diagnosis and enunciations.

Contrary to the notion that a movement must operate as a unified whole in order to be successful, this strategy allowed SCRiP to become an assembly of groups with varying, even antagonistic₂ positions. Following Alain Badiou (2007), we can argue that the successful assemblage of SCRiP was not based on a shared pre-existent condition or the formation of a common identity (“being-us”), but in the aggregation of singularities (“being-together”). The Tardian monad adequately grasps this: [It](#) conveys the idea that “together” is not a condition, but an arduous achievement that includes difference and alterity as a part of itself. For the

purposes of this article, it is useful to make an explicit link between Tardian monads and Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) concept of assemblage as a "constellation of singularities." There are two reasons for this. The first is political: The concept of assemblage was part of an effort to rethink the left as a "symbiotic" or "sympathetic" articulation of difference and disagreement, a "co-functioning" (Deleuze and Parnet 2007)—an idea that has greatly influenced the emergence of new [categorizations](#) of political subjectivity such as "multitude" (Hardt and Negri 2001, 2005). The second reason is that monads and assemblages share a "double emphasis: on the material, actual and assembled, but also on the emergent, the processual and the multiple" (Fariás 2009, 15). In particular, the idea of "potentiality", or more precisely the "virtual," allows us to [conceptualize](#) the "disjunctures between the actual and the possible" (McFarlane 2011, 210), i.e. the power of invention and disruption that collectives have—an issue to which I will return below.

Fabrications

One consequence of approaching SCRiP as a monad is that the closer one gets to it, the further away one arrives—each of its parts become monads themselves and the "infinitesimal complexity" described above unfolds. I will illustrate this by studying one such monad-within-the-monad, the Group for Industrial Heritage (GIH), focusing on the deployment of its trajectory and resources in the crucial task of *fabricating* Can Ricart. Counterintuitive as it may sound, the existence of Can Ricart does not precede the movement generated to preserve it. Before 2005, workers, businessmen, [neighbors](#), the media and the urban plans described the buildings as the "workshops sited in Marquis of Saint Elizabeth Passageway." Most of the people who used the premises had never heard of "Can Ricart," while none of the plans intervening in the area even acknowledged the existence of a relationship between the

different buildings. In a few months, however, the GIH managed to do three things: a) group all these pieces together under the label “the Can Ricart industrial complex” (later simply “Can Ricart”); b) establish its historical and heritage value; and c) disseminate this “production” widely. In turn, the success of this operation allowed the factory to become the gathering device the movement needed. Although they happened in parallel, the “assemblage” stage I have analytically distinguished above was about the production of a new political *subject*; the “fabrication” stage I will describe now was about creating a political *object*.

The GIH led the task of fabricating Can Ricart, drawing from a body of knowledge and resources accumulated by its members since the 1980s. The GIH was a group of professors, researchers, architects, museum curators and [neighbors](#) that had been defining, cataloguing and promoting the value of industrial architecture since the late 1990s (see Roca and Faigenbaum 2003; Tatjer and Vilanova 2002).

The GIH defended the importance of listing buildings in relation to a wider project of restituting the role of industry and [labor](#) in the representations of the city. They linked the conservation of particular buildings to three criteria (collective memory, historical importance and architectural value) and established as an objective maintaining the readability of the industrial fabric and avoiding its fragmentation and aesthetization. In the specific case of Can Ricart (Grup de Patrimoni Industrial 2005a), they argued that it was a building of exceptional historical importance, one of only three great industrial complexes of the 19th Century still standing. It [was designed by two “illustrious architects” \(Josep Oriol i Bernadet and Josep Fonterè i Mestres\) and](#) featured a neo-classical style with “great compositional rationality.” Finally, its history represented 150 years of Catalonia’s continuous technological innovation and entrepreneurial adaptation. The plan approved by the City Council, they said, maintained a few elements (such the chimney and the clock

tower) only for aesthetic reasons, therefore destroying the coherence of the industrial complex.

The cornerstone of the GIH's argument for conservation was establishing that Can Ricart was indeed a coherent whole, i.e. more than a collection of disparate elements. After all, the other arguments (authorship, historical importance, etc.) could be addressed while maintaining only certain parts. This was not an easy task, as the factory had been built in several stages and had in fact never stopped changing. The use of historical images and plans played a key role here, not as mere illustrations of an independent argument, but as “inscription devices₂” i.e. capable of “transform[ing] a material substance into a figure or diagram which is directly usable” in the process of constructing a scientific fact (Latour and Woolgar 1979, 51). Catelucho's 1888 engraving depicting the factory, for instance, was used to [visualize](#) an invisible substance: [It](#) was deployed as an *index* of the existence of a unitary building in the 19th Century. The image was the two-dimensional [materialization](#) of an entity distant in time and space, whose existence (as a whole) was precisely the matter of concern. Surrounded by a persuasive argumentation by experts, it had a powerful truth-effect. It brought the factory into the present and allowed acting on and with it.

[Insert Figure 4 about here.]

Caption: Claudio Catelucho, *Can Ricart*. Engraving, 1888

Once the existence of the “original” building had been established, the GIH had to respond to a second challenge. The difficulty at this stage was not in verifying an existence—which various historical maps from the 19th and 20th Century did well enough—but in affirming an *essence*: that Can Ricart was a coherent whole despite its constant

transformations. The indisputable variation made manifest by the historical images used to inscribe its history had to be (re)interpreted [favorably](#) as also attesting to a continuity. In order to achieve this, the existence of an “original project” underlying these changes had to be established—a difficult thing to do, as there was no record of it. The text argued that “Bernadet’s professional, academic and scientific trajectory, Fontserè’s later plans, Castelucho’s accurate drawing, and our [the GIH’s] empirical study allow us to affirm that Bernadet *conceives and projects the building with a full overview*” (Grup de Patrimoni 2005b, 4, my emphasis). The evidence was no longer based on “indexes₂” but on “traces₂” such as “the repetitions in composition and language₂” “the formal coherence” or “the unitary treatment of rhythms, forms, and spatial and volumetric dispositions” ([Grup de Patrimoni 2005b, 4](#)). A fine use of the rules of scientific argumentation was required to make this collection of traces as solid a proof of the existence of an “original” project as the non-existent plans. But as early ANT laboratory studies showed (e.g. Latour and Woolgar 1979), scientific “facts” can only be successfully established by convincing others—and in particular [skeptical](#) others. In the case of Can Ricart, the success of the GIH’s argument can therefore only be evaluated in terms of its adoption by the other parties involved in the struggle. Would a reticent owner and the City Council accept the existence of a valuable building where they had only seen a collection of separate, disposable workshops? Could the GIH monad conquer its rivals? In relation to this question, it is necessary to once more add new actors to the account.

The GIH and SCRiP were keen to recruit well-known individuals and institutions, as well as to liaise with the media. By doing so, they were simultaneously [legitimizing](#) their demands and distributing their definition of the conflict, which precisely rested on the unequivocal existence of a valuable factory called Can Ricart. It is under this perspective that it is worth examining the Open Letter to the President of the Catalan Government (Fòrum de

la Ribera del Besòs 2005), whose importance did not lie so much in its content as in who signed it. The letter did not make an argument about the existence and historical value of the “original” Can Ricart factory—it treated both [as](#) uncontroversial facts and relied on the good reputation of the signatories to the text for attesting it. As a local newspaper reported, the letter was signed by “26 entities, some of them international, and 151 public figures, including 61 professors, 22 [urban planners](#) and architects, 20 social scientists, 11 artists, 15 cultural managers and 22 businessmen, doctors, lawyers and journalists” (Favà 2005, 31). Who would challenge the legitimacy and soundness of a claim subscribed by such list of individuals and [organizations](#)? Certainly not the media, [who](#) seemed rather impressed. During that early stage of the conflict, the media repeatedly reported how “experts” considered Can Ricart “one of the best pieces of industrial heritage in the country” (Favà 2005, 31) and in doing so was being instrumental in disseminating the GIH’s argument with little interference.

The importance of the increasing circulation of this new entity, Can Ricart, for the conflict as a whole will now be explored.

Bifurcations

The City Council’s position throughout this period was that since no objections had been made during the planning “consultation” process, it would be *illegal* to reopen the discussion over a plan that had been democratically approved and granted the landowner the right to build certain structures.

The power of SCRiP, however, rested on its capacity to propagate its alternative enunciation of the situation with increasing success. SCRiP was not simply trying to “save” Can Ricart, *but to create the conditions in which this was possible*. This involved two distinct operations: dismantling the existing legal architecture and producing alternative plans. The

legal grounds for the demolition were extremely solid: all the proposals had gone through a “democratic” process and passed without objections. The movement’s alternative plans operated therefore on a “virtual” plane, where the future of the factory (and the [neighborhood](#)) was still open for discussion and negotiation. Let us see the remarkable process by which this virtuality became “actual”—that is, by which the political imagination of an entity that had ignored the existing conditions of existence became much more than mere speculation.

After the April 2005 demonstration the first cracks in the City Council’s position appeared. They accepted to mediate between the owner and the businesses [and](#) to facilitate an agreement regarding compensation payments, [as well as](#) to avoid (unpopular) forced evictions. During the [summer](#) most businesses (18 of the 25) accepted the new terms and departed, leaving the factory half-empty. In the meantime, the GIH continued promoting the heritage cause relentlessly, while different groups of artists that were or had been based in the factory—such as the Nau 21 collective—became increasingly involved in SCRiP. These events produced an important shift in the terms of the controversy, as it was not so much about protecting industrial businesses and jobs anymore, but about keeping the buildings and transforming them via new uses into a public asset for the [neighborhood](#). Ideas for these uses included a Museum of Work, the expansion of the two existing artistic/cultural venues, and building artist studios and workspace for crafts and creative industries. A different language was starting to be deployed to this end: Can Ricart was to be “open₂” “alive₂” a “network” and a “hub₂” it would be transformed “from grey to green [space]₂” [and](#) “from mechanic to organic” (Nau 21 2006; Plataforma 2006). During [summer](#) and [autumn of 2005](#), SCRiP would persist in their cause through a combination of continuous media presence, numerous public events (debates, open door days, late evening screenings), and an appeal to the Catalan

Government, which had some responsibilities over heritage decisions and could potentially override the City Council.

On December 2nd 2005 the City Council gave into the mounting pressure and suspended the demolition [license](#). It, too, launched an official investigation on the heritage value of Can Ricart—a formulation that, in and of itself, acknowledged its existence as a [recognizable](#) entity. The event had far reaching consequences. It effectively put on hold the owner's approved project, opening the legal possibility of an alternative plan and radically re-situating the grounds of the conflict. So much so that I have used the term “bifurcation” to describe the branching out of a completely new set of conditions of possibility derived from the recognition of the movement's main fabrication, Can Ricart, and the slow demolition of the legal architecture regulating the case up until that point. SCRiP had simultaneously displaced the conflict to an altogether different terrain and *de facto* achieved legitimacy as a political subject. Indeed, a long and semi-secret⁷ negotiation over the future of the building started between SCRiP and the City Council—despite the fact that the former was not an officially [recognized](#) interlocutor. SCRiP's negotiations and continuing pressure would eventually translate into a new plan that preserved approximately two-thirds of the factory, first announced by the City Council in April 2006. A year after, that part of the factory was listed as a Grade I Building⁸ by the Catalan Government, and the remaining elements demolished. The final plan establishing the architectural treatment and the future uses for Can Ricart (which included a Museum of Languages, a Centre for the Interpretation of Industrial Heritage, a [Neighborhood](#) Centre and the expansion of Hangar Visual Arts Centre) took some time to complete and was finally passed in June 2009.

The bifurcation in the conditions of possibility produced by the [generalized](#) acceptance of the existence and value of Can Ricart does not mean, however, that this is the story of SCRIP's victory. Firstly, the new plan offered a compromised solution and did not

satisfy the movement; it did not preserve all the buildings and ignored several of the social uses they had proposed. Secondly, it arrived very late, after two suspicious fires had destroyed part of the factory and when only [the Hangar Visual Arts Centre](#) remained on the premises. Furthermore, as the 2008 financial crisis deepened the investors abandoned the plans for the construction of the office buildings that had originally justified the demolition of the factory; and changes in the economic and political landscape in Barcelona and Catalonia meant that after having bought the buildings, the plans for the Museum of Languages and other public uses collapsed. At the time of writing, in early 2013, most of Can Ricart is effectively abandoned (with the exception of Hangar, which did expand its premises).

With regard to SCRiP, a monadic understanding of its fate is appropriate to end this section. The assemblage was first weakened when most of the businesses decided to accept the revised compensation payments and leave the factory. This revealed a tension that had always existed implicitly between preserving the factory buildings (more or less independently of its uses) and ensuring the continuity of the businesses (there or elsewhere). The GIH's perseverance and success at fabricating Can Ricart as a heritage building also meant that they became increasingly hegemonic within SCRiP. This was problematic for other members who understood that the technical discussion over which buildings deserved to be saved missed the wider point about the future of the [neighborhood](#). When SCRiP took on the task of producing a full alternative plan of future uses for Can Ricart in early 2006 further disagreements and/or degrees of commitment to the cause became apparent, and several groups abandoned it. The occupation of part of the factory by La Makabra in December 2006 (they were evicted by the police after ten days) divided the movement even more, and soon after the groups that had once been part of it were largely working separately. The delicate agreements and devices that held the collective together during the first stage of the conflict had ceased to work and the SCRIP monad decoupled.

Insert Figure 5 about here]

Caption: “**Demolition/Conservation: 2005-2008,**” © the author

Discussion and Conclusion: Re-imagining the Political in ANT

A great deal of the political discussion within ANT has been defined in terms of “reassembling the common world” (Latour 2005) and has revolved around the politics of nonhumans—from devising ways of incorporating non-humans into formal politics (Latour and Weibel 2005) to paying greater attention to the role of material entities in political action (Marres 2012). Proposals such as “the parliament of things” (Latour 2004) or “hybrid forums” (Callon et al. 2009) represent well, in my opinion, the *parliamentarian impulse* that has dominated the debate. The discussion has been very productive in highlighting the limitations that of our human-only democratic institutions have in dealing with the hybrid and entangled nature of political issues. However, by privileging formal structures as the space of politics there is a danger of overlooking the less visible processes by which political collectives—and the objects and circumstances they operate with—are formed and transformed. By leaning on Tarde (via Lazzarato), I have precisely attempted to redirect ANT’s methodological and analytical tools towards the task of [conceptualizing](#), in their specificity and immanence, the different forms of being together enacted by collectives, as well as the objects and bifurcations they may produce. “Politics” here has little to do with expanded parliamentary forms, and refers instead to a process of invention: of new collectives, new political objects, and new conditions of possibility. Taking into consideration that ANT began as the study of innovation and knowledge-creation in science and technology, I would argue this is in keeping with the perspective’s tradition.

In the specific case of Can Ricart, ANT's relational, material and performative orientation was directed towards the analysis of three moments of invention: the assemblage of a new collective subject, achieved through a combination of discursive operations and direct actions; the fabrication and circulation of a new political object, the factory, which required a series of scientific and rhetorical operations; and the effectuation of a bifurcation in the conditions of possibility through the success in establishing the existence and heritage value of Can Ricart. These three moments ring true to the conceptual opening Lazzarato attributes to Tarde (2006, 57): "Monadology allows us to think a bizarre world, populated by a multiplicity of singularities, but also a multiplicity of possible worlds."

Dimitris Papadopoulos (2010, 178) has used the concept of alter-ontologies precisely to refer to a form of constituent politics "aiming to craft alternative regions of objectivity." He provides the example of early AIDS activists; before becoming an [organized](#) and [recognized](#) movement, they engaged in "concrete, ordinary practical action that primarily targeted the making of justice in everyday life. Such remaking of the everyday led to the formation of *new conditions of existence and action*, which could not be ignored by existing institutions and public discourse" (Papadopoulos 2011, 192, my emphasis). He continues: "[Politics](#) is a collective enterprise that exposes a given social order to be limited, contingent and inconsistent by creating an alternative lifeworld inhabited by the previously miscounted... Constituent politics...is about producing alternative ontologies: alter-ontologies" (Papadopoulos 2011, 193).

To conclude: I have outlined how Tarde's neo-monadology can help to develop a form of ANT which is not committed to re-assembling multiplicity in a common world, but rather to creating a multiplicity of worlds. This alternative [conceptualization](#) of the political in ANT is also intended to be a [politicization](#) of its concepts. In Deleuzian terms, monadology offers a line of flight for ANT, a deterritorialisation, a minoritarian becoming.

Only by taking seriously the political and ontological work of activists (e.g. assembling new collectives, producing bifurcations) can the debate around the composition of the common world be prevented from being enclosed prematurely within imposed forms and structures.

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¹ “Plataforma Salvem Can Ricart” in its original Catalan name.

² Latour’s involvement with Tarde is part of a wider wave of interest triggered by the re-edition of the latter’s complete works from 1999 onwards. Within sociology it has unfolded mostly by way of revisiting his controversy with Durkheim (see Candea 2010; Vargas et al 2008).

³ It could certainly be argued that Lazzarato’s rather monolithic description of Marxism does no justice to Marx’s own theory. Nonetheless, the “straw enemy” he is confronting may be useful in elucidating the limitations of the Hegelian ascendant of Marxist thought. Lazzarato’s position in this regard is similar to that of other post-structuralist Marxists, such as Ernesto Laclau (2005), who has discussed at length the “need to extract Marx from Hegel,” i.e. to escape the latter’s closed system of relations and its teleological underpinnings. There are further points of convergence between these authors, such as the key role they attribute to heterogeneity in the articulation of antagonism—although there are also substantial differences between the Lacanian tradition Laclau embodies and the Deleuzian lineage of which Lazzarato is part. It falls outside the scope of this article to delve into the different paths produced by the influence of post-structuralism in radical Marxist thought, but it is worth making explicit the connection between Lazzarato’s position and a wider debate at the heart of Marxist theory.

⁴ Federico Ricart was a finance director turned real estate developer. His great-great-great grandfather, Jaume Ricart i Guitart (1801-1872), started the family’s successful textile business and married a noblewoman. Her family’s title would eventually find its way to Federico Ricart, who since 2004 [has been](#) Marquis of Saint Elizabeth. (For a brief reconstruction of the family history, see Marrero-Guillamón 2008, 61-62).

⁵ I have translated the names of all these [organizations](#) to facilitate the flow of the text (except La Makabra, which is a made-up word). Their original names are: Associació de Veïns i Veïnes del Poblenou, Grup de Patrimoni Industrial del Fòrum de la Ribera del Besòs, Arxiu Històric del Poblenou, Coordinadora Contra el 22@ and Assemblea de Joves del Poble Nou.

⁶ The factory walls were a testament to this. In late 2004 graffiti read things like: “Ricart-22@ Bloodsuckers!!!” or “You little Marquis, you won’t get away with this.” [When the owner painted over the walls in black](#), new slogans were written [that](#) read: “Doing it well – evicting everyone,” [and](#) “Clean Barcelona...of left-wing politicians” (these are all *détournements* of the City Council’s PR campaigns).

⁷ Secrecy was one of the City Council’s conditions for initiating the negotiation, but it was not achieved. The first meeting was already leaked to the press (Cia 2005) and, later on, when the new plan was passed in 2009, it included in its introduction a description of the negotiation process.

⁸ “Bé Cultural d’Interès Nacional” or “BCIN” in Catalan.