





### **Living fashion as a germ of life**

Fashion as a life-force on a macro scale can be like an epidemic, spreading partly through vectors of togetherness, human interaction and street buzz, but may later take the form of going “viral” in media (cf. Gladwell 2000) and on such scale, it may appear as if fashion has a life of its own (von Busch 2012). Because, as sociologist Gabriel Tarde points out, imitation is the basis for life and fashion, as well as all other societal activities, “Without fashion and custom, social quantities would not exist, there would be no values, no

money, and, consequently, no science of wealth or finance.” (Tarde 1903: 16) Thus, at the heart of Tarde’s account of the social is the notion of imitation. But, for Tarde, imitation was never exact, but always contained a potential surplus which allowed an event or an action to deviate into invention. Thus every event contained the seed of something else. To Tarde, imitation may not be the strongest interhuman force, but “the directing, determining, and explaining force” of social life. Thus, Tarde’s world is “panpsychic”, it is a vital living superorganism or infinitesimally small relationships between humans, with living forces echoing and resonating throughout the social body, with pure vibration, pure potential, of life. It is a social body full of small societies, small clusters and associations. From Tarde’s approach, understanding society is as much a science of bio-chemistry as psychology, it is a science of relationships where “every thing is a society, every phenomenon is a social fact” (Tarde 1999: 58).





Social phenomena exists in the “inter-spiritual” or “inter-psychological” scale (Tarde 1902). This means that the individual, for Tarde, was not primarily an autonomous agent, but as a site within which events happen, a meeting point of lines of repetition and imitation, perhaps not too unlike the ideas of Karma. And as the individual moves on, these events will come to matter later, and elsewhere, as movements through the social.

In order to show the emphasis on relationships, Tarde drew parallels between inter-human relations and the forces of gravity in space. Much like planets, we are drawn to each other, and the relationships between us is what defines us as we cluster to form micro-systems within larger (social) space. “In particular, the basic astronomical fact can be defined as the attraction exerted by a sphere, along with the effect of these repeated attractions involving the continued elliptical movement of celestial bodies. In the same way, the basic social fact is the communication or modification of a state of consciousness through the action of a conscious being on another.” (Tarde 1898: 64)



The idea of “living fashion” also resonates with Tarde’s laws of imitation and especially his view on capital which he call a “germ”, an analytical resource “radiating” from each one of us and infecting others. The germ itself is “trapped between pure repetition, endurance and continuity on the one hand, and on the other, pure vibration, pure potential.” (Lepinay 2007: 526) According to Tarde, “germ capital” is also a specific form of capital that cannot be accumulated because as it loses vibration, intensity and passion it becomes dead and worthless.

Tarde’s perspective of the economy is dominated by two concepts, denoting different types of forces. There is a realm of goods and resources, or to put it in simple terms, the “hardware”, and a realm of intangible and dynamic “software”, of imitative rays, inventions and their mutations, a “living” circulation driven by beliefs and desires. The hardware carries, mani-



gests and “executes” the ephemeral and organic software. It is the software that for Tarde carries life. Drawing terminology from botany, Tarde calls the hardware part of the economy as “cotylédon capital” and the software “germ capital” (Lépinay 2007). The “cotylédon capital”, natural resources, machines and labour is not the main part of the economy, as we usually denote it to, but merely the resource that energizes the germination of new ideas or imitations. Whereas economy has usually been seen as the accumulation of cotylédon capital, this is only one part of the economy, and not the “living” part of it. “As germs harden into machines, they also lose their versatility. The germ is dead as a process” (Lépinay 2007: 542) Materialization means “slowing down of the germ into a book or a method”, or any other form of bound or accumulated capital (Lépinay 2007: 546).

From a perspective of “living fashion” the medialized “hardware” of fashion, such as garments or images, is thus not as interesting as the germ part. Living fashion is pure vibration, pure potential, pure life. It is an unforeseen burst, as a singular event, and occasion of encountering life forces. The germ “does not only come from prior associations of unrelated flows, it also makes associations possible and it points towards its future context.” (Lépinay 2007: 545)





To Tarde, it is in the meeting of germs something new happens, “This encounter, this fertile junction, is the most unperceived event at its origin,” (Tarde 1902: 167) Living fashion is the condition of uncontrolled togetherness, hybridization, and meetings in honesty. It is not about accumulation and competition. A consumer may collect fashionable garments in the wardrobe, accumulate branded accessories and fashionable stuff, but the living part of fashion is the event, the occasion where an outfit springs to life, meets a subject in mutual recognition, in a moment of responsiveness and care. Living fashion happens between us, where garments become membranes rather than shields, when they let a person through.

On a larger scale, the concept of “living” is in this sense the political life of a quasi-biological social organism, a “super-individual creature”, a viral organism, let free throughout liberal society (offered by social/symbolic mobility). It is the liberal society that produces the photosynthesis from which the life is virally spreading, but as Foucault noticed, liberal social life is also squeezed into a liberal market model, governing it:

What is liberalism? The problem of neo liberalism is rather how the overall exercise of political power can be modeled on the principles of a market economy. So it is not a question of freeing an empty space, but of taking the formal principles of a market economy and referring and relating them to, of projecting them on a general art of government. (Foucault 2008: 131)

Biopolitics of fashion means to administer the life and death of the fashion force (the “conatus” or “germ” of fashion), making sure that the living process of fashion is controlled and administered through the fashion-industrial-complex, not something that happens spontaneously, as pure vibration, pure life.

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<https://fashionpraxis.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/fashioncondition-web.pdf>



Let it be both things  
and no things.  
Belonging all places  
and no places



Green yellow

Shape of the  
line

Pass + Repeat



INSPIRATION

MARC JACOBS  
SPRING 2013



WD |  
8.3

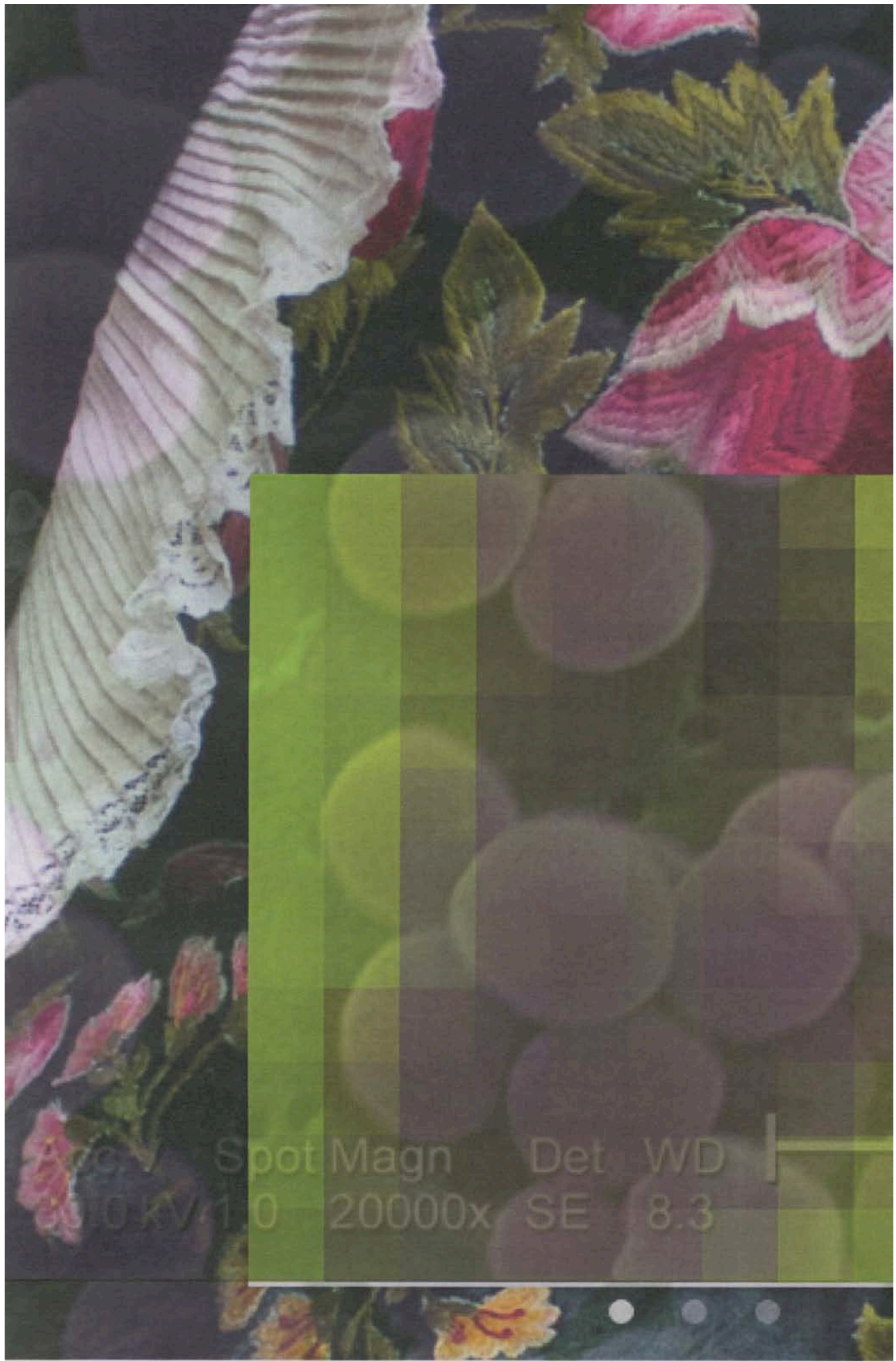
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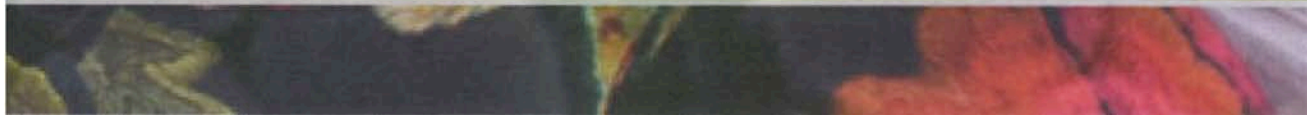
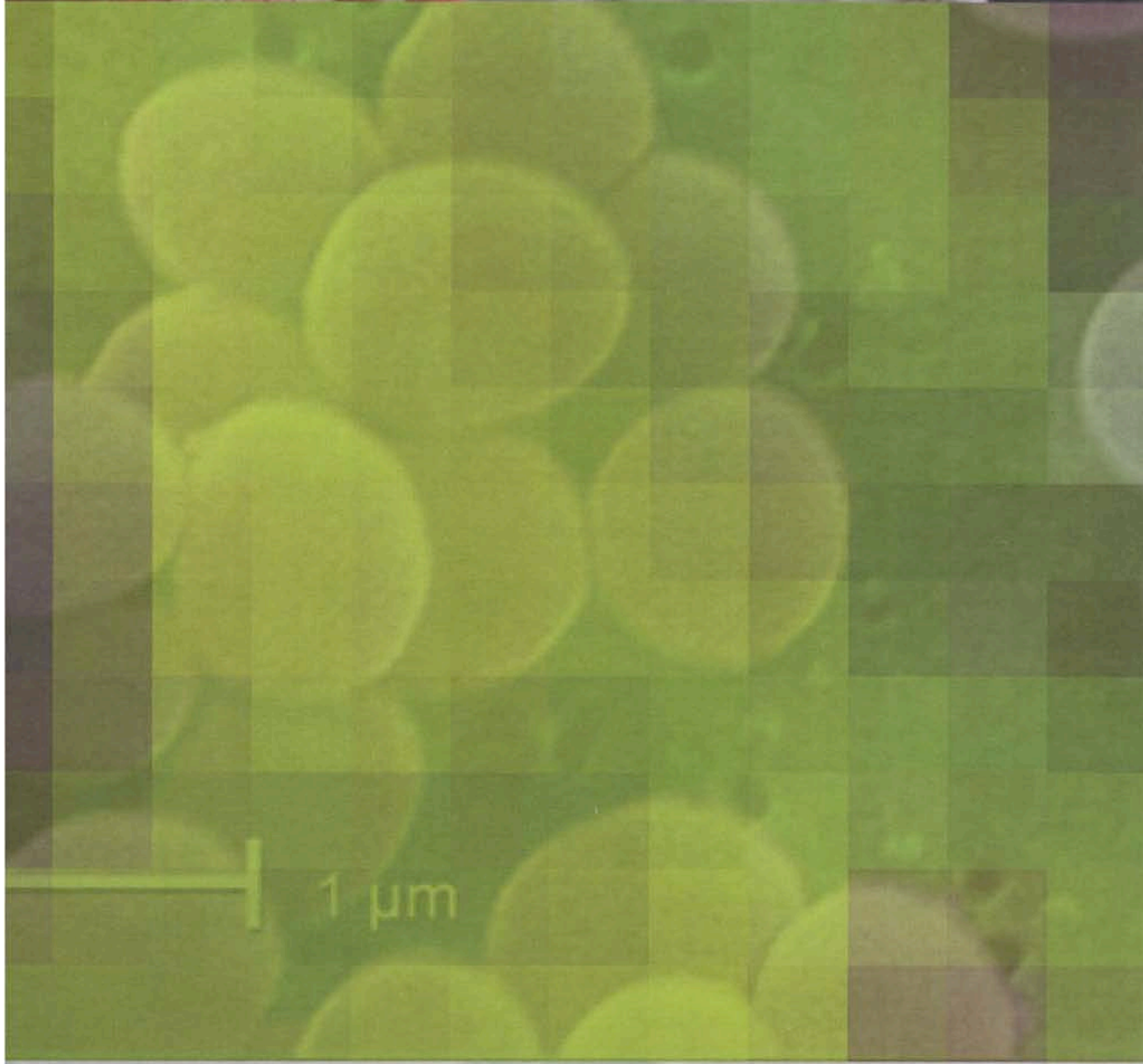
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10 kV/1.0 Spot Magn Det WD  
20000x SE 8.3











MILER MACKIE

Hannah Conannon



Hand down

Brenes

Anessa

McArthur

Tina Sparkler



