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Factures/fractures

From the concept of network to the concept of attachment

BRUNO LATOUR

Why does Mafalda's father, in the last scene of a short comic strip, appear so terrified that he compulsively shreds with scissors all the cigarettes remaining in his pack? Because Mafalda, incorrigible rascal, simply used the *passive* form to describe the innocuous behavior of her father. "What are you doing?" she asks in the first scene. "As you can see, I'm smoking," responds her father unwarily. "Oh," Mafalda remarks in passing, "I thought the cigarette was smoking you." Panic. Whereas he thought of himself as an untroubled father, comfortably seated in his armchair after a hard day at the office, his daughter saw him as an unbearable monster: a cigarette grabbing a man to have itself smoked in a big cloud of tar and nicotine; the father as an appendage, an instrument, an extension of the cigarette, the father becoming cigarette to the cigarette. . . . Nothing more is needed to unleash a crisis: I forswear smoking forevermore. To bind me to this promise, I reduce my entire pack to unsmokable stumps; I tear apart this idol that has enslaved me into such minute fragments that it will never again be able to take hold of me, even if the craving, as we say, "seizes me" again.

Mafalda's amusing story has only the appearance of profundity. Moving from the first to the last scene, we basically pass from one extreme to another: at the start, the father believes himself given to an innocent vice, which he has almost completely under control; at the end, he can extricate himself from his shackles only by pulverizing the cigarette, which so totally controls him that his daughter thought she had seen, in their hybrid conjunction, a cigarette smoking a man. In the two instances, both at the beginning and at the end, the reader continues to believe that we are talking about *control*. From the active form ("I smoke a cigarette") to the passive form ("you are smoked by a cigarette"), nothing has changed other than the apportionment of master and instrument. The father alternates too drastically from one position to the other: too comfortable in the first image, too panicked in the last. What if the question rested instead on the absence of mastery, on the incapacity—either in the active or passive form—to define our attachments? How can we

speak with precision of what the Greeks call "the middle voice," the verb form that is neither active nor passive?¹

I would like to explore some of the obstacles that make it difficult for us to conceptually grasp the middle form, or what I have referred to for several years as "factishes."² I arrived at this incongruous term by beginning with the two words "fact" and "fetish," the first being the object of a positivist discourse of verification and the latter of a critical discourse of denunciation. *By adding to either side of these terms the work of fabrication, we capture the root of work—facts are fabricated ("les faits sont faits")—as well as the etymological root of the word fetish.*³ "Factish" gives a new resonance to the reiteration "*faire-faire*" (meaning, in French, "to make one do" and "causing to be done") for both esteemed facts or disparaged fetishes, for the true as well as the false, and in so doing, shifts our attention to what *makes us act* and away from the obsessive distinction between the rational (facts) and the irrational (fetishes). In other words, the "factish" authorizes us to not take too seriously the forms in

1. Emile Benveniste, "The Active and Middle Voice in the Verb" in *Problems in General Linguistic* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1971), pp. 145–171. The expression of "middle" is, of course, a later rationalization once the active and the passive become evidence of grammar. In this brief and critical chapter, Benveniste casts the "middle" as ancestral to the passive form; this more ancient opposition distinguishes it from the active: "One can diversify at will the play of these oppositions. . . . they always finally come down to situating positions of the subject with respect to the process, according to whether it is exterior or interior to it, and to qualifying it as agent, depending on whether it effects, in the active, or whether it effects while being affected, in the middle" (pp. 149–150).

2. Bruno Latour, *Petite réflexion sur le culte moderne des dieux Faitiches*, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond (Paris, 1996), English translation to be published by Duke University Press.

3. See the impressive work accomplished by William Pietz on this question; "The Problem of the Fetish, I," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (1989):5–17; "The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 13 (1987):23–45; "The Problem of the Fetish, IIIa: Bosman's Guinea and the Enlightenment Theory of Fetishism," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 16 (1988):105–123.

which subjects and objects are habitually conjoined: that which sets into action never has the power of causation—whether it be a master subject or a master object. That which is set into action never fails to transform the action, giving rise neither to the objectified tool nor to the reified subject. To think in terms of “factish” requires some getting used to, but once the initial surprise at such an outlandish form passes, one begins to regard those obsolete figures of object and subject, the made and maker, the acted upon and the actor, as more and more improbable.

I shall not attempt to transcend them once again, through the dizzying effects of dialectics, but instead I will simply ignore them, signaling in passing their complete irrelevance. Our vignette illustrates it well: contrary to what Mafalda expresses in the middle frame, the cigarette does not “smoke” her father, but without doubt, it is making the father smoke. This “*faire-faire*,” or “made to do,” is so difficult to grasp that Mafalda’s father thinks he escapes it by the two traditional routes: at the beginning, by thinking that he is capable of controlling his action (he acts—the cigarette does nothing); at the end, by thinking that he is completely controlled by the object (the cigarette acts—he does nothing). These two idioms, that of liberty and that of alienation, blind us to the strange positioning of “factishes” capable of making one do things that no one, neither you nor they, can control. How to become detoxified of this drug, mastery? What a surprising and almost contradictory question: how to emancipate oneself from the hard drug of emancipation?

I

Let us first remove an obstacle of principle; or rather let us dispel the uneasiness felt by those of leftist sympathies when they hear critiques of the notion of emancipation as self-evident. As soon as the issue is raised, they believe they can sort out attitudes between those that are “reactionary,” that is, advocating slavery, alienation, bondage, and attachment, and those that are “progressive,” that is, championing liberty, autonomy, mobility, and emancipation. Whether about cigarettes, drugs, abortion, the press, conscience, commerce, finance, religion, or taste, one thinks one says something profound when one sets up an opposition between the forces of freedom and the forces of reaction or, inversely, when one reminds those champions of liberty of the existence of duties,

obligations, traditions, constraints, boundaries, or laws. Now it seems to me that all notion of “factish” is foreign to this gigantomachia of liberty against alienation or of law against license. The question to be addressed is not whether we should be free or bound but *whether we are well or poorly bound*. The traditional question construed the subject’s freedom and autonomy as the highest good—and it is thus that Mafalda’s father understands it when he severs all ties with the cigarettes upon seeing, thanks to the hardly innocent notice of his daughter, that he has completely lost his independence. The new question does not refer back to the subject, to his autonomy, to his ideal of freedom, nor does it link back to the objectification or reification by which we would lose our autonomy. Instead, it obliges us to consider the precise nature of that which *makes us be*. If it is no longer a question of opposing attachment and detachment, but instead of good and poor attachments, then there is only one way of deciding the quality of these ties: to inquire of what they consist, what they do, how one is affected by them. The old question directed attention toward either the subject or toward outside forces that caused the subject’s alienation. The new question takes on things themselves, and it is among these things that it claims to distinguish good from evil.⁴ The question of “factish” is centripetal with respect to both the subject and the object.

We need not be intimidated by the great battle between reactionaries and progressives. The former are categorically mistaken, because they believe, on the pretext that detachment is not possible, that one must forever remain within the *same* attachments—a too-convenient complacency that well justifies the indignation felt against those who want to leave the enslaved chained to masters of the past, a sufficient incitement to do battle against the injustice of fate and domination. Nonetheless, when the reactionaries mock the progressives by asserting that the liberation of the enslaved amounts to “changing the chains or the masters,” the emancipators’ indignation at these defeatist propositions is to be faulted: technically, the reactionaries are right, the progressives are wrong.

4. One must understand “thing” as that which has now been liberated from a politics that had kidnapped nonhumans, rendering public life impossible. For the extraction of human/nonhuman relations from the relation of subject/object, see the laborious efforts realized in B. Latour, *Pandora’s Hope. Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

When eulogizing liberty, the progressives forget to specify, for those newly freed of their “bad” ties, the nature of the *new* ties with which they would henceforth be made to exist, the *better* beings from whom they would now alienate themselves. In speaking of liberty as an asymmetric term designating only the chains of the past without referring to the bonds of the future, the progressives commit an error as flagrant as that of their ostensive opponents.

Who is the sure assassin? The one who refuses to free the alienated from his mortifying ties given that absolute liberty is a myth? Or the one who claims to de-alienate for good the subject, finally fully autonomous and master of himself, but without giving him the means to reestablish ties to those who are in a position to act upon him? Just a few years ago, the answer would have been easy: the first, without contest. Today, I admit without shame that I hesitate, because my indignation requires that I now fight on two fronts against the reactionaries and the progressives, the anti-moderns and the moderns.⁵ I am only interested and reassured by those who speak in terms of *substituting* one set of ties with another and who, when they claim to unmake morbid ties, show me the new salutary ties, and this without ever looking to the subject master-of-himself, now without an object.⁶ The terms *liberation*,

emancipation, “*laissez faire laissez passer*” must no longer command automatic adherence by the “*men of progress*.” Preceding the flag of Liberty, forever raised to guide the people, we would be well advised to carefully discriminate, *among the engaging things themselves*, those that will procure good and durable ties. From now on, the adherents of “factishes”—those adhered to by “factishes,” those authorized by “factishes”—will refuse to equate, with Pavlovian reflex, emancipation with the highest good: liberty is not an ideal, but a heritage to be sorted out.

II

Having cleared this conscientious objection, this principled resistance to entertaining propositions long espoused by the abominable reactionaries, we no longer need to distinguish between the restrained and the liberated, but instead between the well and the poorly attached. We shift our attention, therefore, to the ties themselves. Unfortunately, however, in doing so, we confront an enormous difficulty: there exist sciences, purportedly social sciences, that already claim to speak authoritatively about the innumerable ties that link subjects. In this section, we will realize that they do not perform all the work we might rightfully expect of them. We must, in particular, revisit the strange distinction between the individual actor and the structures of society. Thanks to “factishes,” we will perhaps be able to avoid committing ourselves to a battle that should not concern us, the battle between the advocates of attachment and those of detachment.

There is no lack in sociology of attempts to reconcile the actor and the system, the individual and the social. Even if they do not approach the magnitude of the gigantomachia between the progressives and reactionaries, we can hardly approach the social sciences without being summoned to take part in one side or in the other side of these gargantuan wars. However, if there are as many solutions as there are sociologists to the problem of whether control lies with the actor or the system, hardly anyone has interrogated the nature of *control* itself. For all the protagonists, it seems self-evident that the more society there is, the

5. The new influence of Pierre Legendre (see, for example, *Leçons I. La 901ème conclusion. Etude sur le théâtre de la Raison* [Paris: Fayard, 1998]) can be explained, from my perspective, by this reversal: suddenly, before our eyes, sometimes in our own children, we have these emancipated beings, a state only aspired to—or feared—by preceding generations, who would never veritably become detached, so firmly did the chains of the past hold them. The experiment is now completed: as Legendre affirms with prophetic violence, “You the fathers, you have given birth to the living-dead.” His solution, derived more from Lacan than from Roman law, unfortunately, amounts to forgoing attachments in order to impose upon subjects a sovereign power defined by void alone, making the multiple sources of “*faire-faire*” disappear even more radically.

6. Herein lies my interest in the work of ethnopsychiatrists and, in particular, the work of Tobie Nathan, *L’influence qui guérit* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1994). The fundamentalists in the French Republic regard his work as a return to archaic practices, as though he were tearing away patients from liberty in order to shackle them again with the chains of culture. In fact, he is engaged in a much more subtle reconstruction of persons: he endows patients among the migrant population, now bereft of ties, with *new* appurtenances that owe *as little* to the patient’s culture of origin as to the new culture that has failed to integrate them. The discourse of emancipation completely misses this mechanism and renders all communal belonging—as new and artificial as it might be—a regression. Nathan indicates one of the

possible paths: do for the migrants what the Republic has always done, until now, for the adherents of liberty—give them a culture, intermediary and overlapping communities, in short, cease with the hypocritical slogan “No to the Islamic scarf! Yes to the Hermès scarf!”

greater the weight of determinisms; inversely, the greater allowance made for the individual, the greater the margin of liberty. What Mafalda's author has the heroine utter as a joke, numerous sociologists pronounce seriously about the actor: if he is not "smoked by" the cigarette, he is nonetheless "acted upon" by the social structure. In my youthful days on the boulevard Saint-Michel, the claim was made that the "speaker is spoken by the structure of language." No one found this amusing. . . . Those who regard this passive construction excessive, resort to euphemisms without changing voice: they will say that the actor is "conditioned," "determined," "limited" by the society that encompasses him. However more moderate these terms, we remain within the basic opposition between the active and the passive voice, merely moving toward the right the marker that diminishes one's room to maneuver as it increases the predominance of structures; or, toward the left, allowing greater freedom to the actor as one diminishes the determining role of society.

Hence sociology adopted from modernist ethics the ideal of a subject without ties. It is of minor consequence that this ideal qualifies as positive and inevitable that which the moralists qualify as negative or unacceptable, for it remains the case that social ties are incapable of fostering the individual subject without, by this same action, limiting his freedom. This situation remains unaltered, despite appearances, when it is claimed that subjects are created with the imposition of law by society, for one must all the same, as in Mafalda's story, choose one's master. The traditional choice between freedom and necessity never proffers, despite appearances, a real freedom of choice, that is to say, a choice that would give the option, on the one hand, of a sociology requiring the designation of a master, or on the other, a sociology capable of *doing without a master altogether*. To imagine such an alternative sociology, one must perform two small transformations: the first on the nature of ties, the second on the nature of control.

To force the issue, and in order to clearly delineate the contrast between the two kinds of social science, I propose the following alternative: either we are interested in individuals and societies or we are interested in the multitudinous entities that give rise to action. In the first case, we will traverse the space that extends from subjects to social structures; in the second, we will cross spaces that *never* encounter either the individual or society, given that all setting-

in-motion depends on the nature of attachments and their recognized capacity to render existent or nonexistent those subjects to which they are attached. Against sociologists who play in the key of freedoms and determinations, we counter with a sociology of "factishes," of means, of mediations, in other words, once again, of good or poor attachments.⁷ The greatest difference between the two research programs is that the first believes it must take a position with regard to the question of the individual and society; the second entirely short-circuits these overly general figures and focuses only upon the *specific features* of those entities that alone become the sources of action, that is to say, the "*faire-faire*." To adopt Antoine Hennion's formulation, if I want to understand why I say "I like Bach," I must attend to the particularities of *this* interpretation, of *this* recording, of *this* score, of *this* setting.⁸ Nothing grips me other than these minute differences in rendering to which I learn to become increasingly sensitive—and when I become more sensitive to them, I am obviously no longer concerned with the question of knowing who controls "their/my" action.

Sociological thought seems to have been led astray when it broke apart the "*faire-faire*," or "made to do." Replaying the theological debate on grace: it located on the outside all determination and on the inside all freedom, outside all heteronomy and inside all autonomy, outside all necessity and inside all willfulness. Hence it was left with two lists of opposing terms, the first corresponding to society and the second to the individual. What disappeared in this operation? The very sources of attachment—the formidable proliferation of objects, properties, beings, fears, techniques that make us do things unto others. The grand choice between attachment and detachment obliterates the multitude of little choices contained within ties that differentiate (for those who accept to

7. Hence the importance of the sociology of art as it is developed by Antoine Hennion, *La Passion Musicale. Une sociologie de la médiation* (Paris: A.-M. Métailié, 1993), and its relation to studies of science. For the relation between science and art, see also Carrie Jones and Peter Galison, eds. *Picturing Science, Producing Art* (London: Routledge, 1998).

8. See the work of Christian Bessy and Francis Chateauraynaud, *Experts et faussaires. Pour une sociologie de la perception* (Paris: A.-M. Métailié, 1995), which demonstrates the capacity of an alternative sociology to draw out normativity in chains of action, even on subjects as subtle as the distinction between the authentic and the forged in art.

delve into them) the good ties from the bad in the justice immanent in things.

Thus it seems that we cannot speak of attachments while preserving the paired figures of the individual and structure, of freedom and necessity. In discussing sociology, the example of the puppet always comes up because the enemies of social structure regularly accuse sociologists of “treating social actors as puppets”—which is technically correct, but not in the sense intended by the advocates of a free subject. There is not a single puppeteer, however confident of her skill to manipulate figurines, who does not claim that her puppet characters “make her do” the motions in their story, “dictate” to her their lines, instigate new ways of moving, “which surprise even her” and “which she would not have thought of herself.” Let us not hurry to retort that these are “manners of speaking” without any real sense: the vocabulary of attachment is rich, protean, ubiquitous, nuanced—that of autonomy and determination scant and dry. For those who claim to be attentive to attachments, this is a valuable index. To speak of freedom and causality, one will inevitably do violence to the conditions of attachment, whether in the sciences, in questions of taste, in medicine, in discussions of drugs, the law, or emotions.⁹ In contrast, as soon as we try to understand what permits a puppet to be made to act by its puppeteer, we refer to the specific features of the particular puppet: its color, shape, lighting, the feel of its taffeta, the whiteness of its porcelain arms.

If, in order to explain the subject’s actions, the sociologist must have recourse to the force of society, it is because he no longer has at his disposal the immense repertoire of actions imprinted in the particularities of actants (which he dismisses, almost out of duty, as reified objects).¹⁰ The idea of society was invented by those who, having cut all the puppet’s strings, still hope to breathe life into this collapsed figurine. By retying the strings of action, the notion of attachment permits one to dispense with the concept of society and the concomitant notion of the actor.

It is not enough, however, to distribute the sources of action among all the mediators, all the agitators, all the particularities that compete to set action in motion. We must also reconceptualize the nature of this action, if we are not to slide back into the “fields of force,” having succeeded only in dissolving the figures of subjectivity and structure without being able to determine whether they have been rendered all equally active or all equally passive. To durably transform sociology, it is not enough to disseminate the sources of action, as can be seen by the competing interpretations given to Nietzsche’s will to power or to Foucault’s regimes of discipline. The concept of network, even with the addendum actor-network,¹¹ is similarly limited. Certainly a network distributes action among all the actants, but it does not permit us to focus on the *definition of action* itself: actants, despite their novelty, inherited the *type of action* attributed to their predecessors. The social sciences, moreover, have not simply ignored the activity of mediators, they have broken in two the “*faire-faire*,” the “made to do,” the source of all action in the “middle” voice, which permits us to dispense with both control and determination. Despite their name, “theories of action” are all theories “of inaction,” because they have severed the “factish” in two: on one side, they place action that controls and on the other, action that is controlled. This catastrophic move renders it impossible to activate either the individual or society, because they are deprived of assistants, intermediaries, mediators, or means of any kind. What can be engendered with the “*faire-faire*” is not attainable as long as the making is on one side and the made on the other. With facture once fractured, action becomes forever unspecifiable.¹²

Let us consider one of the casualties of this severance. If, in applying Mafalda’s comical vignette to

9. In this regard, see Emilie Gomart, “Surprised by Methadone” (Thèse de doctorat, École des Mines, Paris, 1999).

10. I traced the genealogy common to the invention of society as theme and the impossible role given to objects in “On Interobjectivity—with discussion by Marc Berg, Michael Lynch and Yrjö Engelström,” *Mind Culture and Activity* 3, no. 4 (1996):228–245.

11. See the contradictory contributions assembled by John Law and John Hassard, eds., *Actor Network and After* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). We could apply the same critique to the notion of irreductions, as I developed it in *The Pasteurization of France. Part 2, Irreductions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). From this point of view, conjoining the notion of actor with that of network did more harm than good, because it was thought that one could read into this conjunction a new dialectic between the actor and the system when, in fact, it was intended to completely bypass the obligatory route.

12. The origin of this obsession with the fracturing of the “factish” does not concern me here; in order to understand its motivating force, one needs to develop an anthropology of the iconoclastic gesture. See *Pandora’s Hope* (see note 4) and *Le culte moderne* (see note 2).

a serious subject, I say that language “speaks me,” I find myself immediately faced with an impossibility, because clearly it is I who speaks at the moment and not the totality of language. I then immediately invent the distinction between language and speech, reserving the term *language* for the system and the term *speech* for its appropriation by an individual subject. But in doing so, I will soon become embroiled in a series of conceptual entanglements as obscure as those afflicting sociology, because I will now have to explain how a speaking subject manages to appropriate for himself that which in the end determines him. In desperation, I will appeal to a dialectical movement that, as we shall see, does not illuminate but obfuscates the issue. What happens if I assert, in accepting the reiteration of “factish”—this stuttered version of causality—not that language speaks me, but that it is language that *makes* me speak. Clearly, it is I and I alone who speaks; yes, but it is language that makes me *speak*. Will we say that this is but a play of words? Yes, but by this new formulation, I no longer seek to sunder what makes and what is made, the active and the passive, because I am positioned to pursue a chain of mediators, each not being the exact cause of the next, but instead, each enabling the next to become, in turn, the originator of action: literally, each renders causal its successor.¹³ Contrary to the notion of language as determinant structure, language does not control those whom it permits to speak, it *makes them those who can speak*, which is something altogether different. Given that there is no system of language with the power to “speak me,” there is no reason to invent a subject lacking autonomy who, despite all the determinations, would appropriate for himself the system of language.¹⁴ Neither language nor speech is a necessary distinction; they are but the artifacts of a break anterior to the action of “factishes.” It is because we have broken the “*faire-faire*,” the “made to do,” that we then find ourselves obligated to separate beings into

those that determine others that, if they had not been determined, would be free. The distinction between objects and subjects is not primordial, it does not designate different domains in the world: it is rooted in the fracture of action.

The same is true for both what is upstream and downstream of the actor: she is no more in control of what she makes than she is subject to control. If language does not control her, similarly, she does not control what she says. Do not believe, however, that she is now superseded by words, which speak her without her being aware of it: no, what she was made to do, she, in turn, makes others do, revising in passing the golden rule: “Make others do as you would have others make you do.” The opportunity she is given to speak, she gives, in turn, to words. She is not determined; she does not determine. She could not speak without language; words cannot speak without her. The puppet establishes a relationship with those whom she manipulates that is exactly as complex as the relationship established by the puppeteer who manipulates her puppet, which proves that the word manipulate—master concept of a critical sociology (with mastery embedded even within this phrase!)—signifies more than determination. The reiteration of action extracts, in this “transfer of efficacy,” the poison of control, of determination, of causality, without thereby being obligated to insinuate to a precise point the honey of freedom. Causality and liberty of yesteryear abound everywhere, all along the chain of mediators, the simple and misunderstood marks of an agile “*faire-faire*.”

Neither determination, nor freedom, nor structural action, nor individual action is an ingredient of the world: these artifacts (in the sense of superfluous artifice) were introduced little by little in the same measure that we deprived ourselves of these other artifacts, the “factishes.” Without attachments capable of “*faire-faire*,” it seemed reasonable to seek in the deep interior or exterior of the natural or social worlds

13. This is what allows us, in our jargon, to distinguish the “intermediary” from “mediation”; the former faithfully transports force and hence can be defined by its inputs and outputs, that is to say, put into a black box and ignored for good. Mediation, by contrast, is defined as that which ensures not a transfer, but a translation, and hence cannot be black-boxed, but instead remains visible, exceeding its inputs and outputs and having the character of an event.

14. In the list, compiled by Benveniste (see note 1), of verbs that are always in the middle voice, one finds the verb “to speak” (*phàto, loquor*), a strange fact if we imagine that what we find here is an entirely different definition of enunciation than one describing a

relation between language and speech. Interestingly, we also find here, in addition to the famous “to be born” and “to die,” the verb “to follow, to wed or take up a movement” (*sequor*), which is the source of the entire family of words used to develop a language about the “social.” We also find “to experience a mental agitation” and “to take some measures” (see note 1, p. 172). In short, the basic principles of anthropology seem to require the middle voice and to ignore both the active and the passive voice, this latecomer.

for the motors of action. Give us back attachments, and you can keep your Nature, Society, and Individual. We will see who will manage more easily to set the world in motion.

III

We did not hesitate in the first section, even risking the charge of “reactionary,” to replace the asymmetrical notion of emancipation with the symmetrical one of *substitution* of a morbid tie with a redemptive one. This risky displacement makes everything depend upon the particular characteristics of the attachments from which we will derive normativity—captured, immanent, crystallized, in the very details of the ties themselves. We became aware in the second section that, to render such a derivation thinkable, we must offend the common sense of the social sciences, which claim to take as their supposed object of study those ties that durably link subjects. Unfortunately, the social sciences offer scant resources to speak with precision about attachments, because they sundered too quickly the bridge of action, left with determinations and freedoms, which they must now assign to *different* domains of reality. However, the mediators that interest us completely ignore this fracturing of action between the active and the passive, and dispense as well with objects and subjects. In order to beneficially draw on the social sciences without suffering from their “theories of inaction,” we would have to have access to the concept of a *network of attachments*. This requires that we clear the path of some remaining problems.

Let us return to our little example. Despite his iconoclastic gesture, Mafalda’s father did not succeed, by “deconstructing” his pack of cigarettes, in obtaining his autonomy. He succeeded only in passing from an extreme innocence to an extreme panic by way of four stages: he believed himself to be free; he becomes a slave in the eyes of his daughter; he panics; he liberates himself by breaking his chains. Basically, however, he has only shifted from one belief in his liberty—with cigarette—to another belief in his liberty—without cigarette. How would he have responded to the barbs of the pestering Mafalda if he had lived in the domain of “factishes”? In understanding the passive form “you are smoked by your cigarette” as an accurate approximation of the middle voice, he would have responded in the same middle voice: “Yes, Mafalda, my daughter, I am effectively held by my cigarette, which makes me smoke

it. There is nothing in this resembling a determining action, neither for it nor for me. I do not control it any more than it controls me. I am attached to it, and if I cannot hope for any kind of emancipation from it, then perhaps other attachments will come to substitute for this one—on condition that I don’t panic and that you do not, as a good critical sociology of the left would, impose upon me an ideal of detachment from which I would surely perish. . . .”¹⁵ We can substitute one attachment for another, but we cannot move from a state of attachment to that of unattachment. This is what a father should tell his daughter. To understand the activity of subjects, their emotions, their passions, we must turn our attention to that which attaches and activates them—an obvious proposition, but one normally overlooked.

One of the reasons for this neglect is that this issue was supposed to have been addressed by the dialectic of subject and object. Believing the problem obsolete, we hardly needed to bother to examine its underlying premises. Let us consider a more difficult example than our cigarette: for the last thirty-five years, I have been writing notebooks that, I can honestly avow, have made me. Who writes? Who is fabricated? We will say that the question does not pose itself; that I am made by that which I myself have made, written by what I have written—the dialectical circle undertakes to clarify a retroactive loop, which will permit us to avoid considering either the point of departure or arrival. The question we would avoid, however, nonetheless poses itself, because the linking of two traditional positions by this loop leaves these positions essentially unmodified: it amounts to drowning the fish, to literally beating around the bush. What is then in this bush? Let us see. The expression “*faire-faire*” does not resemble the dialectical expression “to be made by what I make.” Whereas the former ignores all control, the latter duplicates control by attributing control to the creator over his commands and, at the same time, by attributing control to determining forces over their commanders. When I write in my notebook, it is clearly I who writes; when I am written by my notebook, it is clearly it that writes

15. The concept of “affordance” is so powerful because it permits the deployment of the middle voice in psychology. See James G. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986). See also the work of Laurent Thévenot on the forms of ordinary action “Le régime de familiarité. Des choses en personne,” *Genèses* 17 (1994):72–101.

me. The dialectic raises to the second power the weight of domination. It accelerates the movement, but it always turns in the same circle. But do we need a circle at all?

"Factishes" purge control from all action because they forego both the engendering activity of doing as well as the rendered passivity of the done. If I say "the notebooks that I make-write make me do what I am," the sum result of my description changes everything, because with it, I escape the diameter of the circle. The immaculate page of the notebook on which I place the sharp point of a pen and where I discover what, to my great surprise, I am in the process of writing, which forces me to reflect upon and modify the state in which I believed myself to be a moment previously. . . . None of this forms a straight line that might designate a controlled course. Nor do these displacements of efficacy loop around into a circle that would return to retrace a given repertoire of actions. Once set upon the path of "*différance*," pushed by the betrayals of successive translations of white paper, of black ink, of scribbled paragraphs, "all of us"—notebooks, passions, writings, arguments—descend more and more quickly in a cascade of irreversible events, which chase us before them. We can multiply attachments, substitute one attachment for another, but the attribution of a single source of action has become forever impossible. Any further attempt at such attribution or designation amounts to yet another distorted translation, which, added to all the rest, makes us flee yet further from the original spot. The world is not a barrel whose slats can be encircled by dialectics.

If it is not too difficult to transcend the transcendence attempted by dialectics, given that the latter served only to further entrench the opposing causalities of subject and object, a second obstacle is more difficult to overcome, especially because it appears so eminently reasonable. Even when we double the "*faire-faire*," the "made to do," we are easily tempted to think of each "*faire*," or "making," as an act of creation or an attenuated version of it: construction, fabrication, or efficacy.¹⁶ Beneath the

modest language of construction¹⁷ hides the mythological demiurge that, in turn, veils rather poorly the theological Creator. The whole matter rests on an immense misunderstanding of the sacred expression of creation *ex nihilo*. Despite the vulgate, the term nothingness does not designate the primary matter animated by the demiurge, but instead, the little threshold, the inevitable gap in all mediated action, that precisely renders demiurgie *impossible*, because each event exceeds its conditions and hence exceeds its artificer. Whether we assert with Saint John—"At the beginning there was the made to speak, that is to say the Verb"—or with Goethe—"At the beginning, there was the made to do, that is to say Action"—in the two cases, there is no creator in a position to dominate his creation drawn *ex nihilo*. As powerful as one might imagine a creator, he will never be capable of better controlling his creations than the puppeteer her puppets, a writer his notebooks, a cigarette its smoker, a speaker her language. He can make them do something, but he cannot *make* them—to be engaged in a cascade of irreversible events, yes; to be master of his tools, no. In believing that we were offering a respectful veneration to the creator—God, humanity, subject, or society—we chose, by a cruel deviation from theology, to idolize mastery and its ideal of detachment from everything that brings it into being. The expression *ex nihilo* doesn't signify that the artisan creates something out of nothing, but that the ensemble of prior conditions is never actually sufficient to *determine* action. That which the term *ex nihilo* annihilates is the master's delusional pretension to mastery—and what is true for God is even truer for Man. There is only one perfume whose fragrance is agreeable to the creator, that of surprise in beholding events that he does not control but that he makes happen. The passage from nothingness to being or from being to nothingness has no part in the story—no more significant a part than Mafalda's father's sudden swing from a careless freedom to a panicked

16. The works of François Jullien, *The Propensity of Things. Toward a History of Efficacy in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 1995), *Traité de l'efficacité* (Paris: Grasset, 1997), permit us to ensure an attentive vigil against such a temptation (at the cost of a detour through China).

17. One can certainly say that I did not have good fortune with the subtitle of my first book, "The Social Construction of Scientific Facts"! After having critiqued the adjective *social*, I had to then abandon the word *construction*, and, as for the word *fact*, it took me twenty years to understand at what cost fabrication and truth could become synonyms without trivializing either term. We may understand why the word *construction* no longer serves any useful purpose by seeing that it is even being used by John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

fear of all forms of attachment. We would seriously misunderstand the redoubling inherent in *"faire-faire"* if we contented ourselves with stacking a second myth about creation on a first myth about creation. To use the locution *"faire-faire"* signifies, on the contrary, that we wish to completely abandon the ideal of making and of its "misdeeds."¹⁸

This abandonment permits our re-posing the question of freedom by reclaiming from progressivists a theme that they did not use well and which should not be left for them alone to indulge in. The single slogan "to live without a master" actually signifies two entirely different projects depending on whether one lives under the umbrage of "factishes" or remains torn between objects and subjects. Does liberty consist of living without a master or *without mastery*? The two projects are no more similar than *"faire"* and *"faire-faire"* or "to do" and "made to do." The first project, as was argued in the first section, amounts to confusing the passage from one master to another with the passage from attachment to detachment. Behind the desire for emancipation—"neither God nor master!"—lies the desire to substitute a good master for a bad one; most often, it entails the replacement of the institution with the *"moi-roi,"* the "I/king," to adopt the expression of Pierre Legendre.¹⁹ Even if we accept that this merely represents a substitution and not a definitive severing of ties, freedom continues to consist of replacing one form of mastery with another. But *when will we be able to untie ourselves from the ideal of mastery itself*? When will we begin to finally taste the fruits of liberty, that is, "to live without a master," in particular, without an I/king? This is the second project that gives an entirely different meaning to the same slogan. We had confused freedom as the exercise of command *in the place of* another commander²⁰ with freedom as life lived *without* command altogether. With "factishes," the expression of freedom regains the path that the ideal of emancipation

and detachment had transformed into an impasse: freedom becomes the right not to be deprived of ties that render existence possible, ties emptied of all ideals of determination, of a false theology of creation *ex nihilo*. If it is correct that we must replace the ancient opposition between the attached and detached with the substitution of good and bad attachments, this replacement would leave us only feeling stifled if it were not supplemented and completed by a second idea, that is, the deliverance from mastery altogether: *at all points* of the network of attachments, the node is that of a "make-make"—not of something that makes nor of something that is made. That, at least, is the new project of emancipation, which is as vigorous as the former but much more credible, because it obliges us not to confuse living without control with living without attachments.

Let us examine one last obstacle to the ability to think the "factish," an obstacle that is not logical, as with the dialectic, nor theological, as with creation, but more directly political. In the eyes of those who have broken the *"faire-faire,"* who have sundered the "factish," cultures of the past or at a distance seem profoundly incomprehensible. With the opposed notions of determination and freedom, of heteronomy and autonomy, how could we understand those forms of existence that claim very simply that they could not exist without being continually intertwined with certain divinities or certain "goods"?²¹ The notion of fetish or fetishism emerges precisely from the shock encounter between those who utilize the terms of necessity and freedom and those who know themselves to be fastened by numerous beings that make them exist.²² Faced with the accusation cast by his daughter that he is totally dominated by his fetish, Mafalda's father has no other choice than to fanatically destroy his idol to guarantee

18. Theorizing about the technical obviously influences all these vague notions about construction and fabrication. For a reformulation of the relations between the tool and its maker, see, in particular, my "On Technical Mediation," *Common Knowledge* 3, no. 2 (1994):29–64.

19. See note 5.

20. The Stoic or Spinozist formulation of liberty as the acceptance or knowledge of determinisms amounts as well to a substitution of masters and the treatment of causal determination as the sole form of attachment. From the perspective of the "factish," this represents no appreciable change.

21. The question concerning the attachment of properties is not any easier to resolve than that of divinities, and the key concept of externality does not suffice to end the discussion, despite its pretensions of achieving closure. See Michel Callon, ed., *The Laws of the Market* (London: Routledge, 1998). The arguments on the freedom of choice or the organization of the market rehearse exactly the same theories of inaction as those of the social sciences.

22. In addition to the summation by Pietz (see note 3), see the dizzying analysis of Simon Schaffer, "Forgers and Authors in the Baroque Economy" (paper presented at the meeting "What is an Author?" Harvard University, March 1997), on the relation between history and scientific assessment of gold and the accusation of fetishism.

that he does not succumb again to a fatal attachment. His frenetic reaction proves that he is modern but portends nothing positive about his ability to understand those ties that will make him and his daughter exist. We constantly deliberate to discern the meaning of those vague terms the *West* and *Modernity*. We can define them simply enough: he who has broken his "factishes" sees "Others" as *bizarrely attached creatures*, monsters as much in the grips of their beliefs and their passivity as the father viewed by his daughter Mafalda.²³ But, it is the daughter who doesn't understand her father, the Westerner who doesn't understand the Other, rendered exotic by contrast with an ideal of detachment that would surely kill him—if he were so mad as to actually apply it. The incapacity to recognize in oneself those attachments that enable one to act is taken as reason to believe oneself Western, and to imagine that the Others are not, and are consequently entirely "Other," when in fact they differ only by what precisely attaches them. Instead of a great divide between Us and Them, between the detached and the attached, we would be better off introducing a number of small divides between those who are attached by *one such set* of particular entities and those attached by another such set of particular entities. The specific nature of the activating transfers makes all the difference and not the astounding pretension of escaping all domination whether by facts or by fetishes, by rationality or by irrationality. One gains alterity from attachments and not from the radical difference between the liberated and the alienated, the uprooted and the rooted, the mobile and the fixed.²⁴

If we define politics as the progressive constitution of a common world, we can easily see how difficult it is to

imagine a collective existence if all those who wished to participate were first asked to leave behind, in the outside vestibule, all the appurtenances and attachments that enabled them to exist. Westerners, as the masters of ceremony, manage not to apply to themselves the rule of abstention and detachment that they apply to the Others. The Westerner's attachments are found basically *summed up* by the two great collectors and accumulators of their distinctive tradition: Nature and Society, the reign of necessity and that of freedom. Use of the term *globalization* permits one to believe that the common world will necessarily be an extension, in one form or another, of one of these two reigns. For the competing parties, the global framework of the discussion is not up for debate. Nothing proves, however, that the common world as the object of politics, or what Isabelle Stengers calls "cosmopolitics,"²⁵ resembles globalization. Everything proves, on the contrary, that the two accumulators—the causal determination of Nature and the arbitrary arbitration of the Sovereign—no longer suffice to find closure to controversies concerning the progressive constitution of the common world. In a world that no longer moves from alienation to emancipation, but from entanglement to even greater entanglement, no longer from the premodern to the modern, but instead from the modern to the nonmodern, the traditional division between determinations and liberations serves no useful purpose in defining a "globalization" whose complexity, for the moment, defies political understanding.²⁶ Despite the automatic reaction of Mafalda's father, it is no longer a matter of abruptly passing from slavery to freedom by shattering idols, but of distinguishing those attachments that save from those that kill.

In this paper, I wanted to explore some problems with the concept of attachment with the end of using it to enrich the sociology of networks, which until now has been so useful but is beginning to seriously exhaust its

23. As much could be said about an "internal" exoticism (invented by critical theory, in particular the Frankfurt School), which has transformed all European and American cultures into a manipulated mass, also bizarrely attached. Critical theory plays for the center the same role of exoticizing alterity as that performed by the conceptualization of the fetish for the periphery. Saïd has described Orientalism very well—who has described the Occidentalism of Westerners seen by critical theorists?

24. On this issue of a great divide, see *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). See also the important work accomplished by anthropologists on revising the categories of culture once one removes the obstacle posed by an opposing category of nature, in Philippe Descola and Gisli Pálsson, eds. *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1996).

25. Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitiques*. Tome 1, *La guerre des sciences* (Paris: La Découverte-Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1996) and *Cosmopolitiques*. Tome 7, *Pour en finir avec la tolérance* (Paris: La Découverte-Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1997).

26. This is the objective of the effort I undertook in *Politiques de la nature, comment faire entrer les sciences en démocratie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1999): the definition of a collective capable of assembling a common world without having recourse to the two traditional compendiums of Nature and Society, bicameralism ill adapted to the contemporary situation.

resources. Networks—or rhizomes—permit us not only to distribute action, but also to bring about detachments and dislocations close at hand as well as reattachments at a distance. If networks are extremely efficacious in redistributing force, they are not at all in renewing a theory of action specific to each of the nodes. The addition of the term *actor* to form the hybrid *actor-network* did not have the anticipated effect, because it amounted to a melding of two theories of action: one rooted in determination and structure, the other in freedom and subjectivity. The move towards a network of attachments should permit us to keep the distributive effects of the network, while at the same time enable us to entirely reconceptualize the nature and source of action. Attachments designate that which issues, that which sets in motion and, at the same time, the impossibility of defining this “*faire-faire*”—this “made to do”—by the ancient coupling of determination and freedom. Shifting from networks to attachments would allow us to keep the distributive qualities of networks, while reestablishing a less problematic nature and source of action. Finally, it could give more meaning to the notion of construction, which seems to have exhausted much of its critical edge.

Translated by Monique Girard Stark