

## On the Cult of the Factish Gods

“The light-skinned peoples living in the northern reaches of the Atlantic are said to have a peculiar way of worshipping the gods. They go on expeditions to other nations, seize statues of their gods, and destroy them in huge bonfires, insulting them with cries of ‘Fetish! Fetish!’—a word that in their barbaric language seems to mean ‘forgery, nonsense, lie.’ Though they insist that they have no fetishes, and that it was their own idea to free other nations from such things, they seem to have very powerful gods. Indeed, their expeditions frighten and fill with dread the peoples who are attacked in this way by rival gods, who these peoples call ‘Moh Dun,’ and whose power appears as mysterious as it is invincible. It seems that in their own lands they have built many temples, and the way they worship inside them is as strange, frightening, and barbaric as it is outside. During great ceremonies repeated from generation to generation, they smash their idols to pieces with hammers. They seem to benefit significantly from these ceremonies, for once they have freed themselves from their gods they can do whatever they please. They can mingle the forces of the Four Elements with those of the Six Kingdoms and the Thirty-Six Hells, without feeling at all responsible for the violence they unleash. Once these orgies have ended, these people are said to fall into deep despair. At the feet of their shattered statues they cannot help but hold themselves responsible for everything that happens, which they call ‘human’ or ‘free-will subject’—or else they believe, on the contrary, that they are responsible for nothing at all, and that they are entirely produced by what they call ‘nature’ or ‘causal objects’ (the terms are hard to translate into our language). Then, as if terrified by their own daring, and in order to put an end to their despair, they repair the Moh Dun gods they have just broken, making countless offerings and sacrifices; they put their gods back up at the crossroads, holding them together by iron hoops as we do for barrel staves. They are also said to have created a god in their own image—in other words, one just like themselves, sometimes absolute master of all he does, and sometimes completely nonexistent. These barbaric peoples do not seem to understand what it means ‘to act.’”

—Reported by Counselor De-Bru-Osh, emissary to China from the Korean Royal Court in the mid-eighteenth century

## Part One

## Fairy-Objects, Fact-Objects

In order to mock both our own foolish beliefs and those of others, our freethinking ancestors handed down to us the scoffing tone set by Voltaire, among others. But in order to mock all forms of worship in this way, in order to overthrow all our idols, we had to believe in reason, the only force capable of seeing through all those follies. How can we speak symmetrically about ourselves and others without believing in either reason or belief, while still respecting both fetishes and facts? I have tried my hand at this, somewhat awkwardly, by defining agnosticism as a way of ceasing to believe in belief.

*How the Moderns Fabricate Fetishes in the Lands of People They Meet*

Belief is not a state of mind but a result of relationships among peoples; we have known this since Montaigne. The visitor knows; the person visited believes. Conversely, the visitor knew, the person visited makes him understand that he only thought he knew. Let us apply this principle to the case of the Moderns. Wherever they drop anchor, they soon set up fetishes: that is, they see all the peoples they encounter as worshippers of meaningless objects. Since the Moderns naturally have to come up with an explanation for the strangeness of a form of worship that cannot be justified objectively, they attribute to the savages a mental state that has internal rather than external references. As the wave of colonization advances, the world fills up with believers. A Modern is someone who believes that others believe. An agnostic, conversely, does not wonder whether it is necessary to believe or not, but why the Moderns so desperately need belief in order to strike up a relationship with others.

It all started on the West Coast of Africa, somewhere in Guinea, with the Portuguese. Covered with amulets of the saints and the Virgin themselves, they accused the Gold Coast Blacks of worshipping fetishes. When the Portuguese demanded an answer to their first question, "Have you made these stone, clay, and wood idols you honor with your own hands?"

the Guineans replied at once that indeed they had. Ordered to answer the second question, "Are these stone, clay, and wood idols true divinities?" the Blacks answered "Yes!" with utmost innocence: yes, of course, otherwise they would not have made them with their own hands! The Portuguese, shocked but scrupulous, not wanting to condemn without proof, gave the Africans one last chance: "You can't say both that you've made your own fetishes and that they are true divinities; *you have to choose*: it's either one or the other. Unless," they went on indignantly, "you really have no brains, and you're as oblivious to the principle of contradiction as you are to the sin of idolatry." Stunned silence from the Blacks, who failed to see any contradiction, proved how many rungs separated them from full and complete humanity. Bombarded with questions, they persisted in repeating that they did make their own idols, and therefore these were indeed true divinities. Confronted with such blatant bad faith, the Portuguese could only respond with jeers, derision, and disgust.

To designate the aberration of the coastal Guinea Blacks, and to cover up their own misunderstanding, the Portuguese (very Catholic, explorers, conquerors, and to a certain extent slave traders as well) are thought to have used the adjective *feitico*, from *feito*, the past participle of the Portuguese verb "to do, to make." As a noun, it means form, figure, configuration, but as an adjective, artificial, fabricated, factitious and finally, enchanted.<sup>1</sup> Right from the start, the word's etymology refused, like the Blacks, to choose between what is shaped by work and what is artificial; this refusal, this hesitation, induced fascination and brought on spells. Even though all etymological dictionaries agree on the origins of the term, Charles de Brosses, who invented the word "fetishism" (French *fétichisme*) in 1760, linked its origins with *fatum*, or destiny, the source of the French noun *fée*, "fairy," and of the adjective form in the noun phrase *objet-fée*, "fairy-object" (also of the English adjective "fey").

"The Blacks from the west coast of Africa, and even those from the interior, all the way up to Nubia, along the Egyptian border, worship certain divinities that the Europeans call fetishes, a term de-

vised by our traders from Senegal based on the Portuguese word *Fetisso* [sic], that is to say, a fairy-object, an enchanted, divine, or oracular object, from the Latin root *Fatum*, *Fanum*, *Fari*.”<sup>2</sup>

Whatever root we may prefer, the either-or choice remains the one on which the Portuguese insisted and the Blacks rejected:

“Who is speaking in the oracle? Is it the human being, or the fairy-object itself? Is the divinity real or artificial?”

“Both,” the defendants reply at once, since they are unable to grasp the difference.

“You have to choose,” say the conquerors, without further hesitation.

The two roots of the word indicate rather well the ambiguity surrounding an object that talks, that is fabricated or, to blend both meanings into a single expression, an object that provokes talk. Yes, the fetish is a “talk-maker.”

Too bad the Africans did not return the compliment. It would have been nice to see them ask the Portuguese dealers if their own amulets of the Virgin had been made by hand or had fallen directly out of the sky.

“Carefully crafted and engraved by our goldsmiths,” they would have answered proudly.

“So are they really sacred?” the Blacks would have asked.

“Of course they are; they were solemnly blessed by the archbishop in Nossa Senhora dos Remédios church, in the presence of the King.”

“So if you recognize both the working of gold and silver in the smith’s crucible and the sacred character of your icons, why are you accusing us of contradiction, when we’re saying the same thing? What’s good for the goose is good for the gander.”

“Sacrilege! No one can confuse idols to be smashed with icons to be prayed to,” the Portuguese would have answered, indignant all over again in the face of such impudence.

Still, we can bet that they would have called upon a theologian to get them out of the predicament into which they had been thrown by the merest hint of symmetrical anthropology. But they would have needed a subtle scholar to teach them how to distinguish between *latría* (excessive adoration, reserved for God) and *dulia* (moderate adoration as for example of the Virgin Mary). “Pious images,” the theologian would have intoned, “are nothing in and of themselves; they simply serve to remind us of the model that is the only legitimate object of worship. Your monstrous idols, on the other hand, are supposed to be the divinities themselves, from what you say, and yet you impudently admit that you’ve made them yourselves from scratch.” Why should he jeopardize his reputation in a theological discussion with mere natives, anyway? Ashamed of equivocating, in the grip of a holy zeal, the theologian would have toppled the idols, burned the fetishes, and then consecrated the True Image of the suffering Christ and his Holy Mother inside the disinfected temples.

Even without the help of this imaginary dialogue, we can see perfectly well that what we have here is not a contrast between idolatrous Gold Coast Blacks and image-free Portuguese visitors. We see one group of people covered with amulets scoffing at another group of people covered with amulets. We do not have iconophiles on one side and iconoclasts on the other, but iconodules on both sides (one side being made of selective iconoclasts). Yet the misunderstanding persisted, because each side, acting on its own terms, refused to choose. The Portuguese refused to hesitate between true objects of piety and sinister masks covered with sacrificial blood and grease. On the Gold Coast, every Portuguese suddenly displayed the fervent indignation Moses expressed against the Golden Calf. “Idols have mouths, but never speak, eyes, but never see, ears, but never hear.” The Guineans, on their side, could not see any obvious difference between the idol that had been brought down and the icon erected in its place. Relativists before the term was invented, they thought what the Portuguese were doing was the same thing they did. And it was precisely this failure to distinguish, this lack of comprehension, that condemned them in the eyes of the Portuguese. These savages could not even

tell the difference between *latry* and *dulia*, between their own fetishes and the holy icons of the invaders; they refused to grasp the extent of the gulf that separated human construction of an artifact from the definitive reality of what no human has ever constructed. Even the difference between immanence and transcendence seemed to be beyond them. How could the Portuguese fail to see them as primitives, and fetishism as a primitive religion?<sup>3</sup>

All the more so since the savages have been diabolically persistent in their error. Three centuries later in contemporary Rio de Janeiro, Black and Portuguese mestizos stubbornly maintain both that their divinities are made, fabricated, “seated,” and that, as a result, they are real. The anthropologist Patricia de Aquino has collected and translated accounts by Candomblé initiates:

“I was shaved (initiated) in Salvador for Osala, but I had to seat Yewa (who asked, through divination, to be seated, installed, made, fabricated), and Mother Aninha (his initiator) sent me to Rio because at the time Yewa was already an endangered Orisa, so to speak. There were many who no longer knew the *oro* (Yoruba term for “the words and rites”) of Yewa.”

“I am from Oba, Oba is almost dead already because no one knows how to seat her, no one knows the craft, so I came here (to this Candomblé) because I was shaved here, and they are not going to forget the *awo* (Yoruba term for “secrets”) for making her.”<sup>4</sup>

The anti-fetishist slumbering within us cannot stand the brazenness of such statements. Hide the construction process, the craft, the *fazer* that we cannot see! How can you so sanctimoniously admit that you have to make, fabricate, seat, situate, construct these divinities that grip you and yet remain out of reach? Are you so unaware of the difference between making what comes from yourselves and receiving what comes from elsewhere?

No matter where they landed, the Portuguese, struck by the same sort of impudence, had to understand fetishism by likening it either to naiveté

or cynicism. If you admit that you fabricate your own fetishes yourselves, you must then acknowledge that you pull their strings as a puppeteer would. The whole thing is engineered to impress others through disguising itself. Manipulators of popular beliefs, you then join the whole crowd of priests and falsifiers who—according to the anti-clericals—make up the long history of religions. Or else, if you let your own marionettes take you by surprise and you start believing in the airs they (or, rather, you) put on, this proves such a degree of naiveté that you are condemned to join the eternally credulous and hoodwinked masses who make up—again according to lucid observers—the gullible rabble of the history of religions.<sup>5</sup>

From the mouths of the Fontenelles, the Voltaires, and Feuerbachs of the world, the same either-or alternative keeps spewing forth: “Either you are cynically pulling the strings, or else you are being had.” Or, even more naively: “Either you built it, or else it’s real.”<sup>6</sup> And the shaven adepts of the Candomblé persist gently: “I am from Dada, but since no one knows how to fabricate Dada, we give to Sango or Osala so that they will take over the person’s head.”<sup>7</sup> Whereas the initiates are designating something that is neither completely autonomous nor completely constructed, the notion of belief splits apart their delicate operation, the fragile bridge connecting fetish and fact, and allows the Moderns to see all other peoples as naive believers, skillful manipulators, or self-deluding cynics. Yes, the Moderns refuse to listen to the idols; they split them apart like coconuts, and from each half they take two forms of dupery: you can deceive others, and you can deceive yourself. Moderns believe in belief in order to understand others; initiates do not believe in belief either to understand others or to understand themselves. Can we recover their way of thinking for our own use?

#### *How the Moderns Manage to Build Fetishes in Their Own Lands*

If we allow ourselves to learn from those who do not believe in belief, we notice that the Moderns do not believe in it any more than the coastal Blacks did. The Whites may have accused the savages of fetishism, but

this did not necessarily make them naive anti-fetishists themselves. If we believed that, it would move us further from Scylla but closer to Charybdis; if we believed that, we would save the Blacks from belief—and belief would then become an accusation leveled by the Whites against something they did not understand—but we would be plunging the Whites into an abyss of naiveté. We would have them believing that the others believe! We would be confusing Whites with Blacks! What we have just done for the fetishists we must do now for the anti-fetishists, and show ourselves to be as charitable toward the latter as we have been toward the former.

As it happens, just as the charge of fetishism completely fails to describe the practices of the coastal Blacks, the claim of anti-fetishism likewise fails to explain the practices of the Whites. Wherever they install their great fetish-smashing machines, the Whites begin once again to produce the same sort of uncertain beings the Blacks produced, and it is impossible to tell whether these beings are constructed or collected, immanent or transcendent.<sup>8</sup> Let us consider, for example, everything the fetish object is capable of doing, even though it is accused of doing nothing.

What is the definition of an anti-fetishist? An anti-fetishist is someone who accuses someone else of being a fetishist. And what is the content of the complaint? The fetishist is accused of being mistaken about the origin of the power in question. He has built an idol with his own hands—his own human labor, his own human fantasies, his own human powers—yet he attributes this labor, these fantasies, and these powers to the very object that he has created. The fetish—at least according to the anti-fetishist—acts, so to speak, like an overhead projector. The image comes from the professor who has placed a transparency on the glass over the blinding light, but what is shown seems to spring from the screen toward the audience, as if neither the professor nor the overhead projector had anything to do with it. The fascinated spectators “attribute an autonomy to the image” that it does not possess. Overturning fetishism thus amounts to inverting an inversion, reversing a reversal, rectifying the image, and granting the real master of the action credit for initiating it. Along the way, however, the real master has disappeared! The

object, which was nothing, is now doing something. As for the origin of the action, it gets lost in a frightfully mixed-up battle of inheritance.

As soon as the anti-fetishist unveils the idol’s ineffectiveness, he in fact plunges into a contradiction from which he cannot escape. Just when the fetish is deemed to be nothing at all, it begins to act and shift everything about. It is capable, in particular, of reversing the origin of power. Better yet, since according to the anti-fetishists the effect of the fetish is efficacious only if its creator is unaware of its origin, it must be capable of completely dissimulating its own manufacture. Thanks to the fetish, in a single wave of a magic wand, its creator can turn himself from a cynical manipulator into an ingenuous dupe. Thus, even though the fetish is nothing but what a human makes of it, it nevertheless adds a little something: it inverts the origin of the action, it dissimulates the human work of manipulation, and it transforms a creator into a creature. How could anyone deny the efficaciousness of an object that is capable of so many prodigious feats?

But the fetish does better still: it modifies the very quality of human action and work, and yet, by revealing that only human action gives voice and power to objects, the critical thinker ought to invert the inverted origins of power, ending the illusion of the fetishes once and for all. Someone who (naively) believed he was hearing voices would then turn into a ventriloquist. Having become aware of his own double-dealing, he would be reconciled with himself. Someone who believed he was dependent on divinities would notice that he is actually alone with his own inner voice, and that divinities own nothing he has not given them. Once the scales had fallen from his eyes, he would see that there was nothing to see. He would have ended his alienation—mental, religious, economic, and political—since no alien would ever again come to latch on, parasitically, to something he had built with his own calloused hands and his own creative spirit. Carried away by the critic’s denunciation, humans would finally realize that they are sole masters in a world forever emptied of its idols. The fire that Prometheus had stolen from the gods would be stolen back from Prometheus himself by critical thinking. Fire would come from humans, and from humans alone.

Alone? Not quite, and this is where things become complicated once again. Like an earnest lawyer who has to divide an estate when there is no will and no heir, the critical thinker never knows to whom he should restore the power that was mistakenly attributed to the fetishes. Should it be given back to the individual who is master of himself as well as of the Universe, or to a society of individuals? If the answer is that one should render unto society that which is society's, mastery is lost all over again. The inheritance recovered from the fetishes is dispersed among a cloud of legitimate heirs. Once idolatry's reversal has been reversed, once the projection of power has been "projected" back onto an overhead, it is not the "I," the working individual, who is found at the end of the road, but a group, a multitude, a collective. Under the now-dispelled fantasy of the fetish, the enlightened human being realizes that he is not really alone, but that he shares his existence with a crowd of actors. The alien he thought he was eliminating comes back in the frightfully complicated form of a social multitude. The human actor has merely exchanged one form of transcendence for another. We can see this quite well in Emile Durkheim, in whose hands that which is social seems hardly less opaque than the offending religion it explains.<sup>9</sup> Marx, in his famous definition of the fetishism of commodities, illustrates how something that does nothing can still manage to proliferate:

There . . . is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.<sup>10</sup>

Economic anthropology attests to the fact that relationships among human beings, whether fetishized by way of merchandise or not, seem

no more simple or transparent than those among divinities.<sup>11</sup> If merchandise loses its seeming autonomy, no human regains mastery as a result, and certainly not the tireless worker. Through some strange inversion of the inversion, it appears that the fetish-less world is populated by as many aliens as the world of the fetish. The inversion of the inversion leads to a universe that is as unstable as the world that was supposedly inverted by an illusory belief in fetishes. Neither anti-fetishists nor fetishists know who acts and who is mistaken about the origins of action, who is master and who is alienated or possessed. Thus, even among the Moderns the fetish, far from being drained of its efficacy, always seems to act in such a way as to shift, muddle, invert, and perturb the origins of belief, as well as the very certainty that mastery is possible. The fetish immediately regains the power that people seek to deny it. No one believes. The Whites are no more anti-fetishist than the Blacks are fetishist. It is just that the Whites always erect idols in other peoples' lands and then immediately overthrow them, multiplying the operators that disseminate the origins of the action in their own lands. Yes, the anti-fetishists are just like the fetishists: they worship idols in a rather strange manner, one that we are going to have to untangle.<sup>12</sup>

#### *How the Moderns Struggle—and Fail—to Distinguish Facts from Fetishes*

Why must the Moderns resort to complicated forms in order to believe in others' naive beliefs, or in knowledge without belief among themselves? Why must they act as if others believe in fetishes, while they seemingly practice the most austere anti-fetishism? Why not just admit that there is no such thing as fetishism—and no anti-fetishism either—and recognize the strange efficacy of these "action displacers" with which our lives are intimately bound up?<sup>13</sup> The reason is that Moderns are strongly attached to the conviction that there is an essential difference between facts and fetishes. The goal of belief is neither to explain the mental state of fetishists nor to account for the naiveté of anti-fetishists. Belief depends on something completely different: on the distinction between knowledge and illusion, or rather, as we shall see in the following sections, on the separation between practical life—

which does not make this distinction—and theoretical life, which maintains it.

Let us look a little more closely at the double repertoire that the notion of belief has to contain in separate compartments, and see how it works. As soon as the anti-fetishist has denounced naive belief and revealed the work of the human actor, work that is mistakenly projected onto idols made of stone and wood, he goes on to denounce the naive belief that the individual human actor thinks he can attribute to his own actions. It is not easy, in the eyes of the anti-fetishists, to behave like ordinary actors! If you try to dance to their tune, you are always starting off on the wrong foot. If you believe you are being manipulated by idols, they will show you that you have created them with your own hands; but if you proudly boast of your ability to create so freely, they will show you that invisible forces are manipulating you and making you their agent without your knowledge. The critical thinker triumphs twice over the consummate naiveté of the ordinary actor, seeing the invisible work that the actor is projecting onto the divinities who manipulate him, but also seeing the invisible forces that drive the actor, who believes he manipulates freely! (Critical thinkers, offspring of the Enlightenment, ceaselessly manipulate invisible things themselves, as we can see; the great liberators from alienation produce endless numbers of aliens.)

How do the Moderns go about framing the actions of ordinary actors by means of two such contradictory denunciations? They do this by using two operators instead of just one: they invoke fairy-objects on the one hand, and fact-objects on the other. When they denounce the naive belief of actors in fetishes, they are using human action that is free and focused on the subject. But when they denounce the naive belief of actors in their own subjective freedom, the critical thinkers are using objects—as they are known by the objective sciences—that they have established, and in which they place their full trust. They thus alternate between fairy-objects and fact-objects, so they can show off to ordinary, naive people twice.

Since the situation is likely to become complicated, perhaps a diagram will help guide us. Let us start with the first critical denuncia-

tion. The human actor thinks he is determined by the power of objects, a power that tells him how to behave. Fortunately, the critical thinker is watching out for him, and denounces the actor's double-dealing, which, "in reality," projects the power of his own action onto an inert object.<sup>14</sup>

One might believe that the work of denunciation is over. Sobered up, freed, de-alienated, the subject takes back the energy that used to belong to him and refuses to grant his imaginary constructions an autonomy that they can never again recapture. The work of denunciation does not stop here, however; it starts up again, but now in the other direction. The free and autonomous human subject boasts, a little too soon, that he is the primal cause of all his own projections and manipulations. Fortunately, the critical thinker, who never sleeps, once again reveals how determination works, beneath the illusion of freedom. The subject believes that he is free, while "in reality" he is wholly controlled. In order to explain the determinations involved, we must take recourse to objective facts, revealed to us by the natural, human, or social sciences. The laws of biology, genetics, economics, society, and language are going to put the speaking object, who believed himself to be master of his own deeds and acts, in his place.

The two forms of denunciation look strikingly similar: the critical thinker with his belief in causes (fig. 2) occupies the same position as the naive individual with his belief in idols (fig. 3). If anything appears

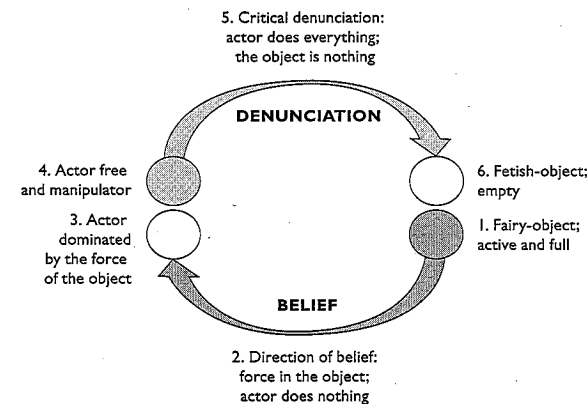


FIGURE 2.

The first critical denunciation reverses the direction of belief (from 1 to 3), so as to foreground the role of the actor freely projecting values upon mere objects (from 4 to 6).

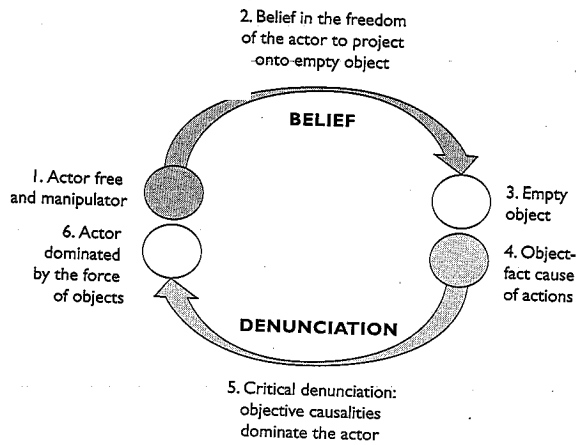


FIGURE 3. The second critical denunciation reverses once again the direction of belief (from 1 to 3), so as to foreground causal factors that strictly limit the actor's freedom (from 4 to 6).

to be denounced by the superimposition of the two diagrams, it ought to be denunciation itself, since this is what once again reverses the origin of the power whose reversed origin it had previously reversed! But denunciation by critical thinkers is no more at stake than is the naive belief of ordinary actors. The notion of belief allows the Moderns to understand the origin of action in their own way, through the double vocabulary of fetishes and facts.

The two diagrams presented above can never be superimposed, however, and the task of belief is precisely to prevent such superimposition. Why? Because critical denunciation is based on four different lists, two for the object pole, and two for the subject pole—four lists that must never be mixed together under any circumstances. To state it bluntly, the critical thinker will put everything he does not believe in on the list of fairy-objects—religion, of course, but also popular culture, fashion, superstitions, mass media, ideology, and so on—and he will put everything in which he firmly believes on the list of cause-objects: economics; sociology; linguistics; genetics; geography; neuroscience; mechanics; and so on. Conversely, he will constitute his subject pole by putting all the aspects of the subject that are dear to him—responsibility, liberty, inventiveness, intentionality, and so forth—on the credit side of the ledger, and will put on the debit side anything that he deems useless or artificial: mental states; affects; behaviors; fantasies; and the like. The content and

length of each list will vary from thinker to thinker, but the four-part division will remain intact.

Thus, as the anti-fetishists see it, naive belief starts off on the wrong foot every time. It credits fetish-objects with a power that comes from human ingenuity alone; this is what the first denunciation makes brutally clear (fig. 4). Naive belief also credits itself with freedom when it is actually manipulated by a host of causal determinations; this is what the second critical denunciation obligingly reveals. But the resemblance between the two ways of proceeding never strikes the anti-fetishist, because the fact-object used in the second critique comes from a list of solid objective causes, while the fairy-object denounced in the first critique is only the projection of a hodge-podge of more or less vague beliefs, heaped onto an unimportant substratum. Conversely, the active subject carrying out the first denunciation is assigned the role of a human actor rebelling against alienation and courageously demanding his full and total freedom, while the active subject in the second denunciation is a puppet drawn and quartered by all the causal determinations that mechanize it in all directions. Provided that the black and grey lines

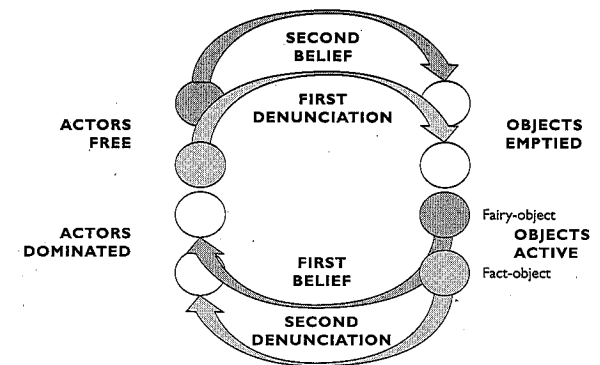


FIGURE 4. The two critical denunciations might appear contradictory, except if a strict division is enforced between the two types of objects (on the right), and the two types of subjects (on the left) that both critiques presuppose. It is this strict division that, taken together, constitutes the phenomenon of belief.



of figure 4 are kept strictly apart, critical thought will have no difficulty ~~claiming both that a free and autonomous human actor creates his own fetishes, and that the objective determinations revealed by the physical or social sciences define that actor completely.~~

We can now call "belief" the entire operation authorized by figure 4. We understand once again that belief in no way refers to a cognitive ability. Instead, it refers to a complex configuration in which the Moderns construct themselves: in order to understand their own actions, they forbid themselves to return to fetishes even though, as we shall see, they continue to use them.