

A Brief Theory of the ‘Captation’ of Publics

Understanding the market with Little Red Riding Hood

Franck Cochoy

One sees here that some children,
Particularly young girls,
Beautiful, well formed, and nice,
Make the mistake of listening to all kinds of people
And it is not surprising
That there are so many who are devoured by the Wolf.

I say wolf, yet wolves are not all alike;
There are those who are quite charming,
Quietly spoken, without malice and without anger,
Civil, obliging and pleasant,
Who follow the young maidens
Right up to the houses, and the lanes;
But alas! who does not know that these sweet-talking wolves
Are the most dangerous ones.
(Perrault, 1991: 260)

THE NEW economic sociology has had the great merit of demonstrating how much economic action depends on relational forms (Granovetter, 1985). Yet, what are these connections and how are they formed? Is exchange always dependent on social ties that are external and prior to it, or does it not itself contribute to the construction of bonds which are proper to it? In order to understand economic action, would it not be an advantage to study the sociality which is established in the course of relations amongst

-
- *Theory, Culture & Society* 2007 (SAGE, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, and Singapore),
Vol. 24(7–8): 203–223
DOI: 10.1177/0263276407084704

strangers and to invert the sense of the explanation so that economic activity itself can be thought as manipulating the bonds and producing them? In answering such questions, one must be interested in the possibility that the actors of exchange put into place relational techniques which are supposed to establish a new connection between them. Such a direction for research joins up with works that pay attention to the definition of the social as an art of association (Latour, 2005), to the performative character of economic knowledge and management (Callon, 1998), but also to the technologization of market relations (Callon et al., 2007).

Here we propose to observe the way in which an individual or collective actor goes about having a hold on their publics. More precisely, it is a matter of studying the actants and the *dispositifs* (devices) which allow the opposite poles of the organization and the market, the institution and public space to be brought together, and of trying to understand their modes of articulation. We aim to show how and by what means a regulated context, dominated by management or administrative procedures, attempts to exert a hold on these less understood, more fleeting, more fluid, collectivities that we know as citizens, users, electors, buyers, consumers, clients (Cochoy, 2005). To do this, we shall focus upon the study of a central figure of relational work, which we call the ‘captation of the public’. By *captation* (a French word which has no satisfactory English equivalent), we mean the ensemble of the operations which try to exert a hold over, or attract to oneself, or retain those one has attracted.

We shall see that the captation of publics consists in putting to work *dispositifs* which attempt to profit from dispositions that one attributes to persons in order to shift their trajectories, to remove them from the external space and exercise control over them. The example of the different modalities of captation or the sting put in place by the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood will enable us to reflect upon the machinery specific to these *dispositifs*, but also to sketch a typology of these *dispositifs* as they are encountered in the market and in public space today.

The Captation of Publics: The Articulation of Dispositifs and Dispositions

Captation: An Attempt at a Definition

What is captation? Given the absence of literature, and before proceeding, we shall have recourse to the sensible method of starting with several prior meanings of the French word *captation*: to the official meaning of ‘embezzlement’, which is included in the notion of *captation d’héritage* (misappropriation of inheritance), one can add other older meanings such as *captatio benevolentiae*, that figure of rhetoric which consists in capturing the sympathy of an audience by playing on empathy and appeal to indulgence, and a whole series of more current synonyms such as seduction, adduction, capturing the interest, recruitment, encirclement, securing loyalty, framing, derivation, interception, even the slang *capter* (to receive), which means to

understand, to get the drift of one’s interlocutor. In the background of captation and its possible substitutes, one can discern the will to encircle, to surround, to enrol, to deflect, to catch, to include or to seduce users, clients, consumers, in short, all the likely actors from whom money can be made by captation, but a priori outside their control. From this point of view, and amongst all the synonyms, seduction is doubtless one of the best, to the extent that this word designates the affective, symbolic and cultural mechanisms in the process, beyond rational forms of gain, while placing the emphasis on the ‘deviation from the path’, on the deviation inherent in this kind of operation.

The disordered collection of terms which circumscribe the semantic field of captation enables one to target what is fundamentally at stake in the notion, namely, that it is a matter of having a hold over something that one does not, or rather not yet, completely control. In captation, one thus meets a figure which applies to hunting, to war, to love, in politics or concerning the market: the care and the effort put into establishing a bond without any guarantee of succeeding. Captation appropriately finds its origin in the liminal recognition of the flight of publics, of the elusive character of demand, of the growing opaqueness of what citizens expect. ‘*Capter*’, to lure to oneself, is thus to paradoxically accept the possibility of strangeness, of departure or indifference, and even to allow one’s target freedom: one has a greater chance of holding on to one’s prey or game, one’s mistress or lover, a client or an elector, if the latter has the feeling that she is able to leave, to be unconcerned, to pass by. Captation supposes an opening, mastery implies dispossession; this is the paradox on which a whole series of devices for the captation of customers has relied for quite some time: the historical innovation of ‘satisfaction or return’ (Strasser, 1989), the backgrounding of the seller, the setting up of ‘no purchase exit zones’, automatic entrances and exits in stores, etc.

The punter comes more readily to market the more she feels she can emerge incognito: in shops where the seller awaits like a spider at the edge of its web, one hesitates to enter. One learns thus that the functioning of the free market supposes its scrupulous orchestration: one must vigorously supply the means to allow flight, to ensure free movement, anonymity, to reduce the importance of engagements. There is no contradiction in the expression ‘management of the market’ (Cochoy, 1998): much as at the macro level the market needed the state to be instituted (Polanyi, 1971), it needs management to exist at the micro level (and to exist as a free environment, in which one contrives the absence of organization). After the illusion of ‘laissez-faire’ that liberals hold dear, after the alternative between making something oneself (*faire*) and subcontracting (*faire faire*) introduced by the new institutional economy, it is perhaps a matter of understanding that marketing action consists equally in mobilizing the art of ‘making free market behaviour’ (*faire laissez-faire*) in staging very tightly the freedom of actor while at the same time respecting it deeply. It follows that one must

have recourse to captation (the sting), in the sense of persuasion (rhetoric) and seduction (erotic), of the mobilization of speech and of body.

At this stage of our account, an important question emerges: does dealing with captation amount to another way of speaking about manipulation? In a sense yes, if one understands manipulation to mean what Jean-Leon Beauvois and Robert-Vincent Joule (1987) indicate in their wonderful *Petit traité de manipulation à l'usage des honnêtes gens* (Little Treatise on Manipulation for Honest Folk), that is to say, in short, all the techniques, all the knowledges, all the stratagems which enable one to bring someone to freely make a decision that she would not have made had she known from the beginning all the data upon which it is based. As an example, one could cite the technique of 'a-foot-in-the-door', which consists of:

... extracting from the subject an unproblematic and not costly conduct, clearly in a context of free choice. ... Once this preparatory conduct has been secured, a request is explicitly made to the subject inviting her to produce a new conduct, more costly, and which stood little chance of being spontaneously secured. ... The effect of foot-in-the-door translates ... an effect of preserving a prior decision, for subjects committed to a first freely chosen conduct accept more easily a later request compatible with the earlier one, although obviously more costly. (Beauvois and Joule, 1987: 98, 99)

To illustrate this technique of foot-in-the-door, one can cite the classic strategy of the car salesman who promises a significant rebate on the cost of buying a car, only to reveal at the end of negotiations that the percentage mentioned only applies to part of the new car. If one follows the authors' theory, the chances are high that the buyer will continue with her initial choice, in spite of the disclosure of this unexpected condition, because of the strong commitment inscribed in the spiral of negotiation. The profusion of figures of manipulation provided by Beauvois and Joule allows us to see the combination of a calculation which quickly becomes a habit, which gets stuck in an initial option and shows itself unable to integrate surprises that emerge along the different stages of the process of decision-making.

But if, in line with our interest, captation encompasses well enough this kind of cognitive mechanism, it seems that it cannot be reduced to it in any way. In fact, the term is appropriate in designating not only manipulation as understood by Beauvois and Joule, but at least three other situations and modalities of relations to publics which are not covered by that notion: to begin with, captation lets us apprehend techniques of instant engagement, which exclude the sequential processes the authors deal with. Moreover, the notion of captation enables us to address situations where reciprocal manipulation by actors in play is at work.¹ Finally, and above all, this idea of captation has the great advantage of also designating relations of attraction independent of, or even alien to, the risk that the target may escape that is associated with the idea of manipulation: to entrap is not necessarily to manipulate; for example, to respond favourably to information, an advert, a commercial offer (to be captured) does not necessarily

proceed from an error, a mistake in understanding or a cognitive imperfection, as is implicitly assumed by the notion of manipulation, but can result from the likely neutral assessment between a ‘ready-to-choose’ dispositif (perhaps deceiving, disappointing or unsuitable, but which improves comfort and the period of decision) and an independent personal choice (perhaps more adequate, more exciting or personal, but very costly in investment of time and thinking, and itself potentially fallible too) (Barrey et al., 2000).

The Two Supports of Captation

Given that there is no captation without any ad hoc devices, captation has this particular advantage, specific to it, which is that of demonstrating better than any other object that dispositifs (techniques) maintain a very close relation to dispositions (social).

The emergence (or rather the return)² of the notion of ‘dispositifs’ in sociological literature owes a lot to the convergent research of anthropologists of science and technology and of specialists in situated/distributed cognition who, in their own way during the last 25 years, have contributed to do justice to the role of objects in action (Latour, 1996a), to show the extent to which the arrangement (*agencement*) of material elements that are sometimes commonplace, such as plans, sketches or lists, can play a central role in the configuration of human activity (Hutchins, 1994; Lave, 1988; Norman, 1988).³ The study of dispositions is older and has aimed to show, for instance under the direction of Pierre Bourdieu, the extent to which the incorporation of schemes of action inherited from practice shapes conduct, conditions the reproduction of ways of doing, being or thinking, by way of the mediation of the habitus, that ‘structured-structurizing structure’ generative of practice (Bourdieu, 1998).⁴

These two traditions have barely crossed each other’s paths: while ‘sociologists of objects’ never cease to speak of dispositifs (devices), ‘sociologists of the social’ only speak of dispositions. The two proposed models seem even to exclude each other, as the expert discussion around the notion of routine seems to show: the routine incorporated in a subject is shown as opposed to the routine supported by things; the social ‘subjectivist’ explanation of circular conduct in terms of the theory of habitus is opposed to the objectivist explanation, which grounds the repetition of action in the material supports that are its foundation, as for example the green button which one sees every day on one’s photocopier and that commands the gesture that puts in motion the photocopying (Suchman, 1987).

Yet the study of the operation of captation enables one to bring together dispositifs and dispositions, by founding this *rapprochement* not on a theoretical argument, but on an empirical observation: *as soon as one is interested in actions that aim to seduce/displace (capter) a public, one notices that these actions usually find support in ad hoc dispositifs, the main characteristic of which is to bring into play the dispositions that one connects (which one assumes or which one attributes) to the targeted public.* To illustrate this

fact, I will start by invoking four examples of dispositifs of captation. These examples will allow us to list some of the dispositions upon which particular dispositifs rely, but equally to begin to reflect upon the way in which captation articulates these two notions, and what is to be made of this.

Dispositifs. Let us take an old example: that of the introduction of the potato in France. In order to develop the use of a little-known product, the agricultural engineer Parmentier had the idea not so much of commercializing it but, on the contrary, of forbidding it and placing a deliberately intermittently vigilant guard around it. Some curious robbers, taking advantage of the lapses of the guards, soon enough stole the product to try it out; then they went on to disseminate their impression and thus bring about the generalization of the product. A modern variant of such a dispositif of captation lies in the marketing policy which consists in selling at an artificially inflated price the product that one hopes to make popular, betting on the effects of mechanisms of distinction (Bourdieu, 2002): wealthier people are inclined to appropriate the scarcest goods, and the poorest are driven to acquire the goods owned by the rich. Finally, let us mention two more recent examples. The first case is that of a poster campaign for Siemens mobile phones: in March 2001 the ads of this firm put their faith in slogans like ‘Spread love’ or ‘Give in to temptation’. The last example is that of programmes for securing the loyalty of customers (Blanc, 2001; Barrey, 2004; Kjellberg and Liljenberg, 2003). This type of programme rests on the expert combination of several dispositifs: for example, a registered card entitles the customer to claim reductions, to obtain credit or have priority accounts on leaving the store, but the same card gives the same store access to information, to statistics and priority access to the customer, who then receives offers targeted according to her shopping pattern. This exchange of service then reinforces the double bind (Callon et al., 2001) of the customer to her trademark and the latter to the customer.

The point that interests us here is this. Each of these dispositifs puts to work a strategic use of dispositions: the first gambles on curiosity, the second on the anxiety about distinction, the third on love and/or temptation, the last on loyalty. These four examples thus show us that the sociology of merchants is sometimes richer than that of economists or even sociologists: there exists amongst market professionals a greater degree of calculation and more information on the mechanisms of social action than in many treatises in economy and sociology! These professionals play not only on the price – and thus on the anthropology of interest which economists value – or on belonging – and thus on the ethnography of the habitus which sociologists hold dear – but they rely also on a wider number and/or more subtle cogs such as love, curiosity, temptation, loyalty, as Mallard (2007) found in his study of consumerism. The latter, for instance, which appears a priori to be closely related to habit, is on the contrary, considered by market actors as an object which it is difficult to secure, requiring the instrumental and managerial support of a whole series of relatively unreliable dispositifs (Blanc, 2001). On the scene of the market, if one pays attention to the

incorporated schemes of action, this often happens in the sense of ‘incorporated by’, or schemes that are candidates for incorporation; in terms of the market, incorporation, far from being a passive and spontaneous mechanism for the absorption of the social, is the object of a whole theory and practice of marketing work.

Dispositions. The opposition, the struggle between economy and sociology has been much commented upon. Even so, it has been little noticed how much each discipline has pursued a parallel effort to suppress, each in its own way, human passions, in order to promote, on the one hand, a model of the rationally interested actor, and on the other hand, a model of the disciplined and habit-dependent actor. On the one side, Albert Hirschman (2002) has brilliantly shown how liberal economy has gradually managed to fold passions back into the single dimension of interest, to thus form a foundation of calculation, to make conduct predictable, and to realize the *tour de force* that amounts to the containment of the disorder of passions while liberating oneself from the authority of older political and religious guardianship. Similarly, one could show how much the kind of society described by Norbert Elias (1975), as well as the sociology that Bourdieu (1998) formalizes, have succeeded in folding conduct onto the single dimension of self-control (Elias) and of the habitus (Bourdieu), in order to form a foundation for civil action, social belonging, and reflexive acts; equally, it is a matter of making conduct predictable without having to propose any other hypothesis except the existence of a linear mechanism for channelling or incorporating schemes of action (if need be, reinforced by ad hoc institutions such as the school, the family or the state).

The problem posed by the empirical analysis of the market is thus precisely the place of the subject and of his or her passions. The crucial question is this: has the double vaccine of interest and habitus succeeded in eradicating the virus of passions? The opposition between interest and habitus is a sign of this potential failure: if there are two vaccines, is it not because we are faced with having to combat at least two sources of infection? This means that we need to investigate the state of the subject, the nature of the forces that could motivate her.

In fact, a brief observation of the market and of the world shows us that what used to contain the passions no longer works. The double vaccine of interest and habitus is increasingly less effective; everywhere around us we see passions erupt; interest gives way to compassion, habit to phantasm, civility to hubris, etc. Their mode of acting has become so mixed that passions have mutated, they have become resistant: interest is opposed to habit while habit undermines interest. It may well be that the coexistence of habit and interests has become the fundamental driving force of the market: marketing activity, on the side of supply as much as demand, consists not only in looking for the best opportunities, but also to reduce the cost of research and cognition, and thus to preserve standard and stabilized solutions, even to delegate the exercise of one's rationality to tools of calculation, dispositifs such as buying guides, or experts such as

journalists of consumer associations who specialize in this delegation of market rationality (Callon, 1998; Cochoy, 2002; Karpik, 2000; Mallard, 2007).

Captation functions as hinge for these two contradictory drives: the captation of a clientele or a public plays strongly both on competition – captation assumes one allows the market to be open, free, accessible – and upon its suspension: to take things back to oneself, to keep and hold on to one's customers. It is precisely this double action of pulling out and digging in performed by captation which breaks up the two black boxes, the two models, the two vaccines of calculation and habit, and sets free all the cogwheels whose action they had halted: pleasure, self-esteem, envy, all these passions so well analysed by 17th-century moralists and which at last find their place in the marketplace.

In loosening these two constraints, the role of marketing dispositifs is central. Contrary to what one had thought for a long time, the market is not necessarily the best basis for interest: it is often in the interest of traders to turn against interest! Operators in the market have for a long time used pressure to remove their operations and their audience from the dimension of calculation, displacing economic cognition onto the register of quality (Karpik, 1989), or qualities (Callon et al., 2001), or onto what I call 'qualculation', in order that competition be engaged not on a suicidal reduction of prices for a given quality, but on a constant redefinition of the appearance of a product, as the car market demonstrates (Cochoy, 2002). In a symmetrical way, the dispositifs of the market craftily misuse and mobilize the register of habit. The dispositifs misuse habit because competitive techniques have always aimed to destroy belongings and prior routines in order to capture a new clientele, which is often the neighbour's: but the marketing dispositifs also mobilize habits, since it is equally a matter of doing everything possible to hold on to a clientele, to secure its loyalty (Blanc, 2001), once it has been captured/seduced, in short to inculcate habits.

These two symmetrical drives of interest for disinterestedness and of propensity for change are inscribed in dispositifs that find support in a wide range of dispositions. I could mention weariness, which is the exact antidote of habit, or curiosity, which is characterized by the surprising propensity of each of us to forget oneself, to come out of oneself, to allow oneself to be surprised. The whole of modern publicity has recognized the force of these two springs of action, which has the great advantage of being inscribed in individuals while allowing their ex-centredness.

Under the influence of practices for the management of markets, the economy, cleansed of the passions which Hirschman (2002) described, speaking about conditions specific to 'capitalism in its highest state', does not quite correspond to that of today, for the latter is once again crossed by plural passions and values. Similarly, the policed society which Elias described is no longer like ours, because, to begin with, the forms of control have become displaced away from the subject, namely, in technical devices

which increasingly free us from the burden of morality and discipline; for example, hotel keys, weighted with a heavy appendage, that converts the altruism one owes to the hotel keeper into egoism, turned towards the preservation of our pockets (Latour, 1993). Furthermore, the former self-controlled society is no longer ours because appeals to let oneself go, to throw away caution and to become committed are increasingly frequent, as is shown by the case of advertising appeals to unleash our passions and by the marketing of causes (Callon and Rabeharisoa, 1999): from now on we live as much in a world of constraints, asceticism, savings, calculation and interest, as in a world of temptation, pleasure, dream, but of altruism and social values too.

Faced with this situation, the sociology of the market must evolve. The recognition of the proliferation of dispositifs meant to incite a multiplicity of dispositions should lead us to question the way current market sociology utilizes this term. Generally the term ‘disposition’ is only used to designate conservative modalities of action. To use a Bourdieusian style, one never ceases to be surprised by the (sociological) habits resulting from the incorporation of the model of the habitus, which leads one never to be surprised by this surprising sociological world in which actors are never surprised, but remain faithful to themselves in their square box. They live without experiencing any weariness, curiosity or temptation to move out of such confinement (except when they follow the one-dimensional logics of distinction and ‘struggle of places’, which consist in sliding from one social confinement to another, or rather to confirm the inescapable confinement in the social order).

The habitual circumscription of dispositions by the tyranny of habits probably owes a lot to the methodological routine which consists in avoiding the observation of common sense and of ‘spontaneous sociology’. Yet, paying the briefest attention to spontaneous sociologies indicates the extent to which it is a mistake to spurn common sense: taking into account social theories developed by actors themselves shows on the one hand that theories have wider claims than the indexicalized routines of Garfinkel (1967), and on the other hand that these spontaneous sociologies are extraordinarily plural, as summarized in Latour’s formula: ‘given a number of actants, one has as many theories of action’ (Latour, 1996b).

Fortunately, the proliferation of these theories, particularly their ability to performatively enact the economy, management and the market (Callon, 1998), have ended up being noticed and triggering the emergence of a whole series of coherent as well as convergent advances. The need for actants today to act in a plurality of worlds has led Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) to bring to light the argumentative capabilities of actors, and to show, for instance, the extent to which people mobilize competences relating to ‘love’ or ‘justice’ to extend their capacity for action, to reach a critical consciousness and to justify themselves (Boltanski, 1990).

In the wake of this set of work, the assessment of the break-up of sociology has radically changed: the troubling existence of a plurality of

sociologies where previously one found a unique theory of the social is no longer interpreted as a sign of ‘crisis’, but rather as an effect of the field: once one accepts that each sociology is not trying to give an exogenous and overarching account of the ensemble of conduct, but is trying to restore the logic of action endogenous to the social world, one can regard theories of the social as at once multiple, performed or performative, possessing their own zone of validity, each located in actants and/or specific compartments of the social (Latour, 2005). Thanks to this approach, one can now study the competition and the combination of theories, and one can practise more fully this ‘relationalist’ sociology which Latour (1996b) has sketched.

However, the market and the operations of captation offer an appropriate observational site to study how the different logics of action combine (Cochoy, 2004a). Because by definition it concerns the encounter of different universes and actants, the marketing scene enables one to observe the extent to which some people try to be more capable than others, or to rely on the amplifying capacity of others to achieve their aim and/or to let themselves be carried away. Finally, the market and its dispositifs of captation enable one to study how those actants are coordinated with ‘variable ontologies’ that Latour (1996b) had discovered while examining the vicissitudes of a failed technical project.

The market form of captation teaches us that dispositions are mostly on the demand side, and that dispositifs/strategy can be seen in action mostly on the supply side. This fact provides interesting information on the unequal *social* distribution of theories and technologies of action, on the stratagem which involves circumscribing some actants in a mechanical or unreflexive model so that strategy and calculation can be better and more easily deployed. In other words, one often notices on the scene of the market ‘*self-seeking actors*’ (Friedberg, 1996) (on the supply side) who covet *attractive agents* (on the demand side). In the background to this observation, one can surmise the existence of a political stake regarding the possible re-balancing of the two spheres, as evidenced in recent studies concerning ‘political consumerism’ (Micheletti, 2003).⁵ In order to clarify and develop these stakes, I would finally like to uncover the fundamental mechanisms of the dispositifs of captation by focusing, for pedagogical reasons, on a familiar story: that of Little Red Riding Hood.

Captation as Calculation of Predictable Trajectories: Little Red Riding Hood Revisited

We could say that captation is about observing the path of a target, to anticipate its trajectory, to try and join up with it, to accompany it, to encircle it and to guess it in order to then attract it or intercept it. This way of acting corresponds quite precisely to the strategy of the wolf in the story of Little Red Riding Hood. Since this tale has particular heuristic value in highlighting the process and the dispositifs of captation, we will analyse it in some detail. The story is played out in three episodes: the first episode stages the encounter between the little girl and the wolf in the woods; the second is

the confrontation between the wolf, the grandmother, then Little Red Riding Hood on either side of the door; the third scene plays out the third meeting between the beast and the child in the grandmother’s bed.

The first episode would not have happened without its prior preparation, had her mother not asked the little girl to take a cake and a little pot of butter to her sick grandmother. This mission which gives its thrust to the story and determines the little girl’s route, folds Little Red Riding Hood onto the model of action guided by the *habitus*: the whole tale places the little girl between her mother and her grandmother, it thus closely inscribes the gestures and the courses to follow within the circular and closed register of kinship, gift, reciprocity and obligations owed to family ties: one goes from one place to another to return to it, to accomplish one’s destiny, to follow a lineage, to be faithful and to help each other, to offset the weakness of the grandmother by the courage of the girl, allowing the self-enclosed circulation of domestic products well outside the sphere of the market.

Does the encounter with the wolf break this neat logic of social determination? Not at all. Of course Little Red Riding Hood, due to the wolf’s intervention, will take another route. But if the girl follows the wolf and deviates from the path, it is not because she had forgotten the imperatives of her destiny, it is because, on the contrary, she is trying to conform to it, though without having control over all the elements of the situation: the deviation is involuntary, Little Red Riding Hood takes the road indicated by the wolf because she believes the choice of route makes no difference; the only mistake she makes with regard to her family is not a deviance but a delay; the problem is not located in space but in time; the error is to have taken too long, to have done other things on the way.

What is the place, the role and the action of the wolf in this first episode? The story puts in play a wolf who is trying hard not to be like a wolf at all. The contrast between the two adversaries is striking: while the one openly and naively reveals the almost animal nature and logic of the action which motivates her (repeating what we know already is the point of her task), the wolf hides its true nature under human appearances: instead of giving out information on its identity and its animal drives – by growling or baring its teeth – it politely requests information – by asking questions and giving advice as people do. In masking its intentions, the wolf is of course being a manipulator, but taking care to avoid violence, it tries not to act as predator. This way of acting is typical of captation. We could say that in the first episode, the wolf poses as the ‘sensor’ (*capteur* in French): it only wants to be in the right place, to do nothing other than to gather information, making itself as discreet, as invisible, as human as possible: during the first episode, there is no need for disguise, since adopting the polite manners of human society is enough to make one forget the long arms, the big eyes and the large teeth. From the side of the wolf, information gathering (*capter*) precedes predation (capture): by this action, the imposter will secure two meals (the little girl and her grandmother).

The second episode presents us with a dazzling exchange of positions and dispositions on either side of the locked door which serves as obstacle and occasion for this inversion. Indeed, in this episode the wolf disguises itself twice, as the little girl in order to eat the grandmother, and as the grandmother in order to devour the little girl. The two scenes are exactly symmetrical, save for the inversion of positions, a symmetry the hinge of which is clearly the door and its play of bolt and latch, this obstacle twice overcome to show us that we are dealing with the register of repetition (in time) and of symmetry (in space). The grandmother, the girl and the wolf who comes between them know who they are and how to proceed: one to get the door open (thus: 'It's your grand daughter, Little Red Riding Hood . . . who brings you a cake and a pot of butter which Mother sends you'), the third to inveigle (*capter*) the knowledge, the consent, then the flesh of the other two. Repetition here shows us the at once efficient and fragile character of the dispositifs of captation put into place by the wolf. Efficient, since the stratagem succeeds twice, including in the case of an elder who is a priori more careful and experienced. Fragile, for reasons we shall soon see.

In the second episode, the sting no longer rests on the logic of the sensor, but on that of the 'reflector': the information winkled out is reinvested to build a picture, a model, a mirror effect in which the target vaguely recognizes herself and towards which she moves without appearing to change place, since for her it is a matter of returning to herself. Let us observe the fascinating precision/efficiency of the dispositif: what the wolf tells the grandmother while playing the part of the little girl ('It's your granddaughter . . .') is exactly, with nearly the right accent – '(the wolf says imitating her voice)' – what the little girl says to the wolf a few minutes later; similarly, what the grandmother tells the wolf ('pull the bolt out . . .') is precisely what the wolf will order the girl to do ('The wolf shouted mellowing its voice'). One notices here a double captation in the sense of 'captivation' and of fascination, the effect of aiming (mirror and target), and an enticement effect (bird mirror). The device of 'reflector' consists in returning to the subject the image of its own identity or belonging; it is a matter of attracting a subject to oneself by persuading her that she is only going towards herself, that she is expressing her identity rather than moving towards otherness. In such a scheme, the captor does not put himself forward, he maintains discretion, appears absent behind the subject on whom all his action is directed. One comes across this logic of the reflector in the world of advertising (with slogans like 'L'Oréal, because I deserve it' or 'I dreamt about it, Sony made it'), or in 'Customer Relationship Management', which consists in configuring commercial offers in a specular fashion, reflecting for the customer the very expression of her previous choices.

Let us nevertheless notice the difficulty of the exercise: we had stressed that, at each intervention by the wolf (in front of and then behind the door), the substantial identity of the message had for counterpart a

formal imperfection of the enunciation (‘the wolf said, changing its voice’/ ‘shouted the wolf, mellowing its voice’). One learns thus that, among the ensemble of the likely devices for captation, one must take account of corporeal devices, of the presentation of face and tone of voice. Yet these dispositifs are fragile: the wolf before eating a second time must counter the growing astonishment of the youngster whose doubt gradually increases with each new test as she senses that something is not right, that the message and soon the clothes do not add up to the grandmother: while the elder relation opens the door without concern, the younger relation paradoxically proves to be less naïve. One comes then to the third episode which drives the wolf to put an end to this tale, to abandon the subtle ruse of human conduct followed by that of technique, and to resort to the more brutal character of appetite.

The third episode is played out in the bed and shifts from the efficiency of dispositifs to their fragility. There are two explanations for this fragility. The first relates to the change in circumstance which accompanies the wolf’s action: when the latter finds itself in bed next to the little girl, it is the third time it is in a situation of encounter with her. Yet, the ingenuity has nothing to do with the repetition of the encounters; the reinforcement of the polite attitude expressed in the first episode by the donning of human clothes in the third encounter is not enough to replay the scene of seduction, manage the sting, with the same degree of success. One thus incidentally learns that the efficiency of any dispositif of captation is eroded in time and through repetition, and that readjustments do not always work. The second explanation has more to do with the internal limits of the dispositifs employed. The action of the wolf in the first two episodes involved a transformation into a captor/sensor (to gather information in order to know how to act subsequently) and a reflector (sending back information in order to secure complete ultimate success). Yet, in the end, the surprise of the child points to and exposes the winning cards of the captor and the efficiency of the reflector: the series of questions – ‘Grandma what long arms/long legs/big ears/big eyes/large teeth you have’ – lists nearly all the senses of the wolf, everything which enables it to see and know the target. But such questions expose the power of the wolf to the extent that every captor is able to capture, each reflector is able to reflect, the more it is able to operate by stealth, without the target knowing that she is being observed, judged, tasted, simulated, nor how and through what channel. From one episode to the next, the inversion is striking: the one who is asking the questions has changed camp. The naïve and almost natural questions of Little Red Riding Hood have been followed by the animal or visceral responses of the wolf (hold, hear, see, eat . . .) to questions from the girl as her suspicion quickly grows: how can one reduce a grandmother to a series of gestures which predominantly connote predation? The third episode obliges the wolf-captor to make itself a reflector, then interactor, to engage in a question-and-answer game which it can no longer control, except by resorting to force and thus by leaving behind the play of captation for sheer capture.

Contrary to appearances, this story has not one but three morals. The first is of course the one addressed to young girls in Perrault's conclusion in the aphorism at the start of this article. The moral seems pretty clear; the whole story is aimed at teaching us its meaning and demonstrating its solid base: children should be wary of strangers. Yet, as Soriano (1968) amply demonstrated, Perrault, in combining scrupulous respect for the oral tale with the staging of a subtle writing, has introduced in his own retelling a particular ambiguity. The figure of the wolf relates to two distinct referents. Contrary to what readers today might think, the animal does refer to a real wolf, which used to be the cause of many accidents when the tale was in common circulation, as a way of warning children. But the wolf also refers to another figure, suggested by Perrault throughout the story and confirmed in the final moral: that of a male human subject who lusts after the bodies of naïve young girls: 'I say wolf, yet not all wolves are alike;/There are those who are quite charming/. . . civil, obliging, and pleasant,/Who follow young maidens/Right up to the houses and the lanes.' The coexistence of these two readings is fascinating, for it points to two economic interpretations of the story. The first, which we have favoured till now, is that of captation–interception. The second, which the moral of the story stresses at the end, is that of captation–seduction. While the former operation is unilateral, placing an active captor against a passive predictable target, whose participation is hardly needed, the second is more symmetrical: if Little Red Riding Hood follows the wolf to the end, it may well be because she is accomplishing her fate, but it could also be because she is attracted by this wolf she has met along the way. There is a double attraction: if it is possible that the game between the girl and the predator relates to the discovery of amorous feelings and sexual desire, it is also the case that the relation between the two characters draws on the fascination with what frightens, which we find in the text and outside it, between the young reader and the story she reads. However, this double reading finds its equivalence on the scene of the market, where captation equally hesitates between predation and seduction: on the one hand, the merchant will be led to rely on one or the other register, depending on the relative predictability or resistance of the target; on the other hand, the customer will soon live the market relation in a passive register, because of lack of ingenuity or implication, or by habit, or else on an active register that then crosses into defiance and fascination. The market relation is unsettling because the customer knows very well that she is involved in a zero sum game in which the profit of the merchant is proportional to her own expenditure, and in which, as Adam Smith has shown, the concern of the supplier is but the social expression of his own interest. But the market relation fascinates also, since the relation to objects of exchange is caught up in a game of mutual attraction and seduction, in which each party 'plays the game', drawn by the hope of either gain or satisfaction depending on which side they are on, but also by the search for a perhaps fragile relation of trust, of sociability, of a possible – though often disappointing or risky – sociality.

That first moral in fact anticipates the second, which is a more discreet moral directed to the wolf by Little Red Riding Hood herself, perhaps in spite of Perrault: the ingenuity of little girls does not last, ‘captors’ are perhaps as fragile as maidens; as soon as the public speaks, overturns the order between the questioner and the questioned, the three dispositifs of captation put in place by the wolf – captor, reflector, interactor – collapse: the little girl dies of course but wiser; and although the wolf triumphs, it does so as wolf, while losing the humanity it believed it had found. In a symmetrical way, Little Red Riding Hood – or rather the little girl who identifies with this character – has learned to read, she has devoured the story of the wolf beyond possibly Perrault’s aims, opening out onto the new figure of the captor-captured, as the splendid publicity of the Book Fair and Youth Press illustrates so well (see Figure 1, p. 228).⁶ One of the mechanisms of the tale is indeed to give to the young reader the pleasure and the dread of anticipating what Little Red Riding Hood understands too late, no doubt because the education of the reader will be all the more complete if she discovers by herself the meaning of the story. One finds here the temporal fragility of dispositifs of captation, which weaken with repetition. A device only works for a while, so that actors in the markets must ceaselessly abandon obsolete dispositifs and invent new ones to renew the terms of the relation.

The third moral is the one which reveals the closeness of the first two. The lesson Perrault teaches and the growing awareness of the little girl are contradictory: the second emerges in spite of the first. Because of this contradiction, and thanks to the belated resistance of the little girl, we discover, after nearly getting caught ourselves, that one wolf can hide another. What Perrault teaches us about wolves applies equally to himself: the author of the tale corresponds better than anyone to the stereotypical picture of the quiet, obliging and pleasant wolves who are capable of assuming the voice of grandmother as reader of tale to join the youngsters in bed and better insert their moral. Through Perrault we incidentally discover one of the most twisted features of captation, what we will call the ‘deflector’: this type of dispositif works by diverting attention, by designating a particular dispositif (here the wolf) in order to better preserve the efficiency of another. On the scene of the market, a clear example of this procedure involves the hiking of one’s value by denigrating that of a competitor.

The Perrault tale makes it possible for us to better understand the deep mechanisms of captation. *Every operation of captation involves the actor undertaking it having to deal with two apparently contradictory hypotheses: an hypothesis of predictable trajectory; an hypothesis according to which the same trajectory can be deviated, or cut off.* Faced with a mobile target, the wolf assumes that Little Red Riding Hood has motives for her actions and proceeds accordingly, gathering signs, information, data, in order to construct a model that helps to anticipate the path of the adversary. But the wolf is able to do this because it is also convinced that nothing is fixed, that



Figure 1

every trajectory can be intercepted or diverted. The tale thus gives one an insight into the combination of the model of an actant centred on action, strategy and calculation, and a model of agency based on the predictability of practices, the incorporation of action schemes and habitus, so that we can observe quite clearly the fundamental logic at work in any dispositif of captation.

On the basis of the kind of figures and facts discussed earlier, one can sketch a typology of dispositifs, ordered around two axes (visible/invisible, mobile/immobile), in which one can locate more modern dispositifs of captation (Table 1). Thus to understand the market, one must study neither the customers nor the producers, but the work aimed at equipping the market relation played out between them (Cochoy, 2007; Cochoy and Grandclément, 2005; Du Gay, 2004). What is at stake in a sociology of captation is precisely the need for an inventory of the endeavours – all the competences and all the dispositifs noted earlier – which make it possible to maintain a hold on the public and to seduce it (and therefore to realize/reinforce/modify/develop the skills of supply; and to displace/attract/redefine the identity of the public).

The study of captation, of its actants and its dispositifs relates to three stakes. The first stake concerns economic sociology, in which this study is located (though captation does not relate entirely to the economic domain). When one approaches captation as a figure of relational work, one is able to examine elements neglected by the sociology of networks. While the latter often assumes that networks are already in place or stabilized, and thus privileges the study of the morphology and socio-economic incidence of nets, captation on the contrary emphasizes the construction of networks as a problem and a dynamic central to the functioning of markets; it proposes that interest should focus on embedding as a dynamic process, and suggests that one studies in some way the operations of networking as much as the configurations of social networks. The second stake concerns the sociology of work and organizations. Because it radicalizes the opposition between

Table 1

<i>Dispositif</i>	<i>Visible</i>	<i>Invisible</i>
Mobile	Beaters: vouchers, loyalty cards, tie-in mechanisms, buying guides, recommendations, representatives	Followers: bar codes, cookies, search systems (visible but often coded)
Immobile	Interactor/attractor: hot lines, games, free call numbers, packaging, publicity, voice mails, web sites	Captor/reflector/deflector/selector: customer data base, Customer Relations, management, comparative or speculative publicity, scanners

management and its domain of application, because it underlines the will to control and the fleeting character of the target, markets can bring to attention processes which one tends to ignore, yet which run through organizations today (such as the inscription of cognitive speculations and schemes in material dispositifs). The third stake concerns sociology generally, and relates not only to the plurality of registers for action, but particularly to the need to take account of the possible strategic use of this plurality (or else of the inscription of strategic models in routines). The study of the way in which actants gamble on their capabilities for action, combine cognitive registers, indeed, invent tools and instruments for channelling their conduct and redefine their place and their respective advantages, is an urgent task, given the importance of the political stakes raised.

Translated by Couze Venn

Acknowledgement

This article is a shortened, updated and translated version of the introduction of a collective book of essays (Cochoy, 2004b).

Notes

1. As we shall see in the case of market captation, the buyer (demand), as much as the seller (supply), can often appear in the role of captor; this is suggested besides by the etymological connection between the verbs ‘acheter’ (to buy) and ‘capter’ (to capture), since to buy comes from the Latin ‘accapare’, from ‘captare’, which means ‘attempting to take’.

2. The term ‘dispositif’ has notably been mobilized in Foucauldian theory, where it sometimes designates rather extended arrangements (*agencements*) of composite elements (texts, rules, plans, statements, etc.) that serve to support effects of domination (Foucault, 1994, 1995).

3. An excellent overview of the development of the notion of dispositif in the social sciences is Beuscart and Peerbaye (2006).

4. As François Hérán (1987: 393) has summarized it:

The term ‘disposition’ as Bourdieu (1972: 247, n. 28) emphasized, is particularly useful for expressing what the concept of habitus encompasses: it is to begin with the result of an organizing action, it is also an habitual state, a way of being, and finally a predisposition, a tendency, a propensity.

5. The rise of political consumerism, and the concern with the ‘empowerment’ of consumers, poses a whole series of problems: does the rebalancing of power necessarily mean the hyper-rationalization of consumers and the reduction of the share of dreams inscribed in consumer objects, as consumerism tries to do? In many ways consumerism conveys a rather strange notion of critique, for it seems to contest calculation by extending it even further (Mallard, 2007).

6. What is striking about this publicity is its reflexive character, its ability to fold back the Little Red Riding Hood story and uncover its critical purchase, yet re-use it as a different commercial captation strategy aimed at children, although it is about books which are meant to teach them about the many dangers in life, the risks of captation inherent in the adult world.

References

- Barrey, S. (2004) ‘Fidéliser les clients dans le secteur de la grande distribution: agir entre dispositifs et dispositions’, in F. Cochoy (ed.) *La Captation des publics*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail.
- Barrey, S., F. Cochoy and S. Dubuisson-Quellier (2000) ‘Designer, packager, et marchandiser: trois professionnels pour une même scène marchande’, *Sociologie du travail* 42(3): 457–82.
- Beauvois, J.-L. and R.-V. Joule (1987) *Petit traité de manipulation à l’usage des honnêtes gens*. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble.
- Beuscart, J.-S. and A. Peerbaye (2006) ‘Histoire des dispositifs (introduction)’, Special Issue on Dispositifs, *Terrains et travaux* 11.
- Blanc, J. (2001) *Les Monnaies parallèles: unité et diversité du fait monétaire*. Paris: L’Harmattan.
- Boltanski, L. (1990) *L’Amour et la justice comme compétences: trois essais de sociologie de l’action*. Paris: Métailie.
- Boltanski, L. and L. Thévenot (2006) *On Justification: Economies of Worth*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1972) *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique*. Paris: Minuit.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998) *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Social Action*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2002) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Callon, M. (1998) ‘Introduction: The Embeddedness of Economic Markets in Economics’, in M. Callon (ed.) *The Laws of the Market*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Callon, M. and V. Rabearisoa (1999) *Le Pouvoir des malades: l’Association française contre les myopathies et la recherche*. Paris: Presses de l’École des Mines.
- Callon, M., C. Meadel and V. Rabearisoa (2001) ‘The Economy of Qualities’, *Economy and Society* 31(2): 194–217.
- Callon, M., Y. Millo and F. Muniesa (eds) (2007) *Market Devices*. London: Blackwell.
- Cochoy, F. (1998) ‘Another Discipline for the Market Economy: Marketing as a Performative Knowledge and Know-how of Capitalism’, in M. Callon (ed.) *The Laws of the Market*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cochoy, F. (2002) *Une sociologie du packaging, ou l’âne de Buridan face au marché*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Cochoy, F. (2004a) ‘Is the Modern Consumer a Buridan’s donkey? Product Packaging and Consumer Choice’, in K. Ekström and H. Brembeck (eds) *Elusive Consumption*. Oxford: Berg.
- Cochoy, F. (ed.) (2004b) *La captation des publics*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail.
- Cochoy, F. (2005) ‘A Short History of “Customers”, or the Gradual Standardization of Markets and Organizations’, *Sociologie du travail* 47(Suppl. 1): e36–e56.
- Cochoy, F. (2007) ‘A Sociology of Market-things: On Tending the Garden of Choices in Big Retailing’, in M. Callon, F. Muniesa and Y. Millo (eds) *Market Devices*. London: Blackwell (in press).

- Cochoy, F. and C. Grandclément, C. (2005) 'Publicizing Goldilocks' Choice at the Supermarket: The Political Work of Shopping Packs, Carts and Talk', in B. Latour and P. Weibel (eds) *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Du Gay, P. (2004) 'Self-service: Retail, Shopping and Personhood', *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 7(2): 149–63.
- Elias, N. (1975) *La Dynamique de l'Occident*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy.
- Foucault, M. (1994) 'Le Jeu de Michel Foucault', in *Dits et écrits*, vol. 2. Paris: Gallimard.
- Foucault, M. (1995) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage.
- Friedberg, E. (1996) *Power and Rules: The Organizational Dynamics of Collective Action*. London: Avebury.
- Garfinkel, H.G. (1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Granovetter, M. (1985) 'Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness', *American Journal of Sociology* (91)3: 481–510.
- Héran, F. (1987) 'La Seconde Nature de l'habitus: tradition philosophique et sens commun dans le langage sociologique', *Revue française de sociologie* 28(3): 385–416.
- Hirschman, A.O. (2002) *Passions and Interests: Political Party Concepts of American Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hutchins, E. (1994) *Cognition in the Wild*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Karpik, L. (1989) 'L'Économie de la qualité', *Revue française de sociologie* 30(2): 187–210.
- Karpik, L. (2000) 'Le Guide rouge Michelin', *Sociologie du travail* 42(3): 369–89.
- Kjellberg, H. and A. Liljenberg (2003) 'The Difficult Customer – On the Construction of SAS' Domestic Airline Customer', Workshop on market(-ing) practice in shaping markets, Stockholm School of Economics, Skebo, Sweden, 14–16 June.
- Latour, B. (1993) *La clef de Berlin, et autres leçons d'un amateur de sciences*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Latour B. (1996a) 'On Interobjectivity', *Mind, Culture & Activity* 3(4): 228–45.
- Latour, B. (1996b) *Aramis or the Love of Technology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, B. (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lave, J. (1988) *Cognition in Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mallard, A. (2007) 'Evaluating Telecommunication Products and Services: Consumerist Tests as Economic Experiments', in M. Callon, Y. Millo and F. Muniesa (eds) *Market Devices*. London: Blackwell (in press).
- Micheletti, M. (2003) *Political Virtue and Shopping: Individuals, Consumerism, and Collective Action*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Norman, D.A. (1988) *The Psychology of Everyday Things*. New York: Basic Books.
- Perrault, Ch. (1991) 'Le Petit Chaperon rouge', in *Contes*. Paris: Garnier Flammarion.

Polanyi, K. (1971) *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press (first published 1944).

Soriano, M. (1968) *Les Contes de Perrault: culture savante et traditions populaires*. Paris: Gallimard.

Strasser, S. (1989) *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market*. New York: Pantheon.

Suchman, L. (1987) *Plans and Situated Actions: The Problem of Human–Machine Interaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Franck Cochoy is Professor of Sociology at the Université de Toulouse II and member of the CERTOP, a CNRS research laboratory. His work on the sociology of markets focuses on the different mediations that frame the relation between supply and demand, such as packaging, marketing and standardization. He is the author of *Une histoire du marketing* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1999) and *Une sociologie du packaging ou l'âne de Buridan face au marché* (Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), and the editor of *La Captation des publics* (Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2004).