Latour's guarantees

1. Once there, and no matter how it came about, discussion about X should stop for good.
2. In spite of the indisputability insured by the former, a revision process should be maintained to make sure that new claimants should be able to have their voices heard.
3. The common world is to be composed progressively: it is not already there once and for all.
4. Humans and non-humans are engaged in a history that should render their separation impossible.
5. Institutions assuring due process should be able to specify the quality of the "good common world" they have to monitor.

The idea of my (very rough) list is that it should now be possible to compare propositions entering the common arena - the new public space - to check if they lead toward a strengthening or a weakening of those five guarantees *taken together*.

Latour's concerns

Social constructivism?
- ... had to scrap the adjective "social" ...
- ... it doesn't seem possible to salvage the word "constructivism" from the furies triggered by the 'science wars'
- ... In order to show that one is not a dangerous outcast, it seems compulsory to swear a pledge of allegiance to "realism" - now meaning the opposite of constructivism. "You have to choose," roar the guardians of the temple. "Either you believe in reality or you cling to constructivism."

"... saving constructivism is precisely what I want to accomplish"

What is wrong with constructivism - everything!

- ... **social** constructivism doesn't refer to a kind of stuff, but to the *process* through which any thing, including matters fact, has been built, BUT
- ... [this is misread to mean that] Things do not stand upright because of the inner solidity of what they claim to be built with, but because their superficial facades are propped up by the solid steelwork of society.
- This might apply to law and religion, but not to "the facts of nature" ...
- Science studies fighting on two fronts: against critical sociology (extending social explanation from law and religion to science and technology, and against nature fundamentalists who wanted facts to pop up mysteriously from nowhere.

... but also problems "with the inner mechanism of construction itself".
- ... in the metaphor that has been popularized in social sciences ... nothing works
- a mason, architect, or Little Pig trying to build anything with the *theory of action* would fail hopelessly to assemble any durable whole.
- Unrealistic image of the maker ... architects' stories of their own achievements are full of little words to explain how they are "led to" a solution, "constrained" by other buildings, "limited" by other interests, "guided by the inner logic of the material," "forced to obey" the necessity of the place, "influenced" by the choices of their colleagues, "held up" by the state of the art etc. To "become sensitive to the many constraints that lead to a rather autonomous scheme that begins to take over a sort of life of its own" is precisely what they will try to emphasize.
- ... making does not lead to the concept of a *human* actor *fully* in *command* ...the constructor has to share agency with a sea of actants

Failure in the conception of the material involved in the process of construction ...
... how constructivists have characterised the materials with which the constructor works:

1. matter as master
2. matter as wet sand in a sandbox
3. an occasion to feel one's force being resisted

scientist at the bench not content to choose between 'realism' and 'constructivism'

no potter believes in "infinitely plastic" clay

Everywhere, building, creating, constructing, laboring means to learn how to become sensitive to the contrary requirements, to the exigencies, to the pressures of conflicting agencies where none of them is really in command.

Any architect, mason, city planner, tenant, in accounting for the reality of the building they designed, built, planned, or inhabit, will consider the amount of work done as one of the *reasons why* the building is well-designed, well-built, well-planned, or well-furnished. So, for them, working hard and having a building standing solidly and *independently* of their work is one and the same thing - provided it has been *well*-done

One in which all the items showing that the building stands solidly and independently are entered in the *credit* column while all the items tending to show that work has been done are noted in the *debit* column? Even Enron and Arthur Andersen would not dare massage their account books to that extent. And yet this is exactly what we do when we move from the practical language of construction to a theoretical one.

In the practical parlance of scientists at work, it is because they work and work well that facts are autonomous end stand independently of their (the scientists') own action (Latour 1996).

[Where 'facts' rather than 'fabrication' is concerned:] The autonomy [that scientists and philosophers] strive for is that of a building which has always stood erect on its own weight no matter what work has been necessary to discover its exact location, to measure its height and to visit or inhabit its interior. Such a degree of certainty, such an occupation of time and space, such an unquestionable autonomy, solidity, and durability no idiom of construction or architectural metaphor can provide - even if we stick as closely as possible to the confusing practice of really building real buildings - since construction, by definition, leaves exactly these traces that should be erased.

... **the most difficult of all metaphysical questions** ... that critical sociology... trivializes ... into a Q & A at the end of a course in Continental Theory 101: "Is constructed reality constructed or real?" Answer: "Both." Commented with a mildly blase smile: "Are we so naive as to think that we have to chose? Don't we know that even the maddest ideologies have real consequences? That we live in a world of our own construction and that it is no less real for that?" How I despise this little "both" that obtains so cheaply a veneer of depth that passes nonetheless for the ultimate critical spirit.

Latour's assessment of the problem:

There seems to be no plausible way to say that because something has been constructed and *well*-constructed it is *thus* solid, durable, independent, autonomous, and necessary - even though this is what the manifold languages of practice obstinately belabor, and what science studies has tried to extract by staying as close to the bench as possible. The threat will be carried out, we will have to submit to the examination: "You have to choose: *either* it is real, *or* it is constructed," and if we dare answer "both"

our own *positive* both will be confused with the weak, cheap, and blase *negative* answer of our worst enemies, i.e., our dear friends the critical sociologists ...

... It seems that if deconstruction, more voraciously than termites, has been able to turn into dust all the claims to solidity, autonomy, durability, and necessity, it is because constructivism was too fragile a material to begin with. There seem to be no anti-termite treatments, no fumigation to protect constructivism against falling into ruins. Only what has not been constructed will stand the test of time

---

Latour's guarantees

1. Once there, and no matter how it came about, discussion about X should stop for good.
2. In spite of the indisputability insured by the former, a revision process should be maintained to make sure that new claimants should be able to have their voices heard.
3. The common world is to be composed progressively: it is not already there once and for all.
4. Humans and non-humans are engaged in a history that should render their separation impossible.
5. Institutions assuring due process should be able to specify the quality of the "good common world" they have to monitor.

The idea of my (very rough) list is that it should now be possible to compare propositions entering the common arena - the new public space - to check if they lead toward a strengthening or a weakening of those five guarantees *taken together.*

Once there, and no matter how it came about, discussion about X should stop for good.

"Work can lead to constructions that have the qualities of realities":
cf. because something has been constructed and *well-constructed* it is *thus* solid, durable, independent, autonomous, and necessary

In spite of the indisputability insured by the former, a revision process should be maintained to make sure that new claimants should be able to have their voices heard.

cf. the maker as not omnipotent: wrestling with the materials and agencies that cannot be totally controlled.

The common world is to be composed progressively: it is not already there once and for all.

Countering the response to the most difficult of all metaphysical problems that wants to postulate answers as out there waiting to be discovered ...

Humans and non-humans are engaged in a history that should render their separation impossible.

The work done being as important as the thing constructed; the essential roles played by human and non-human agencies in the process of construction.

Institutions assuring due process should be able to specify the quality of the "good common world" they have to monitor.

Everywhere, building, creating, constructing, laboring means to learn how to become sensitive to the contrary requirements, to the exigencies, to the pressures of conflicting agencies where none of them is really in command.