

The image features a large, circular, metallic industrial hatch, possibly from a submarine or a large ship, with a green plant growing inside. The hatch is surrounded by a thick metal frame with numerous bolts and a locking mechanism. The plant inside is a vibrant green, with several large, pointed leaves. The background is dark and industrial, with some orange structures visible at the bottom.

POLITICS OF NATURE

HOW TO BRING THE SCIENCES INTO DEMOCRACY

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ety. This new collective will allow us to proceed in Chapter 3 to the transformation of the venerable distinction between facts and values; we shall replace it with a new separation of powers* that will offer us more satisfactory moral guarantees. The distinction between two new assemblies—the first of which will ask, “How many are we?” and the second, “Can we live together?”—will serve political ecology as its Constitution. In Chapter 4, readers will be rewarded for their efforts by a “guided tour” of the new institutions and by a presentation of the new professions contributing to the animation of a political body that has at last become viable. The difficulties will begin again in Chapter 5, where we shall be obliged to find a successor to the ancient split that separated nature (in the singular) from cultures (in the plural), in order to raise once again the question of the number of collectives and the progressive composition of the common world* that the notion of nature, like that of society, had prematurely simplified. Finally, in the conclusion, I shall address questions about the type of Leviathan that allows political ecology to leave the state of nature. In view of the spectacle that has been embraced throughout, readers will perhaps forgive me the aridity of the route.

Before ending this introduction, I need to define the particular use that I am going to make of the key term “political ecology”*. I am well aware that it is customary to distinguish scientific ecology from political ecology, the former being practiced in laboratories and field expeditions, the latter in militant movements and in Parliament. But as I propose to reshape the very distinction between the two terms “science” and “politics” in every particular, it will be clear that we cannot take that distinction at face value, for it is going to become untenable as we progress. After a few pages, at all events, there will be little point in differentiating between those groups of people who want to understand ecosystems, defend the environment, or protect nature, and those who want to revive public life, since we are going to learn instead to distinguish the composition of the common world that is built “according to due process” from that of a world elaborated without rules. For the time being, I shall retain the term “political ecology,” which remains an enigmatic emblem allowing me to designate—without defining it too quickly—the right way to compose a common world, the kind of world the Greeks called a *cosmos**.

Why Political Ecology Has to Let Go of Nature

An interest in nature, we are told, is precisely what is novel about political ecology. In this view, political ecology extends the narrow field of the classic preoccupations of politics to new beings that have previously found themselves underrepresented or badly represented. In this first chapter, I want to challenge the solidity of the link **between** political ecology and nature. Despite what it often asserts, I am going to show that political ecology, at least in its theories, has to let go of nature. Indeed, nature is the chief obstacle that has always hampered the development of public discourse. This **argument**—which is only paradoxical in appearance, as we shall see—**requires us** to bring together three distinct findings, one from the sociology of the sciences, another from the practice of the ecology movements, and the third from comparative anthropology. But this necessity is what makes our present task so difficult: in order to approach the true subject of our work, we need to take for granted demonstrations that would call for several volumes each. I can either waste precious time convincing my readers of this, or else I can move ahead as quickly as possible, while asking readers to judge the tree only by its fruits: that is, to wait until the following chapters to see how the postulates presented here make it possible to renew the exercise of public life.

Let me begin with one small contribution of science studies, without which it would be impossible to cover the necessary ground. In all that follows, I shall ask my readers to agree to dissociate *the sciences*—in the plural and in small letters—from *Science*—in the singular and capitalized: I ask readers to acknowledge that discourse on Science has

no direct relation to the life of the sciences, and that the problem of knowledge is posed quite differently, depending on whether one is brandishing Science or clinging to the twists and turns of the sciences as they are developed. I ask readers finally to grant that if nature—in the singular—is closely linked with Science, the sciences for their part in no way require such unification. If we were trying to approach the question of political ecology as if Science and the sciences were one and the same enterprise, we would end up in radically different positions. In the first section, in fact, I am going to define Science* as *the politicization of the sciences through epistemology in order to render ordinary political life impotent through the threat of an incontestable nature*. I shall of course have to justify this definition, which seems so contrary to good sense. But if the single word “Science” already combines the imbroglio of politics, nature, and knowledge that we must learn to disentangle, it is clear that we cannot set out on our journey without removing the threat that Science has always brought to bear as much on the exercise of politics as on the practices of scientific researchers.¹

First, Get Out of the Cave

If we want to move ahead quickly while remaining precise, nothing is as concise as a myth. As it happens, in the West, through the ages we have become heirs to an allegory that defines the relations between Science and society: the allegory of the Cave*, recounted by Plato in the *Republic*. I have no intention of getting lost in the twists and turns of Greek philosophy. I shall simply focus on two points of rupture, two radical shifts that will help us dramatize all the virtues that might be expected of Science. The Philosopher, and later the Scientist, have to free themselves of the tyranny of the social dimension, public life, politics, subjective feelings, popular agitation—in short, from the dark Cave—if they want to accede to truth. Such is the first shift, according to the allegory. There exists no possible continuity between the world of human beings and access to truths “not made by human hands.”² The allegory of the Cave makes it possible to create in one fell swoop a certain idea of Science and a certain idea of the social world that will serve as a foil for Science. But the myth also proposes a second shift: the Scientist, once equipped with laws not made by human hands that he has just contemplated because he has succeeded in freeing himself

from the prison of the social world, can go back into the Cave so as to bring order to it with incontestable findings that will silence the endless chatter of the ignorant mob. Once again, there is no continuity between the henceforth irrefutable objective law and the human—all too human—logorrhea of the prisoners shackled in the shadows, who never know how to bring their interminable disputes to an end.

The illuminating power of this allegory, the source of its inexhaustible effectiveness, stems from the following peculiarity: neither of these two radical shifts prevents the emergence of its exact contrary, and the contraries turn out to be combined in one and the same heroic figure, that of the Philosopher-Scientist, at once Lawgiver and Savior. Although the world of truth differs absolutely, not relatively, from the social world, the Scientist can go *back and forth* from one world to the other no matter what: the passageway closed to all others is open to him alone. In him and through him, the tyranny of the social world is miraculously interrupted when he leaves, so that he will be able to contemplate the objective world at last; and it is likewise interrupted when he returns, so that like a latter-day Moses he will be able to substitute the legislation of scientific laws, which are not open to question, for the tyranny of ignorance. Without this double interruption there can be no Science, no epistemology, no paralyzed politics, no Western conception of public life.

In the original myth, as we know, the Philosopher managed only with the greatest difficulty to break the chains that attached him to the shadowy world, and when he returned to the Cave after exhausting trials, his former fellow prisoners put the bearer of good news to death. Over the centuries, thank God, the fate of the Philosopher-turned-Scientist has greatly improved. Today, sizable budgets, vast laboratories, huge businesses, and powerful equipment allow researchers to come and go in complete safety between the social world and the world of Ideas, and from Ideas to the dark Cave where they go to bring light. The narrow door has become a broad boulevard. In twenty-five centuries, however, one thing has not changed in the slightest: the double rupture, which the form of the allegory, endlessly repeated, manages to maintain as radically as ever. Such is the obstacle that we shall have to remove if we want to change the very terms by which public life is defined.

However vast the laboratories may be, however attached research-

ers may be to industrialists, however many technicians they may have to employ, however active the instruments for transforming data, however constructive the theories, none of this matters; you will be told straight out that Science can survive only as long as it distinguishes absolutely and not relatively between things "as they are" and the "representation that human beings make of them." Without this division between "ontological questions" and "epistemological questions," all moral and social life would be threatened.³ Why? Because, without it, there would be no more reservoir of incontrovertible certainties that could be brought in to put an end to the incessant chatter of obscurantism and ignorance. There would no longer be a sure way to distinguish what is true from what is false. One could no longer break free of social determiners to understand what things themselves are, and, for want of that essential comprehension, one could no longer cherish the hope of pacifying public life, which is always threatened by civil war. Nature and human beliefs about nature would be mixed up in frightful chaos. Public life, having imploded, would lack the transcendence without which no interminable dispute could end.

If you point out politely that the very ease with which scientists pass from the social world to the world of external realities, the facility they demonstrate through this business of importing and exporting scientific laws, the fluency of the discourse in which they convert human and objective elements, prove clearly enough that there is no rupture between the two worlds and that they are dealing rather with a seamless cloth, you will be accused of relativism; you will be told that you are trying to give Science a "social explanation"; your unfortunate tendencies toward immoralism will be denounced; you may be asked publicly if you believe in the reality of the external world or not, or whether you are ready to jump out a fifteenth-story window because you think that the laws of gravity, too, are "socially constructed!"⁴

We have to be able to deflect such sophistry on the part of philosophers of the sciences; it has been used for twenty-five centuries to silence politics as soon as the question of nature comes up. Let us face the facts at the outset: there is no way out of this trap. And yet, at first glance, nothing ought to be more innocent than epistemology*, knowledge about knowledge, meticulous descriptions of scien-

tific practices in all their complexity. Let us not confuse this highly respectable form of epistemology with an entirely different activity that I shall call (political) epistemology*, using parentheses because this discipline claims to be limited to Science, whereas its aim is really just to humiliate politics.⁵ The goal of this form of epistemology is by no means to *describe* the sciences, contrary to what its etymology might suggest, but to *short-circuit* any and all questioning as to the nature of the complex bonds between the sciences and societies, through the invocation of Science as the only salvation from the prison of the social world. The double rupture of the Cave is not based on any empirical investigation or observed phenomena; it is even contrary to common sense, to the daily practice of all scientists; and if it ever did exist, twenty-five centuries of sciences, laboratories, and scholarly institutions have long since done away with it. But it cannot be helped: the epistemology police will always cancel out that ordinary knowledge by creating the double rupture between elements that everything connects, and by depicting those who cast doubt on the double rupture as relativists, sophists, and immoralists who want to ruin any chance we may have to accede to external reality and thus to reform society on the rebound.

For the idea of a double rupture to have resisted all contradictory evidence over the centuries, there must be a powerful reason buttressing its necessity. This reason can only be political—or religious. We have to suppose that (political) epistemology depends on something else that holds it in place and lends it its formidable efficacy. How could we explain, otherwise, the vindictive passion with which science studies are still being greeted? If it were only a matter of describing the practices of laboratories, we would not hear such loud protests, and the epistemologists would be able to mingle unproblematically with their colleagues in anthropology. By becoming so violently indignant, the (political) epistemologists have tipped their hand. Their trap is sprung. It no longer catches any flies.

What is the use of the allegory of the Cave today? It allows a Constitution* that organizes public life *into two houses*.⁶ The first is the obscure room depicted by Plato, in which ignorant people find themselves in chains, unable to look directly at one another, communicating only via fictions projected on a sort of movie screen; the second is located outside, in a world made up not of humans but of nonhumans,

indifferent to our quarrels, our ignorances, and the limits of our representations and fictions. The genius of the model stems from the role played by a very small number of persons, the only ones capable of going back and forth between the two assemblies and converting the authority of the one into that of the other. Despite the fascination exercised by Ideas (even upon those who claim to be denouncing the idealism of the Platonic solution), it is not at all a question of opposing the shadow world to the real world, but of *redistributing powers* by inventing both a certain definition of Science and a certain definition of politics. Appearances notwithstanding, idealism is not what is at issue here. The myth of the Cave makes it possible to render all democracy impossible by neutralizing it; that is its only trump card.

In this Constitution dispensed by (political) epistemology, how are the powers in fact distributed? The first house brings together the totality of speaking humans, who find themselves with no power at all save that of being ignorant in common, or of agreeing by convention to create fictions devoid of any external reality. The second house is constituted exclusively of real objects that have the property of defining what exists but that lack the gift of speech. On the one hand, we have the chattering of fictions; on the other, the silence of reality. The subtlety of this organization rests entirely on the power given to *those who can move back and forth between the houses*. The small number of handpicked experts, for their part, presumably have the ability to speak (since they are humans), the ability to tell the truth (since they escape the social world, thanks to the asceticism of knowledge), and, finally, the ability to bring order to the assembly of humans by keeping its members quiet (since the experts can return to the lower house in order to reform the slaves who lie chained in the room). In short, these few elect, as they themselves see it, are endowed with the most fabulous political capacity ever invented: *They can make the mute world speak, tell the truth without being challenged, put an end to the interminable arguments through an incontestable form of authority that would stem from things themselves*.

And yet, at first glance, such a separation of powers seems impossible to maintain. It requires too many implausible hypotheses, too many undue privileges. People would never agree to define themselves as a collection of prisoners with life sentences who can neither speak directly to one another nor touch what they are talking about, and

who find themselves reduced to chattering without saying anything at all. Moreover, no one would ever agree to give so many powers to a ferry-load of experts whom no one had elected. Even if we were to grant this first series of absurdities, how could we imagine that Scientists and only Scientists could accede to inaccessible things themselves? More outrageous still, by what miracle would mute things suddenly become capable of speaking? By what fourth or fifth conjuring trick would real things, once granted speech through the mouths of philosopher-kings, have the unheard-of property of becoming immediately *unchallengeable* and of shutting up the other humans? How can we imagine that these nonhuman objects can be mobilized to solve the problems of the prisoners, whereas the human condition has already been defined by a break with all reality? No, there is no question about it: we cannot pass this fairy tale off as a political philosophy like any other—and even less as superior to all others.

Alas, to do so would be to forget the tiny but indispensable contribution of (political) epistemology: thanks to the parentheses, we can name one of the two assemblies "Science" and the other "politics." We are going to turn this eminently *political* question of the distribution of power between two houses into a matter of distinguishing between a huge, purely epistemological question about the nature of Ideas and the external world as well as about the limits of our knowledge, *on the one hand*, and an exclusively political and sociological question about the nature of the social world, *on the other hand*. It has happened: political philosophy is becoming irremediably one-eyed, a monstrous and barbaric Cyclops. The indispensable work of political epistemology turns out to be buried forever beneath the apparent confusion that the epistemology police go about creating between politics (in the sense of what distinguishes Science from the Ideas of the Cave world) and politics (in the sense of the passions and interests of those who lie in the Cave).

Whereas it is a question of a constitutional theory that has humans deprived of all reality and nonhumans holding all the power sitting in separate houses, we shall be told calmly that one must be very careful "not to mix the sublime epistemological questions"—on the nature of things—"with the lowly political questions"—on values and the difficulty of living together. It's really so simple! If you try to loosen the trap by shaking it, it will close more tightly still, since you will be ac-

cused of seeking to "confuse" political questions with cognitive ones! People will claim that you are politicizing Science, that you seek to reduce the external world to what the chained Helots put into their world of fancies! That you are abandoning all criteria for judging what is true and what is false! The more you argue, the more you will be challenged. Those who have politicized the sciences* in order to make political life impossible even find themselves in a position to accuse you—you!—of polluting the purity of the sciences by introducing base social considerations. Those who have split public life into Science and society through a sophism are going to accuse you of sophistry!⁷ You will die of hunger or suffocation before you have gnawed through the bars of the prison in which you freely locked yourself up.

It would be too easy to see the political intent behind the epistemological pretensions if we had not swallowed, thanks to the allegory of the Cave, a modest supplementary hypothesis: the entire machine has functioned only if people have found themselves plunged into the darkness of the cave in advance, every individual cut off from every other, chained to his or her bench, without contact with reality, prey to rumors and prejudices, already prepared to go for the jugular of those who come in to reform things. In short, without a certain definition of sociology, the epistemology police is unthinkable. Is this how people really live? It hardly matters. The myth requires first of all that we humans descend into the Cave, cut our countless ties with reality, lose all contact with our fellows, abandon the work of the sciences, and begin to become uncultivated, hate-filled, paralyzed, and gorged with fiction. Then and only then will Science come to save us. Weaker in this respect than the biblical story of the fall, the myth begins with a state of abjection whose origin it carefully refrains from revealing. Now, no original sin requires public life to begin with the age of the Caves. (Political) epistemology has somewhat overestimated its capabilities: it can amuse us for a moment in a darkened room with its own shadow theater that contrasts the forces of Good with those of Evil, Right with Might, but it cannot require us to buy a ticket to watch its edifying spectacle forever. Since Enlightenment can blind us only if (political) epistemology makes us go down into the Cave in the first place, there exists a much simpler means than Plato's to get out of the Cave: we need not climb down into it to begin with!

Any hesitation over the externality of Science was supposed to

thrust us willy-nilly into "mere social construction." I maintain that it is fairly easy to escape the menacing choice between the reality of the external world and the prison of the social world. A trap like that can hold up only as long as no one simultaneously examines the idea of Science and the idea of society, as long as no one entertains *simultaneous* doubts about epistemology and sociology. Those who study Science have to believe what the sociologists say about politics, and, conversely, the sociologists have to believe what the (political) epistemologists say about Science. In other words, there must not be any sociologists *of the sciences*, for then the alternatives would be too obvious, the contrast would be weakened, it would be understood that nothing in Science resembles the sciences, and that nothing in the collective resembles the prison of the social world. Salvation through Science comes only in a world deprived in advance of any means to become moral, reasonable, and learned. But in order for this theory of Science to take the place of an explanation about the work of the sciences, a no less absurd theory of the social world has to take the place of analysis of public life.⁸

It is hard to believe that epistemological questions have been taken seriously, viewed as though they were indeed distinct from the organization of the social body. Once it has been deflected, the ruse loses all its effectiveness. Henceforth, when we hear censors ask "big" questions on the existence of an objective reality, we shall no longer make a huge effort to respond by trying to prove that we are "realists" no matter what. It will suffice to retort with another question: "Hmm, how curious: So you are trying to organize civic life *with two houses*, one of which would have authority and not speak, while the other would have speech but no authority; do you really think this is reasonable?" Against the epistemology police, one must engage in politics, and certainly not epistemology. And yet Western political thought has been paralyzed for a long time by this threat from elsewhere that could at any moment leave the essential part of its deliberations devoid of all substance: the unchallengeable nature of inhuman laws, Science confused with the sciences, politics reduced to the prison of the Cave.

By discarding the allegory of the Cave, we have made considerable progress, for we now know how to avoid the trap of the politicization of the sciences.⁹ The object of the present work is not to prove this small point from science studies, but to spell out its consequences for

political philosophy. How can we conceive of a democracy that does not live under the constant threat of help that would come from Science? What would the public life of those who refuse to go into the Cave look like? What form would the sciences take if they were freed from the obligation to be of political service to Science? What properties would nature have if it no longer had the capacity to suspend public discussion? Such are the questions that we can begin to raise once we have left the Cave en masse, at the end of a session of (political) epistemology that we notice retrospectively has never been anything but a *distraction* on the road that ought to have led us to political philosophy. Just as we have distinguished Science from the sciences, we are going to contrast power politics*, inherited from the Cave, with politics*, conceived as *the progressive composition of the common world*.

Ecological Crisis or Crisis of Objectivity?

Some observers will object that science studies are not very widespread and that it seems difficult to use this discipline to reinvent shared forms of public life. How can such an esoteric field help us define a future common sense? It can, if we combine it with the immense social movement of political ecology, which it will unexpectedly clarify. From now on, whenever people talk to us about nature, whether to defend it, control it, attack it, protect it, or ignore it, we will know that they are thereby designating *the second house of a public life that they wish to paralyze*. Thus, if the issue is a problem of political Constitution and not at all the designation of a part of the universe, two questions arise: Why do those **who are** addressing us want two distinct houses, of which only **one would** bear the name politics? What power is available to those who shuttle back **and forth between** the two? Now that we have left the myth of the Cave **behind and** are no longer intimidated by the appeal to nature, we are going to be able to sort out what is traditional in political ecology and what is new, what extends the lowly epistemology police and what invents the political epistemology* of the future.

We need not wait to find out. The literature on political ecology, read from this perspective, remains very disappointing. Indeed, most of the time it changes nothing at all; it merely rehashes the modern* Constitution of a *two-house* politics in which one house is called poli-

tics and the other, under the name of nature, renders the first one powerless.¹⁰ These revisitings or "remakes" even become entertaining when their authors claim to be passing from the anthropocentrism of the moderns—sometimes called "Cartesian"—to the nature-centrism of the ecologists, as if, from the very beginning of Western culture, starting with the original myth of the fall into the Cave, no one had ever thought about anything but forming public life around *two* centers, of which nature was one. If political ecology poses a problem, it is not because it *finally* introduces nature into political preoccupations that had earlier been too exclusively oriented toward humans, it is because it *continues, alas, to use nature to abort politics*. For the cold, gray nature of the ancient (political) epistemologists, the ecologists have simply substituted a greener, warmer nature. For the rest, these two natures dictate moral conduct in the place of ethics: apolitical, they decide on policy in place of politics.¹¹

Why take an interest in political ecology, then, if its literature only manages to plunge us back into the Cave? Because, as we are going to show in this second section, political ecology has nothing to do, or rather, *finally no longer* has anything to do with nature, still less with its conservation, protection, or defense.¹² To follow this delicate operation, after distinguishing the sciences from Science, readers have to agree to introduce a distinction between the *practice* of ecology movements over thirty years or so, and the *theory* of that militant practice. I shall call the first militant ecology* and the second the philosophy of ecology* or *Naturpolitik* (an expression modeled on *Realpolitik*). If I often appear unfair to the latter, it is because I am so passionately interested in the former.¹³

There is always danger, as I am well aware, in distinguishing between theory and practice: I run the risk of implying that the militants do not really know what they are doing, and that they have succumbed to an illusion that the philosopher takes it upon himself to denounce. If I resort nevertheless to this perilous distinction, it is because the "green" movements, by seeking to restore a political dimension to nature, have touched the heart of what I call the modern* Constitution.¹⁴ Now, through a strategic oddity that is the object of this chapter, *under the pretext of protecting nature, the ecology movements have also retained the conception of nature that makes their political struggle hopeless*. Because "nature" is made, as we shall see throughout, precisely to evis-

cerate politics, one cannot claim to retain it even while tossing it into the public debate. Thus we have every right, in the curious case of political ecology, to speak of a growing divorce between its burgeoning practice and its theory about that practice.¹⁵

As soon as we begin to turn our attention toward the practice of ecological crises, we notice at once that they are never presented in the form of crises of "nature." They appear rather as *crises of objectivity*, as if the new objects that we produce collectively have not managed to fit into the Procrustean bed of two-house politics, as if the "smooth" objects of tradition were henceforth contrasted with "fuzzy" or tangled objects that the militant movements disperse in their wake. We need this incongruous metaphor to emphasize to what extent the crisis bears on *all* objects, not just on those on which the label "natural" has been conferred—this label is as contentious, moreover, as those of *appellations d'origine contrôlée*.¹⁶ Political ecology thus does not reveal itself owing to a crisis of ecological objects, but through a generalized constitutional crisis that bears upon *all objects*. Let us try to show this by drawing up a list of the differences that separate what militant ecology thinks it is doing from what it is actually doing in practice.¹⁷

1. Political ecology claims to speak about nature, but it actually speaks of countless imbroglios that always presuppose human participation.

2. It claims to protect nature and shelter it from mankind, but in every case this amounts to including humans increasingly, bringing them in more and more often, in a finer, more intimate fashion and with a still more invasive scientific apparatus.

3. It claims to defend nature for nature's sake—and not as a substitute for human egotism—but in every instance, the mission it has assigned itself is carried out by humans and is justified by the well-being, the pleasure, or the good conscience of a small number of carefully selected humans—usually American, male, rich, educated, and white.

4. It claims to think in terms of Systems known through the Laws of Science, but whenever it proposes to include everything in a higher cause, it finds itself drawn into a scientific controversy in which the experts are incapable of reaching agreement.

5. It claims to seek its scientific models in hierarchies governed by ordered cybernetic loops, but it always puts forward surprising,

heterarchic assemblages whose reaction times and scales always take by surprise those who think they are speaking of Nature's fragility or its solidity, its vastness or its smallness.

6. Political ecology claims to speak of the Whole, but it succeeds in upsetting opinion and modifying power relations only by focusing on places, biotopes, situations, or particular events—two whales imprisoned on the ice, a hundred elephants in Amboseli, thirty plane trees on the Place du Tertre in Montmartre.

7. It claims to be increasing in power and to embody the political power of the future, but it is reduced everywhere to a tiny portion of electoral strap-hangers. Even in countries where it is a little more powerful, it contributes only a supporting force.

Let us now go back over the list and take as strengths what at first appeared to be weaknesses:

1. Political ecology does not speak about nature and has never sought to do so. It has to do with associations of beings that take complicated forms—rules, apparatuses, consumers, institutions, mores, calves, cows, pigs, broods—and that it is completely superfluous to include in an inhuman and ahistorical nature. Nature is not in question in ecology: on the contrary, ecology dissolves nature's contours and redistributes its agents.

2. Political ecology does not seek to *protect* nature and has never sought to do so. On the contrary, it seeks to take charge, in an even more complete and mixed fashion, of an even greater diversity of entities and destinies. If modernism claimed to be detached from the constraints of the world, ecology for its part gets attached to everything.

3. Political ecology has never claimed to serve nature for nature's own good, for it is absolutely incapable of defining the common good of a dehumanized nature. It does much better than defend nature (either for its own sake or for the good of future humans). It *suspends* our certainties concerning the sovereign good of humans and things, ends and means.¹⁸

4. Political ecology does not know what an Ecologico-Political System is and does not proceed thanks to a complex Science whose model and means would moreover entirely escape poor thinking, searching humanity. This is its great virtue. It *does not know* what does or does not constitute a system. It does not know what is connected to what. The scientific controversies in which it gets embroiled are precisely

what distinguish it from all the other scientifico-political movements of the past. It is the only movement that can benefit from a different politics of science.

5. Neither cybernetics nor hierarchies make it possible to understand the unbalanced, chaotic, Darwinian, sometimes local and sometimes global, sometimes rapid and sometimes slow agents that it brings to light through a multitude of original experimental arrangements, all of which taken together fortunately do not constitute a secure Science.

6. Political ecology is incapable of integrating the entire set of its localized and particular actions into an overall hierarchical program, and it has never sought to do so. This ignorance of the totality is precisely what saves it, because it can never array little humans and great ozone layers, or little elephants and medium-sized ostriches, in a single hierarchy. The smallest can become the largest. "It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone" (Matt. 21:42).

7. Political ecology has fortunately remained *marginal* up to now, for it has not yet grasped either its own politics or its own ecology. It thinks it is speaking of Nature, System, a hierarchical Totality, a world without man, an assured Science, and it is precisely these overly ordered pronouncements that marginalize it, whereas the isolated pronouncements of its practice would perhaps allow it finally to attain political maturity, if we managed to grasp their meaning.

Thus we cannot characterize political ecology by way of a crisis of nature, but by way of a crisis of objectivity. The risk-free objects*, the smooth objects to which we had been accustomed up to now, are giving way to *risky attachments*, tangled objects.¹⁹ Let us try to characterize the difference between the old objects and the new ones, between matters of fact and what could be called *matters of concern**, now that we have gotten ourselves unaccustomed to the notion of nature.

Matters of fact, that is, risk-free objects, had four essential characteristics that made it possible to recognize them at a glance. First of all, the object produced had *clear boundaries*, a well-defined essence*, well-recognized properties. It belonged without any possible question to the world of things, a world made up of persistent, stubborn, non-mental entities defined by strict laws of causality, efficacy, profitability, and truth. Next, the researchers, engineers, entrepreneurs, and technicians who conceived and produced these objects and brought

them to market became *invisible*, once the object was finished. Scientific, technical, and industrial activity remained out of sight. Thirdly, this "risk-free object" brought with it some expected or unexpected consequences, to be sure, but these were always conceived in the form of an impact on a *different* universe, composed of entities less easy to delimit, and which were designated by vague names such as "social factors," "political dimensions," or "irrational aspects." In conformity with the myth of the Cave, the risk-free object of the old constitutional order gave the impression of falling like a meteor to bombard from outside a social world that served as its target. Finally, sometimes years later, certain of these objects could entail senseless risks, even cataclysms. Still, these unexpected consequences, even the catastrophic ones, *never had an impact on* the initial definition of the object, with its boundaries and its essence, since they always belonged to a world lacking any common measure with that of objects: the world of unpredictable history. Contrary to the impacts that one could retrace no matter what, the cataclysmic consequences had no retroactive effects on the objects' responsibilities or their definitions; they could never serve as lessons to their authors so that the latter might modify the properties of their objects. Matters of fact were just that: matters of fact.

The case of asbestos can serve as a model, since it is probably one of the last objects that can be called modernist. It was a perfect substance (was it not called a magic material?), at once inert, effective, and profitable. It took decades before the public health consequences of its diffusion were finally attributed to it, before asbestos and its inventors, manufacturers, proponents, and inspectors were called into question; it took dozens of alerts and scandals before work-related illnesses, cancers, and the difficulties of asbestos removal ended up being traced back to their cause and counted among the properties of asbestos, whose status shifted gradually: once an ideal inert material, it became a nightmarish imbroglio of law, hygiene, and risk. This type of matters of fact still constitutes a large part of the population of the ordinary world in which we live. Yet like weeds in a French garden, other objects with more extravagant forms are beginning to blur the landscape by superimposing their own branchings on those of modernist objects.²⁰

As we see it, the best way to characterize ecological crises is to rec-

ognize, in addition to smooth objects, the proliferation of matters of concern*.²¹ They are of an entirely different character from the earlier ones; this explains why we talk about a *crisis* every time they emerge. Unlike their predecessors, they have no clear boundaries, no well-defined essences, no sharp separation between their own hard kernel and their environment. It is because of this feature that they take on the aspect of tangled beings, forming rhizomes and networks. In the second place, their producers are no longer invisible, out of sight; they appear in broad daylight, embarrassed, controversial, complicated, implicated, with all their instruments, laboratories, workshops, and factories. Scientific, technological, and industrial production has been an integral part of their definition from the beginning. In the third place, these quasi objects have no impact, properly speaking; they do not behave as if they had fallen from elsewhere onto a world different from themselves. They have numerous connections, tentacles, and pseudopods that link them in many different ways to beings as ill assured as themselves and that consequently *no longer* constitute *another universe, independent of the first*. To deal with them, we do not have the social or political world on one side and the world of objectivity and profitability on the other. Finally, and this may be the strangest thing of all, they can no longer be detached from the unexpected consequences that they may trigger in the very long run, very far away, in an incommensurable world. On the contrary, everyone paradoxically expects the unexpected consequences that they will not fail to produce—consequences that properly belong to them, for which they accept responsibility, from which they draw lessons, according to a quite visible process of apprenticeship that rebounds onto their definition and that unfolds in the same universe as they do.

The famous prions, probably responsible for the so-called mad cow disease, symbolize these new matters of concern as much as asbestos symbolizes the old risk-free matters of fact.²² We argue that the growth of political ecology can be traced through the multiplication of these new beings that henceforth blend their existence with that of classic objects, which always form the background of the common landscape.²³ It seems to me that this difference between risk-free matters of fact and risky matters of concern is much more telling than the impossible distinction between the crises that call nature into question and those that call society into question. We are not witnessing

the emergence of questions about nature in political debates, but the progressive transformation of all matters of facts into disputed states of affair, which nothing can limit any longer to the natural world alone—which nothing, precisely, can *naturalize* any longer.

By translating the notion of ecological crisis in this way, we are going to be able to account for the strangest feature of political ecology, one that runs entirely contrary to what political ecology claims to be doing. Far from *globalizing* all that is at stake under the auspices of nature, the practice of political ecology can be recognized precisely by the *ignorance* it turns out to manifest about the respective importance of the actors.²⁴ Political ecology does not shift attention from the human pole to the pole of nature; it shifts from *certainty* about the production of risk-free objects (with their clear separation between things and people) to *uncertainty* about the relations whose unintended consequences threaten to disrupt all orderings, all plans, all impacts. What it calls back into question with such remarkable effectiveness is precisely the possibility of *collecting* the hierarchy of actors and values, according to an order fixed once and for all.²⁵ An infinitesimal cause can have vast effects; an insignificant actor becomes central; an immense cataclysm disappears as if by magic; a miracle product turns out to have nefarious consequences; a monstrous being is tamed without difficulty.²⁶ With political ecology, one is always caught off-guard, struck sometimes by the robustness of systems, sometimes by their fragility.²⁷ It may well be time to take certain ecologists' apocalyptic predictions about the "end of nature" seriously.

The End of Nature

We understand now why political ecology has to let go of nature: if "*nature*" is what makes it possible to recapitulate the hierarchy of beings in a single ordered series, political ecology is always manifested, in practice, by the destruction of the idea of nature. A snail can block a dam; the Gulf Stream can turn up missing; a slag heap can become a biological preserve; an earthworm can transform the land in the Amazon region into concrete. Nothing can line up beings any longer by order of importance. When the most frenetic of the ecologists cry out, quaking: "Nature is going to die," they do not know how right they are. Thank God, nature's going to die. Yes, the great Pan is dead. After the death

of God and the death of man, nature, too, had to give up the ghost. It was time: we were about to be unable to engage in politics any more at all.

Readers may protest that this is a paradox. If they do, it is because they have the popularized version of deep ecology in mind: a movement with vague contours that claims to be reforming the politics of humans in the name of the "higher equilibria of nature." Now, deep ecology, in my interpretation, is situated as far as possible from political ecology; moreover, the confusion between these two approaches is what constantly disrupts the strategy of the "green" movements. The latter, persuaded that they could organize themselves along a spectrum ranging from the most radical to the most reformist, have in effect agreed to put deep ecology at the far end of the spectrum. By a parallelism that is not accidental, deep ecology fascinates political ecology, as communism fascinated socialism—and as the serpent fascinates its prey. But deep ecology is not an extreme form of political ecology; *it is not a form of political ecology at all*, since the hierarchy of beings to which it lays claim is entirely composed of those modern, smooth, risk-free stratified objects in successive gradations from the cosmos to microbes by way of Mother Earth, human societies, monkeys, and so on. The producers of this disputed knowledge remain completely invisible, as do the sources of uncertainty; the distinction between these objects and the political world they bombard remains so complete that it seems as though political ecology has no goal but to humiliate politics still further by reducing its power, to the profit of the much greater and much more hidden power of nature—and to the profit of the invisible experts who have decided what nature wanted, what it could do, and what it ought to do.²⁸ By claiming to free us from anthropocentrism, political ecology thrusts us back into the Cave, since it belongs entirely to the *classic* definition of politics rendered powerless by nature, a conception from which political ecology, at least in its practice, is just beginning to pull us away.²⁹

Now we can see the problem that obliges us to distinguish between what the ecological militants do and what they say they do. If we define political ecology as something that multiplies matters of concern, we give it a different sorting principle from the question of whether it is concerned or not with nature, a question that is going to become not only superfluous but politically dangerous as well. In its practice, po-

litical ecology disrupts the ordering of classes of beings by multiplying unforeseen connections and by brutally varying their relative importance. Still, if political ecology—because of the modernist theory that it thinks it cannot get along without—believes that it is obliged to "protect nature," it is going to focus on the wrong objective as often as on the right one. Even more perversely, it is going to let itself be intimidated by deep ecology, which, because it defends the largest beings arranged in the most rigid and incontrovertible fashion possible, will always seem to have the high ground, appropriating the power invented by the myth of the Cave for its own benefit. Whenever political ecology encounters beings with uncertain, unpredictable connections, it is thus going to *doubt itself*, believe it has been weakened, despair over its own impotence, be ashamed of its weakness. As soon as a situation shows arrangements that are different from the ones it had predicted (that is, always!), political ecology is going to think it is mistaken, since in its respect for nature it thought it had at last found the right way to classify the respective importance of all the beings it purported to be linking together. Now, it is precisely *in its failures*, when it deploys matters of concern with unanticipated forms that make the use of any notion of nature radically impossible, that political ecology is finally doing its own job, finally innovating politically, finally bringing us out of modernism, finally preventing the proliferation of smooth, risk-free matters of fact, with their improbable cortege of incontestable knowledge, invisible scientists, predictable impacts, calculated risks, and unanticipated consequences.

We see the confusion into which we are plunged if we mistake political ecology's theory for practice: the opponents of deep or superficial ecology reproach it most often with conflating humans with nature and thus forgetting that humanity is defined precisely by its "removal" from the constraints of nature, from what is "given," from "simple causality," from "pure immediacy," from the "prereflexive."³⁰ They basically accuse ecology of reducing humans to objects and thus seeking to make us walk on all fours, as Voltaire said ironically about Rousseau. "It is because we are free subjects forever irreducible to the constraints of nature," they say, "that we deserve to be called human beings." Now, what best fulfills this condition of removal from nature? Why, political ecology, of course, since it finally brings the public debate out of its age-old association with nature! Political ecology alone

is finally bringing the intrinsically political quality of the *natural order* into the foreground.

We understand without difficulty that political ecology can no longer be presented as a new concern that arose in Western consciousness around the middle of the twentieth century, as if since the 1950s—or 1960s or 1970s, it hardly matters—politicians have finally become aware that the question of natural resources had to be included on the list of their usual preoccupations. Never, since the Greeks' earliest discussions on the excellence of public life, have people spoken about politics without speaking of nature;³¹ or rather, never has anyone appealed to nature except to teach a political lesson. Not a single line has been written—at least in the Western tradition³²—in which the terms “nature,” “natural order,” “natural law,” “natural right,” “inflexible causality,” or “imprescriptible laws,” have not been followed, a few lines, paragraphs, or pages later, by an affirmation concerning the way to reform public life. Certainly, the direction of the lesson can be reversed; the natural order is sometimes used to critique the social order, and the human sometimes used to critique the natural; people can even seek to put an end to the link between the two. But no one can claim under any circumstances to be dealing with two distinct preoccupations that had always evolved in parallel until they finally crossed paths thirty or forty years ago. Conceptions of politics and conceptions of nature have always formed a pair as firmly united as the two seats on a seesaw, where one goes down when the other goes up, and vice versa. There has never been any other politics than the politics of nature, and there has never been any other nature than the nature of politics. Epistemology and politics, as we now understand very well, are one and the same thing, conjoined in (political) epistemology to make both the practice of the sciences and the very object of public life incomprehensible.

Thanks to these double findings of science studies and of practical ecology, we are going to be able to define the key notion of *collective**, whose meaning we are thus gradually specifying. In fact, the importance of the term “nature” does not stem from the particular character of the beings that it is supposed to have assembled and that are thought to belong to a particular domain of reality. The whole power of this term comes from the fact that it is always used in the singular,

as “nature in general.” When one appeals to the notion of nature, *the assemblage that it authorizes counts for infinitely more than the ontological quality of “naturalness,” whose origin it would guarantee.* With nature, two birds are killed with one stone: a being is classified by its belonging to a certain domain of reality, and it is classified in a unified hierarchy extending from the largest being to the smallest.³³

The test is easy to administer. Replace the singular with the plural everywhere. Suddenly we have *natures*, and it is impossible to make *natures* play any political role whatsoever. “Natural *rights*” in the plural? It would be difficult to dictate positive laws by relying on such a multiplicity. How could we inflame minds for the classic debate over the respective roles of genetics and the environment if we set out to compare the influence of “*natures*” and cultures? How could we curb the enthusiasm of an industry if we said that it must protect “*natures*”? How could we use the force of Science for leverage if we were talking about sciences of “*natures*”? If we said that “the laws of *natures*” must curb the pride of human laws? No, the plural is decidedly unsuited to the political notion of nature. One multiplicity plus another multiplicity always make a multiplicity. Starting with the myth of the Cave, it has been the *unity* of nature that produces its entire political benefit, since only this assembling, this ordering, can serve as a direct rival to *the other form* of assembling, composing, unifying, the entirely traditional form that has always been called *politics*, in the singular. The debate over nature and politics is like the great debate that opposed the pope and the emperor throughout the entire Middle Ages, when two loyalties toward two totalities of equal legitimacy divided Christian consciences into two camps. If the term “multiculturalism*” can be used with reckless abandon, the term “multinaturalism*” appears—and will continue to appear for quite some time—shocking or devoid of meaning.³⁴

What is the effect of political ecology on this traditional debate? The very expression makes the point clearly enough. Instead of *two* distinct arenas in which one would try to totalize the hierarchy of beings and would then have to try to choose among them (without ever being able to succeed), political ecology proposes to convoke *a single* collective whose role is precisely to debate the said hierarchy—and to arrive at an acceptable solution. Political ecology proposes to move

the role of unifier of the respective ranks of all beings out of the dual arena of nature and politics and into *the single arena* of the collective. That is at least what it does *in practice*, when it jointly forbids both the natural order and the social order to categorize in a definitive and separate way what counts and what does not, what is connected and what must remain detached, what is inside and what is outside. Multiplication of objects that put the classic constitutional order in crisis: such is the means that political ecology has found, with all the astuteness of a burgeoning practice, to simultaneously confuse the political tradition and what has to be called the natural tradition, *Naturpolitik**.

The philosophy of ecology, however, takes great pains not to do in theory what it does in practice (what I propose to say that it does). Even when it challenges nature, it never calls the unity of nature into question.³⁵ The reason for the gap ought to be clearer now, even though we shall need the entire length of this book for it to bear fruit. As long as (political) epistemology is taken seriously, that is, as long as the practice of the sciences and the practice of politics are not treated with equal interest, nature appears precisely *not* as a power of assembling equal or superior to that of politics. At least not yet. But then how does it appear? How can it justify the use of the singular "nature in general"? Why does it not present itself as multiplicity? Why does it put off measuring itself against politics and thus letting us see quite clearly that we are dealing with two powers that can be criticized in a single thrust? Because of a fabulous invention that political ecology has already dismantled in practice but cannot dismantle in theory without a slow and painful supplementary effort. Because of *the distinction between facts and values* that we shall have to sort out in Chapter 3. One could readily grant that there indeed exists a strong unifying power in nature, but this power concerns *only* facts. Everyone also agrees, of course, that there is also a power of assembling, ranking, and ordering in politics as well, but this power concerns values, and values alone. The two orders are not only different, they are incommensurable. Will we be reminded that that is just what the pope's supporters and the emperor's claimed in the Middle Ages? Yes, but we see them now as two commensurable powers, simply enemies, because we have converted them both into secular figures. This is precisely my hypothesis: *we have not yet secularized the two conjoined powers of nature*

and politics. Thus they continue to be seen as two completely unrelated sets, the first of which does not even warrant the name of power. We are still living under the influence of the myth of the Cave.³⁶ We are still expecting our salvation to come from a double assembly, only one of whose houses is called politics, while the other one simply and modestly declares its determination to define matters of facts; we have no inkling that this hope of salvation is precisely what threatens our public life, just as the fall of heavens, according to Caesar, threatened my ancestors the Gauls. Such is the trap laid by (political) epistemology, the trap that has up to now prevented the various ecology movements from supplying themselves with a made-to-order political philosophy.

I do not hope to convince the reader of this crucial point right away; it may well be the most difficult one in our common apprenticeship. It will take all of Chapter 2 to restore coherence to the notion of a collective of humans and nonhumans, all of Chapter 3 to rid ourselves of the opposition between facts and values, and then all of Chapter 4 to redifferentiate the collective using procedures taken either from scientific assemblies or from political assemblies. But readers may be ready to acknowledge even now that political ecology can no longer be fairly described as what caused concerns about nature to break into political consciousness. This would be an error of perspective with incalculable consequences, for it would reverse the direction of history and would leave nature, a body invented to render politics impotent, at the very heart of the movement that is proposing to digest it. It seems much more fruitful to consider the recent emergence of political ecology as what has *put an end*, on the contrary, to the domination of the ancient infernal pairing of nature and politics, in order to substitute for it, through countless innovations, many of which remain to be introduced, the public life of a single collective.³⁷ In any event, to say that political ecology is finally removing us from nature or that it attests to the "end of nature" should no longer be taken as a provocation. The expression may be subject to criticism, because it may not do justice to the strange practice of ecologists, but it no longer has—or at least so I hope—the futile aspect of a paradox. When it seemed to have that aspect, we were simply at the crossroads between two immense movements whose contrary influence has for some time made the interpre-

tation of ecology difficult: the emergence of nature as a new concern in politics, and the disappearance of nature as a mode of political organization.

The Pitfall of "Social Representations" of Nature

In the first section of this chapter, we distinguished the sciences from Science, and in the second, political ecology from *Naturpolitik*. We are now going to have to carry out a third displacement if we want to draw the maximum benefit from this favorable conjunction between science studies and the ecology movement. It seems to be the case that the most sophisticated of the human sciences have also long since abandoned the notion of nature, by showing that we never have immediate access to "nature in general"; humans only gain access, according to the historians, the psychologists, the sociologists, and the anthropologists, through the mediation of history, of culture—which are specifically social and mental categories. By also asserting for my part that the expression "nature in general" has no meaning, I seem to be reconnecting with the good sense of the human sciences. In short, from this vantage point it is simply a matter of asking the militant ecologists to stop being so naive as to believe that they are defending, under cover of nature, something other than a particular viewpoint, that of Westerners. When they speak of putting an end to anthropocentrism, they manifest their own ethnocentrism.³⁸ Unfortunately, if one believes that my argument based on political epistemology amounts to saying that "no one is capable of evading social representations of nature," then my effort is doomed. In other words, I now have to worry not that my readers will reject my argument, but that they will seize it too hastily, confusing my critique of the philosophy of ecology with the theme of the "social construction" of nature!

At first glance, though, it seems difficult to get along without the help that is offered by works on the history of attitudes toward nature. Excellent historians have demonstrated this quite convincingly: the way fourth-century Greeks conceived of nature has nothing to do with the way nineteenth-century Englishmen did, or eighteenth-century Frenchmen, not to mention the Chinese, the Malay, or the Sioux.³⁹ "If you are trying to tell us that these changing conceptions of nature reflect the political conceptions of the societies that developed them,

there is nothing astonishing in that." To take one example in a thousand, we are all familiar with the ravages of social Darwinism, which borrowed its metaphors from politics, projected them onto nature itself, and then reimported them into politics in order to add the seal of an irrefragable natural order to the domination of the wealthy. Feminists have shown often enough how the assimilation of women to nature had the effect of depriving women of all political rights for a very long time. The examples of ties between conceptions of nature and conceptions of politics are so numerous that we can claim, with good reason, that every epistemological question is also unmistakably a political question.

And yet, if this were true, my project would collapse at once. In fact, to reason in this way amounts to retaining a two-house politics by transposing it into the academic realm. The idea that "nature does not exist," since it is a matter of "social construction," only reinforces the division between the Cave and the Heaven of Ideas by superimposing this division onto the one that distinguishes the human sciences from the natural sciences. When one speaks as a historian, a psychologist, an anthropologist, a geographer, a sociologist, or an epistemologist about "human representations of nature," about their changes, about the material, economic, and political conditions that explain them, one is implying, "quite obviously," that nature itself, during this time, has not changed a bit. The more the social construction of nature is calmly asserted, the more what is really happening in nature—the nature that is being abandoned to Science and scientists—is left aside. Multiculturalism acquires its rights to multiplicity only because it is solidly propped up by *mononaturalism**. No other position has any meaning at all; otherwise we would revert to the olden days of idealism and believe that the changing opinions of humans modify the position of moons, planets, suns, galaxies, trees that fall in the forest, stones, animals—in short, everything that exists *apart from ourselves*. Those who are proud of being social scientists because they are not naive enough to believe in the existence of an "immediate access" to nature always recognize that there is the human history of nature on the one hand, and on the other, the natural nonhistory of nature, made up of electrons, particles, raw, causal, objective things, completely indifferent to the first list.⁴⁰ Even if, through work, knowledge, and ecological transformations, human history can modify nature in a lasting

way, can disturb, transform, and perform it, the fact remains that there are two histories, or rather one history full of sound and fury that unfolds *within a framework* that itself has no history, or creates no history. Now, this good-sense conception is precisely what we are going to have to abandon in order to give political ecology its proper place.

The critical sophistication of the social sciences is unfortunately of no use in drawing the lesson of political ecology, which does not even straddle the divide between nature and society, natural sciences and social sciences, science and politics, but is located in an entirely different region, since it refuses to establish public life on the basis of two collectors, two catchments, two houses. If one accepted the notion of social representations of nature, one would fall back on the inexhaustible argument about external reality, and we would be obliged to answer the either-or question: "Do you have access to the externality of nature, or are you still lying down at the bottom of the gutter in the Cave?" Or, more politely: "Are you talking about things, or about symbolic representations of things?"⁴¹ The challenge is not to take a position in the debate that is going to make it possible to measure the respective shares of nature and society in the representations we have of them, but to modify the conception of the social and political world that serves as evidence for the social and natural sciences.

In the two preceding sections, I was seeking to speak of nature itself—or rather natures themselves—and not at all of the many human representations of a single nature. But how can anyone speak of nature itself? This would seem to have no meaning. And yet it is exactly what I mean to say. When we add the discoveries made by militant ecology to the discovery made by political epistemology, we can detach nature into several of these ingredients, without falling necessarily into the representations that humans make of it. The belief that there are only two positions, realism and idealism, nature and society, is in effect the essential source of the power that is symbolized by the myth of the Cave and that political ecology must now secularize.⁴² This is one of the thorniest points in our argument; I must therefore proceed with caution, the way one goes about removing a splinter stuck in one's foot.

The initial operation that detaches us from fascination with nature seems risky, at first glance, since it amounts—according to the commitment I made in the Introduction—to distinguishing the sciences

from Science, by making visible once again the apparatuses that make it possible to say something about nature, apparatuses that are generally called scientific disciplines. As soon as we add to dinosaurs their paleontologists, to particles their accelerators, to *ecosystems* their monitoring instruments, to energy systems their *standards* and the hypothesis on the basis of which calculations are made, to the ozone holes their meteorologists and their chemists, we have already ceased entirely to speak of nature; instead, we are speaking of what is produced, constructed, decided, defined, in a learned City whose ecology is almost as complex as that of the world it is coming to know. By proceeding in this way, we add the history of the sciences, shorter but even more eventful, to the infinitely long history of the planet, the solar system, and the evolution of life. The billions of years since the Big Bang date from the 1950s; the pre-Cambrian era dates from the mid-nineteenth century; as for the particles that make up the universe, they were all born in the twentieth century. Instead of finding ourselves facing a nature without history and a society with a history, we find ourselves thus already facing a joint history of the sciences and nature.⁴³ Each time one risks falling into fascination with nature, one has only, in order to sober up, to add the network of the scientific discipline that allows us to know nature.

At first, such an operation does no more than drive the splinter that was to be extracted even deeper into the flesh, since we seem to have added the nightmare of the "social construction of the sciences" to the cultural representations of nature. So far, the pain has increased . . . Everything depends on whether we want to add the history of the sciences provisionally or definitively to the history of nature. In the first case, the infection is going to get worse, since the wound of epistemological relativism will be added to the wound of cultural relativism; in the second case, we fall from one difficulty into another, larger one, but at least a cure is possible. "Of course," our objector will say, "if you insist, you may add the history of the sciences to the long list of human efforts to conceptualize nature, to make it comprehensible and knowable, but it remains true nonetheless that *once* knowledge has been acquired, there will always be two blocs: nature as it is, and the variable representations we make of it." The history of the sciences belongs indeed to the same list as the history of mentalities and representations. It just so happens that this portion of human representa-

tions, when it is accurate, passes wholesale over to the side of nature. In other words, the fact of adding the history of the sciences does not modify the distinction between nature and representations of nature in a lasting way: it blurs it only *temporarily*, during the brief period when the scientists are wandering around in the dark. As soon as they find something, what they attest to belongs clearly to nature and no longer in any way, shape, or form to representations. During all this time, anyway, nature has remained safely out of play, out of range, impregnable, as little involved in the human history of the sciences as in the human history of attitudes toward nature—unless we wish to reduce the history of the sciences to history, period, and forever bar scientists from discovering truth, by locking them up forever in the narrow cell of social representations.

We should not be surprised by this objection: we are well aware that the double rupture between history and nature does not stem from lessons drawn from empirical studies but has the goal of cutting observation short, so that no example can ever blur the politically necessary distinction between ontological questions and epistemological questions by threatening to bring together, under the single gaze of a single discipline, the two assemblies of humans and things. The goal of (political) epistemology as a whole is to prevent political epistemology* by limiting the history of the sciences to the messy process of discovery, without this latter's having any effect whatsoever on the lasting solidity of knowledge. I maintain, on the contrary, that by making the history and sociology of the learned City visible, I am aiming at blurring the distinction between nature and society *durably*, so that we shall never have to go back to two distinct sets, with nature on one side and the representations that humans make of it on the other.

"Ah, I knew it—here the social constructivist is showing the tip of his donkey's ear! Here are the sophists who proliferate in the obscurity of the Cave. You want to reduce all the exact sciences to simple social representations. Extend multiculturalism* to politics. Deprive politics of the only transcendence capable of decisively putting an end to its interminable squabbles."⁴⁴ And yet it is precisely on this point that science studies, in combination with militant ecology, allows us to break with the deceptive self-evidence of the social sciences by completely abandoning the theme of social constructivism. If the objectors continue to be suspicious, it is because they do not understand

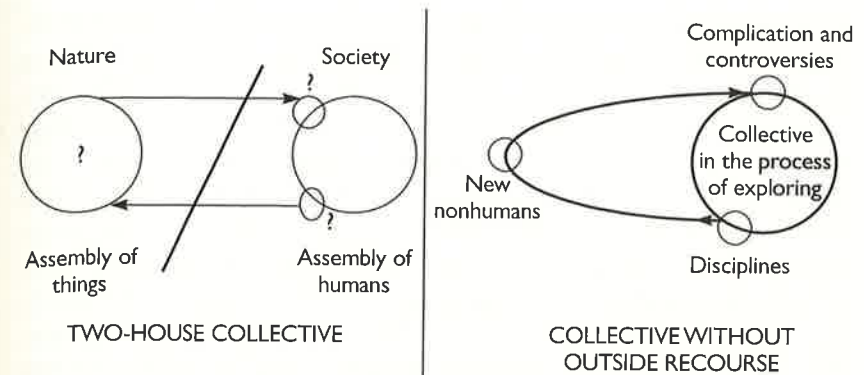


Figure 1.1 The political model with two houses, nature and society, is based on a double split. The model of the collective is based, conversely, on a simple extension of the human and nonhuman members.

that political ecology, in combination with science studies, allows a movement that had always been forbidden before. By emphasizing the mediation of the sciences, one can of course tilt toward sociology and return to the perennial question of the human representations of nature, but one can also make visible the distinction between the multiple presence of nonhumans* and the political work that collected them previously in the form of a unified nature. For this it suffices to change the notion of the social, which we have inherited, like the rest, from the age of the Caves.

We are going to distinguish between two conceptions of the social world: the first, which can be called the social world as prison*, and the second, which I shall call the *social world as association**. When we compare the two positions—the one derived from the myth of the Cave and the one to which I would like readers to become accustomed little by little—at first they appear quite similar, as is evident from Figure 1.1.

In the left-hand version, the collective is bisected in an absolute cleavage that separates the assembly of things from the assembly of humans. In a triple mystery (indicated by question marks), despite the gulf between the two worlds, scientists nevertheless remain capable of breaking with society to achieve objectivity, of rendering mute things assimilable by human language, and, finally, of coming back “to earth”

to organize society according to the ideal models supplied by reason. The right-hand model differs from the left-hand one by virtue of three small features, as decisive as they are infinitesimal; these will become clearer in the next two chapters. In the first place, we are not dealing with a society "threatened" by recourse to an objective nature, but with a collective *in the process of expanding*: the properties of human beings and nonhumans with which it has to come to terms are in no way assured. Next, we do not need a dramatic and mysterious "conversion" to search for new nonhumans: the small transformations carried out by scientific disciplines in laboratories are entirely sufficient. Yes, there is indeed an objective external reality, but this particular externality is not definitive: it simply indicates that new nonhumans, entities that have never before been included in the work of the collective, find themselves mobilized, recruited, socialized, domesticated. This new type of externality, essential to the respiration of the collective, is not there to nourish some great drama of rupture and conversion. There is indeed an external reality, but there is really no need to make a big fuss about it. Finally, and this is the third "small" difference, when the newly recruited nonhumans show up to enrich the demography of the collective, they are quite incapable of interrupting discussions, short-circuiting procedures, canceling out deliberations: they are there, on the contrary, to complicate and open up these processes.⁴⁵ The return of the scientists in charge of nonhumans is of passionate interest to the other members of the collective, but it in no way resolves the question of the common world that they are in the process of developing: it only complicates the issue.

In place of the three mysteries of the left-hand version, we find in the right-hand version three entirely describable operational sets, none of which presents a brutal rupture, and, even more important, none of which *simplifies the collective's work of collection by resorting decisively to an incontestable transcendence*.⁴⁶ The entire genius of the old allegory of the Cave, now empty of its venom, consisted in making its audience believe that the right-hand schema was the same as the left-hand one, that there existed no other version of society than the infernal social world (the social world as prison depicted in the left-hand schema), as if one could not speak about society without at once losing contact with external reality. The trap set by the epistemology police consisted in denying to anyone who challenged the radical ex-

ternality of Science* the right to continue to talk about any external reality at all: those who had doubts about Science were supposed to content themselves with the gruel of social conventions and symbolism. They could never have gotten out of the prison of the Cave on their own. Yet we can now see that precisely the opposite is true. In the appeal to external reality, two elements that are now clearly separate were deliberately confused: on the one hand, the *multiplicity* of the new beings for which room must be made from now on so that we can live in common; on the other hand, the *interruption* of all discussion by recourse to a brutally and prematurely unified external reality. Such recourse is effective only because it short-circuits the work proper to politics, thanks to a nonpolitical supplement called Science* that is supposed to have already unified all beings under the auspices of an illegally convoked assembly called nature. In the left-hand schema, one could not appeal to the reality of the external world without leaving the social world or silencing it; in the right-hand schema, one can appeal to the external worlds, but the multiplicity that is being mobilized in this way *does not bring definitive resolution to any of the essential questions of the collective*. In place of the social world as prison that sociology has inherited without ever inquiring into its original flaws, there appears another sense of the social, closer to the etymology of the term, as association and collection.⁴⁷ On the left in Figure 1.1, Science was part of the solution to the political problem that it was also rendering insoluble by the continual threat of disqualification hanging over the human assemblies; on the right, the sciences are part of the solution only because they are part of the problem as well.

When the mediation of the scientific disciplines is added, when the work of scientists is shown, when the importance of the history of the sciences is stressed, it seems at first glance that we have no choice but to *distance ourselves* even further from nature in order to move closer toward humans. The temptation is great; we need only let ourselves go; the highway is open and toll-free; the entire landscape of good sense has been fashioned for this effortless slippage, this glide down a slide. But thanks to the argument of the collective, one can also move toward a different position, one less well marked, more twisted, and more costly, a position toward which the entire future common sense of political ecology nevertheless pushes us. By making the mediation

of the sciences visible, we can start from nature, not in order to move toward the human element, but—by making a ninety-degree turn—to move *toward the multiplicity of nature*, redistributed by the sciences—something that might be called the *pluriverse**⁴⁸ to mark the distinction between the notion of external reality and the properly political work of unification. In other words, political ecology allied to science studies traces a new branching on the map: instead of going back and forth between nature and the human, between realism and constructivism, we can now go from the multiplicity *that no collective yet collects*, the pluriverse, to the collective which up to now was gathering that multiplicity under the combined names of politics and nature. Only political ecology makes it possible to profit from the formidable potential of science studies, for political ecology manages at last to pry apart multiplicity and what collects multiplicity in a single unified whole. As for the question whether this collecting, this gathering, this unifying, is carried out by the political instrument of nature or by the political instrument of politics, from this point on it hardly matters—but see Chapter 4. From now on, instead of opposing reality and representation, we will oppose the representation of multiplicity and the unification, through due process, of this multiplicity.

There is, then, a path other than idealism that we can follow to leave nature behind, a path other than subjects that we can take to leave objects behind, a path other than dialectics that was supposed to enable us to “get beyond” the contradiction between subject and object. To put it more bluntly still, thanks to political ecology, Science no longer kidnaps external reality to transform it into an appellate court of last resort, threatening public life with a promise of salvation worse than the evil against which it offers protection. Everything the human sciences had imagined about the social world to construct their disciplines at a remove from the natural sciences was borrowed from the prison of the Cave. Intimidated by Science, they accepted from it the most menacing of diktats: “Yes, we readily admit it,” they confess in chorus, “the more we talk about social construction, the further away we actually move from the real unified things in themselves.” Whereas what they should have done was reject the diktat and move closer—despite the threat of Science—to the realities produced by the *sciences* in order to be able to take a fresh look at the question of how the common world is composed.

Have we pulled out the splinter that made walking painful? The wound is still there; it will still hurt for a while, but it is now a scar and no longer an oozing sore. We have removed the principal source of infection, the traditional notion of representation that poisoned everything it touched—the impossible distinction, contradicted every day, between ontological and epistemological questions. It was this distinction, in fact, that imposed the exclusive path that led from nature to society and back, owing to the intermediary of two miraculous conversions. It was this distinction that obliged us either to move closer to things, while distancing ourselves from the impressions humans had of them, or to move closer to the human categories, while progressively distancing ourselves from things themselves. It was this distinction that imposed the impossible choice between realism and constructivism. We shall no longer speak of “representation of nature,” designating by that term the categories of human understanding, while, on the other hand, “nature” in the singular remains even more remote. And yet we shall retain the crucial word “representation,” but we shall make it play again, explicitly, its ancient political role. If there are no more representations of nature in the sense of the two-house politics we have criticized, it will still be necessary to *represent* the associations of humans and nonhumans through an explicit procedure, in order to decide what collects them and what unifies them in one future common world.

In fact, by abandoning the notion of nature, we are leaving intact the two elements that matter the most to us: the multiplicity of nonhumans and the enigma of their association. In the following chapters we are going to use the word “representation” to designate the new task of political ecology, but I hope to have removed the ambiguity that has weighed too long on a term that has been so closely associated with the destiny of the social sciences. We may suppose that the tasks of these sciences will be more inspiring than to prove that there exist “cultural and social filters through which” humans must necessarily pass “to apprehend objects out there, while always missing things in themselves.” By refusing the support that the social sciences claimed to be offering it, political ecology frees these sciences to do other jobs and directs them toward other infinitely more fruitful research paths.⁴⁹ It is of the pluriverse that they should speak, of the *cosmos* to be built, not of the shadows projected on the wall of the Cave.

The Fragile Aid of Comparative Anthropology

Political ecology has finally taken the drama out of the perennial conflict between nature and the social order. If the lesson political ecology has to teach is not obvious, this is not, as its theoreticians still sometimes believe, because political ecology has invented exotic new forms of fusion or harmony or love between man and nature, but because it has definitively secularized the dual political question, the dual conflict of loyalty between the power of nature and the power of society. We have no idea at all what things themselves would look like if they had not always been engaged in the battle of naturalization. What would the entities we have called *nonhumans** look like if they were not wearing the uniform of matters of fact marching in step in the conquest of subjectivities? What would humans look like if they no longer wore the uniform of partisans bravely resisting the tyranny of objectivity? If we are going to attempt to redraw the new institutions of democracy in the remainder of this work, from here on we need to have access to the multiplicity of associations of humans and nonhumans that the collective is precisely charged with *collecting*. In the absence of conceptual institutions or forms of life that could serve as alternatives to the modern Constitution, we run the risk of remaining engaged in spite of ourselves in wars between realism and social constructivism that do not concern us in the least, forgetting in the process the entire novelty of the political ecology that we were seeking to deploy.

Fortunately, the anthropology of non-Western cultures is generous enough to offer us an alternative. To understand this offer, alas, we must detour by way of another seeming paradox and disappoint those who imagine that other cultures will have a "richer" vision of nature than our own Western version. It is impossible to blame those who share such illusions. Countless words have been written ridiculing the miserable whites who are guilty of wanting to master, mistreat, dominate, possess, reject, violate, and rape nature. No book of theoretical ecology fails to shame them by contrasting the wretched objectivity of Westerners with the timeless wisdom of "savages," who for their part are said to "respect nature," "live in harmony with her," and plumb her most intimate secrets, fusing their souls with those of things, speaking with animals, marrying plants, engaging in discussions on an

equal footing with the planets.⁵⁰ Ah, those feathered savages, children of Mother Earth, how nice it would be to be like them! Witnessing their weddings with nature, how puny one feels to be nothing but an engineer, a researcher, a white, a modern, incapable of rediscovering that lost paradise, that Eden toward which deep ecology would like to redirect our steps.

Now, if comparative anthropology offers a helping hand to political ecology, it is once again for a reason that is precisely the opposite of the one advanced by popular ecology. Non-Western cultures *have never been interested* in nature; they have never adopted it as a category; they have never found a use for it.⁵¹ On the contrary, Westerners were the ones who turned nature into a big deal, an immense political diorama, a formidable moral gigantomachy, and who constantly brought nature into the definition of their social order. Unfortunately, the theoreticians of ecology make no more use of anthropology than of the sociology of the sciences. Deep ecology means **shallow anthropology**.⁵²

If comparative anthropology is indispensable, it is **thus not** because it offers a reservoir of exoticism thanks to which whites might succeed in exiting from their uniquely secular and material conception of the objects of nature, but, on the contrary, because it makes it possible *to extricate Westerners from exoticism they have imposed on themselves*—and, by projection, on others—by thrusting themselves into the impossible imbroglio of an entirely politicized nature. We do not mean to suggest that non-Western cultures correspond point for point to the political ecology whose protocol we propose to draw up. On the contrary, as we shall see in Chapter 4, all the institutions of the collective remain contemporary inventions, unprecedented in history. We mean only that the other cultures (to keep on using a quite ill-conceived term), precisely because they have never lived in nature, have preserved the conceptual institutions, the reflexes and routines that we Westerners need in order to rid ourselves of the intoxicating idea of nature. If we learn the lesson of comparative anthropology, these cultures offer us indispensable alternatives to the nature-politics opposition, by proposing ways of collecting associations of humans and nonhumans using a single collective clearly identified as political. More accurately, they *refuse to use only two collectors*, just one of which, the social world, would be seen as political, while the other, nature, would remain outside of power, outside public speech, outside institutions, outside humanity,

outside politics. If they do not form the lovely unities imposed on them by exoticism, at least the other cultures are not blind in one eye.

As a discipline, anthropology has always hesitated on this point: it has only quite recently succeeded in becoming indispensable to political ecology⁵³—this is one reason we cannot hold a grudge against common sense for having so badly resisted the exotic baubles that deep ecology sought to foist off on it, on the pretext that barbarians respect Mother Earth more than the civilized peoples do. From its earliest contacts at the dawn of modern times, anthropology has understood that something was amiss between what it called “the savages” and nature, that there was in Westerners’ nature something that other peoples found unassimilable. But it has taken a very long time—three centuries, let us say—to understand that the nature of the anthropologists was too politicized for them to grasp the lesson of the “noble savages.”⁵⁴

Let us quickly go back over the path that made it possible to transform this very particular politics of nature. The first reflex was to view “primitives” as “children of nature,” something intermediate between animals, humans, and Westerners. This move was not friendly toward animals, savages, or Westerners, the latter never having lived “in” nature in any form. The second, more agreeable stage entailed a judgment that natives, while as different from nature as whites, nevertheless lived “in harmony” with nature, respecting and protecting it. This hypothesis did not hold up under the scrutiny of ethnology, prehistory, or ecology; these disciplines rapidly produced multiple examples of pitiless destruction of ecosystems, massive disharmony, countless instances of disequilibrium, even fierce hatred for the environment. In fact, under the name of harmony, the anthropologists gradually noticed that they should not look for particularly sympathetic relationships with nature, but for the presence of a categorization, a classification, an ordering of beings that did not seem to make any sharp distinction between things and people. The difference no longer lay in the savages’ not treating nature well, but rather in their not treating it at all.

The third, more sophisticated stage thus involved viewing natives (rebaptized non-Western peoples in the meantime) as having formed complex cultures whose categories established *correspondences* between the order of nature and the social order. Among these peoples,

it was said, nothing happens to the order of the world that does not happen to humans, and vice versa. There is no classification of animals or plants that cannot be observed in the social order, and no social classification that cannot be observed in the divisions between natural beings. But the increasingly subtle anthropologists quickly noticed that they were still demonstrating an intolerable ethnocentrism, since they were insisting on the abolition of a difference that was of no interest whatsoever to the people they were studying. By asserting that other cultures brought the natural order and the social order into “correspondence,” the anthropologists were still taking this division for granted, maintaining that it was in some sense in the nature of things. Now, the other cultures under consideration did not blend the social order and the natural order at all; *they were unconcerned by the distinction*. To be unaware of a dichotomy is not at all the same thing as combining two sets into one—still less “getting beyond” the distinction between the two.

Viewed through the lens of an anthropology that has finally become *symmetrical* or pluralist, the other cultures appear much more troubling today: they marshal categorizing principles that regroup within a single order—in a single collective, let us say—beings that we Westerners insist on keeping separate, or rather, while we think it is indispensable to have two houses to hold our collective, most of the other cultures insist on *not* having *two*. From this point on they can no longer be defined as different cultures having distinct points of view toward a single nature—to which “we” alone would have access; it of course becomes impossible to define them as cultures among other cultures against a background of universal nature. There are only nature-cultures, or rather collectives that seek to know, as we shall see in Chapter 5, what they may have in common. We see now the reversal of perspective: the savages are not the ones who appear strange because they mix what should in no case be mixed, “things” and “persons”; we Westerners are the odd ones, we who have been living up to now in the strange belief that we had to separate “things” on the one hand and “persons” on the other into two distinct collectives, according to two incommensurable forms of collection.⁵⁵

The feeling of strangeness that another culture provokes is of interest only if it leads one to reflect on the strangeness of one’s own; otherwise it degenerates into exoticism, Orientalism, Occidentalism. In

order not to fall into a perverse fascination with differences, it is necessary to move quickly to create a common ground that replaces surprise with the deep complicity of solutions. By joining the recent discoveries of comparative anthropology with those of political ecology and the sociology of the sciences, we should be able to get along entirely without the *two symmetrical exoticisms*: the one that makes Westerners believe that they are detached from nature because they have forgotten the lessons of other cultures and live in a world of pure, efficient, profitable, and objective things; and the one that made other cultures believe that they had lived too long in the fusion between the natural order and the social order, and that they needed finally, in order to accede to modernity, to take into account the nature of things "as they are."

The modern world—to which Westerners sometimes regret belonging, even as they insist on bringing other cultures in to join them!—does not have the characteristics commonly attributed to it because it lacks nature entirely. *Nature plays no role in either world*. Among Westerners, because their world is political through and through; among non-Westerners, because they have never used nature as a place to set aside half of their collective! Whites are neither close to nature because they and they alone finally know how it works, thanks to Science, nor distant from nature because they have lost the ancestral secret of intimate life with nature. The "others" are neither close to nature because they have never separated it from their collective nor distant from the nature of things because they have always mistakenly confused it with the requirements of their social order. Neither group is either distant from or close to nature. Nature has played only a provisional role in the political relations of Westerners among themselves and with others. It will play no further role, thanks to political ecology as it has finally been rethought so it could catch up with militant ecology. Moreover, if we take nature away, we have no more "others," no more "us." The poison of exoticism suddenly dissipates. Once we have exited from the great political diorama of "nature in general," we are left with only the banality of multiple associations of humans and nonhumans waiting for their unity to be provided by work carried out by the collective, which has to be specified through the use of the resources, concepts, and institutions of all peoples who may be called upon to live in common on an earth that might become, through a long work of collection, the same earth for all.

Everything now thus depends on the way we are going to characterize this work of collection. One of two things must be true: either the work has already been carried out, or else it remains to be done. All (political) epistemology and the *Naturpolitik* that follows affirm that, under the auspices of nature, this work has been, for the most part, *completed*; political ecology affirms, according to us, that the work *is just beginning*. To participate in the development of political institutions adapted to the exploration of the common world and the "same earth," anthropology must become *experimental**. What political choice does it actually face? Must it always retain multiculturalism against a background of unified nature that serves as its involuntary philosophy?

Since the seventeenth century, it has been common to distinguish between what things are in themselves independently of our knowledge of them, independently of the way they are experienced by a consciousness, and what are called *secondary qualities**. When we speak of atoms, particles, photons, or genes, we are designating primary qualities. When we speak of colors, odors, or lights, we are designating secondary qualities. Nothing is more innocuous than this distinction, at first glance. Yet we need only modify it very slightly to bring fully to light the political arrangement that it surreptitiously authorizes. The primary qualities in fact make up the *common world that we all share*. "We are all," we like to say, "equally made up of genes and neurons, proteins and hormones, in a universe of atoms, void, and energy." On the other hand, the secondary qualities divide us, because they refer to the specifics of our psyche, our languages, our cultures, or our paradigms. As a result, if we define politics*, as I have done, not as the conquest of power inside the Cave alone, but as the progressive composition of a common world* to share, we notice that the division between primary and secondary qualities has already done *the bulk of the political work*. When we enter a universe whose furnishings have been already defined, we know from the outset what we all have in common, what keeps us together. There remains what divides us, the secondary qualities, but this is not an essential division, because their inaccessible essences are located elsewhere, in the form of primary qualities that are, moreover, invisible.⁵⁶

Now we can see that if the anthropology of earlier times paid so much attention to the multiplicity of cultures, it is because it took universal nature as a given. If it could collect so many diversities, it is be-

cause anthropology could grab hold of them by getting them to detach themselves from a common background that had been unified in advance. There are thus two equally unstable solutions to this problem of unity: mononaturalism* and multiculturalism*. Mononaturalism is not at all self-evident; it is simply one of the possible solutions to an aborted experiment in constructing a common world: *one* nature, *a multiplicity* of cultures; unity in the hands of the exact sciences, multiplicity in the hands of the human sciences. Multiculturalism*, if it is more than a bogeyman conjured up to frighten small children, offers a different but equally premature solution to the exploration of the common world: not only are cultures diverse, but all can make equal claims to define reality in their own terms; they no longer stand out against a background of unified nature; each is incommensurable with the others; there is no longer any common world at all. On the one hand, an invisible world, but one that is visible to the eyes of scientists whose work remains hidden; on the other hand, a visible and perceptible world, but one that is inessential because it has been emptied of its essences. On the one hand, a world without value, since it corresponds to nothing experienced, but a world that alone is essential because it has to do with the real nature of phenomena; on the other hand, a world of values, but a world which is also worthless because it has access to no durable reality, even though it is the only world we experience subjectively. The solution of mononaturalism stabilizes nature at the risk of emptying the notion of culture of all substance and reducing it to mere representations; the solution of multiculturalism stabilizes the notion of culture at the risk of endangering the universality of nature and reducing it to an illusion. And it is this cockeyed arrangement that passes for good sense! To get the experimentation with a common world (which has been prematurely shut down by these two calamitous solutions) started up again, we shall have to avoid *both the notion of culture and the notion of nature*. This is what makes political ecology's use of the findings of anthropology so delicate, and may explain why it has refrained up to now from using them more fully.

A comparison will enable us to provide a better understanding of the instability into which we must not be afraid to enter in order to restore full meaning to what could be called politics *without* nature. Before feminism, the word "man" had the character of an unmarked cat-

egory, while "woman" was marked. By saying "man," one designated the totality of thinking beings without even thinking about it; by saying "woman," one marked the "female" as apart from *thinking beings*. No Westerner today would take the word "man" to be *unmarked*. "Male/female," "man/woman," "he/she": these terms have slowly taken the place of what was formerly self-evident. The two labels are both marked, coded, embodied. Neither can claim any longer to designate effortlessly and incontestably the universal on the basis of which the other remained an "other" eternally apart. Thanks to the immense work of the feminists, we now have access to conceptual institutions that allow us to mark the difference not between man and woman but between, on the one hand, the former pair made up of man, an unmarked category, and woman, a single marked category, and on the other hand the new and infinitely more problematic pair⁵⁷ made up of the two equally marked categories of man and woman. We can foresee without difficulty that the same thing will very soon hold true for the categories of nature and culture. For the moment, "nature" still has the resonance that "man" had twenty or forty years ago, as the unchallengeable, blinding, universal category against the background of which "culture" stands out clearly and distinctly, eternally particular. "Nature" is thus an unmarked category, while "culture" is marked. Now, however, through a movement just as vast in scope, political ecology proposes to do for nature what feminism undertook to do and is still undertaking to do for man: wipe out the ancient self-evidence with which it was taken a bit too hastily as if it were all there is.⁵⁸

What Successor for the Bicameral Collective?

With this first chapter, we have covered both the easiest and the most difficult ground. The easiest, because it was still only a matter of clearing away false problems before addressing the truly arduous questions of the new public institutions to be built. The most difficult, because we now know what concerns these new institutions have to address. If we have made a forced march across landscapes that merited a more leisurely pace, at least we have reached our base camp. The combined findings of science studies, political ecology, social sciences, and comparative anthropology, which we have sketched out in turn (and each of which, as I am well aware, would have warranted a much more ex-

tensive treatment), come together to raise one single question: *What collective can we convoke, now that we no longer have two houses, only one of which acknowledged its political character?* What new Constitution can replace the old one? As for the question "Must we have a politics that is oriented toward humans or one that also takes nature into account?" we now know that this is a false dichotomy, since, at least in the Western version of public life, the laws of nature and those of humans have always coexisted, each under threat from the other. We know, too, that today for the first time there is a credible alternative to this bicameral politics, since it is as implausible to assimilate the work of the sciences to Science as it is to reduce politics*—as the progressive composition of a common world—to the Cave politics of power and interests. Contrary to the cries of horror that the defenders of the old Constitution continue to emit (though with less and less effect), it is perfectly possible to speak of external reality without immediately confusing it with its hasty unification by a power that dares not bear that name and that still displays itself under the less and less protective cover of the epistemology police. Thus, for the first time we can remove the parentheses from that particular form of (political) philosophy born in the ages of the Cave and imagine its *successor* by speaking openly of political epistemology*, provided that we bring the sciences—and not Science—together with the question of the collective—and not with the social world understood as a prison.

Like all the results that we shall try to obtain, this one is extravagant only in appearance. Only its banality makes it difficult. More precisely, we have so little experience in *not* dramatizing the question of nature, *not* turning it into a gigantomachy, that we have trouble recognizing how simple it is to gain access to a not yet gathered multiplicity. The new distinction toward which we are being led, as we see it, by political ecology no longer divides nature from society, ecology from politics; instead, it separates two operations that we are going to learn to characterize in Chapter 3. One bears upon the multiplication of entities and the other on their composition, their arrangement. In other words, as we can see more clearly now, nonhumans are no longer objects at all, and no longer social constructions, either. Objects are not innocent inhabitants of the world: *the object was the nonhuman plus the polemic of nature imparting a lesson to the politics of subjects*. Once freed from this polemic, from this bifurcation of nature,⁵⁹ nonhumans are going to occupy an entirely different position.

All the canonical "big problems" of epistemology will appear henceforth only as mere martial arts demonstrations. There is a big difference between the isolated nonhuman tree that falls in the forest, and the object tree that falls in the forest to smash in the head of the idealist confronting the realist in a pub across from King's College! What can we say about the former? That it falls, and falls by itself. Nothing more, nothing less. It is the second that responds, polemically, to a *conflict of power* over the **respective** rights of nature **and** politics. Only the object finds itself **engaged** in the conflict of **loyalty** between the new pope and the new emperor— not the nonhuman. Nonhumans deserve much better than to play indefinitely the rather unworthy, somewhat vulgar role of object on the great stage of nature. Gravity, for example: sublime gravity, an admirable rhizome that transformed Europe and all heavy bodies starting in 1650, deserves much better than to serve as an irrefutable objection to the social constructivist who is supposed to claim he can jump out of the proverbial fifteenth-story window without getting hurt because he believes—or so his adversaries believe—in relativism! When will we grow up and stop frightening ourselves with such bugaboos? When will we finally be able to secularize nonhumans by ceasing to objectify them? When will we be able not to reduce matters of concern* to matters of fact? When will we manage at last to be faithful to the promises of empiricism?

By freeing nonhumans from the polemic of nature, we do not claim to be leaving them to themselves, unattainable, impregnable, unqualifiable, as if they occupied the quite unenviable position of "things in themselves." If we have to free them, we have to do so completely, and in particular from the blockade to which Kantianism sought to condemn them by depriving them of any possible relations with human assemblies. The social world is no more made up of subjects than nature is made up of objects. Since, thanks to political ecology, we can distinguish objects from nonhumans, we are going to be able, also thanks to political ecology, to distinguish humans from subjects: *the subject was the human caught up in the polemic of nature and courageously resisting objectivization by Science*. Subjects were supposed either to free themselves from nature in order to exercise their freedom or else to put their freedom in chains in order to reduce themselves finally to objects of nature.⁶⁰ But humans no longer have to make this choice that is imposed upon subjects. Once freed of what has been a veritable cold war, humans are going to take on a very different aspect, and, in-

stead of existing by themselves, they are going to be able to unroll the long chain of nonhumans, without which freedom would be out of the question.

As for the scientific disciplines, once they have been made visible, present, active, and agitated, while ceasing to be threatening, they are going to be able to deploy the formidable potential of the pluriverse that they have never had the opportunity to develop up to now, since they have been constantly crushed under the obligation to produce objects "of nature" as rapidly as possible, while avoiding "social constructions," in order to return to society as quickly as possible and reform it by means of unchallengeable reason. By loosening the mortal grip of epistemology and sociology, political ecology allows the scientific disciplines, freed of their task of (political) epistemology, to multiply the enclosures, the arenas, the laboratories by means of which humans and nonhumans—both newly liberated—associate. Science is dead; long live research and long live the sciences!

Everything remains to be done, but at least we have emerged from the Cave era! Public speech no longer lives under the permanent threat of salvation from on high that would invoke laws not made by human hands to short-circuit the procedures that allow us to define the common world. Surprise: when we abandon that ancient figure of reason, we are not abandoning either external reality or the sciences or even the future of reason. The old opposition between scientists and politicians, between Socrates and Callicles, between reason and power, yields from now on to a different and more fruitful opposition between the perennial quarrel opposing epistemologists to sophists, on the one hand, and the issue of the collective on the other hand. The old Constitution, invented to keep the prisoners of the Cave in captivity, has had ample time to roll out its effects; it is time now to make an effort to imagine a political philosophy for assemblages of humans and nonhumans. As we shall see in the following chapters, since Westerners have always governed, under cover of nature, with a two-house collective, we may as well do it right this time, explicitly, in the full light of day and *according to due process*.

How to Bring the Collective Together

The lengthy chapter preceding this one sought to make it clear that the terms "nature" and "society" do not designate domains of reality; instead, they refer to a quite specific form of public organization. Not everything is political, perhaps, but politics gathers everything together, so long as we agree to redefine politics as *the entire set of tasks* that allow the progressive composition of a common world*. Now, professional politicians are not the only ones who have taken on these tasks: for a long time, in the West, scientists have occupied a preponderant place, thanks to the kingly power they have held by natural right. Political philosophy, in spite of Hobbes, has never really understood the Gospel text according to which "every kingdom divided against itself is headed for ruin" (Matt. 12:25), for political philosophy has gone on focusing exclusively on the world of human politics, as if there were nothing the matter, leaving most questions to be sorted out elsewhere, in secret, out of court, in an assembly of nonhuman objects that were undertaking mysterious operations to decide what nature was made of and what sort of unity we humans formed with nature.

By dividing public life into two incommensurable houses, the old Constitution led only to paralysis, since it achieved only premature unity for nature and endless dispersion for cultures. The old Constitution thus finally resulted in the formation of *two equally illicit assemblies*: the first, brought together under the auspices of Science, was illegal, because it defined the common world without recourse to due process; the second was illegitimate by birth, since it lacked the reality of the things that had been given over to the other house and had to