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The Wild and the Domesticated

Henri Michaux was not yet thirty when he set off to the Andes to visit an Ecuadorian friend whom he had met in Paris. Fired by the temptation of adventure and despite his fragile health, in 1928 he decided to return to Paris by way of the rivers of Amazonia. This involved one month in a canoe, exposed to the rain and the mosquitoes, all the way along the River Napo as far as the Marañon, followed by three weeks of relative comfort on a small Brazilian steamer, traveling down the Amazon to reach its estuary. It was there, at Belém de Pará that he witnessed the following scene: "A young woman who was on our boat, coming from Manaus, went into town with us this morning. When she came upon the Grand Park (which is undeniably nicely planted) she emitted an easy sigh. 'Ah, at last, nature,' she said, but she was coming from the jungle."[1]

Indeed she was. For this citizen of Amazonia, the forest was no reflection of nature but a disturbing chaos into which she seldom ventured, a place resistant to all attempts to tame it and by no means conducive to aesthetic pleasure. The main park in Belém, with its rows of palm trees and its plots of mown grass planted with a succession of mango trees, gazebos, and stands of bamboo, guaranteed an alternative to the forest: tropical plants, to be sure, but ones tamed by human labor, testifying to culture's triumph over the forest wilderness. This taste for well-groomed landscapes is evident everywhere, as can be seen from the color prints that preside over all the reception rooms, hotels, and restaurants of the little towns of Amazonia. Walls blotched with humidity display nothing but alpine scenes showing flower-decked chalets, cottages snuggling into hedged farmland, or austere rows of yew trees in French-style gardens—all no doubt symbols of exoticism, but necessary contrasts to the excessive proximity of vegetation run riot.

Do we not all, like Michaux's fellow traveler, draw elementary distinctions in our environment according to whether or not it bears the marks of human action? Garden and forest, field and heath, cultivated terraces and shrubland, oasis and desert, village and bush: all are well-attested pairs that correspond to the opposition that geographers draw between ecumene and uninhabited space, that is, between places that humans daily frequent and those into which they more rarely venture.[2] So could it not be said that the absence, in many societies, of any notion similar to the modern idea of nature is simply of a semantic kind since, everywhere and always, people distinguish between what is domesticated and what is wild, between places deeply socialized and others that develop independently of human action? Provided one considers as cultural those portions of the environment that are modified by humans and as natural those that are not, the duality of nature and culture could be saved from the sin of ethnocentrism and even be established upon bases that are all the firmer because they are founded upon an experience of the world that is in principle accessible to all. Doubtless, for many people nature does not exist as an automatic ontological domain, but for them, whatever is wild would take the place of "nature," so they, like us, would be able to see a difference—a topographical one at least, between what stems from human beings and what does not.

Nomadic Spaces

Nothing is more relative than common sense, particularly when it is applied to the perception and use of inhabited spaces. In the first place, it is unlikely that the opposition between wild and domesticated can have been at all meaningful in the period prior to the Neolithic transition—that is to say, during the greater part of human history. And although access to the mindset of our Paleolithic ancestors is difficult, we can at least consider the manner in which hunter-gatherers of our time live within their environment. Subsisting on plants and animals over whose reproduction and numbers they have no control, they tend to move around in accordance with the fluctuations of resources that are sometimes abundant but often distributed in an unequal fashion in different places and in different seasons. Thus, the Netsilik Eskimos, who lead a nomadic life covering several hundreds of kilometers to the northwest of Hudson Bay, divide up their year into at least five or six different stages. In late winter and spring, they hunt the seals in the frozen sea; in summer, they catch fish by building weirs across the rivers of the interior; in early autumn, they hunt caribou in the tundra; and in October, they catch fish through holes cut in the ice covering the recently frozen rivers.[3] Of course, all

this involves vast migrations that require the Eskimos, at regular intervals, to familiarize themselves with new spots or else to revert to former habits and places remembered from past visits. At the opposite climatic extreme, the margin of maneuver for the !Kung San of Botswana is more restricted, for in the arid Kalahari environment, they depend on access to water to establish somewhere to live. For them, the collective mobility of the Eskimos is not an option, so each group tends to settle close to a place with permanent access to water. But individuals are constantly on the move, circulating between the various camps, and so spend much of their lives moving to unfamiliar places , of which they have to learn all the nooks and crannies.[4] That is also the case of the BaMbuti Pygmies of the Ituri forest: even though each group successively sets up camp within a particular known territory, the boundaries of which are generally recognized, the composition of their group and their hunting parties constantly changes in the course of a year.[5]

Whether in an equatorial forest or in the Far North, in the deserts of southern Africa or the center of Australia, in all these so-called marginal zones, which for a long time nobody even thought of claiming from their hunting peoples, the same relations between those peoples and the places they frequent always predominate. Their occupation of the space does not spread out from any fixed point. Instead, it comes about through a network of itineraries marked out and punctuated by more or less ad hoc and more or less recurrent stopping places. As Mauss noticed with regard to the Eskimos as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, most hunter-gatherer peoples divide their annual cycle into two phases: a period of dispersion in small teams on the move and a briefer period during which they all gather at a site that affords them the opportunity for a more intense social life and for performing great collective rituals.[6] It would nevertheless be unrealistic to consider this temporary gathering to resemble village life, that is, as a center regularly reactivated in order for them to impose their domination over the surrounding territory. No doubt the surroundings are familiar and are each time rediscovered with pleasure, but their renewed occupation does not turn such areas into domesticated spaces that stand in contrast to the wild disorder of the places that the people visit during the rest of the year.

Because it is constantly revisited and resocialized, the environment of hunter-gatherers at every turn bears the traces of events that have unfolded there and that revivify old continuities right down to the present. In the first place, there are traces of an individual nature that shape a person's existence by enfolding him or her in a multitude of associated memories: the remains, sometimes scarcely visible, of an abandoned camp; a combe, a striking tree, or a bend in the river that calls to mind the site of the pursuit of some animal

or the lying in wait for one; the familiarity of the spot where one was initiated, married, or gave birth; the place where a relative passed away (which, in many cases, is now to be avoided). But these signs do not stand on their own as constant witnesses that stamp their mark upon space. At most, they constitute fleeting signatures of biographical trajectories legible only to whoever left them there and by the circle of those who share his or her intimate memory of the recent past. However, it is true that certain striking features of the environment are sometimes given an autonomous identity that endows them with the same significance for everyone. Such is the case in central Australia, where peoples such as the Warlpiri see in the relief and accidental features of the terrain—hills, clusters of rocks, salt marshes, or streams—traces left by the activities and peregrinations of ancestral beings that, through metamorphosis, became components of the landscape.[7] However, these sites are not petrified temples or centers for civic activities; rather, they are an imprint left by the passing, in "dream times," of the creators of beings and things. They only acquire meaning when they are linked together in the itineraries that the Aboriginals constantly repeat, superimposing the ephemeral marks of their own passing upon the more tangible ones left by their ancestors. That is likewise the function of the cairns that the Inuit build in the Canadian Arctic. These heaps of stones indicate a site once inhabited or perhaps a tomb or a place for hunters to wait for caribou, and they are built in such a way as to suggest, from a distance, the silhouette of an upright man. Their function is not to tame the landscape but to call to mind former journeys and to serve as landmarks for current travelers.

To claim that hunter-gatherers perceive their environment as a "wilderness"—in contrast to a domesticity that one would be hard put to define—is to deny that they are aware that, in the course of time, they modify the local ecology by their techniques of subsistence. Over recent years, for example, Aboriginals have been protesting to the Australian government against its use of the term "wilderness" to qualify the territories that they occupy and by so doing frequently justifying the creation of natural reserves that they do not want. The notion of a "wilderness," with all its connotations of *terra nullius*, of an original and preserved naturalness, an ecosystem to be protected against the degradations liable to be introduced by human beings, certainly runs contrary to the Aboriginals' own concept of the environment and the multiple relations that they have established with it, and above all it ignores the subtle transformations that they have produced in it. As a leader of the Jawoyn of the Northern Territory said, when part of their land was converted into a natural reserve, "Nitmiluk national park is not a wilderness . . . , it is a human artefact. It is a land constructed by us over tens of thousands of years

through our ceremonies and ties of kinship, through fire and through hunting."[8] Clearly, for the Aboriginals, as for other hunting peoples, the opposition between wild and domesticated is not very meaningful, not only because of their lack of domesticated animals but above all because they inhabit the entire environment as a spacious and familiar dwelling place, rearranged to suit successive generations with such discretion that the touch of its inhabitants becomes almost imperceptible.

Nevertheless, domestication does not necessarily imply a radical change of perspective, provided the society remains a mobile one. At least, that is what is suggested by the way that space is apprehended by itinerant herdsmen, who, in this respect, present more affinities with hunter-gatherers than with many sedentary livestock raisers. Admittedly, real examples of nomadism have become rare over the past couple of centuries, during which sedentary communities have expanded while herding ones have diminished. However, one example is provided by the Peuls Wodaabe, who remain on the move throughout the year, with their herds, in the Nigerian Sahel.[9] The range of their movements certainly varies: more restricted in dry seasons, when they circulate around the wells and markets of the Hausa area, pasturing their herds on the edges of agricultural land; but more extensive in the winter months, when they undertake a great migration to the rich grasslands of the Azawak and the Tadess. They live in no fixed homes but in all seasons are content with an uncovered enclosure within a semicircular thorny hedge, an ephemeral shelter that is hardly distinguishable from the landscape of stunted bushes of the surrounding steppe.[10]

This model of annual transhumance is the norm in many regions of the world. The Basseri tribe of southern Iran moves en masse northward in the spring and erects its tents in the alpine regions of the Kuh-i-bul for the summer. In the autumn, it returns to pass the winter among the bare hills to the south of the town of Lar. The journey away and the journey back each take between two and three months.[11] During the migrations, the campsites change almost every day, but the groups of tents are less mobile in the summer and the winter, and this is the time when family altercations tend to come to the fore and provoke some groups to split away. Close on fifteen thousand people and several hundreds of thousands of animals—mainly sheep and goats—are involved in these migrations within a band of territory five hundred kilometers long and sixty or so kilometers wide. The Basseri consider the transhumance route, known as the *il-rah*, to be their property, recognized by local populations and the authorities alike as a package of rights conceded to the nomads: the right to pass along routes and over uncultivated land, the right

to pasture their herds outside cultivated fields, and the right to draw water everywhere except from private wells.

This way of occupying space has been interpreted as an example of the sharing of a territory by two distinct societies, the one nomadic, the other sedentary.[12] But one may also regard the *il-rah* system along the lines of the Australian model, that is to say as an appropriation of certain itineraries within an environment over which the nomads do not seek to exercise any control. The life of the group and the memory of its identity are attached not so much to an expanse conceived as a whole but, rather, to the unique features that, year after year, mark out the group's journeys. Such an attitude is shared by many nomadic herdsmen in Sahelian and Nilotic Africa, the Middle East, and central Asia. It seems to exclude any clear-cut opposition between a human home and an environment that is self-perpetuating and beyond any human intervention. So distinctions in the treatment and classification of animals according to whether or not they are dependent on humans do not necessarily involve a distinction between what is wild and what is domesticated in peoples' perception and use of places.

But it might be objected that such a dichotomy could well be imposed upon nomads from outside. Whether or not they possess and raise animals or subsist mainly as hunters or, more usually, gatherers, plenty of itinerant peoples find themselves faced with the need to come to some agreement with sedentary communities, whose land and villages manifestly differ from their own nomadic mode of occupying the space. Such perennial sites may be stages in the nomads' itinerary that need to be negotiated or, where the herdsmen are concerned, market towns; or they may be peripheral zones in which to engage in barter, as in the case of Pygmies, who exchange their game for the cultivated products of their farming neighbors; or they may become temporary rallying points, as in the case of the early Christian missions among the Yaghan and the Ona of the Tierra del Fuego or the trading posts for the people of the Canadian Arctic and subarctic.[13] However, whether such sites are to be found adjacent to zones where nomadic peoples pass or constitute enclaves within these zones, they never provide models of domesticity for the nomads, for the values and rules observed in those zones are so very different from their own. And if, in such cases, one persisted in preserving the opposition between "the wild" and "the domesticated," it would, absurdly and paradoxically, be necessary to reverse the meanings of those terms: the "wild" spaces such as the forest, the tundra, the steppes—all habitats that are as familiar to them as the intimate nooks and corners of our own birthplaces are to us—would be classed by nomadic peoples on the side of what is domesticated, in

contrast to the stable, but hardly friendly places where the nomads are not always well received.

The Garden and the Forest

Let us now cross over into cultivated land, to see whether the opposition between "wild" and "cultivated" makes more sense among people whose agricultural labor forces them to lead a relatively sedentary life.

Such is the case of the Achuar, already mentioned in chapter 1. In contrast to nomadic or transhumant people, these horticulturists of the upper Amazon do remain in the same place for quite long periods (ten to fifteen years, on average). It is not soil exhaustion that forces them to go and settle on a new site but dwindling supplies of game in the vicinity and the need to reconstruct their houses, which have a limited life span. Evidently, the Achuar are very experienced in the cultivation of plants, as can be seen from the diversity of species that prosper in their gardens (as many as a hundred in the best-stocked ones) and the great number of stable varieties within the principal species: twenty or so kinds of sweet potato and as many of manioc and bananas.[14] It is also significant that cultivated plants occupy such an important place in Achuar mythology and ritual; and the subtlety of the agronomic knowledge manifested by the women is remarkable, for it is they who are incontestably in charge in the realm of the garden.

Archaeology confirms the great antiquity of plant cultivation in the region, for it was in a lake in the foothills of the Andes and close to the present habitat of the Achuar that the first traces of maize in the Amazon basin were found; they date from over five thousand years ago.[15] No one knows if this was an independent center of domestication; but several tropical tubers widely used today originated from the lowlands of South America, where the earliest occupants have had several millennia of experience in the raising of cultivated species.[16] All the indications thus suggest that the contemporary Achuar are heirs to a long tradition of experimentation with plants the appearance and genetic characteristics of which have been modified to such a degree that their forest ancestors are no longer identifiable. Furthermore, these expert gardeners organize their living space according to a concentric pattern of division that immediately evokes the familiar opposition between the domesticated and the wild. Given that the Achuar habitat is widely dispersed, each house is set in the middle of a vast cleared area that is cultivated and weeded with meticulous care and is surrounded by a confused mass of forest, which is the domain of hunting and gathering. All the ingredients of the classic dichotomy would seem to be well and truly in place: an orderly center versus its

forest periphery, intensive horticulture versus extensive foraging, and a stable and abundant source of supplies within a domesticated environment versus the chancy resources offered by the forest.

However, such an impression certainly turns out to be illusory once one embarks on a detailed examination of the discourse and practices of the Achuar. In their gardens, they cultivate both domesticated species, that is to say those whose reproduction depends on humans, and also wild species transplanted from the forest, for the most part fruit trees and palms. Yet their botanical taxonomy makes no distinction between the two groups in the garden and, apart from the weeds, all the plants present in a cleared plot are classed as *aramu* (that which is placed in the earth). This term qualifies all plants manipulated by humans and applies both to domesticated species and also to those that are simply acclimatized. The latter may also be called *ikiamia* (of the forest), but only when they are found in their original setting. So the epithet *aramu* does not denote "domesticated plants." Rather, it refers to the particular relationship that links humans and plants in the gardens, whatever the origin of those plants. Nor is the adjective *ikiamia* equivalent to "wild," in the first place because, depending on the context in which it is found, a plant may lose that quality but also and above all because, in truth, the plants "of the forest" are likewise cultivated. They are cultivated by a spirit called Shakaim, whom the Achuar represent as the official forest gardener and whose benevolence and advice they seek before clearing a new plot of land. Furthermore, the layered vegetation of a garden that, in an expert disorder, intermingles fruit trees with palms and manioc bushes with ground-covering plants evokes in miniature the trophic structure of the forest.[17] This classic organization of polycultural swiddens in the tropical belt makes it possible, at least for a while, to offset the destructive effects of torrential rains and high temperature on soils of no more than mediocre fertility. No doubt the efficacy of such protection has been overestimated; all the same, each time they create a garden, the Achuar are fully conscious of substituting their own plantations for those of Shakaim.[18] The terminological pair *aramu* and *ikiamia* thus in no way covers an opposition between the domesticated and the wild. Rather, it applies to the contrast between plants that are cultivated by humans and those that are cultivated by spirits.

The Achuar draw a similar distinction within the animal kingdom. Their houses are enlivened by a whole menagerie of tamed animals: birds that were taken out of their nests and the young of hunted animals, which hunters take in when they have killed the little ones' mother. The young are placed in the care of the women, who nourish them by hand or even at the breast while they are still incapable of feeding themselves, and they soon adapt to their

new lifestyle. Very few species, even among the felines, are really resistant to cohabiting with humans. These animal companions are seldom restrained and hardly ever maltreated. And, in any event, they are never eaten, not even when they die a natural death. They are said to be *tanku*, an adjective that might be translated "tamed" or "acclimatized to humans." The term can also be used as a noun that corresponds well enough to the English "pet." So one would say of a young peccary foraging close to the house, "That is so-and-so's *tanku*." But although *tanku* may evoke domesticity, that is to say socialization within the house, it does not correspond to our usual idea of domestication, for the Achuar never try to get their pets to reproduce and establish stable lineages. The term designates a transitory situation that cannot be opposed to a possible "wild" state, particularly since animals may also be tamed in their original state, but by spirits. The Achuar say that the beasts of the forest are the *tanku* of the spirits, which watch over their well-being and protect them from excessive hunting. So what differentiates forest animals from the animals that the Indians become attached to, as companions, is not at all an opposition between wildness and domestication but the fact that some animals are raised by spirits while others are temporarily tended by humans.

The idea of distinguishing places according to whether or not they are transformed by human labor is equally ill-founded. To be sure, in the early days of my stay among the Achuar, I was myself struck by the contrast between the welcoming freshness of their houses and the inhospitable luxuriance of the nearby forest, which I hesitated for a long time to enter alone. But it was simply that I brought to the situation a view reflecting my inbuilt city dweller's attitudes. It was not long before my observation of Achuar practices taught me to see things differently. The fact is that the Achuar mark out their space by means of a series of barely perceptible small concentric discontinuities rather than a head-on opposition between, on the one hand, the house and its garden and, on the other, the forest.

The area of beaten earth immediately adjacent to the dwelling is a natural prolongation of the latter and is the scene of many domestic activities. But it already marks a transition to the garden, for it is there that separate bushes of chili peppers, annatto, and genipapo are planted, along with most of the medicinal herbs and poison-bearing plants. The actual garden, which is the unchallenged territory of the women, is itself partly contaminated by forest behavior: it is the favorite hunting ground for Achuar boys, who keep a lookout for birds at which they can shoot using their little blowpipes. The men, too, lay traps here to catch the plump rodents with delicate, juicy flesh—pacas, agoutis, and agouchis—that nightly invade the garden to root up tubers. Within a radius of one or two hours' walk from the edge of the cleared area,

the forest is used as a vast orchard, constantly visited by the women and children to gather berries, collect palm-tree grubs, or catch fish by asphyxiating them in the streams and small lakes. It is an intimately known domain where every fruit tree and palm is periodically visited in the appropriate season. Beyond it, the true hunting zone begins, where the women and children venture only when accompanied by their menfolk. However, it would be mistaken to see this outer ring as the equivalent of an external wilderness—for a hunter knows every inch of the territory in which he roams almost daily and to which he is linked by a multitude of memories. The animals that he encounters there are, for him, not wild beasts but beings that are almost human and that he must seduce and cajole in order to draw them out of the grasp of the spirits that protect them. It is in this great garden cultivated by Shakaim that the Achuar set up their hunting lodges, simple shelters sometimes surrounded by a few plantations, which they visit at regular intervals to spend a few days there with their families. I was always struck by the happy, carefree atmosphere in those encampments, which resembled that of a holiday in a rural cottage more than a bivouac in the depths of a hostile forest. Whoever is surprised by that comparison should bear in mind that Indians get bored with their all-too-familiar environment and, deep in the forest, they enjoy a little change of scene, just as we enjoy a break in the countryside. Clearly, the deep forest is hardly less socialized than the Achuar house with its cultivated surroundings. In the eyes of the Achuar, from the point of view of these visits to it and the principles of existence that obtain there, it bears no resemblance to a wilderness.

There is nothing extraordinary about regarding the forest as one does a garden when one reflects that some Amazonian peoples are fully aware that their cultural practices exert a direct influence upon the distribution and reproduction of wild plants. Until quite recently, this phenomenon of an indirect human impact on the forest ecosystem was unrecognized. Now, though, it has been well described in the studies that William Balée has devoted to the historical ecology of the Ka'apor of Brazil.[19] Thanks to his meticulous work of identifying and counting the plants, he has been able to establish that the clearings abandoned forty or more years ago are twice as rich in useful forest species than adjacent portions of the primeval forest that are, at first sight, almost indistinguishable from them. Like the Achuar, the Ka'apor plant in their gardens many nondomesticated plants that then flourish on the fallow land, to the detriment of the cultivated plants, which, when uncared for, soon disappear. The clearings still in use or abandoned only recently also attract predatory animals, which, by defecating there, disseminate the seeds of the forest plants that they have consumed. The Ka'apor claim that agoutis

are largely responsible for spreading copal and several kinds of palms, while capuchin monkeys have introduced wild cocoa and various species of *inga*. As generations pass and the cycle of the renewal of the clearings proceeds, a by no means negligible portion of the forest is converted into an orchard, the artificial character of which the Ka'apor recognize, although they have done nothing deliberate to effect this. The Indians are also skilled at calculating the effects of former fallow land upon hunting. The zones with a high concentration of edible forest plants are more frequented by animals, and in the long term this affects the demography and distribution of game. This fashioning of the forest ecosystem, which has been going on over thousands of years in large parts of Amazonia, has no doubt contributed considerably to justifying the idea that the jungle is a space as domesticated as the gardens. It is true that to cultivate the forest, even by accident, is to leave one's mark on the environment, but unlike a humanly organized landscape, it does not rearrange it in such a way that the legacy of humans is immediately detectable. What with periodically shifted habitats, itinerant horticulture, and low population density, in contemporary Amazonia everything combines to prevent the most manifest signs of the occupation of a site from remaining detectable.[20]

A very different situation prevails among certain horticulturist peoples in the highlands of New Guinea. For example, in the Mount Hagen region, the fertility of the soils has allowed intensive exploitation of fallow land and a high density of inhabitation: among the Melpa, density may rise as high as one hundred and twenty inhabitants to every square kilometer whereas, among the Achuar, it is lower than two inhabitants to every ten square kilometers.[21] The valley floors and hillsides are covered by an uninterrupted mosaic of enclosed gardens, arranged like a checkerboard and leaving only the steepest slopes covered by a thin forest. As for the hamlets, each composed of four or five houses, they are almost all within sight of neighboring ones.[22] This is an organized area, appropriated and developed in every nook and cranny, where clan territories with well-defined boundaries fit alongside one another almost in the manner of hedged farmland. All in all, the arrangement presents a tangible contrast to the residual thickets that sprawl across the mountain slopes.

Yet the inhabitants of the Hagen region seem indifferent to this perception of their landscape, as is shown by an article by Marilyn Strathern unequivocally entitled, "No Nature, No Culture."[23] It is true that people in this region use a terminological pair that may be reminiscent of the opposition between the domesticated and the wild. *Mbo* qualifies cultivated plants while *rømi* refers to everything outside the sphere of human intervention, in particular the world of the spirits. But this semantic distinction no more covers a clear-cut

dualism than does the difference between *aramu* and *ikiamia* among the Achuar. As in Amazonia, certain *rømi* spirits afford the forest plants and animals care and protection but allow humans to use them, on certain conditions. The "wild" fauna and flora are thus just as domesticated as the pigs, sweet potatoes, and yams upon which the people of Mount Hagen essentially depend for their subsistence. If the term *mbo* refers to the cultivation of plants, that is because it denotes one particular aspect of it, namely the act of planting. It is associated with the concrete image of placing in the ground, rooting, even autochthony, and in no way evokes the transformation or deliberate reproduction of living things controlled by humans. Nor does the contrast between *mbo* and *rømi* have any spatial dimension. Most of the clan territories incorporate portions of the forest that are appropriated socially according to generally recognized rules. It is there, in particular, that domesticated pigs forage in search of food, under the benevolent eye of spirits that watch over their safety. In short, and despite the strong control that the Mount Hagen inhabitants exercise over their environment, they do not see themselves as surrounded by a "natural environment." Their way of envisaging space in no way suggests that their inhabited places have been wrested from the wild domain.[24]

Admittedly, you could say that the intensification of the techniques of subsistence helps to crystallize the sense of a contrast between a durably organized center of activity and a seldom-frequented periphery. But to be conscious of a discontinuity between portions of space used for different social practices in no way implies that some domains are therefore perceived to be "wild." This emerges clearly from Peter Dwyer's comparison between the customs and representations of the environment in three horticulturist tribes of the highlands of New Guinea, chosen for the degree of the human impact on their ecosystem and for the extent to which they use forest resources as food.[25] The Kubo are a truly woodland people, with a density of population lower than one inhabitant per square kilometer, for whom an opposition between the inhabited center and whatever lies beyond is the more meaningless given that people sleep in little shelters in the forest as often as they do within the village. Spirits, in particular the souls of the dead embodied in animals, coexist everywhere with the humans. One hundred or so kilometers away, the Etolo leave a more consequential mark on their environment: their gardens are bigger and they cultivate pandanus orchards and establish permanent traplines. Their demographic density is in some places fifteen times greater than that of the Kubo. Their spiritual geography is also more clearly defined: the souls of the dead reside initially in birds, then in the fish that migrate to the outer edges of their territory. The Siane, finally, have profoundly and durably modified their habitat. They are decidedly sedentary, engage in intensive horticulture and the

raising of pigs, and seldom visit the residual forests that cling to the mountains. Their spirits are less immanent and more realistic than those of the Kubo and the Etolo. They adopt their own particular kinds of appearances, are relegated to inaccessible places, and only communicate with humans using messenger-birds or ritual objects as go-betweens.

If we regard these three examples as so many stages in a process of an increasingly intensified use of cultivated resources, there can be little doubt that a growing transformation of the forest environment surrounding their centers of habitation goes hand in hand with the emergence of a peripheral sector that is increasingly alien to ordinary social relations both among humans and between humans and nonhumans. Nevertheless, Dwyer establishes that there is nothing in either the vocabulary or the attitudes of these peoples to warrant any inference that these increasingly marginal spaces are considered to be “wild,” even among the Siane, whose demographic density is only half as great as that of the inhabitants of Mount Hagen.[26]

The Field and the Rice Paddy

Readers may consider that the peoples of the highlands of New Guinea do not present the most telling example of a complete domestication of the environment. Even intensive, horticulture in clearings requires more or less lengthy periods of letting the land lie fallow, during which the woodland vegetation colonizes the gardens for a while, creating a periodic intrusion that blurs the frontiers separating the spaces affected by human influence from their forest margins. A vast and dense network of permanent fields where nothing intrudes to call to mind the disorder of uncultivated zones would doubtless render a manifest polarity between the wild and the domesticated more detectable. Such is the case of the alluvial plains and the loess plateaus of eastern Asia and the Indian subcontinent, which, long before the Christian era, were exploited for cereal cultivation. For whole millennia, all the way from the Ganges plain in India to the area bordering the Yellow River, millions of peasants have cleared, irrigated, and drained the land, taming watercourses and enriching the soil and thereby profoundly modifying the aspect of those regions.

In fact, the languages of the great eastern civilizations quite clearly mark the difference between places over which humans exercise control and those that elude their power. Mandarin Chinese distinguishes between *yě*, the zone extending beyond the cultivated periphery of built-up areas, and *jiā tíng*, the domesticated space. Through its etymology, the former term evokes the notion of a threshold, a limit, an interface, and denotes the wild nature of not

only places but also plants and animals. *Jiā tíng* refers more strictly to the domesticity of a family unit and is not used for domesticated plants and animals.[27] Japanese also establishes an opposition between *sato*, "the inhabited place," and *yama*, "the mountain," which is perceived not so much as a relief elevation that contrasts with the plain but rather as the archetype of an uninhabited space, comparable to the original meaning of the French or English "desert."[28] In Sanskrit, a rural inhabited space also seems clearly separated from a periphery that has not been transformed by humans. The term *jāṅgala* designates uninhabited land and becomes synonymous with the "wild place" of classical Hindi, while *atavī*, "the forest," refers not so much to a formation of plants but rather to places occupied by barbarian tribes—that is, the opposite of "civilization." It stands in opposition to *janapada*, the cultivated countryside, the terrain where *grāmya* beings, those "of the village" are to be found, including domesticated animals.[29] Yet when one considers the ways in which these semantically distinguished spaces are perceived and used, one is bound to see that in China, India, and Japan, it is hard to discover any dichotomy of "wild" and "domesticated" comparable to that which the Western world has forged. It is hardly surprising that in Asia a distinction is drawn between places that are inhabited and those that are not; but whether that distinction covers a hard and fast opposition between two systems of mutually exclusive values seems more doubtful.

The subjective geography of ancient China seems governed by a major contrast between town and mountain. The town, with its checkerboard layout, is symbolically associated with the cardinal points in an image of the cosmos and is at the same time the center that appropriates the agricultural terrain and the seat of political power. On the other hand, the main purpose of the mountain, a place of asceticism and exile, seems to be to provide pictorial representation with its favorite theme.[30] However, that opposition is less clear-cut than it appears. In the Daoist tradition, the mountain is the dwelling place of the Immortals, elusive beings that merge with the slopes and lend a palpable dimension to the sacred domain. Time spent on the mountain, in particular by scholars, is prompted by a quest for immortality, the most prosaic aspect of which is the collection of herbal remedies ensuring longevity. Furthermore, as Augustin Berque has suggested, the aestheticization of the mountain in Chinese landscape painting may be seen as a kind of recognition of spiritual characteristics that run parallel to agriculture's practical use of the plains.[31] Far from constituting a disorganized space devoid of any civilization, the mountain—the domain of deities and an expression of their essence—provides a necessary complement to the city and village world.

Nor is the town dissociated from the hinterland, even in its most distant

reaches, for its situation and the arrangement of its houses are dictated in the smallest details by a kind of space-physiology, *fengshui*, imperfectly rendered in English and French by the term "geomancy." Daoism teaches that a cosmic breath, *qi*, irradiates throughout China from the Kunlun mountain chain, circulating along lines of force comparable to the veins that irrigate the human body. Hence, it is crucial to determine, by divination, the most favorable sites for human habitation and the ways to dispose houses so that they fit in with this network of energy that is deployed throughout the Middle Empire. If it is well situated, well built, and well governed, a Chinese town is in harmony with the world, which—to borrow an expression of Marcel Granet's—"is itself in order only when it is enclosed the way that a house is."[32] The wild thus appears to exert little purchase upon this cosmos so densely regulated by social conventions. And if Chinese thought does recognize that obscure forces that offer an enigmatic resistance to civilization exist, it relegates them to its own domain's periphery, where barbarians live.

In Japan likewise, the mountain is par excellence the space that stands in contrast to terrains in the plain. Symmetrical volcanic cones, thickly forested mountains, and rugged crags can everywhere be seen from the valleys and hollows, imposing their background of verticality upon the flat fields and dykes. But the distinction between *yama*, the mountain, and *sato*, the inhabited place, signals not so much a reciprocal exclusion but, rather, a seasonal alternation and a spiritual complementarity.[33] The gods shift regularly from one zone to another. In the spring, they descend from the mountains and become deities of the rice paddies. Then, in the autumn, they make the return journey to their "interior shrine" (*okumiya*), usually some topographical feature, their true home, where they are believed to have originated. A local deity (*kami*) thus proceeds from the mountain and, within the sacred arc, each year undertakes a journey by which it alternates between the sanctuary of the fields and the sanctuary of the mountains, at the center of a kind of itinerant domestic cult that blurs the boundary between what is within the village domain and what lies beyond it. As early as the twelfth century, the sacred dimension of the mountain solitudes had made them the preferred sites for Buddhist monastic communities, to such a degree that the character signifying "mountain" also served to designate monasteries.[34] And although it may be true that in about the same period in the West, the brothers of the order of Saint Benedict had long since fled the world in order to establish themselves in isolated places, it was as much in order to clear the forest and exorcize its wildness by dint of human labor as the better to rise toward God through prayer.[35] This was altogether different from the situation in Japan, where monastic life was lived in the mountains not so as to transform them

but, by walking there and contemplating their sites, to experience a fusion with the sensible dimension of the landscape that constituted one of the guarantees of salvation.

A Japanese mountain is neither a space to conquer nor the seat of a disturbing otherness, so it is not really perceived as "wild," although it may, paradoxically, become so when its vegetation is totally domesticated. In many regions of the archipelago the forests growing on primeval slopes were replaced, following World War II, by industrial plantations of native conifers, mainly Japanese cypresses and *sugi* cedars. For the inhabitants of the mountain villages, the old forest with its deciduous or glossy-leaved species had been a place where harmony and beauty were enhanced by the presence of deities (as well as by a store of resources that were of use to the domestic economy). However, the plantations of resinous trees that replaced it evoke nothing but disorder, sadness, and disorganization.[36] Badly cared for, taking over fields and clearings, and having lost much of their economic value, these "black trees" growing in monotonous serried ranks are now beyond the social and technical control of those who planted them. The mountain is *yama*; the forest is *yama*; uninhabited places are *yama*. The same term is used in all three cases. But although it is wholly domesticated, this artificial mountain forest has become a moral and economic desert; in short, it is much more "wild" than the natural forest that it replaced.

In ancient India the status of places is more complex, for terminological reasons that Francis Zimmermann has illuminatingly explained.[37] In Sanskrit texts, *jāngala*, from which the Anglo-Indian "jungle" is derived, has two main meanings. First, it is, as noted above, an uninhabited place long abandoned and fallow. But—and this is the first paradox—*jāngala* also designates dry land—that is to say, the exact opposite of what "jungle" has evoked for us ever since Kipling. So, in its ancient meaning, a jungle was not an exuberant wet forest. Instead, the word designated semiarid thorny steppes, sparsely wooded savannas, or thin woods of deciduous trees. It thus stood in opposition to marshy land, *anūpa*, characterized by water-loving vegetation: rain forests, mangroves, swamps. The contrast between *jāngala* and *anūpa* reflects a strong polarity in cosmology, in medical doctrines, and in plant and animal taxonomy: dry terrains are valued because they are healthy, fertile, and peopled by Aryans, while marshy terrains appear as unhealthy margins where non-Aryan tribes take refuge. Each type of landscape constitutes a separate ecological community defined by emblematic animal and plant species and by a cosmic physiology that is peculiar to it. Hence a second paradox. How can an uninhabited, apparently "wild" zone also be the seat par excellence of virtues associated with agricultural civilization? Quite simply, because the

jungle represents not only a geographical unit but also a potentiality. It was dry terrain that, thanks to irrigation, was colonized, and it was *in the heart of* those uncultivated but fertile regions that Aryan peasants organized their terrains, leaving to peripheral tribes the use of marshy land that was both impenetrable and waterlogged. The contrast between *jāngala* and *anūpa* thus takes the form of a dialectic involving three terms, one of which remains implicit. Upon the opposition between marshy land, the domain of barbarians, and dry land, claimed by Aryans, is superimposed an overarching notion that makes the jungle a space that, although unoccupied, is available, a place devoid of human beings but imbued with the values and promise of civilization. This twofold view prevents the *jāngala* from being considered a wild place that is in need of socialization, since it is virtually inhabited anyway and encompasses, as a project or ultimate possibility, cultural energies that will here find conditions favorable to their development. Meanwhile, marshy land is not wild either: it is simply lacking in attraction and fit only to shelter a few peripheral specimens of humanity in its bushy darkness.

Piling up examples has never constituted a proof, but examples do at least make it possible to cast doubt on a number of established certainties. It now seems clear that, in many regions of our planet, contrasting perceptions of beings and places, depending on their greater or lesser proximity to the world of humans, coincides hardly at all with the body of meanings and values that, in the West, have become attached to the two poles represented by "the wild" and "the domesticated." Unlike the many forms of gradual discontinuity or encompassment whose traces are to be found elsewhere in agricultural societies, those two notions are mutually exclusive and acquire their full meaning only when they are related to each other in a complementary opposition.

Ager and *Silva*

Anything "wild" in Romance languages (*sauvage*, *selvaje*, *selvaggio*, and so on) comes from the *silva*, the great European forest that Roman colonization was gradually to erode. The *silva* is an uncultivated space to be cleared; a place for the beasts and plants found there and the rough peoples who inhabit it, for individuals seeking refuge from the laws of the city, and, hence, for those possessed of fierce temperaments and who are recalcitrant to the discipline of social life. However, although these various attributes of wildness no doubt derive from the characteristics attributed to a very particular environment, they form a coherent whole only because they are set, term for term, in opposition to the positive qualities affirmed in domesticated life.

These are deployed in the *domus*, not a geographical unit as the *silva* is, but an environment for living, originally involving agricultural exploitation, in which, under the authority of the paternal head of the family and the protection of the household deities, women, children, slaves, animals, and plants all found conditions that favored the realization of their true natures. Laboring in the fields, raising children, training animals, and dividing up tasks and responsibilities all combined to set humans and nonhumans under the same hierarchical regime of subordination, the perfect model of which was provided by relations within an extended family. The Romans bequeathed to us the values associated with this antithetical pair that was to gain increasing acceptability along with the terminology to express it. For the discovery of other forests, in other latitudes, was to enrich the initial dichotomy without altering its range of meaning. The Tupinamba of Brazil and the Indians of New France would take the place of the Germans and the Britons described by Tacitus, while domestication would undergo a change of scale and turn into civilization.[38] It might be said that this slippage of meaning and periods opened up the possibility of the inversion that Montaigne and Rousseau were to exploit: now, what was wild could be good and what was civilized could be bad, with the former embodying the virtues of an ancient simplicity of which the latter had been deprived though the corruption of its mores. But we should remember that that rhetorical ploy was not exactly new (Tacitus himself had resorted to it) and that, besides, it does nothing to undermine the interplay of reciprocal meanings that make the "wild" and the "domesticated" mutually interdependent.

Possibly because they ignore the impossibility of thinking of one of the terms in that opposition without thinking of the other, some authors tend to turn the "wild" into a universal dimension of the psyche, a kind of archetype that humans have progressively suppressed and pushed aside as their mastery over nonhumans increased. That is the case of the scenario proposed by the environmental philosopher Max Oelschlaeger in his voluminous history of the idea of wilderness. According to him, the Paleolithic hunter-gatherers lived in harmony with a wild environment that had many positive qualities but was hypostasized as an autonomous domain and worshiped within the framework of a "totemic" religion. In contrast, the farmers of the Mediterranean Neolithic shattered that fine entente and set out to subdue the wilderness, thereby demoting spaces not dominated by humans to a lower status until such time as they regained their place of honor thanks to American nineteenth-century philosophy and painting.[39] That may be, but it is hard to see how the very notion of "wilderness" could have existed in a preagricul-

tural world in which it was not opposed to anything, and why, if it embodied positive values, anyone should have felt the need to eliminate whatever it represented.

Ian Hodder avoids that kind of impasse by suggesting that a symbolic construction of "the wild" was already under way in the early Paleolithic, as a necessary background to the emergence of a cultural order. For this leader of the new interpretative Anglo-Saxon archaeology, the domestication of the wild began with the improvement of the stone tools characteristic of the Solutrean period, testifying to a "desire" for culture that was expressed in the perfecting of hunting techniques. His suggestion is that more effective protection against predators and less chancy subsistence techniques made it possible to overcome the instinctive fear of an inhospitable environment and to turn hunting into the symbolic means of exerting control over the wild as well as a source of prestige for those who excelled at it. The origin of agriculture in Europe and the Near East could thus be explained simply by an extension of that desire to exercise control over plants and animals, which were gradually withdrawn from their own environment and integrated into the domesticated sphere.[40] There is no way of knowing if this really happened or whether Hodder, carried away by his imagination, perhaps interpreted ancient vestiges in accordance with mental categories that are attested only very much later. Whatever the case may be, the question that remains is why such a movement came about in one particular region of the world and not elsewhere: the psychological dispositions cited by Hodder as the sources of a propensity to exercise an ever-increasing mastery over nonhuman beings are so generally present that it is hard to see why this process should not have occurred everywhere. However, the domestication of plants and animals was not a historical inevitability that only technical obstacles could delay here or there, for plenty of peoples throughout the world seem to have barely felt the need for such a revolution. We should be aware that some sophisticated civilizations—the cultures of the west coast of Canada and southern Florida, for example—developed by prioritizing the tapping of wild resources. Moreover, many contemporary hunter-gatherer groups manifest a certain indifference or even an overt repugnance vis-à-vis the agriculture and stock raising that they see practiced on the margins of their domains. For them, domestication is by no means a compulsion but a choice that they continue to reject.

In a more subtle manner, Bertrand Hell suggests the hypothesis according to which a collective imaginary representation of the wild is present everywhere in Eurasia, and traces of it may be found in its beliefs, rites, and legends concerning hunting and the treatment of large game.[41] One central theme structures this symbolic configuration, the theme of "black blood," the thick

blood of a rutting stag or a solitary wild boar, which is both dangerous and desirable, full of generative power and also a source of wildness. For this fluid also runs in the veins of hunters when, in the autumn, they burn with *Jagdfieber* (hunting fever). This takes possession of woodsmen, poachers, and marginal figures in flight from village sociability, who are barely distinguishable from enraged beasts or werewolves. Admittedly, in the Germanic zone from which Hell draws most of his examples, the world of the wild seems to have acquired a certain autonomy along with an ambiguous power of fascination, as if it has been left room to subsist in itself as a source of life and virile success rather than as a negative contrast with cultivated terrains.[42] Yet, although it may not be the strict converse of agricultural dominion, the domain of "the wild" is nevertheless highly socialized. It is identified with the great forest, not the unproductive *silva* that impedes colonization but the *foresta*, the gigantic park filled with game that the Carolingian dynasty, as early as the ninth century, took measures to protect by edicts limiting grazing rights and deforestation.[43] This, then, was wildness highly cultivated and linked with extremely ancient endeavors to manage and improve hunting territories, organized by an elite that regarded the ambushing and tracking of big game as a character-forming school for the development of courage. It is precisely because Hell so carefully reconstructs the historical context within which the imaginary representation of the wild developed in the Germanic world that it becomes difficult to follow him when he attempts to find analogous manifestations in other regions of our planet, as if everywhere and for all time men have been conscious that dark and ambivalent forces have to be placated by means of the artifices of civilization.[44]

Herdsmen and Hunters

We must beware of ethnocentrism: the "Neolithic revolution" of the Near East is not a universal scenario the conditions of appearance and the material and ideational effects of which are transposable, just as they are, to the rest of the world. In other cradles of agriculture, the domestication and management of plants seem to have developed in different technical and mental contexts. As we have seen, these hardly favor the emergence of a mutually exclusive distinction between a domain controlled by humans and a residual sector that is of no use to humans or is destined eventually to fall under their domination. It would, of course, be absurd to claim that the difference between the inhabited and the wild was perceived and expressed only in the West. But it does seem probable that the values and meanings attached to the opposition between wild and domesticated belong to one particular historical trajectory

and depend, in part, upon a characteristic feature of the process of transition to the Neolithic that began in the Fertile Crescent more than ten thousand years ago. In a region extending from the eastern Mediterranean to Iran, the domestication of plants and animals took place more or less concurrently within less than a millennium.[45] The cultivation of wheat, barley, and rye was accompanied by the raising of goats, oxen, sheep, and pigs. In this way, a complex and interdependent system for the management of nonhumans was set up in an ambience designed to allow their coexistence. But such a system is at variance with what happened in other continents, where large mammals were for the most part domesticated either quite a while after the plants were or, in the case of East Africa, long before—that is, if they were indeed domesticated at all, for in much of the Americas and Oceania the raising of livestock did not occur, or else was adopted only later on, as a result of the arrival of already-domesticated animals from elsewhere.

In the European Neolithic, a major contrast was thus set up, which certainly opposed spaces that were cultivated to those that were not but also and above all opposed domesticated animals to wild ones and the world of cowsheds and pastureland to the realm of the hunter and of game. It may even have been the case that this contrast was desired and actively engineered so as to preserve domains in which it was possible to deploy qualities such as cunning, physical endurance, and pleasure in conquest that, except in warfare, no longer had a role to play in the carefully controlled setting of an agricultural terrain. Indeed, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that peoples of the European Neolithic deliberately abstained from domesticating certain species, such as deer, in order to preserve them as a preferred source of game. In that case, the domestication of some animals would have gone hand in hand with a kind of "huntingization" of a few others, and the maintenance of the latter in their natural state would have resulted not from technical obstacles but, on the contrary, from a desire to set up a domain reserved for hunting that was separate from the cultivated one.[46]

The evidence from ancient Greece shows very clearly how, in the Mediterranean world, the antinomy between the wild and the domesticated draws on a contrast between hunting and livestock raising. The Greeks ate only meat that was provided by a sacrifice, ideally a domesticated ox or the spoils of a hunting expedition. In the symbolic economy of foodstuffs and statuses, the two activities were at once complementary and opposed. The cuisine of sacrifice brought humans and the gods together, yet opposed them, given that the former received the cooked meat of the animal while the latter had the right only to the bones and the aromas from the cooking fire. Conversely, as Pierre Vidal-Naquet points out, hunting "determines the relationship between

man and nature in the wild."[47] Humans behave as predatory animals do but differentiate themselves from those animals through their mastery of the art of hunting, a *technē* linked with the art of warfare and, more generally, that of politics. Humans, beasts, and the gods constitute three opposed elements in a system in which a domesticated animal (*zoon*) is placed very close to humans, being, on account of its aptitude for living communally, barely inferior to slaves and barbarians (we should bear in mind Aristotle's definition of man as a *zoon politikon*). Such a domesticated animal was clearly differentiated from wild animals (*theria*).[48] The sacrificial victim represents a point of intersection between the human and the divine. Moreover, it is imperative to obtain from it a sign of assent before it is put to death, as if the animal consented to the role allotted to it in the civic and liturgical life of the city. Such a precaution was unnecessary in hunting, where victory was won by competing with the game. In hunting, adolescents demonstrated their cunning and agility, while mature men, armed only with a spear, put their strength and skill to the test. It should be added that agriculture, livestock raising, and sacrifice are closely linked in that consumption of the sacrificed victim must be accompanied by cultivated products such as toasted barleycorn and wine.[49] The habitat of wild beasts thus constitutes a belt of noncivilization that is indispensable to the flourishing of civilization itself. It provides a theater in which it is possible to exercise virile dispositions that are poles apart from the virtues of conciliation required for the treatment of domesticated animals and for political life.

The Roman Landscape, the Hercynian Forest, and Romantic Nature

In this respect, the Latin world offers a contrast. Although founded by a pair of twins raised in the wild, Rome gradually withdrew from the model of heroic hunting and came to regard the tracking of game simply as a way of protecting its crops. By the end of the Republic, Varro was stigmatizing the pointlessness of hunting and how unproductive it was in comparison to livestock raising (*Rerum rusticarum*). This was a point of view that Columella endorsed one century later, in his treatise on agriculture (*De re rustica*). The fashion for extensive hunting brought back from Asia Minor by Scipio Aemilianus did not win over an aristocracy that was more preoccupied by the productivity of its domains than by hunting exploits: wild animals were regarded above all as harmful, and it was the duty of stewards and professional trappers to destroy them.[50] The organization of the rural landscape in the plains was now centered on the *villa* (or large farm). A *villa* was a compact building surrounded by a vast quadrangular territory devoted to the cultivation of cereals and vines and olive trees. It favored a clear segregation between the drained,

cultivated land (the *ager*) and the peripheral zone devoted to pasturing free-roaming herds (the *saltus*). As for the great forest (the *ingens silva*), it had lost all the attraction it may formerly have held for hunters and now represented nothing more than an obstacle to the extension of agricultural development. The rational management of resources even extended to game, the numbers of which were fixed and controlled (at least in the great rural properties), thanks to fodder depots to which wild deer were guided in the winter months by the tamed members of their species, which had been specially trained for this purpose.[51]

Under the empire, the Romans' point of view with regard to the forest was certainly ambivalent. In the now almost deforested peninsula, it evoked the setting of Rome's foundation myths and memories of the ancient Rhea Silvia, and its nurturing and sacred aspect was perpetuated only as a faint echo in woods consecrated to Artemis and Apollo or in the woodland sanctuary alongside Lake Nemi, the strange rites of which provided Frazer with the inspiration for his *Golden Bough.* But those residual groves in which the trees produced oracles were by now no more than reduced models of the primitive forest, vanquished by the pursuit of agriculture. As Simon Schama stresses in his commentary on Tacitus's *Germania*, the true forest represented what lay beyond Rome, the limit of the state's jurisdiction, a reminder of the impenetrable tangle of vegetation into which the Etruscans had withdrawn to escape the consequences of their defeat, or, in its concrete form, the vast wooded expanse to the east of Latinized Gaul, where the last savages of Europe still held out against the legions.[52] That "shapeless land" was not to the taste of the Romans: it was agreeable neither to the eye nor to live in. What beauty could it possibly present to the eyes of people who appreciated nature only once it had been transformed by civilizing human action and who definitely preferred the bucolic charms of a countryside marked by labor and laws to the bushy, damp disorder of the Hercynian Forest? This Roman landscape, together with all the values associated with it that colonization had introduced around cities as far away as the banks of the Rhine and in Britain, was the landscape that introduced the notion of a polarity between the wild and the domesticated that we still recognize today. This opposition is neither an objective representation of the properties of things nor an expression of a timeless human nature. Rather, it possesses a history of its own, conditioned by a particular system of organizing space and a particular style of alimentary regime that can in no sense be applied generally to other continents.

In truth, even in the West the line separating the wild from the domesticated has not always been as clearly defined as it was in the countryside of Latium. In the course of the very early Middle Ages, the progressive fusion

of the Roman and the Germanic civilizations introduced a far more intensive use of woods and heaths and tempered the contrast between cultivated zones and uncultivated ones. In a traditional Germanic landscape, the nonagricultural space is partially annexed by the village. Around small, widely dispersed hamlets surrounded by arable clearings, a vast forest perimeter extends and this is pressed into collective use. It is the scene of hunting and of gathering, where people go to collect firewood and materials for building and toolmaking and where they let their pigs loose to forage for acorns. The transition from household to the deep forest is thus a very gradual one. As Georges Duby comments, "This intermingling of fields with grazing grounds and forests is undoubtedly the feature that most clearly marked out the 'barbarian' agrarian system from the Roman one, where the *ager* was kept separate from the *saltus*."[53] In the seventh and eighth centuries, the Roman organization of space deteriorated, as a result of changing eating habits and growing insecurity in regions of the plain that were impossible to defend. Lard and animal fats took the place of oil, venison replaced other meats even in the richer households, and the products of the *saltus* and the *silva* became more widely used as the situation of the great agricultural domains worsened. The combination of the dualistic Roman system and the concentric Germanic pattern generated the medieval Western landscape in which, despite appearances, the frontier between the inhabited and the deserted zones was no longer as clear-cut as it had been a few centuries earlier.

It was possibly not until the nineteenth century that the frontier was strengthened, as was, at the same time, the aesthetic and moral dimension that even now still characterizes our appreciation of different places. This was the period when Romanticism invented wild nature and propagated a taste for it. It was the time when essayists advocating the philosophy of the "wilderness" such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir urged their compatriots to seek in the mountains and forests of America an existence more free and authentic than the one for which Europe had long provided the model. It was also the time when the first national park was created, at Yellowstone, as a grandiose representation of the work of the deity. From being gentle and beautiful, Nature now became wild and sublime. The genius of creation found expression no longer in landscapes bathed in a Roman light, the tradition of which Corot perpetuated, but in precipices from which torrents crashed down, superhuman heights from which tumbled a chaos of rocks and tall, black stands of trees of the kind painted by Carl Blechen, Caspar David Friedrich, and Carl Gustav Carus in Germany and by Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt in the United States.[54] After centuries of indifference or terror, travelers discovered the severe beauty of the Alps, and

poets hymned the delicious horror of glaciers and chasms and succumbed to "the alpine exaltation of the mountain authors" that even Chateaubriand was to deem excessive.[55] There is no need to rewrite the history of this new sensibility, which, amid massive industrialization, discovered an antidote to the world's disenchantment in a redeeming but already-threatened wild nature. Such sentiments seemed self-evident and their effects are everywhere around us: in the favor lavished upon the protection of natural sites and the conservation of threatened species, in the fashion for roaming abroad and the taste for exotic landscapes, and in the interest aroused by vast sea voyages and expeditions to Antarctica. But perhaps this apparent self-evidence is preventing us from seeing that the opposition between the wild and the domesticated is not so patent everywhere or at all times and that it owes its present convincing power to ups and downs in the evolution of techniques and attitudes that other peoples have never shared.

Michaux's traveling companion had no doubt never read *La nouvelle Héloise* or admired the tormented landscapes of Turner. The idea of safeguarding the forest whose resources her fellow citizens were pillaging had never crossed her mind. She, poor dear, was pre-Romantic and was horrified by rampant vegetation, disquieting animals, and swarms of insects. Perhaps she was even astonished by the young European poet's perverse taste for this welter of plants from which she sought to distance herself. On the steamer, descending the Amazon, she carried with her a very particular vision of her environment, a whole baggage of prejudices and sentiments that the local Indians would have found extremely enigmatic had she had the ability and desire to confide these to them. For her, the conquest of virgin spaces was a tangible reality and a desirable goal—but at the same time a distant and confused echo of a more fundamental contrast between nature and civilization. As can be imagined, none of this would have made the slightest sense to the Indians, who see the forest as anything but a wild place to be domesticated or a theme for aesthetic delectation. The truth is that, for them, the question of nature has hardly arisen. It is an obsession that is peculiar to ourselves, and a very effective one too, as are all the beliefs that humans embrace in order to act upon the world.