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# Genesis

introduction + chapter 1

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## A Short Tall Tale

*As I was sailing along that summer, under a dazzling sky, and drifting lazily in the wind and sun, I found myself, one fine morning, in the green and stagnant waters of the Sargasso Sea, at a mysterious spot where thousands of tiny sparks, all shapes and all colors, were glimmering crazily in the early morning light. Bearing off, I was dumbfounded to see an area almost two hundred and fifty acres square entirely populated by dancing bottles. There were countless little vessels, and each one no doubt bore its message; each had its freight and each had its buoyant little roll, ballasted with seawrack and rockery; each carried its hope and its despair. The coiling winds had compelled them all there, from far and near, from a thousand different quadrants. Their constant and perilous collisions made for an acute and cacophonous carillon, and this noise mounted heavenward, wafted to the horizon, it filled all space with giddy ecstasy.*

*The following night, a wide sargasso put me in danger of shipwreck. I had just about foundered. Swiftly I made a raft of some of the bottles, they worked well as floats and bladders, and thus did I make my way back to Bordeaux.*

## The Object of This Book

What I am offering to be sounded and perhaps fathomed in the following pages is a new object for philosophy.



A flight of screaming birds, a school of herring tearing through the water like a silken sheet, a cloud of chirping crickets, a booming whirlwind of mosquitos . . . crowds, packs, hordes on the move, and filling with their clamor, space; Leibniz called them aggregates, these objects, sets. He brought them to people's attention at least; even if he undervalued them by merely according them the status of a heap of stones; even if he kept them mum by classifying them under harmony.

We are fascinated by the unit; only a unity seems rational to us. We scorn the senses, because their information reaches us in bursts. We scorn the groupings of the world, and we scorn those of our bodies. For us they seem to enjoy a bit of the status of Being only when they are subsumed beneath a unity. Disaggregation and aggregation, as such, and without contradiction, are repugnant to us. Multiplicity, according to Leibniz, is only a semi-being. A cartload of bricks isn't a house. Unity dazzles on at least two counts: by its sum and by its division. That herd must be singular in its totality and it must also be made up of a given number of sheep or buffalo. We want a principle, a system, an integration, and we want elements, atoms, numbers. We want them, and we

make them. A single God, and identifiable individuals. The aggregate as such is not a well-formed object; it seems irrational to us. The arithmetic of whole numbers remains a secret foundation of our understanding; we're all Pythagorians. We think only in monadologies.

Nevertheless, we are as little sure of the one as of the multiple. We've never hit upon truly atomic, ultimate, indivisible terms that were not themselves, once again, composite. Not in the pure sciences and not in the worldly ones. The bottom always falls out of the quest for the elementary. The irreducibly individual recedes like the horizon, as our analysis advances. So then, knowledge returns to sets. But a global unity, all the same, remains scarcely accessible. We lose the particular; we've lost the world. We've obliterated the human being, the human being as something specific, as well as the human being in general. We've long ago given up the hope for a unitary knowledge; there's exceedingly little appearance of us living, thinking, or existing as a collectivity, under one law, indivisible. The universal now only appears as the local monstrously inflated. If reason demands a road that will lead us from the monads situated there, or from some locality or other, to a global monadology, we are forced to admit either that there is none or that it is without foreseeable end. So then, by giving up the multiple for the one, has reason given up its prey to chase a shadow? Reason makes use of concepts, under whose unities are sheltered multiplicities that are most often highly dispersed.



No doubt compelled by these disappointments, we've been obliged to substitute the search for relationships for the futile quest of beings. We have supposed this was a decisive and necessary step forward, but perhaps it was merely a detour. The element became a crossroads or nexus of relations, an exchange or cloverleaf, every system was limned as a network of connections. Locally, far from imagining a subset of two terms, only the line connecting them, an analogy or a distinction, was given emphasis. Globally, every theory of systems became a graph of either a simplex or a complex, all things being first of all situated in the depths of a black box. We despise contents, we administer flow charts. So then: the foregoing reasoning transports itself from particles to

connections, without any major changes. Toward the end of his life, as we now know, Leibniz himself had already conceived a second monadology, a monadology of *vincula*—connections. Once more doubt now enters the picture. Are there any connections to begin with that can't be further analyzed? I have no proofs that the simple parasitic arrow, even, is a basic unit of relationship, truly undecomposable. I have believed as much, of course, and I still do; but I can't be sure. Who, in the end, and from the other side of the picture, can boast of having conceived a general system, of projecting or constructing a general system of communication or relation, as a universal network? What would be conveyed by it? and how? What harmony, what cacophony would come of it? Do we have any sort of an ear for hearing that kind of thing?

There is still the problem of finding out how relation is transformed into being, and being into relation—to which we will be returning.



Of old I told the example of the cloud, I told of the concept of a nebulous set, I sketched the fringe of the flame, fluctuating with time; I never attempted to conceive of the multiple as such, directly, without ever allowing unification to come to its aid. I am trying here to raise the brackets and parentheses, syntheses, whereby we shove multiplicities under unities. That is the object of this book: the multiple. Can I possibly speak of multiplicity itself without ever availing myself of the *concept*? I am attempting to open up certain black boxes where it is hidden away, some of the deep freezes in which it has been frozen, a few of the soundproof rooms where it remains mute. Hopelessly, I am attempting to open up Pandora's little casket.

Whence comes the flood, or pandemonium.



The multiple as such. Here's a set undefined by elements or boundaries. Locally, it is not individuated; globally, it is not summed up. So it's neither a flock, nor a school, nor a heap, nor a swarm, nor a herd, nor a pack. It is not an aggregate; it is not

discrete. It's a bit viscous perhaps. A lake under the mist, the sea, a white plain, background noise, the murmur of a crowd, time.

I have no idea, or am only dimly aware, where its individual sites may be, I've no notion of its points, very little idea of its bearings. I have only the feeblest conception of its internal interactions, the lengthiness and entanglement of its connections and relations, only the vaguest idea of its environment. It invades the space or it fades out, takes a place, either gives it up or creates it, by its essentially unpredictable movement. Am I immersed in this multiple, am I, or am I not a part of it? Its edge a pseudopod takes me and leaves me, I hear the sound and I lose it, I have only fragmentary information on this multiplicity.

When we subsume multiplicity under unity, in a concept or a black box, we do not share in or parcel out information. Information is either total or null. We always assume that we don't know, or else that we know everything, yea or nay. Whereas commonly we know a bit, a meager amount, enough, quite a bit; there are various undulations, even in the hardest and most advanced sciences. We are confronted with or absorbed by the multiple where more than three fourths of our knowledge and actions are concerned. Without any principle of individuation, without any simple or easy integration, without any distinguishable concept, without any well-defined boundary between observer and observed, I can only define here an ordinary piece of information, of a given size in some way or another finite and subject to change; I will write once more, neither null nor total. When it's total or null, then unity appears, then comes a concept or a black box, evidence or ignorance, unreason or reason: the exceptions. We're neither gods, nor angels, nor stones, nor dead bodies.

The multiple as such, unhewn and little unified, is not an epistemological monster, but on the contrary the ordinary lot of situations, including that of the ordinary scholar, regular knowledge, everyday work, in short, our common object. May the aforesaid scientific knowledge strip off its arrogance, its magisterial, ecclesial drapery; may it leave off its martial aggressivity, the hateful claim of always being right; let it tell the truth; let it come down, pacified, toward common knowledge. Can it still do this, now that it has vanquished temporal power and reigns in its place, a clerisy? Is there any chance of it still wanting to celebrate a betrothal between its imperial reason and popular wisdom?

The object of this book is both a new one and a common one. We recognize it everywhere, yet reason still insists on ignoring it.



The multiple. Water, the sea. Perceptual bursts, inner and outer, how can they be told apart? How am I to tell, any environment I've entered, become immersed in, that this wood I'm confronted with doesn't go on forever, that I'll get to the edge of the forest some day? I can't see the trees of this forest. A murmur, seizing me, I can't master its source, its increase is out of my control. The noise, the background noise, that incessant hubbub, our signals, our messages, our speech and our words are but a fleeting high surf, over its perpetual swell. Beyond one white plain, there is another white plain, after this dune, a second dune, past a branch of the Ganges delta, a hundred more branches of the Ganges I can't get across. The atmosphere we breathe and hatred, the hate in which we bathe, the hatred that never leaves the we, the hate that separates and joins, that syrupy hate. The collective with its inaccessible edges that we try to conceive with some objectivity. The crowd, fervent or ritual, the common crowd of the centers or the inflamed rabble when it runs wild. Life, the mantle of life that covers me, the generative field of life in which I am only a singularity alive. A certain death at an uncertain hour. Life, my life, work, my work, my labor, my project, this desert with or without a masterpiece, with or without any Mount Carmel summit. Sea, forest, rumor, noise, society, life, works and days, all common multiples; we can hardly say they are objects, yet require a new way of thinking. I'm trying to think the multiple as such, to let it waft along without arresting it through unity, to let it go, as it is, at its own pace. A thousand slack algae at the bottom of the sea.

I'm attempting to think time. I'm well aware that time has no unity, no moment, no instant, no beginning, no end, and that I have no knowledge of its eternal completeness. For all the times that I've been able to tell, all of them were unities. I am now attempting to rethink time as a pure multiplicity.

Thus, perhaps, can history be born. History is in the midst of these hazy midsts, commonly lived, uneasily thought, it is, as it happens, information neither total nor null, without a clear-cut boundary between the observer and the observed. Like the ob-



server, it is full of sound and fury. A meditation on pure multiplicity, this book, is seeking, beyond the sea, the plain, the branch of the river—noise, hate, time—seeking a philosophy of history. The multiple is the object of this book and history is its goal.



These are objects I seem to live through more than view. I think I pick up noises from them more than I see them, touch them, or conceive them. I hear without clear frontiers, without divining an isolated source, hearing is better at integrating than analyzing, the ear knows how to lose track. By the ear, of course, I hear: temple, drum, pavilion, but also my entire body and the whole of my skin. We are immersed in sound just as we are immersed in air and light, we are caught up willy-nilly in its hurly-burly. We breathe background noise, the taut and tenuous agitation at the bottom of the world, through all our pores and papillae, we collect within us the noise of organization, a hot flame and a dance of integers. My acouphenes, a mad murmur, tense and constant in hearing, speak to me of my ashes, perhaps, the ones whence I came, the ones to which I will return. Background noise is the ground of our perception, absolutely uninterrupted, it is our perennial sustenance, the element of the software of all our logic. It is the residue and the cesspool of our messages. No life without heat, no matter, neither; no warmth without air, no logos without noise, either. Noise is the basic element of the software of all our logic, or it is to the logos what matter used to be to form. Noise is the background of information, the material of that form.



Hearing is a model of understanding. It is still active and deep when our gaze has gone hazy or gone to sleep. It is continuous while the other senses are intermittent. I hear and I understand, blindly, when evidence has vanished and intuition has faded out: they're the exceptions.

I begin to fathom the sound and the fury, of the world and of history: the *noise*.<sup>1</sup>



The multiple had been thought, perhaps, but it hadn't been sounded.

*Les Treilles, July 1981*

## La Belle Noiseuse

TREE

NOISE

SEA NOISE

PROTEUS

DOUBLE DOUBT

WORK

ICHTNOGRAPHY

THE FOOT

THE POSSIBLE

THE APPARITION OF FORMS

This that I'll be telling happened at the beginning of the seventeenth century, a time of quarrels and to-dos, whence came that body of geniuses, reason, beauty, we admire today.

This that I'll be telling, and that Balzac relates, couldn't happen, never took place. One of the names in it is a French one, another name in it is Flemish, and the third is German, though imaginary. Has anyone ever yet seen, in this history, the meeting of the real and the symbol? Poussin and Porbus no more knew Frenhofer than they knew his canvas.

*The Unknown Masterpiece* is a fake. This takes place in a locationless location, is from the pen of a nameless author, tells a story beyond time. No, there's nothing behind it, not even a woman. This masterpiece may be improbable or it may be impossible, but it isn't unknown and there is nothing to know. Or else: is there something still, once more, altogether anew to know?

## Tree

Balzac depicts three painters, contemporaries and successors. This all took place during dark days when only headstrong souls without hope keep the sacred flame, in the bare certainty that it must continue to burn. A tree passes through them, a tree of creation, a family tree, a tree of life, a tree of knowledge. The child Poussin at the foot of the tree. Porbus, mature, in the middle of the trunk, and the old man Frenhofer, lost and crowned in the golden boughs. Or else—I'm not sure which way it points—the child Poussin in the green boughs, Porbus at the main branching, and the old painter with the diabolical look in the deep shade at the roots—looking like he'd emerged from the dark shadows of Rembrandt. As I am telling the tale, and as Balzac is telling it, and as the old man paints the second man's canvas under the dazzled gaze of the third, an invisible organist plays the Eastertide motet *O Filii*. Music. Sons and daughters, rejoice, the king of heaven was snatched from death this night. What resurrection can we hope for, in these dark times, what murdered son of this trinity is reborn to day, to the light of day? What is to be born from these days of wrath and flashing outbursts?



Nicolas Poussin is still young, Nicolas doesn't know that he is or that he will be Poussin, has such a thing ever been known, recognized, hoped for? He lives in his garret, in poverty, with Gillette, a perfect beauty. Go to Turkey, Greece, wherever, and you won't find a comparable one. Poussin is beginning, he begins before our very eyes, before the eyes of Porbus and Frenhofer, he executes a brisk copy of Mary the Egyptian, with sketches of red. Father and grandfather are excited, Nicolas is invited in.

Porbus, mature, lives in his studio, with his *Egyptian Marie*, a masterpiece intended for Marie de Medicis. The young talent sketches this woman, the old man touches her up, brings her to life, back to life. The genealogy is very exact in terms of descent. Mabuse, absent, gone without a disciple, bequeathed to the old master before us the technique of life, the master applies in little dabs to the breast, to the limbs, to the background, onto Porbus's canvas, and the youth copies it in ruddy strokes, a monochrome

sketch. Life descends, disappears, there's a direction to the tree, from the old man to the young one.

Nicolas lives with Gillette, a perfect beauty. Porbus lives with Mary, an image that lives only in spots and which in spots does not. A mixed set. Porbus is at the top, he's going to be on the descent, Marie de Medicis has just left him for Rubens. He's wavering, unsure, in the middle: Marie is here a woman and there a statue, here stiff as a cadaver, there blazingly radiant. A motley escutcheon. Frenhofer lives with Catherine Lescault, a courtesan, the "*belle noiseuse*"—the beautiful clamorer or the querulous beauty—who doesn't exist; there's nothing on his canvas but a messy medley of colors. Life is on the ascent, it is gaining, the tree runs the other direction.

The tree runs in one direction for the men, where the brush loses, through time, its power. It flows back in the opposite direction for the women, where beauty wins, through time, its tranquil presence. Time flows in one direction for the maker, it flows the opposite way for the model. Nicolas, with his sketches, lives alongside being itself, the old creator has lost this. Porbus is in the middle, disturbed, uncertain and wavering. His painting fluctuates and doubts, it crosses over the river of time.

I no longer know the point of the tree, which way it points, in this crossing, I don't know the sense of time, where the rivers are headed. While Gillette stands absolutely beautiful and forsaken, naked, in the corner of the studio, all eyes look with envy upon the wall of blind matter. The model says: I love you and I hate you, I despise you and admire you. Nicolas has just reached Porbus's maturity, after the blinding short-circuit of the genius old man and the beautiful girl. Let us attempt to get the sense of time again.



I'll begin again, slowly. The three men form a sequence, following the order of Mabuse, as one says that priests are ordained, time and time again, following the order of Melchizedik. The three painters follow one another, following the order of representation, Mabuse's proper name can't fool us. All three of them have turned to their own picture, while, behind them, forgotten, naked, the beauty weeps. The three women, for their part, follow one

another in the order of being. Not according to the order of appearance, but according to the scale of beings. Catherine is destroyed and entombed, Mary, wavering, existing and not existing, is about to cross the river of mortality; Gillette, in love, is exploding with life and nativity. An image lost in the arrangement, dissolved; half-corpse, half-mortal, half-statue, half-mobility; heat that is naive and there, present. The tree of beings comes out of the painting, the tree of representations, obviously, goes into it. Why is it that these two times, two directions, two scales, two trees form crosses?

Is this a quite ancient, quite absurd way of thinking?

### *Noise*

We did not look carefully at the canvases. Yet Balzac makes them manifest. Let us try to forget for a moment the facile stunt where what he shows us shows us in turn a painting, which shows us what . . . Let us keep the sacred fire, in these dark hours. Let the green serge drapery clothe Catherine, so very naked under her thick wall of jeweled colors. She looks like the vestal Tarpeia, buried under the precious bracelets of the Sabine warriors. Did you or didn't you see Catherine? The painter wished not to let her be seen, destroyed.

Catherine Lescault, the river-christened courtesan, is here baptized *La Belle Noiseuse*.<sup>1</sup> I think I know who the *belle noiseuse* is, the querulous beauty, the noisemaker. This word *noise* crosses the seas. Across the Channel or the Saint Laurence seaway, behold how the *noise* divides itself. In Old French it used to mean: noise, uproar and wrangling; English borrowed the sound from us; we keep only the fury. In French we use it so seldom that you could say, apparently, that our language had been cleansed of this "noise." Could French perhaps have become a prim and proper language of precise communication, a fair and measured pair of scales for jurists and diplomats, exact, draftsmanlike, unshaky, slightly frozen, a clear arterial unobstructed by embolus, through having chased away a great many *belles noiseuses*? Through becoming largely free from stormy weather, sound and fury? It is true, we have forgotten *noise*. I am trying to remember it; mending for a moment the tear

between the two tongues, the deep sea one and the one from the frost-covered lake. I mean to make a ruckus [*chercher noise*] in the midst of these dividing waters.

### Sea Noise

There, precisely, is the origin. *Noise* and nausea, *noise* and the nautical, *noise* and navy belong to the same family. We mustn't be surprised. We never hear what we call background noise so well as we do at the seaside. That placid or vehement uproar seems established there for all eternity. In the strict horizontal of it all, stable, unstable cascades are endlessly trading. Space is assailed, as a whole, by the murmur; we are utterly taken over by this same murmuring. This restlessness is within hearing, just shy of definite signals, just shy of silence. The silence of the sea is mere appearance. Background noise may well be the ground of our being. It may be that our being is not at rest, it may be that it is not in motion, it may be that our being is disturbed. The background noise never ceases; it is limitless, continuous, unending, unchanging. It has itself no background, no contradictory. How much noise must be made to silence noise? And what terrible fury puts fury in order? Noise cannot be a phenomenon; every phenomenon is separated from it, a silhouette on a backdrop, like a beacon against the fog, as every message, every cry, every call, every signal must be separated from the hubbub that occupies silence, in order to be, to be perceived, to be known, to be exchanged. As soon as a phenomenon appears, it leaves the noise; as soon as a form looms up or pokes through, it reveals itself by veiling noise. So noise is not a matter of phenomenology, so it is a matter of being itself. It settles in subjects as well as in objects, in hearing as well as in space, in the observers as well as in the observed, it moves through the means and the tools of observation, whether material or logical, hardware or software, constructed channels or languages; it is part of the in-itself, part of the for-itself; it cuts across the oldest and surest philosophical divisions, yes, noise is metaphysical. It is the complement to physics, in the broadest sense. One hears its subliminal huffing and sougning on the high seas.

Background noise is becoming one of the objects of metaphys-

ics. It is at the boundaries of physics, and physics is bathed in it, it lies under the cuttings of all phenomena, a proteus taking on any shape, the matter and flesh of manifestations.

The *noise*—intermittence and turbulence—quarrel and racket—this sea *noise* is the originating rumor and murmuring, the original hate. We hear it on the high seas.

### Proteus

Proteus—the god of the sea, a minor and marginal god, nonetheless a god of the first water, a god whose name stands at the beginning—is the shepherd who tends the oceanic flocks in the prairies of Poseidon. He dwells in the waters round the isle of Pharos, near the mouth of the Nile, Pharos, bearer of the first Beacon, Pharos, the fire that sheds light, standing out against a misty background, yet whose name means canvas, sail, veil: revealing, re-veiling. For instance, it is the pharos that Penelope weaves and unweaves. In these places of truth, Proteus undergoes metamorphoses: he is animal, he can be element, water, or fire. He's inert, he's alive. He's under the beam of the beacon, he's under the veil. He knows. He's a prophet, he possesses the gift of prophecy, but refuses to answer questions. He contains all information, admits no information. He's the possible, he's chaos, he's cloud, he's background noise. He hides his answers under the endlessness of information. When, for instance, his daughter consults him: he becomes a lion, he becomes a snake, he becomes a panther, a boar, water, a tree, and I don't know what all. The chain that steadies the phenomenal must be found. Chained, motionless, Proteus speaks, answers his daughter. Crafty, but not a trickster. At last he has found his master in physics. Physics is Proteus chained. Background noise is this Proteus badly bound. The sea breaking free. Behold a myth, barely a myth, which grants us an epistemology that is globally accurate, locally rich and detailed. It doesn't grant it in a language all rigor-worn, but through a channel full of noise, murmuring, and images.

What the narrative of Proteus does not tell is the relationship between chaos and form. Who is Proteus when he is no longer water and not yet a panther or a boar? What the narrative says,



on the contrary, is that each metamorphosis or phenomenon is an answer to questions, an answer and the absence of an answer to the questioning. Locally responsive and globally sub rosa. Each appearance—each experience—is a lighthouse-pharos and a pharos-veil, a flash of illumination and a blackout of occultation. Proteus conceals information under the vast abundance of information, a straw in a haystack full of straw. He has an answer for everything; he says nothing. And it is this nothingness that matters. To physics, then, I now prefer metaphysics. The latter is free of Proteus's chains.

Proteus's intermediary states are sea sounds as they are bounding, abounding, unbounding. The *belle noiseuse* is restless. And all at once I know, at sea, who the *belle noiseuse* is. We have to recognize her in the midst of the colored wall of the swell, among the smacking and frothing of forms and tones, the breaking forth of the element divided against itself. Porbus and Poussin never had the right to look at the canvas. And when the old man unveils it, they can't make anything of it. They examine the painting, from left and from right, from right in front, alternately from below and from above. Points of view, phenomena. Fools. And they turn their back on the beautiful, living young woman. Fools. Porbus and Poussin did not see the *belle noiseuse*, and they consider the old man who sees her a fool. Balzac too thinks he is crazy. I guess I'm old enough now to see her. So many mariners never saw anything in the *noise* of the sea; only felt nauseous, organisms teeming with the sound and the fury, like the heaving gray itself; so many only felt the sad nausea over the root of the tree, an avatar of Proteus, so many only experienced phenomenological nausea, so many never saw the *belle noiseuse*, a naked Aphrodite resplendent in her beauty, rising fresh from the troubled waters, as the model Gillette who comes forth naive and aborning from the chaotic canvas of the dying old master. Who cut his brush dripping with color to throw it on the seascape and give rise to Aphrodite?

### Double Doubt

Poussin sketches with an exact, precise, rapid stroke. Poussin has no doubt; Gillette is there, alive. The edge of his flying stroke is

Taylor smooth, almost infinitely smooth. No need to trim it, it is as smooth-skinned as youth. It is rational: no stubble, no hair, no filth or dirt. The neat edge does not hesitate over its definition.

Porbus, mature, in his prime, in his mastery, indeed—in his royalty, doubts. Everywhere his portrait is double: here a painting, there a drawing, here Flemish, there Italian, here dry, there burning, incandescent, here a cadaverish statue, there alive, enough to fool the emperor. Everywhere his painting is double and everywhere doubt, a mix. His stroke wavers a little, hesitates, fluctuates, indecisive. What path will my life choose? La Medicis will soon leave him for Rubens, a mountain of rose and vermilion. Double doubt spreads all over, at all points, at all sites of edge and boundary, at all parts of the body, in all moments of life itself. Marie does not know whether she is going to cross the water, the boatman himself is full of this indecision, the river fluctuates, and the painter hesitates. Doubt: having two movements and two intentions, two goals and two conducts, leaving the branching there before you, leaving stubble on the stroke, leaving the bifurcation cleft.

From Poussin to Porbus, the simple becomes double. From the student to the master, decision is raised, suspended. The climb toward mastery is a promotion to anxiety and absence of peace. The first stroke goes awry. The thundering passage, the flashing edge are a-tremble. The bankside undulates. Mastery probably does come down to this pathetic doubt.

Time rising from the child toward maturity or from apprenticeship to craftsmanship does not run along the single track replay, decision, rectitude. I waited until I had reached an age that was so ripe, that I could hope for no other one after it . . . so now I've got to act, he says. Descartes doubts, he goes back in time, toward father Montaigne, his hesitant questioning. Descartes doubts little, he recovers, thanks to God, the smooth and decisive simplicity of certitude. He prunes the bifurcation, he trims the stroke and gets back on the right track. Old Frenhofer, heroic, has tasted the simplicities of perfection, you need only see what he calls his studies; but still more heroic, he climbs back to this side of Porbus's double doubt and makes it abound. He does not stray back—God Almighty behind him—into the valley of certitudes. The word *doubt* is now at the center of all his sentences; it accompanies all

his words, like a double shadow, it sends his brush awry. His brush multiplies branches and bifurcations. He climbs again the thalweg of the river where Marie the Egyptian wavered, where the boatman fluctuated, he climbs again the *chreod*, the course, the fall of the Scheldt [*l'Escaut*]. The confluence is no longer a low synthesis but a high opening that leads, further upstream, to other openings. The downstream course, the worn-out path, the slope, the *chreod*, run, from upstream confluences to downstream confluences, toward synthesis and the unitary. The upstream course, double doubt wavering to begin with, multiplies its bifurcations like a seven-armed candelabrum, like a full bouquet, a bush, an arborescence, a head of hair, a refined network of veins and fibrils, an endless network of doubts, anxieties. The old master did not prune, he did not trim his doubt, he let the possible burgeon and abound.

He goes back up the slope, goes back in time, giddily upwards, he rejuvenates. The productive man is born old and dies young. The productive man turns time around. You will recognize a thinker by the way he goes from truth to possibilities. As life goes from repetition to negentropy. Mortal time runs along the tree of the river, down, work runs along the straight tree, runs up. That tree, alive, teems, bushes, abounds in profusion.

I did not fix the lineaments, he would say, I scattered over the lineaments a cloud of blond and warm half-tints making it impossible to put one's finger on precisely the place where the outlines meet the background. From close up this work seems cottony, appears to lack precision, but two steps back everything firms up, becomes fixed and stands out . . . Yet, still I have doubts.

The old madman is on the way to the unknown secret of life.



The adult Descartes, doubts removed, shows the smooth and straight way. It is the best one, it is optimal, it is calculated through superlatives, it is the lowest one. At the low point, convergence, the tree appears analytical, simply. It is true that this path is universal. So much is gained there, gained there so often, that it would be foolish to take a different one. Reason rushes forth, analytical, toward the lower, universal confluences of synthesis.

Against the grain of Hegel, so young, or so old, against the grain of Descartes the adult, we can try to rejuvenate by going back up this chreod that remains short of Montaigne . . .

### Work

The masterwork is unknown, only the work is known, knowable. The master is the head, the capital, the reserve, the stock and the source, the beginning, the bounty. It lies in the intermediary interstices between manifestations of work. No one can produce a work without laboring in this sheer sheeting cascade from which there now and then arises a form. One must swim in language and sink, as though lost, in its noise, if a proof or a poem that is dense is to be born. The work is made of forms, the masterwork is a formless fount of forms, the work is made of time, the masterwork is the source of times, the work is a confident chord, the masterwork trembles with noise. He who does not hear this noise has never composed any sonatas. The masterwork never stops rustling and calling. Everything can be found in this matrix, nothing is in the matrix; one could call it smooth, one could call it chaotic, a laminar waterfall or clouds storm-crossed, a crowd. What are called phenomena alone are known and knowable, avatars of a secret remote proteus emerge from the clamorous sea. Visible and beautiful are the dispersed tableaux; beneath the green serge veil, lies the well. Empty, full, will we ever know? When there is an infinity of dispersed information in the well, it is really the same well as if it were devoid of information.

The *belle noiseuse* is not a picture, it is the *noise* of beauty, the naked multiple, the numerous sea, from which a beautiful Aphrodite is born, or isn't born, accordingly. We always see Venus without the sea; or the sea without Venus, we never see physics emerging, anadyomene, from metaphysics. Formed phenomenal information gets free from the chaotic background noise, the knowable and the known are born from that unknown.

The work, through profiles, snapshots, Protean shapes, emerges from the perturbation, from the noisy turbulent sea around the island of Pharos, flashes, occultations, of the proto-phare. Without this pileup, without this unknowable ichnography, there are no profiles, no work. It is necessary to dare to unveil the

ichnography, at times, the one we always carry with us, in the dark, and as though secreted, in a receded nook, under a veil. Like a palette.

### Ichnography

The painting revealed at the end of the narrative is the ichnography. *La Belle Noiseuse* is not a painting, not a representation, not a work, it is the master, the wellspring, the black box that comprises, implicates, envelops, in other words: buries all profiles, all appearances, all representations, and finally the work itself.

Poussin, Porbus run up to the canvas, move away, lean forward, from right to left, top to bottom, they look for a scenography, as is customary. And situate themselves at a vantage point in order to get an oblique profile. Fools. With luck, they will find a spot from which a straightforward form will appear. Scenography, orthography. And seek, as is normal, a place for a phenomenon, a space and an avatar, a cell and a science. A representation.

And thus they do not see the ichnography.

Balzac saw the ichnography. I think he knew he saw it. Since he signed it with its name. But like Frenhofer, like Mabuse, he bashfully masked it. And the ichnography remained unknown.

Leibniz never saw the ichnography. He probably proved that it was invisible. He never knew it, he proved that it is unknowable.

Once more, what is the ichnography? It is the ensemble of possible profiles, the sum of horizons. Ichnography is what is possible, or knowable, or producible, it is the phenomenological wellspring, the pit. It is the complete chain of metamorphoses of the sea god Proteus, it is Proteus himself.

It is thus inaccessible. We are tied down to a spot, our limitation, our definition is our point of view, we are chained to scenographies. Leibniz would say: the flat projection is in God and for Him.

Leibniz never saw the ichnography, but he knew where it was. This flat projection is in God, it is God. He did have an idea, though, about this flat projection, a rational idea. The intellection of God, as a sum of true ideas or as a reservoir of possibilities, as a sum of the atoms or seeds of truth, as the integral ultimately, is also rational. It would no doubt have seemed absurd to the old

master for rationality in its totality not to be rational. There exists a path from the local to the global, even if our infirmity deprives us for all eternity of the ability to proceed along it. Better still, noise, the *noise*, false harmony be it in music, voice or hatred, are matters of simple local effects. *Noise*—shouts and war—has the same range of meaning, only symmetrical to harmony—song and peace. A noisy philosophy would be the shadow of Leibnizianism. The latter relegates it to little departments. In the seventeenth century, you see, hatred *was* limited and squabbling *was* confined. The uproar, the murmur of the sea, the generalized confused battle, nausea, are not avoided, but, once again, are the effect of narrowness or limited perceptions. Our body is constructed so as to integrate the buckshot drab, the blaring waterfall folderol, which would otherwise leave us dazed. Chaos, noise, nausea co-exist, only relegated to an oblivion that resembles repression and that is called apperception: unconsciousness. Often we are drowned in this confused minuteness. The more one ascends, on the contrary, the flights of integration, the more the rational rationalizes itself. Just as our body integrates the *noise* of minute perceptions into sensible signals, so does God integrate in absolute knowledge, in white light, the relative *noise* of our right, flighty thinking. Harmony removes itself from noise, irenism removes itself from fury, as the universal removes itself from the local, the same distance: huge, infinite, measurable. Ichnography, then, should be pure. Smooth, white, unified like a perfect chord. Entering my old master Leibniz's abode, as a ward, and getting, I believe, as far as his studio, I had had only the beautiful Irene to contemplate. That picture of *The Production of Things* where the confused blob of color is only a local cover-up.

Leibniz was perceptive enough not to deny disorder, the *noise*, the sound and the fury. Clearly, we will have to retain the word *noise*, the sole positive word for describing a state we otherwise can only designate in negative terms, such as disorder. The noisy sea is always there, present, dangerous. To be sure, it's enough to make one shudder with fear. Leibniz lumps everything into the differential, and under the numberless thickness of successive orders of integration. The mechanism is admirable. No one ever went so far in rational mastery, down into the innermost little recesses of the smallest departments. The straight line of reason that must turn its back on this chaos is the ascent into those scalar

orders. That way lies before us, it is infinite, the perfect flat projection remains inaccessible. It is divine, it is invisible. (What *noise* does the classical age repress, to what clamor does it close its ears, in order to invent our rationalism?)

There, the masterwork is unknown.

### The Foot

Balzac saw it, he recognized it. And I can show that he saw it. I can really show that he really knew that he had recognized it: since he signed it with its name. Let me explain.

What then is an ichnography? What then is this masterpiece, where the term “master” does not designate a unique and singular achievement, but rather capital, stock, well—the ichnography? This: the Greek word *ichnos* signifies the imprint of a foot, the trace of a step. As they got nearer, they noticed in a corner of the canvas the tip of a naked foot emerging out of the chaos of colors, shades, faint nuances, a sort of formless fog; but it was an exquisite foot, a living foot! They remained petrified with admiration before this fugitive fragment from an incredible, a slow and progressive destruction. The foot appeared there like the torso of some marble Venus of Paros that might have cropped up amidst the debris of a burned-out city. Here then is the signature by the very name of ichnography. The *belle noiseuse* is the flat projection. Here is the end of our art on earth, says Porbus. From hence, it will be lost in the heavens, says Poussin. Balzac makes us understand that he knows, that he’s understood.

The painters have traveled the path Leibniz thought infinite. Breaking down the door, they contemplate the divine floor-plan without understanding. Why don’t they?

Because they expected a different painting, one extrapolated, as it were, within the chain of forms. The last, the first of all representations, why would it not still and once again be a representation? Because they were Leibnizians, because they belong to the seventeenth century, because they are classicists.

Ichnography is not harmony, it is *noise* itself. Leibniz’s system turns over like an iceberg. This woman before us, stripped at last of her appearances, of her representational trappings, no: she is not the lovely Irene, she is the *belle noiseuse*. She is not harmony,

she is racket. She is not peace, she is war. She is not smooth, transparent and blank, she is not one, she is the multiple, and a thundering mix, yes, chaos.

Ichnography is the background noise.

The flat projection was the inaccessible object of metaphysics. It still is. The background noise is this flat projection.

A form of knowledge reputed to be closed is open.

### The Possible

The raucous, anarchic, noisy, variegated, tiger-striped, zebra-streaked, jumbled-up, mixed-up multiple, criss-crossed by myriad colors and myriad shades, is possibility itself. It is a set of possible things, it may be *the* set of possible things.

It is not potential, it is the very reverse of power, rather it is capaciousness. This noise is the opening. The Ancients were right to say of chaos that it gaped. The multiple is open, from it is born nature, which is always aborning. We cannot predict what will be born from it. We cannot know what is in it, here or there. No one knows, no one has ever known, no one will ever know how a possible coexists with a possible, and perhaps it coexists through a relationship of possibility. The set is criss-crossed by possible relationships.

Leibniz—him again—constructs this world like an apartment placed at the point, the tip, the apex of a pyramid. Rare, unique, perfect, rigorously calculated within the principles of the optimum, amidst all possible worlds, it stands out like a sheer peak against the mass of shadows. Below, the pyramid widens its base, down deep, infinitely. In the unfathomable thickness of this foundation, in the obscurity of these multiple conditions, the elements of capacity are buried in their own sleep, awaiting their awakening to some degree of culture. This infinite base cannot be defined by lucid and rigorous rationality. It plunges into the background noise, into the cloudy clamor of the confused.

Balzac depicts the vision opposed to divine architecture. The perfect, optimal, living, existent, quasi-divine form—is a foot. It is at the bottom, the base, the minimum of the vortex. The vision is a sort of tornado with a low point, a noise hole at whose bottom is existence. In reversing this vision, time ascends toward the pos-



sible and so does space, while one descends toward the existing form.



It is the function of the philosopher, the care and passion of the philosopher to protect to the utmost the possible, he tends the possible like a small child, he broods over it like a newborn babe, he is the guardian of the seed. The philosopher is the shepherd who tends the mixed flock of possibles on the highlands, heavy ewes and shuddering bulls, the philosopher is a gardener, he crosses and multiplies varieties, he safeguards the vastness of the old-growth forest, he is on the watch for the inclemency of the elements, a carrier of new seasons of history and of duration, fat cows and lean cows, the philosopher is the shepherd of multiplicities.

The philosopher is no longer right or rational, he protects neither essence nor truth. It is the function of the politician to be right and rational, it is the function of the scientist to be right and rational; there are plenty of functionaries of the truth as it is, without adding more, the philosopher does not wrap himself up in truth as in breastplate or shield, he does not sing nor does he pray to allay nocturnal fears, he wants to let the possibles roam free. Hope is in these margins, and freedom.

The philosopher keeps watch over unforeseeable and fragile conditions, his position is unstable, mobile, suspended, the philosopher seeks to leave ramifications and bifurcations open, in opposition to the confluences that connect them or close them. He goes back up the thalweg a bit, he climbs the chreod, he is going to graze where branches multiply, where freshets are turbulent, where innovation burgeons forth, on the high plains.

The function of the philosopher, the care and the passion of the philosopher, is the negentropic ringing-of-the-changes of the possible.



The multiplicity that he tends is not originary. It was so, to be sure, if and when there was a beginning. But so what? The multiplicity of the possible is here, it is now. It is intermediary between the

phenomena, it rustles in the midst of the forms that emerge from it. I am quite happy for Proteus to live on an island and for him to tend the marine fauna at sea. When a phenomenon, a form, a relatively durable state, a period, a coherent era, whatever, do appear, they do their best to obscure the extreme fragility of their origins and the absence of their legitimacy. Not everything always has the legitimacy claimed and produced, right and reason are often completely subsequent to foundation. Everything is founded in the possible, all representations originate in the *belle noiseuse*, all states come to us from chaos. The most common forgetting is that of the possible. It is so much forgotten that it is not visible. Even Poussin fails to see this roaring sea, he fails to hear it. There is chaos, there is a circumstance, and suddenly there's the whole foundation. There is the background noise, then a noise in the midst of that background noise, and suddenly there's the whole song. There is the perennial surge, then a fluctuation in that surge, and suddenly there's the river of Time. There is the Roman mob, turbulent, restless, powerful, magnificent, there is the throng and the multitude, there is the population, what chain of little circumstances made it glide all along its history? The crowd is always there vehicle of the possible. The surge is always there carrier of a thousand temporalities, chaos is always present to serve as foundation, noise is always there to invent new musics and new harmonies. The *belle noiseuse* is always present, a cornucopia from which myriad forms emerge, the bottom of a well with pictures of genius. The multiplicity of times escorts our miserable little temporality, the multiple gapes, it is always open. Yet the possible is only there if there are keepers, precisely, only if there are shepherds to tend their flocks on the highlands, only if there are watchers. Philosophy is the vestal of the possible, it is the vestal of time, it maintains the sacred flame during dark hours.

Politics pares down the possible in order to remain stable and maintain sanity; economy, religion, the army, Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus, and the administration of our day which synthesizes them, have the function and a passion to reduce multiplicities, to reduce possibilities, to work at the confluences. The social functions of power grapple with time. Science is collaborating, when it trims back the bifurcations in order to get nearer its truth. The philosopher is the keeper of multiplicities, he is thus time's shepherd, he seeks to preserve the possibles. And that is why he will

no longer find himself either within a function or within a power. For the first time, he is experiencing the separation of philosophy and State. He calls on science, summons it to his side, on the side of knowing, in other words, inventing, not on the side of control.

The philosopher lets it be said that the real is rational, for he lets everything be said, including silly things and cruelties, he lets it be said that the rational is the only real. He lets it be said; alas, he lets it be. That the real be rational, that the rational be real, that's what they say, to be sure, but above all, that's what they do, that's what they construct. We construct a real which is a rational one, we construct *a* real, among many possibilities, which is *a* rational one, among other possibilities, just as we pour concrete over the ground. It isn't the only possible concrete, and it is not the only possible covering. City dwellers always think that the constructed world is a landscape, and some country folk believe that the landscape is the world as such. The old rationalism is the concrete of the world, the philosophy of language is the concrete of meaning, our philosophies of politics and history are the concrete of time. There are other possible worlds, I know other possible meanings, we can invent other forms of time. And this is why the philosopher broods over the possible as if it were a fragile newborn babe, like a bouquet of times, like a multibranching candelabrum, like a living network of veins and fibrils, he harkens to the noises and the ringing of changes.

### The Apparition of Forms

The *belle noiseuse* is the sea, the nautical murmur.

The flat projection is the noise, the ichnography is the background noise, any scenography, any profile, and any appearance, are forms sprung from this background, signals come from this noise, perceived things born of these apperceptions.

The multiplicity of colors and hues, the turbulent chaos, the maelstrom, a whirling top, is balanced on a foot, on the trace of a foot.

Aphrodite, beautiful goddess, invisible, standing up, is born of this chaotic sea, this nautical chaos, the *noisè*. Aphrodite, standing, her foot upon this sea, walks upon this sea. We know only Aphrodite, if that. We turn away from the waves to admire the wave-born.

Mary the Egyptian about to cross the river, and the first Adam of Mabuse the father, and the beautiful woman portrayed in the style of Giorgione, so many beautiful pictures, so many beautiful painted women are born of this beautiful noisy Eve, sea, mother, matrix, fabulous uterus, impregnated by Uranus's brush dripping with spermatic and bloody color.

How is Venus born from the sea, how is time born from the noisy heavens? How are forms born from the formless? How is peace born from the *noise* and the social contract from the restless mob's plundering in every sense and in every direction? How are harmony, singing, sound, rhythm, and song born from this noise?



*Listen. Walls, town, and port, death's resort, gray deep where breathes the breeze, all sleep. In the plain is born a noise. It is the breath of the night. It bellows like a soul that a flame forever follows. The higher voice seems a jingle bell. Of a leaping dwarf it is the canter. It dashes, bounds, then in cadence, on one foot . . . dances at the tip of the swell. Fluctuation.*



*Listen then to another possible voice. Music. At first, a faint sound, skimming along the ground like a swallow before the storm, whispers and flits pianissimo, and sows as it goes the poisonous stroke. Some mouth gathers it up, and piano, piano skillfully slips it into your ear. The harm is done, it sprouts, it creeps, it makes its way, and rinforzando from mouth to mouth it goes like the devil; then all at once, don't know how, you see Calumny rise up, hissing, swelling, growing right before your eyes; it darts forward, spreads its span, whirlwinds, encircles, wrests, sweeps off, explodes and thunders, and becomes, Heaven be thanked, a general outcry, a public crescendo, a universal chorus of hatred and proscription. The heinous, hideous noiseuse.*