

Introduction

Idle Nation

“Ours is the century of laziness,” announces Louis-Sébastien Mercier in *Mon bonnet de nuit* (*My Nightcap*, 1784).¹ Looking back upon the literary production of the eighteenth century, he nostalgically observes the waning of the grand intellectual projects. The age of massive tomes of philosophy, of erudite abstraction, is past; the century has now discovered the trifle, the trivial. Mercier laments the impatience of authors and readers alike. It is as if the time of work has been compressed, interrupted by the futile. He would like to restore this time to the artist, so that creation could be reclaimed through action. Mercier concludes with a morality based on usefulness and fecundity, for a proper culture of “enlightenment.”

This despondent view of the century, in particular of intellectual work, might divert us from the image of a century known for bringing about a massive systematization of work, a valorization of labor that culminated in the birth of industrial capitalism. Indeed, the eighteenth century was the century of industry; as such it trumpeted the cause of action and energy. Severe measures aimed at repressing idlers remained in place for the duration of the century, alongside new strategies for economic emancipation. Such repression sought justification through various discourses, beginning with the religious. One text that exerted an influence throughout the eighteenth century (as many as four editions were published in 1743) was Antoine de Courtin’s *Traité de la paresse* (*Treatise on Laziness*), in which he condemns laziness in the harsh-

est terms.² Christian in inspiration, Courtin's treatise considers laziness strictly as a defect: it is an obstacle to (good) works, it diverts one from a useful life, from action understood as a principle of creation. In the author's apt phrase, laziness is nothing less than "the devil's couch of ease."³ More precisely, Courtin defines laziness as "a numbness, a despondency, a desolation, a weight that depletes courage and instills a repugnance for all good deeds; its hatred for work is equal to its love of rest" (*Traité*, p. 28). The moralist sets himself the task of correcting this deadly inclination by inspiring active virtues, those of work as a duty imposed by God. For Courtin the key, in his striking phrase, is not to allow others "the leisure to enjoy leisure" (*Traité*, Avertissement, p. 5). To set man on the right path, the moralist does not hesitate to invoke a mythological model: the paragon of virtue that he proposes is none other than Hercules, the action hero par excellence.

These same values circulate in the Enlightenment discourse of emancipation, as voiced by the encyclopedists. The Chevalier Louis de Jaucourt translated the religious condemnation of inactivity into secular terms.⁴ Under the term "oisiveté" (idleness), Jaucourt lumps unemployment together with loafing. He understands the former literally as a lack of occupation, a void, a pure negativity. Jaucourt at once universalizes and naturalizes work as both a bodily need and a social duty: "the human spirit, being of an active nature, cannot remain in a state of inaction," he writes. Idleness, by contrast, is a "source of disorder"; it strikes at the heart of good citizenship, and may lead to criminal deeds. Like Courtin, Jaucourt celebrates Hercules as the timeless hero of work, the very model of work as pleasure.⁵

In his article on "Paresse" for the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert, Jaucourt makes an effort to distinguish between "paresse" (laziness) and "fainéantise" (loafing), which, despite their close synonymy, denote for him two different degrees of wrongdoing. If laziness concerns (the lack of) action in mind and body alike, loafing is a vice of the body alone. For him the lazy man is

matter reduced to inaction, and this physical inaction reverberates in the “character of the soul.” The loafer or good-for-nothing, in contrast, “likes to be idle, he hates occupation, and avoids work.”⁶ The loafer’s perversion is thus to convert the pleasure of work into its opposite. The negativity of *far niente* is literally *nothingness*. Like Jaucourt, Etienne Bonnot de Condillac consigns the state of loafing to the lowest level of inactivity, where idlers wallow in the company of beggars and other wretches. Their idleness consists of perverting necessity—the necessity of *doing*.⁷

The unoccupied individual is portrayed no more reassuringly in the medical writings of the day. The inactive subject may fall prey to a whole series of illnesses: gout, stones, melancholy, madness and, the *Encyclopédie* adds dramatically, “the despair of wasted time” (“Oisiveté,” p. 446). The proposed remedy for idleness is work, the discipline of exercise which makes it possible to restore health. The disease of laziness poses a threat to culture through its decadent effeminization, its unmanning effect. This is a far cry from Hercules, the robust hero of labor.

The American Enlightenment was to embrace without reserve this idea of active application. Benjamin Franklin, shored up by the principles of what Max Weber has identified as the “Protestant ethic,” elevates industry as a cardinal virtue.⁸ He thus condemns its negation, depicting idleness in the most caricatural terms. In his maxims for the self-made man of the market economy, published in *Poor Richard’s Almanack* and promptly translated into French under the title *La Science du Bonhomme Richard*, idleness is the diametric opposite of the productive maximization of time. Franklin can admit leisure as compatible with utility only if the former is recuperated by the latter: “Leisure, is Time for doing something useful; this Leisure the diligent man will obtain, but the lazy Man never.”⁹ In Franklin’s view, work must aim to eradicate wasted time. Laziness leads to vice, to abject lethargy, and in the end it depletes life: “Trouble springs from Idleness, and grievous Toil from needless Ease” (p. 490). Franklin charges forth under the banner of

Business, of sovereign *Labor* as compulsive imperative. His worker reduces the time he devotes to sleep and rises at the crack of dawn for the sheer joy of resuming his activity, his industrious rhythm.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault offers a telling perspective on the repression of the idle in the eighteenth century. He provides an explicitly political context for the prohibition of laziness, for its condemnation as the root of the city's evils at the dawn of European industrialization. Foucault goes beyond a simple archaeology of work to study the dialectic of work and idleness, its role in the affairs of State, by means of what he calls a "political technology of the body," a "political anatomy."¹⁰ He explores the way in which the body is invested with power, marked, trained, charged with signifying—in short, subjugated and inserted within a political field:

This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labor power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection (in which need is also a political instrument meticulously prepared, calculated and used); the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. (*Discipline*, pp. 25–26)

This technology of the body developed by the Ancien Régime is based above all on the mechanisms of production. The useful body par excellence is that of the laborer attached to the machine of production: the instrument-body or machine-body; the menacing obverse of this body is the idle individual, who is incompatible with the norms of production. In *Discipline and Punish*, the theater of industry (to echo the phrase Anthony Vidler applied to Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's saltworks)¹¹ is the workshop and then the factory, all the sites where the forces of labor become concentrated and where infractions against production and its maximization can be contained.

In the panoply of punishments invented by the eighteenth century, work is conceived as one of the penalties used to combat laziness and vagrancy. A crime against utility must be corrected, forcing the adoption of another attitude. The detention of the idle during the Enlightenment is in fact a pedagogical application of work. Forced labor aims to rehabilitate the lazy subject by integrating him into a project of economic reconstruction and personal reform, bringing to bear the maxim “he who wants to live must work” (*Discipline*, p. 122). Foucault cites Jean-Jacques-Philippe Vilain, a contemporary legislator: “The man who does not find his subsistence must be made to desire to procure it for himself by work; he is offered it by supervision and discipline; in a sense, he is forced to acquire it; he is then tempted by the bait of gain” (*Discipline*, p. 122).

The economist Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot expresses similar concerns. For him, the administration of the State consists essentially of preventing idleness and indolence. In his *Encyclopédie* article “Fondation,” he contrasts “industrious citizens” on one hand with the “vile population” of beggars, vagabonds, and the lazy on the other.¹² For Turgot, industry is the driving force of the State. The ideal administration of the State would consist in achieving full employment, the sole condition for the nation’s well-being and wealth. At the time of the Revolution, the Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt developed similar considerations in his recommendations to the Comité de mendicité (Committee on Begging), created to eradicate a number of social pathologies: begging, poverty, and vagrancy. But what was to come out of the committee’s efforts was a new *ethos* of work: “Society owes to all of its members subsistence or work. Whoever is able to work and refuses to do so is guilty of a crime against society and thus loses all right to subsistence.”¹³ The agents of the State do not hesitate to apply strong measures to repress those who shirk their duty to work. Such behavior constitutes a serious breach of the social contract and places the nation in jeopardy. The pauper who turns down work is perceived as antisocial. The State places these words in the mouth of the offender: “I wish to remain

idle; give me gratis a portion of your property; work for me'—an antisocial proposition in all respects; for whoever consumes and does not produce absorbs the subsistence of the useful man; for the wealth of an empire, existing only in its products, has its origin in the number of its industrious citizens.”¹⁴

In 1789, when Abbé Sieyès formulated the revolutionary idea of the nation in his treatise *Qu'est ce que le Tiers-État?* (*What Is the Third Estate?*), calling for an end to the special privileges of the aristocracy, he placed all citizens under a common obligation, that of work. For this pamphleteer, it is industry that ensures the prosperity of the State. The driving forces behind the nation are production and consumption. Citizens are first and foremost “useful and industrious.”¹⁵ The nobility, condemned for its “indolence” (*fainéantise*; p. 40), must be banished from the shared social project. According to Sieyès, the nobles are out of step with “the general movement”; they are “foreign to the nation” (*Third Estate*, pp. 57–58). They are relegated to the same category as tramps and beggars and “cannot be charged with the political confidence of nations” (*Third Estate*, p. 74).

In her book *Le Travail, reflet des cultures*, Annie Jacob shows how, starting in the mid-seventeenth century, the valorization of labor evolved in the emerging discourse of political economy.¹⁶ If she sees a consensus among various authors regarding the state as the provider of work, a necessary condition for individuals to be useful, she also shows how labor begins to be appreciated as a condition of wealth. But this step was definitively taken only with the advent of the physiocrats. To illustrate this social positivity of work, Jacob points in particular to the work of the Marquis de Mirabeau. And in the face of the physiocrats, represented above all by Quesnay, she examines the writings of a certain Graslin who, even while espousing the ideal of work as a source of wealth, also advanced “socialist” arguments about the inequalities caused by the accumulation of wealth.

The *philosophes*, it must be said, rallied behind the valorization of work and the concomitant moralistic enterprise. Rousseau, in his “Discours sur l’économie politique” (“Discourse on Political Economy”), readily admits the inevitability of work. In considering the responsibilities of government and the commonwealth of the citizens, the philosophe from Geneva declares it essential that work be “always necessary and never useless.”¹⁷ Voltaire too sums up the industrious spirit of the century when, scorning idleness as death itself, he proclaims: “to work is to live.”¹⁸ One hardly need mention the injunction that the same author places in the mouth of Candide: “we must cultivate our garden.”¹⁹ He elaborates on this moral principle: “work keeps away three great evils: boredom, vice, and need” (*Candide*, p. 100). And in his 1734 *Lettres philosophiques*, already rebelling against Pascal’s notion of repose, against an original laziness, Voltaire holds action to be a universal law of nature: “Man is made for action, just as fire rises and stones fall”²⁰—thus imposing the determinism of utility. Denis Diderot expresses himself in similar terms; commenting on Seneca’s writings in his *Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*, he underlines the dilemma of the idle man, living outside of real time; the solution he proposes is work, replacing a life of indolence with one of action:

He drags himself miserably from the time he gets up to the time he goes to bed; boredom endlessly prolongs this interval of twelve to fifteen hours, which he counts minute by minute: from days of boredom to more days of boredom, has he reached the end of the year? It seems to him that the first of January blurs immediately into the last day of December, because this whole stretch of time is uninterrupted by any punctuating action. Let’s get to work, then: among the advantages of work is that it shortens the days and lengthens life.

Diderot’s conclusion: “Better to wear out than to rust.”²¹

Finally, late in the century, Immanuel Kant adopts similar language. He considers laziness to be among the most despicable of vices. Its only justification is as a necessary precondition for work, for which it becomes an enjoyable sanction.²² In the famous essay “What Is Enlightenment?” where Kant proclaims his rallying cry for the century—“*Sapere Aude!* Have courage to use your own reason!”²³—he immediately associates laziness with cowardice, the condition par excellence of what the philosopher calls the state of tutelage. Laziness represents the primary obstacle to a life of autonomy. Reform by Enlightenment thus requires mental labor. Laziness as passivity is the state from which any exercise of reason takes on an aspect of “irksome work,” becoming an “arduous” task. To this state, Kant will oppose a new active posture: walking with the liberated step that must free the subject from the “fetters” or crutches that prevented him from proceeding with confidence (“What Is Enlightenment,” pp. 85–86). Access to Enlightenment, like the conquest of liberty, is itself *action* above all.

But it is impossible to neglect the darker, more sordid side of labor in the eighteenth century, the exploitation and slavery associated with the economic consolidation of European imperial powers. Laziness is a priori projected onto the slave as an innate defect—the better to exploit his manpower. The crime of laziness stalks him constantly. In an anonymous brochure published in 1797, *De la nécessité d’adopter l’esclavage en France (On the Necessity of Adopting Slavery in France)*, the Black is paradoxically judged to be inherently lazy, inimical to laborious activity (black nations are strangers to industry), but at the same time predisposed to work on the plantation, because of his natural tolerance for heat and other local conditions: he is able to “withstand without harm the fatigue exacted by the production of sugar, indigo, and other colonial commodities.”²⁴

Even abolitionist discourse does not escape the question of preventing laziness. When Commissioner Léger-Félicité Sonthonax proclaims the emancipation of the slaves in Saint-Domingue,

abolishes the *Code Noir*,²⁵ and seeks to establish “a new order of things,” he nevertheless takes care to emphasize that the new state of freedom does not exclude labor; on the contrary, he admonishes, “Do not however believe that the liberty you will enjoy will be a state of laziness and leisure. In France, everyone is free, and everyone works; in Saint-Domingue, you are subject to the same laws and will follow the same example.”²⁶ The only change of regime he envisions is in the manner of discipline (the whip is banished) and in the workers’ remuneration for the toil demanded of them.

In this context, a noteworthy case is that of Nicolas-Germain Léonard (1744–1793), the writer born in Guadeloupe. He holds a place in literary history as the poet of laziness, as if that were a nostalgic vestige of his origins in the Antilles.²⁷ Nothing of the kind is true, however: rather, his laziness and his penchant for rest reflect themes borrowed from the classical pastoral imaginary. Léonard follows in the tradition of Fontenelle, adopting the model of the eclogue: Virgilian indolence grazing in the meadows of pastoral Antiquity. However, the reality of colonial slavery does not escape his notice. In his *Lettre sur un voyage aux Antilles* (*Letter on a Voyage to the Antilles*), he describes his return to Guadeloupe, recounting his rounds through various colonial plantations and visits to the estates of colonial administrators. The plantations are bucolic sites of gardens and exotic species of trees which invite the traveler to rest. As for colonial commodities (sugar cane and coffee), they are detached from their reality to become objects of poetic contemplation: “sheaves of light-green canes,” “coffee bushes with their bunches of fiery-red berries.”²⁸ Léonard is not blind to the hardship of the slaves’ labor, but for the most part he transforms it into rhythm and cadence: he sees the fatigue of labor lifted from the Blacks by their singing and dancing. He often takes a paternalistic attitude toward slavery, never giving a thought to abolition but rather envisioning a system to improve the output and exploitation of the slaves, a deliberate policy for managing population

and births among the “creole negroes,” which would free the colonies from the transatlantic slave trade (Léonard, pp. 198–200).

The Prosperity of Laziness

This book is thus an invitation to examine the flip side of the eighteenth century. I propose to show, instead of the values of industry, and in the face of the new battle cry for work, individual instances maintaining their distance from the period’s prevailing trends. In contrast, at the threshold of industrialization, we find a series of characters set against the grain of utility and functionality, repeatedly contesting the universality of labor and activity. This book explores the margins of normalization, without the usual stigmata of damnation and infamy.

In the following chapters, I will reconstitute an *other* discourse of laziness, a contradictory and oppositional vision that defies what Foucault might call the techno-disciplinary model of mercantile society. My aim is not to compile a history of laziness, but to offer a partial narrative through fragments of an antithetical discourse. Through a number of portraits of *homo otiosus*, mined from the underside of the laborious eighteenth century, various figures of idleness as a positive value will come to light: the journalist of Marivaux’s youthful writings and his philosopher bum, Rousseau as a writer belatedly proclaiming laziness in his final years, and Diderot’s famous parasite, Rameau’s Nephew; but there is also the painter Chardin, the musician Jean-François Rameau, and, at the turn of the next century, the little-known Joseph Joubert.

I have intentionally avoided the aristocrat whose privileged idleness is his virtual birthright. This character, and satires thereof, is found throughout the century (with the most virulent expressions found at the time of the Revolution). A caricatural example is found in a comedy by Monsieur de Launay, *Le Paresseux* (1731). The hero of the play, Damon, is presented as paralyzed by the privileges of

his class. His immobile lethargy rests upon his social status and his dwindling fortune. Damon embodies the passion for indolence as an inalienable inheritance. Huddled in his dressing gown, passively managing his possessions, Damon could be the ancestor of the following century's Oblomov, the creation of the Russian writer Ivan Goncharov. In the same vein, one might also point to Xavier de Maistre's somewhat later text, *Voyage autour de ma chambre* (*Voyage Around My Room*, 1795), in which the author describes the insolent and voluptuous *otium* of someone who has capriciously chosen immobility. His "voyage" is also a summons, an invitation to fellow idlers. This proposal of immobility is the effort to end all others: "Buck up, then; we're on our way. . . . let all the lazy people of the world rise *en masse*."²⁹ The idea is to zigzag aimlessly, frittering away the time. The text is an insistent exercise in meandering, a methodless pursuit of slowness through the room of laziness with its oblique, haphazard topography, "lengthwise and breadthwise, and diagonally too," avoiding the "straight line" (p. 8). Ironically crowning a whole century of travel narratives, de Maistre inverts his own and anchors it within a padded interior. His narrator pursues procrastination in all its guises. The bed becomes a shell dedicated to pleasure, a consummate spot of bliss: "I must admit that I love to savor those sweet moments, and I always prolong as much as possible the pleasure of meditating in the sweet warmth of my bed" (p. 10). This precious bed is conceived as an "ever-changing theater" embracing the various ages of life: the promise of birth, the passing delights of love, but also the final repose of the tomb (p. 10). Other pieces of furniture complement this cozy den of leisure, such as the armchair in which the narrator sinks for a spell of contemplation: "During those long winter evenings, it is often sweet and always advisable to stretch out luxuriously in one, far from the din of the crowds. A good fire, a few books, some quills—what excellent antidotes to boredom!" (p. 9). For the occasion de Maistre's character snuggles in his dressing gown, the traveling costume that swaddles him in his private corner: "My winter traveling coat is made of the warmest, most luxurious

fabric I could find: it covers me whole, from head to toe" (p. 72). The narrative of this dilatory voyage consists of putting off for as long as possible the burdensome return to *negotium*, to the "yoke of worldly matters" (pp. 81–82).

Despite such eloquent examples, the laziness arising from the contradictions of bourgeois modernization offers a more intriguing subject of exploration. This laziness takes on a far-reaching signification as soon as the term is detached from the ethical and religious context to which it was originally tied. It can even come full circle to signify its opposite, the paradox of a turbulent, hyper-agitated laziness. The subjects of this book thus anticipate the characters that would emerge in the following century in resistance to the industrial revolution with its capitalist economic order: these include Baudelaire's flâneur and dandy, Rimbaud's Bohemian and vagabond. But their predecessors retain a distinctly eighteenth-century quality.

For Marivaux, laziness resides less in a figure than in a quality of writing practiced by the hero of his journalistic writings, an original embodiment of the philosopher. But laziness is a way for Marivaux to reject the work of abstraction. It is associated with circumstantial, inconsequential reflection. The poetics of laziness cultivates a new form of time: not regular, methodical, linear, but rather unpredictable. Laziness is in tune with transitory time. Marivaux gives us the first elements of this poetics in his composition of a man on the margins, a hero of imprecision and alternation. He sketches the outlines of a truly modern aesthetics of laziness, removed from the models of classical contemplation.

One might imagine the lazy man as bogged down, trampled by lethargy (as depicted in the critical view of moralistic discourse). But the one I celebrate, on the contrary, is a levitationist. He is buoyed up by the air; his genius unfolds in the fluid element. Chardin captures this spirit perfectly in some of his playful paintings. He places figures in light moments of distraction or detachment, poised within a bubble of leisure, of vaporous atmosphere. In Chardin's work, laziness is liquefied in paint.

The chapters on Diderot and Rousseau will unsettle the attitudes expressed by the philosophes, as recalled above. Here the lazy man emerges as a subject liberated from all constraints. He embraces the creative time of the ephemeral and the circumstantial. The marginality of Diderot's and Rousseau's characters (like Rousseau's literary construction of himself as lazy subject) avenges the individual condemned by state institutions as criminal. Laziness becomes an art of living, an aesthetics of existence, an *attitude* (in the sense of "voluntary choice" that Michel Foucault gives this term in defining modernity),³⁰ an ingenious appropriation of the moment-to-moment—the insolent and ironic negation of "doing nothing," a paradoxical affirmation of the self in non-acting and non-productivity. Rousseau's lazy man is no longer a citizen constrained by law, but rather a free agent.

I am guided in my undertaking by the original distinction between labor and work that is proposed by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*.³¹ For Arendt, work is separate from the universe of hardship; it is an enchanted spell that suspends labor through art and creativity. This book on worklessness takes that dialectic even further. It revalorizes leisure by making the negation or suspension of labor a persistent gesture of creation as well. Here non-productivity remains a precious art, a protest against the bourgeois consensus of utility, an original conquest of freedom. In the end, laziness rejoins the essay, the work in progress with no guarantee of completion. It contemplates the unfinished—work interrupted, fragmented without regret.

Idle-ology

Throughout the book, a theoretical discourse will be brought to bear on the literary texts under examination, augmenting this other vision of laziness. First, there is Michel Foucault, quoted earlier, who sheds light on Enlightenment discipline and exposes

its bodies chained by techno-production, controlled by the institutions of confinement (hospital, factory, prison). Turning away from the archeology of those bodies, I write the page of resistance inspired by Foucault.³² The idlers of this book are in the first instance individuals resistant to discipline, to the mechanical order: here they are returned to their nomadic potentiality. At various points I invoke also philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and Michel Serres, who represent what I would call a post-modernist current in opposition to the Enlightenment. When I conjure up a volatile and fluid world in opposition to that of solids, I have in mind Serres's re-envisioning of physics on the basis of chaos theory. This anti-Cartesian philosopher par excellence rejects the methodical and linear in favor of the *randonnée*, the rambling irregularity of the random. Serres's preferred geography is uneven, unpredictable. His approach rejects both system and domination. In his *Éloge de la philosophie en langue française*, he criticizes the scientific universalism of the Enlightenment; for him it is Rousseau who redeems the century. In Serres's view, Rousseau refuses abstract geometry and method, proposing instead the promenade as a way of visiting "idle and lazy" nature.³³ Rousseau collects plants, attunes himself to the sites he discovers, indulges in convoluted detours through the aleatory and the serendipitous: "Jean-Jacques's way of rambling visits every spot on the island [of Saint-Pierre] and allows all its plants and flowers to flourish" (p. 144). Serres also directs his criticism at Laplace's work in astronomy, which married Newton's physics (with its law of central forces, the simple law of attraction) to that of Descartes (with its whirlwinds). This amalgam produces a remarkable system of equilibria and calculable parameters, a planetary vision that neutralizes anomalies and aberrations. Laplacian astronomy globalizes space through abstraction and eliminates obstacles, rationalizing the planetary system.

Serres's countercurrent to this abstraction shares an affinity with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Here I invoke their phi-

losophy of “itineration,” the term by which they designate the scientific approach that privileges the model of ambulation, of mobility.³⁴ Itineration chooses variation over constancy. Another key concept is the rhizome, which tends to decenter by displacement and ramification, in contrast to the tree which fixes and immobilizes. Deleuze and Guattari also favor multiplicity over unity, fragmentation over uniformity. Their geography leaves room for discontinuities; it refuses totalization and linearity. The Cartesian *cogito* is contested for conceiving of space as calculable only from “one point to another” (p. 377). By contrast, Deleuzian nomadology, as a philosophy of fluid and ambulatory processes, of heterogeneous varieties, is turbulent, swirling. It deviates from the gravity of Newtonian physics, in favor of an alternative model that is heterogeneous, differentiated, multiple. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, the science of attraction is the very model of legal science: attraction is the “law of all laws” (p. 370). Deleuze and Guattari point to its pretention of universality, based exclusively on a postulate of constancy and homogeneity. Weight is “a constant relation for all variables” (p. 370). Yet the space of attraction is actually contradicted by other models of space, of eddying flows, operating through separation and speed and escaping the model of gravity.³⁵ When Deleuze and Guattari consider the notion of work, they refer to the mechanistic physical model, the scientific conception of work with its constant quantitative value. To this notion they oppose that of “free action” as a mobile, non-quantifiable force that is impossible to subjugate: “In free action, what counts is the way in which the elements of the body escape gravitation to occupy absolutely a nonpunctuated space” (p. 397).³⁶

These discourses will intersect throughout the book as laziness serves to open up an *other* vision of the eighteenth century. If the narratives I have chosen are distanced from a universalist vision of work, there is an even more profound detachment from the Enlightenment as an ideology of totalization, as the only path

of rationality. The fleeting observations of Marivaux's Spectator, Chardin's distraction, Rousseau's promenade, Rameau's vagrancy, and Joubert's laziness, all nomadic and disengaged activities, embrace a project of slowing down while proclaiming a new order of liberties.