

Jacques Rancière and Indisciplinarity

Translated by Gregory Elliot

This is the transcript of an interview conducted with Jacques Rancière by Marie-Aude Baronian and Mireille Rosello from the University of Amsterdam and ASCA. A version of this interview was published in Dutch by Valiz (NL), in a volume of studies on Jacques Rancière that appeared in the Netherlands in late 2007. In this exchange, Rancière discusses his position with regard to democracy, politics, film, literature, art and research.

I. Introduction

Q) *How do you place yourself in the current French intellectual scene?*

a) *Le Magazine littéraire and Le Nouvel Observateur have recently referred to you as a key figure in the contemporary French intellectual scene: how, briefly, would you characterise your 'profile' and your contribution to French thought?*

I try to problematise the categories that structure diagnoses of our present and debates about it. Thus, I've attempted to rethink democracy by refusing both its official identification with the state forms and lifestyles of rich societies and denunciation of it as a form that masks the realities of domination. Official apologists and Marxist critics basically concur in characterising democracy as a mode of government built on a society defined as a society of consumers. In opposition to this dominant view I've reactivated the real scandal of democracy – which is that it reveals the ultimate absence of legitimacy of any government. As the foundation of politics it asserts the equal capacity of anyone and everyone to be either governor or governed. I've thus been led to conceive democracy as the deployment of forms of action that activate anyone's equality with anyone else, and not as a form of state or a kind of society.

As regards aesthetics, I've questioned the schemas of modernity and post-modernity shared by supporters of modernism, eulogists of the post-modern or high priests of the sublime. All of them more or less agree in characterising the modern artistic revolution in terms of an autonomisation, conceived as a break with representation and as each art concentrating on the exigencies and possibilities of its own material: the transition to abstract painting, atonal music, 'intransitive' poetry whose heroes are Malevitch, Schönberg or Mallarmé. On this basis, they conceive the transition from the modern to the contemporary as a break with such a vocation, as a melange of the arts, a mingling of art and popular and advertising imagery, a confusion of art and life. They can either welcome this or deplore it, justify the confusion or demand an art of the sublime and the unrepresentable. But in each instance they validate the schema. For my part, I've tried to show that what is called artistic modernity has, from the outset, been shot through with a tension between two contradictory requirements: one of these makes art and aesthetic perception into a specific sphere of experience, disconnected from the rules that operate in other spheres; the other feeds on interchange between the arts and spheres of experience and converts art's ways of making into collective ways

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of life. In constructing the archaeology of this tension, I wanted to escape indulgent or doom-laden verdicts on the present state of art; to make it possible to perceive continual shifts in the topography of possibilities, as opposed to major breaks and grand schemas of progress or decline.

So what distinguishes my position is that I put our intellectual objects and forms into historical perspective, rather than offering verdicts based on a priori positions, but also that I reject the schemas of historical necessity and make the archaeology of our present a topography of possibilities that retain their character as possibilities. I say at one and the same time: this is how we came to see what we see and think what we think, but there is no historical necessity, nothing irremediable in this landscape of our intellectual objects and forms. As regards revolutionary projects, I part company both with those who think they possess the correct formula for future revolutions and with those who say that any project for an egalitarian transformation of the world is doomed to totalitarian terror. I don't offer any formula for the future, but I strive to describe a world open to the possibilities and capacities of all: something like an archaeology more open to the event than Foucault's, but without any Benjaminian messianism.

b) *Do you have any special affinities with certain of your philosophical contemporaries (Badiou, Nancy, Balibar)? Or do you regard your work as an attempt at detachment from easily recognisable tendencies in French philosophy?*

Like those you cite, I'm an inheritor of the major philosophical renewal of the 1960s and 70s that challenged the academic philosophical tradition and its modernist form – phenomenology – by opening philosophy up to different domains and practices – literature, history, psychoanalysis, ethnology – which facilitated an expansion and decentring of the intellectual territory. This common origin establishes a connection with Badiou, Balibar or Nancy, as does loyalty to the articulation between philosophical subversion and political emancipation which the intellectual reaction of the 1980s condemned as *la pensée 68*. That said, thinkers like Badiou or Nancy are still linked to an idea of philosophy which I'd call 'fundamentalist', albeit in different ways. Nancy passed through Derridean deconstruction, but he remains attached to the idea of a philosophy that endeavours to think, including in its impossibility, a primary experience of major shared signifiers: meaning, the world, the other, the common. Badiou has taken up the Althusserian idea of a philosophy that does not have its own object but discloses the 'truths' at work in the practices of science, politics or poetry. But at the same time he conceives philosophy as a system in which the rationalities of these practices are dependent on an ontology that provides the general formula of Being and what supplements it. For him this formula is prescriptive – that is, the duty of art or politics can be deduced from it. And from his perspective what I do remains of the order of description and hence an empiricist submission to the order of the world. In contrast, I think there's no general formula of Being from which the practices of art and politics can be deduced; that the prescriptive and the descriptive are always intertwined in such a way as to constitute the landscapes of the possible (those who describe reconfigure the possibilities of a world; those who prescribe presuppose a certain state of the world that is itself made up of sedimented prescriptions); and that the configuration of these landscapes is always, in the last instance, a poem: an expression in ordinary language of the communal resources of thought. So there is solidarity in the face of the reactionary counter-offensive that took ideological power in the 1980s, but at the same time profound differences in our perceptions and practices of philosophy.

Q) *Would it be right to suggest that your work is not so much inter-disciplinary as a-disciplinary?*

Neither. It is 'indisciplinary'. It is not only a matter of going besides the disciplines but of breaking
Jacques Rancière and Indisciplinarity
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them. My problem has always been to escape the division between disciplines, because what interests me is the question of the distribution of territories, which is always a way of deciding who is qualified to speak about what. The apportionment of disciplines refers to the more fundamental apportionment that separates those regarded as qualified to think from those regarded as unqualified; those who do the science and those who are regarded as its *objects*. I began by moving outside of the boundaries of the discipline of ‘philosophy’, because the questions I was concerned with revolved around Marxist conceptions of ideology – the issue of why people found themselves in a particular place and what they could or couldn’t think in that place. Following the events of 1968 and the vicissitudes of the far left, I thought that it was to be resolved not by continuing to immerse myself in Marx’s texts, but by entering into the flesh of working-class experience, into the thinking and practice of emancipation. At the outset, this was a kind of excursion to collect historical material. But the excursion led to a switch of perspectives. I came to understand that the problem wasn’t to search on the terrain of social history for material with which to think through philosophical questions, because the primary philosophical and political question was precisely that of the separation between the intellectual world and a social world which was supposedly merely its object. How does a question come to be considered philosophical or political or social or aesthetic? If emancipation had a meaning, it consisted in reclaiming thought as something belonging to everyone – the correlate being that there is no natural division between intellectual objects and that a discipline is always a provisional grouping, a provisional territorialisation of questions and objects that do not in and of themselves possess any specific localisation or domain.

II. Politics and Philosophy

Q) *One of the major ideas that guides your work is the definition you give of ‘politics’, notably in La Méseintente: not as the interaction between government in power and opposition, for example; not even as the principle of demands on the part of a group already identified as such (e.g. workers), but as the activity that will ‘make that which did not possess grounds to be seen seen, make a discourse heard where once there had been nothing but noise, make heard as a discourse that which had merely been heard as noise’.*¹ *According to you, in France at the moment are there examples of ‘noise’ that are about to produce a political effect? Or what do you think of the efforts of those who try to get ‘visible minorities’ recognised?*

We mustn’t think in terms of instances of noise that are growing louder, ready to be heard by us; or of new subjects that are about to emerge. You don’t have noise biding its time, speech in gestation and awaiting the moment when it will finally be heard. Instead, there is a combination of two relationships: there is the permanence of a conflictual relationship over what is noise, speech or silence; but there are also changes in the form of this division. On the one hand, throughout our society there is speech that is heard merely as noise. Thus, the speech of refusal uttered by people who are made unemployed because of relocation and restructuring is conceived simply as the noise made by a victim. However well-argued, it is always interpreted by the rulers and their experts as the noise of suffering. For them the world moves on and, in so doing, creates wounds and suffering that are to be construed as such. If we take the case of immigration, the people who negotiate with illegal immigrants [*sans-papiers*] on hunger strike know full well that they are talking not with suffering bodies, but with people who argue, who have learnt in Africa the art of discussion, and for whom speech is an important element of social life. This does not prevent the situation of the *sans-papiers* from generally being regarded as a phenomenon of suffering and treated as such. So you don’t have noise which is going to become speech, but speech which is always an issue of interpretation. Will it or won’t it be heard as speech? Where is it going to be heard as noise or as speech?

On the other hand, there are those redistributions of the landscape that lead people to refer, for example, to visible minorities. The political issue is what is meant by this. For me a political subject is a subject who employs the competence of the so-called incompetents or the part of those who have no part, and not an additional group to be recognised as part of society. 'Visible minorities' means exceeding the system of represented groups, of constituted identities. If we think of the quota system, as far as I'm concerned it can't be conceived as a way of conferring importance on groups in accordance with their importance in society. It's a rupture that opens out into the recognition of the competence of anyone, not the addition of a unit.

III. Literature and Politics

Q) *You've published several books on the relationship between literature and politics as you define it, in particular in La Parole muette and Politique de la littérature. Interviewed about the latter, you recently told the French weekly Le Nouvel Observateur that 'whether a literary text is subversive or consensual essentially depends less on the will of the writer than on the political forces that seize upon a description of the world. And that is also true for works which display a political commitment.'*² *Could you develop this idea and explain what you mean here by 'political force' and how a political force can seize upon a vision of the world?*

That formula about a 'political force seizing upon a description' is a bit too flashy. It creates an image, with the result that one seeks to visualise the political force in person seizing upon a description. In that sense I'd find it hard to justify. What it means is that literature operates by reconfiguring the landscape of what can be seen and what can be said by constructing new individualities and a world for these individualities; and that this construction of a politics peculiar to literature follows its own logic. There is no reason for it to open out by itself into a system of description available to some particular political cause. That's what I'm trying to say in *Politique de la littérature*: literature possesses its own democracy, which tends towards a dispersal of individualities, towards the construction of an impersonal stratum that is precisely opposed to the idea of an apportionment of subjective positions of enunciation like those proposed by politics.

If you take the history of the novel since the nineteenth century, literature has significantly developed the space or field of what is of interest to it and hence the field of subjects worthy of interest, of subjects capable of thinking and feeling. Basically, that's what novelistic modernity is: a significant extension of what bodies are capable of feeling, experiencing, speaking, saying. This is the sense in which I assign a central role to *Madame Bovary*. For me, *Madame Bovary* is to some extent the literary equivalent of working-class emancipation. It is the moment when various bodies supposedly destined for a particular place and, therewith, a way of thinking and speaking, a certain capacity for experiencing, defiantly claim a capacity to experience everything and to participate in any kind of enjoyment, be it material or mental. Emancipated workers of the 1830s and 40s had themselves fashioned this capacity by seizing on the 'indetermination' that is the misfortune of novelistic heroes. Now, obviously, such appropriations don't correspond to the intention of the novelists. They wanted workers to embody the nobility of labour and sing of the workshop and popular festivals, rather than transform the psychological problems of their characters into social problems. That's what 'seize upon' means. In rather the same way, the writers of 'negritude' seized on the 'negro' of *Une saison en enfer* and Rimbaud's idea of a language accessible to all the senses.

So literature expands the world of possible experience accessible to anyone. This permits the borrowings and appropriations whereby people excluded from public discourse declared and

Jacques Rancière and Indisciplinarity

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demonstrated themselves capable of intervening in it. But this implies that there is no direct link between a description of the world and a political outcome. Literature's impact on the formation of new forms of political subjectivation operates through the effect of a blurring between domains to which I referred, which is also an effect of redistribution of 'capacities'.

Q) *Your books on literature can't be separated from your works on disagreement and the search for a common language. They re-articulate the issue of the part of those who have no part and the intrusion of politics as the moment when the places that have been allocated to each and every one are called into question. The role of the 'literary critic' as an expert possessed of specialist tools for reading literature is thus called into question. Some literary critics have been rather taken aback by the impression of not being attended to as experts equipped with a method. And you've made it clear to them that literature is for everyone.³ Would you go so far as to say that literature cannot be taught? Or, at least, that it would be useful, not destructive, to abolish courses that take literature as an object of study?*

I'm not asking for the teaching of literature to be abolished. But I'm interested in literature not as a discipline but as a principle of declassification of discourses. Consequently, I don't believe that there is a specific literary method or literary competence. For me literature is not a wholly self-contained art or domain, requiring specialists to reveal its laws and get its works appreciated. It is a historical regime of the art of writing, which is precisely characterised by the abolition of the rules of the poetic arts, by the fact that there is no longer any closure of the system, that there is no longer even any opposition between a fictional reason and a factual reason. For me literature refers to an opening of the boundaries between discourses and there are no experts on this opening. The important thing is to bring out the potential for expanding experience that it carries within it. This is not the object of any specific method. Alternatively put, discourse on literature is always itself a literary discourse; discourse on fiction is itself the construction of a fiction.

So I've never been interested in producing a theory of literature providing instruments that would make it possible to disclose rules, to explain literary works in general and transmit them. I've tried to mark some points of emergence, some points of rupture, some forms of expansion of the meaning of experience, and then to situate their importance vis-à-vis different domains and to make them resonate. For me, what is called literary criticism or film criticism is not a way of explaining or classifying things, but a way of extending them and making them resonate differently. Explaining Flaubert or Balzac or Hugo is of no interest to me whatsoever. What interests me is to make a character, some words or a piece of syntax resonate vis-à-vis other characters, words, pieces of syntax. I first brought Flaubert into play not by writing about *Madame Bovary* but by constructing imaginary combinations between the workers whose texts I was reading in the archives and some of Flaubert's characters. If I've written about *Madame Bovary*, it is to make it resonate in connection with the issue of democracy and its interpretations. Why was the text of an author with an aristocratic sensibility, cultivating art for art's sake, immediately denounced as the literary embodiment of democracy? Answering that question was an opportunity for me to make the clash between several senses of democracy heard: political democracy as I understand it, literary democracy as practised by Flaubert, and sociological democracy à la Tocqueville, which is what Flaubert's contemporaries read in his book and which is still advanced today by those who equate democracy with consumer society.

Q) *The examples you take in your books on literature pertain to what students of literature call the canon. What's the meaning of your approach here?*

The question of the canon is not of much interest to me, since I don't treat literature as an art charged with transmitting a certain cultural legitimacy, and hence with classifying claimants to that legitimacy. I became interested in literature as a historical regime of the art of writing. I've therefore prioritised texts that make it possible to bring out the birth of this regime and the political stakes associated with its emergence.

For example, if I've taken Balzac, it is in connection with the issue I call the war of forms of writing or the issue of literariness. Here literature intervenes in a question that goes beyond it, a philosophico-political question which is that of the circulation of the letter, which is going to be addressed to anyone and everyone. Balzac signals the triumph of the novel, the democratic genre par excellence since it abolishes every hierarchy, any specific destination of speech. At the same time he fictionalises the perils of this mode of circulation off which his book lives, counter-posing to errant speech the writing that can be read on things themselves. The politics of the novel is then inscribed in a conflict between regimes of signification. For me the issue of the democracy of literature is to be found here. The problem is not doing justice to everyone, creating a balance between male literature and female literature, French literature from France or francophone literature from Canada, Africa, the Caribbean. The important thing is, on the one hand, the democracy practised by literature itself and, on the other, the democracy that is going to be practised by those who appropriate it. As I said a moment ago, the major reference-points for emancipated workers in 1830 or 1840 are not Eugène Sue, not the social novel or popular novels, but René, Werther and Oberman. Why? Because these are characters who have simply had the 'misfortune to be born' and who suffer from having no place in society. But 'simply to be born' is the original definition of the proletarian – except that for him it implied a well-defined place in society, which excluded the question of seeking to discover what one has arrived to do in it. The subversion of this subordinate place took the form then of the appropriation of the novelistic figure of the one who suffers from having 'nothing to do' in society.

So for me democracy is not a matter of a programme assigning so-called minority groups their respective weight. To rupture what is called the taught canon, to introduce African literature and Caribbean literature, is well and good. But the significance does not consist in giving those who have long been oppressed their share of the cake. It consists in sharing out a certain battle with the dominant language – for example, the way in which writers like Césaire have activated the language of Rimbaud or the surrealists against the finely polished language of official French literature.

IV. Cinema

Q) *In 2001 you devoted a whole work to film (La Fable cinématographique) and you had already written on film – for example, in Les Cahiers du cinéma, the journal Trafic, Arrêt sur histoire or Malaise dans l'esthétique. How would you define the place of film in your work? Is it a 'indiscipline' like the others (with its own tensions, forms and space)? Or does film occupy a particular position that renders it distinct as a regime from art (at once representative and aesthetic) or any other aesthetic language (literature, for example)?*

Two layers are super-imposed in my interest in film. The first is a love of cinema, which takes us back to the French passion for film at the end of the 1950s and start of the 1960s. This was a way of blurring the dominant aesthetic legitimacy, for which beautiful films were those with images immediately identifiable as artistic, cinema based on a rich psychological plot, or posing metaphysical problems (Antonioni, Bergman and so on). As a culture of autodidacts, this cinephilia was constructed around Hollywood film-makers, regarded as having lapsed from their German artistic dignity (Lang) or as representatives of the film industry of popular genres: the musical

(Minneli), the western (Walsh, Hawks, Mann), melodrama (Sirk), the detective film (Hitchcock), etc. The blurring of hierarchies was also a blurring of hitherto accepted evaluative criteria: plastic quality, psychological subtlety, metaphysical profundity, etc. It was also a blurring of places, because cinephilia negotiated between the film theatre and small neighbourhood screens, which were the two places where you could see films that were looked down on. So at first for me there was this culture of love of films and the blurring of forms of aesthetic legitimacy that it implied. This links up with a more general phenomenon: in 'wild' fashion, cinema realised the programme of uniting art and popular audience that theatre had dreamt about. It was a popular art reclassified by its consumers, an art that allowed a pretty significant number of people to make their way into the domain of art and aesthetic judgement. Even when we refer to mass, Hollywood, commercial films, it has to be said that this 'commercial' art yielded an outcome that was inconceivable in a certain era, bringing it about that millions of people could see David Lynch's films, which are at least as far removed from traditional narrative rationality as the works of the *nouveau roman* closely confined to the world of art.

The second layer is the more reflexive one, more bound up with my work on regimes of art. On the one hand, in effect film is the art that ended up carrying out the programme of the aesthetic revolution. For the theorists of the 1920s, film was the art that had arrived to see off old-style narrative and psychology, so as to convey instead the events of sensory matter – the shimmering of atoms of light on a screen. It was the art of the machine which was supposed to rid us of the classical figure of the artist and make us abandon the classical figures and forms of narration and psychology. It was the art of light and motion speaking for themselves. As it turned out, cinema did something quite different, because it reintroduced forms of narration and psychology that were destroyed elsewhere and even the distribution into genres. So my interest was focused on this contradiction, on the way in which two logics – an aesthetic logic and a narrative logic – were intermingled in film. I've tried to mark the way in which a narrative logic of action is at once sustained and constantly suspended, interrupted by visual forms that are like stases of the visible. This is true even in narrative films like Anthony Mann's westerns, where there are moments of interruption, suspension, moments where nothing happens. So my interest in film is structured around these two questions, connected firstly with the experience of a film-lover and secondly with an examination of the mixing of regimes.

Q) *Might it be said that La Fable does not offer a (new) theory of film, but is instead another way of reading film as an indiscipline differently?*

Yes, you could say that. I don't in any way believe in the need for a theory of film (any more than a theory of literature). I've got nothing against the fact that other people claim to construct one. But the idea that there is a filmic language, that you are going to distil the elements of this language, and that on this basis you are going to analyse films isn't, in my view, of much interest. This still pertains to the idea of disciplines and fields, whereas cinema intermingles different sensory regimes: those of the literary imagination, sensitive viewing of a painting, musical emotion, etc. Film is the standardised form of the 'total art-work'. I've spoken of the film fable, not of a theory of film, so as clearly to signal this heterogeneity of the object 'cinema'. There is a tension between two regimes: a regime of narrative sequence and a regime of aesthetic suspension that is at the heart of the film. There is a mixture of sensory regimes. There's the fact that cinema is both the name of a place, a form of entertainment, an idea of art, etc. There's also the fact that cinema is something that has to be talked about. It's not a library where all the works are at our disposal. It's passing images, films that one has seen and essentially forgotten. The images are transformed as soon as they are seen, then transformed in people's heads by a whole process of selection, and then

transformed by texts that talk about them. That's why I think that narratological theories and methods aren't very interesting, because no one watches a film like that (shot by shot or unit by unit). The very logic of cinema, that of the spectator, is precisely that the elements which occur are filtered; that people construct their own poem, their own film, with what is in front of them; and then they prolong it in words. This means that film, like literature, is not simply an art but constructs a world. About a world you don't construct some theory but your own poem.

V. Transmission of Forms of Knowledge: Pedagogy and Memory

Q) *In the last ten years, you've tackled the subject of the Shoah on several occasions and, in particular, given your opinion in the debate about the interdiction of representation (Arrêt sur histoire, Cahiers du cinéma, contribution to the volume edited by Jean-Luc Nancy, L'art et la mémoire des camps – reprinted in Le Destin des images).⁴ In these texts you seem to argue in favour of a necessary iconography of the Holocaust, stressing the idea that nothing is unrepresentable in itself but that, on the contrary, 'in order to show Auschwitz, art alone is possible, because it is always the presence of an absence, because its labour consists in making something invisible visible to us, through the regulated power of words and images, whether connected or unconnected, because in this way it is the only thing capable of rendering the inhuman palpable'.*

a) *Should we infer from this that the power and peculiarity of visual art are that they make seen what cannot be seen and that this is where the political and aesthetic vocation of catastrophic iconography is to be found?*

'Making something invisible visible' is still too religious a formula. When people refer to the 'invisibility' of the extermination of European Jewry, they mix up two things. In effect, they project an ethico-religious prescription onto what is in the first instance the factual datum characteristic of a process: specific to the process of the extermination is the fact that it unfolded silently and applied itself to destroying its own traces. The artistic issue about the representation of extermination lies here: not in the question of whether one has the right to reconstruct a gas chamber and its victims, but in the fact that we possess almost exclusively the words of a small number of survivors to inform us about a process conducted in secret. In the case of Lanzmann, there is a specifically artistic choice which is to activate absence – an absence of the things in the words, an absence of traces in the sites – so as to make the process of the double disappearance felt, by disconnecting it from any embodiment of external causality. That is why the film begins in a place – Chelmno – where no concentration camp buildings survive. But Lanzmann and his supporters have blurred things by foregrounding the issue of the idolatry of images. For the problem precisely bears instead on what is to be represented and on the type of plot, the type of sequence to be employed to that end. Let's take a different example: Alfredo Jaar has created several installations on the Rwandan massacre without a single image of massacred bodies, but usually by picturing and presenting various words: the names of places and persons. This is because the invisible thing to be made visible assumes a different meaning here. What is not visible, what had to be made visible, was that the victims of this mass murder were all individuals. They had to be given their names, an inscription in the order of discourse and memorial, because indifference to all these deaths in fact prolongs a certain invisibility, the feeling that these lives are external to the world of discourse. Another example: Khalil Joreige and Joana Hadjithomas have spoken about the war in Lebanon on the basis of material that attests to another form of invisibility: the films that there were no longer the resources to develop and print and which had become indecipherable when it was possible to do so. So for me there isn't any iconography or poetics of

catastrophe in general, only poetic or political choices which on the one hand are bound up with particular cases, and on the other run into aesthetic divisions that are not specific to these processes.

b) *Do you support Godard's idea that 'the history of cinema is that of a missed rendezvous with the history of its century'?⁵ Do you therefore think, like Godard in Histoire(s) de cinéma, that cinema's error was that it wasn't capable of filming the camps?*

This kind of statement belongs to a Heideggerian type of dramaturgy, in which one defines the essence of an epoch and a technology as the expression of that essence. There is no vocation of cinema to which it has been unfaithful, because 'cinema' is itself a heterogeneous object. And the very idea of a century is always a construct among other constructs. Godard effects a construct of this kind by constructing a cinema 'forewarning' of the extermination through various films (*Faust*, *Nibelungen*, *La Règle du jeu*, *The Great Dictator*, and so on), all of which might be entered into very different constructions. That's to say, he uses a poetics of montage which is in fact a certain 'poetics of the twentieth century', in order to legitimise a quite different idea of cinema and its relationship to the century. But since this poetics ultimately goes back to a certain German Romanticism (that of Friedrich Schlegel and his 'progressive universal poetry' which fragments and recomposes the works of the past), this means that he uses a particular Romantic poetics in order to construct the image of a twentieth century determined by a different German Romanticism (that of *Faust* and the *Nibelungen*). The 'missed rendezvous' is in fact the fictional object constructed by a confrontation between poetics and temporalities.

c) *Discussing the cinematic work of Chris Marker, you write: 'memory is a work of fiction'.⁶ Today, couldn't this idea be well-nigh systematically extended to any (artistic) attempt at fictionalisation appropriate to the imagery of catastrophes?*

Once again, I don't in any way believe in an imagery or fictionalisation appropriate to the representation of catastrophes, because I do not believe that there is a general, homogeneous figure of catastrophe. On the one hand, what I'm saying there applies to memory in general: it is always a selection, an articulation between fragments, a superimposition of non-synchronous temporal series. That is to say, it is always fiction, in the sense in which I intend it: the construction of a relationship between something visible and some meaning, between heterogeneous spaces and times. On the other hand, insistence on fictional labour assumes its full significance when what's involved are those destructive phenomena that transform their victims into pure objects of a documentary gaze. Godard used to say ironically that epic was for the Israelis and documentary for the Palestinians. The artistic work of memory is that which accords everyone the dignity of fiction.



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¹ Jacques Rancière, *La Méésentente*, Paris: Galilée, 1995, p. 53.

² See 'Sous les pavés, la page', interview with Aude Lancelin, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 8–14 February 2007, pp. 98-100: here p. 100.

³ See 'Jacques Rancière: Literature, Politics, Aesthetics: Approaches to Democratic Disagreement', interview with Solange Guénoun and James H. Kavanagh, *Substance*, no. 92, 2000, pp. 3-24.

⁴ See Jean-Louis Comolli and Jacques Rancière, *Arrêt sur histoire*, Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1997; Jacques Rancière, 'La sainte et l'héritière: à propos des "Histoire(s) du cinéma"', *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 537, July–August 1999, pp. 58-61; Jacques Rancière, 'S'il y a de l'irreprésentable', in *Le Destin des images*, Paris: La Fabrique, 2003, pp. 123-53.

⁵ Jacques Rancière, *La Fable cinématographique*, Paris: Seuil, 2001, p. 217.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 202.