

## A few remarks on the method of Jacques Rancière

Jacques Rancière

When it comes to the appreciation of a thinker, there are two levels of investigation. One can examine his/her ideas, test their consistency, compare them with other thinkers' ideas and judge the good or bad effects that they can produce when going from 'theory' to 'practice'. But, at another level, one examines the way these 'ideas' are produced, the issues they address, the materials they select, the givens they consider significant, the phrasing of their connection, the landscape they map, their way of inventing solutions (or aporias), in short their method.

A method means a path: not the path that a thinker follows but the path that he/she constructs, that you have to construct to know where you are, to figure out the characteristics of the territory you are going through, the places it allows you to go, the way it obliges you to move, the markers that can help you, the obstacles that get in the way. Examining a method thus means examining how idealities are materially produced. 'Ideas are material forces', Marx says, 'when they take over the minds of the multitudes'. The formula is only half-materialistic. Ideas always are material realities, taking over bodies, giving them a map of the visible and orientations for moving.

This idea of what 'method' means should never be forgotten when it comes to Jacques Rancière. Let us look at the first paragraph of the preface of his first book, *La Leçon d'Althusser*: what matters to me, he said, is to picture what 'Marxism' and 'being a Marxist philosopher' mean today. And the first question he asks at the beginning of the first chapter of the book is: who is this strange character that Althusser names by two initials 'the M.L.'? In the same way, at the very beginning of *The Nights of Labor*, he tells the reader that the night is not a metaphor he uses to designate the poor condition of the workers. The night is just the night, the part of the day when workers are supposed to sleep and that some of them, on a specific day of a definite year, decide to use for something else: discussing the creation a workers' journal.

Those two examples give us two important hints of the method of Jacques Rancière. First his books are always forms of intervention in specific contexts. He never intended to produce a theory of politics, aesthetics, literature, cinema or anything else. He thinks that there is already a good deal of them and he loves trees enough to avoid destroying them to add one more theory to all those available on the market. His interventions have always been provoked by situations in which the question 'where am I now?' appeared to him able to overlap with a wider question 'where are

*we now?*. ‘Where are we?’ means two things at once: ‘how can we characterize the situation in which we live, think and act to-day?’, but also, by the same token: ‘how does the perception of this situation oblige us to reconsider the framework we use to “see” things and map situations, to move within this framework or get away from it?’; or, in other words, ‘how does it urge us to change our very way of determining the coordinates of the “here and now”?’

Let us take some examples that mark up the course of his work. It started after 1968 as an interrogation of the type of Marxism that had previously provided him with a theoretical framework, namely Althusserian Marxism: it started with the question: how did it happen that this radical re-foundation of revolutionary Marxism ended up providing the restoration of the Academic order with its sharpest theoretical weapons? What did this reversal teach us about Marxism in general, about the way Marxism had linked together history, knowledge and revolution? In what way did it force us to reconsider the traditions of the working class movement? The aspect of the battlefield changed when, in the mid-1970s, the so-called ‘new philosophers’ took the floor in France, initiating the intellectual counter-revolution that gradually called into question, through the denunciation of Marxism, all the aspects of the revolutionary tradition. The re-thinking of emancipation, from *The Nights of Labor* to *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* was an intervention in that double-waged war. And it is this investigation that brought about the understanding of emancipation and equality that lie at the ground of the rethinking of politics he pursued, from *On the Shores of Politics* to *Disagreement*. Now this rethinking itself came as a response to the provocations of a new situation. In the 90s the context was no more that of the debate on the virtues or crimes of Marxism. It was that of the collapse of the Soviet Empire, of the thesis of the ‘end of history’ achieved in the global triumph of consensual democracy. But it was also that of the new ethnic and religious wars in former communist countries and the new forms of racism and xenophobia in so-called ‘democratic countries’. *On the Shores of Politics* and *Disagreement* were elaborated as an investigation into this strange relationship between the assertion of the global triumph of consensual and peaceful democracy and those new forms of violence. They tried to construct the ideological paradigm able to account for it, by showing that *consensus* meant in fact the contrary of *democracy* and, by the same token, the erasure of politics itself. The opposition of politics and police was proposed as a tool for understanding the logic of this process.

The work on aesthetics was elaborated according to the same logic: firstly as a consequence of the previous work, as the systematisation of a thinking of politics in terms of ‘distribution of the sensible’, of polemics about the visible and the sayable, about who sees and who does not see, who speaks and who makes noise, etc.; secondly as a response to the effective encroachment of the aesthetic on the political and of the political on the aesthetic: on the one hand, the notion of ‘postmodernism’, first used as the name of an allegedly new artistic paradigm had become a form of global description of a time and a world deprived of any perspective of collective emancipation. On the other hand the statement of the ‘end of art’ and the failure of aesthetics, along with the statements on the ‘unrepresentable’ and the retrospective denunciation of the participation of the artistic utopias to the crimes of totalitarianism, had become part of the global reactionary discourse on the

‘end of utopias’. It is against this background that *The Politics of Aesthetics* opened a series of works dedicated to the relationships between aesthetics and politics.

Let us sum it up: the works of Rancière are not ‘theories of’, they are ‘interventions on’. They are polemical interventions. This does not only mean that they take a political stance. This means that they imply a polemical view of what ideas are and do. When he deals with democracy, Rancière deals with the division of the notion: ‘post-democracy’ for instance does not designate a period of history after the ‘end of democracy’ (in passing, he never used the notion of ‘post-politics’ that was generously lent to him by Slavoj Žižek); it designates the logic governing a set of discourses and practices which turn democracy into its contrary. Now this overturning is no accident in his view. ‘Democracy’ is not the concept of a form of power that has been betrayed or misinterpreted. It was, from the very beginning, the object of a struggle. Democracy was invented as a polemical name, designating the unthinkable power of the multitude of those who have no qualification for governing. It was an insult in the mouth of Athenian aristocrats. It became a quandary for philosophers who coped with it in paradoxical ways, by stating that the best democracy is the democracy in which the democrats cannot exert their power (Aristotle) or that absolutism is necessary *because* all men are equal (Hobbes). And still today our governments and their experts explain that the danger which threatens democracies is democracy. To speak of democracy, this means to speak of the struggle about the word, to draw the map of a battlefield. The same goes for ‘aesthetic’ which does not mean the theory or science of art but the paradoxical regime of thinking in which a form is appreciated ‘without a concept’ and art is characterized by the fact of determining a specific experience without defining any border separating art from non-art. What Rancière tries to point out in any situation is the polemical nature that makes it an object of thinking, that situates it in a field of tensions: a democracy that works only by brushing democracy aside, a theory of emancipation that serves the cause of domination, a form which is not the form of any content nor the mark of any will, a situation that is interpreted in the opposite terms of a ‘return of politics’ and of an ‘end of politics’, etc. If ‘division’ is at the heart of his texts on politics, this has nothing to do with any vision of politics, based on the distinction between friends and enemies. ‘Disagreement’ and ‘dissensus’ do not imply that politics is a struggle between camps; they imply that it is a struggle about what politics is, a struggle that is waged about such original issues as: ‘where are we?’, ‘who are we?’, ‘What makes us a we’, ‘what do we see and what can we say about it that makes us a we, having a world in common?’ Those paradoxical, unthinkable objects of thinking mark for him the places where the question ‘How is this thinkable at all?’ points to the question: ‘who is qualified for thinking at all?’ This question, he thinks, is ultimately what is at stake in the war of discourses which is the field of ‘theoretical’ practice.

This can be put in other words: Rancière is only interested in ideas at work: not ‘democracy’ for instance, but ‘democracy’ voiced in sentences that stage its possibility or impossibility, not ‘politics’ in general but discourses and practices which set the stage of its birth or of its fading away, of those who are included in it and those who are not, etc.: it may be the well known statement of Aristotle on the difference between human speech and animal voice, but also the verses of a poet

(Wordsworth) describing how the landscape of the French Revolution appears to a young traveller, or the narration of the scene on the Aventine where what is at issue is to know whether plebeians do or do not speak; this can be the manifesto of tailors on strike asking for ‘relationships of equality’ with the masters, the verse of Homer that gives the first definition of the demos as the collection of those who are not entitled to speak, the statement of a French Prime Minister that ‘France cannot take in all the misery of the world’, the statement made by Olympe de Gouges that women must be allowed to go to the tribune since they are allowed to go to the scaffold, etc.

This is the second important aspect of his method. It is easy to notice that Rancière always constructs his argumentation as a re-staging of a limited number of such scenes or events of discourse. It is also important to remark that he introduces no hierarchy in the selection of its scenes. The Marxist tradition and all the tradition of social science distinguishes two kinds of words: there are the words in which people express a situation as they feel it, and there are the words by which science accounts for a situation and for the ways in which those who are part of it can feel it and express their feeling. But, for Rancière, words are still words, arguments are still arguments, narratives are still narratives. The main point is not what they explain or express, it is the way in which they stage a scene or they create a commonsense: things that the speaker and those who hear it are invited to share – as a spectacle, a feeling, a phrasing, a mode of intelligibility. The inhabitant of the poor suburbs who is interviewed by the sociologist stages a scene of that kind, the sociologist who explains to the reader why the interviewee does not understand the reason of what he feels constructs another scene in the same way. Plato says that the artisan must do only one thing because ‘work does not wait’, his words map a landscape of the possible; when a nineteenth century joiner tells us that time does not belong to him, he restages the same scenery, but, when he tells us how he withdraws the power of his look from the task of his hands, he starts restaging the scene, building a polemical commonsense in which workers can do what they ‘cannot’ do. Politics, Rancière assumes, starts with this tiny modification in the posture of a body. But this can be understood only on condition that one pulls the words of the joiner out of their ordinary status (social stuff) to make them meet the words of the philosopher. It is within this fabric of discourse that Rancière’s concepts take their meaning. This is an unusual texture for a theoretical discourse indeed. Most of those who conceptualize politics today do it on the basis of a general theory of the subject, if not on the basis of a general ontology. But Rancière argues that he cannot make any deduction from a theory of being as being to the understanding of politics, art or literature. The reason, he says, is that he knows nothing about what being as being may be. That’s why he had to manage with his own resources which are not that much. Since he cannot deduce politics from any ontological principle, he chose to investigate it out of its limits, he means out of the situations in which its birth or its disappearance are staged: the birth can be a popular uprising staging the manifestation of a still unheard of subject; but it can also be the modest meeting of nine persons creating in a London tavern a ‘Corresponding Society’ open to an unlimited number of members, or even a slight modification of the timetable of a worker’s evening. The disappearance can be the Marxist statement of the ‘human revolution’ overcoming the ‘political revolution’, the identification of the political subject

‘proletarian’ with the body of the factory worker or the discourse of consensus proclaiming the end of political division.

This is ultimately what is meant by the assertion of the ‘rarity’ of politics. I do think that Rancière could have chosen a less ambiguous term. Nevertheless what he means by this term is clear. It does not mean that politics only happens in moments of insurrection after which everything comes back to mere apathy. It means, firstly, that there is not politics out of the sole fact that there are always relations of power; it means, secondly, that what politics means can best be understood from the moments when the power of anybody emerges most significantly. Rancière continuously emphasized that politics is almost everywhere and in every time interlocked, if not confused, with police. But it is precisely because things are continuously entangled, because the logic of equality is continuously intertwined with the logic of inequality, that you need criteria to distinguish their principles so as to handle the tangle itself. And it is from the consideration of limit-moments that it is possible to do so. The idea that such a view is ‘pessimistic’ would probably sound strange to his ears. He thinks that, on the contrary, the only optimistic perspective about politics is that which thinks about the ‘power of the people’ from the moments of utmost effectiveness of that power, from the moments of disruption of the hierarchical order. This has nothing to do with the worn-out and pointless discussions about spontaneity and organisation. The point for him is: how do we determine what is political in a situation, a gathering, a statement, an action? How can we determine to what extent a ‘political organization’ does politics?

This is why I suspect he might question in turn the critiques questioning his analysis of democracy as mere fantasy, politics without politics. His politics is reproached to miss the crucial question: how can the left take over power? Taking over power, he thinks, is not such a big problem: knowing how to impose one’s will to other human beings is a science that any kid can learn in the playground of his/her school. He knows a lot of left-wing or leftist colleagues who took over power. He knows a lot of left-wing parties that had exerted or exert it from Mitterrand and Tony Blair to Hu Jintao and Kim Jong-Il. The question is not so much: what do they do with the power they hold, as it is: to what extent is their power a political one? To what extent is a power political? There is, he says, a multiplicity of forms of power exerted in families, tribes, schools, playgrounds, teams, workshops, churches, offices, barracks, prisons, etc. There is a multiplicity of patterns of power borrowed from them that are used as instruments of state power. Now the question is: to what extent is state power the same thing as political power? This is where the democratic ‘fantasy’ intervenes: not as the fancy opposed to ‘real politics’, but as a limit-form, a paradoxical form of political fiction which, Rancière thinks, may reveal the paradoxical truth of politics in general: politics in general, is this specific kind of power that deals with a specific entity, a specific community named ‘the people’. If we try to understand what it means, we come, little by little, to the disturbing conclusion that the essence of politics is the power of the people, and that the essence of the ‘power of the people’ is: the power of those who have no quality to exert power. So the denunciation of the fantasy of democracy as ‘politics without politics’ might be itself the theoretical fiction which covers the ‘real’ of any *political* power, namely ‘power without power’.

‘It might be’ is a formulation consistent with Rancière’s peculiar practice of ‘theory’. As I mentioned earlier, even when he writes ‘theses on politics’, he does not say what politics is but what it might be. He does not build a theory starting from the ontological principle of politics to deduce its consequences. Politics can certainly be described as an ontological conflict: it is a question of constructing a real in opposition to another. In the same way an artist or a novelist constructs with words and forms the ontological tissue within which his/her forms are visible or his/her words take weight. An ontological treatise thus means for him an attempt to construct a common space for those constructions, a form of intelligibility of their play. He thinks it is possible to construct in that way interesting and useful poems (you must remember that this term has no pejorative overtone for him), interesting paths allowing us to move from one point to another on the territory of the war of discourses, on condition that they opt out of the pretension to give us the ‘foundations’ of knowledge and action. A foundation, he thinks, is always a ‘might be’ or an ‘as if’, which is reached afterwards, at the end of a process. So he proceeded, as usual, in his investigation about the linkage between politics and democracy. He started from some contemporary paradoxical knots of discourse, notably those discourses which spell out how ‘democracies’ are ‘threatened’ by a danger called ‘democracy’. He investigated this homonymy between the ‘good’ and the ‘harm’ in his usual way: he held onto the textual knot constituted by all the current stuff on ‘democracy as a threat to democracies’ and tried to disentangle the threads of the knot and to draw them as far as he could. The extreme point reached in this progression is the platonic polemics against democracy. This polemics comprises two elements: in the *Republic* a descriptive element, a fancy picture – or fiction – of democracy as the world where everything is upside down because of the reign of equality; and, in the *Laws*, a list of qualifications for exerting power, where democracy is not named but appears only as the ‘choice of the god’ or the power of chance, the only power based on no qualification for ruling. This diptych, he thought, can be taken as the original formula of the democratic scandal: democracy is the world upside down, since it is the formulation of political power as ‘power without power’. An ‘original formula’ is not an ‘origin of’; it is the oldest and the most concise formulation of ‘democracy’ as a polemic issue, as a scandal for both the order of thought and the order of society. And, from this original formula, understood in that sense, he thought it was possible to reconstruct not a political theory but a dramaturgy of politics. Between the contemporary aporias of consensus and this formula it is possible to weave the main threads of a dramaturgy of politics, conceived out of its limits, a dramaturgy of politics conceived as the development of this paradox of ‘power without power’ that is meant by the word ‘democracy’.

How is it possible to weave such a logic, he has often been reproached? How can we compare Athenian democracy, the organization of an antique city based on slavery, the oppression of women, etc., with our wide and complex democracies based on the forms of modern economy, market economy, virtual technologies, and so on? But he overturned the question: how is it, he asked, that, though we live in entirely different regimes, societies and forms of life, the descriptions of democratic life as mass individualism, consumerism, narcissism, etc. that fill our journals and magazines exactly reproduce the platonic description of the democratic village? If it is so, he answers, it *may* mean that this ‘image’ of democracy as individualist anarchy is the

ground-fiction covering the ground-paradox of politics. Politics is an ‘impossible’ regime, but this impossible regime is the ground of politics as such: so long as a government enacts a power that is the power of age, birth, science, etc., it is not a political power. If a political government means anything at all, it means a government based on no specific qualification for power. This is what ‘contingency’ means and how ‘equality’ links up with ‘equality’. It does not imply any metaphysical statement about the reality of the universe. The ‘contingency’ of politics means that its existence dismisses all the forms of necessity and legitimization based on a pre-disposition to the exercise of power and a preliminary distribution of positions based on it. By the same token it means that there is no necessity that something like a ‘political’ government exist at all. In the same way, aesthetic indifference is not indifference *per se*. It is indifference with respect to the oppositions – i.e. the hierarchies structuring artistic performance in the representational regime, such as form/matter, understanding/sensibility or activity/passivity. Political contingency (in general) and aesthetic indifference (in the aesthetic regime) are contingency and indifference with respect to a set of determinations expressing a hierarchical distribution of positions.

So, the investigation about some ‘extreme’ forms of staging of democracy leads us to determine a radical meaning of democracy which means both the ground of any political power and its disruption. From this investigation of the ‘extremes’, we can frame an understanding of the polemical relationships between the structures of constitutional governments and the forms of autonomous political action. We can also draw from it an orientation for democratic action: democratic action is the form of action which carries out the disruption of any ultimate legitimacy of power, or, if you turn it on its positive side, the affirmation of the equal capacity of anybody.

This is not a theory of politics, setting the principles *for* political practice. This is a ‘dramaturgy’ of politics, a way to make sense of the aporias of political legitimacy by weaving threads between several configurations of sense. A configuration of sense is an effective form of linkage between perceptions, discourses and decisions. This form of linkage creates a specific form of commonsense, defining what can be seen, said and done, and confronting other forms of commonsense, which means other constructions of the possible. This is the main intuition underpinning Rancière’s ‘method’: there is not, on the one hand, ‘theory’ which explains things and, on the other hand, practice educated by the lessons of theory. There are configurations of sense, knots tying together possible perceptions, interpretations, orientations and movements. What he does himself is to construct a moving map of a moving landscape, a map that is ceaselessly modified by the movement itself. This is why, indeed, his ‘concepts’ are instable: police and politics, distribution of the sensible, aesthetics, literature, etc. don’t mean the same thing from the beginning of the travel to the end; firstly because the travel is a fight too, a multi-waged fight where the emphasis can be put on different aspects; secondly because the travel – or the fight – continuously discovers new landscapes, paths or obstacles which oblige to reframe the conceptual net used to think where we are.

Let us for instance consider the controversial issue of the link between politics and aesthetics. There is indeed something disturbing in his use of the word ‘aesthetic’.

It gets two meanings in his writings. On the one hand, it names a specific regime of identification of art, historically determined. On the other hand, it names a dimension of human experience in general. So the aesthetics/politics question is two-sided. On the one hand it designates the specific forms of linkage existing between the forms of the aesthetic regime and the modern forms of politics. On the other hand, it designates the way in which political actions and conflicts are conflicts about the distribution of the sensible, conflicts about what is visible, what can be said about it, who is entitled to speak and act about it, etc. It is an intricate situation, for sure. And some people may have good grounds for asking him to use different terms in order to dismiss the confusion. He will answer, as usual, firstly that it is not his fault if some words span such a wide range of meanings, secondly that it is no accident that they do so. 'Aesthetic judgement' in Kant, 'aesthetic education' in Schiller, mean a specific form of relation that dismisses traditional hierarchies and, for these reasons, is proposed by them as a possible mediation to overcome the drawbacks of political revolution. 'Aisthesis' is a Greek word which means both feeling and understanding, which means the connection between a capacity of feeling and a capacity of understanding. It is from the structure of the human 'aisthesis' that Aristotle deduces the political nature of the human animal. Now the point is that this deduction proves controversial from the very beginning because of a small problem: slaves too understand language but it is impossible to see them as political animals; so the human 'aisthesis' has to be divided: understanding language, Aristotle says, does not mean possessing language. But this is not the whole picture: Aristotle opposes the speech which is the manifestation of the human political capacity to the voice which only expresses the animal sensations of pleasure and pain. The point is: how do you recognize the mouthing of a pain from the voicing of an argument? This division of the aisthesis is still at work at any moment in our present: for instance when strikers take to the streets to discuss the decision of rulers or managers while the latter only hear their slogans as the shouts or the grumbling expressing their 'anxiety'. So political conflict is an aesthetic matter from the very beginning, to the extent it deals with the very interpretation of what people do with their mouth. In passing, this does not mean that the aesthetic is a 'principle' of politics that comes to supplement – and possibly to contradict – equality. Equality is the principle of political action, but this action is an aesthetic intervention, an intervention on the distribution of the sensible.

If we bear these points in mind we can understand what the formation of the aesthetic regime of art means: a specific form of refutation of the hierarchical ordering of the 'aisthesis' which sustained both the logic of police and the forms of identification of art in the representational regime. In this sense, there is a 'politics of aesthetics'. This also means a doubling up of the notion of politics. In its strict meaning, politics designates for Rancière the forms of collective subjectivation which call into question the police distribution of positions. Politics is the manifestation of a *we* that restages the scene of the common, the objects that belong to it and the subjects that it counts. Now there are other forms of subversion of the distribution of the sensible: when works of art are no longer determined by their destination as illustrations of faith or power, when they are no longer classified according to a distribution of genres defined by the hierarchy of their subject-matters, when they are no longer appreciated according to rules of taste defined

by a specific public, this means a form of equality which is not, strictly speaking, political equality, but nevertheless contributes to the reframing of the common landscape, to the reframing of the distribution of the possible. This is how 'l'art pour l'art' can take on a political significance. This connection is not a paradox invented by Rancière as a deduction from his idea of aesthetics. It is an effective historical configuration he thought significant. 'L'art pour l'art', as Flaubert carries it out in his novels, this means that the novel is no longer destined to a specific readership, no longer concerned with any consideration of social values, no longer grounded on any distinction between noble or base subject-matters. This is why the works of this reactionary bourgeois, only concerned with art, were immediately denounced as the triumph of democracy. They were 'democratic', for the critics, because of their very indifference to any order of social grandeurs. They were democratic because this indifference was attuned to the indifference of his character Emma Bovary with respect to the system of social differentiations defining what the daughter of a peasant can feel, think and do. Literature weaves forms of community between things and beings in which anyone can feel anything. In this sense, it is part of the democratic subversion of social conditions, it 'does' politics. The reason for the quotation marks is simple: literature does not perform political action, it does not create collective forms of action, but it contributes to the reframing of forms of experience. On the one hand, this reframing makes new forms of political subjectivization thinkable. On the other hand, it tends to break through the surface of political forms of equality to reach true equality or rather to dismiss equality in favour of the sympathy or fraternity of the subterranean drives or impersonal rhythms and intensities of collective life.

In that sense, what literature does is, strictly speaking, 'metapolitics': politics without politics or besides politics. Metapolitics is the attempt to perform the task of politics, the construction of forms of community, by other means. Now the point is that metapolitics, since the emergence of the aesthetic regime of art, has continuously been interwoven with politics. Wordsworth's poetic vision of the French Revolution is certainly 'metapolitical'. Now the lyric of Revolution has become part of the revolutionary tradition and the revolutionary sensibility in the same way as a certain epic of the proletariat has become part of the constitution of the revolutionary proletarian subjectivity. Schiller's conception of the 'aesthetic education of Man', elaborated as a response to the 'failure' of the French Revolution, is a perfect case of metapolitics. But we know how it became part of the modern idea of a revolution transforming not only the forms of the State but the forms of sensory life. The 'Oldest System Program of German Idealism', written by Hölderlin, Hegel and Schelling, spells out the most synthetic expression of this program, opposing the concrete transformation of life to the reform of the 'dead mechanism' of the State. Now this program was taken up by the young Marx when he opposed the human revolution to the political Revolution. And the program of the aesthetic Revolution in which art suppresses itself in creating no longer works of art but forms of life, was inextricably interwoven with the construction of the Soviet Revolution. So, on the one hand, the 'politics of aesthetics' is not 'true politics', it must be distinguished from the form of political subjectivization. But, on the other hand, this metapolitics continuously interferes in politics and contributes to weaving the fabric of the political, its words, images, attitudes, forms of sensibility, etc...

This makes for some confusion, indeed, but Rancière invariably answers three things to the reproach: firstly that he is not responsible for the confusion, secondly that this confusion is not incidental. It is not the consequence of any conceptual flaw. The excess of the political over politics is inherent to politics. Thirdly it is those situations of confusion that make thinking an interesting and possibly useful activity.

**Jacques Rancière** is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Paris-VIII (Saint-Denis). Born in Algiers in 1940, he is the author of numerous books dealing with aesthetics, politics and their relationships. His oeuvre includes such diverse landmarks as *The Nights of Labour*, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* and *The Flesh of Words*, as well as *Disagreement* and *Film Fables*. His next book in English is *The Emancipated Spectator*, forthcoming.

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