

SURVEY

A Thorn in the Side of Social History: Jacques Rancière and *Les Révoltes logiques**

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SUMMARY: The article explores the intersection of history and politics in the works of French philosopher Jacques Rancière, by focusing on the collectively edited journal *Les Révoltes logiques* (1975–1985). It argues that the historiographic project of *Les Révoltes logiques* took up specific forms of counter-knowledge that were embedded in radical left-wing politics of their day. It further traces both the engagement with historiography and the role of history in Rancière’s later work after the dissolution of the journal. Its conclusion looks at certain shared interests between some of Rancière’s themes and some recent writing of social history.

What is the meaning of a thinker of the *inactuel*, such as Jacques Rancière, becoming “actual”? The French philosopher, occasional historian, and former Maoist *militant* (born 1940) attracts attention today beyond narrow circles of academic specialists or theory-obsessed individuals. The art world has taken up Rancière’s concepts, and the introductions and collective volumes are blossoming in literary and film studies, aesthetics, pedagogy, and political philosophy.¹ What has hardly been discussed,

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1. To give a limited and necessarily subjective selection: Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp (eds), *Reading Rancière* (London [etc.], 2011); Jean-Philippe Deranty (ed.), *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts* (Durham, NC, 2010); Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (eds), *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics* (Durham, NC, 2010); Nick Hewlett, *Badiou, Balibar, Rancière: Re-Thinking Emancipation* (London, 2007); Charlotte Nordmann, *Bourdieu/Rancière. La politique*

however, is Rancière's relationship to history. This may well be because since the late 1990s the philosopher has more rarely referred to the archives of working-class history to develop his arguments than he did for a while from the mid 1970s onwards. But an understanding of history as rupture lies at the heart of Rancière's project. In this sense, Rancière has practised historiography in order, as a philosopher, to shift his questions to a different terrain. He has also critically commented on the politics and poetics of historical science. His texts form, according to the historian Arlette Farge who has been involved in Rancière's projects,² a "thorn in the side" of social history.³

Rancière writes of a collection of some of his earlier essays that they contain words "today seen as awkward", such as "people, poor, revolution, factory, workers, proletarians" – and it is not enough to point out that at the time these texts were written, this kind of vocabulary was current usage.⁴ It is rather that when they were written Rancière was already bringing different time periods together, resorting to stories and characters from the nineteenth century in order to shake the certainties of the surrounding present – the debates of the radical Left in France after 1968. I shall discuss here this double untimeliness, the connection between historiography and militant intellectual practice. This was the purpose for which a collective historical project was set up in which Rancière was involved: the periodical *Les Révoltes logiques* that was published from 1975 to 1981.

I shall go on to show how *Les Révoltes logiques*, and Rancière in his individual work, deployed the specific perspectives and methods of the radical Left movement. These included forms of "militant investigation" that have been discussed recently, particularly in connection with Italian *operaismo*.⁵ In France, similar practices were linked with the bywords

entre sociologie et philosophie (Paris, 2006); Laurence Cornu and Patrice Vermeren (eds), *La philosophie déplacée: autour de Jacques Rancière* (Paris, 2006); also see the journal issues: "Jacques Rancière: Aesthetics, Politics, Philosophy", *Paragraph*, 28 (2005); "Jacques Rancière, l'indiscipline", *Labyrinthe*, 17 (2004); "Autour de Jacques Rancière", *Critique*, 601/602 (1997).
2. Camille Deslypper and Guy Dreux, "La parole comme événement. Entretien avec Arlette Farge", *Nouveaux regards*, 30 (2005), online at <http://www.parutions.com/index.php?pid=1&rid=4&srtd=100&ida=6299> (last accessed 14 November 2011).

3. Farge names among others, as similar "thorns", Paul Veyne, Michel Foucault, and Italian microhistory; Arlette Farge, "L'histoire sociale", in François Bédarida (ed.), *L'histoire et le métier d'historien en France 1945–1995* (Paris, 1995), pp. 281–300, 290ff.

4. Jacques Rancière, "Preface to the English Edition", in *idem*, *Staging the People: The Proletarian and His Double*, David Fernbach (transl.) (London [etc.], 2011). This volume, and its successor, *The Intellectual and His People* (London [etc.], 2012), contain Rancière's contributions to the periodical *Les Révoltes logiques* that are discussed below. The argument repeated here is presented more explicitly in Jacques Rancière, "Préface", in *idem*, *Les scènes du peuple. Les Révoltes logiques 1975–1985* (Lyons, 2003), pp. 7–18.

5. Alberto Toscano, in a gripping and pertinent article, has criticized Rancière's challenging of scientific practice, and indicated as a counter-example for consideration the *inchiesta* of Italian

établissement and *enquête* – albeit against a different background and with a pronounced shift of emphasis. *Établissement* referred to the movement of students who went into the factories in search of the working class. The disruption of social categories by the reciprocal connection of two revolts, in the factories and the universities, also governed Rancière’s assessment of 1968.⁶

The present article maintains that *Les Révoltes logiques* sought, at a moment when the revolutionary impulse of 1968 was on the decline, to transfer certain practices of the movement into new fields. With its thirteen volumes, a special issue published in 1978 on the subject “1968”, and two collections, published 1984 and 1985,⁷ *Les Révoltes logiques* is an example of the various historical initiatives that arose in the mid 1970s, and not only in France.⁸ Rancière also discussed the encounter between workers and intellectuals in his major historiographic work *La nuit des prolétaires* (1981).⁹ Starting from a concern with working-class history, he later commented on the difficulty faced by the historical and social sciences of conceptualizing the space for a personal, emancipatory break on the part of the agents involved. I shall seek to trace the path he followed, starting with an explanation of the periodical, and going on to sketch some of Rancière’s arguments.

operaismo, a particular modus of counter-knowledge. I would like to argue, on the other hand, that Rancière proceeded precisely from related forms of counter-knowledge, even if in a specific context, and that his trajectory led him to different conclusions; cf. Alberto Toscano, “Anti-Sociology and Its Limits”, in Bowman, *Reading Rancière*, pp. 217–237. Of the comprehensive historical literature on militant investigation in *operaismo* that has meanwhile appeared, I can only indicate here Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London, 2002), and Karl Heinz Roth, “Benedetta sconfitta? Die Zeitschrift ‘Primo Maggio’ in der dritten Phase des Operaismus”, suppl. to *Wildcat*, 83 (2009), pp. 13–30.

6. Jacques Rancière, “Quels ‘événements’?”, *La Quinzaine littéraire*, 459 (1986), pp. 35–36.

7. Collectif Révoltes logiques (ed.), *L’empire du sociologue* (Paris, 1984); *idem*, *Esthétiques du peuple* (Paris, 1985). Peter Schöttler mentions that after the periodical was closed, a “bulletin” was still produced for a while but this is not dealt with in the present article; Peter Schöttler, “Von den ‘Annales’ zum ‘Forum-Histoire’. Hinweise zur ‘neuen Geschichte’ in Frankreich”, in Hannes Heer and Volker Ulrich (eds), *Geschichte entdecken. Erfahrungen und Projekte der neuen Geschichtsbewegung* (Hamburg, 1985), pp. 58–71, 66.

8. Just to mention here what should be done but is not possible on this occasion: a comparative look at the various historical projects of that time. Cf. Schöttler, “Von den ‘Annales’ zum ‘Forum-Histoire’”; Kristin Ross’s survey of the afterlife of May 1968; as well as Donald Reid’s introduction to the English translation of *La nuit des prolétaires* – the present article owes more to both the latter texts than can be expressed in a few footnotes. See Kristin Ross, *May ’68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago, IL, [etc.], 2002), pp. 116–137; Donald Reid, “Introduction”, in Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor: The Workers’ Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, John Drury (transl.) (Philadelphia, PA, 1989), pp. xv–xxxvii.

9. Jacques Rancière, *La nuit des prolétaires. Archives du rêve ouvrier* (Paris, 1981), translated as Rancière, *Nights of Labor*.

A COLLECTIVE HISTORICAL INITIATIVE AFTER 1968

“J’ai été amené sur le terrain de l’histoire”, Rancière said, looking back in an interview with *Le Monde*, “par les impasses de la grande idée des années 1968–1970: l’union de la contestation intellectuelle et du combat ouvrier.” [“I was led onto the terrain of history by the impasses of the great idea of the years 1968–1970: the union between intellectual challenge and workers’ struggle.”]¹⁰ This turn to history started with a rejection of the theory that had marked the beginning of Rancière’s intellectual development. As a student of philosophy at the École normale supérieure (ENS), Rancière had been, in the 1960s, a pupil of Louis Althusser. Althusser pursued the theoreticist project of defending the scientific character of Marxism against the forms of what he saw as humanistic ideology. Althusser’s approach found great resonance in the Cercle d’Ulm, the ENS division of the communist student organization, which was seeking new fields of activity after the end of the Algerian war – a decisive moment of politicization for that generation.¹¹

Althusser’s seminar led to the immensely influential publication of *Lire Le Capital* in 1965, with a contribution by Rancière along with those of Étienne Balibar, Pierre Macherey, and Roger Estabiet.¹² A year later, a section of the Union étudiante communiste broke away and the increasingly Maoist-inspired Union des Jeunesses Communistes (Marxistes-Léninistes) was formed.¹³ With the founding of the Vietnam support committees, and the

10. Edmond El Maleh, “Jacques Rancière”, in Christian Delacampagne (ed.), *Entretiens avec Le Monde*, 6 vols, I: *Philosophies* (Paris, 1984), pp. 158–166, 159.

11. Jacques Rancière, *La Leçon d’Althusser* (Paris, 1974), now in English translation as *Althusser’s Lesson*, Emiliano Battista (transl.) (London [etc.], 2011), pp. 41ff. Ironically, Althusser’s philosophy in its theoreticist phase actually had thoroughly political effects for Rancière, whereas his latter interventions, after the decisive rejection of theoreticism, remained completely behind the situation; *ibid.*, pp. 23ff.

12. Louis Althusser, Jacques Rancière, and Pierre Macherey, *Lire Le Capital*, I (Paris, 1965); Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar and Roger Estabiet, *Lire Le Capital*, II (Paris 1965). The abbreviated republication as a paperback in 1968 (without the texts by Rancière, Estabiet and Macherey) sold 78,000 copies within two years. When the publisher François Maspero planned a new edition of the original version, Rancière asked to add a criticism and self-criticism to his contribution; Maspero refused, appealing to the original contract of 1965, whereupon Rancière published this text in *Les Temps modernes*; François Dosse, *History of Structuralism*, II: *The Sign Sets, 1967–Present*, Deborah Glassman (transl.) (Minneapolis, MN, 1997), pp. 181ff.; Jacques Rancière, “Mode d’emploi pour une réédition de Lire le Capital”, *Les Temps modernes*, 328 (November 1973), pp. 788–807.

13. For a new English-language presentation of the Maoist intellectuals in France, with a very different interpretation from that put forward here, cf. Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton, NJ, 2010), especially pp. 109–154. Julian Bourg argues in a similar vein in “The Red Guards of Paris: French Student Maoism in the 1960s”, *History of European Ideas*, 31 (2005), pp. 472–490. For an overview, cf. Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States* (New York, 1988).

établissement movement (for more on which see below), the UJC (M-L) turned increasingly to practical forms of politics; the revolt of 1968 finally dealt a deathblow to the prestige of Althusserianism. Rancière too, under the influence of 1968 and the search for new forms of practice, made a break with his former teacher. In his critical rejection of Althusser, Rancière formulated themes that would recur later in his philosophy. Althusser, according to Rancière, pursued philosophy as a discourse of order, raising intellectuals to a controlling instance,¹⁴ to which Rancière opposed the political concepts of “*vérifications d’identité*” and “*interdictions de séjour*”.¹⁵ Against this “*raison policière*” it was necessary to pursue a “decalibration” of theoretical knowledge.

L’idéologie prolétarienne, ce n’est ni le sommaire des représentations ou des vertus ouvrières, ni le corps des doctrines ‘prolétariennes’: c’est une chaîne arrêtée, une autorité bafouée, un système de divisions entre postes de travail annulé, une riposte de masse aux innovations ‘scientifiques’ de l’exploitation, c’est aussi la médecine aux pieds nus ou l’entrée de la classe ouvrière dans l’Université chinoise. [Proletarian ideology is neither a summary of working-class representations of virtues, nor the body of ‘proletarian’ doctrines; it is a stopped assembly-line, a flouted authority, a cancelled system of divisions between jobs, a mass response to the ‘scientific’ innovations of exploitation; it is also barefoot doctors and the entrance of the working class into Chinese universities.]¹⁶

Moreover, this was not just a turn away from the theoretical thinking of an elite. Anyone who sought to take “mass practices” seriously, from a philosophical point of view,¹⁷ was forced to recognize the actual contradictory character of social struggles. Rancière’s first publication in book form, *Althusser’s Lesson* (1974), was accordingly the attempt at a political cartography in the wake of 1968. The question was to locate Althusser’s thinking historically and politically – to trace the conditions of its emergence, what it meant in terms of intervention, and the blockages that it produced. The occasion for it was provided by Althusser’s *Reply to John Lewis*, which had been published the previous year; a moment when *gauchisme* had lost its coherence and Althusser, as Rancière saw it, proposed unification in the

14. Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, pp. 113, 67, 68.

15. Jacques Rancière, “Sur la théorie de l’idéologie – politique d’Althusser”, *L’Homme et la société. Revue internationale de recherches et de synthèses sociologiques*, 27 (1973), pp. 31–61, 34. These quotations are taken from the “*avertissement*” to the essay, which was omitted from the reprinting in English translation of the appendix to *Althusser’s Lesson*.

16. Rancière, “Sur la théorie de l’idéologie”, p. 34, 35 (original emphasis). On “police reason”, cf. among others: Jacques Rancière, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, Julie Rose (transl.) (Minneapolis, MN, 1999), originally published as *La mésentente* (Paris, 1995); *idem*, “Ten Theses on Politics”, *Theory and Event*, 5:3 (2001) (http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v005/5.3Ranciere.html, last accessed 30 August 2011), originally published as “Dix thèses sur la politique”, in Jacques Rancière, *Au bord de la politique* (Paris, 1998).

17. Rancière, “Sur la théorie de l’idéologie”, p. 35.

name of the party. For *gauchisme* at this point had no answer to the new movements and forms of struggle that arose in the 1970s. The struggles of the women's movement, of school pupils, immigrants, and rural workers, for example, could not be brought down to a single common denominator: "It is not just that these struggles, which attack power in its varied and sometimes contradictory manifestations, present us with a multiplicity that makes achieving a synthesis more complicated. It is, more importantly, that they are themselves a multiplication of the discourses of the revolt."¹⁸

This "multiplication of the discourses of the revolt" was pursued by Rancière from 1969 onwards at the new university of Vincennes (Paris VIII), where Michel Foucault, who had built up the philosophy department there before he was called to the Collège de France, had intensively recruited intellectuals from the radical Left.¹⁹ At Vincennes, non-hierarchical forms of collaboration were possible.²⁰ At the end of 1974, the Centre de recherches pour les idéologies de la révolte was set up. The founding manifesto of the Centre was signed by Rancière along with the feminist philosopher and historian Geneviève Fraisse, later co-editor of the nineteenth-century volume of the *Histoire des femmes*,²¹ as well as the philosopher and author Jean Borreil. The editorial collective of the first issue of *Les Révoltes logiques*, in winter 1975, included Pierre Saint-Germain, Michel Souletie, Patrick Vauday, and Patrice Vermeren. In mid-1978 they were joined by Christiane Dufrancatel, Stéphane Douailler and Philippe Hoyau, and in late 1980 also by Serge Cosseron, Arlette Farge, Daniel Lindenberg and Danielle Rancière, who all had already published in the periodical.

Les Révoltes logiques combined archival research with the explicit intention of theoretical development (and particularly of not falling back on the philosophical canon). Its aim was to restore the "memory of the people". What *Les Révoltes logiques* meant by this was neither the history of progress fixed on the state that marked the official historiography of

18. Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, p. 119. This quotation varies from Emiliano Battista's translation, which renders "révolte" as "struggle"; cf. the French original, *Leçon d'Althusser*, p. 219. For a later comment on Althusser, cf. "La scène du texte", in Sylvain Lazarus (ed.), *Politique et philosophie dans l'oeuvre de Louis Althusser* (Paris, 1993), pp. 47–66; as well as the short textbook article: "Althusser", in Simon Critchley and William R. Schroeder (eds), *A Companion to Continental Philosophy* (Malden, MA, 1998), pp. 530–536.

19. Charles Soulié, "Le destin d'une institution d'avant-garde: Histoire du département de philosophie de Paris VIII", *Histoire de l'éducation*, 77 (1998), pp. 47–69, 50ff. On Foucault at Vincennes, cf. David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault: A Biography* (New York, 1993), pp. 219–236, especially 221ff.

20. Paul Cohen, "Happy Birthday Vincennes! The University of Paris-8 Turns Forty", *History Workshop Journal*, 69 (2010), pp. 206–224, 212.

21. George Duby and Michelle Perrot (eds), *Histoire des femmes en occident*, 5 vols (Paris, 1991–1992), IV: Geneviève Fraisse and Michelle Perrot (eds), *XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1992).

the workers' movement, nor an left-radical heroics of the worker, but also not the disillusion with *gauchisme* that the *nouveaux philosophes* (André Glucksmann, Bernard-Henri Lévy, and others) displayed, which sought to “sprinkle Marx with the muddy waters of Kolyma” – the Siberian river that gave its name to the gulag.²² What was characteristic of the periodical was rather the turn that is evoked in its title. On the one hand, it recalls the slogan of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, which appears in French as “on a raison de se révolter contre les réactionnaires”.²³ On the other, the expression “les révoltes logiques” is a phrase from Arthur Rimbaud’s poem “Democracy”, in *Illuminations*, on the defeat of the Paris Commune. The full lines of this text express the triumphalism of the victors: “Aux centres nous alimenterons la plus cynique prostitution. Nous massacrerons les révoltes logiques.” [“In the metropolis we will feed the most cynical whoring. We will destroy all logical revolt.”] Taken out of context, the meaning is shifted: the inner logic of revolt is opposed to the pervasive assertion of order by the victors.²⁴

The journal was interested in “the materiality of the ideologies of revolt”: “les formes de perception de l’intolérable, la circulation des mots d’ordre et des idées pratiques de la révolte, les formes de savoir – manuel et intellectuel – qui transforment l’outil en arme et le lieu de l’oppression en lieu de l’insurrection”. [“the forms of perception of the intolerable, the circulation of slogans and practical ideas of revolt, the forms of knowledge – manual and intellectual – that transform the tool into a weapon and the site of oppression into a site of insurrection”.] Three directions of research were thematically sketched out: the history of feminism, of national minorities, and of working-class emancipation.²⁵ The journal was likewise oriented against both a traditional movement history and the modern social history and history of mentalities, prominently represented by the journal *Annales*, which depicted the life of the masses as almost unchanging, and relegated historical change either to structural forces or to the elites. This oppositional stance, however, was not designed to lead to any counter-history of spontaneous revolts against organized forms. It was rather a matter of putting this opposition itself in

22. *Les Révoltes logiques*, 1 (1975), inside front cover.

23. This slogan was particularly known through a book of interviews with Jean-Paul Sartre under the same title conducted by two leading members of the Gauche prolétarienne; cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, Philippe Gavi, and Pierre Victor (Benny Lévy), *On a raison de se révolter: Discussions* (Paris, 1974).

24. Rancière, “Les scènes du peuple”, p. 10; Davis, *Jacques Rancière*, pp. 39ff.

25. Collectif Révoltes logiques, “Le Centre de Recherches sur les Idéologies de la Révolte (définition des objectifs et projets de recherches pour l’année 1975)”, *Le Doctrinal de Sapience. Cahiers d’enseignants de philosophie et d’histoire*, 1 (1975), pp. 17–19, 17. The fourth direction was given as the history of peasant movements, but this was seldom broached in the journal itself.

question, by confronting different versions of history (for example, an official movement and local struggles).²⁶

These goals were pursued by way of archive-based research initiatives, around half of these focusing on the emancipation of workers and women between 1830 and the Paris Commune of 1871, being followed in frequency by contributions on the twentieth century and a few on the eighteenth.²⁷ The continuous representation of women's history was exceptional in French historiography of that time – apart from *Pénélope*, a journal of women's history founded in 1978.²⁸ The essays of that time often presented a situation of concrete contradiction, as shown by a glance at the first issue. Here we see workers visiting the Paris world exhibition of 1867 and scrutinizing the machines presented there – how was the thinking of a class formed in this connection, in the contradictory field of male wage-labour and female domestic labour? How did feminists in the revolutionary year of 1848 seize the word, and what arguments for a feminine moralization of society presented in this connection were passed to and fro between bourgeois and proletarian women? How did anarchists organize power, for example the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) in Barcelona in 1936? Or, as was pursued by oral history called *témoignage*, what combatant ideal did young French communists in the early 1920s develop after the October Revolution, and how did this ideal intersect with the tradition of syndicalism?²⁹ The spectrum of articles stretched from the deserters of Year II of the French Revolution, who refused to defend the Republic in the name of democratic arguments, via the legal status of artists, the retail trade in printed matter and French settlement in Algeria in the nineteenth century, through to the struggle against Soviet occupation in Afghanistan.³⁰

26. Davis, *Jacques Rancière*, pp. 40ff.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 37f.

28. Schöttler, "Von den 'Annales' zum 'Forum-Histoire'", p. 66; Cécile Dauphin, "Pénélope: une expérience militante dans le monde académique", *Les Cahiers du CEDREF*, 10 (2001), pp. 61–68.

29. Jacques Rancière and Patrice Vauday, "En allant à l'expo: L'ouvrier, sa femme et les machines", *Les Révoltes logiques*, 1 (1975), pp. 5–22, translated into English as "Off to the Exhibition: The Worker, His Wife and the Machines", in Rancière, *Staging the People*, pp. 64–88; Geneviève Fraisse, "Les femmes libres de 48. Moralisme et féminisme", *Les Révoltes logiques*, 1 (1975), pp. 23–50; Jean Borreil, "Barcelona 36: L'été rouge et noir", *Les Révoltes logiques*, 1 (1975), pp. 51–71; "Les lendemains d'Octobre: La jeunesse ouvrière française entre le bolchevisme et la marginalité. Entretien avec Maurice Jaquier et Georges Navel", *Les Révoltes logiques*, 1 (1975), pp. 72–95.

30. Jean Ruffet, "Les déserteurs de l'an II", *Les Révoltes logiques*, 4 (1977), pp. 7–22; Maria Ivens, "La liberté guidant l'artiste", *Les Révoltes logiques*, 10 (1979), pp. 52–94; *idem*, "La liberté guidant l'artiste (deuxième partie)", *Les Révoltes logiques*, 11 (1979/80), pp. 43–76; Jean Borreil, "Circulation et rassemblements", *Les Révoltes logiques*, 7 (1978), pp. 3–24; Philippe Hoyau, "Des pauvres pour l'Algérie", *Les Révoltes logiques*, 10 (1979), pp. 3–28; Olivier Roy, "Afghanistan, la guerre des paysans", *Les Révoltes logiques*, 13 (1980/81), pp. 50–64.

When the journal of social history, *Le Mouvement social*, asked *Les Révoltes logiques* for a comment on the occasion of its one hundredth issue, its editors took the opportunity to demarcate themselves from the project of the cumulative advance of knowledge that, in their eyes, characterized social history. Social history, for *Les Révoltes logiques*, served only to fine-tune the “already known”.³¹ The editorial collective rejected the pressure of contextualization, which social history pursued and which in the last instance only reproduced the perspective of the masters. Instead, the politics of the archive should be included in the investigation, to show what in the tradition is kept silent. Utterance should therefore not be taken as an outpouring of social circumstances that can be completely reconstructed, but rather as making a political break: “Ce qui nous intéresse: que les archives soient des discours, les ‘idées’ des événements, que l’histoire soit en chaque instant rupture, questionnable seulement *d’ici*, seulement politiquement.” [“What matters to us is that archives should be discourses, ‘ideas’ should be events, that history should be at each moment a rupture, to be questioned only from *here and now*, only politically.”]³²

“To question history on the basis of revolt and the revolt on the basis of history” meant intervening politically with a polemical and archeological perspective.³³ In this connection, the perspectives and methods of this research were marked by forms of practice of the Left: the search for counter-knowledge that students pursued in their sojourns in the factories, and the project of letting prisoners be heard which Foucault’s Groupe d’information sur les prisons had pioneered. In the following section we shall deal with *Les Révoltes logiques*’ relation to those practices, which were linked with the bywords *établissement* and *enquête*.

MILITANT INVESTIGATION BETWEEN ARCHIVE, FACTORY, AND PRISON

In its founding manifesto, the journal had linked the experience of intellectuals in the factories with the reference back of contemporary struggles to historical experience.³⁴ An important point of reference was the ten-month strike at the watch factory Lip in Besançon, where workers

31. Collectif Révoltes logiques, “Deux ou trois choses que l’historien social ne veut pas savoir”, *Le Mouvement social*, 100 (1977), pp. 21–30, 26.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 30 (emphasis in original).

33. *Les Révoltes logiques*, 1 (1975), inside front cover; Rancière, *Les scènes du peuple*, p. 15. This procedure has a tense proximity with Foucault’s genealogical perspective. For a critical exchange with Foucault, cf. “Pouvoirs et stratégies. Entretien avec Michel Foucault”, *Les Révoltes logiques*, 4 (1977), pp. 89–97. On Foucault’s principle of genealogy in the mid 1970s, cf. Ulrich Brieler, *Die Unerbittlichkeit der Historizität. Foucault als Historiker* (Cologne [etc.], 1998), pp. 345–401.

34. Collectif Révoltes logiques, “Centre de Recherches sur les Idéologies”, p. 17.

had resumed production for themselves.³⁵ Self-management (*autogestion*) at Lip meant “a slap in the face and a lesson” for the Maoists,³⁶ who were simply not present in this path-breaking strike – a historical study showed seventeen actively producing strikes in the immediate wake of Lip.³⁷ At Lip, according to *Les Révoltes logiques*, old forms of struggle were rediscovered – such as the guiding idea of the association of producers³⁸ – that the CGT trade-union federation, the Communist Party and the Maoists had all let be forgotten.

Through the interest in modes of counter-knowledge and the encounter between different modes of speech, *Les Révoltes logiques* was linked with the *établissement* movement. The final issue from 1981 contained the autobiographical reports of two former *établis*: the thematic focus was on *politiques du voyage*, what Rancière later called “the core political experience of our generation”.³⁹ A “journey” of this kind into the factory was made in France between 1967 and 1989 by some two or three thousand individuals, of whom around one-third were women.⁴⁰ Retrospectively, the *établissement* movement has been frequently categorized as akin to scouting or para-religious sacrifice.⁴¹ That assessment, which according to the historian Donald Reid followed the narrative of lost Catholic faith, reduced the complex motivational situation of the individual militants to a simple model, and obscures more than it illuminates.⁴²

Factory work out of political conviction was generally no fleeting episode. Out of a sample of 283 *établis* who were questioned, 45 per cent had stayed for 6 years or more (22 per cent longer than 10), 31 per cent between 2 and 5 years, and 24 per cent less than 2 years.⁴³ The origin of

35. For an analysis demonstrating the significance of Lip and focusing on the CFDT trade-union federation, cf. Pierre Saint-Germain and Michel Souletie, “La raison syndicale”, *Les Révoltes logiques*, special issue “Les lauriers de mai” (1978), pp. 26–48.

36. Xavier Vigna, *L'Insubordination ouvrière dans les années 68. Essai d'histoire politique des usines* (Rennes, 2007), p. 298.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

38. Collectif Révoltes Logiques, “Centre de Recherches sur les Idéologies”, p. 17.

39. Marc Parinaud, “A travers les forteresses”, *Les Révoltes logiques*, 14/15 (1981), pp. 86–95; Pierre Saint-Germain, “L'ouvrier amateur”, *Les Révoltes logiques*, 14/15 (1981), pp. 96–115; Jacques Rancière, *Short Voyages to the Land of The People*, James B. Swenson (trans.) (Stanford, CA, 2003), p. 2, originally published as *Court voyages au pays du peuple* (Paris, 1990).

40. Marnix Dressen, *De l'amphi à l'établi. Les étudiants maoïstes à l'usine (1967–1989)* (Paris, 1999), p. 11; Donald Reid, “*Établissement*: Working in the Factory to Make Revolution in France”, *Radical History Review*, 88 (2004), pp. 83–111, 90.

41. The comprehensive sociological investigation of Marnix Dressen thus follows the interpretative model of a “political religion”. Cf., for example, *idem*, *De l'amphi à l'établi*, pp. 175ff. For a critique of Dressen's theoretical framework, cf. Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, “A propos des militants établis”, *Mouvements*, 18 (2001), pp. 148–152.

42. Reid, “*Établissement*”, pp. 100ff.

43. Dressen, *De l'amphi à l'établi*, p. 254.

the movement lay in an *enquête* campaign.⁴⁴ In summer 1967 some forty members of the UJC(M-L), following Mao Zedong's motto "no investigation, no right to speak",⁴⁵ began to question port, factory, and rural workers.⁴⁶ In May–June 1968, the organization was surprised by events: an *ouvrierist* position had led them to underestimate the student revolt, and they proved incapable of intervening in the greatest strike movement in French history.⁴⁷ As a result, the UJC(M-L) broke up, with some of its members forming the Gauche prolétarienne, along with others from the Mouvement du 22-Mars. A core tenet of the group's politics – according to Jacques Rancière, a member of it until 1972 – was the demand to abolish the separation between mental and manual labour.⁴⁸

There had been analysis of everyday factory life from a perspective of struggle long before the Maoist movement. And in France after 1968, this was by no means pursued only by Maoists. The originally Trotskyist group around the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, which had increasingly developed council-democratic, autonomous positions, had pursued investigations in the 1950s in car factories and among white-collar workers.⁴⁹ Its point of departure was that only attention to experience, conceived as the link between objective relationships and subjective agency, made it possible to pursue the movements of the class.

The post-1968 *enquêtes* shared the concern not to objectify workers as a sociological "object of investigation", but to use research as a moment of intervention for their ability to act.⁵⁰ The Gauche prolétarienne took this

44. Virginie Linhart, *Volontaires pour l'usine. Vies d'établis 1967–1977* (Paris, 2010), pp. 31–37; Marnix Dressen, "Le lancement du mouvement d'établissement, à la recherche de la classe perdue", in René Mourinaux (ed.), *1968, exploration du mai français*, 2 vols, II: *Les acteurs* (Paris, 1992), pp. 229–246.

45. Mao Tse-Tung, "Preface and Postscript to *Rural Surveys* (March and April 1941)", in *idem*, *Selected Works*, 5 vols (Beijing, 1965), III, pp. 11–16, 13. The expression "s'établir" comes from a further text of Mao Zedong that deals with "the question of the integration of the intellectuals with the masses of workers and peasants". A section of the intellectuals, Mao says, "go to the factories or villages", where many "can stay for a few months, conducting investigations and making friends", and others "can stay and live there for a considerable time, say, two or three years or even longer; this may be called 'settling down' [s'établir]"; *idem*, Speech at the Chinese Communist Party's National Conference on Propaganda Work (12 March 1957), in *idem*, *Collected Works*, 5 vols (Beijing, 1977), V, pp. 422–435, 426.

46. For a UJC(M-L) document that stresses the centrality of the *enquête* in Maoist politics, cf. "Édifions en France un parti communiste de l'époque de la Révolution culturelle", *Garde rouge*, 6 (May 1967), reprinted in Patrick Kessel, *Le mouvement 'maoïste' en France*, 2 vols (Paris, 1972), I, pp. 250–257.

47. Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism*, pp. 93, 100ff.; Wolin, *Wind from the East*, pp. 133ff.

48. Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, pp. 221ff.

49. The following draws on Andrea Gabler, *Antizipierte Autonomie. Zur Theorie und Praxis der Gruppe "Socialisme ou Barbarie" (1949–1967)* (Hanover, 2009), pp. 125ff. Reid, "Établissement", p. 87ff. names as forerunners of the Maoists the reportages of Jacques Valdour in the 1920s and Simone Weil, as well as the early movement of worker priests during World War II.

50. Ross, *May '68*, pp. 109ff.

idea further and, in contrast to the UJC(M-L), demoted analysis far behind a more activist politics.⁵¹ It sought to endow workers with their own voice.⁵² The search for other forms of representation, and the interest in local and concrete conditions, went together with rejection of the myth of a transcendental working class. This also meant abandoning certain ideas. “J’y ai rencontré ce que j’avais cherché: l’échec de mes discours”, [“I found there what I was looking for: the failure of my speeches”], one *établie* at Peugeot-Sochaux recalled from her first factory experience in early 1968.⁵³ Robert Linhart, a leading member of the UJC(M-L) who had worked as a semi-skilled worker (*ouvrier spécialisé*, OS) at Citroën-Choisy, wrote in his memoir, *L’Établi* (1978):

In the outside world the “establishment” appears spectacular, the papers make it into quite a legend. Seen from the works, it’s not very important in the long run. Everyone who works here has a complex individual story, often more fascinating and more embroiled than that of the student who has temporarily turned worker. The middle classes always imagine they have a monopoly on personal histories. How ridiculous! They have a monopoly on speaking in public, that’s all.⁵⁴

The prisoners’ movement constituted another field in which the counter-knowledge of the *enquête* could bear results. In late May 1970, the Gauche prolétarienne and other groups were banned and in summer a wave of arrests followed. As Daniel Defert later recalled, Jacques Rancière contacted him with a view to building a support cell.⁵⁵ Initially, the prisoners struggled for the status of political prisoner, following the model of the fighters in the Algerian war, and organized two hunger strikes. When Foucault, at the request of his partner Defert in early February 1971, announced the founding of the Groupe d’information sur les prisons (GIP), its orientation had significantly changed. The organization operated as an anonymous network behind three prominent representatives, who included, besides Foucault himself, the former Resistance fighter and publisher of *Esprit*, Jean-Marie Domenach, and the historian of antiquity Pierre Vidal-Naquet, who had exposed the practice of torture by the French army in Algeria. The group began to problematize the prison institution as such.

The GIP intended to confine itself strictly to the transmission of information, and give prisoners themselves a voice. The key concept for this was *intolérable*. This was not only the title of a series of pamphlets in

51. Linhart, *Volontaires pour l’usine*, pp. 43–77; Vigna, *L’Insubordination ouvrière*, pp. 291–300.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 287ff.

53. Cited after Dressen, *De l’amphi à l’établi*, p. 180.

54. Robert Linhart, *The Assembly Line*, Margaret Crosland (transl.) (Amherst, MA, 1981), p. 76.

55. Daniel Defert, “L’émergence d’un nouveau front: Les prisons”, in Philippe Artières, Laurent Quéro, and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (eds), *Le Groupe d’information sur les prisons. Archives d’une lutte, 1970–1972* (Paris, 2003), pp. 315–326, 316.

which their research was published, but also their general theme.⁵⁶ According to Danielle Rancière, the *enquête intolérance* combined two distinct strands, bourgeois-philanthropic investigation of the living conditions of the lower classes in the nineteenth century, and the Maoist investigation of factory agitation, and in this way developed an original form of production of knowledge.⁵⁷ In this way, discussion about conditions in prison was tackled not from an external, scientific, and social-reforming standard, but rather from the fact that prisoners clearly did not tolerate these conditions and fought against them. This determined the impetus of the first *enquête*, on which Claude Liscia and Christine Martineau were the main collaborators of Danielle Rancière's, who already had experience with factory *enquêtes*.⁵⁸

The members of the GIP sometimes distributed questionnaires to visiting relatives on Saturday mornings outside the prison gates. In the first *enquête*, the group stressed that it was not conducting a sociological investigation, its aim was to let those affected by the prison system speak for themselves: "Notre enquête n'est pas faite pour accumuler des connaissances, mais pour accroître notre intolérance et en faire une *intolérance active*." ["Our investigation is not designed to build up knowledge, but to increase our intolerance and make it an *active intolerance*."] ⁵⁹ This "active intolerance" took place in an increasingly heated atmosphere. In September 1971, two prisoners attempting to break out of Clairvaux took a woman nurse and a male guard as hostages and killed them. The Minister of Justice demanded a collective penalty, and prohibited the reception of Christmas parcels in prisons throughout France, provoking massive insurrections.⁶⁰ As Danielle Rancière recalled, those involved had to demand rights for the prisoners, even if at the same time – from a Marxist perspective – the concept of human rights was rejected.⁶¹ The model of the *enquête* was in this way stripped of global claims. It would be

56. *Intolérable 1: Enquête dans 20 prisons* (May 1971), reprinted in Artières, *Groupe d'information sur les prisons*, p. 80.

57. Danielle Rancière, "Brève histoire du Groupe d'information sur les prisons (G.I.P.) 1971–1972", *Mana. Revue de sociologie et d'anthropologie*, 5 (1998), pp. 221–225, 222ff.; Philippe Artières, "Militer ensemble. Entretien avec Danielle Rancière", in *idem et al.* (eds), *Michel Foucault* (Paris, 2011), pp. 53–56.

58. Defert, "L'émergence d'un nouveau front", p. 318.

59. *J'Accuse*, 3 (15 March 1971), reprinted in Artières, *Groupe d'information sur les prisons*, p. 52 (emphasis in original).

60. Defert, "L'émergence d'un nouveau front", pp. 322ff. On the background and conditions in the Clairvaux prison, cf. an article that compares an analysis of the contemporary situation with archival material from around the turn of the century: Stéphane Douailler and Patrice Vermeren, "Mutineries à Clairvaux", *Les Révoltes logiques*, 6 (1977), pp. 77–95.

61. Danielle Rancière, "Bref histoire du G.I.P.", p. 225; *idem*, cited after Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal [etc.], 2007), p. 93; *idem*, "Les contributions accidentelles du marxisme au renouveau des droits de l'homme en France dans l'après-68", *Actuel Marx*, 32 (2002), pp. 125–138, 131.

effective only in local circumstances, and was confined to the description of concrete discordances, without this leading on to reformist demands.

Where then were the points of contact and parallel perspectives between the model of the *enquête* and the historiography of *Les Révoltes logiques*? The GIP sought to show who it was that spoke in the conditions of the penal system, who was reduced to silence, and how something was brought to light that had previously remained invisible. The mechanisms by which voices emerged also formed a major interest of *Les Révoltes logiques*. The abandonment – often linked with disappointments – of a class concept burdened with a philosophy of history,⁶² as experienced by the *établi(e)s*, likewise lay at the origin of the kaleidoscopic archival work of the journal. But at a practical level too, *Les Révoltes logiques* took up the experiences of movements, printing declarations of solidarity with political prisoners, analysing penal justice or reporting on strikes under way.⁶³

A special issue of 1978, with the title *Les lauriers de mai, ou les chemins du pouvoir 1968–1978*, was devoted to the transformations of the Left itself. This material was to have appeared in *Les Temps modernes*, but an article by Jacques and Danielle Rancière dealing with the trajectory of intellectuals after 1968 was rejected. Benny Lévy of *Les Temps modernes*, at one time a leading exponent of the Gauche prolétarienne, must have seen his own development attacked in this commentary on the sharp right turn of the *nouveaux philosophes*.⁶⁴ The Rancières discuss the double revolt of 1968 in their contribution. If an egalitarian space arose for a moment through the connection between the factory revolt and that in the universities, the movement of *établissements* posited a contradictory ideal: the self-extirpation of intellectuals. Proletarianization, according to the Rancières, would also be experienced as an individually liberating break. To leave academic careerists the diligent concern for “the latest epistemological or semiological shading of Marxism”, and instead immerse themselves “in the reality of the factory”, was far from being lacking in consolation.⁶⁵

62. For Rancière, the disappointments and subsequent accounts of the *établi(e)s* were also a result of the notion that the working class was shaped by capital in such a way that anyone who recounted the social conditions of exploitation had “grasped” their kernel; cf. Jacques Rancière, “L’usine nostalgique”, *Les Révoltes logiques*, 13 (1980), pp. 89–97, 90.

63. Douailler and Vermeren, “Mutineries à Clairvaux”; Collectif Révoltes logiques, “Pour Marc Sislán”, *Les Révoltes logiques*, 7 (1977), p. 2; Pierre Saint Germain and Michel Souletie, “Le voyage à Palente”, *Les Révoltes logiques*, 7 (1977), pp. 67–80; Stéphane Douailler and Patrice Vermeren, “La stratégie judiciaire hier et aujourd’hui. Entretien avec Jean Lapeyrie du comité d’action prisons-justice (CAPJ) et Jacques Vergès, avocat, ex-défenseur du FLN”, *Les Révoltes logiques*, 13 (1980/81), pp. 64–81.

64. Ross, *May ’68*, p. 132.

65. Danielle Rancière and Jacques Rancière, “La légende des philosophes (les intellectuels et la traversée du gauchisme)”, *Les Révoltes logiques*, special issue “Les lauriers de mai” (1978), pp. 7–25, 14.

Yet the rejection of academic intellectuals involved a further figure, that of the militant leader who claimed to be a transparent medium for the “voice of the people”. The GIP contributed to this turn by declaring information as such to be a weapon. The *nouveaux philosophes* drove this spiral still further. While in the name of a suffering declared as absolutely powerless they fought against the “Marxist master-thinkers”, they once again enthroned the intellectuals – themselves.⁶⁶ The special issue on *Les lauriers du mai* was a self-critical questioning of many of the conceptions from which the metamorphosis of forms of left practice and figures of thought proceeded, without maintaining an underlying essence from which this later development was derived. And yet the defeat of *gauchisme* also affected *Les Révoltes logiques* – the cessation of the journal coincided with the election of Mitterrand in 1981, which signified the disappearance of a certain constellation of the Left. Like other historical initiatives, *Les Révoltes logiques* remained a project tied to the situation of the 1970s, and its thematic strands were now pursued further by most of the authors involved individually.⁶⁷

FROM DISPLACED THINKING TO THE POETICS OF KNOWLEDGE

In his book *La nuit des prolétaires* (1981), Rancière had attempted to look at the connection between mental and manual labour – a basic theme of *gauchisme* – from the opposite direction, he said in a later interview. The theme was no longer the proletarianizing of intellectuals, but rather intellectual appropriation on the part of workers.⁶⁸ His *thèse d'état* was presented as the result of a series of displacements: workers' history instead of philosophy, but instead of a social history of changing forms of work, organizations, or cultural practices, a history of the collision of arguments and fantasies that occupied a few hundred workers between 1830 and 1851.⁶⁹

66. For a debate with the *nouvelle philosophie*, cf. Jacques Rancière, “La bergère au Goulag (sur ‘la cuisinière et le mangeur d’hommes’)”, *Les Révoltes logiques*, 1 (1975), pp. 96–111; *idem*, “Réponse à Lévy”, *Le Nouvel observateur*, 31 July 1977, translated into English as “Reply to Lévy”, *Telos*, 33 (1977), pp. 119–122.

67. Ross, *May '68*, pp. 136ff.

68. François Ewald, “Qu’est-ce que la classe ouvrière? Entretien avec Jacques Rancière”, *Magazine littéraire*, 175 (1981), pp. 64–66, 65; Reid, “Introduction”, p. xxxi.

69. Rancière, *Nights of Labor*, p. vii. The working title of the *thèse* was originally “La formation de la pensée ouvrière en France”, and finally “Le prolétaire et son double”. For a concise idea of the line of argument, see Jacques Rancière, “The Proletarian and His Double, Or, The Unknown Philosopher”, in *idem*, *Staging the People*, pp. 21–33, 21; originally published as “Le prolétaire et son double, ou: le philosophe inconnu”, *Les Révoltes logiques*, 13 (1980/81), pp. 4–12, 4.

At the start of this enterprise lay the intention to trace the thinking of a class before Marxism had transformed this thinking. Rancière proceeded from the assumption that this thinking was to be found in utopian religions and forms of plebeian sociability. In the introduction to the collection of sources *La Parole ouvrière*, published in 1976, a unity of the class anchored in social practices had still been postulated.⁷⁰

This idea, that the reciprocal working of forms of struggle and cultural identity would form a unitary thinking as a class, was one that Rancière subsequently abandoned.⁷¹ For him, the question now was one of individual breakthroughs in which workers discarded a simple affinity declared to be “natural”: people who, instead of sleeping at night and reproducing their labour-power, wrote poems and invented philosophies. This shift of focus from the class as a collective in struggle to personal emancipation initially meant focusing on a structure of thinking through the utterances of workers themselves. The theories of the Saint-Simonians, Fourierists, or Icarian emigrant communities were not to be investigated by the explanation of programmes, but rather by way of dialogues and stories. This procedure departed from the priority given by social history to social conditions or cultural practices. Rancière intended not to “disqualify” this “verbiage”, brush it away in favour of a deeper reality, but to follow the windings of an alien thinking.⁷² Freeing the speech of the actors, therefore, did not mean maintaining that this thinking had an authentic core. What is made visible is not a primordial subject, but an ever new and different picture of working men and women.⁷³

At an initial level, the constituting of a “proletarian subject” took place in opposition to the bourgeois image of the “dangerous classes”: a stress on pride in one’s trade and the idea of a civilization of producers, so as to refute the bourgeoisie’s accusation of “barbarism”.⁷⁴ This was strategic thinking that in one minute emphasized the community of all mankind across class divisions,⁷⁵ and in the next a separatist class discipline.⁷⁶ The discursive figure of emancipation was also open to a repressive mode of deployment: a traditional strand (one of many such) of “praise for labour” can be traced through to the “national revolution” of the Vichy regime.⁷⁷

70. Alain Faure and Jacques Rancière (ed.), *La parole ouvrière 1830–1851* (Paris, 2007, first published 1976), 17.

71. Rancière, “Postface” (2007), in *ibid.*, p. 339.

72. Rancière, *Nights of Labor*, p. 11.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

74. Rancière, “The Proletarian and His Double”, p. 22.

75. Rancière, *Nights of Labor*, chs 5, 7.

76. *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

77. A complex genealogy from a minority position of syndicalism through to Vichy is drawn by Rancière in “From Pelloutier to Hitler: Trade Unionism and Collaboration”, in *idem*, *Staging the People*, originally published as “De Pelloutier à Hitler. Syndicalisme et collaboration”, *Les Révoltes logiques*, 4 (1977), pp. 23–61.

As a response to this view, the *nouveaux philosophes* introduced their substitute concept of the *plèbe*, which postulated the muteness – or the carnivalesque laughter – of the powerless against an all-pervasive power.⁷⁸ But another path was also open, and Rancière maintained that it was the carpenter and philosopher Louis-Gabriel Gauny (1806–1889) who had shown him this.⁷⁹ Gauny had thematized proletarian existence as a daily theft of time by labour, thus leading to a second level of investigation. Rancière found in Gauny an autonomous philosophical reflection on the uncertainty of the proletarian condition, marked by “Brownian movements that constantly affect precarious and transitory forms of existence”.⁸⁰

The starting-point of Gauny’s writing was not the gradual formation of consciousness, but the demand to be someone else, to take leave of ascribed relations. This led to a singular production of meaning on the part of someone who did not speak in the name of others, and not even in his own – but wrote simply so as no longer to be identical with himself. Central in this leave-taking was the encounter with the other – in Gauny’s case the Saint-Simonian missionaries and poets of bourgeois origin. The meeting between working men and women who no longer wanted to be such, and bourgeois who saw the dawning of a new age among the workers, enabled personal emancipation.

These emancipations, however, could not be generalized, on the grounds of a double impossibility. They were beset by constant disillusion about “class brothers” who would not be convinced or who sought only material support from the associations. And they experienced misunderstandings with the bourgeois “brothers in spirit” who expected appropriate proletarian behaviour on the part of workers: “[a]lways be what you are”, Victor Hugo told a worker poet.⁸¹ According to Rancière,

And the argument would be that it is in this spiral of impossibility that a certain image and identity could develop, giving body to the discourse of workers’ emancipation; that this would be the discourse of the working class or workers’ movement, matching the actual inability of its bearers to find the principle of their own identification.⁸²

78. Originally a much-discussed figure of *gauchisme*, André Glucksmann’s “*plèbe*” was deployed sharply against the left; cf. *idem*, *La Cuisinière et le mangeur d’homme. Essai sur les rapports entre l’État, le marxisme et les camps de concentration* (Paris, 1975); Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York [etc.], 2004), ch. 2, and for his argument against Glucksmann, Rancière, “La bergère au goulag”.

79. *Idem*, “The Proletarian and His Double”, p. 25. For a selection of Gauny’s writings, see Louis Gabriel Gauny, *Le philosophe plébéien. Textes présentés et rassemblés par Jacques Rancière* (Paris, 1983).

80. Rancière, *Nights of Labor*, p. 31.

81. *Idem*, “The Proletarian and His Double”, p. 25; *idem*, *Nights of Labor*, p. 13.

82. *Idem*, “The Proletarian and His Double”, p. 28.

Politics makes its appearance in Rancière's work by circumventing the boundaries between the social and the ideological, the scientific and the literary, historiography and philosophy. *La nuit des prolétaires* traces a narrative of equality, as the intellectual division of labour is rejected and the transgression of philosophizing workers is given pride of place. Rancière's writing plays on complicity with historical actors, and lets strangeness turn into surprising familiarity.⁸³ The book's lack of actuality, and the "impossible" actualizings that its reading may suggest, aim at an "estrangement effect" in its own political present.

Surprise, interested acceptance, but also marked rejection characterized the effect of *La nuit des prolétaires* in the field of labour history.⁸⁴ In a debate with specialists on the question as to how far professional skill and worker militancy hung together, Rancière underlined as key points questions of equality and of the effect of words, ideas, and feelings in the genesis of the labour movement. In an essay in *International Labor and Working-Class History*, Rancière challenged the view that handicraft tradition and pride in work were constitutive of the early workers' movement, seeing these rather as a subsequent invention of tradition on the part of trade-union leaders. Labour historians tended to short-circuit political statements by workers with working practices, and in this way asserted a homogeneous workers' culture, instead of concerning themselves with individual encounters with other cultures. To emphasize identitarian difference threatened involuntarily to lead to exoticizing, or promoting an "intellectual racism".⁸⁵ In response to participants in the debate, especially William Sewell, Jr and Christopher Johnson, who both stressed capitalist restructuring, Rancière

83. *Idem*, *Nights of Labor*, pp. 78–87. Rancière further radicalized this principle of complicity in his account of the views of the pedagogue Joseph Jacotot (1770–1840). Jacotot postulated a deep equality of intelligence amongst all people, taking this equality as the starting point of his method of instruction (instead of a goal to be strived for), designed to allow illiterate parents to help their children to read and write. Rancière explained this maxim of equality as a prerequisite of emancipation, the abolition of boundaries, and a re-appropriation of the world; Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, Kristin Ross (transl. and introd.) (Stanford, CA, 1991), first published as: *Le maître ignorant. Cinq leçons sur l'émancipation intellectuelle* (Paris, 1987).

84. It is only possible here to give two examples of a fascinated acceptance, or argued rejection. For the first, cf. Donald Reid, "Reflections on Labor History and Language", in Lenard R. Berlanstein (ed.), *Rethinking Labor History: Essays on Discourse and Class Analysis* (Urbana, IL [etc.], 1993), pp. 39–54. An in-depth, but definitely negative discussion is in Bryan D. Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia, PA, 1990), pp. 125–128; cf. also Palmer's review of *Nights of Labor*, in *Labour/Le Travail*, 27 (1991), pp. 340–342.

85. Jacques Rancière, "The Myth of the Artisan: Critical Reflections on a Category of Social History", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 24 (1983), pp. 1–16, 10. The same text is reproduced in Steven L. Kaplan and Cynthia J. Koepp (eds), *Work in France: Representations, Meaning, Organization, and Practice* (Ithaca, NY [etc.], 1986), pp. 317–334.

insisted that in his view, the demand for participation and expansion of social life bordered on workers' militancy.⁸⁶

Two paths are opened by Rancière's postulate of a genesis of workers' thinking from a project of dis-identification and an impossible identification: a critique of social and historical sciences that assigns the lower classes their proper place, and an attention to aesthetics, as in the last analysis the emancipation of working men and women amounts first and foremost to an aesthetic revolution.⁸⁷

Exemplary for the critique of the social sciences was the example of Pierre Bourdieu, whom Rancière particularly attacked.⁸⁸ Interest in mixed forms and areas of contact between the classes clashed with the demarcation Bourdieu's twin concept of habitus and distinction implied, which – according to Rancière – eliminated zones of exchange.⁸⁹ Already in an article of 1978, on the subject of the Paris pleasure district in the nineteenth century, Rancière had emphasized the salience of a mixed cultural space – a thesis that became central in *La nuit des prolétaires*.⁹⁰ With the concept of habitus, the singular seizure of speech that characterized the poetizing workers of *La nuit des prolétaires* was rationalized away.⁹¹ Rancière found that Bourdieu – similarly in this respect to Althusser – pursued a discourse of order, a “science of right opinion”.⁹² Ambiguity

86. Jacques Rancière, “A Reply”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 25 (1984), pp. 42–46, 42ff., 45.

87. Jacques Rancière, “Afterword to the English-Language Edition (2002)”, in *The Philosopher and His Poor*, Andrew Parker (ed. and introd.), John Drury, Corrine Oster, and Andrew Parker (transl.) (Durham, NC, 2002), pp. 219–227, 219ff., 226. This point is made more clearly in the afterword to the German edition; cf. Jacques Rancière, “Nachwort (2006)”, in *idem*, *Der Philosoph und seine Armen*, Richard Steurer (transl.) (Vienna, 2010), p. 296. We cannot deal here with this path leading on to aesthetics, but only indicate that this is the starting-point of Rancière's concern with aesthetics as a potential for a new arrangement of the sensible: “Politics is aesthetic in that it makes visible what had been excluded from a perceptual field, and in that it makes audible what used to be inaudible. [...] Politics is completely an affair of the antagonistic subjectivation of the division of the sensible”; Rancière, “Afterword to the English-Language Edition”, p. 226. Cf. *idem*, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, Gabriel Rockhill (transl. and introd.) (London [etc.], 2004), originally published as *Le partage du sensible. Esthétique et politique* (Paris, 2000); *Révoltes logiques* (ed.), *Esthétiques du peuple*; this already explicitly draws on Friedrich Schiller's “On the Aesthetic Education of Mankind”, a text that Rancière repeatedly refers to.

88. It is beyond the scope of the present article to judge the extent to which this critique is pertinent, but only how it fits into Rancière's project. For a comparative undertaking of this kind, cf. Nordmann, *Bourdieu/Rancière*; Toscano, “Anti-Sociology and Its Limits”.

89. Rancière, *Philosopher and His Poor*, p. 189.

90. Jacques Rancière, “Good Times, Or, Pleasure at the Barrière, in *idem*, *Staging the People*, pp. 175–232, originally published as “Le bon temps ou la barrière des plaisirs”, *Les Révoltes logiques*, 7 (1978), pp. 25–66.

91. Rancière, “The Proletarian and his Double”, p. 30.

92. Rancière, *Philosopher and His Poor*, pp. 166ff.

and heresy can only appear in this context as a deficient misunderstanding of the rules of the game.⁹³

According to Rancière, Bourdieu deploys a radical critique to illustrate the radical unchangeability of conditions, pointing out relations of domination yet claiming that the concealment of these relations is absolute. This is done by the tautology according to which domination functions only through ignorance, an ignorance that domination itself produces by its reproduction, as shown by the example of education. Firstly, the university remains closed to children of the people because they cannot see the real reasons why it is closed to them, and secondly, the reason why they cannot recognize these real reasons is a structural effect of the system that excludes them.⁹⁴ All that remains for the sociologist is a banal “ethics of suspicion”, which dispenses with explanation and does not prove anything more than that the dispossessed are dispossessed.⁹⁵

Rancière’s polemic against Bourdieu was vehement, but seems to have supplied the foundations for a stronger deconstructive enterprise, which investigated the necessity of the assignment of social place in historical science. *Les noms de l’histoire* (1992) focused on the question of the way in which modern historiography raised its speech to the status of science.⁹⁶ According to Arlette Farge, the historical profession reacted to this attempt at a “poetics of knowledge” partly with organized silence, partly with angry rejection.⁹⁷ What Rancière investigated here were the literary rules and procedures with which history took up its precarious position between narrative and science.⁹⁸ It did this by conceptualizing its newly discovered historical subject – the masses – in a particular way. For Rancière, modern historical science had found ways to make the masses visible in history – but at the price of keeping them silent. It tamed the “excess of words” of the poor, who, as soon as they began to speak, left their assigned domain.⁹⁹ Modern history-writing ceased to consider only the “great” events of the rulers, yet it did so by purging history of all

93. *Ibid.*, p. 186. On cultural allodoxia, i.e. “all the mistaken identifications and false recognitions”, which lead people “to take light opera for ‘serious music’, popularization for science, an ‘imitation’ for the genuine article”, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Richard Nice (transl.) (London [etc.], 2003, first published 1979), p. 323.

94. Jacques Rancière, “L’Éthique de la sociologie”, in Collectif Révoltes logiques, *Empire du sociologue*, pp. 13–36, 28ff.; *idem*, *Philosopher and His Poor*, pp. 171ff.

95. *Idem*, “Éthique de la sociologie”, p. 33.

96. *Idem*, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, Hassan Melehy (transl.), foreword by Hayden White (Minneapolis, MN, 1994), first published as *Les noms de l’histoire. Essai de poétique du savoir* (Paris, 1992).

97. Arlette Farge, “L’Histoire comme avènement”, *Critique*, 601/602 (1997), pp. 461–466, 464.

98. Rancière, *Names of History*, pp. 7ff.

99. *Ibid.*, pp. 16ff., 24ff.

events altogether – of the countless incidents that involve those speaking individuals that history is made of.¹⁰⁰

At the origin of modern historiography stands Jules Michelet, who transposed the Revolution – the event par excellence – into an epic. Instead of the revolt's confusion of voices, he had a new collective subject speak – the Nation – and depicted the surrender of the people to the Nation without allowing the bearers of this surrender to speak for themselves. The modern historical science of the age of the masses has perfected this achievement in moderation. In place of events it puts the facts, conjunctures, and structures of the *longue durée*.¹⁰¹ The spatialized history of *Annales* manages to allocate each speech a place. This explains the history of mentalities' interest in heresies, as a legacy of Michelet's historiography. Michelet's book *La sorcière* (1862) had literally domesticated the witch: as guardian of the hearth in popular belief, who was only diabolized by the church's drive for domination. Heresy – and as further examples Rancière cites among others Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's village of *Montaillou* and Carlo Ginzburg's miller in *The Cheese and the Worms* – is explained as provincial religion, tied to tradition and anchored fast in its territory.¹⁰²

HERETICAL HISTORY AND ITS NON-ACTUALITY

What then would be the approach of a heretical historiography, according to Rancière?¹⁰³ It has first of all to acknowledge the excess of words in the modern age, when breaches in social order lead to previously unknown new communities, such as “that class that is no longer a class but the ‘dissolution of all classes’” (Karl Marx).¹⁰⁴ This leads to identifications with empty names: “Proletarian!”, Blanqui answered when the judge asked him his profession.¹⁰⁵ In Rancière's political philosophy, this is the starting point for the conceptualization of politics as event, which then happens when those without part articulate their part – a paradox that puts the entire order in question.¹⁰⁶ The subjectivity being constituted here must grasp itself as generality and invoke a universality.

100. Farge, “Histoire comme avènement”.

101. Two of the seven chapters are devoted to Fernand Braudel's narrative mode.

102. Rancière, *Names of History*, pp. 67ff. Nostalgia, heritage, and regionalism were problems that repeatedly occupied *Les Révoltes logiques*. Cf. Jean Borreil, “Des politiques nostalgiques (Montaillou, village occitan – Bretons de Plozevet – Le cheval d'orgeil – Être un peuple en marge)”, *Les Révoltes logiques*, 3 (1976), pp. 87–105; Philippe Hoyau, “L'année du patrimoine, ou la société de conservation”, *Les Révoltes logiques*, 12 (1980), pp. 70–78.

103. For example, the title of ch. 6 of Rancière, *Names of History*: “A Heretical History?”.

104. Rancière, *Names of History*, pp. 92, 34ff.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

106. On the imbrication of class struggle and politics, cf. Rancière, *Disagreement*, pp. 18ff., 83ff.

Historiographically, this is “the age of hazardous subjectification” that forms the celebrated opening scene of E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* – the London Corresponding Society founded by nine workers in 1792, which resolved “[t]hat the number of our members be unlimited”.¹⁰⁷

Thompson, according to Rancière, described the genesis of the working class on the basis of a process of thought: as the appropriation of reference texts and the reinterpretation of writings. In order to explain this origin, it was not enough to locate it in popular culture and sociability. The struggling class was rather “the invention of a name for the picking up of several speech-acts that affirm or challenge a symbolic configuration of relations between the order of discourse and the order of states of affairs”.¹⁰⁸ Modernity, under the sign of a break, demanded a specific poetics for historiography. This referred to the relationship of historical science to time, and therefore to change,¹⁰⁹ what Rancière subsequently continued in reflections on anachronies and anachronisms, directed against the idea of epochs as closed spaces of thinking.

The *Annales* co-founder Lucien Febvre, in his classic 1942 study on “the problem of unbelief in the sixteenth century” had called anachronism “the worst of all sins, the sin that cannot be forgiven” for a historian.¹¹⁰ Against the contention that Rabelais had been a disguised atheist, Febvre furnished meticulous examples that the conditions of this very possibility were lacking for people in the early modern age. In this way, according to Rancière, Febvre did two things. First, he proved the impossibility of unbelief by sketching a panorama in which unbelief seemed improbable. Febvre located Rabelais in a world of perfect synchrony, in which no one could be “before” their time and every life was pervaded by religion from baptism to death.¹¹¹ Secondly, Febvre, who characterized this synchronic world of early modernity, posited his own text as outside of time and in this way solved a philosophical problem by way of a poetic procedure, without reflecting on this change of register. Historiography would accordingly be a speech that narrates in the system of the past and explains in the system of the present.¹¹² In this way, Rancière argued, it is precisely anachronism that characterizes historiography as a science.¹¹³

107. *Idem*, *Names of History*, p. 92.

108. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

109. *Ibid.*, pp. 101ff.

110. Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, Beatrice Gottlieb (transl.) (Cambridge, MA [etc.], 1982, first published 1942), p. 5.

111. Jacques Rancière, “Le concept d’anachronisme et la vérité de l’historien”, *L’Inactuel*, 6 (1996), pp. 53–68, 58.

112. *Ibid.*, pp. 63ff.

113. *Ibid.*, p. 65. Starting from this point, the historian of antiquity Nicole Loraux, in debate with Rancière, pleaded for the targeted formulation “controlled anachronism”. Applying such

However, the subjection of historical actors to the “possible” of an era is ultimately anti-historical. For history precisely arises when people are dissimilar to their time and make a break with the temporal line that assigns them their place. There are a plurality of temporal lines at work in history, arising through encounter, displacement, and appropriation.¹¹⁴ Only untimeliness therefore makes history possible.

Untimeliness also appears, however, as a forming principle of Rancière’s procedure.¹¹⁵ The present article began with the question as to what it means if a thinker of non-actuality becomes actual. The principle of non-actuality, it was argued, was pursued by Rancière and *Les Révoltes logiques* by way of a temporal estrangement of themes and debates. *Les Révoltes logiques* stood for an attempt, in the aftermath of revolt, to shift its own politics into history, and in this way – as shown by the counter-knowledge of the *enquête* and the *établie(s)* – maintain an analytic orientation that had arisen from the movement. In this orientation, critique as power of separation is combined with attention to the event. This point of departure might lead to various destinations.

Some historians oriented to the linguistic turn saw in Rancière’s perspective a welcome challenge to what they experienced as an economic determinist straitjacket. I would like, however, to highlight another orientation – the untimeliness of the insistence on “words today seen as awkward”, such as “factory”, “proletarians”, or “revolution” that were mentioned at the beginning. Linked with this could be an idea of emancipation in which a subject – neither endowed with an authentic core, nor autonomous – acts, seizes the word, and thereby alters the coordinates of the situation itself. Subjectification would accordingly then be the historically recuperable moment of a visibility or appearance, when an existing identity is abandoned. Conceiving “hazardous subjectification” as dis-identifying, as a process of surprise, offers a promising alternative to a prevailing view that, with a kind of “Weberized” Foucault, reduces processes of subjectification to streamlining and inscription.

Today, the widespread interest in Rancière’s work could be a token that such a perspective, insisting on an emancipatory break that is untimely in the double sense, is gaining ground. For example, some of Rancière’s arguments have been used to reflect on the situation of gender history.¹¹⁶

modern categories as “public sphere” to antiquity leads to a reciprocal destabilization between the category and the field of investigation. Cf. Nicole Loraux and Jacques Rancière, “Eloge de l’anachronisme en histoire”, *Le Genre humain*, 27 (1993), pp. 23–39.

114. Rancière, “Concept d’anachronisme”, p. 66.

115. Kristin Ross, “Historicizing Untimeliness”, in Rockhill, *Jacques Rancière*, pp. 15–29; Geneviève Fraisse, “À l’impossible on est tenu”, in Cornu, *Philosophie déplacée*, pp. 71–77.

116. Caroline Arni, “Zeitlichkeit, Anachronismus und Anachronien: Gegenwart und Transformation der Geschlechtergeschichte aus geschichtstheoretischer Perspektive”, *L’Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*, 18 (2007), pp. 53–76.

The recently founded journal *History of the Present*, refers explicitly to *Les Révoltes logiques*, without, however, intending simply a new edition of the French journal.¹¹⁷ This journal aims at practising historiography as critique, by challenging the implicit assumptions and uninvestigated foundations of social certainties.¹¹⁸

To conclude, the recent interest in Rancière should be situated in a broader context of social history, and for this purpose – fragmentarily – some positions should be indicated that share certain characteristics with his procedure, without being in debt to something like a Rancièrian perspective (the polemicist of *La leçon d'Althusser* has no lesson to give himself). Some works on the history of emotions, such as those by William Reddy, share an interest with Rancière in taking account of the historical actors' agency beyond representation.¹¹⁹ Other historians formulate a critique comparable with Rancière's of the social *a priori*: for example, Carolyn Steedman has shown with her recent works on domestic servants how people – individually or as a whole occupational group – withdrew themselves from a certain dominant script of social history.¹²⁰ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, in *The Many-Headed Hydra*, sketch the genesis of a trans-Atlantic proletariat through the history of unsuspected connections and solidarities; the “motley crew” were characterized not by a common structural positioning, but rather by participation in “broader, more creative forms of identification”.¹²¹

117. The editorial team is made up of Joan W. Scott, Andrew Aisenberg, Brian Connolly, Ben Kafka, Sylvia Schafer, and Mrinalini Sinha; cf. “Introducing History of the Present”, *History of the Present*, 1 (2011), pp. 1–4.

118. For more detail on this programme, Joan W. Scott, “History-writing as Critique”, in Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, and Alan Munslow (eds), *Manifestos for History* (London [etc.], 2007), pp. 19–38.

119. To repeat, this does not mean that this interest is conceptualized in the same way. Out of the wide field of the history of emotions, we can only indicate here the works of William Reddy, especially as he was connected with *Les Révoltes logiques*; William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge [etc.], 2001); *idem*, *The Invisible Code: Honor and Sentiment in Post-Revolutionary France, 1814–1848* (Berkeley, CA [etc.], 1997); *idem*, “L'ouvrier mauvais public: A travers trois chansons d'Alexandre Desrousseaux”, in Collectif Révoltes logiques, *Esthétiques du peuple*, pp. 175–184. For a short critique of what in his view is a one-sided attention to representation, taking the collective work *Histoire des Femmes* as an example, cf. Jacques Rancière, “L'histoire ‘des’ femmes entre subjectivation et représentation (note critique)”, *Annales ESC*, 48 (1993), pp. 1011–1019.

120. Carolyn Steedman, *Master and Servant: Love and Labour in the English Industrial Age* (Cambridge [etc.], 2007) for the incompatibility between individual actors and social-historical assumptions; *idem*, *Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge [etc.], 2009) for the rewriting of state formation and modernization through the lens of waged domestic service.

121. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London [etc.], 2000), p. 246.

Finally Arlette Farge, in her book on the “impossible”, ever fleeting history of the voice in the eighteenth century, focuses on articulations in the literal sense.¹²²

I mention these very different books, chosen quite subjectively, not because they “appeal” to Rancière, but because in various ways they display a strengthened attention to seizing the word, to a rupture, or to the intersection of different temporal lines. In that sense, history-writing might help in the need for untimeliness in our own political present.

My reading of this is indebted to Patrick Eiden-Offe, “Historische Gegen-Bild-Produktion. Zur Darstellungsweise eines nicht-identischen Proletariats, am Beispiel der Vielköpfigen Hydra”, *Sozial.Geschichte Online*, 3 (2010), pp. 83–116.

122. Arlette Farge, *Essai pour une histoire des voix au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris [etc.], 2009).