

Only in the Form of Rupture: An Interview with Jacques Rancière

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Peter Hallward (PH): I know you weren't part of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, far from it, and that you can't talk about the journal directly. But I'm grateful for your answers to some questions regarding the general context of the project, the political discussions and theories that surrounded it and what was going on at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in those years. When did you arrive at the ENS?

Jacques Rancière (JR): In the autumn of 1960. Jean-Claude Milner in 61 and Jacques-Alain Miller in 62.

PH: And the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*¹ were launched at the end of 1964, is that right?

JR: Yes, that's right. Robert Linhart arrived at the Ecole in 63, and his friend Jacques Broyelle arrived in 1964. They represented the 'political' hard core of the project, if you like, against the theoreticist tendency that dominated in the Althusserian milieu.

PH: What was your own role in the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*?

JR: It was my idea, actually. For me it was, in the beginning, simply about reviving the propagandist activity of the Cercle des Étudiants Communistes de L'Ecole Normale Supérieure (the *cercle d'Ulm*). But the communist *normaliens* [i.e. students at the ENS], who participated in this revival alongside me had become communists under Althusser's influence. And what was supposed to have been a simple informational bulletin of the *cercle communiste d'Ulm* [the circle of Communist students at the ENS] became in fact an instrument for propagating Althusserianism amongst the communist students.

At the time there were two tendencies in the Union des Étudiants Communistes (UEC): those we called 'the Italians', people influenced by the Italian Marxists (or by dissident French Marxists like Henri Lefebvre), who emphasized recent changes in capitalism, the idea that one had to adapt to neo-capitalism. They gathered around the journal *Clarté*, which was basically in favour of opening up politically, for a wider, more open, more culturally-oriented politics aimed at young people; they approved of the policy of peaceful coexistence [with capitalism] proclaimed by Khrushchev – ideas to which the French Communist Party (PCF) did not really adhere. The Italians had just taken over the leadership of the UEC from those loyal to the PCF. Then there were, to the left, the Trotskyists, and those we called the 'pro-Chinese'.

Linhart was already the main organiser of the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*, and his basic position was not to enter ideological quarrels and to affirm, first and foremost, the necessity of theory and of a new foundation of practice on this basis. But this led to an ambiguity: when the *Cahiers* were presented at the UEC congress in 1965, they were

¹ See Frédéric Chateigner, 'D'Althusser à Mao: Les *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*', *Dissidences* 8 (2010), 66-80.

held up by the Party leaders, by the orthodox, by those loyal to the PCF, as an example for the young – who should study and work on theory rather than discuss the political orientation of the Party. In this same congress Linhart made a declaration: 'we are not "pro-Chinese" in disguise'. But in fact, in a way, we were! All those who participated in the *Cahiers Marxist-Léninistes* were more sympathetic to Mao's theses than to the official thesis of the Party, but we played a sort of double game. The line was: the communist students should busy themselves studying Marxism, rather than discussing Party politics.² This implied, for us, that theory should arm us against the politics of the Party, while it appeared to be a declaration of loyalty towards the Party. This was, in fact, also Althusser's position. Except that Althusser was willing to wait-and-see, forever, whereas Linhart was a strategist ready to pick the right moment to split the organisation.

PH : The *normaliens* of the *Cahiers* were thus dealing with the theoretical formation. Were they thus reinforcing the distinction between the ENS and the University, in parallel to the theory-practice distinction: theory for us, and militant practice for the others?

JR: Not really. In the UEC circle at the ENS there were very active people and at the Sorbonne there were students who were very committed to theory, in particular the philosophy group.³ In *La Leçon d'Althusser* I talk a little about these students, who were very active, who criticised Bourdieu when he came to the Ecole, etc., and wanted to promote collective forms of work.⁴ They were critical of the organisation of knowledge, they anticipated many of the questions that emerged in 68. And Althusser intervened to denounce this 'ideological' drift amongst the young in the most violent terms. He insisted on the fact that the students were there to learn, to acquire the science that would deliver them from their petit-bourgeois ideology. It is science that must direct politics, etc.; the legacy of this insistence is the article Althusser wrote against the students at the end of 1963.⁵ And this coincided with a change in the *cercle d'Ulm*; the 'elders', who had been very active during the Algerian war were leaving the Ecole, and the rest of us had just arrived: Miller, Milner, Linhart, etc. We were thus in the position to take over the cercle, if you like.

This was our point of departure: in the first place comes theory, rather than critique of the PCF, or a fight for or against the Italians, or the pro-Chinese. It wasn't

² Cf. Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson* [1974], trans. Emiliano Battista (London: Continuum, 2011), 18-19.

³ See Julian Bourg, 'The Red Guards of Paris: French Student Maoism of the 1960s', *History of European Ideas* 31:4 (2005), 482-483.

⁴ Althusser's intervention against the syndicalist left in late 1963 was partly triggered, Rancière notes, by 'the student strike led by the FGEL [la Fédération des Groupes d'Études de Lettres, at the Sorbonne] in November 1963, whose main – and notable – slogan was "Sorbonne to the students", and the intervention by the FGEL's secretary, Bruno Queysanne, during the inaugural lecture of Bourdieu and Passeron's seminar at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. In Queysanne's intervention, in his questioning Bourdieu and Passeron about the political status of a sociological research project about academic learning that protracted the authoritarian division of academic labour, Althusser recognised his enemy: here was leftism [*le gauchisme*], the subordination of science to politics, the aggression of illiterate politicians against researchers' (*Althusser's Lesson*, 39-40).

⁵ Louis Althusser, 'Problèmes étudiants', *La Nouvelle Critique* 152 (January 1964), 80-111; 'Student Problems', partial trans. Dick Bateman, *Sublation* (University of Leicester, 1967), 14-22, revised and republished in *Radical Philosophy* 170 (November 2011). Althusser takes for granted the idea that 'the pedagogic function has as its object the transmission of a determinate knowledge to subjects who do not possess it', and is therefore 'based on the absolute condition of an inequality between a knowledge and a lack of knowledge' (Althusser, 'Student Problems', *Sublation*, 18). Cf. Rancière, 'On the Theory of Ideology: The Politics of Althusser' [1969], trans. Martin Jordin, *Radical Philosophy* 7 (1974), retranslated by Emiliano Battista as an appendix of *Althusser's Lesson*, 125-154.

simply 'we do the theory and the others do the action', but rather: 'we do politics that pass through a theoretical training or formation [*formation*] first'. Linhart's big project in the UEC circle was this: first we need to take care of theoretical training. Even my text, published in *Lire le Capital*,⁶ wasn't initially written for the book at all, but to help with the sort of school of theoretical training that Linhart wanted to set up. The theoretical training was to allow the gathering of people on a Marxist, scientific basis – that was the idea.

There was, then, a twofold theoretical and political aspect to the project. Even the name of the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*, in the end it was me who proposed it but not at all in the sense of an adherence to Beijing; we chose it because there was Miller who wanted to call them 'Marxist' (this was the theoretical aspect), and Linhart 'Leninist' (to accentuate the directly political side). Marxist-Leninist soon became a name indicating sympathy with Chinese communism, but here it wasn't at all a Maoist affirmation. It was a simple compromise. It was a compromise between those who wanted first to write, think, and work in theory and those, like Linhart, who wanted to act first of all. It was a link between activists and theoreticians.

PH: And the new theoretical training in question, was that first of all a matter of learning the science was needed to understand capitalism? Or was it about interrogating the status of theory and of science as such, of pursuing an epistemological project in the large sense?

JR: Not at all, it wasn't linked to a general epistemological project. It was essentially about teaching Marxism, considered as an existing science, to militants. But at the same time, the science we were supposed to learn was not the one taught in the Communist Party's schools but that of authentic Marxism, which we sought to exhume with Althusser. The job of the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* was really to extend the work of the UEC, for which 'scientific training' quite simply meant 'Marxist training'. We insisted on the difference between science and ideology, between theory and lived experience, but there was no reference to the tradition of French epistemology, etc.

PH: And Sartre, was he no longer a point of reference?

JR: Sartre was soon overtaken by the rise of structuralism and Althusserian Marxism. For my part, I arrived at the Ecole in 1960; phenomenology was still dominant, and Sartre's influence was still strong. But this situation changed very quickly. 1960-61 was the year of Jean Beaufret's last seminar at the Ecole, it symbolised the end of the period of Heidegger's importance. When I arrived at the Ecole I was still very marked by Sartre. His big book on dialectical reason had just come out and I had read it passionately.⁷ Then, there was Sartre's famous lecture at the ENS in April 1961, in the Salle des Actes; Sartre gave a very poor presentation.

PH: This was an important moment, many of your contemporaries mention it too; do you remember the topic?

⁶ Rancière, 'Le Concept de critique et la critique de l'économie politique des *Manuscrits de 1844* au *Capital*', in Althusser et al., *Lire le capital*, 2 vols. (Paris: Maspero, 1965), vol. 1, 93-210; 'The Concept of "Critique" and the "Critique of Political Economy" (From the *Manuscrits* of 1844 to *Capital*)', in *Ideology, Method and Marx: Essays from Economy and Society*, ed. Ali Rattansi (London: Routledge, 1989), 74-180.

⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

JR: I think that it was a lecture on possibility. The subject was, basically, how 'the possible' is wrested from the impossibility of being human. It was extraordinarily weak. He was then attacked by several people in the audience, by Althusser in a rather polite way, and more sharply by Roger Establet, who was at the heart of the UEC circle and who pressed him along Althusserian lines, saying more or less 'your philosophy is a philosophy of consciousness, and your praxis is only that of consciousness, which supposes a transparent cogito', and so forth. For me this marked a disillusionment with Sartre; that evening marked the beginning of Sartre's movement out of our horizon. I believe that those of my generation who were there felt the same way, even though Sartre's influence can still be felt, for instance in Badiou, who remains a great Sartrean.

PH: This is quite a clear line of transition. Was there a lot of discussion when the *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1960) came out?

JR: Absolutely not. Sartre's visit to the ENS was precisely to celebrate its publication, but it was more like a burial. I never saw anyone again (at the Ecole) discussing Sartre. The *Critique* is a book that came too late; he wanted to talk about history, to refer to anthropology, to engage a little with Lévi-Strauss, etc., but it didn't work. It really was the swan song of existentialism. And when I entered the UEC in 1963 Sartre wasn't a point of reference anymore at all.

PH: The Algerian war (in which Sartre had played an important role) was coming to an end and I suppose that for young people at the time the question of colonialism didn't have the same urgency anymore?

JR: Yes, the war was over and the young people of the UEC turned to other things, to student life and the organisation of knowledge. No one talked about the colonial question in France anymore – it was a period in which the spirit of *cartiérisme* dominated, the doctrine of the journalist Raymond Cartier, who said we had to concentrate on mainland France, that the time of the colonies was over. The problem of the colonies disappeared completely from theoretical and political discussion, and the reflection on the international situation began to find a new orientation, towards the idea of a third-world revolution. It was the time of the Cuban revolution, of mobilisation in the Arab world, and it was soon going to be the time of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, etc. Political reflection at the time was about local participation in a global movement. But it was essentially a question of a more or less distant sympathy, as it would be regarding the American war in Vietnam a little later. In France people didn't feel implicated in the same way, and we acted without the immediate problem of solidarity, the war on the home front, etc. which had been issues during the Algerian war. After 1962 the French government was no longer engaged in any colonial war, and therefore there was no reason for this aspect to be pre-eminent. Instead it was a moment of hope in a new era of global revolution, the moment of the third-world.

PH: And those in your group who emphasised political action, on militants, but who also refused any reference to consciousness, to will, to engagement; did they manage to conceive of political action without falling more or less into a kind of economic determinism? The Sartre of the 1950s liked to say that 'Marxism gives us a grip on the historical situation', and thus helps us to act in order to transform this situation. With Sartre it's still fairly clear who he means by this 'us'. Whereas this isn't so obvious, a little later! Can we conceive of militant action without reference to consciousness, to the notion of a project, the deliberations of a subject, etc.? How did you resolve those questions within the orientation of the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*?

JR: Everything is mediated by theory. The idea is to go through theory, through science, in order to have a grip on the situation. And science tells us, precisely, that the subject is only a 'support' or medium [*support*] of the relations of production, etc. What Marxist science says is that one has to liquidate all theories of will, all theories of engagement, in order to think the place of what is done in a historical and actual situation, understood in a way that only science can accomplish. Politics is conceived in ways mediated by theory, I would say, in theory as much as in practice, if you see what I mean.

But one has to understand equally that, at that time, to choose the camp of theory and of science was *also* to choose the camp of rupture, of revolution, the camp of Marxism's autonomy, of its exteriority to the Communist Party's political apparatus, but also to the whole of the existing order. Don't forget that what is at stake at the heart of Althusserianism (even if its conception of history becomes so sophisticated that the aim is lost from view) is still a refutation of evolutionist theories, of a certain conception of historical evolution that leads to socialism, and thus of the idea of a peaceful passage, etc. Theory says that the revolution can only proceed in the form of rupture, and not in the form of a peaceful evolution. And this indeed encouraged most structuralists, in 1968, to become radical political militants.

PH: Those who then became militants without reserve, those who (like Linhart) 'established' themselves in the factories, etc., did they conceive of this militancy as the prolongation of this same project, authorised by theory? Or as a rupture and a passage to a different conception of politics, and thus also to a different conception of the subject? Is there not, in the new reference to the Chinese Cultural Revolution after 67 precisely a kind of hyper-voluntarism?

JR: Those were the politics of the UJC(ml), and then of the Gauche Prolétarienne after 68, precisely a politics of rupture with the Althusserian logic. When the UJC constituted itself as an autonomous political organisation, it did so inevitably in a logic of rupture with Althusser and the Communist Party.

Here there was a sequence in two stages. The first moment of rupture amongst the Althusserians was in 1965-66, when I was no longer at the Ecole: there was a split between those who enlisted in the project of a theoretical re-foundation, of the kind undertaken by the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* (starting with Miller et Milner), and those who chose the path of practical action, like Linhart and Broyelle. And then, in a second moment, the 'theoreticians' and the activists were reunited in 1968, against the Althusserians who stayed in the PCF. What is interesting is how people came back together: what took place in 68 would turn upside down the relation both to theory and to organisation. The UJC and then the GP gave the 'establishment' of militants in the factory an important role. But establishment involved two things at the same time: gaining a way in to the factories, organisation of militant cells, getting a foothold in the workers' domain; but it is also involved a transformation of the intellectual, a re-education of intellectuals – and thus an end to the idea of intellectuals bringing theory to the masses. Both aspects were at play. There was what we could almost call an ethical aspect, a new kind of intellectual militant, and in the second place there was the instrumental aspect, a recognition that in order to do things in the factories you have to be there.

PH: And before this renewal of 68, was the break of 1965-66 perceived as irreversible, fundamental?

JR: Yes, Linhart and the UJC completely cut themselves off from those who left to found the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*. It was a genuine rupture, which began, as far as I remember, with this issue of the *Cahiers Marxist-Léninistes* that Linhart and the cercle d'Ulm refused to distribute, an issue on literature, with texts by Milner and Regnault (cf. CpA 7.Introduction). That was the moment of a real break. The *Cahiers Marxist-Léninistes*, from then on printed with red covers, would afterwards concentrate on the political stakes, even though one still finds the same double game at play, for instance with the long (unsigned) text by Althusser on the Cultural Revolution⁸, which indicated a kind of rallying to Maoism, but still in very theoretical, veiled and convoluted terms.

And then in 68 the UJC found itself moving somewhat against the current of events, since Linhart, in early May, defended a version of the theory according to which this movement of May 68 was just a social-democratic manipulation designed to undercut the workers movement, and he denounced it violently. After which the UJC militants chose various paths: some will gravitate towards the *Humanité Rouge*, the Parti communiste marxiste-léniniste de France and other 'hard-core' Marxist-Leninist groups, others joined the Gauche Prolétarienne, and yet others would fade away, etc. And the committed structuralists, people like Miller and Milner, who had taken their distance from Linhart's project since 66, also joined the Gauche Prolétarienne. Let's say that 68 redistributed the relations between theory and practice.

PH: I'd like to go back to the *Cahiers* themselves a little. The new *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, launched in January 1966 by Miller and Milner – as far as you could tell, were they initially conceived as a kind of theoretical-epistemological supplement to the *Cahiers Marxist-Léninistes*, or rather as a new, independent project, or even in competition with the older *Cahiers*?

JR: I didn't take part in the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* at all and so I can't say much about it. But it would be wrong to say that the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* were a theoretical supplement to the *Cahiers Marxist-Léninistes*, even if there was no contradiction on a theoretical level between the two: the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* sought to develop the structuralist theory within which a renewed Marxism was taking its place. It was about exploring this paradigm at all levels, and this implied working with people who were not directly involved in militant action. They wanted to intervene in what appeared to be the great debate of the day, that is to say – in the terms proposed by Cavailles – the struggle of the philosophy of the concept against the philosophy of consciousness.⁹ They took sides, of course, in favour of the concept. They wanted to renew an anti-phenomenological French epistemological tradition, whose reference points were names like Cavailles, Canguilhem, Foucault (who had been influenced by Canguilhem, his thesis supervisor), etc.

Apart from this, the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* also corresponded, of course, to the period in which Lacan arrived at the Ecole, in 1964. I believe that Lacan quickly realised that he could rely on the normaliens to help shake the structures of the psychoanalytic profession a little, in order to constitute his own school. In 64-65 there was a first meeting to constitute what would later become the Freudian School of Paris; there was a small group of normaliens – Miller, Milner, Grosrichard and me. Lacan had

⁸ [Louis Althusser], 'Sur la révolution culturelle', *Cahiers Marxist-Léninistes* 14 (November 1966); 'On the Cultural Revolution', trans. Jason Smith, *Decalages* 1:1 (16 February 2010), <http://scholar.oxy.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=decalages>.

⁹ 'The term consciousness does not have a univocal application – no more than the thing has a unity that can be isolated. [...] It is not a philosophy of conscience, but a philosophy of the concept that can yield a doctrine of science' (Cavaillès, *Sur la logique et la théorie de la science* [1946] [Paris: Vrin, 1997], 90).

positioned us so as to counterbalance psychoanalysts like Serge Leclaire. Lacan saw that he could use Miller and the others to help him create exactly the kind of theoretical paradigm that could help him take power in his milieu. There was a strategic dimension to all this.

So the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* were created to extract the theoretical, conceptual aspect of the structural-Marxist paradigm, in brief, whereas the UEC was there to deal with the practical side. At the same time the practical side underwent its own evolution, while the theoretical aspect remained a little ambiguous: in 1967 there was the 'philosophy course for scientists' (organised by Althusser), which was part of the great project of an epistemological re-founding. There was still the project of laying a theoretical foundation for politics, but this first had to pass through a general theory of diverse practices, and political practice wasn't the priority of either the Cercle d'Épistémologie or the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*.

PH: Did it seem coherent at the time, for those who were trying to devise a theoretical foundation for political action and for Marxism, to pass through Canguilhem and Lacan, through epistemology and the 'logic of the signifier', etc.? Or did this seem to be not only a 'detour through theory', a kind of Althusserian detour, but even perhaps a kind of distraction or deviation?

JR: Remember that it was Althusser who had defined a kind of equivalence between Marxist materialism and structuralism. There was thus a clear link between Marxism as a general theory and structuralism as a materialist paradigm, in opposition to an 'idealist' philosophy of consciousness. The Lacanian 'procession of the signifier' thus functioned, like Marxist relations of production, as a form of constraint misunderstood or ignored by the ideologues of consciousness, praxis and lived experience. And Canguilhem (who had overseen Foucault's thesis and who had exerted a strong influence on several of us, not least on Balibar), Canguilhem, appeared to be the representative of a tradition of scientific thought in opposition to phenomenological idealism. You might have thought, then, that there was a common theoretical ground to all this. But in practice this wasn't the case. There was for instance the famous argument around the issue of the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* on literature, conceived by the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* people and rejected by Linhart (CpA 7. Introduction).

At the time I was teaching at a lycée [high school] with huge classes of 40-50 students, so I was thus completely cut off from all this and heard only echoes of what was going on. Linhart summoned me, because he wanted to lean on the 'good' Althusserians, as opposed to the 'bad' ones, so to speak. It was the moment the UJC was launched, but I had no time at all to get involved. The following year I moved to the Fondation Thiers, so between 65 and 68, apart from ties of friendship, I had hardly any links at all with the projects at the ENS. And with Miller there had already been this dismal business with *Lire le Capital* in 65.

PH: Concerning the authorship of the concept of metonymical causality?

JR: Yes, that's it. When he read my text about the seminar on *Capital* – initially written only for our lectures in theoretical training – he was furious, he said that I had stolen his concepts. It was very violent. At the time I knew that Althusser was planning to publish the seminar in a volume – the future *Lire le Capital*. I said that I would withdraw my text, but there was pressure from Althusser and others for it to appear anyway, with a footnote referencing Miller, etc. After 65, I no longer saw Miller, and so I was thus never involved in all the things surrounding the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* and the Cercle

d'Épistémologie, I was never invited. Well, I was still a friend of Milner's, but otherwise I remained entirely to one side of all this.

PH: Considered from a distance it seems a little exaggerated, Miller's reaction regarding metonymical causality. Weren't there variants of this idea in several others who sought to think 'structural causality' at the time, in Althusser and around Althusser – Miller no doubt, but also Duroux, Macherey, you ...?

JR: Well, you need to understand that Miller was initially very invested in the seminar on the *Capital*, but he subsequently withdrew, because he wanted it to be a closed seminar, a seminar for researchers, whereas Althusser preferred a public seminar (which it eventually became). As a result Miller did not attend any of the sessions. The seminar took place between the end of 1964 and the spring of 65 (and the first issue of the *Cahiers Marxist-Léninistes* appeared in the autumn of 64). At the end of the seminar he presented himself as having been excluded from what was going on; he said that his concepts had been stolen, he accused Milner (who had participated in the seminar) of not having kept him informed, etc. All this was complicated by the complex structure of the Althusserian group: I had not been associated with the organisation of the seminar and at the same time, as I had been asked to talk about the relation between *Capital* and the young Marx, I had the strategic role of declaring the break that established scientific Marxism. Althusser created concentric circles around him, in this way.¹⁰ For instance, I heard only later about the existence of a 'Spinoza circle' grouped around him, an almost clandestine theoretical cell; I never participated in it, but there were people like Duroux, like Badiou, like Balibar. There was this sort of elaborate machinery of circles, more or less informal, that mediated between Althusser and the others, between politics and theory.

PH: And after this Miller cut himself off from you and from Althusser?

JR: I don't know about Althusser, but with the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* Miller constituted, in effect, his own theoretical space, where the organising point of reference for thinking the structuralist paradigm was Lacan more than Marx.

PH: I suppose that for Linhart and his friends these new *Cahiers* were little more than an esoteric, ultra-theoreticist deviation?

JR: Yes, of course. One side denounced pure activism, the other pure theoreticism. A familiar structure!

PH: And this idea of structural causality, central to analysis of the 'action of the structure' (to use the *Cahiers*' phrase [CpA 9.6]), and which was implicated in the rupture between the two tendencies: could it have, in principle, served as mediation between theory and practice, once all reference to consciousness, to the subject, to militant will, etc. was removed? And this way, through the analysis of causality, it would be possible not only to study history, but to understand how to make history?

JR: Yes certainly, it allowed for a kind of double attitude. First one could say, here we are presenting theory, as far as can be from any thought of engagement, of lived experience; this theory refutes false ideas, idealist ideas about the relation between theory and practice. But one could also hope that theoretical practice itself might open

¹⁰ Cf. Althusser, *The Future Lasts Forever*, trans. Richard Veasey (New York: New Press, 1993), 208.

up other fields for new ways of thinking about political practice... In fact it didn't open any such fields. But this delay [*diffèrement*] also corresponded to Althusser's strategy, to the slightly naïve idea that we would gradually gain influence in the intellectual milieu, that we would expand, and that while appearing to remain faithful to the PCF we might win over this or that person.

PH: Understood. And in the meantime, during these years 66-68, did you already have an idea of what your own subsequent itinerary would be, your projects in the archives, the works that would result in *La Nuit des prolétaires* (1981), etc.? I mean, well before *La Leçon d'Althusser* (1974), did you already foresee a break with the theoretical/scientific orientation?

JR: Not at all! I didn't even have a project, in any sense. That's not how things work. You find yourself in a conjuncture, you're caught up in what is going on – and what is going on could be the Algerian War, it could be Althusser, structuralism, etc. Whether it's a matter of militant political action or of debates around a theoretical point of view, you find yourself in a conjuncture and your orientation depends on what is happening around you. At the time there was a whole context, a whole set of possibilities that allowed you to take part in something new, to follow the new wave. You are gripped by the new, you try to think the new, you try to measure up to the new, and you don't think it in strategic terms. At the time I didn't have any long term theoretical project, nor any strategic or career project, etc. On top of everything else I was teaching at the lycée, I had little time for thinking about the future. You had to run around like a madman preparing classes for the next day, etc. – all this had nothing to do with great projects of theoretical renewal. But at the same time I became aware of the gap between the kind of magisterial position we were aspiring to, as the bearers of scientific knowledge, and the realities involved in teaching young people.

Having said that, it's true that Althusserianism represented a huge restriction, a restriction of things that were recognized as theoretically valid, even with respect to our students, who had diverse interests – ranging from surrealism to Simone Weil, all sorts of things. Even with respect to Marxism and the revolutionary tradition, Althusserianism greatly narrowed the field of Marxist thought and history. All this to say that, at the time, I was living in a sort of bubble. I taught my classes. After a year at the lycée I found a way out, and moved to the Fondation Thiers, a completely different situation: a completely sterile environment, with fifteen people working in an old building, working on their dissertations. I myself was working on my dissertation, and spending a lot of time in the countryside. So all through these years I was living at quite a distance from the world, and heard only echoes: I was sure that the Cultural Revolution was a great thing, but only knew about it through the *Cahiers Marxistés-Léninistes*, you see.

Well, in this context May 68 was a bit like the return of the real, in all sorts of way. But at the time I didn't at all know what I was going on to do, I didn't have a long term plan.

PH: In early 1969 you joined the new philosophy department at Paris VIII-Vincennes, along with many of your former colleagues from the ENS?

JR: Yes, right away; I was solicited by Foucault, who created the department. Foucault later implied that he'd tried to balance various political tendencies, but this is a complete joke: he just asked Althusser and Derrida to help him find young people who were supposed to be good, that's all. I didn't hesitate: after 68 we wanted to be somewhere where things might happen, while also being able to work on our dissertations.

PH: What was your dissertation about, by the way?

JR: It was on Feuerbach, on the concept of man in Feuerbach – but I didn't finish it, and I didn't publish any of it. All the same, this is where I realised that Althusser's and Foucault's interpretations of Feuerbach didn't work, that the theoretical forms underlying his theory of man, of humanity and of humanism had nothing to do with their constructions.

PH: Ok. A last question: when you think about it now, what sort of philosophical legacy has structuralism left behind? The *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* were abandoned almost immediately after 68, and forgotten for a while, or almost. Today there is a renewal of interest, here and there, and questions concerning the relation between structure and subject, between action and logic, between the real and mathematics, are being taken up again, in various ways, for instance through the work of Badiou, Žižek's reading of Lacan, etc.

JR: Maybe. Theoreticians like Badiou and Žižek are pursuing the Althusser-Lacan alliance, albeit through new mediations. Even their Lacan is different from the one of the earlier era. At the time, Lacan was the symbolic; their Lacan is the real. At the time no one would have thought of founding a theory of the renewal of communism or Leninism on the Thing, horror, the act, not at all! For the *Cahiers*, the link was made through the symbolic. The 0 and the 1, the elements of a logic of the signifier, etc., this is precisely not horror, it is not the Thing, abjection, etc. There is indeed a whole Lacanian thematic of the real (which Badiou initially confronted with the *mise en scene* of the struggle of courage against anguish, in his *Theory of the subject* [1982]), but this wasn't really the perspective of the 60s. Badiou subsequently reframed Lacan as a dialectician. Every system is cobbled together, of course, and in Badiou one finds a complicated arrangement between the Althusserian vision of philosophy grasping the rationality of science, the Lacanian conception of the real and a strong Sartrean inheritance, all assembled within a Platonic logic. But yes, it has to be said, that in the end there is, effectively, an Althusserian-Lacanian tradition that has, in a sense, maintained itself and that was able to produce, through bizarre transformations, work as different as that of Milner, Žižek or Badiou.

PH: And do you feel entirely distant from all this?

JR: Yes, completely – first of all I have had absolutely nothing to do with Lacan, and as soon as I arrived at Vincennes I distanced myself from Althusserianism, that is to say, not only from a particular person or way of thinking, but from the whole scientific tradition that had nourished Marxism, structuralism and all the attempts to connect them. It was a break with the avant-gardism of those who believed they had the science that the masses needed to liberate themselves, but it was also a break with any attempt to make the intelligence at work in emancipatory practices depend on a global explanation of the world or of being.

PH: Right. And these days, are you continuing to work on your long series of studies on the politics of writing in the nineteenth century, on aesthetics, on democracy, etc.?

JR: Yes, when I can, I am working on a book about the aesthetic regime of art, a book that attempts to grasp its logic through a certain number of specific or punctual events: a theoretical text, a staging in the theatre, a review of a performance, an exhibition of

decorative art, etc. What I am interested in is always how, in the most concrete and subtle ways, a regime of perception and of thought is transformed.

Translated by Cécile Malaspina, revised by Peter Hallward.