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Now, after . . . it is time to return to sender, not the question which knows too much but the fraternal solitude of the place where it never ceases to resurface.
—Jacques Rancière, “Après quoi,” 196

But now, after the Holocaust? Then it didn’t end? It will never end.
—Jean-François Lyotard, “L’Europe, les Juifs et le livre,” 280

11.

Jacques Rancière’s Ethical Turn and the Thinking of Discontents

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Translated by Bambi Billman

“There is no democratic crisis or malaise,” Jacques Rancière has continuously argued against all those “doctors of democracy” who, for at least the last decade, have been making an interminable inventory of symptoms exhibited by a democratic individual turned consumer, who represents a new menace to the political order and the social bond.∞ There are, of course, difficulties inherent in a democracy, conceived by Rancière not as a form of power or society but as a quasianarchic power of the “people,” a paradoxical power that disrupts the prevailing consensual distribution of function and place. But these permanent tensions of democracy thus redefined as disagreement and disorder must, according to Rancière, be distinguished from the disastrous evils with which the so-called therapists brand the people represented as a large “unpredictable and untamable” animal. In fact, in Rancière’s view, it would be these “doctors” themselves who have been struck with one of the oldest of Western diseases—an endless and perpetually renewed form of “hatred of democracy.” This is what Rancière believes to be flushing out of
certain elites who, in his opinion, are more and more enamored with the idea of a “pastoral government” and for whom paternal care of the herd should manifest itself, above all else, in an incessant interpretation of the “malaise of the collective body.” But, before returning the compliment to these doctors of imaginary diseases, in his *Malaise dans l’esthétique* (2004) Rancière had already diagnosed and analyzed a new “malaise of civilization” that he called the “ethical turn.” Mimicking, among other things, the psychopathological and psychoanalytic knowledge of his colleagues, he brings to light the conceptual confusion that characterizes this malady.  

Thus Rancière’s recent thinking on discontents—an aesthetic malaise, as well as an ethical malaise of democracy—is embedded in his lifelong struggle against antidemocratic forces and their consensual discourses. Surely, the question of the crisis of art, of anti-aesthetic resentment, had already been addressed, and that of postmodern melancholia discussed many times. As a diagnostician-doctor, Rancière has already made himself well known as the unique specialist of maladies discovered by him and henceforth associated with his name: maladies of consensus as varied and serious as racism and hatred of the Other. And it is in this capacity that he is working here again, to draw up this latest symptomatic tableau, even though the cause (the eclipse of politics as dissensus) and the remedy (the vital and necessary return to dissensus) are, for him in any case, identical. Democracy as disease and cure-all at once.

This expertise which appears restricted is due to a very restrictive definition of politics as dissensus, as permanent conflict of discourses, lives, and worlds linked to a conception of the state as an essentially police state, redefined as a set of practices that use power in order to depoliticize, to exclude that dissension (dissensus) which, for Rancière, constitutes politics. Politics, as the opposite of the police, is a form of dissensus that polemically confirms the axiom of equality—the only political axiom for him.

As we know, Rancière, indignant and indefatigable in his form of dissensual thought, methodically practices what he theoretically preaches. Dissension is at once theory and method, as he reminds us in “Thinking the Dissensus,” a paper he presented in September 2003. Furthermore, this “war of lives and of discourses,” which he wages implacably against the master-words, means that every one of his discourses is conceived and written as a “machine of war” and that one must know his target in
order not to miss the point of his effort.\textsuperscript{6} And, since consensus—being the privileged mode of the “symbolic structuration of the community that tears out the heart of politics, namely, dissension (dissensus)”—reconstitutes itself incessantly, this role of “guerilla” is necessarily permanent, and becomes mirrored in Rancière’s theoretical and political bellicosity.\textsuperscript{8}

“The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics”—the concluding part of \textit{Malaise dans l’esthétique}—is at once the mapping of a new consensus and the most recent example of this theoretical bellicosity. It was presented first in March 2004 at the “Geographies of Contemporary Thought” forum in Barcelona. In these final 30 pages of a 175-page book, Rancière describes a sort of consensus, a similar symbolic structuring on both sides of the Atlantic, an ethically oriented “dominant interpretive scheme” that has disposed of both politics and aesthetics, in an evolution that was established around 1989.\textsuperscript{9} I have chosen to concentrate on this section for a number of reasons but mostly because Rancière’s reflection here allows me to reconnect with a question that I have begun to explore: the use of psychoanalysis in his work. Indeed, psychoanalysis—and particularly Lacanian psychoanalysis—is one of the fundamental tools wielded in his analysis of the ethical turn, although in his interview with Peter Hallward in 2003 Rancière acknowledged that he still did not know quite what to do with Lacan’s thought.\textsuperscript{10}

The term \textit{ethics}, in Rancière, has different meanings. First, it refers to one of the three artistic regimes that he has identified, the other two being the representative regime and the aesthetic regime. In fact, one of the fundamental contributions of \textit{Malaise dans l’esthétique} is the identification of an “ethical regime” conceived since Plato as a form of organic community life without politics, an ethical regime of art that he identifies in philosophical works poles apart from one another, like those of Jean-François Lyotard and Alain Badiou.\textsuperscript{11} For Rancière, all conceptions of the aesthetic that suppose an absolute disconnection, a pure radicality of art, by separating it from all promise of political emancipation stray onto paths that lead nowhere, except outside the political.

The other meaning of the word \textit{ethical} presented in “The Ethical Turn” comes from the primary meaning of ethos. This, for Rancière, signifies two things: “ethos is the dwelling and the way of being, the way of life corresponding to this dwelling. Ethics, then, is a kind of thinking which establishes the identity between an environment, a way of being
and a principle of action.”12 But it is also (in an aspect that, to my knowledge, has hardly been commented upon until now) a new and specific interpretive schema governed entirely by one event—Auschwitz—emblematic of totalitarian catastrophe and by a single law—“the new law of Moses”—which is a Janus-faced dictum facing, on one side, Moses (a name that has come to symbolize Jewish ethics) and on the other McDonald’s (a name which has come to symbolize international capitalism). In fact, in the conclusion of his analysis of Lyotard’s “counter-reading of Kant” Rancière writes that the choice is between “either obedience to the Other’s law, which subjects us to violence, or subservience to the law of the self, which brings us to enslavement to consumer culture.”13 This position he immediately reformulates in a rather shocking manner: “Either the law of Moses or that of McDonald’s, such is the last word that the aesthetic of the sublime brings to the meta-political aesthetic.” If this were perhaps a mere rephrasing of the aestheticoethical thinking of Lyotard, the next sentence leaves absolutely no doubt as to Rancière’s position on the subject: “It is not certain that this new law of Moses is really opposed to that of McDonald’s. Rather, what is certain is that it accomplishes the joint suppression of the aesthetic and the political in order to profit this single law that now goes by the name of ethics.” This will effectively be the argument of “The Ethical Turn,” and it is not one of those “probable assertions” Rancière tries to offer to avoid any dogmatic style.14

But how can we explain the effect of affects of this violent formulation on some readers, including myself? Where does the shock of reading come from, a shock not felt at all when reading numerous and current statements on how the global reign of the economy is accompanied by a global reign of morality? Does the shock come only from the identity of opposites—of these two symbolic names? Surely it does not come from the superficial playfulness of assonance between Moses and McDonald’s that resonates with the well-known “from Mao to Moses,” because, with his icy irony and indignation, Rancière seems in no mood for play here. Far from being a simple wordplay made in passing, this catchy symmetry says as much as possible while taking up as little space as possible. What is outrageous at first in this link between the law of the market economy, of international capital, and the law symbolic of Judaism is its classical association with the rise of anti-Semitism since the nineteenth century. Since this is not inconsequential, something else
must be deduced from it, and we should try to understand its deliberate shock value.

Moses is a recurring motif in Rancière’s recent work, since his main targets are those French intellectuals who invoke “the law of people instructed by Moses about the word of God.” Even if the “destruction of democracy in the name of the Koran” does not escape Rancière, his chosen interlocutors are mostly those democracy-hating Jews with whom he used to share a common philosophical and Marxist language, but who have lately become supporters of American wars. Rancière’s relentless attack is also against the “warlike expansion of democracy identified with the mise en œuvre of the Decalogue, hatred of democracy assimilated to the murder of the divine shepherd.”

Thus the tone, the violent and somewhat dogmatic style of his discourse on the ethical turn, the staging of a fictitious and theoretical dispute about the word ethics and particularly Jewish law and the law of the market (Moses/McDonald’s) will be taken here as symptoms of an ongoing, virulent war of discourses, a mirrorlike effect of all the ongoing wars and the hatred that invades everything. “Symptoms” here refers, above all else, to these effects of affects experienced by the reader and the resistance that follows, because, as Lacan demonstrated, the only resistance comes from the analyst. In other words, understanding the theoretical and political stakes of the ethical turn begins with taking into account the effects of affects, the shock given by certain formulations, as well as the feeling of malaise aroused by the apparent relentless animosity toward Lyotard, whom Rancière makes into a sort of significant matrix, omnipresent in all developments of thought, art, and politics over the last twenty years. He goes so far as to retrospectively question Lyotard’s “intentions,” charging him with the elaboration of a new “grand narrative” whereby the Jewish people would somehow usurp the place of the proletariat, completely contradicting Lyotard’s own theorization of the end of the grand narratives. A reading that takes into account these effects of affects is necessarily a reading against oneself, a singular process of subjectivation and disidentification, if one has understood Rancière’s emancipatory lesson and his politics of affects. A reading here and now to understand how a strategy of writing, of staging the ethical turn as a war against antidemocratic forces, of the “opinion of equality against the opinion of inequality,” can change the current consensual “distribution of the sensible.”
Rancière’s identification of the ethical turn is made in two stages: it is first organized, in terms of politics, around the figure of George W. Bush, the “war on terror,” and humanitarian war. It is then centered, in philosophical and aesthetic terms, on Jean-François Lyotard, the question of human rights serving as a transition between the two foci. If the humanitarian as suppression of the political is a frequent theme in Rancière’s work, in “The Ethical Turn” humanitarian war, tied up in the “unending war on terror,” is interpreted on the basis of Lacan’s notion of the originary distress related to the prematurity of the newborn that Rancière calls “birth trauma.”

The second movement of the demonstration revisits themes developed by Rancière since his aesthetic turn of 1996, where he immediately tackled the question of the unrepresentable, linked to the Extermination, before his theorization of the three artistic regimes and the “distribution of the sensible” (2001).∞Ω

In “The Ethical Turn” ethics is referred to as an “indistinct sphere, where not only the specificity of political and artistic practices dissolved, but also . . . the distinction between fact and the law, between what is and what ought to be. Ethics amounts to the dissolution of the norm into the fact—the identification of all forms of discourse and practice under the same indistinct point of view.”≤≠ We are therefore far from the traditional definition of ethics as a moral judgment brought to bear on either artistic operations or political actions. According to Rancière, in order for this ethical turn to take place, it requires “the specific conjunction of these two phenomena: on the one hand, the instance of evaluating and choosing judgment finds itself humbled before the power of the law that imposes itself and, on the other, the radicality of this law that leaves no other choice is nothing but the simple constraint stemming from the order of things. The growing indistinction between fact and law thus brings about an unprecedented dramaturgy of evil, justice and redemption.”≤∞

This confusion of law and fact, where all distinctions are abolished in the same indistinct point of view, is condensed in one word, “terror,” “one of the master terms of our time,” which “designates assuredly a reality of crime and horror” but is also itself a term of indistinction:

Terror designates the attacks on New York on September 11, 2001, or Madrid on March 11, 2004, as well as the strategy in which these attacks have their
place. However by gradual extension, this word also comes to designate the shock caused in people’s minds by the event, the fear that violent acts that are still unthinkable might occur, the situation characterized by such fears, the management of this situation through State apparatuses, and so on. To talk of a war against terror is to connect the form of these attacks with the intimate angst that can inhabit each one of us in the same chain. War against terror and infinite justice then fall within the indistinction of a preventative justice which attacks all that triggers or could trigger terror, everything that threatens the social bond holding the community together. It is a form of justice whose logic [will] stop only when terror will have ceased, which by definition never stops for us beings who are subjected to the trauma of birth.22

To better understand this ethical turn and the new indistinction it promotes, Rancière uses a comparison between the films of Alfred Hitchcock and Fritz Lang, on the one hand, and two films which date from 2003: Dogville and Mystic River. According to Rancière, we have, in effect, passed from the orthodox Freudian vulgate of the 1950s to a new, Lacanian vulgate in 2003 by virtue of a new conception of trauma. In the 1950s, “the reactivation of a repressed childhood secret” could still save the troubled and the violent, whereas with the new conception of birth trauma, from the “prematurity of infans, it is the very condition of an animal born too soon.”23

The paralyzing effects of indistinction, condensed by the master signifiers trauma and terror, are furthermore contemporary with the transformations of the rights of man into humanitarianism on the international scene. Having first evolved from the right to intervene into infinite justice against the axis of evil, humanitarianism has become, in Rancière’s lexicon, the absolute right of those who have no rights. The humanitarian war becomes “an endless war against terror: a war which is not one but a mechanism of infinite protection, a way of dealing with a trauma elevated to the status of a civilizational phenomenon.”24 Moving, then, from the political to the aesthetic, Rancière centers his analysis on Lyotard’s later works.

Rancière’s conceptual elaboration is accomplished, among other ways, through a constant interlocution with the thinking of Lyotard, to whom Rancière is “at the same time very close in vocabulary (wrong, différend) and in the link between aesthetics and politics, but also abso-
olutely removed from by the promotion of absolute wrong and the unre-
presentable.” Thus, in *Dis-agreement* (1995) Rancière will first criticize
the nihilistic age and denounce melancholia as a postmodern ailment of
which Lyotard would be the primary representative, albeit in this apoli-
tical form taken up by the mourning of Marxism and of revolutionary
utopias, wrongfully linking modernity and the extermination camps.
and *The Future of the Image* (2007), the critique of Lyotard’s aesthetic of
the sublime opens the ethical age. But it seems that Rancière has only
recently, since roughly 2002–2004, realized the amplitude of the ethical
operation that the sublime represents. Indeed, it is difficult not to re-
mark upon the systematization of Rancière’s retroactive demonstration
concerning Lyotard’s role in the substitution of this new grand narrative
—that of the genocide of the Jews—for the revolutionary narrative of
the proletariat. To that effect, in September 2003, Rancière wrote the
following:

I disagreed with the idea of a break between a modern epoch where the
proletariat would have been the universal victim, subject of a great narrative,
and a postmodern time of micro or local narrative. So the argument of a
breakaway from the time of the great narrative and the universal victim
seemed to me beside the point. *More accurately, it was beside the point unless
it was in fact embedded in another narrative of an absolute wrong. My assump-
tion was that this was precisely the point.* What Lyotard was doing was not
breaking away from the grand narrative of the victim. It was reframing it, in
a retrospective way, in order to make a new use of it.

From this point of view, *Heidegger and the Jews* . . . is a switching point
that gives the postmodern argumentation a meaning that perhaps was not
there at the beginning. This meaning is that of the substitution of a narrative
and a substitution of the victim. In this text, the Jews become the subject of
the new narrative of modernity, the new narrative of the western world.

If at first glance Rancière’s hypothesis seems to agree with that of
Elisabeth de Fontenay, for whom “it is not certain that *Heidegger and the
‘Jews’* does not signal, in its own way, the invention of a *completely
different genre* of ‘grand narrative,’ nontotalitarian and nondeadly” in
fact, their interpretations are complete opposites because, for Rancière,
it is on the contrary, a *question of a totalizing and deadly narrative.*

Fontenay proposes to chronologically analyze the insistence of the Jew-
ish reference in the works of Lyotard since 1969, what she calls his “causa Judea” or his “judaica,” that which comes “from Judaism, from Levinas, from Israel, from the destruction of European Jews.” Rancière, on the other hand, makes it into the matrix of an ambient discourse on ethics, only concerning himself with the negative effect of the Shoah on thought, politics, and art, and the role that Lyotard would have played in this process. For Rancière, as a theoretician of dissensual democracy, the Shoah is, first and foremost, an object of a dominant consensual discourse that blocks the political horizon, a depoliticizing, demobilizing, inhibiting fiction of political inventiveness and an artistic usurper of insurrectional forces.

Rancière has highlighted the decisive importance, in Lyotard, of the notion of original distress, a misery that would join, according to Fontenay, at the same time the “inherent terror of the infantia, the ontogenetic angst of gender differences for a language-enabled being incapable of speaking, and the Judeo-genealogic destitution of an interdiction concerning representative and nominative signs.” Fontenay has also highlighted the autobiographical element because, in her view, the misery of the child is that of the stranglehold of the familial unit on the child, the confiscation of a child by “a Christian anti-Judaic education: all that he means by misery, childhood, heteronomy, enslavement to the law of alterity” and which refers to his “idea of originary violence.”

Let us note that Rancière pays no attention to the sexual, and even less attention to the subjective, aspect of the trauma, both of which cannot be dissociated from psychoanalytic trauma theory. He is concerned only with the ethical recoding it allows in terms of the destiny of civilization. The psychoanalytic notion of birth trauma, divorced from its sexual and singular specificity, is what helps Rancière create the link between humanitarianism and the war on terror, which he accomplishes through his analysis of Lyotard’s seminal text of 1993, The Other’s Rights. This text is an elaboration of Lyotard’s reflection on the inhuman over the course of the 1980s. The inhuman is “that which separates the human being from himself,” and by which we must understand, according to Rancière, a “positive inhuman”: in other words, “that part within us which we do not control, that part which takes on many faces and many names: the dependence of the child, the law of the unconscious, the rapport of obedience towards an absolute Other.” Therefore, “the other’s rights” become simply “a testimony of the submission to the law of the
other.” 32 From one shift to the next, any violation of the other’s rights is demonstrative of a will to tame the untamable and leads necessarily and inevitably to disaster. This is because, for Lyotard, it is this will to master that “would have been the dream of the Enlightenment and the Revolution, and which led to the genocide of the Jews,” the Jews as the people “whose vocation it is to bear witness to the necessary dependence on the law of the Other.” All these shifts and passages are condensed into one concept—the theory of the sublime and its central notion of the “unrepresentable.” According to Rancière, this is the “fruit” of a double coup de force, which successfully threads together the prohibition of representation in the Jewish tradition with the impossibility of the representation of Auschwitz. 33

When I first presented the paper that would form the basis of the present essay in March 2005, it seems I missed the real target of Rancière’s attacks. Having read almost all of his published works to that point, I was a little puzzled by the following statement made in the last pages of “The Ethical Turn,” where he talks, for the first time, or so it seemed to me, about a dominant consensus:

If the Nazi genocide has lodged itself at the heart of philosophical, aesthetic and political thinking, forty or fifty years after the discovery of the camps, then the reason for this lies not just in the silence of the first generation of survivors. Around 1989, it took the place of the revolutionary heritage, at the time of the collapse of its last vestiges, which up until then, had linked political and aesthetic radicality to a cut in historical time. It has taken the place of the cut in time that was necessary for that radicality, at the cost of inverting its sense, of transforming it into the already occurred catastrophe from which a god only can save us. 34

Foreseeing facile objections, Rancière continues: “I do not mean that the politics of art would be completely subject to this vision today. One could easily counterpose some forms of political action or artistic intervention independent from or hostile to that dominant current.”

Thus, in my first reading, I asked myself the following questions: if the Jewish genocide has been at the center of a dominant consensus since 1989, or if Rancière really thinks that it has, then Rancière either did not notice it, or he did not critique it. If the Shoah was not central to such a dominant consensus, or if Rancière does not really think or care if it was, then he is using the deliberately retroactive construction of
such a consensus as a litigious fiction for some present purpose; in this case, too, it is difficult to understand what that purpose might be.

However, my perplexity was short-lived, because in the October 2005 publication of *Chroniques des temps consensuels*, in the selections Rancière presents, we can easily see the elements that retrospectively constitute his ethical turn. “The Ethical Turn” represents, in fact, a synthesis of the themes discussed in *Chroniques des temps consensuels*, but especially after 2001, marking a transition between the theme of the end/return of the political and that of a discourse on exception.

Ethics, then, becomes the name of a new consensus, freed by Rancière’s dissensual scalpel and condensed by Lyotard’s evolution, thus bearing the weight of “The Decade” and its nightmare. This is the new dominant way of thinking, whose particularity is to have usurped the assets and attires of revolutionary radicality to adorn itself with and to ward off every other promise of emancipation. Because this school of thought “takes its strength from its capacity to recode and invert the forms of thought and the attitudes which yesterday aimed for a radical political or aesthetic change,” this discourse is effectively presented as rendering absolute the political and artistic dissensus in the process of being abolished. This is a dominant trend which, after having placed the Extermination of the Jews in the center of thought, politics, and art thirty to forty years after the discovery of the camps, imposed a “theology of time,” “of time cut in two by a founding event or an event to come”: in this case the traumatic event of the Shoah. This reduced art to “the ethical witnessing of the non-representable catastrophe,” where “the moral law becomes the ethical subjection to the Law of the Other.” In this ethical configuration, human rights have become “the privilege of revenge,” and the world cut in half has become “the war on terror.” At least, these are the conclusions drawn by Rancière at the end of his analysis.

It is undeniable that Rancière’s thesis, which represents a conceptual contribution to the elaboration of a “geography of contemporary thought,” itself participates in the same “distribution of the sensible” that it criticized. But it does so in order to refute the centrality of the Extermination or any political subjectivation on the basis of Jewish ethics (or the Law of Moses). His explicit objective is precisely the political need to step outside of this configuration and to eluding the double-faced concept of terror/trauma that it helped make so commonplace.
Just as *Chroniques* and *Hatred of Democracy* allowed me to note that, in fact, Rancière had brought up all of the elements that would later constitute the theoretical fiction of the ethical turn, in retrospect they also allowed me to better understand certain effects of affects upon reading “The Ethical Turn.” On the one hand, I reproached Rancière for his implacable, somewhat unjust critique of Jean-François Lyotard when it seemed to me that his ethical turn had been more targeted toward Heidegger and Levinas. On the other hand, I bristled at certain shocking formulations, notably the definition of ethics as consensus or Janus-faced law—on one side “the new law of Moses” and on the other “the law of McDonald’s.” But I was not aware that at the same time Rancière was presenting his thesis in Barcelona in March 2004 on “the ethical turn of politics and aesthetics” he was also working on a *Chronique* on “The Criminal Democracy” related to Jean-Claude Milner’s book. Behind Lyotard he had Benny Lévy, Jean-Claude Milner, and a “chorus of subcontractors” in his sights.

In this context, the shocking formulation of the new law of Moses/McDonald’s would be symptomatic of a violence linked to a certain editorial actuality in 2002–2003, to “this little bicephalous war machine” that was the publication of Benny Lévy’s *L’être Juif* (October 2003) and Jean-Claude Milner’s *Les penchants criminels de l’Europe démocratique* (September 2003), preceded by *Le meurtre du Pasteur* (January 2002). It is also symptomatic of a certain state of the world: that is to say, of “manners through which, today, our world gives itself to spectacle and through which the powers-that-be affirm their legitimacy.”

Rancière did not wait for Benny Lévy’s book to attack “the power of the Voice, of which the shock during the night of fire, was felt by all the Hebrews, while it was given to the human shepherd, Moses, the exclusive task of listening and explaining the words and of organizing the people according to their teaching,” as he reads it in *Le meurtre du Pasteur. Critique de la vision politique du monde*. This is what is foundational to his criticism of Lyotard’s notion of the sublime, just as it is to his criticism of any plot of exception. But in 2005, Benny Lévy’s book would permit him to elucidate the position taken by Milner, who was applauded as one of the “champions of secular Republican education” at the publication of his book on *L’école* (1985), and whose position could be reinterpreted retrospectively in this light. Hidden under republican “transcendence,” Rancière identifies the concrete figure of
Moses. And if he reads a similar antidemocratic gesture, from Plato or from the shepherd of the Jewish people, only Plato, of course, can be mobilized for use in his theory of democracy. For the theoretician of dissensual democracy, Moses as guardian of a flock becomes the figure of all guardians of the city; of all those entitled to govern men by their birth, wealth, or science; of every elite, antidemocratic par excellence; and of every law, which essentially implies the subject’s enslavement to a single consensual law with two faces, the law of Moses and the law of McDonald’s, ethics and economy, Judaism and capitalism.

In the French intellectual context of 2002–2004, Rancière’s violent formulations, his relentless and unmerciful critique of Lyotard’s aesthetic and ethical thinking, could have been, in the end, dictated by circumstances, the contribution to the “Geographies of Contemporary Thought,” and the Lévy-Milner effect, before the real attack targeted toward the haters of democracy, who were finally to be unmasked in Hatred of Democracy. Thus Rancière is fully implicated in the ethical configuration, with his ethical turn, and the hypothesis concerning the new grand narrative in which Lyotard substitutes the Jewish people for the proletariat. But he does so in his own way, because he puts Badiou and Lyotard back-to-back and spares neither the Pauline nor the Mosaic universal. He highlights, in both cases, the conception of an “ethical community that dismisses every project of emancipation” and “an idea common to these two visions. Through even the opposition of the power of the incarnation of the word and the Jewish interdiction of representation, from the Eucharistic host and of the Mosaic burning bush.”

We should note, however, that this ethical reading and its reference to Saint Paul do not appear in the first version of his study of Badiou.

Rancière’s war machine—with its triple launch or triple salvo Malaise dans l’esthétique (September 2004), Hatred of Democracy (September 2005), and Chroniques pour des temps consensuels (October 2005)—did not wait long to explode and pulverize the intellectual landscape. Even if this impeccably coherent ensemble is founded on his work on aesthetics and politics since the 1990s, it is firmly anchored in the present, as evidenced by the columns composed between 1996 and 2005 for the Brazilian daily La Folha de São Paulo or for France Culture on the air. It is an ethical consensus that further provokes his cutting, polemical style
and exacerbates his extraordinary capacity to hit his adversary at the most sensitive point.\textsuperscript{45}

Even while situating himself outside the debates of the Parisian intelligentsia, Rancière nonetheless shares a good number of the classic positions of the anticapitalist and anti-imperialist radical Left. For example, not recognizing the Shoah as a central event of the twentieth century or as a cut, sharing the universalist rejection of a Jewish exception, the renewed version of the Pauline rejection of a Jewish particularism. And even if he does not go as far as Badiou’s injunction to “forget Auschwitz,” he does not cease to attack all those who would make it the “object of the century” or purport themselves to be “guardians of the immemorial.”\textsuperscript{46} But to say that is to say nothing if we do not specify that these positions are, above all else, dictated by his system of thought, his conception of the political and of democracy, and his obsession with political emancipation founded on a single postulate: that of equality. His intolerance of exception, of the event that creates a break, of anything that diminishes or annihilates dissensual capacities stems from it. For Rancière, time, history, and even reality only exist insofar as they are dissensual political and artistic radicalities that create themselves in a constant, mobilizing rewriting of the past, to emancipatory ends.

Rancière’s vehement criticism of the “new law of Moses” that cannot avoid being ambiguous in the current context will not concede to any identity blackmail, nor to any “charge of anti-Semitism,” because in the current “hunt for anti-Semites” conducted by a few French intellectuals, we must only hear, according to Rancière, all “those who do not think like them.”\textsuperscript{47} In the same way, his radical, almost allergic rejection to any theologico-political universal brings him to reject any “Jewish conception” of the universal. His thinking of regimes of art and politics is mostly Eurocentric—Greek or German—in a reverse image of those who want “de-Westernization” (following Lyotard’s example) or of those who see the intimate intertwinement of Europe, the Bible, and the Greeks, of Jerusalem and Athens, from Proust to Derrida by way of Levinas, for example. This new contemporary philosophy that posits the existence of another “Jewish thought,” of an elsewhere that is an “extime,” an exterior interior, is fundamentally foreign to him and only arouses his biting rejection—while he himself creates one of the radical breaks he absolutely rejects elsewhere, in this case the irreducible break
between philosophy and Jewish ethics. For Rancière, it is the “Greeks who severed the tie with the divine shepherd and inscribed, under the double name of philosophy and politics, the proceedings of this goodbye,” relegating to the status of fable the model of social organization founded on the divine shepherd and human shepherds who interpret his voice. Democracy is precisely the rupture with any social organization linked to God the Father and which denies any foundational crime or infinite debt.

That it would unfold in this way, that the political and conceptual debate over democracy happens currently around the law of Moses, the sublime, the unrepresentable, the ethical exception, trauma and terror, apocalyptic discourse, the shock of religions and civilizations, the question of the Jewish name, is not due solely to Rancière: these are the terms of the current public debate and the philosophic debate, of the “distribution of the sensible” that asserts itself within a small group of intellectuals but also in the ambient discourse relayed by the media. Rancière’s original contribution was to reframe the stakes, to displace them to his own philosophical and political terrain, without leaving them totally immune to the politics of affects that hold sway around the “simple” or “difficult” universal, be it Pauline or Mosaic.

Rancière’s polemical and theoretical device of fictitious dispute makes the often violent war of discourses and completely irreconcilable positions “treatable” in verbal, epistolary, or written exchanges, without falling into insults or anathema. Thus, we see Rancière thanking Milner “for responses made” to the remarks he had addressed to him concerning the theses of his book, still reserving for his ideas a polemical and theoretical treatment that is ruthless and unrelenting. By the same token, Milner, on the air, the Internet, or in writing, refutes the theoretical positions and denounces the weaknesses of Rancière’s argument without ever severing the discussion. For Milner, there is a “misunderstanding” on the part of Rancière, which takes as “central the question of filiation,” which should instead be only a derived notion. This is a misunderstanding that goes along with “the promotion of democracy at the expense of the republic,” that goes hand in hand with Rancière putting aside the question of names—about which Milner, a former linguist, has something to say. The polemical and theoretical stakes thus clarified free the irreconcilable concepts of democracy, for the one, and “republic,” for the other.
The argument of the ethical turn does not have the pettiness of the settling of scores currently in progress among the old friends of May ’68—ex-Maoists, ex-Trotskyites, irreparably divided, as Slavoj Žižek writes rather summarily, between “Zionists and anti-Zionists”—for the simple reason that Rancière invented a dissensual philosophic style that keeps him above the fray. One of the paradoxical traits of Rancière’s philosophical writing is to adapt the style and tone of the subject under discussion to the “places” or circumstances at hand, without ever abandoning an equal conceptual “haughtiness” to use his terms, a philosophic writing that combines the two regimes—representation and aesthetic—in a clashing mix. He does not hesitate, on the one hand, to judge all the antidemocratic criminals on the basis of the single postulate that he has posited—that of equality—and, on the other hand, to treat texts and discourses equally and indifferently, on their own merits and not on the basis of the declared intentions of their authors or their notoriety. This is the source of the thinly veiled contemptuous irony toward the “chorus of subcontractors,” of which Alain Finkielkraut—one of his whipping boys—is the representative; but it also gives rise to the ruthless treatment of thinkers more worthy of being discussed, as soon as he catches them lacking in “democracy.”

The original conception of ethics according to Rancière allows us to grasp the bellicose ideology currently at work in political practices, governmental or not (Bush’s war on terror, humanitarian war). Terror and trauma are theorized on the basis of the birth trauma, a concept that allows Rancière to link (Bush’s) politics and the aesthetic of the sublime. This litigious fiction functions, then, to delegitimize the ethical consensus constructed as an antidemocratic trend, linking Jewish ethics and wars, the law of Moses and the law of McDonald’s. It also reveals the invisible strings that tie together a host of inherent difficulties of dissensual democracy and the mourning of Marxism, a knot that Rancière wants to untie. He does so in order to give to Lyotard’s aesthetic and political thinking a resistance in the face of the ambient catechism of the ethics of the Other.

But, at the same time, it is a symptom, a trace, of the conflictual history of the leftist Parisian intelligentsia, elevated to the status of global discontents, thanks to the weaving together of two master-words, trauma and terror. From this point of view, Bush, Lyotard, and Milner share the same ethical ideology—religious or materialist—in the pre-
cise sense that Rancière has outlined. Their common Lacanian parlance of trauma and terror in Rancière’s theoretical fiction should not surprise us. As to the effectiveness of the violent formulation of the ethical two-sided law—the law of Moses and the law of McDonald’s—and of the salutary shock that it represented, we could perhaps measure it against the effort of thought it aroused here, to get out of the community confusion of sentiments along with the consensual confusion of concepts, under the seduction of Rancière’s passion for dissensual democracy.

In theorizing the current malaise as inherent in the “aesthetic regime,” in denouncing the conceptual confusion that makes the democratic individual’s malaise into an “ethical turn,” Rancière effectively denounces the malaise of the powerful elites. He launches his theoretical fiction at past and present enemies of the démos, of democracy as a dissensual practice. Democracy requires forgetting the shepherd and denying his murder, separating the political community from any link to the Father and the law, and endlessly denouncing the criminal penchant of democracy haters. But this unfinished and endless war, is it the promise of a future of the past, of a hatred of democracy which we will never be able to overcome? Is not Rancière’s idea of malaise always itself dependent upon the imaginary doctors of democratic man and society, of the antidemocratic criminals? Is it not an interminable form of fratricide, murder in absentia, of all enemy brothers of democracy? In that case, there is hardly anything to rejoice about when the shadow of the Father does nothing but hover over democracy. In the meantime, the show—the staging of psychoanalysis, and the fable of the disappearance of the Father—must go on.