

RANCILLAC COCKTAIL

Il n'y pas de vrai artiste sans cocktail: 'No true artist without a cocktail'ⁱ Bernard Rancillac's cocktails are of the explosive nature: thrown at the art establishment over a span of forty years. Rancillac's painting is wedded to dialectics, politics and ideology, art and music, sex and death. It involves issues of self-expression and self-repression, noise and silence, disdain and frivolity, painting and photography, pleasure and an exquisite degree of pain.ⁱⁱ A sharp eye and love of the history of art, combined with Rancillac's technical flair illuminate his writing: *Peindre à l'acrylique*, 1987, or *Voir et comprendre la peinture*, 1991, while *Le regard idéologique*, 2000, an excoriating analysis of the French art scene of the 1970s is remarkable not only for its vivid style, but the rare transparency of the author's self-examination.ⁱⁱⁱ Rancillac reclaims the positioning of his generation within a history of realisms stretching back to Courbet. His own work provides a bridge between the realists of the 1950s, already perturbed by an *Atlantic Civilisation* (the title of André Fougeron's great figurative canvas of 1953, now in Tate Modern) and the French artists who responded to Pop with Narrative Figuration, making political work based on projected news images, long before hyperrealism arrived in Paris in 1971.

Many have commented on the 'Frenchness' of Rancillac – native of the harsh, volcanic landscapes of Yssingeaux (*ici cinq coqs* - its blason five cocks) a paradox in view of his constant travelling.^{iv} If, indeed, it is to the region's hard rocks that Rancillac owes what he calls his 'bad character', he has nonetheless an acerbic sense of humour. His 'prehistory' he recounted thus for his exhibition at the Galerie la Roue in October, 1963:

Born in Paris to a good family
 Gets his mother to draw him lions
 Colours picture books with his brothers
 Scribbles in the margins of his exercise
 With Met de Penninghen prepares the exam to become a drawing teacher
 (happily in vain)
 Military skirmishes in Morocco....^v

Of course the Moroccan experience – Rancillac's military service and his first encounter with young Communist militants – was his political baptism of fire: it was the start of the Algerian war. On his return from Morocco, as an autodidact, looking at works in the Paris galleries by artists such as Nicolas de Stael or Tapiés, Rancillac taught himself to paint. In 1956, he would have his first solo show at the Galerie Le Soleil dans la tête. *Moonstone*, 1961, won the painting prize at the second of André Malraux's huge international Biennale de Paris exhibitions. 'Painting by copying', Rancillac reflects his father-figures: following Tapiés' dark palette, the moon is blank, a black disc, suggesting Gérard de Nerval's 'black sun of melancholy'. *Wall of Silence*, 1961, again took the picture-surface as a metonym for repression and blockage and anticipates Rancillac's future practice, conflating intensely self-referential and political meanings – here the erection of the Berlin wall.

Assassinating Papa: from trouser flies to comic pricks

The Dark Room of 1962, is a black vanitas, a three-dimensional sculpture, pioneering at a time when installation did not exist as a genre. A table with book and candle, wine bottle and egg; the drapes and textured wall-coverings are made of mens' clothes: the sombre masculine accoutrements of Baudelairean modernity, while at the same time Papa's clothes, *les vêtements du père*. Vanitas, exorcism and a 'work of mourning' in the Freudian sense, its uncanny depends both on the sense of anachronism, frozen time, and the perversity of Rancillac's 'work of sewing' or rather unpicking: unpicking the seams – flattening the ghostly body of the father into art. Anticipating the explosion of psychoanalytic discourses in France in the 1970s, *The Dark Room* is also, perhaps, a precipitate lament for the traditions of painting and sculpture about to be displaced by the *chambre noire* of photography and cinema. Figurative painting – including Rancillac's – would be devoured by these media within the next ten years. With the scraps of clothes and material left over, the artist fabricated *The Book of the Son*, a veritable Book of Trousers. Self-analysis: terminable or interminable? On pages of dark grey serge or tweed, cut to frame the crutch region, he embroidered:

*Papa's clothes
have a
smell
with this
smell the house
was built*

Moving from a belated *tachisme* to textured monochrome painting in 1962, Rancillac's *Fantomas leaps into the void* (it was the year of Yves Klein's untimely death) represents an exuberantly ubuesque, phallic *Fantomas/Rancillac* figure drawn over a hemmed fragment of bed linen collaged onto the surface – (one recalls Picasso's violent *Guitar* of 1926). With *The Miss Fantomas competition*, 1962, the graffiti-masquerade reappears; it is a companion piece to *Fantomas plays seductive*, whose white surface incised with curves erupts with a depiction of straining fly-buttons: the gravity of the monochrome is punctured with a bursting *braguette*.^{vi} Like a crude graffiti or ancient winged phallus, the penis is finally released: it flies into the technicolour surfaces of what have been called, portentously, Rancillac's *latrinogrammes* – a riot of pricks and tits and cunts, scribbled by a Bad Boy in coloured crayons onto paper touched up with watercolour. Re-education through *enfantillages*?^{vii}

These breakthrough drawings – almost a diary practice – would form the basis of brilliantly coloured paintings such as the diptych *Red foam* – a title evoking Boris Vian's novel *L'écume des jours* – or *Carnaval at Canaveral*, both of 1963.^{viii} Breasts float in space like planets, the prick-like finger aims at blast-off; but downward trajectories, no-entry signs, sticking plasters and bandages indicate that something might be amiss in this painterly space-race. Rancillac, impudent guerilla in the art Cold War, is beset by the anxiety of missile backfire from his stolen enemy weapons. But rather than Pollock or Pop, the Cobra painters and the American artist Peter Saul are in evidence here.

With the drawings sequence *Souvenirs of a kick*, 1963, Rancillac's 'adventures of a prick' continue across five separate sheets: the narrativity implicit in 'Fantomas' paintings series, first developed in painting with the diptych and triptych format, is about to encounter the comic strip, giving a whole new meaning to the *bande dessinée* – erection drawing

Mythologies of the everyday

1964: Robert Rauschenberg won the Grand Prix for painting at the Venice Biennale in the context of a dazzling group show in the privately-sponsored American Pavilion. Paris, her artists, curators and critics, reeled. Local anxieties had become an issue of national shame in an international arena. The Ecole de Paris was yesterday's news.^{ix} The story is now familiar: Jasper Johns first showed in Paris in 1959, Rauschenberg's *Combine Paintings* figured in the 1959 Paris Biennale with Raymond Hain's *Palissades*; his first show at the Galerie Daniel Cordier was held in 1961. Johns, Rauschenberg and Larry Rivers were collaborating with Niki de Saint Phalle and Tinguely at this time; Arman, Christo, Martial Raysse, and Daniel Spoerri were contemplating the move to New York.^x By 1962, the Galerie Lawrence (Lawrence Rubin), the Galerie Anderson Meyer and the Galerie Sonnabend run by the powerful Ileana – Leo Castelli's ex-wife - were established in Paris.^{xi}

British Pop proved a diversion This was the epoch of Beatlemania, when Carnaby Street style lead Courreges, when Patrick Caulfield's *Greece expiring on the ruins of Missolonghi*, 1963, showed a way of making Delacroix hip – even politically relevant: Henri Cueco, would paint *Les Barricades*, a 'Vietnam after Delacroix' in 1968 for the Salle rouge de Vietnam exhibition. Caulfield's definitive impact - on Valerio Adami, for example - has been grossly underestimated.^{xii} Swinging London was a playground for a few French artists, including Rancillac, but not a threat: the impact of British gallerists in Paris was almost entirely negligible.

It was as riposte to America and to demonstrate the vitality of art in Paris that Rancillac together with the Haitian artist Hervé Télémaque curated 'Mythologies quotidiennes' at the Musée de la Ville de Paris. (The show cohabited with a Franz Klein retrospective, while the Musée national d'art moderne held a sedate Marcoussis exhibition). The Musée de la Ville de Paris had previously been reserved for well-established individuals or prestigious group Salons. 'Mythologies quotidiennes' was a *coup d'état* by young sharks: Rancillac was the Damien Hirst of his time. He is anxious to emphasise that this was largely an artist-run enterprise: the critic Gérald Gassiot-Talabot has too often taken sole credit for the show, while Marie-Claude Dane, the young in-house curator, put her job on the line: (she was banished to the Musée Galliera – where she managed, nonetheless, to exhibit Warhol's *Maos* in 1974).^{xiii}

'In parallel with the unleashing of the American school, powerfully supported by a concert of galleries, a certain number of European artists... have felt the necessity to register the richness and increasing complexity of everyday life, which mixes together city games, the sacred objects of a civilisation devoted to the cult of consumer society, the brutal actions of an order founded on force and subterfuge, the shock of signals, movements and customary demands which create daily traumas for modern man' declared Gassiot-Talabot in the 'Mythologies Quotidiennes' catalogue. It was here that he first described the narrative dimensions of this new art: no longer was the canvas an 'immediate, global experience', but an itinerary – whether a boxed-in story borrowed from comic-strip format or presented in episodes. The work could also deliberately refute narrative logic and legibility... Another innovative aspect of 'Mythologies Quotidiennes', was the striking display of everyday items which acted as 'initiatory objects': 'For Raynaud, it's a red-coloured flowerpot and a little electric gadget as accessory, for Gironella, the sardine tin, for Niki de Saint Phalle, plastic dolls, bits of old material, artificial flowers, for Rancillac, a guitar [electric], for Atila, a wheel, for Geissler, a magnifying glass, for Pistoletto, a mirror, for Bertholo, an electric iron, for Raysse, a sponge-wipe, for Kalinowski, quality leathers, for Arnal a blow-up mattress.'^{xiv}

The artists were surely exhibiting these objects as a wry comment on consumer society – the show's title, after all, derived from Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* and Henri Lefebvre's marxist analyses of everyday life, while Jean Baudrillard's *Le système des objets* was only four years away. However, the critic François Pluchart interpreted these objects as symbolising an 'frightening, obsessive invasion of a mechanisation which aims to standardise thought in its most intimate manifestations', accusing the artists of a 'masochist abandon'!^{xv} Masochism? It was surely the critic Otto Hahn, writing in *L'Express*, who analysed the enterprise with greatest clarity when he compared the turbulent impact of the thirty four Europeans with the seven great American Pop artists, whose individual styles everyone now recognised: Johns and Rauschenberg, Oldenbergh and Lichtenstein, Wesselman, Rosenquist and Warhol. The Parisian public admired their healthy self-confidence in the same way, Serge Fauchereau says, that they admired the huge, chromed crustacean Cadillacs et Studebakers studding the American army-bases scattered through 1950s France which had made the French 4CV cars look like ladybirds.^{xvi}

Paradoxically, then, at the very moment of the baptism of narrative in painting as a critical tool with which to analyse the mythologies of contemporary life, the myth of Paris as 'capital of the arts' broke down, scattered into fragments. It lost the narrative coherence of its 'isms', its great decades, its quarters, its heroes - and even the mythical unity of the 'Ecole de Paris' whose liveliness contemporary critics were so anxious to evoke when reviewing the 'Mythologies' show.^{xvii}

Rancillac's *Micky's return*, 1964, had been painted after his first encounter with the works of Peter Saul who only later would become a friend.^{xviii} Three by two and a half metres, it was shown in 'Mythologies quotidiennes' in July. Rancillac's cartoon references – so unlike Lichtenstein's contemporary Ben-day dot paintings - are double-coded. Lichtenstein's cold explosions such as *BLAM, 1962*, work through an ironic distancing technique: their flatness corresponds to a deliberately flattened moral landscape (he first exhibited at the Galerie Ileana Sonnabend in 1963). Rancillac's 'hot' intrusion of a gesticulating Micky Mouse into a riot of expressionist gesture and colour is ambiguous: do we love him or hate him? The double coding is political and emotional too. Rancillac takes care to be 'not-too-American': the 'big bad wolf' would feature more often than 'Mickey' as the French called him.

The large format was now repeated in his Walt Disney exhibition at the Galerie Mathias Fels in 1965. The history of European art provided the knowing wink elicited by Rancillac's titles such as *The Devil's Entry to Panama City*; James Ensor's *Christ's entry to Jerusalem* – and hence the great modern tradition - subtends this ironic tribute to Walt. *Apparition of the Virgin to Cartoon characters*, 1964, offers a frisson of anachronism and blasphemy (a naked inverted virgin sporting frothy white knickers) that would be altogether alien to the artists of New York City, as was Rancillac's expressionist handling and his palette, despite streaks of De Kooning-like pink flesh areas. The Disney show created a small scandal, prior to the evolution of Rancillac's harder cartoon style later that year.

The Secret diary of a foot, 1965 takes up the 'foot' story within the white grid of comic-strip cartoon frames; cartoons also form the matrix of the companion piece, *Without Words III, Tribulations of a telephone*. . 'Malicious ambiguity'?^{xix} In both, the overall effect is of deliberate disarticulation, deliberate narrative collapse, symbolised by the aggressive blanks of the white speech balloons and thought bubbles. These create an overriding sense of lack, counterpointed by the stridency of unmodulated flat paint: yellows, reds, blues, greens, pinks - colours intensified with the whites of hard reflections. Rancillac's zooming forms and empty speech bubbles swerve like the crushed, phallic, missile-trajectories of contemporary cartoon

worlds, American or pseudo-American, such as the French-speaking space hero of A. Liqueois's *Salvator*.^{xx} 'Whatever the painter thinks, the world he projects to us is a world of spasm, convulsions and panic' a critic remarked.^{xxi} The images crunch across a flat blue sky in the era of the telephone hotline: a frenzied phone, a crocodile, a brute-cop, a briefcase, helicopter and television – and Pluto the dog, emitting speech-bubbles of himself in a *mise en abîme* as he exits. Irony – within the context of art world politics or the artist's own self-definition – is hard to position. No missile crisis here, rather an evocation for all its ellipses, of the Paris-New York telephone hotline between Ileana Sonnabend and Leo Castelli's gallery – 'Madame Sonnabend didn't come to Paris to contemplate the Seine...' Rancillac repeats. He and his artist friends harbour complex emotions over the issue to this very day. Conspiracy theories abound; the story rests untold. Big money was at stake.

And more: suddenly after such success, and international recognition, a scathing open letter *Les Lettres Françaises* by the critic Raoul-Jean Moulin. 'Where are you hiding, Rancillac?' He spoke of 'alibi', 'puerile obstinacy in playing the Salon anarchists' and a cynical vision, when 'napalm is burning Vietnam.'^{xxii} Was this the impetus for the dramatic change in Rancillac's work and its focus the following year?

The Year 1966

Rancillac's *Elephant Armchair* was created in 1966. It was fun, it was ridiculous, it was groovy. While an elegant woman in a waisted pink satin dress had posed for Cecil Beaton in front of Jackson Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm*, for *Vogue* in March, 1951, it was a dark eyed young model wearing *Haute Tension*, a soft red jersey minidress, that got Rancillac's pop furniture into international *Vogue* for October.^{xxiii}

But despite superficial excitements, something was rotten in France, which withdrew at this moment from NATO's operational structures. Politics fermented abroad. The American dream froze at this point - see the large-scale painting, *Last Whisky*, 1966. Here Rancillac's new use of acrylics, an important development, heightened the sense of ficticity – a fake material for a fake image, taken from the cover of a *roman-photo*. Serge Fauchereau's story woven around this image in his prose piece of 1976 demonstrates its narrative potential – a certain repressed *tristesse* evokes comparisons with Marguerite Duras's lovelorn Lol V. Stein.^{xxiv} America continued to bomb Vietnam. Mao's Cultural Revolution gathered pace.

On January 1st, 1966, Rancillac resolved to paint the political events of the year – the first meditation on globalisation in paint? Using the topsy-turvy device of the picture which could be hung either way-up, devised in 1965 for *Melody beneath the palms* (Hawaiian beach-girl versus American fighter plane) Rancillac now elaborated a series of political canvases, such as *At last, the silhouette reduced to the waist*, 1966. Here, a South Vietnamese soldier stuffing a Vietcong prisoner head-first up to the waist in a cauldron of water is contrasted – through inversion – with five rotating images of a waist-length, stretch-nylon bra. 'Dare to paint a beer-bottle, a 2CV car, a girl in a bra, Mao-Tse-Tung! This is what constitutes our everyday mythology art is nothing other than life itself pushed to its paroxysm of tenderness or horror, its paroxysm of truth' he declared.^{xxv} The sense of a 'France torn apart' by politics versus consumerism, – postulated five years earlier by the *affichistes*, Raymond Hains and Jacques de Villeglé with their ripped poster art - reappears within the Narrative Figurations of a new generation. While Lichtenstein's reds, blues and yellows kept rigorously to comic-strip primaries, Rancillac's sugar pink dames and the acidic brilliance of his jungle shades produced a particularly bilious effect. In contrast to a clash of

juxtapositions, the spectator is forced to choose between two readings, 'Comfort over here, torture over there'.^{xxvi}

The third world was rife with famine. In *Holy Mother Cow*, Rancillac insolently replaces the desert sun with 'La Vache qui rit' (laughing cow) cheese label above a blinding desert of yellow acrylic, across which a veiled woman struggles with her son, mule and waterpot (an image from a tourist brochure); the Hindu cult of the sacred cow coexists with starvation. At home, post-colonial problems took a new twist with the mysterious disappearance of Moroccan leader Ben Barka. In *For the files of the affair*, a separate panel contains the victim's face. This scene differs from the detective story scenarios of Jacques Monory, Rancillac's fellow-artist, through its immediate political currency. The controversial *Dinner of the head-hunters*, would continue Rancillac's critical project. Patrice Lumumba, Malcom X and Frantz Fanon in black and white erupt, with the opening of three shutters, into the virulently-coloured orange glare of this bourgeois dinner party. The art-loving guests sport African masks: a grotesque scene based upon a photograph taken by the host, Tony Saulnier, a professional photographer, African art collector and amateur ethnologist. This photo had been published in *Paris-Match* within a reportage on the exhibition 'Art nègre, sources, evolution, expansion', part of the first World Festival of Black Arts in Dakar.... The show travelled to Musée de l'Homme in Paris for the summer of 1966. Saulnier sued. This was surely the first court case in the art world about intellectual property. But, Rancillac demands, which scene is the off-scene, the ob-scene?^{xxvii}

Dinner of the head-hunters: the politics of taste. A work which required a new critical language. Exasperated by the art-speak of curator-critics such as Michel Tapié, Rancillac was attending Pierre Bourdieu's lectures at the Collège de France. Bourdieu agreed to write in the catalogue of Rancillac's major exhibition, 'L'Année 66': eighteen paintings shown at the Galerie Mommaton in February 1967, treating war in Vietnam, war between Israel and the Arab states, and the assassination of Che Guevara in Bolivia, the Red Guards in China, Apartheid in South Africa – even the pill. Bourdieu's text, 'The Image of the Image' warns of the banalising of such subject matter as it flashes past in the metro, as it is conveyed in the saccharine tone of TV announcers, as 'photographic realism' becomes in itself a sign of the redundancy of thought, and of the erring gaze of the spectator of the 'image of the image', when his own image is thrown back by the mirror beneath Ben Barka's portrait.^{xxviii}

Painting Revolution?

'A generation was formed by Althusser to reflect on marxism in a different way, and to reflect in a different way meant to be close to maoist theories – generally less bureaucratic, nearer the people'^{xxix} In France in 1966, these new Althusserians derided the Stalinist past of the older Communists. The Argenteuil meeting of the French Communist Party Central Committee that year passed its resolution concerning the 'free confrontation of all styles'; at the official Party exhibition of January 1967 Rancillac showed *The tragic end of an apostle of apartheid* along with the older generation, Fougeron and Boris Taslitzky, but also with his contemporaries Erro, Arroyo and the newly-condoned abstractionists.^{xxx} 1967 was the fiftieth anniversary year of the Russian Revolution of 1917, celebrated in Paris by Communists and neo-Marxists alike. In April, the Sino-Soviet split, released Mao's China as an alternative 'territory for the imagination' for anti-Stalinist French intellectuals, offering a brighter palette and a pastoral theatre for artists who were as yet unaware of Peking's Potemkin strategies.^{xxxi} Rancillac's *Red Guard on parade*, 1966, was thus the first anticipation of a theme which would develop with the series of four canvases,

‘The Word’: *General Assembly*, *Truth comes from the mouth of children*, *The Interview* and *The gospel according to Mao*, 1967 (its dislocated images split among by eight panels). ‘As soon as words are aimed at someone, it’s propaganda’ - Rancillac quotes Mao in *Le regard idéologique*.^{xxxii} The analogies between the first and third paintings – grim Western men of power versus excitable young Maoists, using similar violent colour contrasts - are particularly disconcerting.

Controversy and violence. In the catalogue of ‘Le Monde en question’, a 1967 group show in June, Rancillac made his most uncompromising political statement yet:

‘A gun is more efficient – if you know how to use it. If a gun’s repellent, can a paintbrush be a weapon? I doubt it. But, with this doubt inside me, painting through a *force majeure*, I can’t turn my eyes from the battlefield, the killing fields, the besieged towns, the tribunals, the meeting rooms, the operating theatres, the torture chambers – all these places in the world where the world is being made, horrifically fast, without me, without us’.^{xxxiii} As news images also arrived and were processed, horrifically fast, Rancillac’s methods had altered and accelerated: lent an epidiascope by Hervé Télémaque, he continued to project images from the press, film and TV. Was this *photographisme* or *photopeinture*? An ‘anguished response to man’s mechanical conditioning’.^{xxxiv} Or as Pierre Bourdieu would have it, a means to create an ‘image of the image’ with disturbing implications?

During America’s 1967 ‘summer of love’ the Salon de Mai – and its artists, including Monory, Erro and Rancillac – were transported *en bloc* by the revolutionary Cuban government from Paris to Cuba. In one night, 17 July 1967, in front of the world’s TV cameras, a huge, spiralling revolutionary painting, the *Mural Cuba Colectiva* was created by 100 artists from all over the world, a prelude to Castro’s ‘anti-imperialist’ Cultural Congress of Havana which took place in January 1968.^{xxxv} An exhilarating foretaste of revolutionary practice for Paris in May. Castro’s acquiescence when Soviet tanks invaded Prague in August 1968 would spoil the Cuban dream.

Rancillac was now an experienced exhibitor and established star. The press positioned him not only with his contemporaries - often *primus inter pares* - but, for example in contrast with Bernard Buffet, his exact contemporary and now the portraitist of a Parisian elite: (from De Gaulle to Yves Saint-Laurent) or against Michel Tapié and his well-promoted *tachiste* ‘Baroque ensemblistes’.^{xxxvi} Clear boundaries had been drawn up between factions: an artistic right wing (together with milder shades of conservatism) versus the younger artists of the left – often Communists, Maoists or fellow-travellers, often attached to the increasingly militant Salon de la Jeune Peinture.^{xxxvii}

The Warhol Effect: *Bris/Collage/K*

Andy Warhol exhibited four times in Paris before 1968. Rancillac saw every show. The *Marylin* pictures were exhibited in a group show in May 1963 with Rosenquist, Wesselman and John Chamberlain at Ileana Sonnabend’s. For his first one-man-show at her gallery in February, 1964, Warhol strategically anticipated the anti-Americanism of a French public, deciding to show his electric-chairs, the Birmingham Alabama race riots, car wrecks and suicide pictures. The artist Jean-Jacques Lebel, the critic Alain Jouffroy and American poet John Ashbery wrote in the catalogue. After such a topical, indeed shocking debut, Warhol exhibited *Flowers* in May 1965. His *13 Most Wanted Men*, silkscreened FBI suspects, followed in April 1967.^{xxxviii} This show

coincided precisely with the first number of *Opus International*, art magazine of a new generation, with an Uncle Sam cover: a 'siege of Paris' special ...^{xxxix}

Bris/Collage/K, written by the poet and critic Jean-Clarence Lambert, directed by Daniel Bohr and with sets by Rancillac was created for the Studio des Champs Elysées on October 19th, 1967 as part of the Biennale de Paris. It takes its place within a range of spectacular productions at the time, which rehearsed the love-hate relationship with America, such as the Paris-based American photographer William Klein's hilarious 1968 film, *Mr Freedom*, a parody of Cold War politics as a tale of sexual stand-off and orgy, or Nouveau Réaliste, Martial Raysse's film, *Camembert Martial Extra Doux*, 1969, with its psychedelic Statue of Liberty.

Inspired by the assassination of J. F. Kennedy, *Bris/Collage/K* stars K, 'Dentelle' a Jackie/Marilyn/ American sweetheart figure and Victoria, the 'Universal mother', together with thirty-something Oswald, the assassin with blacked-up face, and the mysterious Man with a Briefcase. His Presidential, Stars-and-stripes covered briefcase contains cartoon instructions for reprisals against atomic attack, an order form for luxury coffins, sticking plasters, a portable swimming pool The play is a parodic, oneiric modern tragedy, structured with choral interludes. 'We wanted to replace the theatre of Fear and Pity with a pitiless theatre of sublimation: catharsis via short circuits.. a savage theatre, like [Lévi-Strauss's] "savage thought"'^{xl}. Phrases from William Manchester's *Death of a President*, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, M. Murray's *The Witch Doctors*, the French *Dossier L.S.D.* and Henri Alleg's exposé of French torture in Algeria, *La question* are 'bricollaged' together – as exemplary mythemes of the day - into a hallucinatory texture of voices, accompanied by jazz and drumkit, syncopated with advertising jingles: 'Achetez l'Hyper-Mixer' (Buy a Hyper-Mixer) or *Buvez Cola-Cloaque* (Drink Cloacal-Cola)... The sinister chant, 'SS 100 X / Dallas / SS 100 X Dallas' (referring to the number-plate of Kennedy's Lincoln car) is surely the Cold War equivalent of Louis Aragon's 'URSS /URSS' in his notorious pro-Soviet poem 'Red Front' of 1930.

K stands for
Kancer
Kapital
Karesse...
Kalamity

Rancillac's decors for *Bris/Collage/K* (he worked with Jocelyn de Noblet) are a fascinating contemporary parody of Warhol *à la française*: A still life of cylindrical Skip washing powder cartons in the foreground mimics Brillo boxes; in the background, arranged in bland, repetitive rows like Warhol's *200 Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962, are the significantly Warhol-like covers of *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Adam* magazine and *OOI*, with headlines booming: 'WAR,' 'RUSSIANS TODAY,' 'NASSER AND THE ISRAELIS', 'THE LAST DAYS OF SAINT TROPEZ', 'BRAINWASHING', 'SPY MONTHLY'. Repetition has a percussive power, while inflatable chairs and plastic pouffes and pillows suspended in the air add to the dream-like quality of the décor. (Rancillac does not recall seeing the Warhol exhibition of Cow Wall paper and floating silver pillows at Leo Castelli's during his 1966 visit to New York). Against this décor, 'K' is ritually reassassinated with two resounding gunshots: the cast writhe in post-atomic death convulsions, while the Man with a Suitcase chants the fatal statistics and radiation casualties of the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.... The Anti-American message was unequivocal. Yet denunciation in *Bris/Collage/K* merges problematically with a helpless admiration for America's own

Mythologies quotidiennes. Warhol's own deadpan, undifferentiated approach towards commodity, catastrophe and 'Death in America' remained, paradoxically, more critical.

May '68

May '68: Rancillac's poster *Nous sommes tous des juifs et des allemands* (We are all Jews and Germans) is its iconic emblem. Any grandiloquent statement – a *Guernica* – would have been inappropriate. The laughing and triumphant face of the student leader, 'German-Jew' Daniel Cohn-Bendit, is provocative.^{xli} Despite the modification of his poster title to *Nous sommes tous 'indésirables'*, Rancillac still hears the chanting in the streets: 'Nous sommes tous des juifs-allemands' – 'We are all German-Jews'. The rhythmical contraction is far stronger in its implications. Rancillac's painting on board, *Mai 68* is more romantic: the image of the young man bleeding from a police truncheon has an almost Rimbaudesque appeal – despite its origin in a news photograph. The motif is an aggressive attack on the symbol of national unity, the red, white and blue of the tricolour flag. The process is not, of course, silkscreen (so symbolic of the group ethos of the Atelier Populaire); rather here, Rancillac's technique of masking and taping areas by hand, ready for the quick application of colour contains its own moment of brutality – when the masking is ripped off and the image revealed. The result is one of jubilation and brutal fact, failure or success, despair or happiness, he has claimed. A political gesture towards an ephemeral and affordable art would be made in February 1969, when Rancillac together with five other artists covered Paris with 600 original silkscreen prints – to be sold for a mere 29f 90 each – but gallery shows remained the norm.^{xlii}

While Rancillac claimed Daumier as a precursor for his poster, the 'Warhol effect' of silkscreened images, continued to be problematic after May '68 when political and specifically anti-American content was at a premium. Pierre Buraglio's militant realist portrait – in fact spray-painted – of Nguyen Huu Tho, for the Salle Rouge du Vietnam (postponed from May 1968 to early 1969) is a case in point: is its 'Warhol look' a case of effective sabotage – or does the American spirit haunt and indeed prevail in the enemy camp?

The silkscreened 'Warhol effect' was once again evident in Rancillac's exhibition 'Les Américains' held in October 1968 at the Galerie Mommaton. Rauschenberg was showing at the Musée de la Ville de Paris. Here was the confirmation of the existence of two Americas: 'imperialists' versus protesters – it was above all generational affair.

Rancillac celebrated the American underground: the recently assassinated Malcom X, Jack Kerouac or Allen Ginsberg, heroes in Paris, particularly at the vibrant American Center, Boulevard Raspail.^{xliii} The mug-shot silkscreened photographs used for the 'Les Américains' recalls Warhol's *Thirteen most Wanted Men* shown in Paris the previous year – but the plexiglass Allen Ginsberg, a large seemingly fragile object created in various colours, red or green, has a more fantasmatic presence, Raspoutin with a Rorschach-like gaze. Like a 'venemous flower' it dominated Rancillac's first retrospective, an 'insolent' installation in the suburbs of Vitry-sur-Seine.^{xliiv}

'Pornographie', the exhibition, (the last major fallout of May 68 for Rancillac) says Serge Fauchereau), demonstrates a new direction. In April, 1969, the Galerie Templon found itself the focus of attacks, its exhibits defaced by an outraged public. Naughty photo-blowups, homosexual (*Sailor boy*) or anticlerical (*Sacristy mice* – little girls with a curate) were ripped in the genital area, while the prurient few were exhorted in a survey devised by Pierre Bourdieu, to reply to the following questions: "Seeing this exhibition do you think that art can have a liberating effect?"

Among the works presented in this exhibition are there any which you think are beautiful? Would the same subjects seem more acceptable if treated pictorially?"^{xlv}

In the post-May depression, art was entering what was baptised one year later 'The era of kitsch' – an era where art became part of a continuum embracing 'high' and 'low' culture that Bourdieu would dissect and analyse. A pioneering article by Pascal Rossini in *Chroniques de l'Art Vivant* described the phenomenon: '... for the masses submerged by cheap cultural products art is seemingly also an image of its images.... Through posters, magazine and advertising photos, films and TV, the 'solitary crowd' confronts the phantom of itself, which it has been responsible for imagining, elaborating, creating. So that once and for all it can perfectly conform to it.' The proximity of kitsch contaminates artists and intellectuals, Rossini continues, They become shamefully bound to dealers and the gigantic culture industry which devours everything, including art itself amongst its innumerable products. Hence the recent phenomenon of the *artiste honteux* (the shamed artist).^{xlvi}

Rancillac himself, disgusted with the atmosphere of compromise in Paris left the metropolis for a large studio by the river banks of Boran-sur-Oise.... In a vastly changed and recriminating atmosphere, the major Andy Warhol retrospective was held in 1970 at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, organised by John Coplans from Pasadena.^{xlvii} Hyperrealism - anticipated since the mid-1960s by the Narrative Figuration group - finally arrived at the seventh Paris Biennale in 1971. Works shown came from the Fine Arts Squad, L. A. and Nancy Graves, along with the Zebra group, Equipo Realidad and others. The poet Louis Aragon, promoter of socialist realism from the late 1930s through the 1950s, despised by the new left, was photographed wandering in front of Beny von Moos' six-metre-long *Agony and Ecstasy*....^{xlviii} The 1972 Kassel Documenta, curated by Harald Szeeman, would put Paris firmly in its place.

The ideological Seventies

'Those were the years of ideology triumphant, total questioning, the left at its apogee, and the 'break with the system'. But also the years of sectarianism, unreality, dogmatism? Of course! But memory embellishes it all. In their very unreason, the 1970s had two qualities which we lack so much today: energy and the sense of dreaming. In those days politics wasn't boring, In those days life existed beyond the Stock Exchange. In those days, provocation really meant something... In those days error assumed epic dimensions. In those days the extreme right existed in a cellar. And in those days artistic creation was virulent.^{xlix}

It was a political coup for Rancillac's to have Gilbert Mury, *eminence grise* of the Maoist left, to preface his exhibition 'Le Vent' (Mao's wind of class struggle) at the Centre National d'Art Contemporain in 1971 – a controversial show which toured to Hamburg and Wuppertal and the Aktions Galerie in Bern in 1972.¹ Mury referred to the Communist Party's updated image with its new headquarters by Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer and its patronage of museum-quality populist shows at its annual late summer festival. His conflation of praise for Rancillac's 'photographic painting' and for socialist realism recalls Aragon on John Heartfield's photomontage in 1935. Here, however, Mao's advocacy of a Chinese socialist realism pronounced in the Yan'an talks of spring, 1942 is the touchstone. Mury's political formulas are pitched against the future: 'the probable visit of Nixon to Peking, the certain arrival in Paris of a Chinese government delegation, the diplomatic rapprochement between Tirana and Peking on the one hand, and Belgrade and Bucarest on the other'. Rancillac's photographic painting 'engages

political debate' Mury says. It surely marks the apotheosis of a figurative Maoist painting in France, with *Long Live the Peoples' Republic of China* – nine panels with painted Chinese slogans; *The Female Red Detachment*; *Chinese leaders salute the procession for the 20th anniversary of the Revolution*; *Make Revolution, Promote production* (six canvases, each with Chinese slogans). The installation was crucial. China was confronted by the USA, linked by the Israel-Palestine conflict: Rancillac's great Israeli triptych, *Israel and her judges* (showing Israel's occupation of Jerusalem), and a slogan painting in arabic, *Long live the Palestinian Revolution*, together with *New Albania*, a flag-waving procession. Among the American paintings was the *American Suite* (Vietnam as a sordid Mafia story, purchased by the Centre Georges Pompidou) and the viciously topical *Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Lieutenant Calley on the road to My-Lai* - based on the same photograph by an American army photographer used for the Art Workers' Coalition famous poster *Q. And babies? A. And babies*. Serial assassinations – killers to be killed in their turn.^{li}

No guesses here for Rancillac's *parti pris* – and yet, like his early Berlin Wall painting there is a curious sense of hot versus cold, political topicality versus blockage. The slogans declaim to deserted spaces; the leaders wave their red books stereotypically – no procession is to be seen; the perfect arabesque of the female Chinese ballet dancer on points is devoid of narrative context and completely silent, and where once Rancillac painted a *mise-en-abîme* of cartoon figures, here he provides an 'image of the image' by pasting magazine reproductions of his motif onto the canvas. Amongst documents collaged on *The Red Female Detachment* figures Mao's 'Let a hundred flowers bloom' speech and extracts from the Yan'an talks: dismembered pages are scattered over the canvas.^{lii} The extraordinary 'Maoist' ballet performed on points in Western style in Paris, is grotesque in its hybridity. Released as a film, *Le détachement féminin rouge*, was quoted not only by other painters such as Erro but by Jacques Lacan himself. Despite China's importation of Soviet mentors to its art academies from 1949, when socialist realism became official doctrine, its gloomy chiaroscuro, incomprehensible in China, was substituted by a brighter more indigenous palette.^{liii} This corresponded with Rancillac's own use of pale, flat colours, in particular the powder blues so often contrasted with a dark, blood-coloured maroon.

Rancillac did not go to China in the early 1970s – unlike the delegation of *Tel Quel* intellectuals, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Philippe Sollers in 1974 or the subsequent trip by artist Gérard Fromanger with the Belgian Communist filmmaker Boris Ivens.^{liiv} For Rancillac, China represented the 'Empire of the Word' – the word which in terms of the Chinese Revolution had moved mountains. A long chapter in *Le Regard idéologique*, 'The band of the 800 million' conveys the spirit and ideology of the times, while Rancillac contextualises his exhibition 'Le Vent': '...the Chinese people seem to have given themselves, day after day, an immense and endless representation, played, chanted and danced within a calligraphic décor that provokes, comments on and constantly renews the action. That's what I personally tried to translate in the installation of my political exhibition at the CNAC, with sequences of Chinese ideograms.'^{liiv} The exhibition 'Images du peuple chinois' at the ARC, Musée de la Ville de Paris, showing work by the peasant-painters of Housien that was typically reproduced as posters all over China, together with their original paintings shown slightly later at the Musée Galliera as part of the Biennale de Paris that year – a huge success - showed museum institutions following political and intellectual trends, as did the editors who published historical introductions to marxism and contemporary debates.^{livi}

Yet contemporaries have admitted 'there was a lot of information about broken statues, people being humiliated in public, crimes, murders, tortures – either mental, or real, physical – yes

we knew...’^{lvii} A grim irony redeems Rancillac’s revolutionary encomium. Critics, from Pierre Cabanne in *Combat* to Werner Hoffman writing in Hamburg attempted at the time to challenge Rancillac’s dialectical use of Manichaeian contraries: paintings where the brilliant contrasts of light and dark reinforce messages of good versus evil, right versus wrong – also evident in the tone and moral judgements of his writings in the 1970s.^{lviii} To what extent may Bourdieu’s 1966 discussion of pleonasm as denunciation continue to illuminate ‘the image of the image...’ during this era of the 1970s?^{lix} And today, when Marx’s legacy is debated once more within a context of globalisation and world conflict, how do we reread Rancillac’s case for the ‘Bolivian tin miner, Sudanese peasant, drugged Puertorican bootblack, or Senghalese fisher [who] need marxism to save their human dignity’ pitted against his negative vision of Solzhenitzyn’s ‘anticommunism’?^{lx}

Not until 2000 was Rancillac able to publish *Le regard idéologique*. This contextualises his own experiences in diary form, almost day to day between 1975 and 1979, with a wealth of references to contemporary exhibitions in Paris, reviews in *Le Monde*, current criticism and its reception. Above all he engages with the political past and its impact on the present, revealing the climate of art in a certain Paris: his Paris, and the Paris of many artists and intellectuals, but exclusive rather than inclusive. For the experimental avant-gardes in photography, performance, sculpture or the increasing interest in art and criticism from America in reviews such *Chroniques de l’Art vivant* or *Macula* hardly figure, or figure, often with derision, as *repoussoirs*.^{lxi} Instead, in deadpan descriptions, brilliantly parodying the *nouveau roman*, Rancillac alternates Soviet paintings, Vladimir Alexander Serov’s *Lenin proclaims the power of the Soviets*, with Erro’s *Hommage to the fork*, Chinese peasant painters with Peter Stämpfli, an Albanian Socialist realist with the veteran French provocateur, Alfred Courmes - an East/West device which situates his figurative contemporaries firmly in their dialectical relationship to socialist realism.^{lxii} And Rancillac’s main concern, socialist realism’s presence and heritage, still violently debated between factions and generations, was seen to matter institutionally, officially, diplomatically. The Association Française d’Action Artistique which sponsored cultural exchange, as always took its lead and money from Government. For example ‘Lénine, 1870-1924’, was held at the Grand Palais in 1970; ‘L’URSS et la France’ at the same venue in December, 1974 and ‘60 ans de peinture soviétique’ was held there in 1977 followed the huge display of questionable avant-garde Soviet painting at the Venice Biennale of 1977. ‘Art abstrait soviétique non-conformiste’ continued the story at the Salon d’Automne in 1978 – all precursors to the modernist ‘Paris-Moscow’ curated by Pontus Hulten for the new Centre Pompidou, with Rancillac’s friend Serge Fauchereau in 1979-1980. There was Albanian art at the Petit Palais in 1974-5 with a modern section; Pierre Gaudibert showed contemporary Portuguese painting under dictatorship at the ARC, Musée de la Ville de Paris in spring, 1975 and contemporary art from East Germany was shown in Lille in June. Rancillac recounts how he supplemented this experience through discussions with friends such as Michel Troche, and his own, programmatic reading: Lucien Goldmann, Avner Ziss, Jean Kanapa, Marc Ferro on October 1917, Jean Fréville on Plekhanov. He demonstrated an increasing curiosity about his socialist realist heritage - in France as well as the Soviet Union – through discoveries made in the Bibliothèque des Recherches Marxistes, and on his own trips: to Romania, in July 1974, then to Albania for example, and nearer home: to interview the veteran Communist painter Boris Taslitzky in his studio still near the Place d’Italie.^{lxiii}

At one point Rancillac reads Ezra N. Suleiman’s *Les Hauts fonctionnaires et la politique*, an analysis of France’s elite-forming institutions, which states that ‘it is no longer possible to

consider the French administration as politically neutral'.^{lxiv} France's grand machinery of the State, its diplomatic concerns were preoccupied, alas, with strategic and economic questions of far greater concern than art and the left, realism, representation or the avant-garde in Paris - which the establishment had already embraced. France's artistic foreign policy, so much less astute than America's Cold War cultural strategies, was of cosmetic importance only, its failures insignificant. *Que faire?* What was to be done? as Lenin famously asked.^{lxv}

Jazz

Rancillac was by no means in retreat. During the 1970s powerful political work alternates with charismatic images of Jazz players. From 'Mythologies Quotidiennes' onwards, when Rancillac became friends with jazz drummer Daniel Humair, jazz had provided not only a pleasure but the possibility of a metaphorical transposition of his art into music. 'Mythologic blues' (including 'Rancillac') performed in the show in September 1964 was the 'first experiment in collective improvisation translating a pictorial emotion'^{lxvi}; 'Royal Garden blues', the first French Pop lithograph album involved all this painter friends; 'L'âge du Jazz' at the Musée Galliera in April, 1967 was the first of several museum exhibitions on the subject in France, while summer Jazz festivals at Antibes, or the Fondation Maeght, Saint Paul de Vence, became increasingly ambitious. *The Painting Lesson*, of 1968, again an 'installation' of sorts, is based on a jazz player painting, with another popping out of a wooden packing case; another case lies on the ground. The new 1970s art magazine, *Chroniques de l'Art Vivant*, which had outstanding musical coverage, already offered one stage of a transposition, Philippe Gras's dark, grainy black and white photographs, often put together in syncopated arrangements - compare *BB King*, 1972.^{lxvii} It was indeed Gras who provided all the photographs for Rancillac's *Jazz* series. Musical analogies were picked up at once by Rancillac's critics: 'The disappearance of the sax in an ensemble of dots and forms can be interpreted as the succession of sounds it produces, short or long, sharp or sweeter... the representation of a sonorous space-time transposed into metallic reflections'^{lxviii} Prefacing his exhibition catalogue for the Galerie Mathias Fels in 1974 Gassiot-Talabot noted how Rancillac's once-brutal ripping of masked areas of acrylic became a kind of metaphor of the performance: 'The canvas reveals itself at the end ... tension and anxiety are maintained throughout the process, awaiting the last strident notes; the linear improvisation of jazz responds to the global revelation of the act of picture-making... The cold technique, so appropriate for efficiency, readability, formal dialectics, trembles here, giving unique and subjective images of a man giving himself up entirely - to the point where flashes break out on the surface....' From *Cecil Taylor*, to *Noel McGhee*, *Janis Joplin*, or the sultry and psychedelic *Diana Ross*, her face glittering through the soft darkness of her Afro hair, the subject was always already political; yet *Diana Ross* promised an energy, release, a possibility of passion in the dark without cynicism, never afforded by the other women Rancillac depicted: stars, victims, figures of pornography. Through the 1970s and into the 1980s Rancillac painted jazz in all its modulations, turning to *Reggae* in 1982, when the music itself changed, and the artist was experimenting with shaped canvases: *images éclatées*, new everyday mythologies.

Ulrike Meinhof: Dicing with death

Contrapuntally with the jazz pieces, the political subjects continued, such as *Belfast*, 1977 or *Bloody Comics* of the same year which brought Donald and Pluto back: pillorying the Chilean military junta. Rancillac's more ambitious suite of thirteen large-scale acrylic panels, *In memory of Ulrike Meinhof*, 1978, anticipated by ten years Gerhard Richter's series, *October 18, 1977* of 1988, purchased in 1995 by the Museum of Modern Art, New York.^{lxi} The furore in spring, 2002, surrounding the display of some of these pieces in Richter's MOMA retrospective after the September 11th terrorist attack, gives a renewed topicality and resonance to Rancillac's work. His Meinhof suite alternates images of high speed racing cars on the Le Mans 24 hours circuit with images of Stuttgart's Stammheim prison corridors, where the Red Army Faction terrorists were held. The case had saturation coverage in France, where the terrorist question was far from neutral.^{lxx} Jean-Paul Sartre visited Baader in prison in late 1974, and *Les Temps Modernes* published an article on torture by sensory deprivation. After a year of involvement, Rancillac's series was begun in 1977, before the discovery of the dramatic mass suicide of October 18th

Describing the ensemble in late 1978, Rancillac declared: 'I find passionately interesting the idea of prison in which people are suicided by sensory deprivation when they're shut into special cells with no colour and sound; the absence of sound and colour is already death.'^{lxxi} The spectator, attention initially captured by the speed of the cars is arrested, then brutally plunged into the deep perspectives of the prison corridors, spaces *en abîme* in which perspective functions as a metaphor of control, surveillance and solitude. The metallic prison environment is represented as a steely harmony of greys, modulated with browns and lilacs. Grey is 'the epitome of non-statement' according to Richter; yet his blurred, dark 'non-judgmental' paintings imply political and emotional tragedy. The morality of terrorism, the resurgence of a moment of history from oblivion and the problematics of retrospective martyrdom are at issue: his black and white photographic sources, from the Stuttgart prosecutor's office were generally personality-based. In contrast, it is the death-like impersonality of Rancillac's earlier images which disturb. Typically, he presents the spectator with a nominal choice: yet both sets of images – cars and prisons – approach blankness. Paradoxically the racing-driver is equally a prisoner of his space-capsule, dicing with death. The cars (*bolides*, 'meteors' in French) pass across the lens at 250-300km per hour; the image is compressed via the time/ camera shutter equation. Based on slide-projections of these on-the-spot photos, Rancillac's coloured streaks become increasingly non-referential, increasingly painterly: 'you arrive at 'swept' forms which approach almost pure whiteness. Almost white on white, there'll be no more colours.'^{lxxii}

Richter's calculated delay contrasts with Rancillac's response to the heat of discussion. He was exhibiting his work in a climate where other Narrative Figuration were involved with protest exhibitions and where various groups close to Michel Foucault were actively clamouring for prison reform.^{lxxiii} Rancillac's suite finally reached a Parisian public at ARC, Musée de la Ville de Paris in late 1979, and was shown in January, 1980 at the Maison de la Culture in Grenoble, one of the most militant cultural venues in France at the time, as part of a two-month debate on the subject.^{lxxiv} 5.35, *one more day* in this show, conflates into one double image the *In Memory of Ulrike Meinhof* suite as a whole.

From Cinémonde to Chechenya

Women in Rancillac's work are generally held at bay by the political: among his sonorous jazz works, *Tina* of 1973, *Janis Joplin* and *Diana Ross* of 1974 are exceptions. In the show 'Cinémonde' of 1989 (twenty five large works dating from 1985 onwards), based on touched-up

magazine covers, Vivien Leigh, Debra Paget, Jean Harlow, Rita Hayworth, Diana Dors, are offered up to the public. The painting is lush, almost carnivorous. Some canvases, like *The broken arrow*, 1985, appear provocatively 'unfinished', in fact a game of matt and brilliant whites and drawn lines replace colour over half the canvas. There is a deliberate sense of painting, a perversely sexualised painting, replacing celluloid, replacing photography, replacing sepia (*Jean Harlow 75c*, 1989), and replacing an already modified cover-image.^{lxxv} Harsh framing devices, as in *Souvenir of Santa Monica*, the triptych of 1986, mock and parody the camera. But for all the nostalgia comes an almost aggressive statement of emptiness, interchangeability: the celluloid, like the stars themselves is dead, And for Rancillac the exercise was - almost painfully, one feels - dialectical: no politics for a world turned off by politics. 'Stars aren't innocent either, it's also about women's condition, the kind of model imposed on everyone. In fact they weren't women any more, they were dolls... And the *Cinémonde* review was a kind of brainwashing, for the people, to stop them demonstrating... so it's also a demolition exercise, it's capitalism, go to the cinema, don't demonstrate...' ^{lxxvi}

In the spring of 1988, Rancillac visited China for the first time. '*Bernard Rancillac, non réconcilié*' - 'Rancillac unreconciled' was the title of the preface to Rancillac's exhibition 'Orient-Occident' in 1994 - following 'Pekin-Hollywood' of 1993, anticipating 'Extreme-Occident', 1996. In *Desert Roads*, 1991, oriental cut out figures confront Shell and Esso signs, a painting of twelve Hollywood misses - almost identical except for their tinted hairstyles, and a row of camels versus tanks and a first-aid lorry. Despite the 'message', a relatively jovial cosmopolitan kitsch reigns. Two works of 1995 shown in 'Extreme -Orient' project slides of real naked beauties onto the many-armed Oriental goddess.

Rancillac's last major series, *Algeria*, 1998-9 used this device to a genuinely potent effect. The politics and economics around the pornography industry are an issue he has never addressed - in 1969 or in 1984, when he added nylon stockings, electric bells and an open zipped purse to the enlarged photograph he titled *Pornography censured by eroticism*, and certainly not with the recently completed series 'Woman' where the young girls cavort for Rancillac's photographic posing sessions. Yet the most successful, I think, of the series, The little *Venus de Malakoff* with shaved pubis, who serendipitously emerges from a large jar in Rancillac's studio, cannot help but evoke his depiction of the drowning Vietcong prisoner of 1966. For Rancillac this series is conceived as a 'relief' from the Algerian women: surely a problematic statement.

As early as July 1952 in *Deux Peintres et un Poète, Retour d'Algérie*, France discovered Boris Taslitzky's drawings of the Algerian women who lay in protest on railway lines, who smuggled weapons for the liberation struggle in their djellabas, and Mireille Mialhe's sketches of women at peace meetings. Picasso's drawing of Djamila Boupacha promoted the cause of the anti-torture lobby. In 1960, in *L'An V de la Révolution Algérienne*, Frantz Fanon affirmed the existence of the matriarchy which formed the basis of the visible patriarchy of Algeria.^{lxxvii} Gillo Pontecorvo's banned film, *Bataille d'Algiers*, 1966, clearly showed women's role in the resistance struggle when finally released. Algeria's present situation is extraordinarily tragic, dangerous, and increasingly an international, not a national problem. Despite the artistic precedents (Delacroix, Picasso) for a 'women of Algiers' series, Rancillac's choice of women to bear his political message is a departure. Why are women - the utterly disenfranchised - constantly made to bear the expression of political impotence, as victims? The *Young Girl with her Throat Cut*, 1998, is erotic in the 'women of Algiers' tradition, with lushly-painted reds and crimsons. The close up view and inversion of the girl's face, both filmic devices, imply a male spectator. Rancillac has openly discussed the problem of sadistic pleasure involved in killing, and hence the perverse

complicity he might be seen to inflict upon a male voyeur: 'Some walk out digusted, some take a plane to buy little girls in Thailand', he declares - in the era of Michel Houellebecq's novel *Platform*.^{lxxviii} The 'Women of Algiers' series is less equivocal: faces gaze straight at us, hidden behind wooden trellises with brushwood or behind knives, sickles, shears in *The Bedstead*. The subtext of *Bar Codes*, 1999, is unbearably poignant, with its double evocation of the hot, brilliantly-striped oriental textiles, each woven with their own ancestral meaning, versus first-world, capitalist transactions. It is upon these barred backgrounds that Rancillac projects film stills of victims taken from a newsreel - the looks of pain and shame that will be instantly forgotten: ghosts of the image of an image... Several hundred Algerians, notably women, came to see his 'Algérie' exhibition in Lyons in 2001. Paris will see these works this summer.

Rancillac's first painting of 2003, *Night in Chechenya* stands in his studio; anonymous soldiers in a dug-out stare at a traditionally-decorated marriage photo. Returning from the Picabia retrospective in the building that housed 'Mythologies quotidiennes' almost forty years ago, Rancillac reflects on Picabia's pioneering superimposition of images - Picabia's cocktails thown in the public's face. His own heroes remain Warhol, Godard, Miles Davies; his heroines the women he loves, his stars, the girls who teased him with cheap lingerie for his recent 'Woman' series. An Algerian face stares out through metal barriers onto the scene. Another war approaches. History stands still.

With thanks to Bernard Rancillac, Serge Fauchereau, Jean-Clarence Lambert, Rut Blee Luxembourg, Catherine Petitgas, Yann Perreau and my students. Unpaginated references in the footnotes come from Bernard Rancillac's press archives.

ⁱ Bernard Rancillac, *Le regard idéologique*, Paris, Editions Mariette Guena / Somogy, 2000, p. 24.

ⁱⁱ 'Disdain and frivolity': Rancillac's words, *Manifeste*, 9, March 1989.

ⁱⁱⁱ In conjunction with *Le regard idéologique*, see Gérald Gassiot-Talabot's retrospective essay, 'De la Figuration narrative à la Figuration critique', *Face à l'histoire, l'artiste moderne devant l'événement historique, 1993-1996*, Paris, Flammarion / Centre Georges Pompidou, 1996, pp. 358-363. to frame this essay within a broader context.

^{iv} Rancillac has a *langue d'Oc* derivation meaning 'hard rock'. Yssingaux is a volcanic outcrop 850 metres above sea-level.

^v The dates in the Galerie La Roue catalogue should be corrected to 1949-1951 with Met de Penningham (not 1950-1953) and 1951-1952, military service in Meknes, Marocco (not 1954-55; Rancillac, 23 February, 2003).

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- ^{vi} The Fantomas series (based on the Cubists' favourite detective character) was exhibited in 'Donner à voir', Galerie Creuze in late 1962.
- ^{vii} See Gérald Gassiot-Talabot, *Cimaise*, 66, 1964; Serge Fauchereau: '2 petites fables éparpillées dans le journal colorié' and Meyer Raphael Rubinstein, 'Elements of a diagnostic', *Bernard Rancillac*, Galleria Civica di Palazzo Todeschini, May-June, 1991.
- ^{viii} 'I can see the family spirit' said a lady from Auvergne... See François Pluchart, 'Rancillac comme son père', *Combat*, 14 October, 1963, on his first twin solo shows at the Galerie la Roue and Galerie le Soleil dans la tête.
- ^{ix} See for example Jean-Robert Arnaud, 'Mise-à-mort dans Venise-la-Rouge', *Cimaise*, 69-70, 1964, pp. 104-122.
- ^x See *Paris-New York*, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1977; Amy J. Dempsey, *the Freidnship of America and France: A New Internationalism, 1961-1964*, Ph.D. University of London, 1999; Eric de Chasse, 'Paris-New York: Rivalry and Denial', *Paris, Capital of the Arts, 1900-1968*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2002, pp. 344-351.
- ^{xi} See Laure Phélip, *La réception des artistes américains à Paris, 1958-1968, Néo-Dadaïsme et Pop Art*, Maîtrise, Université Paris I, 2000.
- ^{xii} Rancillac saw Caulfield's work in London's Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1963 prior to the 'Saison de la Nouvelle Peinture Anglaise, Patrick Caulfield, Derek Boshier', fourth Biennale de Paris, Musée de la Ville de Paris, 1965.
- ^{xiii} The organising committee officially comprised Marie-Claude Dane, François Mathey, François Wehrin, Gérald Gassiot-Talabot, Peter Foldes, Bernard Rancillac and Hervé Télémaque.
- ^{xiv} François Pluchart, 'Mythologies quotidiennes', *Combat*, 8 July, 1964.
- ^{xv} François Pluchart, '...Une concession masochiste', *ibid.*
- ^{xvi} Serge Fauchereau, *Bernard Rancillac*, Paris, Éditions Cercle d'Art, 1991, p. 48.
- ^{xvii} See Leonard, 'Vers une nouvelle Ecole de Paris'; Michel Ragon, 'On ne sauvera pas l'École de Paris en imitant New York', *Arts*, 8 July, 1964; 'Trois peintres leaders de la jeune École de Paris: Télémaque, Rancillac, Arroyo', *Art international*, June 1965, p. 48, etc.
- ^{xviii} See *Peter Saul*, Musée de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix /Paris, Editions Somogy, 1999
- ^{xix} See Gérald Gassiot-Talabot: 'Le ballon dans la figuration narrative', *Phenix*, 3, 1967.
- ^{xx} Fauchereau, *Bernard Rancillac*, p. 62, illustrates an extract from *Salvator*, which was published in the French comic *Tarzan* 1948-50. See Thierry Groensteen with Michel Mercier, 'The dawn of revolution. Comic strips and newspaper cartoons', *The Sixties, Britains and France. The Utopian Years, 1962-1973*, D. A. Mellor and L. Gervereau eds., London, Philip Wilson, 1997, pp. 132-149.

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- ^{xxi} Gerald Gassiot-Talabot: 'Rancillac, ou l'insolence', *Les annales du mois*, June, 1965, p.57.
- ^{xxii} Raoul-Jean Moulin, 'Rancillac. Où es-tu? Où te caches-tu?', *Les Lettres Françaises*, 27 May-2 June, 1965. By late 1965, Rancillac had exhibited in Bochum, Tokyo, Geneva, Lund. 'La Figuration narrative dans l'art contemporain' which baptised the movement that year travelled from the Galerie Creuze in Paris to Prague.
- ^{xxiii} The chair was exhibited in 'Objet 2' Galerie Lacloche, place Vendôme, June, 1966
- ^{xxiv} Serge Fauchereau, 'Lieu Commun', (*Phantomas*, Brussels, 1977) in *Fictions complètes*, Paris, Seghers, 1983, pp. 50-52.
- ^{xxv} Rancillac, 'L'art et la cité', Centre Culturel de Vitry, 3, February, 1969.
- ^{xxvi} See Rancillac, *Le regard idéologique*, pp. 215-6.
- ^{xxvii} See Jacques Borgé, Nicolas de Rabaudy: 'Un procès très parisien', *Paris-Match*, 940, 15 april, 1967, and Gérard Gassiot-Talabot, 'Arts', *Candide*, 315, and 'Le diner des têtes de Rancillac', *Arts-Loisirs*, 87, June 1967, p. 30.
- ^{xxviii} Pierre Bourdieu is described in the catalogue as 'sociologist, Director of Studies at the EÉcole des Hautes Études, and author of *L'Amour de l'Art*, *Un Art Moyen* and *Les Héritiers*.'
- ^{xxix} Gérard Fromanger in conversation with Atissah Dorroh, 21 May, 1998. See Dorroh, *A Territory for the Imagination: Mao's China in French Painting, 1966-1976*, M.A thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London 1998, p. 35
- ^{xxx} 'Exposition d'arts plastiques au XVIII congrès du Parti communiste français', preface signed 'Levallois, 4 janvier 1967' including Picasso, *Massacre in Corea*, Matta, *The Rosenbergs*, Eduardo Arroyo: *Spain's worries*, André Fougeron, *Funeral procession, 13 February*, Jean Dewasne: *Fragment of Empedocles* (geometric abstraction) etc.
- ^{xxxi} See Atissah Dorroh above.
- ^{xxxii} Rancillac, *Le regard idéologique*, p. 149.
- ^{xxxiii} Rancillac in *Le Monde en Question, ou 26 Peintres de contestation*, ARC, Musée de la Ville de Paris, 1967.
- ^{xxxiv} Gérard Gassiot-Talabot, in *Marie-Claire*, 169, I November 1966, in response to the show 'Zoom/1', Rancillac, Monory, Beynoun and Alleyn, Galerie Blumenthal-Mommaton. See Alain Jouffroy, 'Les Visionneurs' (1973) in *Les Pré-voyants*, Brussels, La Connaissance, 1974, pp. 103-120.
- ^{xxxv} See *Opus International*, 3, October 1967 (including Gérard Gassiot-Talabot 'La Havane: Peinture et Révolution' : '... Martinez is Cuba's Rancillac, the prototype of an incontestably

talented artist in a society which seeks his effective participation...') and 'Congres Culturel de la Havane', *Opus International* 4, December 1967, pp. 77.

^{xxxvi} See Pierre Cabanne, 'Les Deux Bernard', *Arts et Loisirs*, 72, 8-14 February 1967, pp 32-36 and Jeannine Warnod, 'De l'espace abstrait à l'événement', *Le Figaro*, 9 March 1967 comparing 'L'Année 66', Galerie Blumenthal with Tapie's tripartite show 'Devenir de l'abstraction' at the Galerie Stadler.

^{xxxvii} Francis Parent and Raymond Perrot's *Le Salon de la Jeune Peinture, une histoire, 1950-1983*, Montreuil, Édition JP, 1983, gives a comprehensive view the spectrum of these artists and their origins in the militant painting of the 1950s, their political debates and purges in the 1960s etc.

^{xxxviii} See Joanna Lowther, *The Warhol Effect in France, 1963-1971*, M.A., Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 2001, with appendices reproducing Warhol's Paris catalogues

^{xxxix} *Opus International*, 1, 'Dossier du siège de Paris', cover collage by the Polish artist, Roman Cieslewicz with drawing by Roland Topor. Cieslewicz's brilliant graphics created the look of 1970's Paris.

^{xl} Jean-Clarence Lambert, 'Bris/collage/K: un rêve collectif' (extract, with a collage by Rancillac), *Opus International*, 3, October, 1967, p. 50 (he gives Lévi-Strauss's anthropological definition of *bricolage*). See also *Un Rêve collectif, précédé de diverses activités scéniques. Le Principe d'incertitude. Bris/Collage/K*, with four collages by Cieslewicz, Paris, Georges Fall, May 1968.

^{xli} Cohn-Bendit, a French-German binational of Jewish origin, had opted for German citizenship to dissociate himself from the Algerian War. See Cohn-Bendit, 'Les objectifs des 22 marsiens', *Opus International*, 7, 'Violence/Mai 68', pp. 52-3; 'Cohn-Bendit, affiche de l'Atelier populaire des Beaux-Arts, *Quinzaine littéraire*, 16-31 October, 1968 etc.

^{xlii} See the tract describing this 1969 action by Dronda, Dufo, Frangin, Goetz, Rancillac, Vimard, in Fauchereau, *Bernard Rancillac*, p. 114. A response to Pierre Gaudibert, 'Que ferez-vous?', advocating 'Contact and direct sales in popular areas, in the street and markets in the different quarters and the suburbs', *Opus International* 9, December, 1968, pp 91-2?

^{xliii} See *Opus International*, 4, December 1967, special USA/USSR underground number, with 'USA résistance bibliographie', p. 104, and Nelcya Delanoë, *Le Raspail Vert: L'American Center a Paris, 1934-1994*, Paris, Seghers, 1994.

^{xliv} See the review, *Opus International*, 12, June, 1969, p 40ff.

^{xlv} See Fauchereau, *Bernard Rancillac*, p. 113.

^{xlvi} Pascal Rossini, 'Le temps du kitsch', *L'Art vivant*, November 1969, pp 12-13. The etymological discussion (offering equivalents, 'le "frelatée" ' or 'camelote'), suggest this may be a pioneering French article on the subject, despite Gillo Dorfless' book, *Il Kitsch, antologia del cattivo gusto*, Milan, 1968, surely known to all the artists working on the Paris-Milan axis).

^{xlvi} See Jean Clair on Paris's lateness and the end of Warhol-fever in New York in the Vietnam context: 'La chute d'un ange', *Chroniques de l'Art vivant*, 16, December 1970-January 1971, p. 14.

^{xlvi} Jean Clair, 'Hyperréalisme, 7^{ème} Biennale de Paris', *Chroniques de l'Art vivant*, 24, October 1971, with Aragon photograph.

^{xlvi} Laurent Joffrin, 'Ces artistes qui ont "fait" les années 70', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 26 mars 1 avril, 1998, p. 138

¹ Gilbert Mury, a philosophy professor, banned from teaching, was President of the 'amitiés franco-albanaises', thanks to which Rancillac went to Albania. His militant text was not checked by Blaise Gauthier of the CNAC and provoked a furore at ministerial level. For Mury's funeral of 18 May 1975, attended by revolutionaries from all over the world at the Père Lachaise cemetery, see *Le Regard idéologique*, 2000, pp 143-4.

^{li} See Rancillac on the narrative significance of the installation as a whole in *Le Regard idéologique*, p. 218-9.

^{lii} For Mao's pronouncements and related texts see Eric Jannicot, *La Pensée plastique de Zao Wou-ki et la naissance de l'art moderne chinois*, 3e cycle, Paris-I Sorbonne, 1984.

^{liii} See Julia F. Andrews: *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, Berkeley and London, University of California Press, 1994.

^{liv} See Atissah Dorroh, *A Territory for the Imagination*, 1998 and Joanna Large: *All roads lead to Peking: Joris Ivens and Gérard Fromanger in China, 1974*, MA, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 2001

^{lv} See Rancillac, 'La bande de huit cent millions', in *Le regard idéologique*, pp. 145-172 (he emphasises the active role of the Association des amitiés franco-chinoises).

^{lvi} See for example *Esthétique et Marxisme*, selected essays, or Mikel Dufrenne's *Art et Politique*, both of 1974 (Rancillac's library, heavily marked) published by the 10.18 paperback imprint which had introduced Adorno and Lyotard to a wide public the previous year. Patrick d'Elme's *Peinture et Politique*, Maison Mame, 1974, took Rancillac as a test case, see Chapter 5: 'Le fleur de lys et le petit livre rouge'. See also d'Elme, 'Desacraliser la peinture', *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 25 February-3 March, 1974, p. 15.

^{lvii} Interview with Gérard Fromanger, 21 May, 1998, in Atissah Dorroh, 1998, p. 35.

^{lviii} See Cabanne, 'Rêvez avec eux', (*Combat*, 1971) on Rancillac's 'generous dream' of the denunciation of Evil and celebration of Good' in Jean-Louis Pradel, *La Figuration Narrative*, Hazan, 2000, p 179. The 'Schwarz-Weiss – Dialektik' (black-white dialectic) and its implications are at the centre of the newspaper format flyer, 'Bernard Rancillac, Der Wind', by Werner Hofmann, *Ferdinands-Tor-Blatt*, January 1972.

^{lix} `This painting which makes a pleonasm of the image denounces the fact that the image makes a pleonasm of the world', Bourdieu, *L'Année 66*, 1967, np.

^{lx} See Rancillac, *Le Regard Idéologique*, pp. 57-8. In the wake of Jacques Derrida's *Spectres de Marx*, Paris, Galilée, 1993, Stéphane Courtois ed., *Le Livre noir du communisme*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1997 and its fallout, `Retour(s) à Marx/ Returns to Marx' was held at the French Institute and Tate Modern, 31 May/1 June, 2002, and `Retours à Marx, une autre mondialisation?' (around Derrida's *Marx & Sons*, Galilée, 2002) Collège de Philosophie, Paris, 27/28 February, 2003.

^{lxi} Read *Le regard idéologique* with `Revolution Exorcised: 1968-1981', in Sunil Khilnani's *Arguing Revolution. The Intellectual Left in Postwar France*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1993, pp. 121-154 and alternative French accounts (Jeannine Verdès-Leroux etc.)

^{lxii} Rancillac, `Pièces à conviction', *Le Regard idéologique*, pp 5-21.

^{lxiii} Little did Rancillac know how he was repeating, a generation later, Taslitzky's own Communist-Party sponsored trip to Albania in 1957.

^{lxiv} Rancillac, *Le regard idéologique*, pp. 230-231.

^{lxv} `What is to be done?' Lenin's classic question of 1902. (see `Que Faire? Lénine et Tschernychevski' in Jean-Michel Palmier: *Lénine, L'art et la Révolution*, Editions Payot, Paris, 1975, Chapter 2).

^{lxvi} `Concert de Jazz' 27 September, 1964, flyer.

^{lxvii} See for example `Bilan discographique de l'année', *Opus International* 4, December 1967, pp. 107; Philippe Gras cover and `Musique noire', *Chroniques de l'Art vivant*, 5, November, 1969 pp. 27-29; Philippe Gras, `L'Europe, le "freejazz" et la "pop music"' *l'Art vivant* 6, 1969, pp. 2-8; `Cecil Taylor' interview, *l'Art vivant*, 8, February, 1970, p 26ff; `Free jazz' *l'Art vivant*, 12, July 1970, `Special USA', p. 30; etc.

^{lxviii} Jean-Marc Poinot, *Opus International*, 23 (extract from Rancillac press book)

^{lxix} Holger Meins, Andreas Baader and Jan-Carl Raspe were arrested in 1972. For a full account see Robert Storr ed., *Gerhard Richter, 18 October 1977*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2001, Peter Wollen's analysis in `Leave Taking', *The London Review of Books*, vol.23, 7, 5 April 2001, and Robert Storr ed., *Gerhard Richter, Forty years of painting*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2002.

^{lxx} The Italian Red Brigade's move to direct terrorist action involving civilian victims, was one reason for an end to militancy amongst the French maoists in 1973, when the Gauche Prolétarienne was dissolved ... See Fromanger in Atissah Dorroh, 1998, p. 34 – and Christophe Bourseiller, *Les Maöistes*, Paris, Plon, 1996.

^{lxxi} Rancillac in conversation with Francis Colin, *Rancillac*, Salle Robert Desnos, Ris-Orangis, 31 October – 3 December, 1978, np, (extract reproduced in Fauchereau, 1991, pp. 148-9).

72 Ibid. See also Rancillac in conversation with Sabine Minne, *Princip actif*, August-September 1989 no. 3 p. 6.

^{lxxiii} See Fromanger's *Rebellion, Toul prison* series of 1974 for example. While Rancillac's Meinhof suite was in Grenoble. 'Figures d'enfermement' was held on the prison theme at ELAC, Espace Lyonnais d'Art Contemporain, - a wide range of expressionist painters (Bacon, Rebeyrolle) with the Narrative Figuration group (*Le Monde*, 23, January 1980).

^{lxxiv} The series was shown in 'Tendances de l'Art II' including 'Les partis pris de Gassiot-Talabot' ARC, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, late 1979. Rancillac's suite, was seen with the show 'Ernest Pignon-Ernest, 10 ans de travail' and 'Prisons. Images d'enfermement' - prisoners' work, 'from wooden objects, worked with forks.. to El Greco copies.' See Philippe Merlant, 'A la Maison de la Culture de Grenoble', *Libération*, 26 January, 1980.

^{lxxv} See Jean Ristat, Serge Fauchereau, 'Entretien avec Bernard Rancillac' *Digraphe*, January, 1984, 35, dossier 'De la pornographie' . p. 122 (cover by Rancillac, and the first published extracts of *Le Regard idéologique*, pp. 111-119).

^{lxxvi} Rancillac, interview with Joanna Boulos, May 26th, 2000, in Joanna Boulos, *Bernard Rancillac, Les années politiques*, MA. Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 2000.

^{lxxvii}. See Jeanne Modigliani, *Deux Peintres et un poète, Retour d'Algérie*, Paris, 1952; Franz Fanon, *L'An V de la Révolution algérienne*, Paris, Maspero, 1960, pp. 154-5; Simone de Beauvoir, Gisèle Halimi et al., *Djamila Boupacha*, Gallimard, Paris, 1962, frontispiece by Picasso.

^{lxxviii} Rancillac in conversation with Thierry Laurent, *Verso*, 22, dossier Bernard Rancillac, April, 2001, p. 17.