

Yuk Hui
**In Memory of
Bernard**

01/05

How can I believe that Bernard has already left us? It is true that he has left, but I don't believe it and I will not believe it. Since I woke up on August 7 and read about the death of Bernard Stiegler, I have listened to his voice on the radio and felt Bernard's presence, his generosity, his warm greetings and smiles. I haven't been able to stop my tears. I was on the phone with Bernard just a week ago, talking about an event in Arles at the end of August and our future projects. Bernard's voice was weaker than usual, but he was positive. He complained that his mobile didn't work and his printer was broken, and he wasn't able to buy new ones online because he needed a verification code sent to his mobile. Yet he continued to write. On August 6, I felt unusually weak myself. My belly was aching. This happened to me two years ago when my friend and copyeditor committed suicide. I dragged my body to the post office to send Bernard some Korean ginseng I had promised him a while ago, but the post office was closed due to COVID-19. When I got home, I thought to send him a message telling him that two special journal issues I edited, and that he took part in, were about to come out. I now regret that I didn't manage to tell him, since I no longer have the chance to talk to him anymore.

I met Bernard in November 2008 in London, though I had already seen him lecture several times. I went to St. Pancras Station with a colleague to pick him up. I was young, excited, and very nervous. I had read *Technics and Time, volume 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, his *Echographies of Television* with Jacques Derrida, and watched with admiration *The Ister*, a film made by David Barison and Bernard's long time translator and friend Dan Ross, and which I screened many times for my students. Like everyone, I was intrigued by Bernard's past as a bank robber who took up philosophy again during his five years of incarceration. I had already intensively studied Heidegger's *Being and Time* and his later work after the *Kehre*, and thought I had penetrated into some important aspects of Heidegger's thought on technology. But reading *Technics and Time 1* was mind-blowing and revealing. I read it several times, sentence by sentence, and each reading was an extraordinary experience. Bernard deconstructed Heidegger's *Being* using the concept of technics (tertiary retention), and opened a breach to enter Heidegger's thinking and reconstruct it from within. Even more impressive was Bernard's ambition to deconstruct the history of Western philosophy. For him, the question of technology, which was indeed the first philosophy, is repressed – in Freud's sense – by the history of philosophy. The first two volumes of *Technics and*

e-flux journal #110 — June 2020 Yuk Hui
In Memory of Bernard



Épineuil-le-Fleuriel, Summer 2015, Photo: Michaël Crevoisier.

Time were dedicated to the deconstruction of phenomenology in Heidegger and Husserl. The third volume on cinema is the deconstruction of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and a critique of the Frankfurt School.

This third volume of *Technics and Time* was also the beginning of Bernard's political writings against the technological industry and capitalism. Bernard published almost one book a year, spanning various subjects including aesthetics, democracy, political economy, automation, and so on. Bernard is not against industry as such, but rather the short-term thinking of industrial production and the cynicism of all forms of denial. The current industrial program is based on profit-making, notably consumerism, and no longer takes care of the population, especially the younger generation – the generation of Greta Thunberg. This is also the condition under which technology becomes toxic. From the third volume of *Technics and Time* onward, Bernard systematically attempted to find new weapons in his reading of Marx, Freud, Simondon, biology, and economy. The task of *Ars Industrialis*, an association Bernard created with his friends in 2006, was dedicated to the transformation of industry. His project at Sant-Denis, in the north of Paris, is a collaboration with various industrial partners and banks to develop a new political economy, which he called an economy of contribution.

I still remember that it was a rainy day. He was wearing his black coat and hat, like a typical French intellectual, but still I offered him my umbrella. He refused at first, but then accepted. Bernard was very friendly. He asked me what I was reading. I replied that I was reading his *Acting Out* and another book by the historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot. He was surprised. I had just recovered from a near-fatal disease and was fascinated by the resonance between his philosophy and ancient spiritual practice. Bernard gave a keynote speech in a conference, and I also gave a talk; he was very interested in my work on relation and David Hume and asked me to keep in touch. A few months later, during a debate with David Graeber and Yann Moulier Boutang that Scott Lash organized at Goldsmiths (when a Russian artist, a self-proclaimed fan of Giorgio Agamben, took a shit in front of the speakers to demonstrate his understanding of resistance), he asked me to give a talk in his seminars in Paris. Later, he agreed to supervise my PhD thesis. I looked up to Bernard, and every time I met him to discuss my thesis I felt I was wasting his time. But Bernard was warm and generous – he never treated me as a student. He respected me as a friend and was always

interested in knowing my ideas. I don't remember all of these scenes, but so many details are still vivid today. During one of the meetings, Bernard advised me not to read too much Heidegger, since, according to him, great thinkers only have one or two major works, and for Heidegger it is *Being and Time*. Once, when we were waiting to cross the street, he said there is someone you should take seriously later in your life, and that is Jacques Derrida. I published my thesis *On the Existence of Digital Objects* in 2016, and Bernard kindly contributed a preface.

I only came to know Bernard more personally after I moved to Paris from London and started working in his Institute of Research and Innovation, an institute he created with Vincent Puig in 2006 after leaving his post as director of the Department of Cultural Development at the Centre Georges Pompidou. Before his directorship there, under at the invitation of the musician and composer Pierre Boulez, he was director of IRCAM (Institute for Research and Coordination in Acoustics/Music), an institute of the Centre Pompidou. Bernard's life was legendary, much more than anyone else I've met in my life. A farm worker, an owner of a jazz bar, a former bank robber who studied philosophy in the prison of Toulouse with the help of the phenomenologist Gérard Granel, a masters student of Jean-François Lyotard, then a PhD student of Jacques Derrida, then a person responsible for several projects including one in the 1980s with the National Library of France on digitalization in the 1980s, before becoming acting director of INA (National Audiovisual Institute), then IRCAM, finally retiring from IRI in 2018.

I eventually left France to take a job in Germany, but my relationship with Bernard became even closer. He was a visiting professor for a semester at the Leuphana University in Lüneburg where I worked, and later he was a visiting professor at the Humboldt University in Berlin where I lived, so we were able to meet almost every week during the semesters. I went to his summer school every year in Épineuil-le-Fleuriel, in the countryside of central France, where Bernard and his family organized weeklong seminars with invitees and students. It was a festival of thinking and friendship, which unfortunately ended in 2017. With the passing of Bernard, those French summers I had almost every year since 2010 seem so far away.

I went to China for the first time with Bernard and his family in 2015. Bernard always told everyone that I brought him to China, but I think it was the other way around. I had already lived in

03/05

e-flux journal #110 — June 2020 Yuk Hui
In Memory of Bernard

Europe for a decade, and would only go to Hong Kong once a year for a few days at a time to see my parents, without passing through mainland China. The trip to Hangzhou with Bernard was an important event in my life, since I rediscovered China and was able to do so thanks to the generosity of Gao Shiming, who recently became the dean of the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou. From 2015 on, Bernard and I taught a master class together in Hangzhou, where I also had the chance to have lunch and dinner with him almost every day. During some warm spring nights, we went for a glass of wine on the terrace of an Italian restaurant next to the academy. We had many great conversations. I remember in 2018 Bernard was smoking, with his glass of wine, and all of a sudden said to me, "Do you remember I once asked you not to read Heidegger?" I replied, "Yes, I remember, it was 10 years ago, but I didn't follow your advice." He smiled and said, "I know that you didn't listen to me, and I now think I was wrong."

In 2016, I published my second monograph, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics*, a response to and a critique of Heidegger's 1953 essay "The Question Concerning Technology." In this book, I presented a reading of Heidegger different from Bernard's, but the second part of the book still relies on his critique of Heidegger's concept of world history to deconstruct the Kyoto school and New Confucianism. I dedicated this book to Bernard, for without our numerous discussions, and without the spirit of rebellion he affirmed in me, I wouldn't have been able to make this step. This book, however, posed a problem for Bernard. He disagreed with me, not in my reading of Heidegger, but in my reading of the French palaeontologist André Leroi-Gourhan. We discussed it during a trip to Chengdu in 2018 while on our way to see the pandas with his son, Augustin. We were supposed to have a debate on it in our seminars in Taipei in 2019, but we didn't manage. Finally we thought to stage it in a special issue of *Angelaki* dedicated to the concept of cosmotechnics, which came out on the day of his death. It was very generous of Bernard to complete his article in April from the hospital, while suffering from a lot of pain. However, he changed the direction in the essay and we never staged our confrontation.

Bernard left us a wealth of original and groundbreaking work on philosophy and technology. He never limits himself to a single discipline, nor is he satisfied with any superficial interdisciplinary studies. He has been trying to invent new thinking and practice to break down boundaries and offer vision and hope. He is a

thinker of catastrophe, or, more precisely, a tragic thinker who never missed the chance to turn the contingent event into a philosophical necessity. Still, Bernard owes us the multiple additional volumes of *Technics and Time* that he promised. Bernard told me several times about his psychedelic experience in prison. He wrote a text during that time that he couldn't understand. When he showed it to Gérard Granel, Granel told him, "this is going to be your philosophy." The text was included in his PhD thesis, and Jean-Luc Marion, who was on the committee of his thesis defense, wanted to publish it independently, but Bernard refused. This part was supposed to become the seventh volume of *Technics and Time*, but we are still waiting for the fourth, fifth, and sixth. According to Bernard, this mysterious text is about a spiral. I have never read it, but I started to wonder whether it was close to what I wrote in *Recursivity and Contingency*, whose introduction was titled "A Psychedelic Becoming." Bernard read the book, and thought that it was important that I engaged with German idealism and cybernetics, and recommended it to French publishers. However, we never discussed the relation between recursivity and his concept of the spiral since we missed the chance last year.

Last year, when we were walking around West Lake in Hangzhou, I told him that I once got quite drunk with his old friends Ishida Hidetaka and Hiroki Azuma. Bernard was very happy. He said that after his time in prison he never really got drunk, since he stopped enjoying the feeling of intoxication, but he would like to make an exception. In the restaurant, he ordered a bottle of wine, but I couldn't drink more than a glass since I was still suffering from the exhaustion of completing *Recursivity and Contingency*. Bernard took half the bottle back to his hotel room, and I missed the chance to get him drunk. But, after all, Bernard is the tragist who doesn't need intoxication.

This year I had hoped to find him again in Hangzhou, but the pandemic killed any possibility of such a meeting. The last time I saw Bernard was in November 2019, when we went to Taiwan together to give master classes at the invitation of the Taipei National University of the Arts. I was supposed to go to Paris that December to give a talk at his annual conference, but I was too exhausted to go. This year, the conference will still take place in December, though Bernard will no longer be there with us.

Bernard chose to leave us during a destitute time, when stupidity has become the norm, when politics is no more than lies. All this is

accelerated by the pandemic, and it is all that he fought against in his life. Since 2016, Bernard spoke often about dreams and the necessity of dreaming. Industrial capitalism destroys dreams. It only produces consumerism through the manipulation of attention. The faculty of dreaming, for him, is the faculty that Kant ignored. Bernard was a dreamer who dreamed the impossible, a fighter who fought against stupidity. As he often said: *il faut combattre*. Bernard spoke highly of Hayao Miyazaki's film *The Wind Rises*, which he saw as a good example of the faculty of dreaming. All technologies are primarily dreams, but dreams can also become nightmares, and this makes them pharmacological. After Plato and Derrida, it was Bernard who became the pharmacologist of technology. Today, however, most universities of science and technology work for the industry. Even if they talk about ethics, they no longer need philosophy, because they have already lost the capacity to dream. "The wind rises" is also a phrase from his favorite poem by Paul Valéry, "Le cimetière marin." The poem ends with the following verse, words that could have been left by Bernard, the greatest tragicist after Nietzsche:

The wind is rising! ... We must try to live!
 The huge air opens and shuts my book: the wave
 Dares to explode out of the rocks in reeking
 Spray. Fly away, my sun-bewildered pages!
 Break, waves! Break up with your rejoicing
 surges
 This quiet roof where sails like doves were
 pecking.
 – August 8, 2020

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05/05

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