

In Memory of Bernard

How could I believe that Bernard has already left us?

It is true that Bernard has left, but I don't believe and will not believe.

Since I woke up on the 7th of August and read about the death of Bernard, I listened to his voice on radio and I felt the presence of Bernard, his generosity, his warm greetings and smiles; I couldn't stop my tears. I was on telephone with Bernard a week ago, talking about an event in Arles end of August, about our future projects. Bernard's voice was weaker than that I remember, but he was positive. He complained that his mobile phone didn't work and his printer was broken, while he wasn't able to buy new ones online because he will need a verification code sent to his mobile phone, however, he continued to write. On the 6th of August, I felt unusually weak myself, my belly was aching; this happened to me two years ago when my friend and copy editor committed suicide; I dragged my body to the post office to send Bernard some Korean ginseng, which I promised a while ago, but the post office was closed due to Covid 19. After I went home, I was planning to send him a message telling him that two journal special issues that I edited and that he has participated are about to come out. But I regret that I didn't do it, since I no longer have the chance to talk to him anymore.

I met Bernard in November 2008 in London, though I saw him already several times during his lectures. I went to the St. Pancras Station to pick him up with a colleague. I was young, excited and very nervous. I have read *Technics and Time volume 1 The Fault of Epimetheus*, his *Echographies of Television* with Jacques Derrida, and watched *The Ister* with admiration, a film made by David Barison and Bernard's long time translator and friend Dan Ross, and a film I watched many times with my students. Like anyone else, I was intrigued by his past as a bank robber and 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*; I thought I have penetrated into some aspects of Heidegger's thought on technology.

But the reading of *Technics and Time 1* was mind blowing and revealing. I read it several times, sentence by sentence; every time was an extraordinary experience.



(Épineuil summer school, August 2014, photos: Geert Lovink)

Bernard deconstructed Heidegger's Being with the concept of technics, and opened a breach to enter Heidegger's thinking and reconstructs it from within. But what is even more impressive was his ambition to deconstruct the history of Western philosophy. For him, the question of technology, which was indeed the first philosophy, is repressed—in the sense of Freud's use of the term, by the history of philosophy. The first two volumes of *Technics and Time* were dedicated to the deconstruction of phenomenology

of Heidegger and Husserl; the third volume on cinema is the deconstruction of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and a critique of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School.

The third volume of *Technics and Time* was also the beginning of Bernard's politicized writings against the technological industry and capitalism. Bernard published almost one book each year, spanning various subjects including, aesthetics, democracy, political economy, automation, etc. Bernard is not against industry *per se*, but rather the short-termism of the industry and the cynicism of all forms of denial; the current program of the industry is based on a short-termism of profit making, notably consumerism, and by doing so, it no longer has the intention to take 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 Times* on, Bernard attempted to systematically find new weapons in his reading of Marx, Freud, Simondon, biology, and economy among others. The task of the *Ars Industrialis*, an association that Bernard created with his friends in 2006 was dedicated to the transformation of the industry; his current project at the Saint-Denis, North of Paris, is a collaboration with various industrial partners and banks to develop a new political economy, which he calls an economy of contribution.

I still remember that it was a raining day. He was with his black coat and hat, like a typical French intellectual, but still I gave him my umbrella. He refused at the beginning 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 just recovered from a fatal disease and I was fascinated by the resonance between his philosophy and the ancient spiritual practice. He gave a keynote speech in a conference, where I also gave a talk; Bernard was very interested in my work on relation and David Hume, and asked me to keep in touch with him. A few months later, during his debate with David Graeber and Yann Moulier Boutang at Goldsmiths College organized by Scott Lash (when a Russian artist, a self-claimed fan of Giorgio Agamben, went to shit in front of the speakers to demonstrate what he understand by resistance), he asked me to give a talk in his seminars in Paris. Later he agreed to supervise my PhD thesis.

Bernard was someone I looked up, and every time I met him to discuss my thesis, I only felt that 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 interested in knowing my thought. I didn't have the tertiary retention to record these scenes, but so many details are still vivid today. I still remember during one of the meetings, Bernard asked me not to read too many Heidegger, since, according to him, very great thinker only have one or two major works and for Heidegger it is *Being and Time*; and once when we were waiting to cross the road, he said there is someone who you should take seriously later in your life, it 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 that he created with Vincent Puig in 2006 when he quit his post as the director of the Department of Cultural Development at the Centre Georges Pompidou. Before his directorship at the Centre Pompidou, under the invitation of the musician and composer Pierre Boulez, he became 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 met in my life. A farm worker, a owner of a Jazz Bar, a former bank robber, studied philosophy in the prison of Toulouse with the help of the phenomenologist Gérard Granel, a master student of Jean-François Lyotard, a PhD student of Jacques Derrida, then responsible for several projects including one with the National Library of France on digitalization in the 1980s, before he became acting director of INA (National Audiovisual Institute), then IRCAM and retired from IRI in 2018.

Later I left France for Germany to take up a job, but my relation 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 live, so we were able to meet each other almost every week during the semester time. I went to his summer school every year in Epineuil since 2012, in the countryside of central France, where Bernard and his family organized weeklong seminars with invitees and students. It was a fest of thinking and friendship, which unfortunately ended in 2017. With the decease of Bernard, those French summers I have had almost every year since 2010 seem to be so far away.

I went to China for the first time with Bernard and his family in 2015. Bernard always said to everyone that I brought him to China, but I think it was the other way round. At that time I have already lived in Europe for a decade, and in between I only went to Hong Kong once a year for a few days to see my parents, and never passed by 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 through the generosity of Gao Shiming, who recently became the dean of the China Academy of Art. From 2015 on, we taught a master class together in Hangzhou; I also had the chance to see Bernard almost everyday for lunch and dinner; and during some warm spring nights, we went for a glass of wine at the terrace of an Italian restaurant next to the academy. We had many great conversations. I remember it was 2018, Bernard was smoking, with his glass of wine, and out of a sudden he 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 you. 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 different reading of Heidegger from his, 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 the numerous discussions we had, and without the spirit of rebellion that he affirmed in me, I wouldn't be able to make this step. This book, however, posed Bernard a problem. Bernard disagreed with me, not my reading of Heidegger, but my reading of the French palaeontologist André Leroi-Gourhan. We discussed about it during a trip to Chengdu in 2018, on our way to see pandas with his son Augustin; and we were supposed to debate about it during our seminars in Taipei in 2019, but we didn't manage to do it; finally we wanted to stage the debate in a special issue of *Angelaki* dedicated to the concept of cosmotechnics, which just came out on the day of his death. Bernard was very generous to complete this article during his hospital stay in April 2020, while he was suffering from a lot of pain, however, he changed the direction of the essay and we never came to a confrontational conversation.

Bernard left us a lot of original and groundbreaking work on philosophy and technology. He never limits himself to a single discipline, he was also never

satisfied with any superficial interdisciplinary studies; what he has been trying is to invent new thinking and practice, which break down the boundaries and give us visions and hopes. He is a thinker of catastrophe, or more precisely, a tragic thinker who never missed the chance to make the contingent event a philosophical necessity. Still, Bernard owes us multiple volumes of *Technics and Time* that he promised. Bernard said to me several times about his psychedelic experience in the prison. During that experience, he wrote a text, which he couldn't understand at that time. He showed this text to Gerard Granel, who told him "this is going to be your philosophy." This part was included in his PhD thesis, which Jean-Luc Marion, who was in the committee of the defense of his thesis, wanted to publish independently, but Bernard refused. This part was supposed to come out as the 7th volume of *Technics and Time*, though we are still waiting for the 4th, 5th and 6th. According to Bernard, this mysterious part is about a spiral. I have never read this part, but I started to think if it was close to what I wrote in *Recursivity and Contingency*, the introduction was titled "A psychedelic becoming." Bernard read the book, and thought that it is important that I engaged with German idealism and cybernetics, and recommended it to French publishers. However, we never discussed about the relation between recursivity and his concept of the spiral, since I missed the chance last year.

Last year, when we were walking around the lake, I told him that I was once quite drunk with his old friend Ishida Hidetaka and Hiroki Azuma. Bernard was very happy, and he said that after prison, he never really got drunk since he doesn't like anymore 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 had to take half of the bottle back to the hotel room, and I missed the chance to make him drunk. But after all, Bernard is the tragist who doesn't need intoxication.

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

destitute time, when stupidity becomes the norm, when politics is no more than lies. The pandemic accelerated the evil, which he has been fighting against in his life.

Since 2016, Bernard talked often about dreams, and the necessity of dreaming. Industrial capitalism destroys dreams; it only produces consumerism through the manipulation of attentions. The faculty of dreaming, for him, is the faculty that Kant has ignored. Bernard was a dreamer who dreamed for the impossible, a fighter who fought against stupidity, as he often said, “il faut combattre.” Bernard spoke highly of Hayao Miyazaki’s animation “The wind has risen,” which was for him a good example to explicate the faculty of dreaming. All technologies are primarily dreams, but dreams can also become nightmares, meaning pharmacological.

After Plato and Derrida, it was Bernard who became the pharmacologist of technology; however today most of the universities of science and technology only worked for the industry, they may talk about ethics, but they don’t need philosophy anymore, they already lost the capacity to dream. “The wind has risen” is a phrase from his favorite poem of Valéry, “Le cimetière marin,” the poem ends with the following verse, words that could have been left by Bernard, the greatest tragist 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.

Yuk Hui

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