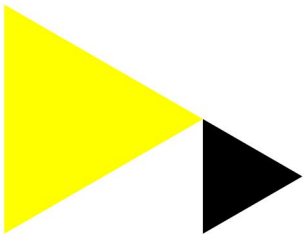
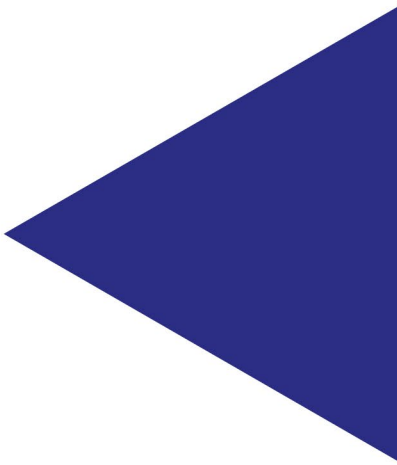
For a philosophy of technology in China

Geert Lovink interviews Yuk Hui





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INTRODUCTION

Soon after his first book on "digital objects",[1] philosopher Yuk Hui published a second title, *The Question Concerning Technology in China*.[2] We decided to do an interview again and focus on contemporary issues related to the rise of China as a world power. Hui's aim is to develop a speculative theory of "Chinese technicity."[3] China has caught up with the great powers but at the same time the country isn't ready yet to deal with the new situation. Hui observes that "China is on the same technological time-axis as the West, but what still lags behind is Chinese thought." According to Hui something went wrong in the separation of tradition and modern life. How could Chinese philosophy "think" technology, and how would such an intellectual enterprise, inevitably, be related to Western thought? Hui, who has been studying and working in Europe for the past decade, has not been able to distinguish China from Europe. If this was ever his ambition, he has failed. Much like his first study, his main references are Martin Heidegger, his French contemporary Gilbert Simondon and today's philosopher of technology, Bernard Stiegler. Equipped with all the latest insights from London, Paris and Berlin, Hui sends the unequivocal message to Beijing that technologies are not merely instruments. They affect the Chinese mind, and all forms of dualism between technology and thought are revealed to be erroneous.

The first part of Hui's fascinating book is dedicated to historical Chinese philosophy and the distinction between *Qi* (tool) and *Dao* (wholeness). It culminates in the crucial historical question, formulated by Joseph Needham, why modern science and technology didn't emerge in China, despite all the elements being present for this emergence in the 16th century. The second part asks what the long-term impact has been of the absence of geometry in ancient China. Instead of going into the direction of an essentialist geo-politics, Hui favours time over space and argues for another view of world history. What will sinofuturism look like in the age of the Anthropocene?

INTERVIEW

Geert Lovink You state that the second half of the 20th century in China did not result in any type of philosophical reflection on the nature of technology. Why was this reflection all but impossible? Are we talking here about a taboo, censorship, a particular blind spot in Marxism-Leninism?

Yuk Hui Technology is at the centre of Marxist thought, since the tool is central to hominisation. This was already clearly stated by Engels in his *Dialectics of Nature*, which later became a central scientific view of the Chinese communist party. Until the 1990s, disciplines like science and technology studies and the philosophy of technology didn't exist in China, they were all put within a "dialectics of nature," which is the title of a manuscript from Engels. However, this anthropological reading of technology which one can find in the chapter "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man" prevents further reflection since it assumes a universal concept of technology. Marx might himself have admitted that his theory is very much a European one, which is the historical product of the Judeo-Christian tradition, but Marxians tend to seek in his thought a universal solution to the realisation of world history. There is a huge difference between applying Marx's thought to a non-European culture and considering Marx's thought as a stage of the *Geist*. The New Confucians of the 20th century who escaped China were very sceptical of such an "application" as a universal solution without considering the compatibility of the specificity of Chinese culture. At first glance, the Marxism-Leninism-Maoism trinity in China seems to have localised Marxist thought in China by adding some Chinese and Russian flavours. As political strategy or political economy, however, it legitimates Marxism as a universal science or logic, which falls prey to false oppositions such as matter and spirit, or modernity and tradition. If at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th cen-

tury, there was still a conscious distinction between Chinese *Qi* and Western *Qi* (i.e. tool), in the second half of the 20th century, that was no longer an issue, since tradition had given way to a problematic interpretation of materialism. The Cultural Revolution presents an extreme Westernisation, manifested in its intensive industrialisation, even if during this period China was more or less isolated. The economic reform that immediately followed didn't leave room for doubt either. Retrospectively, we can say that Deng Xiaoping was a great accelerationist, and acceleration will firstly have to remove obstacles imposed by tradition, including moral and epistemological ones.

GL Did critical thinking in this field instead move to Hong Kong and Taiwan? In November 2016 we both met in Hangzhou at the first conference of the Institute of Network Society. In June 2017 there was another meeting in Nanjing organised by the Nanjing University. How should we position your book in relation to these various locations? Are things changing on the mainland?

YH There is surely a hype about digital technologies, digital humanities, smart cities, archives, etc., but I think there is still room for a critical understanding of technology, and by critique I don't mean only social, economic and political critiques, but also historical-metaphysical ones. Last autumn I was asked by the China Academy of Art to organise a conference, and it was my aim to bring in a diversity of discourses while not being limited to any particular school. So I invited you, and also Matt Fuller, Wendy Chun, Hiroki Azuma, Ishida Hidetaka and many others. The title of the conference is "Forces of Reticulation." The word "reticulation" is from Gilbert Simondon and is central to the third part of *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, when he uses the terms "ground" and "figure" from *Gestalt* psychology to analyse the genesis of technicity departing from the magic phase. The third part is also where Simondon explains the genesis of technicity with which I identify my own notion of cosmotechnics.

The Nanjing conference that you mentioned was initiated by Bernard Stiegler, and supported by the Center for Studies of Marxist Social Theory of Nanjing University. It dealt with the subject of automation, and its participants included Toni Negri, David Harvey and others.

Things are changing rapidly in China. But the country also needs some new conceptual frameworks to conceive and cope with these changes. My book is a reflection on a long historical trajectory, which is of course beyond my limited com-

prehension, but I felt that it had—and has—to be done urgently and rigorously. I started working on it in 2009, but this project is just a beginning, it will take several generations to complete this task. I wrote this book not only for China; in fact, I have emphasised on many occasions in the book that every culture should reflect on the historical and metaphysical question of technology. Since the question is not only that China has to reflect on it, but also that *we* have to imagine a new form of globalisation. The one we have now is a historical consequence that we *had* to accept due to geo-political power differences. Trump's fear of China and the current hype of Asian futurism are indicators that we have to conceive a different globalisation. In order to do so, the primary task will be to understand the multiplicity of technicities.

GL Your choice to put Martin Heidegger at the very centre of your investigation on technology in China somehow comes as a surprise. Is this because you have been on the European continent too long? It's all the more striking as you also pay attention to Heidegger's 1936 call to defend Europe against the "Asiatics, barbarians, the rootless and allochthonic." I could have understood it if you had turned to Lewis Mumford, Günther Anders, Paul Virilio, or the Jünger brothers (Ernst and Friedrich, who were earlier, more original tech thinkers). There is also Science and Technology Studies (with the trajectory from Thomas Kuhn to Bruno Latour), Avital Ronell, and—let's not forget—the critique of development. You're using a German fascist philosopher to explain Chinese communist party industrial policies. That sounds a bit like the totalitarian theories of the 1950s. Why is it necessary for China to respond to Heidegger? What do *Meßkirch* and *Todtnauberg* have to offer those in Guangzhou, Shanghai and Chongqing? Environmental awareness? Comfort that culture and heritage in China was destroyed for a higher purpose? In short, why does the liberation of Chinese philosophy have to go through Western philosophy?

YH It doesn't mean that Mumford, Anders and Virilio are not good thinkers, I engage with them in my other writings, but Heidegger is different. Heidegger is close to the Jünger brothers, he was very much inspired by Ernst Jünger's *Der Arbeiter*, and Anders was his student, whose first volume of *Obsolescence of Man* has interesting contrasts with Simondon's *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* published two years later. But Anders's critique of technology remains a Heideggerian one, and this is very clear in the second volume published in the 1980s. The title of my book is a response to Heidegger's 1953 lecture *The Question Concerning Technology*. If I have to respond to Heidegger, it is not only because I have been intensively studying Heidegger in the past decade, but also because Hei-

degger's analysis of technology is at the same time fundamental and polemical. It is fundamental since Heidegger was able to analyse the relation between modern technology and the history of Western metaphysics. This elevates the question of technology from a social and economic level to a metaphysical level. It is polemical because the concept of technics is limited to the Greek notion of *technē* (*poiesis*, *hervorbringen*) and because technology came out of European modernity, whose essence is no longer *technē* but *Gestell*. The framework that Heidegger has constructed prepares for future dialogues with other philosophical systems.

While reading Heidegger's *Black Notebooks*, I came across an intriguing comment on Chinese communism, which became the second opening quote of my book: "If communism in China should come to rule, one can assume that only in this way will China become 'free' for technology. What is this process?" This sentence is very strange, to be sure. But what interests me about it is that it seems to hint at the lack of resistance against technology when communism came to power in China. We may want to ask, what does Heidegger mean by "not free" for technology? What kind of "resistance," if we can really use this word at all, can we imagine here? Resistance manifesting itself as hate and hostility against the Other, like what Heidegger himself has said about the Jewish and the Asiatic? Heidegger's reading of modern technology as an accomplishment of Western metaphysics is for me both a pivot and a shortcut to expose his own limits and to reopen the question of technology.

To liberate Eastern philosophy is to re-activate it, to give it wings so that it can escape the marginalisation by Western technology (metaphysics), and comprehend the latter from a new standpoint. I think that it is only by doing so that we can develop an Eastern "critical theory" or "critical philosophy." To reopen the question of technology is such a liberation and reinvention. For readers who know Chinese philosophy well will find out that I historicise its problematics in a framework different from conventional readings; I avoid falling prey to philological debates. I make comparisons between the East and West aided by Heidegger—for me it was necessary to take such a detour in order to systematise the investigation.

GL Can I propose a *Dao* reading of copycat culture? First Japanese, then Korean and now Chinese copycat industries have all upset Western intellectual property right regimes. An amoral analysis of this "Asian" attitude towards technology could be interesting. Copying invokes a *schizo* attitude towards technology. The copy doesn't come from inside and the Chinese psychic ar-

mour can be maintained. In this way, Western values do not stick and the civilisation is able to integrate science and technology without losing its roots. A Teflon approach, if you like. Copycat cultures benefit from the positive side of progress, yet, they do not have to internalise the technological impulse and can maintain a "pure" image of the self. I believe this approach comes close to your analysis, even if I will admit that it is more Freudian than Heideggerian.

YH This question is a very delicate one and we have to complicate it and understand it historically. Since the two opium wars, there has been the issue of how to integrate Western technologies and even Christian religion in Chinese culture. It is worthwhile trying to understand the relation between copycating and integration. China has been doing "copycat" in this sense—as "integration"—since the self-strengthening movement (1861-1895), during which China imported knowledge and scientific methods from the West, and more recently the *Shanzai* culture which makes Huaqiangbei of Shenzhen a tourist pilgrimage and succeeds in giving the impression that all the Chinese steal ideas. What drives this integration through copycating? It is delicate, if not dangerous, to imagine a "Teflon surface" between culture/thought and technology. Since the self-strengthening movement, the reformers have advocated instrumentalising Western science and technologies to serve Chinese thought, but we now know that this is far too Cartesian—it didn't only fail, but it also produced an opposite effect: technology became the driving force and Chinese thought was consequently carried away, which Heidegger similarly described as *deracination*.

There is another type of copycating which one should not forget, and I think quite a few authors already mention it in their discourses on Shanzai. It is a tradition in which the Chinese learn painting and calligraphy by copying the work of celebrated artists, or in other words, by automatising through copying; in which, finally, some may arrive at creating their own style. We may find this in the West, but probably with a strong difference. In the Chinese tradition, there is a very strong emphasis on the understanding of *Dao*. So the question is not about creating a "Teflon surface" to separate culture and technology, but about integrating technology with culture through what I call *cosmotechnical* thinking, which may allow us to re-appropriate technology by constructing a new epistemic framework that is in continuity with tradition. This is why I propose to start with the *Qi-Dao* thinking from the ancients in order to demonstrate its importance for this critical moment of technological globalisation and to highlight the historical failures that we should avoid.

GL In the last sentence of your book you are calling for "another version of world history." The spirit can be found in your central term "cosmotechnics." What might be missing here is a confrontation with technology as a "titanic" force. Or is this too much a Greek mythology, to your taste? Is it the sheer size of China that prompted you to start operating at this global level? I am asking this because many in Western Europe think that "cosmotechnics" is precisely the source of the problem we're facing, for instance in the case of global warming.

YH Let me firstly give a preliminary definition of what I call cosmotechnics: the unification of the cosmic order and moral order through technical activities. I use this concept in order to reopen the question of technics, and I wanted to show that the Greek *technē* is only ONE kind of cosmotechnics—there are many. If today in the West, there is no longer the concept of cosmotechnics it is because there is no longer cosmology but only astrophysics. I open the book with two quotes, one is from D.H. Lawrence's *Apocalypse*: "When I hear modern people complain of being lonely then I know what has happened. They have lost the cosmos." It is true that Lawrence was into solar paganism at that time, but it is equally possible to see it as a reaction against the absence of cosmology. This is another limit of our current technological thinking, which is a thinking without cosmology; if it maintains a sense of the cosmic, it is that the universe is only an object of exploration and exploitation. Heidegger has already pointed to the fact that technology is a gigantic force, and furthermore a mysterious force.[4] I hope to understand this force from its outside, the cosmos, therefore I coined the term *cosmotechnics*. Europe took a long time to get rid of its cosmology and to realise a physics and cosmos which are no longer *physis* and *kosmos* in the Greek senses. In the West, since cosmology gives way to astrophysics, it is difficult if not impossible to find the outside of technological thinking. In China, there was no continuity between its ancient cosmology and contemporary astrophysics, so it is easier to retrieve this cosmological thinking and therefore to approach the technological system from both its inside (epistemologies) and outside (cosmologies). The question is the following: can we conceive of a way to transform and to re-inscribe this gigantic force into a renewed cosmotechnics?

The question of world history comes out of my disagreement with the search for an Asian modernity or multiple modernities. I think that if one is still looking for modernity in Asia, one gets trapped in a false understanding of modernity and submits oneself to a single time axis of history. Some historians, especially in art, have written about Asian modernities that are based on comparisons of forms

(e.g. a modernist style portrait and a 19th century Chinese portrait) that seem to me rather ungrounded. It is futile to compare two concepts in philosophy or two forms in art without taking into account their histories and their relations to the systems to which they belong.

Let me be a bit provocative: the search for modernities in Asia in the name of decolonisation turns out to be a sort of neocolonisation of itself. Therefore, I reject the concept of a non-European modernity in order to rethink the question of history which no longer resides on the same time axis defined by pre-modern, modern, post-modern. Modernity in Europe originated from an epistemological and methodological transformation in all domains of cultural and intellectual life, which presented a rupture or a break with the previous epoch. Philippe Descola considers naturalism (opposition between culture and nature) as the ontology of European modernity. This epistemological change didn't really happen in China, and it is not productive to orient oneself according to the notion of modernity simply for the sake of postcolonial resistance. Another world history, which I invoke in the book, is an attempt to negotiate a new relation between tradition and technological development in order to resist the homogeneous global time axis. This is not, strictly speaking, a Chinese question nor is it developed merely from the perspective of China; it is applicable to all non-European cultures that want to escape from the Eurocentric concept of technology.

GL You argue that, in the name of diversity and difference, there should be a specifically Chinese philosophy; particularly, "If one admits that there are multiple technics, which are different from each other not simply functionally and aesthetically but also ontologically and cosmologically." You also state, that "the philosophical concept of technics cannot be assumed to be universal." You see this misunderstanding as an obstacle to understanding global technologies. In political rhetoric, China positions itself as one of the players in a polycentric world. Putin has also endorsed this theory in a common effort to divert the global leadership of the United States. Are you advocating a polycentric philosophy of technology?

YH As I said before, so far, the widely accepted concept of technics is very much limited to either *technē* in the Greek sense or technology in the modern sense. This is already very intriguing, as if technology is in itself universal and the discourse on non-European technics has to be situated within a rather narrow concept of history. I question this, and by doing this, I am also challenging the entire literature on philosophy of technology in order to relativise the concept of tech-

nics. Enlightenment humanists believe in universalism, and up to our day, to talk about relativism and exoticism is something shameful. But it is only so when one takes relativism and universalism at face value by substantialising the universal. We can relativise a concept in order to universalise, to come to the "same".

I agree with you that we need to handle this question carefully, and take it as far as we can, as you suggest, with regard to global politics. There are two ways to conceive the polycentric world based on the interpretations of the movement of "difference." Since the Enlightenment, we have been seeking to deduce difference from sameness, or the universal, and in so doing, we end up today at multiculturalism. This anticipates the recent neo-reactionary anti-Enlightenment sentiment, which is compatible and resonates with the right-wing movement. Another way for globalisation is based on the opposite movement; it induces sameness through the affirmation of differences, or even absolute differences, like the philosophical work of François Jullien (as well as sinologists such as Victor Segalen and Marcel Granet) even if he didn't intend for it to be taken politically and historically. However, such a difference cannot be affirmed without taking up the question of technology because it is the source of synchronisation of the global time axis since the beginning of globalisation and colonisation, and without which it won't be possible to break away from such a synchronisation based on sameness. It's no surprise that Peter Sloterdijk has also talked about this problem of globalisation and proposed a "polycosmology."[5] To me, however, Sloterdijk's critique of Heidegger—of Heidegger's prioritising of time over space—is plausible and at the same time negotiable. The spatial analysis of Sloterdijk arrives at the visual image of foams, which can only exist when there are walls or membranes. These membranes are best illustrated as national borders, therefore Sloterdijk pointed out in an interview with the political magazine *Cicero* in 2016 that it is necessary for Europe to develop an effective border policy to avoid self-destruction. His theory of foam is strangely compatible with right-wing movements including *Alternative für Deutschland*, of which Sloterdijk's former student and colleague Marc Jongen is the philosopher.

Instead, I continue working on the question of time, extending both Derrida and Stiegler's deconstruction of Heidegger's concept of historicity, and work with Keiji Nishitani's lament of the lack of historicity in Asia. In the second part of the book, I expose the weakness of Chinese technological thought that I lay out in the first part of the book.

GL Remarkably absent in your book is Chairman Mao, who once said "We cannot adopt Western learning as the substance, we can only use Western technology." Because of his "peasant deviation," he had different ideas from Soviet-style industrialisation. Much of what we Westerners think about China and technology is projected onto the era after Mao's death, with the transition to a market economy under Deng Xiaoping, and the rise of Pearl River Delta. The Mao period somehow doesn't count. China already possessed its own nuclear power and nuclear weapons as early as the mid 1950s, which was soon followed by the disastrous industrialisation during the Great Leap Forward. Can you tell us why the period before the 1980s is less relevant?

YH You are absolutely right. It is also true that I don't talk much about the Cultural Revolution in the book, but I haven't ignored it entirely. I see the Cultural Revolution as a continuation of a different period of modernisation in China. Roughly speaking, there were three: the self-strengthening movement (1861–1895), the May 4th movement (1919), and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). The Cultural Revolution presents a very complicated question. As I said at the beginning of this interview, the Cultural Revolution is an extreme form of Westernisation, preparing large scale industrial infrastructures as well as conditions for the acceleration of the economic reform of Deng Xiaoping. For sure, it is no less relevant here; indeed, it is central. In fact, the Cultural Revolution is the central theme of a new project that I have just started with partners from Hong Kong and Berlin.

GL Technology without modernity, as you discuss in relation to the Japanese Heidegger scholar Nishitani, reminds me of an "internet without democracy." As Morozov showed in his first book, internet technology does not automatically result in a Western-style of representative democracy. The effects of technology seem hard to predict and can go in many directions—often different from what Western experts are selling in their scenarios. Aren't you fighting shadows here? Why is the link to (Western) modernity so crucial in your story?

YH I think one has to be cautious when one says that technology is radically open and therefore not possible to predict; it is like saying that we can use Facebook for initiating social movements, so we can partially ignore the problems of Facebook. You quit Facebook and created the Unlike Us network, so I am sure that you understand this point better than anyone else. Sometimes, we tend to justify a technology by its positive externalities without really confronting its main purposes and functions; this is because in our culture, as Simondon says, we have a

mode of majority and a mode of minority, the former belongs to the experts and technicians, the latter belongs to users, and between them there is a gap. The users are not able to understand the technical reality, they are contented with the contingent use of it, so it seems there is a sort of unpredictability or an openness. But should we be satisfied with that?

While confronting the Anthropocene, the discussion on modernity is revived, for example in philosophy and anthropology, among scholars like Bruno Latour, Philippe Descola, and Viveiros de Castro, among others. Descola's work is very significant in his criticism of naturalism and his effort to open up an ontological pluralism, meaning to recognise the diversity of ontologies and take them seriously. How can cultures without such a Western "modernity" confront the Anthropocene? Should they go back to their tradition or adopt the Western discourse again? The dilemma here: going back is a trap, mere adaptation is oblivion. I invoked Nishitani since the Kyoto School was very much involved in a philosophical project called "overcoming modernity" during the second World War, which aims to overcome the West and nationalism. Kitaro Nishida, the founder of the Kyoto School, developed a fundamental distinction between Western and Eastern thinking, namely Being vs. Nothingness. The Kyoto school wanted to mobilise the notion of "Absolute Nothingness" to overcome modernity by invoking Nietzsche's *dictum* "overcoming nihilism through nihilism". Unfortunately, this "home coming" of philosophy ended up in fascism and imperialism. It is important to reflect on "overcoming modernity" after almost a century to avoid repeating the same path.

GL I am interested in radical Chinese nihilism. Isn't the critique of the Chinese *Seinsvergessenheit* a new colonial educational program in order to train this large new army of "global citizens" according to the latest therapies à la Peter Sloterdijk: a mental workout to get rid of the smart phone addiction. There is always a pedagogical element in the call for national philosophies. How do you think this can be avoided?

YH In the book, I launched an attack against the metaphysical fascism that I have identified with the "home coming" that we found in Heidegger (that you have just quoted), the Kyoto school, and Aleksandr Dugin, among others. I am convinced that we must retrieve tradition from a new perspective, in other words, we have to desubstantialise tradition. In the past century, substantialising tradition or culture had two major outcomes: nationalism and the culture industry. The former sets a line between the authentic self and the others and mobilises nationalism

as a governmentality; the latter turns culture into an industrial production, which is evident in the policies of the culture industry—for example in China, there are more and more "creative towns," or *Chuang Yi Xiao Zhen* in Chinese, which aim to capitalise on cultural heritages. Development in China—as is already evident now and will become only more obvious in the coming years—is moving from the industrialisation of mass products (of the Pearl River Delta) right after the economic reform, to the industrialisation of cultural products (of the Yangzi River Delta) in the digital era.

The decisive question is: will it be possible to desubstantialise tradition in order to set it free from nationalism and consumerism, so that it can regain its force to engage with technology, urbanism, and social imagination in a new way? This is the reason for which I attempt to analyse the technological thought in terms of *Qi* and *Dao* instead of from a certain technical object or technical system. Opposed to the *Vergessenheit* is anamnesis, and it depends very much how are we are going to understand and perform this process of anamnesis. Anamnesis is not entirely about remembrance, or retaining as many traces as possible; it also implies a kind of passage, a passing into somewhere else.[6]

GL Will there be a digital "episteme," to use a Greek term that you borrow from Michel Foucault, and will China play a role in defining it? The ongoing absence of China in the realm of software production is not very encouraging in this respect. India has already taken that position in the global division of labour. Instead, it seems that China will remain the hardware manufacturer. Despite new policies from Bejing to invest in research, knowledge production and design, its role as "global factory" is still the consensus. To reach a global software hegemony is a whole other ballgame, very different from the customising crafts coming out of Shenzhen. I sense that your project could play a role in this. The real test here, as I see it, is whether there can be a thriving design sensibility without critical thinking. Can concepts and designs be developed without an autonomy for philosophy? Can there be Chinese technology without Chinese thought? What if the answer is yes?

YH The digital episteme is already there: just look at the hype of digital media, innovation, artificial intelligence, social networks, smart cities, internet of things, etc., which constitute a new regime of truth, which Antoinette Rouvroy has analysed well. Digital technology is rapidly becoming a base for culture, economy, sociality, etc. However, it also poses problems. In *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, which was written more than 60 years ago, Simondon observed the

discrimination of culture against technics, but today the antagonism takes another form: technology has been the major driving force of culture, it modulates the dynamics of culture. Can there be Chinese technology without Chinese thought? I think this is what we have now, and what sinofuturism means, and what Heidegger means when he says "China will be free for technology."

All I try to do in this book is to move past this stage of modernisation and technological globalisation by going back to history and traditional metaphysics in order to understand what options and possibilities are left to us. As you know, Foucault gave up on the term "episteme" after *The Order of Things*; he started using *dispositif* instead and redefines episteme as a kind of *dispositif*. I rescue the term episteme by giving political agency to it. The question that I want to raise is, will it be possible to imagine a new episteme in which we can find another way of *framing* digital technology? When culture is in crisis, it will be forced to produce a new episteme as a new sensibility and a new way of *sensibilisation*. I am more and more convinced that this was what Jean-François Lyotard wanted to do with the postmodern and that which he has attempted to make felt (*faire sentir*) in *Les Immatériaux*, an exhibition that he curated with Thierry Chaput in 1985 at the Centre Pompidou.

However, in the context of China, the question of episteme has to be investigated from the standpoint of its own history. I am tempted to distinguish three epistemes in the Chinese history of philosophy: first, the emergence of pre-Qin philosophy and the gradual dominance of Confucianism after the fall of the Zhou dynasty which established and legitimated the moral sensibility between humans and the heavens, for the latter provides the legitimacy for political, social and individual actions; secondly, after the dominance of Buddhism in the late Tang dynasty, the emergence of neo-Confucianism in the 11th century re-established a moral cosmology by reintroducing cosmogonies into the Confucian doctrine in order to reaffirm the unity between the cosmic and moral orders; and third, after the defeat by Britain in the opium wars, China was forced to search for a new episteme to cope with Western science and technology, but it has failed because there was a serious lack of knowledge and understanding of technology throughout the experience of dealing with such a material transformation. Now, it seems to me to be the moment of taking this quest for epistemologies and epistemes seriously again, when globalisation actually touches its limit and it becomes more and more pressing to respond to the Anthropocene.

GL Talking about cosmotechnics in 2017, it is very hard not to close with Brexit, Trump, the rise of right-wing populism and the current crisis of neoliberalism as a facilitating ideology of globalisation. China has benefitted a lot from the outgoing globalisation consensus. On the one hand, China could also benefit in a new constellation when the world falls apart into smaller regions. On the other hand, the "global factory" will suffer from the expected drastic reduction of global trade. The internal market will have to grow. Neocolonial relations with Africa, other parts of Asia, and Latin-America could compensate but don't look very promising. Needless to say, a war, regardless on what scale, would be catastrophic. How do you read the signs of the times in the light of your metaphysical quest?

YH In a recent article on the neo-reactionaries, published in e-flux journal, I have tried to show how the end of a unilateral globalisation since the European Enlightenment (if not earlier) led the West to lament its second decline after the book with the same title from Oswald Spengler.[7] However, this time it is not about the *Innerlichkeit* of culture, namely the incompatibility between nature and technics, or culture and civilisation; the pressure is from the outside. Brexit, Trump and the right-wing movement belong to this resentment of the decline of the West, therefore Britain and America have to be great *again*. What kind of globalisation can we imagine after the current one comes to an end? A coalition between Asia, Africa and Latin America is important but it is not sufficient, since all these cultures also have to retrieve and reinvent their own cosmotechnics. Unless they do so, what is going to be changed is not the nature of globalisation but only its geographical configuration of power. The new coalition could be seen as a continuation of the Bandung Conference in 1955, which set its aim to oppose colonialism and neocolonialism; however, we should also understand that the technological universalisation dominating the current state of globalisation is a form of neocolonialism par excellence, which won't go away without a deeper reflection on technology, no matter how strong the coalition is.

We should try to avoid a third world war at all costs, but with Brexit, Trump and the right-wing movement, and the coming intensified competition of technological singularity, I feel, and I believe you do as well, that a war has never been so imminent. You may remember that when the philosopher of *Todtnauberg* said in an interview with *Der Spiegel* that only a god can save us, he was not talking about God, but rather about the *unknown* (*Unbekannte*). The task of the poet is to invoke this unknown, to *sensibilise* according to the unknown and set a limit to the known.[8] This is why I am convinced that Heidegger himself was longing for a cos-

motechnics by reinventing the pre-Socratic notion of *technē*; it is in this sense that we can understand his proposal for *another beginning* (*anderer Anfang*). Heidegger was ambiguous, of course, and this ambiguity has to be clarified and radicalised to allow us to approach globalisation anew from the standpoint of cosmotechnics; we may follow him, to look for another beginning, but not only for Europe.

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NOTES

1. Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*. Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 2016.
2. Yuk Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics*, Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2016.
3. Yuk Hui and Geert Lovink, "Digital Objects and Metadata Schemes," *e-flux journal* #78 (2016): http://www.e-flux.com/journal/78/82706/digital-objects-and-metadata-schemes/
4. See: Martin Heidegger and Richard Wisser, "Martin Heidegger im Gespräch mit Richard Wisser," in *Martin Heidegger in Gespräch*. Ed. Günther Neske. Pfullingen: Neske, 1988. "However I see in the essence of technology the first emergence of a very deep mystery (*Geheimnis*) which I call 'event' (*Ereignis*)—from what you concluded, there can be no talk of a resis-tance or a condemnation of technology, but rather getting to understand the essence of technology and the technological world" (Heidegger, 1988, 25).
5. Peter Sloterdijk, "Talking to Myself about the Poetics of Space," *Harvard Design Magazine* vol.30 (Spring/Summer 2009): www.harvarddesignmagazine.org/issues/30/talking-to-myself-about-the-poetics-of-space
6. Jean-François Lyotard employed Sigmund Freud's term "*durcharbeiten*" to describe this "passing." See: Jean-Françcois Lyotard, "Logos and Techne, or Telegraphy," in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988. Also see: Yuk Hui, "On a Possible Passing from the Digital to the Symbolic," *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* (2017): http://hkw.de/de/tigers_publication/on_a_possible_passing_from_the_digital_to_the_symbolic__yuk_hui/on_a_possible_passing_from_the_digital_to_the_symbolic__yuk_hui.php
7. Yuk Hui, "On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries," *e-flux journal* #81 (2017): www.e-flux.com/journal/81/125815/on-the-unhappy-consciousness-of-neoreactionaries/
8. Yuk Hui, "Rhythm and Technics: On Heidegger's Commentary on Rimbaud," *Research in Phenomenology* 47 (2017, 60–84)