

## News of the Profession: Eloge

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Treman State Park, Ithaca, NY on October 30, 2016, following a Conference at Cornell University: “Where has STS Travelled? Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Inaugural Meeting of the Society for Social Studies of Science.” From the left: Bruno Latour, Trevor Pinch, Michael Lynch, Steve Woolgar, Wesley Shrum, and Hélène Mialet. Courtesy of Michael Lynch.

### TREVOR PINCH (1952–2021)

On 16 December 2021 my friend and colleague Trevor Pinch died from cancer, after living with the illness for four years. Plenty of people knew Trevor better than I did. But Trevor helped me to understand what it means to be a person in the academic world.

The most important thing I learned from Trevor is gratitude. I don’t mean the platitudinous “practicing gratitude” thing that goes around every so often on social media. Trevor had this “I can’t believe I get to do this!” affect about him. He just lived it; if he worked at it, that work produced the kind of effortless one finds in a master musician. He understood what an immense privilege it is to be a tenured academic. We are paid to talk about ideas—and not only books, but *books we find really interesting*, often *with people we find really interesting*. We are also paid to read them and write about them.

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It is hard to express how *rare*, *special*, and *profound* Trevor's simple acknowledgment of this fact—"It is amazing we get paid to do this"—is in the world of tenured faculty. I often say that my career aspiration is "graduate student, minus the poverty and angst," and as far as I can tell Trevor is one of the few people who has achieved that goal. Part of it is the dissonance between the reasons people get into academia and where they find themselves in it. People get in for those intellectual reasons, but soon things start to cloud and crowd and push us away from those things and toward overwork, the stress of precarity, or, if we're among the lucky few with tenure, an absolutely obscene amount of middle-management box checking, paper pushing, and occasionally being forced into positions that contradict our own values. All of those challenges are real, but the fact that we get to spend even some of our time doing meaningful work—work we

believe in—is a privilege. Most people don't; and since the pandemic, some of them have also had to risk their lives to do it.

Trevor was also a great example of how to be a successful senior academic: he listened as much as he talked, was always curious about others' work, kept reading and showing interest in the work of new scholars and actively promoted it, and mentored generations of students. He took his turns at service; he helped build at least three fields as spaces for others to do work: the sociology of scientific knowledge, the social construction of technology, and sound studies. He was the rare academic with multiple crossover hits—in the Golem books and later in *Analog Days*—and his work was widely translated and read across many disciplines. For me, "The Social Construction of Facts and Artefacts" was a major touchstone, as science studies had before then focused much more on science than on technology, to its own detriment. As a young media historian looking to get outside the 1990s drunken techno-utopianism, Trevor's (and Wiebe Bijker's) 1986 essay, along with the coedited *The Social Construction of Technological Systems* (1987; with Bijker and Thomas Hughes), gave me tools for going beyond simply asserting that technologies were cultural artifacts and instead getting into the details of how and why that matters. *Analog Days* (2002) was also hugely important for me as a scholar and remains so. In Winter 2023 I am teaching a Ph.D. seminar on interfaces, and that book's chapter on whether a synthesizer should have a piano-shaped keyboard remains a major influence on how I understand the politics and possibilities of interfaces.

Trevor was opinionated but wonderfully aware of his own limits. Several times we had a conversation about politics and scholarship where he asked me about something he didn't "get." We're not going to be good at everything, and Trevor never pretended to be. Perhaps that's why so much of his essential work was done collaboratively—Trevor was a living retort to academics' ongoing infatuation with the idea of genius as a trait that inheres in and emanates from individuals. Like the artifacts he wrote about, his intelligence was socially shaped—and socially shaped others in turn. Trevor was proud of his achievements, but he was also humble, always ready to collaborate, and happy to talk with anyone about any of his many interests, and he maintained a very enthusiastic curiosity about the world right up to the end.

Although he was of the wrong generation for it, he had a bit of a punk rock attitude to what he studied. Sure, he could talk about physics, or epistemology, but I am certain his best-selling book was his coauthored history of the Moog synthesizer. Even in supposedly critical fields like science and technology studies or sound studies, scholars too easily confuse the quality or sophistication of the scholarship with the unearned intellectual prestige of the object of study or its conformity to the bourgeois value systems and aesthetics of

overwhelmingly middle-class and white academics. Trevor Just Did Not Care about prestige, and he didn't buy into high/low culture distinctions. Of course, I met him late in his career, and he had followed the standard path of establishing a career with a high-prestige object and then branching out to subjects that graduate advisors might have advised against as dissertation topics. But Trevor's approach as a scholar, mentor, and colleague made space for many other people to venture out of the rather restrictive intellectual parameters of high-prestige objects earlier in their careers. Because of this quality, he was able to engage productively with interdisciplinary movements outside his home fields that were also reshaping the humanities and social sciences in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, like cultural studies.

Trevor also taught me about being an academic and musician, moving between those two roles and integrating them. Until the 2010s, I had kept those parts of my life mostly separated. Trevor actively drew from his own knowledge of synthesizers to get into the Moog scholarship and as a point of entry in early sound studies, and both his own work and his encouragement of other scholars benefited mightily from that combination. Conversely, his knowledge of the cultural and technical history of synthesis shaped his musical practice in countless ways. He spoke fluently to both academics and musicians and moved freely between those worlds, interweaving them. I hope to do half as well as he did in this regard. It also took me a few years to concede that he was right about modular synthesizers: the currently fashionable explosion of Eurorack modular synthesizers has produced many instruments that are simply too tiny for live performance. You were right, Trevor! I should have listened to you sooner.

Later on, Trevor also became one of my cancer friends. I have two kinds: there are the friends who really go out of their way to look after me when I am going through shit; and there are people who are also going through shit, with whom I can talk about going through shit. Trevor started as the first kind and became the second kind. I found an email from 22 February 2010. I was in a two-week hospital stay that I refer to as "the longest period of my life." I could not talk (well, maybe by then I was talking again), so I was reading and writing a lot over email from the hospital. Trevor wrote me about his travels, an exciting conference he'd been to, some books he was reading, and some music tech stuff he knew I would find interesting. He also talked about the beauty of the desert. It was an utterly banal email, but also discursive, caring, and detailed enough to stimulate my imagination.

Sadly, less than a decade later, I would be able to return the favor. But then: we got to the kind of talking the *other* sort of cancer friends do. The conversations were more personal, as you might imagine, but still with Trevor's somehow effortless gratitude for the opportunities he had, even when it was just about being close to his daughter.

Trevor Pinch (1 January 1952–16 December 2021) was Distinguished Professor of Arts and Sciences in Science and Technology Studies at Cornell University. As an undergraduate at Imperial College he studied physics, and he completed a Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Bath in 1982. He held a postdoc at the University of Twente. Before Cornell, he worked at the University of Bath and the University of York. Trevor won countless awards for his work and contributed to his department and his fields in many ways, both formal—as department chair, president of 4S, editor of journals, collections, and a book series—and informal—as mentor, guide, and confidant. He is survived by his wife Christine Leuenberger, daughters Benika and Annika, and many adoring friends, students, colleagues, academic and musical collaborators, and fans. He will be missed.

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