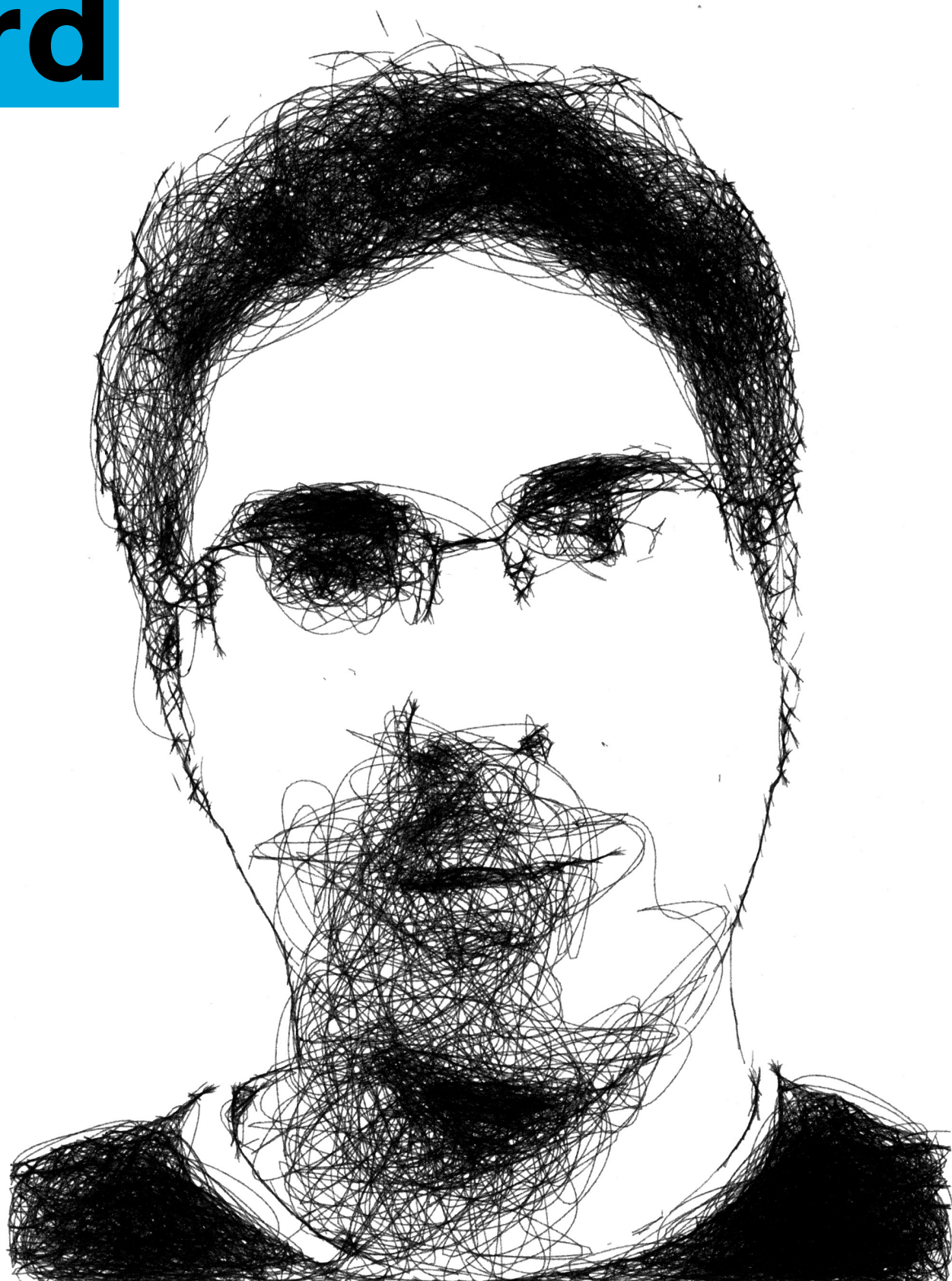
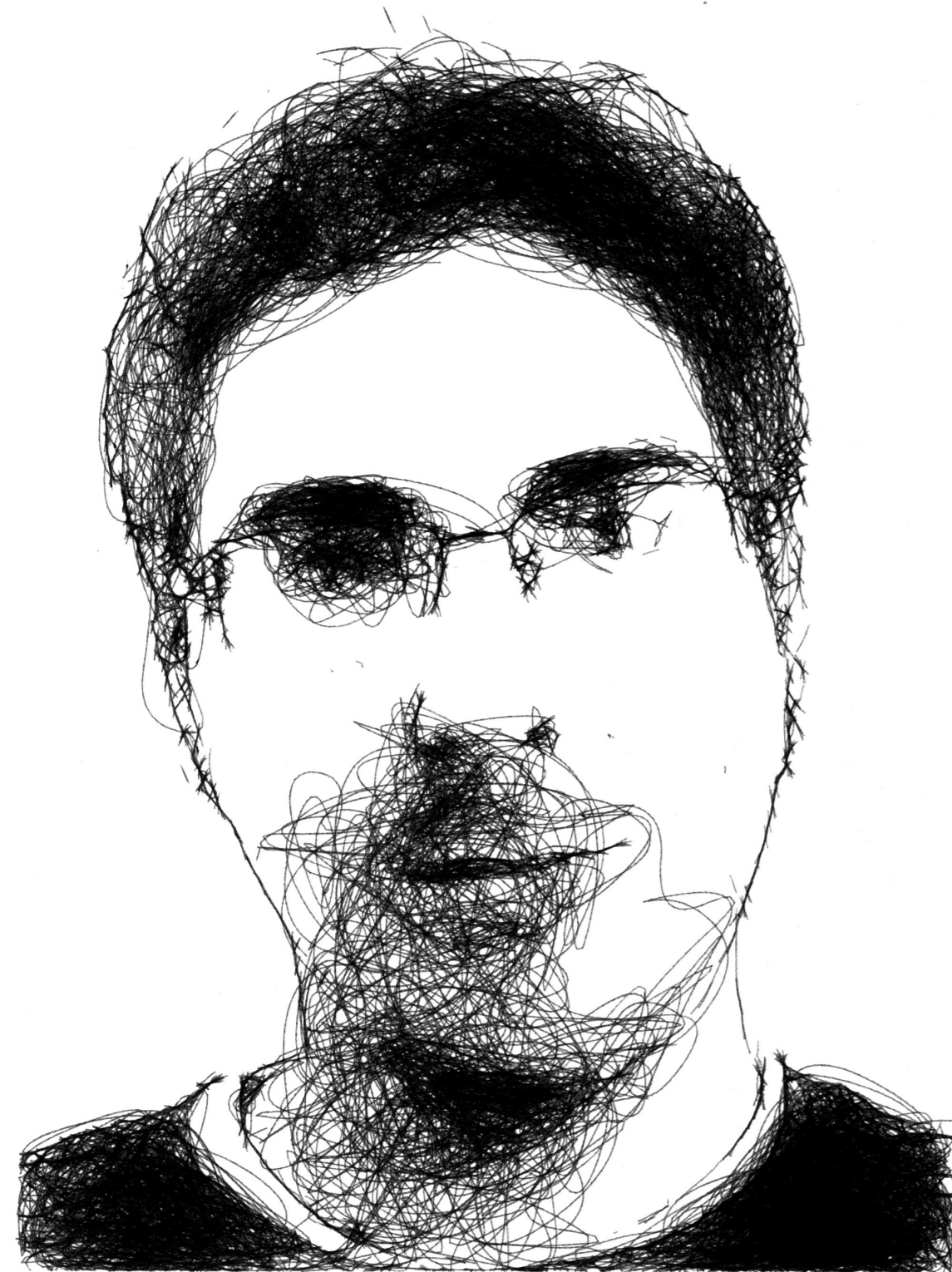


# Alumnus Julien Bernard

Alumni Portrait Nr. 13—2017

Maître de Conférences  
of Philosophie,  
Aix-Marseille University





“I have always been a philosopher in the etymologic sense of the word: A lover of knowledge on the pursuit of wisdom.”

**Today, Julien Bernard is a Maître de conférences of philosophy and he says: “I have always been a philosopher in the etymologic sense of the word: A lover of knowledge on the pursuit of wisdom.”**

He started his academic career in Aix-Marseille by studying physics, intending to become an astrophysicist. But he soon realised that philosophy, as an academic discipline, was more relevant to his fundamental questions about science. Therefore, he changed his focus and studied philosophy and mathematics instead. This took some time, especially as it was not easy to organise two MScs: “In France, we’re usually compelled to choose one discipline!” But this combination permitted him to eventually direct his research towards the philosophy of science, also called epistemology, a branch of philosophy that requires a solid understanding of exact sciences. Philosophy of science questions the implication of science as well as its boundaries. Furthermore, it looks into the relationship between science and the truth: “We cannot have definite and fixed answers for difficult questions, questions at the frontier of human knowledge – and this could be seen as frustrating. But it isn’t! I think it’s very fascinating to deal with the most fundamental element of reality and the foundations of science.” In his research, he aims to achieve results through scientific understanding, philosophical thinking and historical analysis – using an interdisciplinary approach. He wrote his most successful paper when he was a Fellow at the Zukunftskolleg, where his method is clearly evident: “I succeeded in articulating historical considerations by starting with a correspondence between two great researchers, and then moving towards a philosophical discussion and mathematical understanding of a specific branch of differential geometry.”

In 2010, Julien finished his PhD in Philosophy at the University of Aix-Marseille. He continued with a postdoctoral position there and applied for a Research Fellowship at the Zukunftskolleg in 2013. “I was planning to take my career further. Eventually I got the position in Konstanz and I’m very pleased with that. The whole aspect of interdisciplinarity that the Zukunftskolleg promotes was exactly the context for my research within the philosophy of science. My stay there reinforced this idea and taught me the importance of collaborative work.” Julien Bernard organised a reading group, which permitted him to work with mathematicians, physicists, linguists and philosophers with whom he remembers carrying out “some very interesting discussions that still help me in my work today!” Fellows who worked on related topics in the Department of Philosophy helped him in his academic development as well.

Julien emphasises the overall support he received: “Thanks to the **Mentorship Programme**<sup>2</sup>, I had the opportunity to invite Professor Erhard Scholz, a historian of mathematics from the University of Wuppertal, to Konstanz. He is one of the best specialists in the world on Hermann Weyl, who is one of the major authors on which my philosophical work is based.” The opportunity to organise a three-day international workshop and to conduct a contemporary art project also influenced his time in Konstanz. Together with artist Julie Pelletier, he organised *Gedankengeflechte*, an exhibition in which philosophical perspective and visual art formed a dialogue. Julien Bernard put his thoughts into words, focusing on “matter and form in three-dimensional biomorphic art”, while Julie Pelletier created plastic art and paintings. Especially matter and different materials were very important for her, as well as the ways flexible materials can be shaped and recycled.

Looking back at his career, Julien also remembers the challenges. He admits that it is sometimes difficult to understand the editorial decisions that lead to rejections of papers, after all, “in experimental sciences or in formal sciences such as mathematics, you have an objective criterion to examine when an attempt is not successful. But in philosophy, there is no impartial judge like nature itself. There are only your peers who decide if your work is good enough to be published.” But then again, pursuing a career in academia consists of meeting challenges. Julien says that it has always been his main focus to become a professor – even at the beginning, when he still concentrated on studying physics. He advises young scientists to keep in mind that an academic career is long and uncertain. “Perhaps you will have a position, perhaps not. Do exactly the research you like, but also concentrate on research that is seminal within your discipline. This will give you the energy to stay in the academic world.”

## Curriculum Vitae

### Education

- 2010** Ph.D., Department of Philosophy, Aix-Marseille University, France  
„The philosophical foundations of Weyl’s Nahegeometrie“
- 2006 – 2010** Ph.D. student under the supervision of Alain Michel
- 2005** Master’s thesis, Department of Philosophy, Aix-Marseille University, France  
„Nature and Origins of Mathematical Entities in Weyl’s ‚Das Kontinuum‘“
- 2001 – 2005** Philosophy studies, Aix-Marseille University, France
- 1998 – 2004** Mathematical studies, Aix-Marseille University, France

### Scientific Career

- since 2016** Maître de conférences of Philosophy, Aix-Marseille University, France
- 2015 – 2016** Postdoctoral Researcher, U.F.R. Sciences, Aix-Marseille University, France
- 2013 – 2015** Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Philosophy, University of Konstanz
- 2010 – 2013** Postdoctoral Researcher and Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, Aix-Marseille University and Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), France

### Distinctions, Awards and Honorary Posts

- 2013 – 2015** Fellow of the Zukunftskolleg, University of Konstanz