

## Obituary

### Maurice Nivat (1937–2017)

**Maurice Nivat, Honorary Professor at University Paris Diderot, corresponding Member of the French Académie des Sciences and Member of Academia Europæa, a founding father of EATCS, left us on September 21st, 2017.**

Maurice Nivat, was born on December 21st, 1937, and grew up in the city of Clermont-Ferrand. He moved to Paris in 1954, and was admitted at Ecole Normale Supérieure in 1956. Henri Cartan, then Director of the Mathematics section, proposed he worked at the newly created Institut Blaise Pascal, in charge of the CNRS Computing Center. There he met Louis Nolin, learned the Algol programming language, and was thus a pioneer «informaticien», even if this terminology was not yet coined for computer scientist in French.

In 1961, Maurice Nivat was named Lecturer at the Faculté des Sciences de Paris. This is where he met Marcel-Paul Schützenberger, who initiated him in combinatorics and formal language theory, and became his scientific adviser. In 1965 Maurice Nivat was named Reader (Maître de Conférences) at Grenoble University, the leading computer science academic institution at the time, where he prepared his thesis. Two years later, he moved to Rennes University, another pioneer computer research center. In 1967 he was awarded his Thèse d’Etat, on the topic of formal languages transductions, and he was named Professor at the Faculté des Sciences de Paris in 1969. He turned then his research interests to formal program schemata and semantics of programs. In the subsequent reorganization of French Universities, he followed Schützenberger to University Paris 7, where he taught until his retirement in 2001.

In 1971 Maurice Nivat directed a research team “Sémantique Formalisée des Langages de Programmation” at the recently created IRIA research center in Rocquencourt, the ancestor of INRIA. His team in 1972 comprised Bruno Courcelle, Philippe Flajolet, Gérard Huet and Jean-Marc Steyaert. Gérard Berry and Jean-Jacques Lévy joined the project a while later.

Maurice Nivat was a very active scientific correspondent with the main theoretical computer science luminaries worldwide. In 1972, together with Jaco de Bakker, Corrado Böhm and Mike Paterson, he created the European Association for Theoretical Computer Science - EATCS, and as first event of the association he orga-

nized the first “International Colloquium on Automata, Languages and Programming” (ICALP) at IRIA. In 1975, Maurice Nivat created the journal Theoretical Computer Science (TCS) with a prestigious editorial panel. He was to be its Editor in Chief for almost 25 years.

Maurice Nivat was an indefatigable scientific organizer. He created in 1973 a very influential series of spring schools for young researchers, the “Ecoles de Printemps d’Informatique Théorique”, which were essential in the shaping of fundamental computer science in France. He created at University Paris 7, jointly with Jacques Arsac, the CNRS laboratory LITP (Laboratoire d’Informatique Théorique et Programmation), and was its co-director until 1985. He was also an active counselor in government circles, fighting relentlessly for the recognition of Informatique as a science, and its proper teaching at every level. In 1982, named President of the French “Conseil Scientifique du Programme Mobilisateur de la Filière Electronique”, Maurice Nivat initiated a Federated Research National Funding Program which was essential to foster and coordinate strategic research areas in informatics (PRCs).

At the end of his career, Maurice Nivat went back to research, and turned his attention to the study of discrete geometrical objects, such as pavings and discrete tomography, while keeping an active interest in concurrency and tree languages. In December 1997 his students organized his Jubilee at Ecole Normale Supérieure. He was honored with a Festschrift Volume “Merci Maurice”, edited by Pierre-Louis Curien in 2002 as a special volume of TCS.

Maurice Nivat was elected a Corresponding Member at the French Académie des Sciences in 1983. He was elected one of the first Members of Academia Europæa in 1989. He was Officer of the French Légion d’Honneur and of the Ordre National du Mérite, as well as Commander of the Ordre des Palmes Académiques. He received a Honorary Doctorate from the University of Bologna in 1997 and of the University of Québec at Montreal in 2006. He obtained the EATCS Award for his scientific career in 2002.

Maurice Nivat, one of the founding fathers of European Computer Science research, was a passionate man with a vision, a respected scientific leader, and a humanist. His numerous students and colleagues are in grief.

Pierre-Louis Curien  
Gérard Huet  
Antoine Petit

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