

Paul Virilio

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# The Administration of Fear

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SEMIOTEXT(E) INTERVENTION SERIES

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Published by Semiotext(e)

2007 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 427, Los Angeles, CA 90057

[www.semiotexte.com](http://www.semiotexte.com)

Thanks to John Ebert.

Inside cover photograph:

Design: Hedi El Kholti

ISBN: 978-1-58435-105-4

Distributed by The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.  
and London, England

Printed in the United States of America

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# The Administration of Fear

With Bertrand Richard

Translated by Ames Hodges

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Climate chaos, stock market panics, food scares, pandemic threats, economic crashes, congenital anxiety, existential dread... Fear and fears: individual and collective, combining and reinforcing each other (the dynamic of fear itself), are charging through our world. Infiltrating it, jolting it, deranging it. Isn't this overindulgence frankly exaggerated and a symptom of our times? At first glance, one might think that there is something shocking in the childishness of this fear that has replaced philosophy for us French and Europeans who, despite being deeply affected by the crisis, still number among the privileged of the world.

It is childish because, not so long ago, becoming an adult meant overcoming your fears and striding bravely and lucidly (or pretending to) through the difficulties of "adulthood." Being an adult meant freeing yourself from baseless fears, from worries

arising from a confused picture of the world, taking control of your life and, in the end, contributing to the collective destiny.

Fear, in short, once had a bad reputation. It was the sign of a weak character, an incompleteness, even though, it must be said, denigrating it was part and parcel of the social organization and conception of social roles of another era.

Today, however, a sociological and moral flip-flop has reversed these values to turn fear into something more than just a legitimate feeling: it has taken on an additional temperamental solidity that it would be foolish to ignore; it has become a sign of wisdom, a tool of thought, a propaedeutics. The exoneration of fear certainly has many historical, philosophical and political causes that we will not examine here in detail, but for which we can enumerate a few themes: the questioning of traditional values, the deconstruction of overarching narratives, the progress of individualist ideals and, concomitantly, the collapse of the institutions that traditionally protected individuals from the hazards of existence: the Church, extended families, unions, or even a powerful welfare state.

Yet even more profoundly, we should mention a dual phenomenon that can explain the current spread of fear. On the one hand, the doubts raised about the ability of science and progress to provide humanity with security and happiness after the

violence of the 20th century and the nuclearization of the world (“Now we’re all sons of bitches,” said the director of the Manhattan Project in July 1945 after the first atomic explosion in the New Mexico desert). On the other, the spread of German philosopher Hans Jonas’s thought, which takes these atrocities into account and turns fear into a veritable “heuristic principle”: to think about the world appropriately, he recommends, one must start with fear, especially the fear of our planet’s disappearance, before assessing any decision, be it political or scientific. It is a complete reversal and it would be harsh to mock this contemporary fear too quickly.

Once chimeric, fear has become a foundation. All of our confidence in reason and in the perfectibility of the human species has progressively given way to a “principle of fear” that replaces faith with fear as the cornerstone of our attitudes towards existence. The spread of fear thus appears to be the product of a nuclear era with pervasive totalitarianism where science, once the hope of Western Enlightenment, has now taken on a threatening appearance. In the face of all this, a moralist position could rightly fear the return of obscurantist thinking that condemns anything and everything connected to progress in knowledge and technology.

Those who despise an invasive principle of precaution are among them. Others defend the

idea that thinking of the worst as possible, and almost as already occurring, is the only way to incite virtuous action. This is the approach of Jean-Pierre Dupuy who, under the powerful inspiration of René Girard and Ivan Illich, suggests living in a state of constant fear in order to combat the dangers that threaten us most effectively.

This interview with philosopher and planner Paul Virilio is a vital contribution to our understanding of the context that has just been presented in brief. As always with this thinker of speed and technology, his interpretation of the contemporary world is based on a highly original vision of the world, both well-rooted and off-center. Rooted because he is a man of land, habitats and construction; off-center because he does philosophy as a planner and as a philosopher, he considers the materiality of the world at every scale.

If there is fear, he tells us, it is because the Earth is shrinking and space is dwindling, compressed by instantaneous time. Carried along by the headlong rush of an increasingly accelerated world, all we can do is manage and administer this fear instead of deal with it fundamentally. The administration of fear is politics without a polis; the administration of people who are no longer at home anywhere, constantly squeezed and dreaming of a somewhere else that does not exist. The administration of fear is a world discovering that there are things to be

afraid of but still convinced that more speed and ubiquity are the answer. In a language that is his own, Paul Virilio suggests, interprets, extrapolates, elucidates.

He looks for everyday words to translate Einstein's Relativity in order to help us understand profoundly that shrinking time means killing space little by little. Following his thoughts, correcting them, digging deeper: this son of an Italian communist and a catholic from Brittany traces the rules of the game in which we are caught. And that we must escape.



“TERROR IS THE REALIZATION OF THE LAW OF MOVEMENT.” —HANNAH ARENDT

**Bertrand Richard:** *Paul Virilio, what do you mean by “administration of fear”? The expression seems to have a paranoid, Orwellian connotation and I would like to begin our conversation with it.*

**Paul Virilio:** When you and I began to discuss the project of doing this interview, the title, *The Administration of Fear*, sprang to mind right away as a direct echo of the title of Graham Greene’s well-known book, *The Ministry of Fear*. As you know, the novelist portrays London under the devastation of the German *blitz* in the Second World War. Greene’s protagonist fights members of the Fifth Column, Nazis disguised as ordinary Londoners fighting a merciless war against the British *from the inside*. I lived through *the ministry of fear* as a child in Nantes after witnessing the Debacle; the Fifth Column, which had been

formed during the Spanish Civil War, was omnipresent in everyone's thoughts and conversations. The presence of this sometimes imagined army of "saboteurs" and "traitors against the Nation" turned every neighbor, priest and shopkeeper into a potential enemy. The idea behind the Fifth Column was to sow panic; its message and power to create fear could be stated as: "We are not there, but we are already among you." We had had a first-hand experience of the *Blitzkrieg*, the lightning war. Nantes, 1940: one morning, we were informed that the Germans were in Orléans; at noon, we heard the sound of German trucks rolling through the streets. We had never seen anything like it. We had been living with memories of the First World War, a conflict that stretched out endlessly in time and between the positions occupied by the combatants—a war of attrition. Thirty years later, it only took a few hours for our city to be *occupied*.

It is important to understand that occupation is both physical and mental (preoccupation). I use the expression "administration of fear" to refer to two things. First, that fear is now an environment, a surrounding, a world. It occupies and preoccupies us. Fear was once a phenomenon related to localized, identifiable events that were limited to a certain timeframe: wars, famines, epidemics. Today, the world itself is limited, saturated,



reduced, restricting us to stressful claustrophobia: contagious stock crises, faceless terrorism, lightning pandemics, “professional” suicides (think of France Télécom, but we will come back to them). Fear is a world, *panic* as a “whole.”

The administration of fear also means that States are tempted to create policies for the orchestration and management of fear. Globalization has progressively eaten away at the traditional prerogatives of States (most notably of the Welfare State), and they have to convince citizens that they can ensure their *physical* safety. A dual health and security ideology has been established, and it represents a real threat to democracy. That is a brief explanation of my choice.

*Can you elaborate on the connection between occupation (with fear representing the occupier today) and the notion of speed that you mentioned in relation to the Blitzkrieg of 1940?*

What is a *Blitzkrieg*? It is a military and technological phenomenon that occupies you in the blink of an eye, leaving you dumbfounded, mesmerized. It is also a phenomenon that introduced the extraordinary moment known as the Occupation. As you know, I think about speed, about speed that becomes increasingly faster through technological progress, with which it

combines to form what I call a “dromosphere.” I am convinced that just as speed led to the Germans’ incredible domination over continental Europe in 1940, fear and its administration are now supported by the incredible spread of real-time technology, especially the new ICT or new information and communications technologies. This technological progress has been accompanied by real propaganda, notably in the way the media covers the new creations presented by Steve Jobs, Apple’s all-powerful CEO. This combination of techno-scientific domination and propaganda reproduces all of the characteristics of occupation, both physically and mentally.

*To continue the analogy, can we also see phenomena of resistance and collaboration today?*

To be a collaborator, there has to be an occupation, either intellectual (a preoccupation) or physical; the same is true for resistance fighters. During the Second World War, we were in the presence of a trinity: Occupation, Resistance and Collaboration. We can only understand the nature of fear within the complexity of an imposed situation like this. It was hard for me to understand as a child because we saw the enemy every day. They ate Lu cookies in the streets of Nantes; they bought meat at the same butcher shop as my mother; the ones

who were bombarding and killing us were in fact our allies.

*If I follow you, you mean that the administration of fear is also a problem of identity, and of identifying danger?*

Yes, it is a problem of identity in the proximity and interpenetration of different realities. Realities that can no longer be imagined in their conflict, which we imitated in our games as children, putting toy bayonets on our rifles to play Verdun—tragic but clear situations—but in their proximity. When I read Graham Greene's book, I found the expression "ministry of fear" to be particularly well chosen because it carries the administrative aspect of fear and describes it like a State. When you are occupied, fear is a State in the sense of a public power imposing a false and terrifying reality.

*Why "false"?*

False because no one is inherently a collaborator, especially as a child, no more than anyone, is inherently a resistance fighter, even though the moral reality imposed on us follows this bipartition. For a child, an adult is at first surrounded by an aura of authority, no matter where he or she is

from. Reality first appears as a trick. That is why I am sensitive to the current situation of the acceleration of reality. Not an “augmented” reality as the virtualists say but an *accelerated* reality, which is not the same thing. There is something at play here causing fear to become a constitutive element of life, relating it to the world of phenomena. And giving it a relationship with the world, a distorted relationship with Being-in-the-world. I am a phenomenologist, so I look back on a distorted world because the child that I once was lived in a world where you could not trust adults, which was very traumatic.

Reality also appeared distorted on the level of physical fear: you could be killed by people who lived nearby and who appeared to be normal human beings, since we were in France and not in Poland where atrocities like the Warsaw ghetto were taking place. The occupiers were “normal” up until the head of the Kommandantur was assassinated in Nantes and the reprisals turned violent—I’m thinking of the prisoners executed at Châteaubriant, including Guy Môquet. The city was then in a state of siege and a curfew was imposed starting at 4 o’clock in the afternoon. Fear became physical, the fear of imminent death. Then, a few years later, we were subjected to extremely heavy Allied bombardments. Our allies were killing us and we saw truckloads of

legless bodies, eviscerated torsos, decapitated heads drive past to the Saint-Jacques Hospital. The administration of fear is on both sides: it is an environment.

*What happens to individual courage when fear is environmental and collective?*

For a young boy like myself, fear was a question of who was strongest and the question was limited to individual courage, skill and strength. But with the shelling and hostage taking, fear took hold of everyone, including the adults. Every building was shaking with fear. We were faced with collective fear, and it is impossible for children to be courageous in a time of collective terror, except by embracing sacrificial ideologies like patriotism or the kamikaze. What can be done with collective fear? It is a question of speed, which is essential to my work as a planner and philosopher. There was the *Blitzkrieg* and then the war of the radio waves. The speed of radio waves for communication and fighting immediately took on new importance on June 18, 1940 with General De Gaulle's call to arms. And it all took place in the same town, in the same street, in Nantes.

*The reality you describe appears to be chaotic and indistinct. There is no distinction between things—it*

*is a real hodge-podge. Is this an early form of Jean Baudrillard's "viral process of indistinction"? And how does one develop a capacity for judgment when things are so mixed up?*

First by taking refuge at the heart of the micro-collectivity of the family, then the building or the town. They allow children to situate themselves. Towns are more protected than cities because the countryside is more isolated and occupied less strictly. Living in the countryside means being more in the resistance because there is less control. I lived for a time in Vertou, in 1943–44, in the Loire–Atlantique near Nantes: it was there that we met members of the Resistance. Getting outside the administration of fear took place in communities, first in families and then in villages. I sketched the anti-tank fortifications located south of Nantes in my school notebook and passed them on to the resistance.

*Isn't it inappropriate to use the same expression "administration of fear" for both the tragic historical events of the Second World War and what we Westerners are experiencing today, facing considerable challenges but in a relatively protected and prosperous position? In short, can't you be accused of being overly dramatic?*

I don't think so. To explain myself, I would like to refer to a phrase from one of the most eminent post-war thinkers, Hannah Arendt. In other words, Hannah Arendt has had a much greater influence on contemporary thought than Martin Heidegger. With the philosopher Günther Anders, her first husband, she revealed the shock and the nature of the totalitarian phenomenon. She is its most incisive philosopher and theorist, especially when she states in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that "Terror is the realization of the law of movement." For someone like me who lived through the *Blitzkrieg* and the war of the radio waves, it is clear that terror is not simply an emotional and psychological phenomenon but a physical one as well in the sense of physics and kinetics, a phenomenon related to what I call the "acceleration of reality." Arendt uses the expression "law of movement" to refer to the fact that there is no relationship to terror without a relationship to life and speed. Terror cuts to the quick: it is connected to life and quickness through technology. You can see it in the image of a gazelle using its agility to escape a lion.

Speed is a significant phenomenon that became my life's work. The "law of movement" theorized by Arendt is the law of speed. Soon after celebrating the end of the war, a "balance" of terror was established between the Western and Eastern

Blocs, a reciprocal immobilization, suspended speed. After experiencing the wars of direct confrontation symbolized by Verdun and Stalingrad, we came into the idea of massive dissuasion with Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We lived under this regime of a balance of terror for almost forty years. The first real and symbolic explosion in Hiroshima opened the space of cosmic fear.

*“Balance of terror” is an “unbalanced” expression. It makes security the “offspring of terror” to use philosopher Jean-Pierre Dupuy’s expression. Fear as a generating principle. How can we think this incongruity?*

This “incongruity,” as you say, is at the heart of the administration of fear. The “balance of terror” was first and foremost, concretely, a military balance based on the arms industry and the scientific complex. Let’s remember that science started to become militarized in World War I with chemical warfare but was only truly militarized with the H-bomb, which was on an entirely different level as an absolute weapon. We must see reality as it is. Since Hiroshima, Western democracies and the USSR, followed by Russia, and the rest of the world by means of diplomatic alliances and preferences, have lived with a military regime overshadowing political life. We can graciously recognize that this would be in democracy’s interest



if it wanted to be preserved, but we must also admit that it created a politically uncomfortable situation. It is even politically incorrect because democracy, under this military-scientific regime, can only survive in an illusory and very partial manner. And I will remind you that the reason we did not have an atomic war is due more to a miracle of history than the supposed virtues of mutual dissuasion. Take the Cuban Missile Crisis. Arthur Schlesinger, Kennedy's advisor at the time, said that it was not only the most dangerous time of the Cold War but the most dangerous time in the history of humanity. It was two minutes to midnight on the Doomsday Clock, the timepiece invented in 1947 by physicists who were shocked by the atomic bombs dropped on Japan.

*Robert McNamara, military adviser during the War in the Pacific and later Secretary of Defense under Kennedy, even said "We lucked out."*

Yes, but political reality is rigged by military power. The military-industrial complex took control in the end. When he left the White House, Eisenhower, a specialist in military logistics, warned against the military-industrial complex and its increasing hold over all levels of decision making, and against the fact that it was becoming a univocal filter for reading the contemporary

world. And Eisenhower knew just how much it threatened democracy.

*In using the expression “military-industrial complex,” you have no hesitation in sharing terminology favored by conspiracy theorists?*

I am not a conspiracy theorist; I only describe logics. This complex started to become dominant with the bomb because it took hold of science and contaminated it. To be precise, however, the word “scientific” is missing from the expression “military-industrial complex.” No political philosophy emerged to counterbalance, manage or channel this ideological and logistical complex. To understand it, I think we need to remember how a major, historic rendezvous in the history of ideas was missed. In fact, in the early 20th century, the question of the relationship between philosophy and science became frayed: a misunderstanding occurred between two leading thinkers. The intellectual encounter between Henri Bergson, the theorist of duration, and Albert Einstein, the inventor of relativity, did not work. The two thinkers, both Jewish, both geniuses, were not able to understand each other when they met in Paris. Bergson did not interpret relativity in the same way as Einstein: he understood it from the perspective of the feeling of immediacy and the

experience of time, not from the perspective of physics. Neither as special relativity, with the question of the respective position of two observers placed in situations of relative movement, nor from the point of view of the curve of space-time in general relativity. For me, this is the domination of the military-industrial complex: it is all the more frightening for political philosophy today because this philosophy has not thought about speed or speed articulated in space.

*In terms of concrete political philosophy, what did we miss in the unproductive dialogue between Bergson and Einstein?*

The source of the misunderstanding between Bergson and Einstein was mainly the fact that the philosopher was talking about “*vif*” [vivid, lively] and the physicist was talking about “*vite*” [quick] and “*vide*” [vacuum] which have scientific validity but lead people to be anxious about life, towards doubt and the relativity of life. It was a space-time that had until then escaped immediate consciousness; temporal compression crushed the euphoria of progress. Phenomenology, which could be hastily described as the science of phenomena as they are perceived by the consciousness, was caught short, and I am using this expression on purpose. I am a phenomenologist, a Bergsonian

and Husserlian. Bergsonian because of the attention to the living; Husserlian because of the attention he gave to thinking our habitat, the Earth, as the space in and through which we experience our own body, most notably in one of his posthumous works “Overthrow of the Copernican theory in usual interpretation of a world view. The original ark, Earth, does not move.” [TN—published in English under the title “Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature”] Husserl asserted the inertia of being in the world, which makes it a world and not a flux. Today, the inertia of the instant (simultaneity of communications) dominates the inertia of place (sedentariness) and phenomenology has been caught short by the notion of speed, despite the “intuition of the instant” by Gaston Bachelard. Phenomenology has been unable to explain that speed is not a phenomenon but *the relationship between phenomena*. Speed is relativity and relativity is politics! To explain: ancient societies had varied and diverse chrono-politics: calendarial, liturgical, natural (the seasons), civil or religious (holidays), professional, with the rhythms of farmers and then craftspeople, etc. In the 20th century, we discovered and used the instantaneity offered by the absolute speed of waves: at this precise moment, philosophy was left behind. I

was friends with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and we often remarked that the lack of a political economy of *speed* to follow the traditional political economy of *wealth* was and still remains the great drama of political thought. The administration of time and tempo escapes us. Tempo and rhythm. Dromology, the science of movement and speed, has therefore always been a musicology for me. My master, Vladimir Jankelevitch, was a prominent musicologist. Dromology is a question of rhythm, of the variety of rhythms, of chrono-diversity. You can see that what I am trying to think about has nothing to do with deciding whether or not to decrease or increase the speed of the TGV. I am not part of an Ancients vs. Moderns debate between technophiles and technophobes. The stakes are on a completely different level: it is the question of the diversity of rhythms. Our societies have become arrhythmic. Or they only know one rhythm: constant acceleration. Until the crash and systemic failure.

*Yet we are in an era of the balance of terror. Atomic weapons still exist, but their proliferation is relatively limited and slow, at a rate that the researcher Bruno Tertrais estimates to be approximately one new nuclear power every five or six years since the end of the 1940s. And the two blocs no longer exist. Isn't that enough for fear to ebb?*

No, because the first, largely unthought sequence constituted by the balance of terror, was followed by a second sequence characterized by the imbalance of “terrorist” terror. This is the key factor in the spread of contemporary terror. It is an imbalance because the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has spread beyond the sphere of dissuasion between the blocs to threaten world peace (in particular, by means of radiological weapons, which are relatively more accessible than nuclear devices and can still render cities uninhabitable for a century). The initial events of this new phase called the “imbalance of terror” are of course the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York, followed three years later by the attack at Atocha Station in Madrid and then in London. How should we define the imbalance of terror? As the possibility for a single individual to cause as much damage as an absolute weapon. It is also the “making of fear” in the literal sense of the word, which is what terrorism does. The weapons are not necessarily sophisticated, but they are volatile, movable and frighteningly effective. The possibility of a total war caused by a single individual is frightening because it changes the traditional relationships of force as they have been experienced throughout most of human history. It has caused panic not only on the individual level but also a political panic that has lost all sense of scale, especially in the United States.

*You are thinking of Donald Rumsfeld when he said that “the war on terror will be won when Americans and their children can again feel safe.” The American political scientist Benjamin R. Barber’s response was that “no American child may feel safe in his or her bed if in Karachi and Baghdad, children don’t feel safe in theirs.”*

True, but these two statements reveal the failure of the war on terror. Between them, the outraged and outrageous political reactions of neoconservative America and Great Britain have multiplied. The second Iraq War that removed Saddam Hussein revealed the grotesque face of a response that was literally a misstep, one war late and one terror removed. When you realize that a person can get on an airplane with explosives while his father is warning the CIA of his dangerousness and radicalization, it says a great deal about the means being deployed and the nature of the threat.

The imbalance of terror has also taken an apocalyptic slant, in the religious sense of the word, a “revelation” in the extremely suggestive combination of man-made events and acts of nature, some of which come from what I would call the “ecological bomb.” The major biblical myths were realized and concentrated in the first decade of the 21st century. Babel, with the collapse of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center; the Flood with

the combination of the tsunami in December 2004 and Katrina in 2005; and then the Exodus today with the probable submersion of coastal regions caused by the rising seas of global warming. I call it an ecological bomb in reference to the atomic bomb. I should also mention a second type, which is intimately connected to this time of the imbalance of terror. It is no longer atomic and not yet ecological but *informational*. This bomb comes from instantaneous means of communication and in particular the transmission of information. It plays a prominent role in establishing fear as a global environment, because it allows the synchronization of emotion on a global scale. Because of the absolute speed of electromagnetic waves, the same feeling of terror can be felt in all corners of the world at the same time. It is not a localized bomb: it explodes each second, with the news of an attack, a natural disaster, a health scare, a malicious rumor. It creates a “community of emotions,” a communism of affects coming after the communism of the “community of interests” shared by different social classes. There is something in the synchronization of emotion that surpasses the power of standardization of opinion that was typical of the mass media in the second half of the 20th century. With the industrial revolution of the second half of the 19th century, the democracy of opinions flourished through the press, pamphlets and then the mass



media—press, radio and television. This first regime consisted of the standardization of products and opinions. The second, current regime is comprised of the synchronization of emotions, ensuring the transition from a democracy of opinion to a democracy of emotion. For better or for worse. On the positive side, there are the examples of spontaneous generosity following disasters of all types; on the negative side, there is the instantaneous terror caused by an attack or a pandemic and the short-term political actions that are taken in response. This shift is a significant event that places the emphasis on real time, on the *live feed*, instead of real space. And because the philosophical revolution of relativity did not take place, we have been unable to conceive of every space as a space-time: the real space of geography is connected to the real time of human action. With the phenomena of instantaneous interaction that are now our lot, there has been a veritable reversal, destabilizing the relationship of human interactions, and the time reserved for reflection, in favor of the conditioned responses produced by emotion. Thus the theoretical possibility of generalized panic. This is the second major explosion of the relationship with reality.

*In your opinion, then, fear is the product of speed, which causes anxiety by the abolition of space, but is also amplified and vectorized by it.*

Yes, speed causes anxiety by the abolition of space or more precisely by the failure of collective thinking on real space because relativity was never truly understood or secularized. It is why Francis Fukuyama was wrong in predicting the *end of history*. First of all, because there is something unnecessarily apocalyptic about his prognosis; second, because history continues with the march of time and human action; and third, because Fukuyama was misleading us and causing us to waste time. The question is not the end of history but the end of *geography*. My work on speed and relativity led me to suggest the notion of a “gray ecology” on the occasion of the Rio summit on the environment in 1992. Why “gray”? More than just a reference to Hegel’s “gray ontology,” it was a way for me to say that if green ecology deals with the pollution of flora, fauna and the atmosphere, or in fact with Nature and Substance, then gray ecology deals with the pollution of distance, of the life-size aspect of places and time measurement. Almost twenty years later, I fear that we have not made any further progress in understanding this pollution or the ways to reduce it.

*Do you mean a disappearance of reality, and do you agree here with Baudrillard and his theory of simulacra? I am thinking of his polemical article post–September 11 where he claimed that the*

*iconographic power of the towers collapsing was such that it would cover up the event itself.*

More than Baudrillard, whose conclusions on simulacra I do not share, I would prefer to mention the book by Daniel Halévy published in 1947 called *Essay on the Acceleration of History*. In my opinion, we have left the acceleration of history and entered the *acceleration of reality*. When we speak of *live* events, of real time, we are talking about the acceleration of reality and not the acceleration of history. The classical definition of the acceleration of history is the passage from horses to trains, from trains to propeller planes and from planes to jet aircraft. They are within speeds that are controlled and controllable. They can be managed politically such that a political economy can be created to govern them. The current era is marked by the acceleration of reality: we have reached the limits of instantaneity, the limits of human thought and time.

*The loss of place is joined by the loss of the body?*

Yes, and people are required to transfer their power of decision to automatic responses that can function at the immobile speed of instantaneity. The acceleration of reality is a significant mutation in History. Take the economy, for example.

The economic crash that we experienced in 2007–2008 was a systemic crash with a history, a history going back to the early 1980s when global stock exchanges were first connected in real time. This connection, called “Program Trading,” also had another, highly suggestive name: the “Big Bang” of the markets. A first crash in 1987 confirmed and concretized the impossibility of managing this speed. The crash in 2008, which was partially caused by “flash trading,” or very fast computerized listings done on the same computers as those used in national defense.

Insider trading could occur very quickly. In fact, the shared time of financial information no longer exists; it has been replaced by the speed of computerized tools in a time that cannot be shared by everyone and does not allow real competition between operators. We are witnessing the end of the shared human time that would allow competition between operators having to reveal their perspective and anticipation (competition that is vital for capitalism to function) in favor of a nano-chronological time that *ipso facto* eliminates those stock exchanges that do not possess the same computer technology: automatic speculation in the futurism of the instant. This insider trading is an anamorphosis of time that has yet to be analyzed and sanctioned. Regulation becomes impossible because of this escape into the

acceleration of reality. We can see how the absence of a political economy of speed is now literally causing not capitalism but turbo-capitalism to explode because it is caught at the limits of the acceleration of reality. I know that the current systemic crash, with the collapse of the housing bubble in 2007, is more complex and is leading us to rethink the relationship to value and accounting norms; however, the short-termism is obvious. The dilemma is that science itself has been deeply affected. Our reality has become uninhabitable in milliseconds, picoseconds, femtoseconds, billionths of seconds.

*In an infinitely reduced space-time, does fear become fear of the lack of space, claustrophobia?*

Fear, as a product of spatio-temporal contraction, has paradoxically become cosmic. It was already cosmic at the time of the balance of terror. Now it has become cosmic in the sense of space-time: fear now covers the relationship to the universal. The universal was fundamentally peaceful as it was understood in the Enlightenment and Judeo-Christian thought. Panic has now become something mystical. For example, do you remember how the end of communism saw the rise of a movement that had gone unnoticed: “cosmism”? Leonid Plioutch, a dissident, wanted to write a book on

this phenomenon and on the Moscow philosophers who worked on it. Cosmism was the chimerical and expansionist desire to perpetuate the communist ideal in universal space as it was opened by the conquest of space. In the same way, with the crisis of capitalism, we can see how a “cosmic-theism” has developed with the same mystical fantasies. German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, whom I admire, has done significant work on this subject and has even developed a philosophy of the space station. I see it as no more and no less than another example of contemporary illuminism. The current crisis is an anthropological crisis. Literally. Hegel’s “beautiful totality” is becoming the “awful globality” of the ecological crisis.

*Isn't this fear the fear of losing reality, along with any control over it?*

Derealization is no more and no less than the result of progress. The defense of augmented reality, which is the ritual response of progress propaganda, is in fact a derealization induced by the success of the progress in acceleration and the law of movement that we mentioned at the start of this interview. This continual increase in speed has led to the development of a megaloscopy which has caused a real infirmity because it reduces the field of vision. The faster we go, the

more we look ahead in anticipation and lose our lateral vision. Screens are like windshields in a car: with increased speed, we lose the sense of lateralization, which is an infirmity in our being in the world, its richness, its relief, its depth of field. We have invented glasses to see in three dimensions while we are in the process of losing our lateralization, our natural stereo-reality. Augmented reality is a fool's game, a televisual glaucoma. Screens have become blind. Lateral vision is very important and it is not by chance that animals' eyes are situated on the sides of their head. Their survival depends on anticipating surprise, and surprises never come head-on. Predators come from the back or the sides. There is a loss of the visual field and the anticipation of what really surrounds us.

Yet this situation is not fatal. It would be if we pay no attention to it and speed is still not taken into account with wealth. I have always thought that political economy was invented by physiocrats, men of the body, human, humus, and hygiene. We lack a political economy of speed. I am not an economist, but one thing is clear: we will need one, or we will fall into globalitarianism, the "totalitarianism of totalitarianism." As a reminder, I believe that the mastery of power is linked to the mastery of speed. A world of immediacy and simultaneity would be absolutely uninhabitable.

*How can a body or density remain in a purely informational logic? Do you share the idea that progress has something to do with our fate, which is to be unable to resist it?*

We must be able to dominate the domination of progress. There is a distinction between progress and propaganda. Speed, the cult of speed, is the propaganda of progress. The problem is that progress has become contaminated with its propaganda. The computer bomb exploded progress in its materiality, its substance in the sense of reality, geopolitics, temporal relationships, rhythm. To be clear, my fight is against the propaganda of progress and not against progress itself. I remember reading *Signal* during the Occupation; it was a newspaper that promoted the occupiers. I remember it very clearly: the power of domination and, moreover, the will to convince others of its merits had something very contemporary about it. Today, propaganda has replaced progress. In the word propaganda, we can recognize “propagation.” In religious faith, there is *propaganda fide*, the spread of the catholic faith under the direction of the department of pontifical administration. Propagation and faith are of the same nature. Propaganda and faith are not of the same nature.



*Propagandists and proselytizers are not the same...*

Exactly. And propaganda comes directly from the fact that we did not take into account the phenomena of relativity that we have been talking about from the beginning. The damage of progress is the damage caused by propaganda. I have always said that I am not against new technologies; I am only against promoting them. How can we not be alarmed by the media storm that erupts with each new product released by the company with an apple as its logo? The media provides free promotion and participates in the mass illuminism which is at a far remove from information. It explains how augmented reality (the computerized technology that allows virtual images to be superposed onto natural perception) is passed off as progress *in itself*. Whereas these new perceptions come at a cost: the loss of a part of the field of perception, since augmented reality is nothing more than accelerated reality.



ADMINISTRATING FEAR:  
TOWARDS CIVIL DISSUASION

**Bertrand Richard:** *The propaganda of progress raises the question of the propagandists. Who are the people behind this propaganda? And if there are no propagandists, how are we to understand it?*

**Paul Virilio:** There is a destiny connected to the considerable event that has speed *dominate* light. Speed now illuminates reality whereas light once gave the objects of the world their shapes. In the light speed of electromagnetic waves that create this instant interactivity, speed has taken power. In a way, waves and not rays illuminate reality; it is a major phenomenon that I would not hesitate to call illuminist. What we are living through now has taken the shape of a religion; it is not unlike a return to sun worship where speed has replaced light. We are experiencing the return of a major myth supported by the propaganda of progress.

There is nothing behind it, no *deus ex machina* or pope. We are no longer in the Enlightenment: we are in the century of light speed.

*Obscurantism propagates fear. You are trying to trace the reasons behind this contemporary fear, but is it a real fear? Or is it more of an anxiety, a fear without an object, or a phobia, the projection of internal anxieties on an external object?*

The question of fear is clearly polysemic and covers all three of the notions that you just mentioned. Fear is very resourceful and can use anything at hand, but it has a very concrete explanation. It comes at a time in history when three major fears (the balance of terror with the atomic bomb, the imbalance of terrorism with informational bombs and the great ecological fear with the fear of the explosion of a genetic bomb) have displayed their incredible conditioning power. Gunther Anders, whose broad theoretical reach we have already mentioned, affirmed in his work *The Outdatedness of Human Beings* (1956): "The power of an ideology is not only measured by the answers it can provide but by the questions that it is able to suppress." In the propaganda of progress as I defined it, the question of speed and its violence (unsanctioned violence) has been purely and simply suppressed. There was a missed connection

at the origin in the history of ideas, but afterwards the ideology of progress prevented the development of the *political* question of relativity and the question of its violence. We have conscientiously established an ideology of speed, with all of the fear and terror that comes with it. As the philosopher of war Sun Tzu aptly noted: "Speed is the essence of war." And if time is money, speed is power, the essence of power. How could you not be afraid of the power, ubiquity, and instantaneousness that, very significantly, were first the attributes of the gods?

*And yet, when we are afraid, that is not what we are afraid of.... There are many intermediate, more prosaic fears (jobs, health, security) that take the place of what we should really be afraid of, which is that the world is becoming, as you describe it, unlivable, compressed, shrunk by speed. And the worst part is that we still want even more speed and instantaneity. What does it mean?*

My task, as you know, is to focus on the fear that is hidden by the ideology of progress. The hothouse effect of the siege mentality, the claustrophobia of masses of individuals under siege are the phenomena that draw and require my attention. During the Second World War, an American journalist entered the Warsaw Ghetto and noticed that the windows

were open in the middle of winter even though the inhabitants were burning their furniture to keep warm. When he expressed his surprise, people there replied: “You wouldn’t want us to have to close our windows too.” This is the siege mentality: foreclosure. The growing atmospheric pressure caused by global warming is joined by dromospheric pressure, the tension created by speed in our daily lives and work. At the intersection between the environment and our ways of life, we can find fears that are related to socio-economic contexts. On this topic, how can we not think of the wave of suicides that swept France Télécom at the beginning of winter in 2009–2010? And the scale! How can we not see that fear has been administered, in the strict meaning of the term, by instant interactivity, in particular in the functions that relate to real-time communications? The acceleration of reality has had a considerable impact on social rhythms and has started to wreak havoc. The notion of arrhythmia that I also mentioned earlier is obvious in the slogan “Time to move,” the management program implemented within France Télécom to ensure the permanent mobility among its executives. The rhythms of the past were tied to seasons, the liturgical calendar, Sunday holidays, the Sabbath; they have been pushed aside in favor of 24/7. “For what reason should we stop people from working on Sunday?

The world is changing,” is the refrain we now hear. With the rural exodus in the 19th century and the urban exodus that is beginning (since a number of Western cities have seen a decline in the net migration rate), with the change from an artisanal rhythm to an industrial rhythm to a postindustrial rhythm characterized by logics of synchronization, we are now experiencing firsthand the loss of the sociopolitical rhythmology that has always governed human beings.

Temporal compression, as it is technically called, is an event that concretely modifies everyone’s daily life at the same time. In the face of this acceleration of daily life, fear has become an *environment*, even in a time of peace. We are living in the accident of the globe, the accident of instantaneousness, simultaneity and interactivity that have now gained the upper hand over ordinary activities.

*What do you mean by environment?*

The word “environment” is an Anglicism in French. The key word to remember here is “habitat” or the place of our habits. But there is almost no space left, because of both spatiotemporal compression and the ruin of ecosystems. This contraction has made a fusion possible between the sanitary ideology of ecological Great Health and the security ideology of the search for Lebensraum. This

hybridization can lead to biopolitics, as Giorgio Agamben has denounced it, and to meteorological-politics. Seasons and their rhythms no longer condition and shape our social temporalities; it is now a meteorological-politics where weather patterns threaten to replace the geopolitical chronicles of History.

Biopolitics is the contemporary extension of the Great Health government announced by Nietzsche, a utopia proclaiming the death of God. It was taken up and perverted by the Nazis with their creation of *Lebensborn*, centers for the birth of pure, Aryan children. They turned it into something other than the aristocratic morality of Nietzsche; it became a “raciality” “scientifically” developed through racism. Fear has become an environment in the sense of the fusion of security (video surveillance, movement control, etc.) and health; it is extremely problematic and traceability has replaced any real identity.

The fusion of these ideologies has also led to the return of strictly individual existence. “Strictly” because we are very much a society of individuals, yet it is a society of mass individualism. As filmmaker Joseph Losey observed, “It is too late to do anything in private life.” The communism of affects is the privatization of communism. In this way, communism has not disappeared from History; it has been privatized, creating a community of



synchronized emotions. Something happened with progress and its propaganda to make us constantly preoccupied with progress and perpetually *occupied* by it. We are now in a situation of occupation in both the temporal and martial meanings of the word: we are under the pressure of permanent occupation. This occupation places us under surveillance, watching us, scanning us and evaluating us, revealing us and it is increasingly present, increasingly accepted as a fate, a destiny. Promoting progress means that we are always behind: on high-speed internet, on our Facebook profile, on our email inbox. There are always updates to be made; we are the objects of daily masochism and under constant tension.

*I am reminded of Pascal who found that people's unhappiness comes from not knowing how to be still, in their room. Their room is now Facebook. They put pictures on their "wall" but it is also the opposite of Virginia Woolf's "room of one's own." Yet there must be something to this progress and even some liberating qualities.*

The room is the box: the high-speed terminal and its container. The container is an architectural figure of the box. It becomes an interconnected *locus solus*. I don't want to be cast as the eternal Cassandra of technology, but it must be said that

we are encountering a phenomenon that is not at all secular. This ideology of progress, which is not progress, can be seen in certain practices. The notions of resistance and collaboration as I described them at the beginning of this conversation come to mind. But we no longer feel occupied, we feel free, and even increasingly free, *delivered*. And in fact we are freed from the space-time of duration. The question is whether it is good to be free of it, unless the ideal of liberation becomes freedom without content, intransitive secession. And we notice with this pressure that performance and its demands place us under constantly renewed evaluation, which is the source of enormous stress. Stress: the “mot-valise” that translates the dromospheric pressure I mentioned before. Terror is therefore the accomplishment of the law of movement. When suicide itself becomes a workplace accident (and we are on the verge of official recognition of suicide as a workplace accident), the administration of fear is again at work, albeit now in peacetime. It is a movement from Freudian psychopathy to the sociopathy of the Suicidal State. It is no longer a particular psychological state, it is a common sociological state.

*So you see the trajectory of our modernity as going from Freud to Durkheim, since the father of sociology dedicated a significant part of his research to suicide.*

You are correct. The Suicidal State becomes a socio-politics. The advertising promotion (from pro-mote) of new ICT leads to the anguish of permanent stress that makes the acceptance of death feasible and even more desirable than living *that life*. From this perspective, there is now a new paradigmatic figure of our modernity: the kamikaze. And if suicide is soon recognized as a work accident, the actions of kamikazes become official. Individual resistance to the state of technological occupation would take the form of sacrifice and nihilist philofolly. In terms of corporate performance, there is no other alternative than for employees to give their lives for the land of their boss. The kamikaze heroism of resistance to the program is a response to this figure of postindustrial heroism.

The phenomenon is quite extraordinary. Mohammed Atta, the mastermind of the September 11, 2001 attacks, who flew an airplane into the World Trade Center after going to pilot school, is a telling example. His weapon was his work equipment combined with his sacrificed body. I might add that Mohammed Atta was an architect and he wrote about the Twin Towers in his Master's thesis in Hamburg. We should note: if political or religious ideologies lead to the type of engagement theorized by Sartre, those of the progress of instantaneous-ism, of the futurism of the instant lead to enthusiasm and then to being

carried away, to violence against others and finally against oneself. It is here, in particular, that the question of private life becomes most acute.

*The political scientist Pierre Hassner, in reference to post–September 11 international politics, described a phenomenon that he called “the gentrification of barbarians and the barbarization of the gentry.” Western information technology has been perfectly mastered by terrorists and the disenfranchised, while Western powers show no qualms about putting their moral and legal statutes on hold to wage war on terror (Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib). Isn’t this also fear blurring divisions and mentalities?*

You will have noticed that when we spoke of occupation and when you asked about how I was able to navigate a world with restricted boundaries, the first thing that I mentioned was my family and then my village. What does it mean? Familialism, on the one hand, and communitarism. When the world becomes uninhabitable, we turn to cliques and tribes, even if they are largely imaginary. When temporal compression occurs, the fragmentation of the resulting society leads to the creation of a fractal society. In my book *Lost Dimension*, I examined Mandelbrot’s theory of fractal geometry and found that globalization was also a fractalization. The more economic and social dimensions

are global, the more the organization of society becomes fractal, and the chances of cracks and breakdowns increase. It is not by chance that an explosion of research in what is called nanotechnology, which is in fact nano-chronologies, is taking place at a time when the globalization of the entire sphere of the planet has been achieved. The magnitude of the power of globalization necessarily results in the magnitude of the poverty of fragmentation. This fragmentation continues to deepen, all the way to the egotism and solitude of the subject, which goes along with the mass individualism that has become our sociological state. After a historical period marked by collectivism and grand totalitarian societies, another period marked by a return to an individualist but mass ideology began: we became individualists because of the masses and temporal compression, the mass effect of the globe. The notion of mass individualism should be analyzed and even psychoanalyzed. Socialist parties are now going through an ideological crisis because they haven't done this analysis. They haven't realized that with the privatization of communism in the communism of affects, socialism, the *socius*, has not yet found its relationship to postmodern individuality.

Even more significantly, social-democrats missed the movement of our societies' center of gravity towards security. In the fusion of health

and security that we mentioned before, they should have adopted a strong position. The demand for security is real and it would be wrong for us to dismiss it as fantasy or paranoia. The demand for security in a world subject to fear and major dangers is a political reality. Let's be perfectly clear: I am not speaking about Charles Pasqua or Nicolas Sarkozy's policies nor their use of the police. I am talking about the pressure, stress and contraction of a world that is now too narrow for technological progress where mass individualism is one of the major psychopolitical questions for humanity in the future.

*In his book Liquid Times, Zygmunt Bauman demonstrated how the development of the security ideology occurred as providential States, by ideology or impotence, turned away from insurance (health insurance or employment insurance). According to him, we have evolved from "a desire for individual insurance to a need for physical security." At the same time, there is the feeling that a form of Social Darwinism is starting to take over. Bauman wrote that "in contemporary dreams, however, the image of 'progress' seems to have moved from the discourse of shared improvement to that of individual survival. Progress is no longer thought about in the context of an urge to rush ahead, but in connection with a desperate effort to stay in the race."*

In a world characterized by mass individualism, my body becomes the final rampart. And even skin finds an echo in screen interfaces. The surface of the body becomes an emblem of my finitude. It resonates with the plenitude of the finite world. I have worked on walls, on the Atlantic Wall, but also, as an architect, on secure homes, on gated communities, and this notion of the final frontier is crucial. There is a passage from agoraphobia to claustrophobia. And it is a troubling situation. Remember Mermoz when he said, "I would not want to be a survivor." This man, a man who took part in conquering and opening up the skies, was terrified of not being able to explore. Outdoor sports, certain extreme practices have been developed that are related to suicidal pathology and interindividual aggression. Let us take a look: there have always been bad guys. But their fights were due to trafficking or hierarchical codes of honor with graduated levels of violence. Now a glance is enough to cause an attack and people are stabbed for next to nothing, for increasingly futile motives. Getting carried away has taken the place of enthusiasm, and reaction, action. We are in the fit of rage. Along with a lack of verbalization, a deficit in the mastery of language.

I think that you are right to mention Social Darwinism because there are two questions underlying this notion: on the one hand, the abolition of the death penalty and, on the other, voluntary

death. The freedom to commit suicide is a natural freedom; there is no need to discuss it. But things become disturbing when a certain discourse on personal dignity asks people to bring an end to lives that are deemed unsuitable. It is incredibly perverse. But we should not forget that anxiety secretes its own theories.

*Would you agree with sociologist Loïc Wacant that we have entered a “new government of social insecurity. A time where all grand ideas [have] lost their credibility and the fear of an illusory enemy is the only thing left for politicians to guarantee their power”?*

I can believe it, which leads us to the second dissuasion, not military dissuasion (the balance of terror, dissuasion between Eastern and Western Blocs) but civil dissuasion. Today, given the imbalance of terror that is our lot, there is a great temptation for military or civilian powers to establish civil dissuasion, in other words a state of fear that allows the suspension of controversial social situations. My first book was called *The Insecurity of Territory*: contemporary social insecurity is connected to this insecurity of the territory of temporal contraction. We are only at the beginning of a social dissuasion that will confirm that the ideologies of security and health are combined in an ecology devoid of any vital space, in



opposition to the authentic ecology of the *here and now*. I believe that in the short term, this state of social dissuasion will threaten democracy. Massive electoral absenteeism is already a clinical symptom.

*And yet democracy still functions. Isn't the question now what form collective courage will take against the management of fear?*

You know that I am a critical theorist. I am not a man of expedients. All I can say is that political hope will come from a deeper awareness of the crisis. Thus my wish for a “university of disasters” and a collective reflection on limits. We have reached the limit in the sense that the Earth is too small and the world is foreclosed. If there is any hope, it resides in the collective and universal intelligence of the *real* state of the world. We cannot stop at only the economic and political dimensions of the crisis. You can hear some people saying that the economic crisis of 2007 signed the death warrant of capitalism. Of course not! We need to stop this fractalization of reality. The true heart of the problem lies in becoming aware that managing the economy cannot come from the use of politics alone. A *philosophical* intelligence of the state of the world needs to be developed to regain control over the major social choices that we have to make; from this point of view, it is necessary to

rediscover the original force of philosophical discipline in the polis. "Where is being-in-the-world in the era where speed is at the limit?" This is the question we should be asking and the question we must answer. Only from that point can we begin to imagine taking paths that might offer something new in social and economic terms. But we cannot get out of it with a basic anarcho-syndicalism, even if it is strong and dedicated. And not with a logic that makes anti-progress its alpha and omega. I also have my reserves about the notion of degrowth. I do not believe that local solutions exist: this reflection must take place on the global scale, where something like the birth or rebirth of the University (a major intellectual collectivity in History) must take place. Marxists know the intellectual collectivity of socialism. The intellectuals I am talking about are the human race. At the time of the Sorbonne, Salamanca, and Bologna, universities were an incontrovertible collectivity (Greco-Latin, Judeo-Christian and Arab). We need to rediscover this authority and depth of field, this intelligence of the state of the world, the lack of which explains the lifelessness of current political proposals.

*The only distinctive aspect of the modern version of fear, Bauman writes, may be the break between the measures inspired by fear and the existential tremors that caused it.*

The phenomenon that Bauman describes can also be seen in the art world. Since the Second World War, we haven't gone beyond Expressionism. While I understand the passage from Impressionism to Expressionism, which sought to produce the most emotion possible in the viewer or listener, when attending the productions of the Viennese Actionists, I thought that the process was no longer possible or tolerable. I understand Picasso's *Guernica*, a masterpiece, and Otto Dix's work. But Neo-Expressionism continued into an academism of disgust. Fear produced an art that outlasts itself, disconnected from the impulses that created it; it becomes a fear itself, an autonomous anxiety, in music, theater and even architecture. Remember that I have done work on bunkers. There is post-bunker architecture that is not Expressionist but Neo-Expressionist, and even Actionist. Houses and dwellings have been built where the architect seeks to produce physical or mental discomfort, where torture is a phenomenon caused by the place itself. Think of Takamatsu, the Japanese architect, who said: "I want people entering my houses to be afraid of leaning on the walls, and to have the feeling that there are razor blades in the corners." Takamatsu is a leading Japanese architect, whom I have worked on, in particular with Félix Guattari at the *École spéciale d'architecture*. Corners are very important for architects. And he wanted this

cornerstone to cut. The culture of repulsion continues on long after the real causes (wars, horrors) are gone. Repulsion replaced the seduction that was typical of older architecture, the seduction of the baroque, the seduction of volume and the golden number in Adolf Loos and many others. Today, the effect sought is to recoil. First of all, because it is frightening (and we return to the bunkers that come from an architecture of repulsion), fear is their functional aim. The society of fear brought forth its own art that replaced seduction with repulsion. This explains my disagreement with Baudrillard, who was a man of seduction and simulation, while I am a man of repulsion and substitution. Take a simulated reality. According to Jean Baudrillard, it stops there. But I have always argued that a simulated reality will change and end up substituting itself for itself to become a different reality. It will integrate its simulation. We end up having causal chains of successive realities. We now live in the time of substitution and repulsion. And enclosure in the world, like the “great enclosure” that Michel Foucault spoke of for the 18th century, creates a claustrophobic panic reflected in our works. Fear not only creates its environment, with its ghettos, gated communities, communitarianism, it has also created its culture, a culture of repulsion. It relates to racism and the rejection

of the other: there is always a reason to push out, to expulse the other.

*With the apocalyptic portrait that you paint of our world, how do you explain the hedonism that seems to prevail? It is hard not to raise the objection of orgasmic fevers, the way people enjoy technology as well as leisure activities. Is it a danse macabre or a glitch in your analyses?*

It is hard for me to respond without sounding like a moralist. And I am not a moralist. Basques often say that they enjoy themselves seriously and I must be part Basque. It is hard for me to talk about happiness and collective pleasure. I am an only child, and my experience was less of pleasure than pain and solitude. That said, I do not believe in hedonism and on that point I disagree strongly with Michel Onfray. In a sense, Onfray is expressing the end of hedonism. He speaks about it with such diligence that it sounds like a funeral mass. True joy does not need to be promoted; it is striking. Let's take an example: raves. They are baroque parties in the political sense of the word. In the societies of the 17th century, dance had a political and choreographic dimension that communicated something of the king's body to those around him. Raves today remind me of something similar. They are like a political manifesto on the uneasiness of being together. Their significance

comes from expressing the uneasiness of being together of mass individualism.

*It is very important to note their clandestine character, and the fact that they can be held anywhere and at any time. To organize one, you occupy a space, often a military one (army base or airport), which is not insignificant, and turn it into a political and logistical ceremony of contemporary malaise. My judgment here is not moral but aesthetic.*

Along with the feeling of claustrophobia that you describe, our fears also grow out of a demographic panic, to the point that Malthusian ideas are once again being debated. Claude Lévi-Strauss, recently deceased, did not hesitate in confronting the question head-on; news magazines openly examine human overpopulation; and some politicians...

The demographic question is crucial. Yet the way that we approach it is essential. There is an awful way of doing it, which relates to civil dissuasion. Civil dissuasion agrees with activating the genetic bomb, the possibility of mutating the human species, of producing life. After the industries of death brought about by the gas chambers and concentration camps, the industries of life now offer the possibility of a genetically modified human race, calling into question humans born of blood and sperm, and therefore the wild, the

“natural” part of humanity. The “naturals” would become the new savages, with augmented people leading a “new humanity” shaped less by political totalitarianism than bioengineering. And now we have entered the question of hyper-racism. The deadly consequences of the great ecological fear are extremely disturbing. We are at risk of seeing not only military dissuasion established between powers but civil dissuasion between people. What would be behind this civil dissuasion? The third bomb, which in truth has not yet exploded, but already carries a name: the genetic bomb. It is the mutation of the human species by genetic engineering; the production of a human being with a smaller ecological footprint, consuming less air, water and energy; the installation of a genetically modified organism to adapt to new environmental conditions, a new human being with a smaller ecological footprint because it uses less proteins, oxygen and water, a creature made compatible with an Earth of dwindling resources. On this point, we should return to the important work of Henri Atlan. There is nothing gained without a loss. We needed cars to leave horses, which were relegated, significantly, to the race track. We have now reached a point where we cannot lose what we are working to banish: space and time. Success forbids the loss. We cannot take the risk of such a loss. Günther Anders would not have said it any

differently. Which is why the health-security ideology is caught up in this dissuasion, which is not a dissuasion of substance, of natural size, but of the natural in the sense of Being. The new humanity desired by the totalitarians has become a techno-scientific reality in its own right!

*You have mentioned how the search for vital space, either in the sense of armed conquest and war (the Nazi Lebensraum), or in the search for an outside planet to conquer, would constitute a double impasse. But what else can we come up with against the enclosure that you describe?*

Let's stay with the demographic question, because it is a concrete concern. The problem with the demographic question is that it is essentially treated as a numerical problem, a purely quantitative problem. In passing, I am surprised to see how many of the decisive issues of our future turn to the advantage of the quantitative at the expense of the qualitative. I do not think that we can deal with future history purely in quantitative terms. If we do so, in a certain way, we are leaving History. By studying problems from a quantitative point of view, we are paradoxically led to solutions that break powerfully and qualitatively with our true life. Let me explain. It is telling to note that the mathematization of reality, through the physical or



biological sciences, has led, through its own logic, to the question of the possibility of exobiology, the opportunity of life outside of life. Take, for example, extremophile ways of life, which interest exobiologists who have an interest in the ways that life, living creatures, can exist in conditions that are hostile to human beings. This line of thinking goes along with quantitative measures: difficult conditions for life, rarefied atmosphere, etc. The problem is that exobiology is not only a question of finding a place where we would live less well but where we could *survive*, and it is above all a way of asking the question of History and of what is vital, questions that are qualitative. Thus, by small steps, the industry of life would not only have to deal with the post-human or trans-human but with the ex-human or the extra-human. Just as we now live in the presence of an extra-world (the cyber-world), we may create an extra-humanity. In fact, I think that our quantitative obsession is leading us directly to a qualitative revolution, an exobiological revolution outside all rationality that cannot be reduced to the numbers that produced it. We are beyond Malthus. Malthus was the birth of statistical thought. We are now at the end of the digital. I cannot accept being enclosed in numbers, in a numerological cult.

*How can we escape this numerical law?*

To escape this summarily quantitative logic, we must realize that the central question is the question of movement. For a long time, the pattern of human movement on Earth took the form of a linear exodus, from a given point to a promised land; the biblical myth is the archetypical example. We then had the era of anthropostasis, of sendentarity. We are now leaving this period to enter a time not of tribal nomadism but of anthropodynamism. The form that is now taking hold is the closed-circuit, repeated exodus: an exodus where you move around. What we can see and think about is the era of urban exodus and the end of sendentarity. Over the past several years, sixty American cities have declined in population, along with more than four hundred in Russia. It is not a passing phenomenon. The subprime crisis, which caused the greatest economic crisis since the 1930s, was the start of the decline of cities, and not merely the decline of some cities, like Detroit, that are tied to a certain industry (the automobile industry in the case of Detroit) that need reconversion. We are leaving the immobility of buildings, which is true of cities, and are entering the polar inertia caused by real time. The immobile speed of interactivity is replacing the immobile speed of activity that went along with the co-presence of individuals. And this change in inertia will radically change the history of repopulation on earth. This closed-

circuit exodus represents a historic moment in population that could call into question the nature of demography. Just as the demography of nomads was different from that of sedentary peoples, the demography of this moment of inertia characterized by the repeated exodus will also be different: the relationship to procreation will change.

*The question of taking root will have to be completely reconsidered?*

Precisely. When you start a family, you let it take root. And a family does not take root in the same way if our lives are under the sign of polar inertia or immobile inertia. Why “polar”? Because poles are fixed, they are an axis. Ubiquity and immediacy are nothing more than immobilism. Relativity teaches us that perfect synchronization is the same thing as immobility. The contemporary sedentary is someone who feels at home anywhere, thanks to cell phones, and the nomad is someone who does not feel at home anywhere, someone who is excluded, ostracized. Someone excluded from everywhere. But a fusion will take place between mass exiles (a billion people will be displaced in the coming decades) and tourists. Tourists are starting to become the immigrants of cell-phone inertia. In 20th century societies, the city was still at home, through radio for example. With the new

technologies, we carry the city with us. The world has gone from the transportation revolution to the take-along revolution. Communication spots are also places for exchanging loads between one vehicle and another, between one type of encounter and another. We carry the world on ourselves while waiting for the in-ourselves: RFID chips (Radio Frequency Identification), nanotechnology implants that will make the world lie within us instead of before us. “Home” has endured for thousands of years under various guises since the Neolithic, and then “portable” took hold at the end of the 20th century with miniaturization. In a few years, it will be abandoned for the “inside ourselves” of incorporation. We will then have a painfully clear awareness of the phenomena of alterity and limits. The things involved go beyond immobile sedentarity. They will call into question the repopulation of the world, which will take place through movement. We will observe the same type of changes in the population dynamic that took place with ships and convents: after the gyrovagues, nomadic monks, Saint Benedict invented the monastery, their sedentarity. Inversely, women are present on ships throughout the world whereas they were absent from them at the start of the nautical movement, which gave rise to the myth of the Sirens.

*Milan Kundera wrote in his Art of the Novel that the “unity of mankind means: no escape for anyone anywhere.” His words come to mind in hearing your chilling prediction of this repeated exodus that is now taking shape...*

Michel Foucault located the emergence of the imprisonment phenomenon in the 18th century with the development of asylums and prisons. I think that the real imprisonment is just ahead. The mass claustrophobia that takes hold of peoples is one of the reasons for the great ecological panic, which is characterized in part by the fear that the planet is incapable of guaranteeing our development. That is why movement, escape, exodus become permanent phenomena. The only solution now is to move constantly or flee definitively.

*Move or, inversely, barricade yourself at home in the hope of preserving your space, according to a logic that is not the search for living space but its preservation.*

I worked for ten years to bring the bunkers out of the Atlantic because my youth was spent behind the walls of Fortress Europe and enclosed by the Western Wall. It seems clear that there is a strong temptation to rebuild a Fortress Europe, an anti-immigration fortress, outsourcing immigration policing to subcontractors (like Libya). The slogan

of our times is: “just-in-time, zero stock.” The slogan of mass retail should in fact grace the door to our future. Stock is just as much the stock exchange as the city: accumulation is left behind in favor of acceleration.

## NEW FEARS, NEW FIGHTS

**Bertrand Richard:** *How has speed become so attractive? Where does it get the “charisma” to seduce and abuse us?*

**Paul Virilio:** Its damage is its success. It presents us with an incredible paradox. I do not see paradoxes as aporia but as places of understanding a powerful tension, a meaning that cannot be overlooked. For speed, its success is also its damage. It is not an errant mistake in the sense of doing wrong or being mistaken. Its success itself becomes a catastrophe. It is very hard for researchers, politicians or celebrities to resist success, even if it is deadly. Extreme sports, performance enhancing drugs, extreme lifestyles are all indicators: doping is linked to success, even when the drugs are catastrophic for the body and the ethics of the sporting world.

*Citius, altius, fortius, faster, higher, stronger: Aren't you going against the Olympic ideal and, even more fundamentally, the human desire to go beyond our limits?*

The drama of our current society based on speed is what allowed us to build a rocket fast enough to escape the Earth's attraction and go into outer space. Think of Bossuet when he distinguished between two magnitudes: the magnitude of power and the magnitude of poverty. Whether we like it or not, we cannot separate the magnitude of power, or success, from the magnitude of poverty, or finitude. Our collective determination to separate them has led us to the third great fear, the ecological fear. The Earth is too small for progress; it is too small for instant profit. Acceleration dominating accumulation ("just-in-time, zero stock") is making it implode before our eyes. Consider the logics of distribution that we can see today: there are fewer and fewer warehouses, almost no stock, only the flow of goods. You can see how acceleration, the pure speed of circulation, has overcome accumulation. Turbo-capitalism has exploded the capitalism of accumulation and the major banks in favor of even larger banks that no nation state will ever be able to bail out.



*Shouldn't we see this as a good thing? They only took such careless risks because they knew the State would cover for them...*

Only in that it is the States that run the risk of failing, offering a revolutionary perspective. But I am not a revolutionary; I am a *revelationary*. What I write about and describe does not have the aim to revolutionize the system or lead to any change in political regime: I prefer the revelation to the revolution. What is revealed is that the acceleration of reality is eliminating the accumulation of products but also of goods, habitats, people. Delocalization is purely and simply the destruction of the mechanisms of production. With delocalization, the *hic et nunc*, the “here and now,” no longer has any meaning. To be even more precise: the *hic et nunc* has too great a *cost* and therefore no longer has any *value*. This explains the subtitle to the exposition I organized with Raymond Depardon at the Cartier Foundation in Paris: “Native Land, Stop Eject.” [French title: *Terre natale: ailleurs commence ici* (*Native Land: the Outside Starts Here*)]

*Do you agree then with what some ecologists call “localism”? Doesn't it run the risk of being seen as a withdrawal or even necrosis?*

I accept the term “localism” because the logic of the empire consists of saying “here begins somewhere else.” It consists of considering human fate in the same way that a rocket launcher sees a rocket successfully detach itself from the reality of the Earth. The empire consists of postulating that the *hic et nunc* is in the past and that only interactivity remains. For imperialism, it is a given that the immobile speed of instantaneity has replaced the immobile speed of co-presence. You and I, in the moment in which we are speaking, are in the immobile speed of the face-to-face and the co-presence of a dialog. But we could “talk” while being on two opposite sides of the globe. In the interval, we would have lost the relationship to the material world in favor of the world of electromagnetic waves; we would have entered a process of derealization. And then we would have lost the power to determine our conversation. In the end, programs would respond for us. This realization is what led George Bush Senior and Mikhail Gorbachev to agree on procedures to prevent instantaneous radar control that could launch a nuclear strike without human intervention, without any decision being made. The SS20s in Europe were so close to each other during the Cold War that the reaction speed in the case of an attack could only be performed by computers. We can see how these are limit-cases; they are ecological

questions in the sense that they deal with time and space. The Earth is too small for interindividual activity for the sake of interactivity, instantaneity and simultaneity.

*Couldn't someone reply that it is because the Earth is too small that we should seize the opportunity of interactivity? The technological possibilities of augmented reality could counteract the ecological cost of real physical travel.*

I think that it is not only a sham but it is also unlivable. We have gone from the “twilight of the idols” to the “twilight of places.” This is not a play on words. We are *of* and *in* the world. We are not pure spirit. In this sense, I am a materialist and a phenomenologist. The fear that takes hold of the masses comes from the feeling that something essential is being definitively lost, a relationship to places and reality is disappearing, dissolving, evaporating. As you know, for an architect, proportions are essential. On the side of “Nature” there is the “life-sized”: the question of proportions and dimensions. Being human takes place between 1.5 and 2 meters, not 18 meters, which would be the world of sycamores and sequoias. Looking at a computer chip, the scale is down to half millimeters. The pollution of “life-size,” the pollution of proportions is nothing more than the

pollution of the relationship of being in the world. Our relationship with others is a relationship of magnitude. Not “magnitude” in a symbolic or abstract sense but in a physical and physiological sense. We live with the size of the Other, of the world and places. “Desolation tourists” who travel the world in a siege fever (the fever of those under siege) understand, perhaps unconsciously, that the “life-sized” is disappearing. They are the mirror image of the emigrants fleeing misery and despair in an inverse and symmetric logic. The migrants of happiness want to see the entire world because they know that they have lost it through interactivity, television and screens. The migrants of sadness are escaping an unlivable world, Haiti or Africa. Here we are rediscovering the *hubris* of the Greeks; the notion of disproportion or excessiveness is reentering history. Our difficulty is that unlike the Greeks, who staged it to distance themselves from it, *hubris* is now taking over. Progress has become excess. We no longer fight it: we take pleasure in it while retreating. This is the contemporary hedonism that you raised as an objection earlier. In fact, the nature of the great ecological fear is imprisonment in a world that is too small and the appearance of cosmo-theistic temptations, the desire to discover an inhabitable planet for its exobiology and extremophile life. Which means a total lack of understanding of authentic human ecology.

*Everything is happening as if we were suffering from an excess and a lack of imagination in this crisis. Jean-Pierre Dupuy once wrote, on the consequences of the H-bomb, that “beyond certain limits, our power to act infinitely exceeds our power to feel and imagine” which he calls the “Promethean gap”...*

We are facing the emergence of a real, collective madness reinforced by the synchronization of emotions: the sudden globalization of affects in real time that hits all of humanity at the same time, and in the name of Progress. *Emergency exit:* we have entered a time of general panic.

*Would you say that the dynamic of progress, the desire for constant liberation, has outstripped its content (bestowing human happiness), or has the notion of promise itself disappeared?*

The notion of promise has indeed suffered from the nihilism that has settled deeply into our modernity. Nazism led the way. As a Christian, I like to remember the following thought: A philosopher says to his interlocutor, “So, you don’t believe in God?”—“No.”—“But you believe in everything else!” It is “everything else” that is coming to an end. Soon we will not believe in anything and nihilism will have reached its zenith. We will have entered what I call mono-atheism,

the paradoxical faith of those who believe in nothing *at all*. Even the areas most open to nihilism, like the financial sectors, are undermined by hyperbolic nihilism. The actors of the financial world are no longer confident, which is extremely worrisome because confidence and competition are the cornerstones of capitalism. Why do they lack confidence? For a reason of biblical simplicity. Because confidence can never be instantaneous. It must be built, earned, *over time*. Instant confidence, like instant faith, doesn't work. You need time to have confidence; you need time to have faith. It must be built: it has a tempo and a rhythm. That is why the liturgy, as an "act of the people" is vital. In a way, mono-atheism consists of not believing in anything of the "big" at all. The time of philofolly will then begin and spread, and along with it a kind of hyper-fascism. We are on the edge of this extremism with the systemic stock market crisis.

*Aren't you going too far?*

I think that the stock brokers are the victims of the illuminism that I have described elsewhere, an ersatz sun worship where the cult of speed has replaced the sun. After the accident of substance (Nature) and the accident of distance (commensurate with shortened travel times), we have entered

the accident of knowledge (related to the limits of our brains when faced with the immediacy of nano-chronology). Science itself is on the verge of a systemic crash, a philosophical coma. In the face of this crash, I suggested creating a “university of disaster” that has nothing to do with the disaster of the University! It is an invitation to acquaint ourselves with the era of speed. The great ecological fear combines three types of pollution: pollution of substance, distance and knowledge. Think of the famous phrase by Norbert Wiener, the father of cybernetics: “The world of the future will be an even more demanding struggle against the limitations of our intelligence.”

*So be it, but can the human adventure only rely on a defensive posture? Don't we need, not only to fight against our limitations, but to push back the boundaries, to dream of new utopias?*

Remember what the poet Saint-John Perse once wrote: “Go on, go on, word of the living!” But where should it go? To what utopia and, more importantly, to what uchronia, to what new relationship with time? Incidentally, it raises the question of whether thinkers, from the Presocratics to the Moderns, are of any help in the period we are now living. The acceleration of reality is such that I do not think philosophers from a distant

past could be very helpful. I do not mean to disparage them. You must learn the Ancients; they are an extraordinarily rich resource. But they are not enough. Why do I say that? Because rear-view philosophy will not help us face the question of global finitude, or the enclosure of consciousness. We must turn to the university of disaster. A recent workshop at NASA gathered philosophers, physicists and mathematicians in order to lay the foundations for what they called a “university of singularity.” It is promising, because by taking the notion of singularity, our singularity, they are putting the accent on the notion of limit and finitude and trying to break the crazy mechanisms of technological *hubris*. The unprecedented aspect of what we are experiencing requires another way of thinking, a conceptual beyond, that I call “revelation,” in the apocalyptic sense of a “new day.” In German, the “apocalypse” is “the youngest day.” What happened in Hiroshima and Auschwitz requires productive work, not just complementary work. We must not cut ourselves off from our roots, but we need to work. Like Heraclitus and Parmenides worked in their times.

*What is the reason for philosophy's conceptual drought following the advent of nuclear power? Why is it unable to grasp the novelty of what we are facing?*



Because we have failed to conceptualize acceleration. Speed is not what Antiquity thought about. It is logical, since speed is originally metabolic: the speed of an animal, a marathon runner, and then of a horse or a sailboat. The question of speed is an eminently modern and even postmodern question, if you think of the limit-speed of light that is now our reality with the digital world and high-frequency processors. With this limit-speed, I am even hesitant to call our times “contemporary.” I would prefer to call the sequence in which we are placed “in-temporary” in the sense that our regime of speed does not fit into the traditional tripartite division of past-present-future. Instantaneity is other-worldly and other-temporal. The 20th century was the century of techno-scientific revolutions. What we need is a philo-scientific revolution, the convergence of future Bergsons and Einsteins. And this time, they had better get along.

*It reminds me of the fine work by Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, The New Alliance. Yet hasn't this ideal become impossible to obtain? Does the extreme technicity of the fundamental disciplines still leave room for the humanities?*

I do not think that the difficulty comes from the technicity of the fundamental sciences. After all, the notion that we are examining—speed, relativity,

finitude, etc.—involve issues that the humanities are very well placed to elucidate in a dialog with scientists themselves. The primary difficulty, the cause of the split between the “exact” sciences and the “human” sciences comes from the fact that science has become militarized. The objective of science is no longer simply knowledge but knowledge of *final* power: poison gas and then the bomb. By “*final* knowledge,” I mean the end of the world and the end of life. The goal is to replace techno-science with philo-science and to rediscover the Other of philosophy and of science, which were united at the beginning. I call it revelation instead of revolution. Technology’s time is not past, but it can no longer continue *like this*. It can no longer continue, not only because we are losing sight of the meaning of what we are doing and we are consciously working to build an uninhabitable world, but also for a completely technological reason: the ebb, the questioning of the experimental sciences.

*What do you mean?*

I have had a few lively debates with the physicist Etienne Klein on this subject. He does not agree with me concerning this aspect of things but I think that contemporary fear is also linked, for people of science, to the questioning of the experimental sciences. Why? These sciences, of which Claude

Bernard was the paragon, were the foundation for the exact sciences. Because we experimented and to the extent that theories could be confirmed by experimentation, we could continue to think that the theories remained adequate. Without experiments, we are back in the realm of magic, not science. The problem, the major problem is that we can no longer perform experiments on the nature of progress. The impossibility of these experiments was first noted in 1945 at Trinity Site, the location of the first atomic bomb explosion in the New Mexico desert, when Oppenheimer declared that a scientific sin had been committed. When the detonate button was pressed, no one knew how far the chain reactions would go and they had no idea whether space wouldn't simply disintegrate. Watching from 30km away, the scientists in the control center had no idea if they were far enough away and the official reporter for the project, known as the "Manhattan Project," had prepared different press releases on the test ranging from total success to major disaster. What does it mean? It means that the power of theory and the exact sciences led us to the limits of experimentation, since the atomization of the experimenters became possible. For the first time in the history of science, a blind test was performed, literally. It is fascinating to note that in 2008, when the CERN collider was about to be launched (and I remind you that the

aim of the collider is to produce collisions between particles travelling at the speed of light to reproduce the physical phenomena that occurred just after the Big Bang), the physicist Otto Rössler, a chaos theory specialist from the University of Göttingen, challenged the Franco-Swiss researchers by asking: “Who gave you the authority to take the risk of creating a black hole?” Again, I am not saying that experimentation should be stopped: science’s greatness lies in its experiments. But when scientific success leads to the end of experimentation, the question of an “over-magic” or a “new magic” must be raised. Even atomic bomb testing is now done by computer simulation. We simulate the effects of bomb detonations “in the machine” because we can no longer test them “live”: the damage would be impossible to manage. An experimental limit has apparently been reached and the reign of the quantitative, of processors has definitively arrived. This is what I mean by “calling into question the scientific experimentation” that is the foundation of exact science, *big science*. And if experimentation is taken away, then we find ourselves back on the freshly cleared path of magic, along with the return of the mad scientist and the rise of philofolly.

*Can't the same thing be said of all current fundamental research, and in particular research into living organisms?*

Yes, it is what I called the genetic bomb earlier. Using processors, we can decode the human genome and begin the process of industrializing life after industrializing death.

*The analogy you are making is extremely violent. Do you stand by it?*

Absolutely. The notion of industrialization, or standardization, is there. Remember the terms of the debate: the industrial revolution produced standardization and the computer revolution produced synchronization. Biopolitics has become a major question, and not merely an issue of dealing with a pandemic of type-A influenza. And there are no longer any safeguards outside religion to protect us from its excesses.

*In France, however, when you are a genome specialist or when you do totipotent stem-cell research, there are more legal restrictions than anywhere else in the world, which could cause a harmful scientific delay. What is your response to this situation?*

First, I would note your important use of the word “delay,” since everything is now conditioned by the masochism of speed. Next, the situation you describe is not specifically French but European. Europe is where the University was created and is

therefore at the origin of contemporary science. And because it is the source, it is now showing a strong reticence to go too far in the manipulation of life. This European resistance comes from our millennial past. The issue raised by genetic engineering is no less than the question of the superman, the possibility of a real difference between human beings. It would no longer be a question of “race” as designated so abusively by skin color, but an ontological difference between those born of sperm and blood and those born of calculation and bioengineering. This split between two types of humanity would be infinitely disastrous, because it would be irremediable and indisputable, unlike the old opposition between savages and civilized people. Discrimination would reach catastrophic proportions.

*Isn't it overly conceited to think that we are close to disaster? And, even worse, isn't it a misleading optical illusion?*

To avoid it, I try to hold on to the remarkable term “singularity.” We are now experiencing the last of the globalizations: the finitude of geography in the face of temporal compression, which is the basis for “gray ecology.” We are facing a singularity (without any helpful reference or assistance) in History. Are we that incapable of realizing it? I use

the word “disaster” out of reference to the word “astral,” not out of any doom mongering. A disaster is an astral accident; and I think our geophysical totality is damaged. Are we Moderns able to recognize what is unprecedented and unspoken here? In my classes at the International Collège international de philosophie, I explored the meanings, the stakes of the word “inouï” [unprecedented, unheard of]. And I was always shocked to see how difficult it was to think about it, to think about telepresence and bilocation. From a religious perspective, the question of bilocation has already been raised: the appearance of a saint in two places at once. But it has not been raised from a technological and “real” perspective. And it is all the more astounding that “bilocation” has now become “multilocation” and the question remains philosophically untouched. For me, recognizing singularity means understanding the unthinkable in interactive telepresence.

*Freedom is necessary to think this singularity. But isn't the question of freedom extremely muddled by the confusion between the revolution in information technology and the contemporary promise of emancipation?*

If the freedom to think this liberty is uneasy, muddled as you said, it is because the power of the

ideology of progress, like that of any ideology, consists of covering up the questions that could raise doubts about its current form. At the same time, our freedom may seem troubled because of prostheses. Tele-technologies are nothing more than prostheses and thinking about freedom in relation to prostheses is altogether new. For example, can you say “no” to prostheses, especially in cases where they do not have a directly curative function? When they are adjuvants, increasing my “power to act,” my power to be, how could I say “no” to them? Would I have the strength to decide to go without them and remain an “unaugmented” human? This ethical question has hardly been explored.

As a city planner, I can say something about the political aspects of this question. With tele-technological prostheses and the development of teletact, we come back to the notion of temporal contraction leading to the revision of tripartite notions of duration (past, present, future), which in turn raises serious questions about politics as an art of the possible. Immediacy prevents the elaboration of a project *over time*, outside temporal pressures and these immediate concerns. The illusion of omnipotence by means of teletact, moreover, the feeling that reality is bending under our technological tools, contributes to the loss of the possible, which is the foundation of politics as an art.



It has an influence not only on individuals and their prostheses but also and increasingly on a new kind of politics that could be called “transpolitics,” which is nothing more than a movement beyond sociopolitics as we have known it since the Greeks. And therefore beyond democracy as an art of the possible. Until now, going beyond the possible was limited to tyrannies and dictators. As a counter example, Winston Churchill was a master in the art of the possible. An anecdote portraying the problem of temporal contraction illustrates it clearly. When the French and English were surrounded and bombarded by the Germans in Dunkirk in 1940, Churchill was the Prime Minister and requested a one-page note from the three armed services in response to the question “What do we do now?,” nothing more. The Lord of the Admiralty returned a paper filled completely on two sides. Churchill took him by the shoulders and said: “I was once Lord of the Admiralty like you. I said, ‘one page.’ I want your note in fifteen minutes.” Truth of the moment. This is the art of the possible, which is the opposite of tyranny. Churchill was perfectly in sync with urgency required by the situation. He exercised power in time, at the tempo of the *Blitzkrieg*. What would be the nature of transpolitism? I couldn’t say. The threat to democracy, the globalitarianism that I fear comes from there because it is being together

that is being questioned. Are transpolitical humans still humans or automatons? Thankfully, during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the two protagonists, Khrushchev and Kennedy were still human. Khrushchev enjoyed life and a dialog could be started with Kennedy because the two men understood that the automaton would destroy them since no strategy was possible in such a short-circuited temporality. The two leaders were able to reintroduce the art of the possible into their practice, which was under threat from total war. But for how long from the moment that politics becomes a chronopolitics of instantaneity? And for now it is a tyranny that has yet to be thought: the tyranny of real time.

*Which leads to the need for maintaining diversity in the different tempos and rhythms of life.*

Yes. We must work on chronodiversity. Like biodiversity, with the end of myriads of species leading to a veritable desert of life, and geodiversity, because of the salinization of soil or the submersion of coastal zones, chronodiversity is being exhausted before it could even be developed. The high frequency trades on electronic stock market platforms negate this diversity. We must therefore put the cultivation of rhythmology in the use of time and way of life at the center of our individual

and collective concerns, in opposition to the ways of speed, which are totally invasive. We must rediscover a “melodic line” to share. Arrhythmic societies allow no sharing. Modern societies have undergone a veritable accident in their tempo. We have broken the melody that was called life in common for the sake of the communism of affects.

What can be done? Italy has been in the avant-garde on this issue. In some of its larger cities, starting with Milan, the municipalities have established time offices. Now it has become commonplace. The use of space and the use of time are synchronized and debated. There are no directions for using space with directions for time, they stated. With faster means of transportation and the increase in center-suburb commuters (*pendolari*), Italians have recognized the need to define a chronopolitics. Debates including unions, transit authorities and employees are aimed at organizing everyone’s life with everyone else’s. It is not by chance that the terrorists targeted Madrid Atocha Station, the London Underground and the telecommunications in the World Trade Center: they had a perfect grasp of what was at stake in these zones of disruption, passage and disjunction. An arrhythmic society is a chaotic society. Despite its democratic regime, the feeling of chaos starts to reach people. We can observe

how the Paris subway and suburban rail (RER) strikes, unlike the TGV strikes (affecting the entire country), were strikes that affected the city, life in common, and could bring down a government.

All of this means that the rhythm and way of life must be saved from arrhythmia. People gather in raves and music dominates all cultural productions because rhythm is fundamental. Politics that aren't rhythmic are not politics of the possible: they become surrealist. Surrealism comes from war, from Apollinaire's "Oh God! what a lovely war." The madness of war and fear fed Surrealism, which is an excess of reality. The Surrealists wanted to highlight the acceleration of reality, the movement beyond common reality through speed. But we have turned the Surrealist's alarm into an ideal, which is a tragedy.

*What is the political form of this perverted ideal?*

Current thinking has turned to the hybridization of political regimes. It is indeed a time of hybridization (cars, political regimes, morals). China and Russia are troubling examples in their combination of turbo-capitalism and authoritarianism. Surreality tends toward the fusion of opposites and if one thing is certain, it is that the generalized democracy envisioned with the fall of the Berlin Wall has not occurred. The concept of hybridization

can lead to the best or the worst. It is for example the society of control described by Gilles Deleuze as it is developing in Great Britain and, increasingly, in France. As a man of the ramparts, I spoke with Deleuze many years ago about my fears concerning security gates. Metal detectors appear to be open but, in fact, they are worse than a wall. You have to go through them. In some airports, the security gate has become a hallway, an entirely separate space. When you have passed through the corridor, they know everything about you. Gates have become corridors before becoming a world! This is the reason why I pursue critical thought. My concern is that this hybridization will disorient politics and its historical, territorial foundations. After the deconstruction of nation-states, we are entering the potential disorientation of traditional guidelines for law and the unlawful, with the deconstruction of the rule of law soon leading to the disorientation of politics.

*When the question of security predominates, the question of the means for reaching it probably becomes looser. But don't our societies contain a refusal of the randomness and brutality of life? Isn't fear what remains when we have nothing left to fear?*

Once again, I think there are very objective reasons to feel fear. One thing that is clear about

security is that the most reasonable hells are created for the best reasons in the world. Public health and security end up devouring everything. From this perspective, “hyper-interactive” children are the sign of this situation. There have always been hyperactive children. Today, they are panic signs. They are pushed aside even though they are in unison with the mad rhythm of the world. The quick-tempered, passengers of their passions, have replaced the Sartrean *engagé*, the politically involved. This hurrying is a grave threat to democracy. It is something the lawyer Laurence Boisson de Chasourne warned us about: “Emergency does not produce laws because laws come from the normal political process.” I think this statement is essential. The law of the fastest is the source of the law of the strongest. These days, laws are under a permanent state of emergency.

As a conclusion, I would like to bring to our reader’s attention this popular saying: “Fear is the deadliest assassin; it does not kill, but it keeps you from living.” It defines the civil dissuasion that I wanted to discuss with you. The manifestations of the administration of fear are countless: they are our daily existence/everyday lives. In early 2010, in France, the Milgram experiment of 1963 was repeated to reveal the frightening docility of individual television viewers towards the commands of the host in a documentary called “The Game of

Death”; in 2006, the television program “Bye Bye Belgium” falsely announced the country’s split to unsettle both Flemish and Walloons. More recently, in Georgia, a program on the private channel IMEDI (“Hope,” sic!) announced an invasion of Russian tanks and the death of the president, causing panic. Images and panic... It is easy to understand how Graham Greene’s *Ministry of Fear* has once again taken up active—and now interactive—service.







We are facing the emergence of a real, collective madness reinforced by the synchronization of emotions: the sudden globalization of affects in real time that hits all of humanity at the same time, and in the name of Progress. *Emergency exit*: we have entered a time of general panic.

Semiotext(e)  
distributed by The MIT Press  
ISBN-13: 978-1-58435-105-4

