

# Virilio: Mimesis, Mourning, and Modern Technology

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*Abstract:* In *The Vision Machine* (1994) Paul Virilio uses powerful imagery to warn us about the consequences of our increasing dependence on “vision machines.” With little use, he claims that our sense organs will atrophy and we will degenerate into neurologically simple organisms. This article examines his use of imagery, arguing (after NicholSEN, 1997; Saussy, 2006; and Taussig, 1993) that he mimetically replicates cultural anxieties as well as the destructive drives he critiques. Arguing that he mourns the loss of an ideal human animal of knowledge constituted through the Greek practice of *technē* (Heidegger, 1977), the article further questions whether his writing is symptomatic of “left melancholia” (Brown, 2003).

*Keywords:* Media theory; Theories of technology; The body

*Résumé :* Dans *La machine de vision* (1994), Paul Virilio emploie des images puissantes pour nous avertir des conséquences de notre dépendance croissante par rapport aux « machines de vision ». Il croit que nos sens, en étant sous-utilisés, s’atrophient et que nous allons nous dégrader, devenant des organismes neurologiquement simples. Cet article examine les images que Virilio utilise; il soutient (à l’exemple de NicholSEN, 1997; Saussy, 2006; et Taussig, 1993) que cet auteur reproduit mimétiquement des anxiétés culturelles ainsi que les pulsions destructrices mêmes qu’il critique. L’article, affirmant qu’il fait le deuil d’un animal humain idéal possédant un savoir formé au moyen de la pratique grecque du *technē* (Heidegger, 1977), soulève en outre la question de l’écriture de Virilio en tant que symptôme de « mélancolie de gauche » (Brown, 2003).

Mots clés : Théorie des médias; Théories sur la technologie; Le corps

## A warning to humankind

In Paul Virilio’s provocative volumes on technology and contemporary life<sup>1</sup> the modernist dream of a “harmonious machine civilization” envisioned by Le Corbusier is nowhere in sight. Virilio (1994, 1995) vividly paints the devastating consequences of the obsessive cult of technology for both terrestrial and human forms of life. In *The Art of the Motor* (1995) he announces that the very nature of

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our bodies is in the process of being radically transformed. He warns us that neither “ethics [n]or biopolitical morality” are able to protect the body from being transformed into “primary material” (1995, p. 113) with the emergence of what he calls “technoscientific fundamentalism” (p. 120).

The will to power of a science without a conscience will pave the way for a kind of intolerance yet unimaginable today precisely because it will not simply attack peculiarities of the species like sex, race or religion. It will attack what is alive, “natural” vitality finally being eliminated by the quasi-messianic coming of the wholly *hyper-activated* man. (1995, p. 120, emphasis in original)

For Virilio, science in the late twentieth century inherently has no value—not just for human life, but for life itself. He argues that the principles of the new “perverted science” (p. 120) are, in fact, the antithesis of life.

Alarmed by the way critics, artists, and scientists have embraced “technoculture,” Virilio aims to provoke us, to wake us from our “sleep” (Armitage, 2001a, pp. 3, 6). As he races with breathtaking speed across history, linking war and the logistics of perception with innovations in the acceleration of communication, transportation, and visual technologies (Kellner, 1999), he warns us about the dangerous impulses of modernity’s dream of ever increasing acceleration. In an attempt to burst any illusions of equating speed with (democratic forms of) freedom, he reminds us that Marinetti’s futurist movement, which supported the rise of Italian fascism during the 1920s and 1930s, was also characterized by the celebration of speed and the desire to escape the material confines of the human body (Armitage, 2001a; Virilio, 1994, 1995; Zurbrugg, 2001). For Virilio, “those who are optimistic about [modern and hypermodern] technology are very closely allied to Fascism” (quoted in Zurbrugg, 2001, p. 158).

Although scholars are critical of Virilio’s “demonization” of technology and his lack of faith in democratic alternatives (Armitage, 2001a; Kellner, 1999; Redhead, 2004), as Kellner states, “Paul Virilio is one of the most prolific and penetrating critics of the drama of technology in the contemporary era” (1999, p. 103). Over the past decade as an increasing number of his texts have been translated into English, scholars have sought to definitively pin down his political and theoretical position (see Armitage, 2000; Armitage, 2001a; James, 2007; Kellner, 1999; Redhead, 2004). Yet scholars who focus on Virilio’s ideas tend to overlook one of the most powerful dimensions of his work: his form of writing, what he refers to as his painterly approach to theory. Virilio reflects:

At this point one enters into the realm of emotional responses. I’m so involved in the world of painting and the world of art that I don’t speak about it much in my books because I live it! I am a painter who writes. . . . Surely you feel that my books are very visual. . . . They’re not words, they’re visions! (quoted in Zurbrugg, 2001, p. 160)

Taking Virilio’s lead, this article examines his powerful “visions” of modern technology. In particular it focuses on the imagery he creates to capture the destructive forces of “vision machines” and the consequences for humans as animals of knowledge. The article concentrates on his imagery in *The Vision Machine* (1994) with some reference to *The Art of the Motor* (1995). In both

books, the influence of phenomenology on his conception of humans as embodied and sensual beings is evident. Though, unlike other philosophers of technology influenced by phenomenology (Hayles, 1999, 2005; Idhe, 1990, 2002; Sobchack, 2004), who recognize the active forces of the body, in the face of the violent forces of modernity, Virilio views the human body as passive. He claims that our increasing dependence on vision machines has meant that we use our sense organs less and less. With lack of use, he warns us that our bodies are regressing into disorganized, “dyslexic” pulsating flesh, unable to apprehend the worlds in which we live.

As I will argue, Virilio uses mimetic techniques to create graphic imagery to warn us about the destructive forces of modern technologies like vision machines.<sup>2</sup> Through mimetic replication he captures the way these technologies “attack what is alive,” invoking feelings of horror, fear, and disgust. To examine Virilio’s imagery in detail, I draw on discussions on mimesis from the fields of anthropology (Taussig, 1993) and aesthetic theory (Jay, 1997; Nichol森, 1997; Saussy, 2006). On the one hand, I ask whether Virilio’s mimetic techniques have a critical potential, shattering the thrall that vision machines and other modern technologies have over us. On the other hand, I question whether Virilio’s mimetic techniques place him in danger of replicating the forces he aims to critique, of becoming possessed by their destructive drives. To conclude, the article then takes a closer look at Virilio’s disturbing dystopic vision of humankind and questions whether his views are symptomatic of a deep melancholy,<sup>3</sup> which Wendy Brown (2003) has argued afflicts left intellectuals trapped in mourning the lost promises of modernity.

### **Vision machines**

Before discussing Virilio’s use of mimetic techniques, I will outline his thesis on vision machines and the degeneration of the human body, revealing the influence of phenomenology on his conception of humans. For Virilio, the body is the basis for two essential attributes of humankind: knowledge and imagination. His essay “Topographical Amnesia” (1994) argues that our increasing dependence on vision machines that selectively record and interpret the world, whether telescopes, cameras, or digital recorders, has led to the degeneration of our ability to know the world as well as a decrease in our capacity for imagination. Like Merleau-Ponty (1962), for Virilio, sight with all its neurological and cognitive processes is the sense that forms the foundation of our capacity to perceive and thus know or, in more phenomenological terms, apprehend the world.

According to Merleau-Ponty, whom Armitage claims has had a great influence on Virilio (Armitage 2001a; see also Virilio, 1994, 1995), our ability to apprehend the world relies on a synthesis of perceptions from multiple senses, whether sound, touch, or smell. At one level, according to Merleau-Ponty (1962), the synthesis of our perceptions makes it possible for our bodies to orient themselves and move as well as engage in a range of activities in specific environments with various people. Through the synthesis of perceptions we generate kinesthetic images that Merleau-Ponty refers to as “body images.” Over time, these images become the basis of the non-conscious embodied assumptions about the nature of our worlds and underlie a range of potential responses to any num-

ber of situations. For example, after repeatedly walking down a narrow flimsy staircase with a rickety handrail, one's body image would form in relation to the staircase and shape how one might cautiously walk down the stairs, attuned to the danger of falling without having to consciously check every step and constantly remind oneself to avoid using the handrail. Thus the body image is not static. It is generated through an accumulation of experiences. Ideally it changes over time, incorporating new interactions with various environments and people.

Virilio argues that relying on vision machines means that we will decreasingly use our visual organs and the physiological and cognitive mechanisms associated with their operation. This has severe consequences. For example, he notes that studies

record a weakening of the central (foveal) vision, the site of the most acute sensation, along with subsequent enhancing of a more or less frantic peripheral vision—a dissociation of sight in which the heterogeneous swamps the homogenous. This means that, as in narcotic states, the series of visual impressions become meaningless. They no longer seem to belong to us, they just exist. (Virilio, 1994, pp. 8-9)

To understand the link between our sense organs—specifically, our eyes—and our ability to make sense of the world, I turn to Virilio's discussion of "visual dyslexia." He cites teachers who have observed the damaging effects of vision machines on "the last few generations" who "have great difficulty understanding what they read because they are incapable of *re-presenting* it to themselves" (1994, p. 8, emphasis in original). According to Virilio, the ability to read depends on our visual abilities. Reading refers to interpretation: interpreting sensory impressions and synthesizing them into the meaningful units of comprehension within a specific system of signification or language. As we use our eyes less and less, we find it increasingly difficult to interpret visual sense data and synthesize them into meaningful units of comprehension. As we lose the ability to use our eyes, we lose the ability to know the world.

To use our sense organs to read, Virilio (1994) says we need to learn bodily techniques of perception. Merleau-Ponty's influence on Virilio is evident here. Merleau-Ponty (1962) explains that as we learn techniques to see and hear, for example, what is in our environments, over time we incorporate these techniques into our taken-for-granted movements, dispositions, and responses. These techniques integrate us with our surroundings and become the foundations of understanding the worlds in which we live (Merleau-Ponty 1962). But while Merleau-Ponty does not hesitate to explore the use of prosthetics (canes, eye glasses) as extensions of our sensory organs, in contrast, Virilio posits that prosthetic devices, especially modern optical devices (for example, see the discussion of military sighting technology below), *replace* versus *extend* our capacity to see. He argues that as we increasingly rely on vision machines, we no longer regularly practise bodily techniques (phenomenological means of apprehension) (Virilio, 1994).

To illustrate the consequences, Virilio presents historical cases. He points out that since "lamps came into fashion" in France, it "is the young who are wearing glasses; good eyes are now only to be found among the old who *have kept up the*

*habit of reading and writing*” (Virilio, 1994, p. 10, emphasis added). The “habit of reading and writing,” in other words, is a bodily technique that trains sense organs to apprehend visual data. Those who decreasingly practise the bodily techniques of perception end up with atrophied sense organs—in this case our eyes. In Virilio’s view, the bodies of those who rely on vision machines to interpret and synthesize sense data are increasingly reduced to passive (or weakened) amorphous flesh and steadily lose the capacity to apprehend the world.

According to Virilio we are not only losing the ability to perceive the world but also the ability to recollect our experiences. This has dire consequences for the second essential human attribute: the imagination. The techniques of mnemonics are especially important for the imagination, which in turn involves anticipation. Anticipation, the ability to conceive what may happen next, relies on the ability to remember. Virilio explains that we

do not manufacture mental images on the basis of what [we] are immediately given to see, but on the basis of . . . memories, from which, *by [ourselves we can fill] in the blanks and [our] minds with images created retrospectively, as in childhood.* (p. 3, emphasis in original)

Thus our memories of previous events provide the basis for anticipating what might happen next. It is important to emphasize that for Virilio, like vision, memory does not consist of just virtual images. Memory entails bodily techniques: mnemonics. Virilio cites Cicero’s ancient “Method of Loci” as his ideal mnemonic model, which he refers to as a “topographical system” (1994, p. 3). This “imagery-mnemonics” consists of selecting a sequence of places and items that can be ordered in time and space, such as the rooms and furniture in a house. The material to be remembered, for example, points in a speech, are associated with individual rooms and pieces of furniture. To recall your speech, you imagine yourself walking in sequence through the rooms past the furniture, which trigger your memory of the sequence of points. But with our increasing reliance on technological devices to store data, we have stopped practicing mnemonic techniques. As a result we find it difficult to recall both information and our own experiences of the world.

Vision machines also threaten memory also because they reduce our ability to retain mental images.

With the industrial proliferation of visual and audio-visual prostheses and unrestrained use of instantaneous transmission equipment from earliest childhood onwards, we now routinely see the encoding of increasingly elaborate mental images together with a steady decline in retention rates and recall. In other words we are looking at the rapid decline in mnemonic consolidation (Virilio, 1994, pp. 6-7).

To describe in more detail how the act of imagining necessarily involves perception and especially recollection, Virilio turns to Western art. Virilio argues that the veracity of a work of art depends on the ability to produce an illusion that engages our visual organs. He explains that artists “solicit” the

eye (and possibly the body) movement in the witness who, in order to *sense* an object with maximum clarity must accomplish an enormous

number of tiny, rapid movements from one part of the object to another. Conversely, if the eye's motility is transformed into fixity 'by artificial lenses or bad habits, the sensory apparatus undergoes distortion and vision degenerates.' (Virilio, 1994, p. 2, emphasis in original)

Virilio discusses the work of the sculptor Rodin to describe the way artists solicit eye movements of "witnesses" to invoke their imagination. Rodin insists that the veracity of his sculptures is accomplished by fashioning his work with imprecise details—in contrast to mechanical reproductions, such as photography. For example, one foot of the sculpture of a woman might be disproportionately larger than the other, or facial features might sag and drip in ways that suggest a body collapsing with exhaustion. Insofar as the imprecise details make the sculpture either "fall short of" or go "beyond immediate vision" (p. 2)—they are suggestive. The missing but suggested physiological details engage the imagination of the viewer. They compel the viewer to "fill in the blanks" either retrospectively or by anticipating the next movement of the body.

The capability to "sense" what might have come before or anticipate what might come next is essential in the realm of art. Unlike photographs or other images produced by vision machines, the artist works with the viewer's perception and experiential memory. Rodin captures the body in a state that anticipates *something beyond itself*—beyond what is depicted—whether another movement, person, or event. In contrast, images produced by vision machines do not involve bodily techniques of perception and memory. Vision machines precisely record all details of a body or event in a given moment, whereas artistic techniques work purposely with imprecision and incompleteness to suggest possibilities beyond what is seen. Thus, vision machines, according to Virilio, fail to engage the body's capacity to imagine.

Over time, with the reliance on vision machines, the human body decreasingly perceives and recollects. Instead it simply receives whatever images flash before it. Virilio concludes that the body is reduced to a simple organism drawn to phatic images and other stimuli. The phatic image is

a targeted image that forces you to look and holds your attention—[it] is not only a pure product of photographic and cinematic focusing. . . . [It] is the result of an ever-brighter illumination, of the intensity of its definition, singling out only specific areas, the context mostly disappearing into a blur. (1994, p. 14)

Here Virilio suggests that, like infants, we are drawn to intense images, rather than exploring the underlying forces of what is at play. This is another example of how Virilio's work diverges from other phenomenological studies, especially those that explore the embodied cultural processes of reading images produced by modern technologies. Most significantly, Virilio's analysis stands in stark contrast to Roland Barthes' 1972 *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. While Virilio assumes that humans are powerless in the face of modern technologies like photography, Barthes explores the complex experiential and mnemonic dynamics of reading photographs as temporal imprints of events and people as they become engulfed into what has passed. But it could be argued that while Barthes is concerned with the possibilities of "reading," Virilio is more concerned

with the consequences of a visual regime that destroys our capacity for phenomenological readings.

As Virilio explains, phatic images and vision machines are situated in a broader industrial-military context. In the first half of the twentieth century, phatic images, he writes, “spread like wildfire in the service of political or financial totalitarian powers in . . . North America as well as in destructed countries like the Soviet Union and Germany, which were carved up after revolution and military defeat” (1994, p. 14). Virilio argues that vision machines (and the phatic images they produce) are one element in the increasing domination of what he calls the “logistics of perception” (1994, pp. 4, 12; see also Virilio, 1989). The logistics of perception entail the reconfiguration of sight around a military logic that organizes everything in terms of securing control and annihilation. Whether the telegraph or satellite, it involves a logistics that abstracts and “delocalizes,” accelerating the speed of calculation and transmission of information.

Alerting readers to the spread of the logistics of perception, Virilio traces its movement from its military roots to broader society. He describes how “optical arsenal” designed in accordance with the logistics of perception shifted the “line of sight” of the firearm—“cannons, rifles, machine guns used on an unprecedented scale [in the First and Second World Wars]—to cameras, the high-speed equipment of aerial intelligence, projecting an image of the de-materialized world” (1994, p. 13). Millions of men in battlefields became dependent on “lines of sight,” whether looking across the barrels of their rifles or at intelligence photographs mapping the terrain of carnage. This inaugurated a “revolutionary change in the regime of vision” (p. 13). Americans and Europeans stopped believing their eyes and started investing their faith in “the technical sightline” of battlefield devices. Virilio claims that this led to a fusion-confusion of eye and camera lens. As eyes became rigid and immobile, “losing their natural speed and sensitivity, photographic shots . . . became faster” (p. 13). He suggests here not only that humans are losing the ability to apprehend the world, but also that destructive industrial-military technologies are rapidly assimilating these capabilities.

### **Imagery of the body and cultural anxieties**

As short provocative treatises, it could be argued that Virilio’s texts belong to a tradition of critical intervention (see Ellul, 1964; Klein, 2007; Lifton & Falk, 1982; Mumford, 1970; Plumwood, 1993; Shiva, 1999) that warns us about our material and emotional investments in increasing levels of destructive technological control and exploitation of global environments and populations. It is my contention that the power of his texts does not rely simply on convincing argumentation and evidence. There is more going on. He creates imagery, for example, of humans reduced to “pitiful caricatures of semi-immobility” (Virilio, 1994, p.8) that confronts us with the terrifying, annihilating technological forces that we now rely on. In this section, I examine his use of mimetic techniques to create graphic imagery of degenerated human bodies. I examine whether his techniques end up replicating the destructive forces of technology he critiques,<sup>4</sup> placing him in danger of becoming possessed by their power, or alternatively, whether he successfully generates imagery that shatters the thrall these technologies have over us.

In many ways, Virilio's imagery recalls iconic science fiction novels and films, whether William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and *The Matrix* (1999) or more recent texts, like *Code 46* (2004) (Stacey, in press). These texts give us glimpses into a future where humans have been reduced to compliant bodies plugged into insidious networks of technology. They introduce us to dystopias where there is little possibility for existence outside the eugenic and/or digital order of things. Those who slip outside the grasp of the totalitarian techno-megacities become outcasts, valueless "human waste" (Bauman, 2004, p. 80) in toxic borderlands. The imagery of passive bodies and "human waste" in these texts draws its power from imagery that evokes feelings of horror, disgust, and fear.

To illustrate the way this imagery works, it is useful to examine a scene from the iconic film *The Matrix*. I have selected the frequently cited scene where Morpheus introduces Neo to reality outside the illusions of the computer-generated matrix. The audience is presented with a terrifying Art Nouveau cum Gothic nightmare. Chords of choral-like music drive toward a dissonant climax as cameras pan to show huge black towers that soar into the dark sky and disappear into unseen depths. Almost the entire human population—millions of unconscious "sleeping" bodies—is arranged in tiers of glowing red pods encircling the black towers. The audience experiences the horror of this organic-machine in a close-up that replays the moment when Neo "wakes up." The camera frame is filled with his pale body immersed in thick mucus, recalling a fetus in a mother's womb. But rather than safely nestled in amniotic fluid, Neo has black leechlike tubes plugged into his body's central nervous system, feeding his electrical power into the world of machines.

This scene draws on images filled with modern Man's contradictory fear of and fascination with technology and the power to create life (Hayles, 1999; Porter, 2003; Ullman, 2002). In *The Matrix* the massive black towers laden with seedlike pods invoke an image of Nature gone mad, calling up misogynist images of a monstrous mother that breeds ceaselessly (Constable, 1999, 2006; Springer, 1999). The horror of machines plays regressively with the horror of the Mother who refuses to release her children from her womb, infantilizing her grown offspring so they remain dependent extensions of her life. As if plucked from Freud's worst nightmare, the Mother is parasitic, her power expanding as she feeds off their unfulfilled potential.

Humans who regain consciousness, like offspring who threaten the Mother with too much autonomy, are unplugged from the life support system and flushed out of their pods in a sequence recalling birth. They are then liquefied and fed intravenously to the living in a closed system that resembles the livestock factories producing fresh meat infected with bovine spongiform encephalomyelitis for the globe's carnivorous human populations.

The imagery, like the imagery in other iconic science fiction texts like *Neuromancer*, consists of a constellation of references, many of which gather their emotional force from regressive impulses and anxieties. As the description above suggests, the constellation reaches its own visual-aural-emotional climax with the misogynist imagery of the Mother gone mad. In Virilio's work, one experiences similar feelings of climax as he graphically captures the destructive drive of tech-



nology and its horrific end: the regression of human life to primordial, pulsating matter. Virilio most vividly captures this climactic end in his description of the human body as it is stripped of embodied perceptual techniques in his essay "A Topographical Amnesia" (1994). In the following quote he describes what happens when "vision machines" replace the movements of the eye.

The age-old act of seeing was to be replaced by a regressive perceptual state, a kind of syncretism, resembling a pitiful caricature of the semi-immobility of early infancy, the sensitive substratum now existing only as a fuzzy morass from which a few shapes, smells, sounds accidentally leap out . . . more sharply perceived." (p. 8)

In Virilio's apocalyptic world, when techniques of perception, and specifically ocular movements involved in the act of seeing, are replaced by vision machines, the body degenerates, becoming semi-immobile, capable of only passively receiving sensory data. Virilio here uses evocative language filled with revulsion and fear to describe the degraded state of the human: "pitiful caricature," "early infancy," "fuzzy morass from which a few shapes, smells, sounds accidentally leap out." There is zeal in capturing the amoebic state of humans and also a hint of scorn for those who constantly seek out the latest technological innovations drawn to the ever brighter, sensually stimulating phatic image. Their desire for the technological innovation suggests a childlike obsession for the latest gadgets with no consideration of the consequences. The description of our regression to a "pitiful caricature" of "early infancy" links this obsession with infantile fascination.

The imagery of pulsating primordial flesh is disturbing. Virilio's description mimetically replicates the imagery of amorphous flesh, like the scene from *The Matrix*, with all the references to the infant human as an uncontained bundle of bodily impulses, responding to simple stimuli and sensations. Virilio's imagery suggests that the ungoverned, undisciplined body of the modern human, like the infant, has not been inculcated into socially meaningful coordinates of movement and gesture. This imagery of the infant as a difficult to decipher bundle of drools, cries, and coos oblivious to social boundaries is replete with cultural anxieties, including the fear of being completely dependent on the M/other. Dependence and lack of control over bodily functions threatens the fiction of the autonomous, self-controlled subject. Drawing on regressive fears and pathological repressions, as a body outside of the Symbolic, the Law of the Father, it is flesh outside meaning, driven by primordial impulses (Silverman, 1983). In the most reactionary terms, this imagery stands in for "the Other" incarnate: whether the female body or uncontrollable floods of human waste.

While Virilio mimetically replicates imagery of amorphous infantile flesh in his imagery of modern humans, in contrast to the *Matrix* films, he does not couple this horror with a fascination with the powers of the human mind. For example, in the *Matrix* trilogy one can escape the confines of the human body through the virtual world, with its promise of delivering a head rush of unimaginable control. The audience follows Morpheus and his crew as they jack off into the matrix: instantly becoming superhero fantasy-selves with hard six-pack torsos, death-defying speed, and kung fu expertise uploaded in a flash. The crew takes us on an entertaining romp as they navigate portals and glitches with equipment that

looks like it was soldered together from a trawl through pawn shops and garage sales, a gesture to the creative bricolage of the humans eking out a life in the ruins of William Gibson's post-apocalyptic cities.

Rather than celebrating the exhilarating experiences of new technologies, Virilio warns us about the destructive cult of speed and power. "With acceleration, there is no more here and there, only the mental confusion of near and far, present and future, real and unreal—a mix of history, stories and the hallucinatory utopia of communication technologies" (Virilio, 1995, p. 35). For Virilio, the appeal of the exhilarating experience of technology is nothing new. For instance he draws on literary figures such as Flaubert, who describes the craving for increasingly intense and accelerated experiences in the 1870s. Virilio describes Flaubert as a "habitué of train travel" (p. 80) with cravings for travelling to far-flung places across the globe and overcoming the material limitations of his body. Railway travel introduced inconceivable speeds to journeys that previously took days and months by foot and horse. Virilio suggests that the train as a new transportation technology had the effect of liberating travellers from their bodies. Flaubert's musings from over 130 years ago seem eerily similar to the writings of high-tech cyberfanatics. "Aren't you tired of this body that weighs on your soul and cramps it like a narrow [prison] cell would? Demolish the flesh, then . . . we shun the flesh, we execrate it" (quoted in Virilio, 1995, p. 80).

This quote shows how the fascination with speed is coupled with a disgust of the body. Yet while critical of this fascination, Virilio uses language that mimics the impulses of Flaubert. For example, he writes, "[t]o expand, to dissolve, become weightless, burst, leave one's heavy body behind: our whole destiny could now be read in terms of escape, of evasion" (p. 80). In this quote he appears to "try on" the language, moving into its logic, its drives, as with his descriptions of the "semi-mobile" human impulsively drawn to phatic images. The quote is but one example of how his language replicates the same fatalistic, self-combusting drives that he critiques. Thus like his replication of the reactionary cultural anxieties about the body (even if these anxieties are mobilized to warn us about destructive technological forces) circulating in iconic science fiction texts, he also mimetically replicates the imagery of writers like Flaubert who celebrate body-combusting technologies.

Like the futurists he criticizes, Virilio, too, seems fascinated with speed and technologies that exceed the limits of the human body. In his interview with Zurbrugg his fascination with the power of technology is demonstrated in the analogy he uses to describe the relation between humans and technology: the biblical image of Jacob (humankind) wrestling with the angel (or God, representing the powerful forces of technology). Rather than "sleeping before technology," he is determined like Jacob to fight against it, "not to destroy it, but in order to transfigure it" (quoted in Zurbrugg, 2001, p. 157). Given this analogy, it is no surprise to find a degree of relish as well as fascination in his mimetic replication of technology's destructive force. The following example, where Virilio distinguishes the logistics of perception from pre-modern embodied forms of vision, further illustrates this point: "The advent of the logistics of perception . . . ushered in a eugenics of sight, a pre-emptive abortion of the diversity of mental images, of the

swarm of image-beings doomed to remain unborn" (1994, p. 12). Here Virilio's references to eugenics and abortion again rely on graphic images of the body, but in this case explicitly appeal to moral and religious sensibilities. He refers to the violent extermination of the innocent: targeted segments of the population reviled as mutant, abnormal, and threatening as well as vulnerable unborn image-beings, both have manifold Catholic references.

### **Mimesis: Seduction or illumination?**

Virilio's mimesis suggests a compulsiveness as well as a "seduction."<sup>5</sup> The anthropologist and cultural theorist Michael Taussig describes mimesis as the compulsion "to copy, to imitate, to explore difference, yield into and become Other" (Taussig, 1993, p. xiii). In the urge to copy resides the magical power of replication: "the image affecting what it is an image of, wherein the representation shares in or takes power from the represented" (p. 2). It involves "a palpable, sensuous, connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived" (p. 21). There is a pleasure in mimesis. It entails taking possession and, specifically, taking "power from the represented."

Ethological studies claim that mimesis has roots in the deception strategies of both predator and prey. Drawing on Merlin Donald's studies, Yann-Pierre Montelle writes:

Mimesis is often defined as a behavioural process whereby what is achieved is a close external resemblance [to another animal] . . . that is distasteful or harmful to potential predators [to evade becoming their prey]. Mimesis therefore is imitation. . . . It is by imitating that most of our learning (conscious or not) is done. (Montelle, 2006, p. 24)

Montelle suggests that mimesis is deeply rooted in instinctual drives. If Virilio's work expresses a pleasure in imitation, what type of pleasure is it? Montelle states that "exercising imitative behaviour . . . [reduces] the alterity of 'otherness' and by performing deceiving hermeneutic tactics, the destabilising unknown [can be] framed" (p. 24). Yet Virilio is not imitating to make threatening forces familiar: to understand and gain control over the destructive drives so they can be integrated into the familiar terrain of our lives. He is trying to make the enormity of their violence evident. But as Taussig argues, mimesis does not just simply deliver control over what is copied. Mimesis requires the perceiver also to yield to the other, with the danger of losing oneself. In other words, mimesis can result in being possessed by the other: assimilated, ingested, or obliterated.

Before concluding that Virilio is possessed by the destructive forces of modern technology, it is useful to consider aesthetic theories of mimesis elaborated by Haun Saussy (2006) and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (1997). Their work is influenced by Aristotle (1982), Walter Benjamin (1978), and Theodore Adorno (1997), and more recently by Buck-Morss (1977, 1989).

Given Virilio's phenomenological approach, I first turn to Saussy (2006), whose discussion of mimetic literary techniques makes analogies to mimetic physiological processes such as perception and digestion. Saussy writes that "perception in its way digests the object—assimilates it by breaking it down and taking it in, though only formally, not materially like digestion" (p. 116), where

“mixed substances of food are ground up, separated into various kinds and then selectively assimilated by the blood, which takes into itself that which, in the food, resembles it and can be used to maintain bodily heat; the leftover is eliminated” (p. 116). Saussy elaborates on the principle of formal similarity. A sensory organ is “in some way of the same nature as the things it is to perceive” (p. 116). For example, the eye is able to receive impressions of shape and colour. It then “reproduces within itself, the corresponding forms that outer objects possess” (p. 116), just as the ear can receive impressions of volume and pitch and reproduce a corresponding sound the perceiver can hear.

According to Saussy, this formal principle of mimesis applies not only to perception but also to linguistic mimesis. Both perception and language rely on identifying formal similarities. Saussy explains that metaphors, which are a form of linguistic mimesis, rely on what Aristotle considers “a gift for ‘seeing the sameness’ in two unrelated things” (p. 116). When the mind recognizes different things as similar, as in metaphor, there is a recognition of something that makes them the same (p. 117): a common form. Moreover, as Saussy argues, form is not transportable intact from one context to another without transformation.<sup>6</sup> Thus in relation to Virilio’s imagery, it is necessary to ask, how is the form of the futurists’ celebration of the destructive technological drives transposed into his texts? To what extent is the form transformed when Virilio mimetically replicates it?

Saussy describes how form is transformed through mimesis in his analysis of Xu Zhimo’s 1924 Chinese translation of Baudelaire’s 1857 poem “Une Charogne” (“A Carcass”), which gives a visceral account of a carcass rotting in the hot sun being devoured by maggots. As Saussy explains, Xu is concerned with translating the form of Baudelaire’s poem, not the linguistic content: what Xu identifies as its “music”—which he describes in the words of fourth-century BCE philosopher Zhuang Zhou as “the piping of heaven . . . earth and . . . man” (Saussy, 2006, p. 122). In this creative use of mimetic techniques, matter is selectively appropriated and then assimilated according to “his need.”

In terms of power, Saussy claims that that Xu does not fall into the trap of Aristotle’s model of mimesis where the “non-self” is assimilated or digested into and made consistent with self (2006, p. 126). While the “I” remains intact in Xu’s mimetic imitation of the “Corpse,” “the decay provides matter for the formal creation of a new artwork” (Kahn, 2006, p. 4). In mirroring the decay of the poem’s rotting corpse and combining it with the fourth-century Daoist philosophy of Zhuangzi (where “there is no self to defend”), Xu makes “translation, comparative literature . . . appear as a process of dissolution, of decay, of selective uptake” (Saussy, 2006, p. 26). Ingested, both Baudelaire and Zhuangzi become difficult to recognize. The mimetic imitation thus results not as much in a new self as in what Saussy calls a new “crowd of selves” that feed off the corpse and the corpus of modern literature.

In a similar manner, Virilio applauds the work of artists insofar as “every time a new technology appears, art diverges from it” (quoted in Zurbrugg, 2001, p. 158). But Virilio does not use Xu’s creative mimetic techniques. His imagery does not diverge from the reactionary imagery of the degenerated body or the futurist fascination with speed. Both remain identifiable in his imagery. But again

concluding that Virilio is digested by the destructive forces of modern technology, it is important to consider the challenge he faces in mimetically copying these forces. Saussy is more concerned with mimetic techniques to ensure the author does not assimilate a less powerful Other into his or her self, rather than being assimilated by the Other.

Walter Benjamin's work on mimesis pays particular attention to the power relations. Shierry Weber Nicholzen (1997) states that for Benjamin, like Taussig, mimesis is rooted in ancient forms of magical imitation and functions as "a means to connect with and control or be transformed by the power and order inherent in the other" (Nicholzen, 1997, p. 57). In other words, for Benjamin, mimesis entails relations of power where the author is in danger of being engulfed by the other.

With the disappearance of magic, Benjamin argues that the mimetic faculty has migrated to language: "It is now language which represents the medium in which objects meet and enter into relationship with each other, no longer directly, as once in the mind of the augur or priest, but in their essences, in their most volatile and delicate substance" (quoted in Nicholzen, 1997, p. 58). Language has become an "archive of nonsensuous similarity" (p. 58). For artists and writers exploring ways to break out of the reified forms of modern consciousness or post-fordist rhizomic forms of capital, there are rich possibilities in Benjamin's "non-sensuous similarity." Bringing together non-sensuous words "arrayed around the thing they all mean" can ignite a revelatory shock of understanding (Nicholzen, 1997, p. 58). Here it is important to note that mimetic work sharply differs from conceptual work. Insofar as mimesis enacts an imitation, it is non-conceptual: it relies on experience. As Martin Jay argues with respect to Adorno's formulation of mimesis, which has been influenced by Benjamin:

Conceptual thought can be thought of as an act of aggression perpetrated by a dominant subject on a world assumed to be external to it; it subsumes particulars under universals, violently reducing their uniqueness to typifications . . . of a general . . . principle. Mimesis, in contrast, involves a more sympathetic, compassionate, and noncoercive relationship of affinity between nonidentical particulars. (Jay, 1997, p. 32)

Thus while the conceptual aggressively strips the particularity of the world, Benjamin's mimesis seeks affinities between that which is characterized by difference.<sup>7</sup> So rather than seeking to gain control over an Other (whether weak or powerful), Benjamin's and Adorno's mimesis aims to generate non-coercive relations of affinity.

Nicholzen claims that the critical potential of Benjamin's form of mimesis lies in the possibility of drawing together word-images that are linked in their non-sensuous similarities to an enigmatic " 'thing' at the center, which is not language. . . . [The enigmatic thing] binds the dissimilar, in fact alien words together" (Nicholzen, 1997, p. 78). It is only in the constellation of word-images that the similarities become evident and their sudden coherence incites a shock of realization (p. 78).

It could be argued that Virilio succeeds in creating a constellation of word-images of the body and technology that shocks us, illuminating the violent nature

of both our fascination with modern technologies and their destructive force. He works with the dynamics of the technological forces themselves, creating a constellation that shatters fantasies of technology's power to project us into the Transcendental realm where we can escape the reduction of our increasingly powerless, devalued bodies amidst techno-proliferating levels of risk and the loss of living environments. Virilio exposes the way images that offer fantasies of freedom are violently rooted technological drives of obliteration. Yet while Virilio's texts expose the roots of these fantasies, at another level, there remains something disturbingly seductive about his imagery. As suggested above, there is a relish and pleasure in creating powerful constellations that have the capacity to shock me as a reader with apocalyptic visions.

As a reader, I experience Virilio's powerful ability to capture the exhilarating, horrifying imagery of technological destruction. As he adroitly leaps between historical periods, he catapults his readers into the future, a future that has already arrived, confronting us with an apocalypse that it is too late to stop, that "neither ethics nor biopolitical morality" can protect us from (Virilio, 1995, p. 113). His texts overwhelm the reader with images of the drive of obliteration. He states, "Since the standard acceleration magnitude has reached the absolute limit of 180,000 miles per second . . . *elimination will now be pursued right inside living matter*" (p. 105, emphasis in original). *The Art of the Motor* and *The Vision Machine* offer no room to even imagine anything that escapes annihilating forces of exponentially increasing forms of control: for uncertainty and the unknowable. Thus, unlike Xu, the form he copies retains its character; in this case its destructive power.

The future he paints is dystopic without the Christian allusions to the coming of the messiah or the falling of man (Idhe, 1990): it simply is a drive toward the elimination of "living matter." Without hope, there is no space to continue to go on living (Said, 2003). It is no surprise that Virilio's texts do not open themselves to the possible, the "yet to come." Virilio has already concluded that the Metaphysical disappeared with mechanical reproduction. The capacity to realize a realm beyond what is present, what remains unknowable, for Virilio instantiates the sacred. This is evident in his statement: "In the West, the death of God and the death of art are indissociable" (1994, p. 17). The bodily practices of perception necessary for engaging with art are also necessary for realizing the presence of the sacred. Here, recall that Virilio defines art as a practice that engages our perception. Art necessarily relies on *embodied* techniques of perception. It is our bodies that make it possible to anticipate, to imagine both retrospectively and beyond what is given, in other words, to realize the sacred. With our dependence on vision machines, our bodily techniques of perception have atrophied, destroying the capacity to imagine, and with it, the ability to realize the sacred.

### **Trapped in mourning: The animal of knowledge**

Kellner describes Virilio as "[mourning] the loss of the phenomenological dimension that privileges experience" (1999, p. 117).

[He is committed] to philosophical perspectives committed to the primacy of the body, subjective experience and concrete relations to the earth that he sees as being undermined in both technological experience

and contemporary theories which deconstruct experiences of the body and subject. (p. 117)

This section outlines the dangers of mourning, which can result in an inability to engage with the world in which the mourning subject lives. First, however, I want to examine what Virilio appears to mourn. The claim that Virilio mourns “the phenomenological dimension that privileges experience” simplifies both Virilio’s position as well as phenomenology. More accurately, Virilio mourns a particular conception of human experience. It has similarities to the conception found in Heidegger’s description of humans as animals of knowledge, which is based on ancient Greek notions of *technē*. As I will argue below, it is humans as animals of knowledge that Virilio mourns.

To make this argument, I begin by drawing a parallel between Heidegger’s conception of Greek *technē* and Virilio’s conception of “bodily techniques” of perception. Both *technē* and Virilio’s bodily techniques of perception are based on phenomenological conceptions of the human subject and human knowledge. Heidegger (1977) writes: “*Technē* is the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman, but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. [Moreover, *technē*] belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiesis*” (p. 13). He further explains that “[*technē*] is linked to the word episteme . . . knowing in the widest sense . . . [which entails being] entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it” (p. 13).

Like Merleau-Ponty’s formulation of perception, Heideggerian *technē* is an activity that transforms what it *works on*—substances, body movements, living matter—enculturating it with meaning and value, incorporating it into fields of human activity. As an “art,” *technē* always operates in relation to the terms of a specific episteme. The fact that as an “art” it is “entirely at home” in whatever it transforms suggests that it becomes familiar with the substance it transforms. It suggests that as *technē* is crafted over time, it takes into account the characteristics of whatever it works upon. There is a mutual relation between the formation of *technē* and the substance it transforms. Rather than imposing abstract order, *technē* in its “highest sense . . . lets things emerge as they are” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 11). The things “call forth . . . thought” within the terms set by their mode of being (Lovitt, 1977, p. xxviii). As such, insofar as *technē* “belongs to bringing-forth” in the “highest sense,” it entails bringing forth the presence of the nature of a thing it works upon.<sup>8</sup>

Heidegger claims that in relation to human crafts, *technē* also brings forth that which is in the “craftsman or artist” (Heidegger, 1977, pp. 11-12). Here Heidegger conceives the “craftsman or artist” also in phenomenological terms, being enculturated within the terms of an episteme specific to a place and time. While Heidegger claims the Greek craftsmen let things “presence as they are in themselves,” in the modern period he claims scientists increasingly have sought “not a reality beyond [and other than] himself [in the thing] but precisely that which was present *as* and *within* his own consciousness” (Lovitt, 1977, p. xxvi). The modern episteme entails control over “reality.” The substance worked upon is reified and fashioned within terms set by modern Man. The mutual relation of constitution is lost. The scientist reduces the substance to the terms of the epis-

teme. Yet, as Heidegger argues, modern forms of *technē* still bring forth the nature of a thing: the instrumental formation of modern “man himself” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 28).

Virilio’s vision machines driven by war and the logistics of perception can be seen in terms of “modern” *technē*,<sup>9</sup> which instrumentally reduce the significance of things to the dominant terms of existence, making the material and the social and affective qualities of things (what characterizes their being) insignificant. This, in turn, strips the inherent power of things in themselves. Within this logic, vision machines render the matter of living impotent, turning it into malleable primary material. As Virilio suggests, stripping away *technē* and replacing bodily practices with vision machines amounts to dispensing with the body: “Devices for seeing [vision machines] dispense with the artist’s body in so far as it is light that actually makes the image” (Virilio, 1994, p. 160).

The conclusions Virilio reaches are alarming. Like Heidegger’s modern episteme, the logistics of perception is driven by a reductive law, but unlike the modern episteme, it specifically targets life forms, stripping them of complexity. The reduction to passive flesh suggests a regression in evolution back to simpler forms of life lacking in neurological complexity and moral-political development. I do not dispute the fact that biological and human life forms as well as planetary existence are under threat (Gilroy, 2004). But I question embracing the conclusion that the inherent power of things (humans, bodies of water, micro-processors, plants, turbine engines, microbes, buildings, photocopies) has been completely denuded and all things have been reduced to “primary material.” This grants far too much effective power to the reductive drives characterizing what Virilio calls the “antithesis to life.”

Consider Virilio’s argument that increasing the speed of the body’s rhythms to the speed of “instant teletechnology” destroys the distinction between “*internal* and *external* and promotes hypercentrality—that time, of some ‘present’ if not ‘real’ time” (1995, p. 106, emphasis in original). Virilio writes, “Being present [previously] meant . . . being physically close to the other in face-to-face, vis-à-vis proximity [which made] dialogue possible through voice and eye contact” (p. 106). But “media proximity,” which is based on the properties of electromagnetic waves, has diminished the value of physically coming together. We can now “teleact at a distance—see, hear, speak, touch and even smell at a distance” (p. 106). According to Virilio,

the ‘body image’—the individual’s SELF PERCEPTION—[will not be left] intact for long. . . . Sooner or later, intimate perception of one’s gravimetric mass will lose all concrete evidence. (p. 106, emphasis in original)

Here Virilio suggests our bodies are literally disappearing and our minds degenerating. Soon whatever remains will witness the disappearance of the human species.

Virilio (1995) further warns us about the micro-scale “endocolonization” of our bodies.

The recent progress in science and technology today resulted in the gradual colonization of the organs and entrails of man’s animal body, the



invasion of the microphysical finishing off the job that the geophysical invasion began. (pp. 99-100)

Now the *nervous system will be stimulated*, the vitality of memory or the imagination, new mnemonic practices producing a structuring sensation. . . . Neuroscience's METADESIGN . . . now wants to regenerate the impulses of the neurotransmitters of the living "subject," thereby achieving a sort of cognitive ergonomics. (p. 105, emphasis in original)

Here Virilio describes the invasive reach of technology into the microprocesses of the body, fuelled by the drive to expand and colonize. In Virilio's visions there appears to be no escape, or what Raymond Williams described in his foreboding book *Towards 2000* (1983) no "resources of hope," in Virilio's visions. Does Virilio grant too much effective power to the processes of reduction in a future that has already arrived? I would argue he does not take into account the massive resources needed to orchestrate control over vast heterogeneous networks and populations.

It would be easy to argue that Virilio mourns the loss of Greek *technē*, a.k.a. Tradition. This would overlook the way his thinking lays out a conception of human life that integrates the living, perceiving body and the capacity to apprehend, recall, and imagine beyond what we (believe we) know about the worlds in which we live. One could argue that in some ways, Virilio's work is akin to that of feminists like Vivian Sobchack (2004) and Katherine Hayles (1999, 2005). Both portray the living body as essential in the process of knowing and imagining the world. Virilio regrettably, however, does not consider feminist scholars, and instead misreads and dismisses them (Armitage, 2001b). For instance, Armitage asks Virilio to respond to the developments of cyberfeminism, "a movement that some see as one of the most important theoretical and political developments in the past decade with respect to our understanding of the human body, technology and subjectivity" (2001b, p. 44). Virilio replies:

Even if it is still at the gimmick stage, it is a well-known fact that research is very advanced in the field of 'tele,' 'remote,' or cybersexuality, especially in Japan. And thus I am baffled to see feminists—far from opposing, like I do, the conditioning of the female body, or the male body for that matter—projecting themselves as followers of cybersexuality. . . . Do [they] really believe that cybersexuality is going to liberate them? . . . [It entails the] replacement of emotional involvement by electrical impulses . . . they will be servants of a new type of sexual control . . . machine controlled sexuality. (quoted in Armitage, 2001b, p. 44)

Virilio's dismissal of feminists' "theoretical and political developments" with regard to the body, technology, and subjectivity in terms of a "gimmick stage" not only suggests his scorn, but his equation of cyberfeminists with followers of cybersexuality also indicates that he has not systematically read their work.

But I am less concerned with what is obviously Virilio's ideal human subject than with the way his work appears to be trapped in mourning, in melancholy. He seems unable to let go of something he assumes has been lost. Grieving this loss, he refuses to reach beyond the terms of the model for the

world. The inability to engage with the contemporary changing world is evident in his inability to contemplate anything other than the degeneration of human life. Even if his aim is to blow apart the fantasies of academics who blindly embrace technoscience, his focus on the techniques to effectively blow apart their fantasies point to the way he is enthralled by the destructive forces of modernity.<sup>10</sup> And while Virilio asserts “Resistance is always possible!” (quoted in Armitage, 2000, p. 194, emphasis in original), resistance seems impossible in the worlds he paints in his texts.

Wendy Brown writes about the melancholy of left intellectuals, what Walter Benjamin referred to as “left melancholia,” pointing out that “we come to love our Left passions and reasons, our Left analyses and convictions, more than we love the existing world that we presumably seek to alter with these terms” (Brown, 2003, pp. 460). Benjamin defines left melancholia as “a mournful, conservative, backward-looking attachment to a feeling, analysis, or relationship that has been rendered thing-like and frozen in the heart of the putative Leftist” (quoted in Brown, 2003, p. 460). It issues from an “unaccountable loss, some unadvisedly crushed ideal” (p. 460). Brown identifies many losses for the Left over the last century, including labour and class, socialist regimes, the legitimacy of Marxism, a unified movement, and alternatives to capitalism (p. 460). Although many on the Left can acknowledge these losses, Brown contends there is an unavowed loss, the loss of the promise that “Left analysis and . . . commitment would supply its adherents with a clear and certain path towards the good the right and the true” (p. 460). She claims that this was the basis for the pleasure of being on the Left and the basis of our “self-love as Leftists.” To give up this love up would require a radical transformation of the self. Brown turns to Freud to explain

that if the love for the dead object or destroyed ideal cannot be given up, it takes its refuge in narcissistic identification, and hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering. (quoted in Brown, 2003, p. 460)

Brown claims that identity movements as well as post-structuralism and post-modernism have become the substitutive objects blamed for the Left’s weakness and its inability to generate coherent authoritative accounts of the world. This scorn safeguards the critics from recognizing the inadequacy of their own analyses. With regard to Virilio, as mentioned above, his energies are focused on mimetically capturing the destructive drive of modern technology rather than considering what is necessary for a new basis for life, for example, non-humanist modes of eco-centred living (for example, see Heyd, 2005; Katz, Light, & Rothenberg, 2000; Plumwood, 1993; Shiva, 1999; Wong, 2008).

Caught in mourning for the loss of pre-modern *technē*, which, for Virilio, is tied to the sacred, he seems to refuse to let go of that to which he is profoundly attached, to accept its death. As a result, he views the world around him in terms of painful absence and is unable to realize that life continues to undergo transformation rather than just destruction (Freud, 1984).<sup>11</sup> His zeal in describing the collapse of the human world, atrophied human bodies, the mad worship of

speed, and the penetrating reach of the antithesis of life at its most infinitesimal level suggests that humans have become his substitute object. His imagery debases the human body as he sadistically describes our reduction to neurologically simple organisms capable only of a few feeble winks and squirms. The danger of melancholy is that it makes it impossible to accept the loss. The subject thus becomes locked in stasis, unable to realize the adaptive and transformative potential of life forms and cultural practices: what might be the basis for new forms of *technē* that instantiate sustainable relations between life forms and socio-political technologies. For example, as I have suggested, he refuses to engage with the work by feminist scholars and artists who have critically theorized techno-body interfaces. What is “other” and “not yet” is all of what escapes and transmutes the relentless colonization of life that he so vividly paints.

Yet to dismiss Virilio because of his melancholy and how it plays out in the regressive disgust and fear of the body overlooks what else drives his work. He is alarmed by terrifying technological and political reconfigurations where transnationals, neo-imperial centres, and military forces have lost control over what happens next as the Earth teeters toward its environmental limits and human populations toward self-destruction whether through war, overconsumption, or the deep malaise of depression. In this context, in contrast to Traditionalists and Modernists, he does not call for a return to order, asserting the Law to bring unruly bodies and masses into the semblance of coherent organization. Yet nor does he offer resources for hope, unlike Edward Said (1995), who has attempted to learn about the possibilities and dangers of the global from those who are viewed as the most hopeless, dispossessed populations. Instead, Virilio seems to embrace the melancholia of loss. He does not consider what might be entailed in generating new adaptive tactics for living and transforming this world. This makes sense, since as he argues, little remains of the subject and nothing of the Metaphysical. Characteristic of melancholia, he is unable to fully accept the loss (or failure) of his ideal; as such, he is in danger of following his lost world into death.

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### Notes

1. For example, see his books *War and Cinema* (1989), *The Vision Machine* (1994), *The Art of the Motor* (1995), *Politics of the Very Worst* (1999), *Information Bomb* (2000), and *Ground Zero* (2002).

2. Similar dystopic imagery circulates in the work of contemporary theorists like Giorgio Agamben (1998), especially his work on “naked life.” Agamben is someone for whom Virilio “has a boundless admiration” (Armitage, 2001a, p. 45). Zygmunt Bauman in *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts* (2004) and *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (1998) uses similar imagery in his descriptions of displaced populations as “the waste of globalization” and “human waste” (see Armitage, 2001b, p. 3).
3. Significantly, Virilio is recognized as a modernist or “hypermodernist” rather than a postmodernist like Baudrillard insofar as he takes a strong moral stand on the evils of technology and identifies logic and knowledge as central human characteristics (see Armitage, 2001a, and Kellner, 1999).
4. For example, it could be argued that the rapid translations of his short provocative texts hit the English-speaking market with critical and explosive ideas, much like rapid-fire artillery or phatic images that bombard populations in advertising.
5. The term “seduction” was a term used by Michael Dillon at Lancaster University to describe the operation of digital code.
6. Saussy discusses this point in relation to digital technology.
7. Jay points out that Horkheimer and Adorno are aware of “the sinister potential of mimetic behaviour when combined with instrumental rationality that it has typically been used to counter,” for example, in the case of the Nazis’ mimicry of Jewish people (Jay, 1997, p. 30).
8. Nature is not equated with a static essence but rather something in the process of becoming. See Heidegger’s essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” (1971).
9. It is not a matter of simply stripping away *technē* and leaving bodies as passive flesh, but rather the imposition of a new type of post-disciplinary *technē*.
10. Virilio does not deterministically view all science and technology as agents of destruction. See his discussion of the ship as “the great technical and scientific carrier of the West,” where he describes how it entailed an interplay between “poiein” and “tekhne” (Virilio, 1994, pp. 28-30). Every failure of technical knowledge (the shipwreck) opened up a “poetics of wandering, of the unexpected” (p. 28). With respect to modern technologies, Nick Prior from the University of Edinburgh makes the point (June 18, 2008, personal correspondence) that Virilio does not seem to take into account his own preoccupation with “the accident,” which suggests that the very technologies he warns us about will fail anyway.
11. There is a growing body of scholarship on melancholy that argues that it is not necessarily pathological to refuse to let go of the loved object. It can be a refusal to forget, a refusal to enact closure and “lay the past to rest.” It can be a commitment to continuing an engagement with “loss and its remains” that makes sites for memories, cultures, and histories denied by the dominant order (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003; Forter, 2007). Greg Forter makes reference to Philip Novak and Michael Moon, who argue that “for blacks and queers . . . melancholia [is] not a pathology . . . but . . . a mechanism that helps (re)construct identity and take our dead to the various battles we must wage in their names” (Forter, 2007, p. 241). Forter points out that in particular, for gay men and women to relinquish their loved ones, as Freud’s model for mourning would require, would be to undergo normalization insofar as it would require them to give up their same-sex lover (p. 241). Though as Forter notes, Freud’s mourning does not require us to “relinquish” nor forget the loved one, only to accept that she or he is dead (p. 241). The melancholic, according to Freud, as Forter argues, in fact can’t remember the lost object because it has been withdrawn from consciousness and been incorporated into the unconscious. The withdrawal of the lost object from consciousness results in aggressive behaviour toward the displaced object (p. 241).

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