

# THE FUTURISM OF THE MOMENT

By Steve Redhead



Professor of Sport and Media Cultures at the University of Brighton in the UK, Steve Redhead is Head of the Research Student Division in the Chelsea School where he directs research into Mobile Accelerated Nonpostmodern Culture (MANC). He is the author, or editor, of fourteen books including *The Jean Baudrillard Reader* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh and Columbia University Press, NY, 2008), *Paul Virilio: Theorist For An Accelerated Culture* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh and University of Toronto Press, Toronto and Buffalo, 2004) and *The Paul Virilio Reader* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh and Columbia University Press, NY, 2004). His photo essay 'Before The Bunker' is published by *Nebula 6.2*. He is editor of Berg's *Subcultural Style* book series.

Paul Virilio's work has been seen in recent years to be even more relevant to our current condition than ever before, despite the drawbacks of its roots in French phenomenology and Christian humanism. Virilio often speaks of himself, unashamedly, by using the label 'Anarchistic Christian'. He has asserted in interview that 'what I'm saying here isn't negative in a desperate way. I'm Christian. I have hope' (1). In terms of French phenomenology Virilio was massively influenced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty when he was a student at the University of the Sorbonne in the early 1960s shortly before Merleau-Ponty died. Merleau-Ponty's Marxism however did not rub off on Virilio. An international symposium in San Francisco in the Fall of 2008 entitled 'Trajectories of the Catastrophic' was dedicated to a critical appraisal of the work of Paul Virilio. City Lights Bookshop in San Francisco, which stocks copies of all of Paul Virilio's work, and many commentaries on him, hosted the symposium at the San Francisco Art Institute and maintains a website for the event.

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PRESENT

# Trajectories of the Catastrophic

A critical appraisal of the work of Paul Virilio

A symposium exploring the ideas and arguments put forth in the theoretical work of Paul Virilio. From the sweeping effects of technology on culture to the history of the City as an machine, internationally acclaimed artists and writers will discuss various aspects of one of the foremost theorists of the information age.

Includes: film screenings, artist multimedia installations spanning over a two day event featuring:

Specialty Appearances: Justin Crowell, James Der Derian, Ricardo Dominguez, Michel Rocard, Marianne Kribak, Sylvette Lottman, John Marks, Timothy Murray, Steve Neuman, John King, Stacey and Sherry

#### Dates & Locations

Friday, October 24, 2008

San Francisco Art Institute, 715 S.W.  
California Street, 4th Floor, San Francisco

Saturday, October 25, 2008

Palace Theatre, 1120 S.W. 8th Street  
Miami Beach, Florida

San Francisco Art Institute, 715 S.W.  
California Street, San Francisco

The event is being sponsored by:

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#### Who is Paul Virilio?



Paul Virilio (1932-2018) was a French philosopher, writer, and theorist of technology and war. He is best known for his work on the philosophy of speed and the concept of 'dromology'. His most famous work is 'The Visible: The Invention of the Sightless'.

#### The agenda:

10:00 AM - 11:00 AM: Introduction to Paul Virilio's work by Justin Crowell.

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM: Panel discussion on 'The Visible: The Invention of the Sightless'.

12:00 PM - 1:00 PM: Lunch break.

1:00 PM - 2:00 PM: Panel discussion on 'The Visible: The Invention of the Sightless'.

2:00 PM - 3:00 PM: Panel discussion on 'The Visible: The Invention of the Sightless'.

3:00 PM - 4:00 PM: Panel discussion on 'The Visible: The Invention of the Sightless'.

4:00 PM - 5:00 PM: Panel discussion on 'The Visible: The Invention of the Sightless'.

5:00 PM - 6:00 PM: Panel discussion on 'The Visible: The Invention of the Sightless'.

6:00 PM - 7:00 PM: Panel discussion on 'The Visible: The Invention of the Sightless'.

7:00 PM - 8:00 PM: Panel discussion on 'The Visible: The Invention of the Sightless'.

8:00 PM - 9:00 PM: Panel discussion on 'The Visible: The Invention of the Sightless'.

9:00 PM - 10:00 PM: Panel discussion on 'The Visible: The Invention of the Sightless'.

10:00 PM - 11:00 PM: Panel discussion on 'The Visible: The Invention of the Sightless'.

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Paul Virilio was born in 1932 and at 77 years old is still producing new and provocative output to add to his large back catalogue. 2009 saw publication in the USA of a new edition of *Bunker Archeology* (2), a self-illustrated book which Virilio first started writing in 1958 and eventually published in French in 1975. Virilio's haunting still black and white photography lavishly permeates the text. Also in 2009 Virilio's most recent new book, *The University of Disaster* (3), first published in French by Editions Galilee in September 2007, came out in English translation.

Virilio has commented in interview (4):

'I was a child of the war and I have published a book called *The University of Disaster* – not the disaster of university. I say that we need a university founded on the disaster we're discussing, the progress that turns to catastrophe...It's in this area that I find my work on "negative monuments" – but now, rather than a museum, I'm proposing a university'.

Increasingly Paul Virilio's idiosyncratic tracing of the 'trajectories of the catastrophic' over the last fifty years has chimed with the world we now inhabit – a 'claustropolitan' world of economic downturn, 'impure war' in Iraq, Gaza, Lebanon and Afghanistan, 'globalitarian' new depression and apocalyptic predictions of 'accelerated' world climate catastrophe. Claude Parent, his partner in architectural crime in the 1960s when they were 'hip young gunslingers' of 'post-architecture', described Paul Virilio as an 'archaeologist of the future'. Virilio himself has been compared to

Marinetti and the Futurists. But we are post-Futurist now. Indeed we are in what I call the 'post-future'. As writer William Gibson puts it; 'the future is already here: it is just unevenly distributed'. In this context, Paul Virilio is an archaeologist of the post-future. Virilio, too, is acutely aware of this 'archaeology of the post-future', without necessarily using the same language:

'Octavio Paz wrote "The Instant is uninhabitable, like the future". I'm saying that we live in the futurism of the moment and we live in a habitable world. Marinetti's Futurism was still the futurism of History – the racing car, etc. Russian and Italian Futurism was historic, that of long time periods, of history. What we have here is that of the real instant, the live, and that is uninhabitable. A big thought, like Octavio Paz's. Tomorrow this real instant will render the Earth uninhabitable, by its acceleration.'

(5)

In 2002 Bob Dylan sang 'the world is old, the world is grey' in a film soundtrack, "Cross The Green Mountain" (6). Paul Virilio, in conversation with photographer Raymond Depardon for the catalogue for their *Native Land/Stop Eject* exhibition in Paris (7), has mused that:

'everyone knows that for some thirty years I've been working on speed, on the shrinking of the world, that is, on what I have called the world's old age...and today we can say that what with supersonic transport and the speed of telecommunications, the world operates instantaneously. This is what we call real time.'

Virilio has taken up the 'world is grey' theme further in interview (8):

'The real question is our relationship to speed and the exhaustion of the world. What I call "grey ecology" has to do with the pollution of distances by speed. Air, water, wildlife, flora, and grey ecology, that of distances,



the life-sized, proportions. It's not nature that's polluted, but the lifesized. Miniaturisation – tomorrow, today probably, this dictaphone is a chip and it follows on from ENIAC, the computer that was as big as a house and today fits into your pocket. Next to the central question of speed, you have to take into account the pollution caused by speed, the problem of pollution spread across the world. Our world!

## **Acknowledgement**

All photos by Tara Brabazon, Professor of Media, University of Brighton

## **Notes**

1. See 'Rock Around The Bunker : Paul Virilio – Design, War and Society', *DAMn* magazine, No 21, March/April 2009, pp. 92-96 (interview by Thomas Geisler and Pierre Doze).

2. Published by Princeton Architectural Press.

3. Published by Polity Press.

4. 'Rock Around The Bunker', page 94.

5. 'Rock Around The Bunker', page 95.

6. *Tell Tales Signs: The Bootleg Series Volume 8* (Sony).

7. Published by Fondation Cartier Pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris, 2008.

8. 'Rock Around The Bunker', page 94.