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Paul Virilio

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# The Administration of Fear

With Bertrand Richard

Translated by Ames Hodges

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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,

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