

SILENCE AND THE SCREAM

*Exposing Virilio's humanism through the architecture of **anti-form***

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SILENCE & *THE SCREAM*

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[INTRO]

INTRODUCTION

'Architecture is the art of concealment'



image 0.0: "The essential is no longer visible." *Atlanticwall* (1995) by Magdalena Jetelova.

Since World War II, Hitler's fatal efforts to secure the European littoral with an Atlantic Wall were outpaced by an enemy taken to the sea and sky. The non-vital conquest of terra firma was a primary reason for Nazi defeat—a megalomaniacal plan, which resulted in the largest physical/architectural reminder of Europe's darkest era in recent history.

It is the sublime nature of these vast concrete ruins of Hitler's *Atlantikwal* that has captivated architects and intellectuals like Paul Virilio, who has built his legacy upon the inclines of toppled bunkers and childhood memories of war. In his own words:

I am a victim of war, a 'war baby.' I was born in 1932, along with the rise of fascism. As a child I lived through the horrors of the Second World War, through the reign of technology as absolute terror. I was in a city, Nantes, which was destroyed by our allies, the Americans and English, by bombardments. I lived through this extraordinary event, to hear on the radio that 'the Germans are in Orléans.' Ten minutes later I heard noise in the street; it was the Germans. They were already there, we were occupied. I lived through the full power of technology; Blitzkrieg. For a child it is extraordinary to see what degree a city can be obliterated in a single bombardment. For a kid, a city is like the Alps, it's eternal, like the mountains. One single bombardment and all is razed. These are the traumatizing events which shaped my thinking. War was my university. Everything has proceeded from there.¹

Although he is infamously known as a somewhat frantic thinker and writer, there is a clear trajectory in Virilio's work, which consistently references his unique "university" experiences. He writes in a kind of "perpetual wartime," drawing frequently from instances of actual warfare and the forces of culture that instigate military and social conflict.² His architecture—especially the "bunker-church" of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay and the spatial experiments of the *oblique function*—represents the most vivid account of his explorations of the Atlantic Wall ruins. This work can be read as a means to re-interpret memories of close, personal encounters with war and its physical imposition on landscape into intellectual and spatial theories.

¹ Der Derian and Virilio 1998: 16.

² *Ibid.*

I. CRISIS OF VIRILIO

There is a kind of crisis of Paul Virilio within the 21st century generation of young architects and scholars in the United States who approach his work from an adequate distance. This removal is not only geographic but also chronological, as we cannot inherently relate to the socio-historical context in which his work is significantly grounded. Furthermore, though he has been an active participant in architectural discourse since the mid-1960s, his most important work has only recently been published in English. *Bunker Archeology*, for example, was first published in 1966 in France as part of the *Architecture Principe* journal series. This book, as he has emphasized a number of times, chronicles his early architectural education and exploration of anti-form within the decommissioned military landscape of the Atlantic Wall in France. *Bunker Archeology* was not published in English until 1994, so it seems we are nearly thirty years behind in understanding how his work might be relevant to our contemporary understanding of post-WWII architecture in France.

Virilio has been both canonized as a pioneer in the realm of architectural discourse and discredited for radical propositions and the “double-edged” nature of his thought. According to Neil Leach, even when Virilio expresses a harsh critical perspective of certain issues, “he displays a marked fascination with those issues”, which often undermines his critique. His outspoken skepticism threatens to wither and “fold into some form of acquiescent support.”³ In fact, along with the thread of continually reflecting on his “university of war”, the habit of exposing some form of inner conflict is subtle, but evident—especially in his early work. Experts on Virilio have mentioned this “Achilles heel”, but there is little critical analysis that offers deeper insights into the dialectical nature of his discourse.

James Der Derian, a Virilio scholar and editor of *The Virilio Reader* (1998), believes that the main thread of Virilio’s self-reflection is “a persistent ethical, even spiritual pull.”⁴ Leach argues, “it is almost as though there is something [Virilio] recognizes within himself which he wishes to suppress, and

³ Leach 1999: 72.

⁴ Der Derian and Virilio 1998: 6.

which he therefore projects on to some external object in order to criticize it.”⁵ These types of commentaries represent a kind of psychological analysis of Virilio and suggest the presence of a personal, perhaps darker, underlying intention operative in his work. A kind of “working through” or “coming to terms with” as delineated by Theodor Adorno in his lecture “What does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?” is evident, but not fully engaged in analyses of Virilio, the self-styled architect and philosopher. Adorno’s critique of the post-WWII German psyche and his analysis of “art after Auschwitz” in *Aesthetic Theory* (1984) forge connections between Virilio’s extensive oeuvre and the issues of resolving traumatic memories associated with place. In light of current debates concerning the role of architects in the recovery of war-ravaged cities and landscapes, Virilio’s work and the understanding of his own personal “coming to terms” via architectural design and theory represent a valuable perspective in this discourse. As many of Virilio’s most important works have only recently been translated from French into other languages—his voice in contemporary aesthetic discourse is rapidly globalizing and gaining exposure. [Image 1.95] There is a need to understand him as more than the “doomsday” philosopher he has been commonly dismissed as. His early architectural work and discourse, in particular, offers incredibly vivid insight into the aesthetic and psychological crises within the context of post-WWII France.

II. THESIS STATEMENT

Paul Virilio maintains an active voice in the realm of critical theory and architectural discourse. His work has shifted from topics of spatial typology and phenomenology to “dromology,” the study of speed. Often publishing several essays and books in a single year [Image 1.94]; Virilio proposes concepts that are always relevant, forward thinking, and radical. The rapid production and boldness of his writing never fails to invite analysis and critique, ensuring his inclusion in a wide spectrum of literature ranging from science to politics and art. Authors frequently mention his “war university”, and Virilio himself

⁵ Leach 1999: 72.

never fails to acknowledge his exposure to World War II and its profound impact on his architectural “education”. Though his work has departed from issues of architectural typology, he is still perhaps best known for his provocative photographs of the Atlantic Wall in *Bunker Archeology*. The thesis consults his early architectural work and one of his latest proposals, the *Museum of Accidents*, in order to highlight the development of his humanism through his notion of anti-form.

This thesis traces the development of Paul Virilio's humanism and examines its initial expression in his architectural work from the mid-1960s, primarily the church of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay (1962 – 1966), and its latest form in his proposal for a *Museum of Accidents* (2003). Though these projects span an interval of roughly forty years, they represent important examples of his anti-form and his experiment with the “visible” and “invisible” aspects of reality through spatial experience. Architecture, Virilio says, “is the art of concealment”.⁶ His church and his museum are “concealed” architectures that demonstrate Virilio’s “sacred” regard for the human body relevant to their respective historical moments. While Sainte-Bernadette appears to embody an aggressive, militaristic architectural expression, Virilio intends the “invisible” quality of anti-form to facilitate a post-war reconciliation with the painful and shameful past. The *Museum of Accidents*, conversely, is not a building, but a pure expression of anti-form for what Virilio perceives is necessary to “come to terms” with catastrophe in the current age of rapid information delivery and media.

Born out of his firsthand experience as a “blitzkrieg baby” in occupied Nantes during World War II, Virilio's contempt toward the dehumanizing characteristics of total war and the perpetuation of “aesthetics of Auschwitz” fueled his resistance to an architecture that contributed to the “disappearance” of the body in postwar aesthetic culture. His work in collaboration with the *Architecture Principe Groupe* manifested this resistance through a “reprocessing” of his memories of surviving the devastation of his home and of his archeology of the abandoned Atlantic Wall ruins. Virilio's exploration of anti-form,

⁶ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 95.

drawn from these experiences, was both a means of “working through” what he saw during the war and a prescription for an architectural environment that would call others to “face up” to painful memories of the past. Virilio's work protests the silencing of “tortured bodies”; his architecture as such demands to be discussed alongside Theodor Adorno's aesthetic theory. This thesis will conduct this investigation through a sequence of chapters that begins with the archeology of Virilio's past and ends with a close examination of his bunker church of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay in Nevers, France.

[1]

1. ARCHEOLOGY OF VIRILIO

A biography of the 'high priest of speed'



image 1.0: Paul Virilio

image 1.1: Allied bombing of Nantes, September 1943; 15,000 civilian deaths, 3,000 homes destroyed.

Slowed down in his physical activity but attentive, anxious over the catastrophic probabilities of his environment, the visitor in this perilous place is beset with a singular heaviness; in fact he is already in the grips of that cadaveric rigidity from which the shelter was designed to protect him.

- Paul Virilio, Bunker Archeology, 1975



I. 'BLITZKRIEG BABY'

Paul Virilio was born in Paris, France in 1932, eight years before the outbreak of World War II in Europe. His father was an Italian communist from Genoa who was living in France as an illegal alien, and his mother was a devout Catholic from the northwest region of Brittany.¹ Virilio was a small child when his family fled from Paris to the port of Nantes in 1939, where he was traumatized by the spectacle of *blitzkrieg* warfare, the claustrophobia of the German occupation, the annihilation of the urban fabric by Allied bombings, and the blockade of the Atlantic littoral. He has said that WWII was “[his] university, [his] father, [his] mother,” and that he is “going to live from war and in war. [He] cannot but speak of it because it’s [his] origin.”² Through WWII, Virilio “learnt of total war and total urban destruction” and the disaster of aerial bombardments, “of cities reduced to nothingness—Guernica, Hiroshima, Dresden, Coventry.”³ His trauma-ridden upbringing as a “*blitzkrieg* baby,” though he claims he is not a “man of the past”, provided the inspiration for his entire career. In a recent interview, he attests to the significance of his childhood in war-torn Nantes:

I was right in the midst of it all. My street, rue St. Jacques, was totally flattened but as a ten-year-old I survived because I hid under the staircase of a local bar. The whole building was destroyed but the stone staircase remained intact. Without this experience I clearly wouldn't have been the same person—I also wouldn't have written and I wouldn't have produced architecture. Everything I have done as a writer and as an architect has its origins in this childhood experience of bombardment.⁴ [Image 1.0]

The instantaneity of the Nazi invasion and occupation of Nantes is a memory that both haunted and inspired him—his thought and writing remain in a kind of “perpetual wartime.”

As a child I lived through the horrors of the Second World War, through the reign of technology as absolute terror. I was in a city, Nantes, which was destroyed by our allies, the Americans and English, by bombardments. I lived through this extraordinary event, to hear on the radio that ‘the Germans are in Orléans.’ Ten minutes later I heard noise in the street; it was the Germans. They were already there, we were occupied.⁵

¹ Redhead. 2004b: 12.

² Virilio and Brausch 2011: 6.

³ Tappan and Andrianopoulos 2008: 31.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Der Derian and Virilio 1995: 16.

The accelerated temporality of *blitzkrieg* (“lightning”) warfare left a lasting impression on Virilio. *Blitzkrieg* warfare was developed to ensure a successful invasion before the enemy could marshal a response.⁶ [Images 1.2 – 1.4] The speed at which the city around him was invaded and destroyed caused him to reflect on the permanence of the built environment and the dichotomy of fear and hope in the Allied reclamation of Nazi territory. Virilio often recounts how the notion of territory – of both space and time – was profoundly redefined in the combat theater of WWII, the effects of which he experienced firsthand.

When we talk of Blitzkrieg, of a war of speed, it's clear that this is going to be a source of work for me. But it will be so via events experienced by a child. Blitzkrieg (it's Paul Virilio the adult speaking, but the child Paul Virilio experiences it, senses it, feels it) is, in fact, a war that will call the notion of the border into question. Up to that period, borders were solid: there were troops there, the Maginot Line, the trenches in 1914, the Vauban forts, etc. Now, suddenly, the borders are pierced by the Panzerdivisionen and war spreads exactly like a flood.⁷

The war spread like a flood into the city, an otherwise unprecedented terrain for the staging of total war. Virilio's memories are a testament to the urban battlegrounds of WWII, and his experiences comprise the origins of his urban theory. Nantes, he describes, was like a stage set for the theatrical performance of the *blitzkrieg*. He often refers to his own early perception that his city was a “Potemkin” city – an artificial village built only to deceive outsiders – and his descriptions portray a sense of both fear and wonderment of this revelation. [Images 1.1, 1.5 – 1.7, 1.11 – 1.13]

[T]he entire center of Nantes was razed to the ground. When we go back there in the smoke and the horror of the bombing, we can see the horizon in the distance. In other words, for me the city is just stage scenery: it can be whisked away, as you've just said. In an instant the real city becomes a Potemkin city. For a child, a city is a solid thing; it's like the Alps, it's eternal. Something like that can't be reduced to ruins. But in this case it took just an hour's bombing and the city was gone... I remember a house that had lost its facade and I saw an old man in his bedroom. We went to wake him up because he'd heard nothing... This idea that suddenly the city all around me is ultimately just scenery was to profoundly modify my relation to the real and my relationship with others. From that point on, I'd become a relativist.⁸

⁶ Hirst 1997:12.

⁷ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 7-8.

⁸ *Ibid.*: 18-19, 21.

The reduction of the “real” to “just stage scenery” through the inevitable razing of Nantes was a daily threat during the German occupation. For the boy Virilio, this harsh reality was further complicated by the significance of the destruction in relation to the larger war effort. The Allied bombings intended to bury the Germans also endangered the citizens of the occupied territory.

So we regard the sky both as the source of death—as is well known, Allied bombers made 'mistakes' and also cruel but necessary decisions to bury 'us' beneath the bombs intended for the Germans—and as a source of liberatory hope. It's terrifying for a child to be torn like this between two situations.⁹

Perhaps the most profound dilemma of his childhood experience concerned this relationship with the sky, the space from which both death and freedom were possible. He remembers the terror he experienced—“an apocalyptic, almost mystical level” of fear that “brought with it the quasi-divine idea that the sky could crush you.”¹⁰ [*Images* 1.4, 1.8 – 1.10, 1.14] As a boy, Virilio fantasized about being a pilot, because he “didn’t want to be underneath the bombs but above them, occupying the sky.”¹¹ WWII had ushered in a third dimension of warfare:

It was the war that brought these great squadrons of bombers that would invade the sky and turn Fortress Europe into a roofless fortress... The war took place in the third dimension of space, not just in the two dimensions of the army and the navy. From now on, we’d have an air war and a strategy of aerial destruction; and that would be the way of it until the destruction of Hiroshima...¹²

The thousands of bombers or “atmosphere machines”, so called by Virilio and his contemporaries, left vast vapor trails in the sky. To the citizens of Nantes on the ground, these were the traces of a dominant aerial presence and visible proof of total war. Virilio uses this imagery to represent the collective anxiety of the time—war had never before “existed” in the sky. Virilio discovered life in the war zone of occupied Nantes, under a volatile sky, and was torn between his desire for the end of Nazi reign and the

⁹ *Ibid.*: 15.

¹⁰ Tappan and Andrianopoulos 2008: 31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Virilio and Brausch 2011: 14.

desire to survive the measures of liberation. The “terror was magnified for the child that [he] was then.”¹³

The boy Virilio, however, after a few years of living in Nantes had established his orientation:

I was like Nero, because I'd chosen which side I was on. I was delighted for my city, Nantes, to be destroyed—8,000 buildings were destroyed—I was delighted, while at the same time being afraid of the death and destruction involved... I was Nero, happy to see Rome burn!¹⁴

Virilio's delight was not childish – as Marianne Brausch surmised in an interview with Virilio about his personal history, “The adult within the child is born.”¹⁵ Though the adult Virilio has had many years to reflect on these formative experiences, as a child he was mesmerized by the spectacle of the burning of his “Rome.” He began keeping a journal of experiences at age ten:

I take a notebook and make it ‘my’ notebook—though I’ve never found it again since—called Five years of War... I’ll finish it in 1945 at the Liberation...and I relate my experience. Because I want, like Kafka, to write in effort to understand. I write with lots of spelling mistakes, not to mention stylistic errors, but I’m only a kid, and when you’re ten or twelve, you’re not that brilliant at writing, particularly when you haven’t done much literary study in those years.¹⁶

Clearly the boy Virilio had already found the practice that would sustain his future career. The events of WWII in Nantes were not only the founding influences of his thought, but also the instigation for his most prolific method of expressing his critical theory—through writing.

The verbose boy Virilio, however, was writing to process imagery. To this day, Virilio claims to “write with images”, and his critiques are loaded with metaphors of the image-making crafts, namely painting, photography, and cinema. His characterization as a “doomsday philosopher” most certainly resulted from his childhood “shocks”—instances where he realized he could no longer “believe his eyes”. Having “doubts about the real”, he developed a relativist position at this early age. Virilio became skeptical of his own perception of the world through witnessing the destruction of the built environment, and continued to question the various forms of camouflage—*strategies of deception*—that masked the reality of total war in Nazi-occupied territory. [*Images* 1.15, 1.16, 1.20 – 1.28] He now refers to this

¹³ *Ibid.*: 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*: 29.

activity of unveiling the real as “conscientious objection.” For Virilio, this means not just a refusal to serve in the military—an ironic association considering his exhaustive pursuit of war-related topics—but an act of resistance directed towards dishonest representations of truth. In his own words:

Conscientious objection is when there’s a hiatus between real perception—one’s eyes—and the conception of the real. One doesn’t simply perceive the real through one’s eyes, but through a delayed process of thought. That is to say, you have doubts about the real. From that moment on, I had doubts about the real.¹⁷

Doubting the “real” would become a life-long practice for Virilio, who as a young boy examined the illusory landscape of war. The ground, the sky, and the air of his war landscape in Nantes delivered shifting versions of reality. The physical camouflage of the built environment and the war machines would comprise the first acts of what he describes as a “carnival of appearances”.¹⁸

The landscape of war isn’t just a landscape like any other... the war landscape is a landscape of events. In other words, the landscape is no longer simply a thing of relief, of trees and hills, etc. It’s made up of explosions, shockwaves, craters that are constantly changing it... it’s a thing of sound and fury, of vaporization and smoke... a thing of vibrations and, I would say, it involves a sense of the destruction of space—not simply of land or houses but also of space. When you’re being bombed, as I often was, you have the impression that what’s being destroyed isn’t just the houses around you but reality itself, with the disappearance of your body next on the agenda...¹⁹

The “normal landscape” became camouflage—“the world turned upside down”. [*Images* 1.17 – 1.19] On the ground, the Germans blanketed their positions with nets and branches; “everything is khaki,” Virilio remembers. In the sky, the Allies concealed their aircraft. [*Images* 1.20, 1.21] The Allied planes were painted blue on their underbellies and green on top, so that they “merged” into the ground when the enemy flew above them, and “merged” into the sky when seen from the ground.²⁰ The camouflage of the war landscape—merging the sky with the ground—was, like the veneer of the Potemkin city of Nantes, manifesting what Virilio began to call the *aesthetics of disappearance*. First accomplished with color and texture, these aesthetics later extended to form. The “dummy” inflatable plastic tanks, guns, planes,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*: 22-23.

¹⁸ Virilio elaborated on this concept in the first of four interviews with Marianne Brausch: "I had the impression of having lived through a carnival of appearances or, more precisely, a carnival of dislocation and, in a way, yes, I saw the world through that vision of destruction, since I'd stopped believing my eyes." (Virilio and Brausch 2011: 68-69.)

¹⁹ *Ibid.*: 34-35.

²⁰ *Ibid.*: 38.

trunks, carriers, and bunkers represent the height of this kind of deception, which was perfected by the Allies—“a faked-up Fortress Great Britain!”²¹ [*Images* 1.15, 1.16, 1.28]

[T]here was already, at the time, an aesthetics of the disappearance of everything... In other words, the things are there but they're concealed. Here again, you couldn't trust what you saw. You thought you saw a tank, for example, but in fact it was an inflatable tank that had been placed at a particular location.²²

These and other strategies of deception determined the outcome of WWII; the Allied invasion of Normandy, for example, was a surprise to the Nazis who were deceived by the fake field armies positioned to land in the Pas-de-Calais area.²³ The “real virtuality” that either side possessed certain weaponry or manpower also took another form of camouflage—propaganda literature, which exaggerated the readiness for combat engagement on both the Allied and Axis sides.²⁴ [*Images* 1.29 – 1.35] Therefore, as Virilio remembers, deciphering the truth about the war was a complicated matter. Nantes was “in a system of a war of the airwaves, a phenomenon of ‘fictional montage’ that was extraordinarily effective.”²⁵ For the boy Virilio, this was an even more invasive strategy of deception that would become a focus of his later theoretical explorations.

...the sky belonged to the Allies, the land to the Germans, the radio to the Allies and the cinema to the Germans! We got no pictures from London, we only got sounds... And a collective fear went with this sense of ‘unhooking’ from reality.²⁶

For Paul Virilio the “blitzkrieg baby” there is no question that his career was profoundly influenced by those formative war years in Nantes. His later explorations of the Atlantic Wall “ruins” would be inspired by his desire to “do archeology” of the architecture emblematic of his childhood

²¹ *Ibid.*: 39.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Operation Fortitude* was the codename for this significant military deception.

²⁴ The perception of inflated resources and power started with the German Westwall, which was built prior to the outbreak of WWII. Paul Hirst explains the effectiveness of the propaganda literature as a kind of camouflage of reality: “The Westwall was a vast propaganda success. German newsreels, photographs and articles portrayed it as much more extensive and powerful than it really was... As the French were deterred from attacking in support of Poland in 1939, the Westwall, both real and imaginary, proved effective.” (Hirst 1997: 12)

²⁵ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 26.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

oppression in occupied France and to understand the “military space” of the total war that provoked his “conscientious objection”. [*Images* 1.36 – 1.42]

II. LIBERATION & THE LITTORAL EXPANSE

The end of the war brought “peace and access”, Virilio remembers:

I have forgotten none of the sequences of this finding in the course of a summer when recovering peace and access to the beach were one and the same event. With the barriers removed, you were henceforth free to explore the liquid continent; the occupants had returned to their native hinterland, leaving behind, along with the work site, their tools and arms.²⁷

Born in Paris and raised in Nantes during the German occupation, the boy Virilio had never set eyes on the ocean. The Atlantic littoral was blockaded during the war for Hitler’s great fortifications, and the beaches were transformed into battlegrounds with the imposing thousands of concrete monoliths. [*Images* 4.26, 4.27] In the preface of *Bunker Archeology*, an account of his exploration of the decommissioned Atlantic Wall and conquest of WWII “military space”, Virilio describes his first encounter with the ocean—the “great reflector”, the “infinite expanse”, the “void”, the “hydrosphere”. It was the summer of 1945 when Virilio had this “precious experience” in the Loire estuary:

Seeing the oceanic horizon is indeed anything but a secondary experience; it is in fact an event in consciousness of underestimated consequences.²⁸

This experience was an astonishing contrast to the claustrophobia of occupied Nantes. With *blitzkrieg*, Virilio discovered that there was no space in time—within ten minutes of being warned over the radio that the Germans were coming, his city had been invaded. The Allies—the liberators—brought the collapse of the sky with their “accidental” bombardments. Virilio himself was nearly crushed when his street, rue St. Jacques, was completely razed.²⁹ From a state of occupation to that of desertion, the

²⁷ Virilio and Collins 1994: 9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ In a 2008 interview, Virilio described this experience of bombardment: “I survived because I hid under the staircase of a local bar. The whole building was destroyed but the stone staircase remained intact. Without this experience I clearly wouldn’t have been the same person—I also wouldn’t have written and I wouldn’t have produced architecture.” (Tappan and Andrianopoulos 2008: 31.)

space of Virilio's childhood was dramatically altered by the end of WWII. His vivid descriptions of his first visit to the beach emphasize the importance of this particular moment to his discovery of architecture.

The clearest feeling was still one of absence: the immense beach of La Baule was deserted, there were less than a dozen of us on the loop of blond sand, not a vehicle was to be seen on the streets; this had been a frontier that an army had just abandoned, and the meaning of this oceanic immensity was intertwined with this aspect of the deserted battlefield.³⁰

This architecture of the border between the terra firma and the hydrosphere would comprise his architectural education. Virilio was drawn to the bunkers, he explains, by his own "intuition" and a "convergence between the reality of the structure and the fact of its implantation alongside the ocean". It was as if, hardened to his practice of "conscientious objection", the boy Virilio was able to believe his eyes for the first time. For the citizens of Nantes, the wartime existence of the Atlantic Wall infrastructure was only known through the German propaganda and newsreels that were shown in cinemas prior to the running of feature presentations. Having resolved to doubt his perception, Virilio's firsthand experience of the Atlantic Wall remains was revelatory. He describes the memory of his discovery of the Atlantic Ocean as,

...a convergence between my awareness of spatial phenomena—the strong pull of the shores—and their being the locus of the works of the "Atlantic Wall" (Atlantikwall) facing the open sea, facing out into the void.³¹

The bunkers, to Virilio, were like the shells of giant turtles or abandoned helmets—the resilient outer layer of some animal that was designed to protect soft flesh. These "anthropomorphic" ruins would continue to fascinate Virilio during his many visits to the Breton coast.

Thirteen years after his first encounter with the hydrosphere, Virilio returned to the beach south of Sainte-Guénolé and began his archeological pursuit of the Nazi military infrastructure. From 1958 to

³⁰ Virilio and Collins 1994: 9.

³¹ *Ibid.*: 10.

1965, Virilio explored, mostly on foot, the Breton coasts along the high-tide line from Audierne and Brest in the north to Concarneau in the south. He recounts:

I would hunt these gray forms until they would transmit to me a part of their mystery, a part of the secret a few phrases could sum up: why would these extraordinary constructions, compared to the seaside villas, not be perceived or even recognized? Why this analogy between the funeral archetype and military architecture? Why this insane situation looking out over the ocean? This waiting before the infinite oceanic expanse?³²

The “mystery” of their total abandonment, their resemblance to cryptic architecture, and their strategic positioning for a specific military theater became the foundational explorations that would lead to the formation of his critical theory. Virilio’s extensive investigations of this architecture/infrastructure made the Atlantic Wall fortifications relevant within military history discourse.

A long history was curled up here. These concrete blocks were in fact the final throw-offs of the history of frontiers, from the Roman limes to the Great Wall of China; the bunkers, as ultimate military surface architecture, had shipwrecked at lands’ limits, at the precise moment of the sky’s arrival in war; they marked off the horizontal littoral, the continental limit. History had changed course one final time before jumping into the immensity of aerial space.³³

His dramatic photographs of the bunkers captured the essence of this abandoned architecture; the icons of an oppressive regime, yet, as Virilio describes, a “defensive architecture...the architecture of survival”.³⁴ [Images 1.37 – 1.42] The dichotomies of oppression or protection, shelter or grave, and resistance or submission were, for Virilio, embodied in the architecture of the Atlantic Wall infrastructure. Preserved in their form and placement was a *military space* specific to the Second World War. This would launch Virilio’s architectural career, his theory of *dromology* (the study of speed), and his later work on the accident.

³² *Ibid.*: 11.

³³ *Ibid.*: 12.

³⁴ Tappan and Andrianopoulos 2008: 32.

III. THE VIOLENCE OF HOPE

It is important to emphasize Virilio's reading of the bunker as an architecture of *survival*. The rough board-formed concrete shells evoke the character of the *béton-brut* technique and the Brutalist style, which would be defined after the war through the vision of architects such as Allison and Peter Smithson, Le Corbusier, and Paul Rudolf. [Images 1.43 – 1.49] Virilio's perception of the bunker as a shelter is interesting by comparison; the architecture of Brutalism and New Brutalism would be criticized for its hostile appearance. Concrete was an inexpensive material that made for the efficient building of blast-resistant structures. This is a fundamental reason why it was utilized widely by the Germans to quickly build the Atlantic Wall infrastructure. The board-formed concrete technique was later adopted for government buildings, low-income housing, and shopping centers, because its structural efficiency and thrift had proved effective during the war. Architects of the Brutalist movement were drawn to the sculptural capacity of concrete in addition to its functionality. Though he would later capitalize on the board-form technique to similarly sculpt architectural forms, Virilio came to understand the use of concrete as a protective measure while conducting his research into the archeology of the Atlantic Wall:

...I asked myself why they were made of concrete. The answer is simple—it was so the bunker couldn't be destroyed. Concrete offers life through its protection.³⁵

The *béton-brut* of the bunker provided sanctuary from the “sky that could crush you”. Concrete was the material of resistance, Virilio concludes:

This survival is therefore fundamental to architecture because it is about creating a sound structure and offering material resistance.³⁶

The themes of *survival* and *resistance* were integral to Virilio's architectural work and discourse. Beyond the physical form of the bunker, which embodies the nature of WWII combat theater, these themes are symbolic of the political climate of the Nazi-occupied territory. Virilio explains:

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

The Second World War...was one of two things for all Europeans—resistance or collaboration. Even as a child I felt a strong sense of resistance against the occupation. My parents, too, were resolutely against the Germans who took over the city and against Nazism as a whole. To resist or to collaborate is something we find repeatedly in life; resisting the situations that we do not accept or else accepting servitude, slavery. The dichotomy between the two is a defining element of history, and also an integral part of the history of architecture.³⁷ [*Images* 4.41, 4.42]

Between the end of the war and his bunker archeology, Virilio found another kind of resistance through Christian religion. So much of what he had experienced as a *blitzkrieg* baby in Nantes—the terror of aerial bombardments, the claustrophobia of his entrapment in the staircase of a bombed building, the killing machines of warfare, the emaciated bodies of concentration camp survivors³⁸—caused him to critique the disappearance of corporeality in contemporary postwar culture.³⁹ Total war—atomic war—demonstrated, for Virilio, the end of a sacred consideration for the human body. In Christianity the incarnation of Christ represented a resistance to total war. Virilio came to recognize, through the horror of Auschwitz and Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that humanity, in bringing on total war, had devised and implemented the technology to execute mass killings from a distance. The military space of WWII, Virilio asserts, encapsulates the tension between localized and virtual warfare. The Atlantic Wall bunkers, for example, mark a defensive posture awaiting military engagement on the site. Military space, in this configuration, supports a kind of hand-to-hand combat. Auschwitz and Hiroshima, however, are methods of a kind of virtual warfare, in which the order to kill is issued from a position that is physically removed from the site of combat. [*Images* 3.0, 3.1, 4.45 – 4.48] Virilio calls this configuration a “totalitarian space”; military space with an unprecedented global range.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Virilio describes his discovery of the concentration camps: "It was at the end of the war, like everyone else, of course, that I discovered the (concentration) camps. I never thought about that during the war... I wasn't told about it. ...it wasn't something 'people' talked about. There were the men who were executed, the hostages, the prisoners -- I knew about that, I lived through that. But 'people' didn't know about the camps. We found out only at the end of the war. And, there again, it was an unthinkable, unplaceable thing for a child. You wouldn't believe it. Once again, I didn't believe my eyes, until I saw the first concentration camp survivors getting off the trains..." (Virilio and Brausch 2011: 56.)

³⁹ Chapter Three will explore this critique further, through a discussion of Virilio's humanism and his assessment of “art after Auschwitz”.

Auschwitz and Hiroshima are pendants to each other. They're organized death, and that's the supreme perversion of the human spirit... take Pompeii and the natural explosion of Vesuvius in Antiquity. It's the same phenomenon again, but this time manufactured artificially, devised by the mind and hand of man: this space of war that has become a totalitarian space through the appearance and disappearance of things, creatures, cities, towns, villages, races, etc...⁴⁰

As an inhabitant of totalitarian space, Virilio was exposed to catastrophic destruction—the annihilation of populations, cities, and landscapes—directly through the devastation of Nantes and remotely through the exposure of information regarding events. He processes the implications of total warfare in the terms of both corporeality and vision; it should be understood that when he uses the terms “appearance” and “disappearance”, he implies both the physical and perceptual consequences. The “sky’s arrival in war”, had reduced the human body to a speck on the ground surface during combat. The ethics of total warfare, as Virilio observed, became obsolete as a result of a “perverse relation to the landscape” inherent in the virtual reality of totalitarian space.⁴¹ Bodies were camouflaged along with the evidence of a Nazi presence in the occupied territory. In the war landscape of Nantes—“faked and camouflaged” along with “human beings, sounds and light”—Virilio observed and experienced the forgetting, and thus disappearance, of the human body.⁴²

If we forget the body, it will mean the end of everything... But this is why I am a Christian. Christianity is the religion of incarnation.⁴³

For Virilio, incarnation was the not-forgetting of the human body. His acceptance of the Christian religion was in part an act of resistance towards the disappearance of corporeality during WWII and in its aftermath. Virilio converted to Christianity at the age of eighteen through the inspiration of Abbé Pierre and the worker-priest movement in France. [Image 1.5] His fraternity with the worker-priests was the first of many notorious associations with radical movements in France. The Abbé Pierre, a popular French priest and advocate for the poor, spearheaded the Catholic Church’s initiative to

⁴⁰ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 59.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 53.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Tappan and Andrianopoulos 2008: 37.

“reclaim the working class” after WWII.⁴⁴ His ministry eventually became very controversial in France because of “his backing of a revisionist view of the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews in the Second World War.”⁴⁵ Priests left their parishes and went to work in the factories. Virilio himself converted through this outreach. Christianity has since “been dominant in [his] life in terms of his strong personal faith and active concern for the homeless and the poor.”⁴⁶ Virilio has continued to show resistance to “dis-incarnation” through social service projects for the homeless population of Paris—the *sans-logis*.

While religion served as a means for Virilio to work through the ethical implications of total war and to participate in acts of healing, painting allowed him to process visual and spatial impressions. He recounts:

After the war and the euphoria of the Liberation came the discovery of the sea and the infinite, of that space that was now unoccupied once again, and the revelation of the bunker monolith. I became contemplative. I wanted to become a painter.⁴⁷

The act of painting gave Virilio the sense of being an “actor” instead of a “voyeur”. During the war he was always looking, though he couldn’t believe his eyes. Painting allowed his “self” to be active—even if that was a contemplative time”.⁴⁸ The engagement of his own body in the making of his art was a resistance to his wartime experience of being unable to control his own body, as he explains:

...on account of the war and being knocked about from pillar to post by events, I was never able to establish a place for myself in the world except as someone looking on passively at events.⁴⁹

Through painting, an active process from “[his] brain to [his] fingertips and back”, Virilio began “establishing a place” for himself.

The engagement in the body would always be an important theme in his work—beginning very early on within the two-dimensional space of the canvas. He painted mostly still life compositions, but in an inverted manner; the “whole of [his] work [was] directed towards the *anti-form*, to the gap between the

⁴⁴ Redhead 2004b: 15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 65.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 66.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 67.

objects”.⁵⁰ The anti-form, according to Virilio, is “a figure of displacement” or “the form of the travel or displacement of the observer”.⁵¹ Virilio’s exploration of this “between” space of the *anti-form* was an important foundation for his architecture and his theoretical discourse.

...in my movements around the city, the anti-form enabled me to find a nature. Nature isn't flowers, trees and rivers in the generic sense of the term, but this form of movement, this tropism of appearances which means that at a particular moment, at the place where I am and where I'm seeing only something ordinary, something extraordinary appears.⁵²

Virilio’s self-exploration through painting was a critical exercise, but as he says, “that didn’t make me a living.” He went back to Paris, the city of his birth, to study stained glass making at the Ecole des Métiers d’Art and became a master glazier to support himself. This career led to another encounter with architecture, that of liturgical space in particular. Virilio joined the Paris studio of Paul Bony in 1952 and had the “good fortune” to work alongside Matisse on the stained glass windows for Saint-Paul-de-Vence [*Images* 1.51, 1.52], with Braque at Varengeville [*Image* 1.54], and, consequently, under the direction of Father Marie-Alain Couturier. [*Images* 1.53 – 1.57] This was a significant moment for the revolution of Sacred Art in France, and Father Couturier was the spearhead of a progressive approach to the re-conception of architectural and artistic work for the Catholic Church. A fierce opponent of anti-Semitism, Father Couturier founded the journal *L’Art Sacré* (1936-1954) to publicize his manifesto of a postwar, and later post-Auschwitz, art.⁵³ He would provide Virilio a contact with Le Corbusier, who visited the Bony studio in 1958 to discuss the glass for his windows at Ronchamp. Virilio remembers his exchange with the great architect as a significant event in his career:

I met Le Corbusier at the time when he was working on the church at Ronchamp. ... That meeting took place in 1958, at the point when I was starting my research into the bunkers of the

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: 69.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*: 70.

⁵² *Ibid.*: 71.

⁵³ Father Couturier sought to mirror the Abbot Suger’s architectural influence of the Gothic cathedral and his “metaphysics of light”. He and Father Pie-Raymond Régamey were the chief editors of *L’Art Sacré*. For nearly twenty years, the priests contested what they considered outdated 19th-century church ornamentation through the journal publications and collaborating with artists and architects. Father Couturier was a veteran of WWI and became a Dominican priest after he was wounded in combat in 1930. He is remembered as an outspoken advocate for Jews in Vichy France. “I beg of you, remember that you are Christians, that charity tolerates no anti-Semitism, and that even if certain measures seem politically inevitable among those who have been conquered, at least let us maintain the integrity of our hearts.” (Schwartzwald: 149.)

Atlantic Wall. That was obviously very important for me, since there are obvious relations between the architecture of bunkers and the architecture of Ronchamp, La Tourette, etc.⁵⁴

Virilio would later design and build his own church utilizing the *béton brut* technique with his partner Claude Parent. The bunker-church of Sainte Bernedette du Banlay in Nevers can be understood, much like his paintings of anti-forms, as a progressive critique of post-WWII France and a personal working through of his wartime experiences—a manifesto of Virilian humanism.

IV. ARCHITECTURE CRYPTIQUE

By 1966, “the bunker was already a historical object, the persistence of the military strategy of the Todt Plan.”⁵⁵ Virilio’s archeology of the Nazi infrastructure and *military space* would spark his architectural career, but it should also be recognized as an extension of his childhood practice of “conscientious objection”; his resistance to the blinding and silencing effects of total war. In an essay titled “Never(s) more”, Frédéric Migayrou describes Virilio’s archeological pursuit of the Atlantic Wall as “pushing against history” and a means to “escape the cursiveness of a historicization that erases contradictions, obliterates sources, [and] multiplies memory into narratives.”⁵⁶ What Migayrou identifies is Virilio’s resistance to not just the recording of incomplete histories, which contribute to the oblivion of collective memory, but also the *camouflage* of historical truth. Much like the various strategies of deception Virilio experienced during WWII, the multiplication of “memory into narratives” is further cause for him to question the dominant historical paradigms. His work, by extension, developed as an act of exposing the aesthetics of such camouflage—what he would come to call the *aesthetics of disappearance*—and the social, political, cultural, and technological devices that enable and perpetuate the erasure of memory and, thus, the perception of truth.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*: 74.

⁵⁵ Migayrou, Parent and Virilio 2010: 29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Though his firsthand experience of the blitzkrieg, the devastation of Nantes, and his later excursions along the Atlantic littoral prompted his intellectual alignment, the Second World War should not receive all of the credit for Virilio's thinking. After moving to Paris in the early 1960s, he began studying philosophy at the university of the Sorbonne, where he refined his ability to articulate his wartime experiences in terms of architecture and the psychology of form. Among his most influential professors were sociologist Raymond Aron, the existentialist philosophers Vladimir Jankelvitch and Jean Wahl, and the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), and *Le visible et l'invisible* (published posthumously in 1964), both written by Merleau-Ponty, were integral to the formation of Virilio's own brand of phenomenology—the *logistics of perception*. *Logistics*, for Virilio, became a more specific phenomenology that applied the principles of phenomenological assessment to an analysis of WWII military space and various mechanisms for “looking”. His memory of the war and his archeology of the Atlantic Wall became the arena for his philosophical inquiry:

War is a field of perception, so it's also a field of analysis for the phenomenology of perception... What's camouflage? It's phenomenology of perception with the aim of deceiving the enemy gaze.⁵⁷

It is important to understand Virilio's position as, to utilize his own self-description, a “phenomenologist based on looking”.⁵⁸ His early exposure to Merleau-Pontian phenomenology resonated with his wartime disillusionment of the visual “reality” of his environment. Having learned to doubt his own perception, Virilio naturally found a mentor in Merleau-Ponty, who utilized the study of human perception as a point of departure for his theory. *Phenomenology of Perception*, in essence, captivated Virilio with its assertion of the body-subject as a center of consciousness through which the world is experienced and known. Virilio's painting and study of the *anti-form*, for example, anticipated Merleau-

⁵⁷ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 78.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: 79.

Ponty's phenomenological structure of spatial perception. This connection is illustrated by Part II of *Phenomenology of Perception* "The Theory of the Body is already a Theory of Perception":

When I walk round my flat, the various aspects in which it presents itself to me could not possibly appear as views of one and the same thing if I did not know that each of them represents the flat seen from one spot or another, and if I were unaware of my own movements, and of my body as retaining its identity through the stages of those movements. I can of course take a mental bird's eye view of the flat, visualize it or draw a plan of it on paper, but in that case too I could not grasp the unity of the object without the mediation of bodily experience, for what I call plan is only a more comprehensive perspective: it is the flat 'seen from above', and the fact that I am able to draw together in it all habitual perspectives is dependent on my knowing that one and the same embodied subject can view successively from various positions. It will perhaps be objected that by restoring the object to bodily experience as one of the poles of that experience, we deprive it of precisely that which constitutes objectivity.⁵⁹

Merleau-Ponty's description of the experience of his flat combines his bodily engagement with the space and the purely two-dimensional impressions that constitute its "objectivity". The mobility of the body, as he says, allows the one who experiences the space to "grasp the unity of the object".

For Virilio, the "mediation of bodily experience" is integral to not only "knowing" the object—validating its full existence—but also for unveiling its potentially superficial presence. He frequently invokes the language of the theater, recalling his wartime experience of Nantes as a Potemkin city, to present the perception of place—in this case, the urban surface—as mere "scenery". A statement made by Victor Hugo, Virilio says, describes his stance completely: "Nature, which puts the mask of the visible—the scenery—on the invisible is simply an appearance corrected by a transparency."⁶⁰ In Virilio's own words:

All the work I've done since the war has been on this sleight of hand of reality: reality's elusive, it escapes, it's never stable.⁶¹

It's the invisible space that enables us to see the visible.⁶²

⁵⁹ Merleau-Ponty 1962: 235.

⁶⁰ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 87.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 79.

⁶² *Ibid.*: 65.

It has been argued that “Merleau-Ponty’s perspective in particular does not really fade from Virilio’s work.”⁶³ Virilio himself attests that Merleau-Ponty was “the philosopher who most inspired” him.⁶⁴ While this is most certainly true for Virilio’s intellectual work, an account of his architecture must also include his influence from *Gestalt* theory. Having already discovered *Gestalt* theory through Paul Guillaume’s *La psychologie de la forme* (1937) and the Berlin School, it was in Merleau-Ponty that Virilio found “an echo of [his] German masters, who were the ‘Gestaltists’”.⁶⁵ *Gestalt*, from the German root *Gestaltung* (literally translated as an act of conceiving, forming, or creating), was for Virilio the definition of “the environment itself”.⁶⁶ As he says,

With the military space and the space of my anti-forms, I find myself right inside it.⁶⁷

Utilizing the experience of elevator descent as an example, Virilio explains:

When you take a lift with plain walls and you look at the wall, you can’t help looking upwards if the lift is going down. It’s as though there were a piece of elastic between the wall and the eyes of the person looking... That’s *Gestalt*: when something passes in front of you—assuming you don’t close your eyes—you can’t help but be sucked in by the movement of that thing.⁶⁸

He calls this phenomenon “another ‘aesthetics of disappearance’”.⁶⁹ *Gestalt* theory gave Virilio what he calls the “construction set”, exposing him to the practice of structuralism long before the movement’s height with Levi-Strauss in the 1960s. Virilio had already learned,

Thanks to the Gestaltists that you had to both recognize structure...and then beware of it!⁷⁰

Virilio’s fixation on the Atlantic Wall bunkers and his influence of phenomenology and *Gestalt* theory inspired him to pursue a career in architecture, and thus his partnership with Claude Parent and the collaboration of the *Architecture Principe Groupe* (APG).⁷¹ Virilio and Parent met, ironically, when

⁶³ Redhead 2004b: 21.

⁶⁴ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 76.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: 78.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 80.

⁷¹ Literally translated Architecture (in) Principle, “but essentially urging architecture to begin again”. (Redhead 2004b: 22.)

Virilio was looking for an apartment in Paris. Parent had designed the apartment that Virilio purchased two years later, and the two struck up a partnership shortly after. They formed *Architecture Principe* in 1963, along with painter Michael Carrade and sculptor Morice Lipsi, which sought to explore a new architectural urban order. [Images 1.56 – 1.66] It was during this period during the mid-sixties (1965-1966) that Virilio’s creative interests shifted from drawing still life to imagining living spaces and bunkers. His archeology of Fortress Europe had left a “permanent impression” on his thinking since he began studying the military infrastructure in 1958.

The APG published a series of nine short journal-manifestos between February and December of 1966; each focused on one facet of their architectural theory. [Images 1.61, 1.67] These were: ‘The Oblique Function’, ‘The Third Urban Order’, ‘Potentialism’, ‘The Nevers Worksite’, ‘Habitable Circulation’, ‘The Mediate City’, ‘Bunker Archeology’, ‘Power and Imagination’, and ‘Blueprint for Charleville’. Brief, but provocative, the APG manifestos were “high on rhetoric and conceptual innovation.”⁷² However, their work was considered highly controversial within the contemporary design practice and discourse. The profound influence of the Nazi military architecture, though *Architecture Principe* was working twenty years after the end of WWII, was a jarring aesthetic for the conception of new architecture in postwar France. Only heightening the group’s negative reception, Virilio and Parent consistently referenced what they called “cryptic” and “repulsive” architecture as the inspiration for *Architecture Principe*’s built work. [Image 1.68]

The “cryptic” and “repulsive” architecture was widely misunderstood in France, however, for Virilio, examining buildings according to their cryptic properties was a deeply personal endeavor. His association of architecture to the crypt is drawn from his family’s escape from the Gestapo of Nantes in 1941. He later surmised that the “cryptic” architecture of his family home offered protection from the Nazi secret police and the Allied bombings; and he would spend several years seeking to understand the

⁷² *Ibid.*: 23.

space of his survival.⁷³ In 1960 Virilio began writing a manifesto, *Architecture Cryptique*, which would account for his discovery of WWII military architecture. He devoted five years to the project, making several trips to Germany for archival research, which led to his study of the air-raid shelters of large German cities and the pre-Atlantic Wall infrastructure of the Maginot and Siegfried lines. Though he equates the bunker architecture to that of Etruscan tombs and Aztec temples, Virilio's conception of cryptic architecture is not about form, but the inhabitants of the architectural container. Therefore, it was through *Architecture Cryptic*, that Virilio began to make architecture about bodies. An excerpt from an essay titled "Architecture Cryptique" published in *Architecture Principe* No. 7 (the journal titled "Bunker Archeology") illustrates his progressive approach:

Cryptic architectural conception is necessarily developed and understood through the integration of the autonomous bodies it contains and to whose future it is linked.

These bodies, themselves considered as primary architecture, are put into relation with a place through their communication orifices, through the median zones of the cladding—secondary "portable" architecture and objects, innumerable cryptic functions—and this, all the way to the notion of territory, that is to say of the movement in a possible space, and through this all the way to the notion of time.⁷⁴

Virilio's assertion of the body as "primary architecture" resonated with his *Gestalt*-phenomenologist stance. Rejecting Le Corbusier's *le moduler* [Image 1.69], which Virilio considered bourgeois, Virilio adopted Nietzsche's dancer as the ideal body for his architecture.⁷⁵ [Image 1.71] Where *le moduler* concerned issues of proportion, Virilio's dancer was about the dynamic perception and experience of architectural space. According to Virilio, what interested *Architecture Principe* was the,

imbalance, disequilibrium, life on inclined planes. We were taken with the idea that the age of the orthogonal was past and that one could live on oblique surfaces, that we could effectively envisage going beyond the postural reference of the classical age and orthogonality: the standing man.⁷⁶

⁷³ Migayrou, Parent and Virilio 2010: 77.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 105.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*: 103.

Virilio and Parent's rejection of the Euclidian geometry of Modernism in favor of the inclined plane manifested in such architectural concepts as the "living ground" and the *fonction oblique*.

V. THE DANCER & THE INCLINED PLANE

Virilio and Parent's concept of the "living ground" celebrated the ground plane and prioritized its expression and functionality higher than any other building component.

It was our view that movement—the trajet—was at last gaining the upper hand over the architectural object. The bridging structure made it possible to free up the landscape to the maximum thanks to the non-Euclidian geometry of large inclined arches. So, the sixth issue of the journal presented our 'Topo-tonics', great bridging structures stretching out 100 or 200 metres above a protected territory. This is how we came to the idea... of the 'living ground'.⁷⁷

The two architects delineated a range of angles through which this "living ground" would function—this became the rule for their "oblique" architecture, which thus became known as the *fonction oblique* (or the oblique function). [*Images* 1.71 – 1.75] The oblique function is, as Virilio explains, is:

a culture of the body that plays on disequilibrium, that regards man not as static but in motion and takes the dancer as the model of the human being.⁷⁸

The architectural result was a "habitable circulation", which Virilio admits was "an unconscious reaction to the deportation to concentration camps."⁷⁹ [*Image* 1.76] Though a less vivid re-processing of themes from Virilio's wartime experience, the oblique function and its habitable circulation;

[brought] gravity into play, [in order] to put bodies on—very slight—slopes, so as to lend them gravity's dynamic.⁸⁰

By expressing the ground plane and creating partial divisions of space through inclined planes, Virilio and Parent contested the oppressive "orientation" and "concealment" of Euclidian geometry and orthogonal architecture. They proclaimed "the end of the vertical as the axis of elevation" and "the end of the

⁷⁷ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 112.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*: 104.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*: 114.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

horizontal as the permanent plane.”⁸¹ The oblique function, Virilio and Parent claimed, would multiply usable space in architecture. They expressed this benefit of the oblique function with an ideogram that became iconic for the APG and “frequently provoke[ed] a smile”.⁸² [Image 1.77] The intersection of two oblique lines makes a multiplication sign, as opposed to the combining of one horizontal and one vertical line resulting in an addition sign.

VI. OF WAR AND PEACE

Virilio and Parent’s provocative research on the oblique function was finally realized in the church of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay at Nevers (1964-1966). [Image 1.76 – 1.80] The chapel commonly referred to as the “bunker church”, was one of two (out of four total prospective projects) built works resulting from the AP collaboration. The Aerospace Research Center for the Thomson Houston group at Vélizy-Villacoublay (1964-1968) was the only other building commission that Virilio and Parent saw through to construction. [Images 1.84, 1.86] Ironically, the project at Vélizy was repurposed as a missile factory; Virilio and Parent apparently had no idea of the project’s inevitable fate during the design process. Virilio, a man of faith against total war, says of his two built works:

In the Gospels there’s a verse that runs as follows—this is Christ addressing Peter—‘upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’ Curiously, I have the impression of having built both these things: the church and the gates of hell.⁸³

The two projects “represent two ends of a metaphorical chain—of peace and war” and reinforce the dichotomies that repeatedly surface in his oeuvre.⁸⁴ *Architecture Principe’s* only other architectural projects, besides some installation work exhibiting the oblique function, were never constructed. These were the Palais des expositions at Charleville and the Mariotti house at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. [Images 1.81, 1.82, 1.85, 1.86]

⁸¹ Virilio 1966a.

⁸² AA 1996: 5.

⁸³ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 110.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*: 109.

Virilio and Parent's collaboration with the APG lasted five years. The two parted ways during the events of May '68, which disrupted the completion of their most radical experiment yet—the *Pendular Destabilizer No. 1*. [Images 4.23 – 4.25] This project would stage a “full-scale experimental model of an elevated oblique structure” constructed at the University of Nanterre.⁸⁵ Virilio and Parent had planned to live for several weeks in the mock-up oblique building “in attempt to test the equilibrium and habitability of inclined slopes”. The experiment would allow them to “determine the best choice of angles” for various living spaces and activities within an oblique dwelling. However, the students' and workers' uprising that began at the University of Nanterre effectively aborted their “psycho-physiological” test of the oblique function and *Pendular Destabilizer No. 1* was never constructed. Virilio was caught up in the riots, invigorated by the “cultural revolution” that resisted the oppression of the working class. He claims he did not “believe in the revolution” but in “revolutionary resistance” and “popular defense”.⁸⁶ [Images 1.90 – 1.93] Defending his position, Virilio articulates:

I remember the speeches in the Richelieu Amphitheater of the Sorbonne, before the taking of the Odeon Theater at the very beginning of May '68. I went in: the place was packed. I heard a guy, probably a communist say, 'I read on the walls of the Sorbonne: "Imagination comes to power!" That's not true, it's the working class!' I answered: 'So, comrade, you deny the working class imagination.' It was pretty clear, one referring to a horde able to take power like a mass of soldiers, and the other (me) referring to the active imagination—the autonomists. On this level, at the time, I acted like them.⁸⁷

Parent strongly disagreed with his partner's participation⁸⁸, and the two went their separate ways. Virilio went on to teach at the Ecole Spéciale d'Architecture in Paris in 1969, became its co-director in 1972, director in 1975, and President in 1990. Virilio and Parent published an anniversary issue of *Architecture Principe*, number 10 in 1996. He left in 1999 with the title Emeritus Professor to focus solely on writing

⁸⁵ Redhead 2004a: 21.

⁸⁶ Redhead 2004a: 29.

⁸⁷ Virilio and Lotringer 2008: 82.

⁸⁸ Parent bluntly described the May '68 events as “idiotic”. Recalling his perception of Virilio's experience and their separation, Parent has said, “When I went to see [Virilio], I was told that he was now calling himself ‘Comrade Paul’. Those people all took themselves very seriously, forming ‘revolutionary committees’ and ‘sub-committees’. I have no stomach for that kind of thing ... I don't like that mob mentality ... [Virilio] was very much involved in the movement as a whole. He said it was something he'd been dreaming of all his life—1798 revisited. All the same, he was no fool. The day the police stormed the Odeon and drove everyone out with their batons, he wasn't there. He'd gone home to take a bath.” (Virilio and Parent 1997: 55.)

and giving interviews. His provocative intellectual stance was still sought after in France after his teaching career ended, however, and Virilio was asked to be on editorial boards and write for several journals.⁸⁹ [*Images* 1.94, 1.95]

VII. THE “MOTHER MEMORY”

Scholar and frequent participant in Virilio studies, Steve Redhead has argued that Virilio “is certainly one of the most noted French theorists of contemporary culture and has been so for more than thirty years.”⁹⁰ The French media have echoed Redhead’s sentiment, calling him “one of the most original thinkers of our time”.⁹¹ In looking back at Virilio’s childhood experience in Nantes and his early career, it is clear that he is, to a great extent, processing his own potent memories through his architecture and critical theory. While the focus of this thesis is not specifically on the relationship between Virilio’s personal history and the trajectory of his oeuvre, it is important to lay the groundwork for the following analysis. Virilio, himself, always explains his work as a product of his experiences and describes his aesthetic and architectural explorations in terms of corporeality. This, as delineated in this biographical sketch, has allowed him to express a kind of resistance to *death*—the disappearance of the body—by insisting that human perception and bodily behavior carry great philosophical importance. His attachment to his mentor Merleau-Ponty and the Gestalt theorists led him to brand his own version of phenomenology: the *logistics of perception*.

Born from a sense of urgency to process impressions of the Second World War, Virilio’s work from the postwar era was controversial. Perhaps, this was due to his own speed in re-presenting the historical events. He was, and still is, combatting the culture of forgetting, of looking away, and of mistaking “camouflage” for reality. This was the climate after the Second World War, after Auschwitz,

⁸⁹ Redhead 2004a: 32.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*: 33.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

in which Virilio's career began. He cannot detach himself from this moment in history. As Redhead acknowledges, "Today we are in a position to see more clearly the impact of the 'total war' of the Second World War on Virilio's thinking in whatever sphere he was to subsequently interrogate in his theoretical work or his teaching, be it architecture, photography, cinema, or contemporary art."⁹² Virilio's work, among many things, is about the importance of accessing original memories. His architecture vividly expresses his own journey through the past and calls us to do the same. In the contemporary condition of "accelerated reality", Virilio argues, it has never been more urgent to do so:

I'm sure that the acceleration of history has already given way to the acceleration of reality and that this brings memory back into question. History was the memory of the world. Now, accelerated reality will demand—is already demanding—a mother memory. A genuine memory, but a memory different from that of computer disks or CD-ROMS. A memory different from that of the book alone or the screen image alone. I can't say what this living memory of an accelerated present will be. All I know is that it has to be invented and constructed, and this is a matter for us all. But it's a question that has, as yet, no answer.⁹³

⁹² Redhead 2004: 20.

⁹³ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 125.

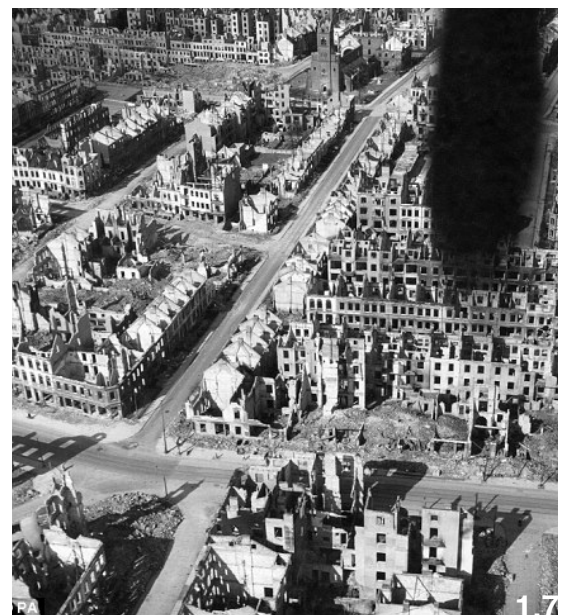
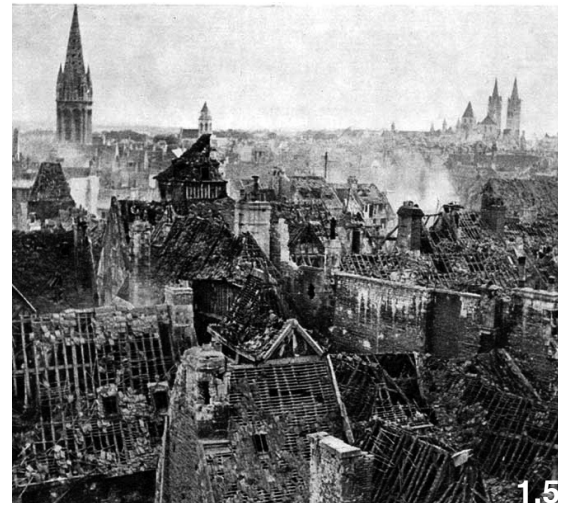


image 1.2: German soldiers at the Arc de Triomphe after the surrender of Paris, 14 June 1940.

image 1.3: Blitzkrieg mobil infantry and armour, June 1943.

image 1.4: Blitzkrieg over Poland, 1 September 1939.

image 1.5: Caen, Normandy in ruins after Allied bombings, 8-9 July 1944.

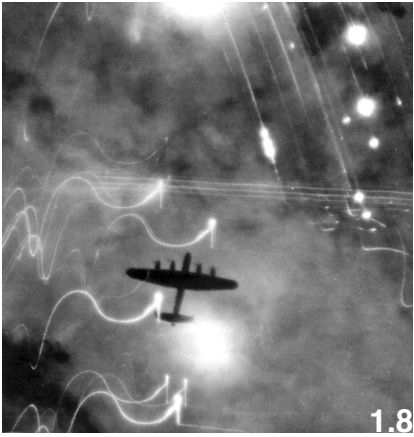
image 1.6: Aerial view after Allied bombardment of Vire, Normandy, 1944.

image 1.7: Aerial view after Allied bombardment of Vire, Normandy, 1944.

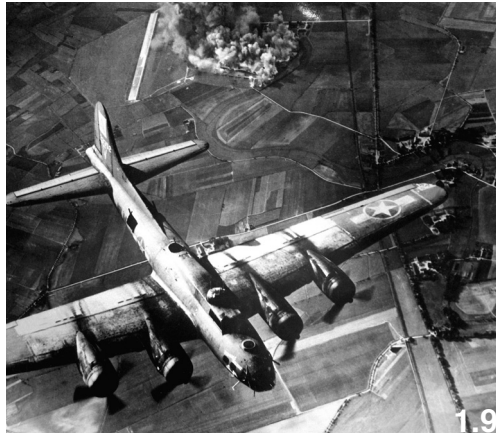
image 1.8: Lancaster over Hamburg, Germany.

image 1.9: Raid by the 8th Air Force on the Focke Wulf factory at Marienburg, 9 October 1943.

image 1.10: Luftwaffe raid over French Algeria 1943.



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image 1.11 : Devastation of Allied bombing of Mortaine, France August 1944.
image 1.12 : Virilio recalls Perec's book to describe Potemkin Nantes.
image 1.13 : Devastation of Allied bombing of Mortaine, France August 1944.



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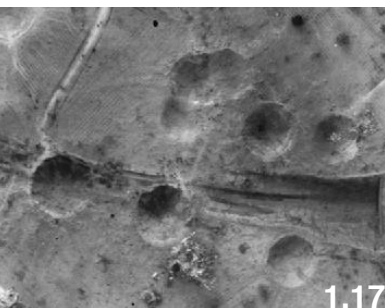


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- image 1.14:* Airfield raid at Berck Sur Mer, Pas-de-Calais in France.
- image 1.15:* Hollywood set design camouflage netting concealing US air base during WWII.
- image 1.16:* Camouflage netting concealing an air base, US Pacific Coast during WWII.
- image 1.17:* Crater detail from Allied bombing of Saumur railway tunnel, 8-9 June 1944.
- image 1.18:* Active V-1 Site Fleury Pas de Calais July 6, 1944.
- image 1.19:* Craters from Allied bombing at German missile plant, 2 September 1944.
- image 1.20:* Paint camouflage of Junker 87 plane.
- image 1.21:* Camouflage of Spitfire plane merges with the sky.



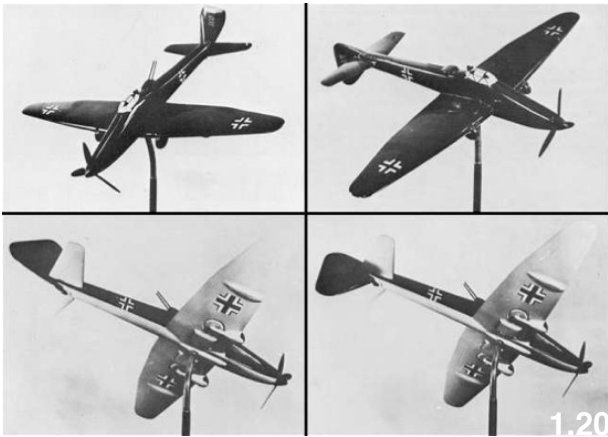
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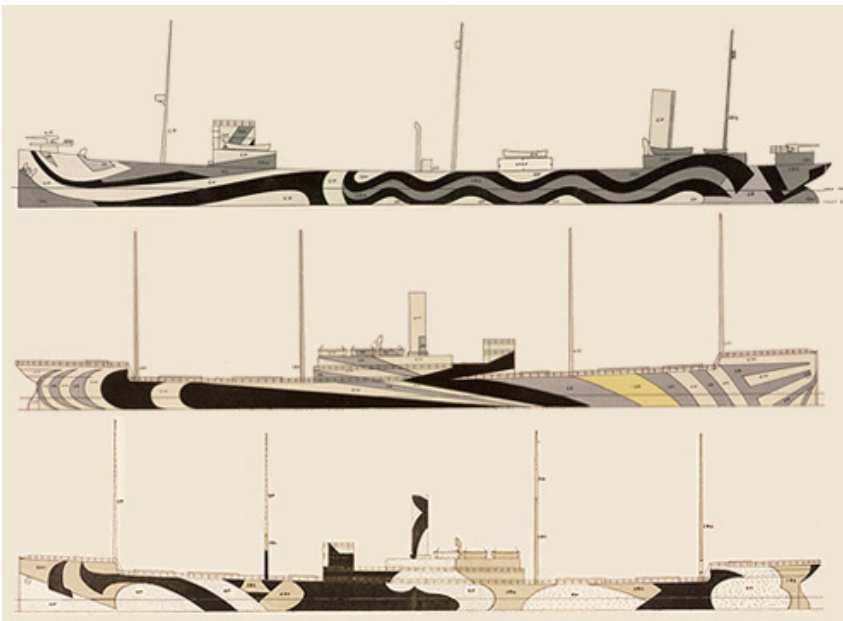
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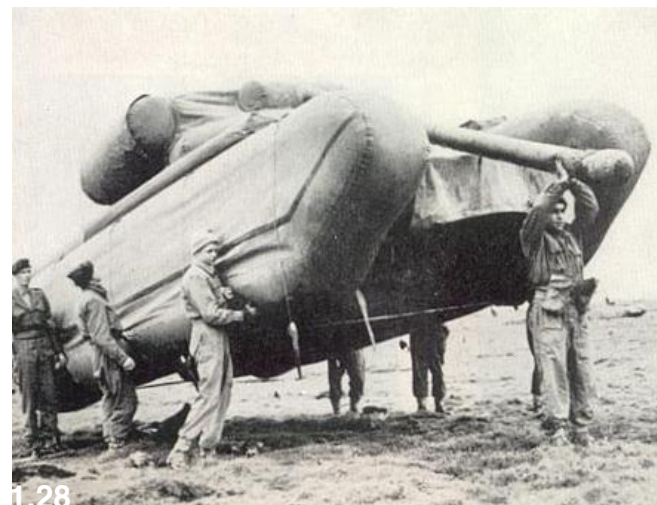


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- image 1.22:* Dazzle camouflage of HMS Furious, 1918.
- image 1.23:* WWII Russian Camouflage, Eastern Front.
- image 1.24:* WWII Russian Camouflage, Eastern Front (cryptic camouflage).
- image 1.25:* Dazzle camouflage of British ship.
- image 1.26:* Dazzle camouflage-inspired swimwear, 1921.
- image 1.27:* Dazzle camouflage of ships.
- image 1.28:* Inflatable “dummy” tank.



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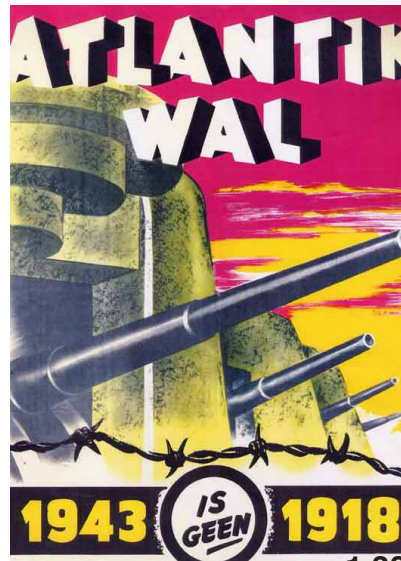
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image 1.29: French propaganda, "We are ready".

image 1.30: German Atlantic Wall propaganda.

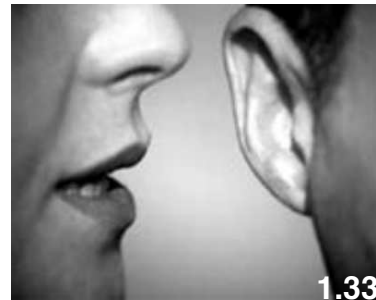
image 1.31: Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, overseeing a drawing of the Atlantic Wall Construction.

image 1.32: German propaganda poster.

image 1.33: The British "Underground Propaganda" committee spread thousands of rumors.

image 1.34: Leni Riefenstahl, film maker for Nazi propaganda.

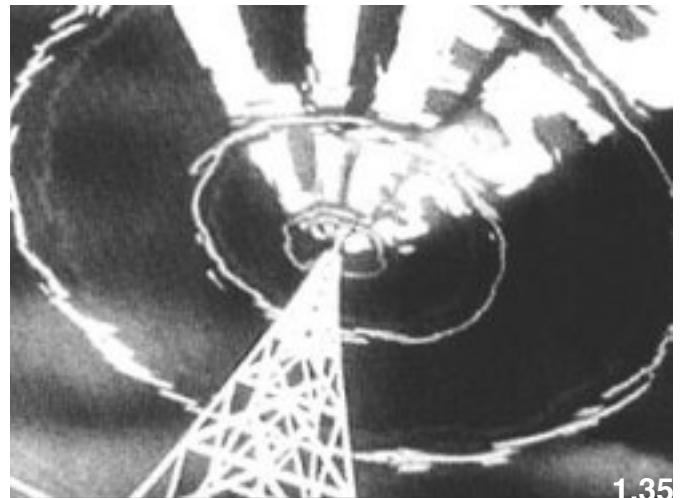
image 1.35: Scene from film *Why We Fight* by Frank Capra.



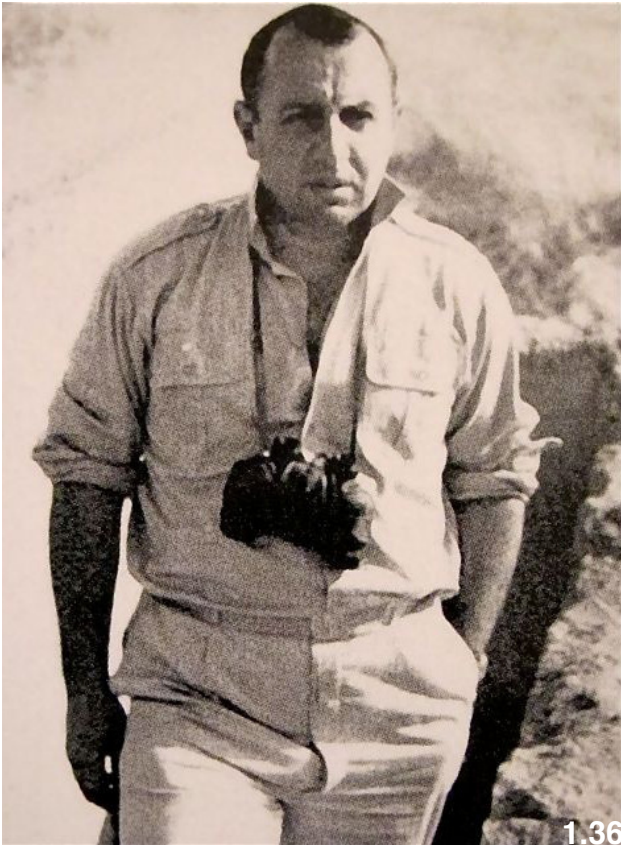
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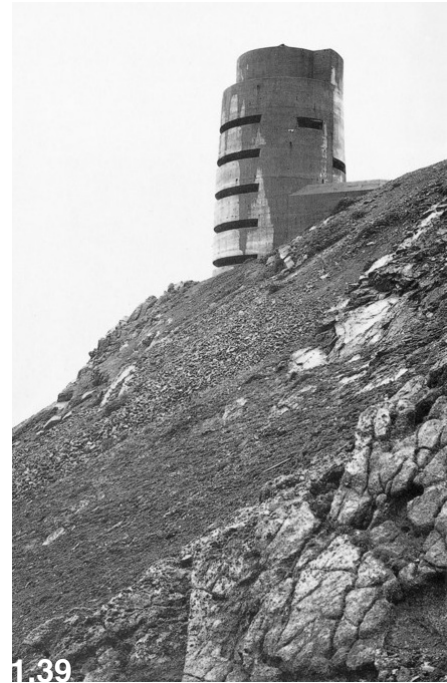
image 1.36: Paul Virilio during his archeology of Atlantic Wall bunkers.



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image 1.37: Virilio's photographs from *Bunker Archeology*.

image 1.38: Virilio's photographs from *Bunker Archeology*.

image 1.39: Virilio's photographs from *Bunker Archeology*.

image 1.40: Virilio's photographs from *Bunker Archeology*.

image 1.41: Virilio's photographs from *Bunker Archeology*.

image 1.42: Virilio's photographs from *Bunker Archeology*.



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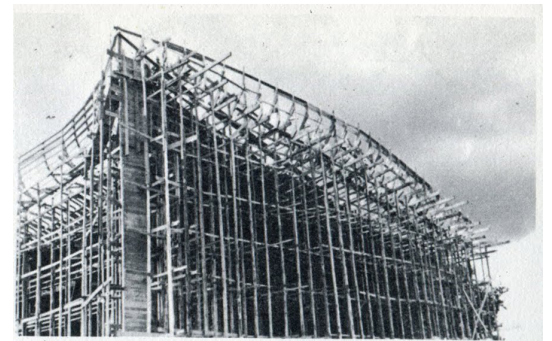
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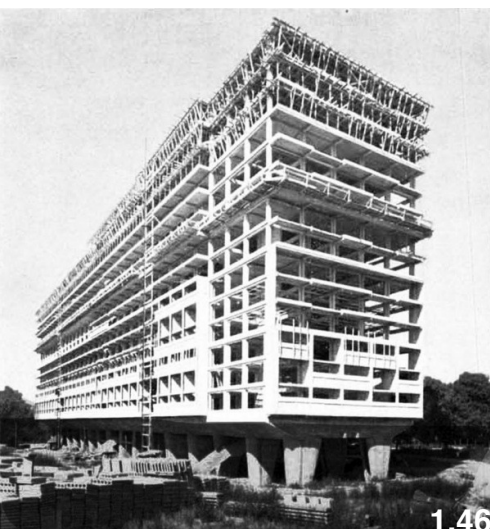
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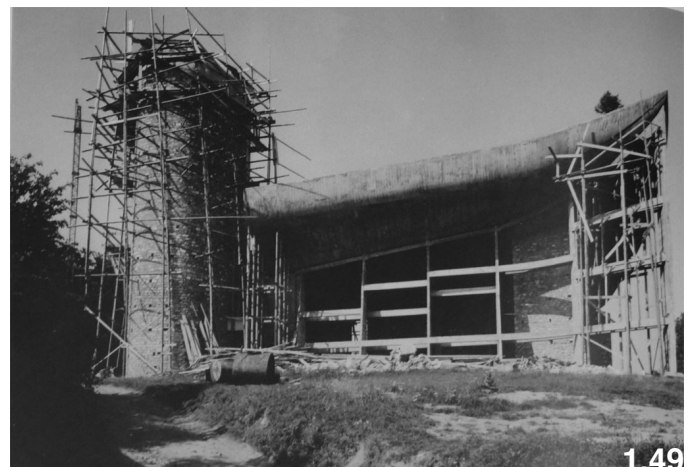


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- image 1.43:* Chapel of Notre Dame du Haut, Le Corbusier (1954).
- image 1.44:* Ronchamp under construction, board form concrete.
- image 1.45:* Ronchamp under construction, board form concrete.
- image 1.46:* Unité d'Habitation construction, Le Corbusier (1946-52).
- image 1.47:* The pilgrims' hostel at Roncamp, Le Corbusier (1954).
- image 1.48:* Robin Hood Gardens, Alison and Peter Smithson (1972).
- image 1.49:* Ronchamp under construction.
- image 1.50:* Abbé Pierre, worker-priest movement in France (1913-2007).
- image 1.51:* Chapelle du Rosaire, Virilio worked alongside Matisse making the stained glass (1949-51).
- image 1.52:* Chapelle du Rosaire interior.
- image 1.53:* Mural, Notre Dame du Haut, Le Corbusier.



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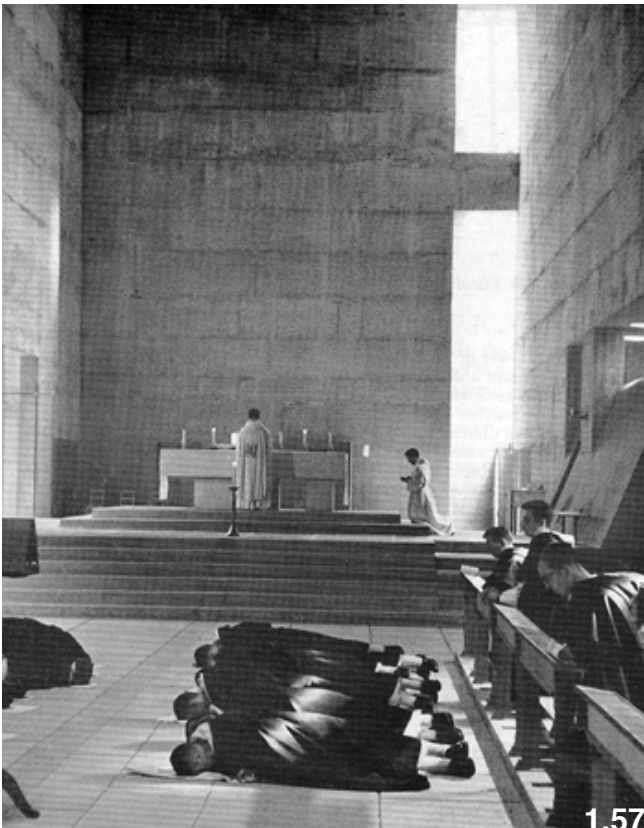


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image 1.54: Stained glass, Saint-Paul-de-Vence at Varengeville, Braque and Virilio.

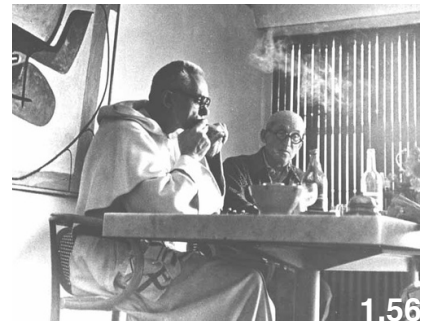


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image 1.55: Father Marie-Alain Couturier (ca. 1954).



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image 1.56: Father Couturier and Le Corbusier.

image 1.57: Worship at the monastery of La Tourette, Le Corbusier (1957-60).

image 1.58: Logistics of Perception: Virilio was inspired by military technology of WWII.



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image 1.54: Virilio, Parent, Lipsi, Carrade; first meeting of Architecture Principe (1963).

image 1.55: Oblique function, sketch by Parent.

image 1.56: *Architecture Principe* cover of journal No. 1, "La Fonction Oblique".

image 1.57: Virilio and Parent (1963-66).

image 1.58: Morice Lipsi's sculpture studio, where the APG met frequently.

image 1.59: Virilio and Parent (1963-66).

image 1.60: Paul Virilio.

image 1.61: Claude Parent.

image 1.62: *Architecture Principe* covers of journals No. 2-9.

image 1.63: "Cryptic architecture" image from original AP journal No. 7.

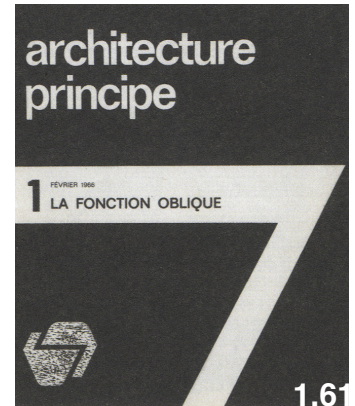
image 1.64: "Le modulator", Le Corbusier's design principle (1948).

image 1.65: "Three types of circulation" sketch by Virilio.

image 1.66: Nicole Parent, C. Parent's sister, dances on inclined planes to demonstrate the oblique function.



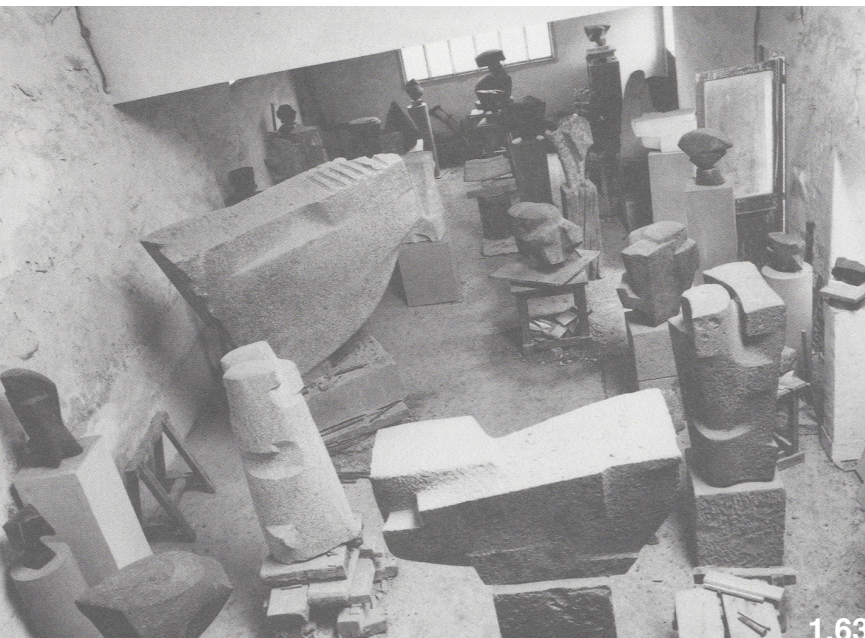
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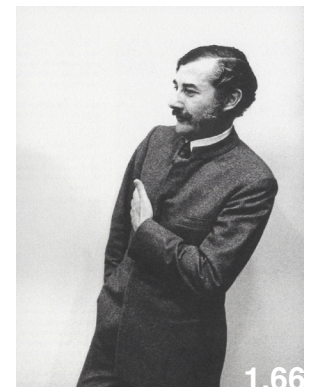
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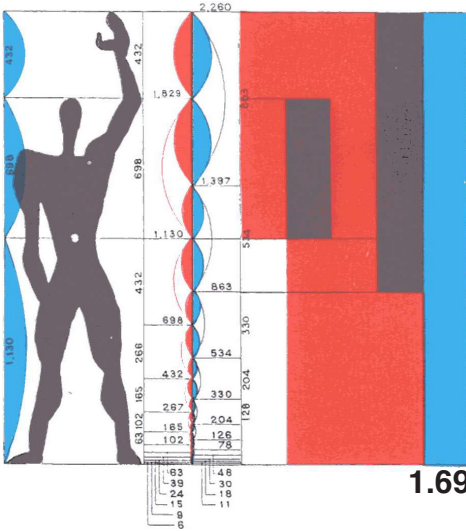
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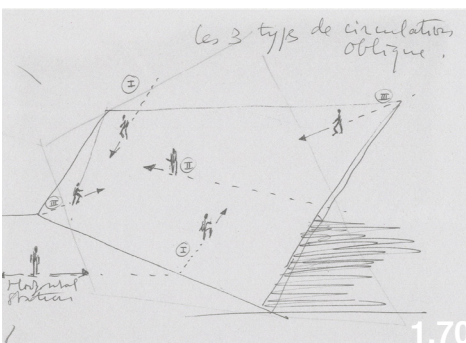


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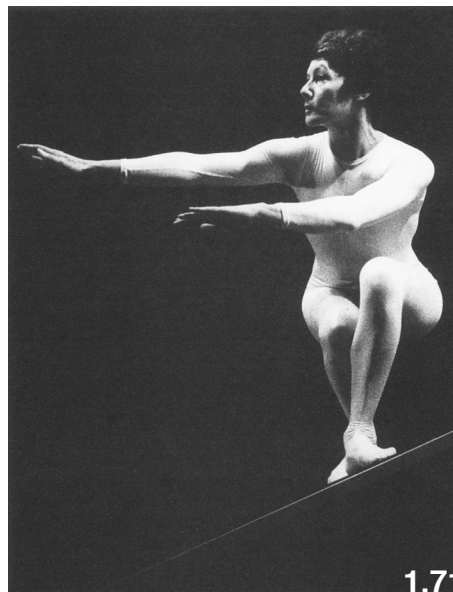


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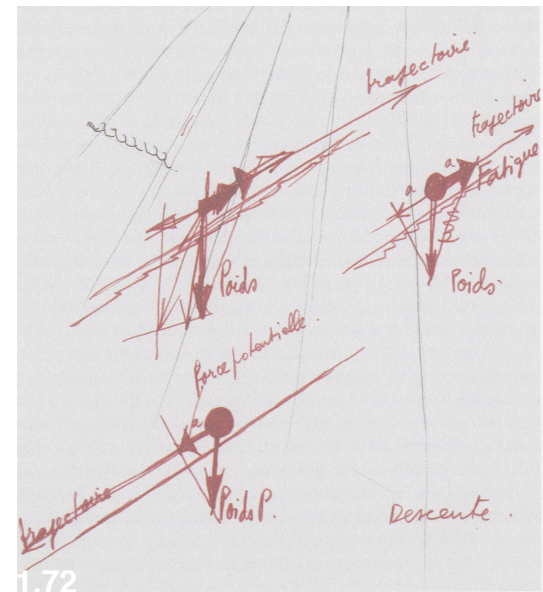
- image 1.67:* Architecture Principe covers No. 2-9.
- image 1.68:* “Cryptic architecture”, AP journal No. 7.
- image 1.69:* “Le moduler”, Le Corbusier, (1948).
- image 1.70:* “Three types of circulation”, Virilio.
- image 1.71:* Nicole Parent, C. Parent’s sister, dances on inclined planes to demonstrate the oblique function.
- image 1.72:* “The potential load of an individual” sketch by Parent.



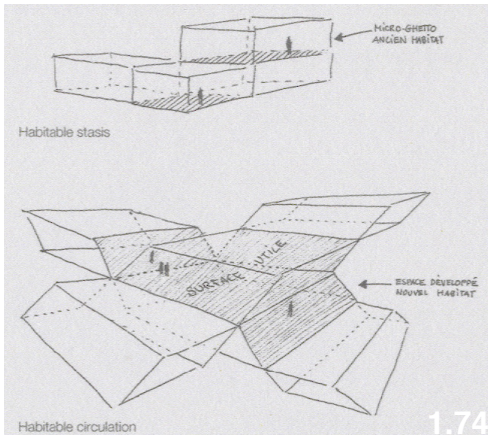
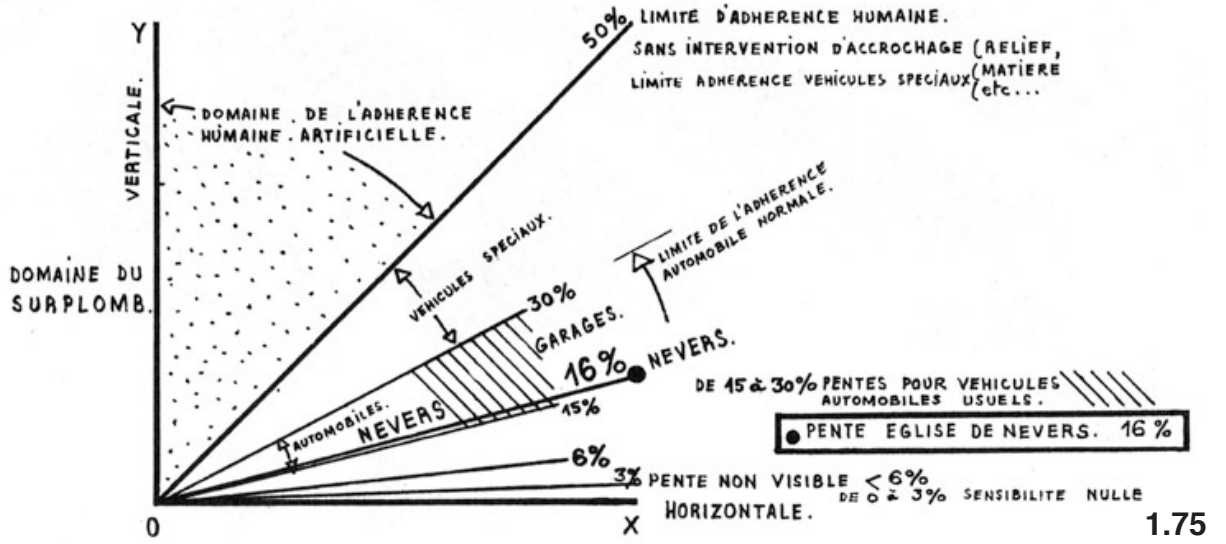
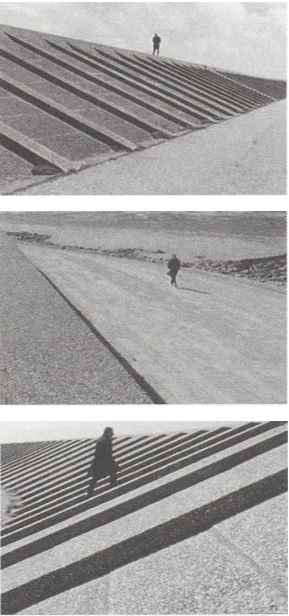
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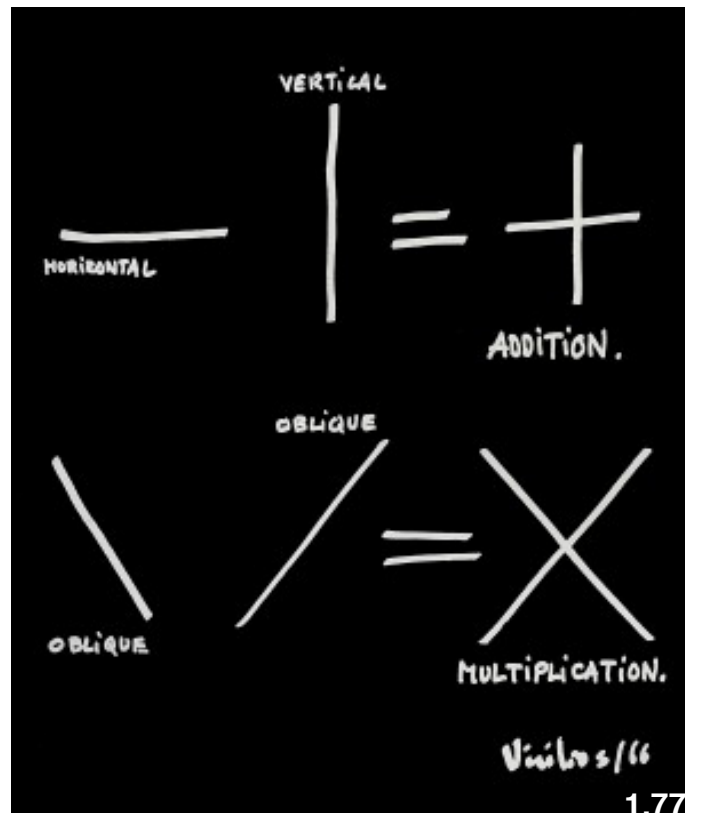
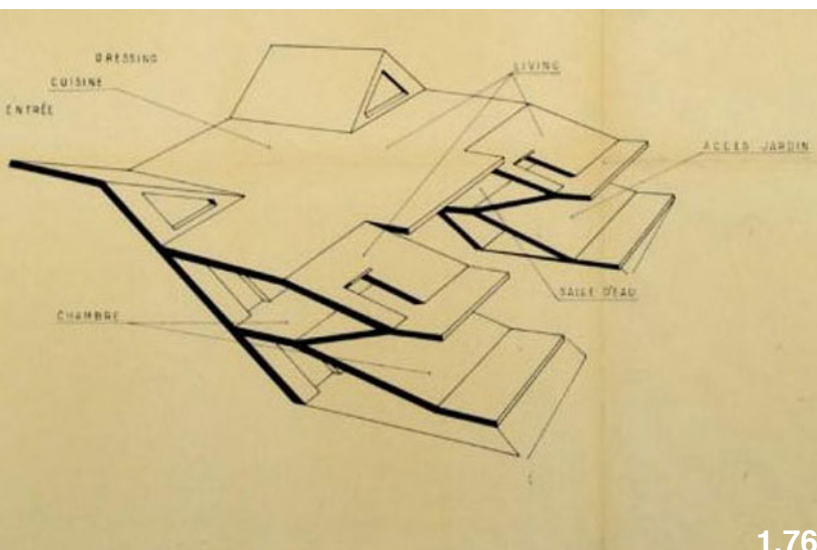
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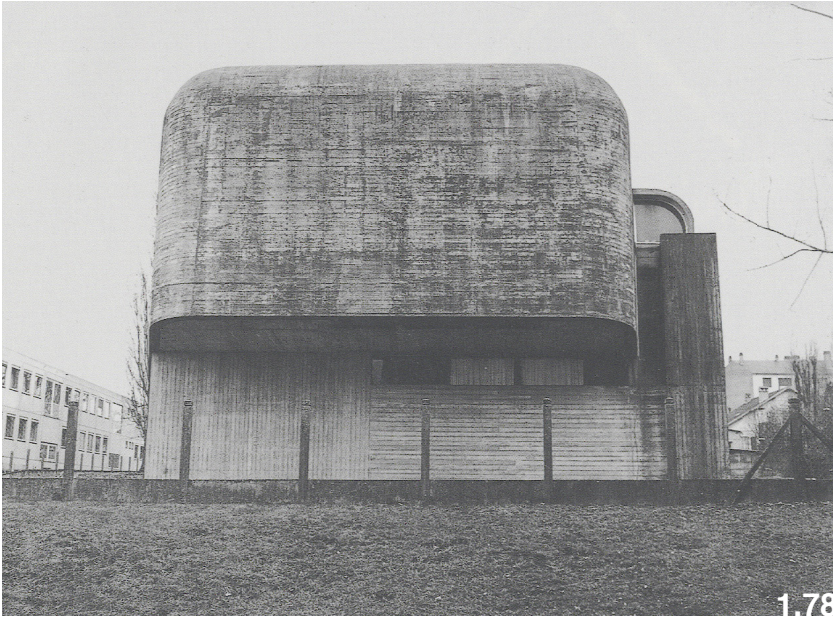


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- image 1.73: Scenes from Virilio's film, "La ville utopique" (1969).
- image 1.74: Diagram of habitable inclines for the oblique function.
- image 1.75: "Habitable stasis" and "habitable circulation", sketch by Virilio.
- image 1.76: Experimental house, St. Germain en Laye, *Architecture Principe*.
- image 1.77: Ideogram for the oblique function, Virilio (1966).
- image 1.78: Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, *Architecture Principe* (1963-66).
- image 1.79: Sainte-Bernadette, section drawing showing oblique floor planes.
- image 1.80: Nevers, detail of exterior board-formed concrete texture.
- image 1.81: Prospective design for Charleville Cultural Center (1966-67).

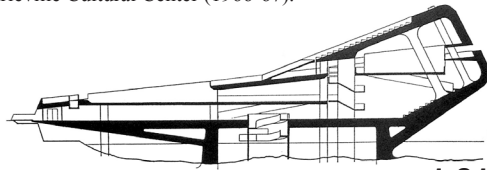




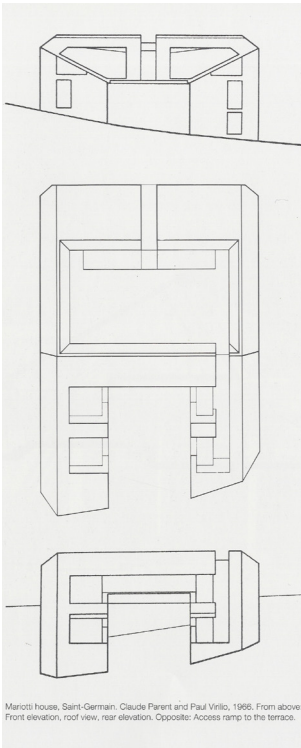
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image 1.82: Mariotti house, Saint-Germain, *Architecture Principe* (1966).

image 1.83: Prospective design for Charleville Cultural Center (1966-67).

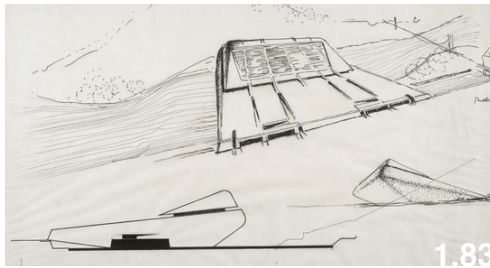


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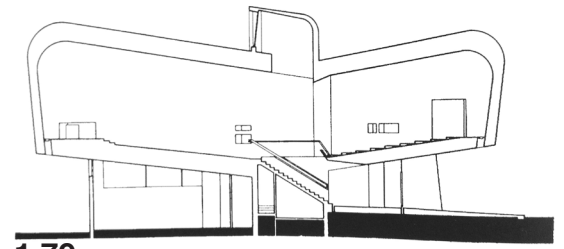


Mariotti house, Saint-Germain. Claude Parent and Paul Vélizy, 1966. From above: Front elevation, roof view, rear elevation. Opposite: Access ramp to the terrace.

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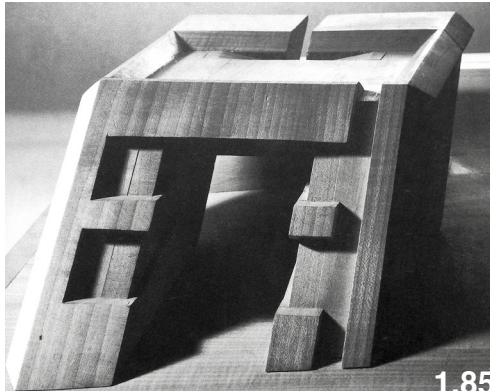


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image 1.84: The Aerospace Research Center for the Thomson Houston group at Vélizy-Villacoublay (1964-1968).

image 1.85: Wood model, Mariotti house, *Architecture Principe* (1966).

image 1.86: The Aerospace Research Center for the Thomson Houston group at Vélizy-Villacoublay (1964-1968).



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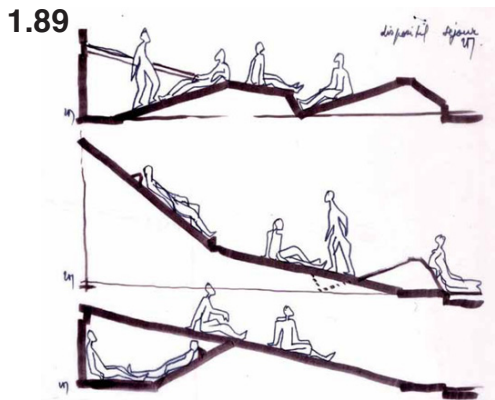
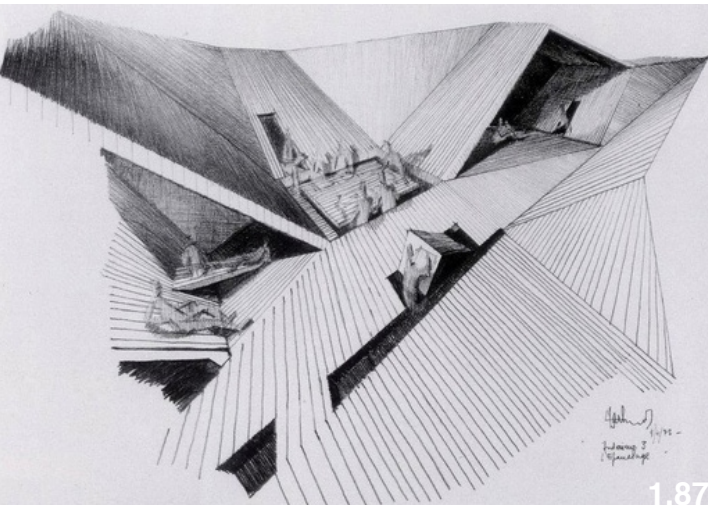
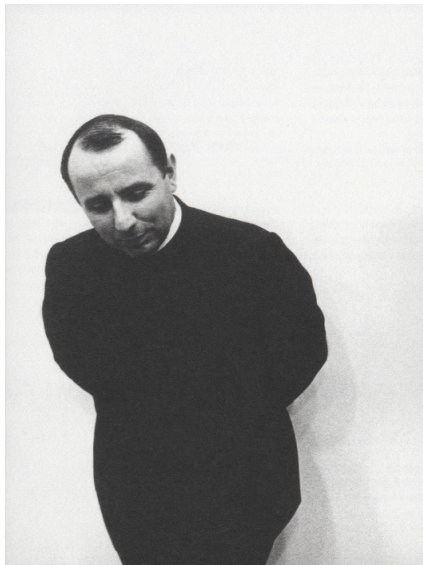
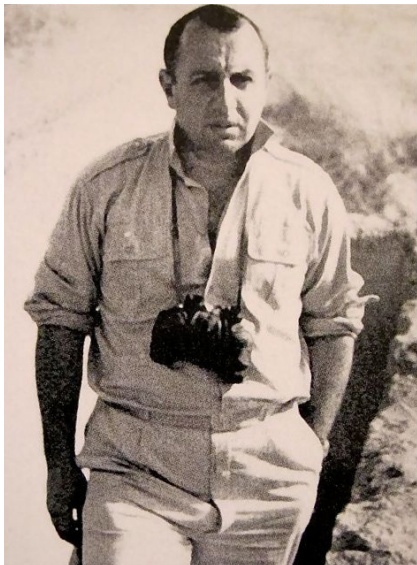


image 1.87: Sketch for the French Pavilion, 1970 Venice Biennale, Parent.
image 1.88: French Pavilion for 1970 Venice Biennale, Parent.
image 1.89: Sketch study of oblique living, Parent.
image 1.90: "Beauty is in the street", poster for revolution of May '68.
image 1.91: Poster for factory workers' protest, May '68.
image 1.92: Student mob in Paris, May '68.
image 1.93: May 13, 1968 protests on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées.





.....>
 1939 (FLED PARIS TO NANTES);
 1940 (BLITZKRIEG IN NANTES, GERMAN OCCUPATION BEGINS);
 1940 - 1944 ('BLITZKRIEG BABY'; WAR VOYEAR);
 1952 - 1963 (MASTER GLAZIER, STUDIES PHILOSOPHY @ SORBONNE, GESTALT THEORY + MERLEAU-PONTY PHENOMENOLGY OF PERCEPTION);
 1958 - 1966 (BUNKER ARCHEOLOGY)

.....>
 1962 - 1966 (STE.-BERNADETTE DU BANLAY);
 1963 (ARCHITECTURE PRINCIPE GROUP COLLABORATION);
 FEB - DEC 1966 (AP JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS no.1-9)
 MAY '68 (VIRILIO AND PARENT DISSOLVE APG)

.....>
 MAY '68 - PRESENT ('CRITIC OF THE ART OF TECHNOLOGY');
 1969 (PROFESSOR @ ECOLE SPÉCIALE D'ARCHITECTURE PARIS);
 1972 - 1975 (CO-DIRECTOR ESA PARIS);
 1975 - 1990 (DIRECTOR ESA PARIS);
 1990 - 1999 (PRESIDENT ESA PARIS, EMERITUS PROFESSOR);
 1999 - PRESENT (WRITING, INTERVIEWING)

image 1.94: Virilio's career timeline.

image 1.95: Virilio's book timeline.

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 1975 1977 1978 1984



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 1980 1991 1994 1995 1997 1997 1999 1999



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 2000 2000 2000 2002 2002 2002 2003 2003 2005 2005 2005 2007 2007 2009

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 2010 2010 2011

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2. THE AESTHETICS OF EXPOSURE

Virilio's Instantaneism, a history of 'ruptures'

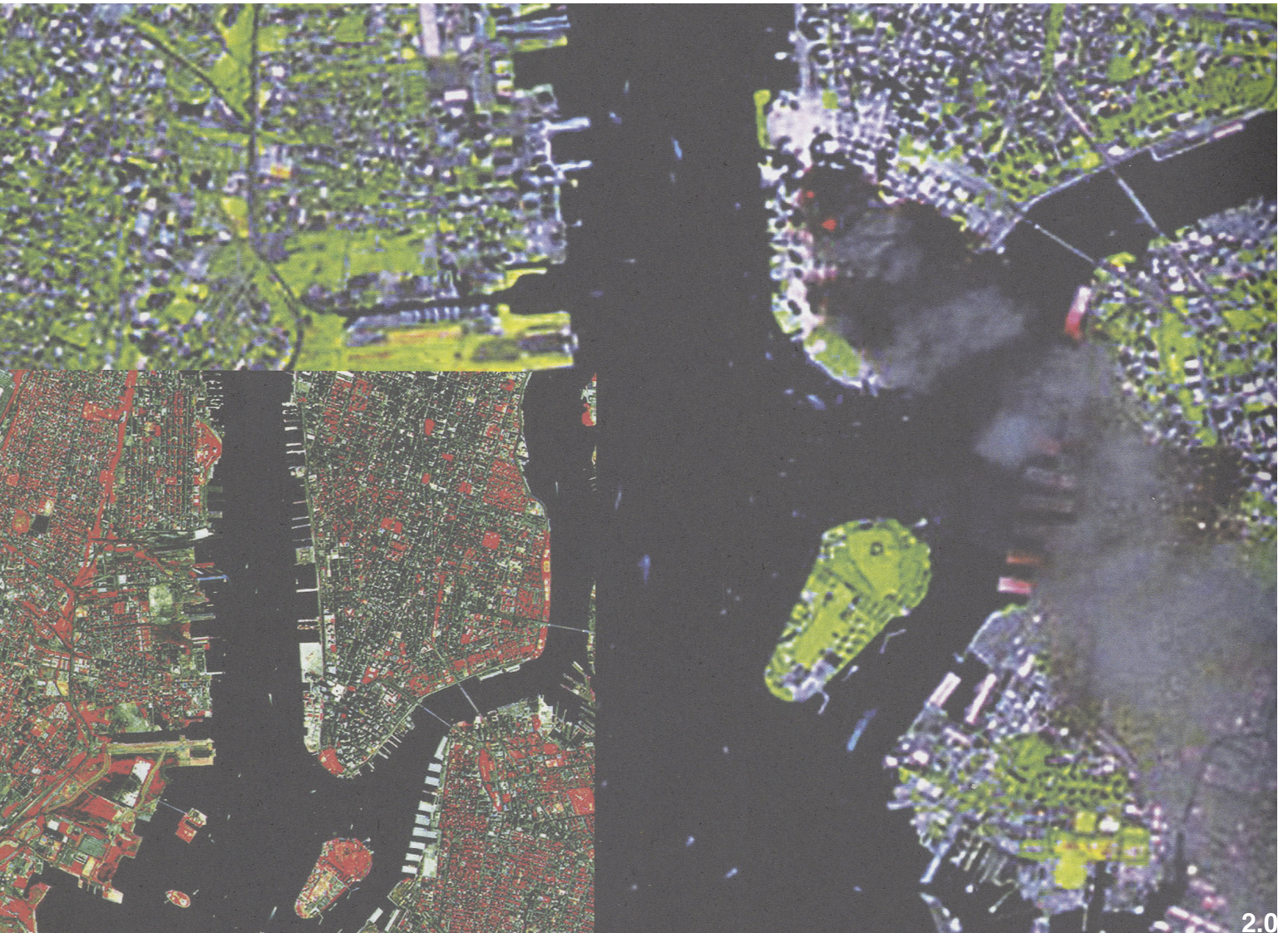


image 2.0: *Unknown Quantity*; Satellite image of Manhattan before and after terrorist attacks, 11 September 2001.

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.

- Walter Benjamin, 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History, IX'

I. “ARCHEOLOGIST OF THE FUTURE”

Of his partner in the *Architecture Principe*, Claude Parent wrote:

Paul Virilio is a reader of reality. With a master’s degree in reading the real, in this domain he is not an analyst but a creator. In the present, he tracks possible futures. He sorts, selects, gathers; in his hands, the tiniest clues become evidence; unsettling the hierarchy in our current events, he is an archeologist of the future. Escaping the smoke and mirrors, the dungeons of the avant-garde, deaf to the siren’s call, the temptation of sated good consciences; man of action, massive, wild, stubborn, he finds his weapons for acting upon the real. Man of faith, he is engaged in a permanent disequilibrium. It is in order to break the original sin that he now has us discover the masterpieces of an old form of terror.¹

Though he was speaking specifically of Virilio’s fascination of the bunker and its cryptic architectural quality during their collaboration in the mid-1960s, Parent’s acknowledgment of Virilio as an “archeologist of the future” is a fitting statement for Virilio’s long-term career as a “critic of the art of technology”. Virilio’s trajectory has always been one of looking to the past in order to anticipate future events—to predict the ramifications of an accelerated temporality. His “permanent disequilibrium” is perpetuated by a relentless pursuit and exposure of an elusive “reality”, which, he argues, has been camouflaged by increasingly deceptive technologies. Virilio’s work, in part due to his religious convictions, seems to occupy a kind of moral high ground, though he appears to be just as fascinated by humanity’s “original sin” as he is repulsed by it. He has, since his departure from *Architecture Principe* in May of 1968, moved away from architecture as the primary expression of his humanistic orientation. His critical theory is primarily concerned with the reprocessing of historical events into aesthetic questions, a practice he initiated in the aftermath of the Second World War. Virilio’s recent work, the *Museum of Accidents* in particular, though not an architectural concept in the traditional sense, manifests as an expression of an *anti-form* of the museum archetype. In his proposal for a *Museum of Accidents* it is possible to gain a heightened understanding of his early architectural projects. He reminds us that, “it’s the invisible space that enables us to see the visible”.²

¹ Migayrou, Parent and Virilio 2010: 77.

² Virilio and Brausch 2011: 65.

II. MUSEUM OF ACCIDENTS

A society which rashly privileges the present – real time – to the detriment of both the past and the future, also privileges the accident.³

So wrote Paul Virilio in his proposal for the *Museum of Accidents* in 2003.⁴ A curated confrontation of past horrors represented through photography, cinema, and sound bites, the “museum” would compile a landscape of natural, industrial, and intentional (man-made) catastrophes. [Images 2.10 – 2.22] Jarring the viewers’ memories of certain disasters, Virilio hoped he “could reconnect the present of the accident to the past of its invention, revealing finally what remained hidden, unconscious, to a public enamored by the rapid development of progress.”⁵ The prototype for such a museum was tested through the multi-media exhibition “Ce qui arrive” (“What is Coming” in French, but with the English title “Unknown Quantity”), which Virilio co-produced with the Foundation Cartier pour l’art contemporain. Virilio, a self-proclaimed student of war, had arranged a rendezvous with painful past events in a most ironic manner – to be consumed as a series of multimedia artworks highlighted in a cultural venue.

Virilio’s definition of the “accident” is three-fold. Firstly, accidents are the enemies of philosophical “substance”, technology, and all other structures of knowledge based on Enlightenment

³ Virilio 2004: 256.

⁴ Virilio defines his concept of the “accident,” which has been profoundly oversimplified for the English translation: “For the philosopher substance is absolute and necessary, whereas the accident is relative and contingent. So the accident is what happens unexpectedly to the substance, the product or the recently invented technical object. It is, for example, the original accident of the Challenger space shuttle ten years ago. It is the duty of scientists and technicians to avoid the accident at all costs. In fact, if no substance can exist in the absence of an accident, then no technical object can be developed without in turn generating “its” specific accident: ship wreck, train wreck, plane crash. The accident is thus the hidden face of technical progress. One thing that must be considered here is the preponderance and role of the speed of the accident, thus the limitation of speed and the penalties for “exceeding the speed limit”. With the acceleration following the transportation revolution of the last century, the number of accidents suddenly multiplied and sophisticated procedures had to be invented in order to control air, rail and highway traffic. With the current worldwide revolution in communication and telematics, acceleration has reached its physical limit, the speed of electromagnetic waves. So there is a risk not of a local accident in a particular location, but rather of a global accident that would affect if not the entire planet, then at least the majority of people concerned by these technologies. It is apparent that this new notion of the accident has nothing to do with the Apocalypse, but rather with the imperious necessity to anticipate in a rational way this kind of catastrophe by which the interactivity of telecommunications would reproduce the devastating effects of a poorly managed radioactivity - think about Chernobyl.” (Virilio, Petit and Lotringer 1999: 92-93.)

⁵ Bray 2008: 13.

rationality. They are distinguished from “substance”, which for the philosopher, Virilio articulates, “is absolute and necessary”; accidents are “relative and contingent”:

The accident is what happens unexpectedly to the substance, the product or the recently invented technical object. It is, for example, the original accident of the Challenger space shuttle ten years ago. It is the duty of scientists and technicians to avoid the accident at all costs. In fact, if no substance can exist in the absence of an accident, then no technical object can be developed without in turn generating "its" specific accident: ship wreck, train wreck, plane crash. The accident is thus the hidden face of technical progress.⁶

“Original” accidents generate the need for new “technical objects”, but as our reliance on technology increases so does the occurrence of accidents. Virilio is, therefore, skeptical of any pursuit of technological progress without regard for its hazardous capacity. The notion of speed comprises the second facet of Virilio’s definition: accidents have an accelerated temporality. Historically, Virilio argues, the frequency of accidents has escalated and will continue to follow this trend. The *Museum of Accidents* considers,

the preponderance and role of the speed of the accident, thus the limitation of speed and the penalties for "exceeding the speed limit". With the acceleration following the transportation revolution of the last century, the number of accidents suddenly multiplied and sophisticated procedures had to be invented in order to control air, rail and highway traffic. With the current worldwide revolution in communication and telematics, acceleration has reached its physical limit, the speed of electromagnetic waves.⁷

Thirdly, as the element of speed increases, the influence of technology globalizes. Virilio acknowledges that this has already occurred, and now the accident can travel at the “speed of electromagnetic waves”.

So the accident, in addition to its increasing acceleration, can occur on a global scale:

So there is a risk not of a local accident in a particular location, but rather of a global accident that would affect if not the entire planet, then at least the majority of people concerned by these technologies. It is apparent that this new notion of the accident has nothing to do with the Apocalypse, but rather with the imperious necessity to anticipate in a rational way this kind of catastrophe by which the interactivity of telecommunications would reproduce the devastating effects of a poorly managed radioactivity - think about Chernobyl.⁸

⁶ Virilio, Petit and Lotringer 1999: 92-93.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

In the closing sentence of this definition of the accident, Virilio reiterates that we cannot trust preventative measures derived through epistemological systems of prediction. This, as he says, has nothing to do with the idea of an imminent Apocalypse, but a culture “collective folly”, which arrogantly assumes the same technology that causes the accident will save us from it.⁹

Virilio’s provocative exhibition was hardly the first of its kind. In her book *Regarding the Pain of Others* published in 2003 (the same year as the exhibition of “Unknown Quantity”), Susan Sontag traces a history of war photography, the methods through which wreckage is represented and, in turn, the “inner commotion” stirred up by their viewing.¹⁰ Recounting exhibitions and monographs of various photographers, such as Ernst Friedrich and Virginia Woolf, Sontag’s book unveils a similar urgency to process the images of war into recent memory:

[T]here are many uses of the innumerable opportunities a modern life supplies for regarding – at a distance, through the medium of photography – other people’s pain. Photographs of an atrocity may give rise to opposing responses. A call for peace. A cry for revenge. Or simply the bemused awareness, continually restocked by photographic information, that terrible things happen.¹¹

Look, the photographs say, *this* is what it’s like. This is what war *does*. And *that*, that is what it does, too. War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War *ruins*.¹²

This is certainly the plea of Ernst Friedrich’s *War Against War!* (1924) and Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas* (1938). Haunting juxtapositions of bodies and buildings ravaged by war, these works, like Virilio’s “Unknown Quantity”, envisage the sheer devastation of war reinforced in its aftermath by the perverse resemblance of flesh to architecture. As Sontag notes, “photographs of the victims of war are themselves a species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus.”¹³ While there are many approaches to evaluating this kind of artistic production, it is clear that the image’s first objective is to arouse painful memories – to validate the existence of terrible events

⁹ “The twentieth-century is a century of absolute folly—Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Chernobyl...” Virilio claims in a 2008 interview. (Tappan and Andrianopoulos 2008: 37.)

¹⁰ Sontag 2003: 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: 13.

¹² *Ibid.*: 8. (Original emphasis)

¹³ *Ibid.*: 6.

in history.¹⁴ As Woolf plainly states, photographs “are not an argument; they are simply a crude statement of fact addressed to the eye ... the eye is connected with the brain; the brain with the nervous system. That system sends its messages in a flash through every past memory and present feeling.”¹⁵

In the context of cities and other built or natural environments ruined by war, the memories of both the catastrophic event and the time before it occurred can be powerful agents in uniting and stirring the affected community toward a common goal. In the case of “Unknown Quantity,” Virilio was very clear about the emotional and intellectual response he desired to provoke within the viewing public. As a curated visual history of violence and catastrophe, “Unknown Quantity” sought “to make an ‘exhibit’ of the accident in order to no longer be ‘exposed’ to it.”¹⁶ The *Museum of Accidents*, according to Virilio, proposes a *preventative* measure:

Designed to raise the issue of the unexpected and of the lack of attention to major hazards, the exhibition manifesto endeavored above all to pay homage to discernment, to *preventive intelligence*, at a time when threats of triggering a *preventive war* in Iraq abounded.¹⁷

Virilio asserts here that “preventive intelligence” falls in the hands of the artists.

To be sure, Virilio’s exhibit must also be set apart from the grisly presentations of Freidrich and Woolf. “Unknown Quantity” focused primarily on the destruction of cities, landscapes, and infrastructure with less of an emphasis on the resulting death and bloodshed, although it was certainly implied.¹⁸ Virilio provoked memories of catastrophe through images of the devastation of the built and natural environment—the ruination of architectural landmarks and the wreckage of natural landscape especially tied to collective identity and culture. Virilio experienced this type of targeted accident firsthand through

¹⁴ According to Sontag “photographs are means of making ‘real’ (or ‘more real’) matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore.” (*Ibid.*: 7.)

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 26.

¹⁶ Bray 2008: 12.

¹⁷ Virilio 2003a: 9.

¹⁸ In “Aesthetics in the Shadow of No Towers: Reading Virilio in the Twenty-First Century” Patrick Bray explains that the omission of gore in Virilio’s exhibit was due to his “disapproval of fear and horror in art.” This can be read as a contradiction typical to the double-edged nature of Virilio’s thought. The specific convictions that Bray is referring to (present in Virilio’s *Art and Fear*) will be discussed later in this chapter. For the purpose of this study, the emphasis on architecture, infrastructure, and landscape bears the most significance for interpreting Virilio’s aesthetic and philosophical endeavors as a manifesto for “coming to terms with the past.” (*Ibid.*)

the obliteration of Nantes by the *blitzkrieg* and the Allies. Robert Bevan in *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War* (2006) describes how war (an “original” accident that encompasses a massive output of accompanying “technological objects”) devastates not only the places where events in national and personal histories occur, but also the integrity of memory. He asserts, “This [the targeted accident] is the *active* and often systematic destruction of particular building types or architectural traditions that happens in conflicts where the erasure of the memories, history and identity attached to architecture and place—enforced forgetting—is the goal itself.”¹⁹ Taking Bevan’s argument into account, recalling the destruction of architectural monuments in a *Museum of Accidents* might enforce a kind of *remembering* of the accident itself, and, perhaps more fundamentally, the embodied memories that fade in the monument’s absence. Virilio includes intentional (actions of war and terrorism, for example) and unexpected accidents (wrecks and natural disasters) in the exhibit of “Unknown Quantity”,

III. THE EXPOSURE OF THE ACCIDENT

With the proposal for a *Museum of Accidents*, Virilio calls for a new philosophy for the writing of history—which would become a mapping of the trajectory of “negative monuments” to human civilization.²⁰ In an interview for *Le Monde* in 2008 he addressed this charge:

The dominant form of writing about History limits itself to the study of facts as seen in the light of the long term. Contrariwise, I advocate a study of History based exclusively on ruptures. [French] Historian Francois Hartog calls the dominant paradigm ‘presentism’. We must go further. Our paradigm should be ‘instantaneism’.²¹

A history constructed of instants corresponds to Virilio’s theory of *dromology* (the study of speed) insofar as catastrophic events are processed and represented in the manner in which they occur—*now*. As Virilio has argued, the claustrophobic, rapid nature of the media’s delivery of global information is overwhelming, yet simultaneously numbing to contemporary society. There is simply too much

¹⁹ Bevan 2006: 8.

²⁰ Redhead 2012

²¹ Virilio, Courtois and Guerrin 2008

information, coming to us too quickly, for a coherent collective memory of the accident to form in our consciousness. “Unknown Quantity” contests what Virilio believes is the failure of *presentism*—its delayed response time in representing the accident, which promotes an inadequate exposure of “mother memories” surrounding the event.²² Within the condition of *accelerated temporality*, Virilio believes it is imperative to also accelerate the representation of historical events as they occur in real-time. Virilio calls on the word “exposure” rather than “education” to describe the objectives of *instantaneism*.

In order to study accidents, one of course must research them, but also ‘expose’ them. The accident is ‘invented’, it a work of creation. Who could be more apt than artists to make real the tragic dimension of human development (‘progress’)? That was the intent behind the ‘Ce qui arrive’ exhibition... It stood for the museum, or the observatory, of major accidents that I’d like to see coming about some day. Not only to instill fear, but to make us face up.²³

Presentist history is based on the observation of events from a long chronological distance, in order to educate and *expose us to* them. According to Virilio, this kind of historical account does not provide *an exposure of* the events. This is the object of Virilio’s critique embedded in his proposal for a *Museum of Accidents*. The very term “exposure” implies an act of uncovering or unveiling some hidden truth in a manner that is surprising or unexpected. This kind of exposure causes an interruption of the otherwise predictable rhythm of daily life. In the forward of his monograph of the “Unknown Quantity” exhibit, Virilio quotes Paul Valéry:

In the past, where novelty was concerned, we had almost always seen only solutions or answers to very old—if not indeed age-old—problems...The novelty of our present situation consists in the unprecedented nature of the questions themselves, not of the solutions, in the statement of the problems, not the answers to them. Hence a general impression of powerlessness and incoherence predominates in our minds.²⁴

²² Recalling Virilio’s statement in *A Winter’s Journey*, “mother memories” can be explained by the following: “I’m sure that the acceleration of history has already given way to the acceleration of reality and that this brings memory back into question. History was the memory of the world. Now, accelerated reality will demand—is already demanding—a mother memory. A genuine memory, but a memory different from that of computer disks or CD-ROMS. A memory different from that of the book alone or the screen image alone. I can’t say what this living memory of an accelerated present will be. All I know is that it has to be invented and constructed, and this is a matter for us all. But it’s a question that has, as yet, no answer.” (Virilio and Brausch 2011: 125.)

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Original quote from Valéry 1957 in Virilio 2003a: 5. (Virilio’s emphasis.)

What is unprecedented, according to Virilio, is a condition of *accelerated temporality*. Perhaps, it is not just the surge of information—“a kaleidoscope of incidents and accidents, catastrophes and cataclysms”—that overwhelms us, but the very perception of time, which is collapsing—“we are endlessly running up against the unexpected, which occurs out of the blue...those events coming upon us inopportunistically, if not indeed simultaneously.”²⁵ Virilio calls this the “Time accident,” and he is ultimately preoccupied with exposing it to reverse the condition of powerlessness and incoherence that Valéry brought to light:

This acknowledgement of powerlessness before the upsurge of unexpected, catastrophic events forces us to reverse the usual trend which exposes us to accidents and inaugurate a new kind of museology and museography: one which consists in exposing or exhibiting the accident—all accidents from the most commonplace to the most tragic, from natural catastrophes to industrial and scientific disasters, including also the kind that is too often neglected, the happy accident, the stroke of luck, the *coup de foudre* or even the *coup de grâce*!²⁶

Virilio’s new museology, which refers to this concept of *instantaneism*—seeks to access one’s mother memories rather than to engage one’s sole knowledge of the “Time accident.” Accidents have become automatic—“to the extent, indeed, that their repetition is becoming a clearly identifiable historical phenomenon.”²⁷ This is the character of the twenty-first century according to Virilio. The monotony of repeating seemingly automatic accidents ceases to catch our attention, therefore, as a society we are failing to recognize our hand in the destruction. Again, quoting Valéry, Virilio postulates:

Recognition of a failing leads to a clear, definitive conclusion: ‘All that becomes capable of recommencement and repetition becomes obscure, falls silent. Function exists only outside of consciousness.’²⁸

In other words, the automated accident no longer surprises us; we need a new kind of accident—or a new experience of history—to call us out of such a deep state of oblivion.

[I]f consciousness exists only for accidents and if things now operate only “outside of” consciousness, the loss of consciousness of the accident, and of the major disaster, would amount

²⁵ Virilio 2003a: 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*: 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*: 7.

not just to thoughtlessness, but to madness—the madness of voluntary blindness to the fatal consequences of our actions and inventions.²⁹

Virilio implies another connotation of “exposure” here; as long as we remain in a state of “voluntary blindness,” we, ourselves, are *exposed*—vulnerable—to the recurring accident.

Virilio calls on artists to address the shortcomings of the *presentist* format, arguing: “Who could be more apt than artists to make real the tragic dimension of human development (‘progress’)?” While Virilio has never claimed to be a historian, his vast intellectual biography centers around this critique. His architecture and, more recently, his writing address this issue of history’s failure to “expose” the gravity of accidents and of humanity’s potential to regenerate catastrophe. Trained as an artist and deeply affected and influenced by his own personal history, Virilio has chosen to express and process the “Time accident” aesthetically. He operates in a constant state of threat, which is most certainly why his work is regularly perceived as dark and ominous. The remainder of this chapter discusses both *instantaneism* and Virilio, himself. Both are necessary for understanding his approach to design and theory. The *Museum of Accidents* and “Unknown Quantity” are subjected to further analysis—as both social and aesthetic projects—in order to delineate Virilio’s humanistic intentions and to initiate a discussion of his architecture.

IV. AESTHETICS OF THE ACCIDENT & THE ‘ACCIDENT OF ART’

Virilio’s definition of contemporary aesthetics and art is not contingent upon the latest trends in expression or technique. According to Armitage, Virilian aesthetics and art must promote the “understand[ing] and reinvent[ion of] consensus” and provoke “the appearance of new forms and visions that augment the variety of potential ways to communicate experience.”³⁰ Virilio’s plea to the artists of an accelerated temporality invites the question: Is it possible to aestheticize this concept of *instantaneism*?

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Armitage 2013: 157.

The *Museum of Accidents* and “Unknown Quantity” are, essentially, artistic exercises through which Virilio is addressing the problem of society’s “voluntary blindness” and searching for an aesthetic representation of the “Time accident”—to bring us out of our collective unconsciousness regarding the memory of painful past events. Virilio’s entire oeuvre can be generally understood as a pursuit of aesthetic and experiential representations of the “ruptures” during the evolution of technology. As such, it is problematic to understand him as a social theorist, though his proposals often communicate a desire for socio-cultural renewal. The characteristic scandalous nature of his so-called “aesthetics” often distracts from the true significance of his work. Steve Redhead, an expert on Virilio, provides a clear distinction, “[Virilio] is by his own consistent admission ‘a critic of the art of technology’ and an overview of his life and career leave us in no doubt that he is an ‘artist’ rather than a social theorist in any conventional sense...”³¹ Redhead compares Virilio’s work on the *Museum of Accidents* to that of artists Damien Hirst and Karlheinz Stockhausen, who have processed the 9/11 event through their controversial artwork. Virilio, like Hirst and Stockhausen, should be perceived as an artist seeking aesthetic representations of catastrophic historical events.

It has been said, that while much of Virilio’s work seeks to expose the embodied danger of a society inebriated with technology, Virilio himself is fascinated by the phenomena he critiques.³² His artistic “therapy” for a society numbed to disaster might seem tactless, but it is important to understand his intentions, which are often lost in their translation to a kind of dark “Virilian” style of expression. The attempt to commemorate accidents – both the events and embodied memories that risk oblivion—“reveals how individuals and society come to terms with violence and tragedy.”³³ “Unknown Quantity” and *The Museum of Accidents*, through the exposure of violent images and installations, revisit the consequences of speed in the present day. However, unlike the photographic work of Friedrich and Woolf, Virilio’s

³¹ Redhead 2006

³² Leach 1999: 72.

³³ Foote 1997: 28.

exhibit is based on the assumption that after the initial disgust in viewing the collections, the visitor must shoulder some of the responsibility for the accidents—to “face up,” as he says. This assertion is evident in the underlying assumptions of Virilio’s manifesto for the *Museum of Accidents*, which argues that man-made disasters are on the rise:

This recently published study, which each year lists man-made disasters (explosions, fires, terrorism, etc.) and natural catastrophes (floods, earthquakes, storms, etc.), takes into account only those disasters causing losses in excess of 35 million dollars. ‘For the first time,’ the Swiss analysts observe, ‘since the 1990’s, a period when damage due to natural catastrophes predominated over man-made damage, the trend has reversed, with man-made damage standing at 70 percent.’³⁴

Virilio goes on to blame twentieth century industrialized (capitalist) societies, even those without possession of weapons of mass destruction that would threaten catastrophe, that have “developed disquiet and major risk” through proliferating societal numbness to the consequences of modern technology.³⁵ *The Museum of Accidents*, according to these statements, represents Virilio’s answer to a present social unwillingness to acknowledge the accumulation of accidents due to ever increasing technological progress.

Hence, the urgent need to reverse this trend which consists in exposing us to the most catastrophic accidents produced by the techno-scientific spirit, and to establish the opposite approach which would consist in exposing or exhibiting the accident as the major enigma of modern progress.³⁶

Absorbing the accident as the “major enigma”—the major problem or byproduct—of the current age transforms the reading of the accident itself. Since it is no longer a question of why a catastrophe occurred (because, as Virilio argues, it is the capitalist society’s invention), the meaning of the accident is ominous according to his curated representation of recent history. Without the current society’s acknowledgement of fault in proliferating catastrophe—without true *exposure*—accidents will continue to pile up at greater frequencies. Virilio argues:

³⁴ Virilio 2004: 256.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Since one catastrophe may conceal another, if the major accident is indeed the consequence of the speed of acceleration of the phenomena engendered by progress, it is certainly time, in these early years of the twenty-first century, to take what is happening, what is emerging unexpectedly before our eyes and analyze it wisely.³⁷

The Museum of Accidents, though it remains a visionary proposal, is a warning to society to acknowledge the consequences of speed—a validation of Virilio’s theory of *dromology*—through the confrontation of a painful past. In both content and medium, the exhibition would mobilize his cultural theory within the realm of art to contest the viewing public’s numbness to the horror of past trauma. Virilio’s compelling manifesto for the project delineates the havoc wrought by human carelessness and advocates for future readiness and prevention. However, in true Virilio fashion, the prescription for moving on from such a revelation is cryptic. In the closing lines of his manifesto, Virilio urges for a response to the “imperative need now to exhibit the accident.”³⁸ An “imperative need” also to construct a history of the accident based on the principles of *instantaneism*, is also evident in this text. As noted in a review of the “Unknown Quantity” exhibition by Joseph Nechvatal: “The accident museum is necessary in Virilio’s thinking in order to preserve for posterity the collapsing buildings, high speed plane crashes and other accidents (or attacks) of accelerated modernity.”³⁹ While Virilio explicitly asserts that the burden of delivering “preventative intelligence” to the masses should be in the hands of artists, he is unclear about the forms “preventative intelligence” can take.

As a prototype for the *Museum of Accidents*, the exhibition “Unknown Quantity” conveys the sense that somewhere along the path from recovery to prevention of catastrophe, the accident should be understood as a kind of artwork, exhibition, or aesthetic text.⁴⁰ Or, perhaps, the representation of historical trauma as art (and thus its reception by the public in this form) provides a gage with which the respective audience can measure its readiness to take the accident into historical consciousness and apply

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Virilio 2004: 261.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Armitage 2013: 169.

its meaning to the construction of a renewed collective identity. This is an exciting prospect for Virilio. In *Grey Ecology* (2009), he depicts how the “paying of homage to discernment” is equally effective for demonstrating the catastrophic potential of progress and for preventing unexpected accidents and societal inattentiveness to major risks. The aesthetics of the accident, Virilio suggests, reveal the condition of our “approximation” and “openness” to the acknowledgment of original accidents and to the critique of modes of perception that determine our understanding and memory of accidents.⁴¹ Furthermore, as Armitage posits, the act of “paying homage to aesthetic and artistic discernment” allows Virilio to address the “preventative intelligence of the paying of homage to aesthetic and artistic discernment themselves”.⁴² Virilio maintains that we must critique our own assessment of aesthetic and artistic creation. This is a social responsibility through which we will be empowered to resist the probability of accidents and expose our vulnerability to potential catastrophe.

However, despite Virilio’s call for a paying of homage to aesthetic and artistic discernment through the “exposure” of accidents, the exhibit faced a scandalous reception. Joseph Nechvatal, a frequent commentator in Virilio studies, published an irate review of the exhibition. More of a tirade than a discussion of the work, Nechvatal wrote:

[T]he bulk of this show is dreadfully irresponsible in its appropriation of the 9/11 attack on New York City. As a downtown New Yorker who experienced daily these ruins (thank god the horrid smell could not be reproduced and exploited here), I was offended by how facile the show is. It is really a vapid presentation in that it aims to teach us that “shit happens”. Do we really have to dress this recognition up in priestly black profundity and pretend it is art? ... “Ce qui arrive”/“Unknown Quantity”... wallows in the pathetic tropes of Romanticism by inviting us to contemplate the smoky ruins of the World Trade Center attack.⁴³

Redhead, like Nechvatal questioned the effectiveness of producing such an exhibit:

[Virilio’s] theory of the accident ... involves what we call here an aesthetics of the accident. Virilio, however, in providing a perspective on the art of the accident in our increasingly accelerated and dangerous modernities, falls short of what is required in the contemporary urban

⁴¹ Virilio, Burk and von Amelunxen 2009: 25, 52, 54, 62.

⁴² Armitage 2013: 171.

⁴³ Nechvatal 2002

sociological project. What is required, more generally, is in fact a reinvigorated sociology, not merely an art, of the accident.⁴⁴

“Unknown Quantity” may have been perceived as a vain attempt to arrange a confrontation with the accident, but for Virilio the use of images—to intentionally manifest an “aesthetic of the accident” or not to—is precisely the mode of artistic representation he is critiquing. This is, Virilio argues, the way that most of the world experiences catastrophic events in the first place. He says, “The world is exposed to accidents through television.”⁴⁵ In *Ground Zero* (2002), a lengthy analysis of the 9/11 attacks, Virilio notably quoted electronic composer Karlheinz Stockhausen in proclaiming that the act of terrorism was “the greatest work of art there has ever been.” Likewise, Redhead compares Virilio’s avant-garde appreciation of the accident as art with British artist Damien Hirst, who during the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center explicitly claimed that the terrorists produced “something which nobody would ever have thought possible.”⁴⁶ Hirst viewed the event like a work of art: “wicked, but it was devised in this way for this kind of impact...devised visually.”⁴⁷

Aesthetically, the 9/11 event—an “accident of accidents”⁴⁸—was indeed experienced globally as a spectacle of images and real-time broadcasts. According to Virilio’s analysis in *Ground Zero*, the aesthetic production became a means for infecting the world with terror:

broadcast live many TV viewers believed they were watching one of those disaster movies that proliferate endlessly on our TV screens. [It was only] by switching the channels and finding the same pictures on all the stations that they finally understood it was true.⁴⁹

Virilio’s proposal for the *Museum of Accidents* was derived from this kind of experience of catastrophe—that of physical/geographical disconnectedness from the event itself and one of confusion over its representation (was it art or disaster?). In the case of 9/11, terror set in after the images ceased to be

⁴⁴ Redhead 2006

⁴⁵ Virilio and Wilson 1994

⁴⁶ Redhead 2006

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Or, the “Great Accident” as Virilio has cited the 9/11 attacks on the WTC. Virilio’s theory of the “accident of accidents” describes the ultimate act of terror: “a generalized accident occurring everywhere at the same time, live on global television and the internet.” (*Ibid.*)

⁴⁹ Virilio 2002: 38.

solely aesthetic productions and were instead realized as a vivid report of a horror happening in real-time. Virilio endeavors, through the Museum of Accidents and “Unknown Quantity”, to induce what he calls an “accident of art”. This type of accident, according to Virilio, mimics the integral accident’s element of surprise but resists the dehumanizing prospects of accelerated temporality. An accident of art, Armitage explains, “questions traditional discourses and demands that all that was prior to it be retheorised”.⁵⁰

Virilio describes this concept:

The accident of science induces the accident of knowledge, and art is a branch of knowledge, there’s no question about it. Here we touch on something that interests me very much: the accident of knowledge. Through mathematical precision, through the experimental method, we have built a structure for science. But there are branches of knowledge without experimental methods, in the mathematical and scientific sense of the word—and that’s what art is. Experimental science is the opposite of storytelling, chimeras and myth. The rational position of science has gradually broken away from alchemy and magic. The experience, the experiment of art can’t be mathematized, and so, yes, in my opinion, the accident is total. We are entering the period of the total accident: Everything has been damaged in the accident. Knowledge has been mortally maimed ... everything that constitutes the world has experienced and accident, and this without exception. The colossal dimension of the accident surpasses us, and that’s why I am so passionate about it.⁵¹

As the integral accident of science gains speed and frequency, the potential for the accident of art decreases; Armitage explains, “the accident of art disappears into the acceleration of history” and can only be recovered “if it exemplifies the unexpected event”.⁵² For Virilio, preventing the disappearance of the accident of art requires an elimination of its “unintelligent classification as representation as a form of delay”, according to Armitage.⁵³ Artists and critics of the art of technology, therefore, must resist the structures of reason that determine art’s evaluation. Art appreciation cannot, Virilio argues, allow the lag time required for the current process of artistic and aesthetic discernment. In order to classify as accidents, Armitage explains, “aesthetics and art stage their occurrence without inevitably supplying thorough analyses or rationalizations of them”.⁵⁴ Though Virilio has only recently delineated his theory

⁵⁰ Armitage 2013: 172.

⁵¹ Armitage 2013: 172.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*: 171.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*: 172.

of the accident of art, his work has always centered around this resistance of “unintelligent classification” and delayed aesthetic and artistic exposure of ruptures. Virilio’s architecture “happens as an accident of art that reinvents and contests” previously conceived notions of aesthetic and artistic exposure.⁵⁵

V. TOWARD AN AESTHETICS OF EXPOSURE

In their essay on the discussion of Virilio's impact on visual culture, John Armitage and Joy Garnett argue: “Virilio’s theoretical preoccupations are associated with ideas involving the visual culture of art and its histories as forms of knowledge that reveal themselves as pictorial representations.”⁵⁶ While accepting this view, it is also apparent that Virilio is preoccupied with spatial and temporal circumstances that engage the body in a kind of ritualistic movement, revealing or “exposing” historical ruptures. The movement sequence is imperative to accessing the memory—either through the exposure of accidents in an unexpected venue, or through a procession through space that imitates the physical environment in which the original memory was conceived. “Unknown Quantity” embodies the first method; Images of disasters that occurred in various settings and that were originally exposed via the television or the Internet were represented as artworks. The exhibit and Virilio’s concept for the *Museum of Accidents*, featured in a surprising, perhaps profane, venue for remembering the integral accidents, displaced the original pictorial representations, caused a provocative encounter with memory, and—as Virilio predicted—revealed the need to reverse society’s inclination toward proliferating accidents.

With his admonishment for *instantaneism*, Virilio is advocating for an aesthetic experience that triggers a return to the original emotion of shock and total awareness of the accident—a return to the original *perception* of the accident taking place.⁵⁷ His concept for the *Museum of Accidents* as such

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: 158.

⁵⁶ Armitage and Garnett 2011: 200.

⁵⁷ The term “perception” is here referring to Virilio’s *Logistics of Perception*, his own version of phenomenology, which was modeled after his mentor Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s work (*Phenomenology of Perception*). Virilio’s construction of his *logistics*, his influence from Merleau-Ponty, and thus his belief in the potential of experiential circumstances to stimulate the human memory are discussed in the third chapter of this thesis.

represents his most straightforward attempt to challenge the paradigm of historical representation through museography. Virilio proposes that the accident should be re-lived, in the memory of the viewer, as an experience rather than retold in narrative form. Virilio's *instantaneist* history, as such, breaks from a reliance on a language-based presentation of events, and, in the case of a *Museum of Accidents*, relies on external phenomena to stimulate the remembrance of painful events in history. This history also requires a perceived collapse of the chronological distance that separates the viewer from the historical subject. Virilio's response to the question "Is the author dead?" in a 1995 interview reinforces this point:

There is a great threat to writing. The written work is threatened by the screen, not by the image. There have always been images in books. There have always been images in architecture, like frescos or stained-glass windows. No, it is the evocative power of the screen, and in particular the live screen. It is real time that threatens writing. Writing is always, always in a deferred time, always delayed. Once the image is live, there is a conflict between deferred time and real time, and in this there is a serious threat to writing and the author.⁵⁸

The imposition of real time—an accelerated temporality—in the delivery of information via the "live screen" (the television, the Internet) threatens the practice of recording history in writing. Virilio's work, as a result, often reveals the tension between deferred and real time, and, as with "Unknown Quantity", interjects a representation of certain events at an uncomfortable moment—somewhere between the happening of the event itself and the culturally acceptable time for its recording in official history. Therefore, Virilio's production of critical work does not operate at the safe distance from which we are able to withstand the memory of accidents. This is why he strives to preserve accidents of art.

Virilio's exact position in the realm of continental philosophy is debated—if not misunderstood—although a certain body of his work aligns with a deconstructionist approach to the study of the past. The concept of *instantaneism*, allows for an understanding of Virilio's engagement with philosophies of recording and depicting historical events. Just as he has claimed to be a critic of the art of technology, Virilio is certainly a critic of the "traditional disciplinary language," which forms the base of the "belief that we can more or less accurately and truthfully interpret the world of the past as an entity

⁵⁸ Der Derian and Virilio 1995: 16.

separate from ourselves.” Through his critical theory, such as that of the accident of art, he joins the ranks of other critical philosophers who have scrutinized the “idea of a representational language that permits both the separation and the correspondence of word and world.”⁵⁹ These connections place Virilio within the field of deconstructionist history, which seeks to undermine a foundational philosophical principle of the Cartesian-based Enlightenment: that genuine knowledge can be attained through the “process of logic and rational thought” predetermined through a universal “neutral, passive, and stable system of language”.⁶⁰ The isolation of interpretation from an ontological approach to historical events is problematic for Virilio; the basis for his own architectural “education” was precisely the opposite of a rational, pedagogically structured curriculum. His work stands in opposition of Enlightenment knowledge of the life-world, asserting that Cartesian-inspired rational (“visible”) structures of knowing mask the perception of reality, which can only be grasped through experiential (“invisible”) means.

Though he is a prolific writer, currently publishing at least one book and/or dozens of essays every year, his work is predominantly concerned with aesthetic concepts and solutions, rather than an epistemological approach based on a “rationally justifiable process of the evidence-based inductive method” in order to interpret historical events.⁶¹ His preference for ontological bases of knowing refers to his own “education”, which was constructed by his experiences of *blitzkrieg*, entrapment, anti-form, and explorations of the bunker. Consequently, this is how he constructs architectural situations. His architecture is loaded with the responsibility—often of social, political, or humanistic origin, much like his writing—to educate the users through spatial experience.

In the case of “Unknown Quantity”, Redhead understood the proposal as a testing site of Virilio’s “aesthetics of the accident” for the purpose of expressing the need to confront the ruptures of

⁵⁹ The quotations in this paragraph are sourced from the definition of DECONSTRUCTIONIST HISTORY. (Munslow 2000: 80.)

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Quotation from the definition of EPISTEMOLOGY. (Munslow 2000: 94.)

technological evolution. This thesis conceptualizes the *aesthetics of exposure*, which embody the multifaceted nature of Virilio's work concerning the production of experiential phenomena as a representation of historical events. His design methodology is inspired by his personal experiences, and follows the general sequence of; 1. Looking at objects or events (voyeurism), 2. Exploring the between space of anti-form (acting), and 3. Isolating the critical moments of perception that occur both through and of reality (determining the "origins of geometry"). Each of these steps will be developed in subsequent chapters.

There is something deeply personal about Virilio's work, through which he aestheticizes his life experiences, often drawing on his own perspective of the events and contriving his entire theoretical body of work and spatial convictions for architectural/urban design from his own personal brand of phenomenology—the *logistics of perception*. Within this broad sense of his production there are two main registers for understanding Virilio. His work can be seen as part of a shared aesthetic problem—how to represent suffering/disaster through works of art, aesthetic theory, and architecture in order to resist dehumanization. His work is also a projection of his own past—his traumatic experiences as a child living in Nantes during WWII and his rigorous exploration and photography of the Atlantic Wall bunkers, what he refers to as his "architectural education." Virilio demands comparison with the work of Theodor Adorno on both fronts.

In order to produce a total exposure of the accident, Virilio renders the architectural container obsolete. Much like the stationary infrastructure of the Atlantic Wall, which, as Virilio observed in his bunker archeology, was useless once the sky became part of military space, the architecture of a museum can no longer support the exposure of accidents now that television and the Internet deliver information, virtually, in real-time. The "invisible" architecture of the *Museum of Accidents*—the "disappearance" or "under-exposure" of the architectural container—exposes a critique of the art museum as a venue for artistic consumption and the structures of evaluation that determine its content. We can understand this

museum as a space to encounter both a history of accidents and, as John Armitage proposes, to confront “the very act of the paying of homage to discernment which can prevent the forms of disgraceful intimidations”.⁶² By bringing us into a space where the notion of what constitutes as “art” is radically challenged—through exhibiting representations of catastrophe, both natural and man-made—Virilio invites us to consider the “unknown quantity” of devastation that art appreciation and critique themselves have on our ability to “face up” to the gravity of our past and the inevitability of future accidents. This unknown quantity of perceptual destruction, Virilio argues, is rampant due to the proliferation of what he calls “pitiless art”, which depicts traumatic subject matter without reason beyond its mere presentation. While it must be noted that Virilio is notoriously biased in his own interpretations of contemporary artistic culture, the fact that he allows his own work to express the same traumatic subject matter indicates that he sees his work as something other than a presentation of this material.

Armitage’s evaluation of Virilio’s “museum” references a broader survey of Virilio’s architecture, which has always evolved from space programmed for similar kinds of encounter. The activity of paying of homage, as Armitage identifies for the *Museum of Accidents*, is a consistent theme in Virilio’s more conventional architectural work. However, Virilio’s architecture is often interpreted as the very “forms of disgraceful intimidations” he claims to protest. This is because Virilio’s formal expression of architecture appears to be in conflict with his intended purpose for the user experience. Architecture, for Virilio, is a venue for exhibiting the accident of art and, as a result, must resist what he perceives to be the dehumanizing criterion based on Enlightenment reason. While the scandalous nature of his work is often distracting, it should not intimidate us from engaging in a deeper reading. Virilio’s assertion that architecture is “the art of concealment... the art of keeping something in one’s possession”, begs the question: what is there still to be discovered within his architectural discourse?⁶³

⁶² Armitage 2012: 169.

⁶³ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 95.



image 2.1: *Unknown Quantity*; Earthquake 8.1 on the Richter scale, Wufeng, Taiwan, 21 September 1999.

image 2.2: *Unknown Quantity*; Voltaire, Poem on the Disaster of Lisbon (1756).

image 2.3: *Unknown Quantity*; San Francisco earthquake (1906), rift in the road.

image 2.4: *Unknown Quantity*; San Francisco earthquake (1906), engraving by Achile Beltrame.

image 2.5: *Unknown Quantity*; Paint chip on a satellite's thermal panel (image enlarged 100,000 times).

image 2.6: *Unknown Quantity*; Seine flood, interior of Orsay station, Paris 1910.

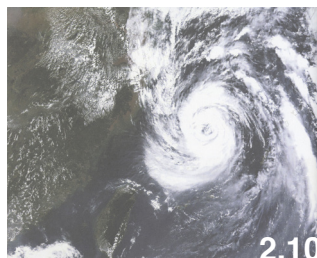
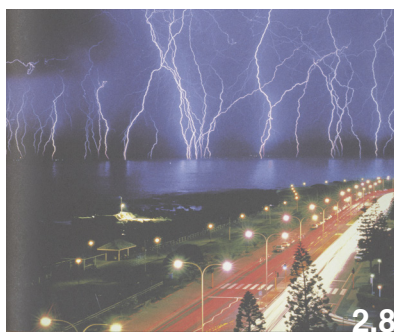
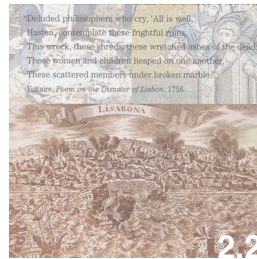
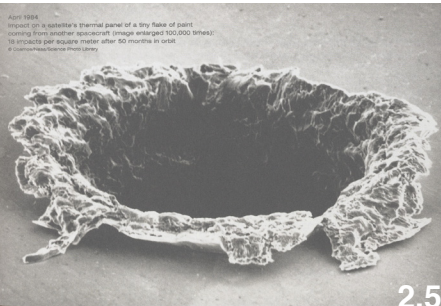
image 2.7: *Unknown Quantity*; Jan Van Scorel, *The Universal Deluge*, 16th c. (detail).

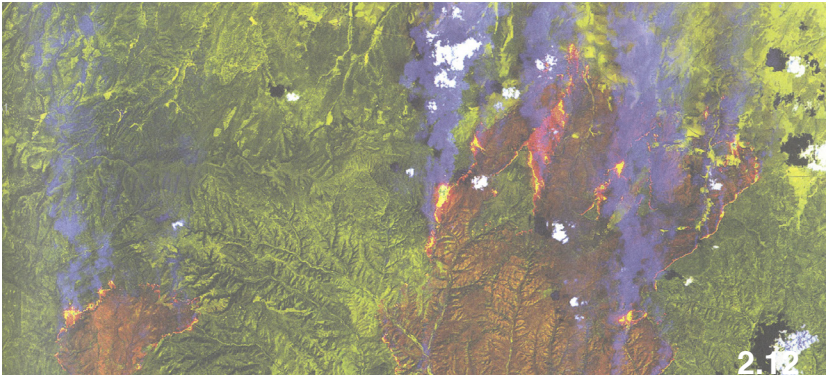
image 2.8: *Unknown Quantity*; *Lightning over Water* (Wim Wenders).

image 2.9: *Unknown Quantity*; Collapsed road, Columbus, Ohio, United States.

image 2.10: *Unknown Quantity*; Typhoon Nari in the East China Sea, 14 September 2001.

image 2.11: *Unknown Quantity*; Flood of the Seine, Paris 1910.





2.12



2.13

image 2.12: *Unknown Quantity*; Infrared satellite image of two fires in Arizona, U.S., 12 June 2002.

image 2.13: *Unknown Quantity*; New York fire 16-17 December 1836 (William James Bennett).

image 2.14: *Unknown Quantity*; Italian acrobatic squad jets collide, 28 August 1988, Germany.

image 2.15: *Unknown Quantity*; Chronophotographs, torpedo impact 24 May, 6 June 1888.

image 2.16: *Unknown Quantity*; "War crime or ecological crime?"

image 2.17: *Unknown Quantity*; Sinking of the British steamship Lusitania, 7 May 1915.

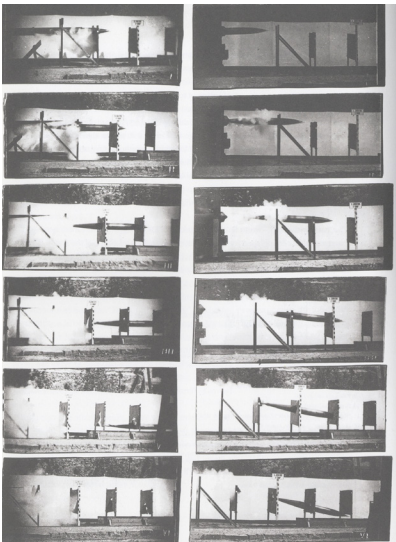
image 2.18: *Unknown Quantity*; Fire in Palais de Chaillot, 22 July 1997, Paris.

image 2.19: *Unknown Quantity*; Train accident in Montparnasse Station, 22 October 1895, Paris.

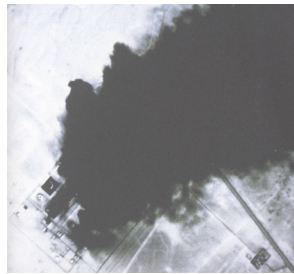
image 2.20: *Unknown Quantity*; Train derailment, 24 March 1999, Nairobi, Kenya.



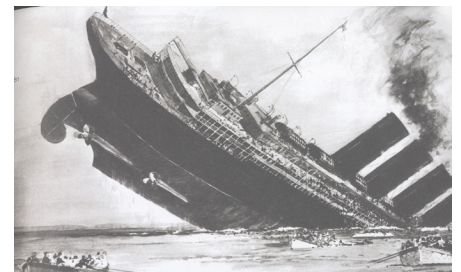
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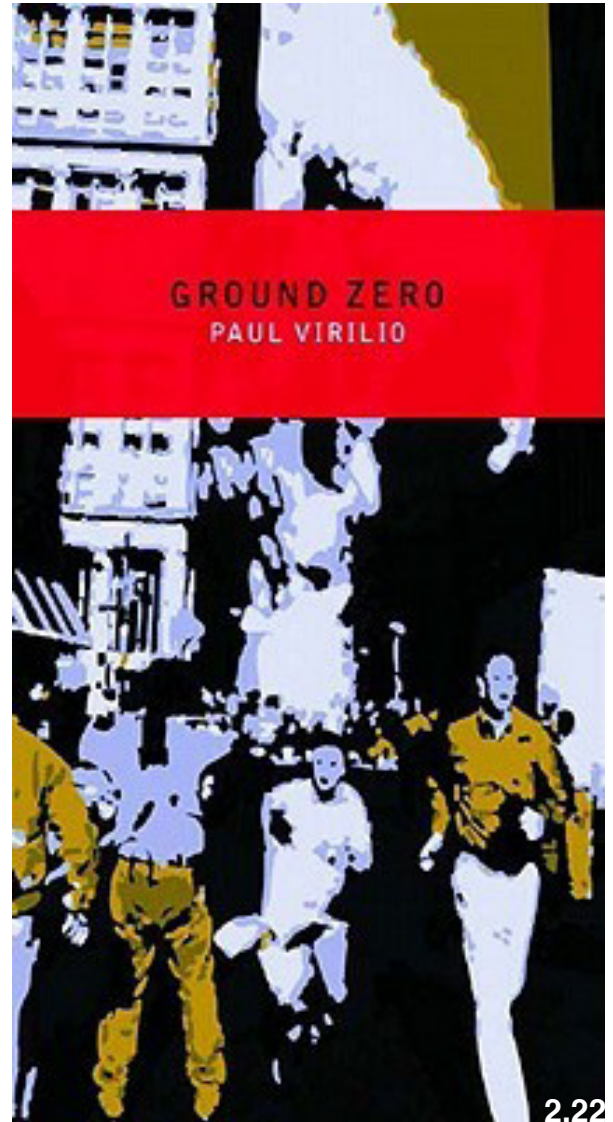
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2.22

image 2.21: *Unknown Quantity*, 19 November 1997, Reconstitution of TWA Boeing 747 that crashed 17 July 1996.

image 2.22: Cover of *Ground Zero*, by Paul Virilio (2002).

image 2.23: The second plane crash at the World Trade Center, 11 September 2001.

[3]

3. SILENCE AND THE SCREAM

Art after Auschwitz and the collapse of the 'kraftfeld'



image 3.0: Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp, Oswiecim, Poland.

image 3.1: Auschwitz-Birkenau main camp, 13 September 1944.

After Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric.

- Theodor Adorno, 1949



3.1

I. VIRILIO'S HUMANISM

Virilio's *Museum of Accidents*, though a very recent proposal, is a valuable point of departure for the exploration of Virilio's humanism through his early architectural work from 1958 to 1966. *Bunker Archeology* (1958-1965, first published in 1975), the *Function Oblique* (1963), and Sainte-Bernadette-du-Banlay (1963-1966), also known as the "bunker church" in Nevers, France, are Virilio's most significant contributions to the proliferation of "post-architecture" during that era. Conceived before the twentieth anniversary of the end of World War II, these projects were highly controversial "accidents of art". Virilio was profoundly inspired by the Nazi military infrastructure and strategies of warfare, and, quite literally, translated familiar forms of bunkers and temporal qualities of German combat, such as *blitzkrieg*, into aesthetic theory and architectural space. The *oblique function*, Virilio's governing principle for spatial organization on both the scales of individual dwellings and entire urban centers, originates from Virilio's initial explorations of the toppled bunkers along the Atlantic Wall.

In the introduction of Virilio's book *Art and Fear* (2003), John Armitage observes that he is "...continually responsive to the most frightening and extremely horrific features of our epoch."¹ He further elucidates the source of Virilio's consistent critique of the art of technology and its ruptures: "It was ...the Second World War, and, in particular, the tragedy of the Nazi concentration and extermination camps that educated Virilio about the depths of human violence."² [*Images* 3.0 – 3.1] Virilio is notorious for emphasizing that "war was his university." James Der Derian, in the introduction of his compilation of important Virilio texts *The Virilio Reader* (1998), traces Virilio's unique exposure to the elements that would inspire his aesthetic theory. Virilio had experienced the "speed of the war machine" when the *blitzkrieg* arrived in Nantes. He heard "the sound of tanks outside his window" only minutes after warnings were broadcasted over the radio. He experienced the fear and fascination of the sky as a war zone; the Allied aerial attacks razed his hometown in order to liberate France. Though he practiced

¹ Armitage 2003: 3.

² *Ibid.*

“conscientious objection” and skepticism of perceptions of reality produced by mechanisms of war, he was still drafted to fight in the French-Algerian war.³ Through these experiences Virilio was exposed to a culture of violence, which in various ways contributed to his own “silencing”.

Both Armitage and Der Derian conclude, much in accordance with the aspirations for the *Museum of Accidents*, that Virilio is preoccupied with “silence”—or oblivion—as a residual condition of technological progress and the piling up of accidents throughout history. Through understanding Virilio’s work as itself an *aesthetic of exposure*, we can appreciate his intention to, as Armitage identifies, forge and transform “our understanding of the ethical dilemmas associated with silence and the subsequent aesthetic conflicts”.⁴ Returning to this concept of a Virilian *aesthetic of exposure*, it is important to read the subtext of his apocalyptic expression. This expression, however is not referencing the Apocalypse but what he regards as a twentieth-century “culture of folly”. The exposure of ruptures is carried out as a result of Virilio’s deep conviction that we should pay homage to the current “culture of folly”. Armitage understands Virilio’s motivation for his work as a process of realization of a kind of humanism. Armitage links this to a combination of Virilio’s religious beliefs, which compelled him to serve the homeless population after WWII, and his “theoretical critiques of the dehumanizing characteristics of total war”⁵, which he developed during this *voyage d’hiver*.⁶ Critical to Virilio’s discovery of humanism is his evaluation of the “aesthetics and ethics of human perception”, which were inspired through his mentor Maurice Merleau-Ponty.⁷

Virilio’s work, as Armitage explains, “must be interpreted as the search for a humanism that can face up to the contempt shown toward the body.”⁸ While this is certainly not a consensus among Virilio’s critics, it is evident, especially when one considers Virilio’s personal history in concordance with his

³ Der Derian 1998: 12.

⁴ Armitage 2003: 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Virilio refers to his social service for the homeless as his *voyage d’hiver* (“a winter’s journey”), which he began in the winter of 1954. He has maintained an active concern for the poor ever since. (Redhead 2004b: 15.)

⁷ Armitage 2003: 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*: 2.

writing and his architectural work, that there is a strong attempt to force the remembrance of certain events out of a condition of silence. This argument can be best explored through a careful examination of Virilio's response to the rupture of World War II and the Holocaust within his architectural work. His proposals for the *oblique function* and the "bunker church" of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay were, in Virilio's own meaning of the concept, accidents of art generated for the paying homage of WWII and the culture of violence that produced the monstrous "assault on human subjectivity" that was Auschwitz.⁹ Virilio's humanism is derived from resistance to the dehumanization of subjectivity within the culture of "pitiless ... 'contemporary art'".¹⁰ The expectation for "profanity" in contemporary art is condemning to "sacred art", which Virilio defines as a representative artwork that celebrates the human figure and its various forms of perception. Artists and critics are expected to condone the "profanation of human forms and bodies in a profane twenty-first century way" and reject sacred art's "antiquated ... anti-terroristic and museological" character.¹¹

Through the mortification of the human figure in contemporary art and aesthetic practice, and the acceptance of this form of violence within critical discourse, Virilio argues that an issue of "profane humanism" arises. He implies that the current culture assumes that being profane is in vogue, and "sacred" regard for the body is an antiquated sentiment. Profane humanism expresses the degradation of the human existence so as to be relevant within the twenty-first century society. Virilio asserts; the society that receives these messages and accepts aestheticized forms of violence against perception as relevant examples of contemporary art, will also accept the artists' negligence "to ask one vital question: *Contemporary art, sure, but contemporary with what?*"¹² Instead, as Armitage explains, "the artist or the critic of the art of technology is implored to tempt the profane and his or her ability to 'enjoy'

⁹ Armitage 2013: 159.

¹⁰ Armitage 2003: 27.

¹¹ Armitage 2013: 159.

¹² Armitage 2003: 27.

contemporary art's production of forms that are in fact modes of destruction".¹³ Consequently, according to Virilio, art faces the dilemma first announced by Walter Benjamin; that a culture of violence will "supply the artistic gratification of a sense of perception that has been changed by technology".¹⁴

Virilio wholly rejects the acceptance of this altered sense of perception, which manifests not only the artworks themselves but also the modes of our viewing them. In *Art and Fear*, Virilio is reacting in particular to the sonorization of art and audio-visual media, which he believes has not been reclaimed for the purposes of combatting the "silencing" of the human form. It is important to distinguish that Virilio's understanding of "silence" the human body has nothing to do with sound. In contesting "silence" he resists artistic and aesthetic modes of production that present the human body as a "pitiful" object. The violent dismantling of the human figure by body artists such as Orlan and Stelarc, Virilio protests, subverts its subjectivity through forms of dominance and disfigurement. [*Images* 3.16 – 3.19] By penetrating literal silence with multimedia events, Orlan and Stelarc also dominate the viewer's subjectivity; the onlooker cannot escape the presentation by turning away from it. Virilio condemns the destruction of silence through this kind of "pitiless" art, "the call to murder and torture".¹⁵ As Armitage explains in the introduction of *Art and Fear*, Virilio's denunciation is "a consequence of his belief that the mutism intrinsic to contemporary body art shows the way to the terrorization of the real body by the virtual body".¹⁶ Virilio understands the presentation of the body in this manner as a legacy of the Second World War and Auschwitz. In refusing to recognize the altered sense of perception since the exposure of Auschwitz, contemporary artists reinforce the "forget[ing of] the reality of the horror of war and the violence of extermination" through their presentations of torture.¹⁷

Within this culture of "forgetting the reality" of WWII and Auschwitz, Virilio recognizes that he must detach his own work from this idea of an "aesthetics of Auschwitz". In doing so, Armitage

¹³ Armitage 2013: 159.

¹⁴ Benjamin 1968: 23.

¹⁵ Armitage 2003: 23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

suggests, Virilio promotes a kind of “sacred humanism”. Like that of the system of thought originating from the Renaissance period, Virilio’s sacred humanism “rests on human values, interests, needs and, especially, the welfare of humans” in order to promote a “sincere acknowledgement of human corporeal boundaries and mental limits”.¹⁸ For Virilio, this ideology enables us to appreciate “wounded” or “pitiful” art’s potential to revolutionize artistic culture apart from traditions of academicism—the “universality of the extermination of bodies”.¹⁹ Finally, in elevating Virilio’s work as an example of Renaissance sacred humanism, though Virilio himself does not literally define his work as such, we must recognize that his aesthetic theory is saturated with this ideology. As Armitage explains, Virilio’s sacred humanism “is another rendering of those expressions that Virilio has utilized to point to the aesthetics of disappearance”. It furnishes the same opportunity to pay homage to accidents through “art, aesthetics, disappearance and war, film and cultural politics” without the preconceived structures of “techno-scientific thought”.²⁰

II. ART ‘AFTER AUSCHWITZ’

Theodor Adorno would later regret his grave statement about the problem of art after Auschwitz, which has since its proliferation in 1949 served as a “moral and aesthetic dictate for the postwar era”.²¹ The Virilian perspective would seem to argue that Adorno’s words could not be farther from the truth, “given the increasing pace of artistic desperation, the catastrophes of modernity, and the crisis in modern art”.²² In *Art and Fear*, Virilio traces the devaluation of modern art since World War II, challenges twentieth-century theories of modern art, and depicts a much graver situation than Adorno described. Virilio supplants “barbarism” with “terrorism” in his elaboration of “pitiless” art—an art that is only *presentative* and not *representative*. The situation of contemporary art, as problematized by Virilio, proliferates only

¹⁸ Armitage 2013: 161.

¹⁹ Virilio 2003b: 32; and Armitage 2013: 161.

²⁰ Armitage 2013: 161.

²¹ Saltzman 1999: 17.

²² Armitage 2003: 4.

presentational art forms that camouflage the absence of meaning. As Virilio argues in *Negative Horizon* (2005),

Our vision is a battlefield in which the movement of our culture towards nothingness and disappearance is concealed in the obvious.²³

Virilio rejects “an aesthetics that implies the disappearance of every type of art except presentational art”, according to Armitage in his synopsis of *Art and Fear*. In exposing its “deceptive closeness”, Virilio resists a presentational art that aims for “the total destruction of careful viewer contemplation”.²⁴

According to Virilio in an interview with Armitage, artists working after Auschwitz should:

instead of producing merciless art of presentation, with its live TV images of genuine torment and aggression, its wretchedness, self-destruction, disfigurement, extinction and abhorrence... reclaim the evacuated space of the art of representation, the space of symbolic yet crucially sympathetic images of violence.²⁵ [*Images* 3.11 – 3.15]

The trouble with interpreting Virilio, in this case, is that his belief of what is considered “symbolic yet crucially sympathetic” appears, on the surface level, the very opposite. His art and architecture after Auschwitz is characterized by a continuous reprocessing of imagery and themes derived from the Nazi occupation of France. How, then, can we appreciate *Bunker Archeology* or the “Unknown Quantity” as something other than a reminder of past suffering? How might an understanding Virilio’s symbolism and sympathy free us to, as Virilio says, “face up” to painful memories of the past? Armitage argues that: “Virilio’s words of warning to contemporary artists are that to stop thinking about the Second World War and Auschwitz is to forget the reality of the horror of war and the violence of extermination.”²⁶ Forgetting—the disappearance of the memory of accidents—is according to Virilio’s belief the most terrible accident of all. Therefore, to be sympathetic requires a rejection of all art that inherits the “aesthetics of Auschwitz” without exposing the violent modes of perception and thus attempting to aid society in reconciling the past.

²³ Virilio and Degener 2005: 38.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*: 23.

Furthermore, Virilio believes artists must also disassociate from purely presenting images of the past without humanistic intentions. He recognizes a subtle, yet significant, difference in his approach to aesthetic production when compared with the “hypermodernist”²⁷ contemporary artists. In *Art and Fear*, Virilio makes the distinction clear; as Armitage explains, he “employs his Christian humanist critique of war, alienation and cruelty in an artistic and political sense, perhaps as an *aide-mémoire* of a further precise obligation to poetry or as an awareness of the aesthetics of Auschwitz.”²⁸ Since post-WWII society has witnessed the exposure of the ultimate dehumanizing mechanism of the Nazi death camps, Armitage explains, the “aesthetics of Auschwitz” permeate all forms of media.²⁹ Virilio’s work often approaches aesthetic problems through this lens. For the *Museum of Accidents* this is very clear – Virilio confronts the commonplaceness of violent imagery and critiques society’s desensitization to the real horrors from which these representations emanate.

“Unknown Quantity” can be compared to the Museum at Auschwitz on this level. Both museums exhibit “ruptures”, but they are inversely scandalous. “Unknown Quantity” was perceived negatively because images of the accidents were projected as contemporary art, while exhibits (artifacts from the genocide) at the Museum at Auschwitz are confused with contemporary artworks. Virilio demonstrates this confusion in the opening of the first essay of *Art and Fear*, “A Pitiless Art,” by quoting Jacqueline Lichtenstein’s impression of the Museum at Auschwitz. Lichtenstein found the exhibits at the museum “absolutely terrifying”. Her shock was not due to the content itself, but rather the fact that she wasn’t “frightened” or “completely overcome” as she had been walking around the camp. The artifacts—suitcases, prosthetics, and children’s toys—as they were arranged in display cases, she recalls, “were images from contemporary art”. [*Images* 3.2 – 3.15] She concluded from this experience that the Nazis

²⁷ In the introduction of *Art and Fear*, Armitage explains: “Hypermodern art is for Virilio a manifestation of contemporary aesthetics that aspires to celebrate Nietzschean violence while discounting a crisis of meaning that is so profound that it is fast becoming indistinguishable from what he describes in ‘A Pitiless Art’ as ‘the call to murder and torture’.” (Armitage 2003: 23)

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*: 21-22.

had won “since they’d produced forms of perception that are all of a piece with the mode of destruction they made their own.”³⁰ In response to Lichtenstein’s account, Virilio asks the question, “[D]id the Nazi terror lose the war but, in the end, win the peace?” He argues that the current condition of peace is based on what Armitage calls the “‘balance of terror’...between the forms and figures of an aesthetic of disappearance that would come to characterize the whole fin-de-siècle.”³¹

III. THE *WOUND AND THE KNIFE*

Virilio’s depiction of contemporary art through Lichtenstein’s account of the Museum at Auschwitz is inextricably bleak. Her confusion between the exhibit of relics from Nazi death camps and contemporary art echoes Adorno’s statement that the creation of art after the existence of fascism and genocide is impossible. The expectation of contemporary art after Auschwitz to express the anguish of the WWII era, both Adorno and Virilio would contest was unfulfilled by the modes of perception that the new art utilized. According to Armitage, Virilio urges us to recognize that cinema, TV, and Internet contain aesthetic forms of Auschwitz that occupy “us all as a fundamental if often repressed component of contemporary processes of cultural globalization.”³² Virilio argues in *Art and Fear* that a culture of “Pitiless Art” exploded in the aftermath of World War II. He protests:

[W]hat is left of Adorno’s pompous pronouncement about the impossibility of writing a poem after AUSCHWITZ? Not much at the end of the day, for everything, or almost everything, kicked off at the turn of a pitiless and endlessly catastrophic century...³³

Perhaps, Adorno would have argued that what Virilio calls a “Pitiless Art” does not constitute actual art—which was the poetry he believed could never be created after the exposure of such great evil. Further

³⁰ Lichtenstein’s full quotation: “When I visited the Museum at AUSCHWITZ, I stood in front of the display cases. What I saw there were images from contemporary art and I found that absolutely terrifying. Looking at the exhibits of suitcases, prosthetics, children’s toys, I don’t feel frightened. I didn’t collapse. I wasn’t completely overcome the way I had been walking around the camp. No. In the Museum, I suddenly had the impression I was in a museum of contemporary art. I took the train back, telling myself that they had won! They had won since they’d produced forms of perception that are all of a piece with the mode of destruction they made their own.” (Unpublished interview with Jacqueline Lichtenstein and Gérard Wajcman conducted by Francois Rouan, May 1997. In Virilio 2003b: 28. Emphasis Virilio’s).

³¹ Virilio 2003b: 28.

³² *Ibid.*: 21.

³³ *Ibid.*: 29. (Emphasis Virilio’s.)

consideration of Virilio's description of the dehumanizing characteristics of modern (presentational) art aligns his sentiments with Adorno's.

Focusing on the aesthetic legacy of Auschwitz, Virilio constructs his critique around what he observes is an artistic culture fixated on barbarism. The horror of Auschwitz and the evolution of military logistics during WWII, recalling the words of Walter Benjamin, "supply the artist gratification of a sense of perception that has been changed by technology."³⁴ [*Images* 3.20, 3.21] Virilio is preoccupied with illustrating the dilemma, which was first recognized by Benjamin, of an art that is so entrapped by barbaric forms of perception it cannot represent a history of Auschwitz without reproducing its aesthetic modes.

'To humanize oneself is to universalize oneself from within', they say. Hasn't the universality of the extermination of bodies as well as the environment, from AUSCHWITZ to CHERNOBYL, succeeded in dehumanizing us from without by shattering our ethic and aesthetic bearings, our very perception of our surroundings?³⁵

Art and Fear is a limited review of contemporary art after Auschwitz. According to Armitage, Virilio's argument "develops into that of both being censured for his lack of familiarity with the contemporary aesthetic and political discussions that he disapproves of and for trying to place his work outside of such deliberations."³⁶ While this may be true, *Art and Fear* provides insight into Virilio's personal convictions regarding postwar aesthetics and, more importantly, the terms of his "sacred humanism", which is deeply rooted in his understanding of the subjectivity of perception.

Virilio's frequent use of this word—*perception*—should not be overlooked in an analysis of his aesthetic thought. For Virilio, perception has profound implications on the modes in which we view and experience the world. Therefore, it is imperative to understand exactly what he means. Virilio's *logistics of perception* ties the concept of the aesthetics of Auschwitz to what Virilio identifies as *dehumanizing*

³⁴ Benjamin 1968: 23.

³⁵ Virilio quotes Gabriel Ringlet in *L'Évangile d'un libre-penseur: Dieu serait-il laïque?* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), in Virilio 2003b: 28-29. (Emphasis Virilio's.)

³⁶ *Ibid.*: 20.

techniques of representation. For the purpose of linking Virilio to Adorno's critique of the post-WWII collective perception of Auschwitz, perception should be understood as an expectation for artistic expression based on our knowledge and use of technology of representation. David Beard and Joshua Gunn argue that Virilio's extensive body of research "interrogates the critical history of logics of perception molded or enabled by technology, from the printing press, the telescope, and the photograph, to film, television, and the internet", and beyond.³⁷ [Image 3.20] These mechanisms inform the manner in which aesthetic media is generated and, therefore, technology governs our perception of information. Furthermore, Virilio's interrogation "not only concerns a recognition of the internal logics and specificity of a given technology of representation, but also concerns the broadest implications of these technologies upon our collective perceptions of time and space, and the material and political consequences of these shifts."³⁸ In essence, Virilio's concept of perception cannot be detached from the exposure of Auschwitz nor the instruments that both create the art and facilitate our experience of it. Virilio's position closely follows that of his mentor, the existential thinker Maurice Merleau-Ponty (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945), whose objective was to "re-establish the roots of the mind in its body and its world, going against doctrines that treat perception as a simple result of the action of external things on our body as well as those that insist on the autonomy of the consciousness."³⁹ [Images 3.22, 3.23]

If we consider Adorno's discussion of the perception of art, he is less concerned about the technology of representation, but like Virilio, extremely critical of presentational art. Where Virilio argues that the modes of perception generated by the "accident" of Auschwitz—the self-alienating, dehumanizing qualities that prevent the viewer from understanding the artwork—dominate, Adorno asserts that modern art suffers from a "crisis of meaning" and a lack of "dialectical aesthetics".⁴⁰ As he states in his *Aesthetic Theory*: "What has become self-evident is that nothing concerning art is any longer

³⁷ Beard and Gunn.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Merleau-Ponty 1964: 3-4.

⁴⁰ Paddison 1987: 357.

self-evident—not in terms of its relation to the whole, and not even in terms of its very right to exist.”⁴¹

According to this view modern aesthetics had lost both the ability to be interpreted and to be understood as part of a broader context of artworks. Adorno does not attribute this to Auschwitz, or any specific event for that matter, but his manifesto reflects a similar attitude toward postwar aesthetic culture. He recognizes a general lack of critical enquiry in the process of creating artworks and argues:

As long as the *perception* of art is confined to art, the work of art is not adequately perceived. In order to be so perceived, the inner composition of a work calls for an *external referent* which is not part of art, yet mediated by it.”⁴²

According to Max Paddison, *Aesthetic Theory* (written from 1961-1969 and published posthumously in 1970), as Adorno’s last book, is an attempt to define an aesthetics of modernism “when the essence of its subject matter, the modernist art work, rejects the kind of systematic, generalized categories and concepts formerly considered indispensable to the discipline of aesthetics and now identified with the *status quo*.”⁴³ While Virilio would most likely assert that the status quo is carnality, and modern artists are consumed with bloodlust and death, Adorno’s consideration of the norm is that artists are caught in the dilemma of how to create unified representations when “one of the most fundamental assumptions of traditional aesthetics has been thrown into doubt: the assumption that it is possible to *understand* artworks at all.”⁴⁴ Paddison elaborates that Adorno’s “dilemma of modernism” can be understood as “the predicament faced by the artist caught between, on the one hand, the traditional demands of the art work for unity and integration—the harmonious relationship between part and whole—and, on the other hand, the loss of faith in any overarching unity on both individual and social levels in the face of the evident fragmentation of modern existence—manifesting as critical opposition to the ‘false totality’ of the status quo, represented by the ‘culture industry’”.⁴⁵ The situation of modern aesthetics, according to Adorno, has produced art that “revolts against its essential concepts while at the

⁴¹ Adorno, Adorno and Tiedemann 1997: 9.

⁴² *Ibid.*: 478.

⁴³ Paddison 1987: 355-356. (Emphasis author’s.)

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*: 358. (Emphasis author’s.)

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* (Emphasis author’s.)

same time being inconceivable without them”.⁴⁶ This predicament, Paddison claims, is “central to both content and form of [Adorno’s] *Aesthetic Theory*”.⁴⁷ Virilio, through his proposal for a *Museum of Accidents* and his short manifesto *Art and Fear*, is also critical of epistemological structures incapable of “admit[ting] chaos, fragmentation and meaninglessness”.⁴⁸ Where Virilio calls for “paying homage” to these structures, Adorno advocates for “critical consciousness”; both are acts of inquiry with the potential to transcend the “meaningless” content of modern art.

Adorno’s description of the situation “where art revolts against its essential concepts while at the same time being inconceivable without them”⁴⁹ resonates with Virilio’s elaboration of a “Pitiless Art”. Virilio illustrates the disconnect between what Adorno identifies as “perception” and “external referent” using Baudelaire’s phrase: “*I am the wound and the knife.*”⁵⁰ For Virilio, the *knife* is representative of the violence of war and the mechanisms employed for human torture—military technology that Beard and Gunn argue: “mediates our perceptions and brings into vision things beyond our reach.”⁵¹ The *wound* embodies the human response to the knife; the absorption of evil inflicted on one’s own body—one’s own life—one’s nation, or one’s humanity in general. As Virilio states,

How can we fail to see that, in the wake of the hecatomb of the Great War, when Braque and Otto Dix found themselves on opposite sides of the trenches in the mud of the Somme, modern art for its part *forgot about the wound and concentrated on the knife*—the bayonet...⁵²

IV. RESISTING NEGATIONISM

It is apparent that both Virilio and Adorno recognize the same crisis: the aesthetics of the modern art they critique are so defined by a lack of understanding and intelligibility of the subject matter. It has been discussed, that Virilio views these so-called “dehumanizing” aesthetics as residual aesthetics of

⁴⁶ Adorno, Adorno and Tiedemann 1997: 465.

⁴⁷ Paddison 1987: 358.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Adorno, Adorno and Tiedemann 1997: 465.

⁵⁰ Virilio 2003b: 29. (Emphasis Virilio’s.)

⁵¹ Beard and Gunn 2002.

⁵² *Ibid.*

Auschwitz. This is due to his perception of the event of Auschwitz itself, not a singular event in history, but a climax that exposed a long-existing tradition of genocide—both in the literal and proverbial senses. “Whether Adorno likes it or not,” says Virilio, “the spectacle of abjection remains the same, after as before Auschwitz. But it has become politically incorrect to say so.”⁵³ That it is now taboo to say that the aesthetics of Auschwitz inhabit every expression of modern society—such as science, medicine, technology, and art—is an affirmation of the status quo, which, Virilio argues, perpetuates a culture of *negationism*. This silence is ultimately denial, and, when practiced habitually and collectively, contributes to the mass extinction of memory and the formation of a cultural identity that resists taking horrific events such as Auschwitz into collective consciousness. In various aspects, Virilio describes this climate of *negationism* in terms of his concept of the *aesthetics of disappearance*. Virilio's observation of the aesthetic of the disappearance of the human body is imperative for understanding the relationship of his humanism to his critical theory. The degradation and disappearance of the recognizable form of the human body in modern art, especially since Auschwitz, is Virilio's main concern.

Regarding the treatment of bodies, in *Art and Fear* Virilio outwardly opposes the “suffocating” culture of bourgeois academicism, which he blames for the proliferation of “Pitiless Art”. He announces the existence of a “COUNTER CULTURE”, which is “opposed to the culture of the bourgeoisie, but also of an art that is frankly COUNTER-NATURE.”⁵⁴ While Virilio's specific attention to the embrace of eugenics in this “counter-nature” is not the focus of this study, it is important to note that he is extremely skeptical of the ethical evolution of medical technology, which he argues has rationalized both the genocide and cloning of human beings. Virilio ascertains that human bodies are, essentially, as duplicable and disposable as images. As Virilio notes in *Art and Fear*:

⁵³ Virilio 2003b: 57. (Emphasis Virilio's.)

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*: 55. (Emphasis Virilio's.)

Ethics or aesthetics? That is indeed the question at the dawn of the millennium. If freedom of SCIENTIFIC expression now actually has no more limits than freedom of ARTISTIC expression, where will *inhumanity* end in the future?⁵⁵

Recalling the statements of Friederich Nietzsche and Adolf Loos—“Simplify your life: die!” and “ornament is crime”—Virilio attests that the aesthetic sentiments of twentieth-century academicism not only stripped art of its symbolic meaning, but also severely discredited the value of human life.⁵⁶ This “extremist simplification,” he argues, “has stayed with us throughout history of the twentieth century, from the pointlessly repeated assault on the peaks of the Chemin des Dames in 1917 to the genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in the 1970s.”⁵⁷ The stripping of art from its recognizable symbols, according to Virilio, is as alienating as stripping the human body of its subjectivity—he cites the shower block at Auschwitz-Birkenau and the gas chambers of Ypres and Verdun.⁵⁸

In the same breath as the mention of these sites where some of the most dehumanizing acts of the twentieth century took place, Virilio addresses the work of Mark Rothko (1903-1970), the American Abstract Expressionist painter of Latvian Jewish descent. [*Images* 3.25, 3.26] According to Virilio, Rothko’s painting is an example of the alienating *presentative* aesthetics characteristic of academicism. Though Rothko and his contemporaries defended the absolute importance of the subject matter of their work⁵⁹, Virilio asserts that their practice of abstract expression only cultivated the “suicidal state of representative democracies” and displaced the viewer from his or her own critical search for meaning in the artwork.⁶⁰ Virilio quotes Rothko as saying:

I studied the figure. Only reluctantly did I realize it didn’t correspond to my needs. *Using human representation, for me, meant mutilating it.*⁶¹

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: 61. (Emphasis Virilio’s.)

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*: 31.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 30.

⁵⁹ Rothko, Gottlieb, and Newman wrote a manifesto-like letter that was published in the *New York Times* in 1943. Together they declared: “There is no such thing as a good painting about nothing. We assert that the subject is crucial and that only subject matter is valid which is tragic and timeless.” (Dempsey 2002: 190-191.)

⁶⁰ Virilio 2003b: 32.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 37. (Emphasis Virilio’s.)

Describing Rothko's creative process, Virilio connects this destructive sentiment toward the formal value of the human body with a perceived collapse in the dialectic, between self-reflection and self-search, of the artwork, stating: "Shot of all moral or emotional compromise, the painter seeks to move '*towards the elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the idea, between the idea and the onlooker*'.⁶² In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno identifies the same collapse of a dialectical experience as an isolation of either the rationality or the mimesis of the artwork—though he believes that both are inherent in the manifestation of true art. Adorno's concept of the *kraftfeld* (force-field) constitutes a kind of tension between the idea and the onlooker, a mimetic process of "'identifying with' on the part of the subject which traces the dynamic laws of the object."⁶³ *Kraftfeld*, Paddison elaborates, is produced from "conflict between the mimetic impulse, 'blind expression', which threatens to fall back into magic, and rationality as construction, the logic of form, which is the self-reflective aspect of the work and which threatens the blind quality of the work with disenchantment and enlightenment".⁶⁴

For Virilio, Rothko's paintings are *overexposed* due to a transparency of the *Kraftfeld*. (*Images* 3.25 – 3.26) As such, the practice of abstraction in this manner fails to retain the intro- and extro-spective actions of mimesis. According to Virilio's depiction, it would appear that Rothko's work is the epitome of what Adorno calls *the rationality as construction* and *the logic of form*. Of this kind of art, which he asserts is "the radiographic triumph of transparence", Virilio warns: "this sudden OVEREXPOSURE of the work, as of those who look upon it, is accompanied by a violence that is not only 'symbolic', as before, but practical, since it affects the very intentionality of the painter..."⁶⁵ He, again, quotes Rothko to further validate this claim:

To those who find my paintings serene, I'd like to say that *I have trapped the most absolute violence in every square centimeter of their surface*.⁶⁶

⁶² *Ibid.* (Emphasis Virilio's.)

⁶³ Paddison 1987: 362.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*: 362-363.

⁶⁵ Virilio 2003b: 37-38. (Emphasis Virilio's.)

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: 38. (Emphasis Virilio's.)

This violent, *suicidal state* of art after Auschwitz, Virilio says, overexposes even the artist himself to the exclusively self-reflective and, thus, self-destructive nature of aesthetics of Auschwitz. After confessing the entrapment of *absolute violence* in his paintings, Rothko “[proved] the point by turning this repressed fury against himself on a certain day in February, 1970.”⁶⁷ In reflecting on this event, Virilio notes:

After having ‘only reluctantly’ abandoned the figure on the pretext of not mutilating it, the American painter then chose to end this life himself as well by exercising the most nihilistic of freedoms of expression: that of SELF-DESTRUCTION.⁶⁸

The alienation of the human figure through abstraction, for Virilio, is also a consequence of aerial photography, in which this “scopic turning back to face the terrestrial surface” generated the “abstract world of aeroscropy”.⁶⁹ [Image 3.24] In *Art as Far as the Eye Can See* (2007), Virilio addresses the “vertically executed ‘all over’ paintings” of American artist Jackson Pollock to illustrate the shift in perception from horizon to a flattened ground surface.⁷⁰ [Images 3.27 – 3.30]

Instead of observing the line that decides between the Earth and the sky, you observe the surface, the “support-surface”, as people once contemplated the stars in the age of popular astronomy.⁷¹

For Virilio this is a devastating tradition of perception; the view from the sky negates the identification with human life on the ground. Human bodies are imperceptible, distant, and ephemeral within the two-dimensional composition from the “aerial zenith”.⁷² [Image 3.24, 3.27] John Beck in “Strangers to the Starts: Abstraction, Aeriality, Aspect Perception” explains, “Virilio mourns ... the loss of depth and weight, of embodied experience” as vision is redefined through “the release from the pull of gravity enabled by aerial technology”.⁷³ There is a perceived collapse of space, and of *kraftfeld*, that characterizes the aerial abstraction—a “horizonless surface” that perpetuates the deception that the earth is no longer a supportive structure. Without the “relationship between vision and weight”, Virilio argues

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* (Emphasis Virilio’s.)

⁶⁹ Virilio 2007: 36-37.

⁷⁰ Beck 2011: 65.

⁷¹ Virilio 2007: 37.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Beck 2011: 65.

that the perception of the ground will “fall upwards” into the aerial abyss.⁷⁴ It is in this moment that Adorno’s concept of *kraftfeld* is lost in the aerial image, when one is no longer “bound up with the delicate balancing act of a universal attraction which imposes on us its gearing toward the center of the Earth”, according to Virilio.⁷⁵ There is no sense of weight or depth, no “vanishing lines converging on the horizon” that delineate perspectival illusion, and a complete absence of an essential connection between sight and being in the aerial image.⁷⁶ This abstraction, which Virilio insists denies the human figure of its subjectivity and experience of the between space of anti-form, is another form of alienation after WWII.⁷⁷

Adorno’s stance in *Aesthetic Theory* is less accusatory than Virilio’s in *Art and Fear*. The modern art, as Adorno delineates, is validated by its autonomy from the literal representation of subject matter, though they should still retain the quality of mimesis. Therefore, the modernist dilemma is not that there is no absolute meaning to be gleaned from the aesthetic expression, but, as Paddison notes, that the problem of “how to evolve structures which can admit chaos, fragmentation and meaninglessness and which at the same time, through ‘critical consciousness’, can transcend such content” is intangible.⁷⁸ As Adorno delineates in *Aesthetic Theory*:

Each artwork is a system of irreconcilability ... By their spiritual mediation [the elements] enter into a contradictory relation with each other that appears in them at the same time that they strive to solve it. The elements are not arranged in juxtaposition but rather grind away at each other or draw each other in; the one seeks or repulses the other. This alone constitutes the nexus of the most demanding works.⁷⁹

Though the work may be categorized as abstraction, there is still room for the revelation of truth content in art after Auschwitz. Paddison identifies three principles of Adorno’s constitution of *Kunstbegriff* (art):

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*: 65. and Virilio 1997: 2.

⁷⁵ Virilio 1997: 1-2.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ While Virilio is extremely critical of abstraction in painting and photography, artists of the related aesthetic movements have argued that the divorce from traditional techniques and modes of representation liberates the human figure. Where Virilio asserts that abstraction “mutilates” and “alienates” human subjectivity, he directly relates abstract expressionist art with “dehumanizing” technological production, especially that of military logistics.

⁷⁸ Paddison 1987: 358.

⁷⁹ Adorno, Adorno and Tiedemann 1997: 242.

“1) art is different from and opposes society; 2) art is derived from and part of society; 3) art points beyond society.”⁸⁰ Therefore, Paddison concludes, “it is apparent that for Adorno the ‘truth content’ of the art work—the correspondence of the work to that which lies outside its ‘monad-like’ existence as individual object—possesses both subjective and objective moments, as does the work itself.”⁸¹

Virilio is convinced that the undecipherable meaning of modern art is the consequence of an ethical crisis that results in an either-or condition for the subjective and objective moments. He writes,

Short of committing a real crime by killing innocent passers-by with a bomb, the pitiless contemporary author of the twentieth century attacks symbols, the very meaning of a ‘pitiful’ art he assimilates to ‘academicism’.⁸²

Of the French Situationist movement, with which Virilio has often been associated despite his protestations, Virilio is extremely critical:

Take Guy Debord... as an example. In 1952, speaking about his *Film Without Images*, which mounted a defense of the Marquis de Sade, Debord claimed he wanted to kill the cinema ‘because it was easier than killing a passer-by’. A year later, in 1953, the SITUATIONISTS would not hesitate to extend this attack by trashing Charlie Chaplin, pitiful actor par excellence, vilifying him as a sentimental fraud, mastermind of misery, even a proto-fascist!⁸³

Virilio’s confrontational analysis of art after Auschwitz in *Art and Fear* embodies his effort to distinguish his work as something other than a presentation of Auschwitz. The work reads as an almost frantic accusation of the inhumane ethical forces that have undermined aesthetic development throughout the twentieth century, and vice-versa. In Virilio’s seemingly astute portrayal of postwar society, artists and their aesthetic theories possess the power to mobilize populations. He argues:

Avant-garde artists, like many political agitators, propagandists and demagogues, have long understood what TERRORISM would soon popularize: if you want a place in ‘revolutionary history’ there is nothing easier than provoking a riot, an assault on propriety, in the guise of art.⁸⁴

Virilio, as a self-proclaimed critic of the “art of technology”, takes his role very seriously here; for in aesthetic culture he perceives the same “accident” that produced Auschwitz:

⁸⁰ Paddison 1987: 363.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Virilio 2003b: 31.

⁸³ *Ibid.*: 31-32.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*: 31.

...the hypothesis of an accident in AESTHETIC values—or in scientific knowledge—in the age of the information revolution is no more far-fetched than the hypothesis of the accident in ETHIC values that shook Europe in the age of the production revolution...⁸⁵

Adorno's statement on art after Auschwitz—the barbarity of writing poetry after the exposure of such evil—echoes the aesthetic shift that Virilio identified. Their declarations reveal an art *before Auschwitz*, which was something other than art *since*. Both Virilio and Adorno highlight the practice of abstraction—understood as the extermination of mimesis—as something especially troubling in postwar art. If artists, according to Canadian sociologist Marshall McLuhan, “live in the absolute present”, *what*, Virilio asks, is the meaning—if not dire—of this collapse, this transparency, of the *Kraftfeld*? He rhetorically answers his own question in stating:

What is this ABSOLUTE PRESENT ... if not the resurgence of a classicism that already laid claim to the eternal present of art, even going so far as to freeze it in geometric standards (witness the Golden Mean) bearing no relationship to the relative and ephemeral nature of analogical perception of events.⁸⁶

The aesthetic of the *absolute present*, as such, lacks the presence of perceptual signifiers. To Virilio, this is another kind of *accident* with profound implications for both the artist and the onlooker. Modern art denies the onlooker the pursuit of meaning in the media—the prolonged critical gaze—and, therefore, the artist participates in the shallow repetition of images/impressions that cannot provide connections to some realization of truth content—what Virilio and Adorno attest to is both the purpose and revelation of art.

V. BEAUTY & THE ABUNDANCE OF REAL SUFFERING

Though it would seem that Virilio is telling us to jettison all hope for truth content in art, he admonishes us in saying: “let's not become *negationists of art*.”⁸⁷ However, as Susan Sontag asks, “What does it mean to protest suffering, as distinct from acknowledging it?”⁸⁸ How should Virilio's “Unknown

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*: 96. (Emphasis Virilio's.)

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*: 47. (Emphasis Virilio's.)

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*: 39.

⁸⁸ Sontag 2003: 40.

Quantity”, for example, be understood as a protestation of accidents rather than an acknowledgment—a mere *presentation*—of their existence? What of his design for the church of Sainte Bernadette du Banlay in Nevers? [Image 3.31] How can his repetition of the imagery and form of the bunker, from *Bunker Archeology*, to the *oblique function*, to Nevers, be comprehended as a protestation of the contemporary transparency of what Adorno calls the *kraftfeld*? [Image 3.32]

Prior to addressing the specific protestations of Virilio’s architectural projects, it is necessary to ground his definition of *negationism* more thoroughly in the relative historical context of post-WWII Europe. *Negationism*—the cultural practice of denial—was in various circumstances and attitudes a deadly sin that, when the reality of the Nazi death camps was exposed, became a source of a great collective guilt. The *disappearance* of so many people was not unnoticed, as countless accounts from the time have recorded. Virilio cites one priest’s testimony in the essay “Silence on Trial” in *Art and Fear*:

By indirectly promoting the rise of TOTALITARIANISM, Democratic Germany’s ‘silent prosecution’ promptly authorized every kind of negationism. Bear in mind the confession of the German priest, Father Niemoller: ‘When they arrested the gypsies, I said nothing. When they arrested the homosexuals, I said nothing. When they deported the Jews, I said nothing. But when they arrested me, the others said nothing.’⁸⁹

Virilio and Adorno, among others, would later accuse this collective practice of “silent prosecution” for perpetuating the theme of silence throughout aesthetic production of the postwar period. Adorno’s radical statement on art after Auschwitz, though he retracted it later, is revelatory of the historical context. The survivors of Hitler’s reign were plagued by the memory of observing the disappearance of others, but saying nothing. Adorno’s demand for the death of poetry—a call for silence—at its core reveals a certain skepticism toward the value of beauty, negating the very existence of artistic pleasure after Auschwitz. Liliane Weissberg, in her essay “In Plain Sight”, published in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust* (2001), further explains this reading of Adorno’s statement, in arguing that: “No other statement by Adorno has

⁸⁹ It is also possible to infer Virilio’s critical stance on the “sins” of the Catholic Church during WWII—namely cooperation with Nazis on various levels—from his inclusion of this testimony in the “Silence on Trial”. Virilio’s subtle, yet clear, accusation here is relevant in the discussion of his design for the church of Sainte Bernadette du Banlay in Nevers, France, and will be elaborated in Chapter Four. (Virilio 2003b: 87.)

been so often repeated as his announcement of, or perhaps demand for, the death of poetry." As Adorno explained later, his call for the end of poetry was not as much linked to its representational failings as to its irrelevance in the face of human suffering and death. Moreover, poetry affected pleasure. Pleasure, in turn, seemed not only inappropriate in view of the recent historical events; it also seemed impossible to derive from any depiction of reality.⁹⁰

As Adorno wrote in his *Notes to Literature*: "The so-called artistic rendering of the naked physical pain of those who were beaten down with rifle butts contains, however distantly, the possibility that pleasure can be squeezed from it."⁹¹ For Adorno, at that moment, the creation of art was "antithetical to the historical event of the Holocaust."⁹² There was no meaning, beauty, or truth to be retained from the event of the Holocaust, and, therefore, he perceived any artistic representation after it to be carried out in vain.

However, it is important to move on from Adorno's verbal annihilation of art after Auschwitz. He would later urge his contemporaries to confront the painful past—with art being one of the more productive mediators. As Adorno wrote in 1966, "The enduring suffering has as much right to expression as does the tortured man to scream; therefore it may have been wrong that after Auschwitz poetry could no longer be written."⁹³ Art, according to this view, should be the antithesis of silence—the *scream*. Furthermore, as Adorno writes, "the abundance of real suffering tolerates no forgetting ... [it] demands the continued existence of art [even as] it prohibits it. It is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it."⁹⁴

Virilio's early architectural work is saturated with this notion of not forgetting. Though controversial to be sure, his projects deeply resist the perpetuation of silence and the false perceptions of Auschwitz—the historical revisionism as it occurred during the Holocaust and afterwards. His

⁹⁰ Weissberg 2001: 14.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*: 15.

⁹⁴ Adorno and Jameson 2007: 188.

humanistic approach to the organization of the built environment reveals a radical approach to representing and reversing the aesthetics of silence and disappearance. His architecture, both inspired by and severely critical of aesthetic symbols of the Nazi reign, evokes the *scream*.

VI. “WHAT DOES COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST MEAN?”

In an important lecture first published in 1959, ten years after his scandalous statement on art after Auschwitz, Adorno proposed an answer to the question; “What does coming to terms with the past mean?” Perhaps a reflection of his own reluctance to remember the terror of Auschwitz, Adorno urged his audience to endure the painful recognition of past events and to confront residual feelings of guilt. Though his critique was aimed specifically for German citizens nearly fifteen years after the end of World War II, he puts forth universal psychological concepts that are useful in interpreting Virilio’s work. In light of the contemporary socio-historical context of Germany, Adorno attempts to define the concept of “Aufarbeitung”⁹⁵—the original German translation for “coming to terms with.” For the audience at the time this notion meant acknowledging the horror of the Hitler era.⁹⁶ As Adorno states, “the German phrase has psychoanalytic as well as political connotations and may also allude to the way old materials are ‘worked up’ into something new, like the fabric of a hand-me-down.”⁹⁷ The notion of reprocessing is revealed in the structure of the text itself, through which Adorno stylistically represents the complex development of collective cultural consciousness and memory. Ironically, his first statements expose “Aufarbeitung” as it was being practiced in Germany at the time; not a processing of past events, but primarily as an act of erasure by the guilty party – to the detriment and loss of those who suffered by their

⁹⁵ According to Geoffrey H. Hartman, editor of the *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective* (which includes Adorno’s lecture), “Aufarbeitung” for Adorno evokes: “1. The personal and painful character of the consciousness that must emerge from Germany’s ‘Zero Hour’; 2. The psychoanalytic effort to confront and ‘work through’ the memory of offense and catastrophe; 3. the convergence, however distantly, of ‘Aufarbeitung’ and ‘Aufklärung’ (enlightenment, clarification); 4. a critique of the parallel notion of ‘mastering the past’ (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), which is tainted, verbally at least, by the idea of some ultimate repression.” (Adorno and Hartman 1986: 115.)

⁹⁶ According to Hartman, the English wording only adequately conveys Adorno’s intent. Hartman’s note prior to the text provides a brief clarification the word “Aufarbeitung” in order to notify the English-speaking reader of a more comprehensive meaning lost in the translation. (Adorno and Hartman 1986: 114.)

⁹⁷ Adorno and Hartman 1986: 114-115.

hands. In this case, the notion of dealing with the past has been warped. Adorno brought the dialectical nature of their attempted psychological recovery into the light with his aggressive analysis. In the very first statements of the lecture he argues that the phrase “Aufarbeitung” itself has:

become highly suspect as a slogan. ‘Coming to terms with the past’ does not imply a serious working through of the past, the breaking of its spell through an act of clear consciousness. It suggests, rather, wishing to turn the page and, if possible, wiping it from memory. The attitude that it would be proper for everything to be forgiven and forgotten by those who were wronged is expressed by the party that committed the injustice.⁹⁸

This act of erasure (what Adorno calls the “unconscious and not-so-unconscious defense against guilt”) is a dangerous psychological condition—inducing a kind of self-destruction as a mechanism for “Aufarbeitung.” It is deceiving in its instantaneous grant of relief from catastrophe and is (in actuality) a complex process of repression, which Adorno confronts in the lecture. The desire to escape the past is valid, though, unproductive because “the past one wishes to evade is still so intensely alive.”⁹⁹ The notion of “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” (“mastering the past”) is therefore impotent, because one cannot master a task through a process of repressing the accountability of his or her own historical perspective and resolution.

“Vergangenheitsbewältigung” is, alternatively, a mastering of “guilt complex,” which pervades the cultural memory and inhibits the psychological ability for a real confrontation with the nation’s offensive history. Adorno’s critique in response is severe: “The idiocy of all this really does testify to a lack of psychic mastery and an unhealed wound.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, the nation is incapable of mentally processing memory and will suffer the lashing (and re-lashing) of painful remembrance. According to this view, “as good as if it never happened” becomes the slogan for actual “Vergangenheitsbewältigung,” thus implying the nation’s acceptance of the destruction of memory.

According to Adorno, this destruction is only perceived falsely and deliberately.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*: 115.

⁹⁹ Adorno and Hartman 1986: 115.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*: 117.

The effacement of memory is more the achievement of an all-too-wakeful consciousness than it is the result of its weakness in the face of the superiority of unconscious processes. In this forgetting of what is scarcely past, one senses the fury of the one who has to talk himself out of what everyone else knows, before he can talk them out of it.¹⁰¹

The violent suppression of memory is elucidated as a “mighty historical tendency” in his argument. In the case of postwar, post-Nazi Germany, the victims of Hitler’s reign of terror will suffer the loss of “the one thing that our powerlessness can grant them: remembrance.”¹⁰² The denial of historical continuity and the collective acknowledgment of shameful past events are the subjects of Adorno’s criticism. Thus “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” has the potential to perpetuate oppression through the fabrication of a biased historical narrative—one that operates to save the national reputation. Adorno utilizes this accusation to make another: the very “collective narcissism” (“national vanity”) bolstered by National Socialism lingers in the human psyche.¹⁰³ Under the guise of “Nationalism,” collective narcissism produced illusions of historical substance.

Collective delusions such as anti-Semitism confirm the pathology of the individual who shows that he is psychologically no longer able to cope with the world, and is thrown back upon a purely illusionary inner kingdom.¹⁰⁴

Adorno’s final argument attests that these mirages are still active and are continually generated. Therefore, the national need to “work through” or “come to terms with” (*Aufarbeitung*) the past cannot occur. In closing Adorno issues a provocative thought:

We will not have come to terms with the past until the causes of what happened then are no longer active. Only because these causes live on does the spell of the past remain, to this very day, unbroken.¹⁰⁵

The “unbroken spell”—a haze over the future of Germany, in this case—was the general condition in Europe after the war ended in 1945. It had inevitably interrupted architectural design practice and sent many premiere architects into battle or exile. Rebuilding destroyed cities and imagining a renewed,

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*: 121.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*: 124.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*: 129.

European identity called for an architectural response that would also be “worked through” in the postwar era. Reprocessing, erasure, repression, and collective narcissism, are key concepts developed by Adorno that can be utilized to read Virilio’s architecture of anti-form and its reception in France during the 1960s.

The notion of reprocessing is most literally interpreted in the architectural expression of the church of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay. The brutal form and monolithic character recall the bunker—a decommissioned infrastructure of the Nazi Empire. Erasure, repression, and collective narcissism are themes associated with the post-war society in France. As Adorno notes: “The fixated attitude of those who don’t want to hear or know anything admittedly finds itself in agreement with a mighty historical tendency.”¹⁰⁶ This tendency, which is specifically delineated for post-war Germany, surfaced in the reactions to Sainte-Bernadette. Though WWII had ended twenty years prior to its construction, the reproduction of Hitler’s military architecture for the design of a sacred building was scandalous. The bunker-church recalled images of war that had been repressed by the nation, and required a re-visitation of painful memories that had not yet been reconciled.

¹⁰⁶ Adorno and Hartman 1986: 117.



3.2



3.3



3.4



3.5



image 3.2: Zyklon B canister (poisonous crystals utilized in gas chambers).

image 3.3: Hair cut after the gas chamber murders.

image 3.4: General exhibition room dedicated to children of Auschwitz.

image 3.5: Prisoner garments and wooden clogs.

image 3.6: Glasses that belonged to people murdered at Auschwitz.

image 3.7: Personal items of Auschwitz victims plundered by the Germans.

image 3.8: Suitcases stolen from deportees to Auschwitz.

image 3.9: Fabric woven from human hair.



3.7



3.8



3.9



3.10

image 3.10: General exhibition, artificial limbs that belonged to deportees.



3.11

image 3.11: *Soup* by Halina Olomucka.



3.12

image 3.12: *Children... children...* by Zinowij Tokaczew.

image 3.13: *Transportation to the gas chamber* by Francis Reisz.

image 3.14: *First steps in the camp* by Halina Olomucka.

image 3.15: *Last kiss* by Halina Olomucka.



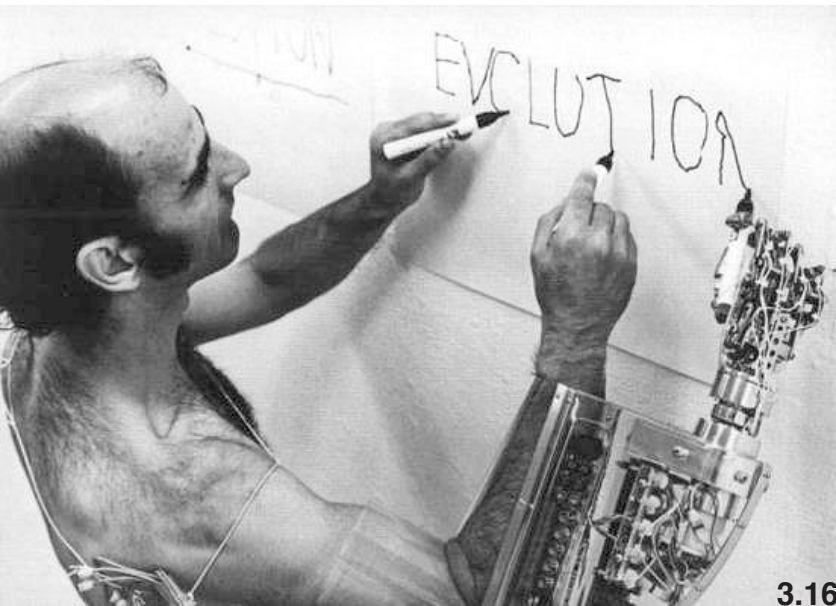
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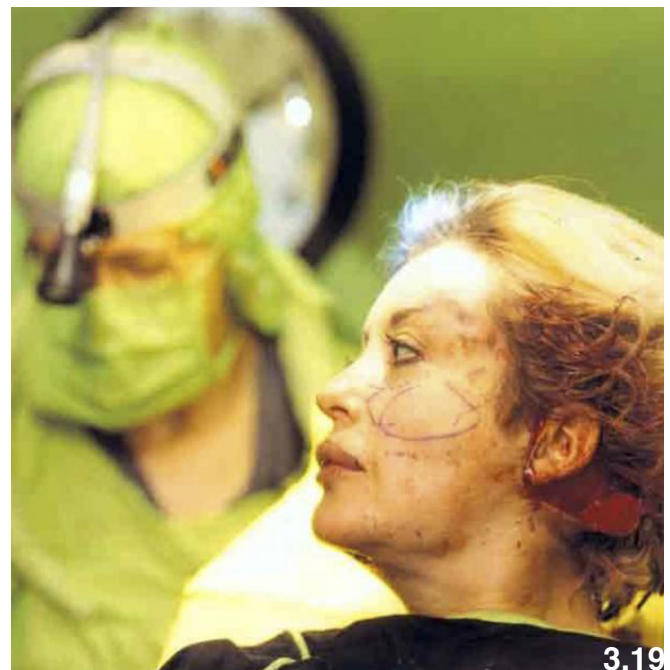
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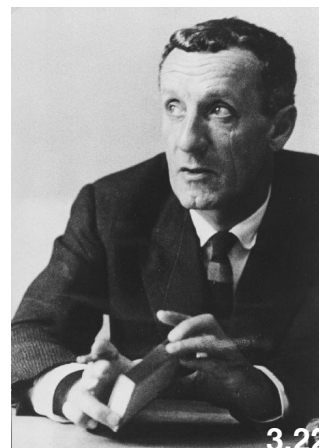
image 3.16: The Third Hand (1980) by Stelarc.

image 3.17: TechnoMorphica (1997) by Stelarc.

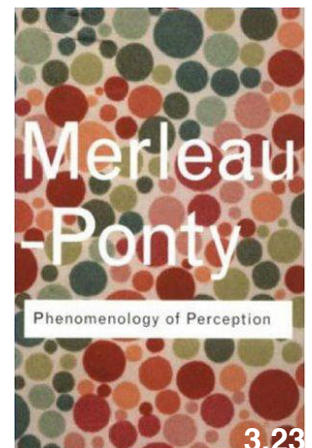
image 3.18: Le Baiser de l'Artiste (1977) by Orlan. The artist created a slot machine out of her body.



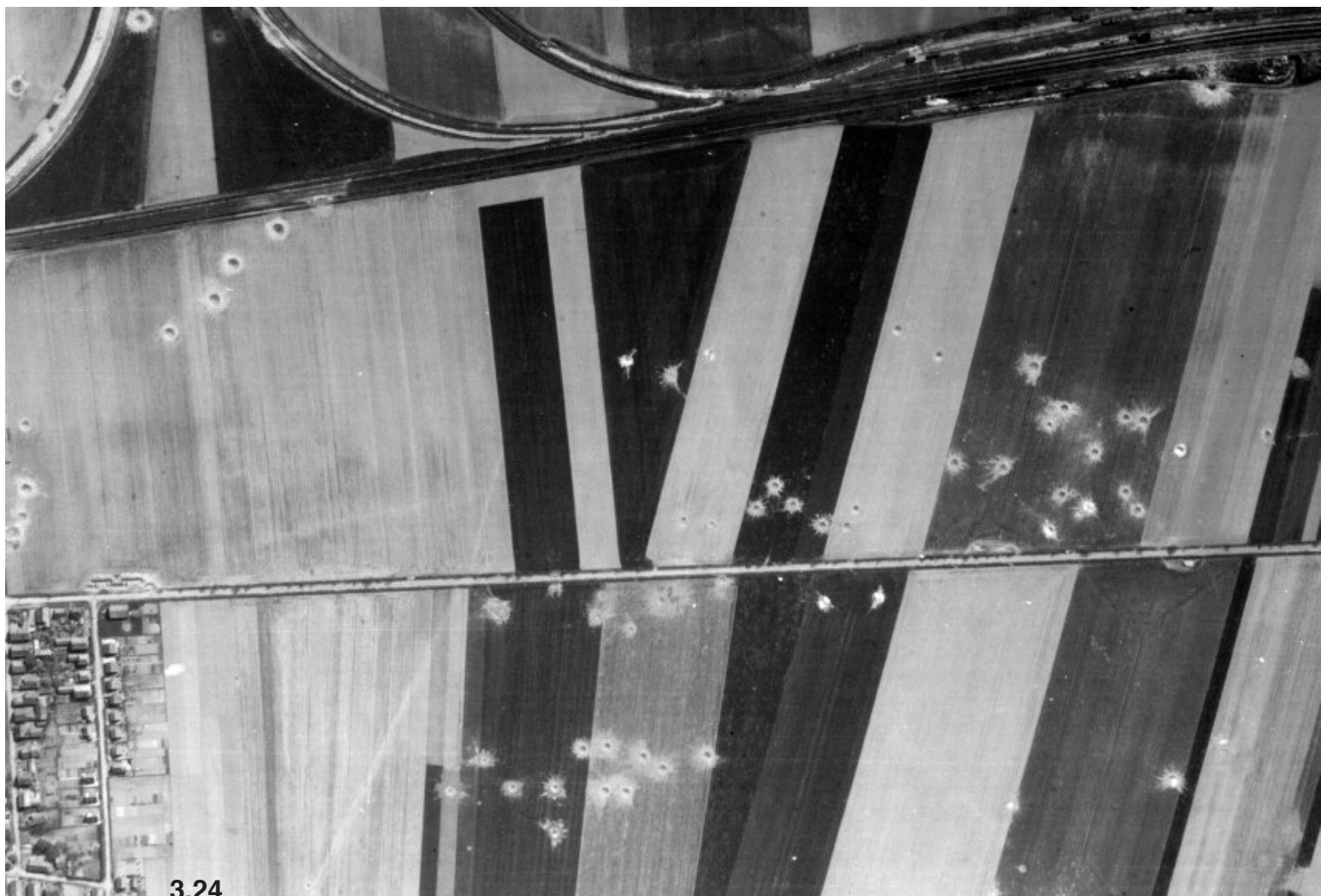
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3.24

- image 3.19:* Orlan documents her plastic surgeries as performance art.
image 3.20: WWII “logistics of perception” (1944).
image 3.21: WWII “logistics of perception” (1944).
image 3.22: Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908 - 1961).
image 3.23: *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945).
image 3.24: Allied bombing of field near Braunschweig, May 1944.
image 3.25: *Magenta, Black, Green on Orange* (1947) by Mark Rothko.
image 3.26: *No. 61* (1953) by Mark Rothko.



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 3.26 >





3.29



image 3.27: Vertical aerial photograph taken during a daylight raid by 872 aircraft on German defensive positions near Calais.

image 3.28: Pollock's "drip" technique.

image 3.29: *Full Fathom Five* (1947) by Jackson Pollock.

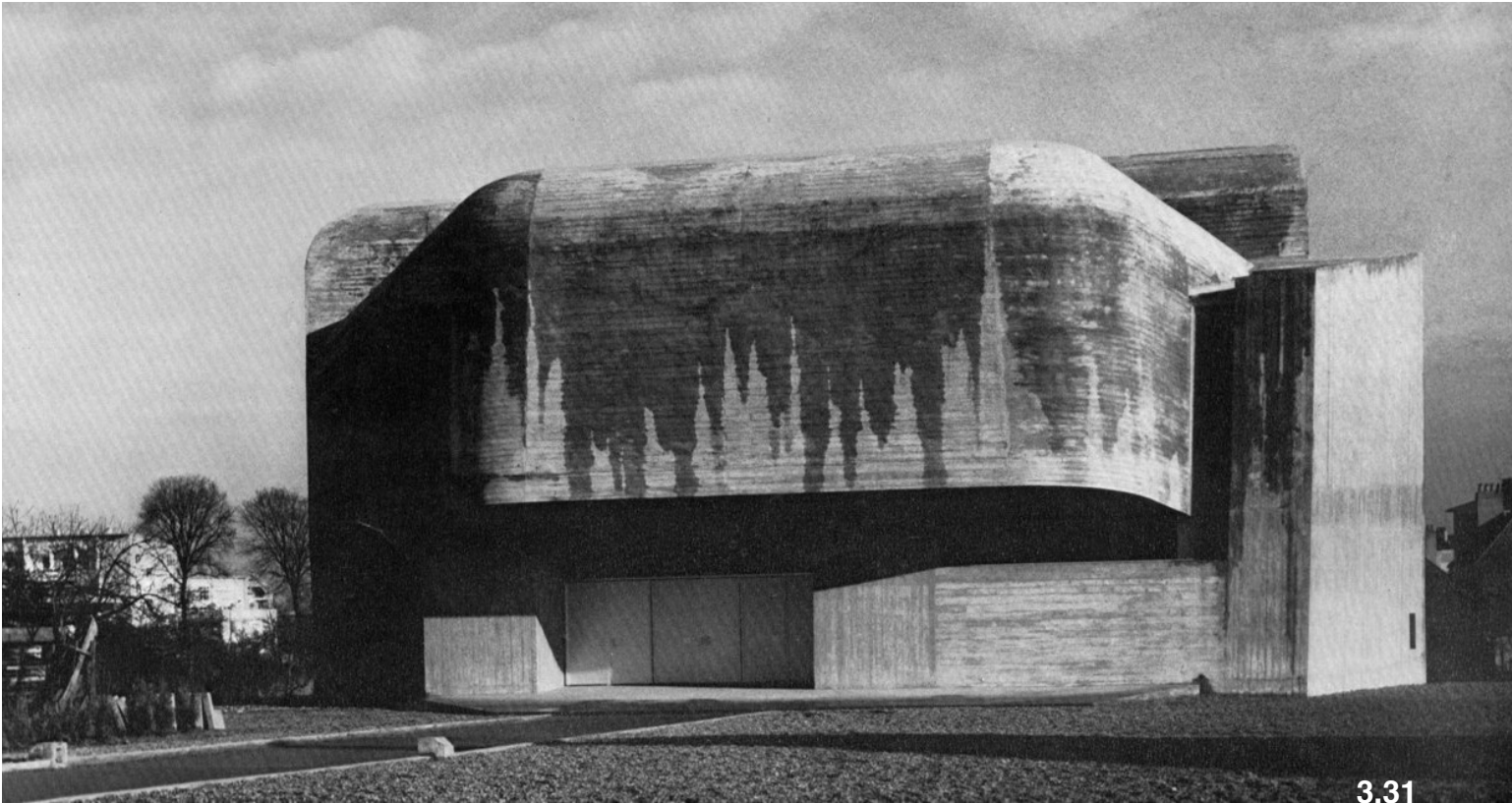
image 3.30: *Lavender Mist: No. 1* (1950) by Jackson Pollock.

image 3.31: *Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay*.

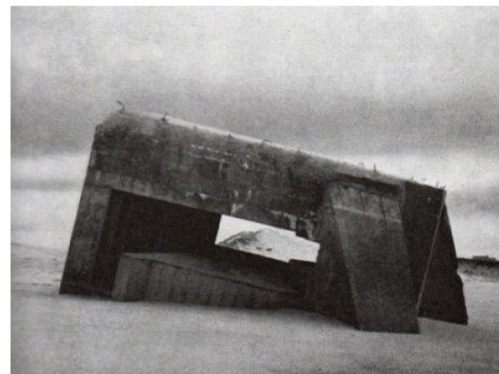
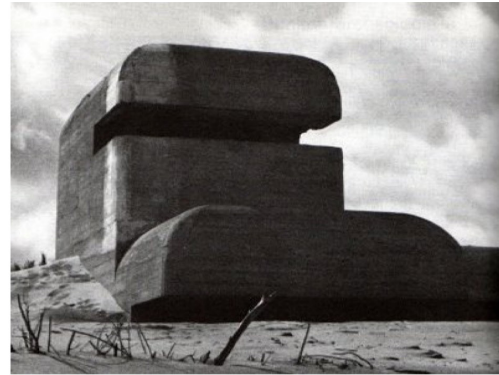
image 3.32: Photographs from Paul Virilio's *Bunker Archeology*.

3.30





3.31
3.32



[4]

4. THE 'ACCIDENT' OF ARCHITECTURE

Virilio's architecture of anti-form: Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay



image 4.0: Postcard image of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay in Nevers.

The relationship between the wide-ranging philosophical and theoretical writings of Virilio and his more limited participation in exhibitions and built works is complex and difficult to elucidate. In part this has to do with the fact that in some cases there was a direct connection to his written and spatial explorations and in others not. Indeed, the book *Unknown Quantity* (2003) was realized as a gallery exhibit that provided viewers with a physical experience of Virilio's aesthetics of the accident, while Virilio's concept for the *Museum of Accidents* does not have a formal architectural component. For Virilio, television is the paradigm for this specific installment. As he explained in a 1994 interview:

television is the actual museum ... I say: a museum of accidents is needed, and the reader imagines a building with accidents inside...this museum already exists, it's television.¹

This statement calls into question Virilio's architectural legacy, which is not particularly robust if one only counts the number of building projects carried to completion. In order to weave Virilio's built work into the study of architectural history and design theory, it is necessary to consider his exploration of anti-form as a pre-cursor to his built work. Virilio and Parent's chapel of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, though not a direct exploration of the "invisible" architecture of the *Museum of Accidents*, can be understood as a similar exposure of accidents and a space for confronting the past through anti-form.

[Image 4.0]

I. THE ARCHITECTURE OF ANTI-FORM

Virilio's design for Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, according to Frédéric Migayrou, "reconstructs a mirror image of modernity's achievement, of a return to its principles".² This was a sobering reality that Virilio unmasked through his archeology of Atlantic Wall bunkers. [Images 1.37 – 1.42] The space of anti-form investigated his perception of reality, which had been compromised due to the ubiquitous strategies of deception and the "carnival of appearances" and disappearances within totalitarian space. Virilio's

¹ Virilio and Wilson 1994.

² Migayrou 2010: 29.

architecture of anti-form is a release from “the cursiveness of a historicization that erases contradictions, obliterates sources, multiplies memory into narratives”³ and, as a result, acts as a direct translation of his humanism into habitable space.

Virilio’s design and theoretical trajectory can be understood as a pursuit of aesthetic and experiential representations of “ruptures” throughout modern history. The discussion of Virilio and Adorno’s manifestos on art after Auschwitz, Virilio’s humanistic convictions regarding the representation of the human body in modern art, and both Adorno and Virilio’s call for a society-wide “coming to terms” deepen the meaning of the “rupture” as it surfaces in the design of Sainte-Bernadette. In particular, Virilio’s contestation of the loss of a sacred regard for the body—“sacred humanism”—in art and architecture is something he perceives as being inextricably linked to the exposure of Auschwitz and WWII totalitarian space, but perpetuated by technology that produces a condition of “accelerated temporality”.

For Virilio, the dehumanizing character of total war and the effects of its aftermath in aesthetic culture resonate with his personal experience of the Second World War. In the second interview in *A Winter’s Journey*, Virilio describes his personal transition from a “voyeur” to an “actor” once WWII had ended. Echoing Adorno’s prescription for postwar Germany, Virilio depicts how it was necessary to “work through” everything he saw in Nantes as a child.⁴ He began to paint still lives, “fixing” the memories of war in his mind “so as to look at them.”⁵ This was a formative period in his early career, though his brief stint as a painter is rarely discussed in current Virilio scholarship. It is apparent that his phenomenological impulses are a product of these exercises, without which he would “never have gone into architecture”.⁶ For Virilio, still life painting was a way of retracing “a carnival of dislocation”, a phrase he has used to describe his perception of the world as he watched the devastation of war. The

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 66.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*: 73.

canvas provided a space for Virilio to reprocess his own dislocation; and he did so through studies of the “between” space of anti-form.

In order to understand the varied influences of his architecture, it is important to briefly describe the time period in which Virilio began painting. Shortly after the end of the war, the dispute between figurative and abstract representation was beginning to polarize the artistic community in France. Virilio admits to having been inspired by 20th century artists such as Picasso, Van Gogh, and Cézanne [*Images* 4.4 – 4.7], as well as Florentine Renaissance artists Piero della Francesca and Paolo Uccello, though he only painted still life compositions. [*Images* 4.2 – 4.3] He claims to have been disenchanted with the Paris School because it “was concerned only with surface effects.”⁷ As he had experienced the unreality of the “surface effects” of his “Potemkin” city of Nantes, Virilio sought to reinstate the opposite; “structure or geometry ... in the physical sense” within the paintings themselves.⁸ While Virilio’s paintings remain unpublished, it is clear from his descriptions that he characterizes his work as abstract, but representative of “the tangible world”. The presence of “a figure”, however, was essential to his compositions. He explains,

...abstraction was real. I could make sense of things only when there was a figure, but I do mean ‘a figure’, not the figurative... It was an effect of the war on my vision of the destroyed, vanished world.⁹

It must be clarified that Virilio’s abstract compositions were not explorations of the figure itself, though as he has articulated, the figure was necessary. For Virilio, the still life genre was an “exercise on the space between objects”.¹⁰ The space generated by the position of figures represented a real space with temporal limitations, not just a two-dimensional void in the composition of the artwork. [*Images* 4.8 – 4.12] This is why Virilio uses the word “interval” to describe this moment in space-time:

⁷ *Ibid.*: 86.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Virilio references the sculptural work of Henry Moore as an example of anti-form. See *Image* 4.4. (*Ibid.*: 68.)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 69.

...this notion of interval, of *entrevaut*, in the sense of what is valid or of value (*vaut*) between (*entre*) things ... it was in fact a philosophical labor.¹¹

The *entrevaut*—the anti-form—maps the movement of the observer through objects within the composition. It represents “the form of the travel or the displacement of the observer”, according to Virilio.¹² Through the process of creating art in this manner, Virilio was actually rerouting his perception from the viewpoint of “someone looking on passively at events” to an “active” body engaged in “making sense of” his experiences.¹³ This was a critical act of resistance, a “paying homage” to the dehumanizing effects of totalitarian space, and “conscientious objection” of the false reality produced by strategies of deception, camouflage, and imminent devastation of the prewar landscape. Leaving behind the era of Nazi reign in France, Virilio explored the anti-form as a means of unmasking the “theater set” of reality in order to believe his eyes once more. [*Images* 1.2 – 1.28]

Virilio activated his own body in order to contemplate the effects of WWII destruction on his perception. This sequence of moving the body first, then engaging intellectual matters, as previously discussed, would come to characterize Virilio’s design process¹⁴ and, consequentially, the function of his architecture. The act of painting, itself a physical labor, was also a means of a hypothetical physical exploration of this “between” space. Having suffered the claustrophobia of the German occupation, Virilio first imagined the conditions of “unoccupied” space by representing them two-dimensionally—anticipating what would be his later archeological explorations of the Atlantic Wall. Through engaging his own body on both plateaus of experience: the physical endeavor of creating images and hypothetically exploring the between space as a three-dimensional landscape, Virilio’s work on the anti-form can be understood as a process of *Aufarbeitung*, Adorno’s definition of “coming to terms with” the past.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: 72.

¹² *Ibid.*: 70

¹³ *Ibid.*: 68.

¹⁴ As outlined in Chapter 2, Virilio’s methodology is inspired by his personal experiences, and follows the general sequence of; 1. Looking at objects or events (voyeurism), 2. Exploring the between space of anti-form (acting), and 3. Isolating the critical moments of perception that occur both through and of reality (determining the “origins of geometry”).

Virilio's *Aufarbeitung*, his process of working through the traumatic memory of war, was integral to developing his unique approach to architectural design, in itself an *aesthetic of exposure*. Through painting and architecture he confronted the silencing of his own body, which he experienced as various forms of entrapment during the occupation of Nantes. For Virilio, the Liberation of France served as the context in which he began to work through the effects of totalitarian space. He exercised this newfound autonomy by physically and intellectually moving through the unoccupied space of the postwar era. His confrontation with the "hydrosphere" and the ruins of the Atlantic Wall infrastructure materialized a condition of anti-form previously explored through painting. While his still life compositions captured instants of *entrevaut*, his bunker archeology allowed him to inhabit the dynamic landscape of "between" space. [*Images* 4.14 – 4.21]

II. RUPTURE IN THE APPREHENSION OF THE REAL

Virilio vividly describes his epiphanic experience of anti-form in the preface of his book *Bunker Archeology* (1994) so as to emphasize the relevance of corporeality in his discovery of architecture. He narrates the journey of his own body moving through the vastness of the open sea, compressed openings, claustrophobic interiors, and upon the incline of the ground plane (which was a result of coastal erosion that shifted the earth beneath several bunkers). His dance of "displacement" throughout these conditions translated into a manifesto for his architecture, which contested the dominant paradigm of Modernism.¹⁵

[*Images* 1.69, 4.22] Virilio identified an alternate "lifestyle" through the potential architecture of the

¹⁵ Virilio and Parent published a counter-manifesto of architecture in the first edition of their *Architecture Principe* journals, in which they maintained: "Those who have been trying for several years now to subject architecture to the purposes of industry, those who standardize, ... who thrash and hound the mass, ... who push architecture towards the uncorrected utilization of mathematical structures and raise these structures to the rank of architecture, ... who try to reduce [architecture] to addition of industrialized objects, ... who rattle on about the human scale, ... who subjugate architecture to the man in his intentions and his dimensions, and see in the notion of 'comfort' the supreme function, the goal, ... who tremble before the risk of the constraint imposed by authentic creation, that they insist that architecture be neutral, indeterminate, in the pursuit of flexibility, mobility, suppleness, adaptability, who push man towards NOMADISM, ... who reckon that architecture and urbanism are not, first and foremost, the work of the architect but rather they are derived from the joint, unanimous study, and without the existence of the creative hierarchy, of multi-disciplinary groups and teams, ... who do not believe in the independent existence of architecture, ... who demand humility from the architect, they BETRAY architecture. We are MOBILIZING against them and herewith declare a state of war." (Parent and Virilio 1966a: 53.)

Atlantic Wall anti-form, that of a “rupture in the apprehension of the real”. Euclidean architecture—mathematically calculated “idealized” geometry—embodied the bourgeois traditions of the Cartesian-inspired Enlightenment, which produced the scientific logic that, he has argued, rationalized such barbaric operations as Auschwitz.¹⁶

Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* resonates with Virilio’s critique. The architectural byproduct of Enlightenment reason had apparently universalized design practice by rejecting the socio-cultural institutions that excluded “good” design from the masses. This non-distinction of class or race reflected the elimination of a natural, “divinely ordained” law, which had previously allowed the feudalistic structuring of community. However, as Adorno and Horkheimer posit, there is a dark side to this novel democratic society. Enlightenment thought became essentially anti-enlightenment, and therefore required a new hierarchy of natural authority. As Brian O’Connor explains in *Adorno* (2012), Adorno and Horkheimer believed the Enlightenment intellectuals’ embrace of scientific reason as a “model of discipline” would devastate the promise of autonomy the Enlightenment was supposed to fulfill.¹⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer argue that “on their way toward modern science human beings have discarded meaning.”¹⁸ Scientific reason had acquired a status that could not be challenged nor critiqued, since any means of evaluation could only be judged according to the structure of logic it might seek to contest. Adorno and Horkheimer call this historical “dialectic” the “self-destruction of enlightenment”, which they argue cultivated a socio-historical resistance of self-reflection.¹⁹ Adorno’s 1959 lecture, given one year after Virilio began his archeological expedition of the Atlantic Wall, called for the post-Auschwitz German society to “come to terms with” offensive memories of the recent past through a process of self-reflection: a critical “mastering of the past”, which opposed Immanuel Kant’s original

¹⁶ Cook 2003

¹⁷ O’Connor 2013: 112-113.

¹⁸ Adorno and Horkheimer 1972: 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*: xiv.

manifesto for Enlightenment thinking: “Enlightenment is humanity’s exodus from its self-imposed immaturity.”²⁰

Virilio came to a similar conclusion as Adorno and Horkheimer through the phenomenology of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, which he utilized to undo the influence of an Enlightenment “exodus” on his perception of reality. In terms of architecture, this meant eliminating “idealized” geometries. Modernity, as Husserl argued, cultivated the “idealizing, spiritual act, one of ‘pure’ thinking ... [which] creates ‘ideal objects’” that are in the end “empty of meaning”.²¹ It is apparent that Virilio and his collaborators were skeptical of “meaningless” geometries during their brief architectural practice. *Architecture Principe’s* declaration of a new urban order countered the Enlightenment rationality, which effectively proliferated the standardization and mass production of architecture in the Modern era. *Architecture Principe’s* proposal for counter-architecture was directly inspired by Virilio’s experience of anti-form along the Atlantic Wall. He writes in the preface of *Bunker Archeology*:

These heavy gray masses with sad angles and no openings—excepting the air inlets and several staggered entrances—brought to light much better than many manifestos the urban and architectural redundancies of this postwar period that had just reconstructed to a tee the destroyed cities. The anti-aircraft blockhouses pointed out another lifestyle, a rupture in the apprehension of the real. The blue sky had once been heavy with the menace of rumbling bombers, spangled too with the deafening explosions of artillery fire. This immediate comparison between the urban habitat and the shelter, between the ordinary apartment building and the abandoned bunkers in the hearts of the ports through which I was traveling, was as strong as a confrontation, a collage of

²⁰ Kant, Immanuel. 1784. “Response to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” Adorno’s lecture “What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?” was given in a similar spirit as Kant’s 1784 address, but with an opposing message calling humanity to endure the psychoanalytic effort to “work through” painful memories. Where scientific rationalization had provided Kant’s “exodus” from “self-imposed immaturity”, for Adorno it had only masked the existence of collective delusion. Adorno depicts the “idiocy” of Kant’s exodus in terms of how the events of the Holocaust were being processed into historical memory at the time, asserting that the “readiness to deny or belittle what happened” was against human nature: “Irrational ... is the widespread ‘settling of accounts’ about guilt, as if Dresden made up for Auschwitz. There is already something inhuman in making such calculations, or in the haste to dispense with self-reflection through counter-accusations. Surely, military actions in time of war ... are not comparable to the organized murder of millions of innocent people. Even their innocence, absolutely simple and plausible, is contested. The enormity of what was perpetrated is the very cause for a self-justifying attack: such things, so a lazy consciousness comforts itself, could not have occurred if the victims had not presented some kind of provocation; and this vague ‘some kind of’ can then flourish wildly ... As for the unspeakable acts of Hitler, those who tolerated his seizing power are made responsible, and not those who cheered him on. The idiocy of all this really does testify to a lack of psychic mastery and an unhealed wound—although the thought of wounds is more appropriate to the victims.” (Adorno and Hartman 1986: 116-117.) Adorno’s warning in this lecture anticipates that of Virilio’s proposal for a *Museum of Accidents*, which responds to an accelerated “lack of psychic mastery” that neglects to acknowledge a global history of ruptures.

²¹ Derrida and Husserl 1978: 169, 179.

two dissimilar realities. The anti-aircraft shelter's spoke to me of men's anguish and the dwellings of the normative systems that constantly reproduce the city, the cities, the urbanistic.²²

This description reveals Virilio's perception of the reality of modern dwelling: a camouflaging of "men's anguish" in the postwar era. He thus views the reconstitution of prewar architecture as a continuation of an Enlightenment ideology and a means to erase the recent past, without working through the effects of total war and conceiving of new architecture that acknowledges totalitarian space. The "rupture in the apprehension of the real" indicates a resistance to this notion of erasure, which both Virilio and Adorno identify as a destructive practice of psychological deception—the repression and oblivion of painful memories of the past. Virilio associates the alternate mode of dwelling within the decommissioned bunker-inspired anti-form with what Adorno calls *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, "mastering the past". Virilio's architecture, as a result, requires an acceptance of this postwar environment through a confrontation with the symbols of an offensive national history and a "paying of homage" to dehumanizing structures of logic, which facilitate the acceleration of accidents. [*Images* 4.23 – 4.25]

Recalling the iconic Nazi infrastructure that so inspired Virilio and *Architecture Principe Groupe*, it is evident that confrontation is a necessary component of the architecture of anti-form. Of the Atlantic Wall, Virilio identifies the controversy the APG faced in adopting the formal language of the bunker for their new architecture:

We [collective postwar France] identified these constructions with their German occupants, as if they had in their retreat forgotten their helmets, badges, here and there along our shores...²³

Virilio had confronted the menacing, offensive forms through his archeology. The bunker embodied the collective memory of the WWII "rupture"—the moment in military history when the remote conduct of warfare, which culminated with the atomic bomb, rendered the stationary barricade of the Atlantic Wall completely useless. A deeper reading of the historical significance of this infrastructure

²² Virilio and Collins 1994: 13.

²³ *Ibid.*

reveals the “self-destructive” thinking as it played out in Hitler’s military strategy. The standardization of the bunker typology—an Enlightenment-driven assumption that the universality of the infrastructure could function along the entire Atlantic littoral—perpetuated the delusion of security within the “roofless” Fortress Europe. [*Images* 4.26, 4.27] The massive deployment of resources and manpower toward the effort of realizing the Atlantic Wall, in the end, contributed to the demise of the infrastructure itself. One could also argue, along with Adorno, that a sense of collective guilt plagued the citizens of the formerly Nazi-occupied territory for having cooperated through the construction of the Atlantic Wall. Within the context of Virilio’s postwar France, the resurfacing of the bunker icon in the architectural work of *Architecture Principe* was shocking. Virilio recounts,

My vision appeared to be countered by that of my contemporaries, and the semireligious character of the beach altars, left for children’s play, was counteracted by resentment. What was the nature of this criticism? We violently rejected the bunkers as symbols rather than logically, with patience: as so many people said, “It is a question of time!” That is what you say of the avant-garde.... What was the nature of the modernness in these historical ruins? Could war be prospective?²⁴

However, for Virilio and *Architecture Principe* the Atlantic Wall was both “prospective” and original. Through his archeology he discovered a kind of agelessness of the bunker; it evoked “cultural memories” of the Egyptians, Etruscans and Aztecs, at the same time resonating with “brutalism” and Le Corbusier’s *béton-brut* aesthetic.²⁵ In contrast, the presence of both ancient and avant-garde qualities was another active dialectic, which Virilio identified in the modern yet “decrepit” state of their abandonment:

This architecture’s modernness was countered by its abandoned, decrepit appearance. These objects had been left behind, and were colorless; their gray cement relief was a silent witness to a warlike climate.²⁶

What, then, was the meaning of “contemporary”? For Virilio, it was as if his archeology of the recent past had projected the future of Modernism. The “reality of Occidental geometry”, Virilio realized,

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

was headed toward a similar state of abandonment.²⁷ His architectural response resists the denial to regard the recent past and the “cultures of adversaries”, however painful it is to face up to their memory. The *Architecture Principe* manifestos boldly declare war against the architects who conformed to modernist ideals. Their utilization of the bunker, and anti-form inspired by Virilio’s archeology, resisted the protestation, “Time must pass before we are able to consider anew these military monuments”, generating accidents of art prior to Virilio’s identification of this concept.²⁸

III. “ORIGINAL” GEOMETRY & ‘PRIMACY OF PERCEPTION’

Virilio’s design for Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay imitates the architecture of Nazi military infrastructure. Ironically, Virilio utilizes the form of the bunker as he experienced its state of abandonment in order to contest “the reality of Occidental geometry” and the architectural expression of what he perceives to be a true culture of adversaries. At the time of his archeology and architectural practice, Virilio was highly invested in his explorations of anti-form but fascinated with the military monument of the Atlantic Wall. Two of the greatest influences on his architecture—“between” space and the bunker—one could argue, were in contest as he began his work with the *Architecture Principe*. Anti-form was Virilio’s personal exercise through which the effects of totalitarian space on his perception of the real world were undone, and the bunker was the icon of the Nazi occupation through which he learned that he could not “believe his eyes” during the war in Nantes. The Atlantic Wall defensive infrastructure was also somewhat of a mystery during the occupation. Virilio had not seen the ocean or the coastal fortifications for himself, and had only known of these structures through the propaganda media of both Allied and Axis origin. [Images 1.29 – 1.35] His accommodation of both anti-form and bunker in the design of Sainte-Bernadette must be considered in light of their contradictory qualities; Virilio sets the two in conflict in

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*: 14.

order to expose an accident of art, which as Armitage defines, “questions traditional discourses and demands that all that was prior to it be retheorized”.²⁹

Virilio’s search for “original geometry”, in particular, requires further explication in order to ground his theory of perception and anti-form in an interpretation of an actual architectural space. In one of his latest books *Open Sky* (2007) Virilio references Edmund Husserl’s *The Origin of Geometry*, which as David Cook argues, offers insight to Virilio’s primary assumptions concerning the phenomenological conception of anti-form.³⁰ [Image 4.28] Husserl advocates that geometrical origins should not be determined through mathematical calculation, but through a process of “reactivating the original activities contained within its (geometry’s) fundamental concepts”.³¹ For Husserl (and Virilio) a reactivation of “original activities” requires a resistance to a world given over to the “idealizing, spiritual act, one of ‘pure’ thinking ... [which] creates ‘ideal objects’”.³² These “idealized” objects are cut off from an experience of the “original” world in their conception and are, as Husserl argues, “empty of meaning”.³³ Virilio’s pursuit of this “original” world through anti-form established the basis for his phenomenology of perception, or as he explains, “the phenomenology of figures, the origin of geometry, this is my territory”.³⁴

Anti-form provided a space for Virilio to seek out the original world through the *primacy* and *phenomenology of perception*. His early reference to Martin Heidegger in *Bunker Archeology*, indicates that he was influenced by the kind of phenomenology that challenged the implications of technological advancement on the meaningfulness of the “obvious” world.³⁵ As a result of the world “turning away”

²⁹ Armitage 2013: 172.

³⁰ Cook 2003.

³¹ Derrida and Husserl 1978: 169.

³² *Ibid.*: 179.

³³ *Ibid.*: 169.

³⁴ Virilio and Degener 2005: 16.

³⁵ Virilio quotes Martin Heidegger in the opening of his first major publication, *Bunker Archeology*: “The combat designed here is an originating one, for this combat brings forth combatants as such, not simply the assault given to a subsistent thing. Combat is that which first of all draws up and develops the unheard of, up to then unsaid and unthought. The combat is then underpinned by those who strive: poets, thinkers, statesmen. When the combat ceases, that which is does not disappear, but the world turns away.” (Heidegger 1955)

after the “combat ceased”, the struggle of the “poets, thinkers, [and] statesmen” is in vain.³⁶ What remains in the aftermath Virilio takes up as a “battlefield” of vision, in which, as he states, “the movement of our culture towards nothingness and disappearance is concealed in the obvious”.³⁷ [*Images* 4.29, 4.30] In seeking out this original world, Virilio exhibits nostalgia for a kind of “primordial geometry” that contains “a sense of space and time as lived experience or social practice”, which was lost in pursuit of “ideal objects”.³⁸ As he describes in *L'insécurité du territoire*:

And, in effect, our civilization begins at the moment where the Greeks exhumed geometry from their ethnological field, where they tear it from social practice in distinguishing the properties of forms of dimensions from their representations. They did not invent geometry, but the ecological utopia (the no place of the science of place!). In making it independent of the places and times of societies, they made of a geometry a power in itself, that which these societies would have to imagine for themselves in recreating with their relations to space their relations to nature, and it is this type of liberating conviction that animates all ancient thought right up to their impossible mathematics.³⁹

After Archimedes, who Virilio considers the last creative geometer in Western tradition, we can no longer grasp an “ideal of a world essentially common as a proto-foundation of the forming of sense [sens]”.⁴⁰ Virilio argues that in order to return to this condition of a primordial geometry, both the original experience of space and the original means of perceiving and thinking of space are required. It is obvious that Virilio is extremely critical of our current modes of perception. He assumes everything we see or experience is unoriginal and reprocessed; Virilio explains:

Our contemporary situation is the inverse of that of the primitive. It has to make its path in the midst of the proliferation of references, rules and orders. That is why the process of organizing perception seems to me so little suitable to the period. An actualization of perception ought to be at work in the composition of the immediate image: to see should not be constantly to re-see. Today we are no longer truly *see-ers* [voyants] but already *resee-ers* [revoyants], the tautological repetition of the same, at work in our mode of production (industrial) is at work equally in our mode of perception.⁴¹

³⁶ As in Heidegger’s notion of combat: “that which first of all draws up and develops the unheard of, up to then unsaid and unthought...” (Heidegger 1955)

³⁷ Virilio and Degener 2005: 38.

³⁸ Cook 2003.

³⁹ Virilio 1976: 118.

⁴⁰ Virilio utilizes the French word “sens” to reference back to Husserl’s *The Origin of Geometry*. (Virilio 1976: 118.) Sens embodies the five senses and “the direction or movement implicit in geometry”. (Cook 2003.)

⁴¹ Virilio and Degener 2005: 31.

As with his mentor, Merleau-Ponty, Virilio is preoccupied with the “visible and invisible.” In order to understand this, the immediate image requires “unmasking”.⁴² The visible world invades one’s perception; this vision of the obvious is a camouflage of the real. In pursuit of true vision, Virilio says of his work: “I then became a specialist in tropes as I had given myself the goal of rendering the visible the invisible”.⁴³ In order to unmask the obvious such as the bunker imagery of Sainte-Bernadette, we must place our perception within the interval of space-time created by the architectural object. In doing so, we “experience perception”. An excerpt from Merleau-Ponty’s *Primacy of Perception*, illustrates Virilio’s approach:

...the experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us; that perception is a nascent logos; that it teaches us, outside all dogmatism, the true conditions of objectivity itself; that it summons us to the tasks of knowledge and action. It is not a question of reducing human knowledge to sensation, but of assisting at the birth of this knowledge, to make it as sensible as the sensible, to recover the consciousness of rationality.⁴⁴

Merleau-Ponty asserts that an “experience of perception” is required to “recover the consciousness of rationality”, not simply to eliminate rationality altogether. Virilio, in his outspoken rejection of Enlightenment thinking and influence, could be misunderstood as desiring the total annihilation of “rationality”. This is not the case, however, it is evident that Virilio’s work seeks to subvert a total reliance on pure “rationality” and develop what Merleau-Ponty considers a “consciousness” of it. In doing so through architecture, Virilio incorporates both the “obvious” imagery associated with the object of his critique and the choreography of the anti-form. The act of engaging the “nascent logos” of perception exposes potential other readings through between space: the oppressive formal language of the bunker, which conveys fear of mortality, facilitates the activity of a religious

⁴² For Virilio the art of “unmasking” is actually a “voluntary blindness” that exposes the true process of vision. In *Negative Horizon*, Virilio describes: “This way of visually feeling the parametric limits of things was comparable enough to a second Braille method, there was a part of voluntary blindness in my way of seeing, I was suddenly persuaded that vision gave less to see, that it was above all a process of occultation, a very ancient process where the old custom of referencing fashioned the everyday image, something chose for me the figure that I contemplated; ‘One sees well only that which one has already in one’s own head...’, this maxim confirmed for me the clandestine will at work in the most ordinary vision, it made me indignant as well, me for whom vision consisted precisely to discover, to constantly unmask...” (*Ibid.*: 28-29.)

⁴³ *Ibid.*: 25.

⁴⁴ Merleau-Ponty 1964: 25.

celebration of incarnation, for example. Architecture becomes a medium for Virilio's "conscientious objection" in asserting that what we *resee* is not what it seems. Again, in descriptions of the anti-form of military space, Virilio illustrates how *seeing* is possible:

Suddenly, before me, new objects appeared, bizarre figures cut out, notched, a set of articulations has become suddenly visible and these observed objects were no longer banal, whatever, insignificant; they were on the contrary diversified in the extreme. They were everywhere, all space, all the world was filled with new forms. They were nested in the hollows of the least forms. It was like an unknown vegetation that grew around me. Industrial objects without value provoked the appearance of objects temporarily given a great complexity. The position of things triggered new exotic forms, forms that escaped us despite their evidence. Accustomed as we were to trivial geometries, we perceive perfectly the circle, the sphere, the cube or the square, we perceive infinitely less well intervals, the interstices between things, between people.⁴⁵

Virilio's architecture imitates these "new exotic forms" through the perception of anti-form—the "interstices" between building components and other bodies within the space. The formal expression, Virilio argues, cannot promise this dynamic experience without reinforcing the body's subjectivity. This principle is derived and sustained through his inspiration from *Gestalt* theory and Merleau-Ponty's *phenomenology of perception*. [Images 4.31, 4.32] Merleau-Ponty, in particular, furnished Virilio's emphasis of the interval in his architecture. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty claims, "The thing, and the world, are given to me along with the parts of my body, not by any 'natural geometry', but in a living connection comparable, or rather identical, with that existing between the parts of my body itself."⁴⁶ Through the architectural manifestation of anti-form Virilio establishes the body as the center point of perception. This is his resistance to totalitarian space (subjectivity disconnected from the body as a result of industrial modes of production) and conscientious objection to "trivial geometries".

⁴⁵ Virilio and Degener 2005: 18-19.

⁴⁶ Merleau-Ponty 1962: 237.

V. SOB: 'SAVE OUR BODIES'

Recalling Virilio's description of "conscientious objection", an application of this principle to his architecture must imply "a hiatus between real perception—one's eyes—and the conception of the real."⁴⁷

This architectural moment cannot be, as Virilio suggests, perceived "through one's eyes, but through a delayed process of thought."⁴⁸ It has been emphasized throughout this study, that the principle means of "delaying the process of thought", for Virilio, has meant activating the body and the sensory experience of anti-form. As Virilio mentioned in a 2008 interview:

The body—corporeality—was always our principle point of resistance, and in many ways it still should be. As I used to say, when the titanic sank we invented SOS—Save Our Souls (and I remind you that as a Christian I have nothing against souls). But now we need SOB—Save Our Bodies.⁴⁹

The "saving of bodies" (SOB) involves bringing them out of a condition of silence—a condition of voyeurism—into one of activation, movement, and anti-form. Anti-form has obvious physical implications for Virilio, which he developed to contest the Modernist Euclidian architectural paradigm of the box (an "idealized geometry") during his brief occupation as an architectural consultant with Claude Parent in the 1960s. [Image 4.33] Virilio's collaboration with *Architecture Principe Groupe*, as a result, facilitated the creative exploration of a new architectural order based on "the possibility of a topological ... or ... a non-orthogonal architectonics".⁵⁰ APG responded to the bourgeois figure of the *le modulator* with the *oblique function*. The human body, when taken out of Le Corbusier's modular box (based on rigid mathematical proportions of a universal body at rest) and placed onto an inclined plane is exposed to the resistant and propellant forces of gravity and must become kinetic to re-stabilize. Nietzsche's dancer replaced *le modulator* as APG's model figure for the configuration of architectural space, thus conceptually

⁴⁷ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 22-23.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Tappan and Andrianopoulos 2008: 34.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

bringing the body out of a static position and into a dynamic field of perception. [*Images* 1.69 – 1.72, 4.22]

The relation to the physical body, to incarnation is crucial. The architecture is architecture of the body. It is not architecture of the soul. Architecture, statics and strength of the materials are linked to seriousness and gravity, not only of the foundations, of the architectural balance of the building, but also to man, and to women on the move. Hence the choreographic dimension. The oblique function is choreographic.... The rhythms of the body are for me an extraordinary language. For us, the oblique function was this relation to gravity. Architecture is the moving of bodies.⁵¹

The architectural box, the architecture of walls and built volumes that Virilio calls the “architecture of fullness”, could not facilitate the activity of APG’s dancer; therefore Virilio’s anti-form became a choreographed “architecture of emptiness” in which the importance of formal architectural components—walls, windows, and even furniture—was minimized against the prioritization of the floor, the “living ground”.⁵² The floor, Virilio asserts, “is always overlooked ... it is only seen as something you put your feet on.”⁵³ This point of contact with the body, however, established the *oblique function* not, as Virilio points out, “to amuse oneself” by making “blobs” or fetishizing the formal qualities of topological space, but to relate to man physically.⁵⁴ [*Images* 4.14 – 4.21] He elaborates,

It (the oblique) is there while you're ascending on an inclined surface; while descending; while traversing. And each favors what we could call dancing. Architecture in this sense becomes choreographic. Its value comes only from the fact that it engages the body in the same way that the great staircases of Palladio engage the body. Somehow *that* is architecture.⁵⁵

Furthermore, Virilio maintains that the *oblique* is defined by the body’s engagement:

It is an architecture of the body. Not simply of the eyes and the ears but of the whole body. And as such it is an architecture of gravity, of heaviness. It is a way to put man in motion in a harmonious manner. A Euclidean architecture that takes no notice of the body and its displacement in space is not architecture but simply a game, a gadget.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Brayer and Virilio 2010: 24.

⁵² *Ibid.*: 88.

⁵³ Tappan and Andrianopoulos 2008: 33.

⁵⁴ Virilio distinguishes oblique forms (the fetishizing of topological space and “blobs”) and oblique space: “Remember that the horizontal forms a part of the ground line. In the oblique function, the incline is variable first of all, but the incline and the horizontal work together. The threshold of recovery is the restoration of the body so that it can bifurcate. In the oblique planes I see, there are not really oblique surfaces that you can cross, that take the body into account. The choreography that we wanted ... has been forgotten in favor of the oblique forms.” (Brayer and Virilio 2010: 26.)

⁵⁵ Tappan and Andrianopoulos 2008: 33.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

The disappearance of the familiar architectural symbols of Euclidean space was re-appropriated by APG as an undulating “non-orthogonal” system of architectonics applied to their visionary projects both at the urban scale as well as that of individual buildings and dwellings. The mobilization of the body-subject within this new architectural order of the *oblique* imitated Virilio’s own transition from “voyeur” to “actor” within the unoccupied military space of WWII.

VI. SAINTE-BERNADETTE DU BANLAY, A COLLISION OF HEAVEN ON EARTH

The church of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay embodies Virilio’s “sacred humanism” through the architecture of anti-form. His humanistic principles are carried out through aesthetics of exposure, which involve the unmasking of painful memories and forcing a “rupture in the apprehension of the real”. The architectural manifestation of this rupture subverts modernist design principles, which, for Virilio and Parent, meant returning to the origins of architecture—the origins of perception. Designed to honor Sainte-Bernadette, who sought refuge in the “original” architecture of a cave, the chapel was an ideal project for the *Architecture Principe’s* testing of the oblique function. In their article on sacred architecture, also referred to by the group as “architecture of transfer”, Virilio and Parent explain their return to the original geometry of the crypt and its potential for supporting life on the oblique:

We go from the traditional orthogonal geometry of regulated surfaces (the Euclidean space, the sphere, the cylinder, the cube, the parallelepiped) to the topology of oriented surfaces ... architecture emerged from the crypt through the wall, the colonnade, the vault and the arch.⁵⁷

Virilio relates the bunker to the funerary archetype of the crypt and the cave. The story of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay involves its genesis from an integral accident related to both Virilio’s own experience of WWII and an *unknown quantity* of potential destruction from a collision of “heaven on earth”. The between space of anti-form in the design of Sainte-Bernadette interrogates perception after the “sky’s arrival in war” in the approach to the building from the heavens. It also engages

⁵⁷ Parent and Virilio 1966b

Enlightenment discourse in its controversial re-contextualization of the bunker—a rationalized form of defense that failed, one could argue, due to “pure thinking”—as a religious space.

VII. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Virilio’s introduction to architecture was a result of violent endings: *blitzkrieg*, aerial bombardment, and the dereliction of the built environment of war. The obliteration of urban developments and landscapes during WWII imposed a version of the modernist *tabula rasa*, which Virilio concluded was not solely due to the erasure of the physical realm but also to the devastation of perception and memory.⁵⁸ [Images 4.29, 4.30, 4.39, 1.3 – 1.19] These forms of destruction were largely a result of “the sky’s arrival in war” and the corresponding technological objects that inspired new artistic modes of production. Aerial photography, initially developed for military surveillance, simultaneously produced the “accident” of bombing the ground below. It was also linked to forms of artistic abstraction that mask the necessity, Virilio says, of “paying homage to” the dehumanizing structures of art criticism and assessment. [Images 3.24 – 3.30] Inversely, Virilio’s brief architectural career produced a violent beginning with the commission of the church of Saint-Bernadette du Banlay in Nevers, France. The church, designed from 1963-66 in collaboration with Claude Parent and the *Architecture Principe Groupe*, borrows the architectural language of Nazi military architecture and resembles the form of the bunker. This re-appropriation of the bunker typology for a sacred space, nearly twenty years after the end of WWII, as Frédéric Migayrou explains, “rather violently opened the Pandora’s Box of a still troubled and obscure collective memory”, while exposing “a certain malaise concerning the issue of responsibility.”⁵⁹

Postwar French society, as Virilio remembers, was divided by efforts of collaboration and resistance. [Images 4.41 – 4.42] Virilio describes the wartime experience in France as a time of division, where citizens either resisted or collaborated with the German occupation. Those who sided with the

⁵⁸ Migayrou 2010: 31.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: 28.

Vichy regime were collaborators. Virilio and his family sided with the resistance in Nantes, which was proximate to the ocean on the literal edge of Axis and Allied territory. This era coincided with the revolution of sacred art and the Vatican II Council, which sought “to reconcile the church with modernity”.⁶⁰ The Sacred Art movement encouraged the resistance of traditional architectural references and classical forms that could have referenced past sins of the Catholic Church. As a result architecture and its iconography of became a subject of experimentation, which produced a number of “imposing” church buildings that represented a message of reconciliation as well as a “new formal liberty, a sobriety and a brutalism intended to reaffirm proximity to the origins of faith”.⁶¹ [*Images* 4.40, 1.43 – 1.45, 1.47, 1.49, 1.51 – 1.57] The notion of returning to “origins” resonated with Virilio and Parent’s architectural ambitions. In condemning “neo-styles”—the “backward notion of misunderstood poverty”—the *Architecture Principe* prioritized “the ontological principle of a new architecture”.⁶² The “new” architectural principles centered around the notion of exposing, as Migayrou explains, “the source idea of inscription”, which embodies man’s “most immediate relation to space and time”.⁶³

The violent beginning of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay can be summarized in the words of the bishop who blessed the building: “How horrible!”⁶⁴ Father Bourgoïn, the priest who oversaw the design and completion of the church, responded: “Monsignor, it is a consecration, not an exorcism!”⁶⁵ The “repulsive” nature of the architecture, Virilio says, “conveys things that are beyond us”.⁶⁶ The *unknown quantity* of probable annihilation was one of those things in 1962. This was the year of the Cuban missile

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*: 29.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*: 31.

⁶³ *Ibid.*: 28.

⁶⁴ Claude Parent recalls the resistance to their design of the church: “It raised every possible abuse, but now it is appreciated. I went to a mass there just before the holiday; it was the anniversary of the death of the priest who helped us to make it come true, against his hierarchy. We had everyone against us, people from the town, people from the church, no one wanted it—until this priest, who was to become the abbot of the parish, in a poor area of Nevers, understood what we were getting at.” (Parent 2012)

⁶⁵ Brayer and Virilio 2010: 24.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

crisis, “when the threat to humanity was the greatest there every was.”⁶⁷ Virilio’s bunker church in Nevers is, in his own words, “a memorial to a tragic time of History”.⁶⁸ It was a period lacking architectural references, which is why the funerary archetype of the bunker and the atomic shelter seemed appropriate to the *Architecture Principe*. Virilio elaborates,

The problem with a church is not simply a problem of a cruciform plan or of a bell-tower, but the fact that we were living in a period without references. Atomic shelters were being constructed everywhere. Numerous films were shot about that at the time. The equilibrium of terror cannot leave us indifferent.... We were not looking for success. We were in a historical and symbolic logic.⁶⁹

The “historical and symbolic logic” of the bunker served as a reminder of the past and encapsulated the global fear of the present.

VIII. CONFLICT SPACE

It is important to briefly mention the site of this building in terms of the relative military geography of WWII France and its intersection with Virilio’s explorations of anti-form. There is a parallel situation of a major boundary and resulting conflict space in Nantes and Nevers. [*Images* 4.41 – 4.42] The Atlantic Wall might be considered the most intense physical endeavor to divide and enforce a boundary during the WWII. The demarcation line, though it lacked the infrastructural heft of the Atlantic Wall, was perhaps a more significant division in terms of separating the citizens of France. Life was very different on each side of this barrier during the war, and sentiments of guilt and blame did not disappear after the Liberation. Virilio’s church makes a bold statement in suggesting that this boundary, this invisible line dividing territory, needed a bunker. Even more intriguing is the fact that Virilio intended the church of

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*: 20.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Sainte-Bernadette to be a place of healing, remembrance, and conflict resolution—a place to confront the past and face up to the unknown quantity of future war.⁷⁰

IX. LOVING THE ENEMY

While there have been several readings on the symbolism of the Nevers church, this study concerns that of “between” space—anti-form as delineated earlier in this chapter. This applies to the physical dimension of the building experience and the intended psychological transition symbolized in the passage from exterior to interior. Integral to this discussion of an architecture of “transfer” is a subtler notion of embracing the “culture of adversaries”, which harkens back to Virilio’s bunker archeology and his answer to skeptics who questioned his interest in aggressive military architecture:

I would ask if people still had the opportunity to study other cultures, including the culture of adversaries—if there were any Jewish Egyptologists.⁷¹

For Virilio, the film *Hiroshima mon amour* (Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras, 1959) perfectly captured the idea of overcoming prejudices associated with conduct of cooperation or resistance during the war and “hatred of the enemy at least equal to that which the enemy had for us”.⁷² [*Images* 4.43, 4.44] The film was also significant for its utilization of aerial footage over the Ota river estuary, which as Virilio remarks, “represented a very distinct break [with the past]”.⁷³ [*Images* 4.5 – 4.48] The non-linear

⁷⁰ The year of 1962, when Virilio began conceptualizing the design of the church, was the year of the Cuban missile crisis. As Virilio describes, 1962 was “the year when the threat to humanity was the greatest there ever was.” He quotes Arthur M. Schlesinger, President Kennedy’s assistant, who said, “The case of the Cuban missile crisis was not only the hottest period of the Cold War but the hottest in the history of mankind.” The unknown quantity of potential disaster, Virilio argues, was due to the reality that “someone could have pushed the button, given the seriousness of installing nuclear missiles in Cuba”. The bunker was a vestige of the past and, at the same time, a reference to the atomic shelter. (Brayer and Virilio 2010: 18.)

⁷¹ Virilio and Collins 1994: 14.

⁷² *Ibid.*: 19. *Hiroshima mon amour* chronicles a series of conversations between two former lovers: a French actress (Emmanuelle Riva) and a Japanese architect (Eiji Okada). Memory and forgetfulness are two primary themes in the film, which surface in the nature of their conversations (“She” controls most of the narration, while “He” accuses her of fabricating the truth and interrupts with the famous line “You are not endowed with memory.”). The lovers’ failing relationship is juxtaposed with the bombing of Hiroshima and the perceptions of the “accident” from those who experienced it firsthand and those outside of it. The film makes reference to the past through the use of flashbacks (a technique of non-linear storyline characteristic of the French New Wave style) of “Her” life: Riva’s character spent her youth in Nazi-occupied Nevers (ironically, the location of Virilio’s church and the former home of Sainte-Bernadette) where she was shamed for having a love affair with a German soldier.

⁷³ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 90.

narrative of a love affair between “enemies” juxtaposed with insider and outsider perspectives of the Hiroshima bombings and aerial surveillance brought together several essential elements. Virilio explains:

For once... one had an aerial vision of what one had experienced on the ground.... This Japanese man and French women finding each other expressed the ambiguity of what we'd lived through during the war: it was the metaphor of mythical figures; it wasn't a private vision but a historical one that lent a whole period its identity.... For me it was something self-evident that enabled me to be reconciled with myself—with my equivalent view of the world.⁷⁴

In suggesting the need for reconciliation, Virilio invokes the biblical imagery of loving the enemy, which weighs heavily on his interpretation of the architecture of Sainte-Bernadette. The issues of forgiveness and mercy were most important in the postwar message of the Catholic Church. The Council of Vatican II was held in 1962 with Pope John XII, whom Virilio remembers was a “man of the people and not a great theologian”.⁷⁵ The image of Christ broadcast by Vatican II was “a God of mercy, a savior God and not a judge God”.⁷⁶ Virilio tributes his own conversion to this idea of a “God of mercy” instead of a “God of war”, which, as he explains, led him “to the idea of the heart and the Sacred-Heart in Sainte-Bernadette”.⁷⁷

X. ANTI-FORM AND ACCIDENT

The “Sacred-Heart” of the church building is also inspired by an accident. The primary architectural anti-form of the church concerns the habitable and perceived interval between the sky and ground and the merging of the hypothetical spatial result of “heaven on earth.” This is most deliberately exhibited in aerial views of the building and the incline of the ground plane, which were designed to influence both the perception of the human body from the ground and from the aerial zenith. The consequence of the experience of anti-form from both positions is *sensitization*; the oblique space brings the body out of a state of “indifference”, and the projection of the “Sacred-Heart” towards the sky represents the presence

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*: 91.

⁷⁵ Brayer and Virilio 2010: 20.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

of human life on the ground. An original accident inspired the design of Sainte-Bernadette, and the architecture of the building itself embodied an “accident of art” or, as this thesis asserts, an *accident of architecture*.

As he and Parent were drawing up concepts for the project, Virilio was searching for conditions of “heaven on earth” to honor Sainte-Bernadette Soubirous. [Image 4.49] As a young girl, Bernadette would retreat to the cave-grotto in Massabielle near Lourdes, France, where she had several visions of the “Immaculate Conception”. The cave-grotto, which Virilio relates to the archetype of the bunker, was a protective space where Bernadette experienced these divine apparitions. Of her sanctuary, Bernadette is recorded saying, “I came here to hide. The cave was my heaven on earth.” While the cave-grotto metaphor can certainly be read in the monolithic form and dark, sober interior of the church—an *expected* place of communion with the divine—Virilio offers the notion of a heaven-on-earth as an *unexpected* “collision”, resolving the site as an experience of anti-form merging the sky with the ground. In conceptualizing the project, Virilio referenced a relevant example of an alternate heaven-on-earth moment; plane crashes and bombardment—accidents that produced the state of terror and anticipation of atomic war at the time. [Images 1.3 – 1.19, 2.0, 2.21, 2.23] Virilio explains,

This Blitzkrieg came to die in the inertia of the concrete monolith, which served no purpose, except for some blockhouses on the (Allied) landing beaches. When working on Nevers, I knew that I was looking for shapes in which heaven and earth met. I then thought of airplane crashes in which the aerial shape met with the ground. I made drawings of these forms of collisions of an aerial shape of a cloud, of a plane, with the ground. And it was usually inclined.⁷⁸

This passage brings several important readings of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay to the surface: First, the *death of inertia* embodied in the bunker; second, the perception of the *merging of sky and ground*; and third, *reconciliation through oblique space* as a result of this collision. The church is a simultaneous expression of Virilio’s wartime education and the “prospective” architecture he discovered in the abandoned bunker.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*: 22.

The bunker, the collision of “heaven on earth”, and the oblique function, while exposing the archeology of Virilio’s discovery of architecture, construct the environment within which the anticipation of genuine memories—what he would later identify as “mother memories”—is present.⁷⁹ As Migayrou identifies, the bunker is “re-contextualized” to function as a “critical instrument of the collective memory”.⁸⁰ Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay is a complex, cryptic, expression of shelter that facilitates confrontation with the controversial past through the imagery of war while engaging the body in a critical spatial “participation”. This architecture transforms static bodies into “alert bodies”⁸¹ and, as Parent states, “conditions man, [and] calls upon him to change his behavior, his way of fitting into his environment against static forces and mental laziness”.⁸² Furthermore, as Parent explains, this “architecture of transfer” is communicative of the body’s mobile potential and architecture’s potential to function as something other than just a container:

The transfer can only take place on the condition of obtaining conscious participation in the architecture. Therefore, we must sensitize man; make him receptive by making architecture’s ‘potentiality’ obvious. The oblique function is the only way of incorporating this potential, making it palpable to man.⁸³

The oblique space of anti-form as a result of the collision of “heaven on earth” and as conceptualized for the church of Sainte-Bernadette, brings the user out of “indifference” into the “circulatory habitat”. Virilio explains:

In the dwelling habitat, man’s action had to compensate for the indifference of the interior space; in the circulatory habitat, man is put into action by the place that contains him.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Virilio describes the need for access to “mother memories” in an interview: “I’m sure that the acceleration of history has already given way to the acceleration of reality and that this brings memory back into question. History was the memory of the world. Now, accelerated reality will demand—is already demanding—a mother memory. A genuine memory, but a memory different from that of computer disks or CD-ROMS. A memory different from that of the book alone or the screen image alone. I can’t say what this living memory of an accelerated present will be. All I know is that it has to be invented and constructed, and this is a matter for us all. But it’s a question that has, as yet, no answer.” (Virilio and Brausch 2011: 125.)

⁸⁰ Migayrou 2010: 31.

⁸¹ Migayrou, Parent and Virilio 2010: 46.

⁸² Claude Parent in Gérald 1990.

⁸³ Parent 1966: 7.

⁸⁴ Virilio 1966b

The sensitization of the body upon entering the church happens first through the shocking imagery of the bunker—recalling the “God of war”—and second, once inside, ascension toward the altar—reflecting the “God of mercy”. [Images 4.52 – 4.57] Parent describes the vertical progression as “the necessity of making an effort to rise toward the sacred”.⁸⁵ The faithful begin their ascension from the natural ground up into the building by way of one of the two peripheral stairwells into the main chapel. Their entrance occurs from the side, rather than at the back as in the traditional longitudinal nave arrangement. The side entrance was a strategic element that brought the users in at what Virilio and Parent call a “threshold of recovery”.⁸⁶ [Images 4.77, 4.80, 4.81] This moment is a relief from traversing the inclined ground that spans the width of the interior space. The side entry also permitted a greater visibility within the congregation; an important element of oblique space and a property of “cryptic architecture” as defined by the *Architecture Principe*.⁸⁷ The pews are arranged within two tilted shells that continue the users’ ascension from the recovery threshold. The inclined ground surface allows each member of the church body to see everyone in the sanctuary, as opposed to an entirely flat ground plane on which, once seated, the user can only see those in his or her immediate proximity. A “raised V” is visible in the section of the building. [Images 4.51, 4.72] This configuration unveils the true nature of the structure—the church is not a bunker, except for its appearance on the exterior from the ground perspective. According to David Liaudet, a drawing professor who wrote to Parent after his visit to the church, “it would have made no sense to build a real thousand-ton bunker when the shell in its tension creates this image”.⁸⁸ The structure is like two inverted shells that converge over the recovery threshold;

⁸⁵ Parent 2010: 14.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ An excerpt from Virilio’s essay in *Architecture Principe no. 7* defines “cryptic architecture”: “Cryptic architectural conception is necessarily developed and understood through the integration of the autonomous bodies it contains and to whose future it is linked. These bodies, themselves considered as primary architecture, are put into relation with a place through their communication orifices, through the median zones of the cladding—secondary “portable” architecture and objects, innumerable cryptic functions—and this, all the way to the notion of territory, that is to say of the movement in a possible space, and through this all the way to the notion of time.” (Migayrou, Parent and Virilio 2010: 77.)

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*: 16.

their intersection results in a giant fracture in the ceiling, which disarms the appearance of an anti-aircraft bunker. [*Image 4.79 – 4.81, 4.87*]

The architecture, once inside the church, transitions from total objectivity of the impenetrable form of the bunker, to the subjectivity of bodies inhabiting the space—their visibility and transfer from a static position to “dancing” on the oblique surfaces. The parish body is the “primary architecture”, according to Virilio, and the building, which comes “secondary”, provides the choreography of movement throughout.⁸⁹ [*Images 4.85, 4.86*] Virilio also understands the church as a bridge, allowing the crossing, as he says, “between the human being and the divine”.⁹⁰ His statement brings up another moment heaven-on-earth merging; the bunker church of Sainte-Bernadette is a substance of both sky and ground. As Virilio explains, “It is encounter of the cloud and the rock, of the air and the solid”.⁹¹ Parent also alluded to the church as a “crypt leaning above the ground”.⁹² [*Image 4.51*]

However, the bunker and the cloud-crypt form are imperceptible from the aerial zenith. The “Sacred-Heart” is evident in the building plan and visible from the sky—which is a position of total removal from the site and the bodies within the church. [*Images 4.71, 4.90 – 4.92*] The hexagonal configuration with two exterior stairwells, what Virilio describes as the “double ventricle circulation”, is visible. As people ascend and descend the structure, he metaphorically suggests that the flow of the congregation coming to and from worship is a living heart pumping blood. It is as if, by reflecting this symbol of human life back up into the sky—an organic form that contrasts with its orthogonal context—Virilio is articulating resistance to the abstraction of the human figure. He blows up the human heart to the size of a building as a form of defense and protection of the human life on the ground below. From the aerial perspective, there is a reversal of this collision of “heaven on earth”—the “Sacred-Heart” becomes a collision of earth on heaven. In this hypothetical anti-form of collision, the bodies on the

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*: 77.

⁹⁰ Brayer and Virilio 2010: 22.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*: 21.

⁹² Migayrou, Parent and Virilio 2010: 14.

ground and the sky dwellers exist in perceptual relationship to one another. This can be considered an expansion of what Adorno calls the *kraftfeld*, a prolonged gaze between the idea and the onlooker. This “force-field” generates the mimetic process of “‘identifying with’ on the part of the subject which traces the dynamic laws of the object.”⁹³ There is a tension and a mutual experience of resistance to feelings of indifference regarding the architecture of the church. From the ground, bodies must penetrate the fortress and confront the painful memories it conjures. From the sky, the abstraction of human life on the ground must be rejected.

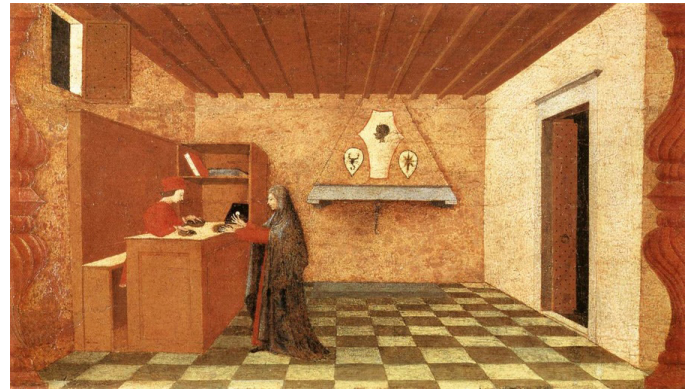
Virilio’s church of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, in provoking the collisions of heaven on earth, earth on heaven, and past and future on the present, calls for a “coming to terms” with a culture of violence. The shock value of this building produces an accident of architecture that confronts the silence of collective guilt and fear. In doing so, Virilio tolerates no forgetting or denial; aligning with Adorno’s claim: “The enduring suffering has as much right to expression as does the tortured man to scream.”⁹⁴

⁹³ Paddison 1987: 362.

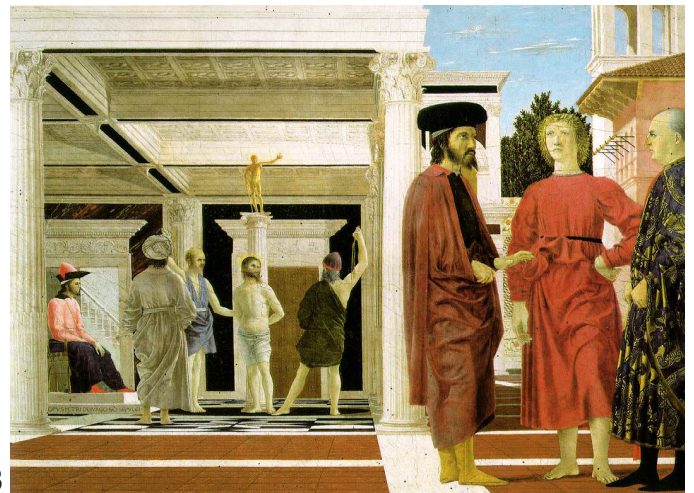
⁹⁴ *Ibid.*: 15.



4.1



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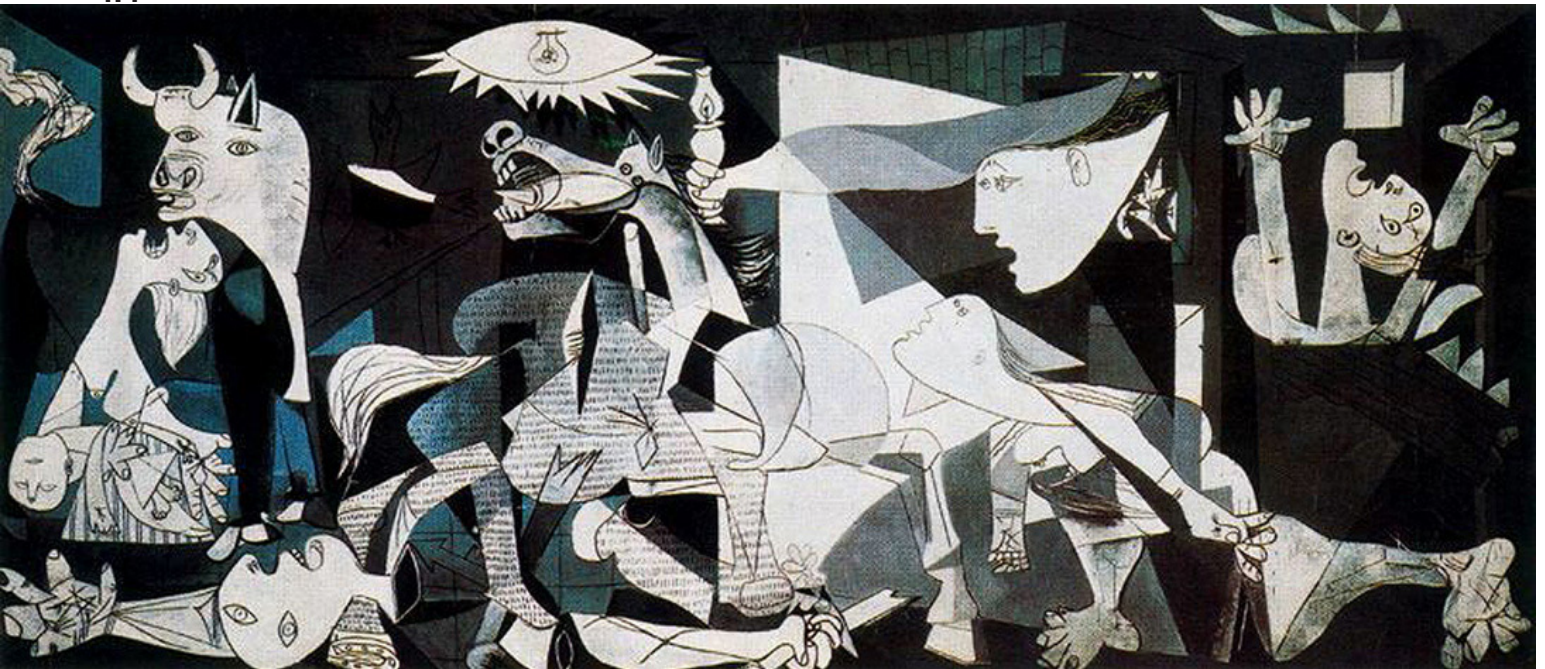
image 4.1: Photograph from *Bunker Archeology* (1958 - 1965).

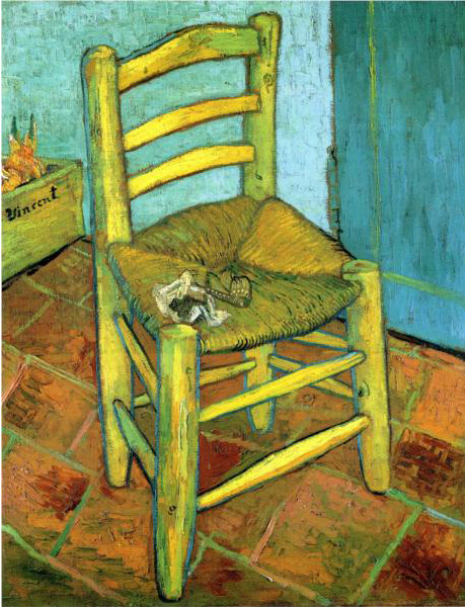
image 4.2: *Miracle of the Desecrated Host, Scene 1* (1465-1469) by Paolo Uccello.

image 4.3: *Flagellation of Christ* (1455-1460) by Piero della Francesca.

image 4.4: *Guernica* (1937) by Pablo Picasso.

4.4





4.5



4.6



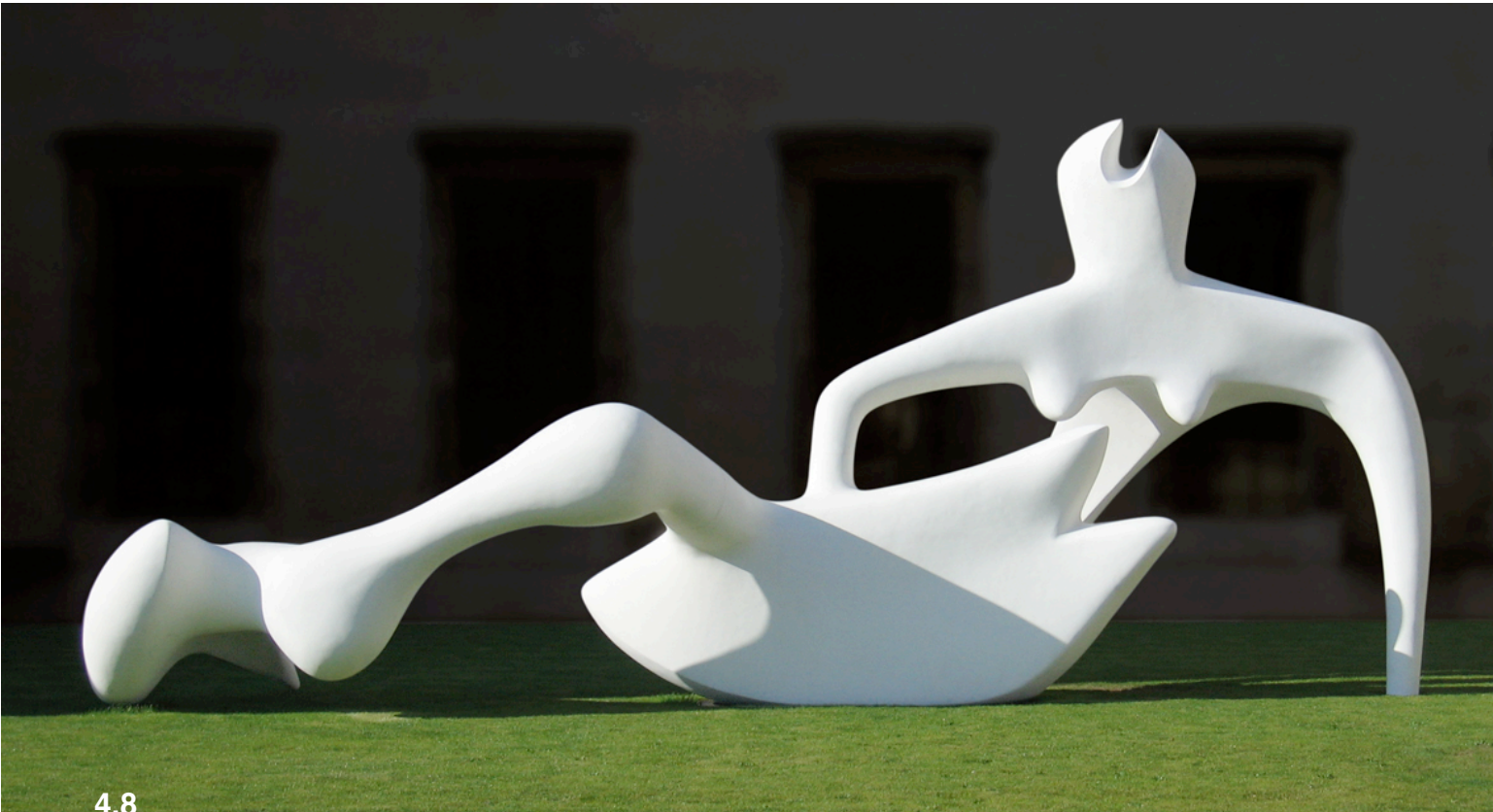
4.7

image 4.5: Van Gogh's *Chair* (1889) by Vincent van Gogh.

image 4.6: *Corridor in the Asylum* (1889) by Vincent van Gogh.

image 4.7: *Still Life with Plaster Cupid* (1895) by Paul Cezanne.

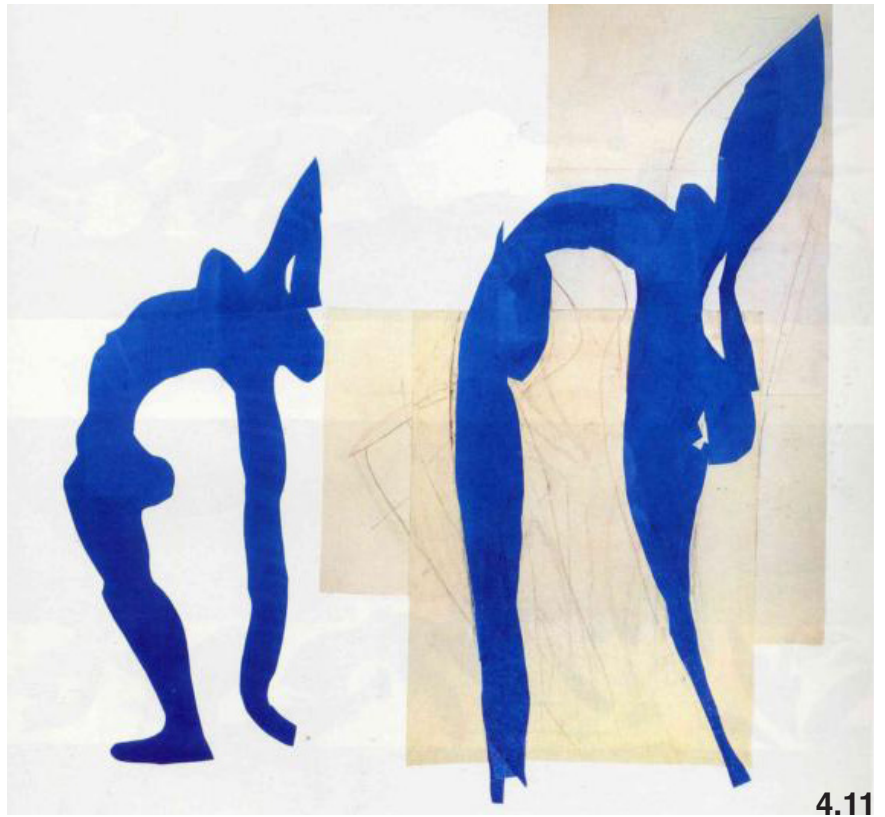
image 4.8: *Reclining Figure* (1951) by Henry Moore.



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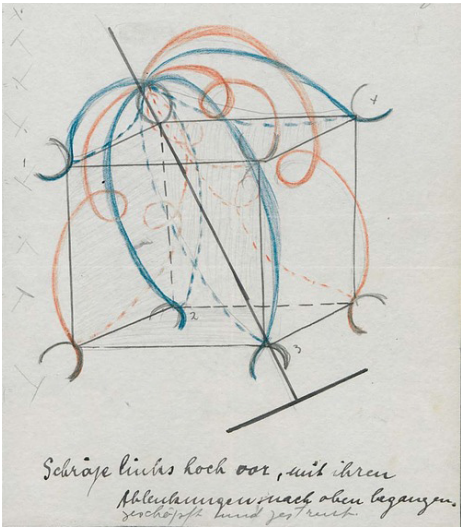
image 4.9: *Bather in the Reeds* (1952) by Henri Matisse.

image 4.10: *Blue Nude* (1952) by Henri Matisse.

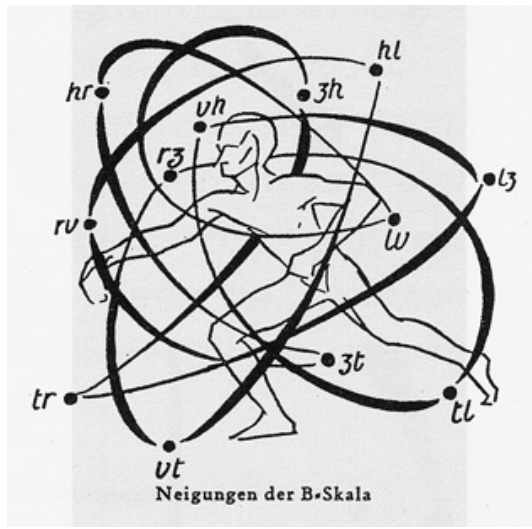
image 4.11: *Blue Nudes* (1952) by Henri Matisse.

image 4.12: *Birds* (1957) by Georges Braque.

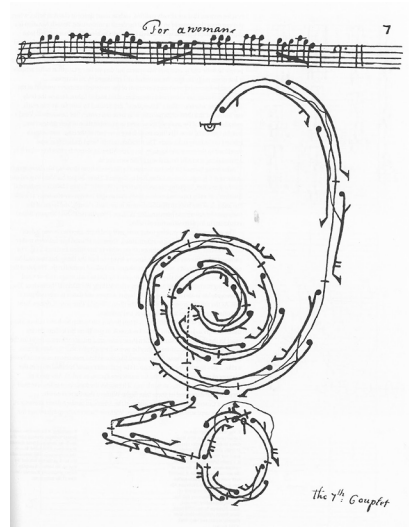
image 4.13: Morice Lipsi, International Sculpture Symposium, Grenoble, 1967.



4.14



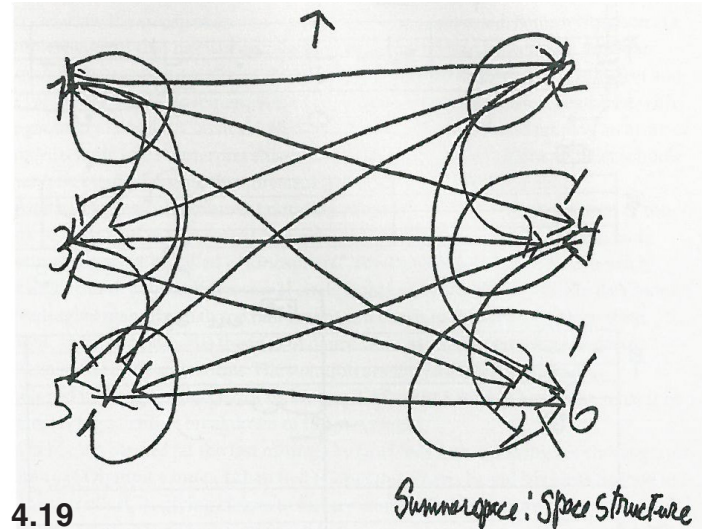
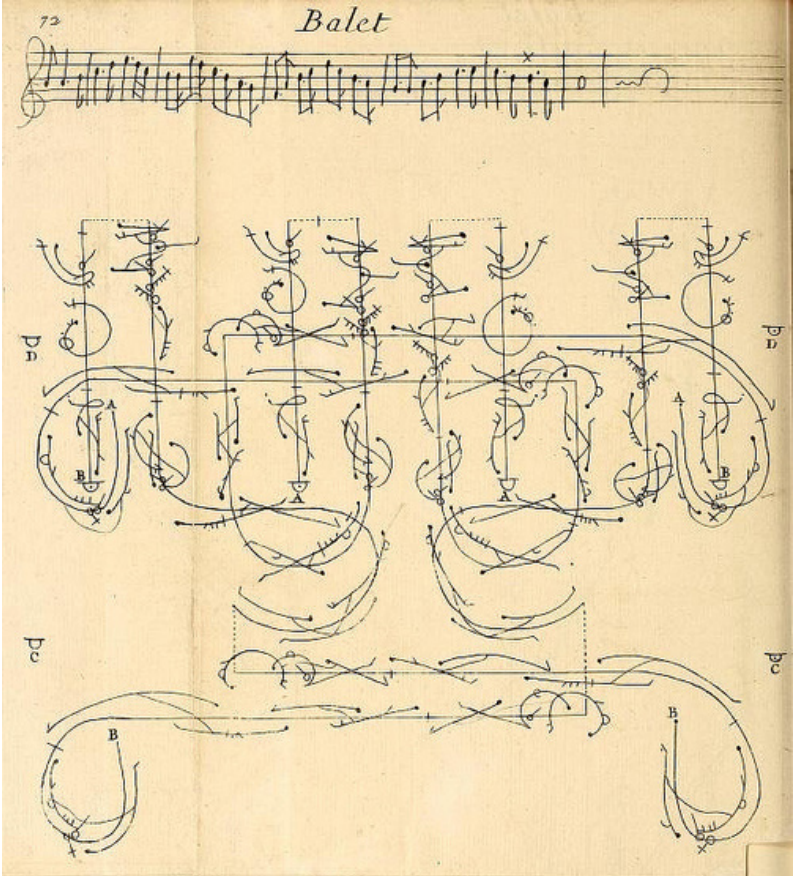
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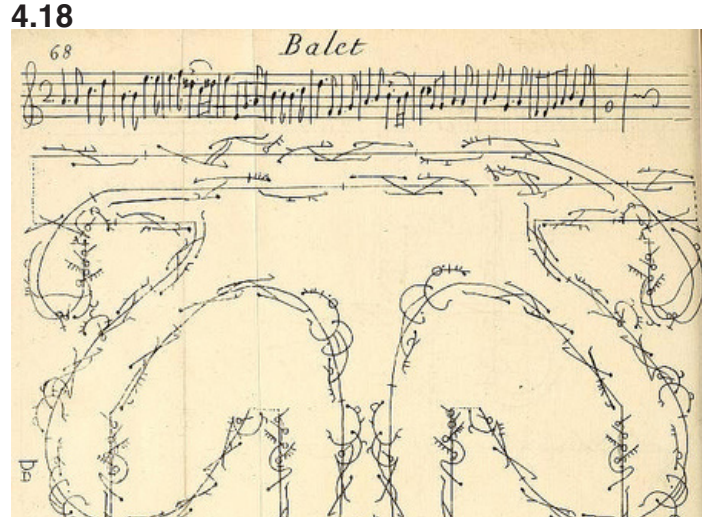
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- image 4.14:** *Basic Principles of Movement Notation* (1914) by Rudolf von Laban.
- image 4.15:** Illustration from *Sketches of the "Scales"* (1920s) by Rudolf von Laban.
- image 4.16:** Dance notation (18th century) by Kemmom Tomlinson.
- image 4.17:** Collection of dances in choreography notation (1700) by Raoul-Auger Feuillet.
- image 4.18:** Collection of dances in choreography notation (1700) by Raoul-Auger Feuillet.
- image 4.19:** Space plan for Merce Cunningham's *Summerspace* (1958).

4.17



4.19



4.18

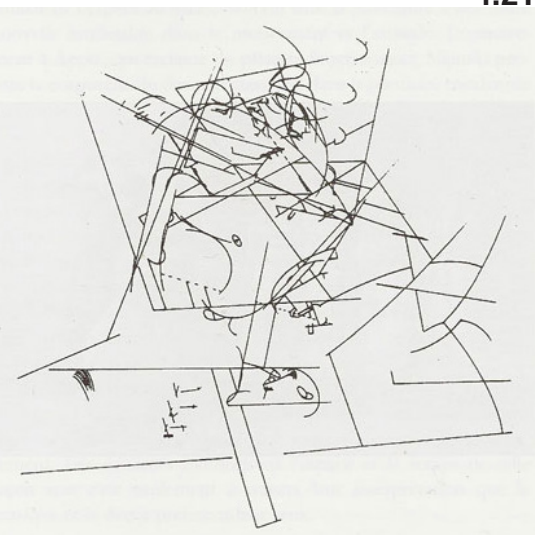


4.21

image 4.20: Martha Graham performing "Punch and Judy" (1941).

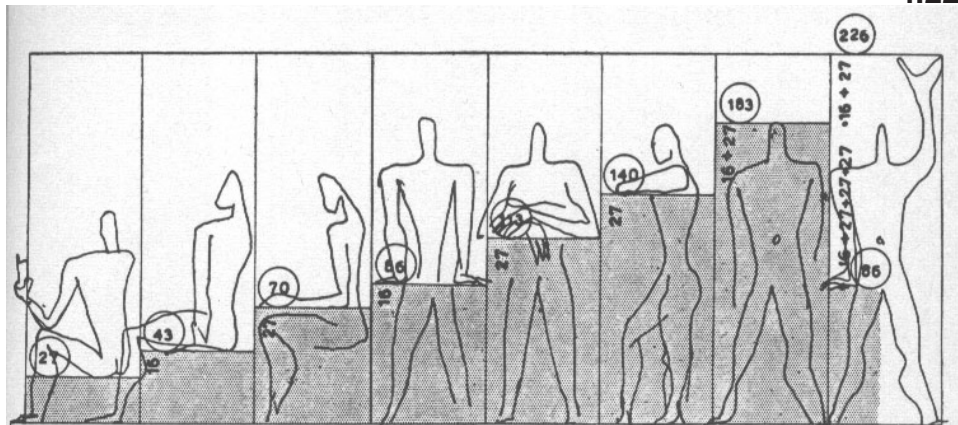
image 4.21: The loss of a small detail, Choreographic diagram (1991) by William Forsythe.

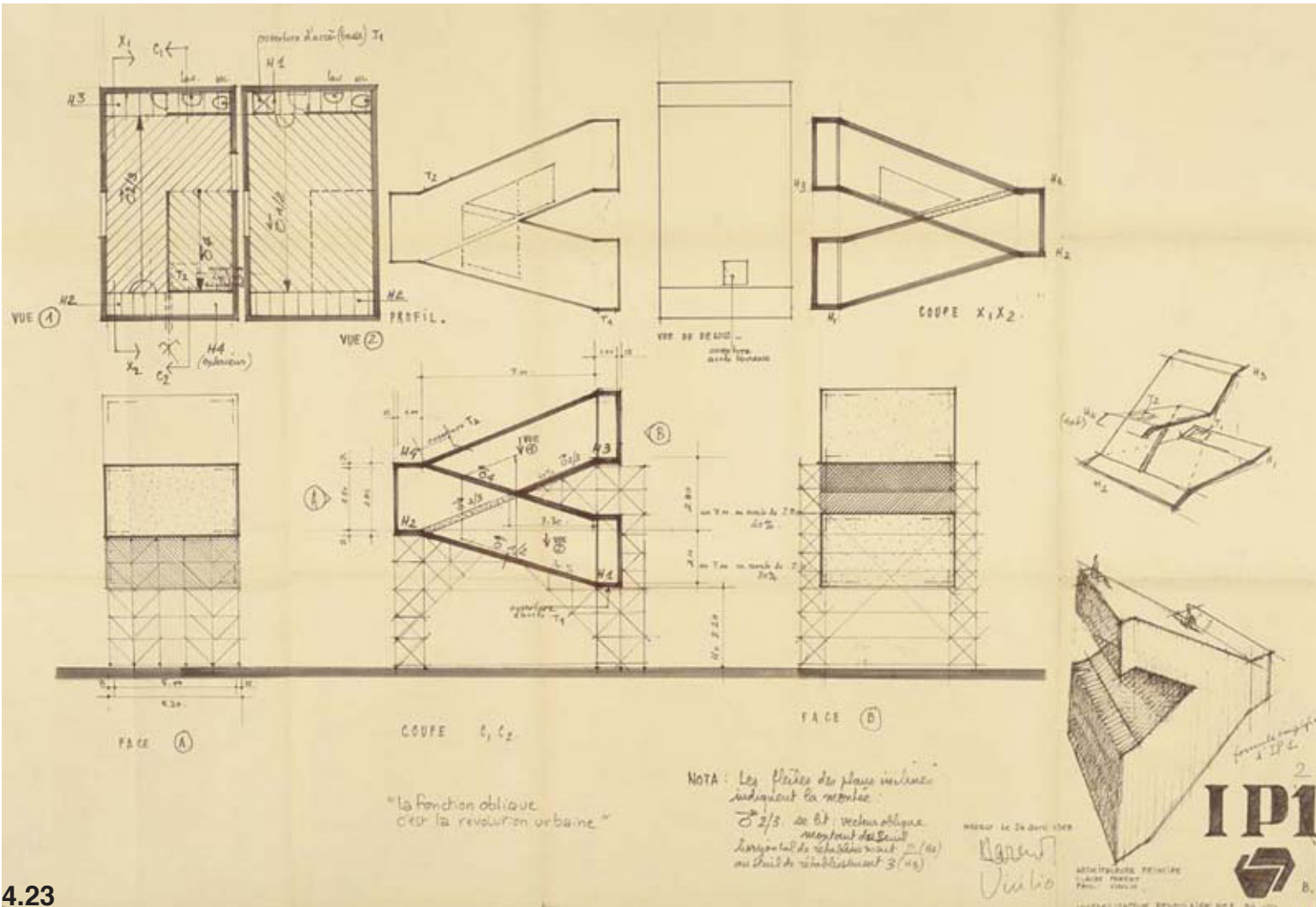
image 4.22: Le Corbusier's modular man.



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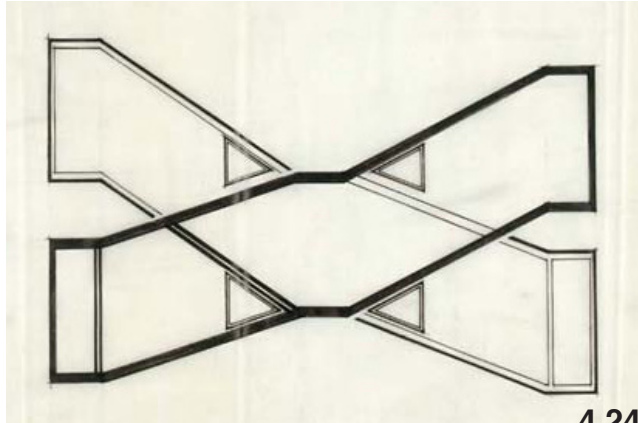


4.23

image 4.23: IP 1, Instabilisateur pendulaire plans (1968).

image 4.24: IP 1, Instabilisateur pendulaire section (1968).

image 4.25: IP 1, Instabilisateur pendulaire model (1968).



4.24



4.25

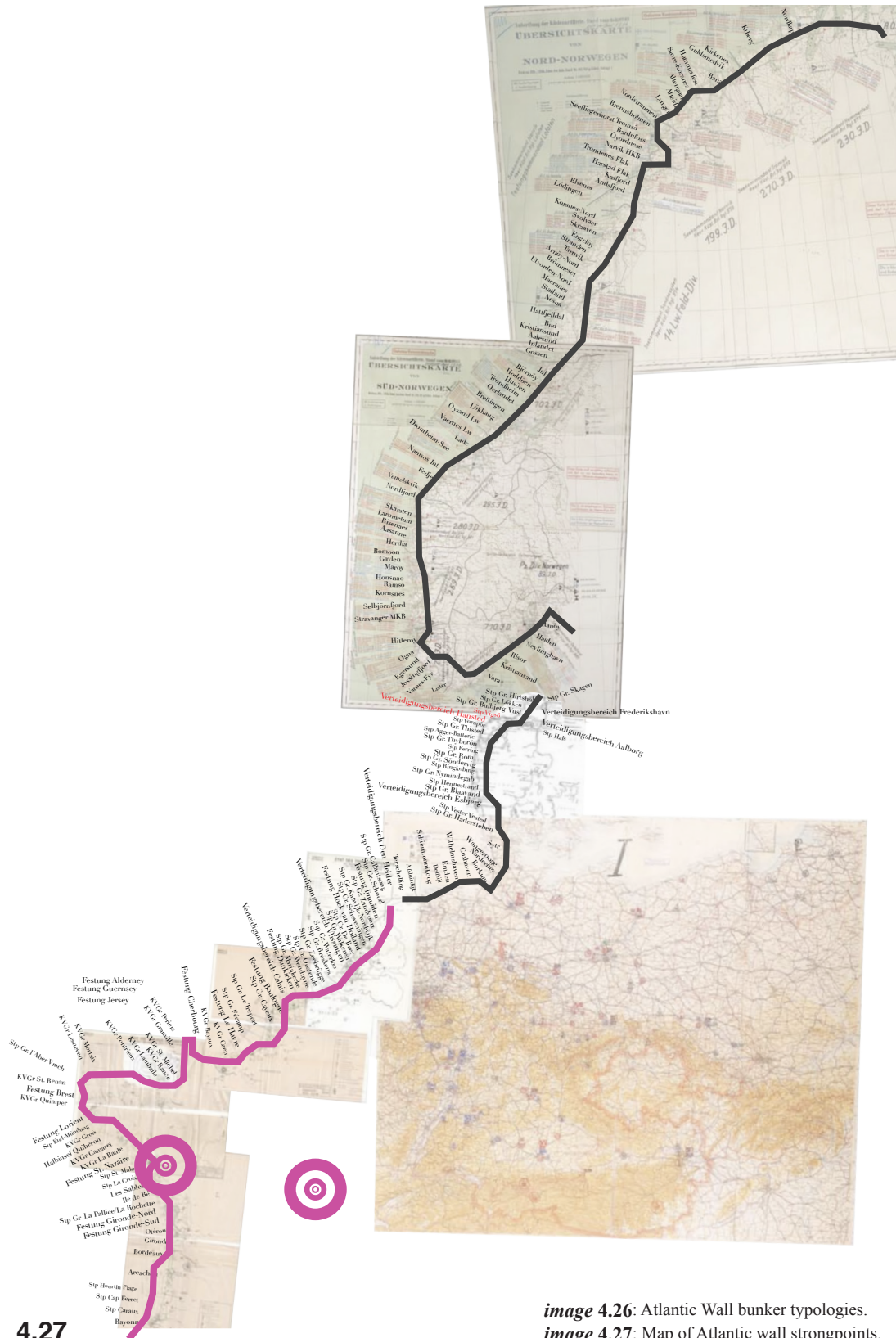
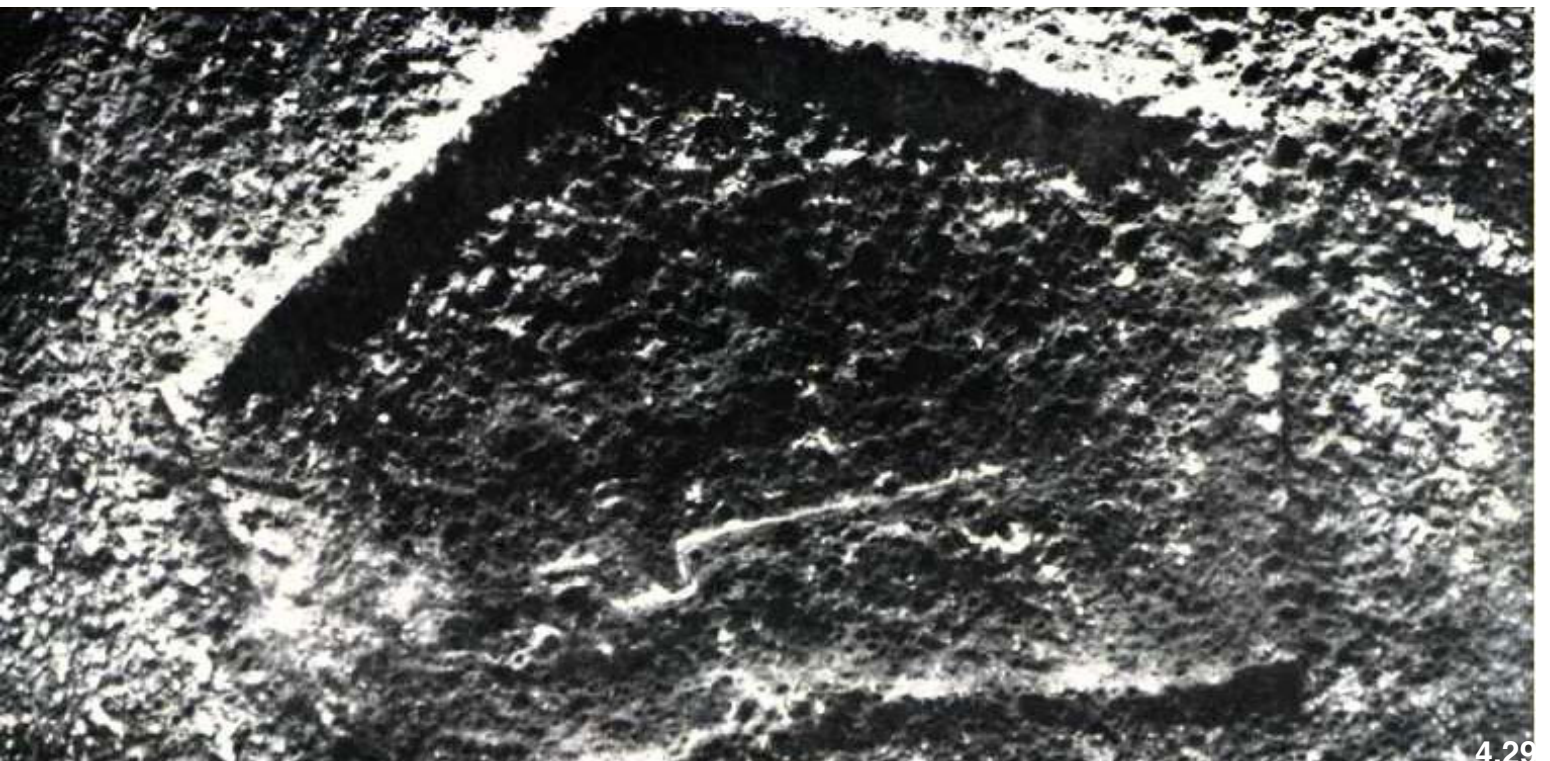
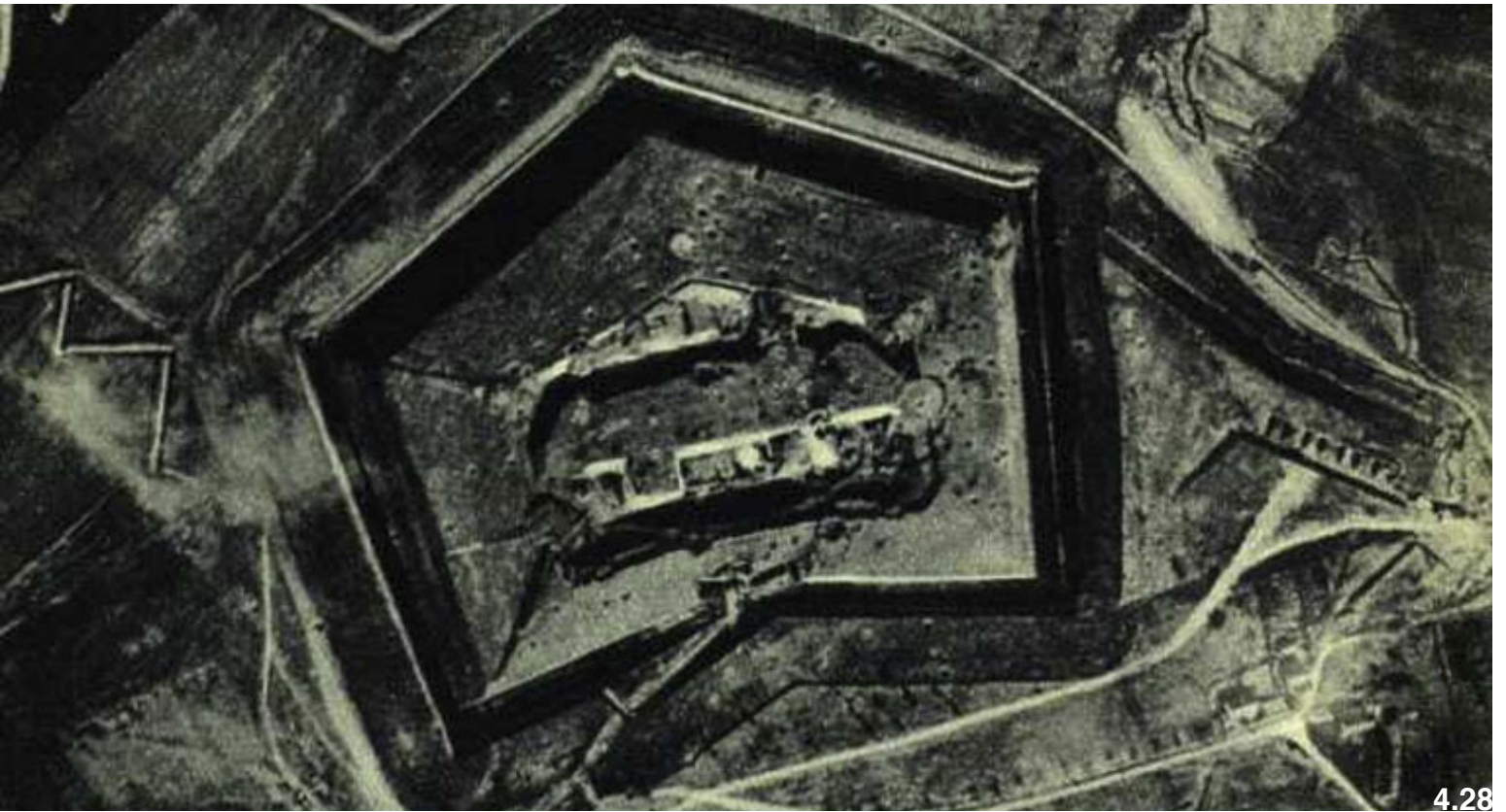
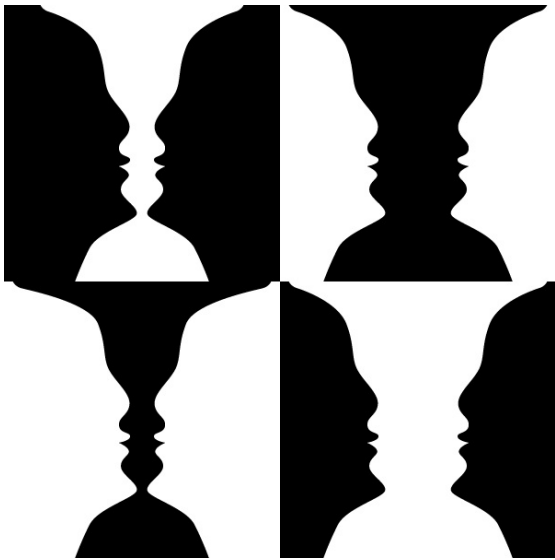
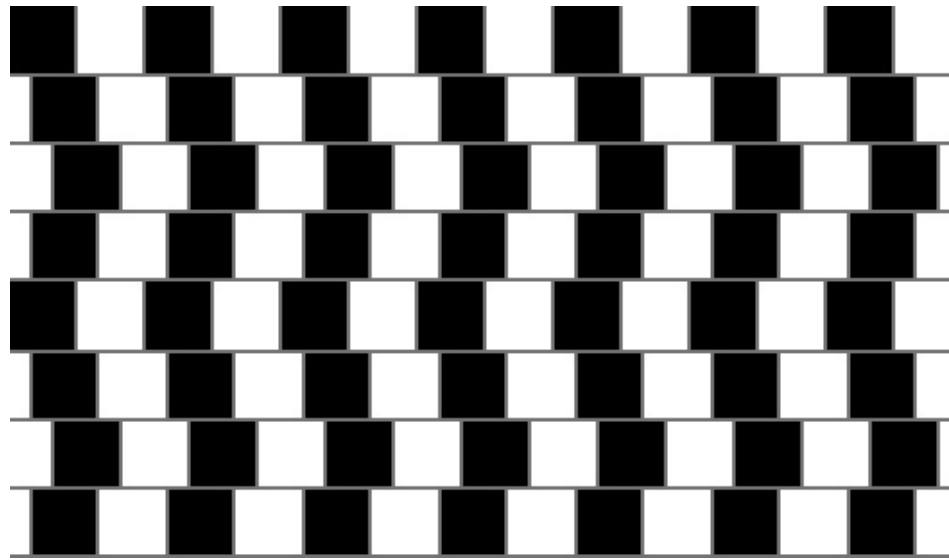


image 4.26: Atlantic Wall bunker typologies.
image 4.27: Map of Atlantic wall strongpoints.

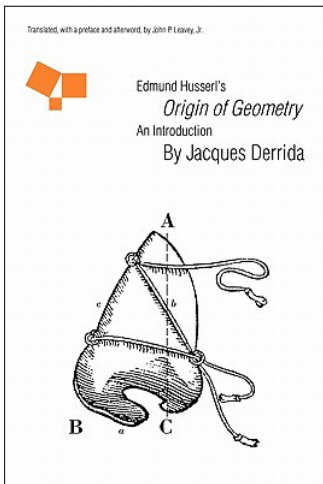




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image 4.28: Fort Douaumont in 1915 before Battle of Verdun.

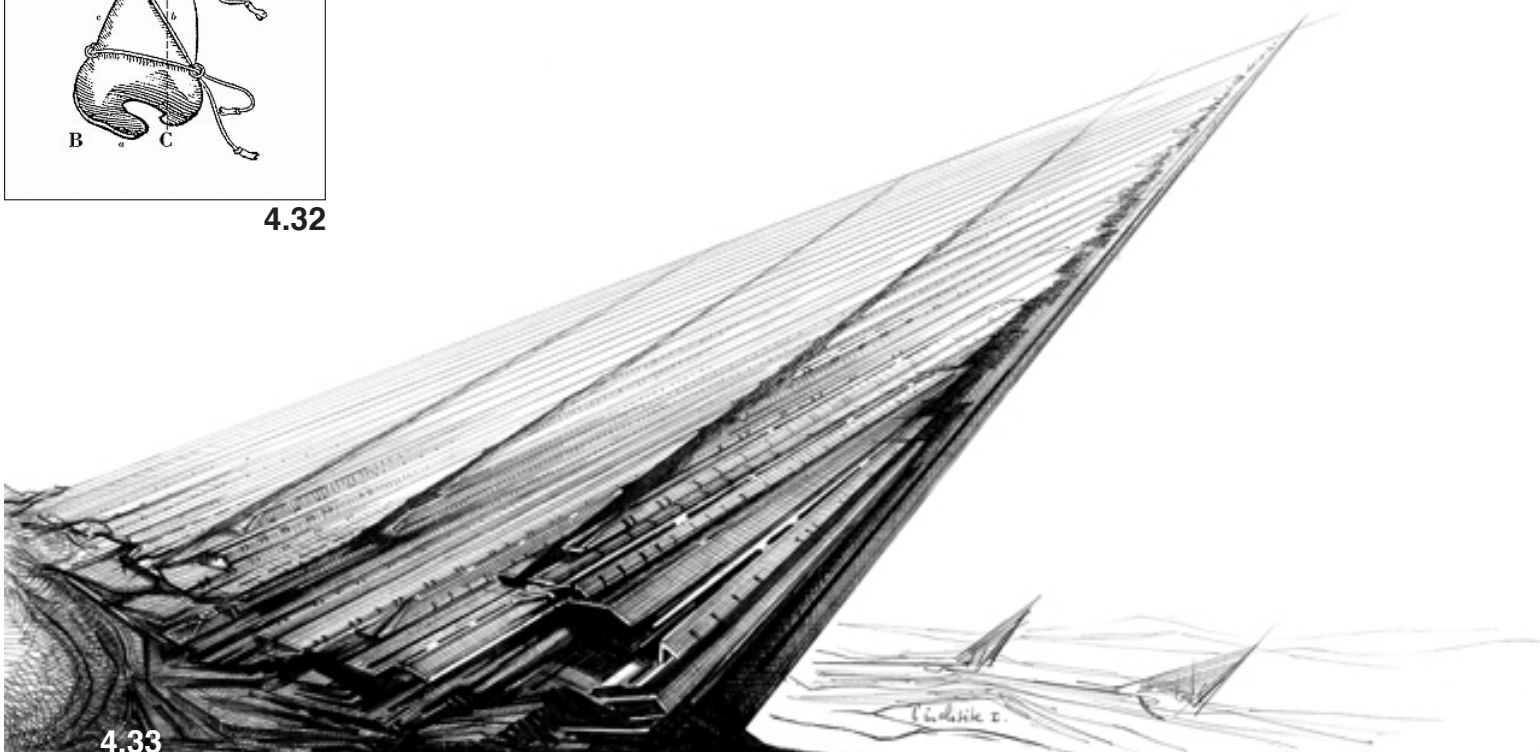
image 4.29: Aerial view of Fort Douaumont in November 1916 after Battle of Verdun.

image 4.30: Gestalt theory of perception, Rubin's vase exercise.

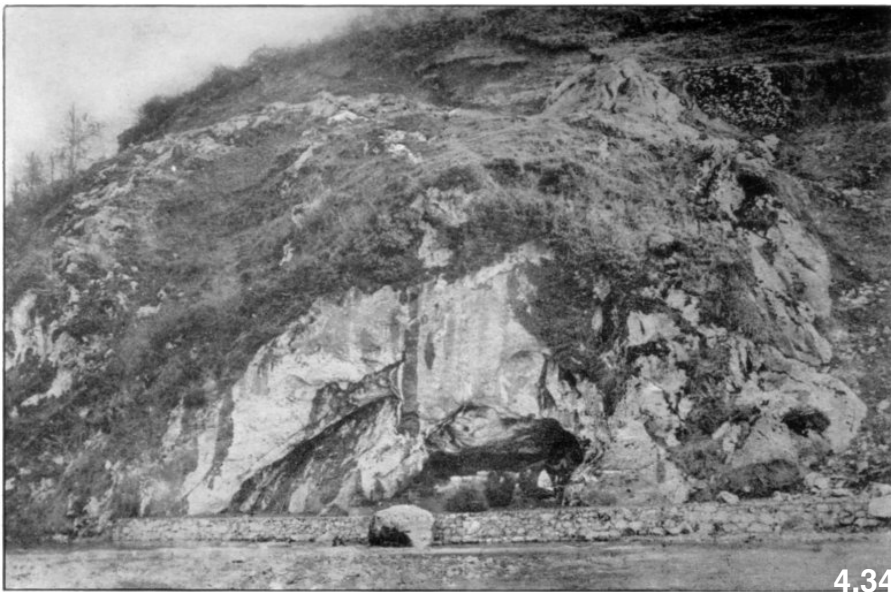
image 4.31: Gestalt theory of perception, horizontal parallel lines appear to be slanted in this visual exercise.

image 4.32: Edmund Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry, an Introduction* (1962) by Jacques Derrida.

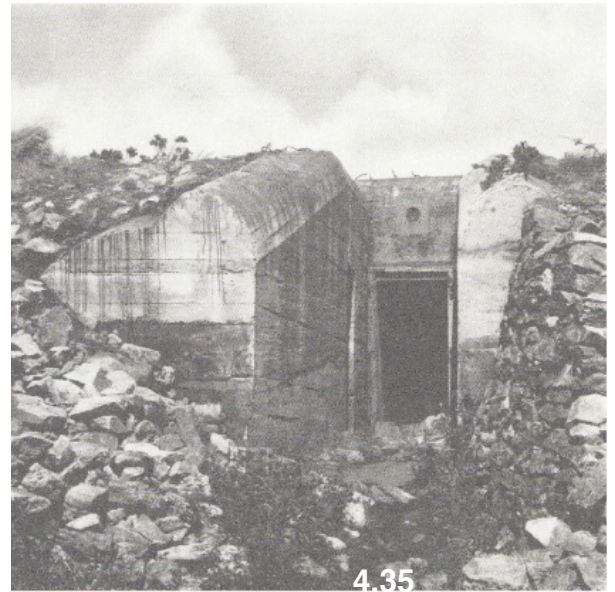
image 4.33: *Architecture Principe topological urbanism* (1966), drawing by Claude Parent.



4.33



4.34



4.35

image 4.34: Cave-grotto at Lourdes, where Ste. Bernadette experienced visions.

image 4.35: "Cryptic Architecture", image from Virilio's *Bunker Archeology*.

image 4.36: Mass at Lourdes.

image 4.37: Mass at Lourdes.

image 4.38: Bunker-cave, image from Virilio's *Bunker Archeology*.

image 4.39: Bombing of Frampol, Poland by Luftwaffe (1939), before and after.

image 4.40: Notre Dame du Haut at Ronchamp (1950 - 1954), Le Corbusier.



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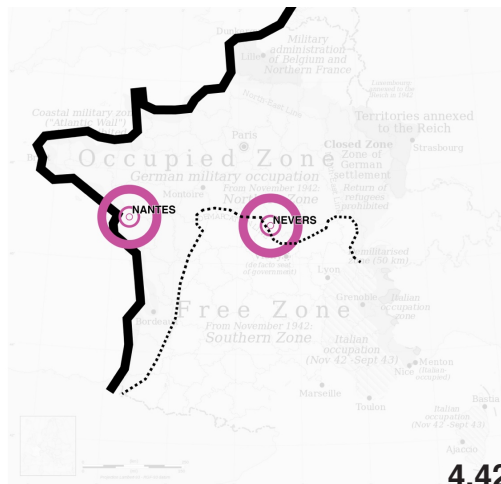
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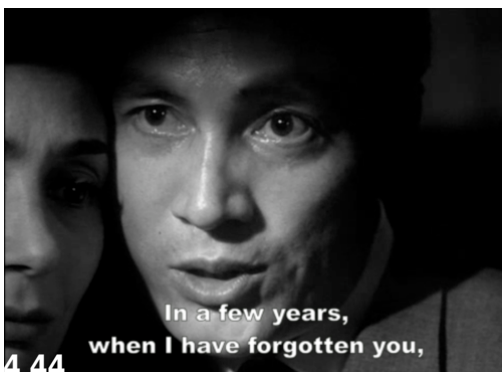
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image 4.41: Map of France during German occupation of WWII, Atlantic Wall (solid line) and demarcation line (dotted).

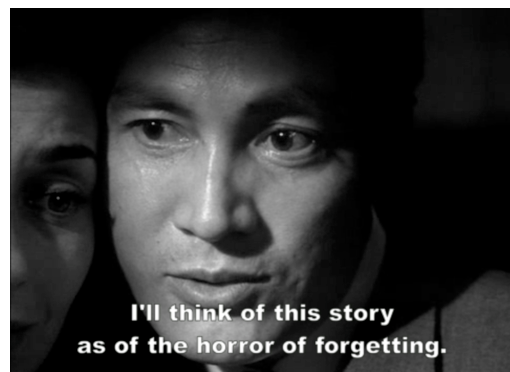
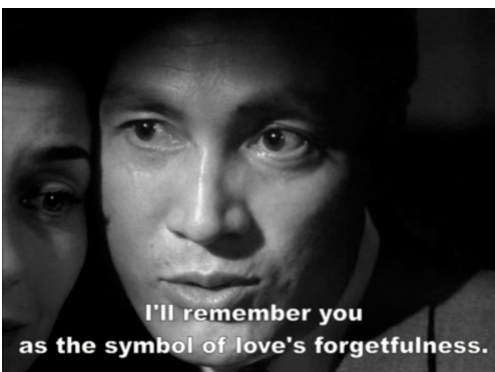
image 4.42: Map of France during German occupation of WWII, Nantes and Nevers shown at points of “conflict space”.

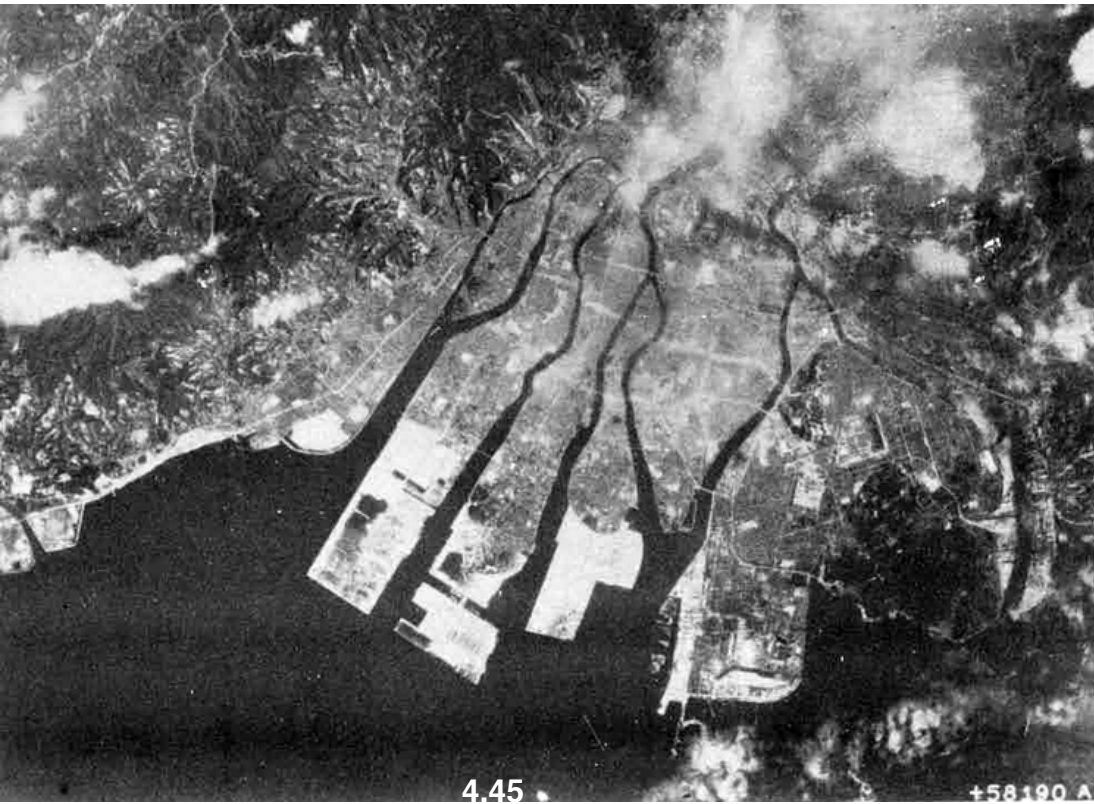
image 4.43: Hiroshima mon amour (Alain Resnais, Marguerite Duras, 1959) original movie poster.

image 4.44: Scene from Hiroshima mon amour.



4.44





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image 4.45: Atomic bombing of Hiroshima, aerial of Ota River estuary, 5 August 1945.

image 4.46: Before and after atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

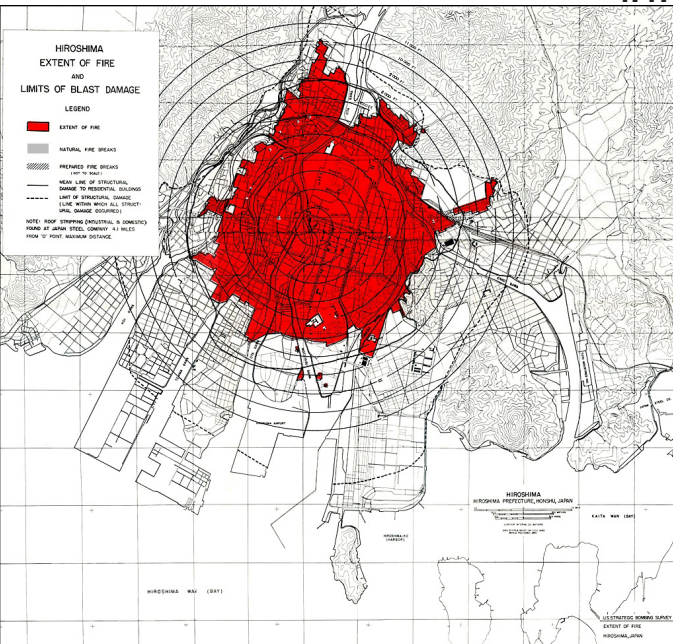
image 4.47: Map of limits of blast damage at Hiroshima.

image 4.48: Photograph of Hiroshima by Harbert F. Austin Jr. from the roof of the Kodo elementary School. (October, 1945)



4.46

4.48

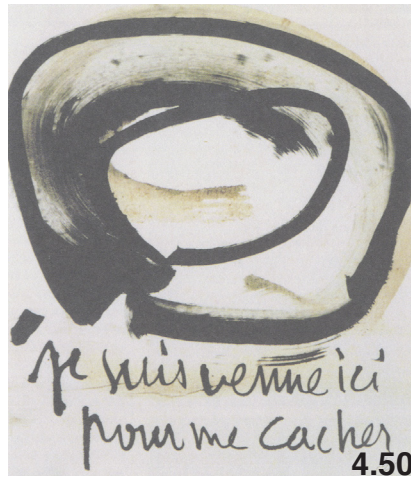


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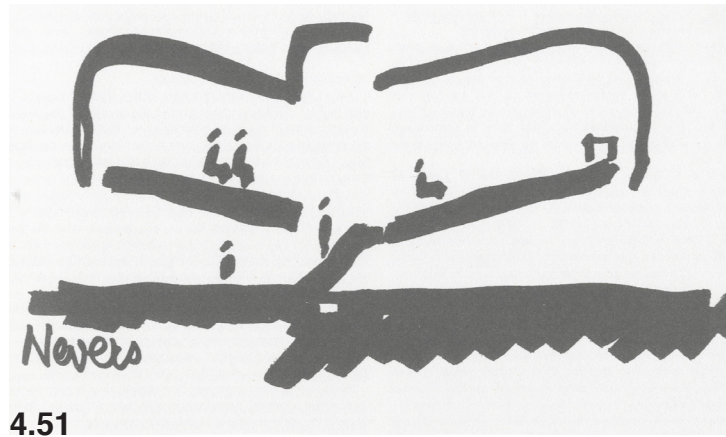




4.49



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4.51

image 4.49: Sainte-Bernadette Soubirous (1844 - 1879).

image 4.50: "I came here to hide", study for the tapestry at Nevers, Michel Carrade.

image 4.51: Sketch of "circulatory habitat" at Nevers, Claude Parent.

image 4.52: Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, Nevers, north elevation.

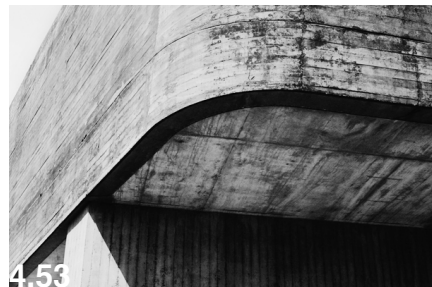
image 4.53: Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, Nevers, exterior detail.

image 4.54: Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay view of north elevation.

image 4.55: Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, Nevers, south elevation.



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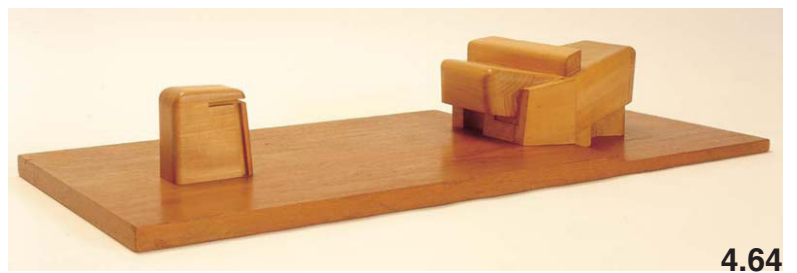
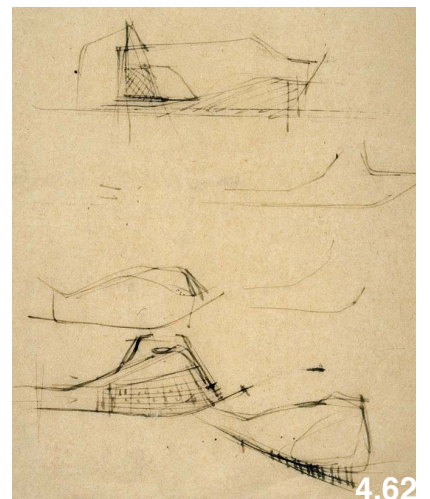
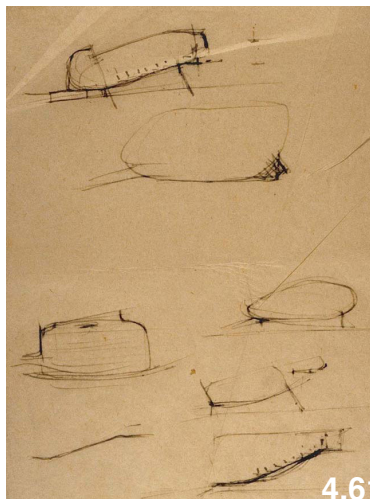
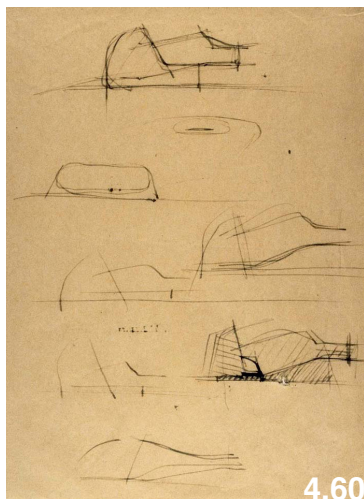
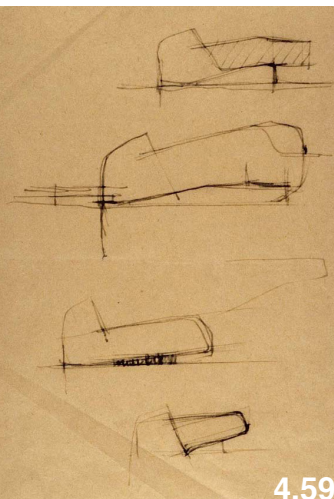
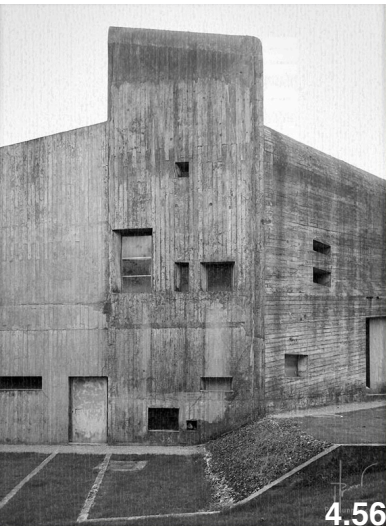


image 4.56: Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, Nevers, exterior view.

image 4.57: Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, Nevers, exterior view.

image 4.58: Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, Nevers, exterior view.

image 4.59: Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, sketch study (1963) Claude Parent.

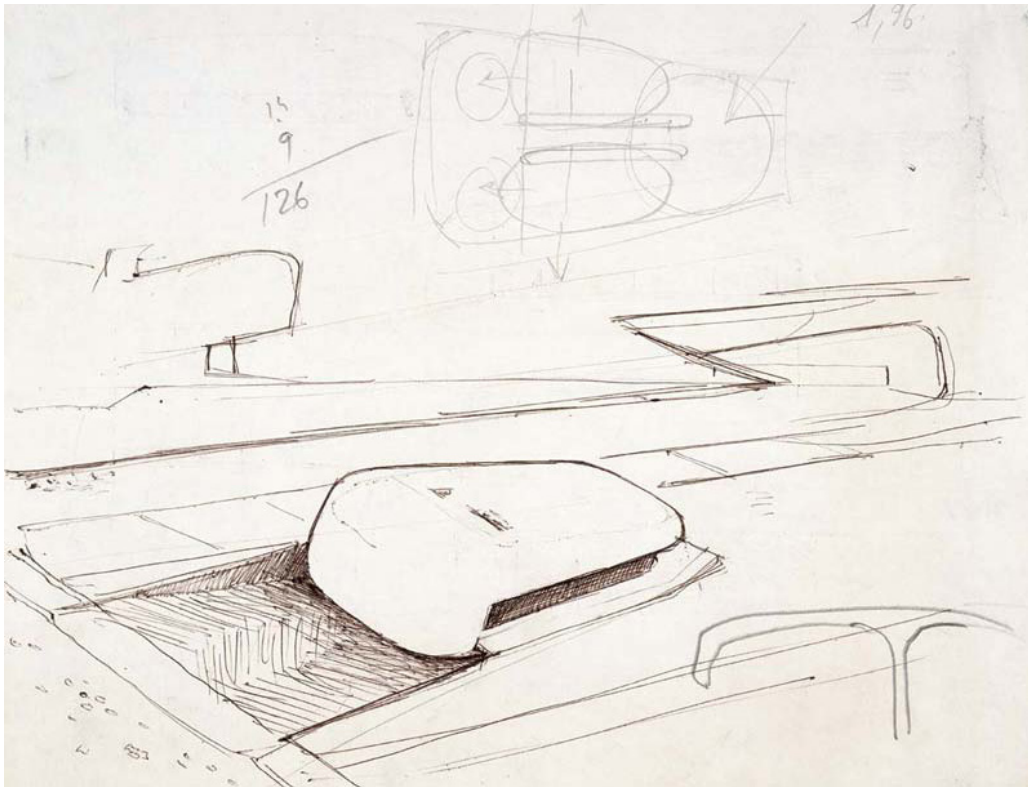
image 4.60: Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, sketch study (1963) Claude Parent.

image 4.61: Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, sketch study (1963) Claude Parent.

image 4.62: Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, sketch study (1963) Claude Parent.

image 4.63: Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, wood model no. 1, Paul Virilio. (1963 - 1966)

image 4.64: Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, wood model no. 2, Paul Virilio. (1963 - 1966)



4.65

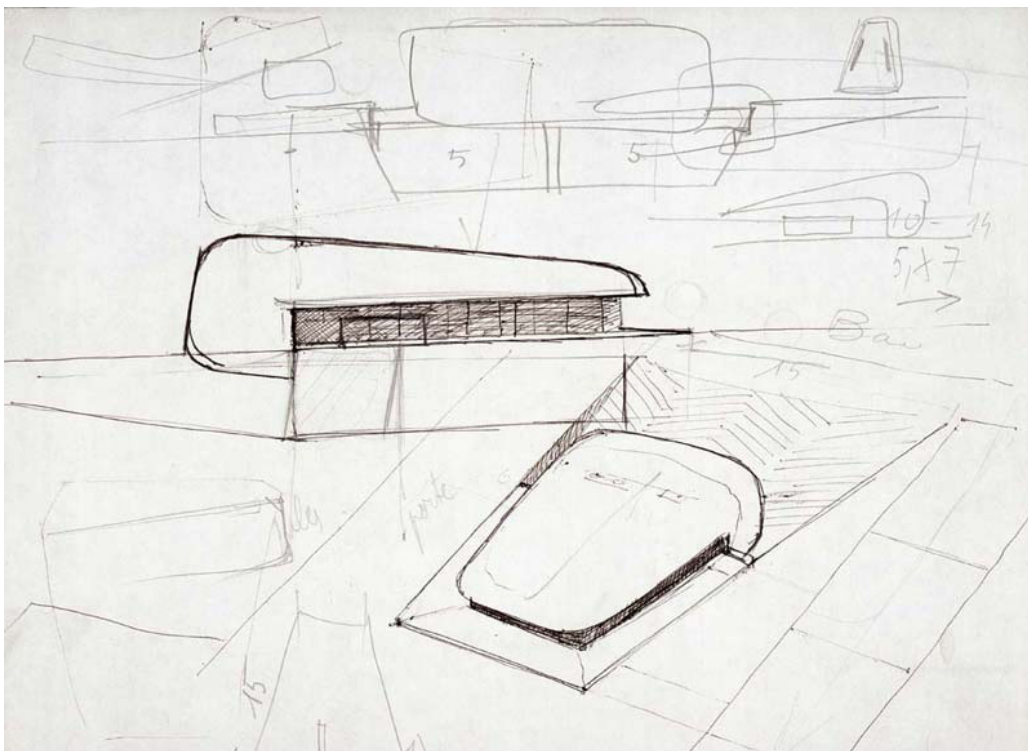


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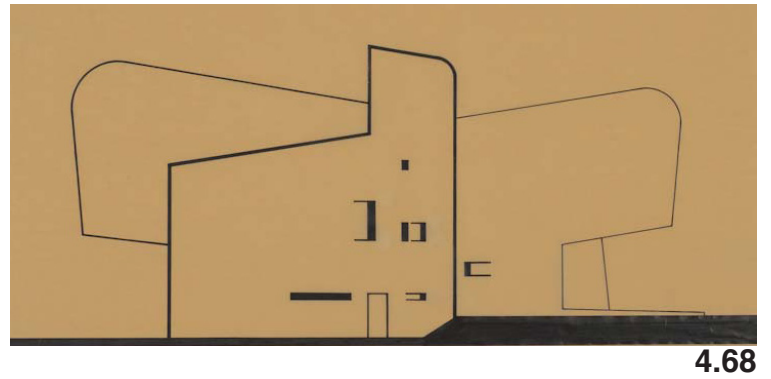
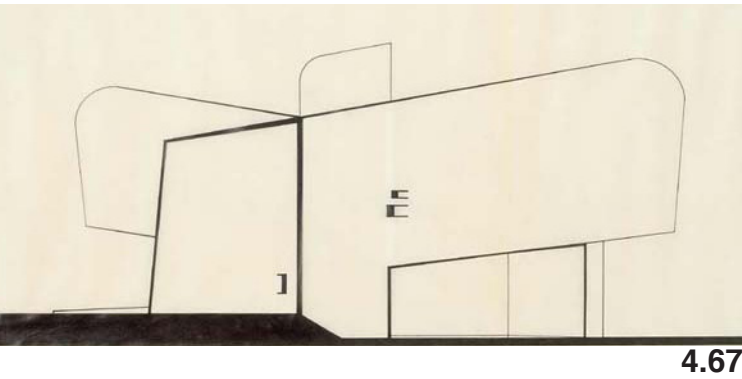


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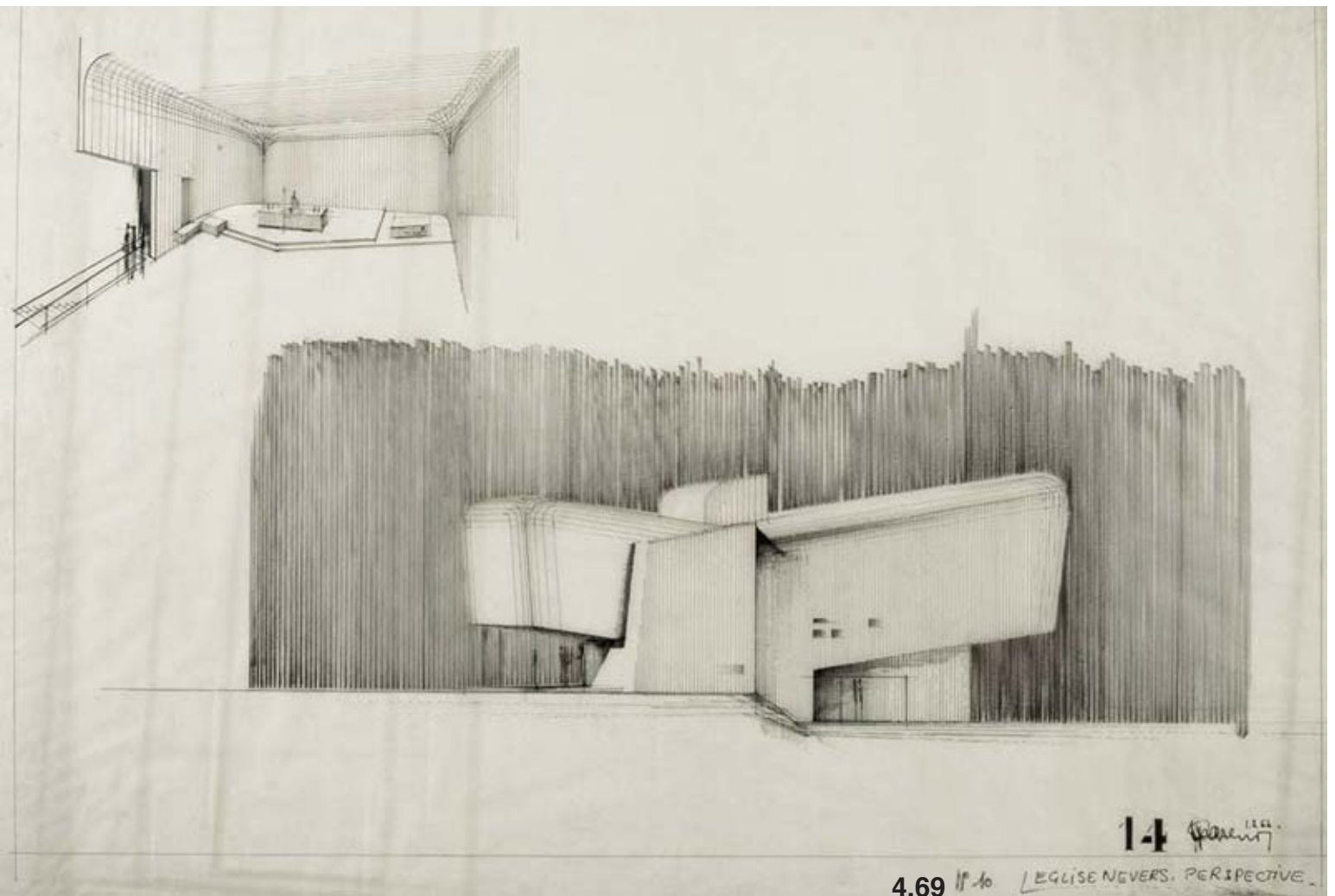
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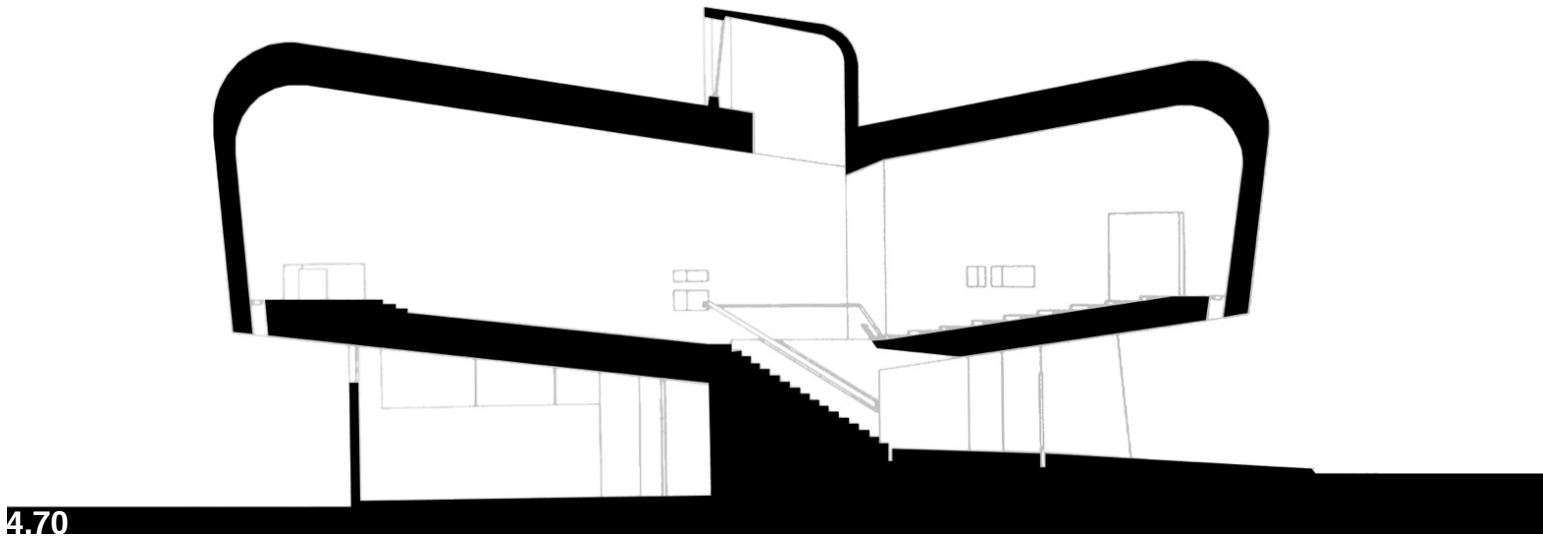
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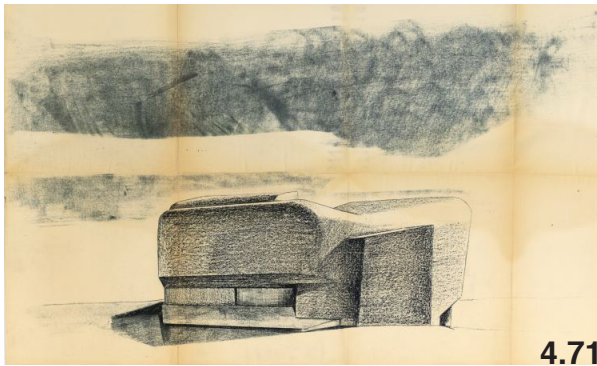
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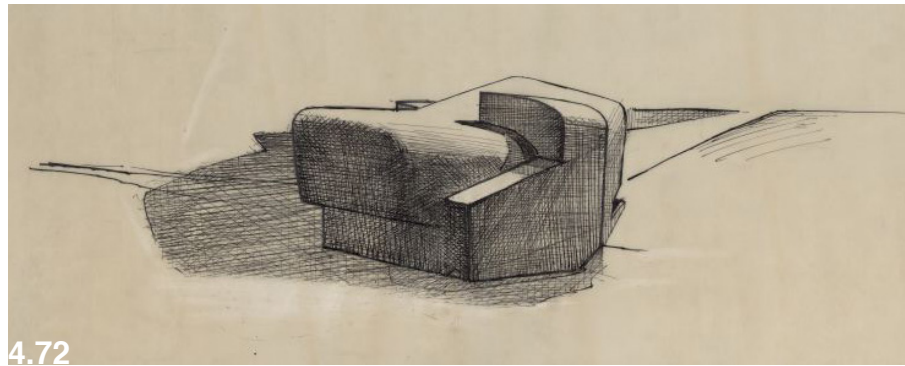




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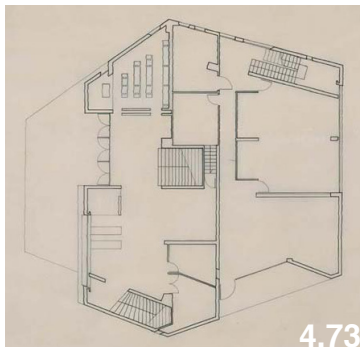
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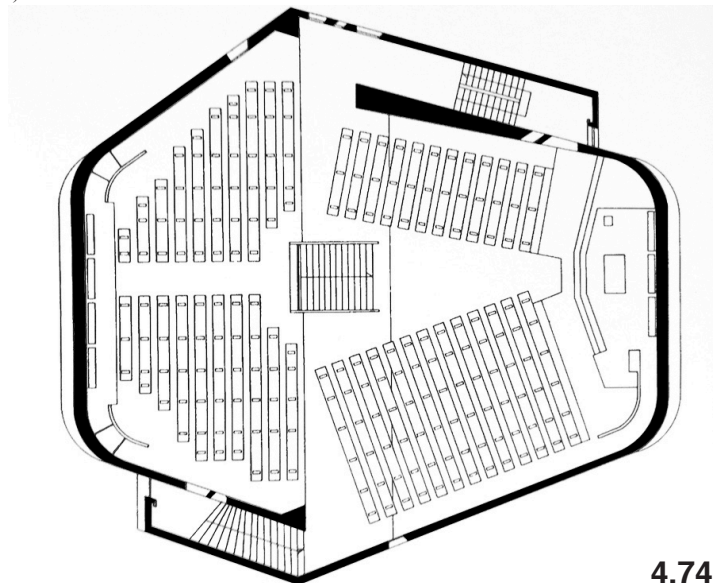
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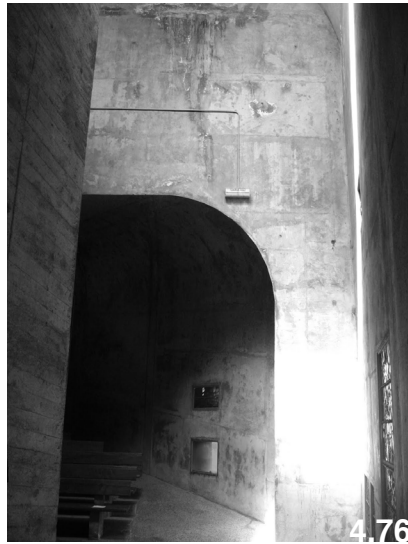
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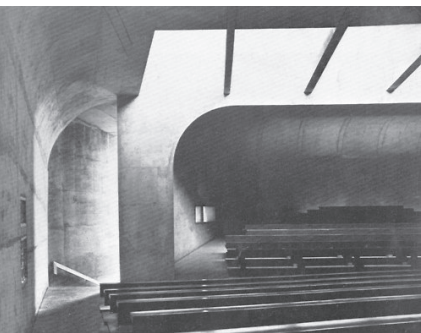


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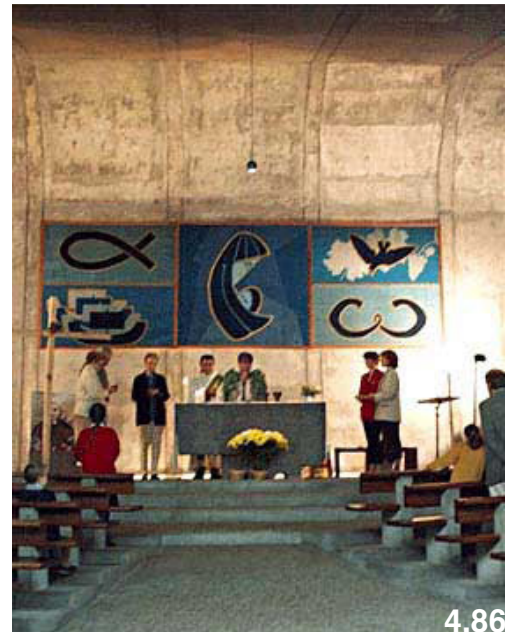
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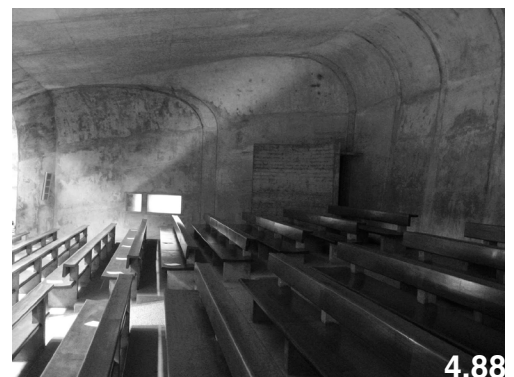
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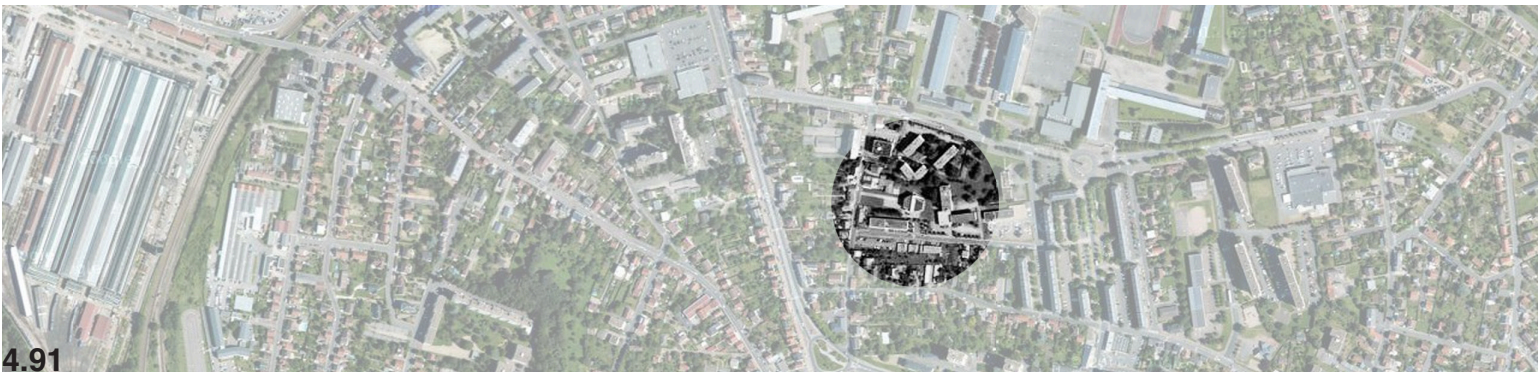
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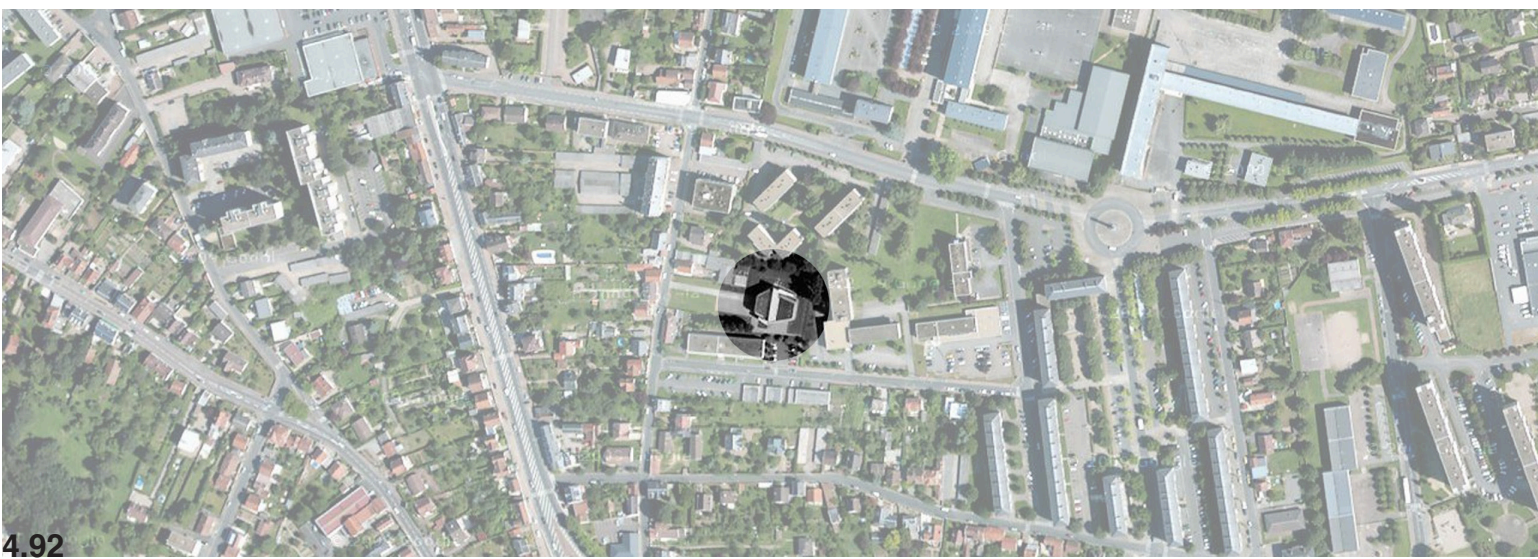
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5. THE MEMORY TRACE OF MIMESIS

Concluding thoughts and (accidental) future departure points



5.0

image 5.0: "An object tended to become a subject." *Atlanticwall* (1995) by Magdalena Jetelova.

This project set out to establish how Virilio's architecture of Saint-Bernadette was a manifestation of Virilio's own "working through" of the painful past. Virilio's bunker-church and Adorno's question—"What does coming to terms with the past mean?"—were the two main points of departure for this archeology of Virilio. While Virilio's church in Nevers is loaded with representations of his own experience of anti-form and the imagery of his bunker archeology, there is another side to this architecture that anticipates the agony within humanity should the aesthetics of Auschwitz not be resisted. When Virilio asked if war could be prospective, his answer appears to have been worked through in the design of the bunker church, perhaps more so than his own childhood memories of the Second World War. This realization came late in this study, both through a deeper understanding of the building and through uncovering stronger connections between Virilio and Adorno's aesthetic theories. Indeed, a broad review of Virilio's work and writing suggests that there are several significant links between the two philosophers.

The first link was through Virilio's proposal for a *Museum of Accidents*. Virilio, as it turns out, has issued the same call for *Aufarbeitung* to a post-9/11 society as that of Adorno's to post-Auschwitz Germany. The *Museum of Accidents* and "Unknown Quantity" are Virilio's critique of contemporary society, which needs to "come to terms with" the accidents of the past and an accelerated history of ruptures. Adorno's lecture anticipates Virilio's, which was given nearly fifty years later to a society conditioned to instantaneous information delivery and, consequently, in the midst of a "picnoleptic crisis". Virilio's concept of *picnolepsy* is the major discussion in his book, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* (1980), and may, for the technology-driven twenty-first century, bear a significant resemblance to what Adorno identifies as a "lack of psychic mastery". Virilio's description of the "young picnoleptic" demonstrates how one's perception of events can alter the memory of what actually occurred:

There is a tendency to patch up sequences, readjusting their contours to make equivalents out of what the picnoleptic has seen and what he has not been able to see, what he remembers and what,

evidently, he cannot remember and that it is necessary to invent, to recreate, in order to lend verisimilitude to his *discursus*. Later, the young picnoleptic will himself be inclined to doubt the knowledge and concordant evidence of those around him; everything certain will become suspect.¹

This passage seems to mirror Adorno's discussion of the collective "delusion" that he observed was shrouding his contemporaries' perception of the Holocaust and allowing the "pathological" suppression of guilt over the events of Auschwitz. Adorno utilizes the phrase, "it's as good as if it never happened," to describe the contemporary attitude of moving on from the memory of catastrophe. It appears that this problem of *forgetting*, which both Virilio and Adorno are passionate about immortalizing through their work, is linked to the psychological issues of the picnoleptic. While Adorno, in his lecture, blames the erasure and/or alteration of uncomfortable memories on "inhuman calculations" and "lazy consciousness", Virilio's picnoleptic is nearly incapable of combatting oblivion. Of course, this is due to the rapid evolution of technology and accelerated temporality that Virilio is constantly warning us about. By the time Virilio diagnosed the condition of picnolepsy, Adorno's critique had already fallen flat. What, then, can we make of Adorno's warning to work through the past now that we have no escape from an accelerated present and an instantaneous history? There is something in Virilio that posits a response.

This study examined the architectural anti-form as Virilio's prescription for not only his own awakening, but also that of Nevers in the postwar era. His response involved re-contextualizing the bunker in its tilted, derelict state of abandonment to arouse memories of the painful past that had yet to be confronted and worked through. Today, we might ask, "What is the bunker of this post-postwar era?"² Virilio's work seems to suggest that today's "bunker" is a *Museum of Accidents* and, as he has proposed more recently, a *University of Disaster* (2009)—facilities that do not provide a physical or spatial armament, like the bunker, but invoke a kind of psychological defense against the repetition of accidents and the desensitization to their occurrence. These projects bring Virilio's critique in alignment with

¹ Virilio 2009: 20.

² This question was asked during the defense of this thesis on June 3, 2013, by Ted Heibert, PhD, Assistant Professor, School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, UW Bothell.

Adorno's urgent message. It seems that there is no effective bunker, and we must "come to terms" with this reality in order to master the past and prepare for future potential catastrophes.

The other surprising connection between Virilio and Adorno is that of mimesis. A large portion of the research for this thesis concerned Virilio's design process, which he has described intensely in several key interviews. The most insightful set of conversations with Virilio and Marianne Brausch in *A Winter's Journey* (2011) introduced the mimetic qualities of Virilio's artistic production. Namely, what Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory* identifies as the *memory trace of mimesis*:

The memory trace of mimesis unearthed by every artwork, among other things, anticipates a condition of reconciliation between the individual and the collectivity. And this collective remembrance is not divorced from the subject but actualizes itself through it. The latter's impulsive aversions are an indicator of collective modes of response. That is why the philosophical interpretation of truth content has to proceed through the particular as well. The subjectively mimetic and expressive moment of works of art terminates in objectivity. They are neither pure impulse nor pure form, but the congealment of the process of obtaining between impulse and form. This process is a social one.³

Regarding the bunker-church of Sainte-Bernadette, an application of mimesis in this sense at first seems incongruous. The literal form of the bunker does not inherently convey what Adorno requires for mimetic art; that the "the true language of art is speechless".⁴ The harsh imagery of the Nazi military infrastructure for the design of a Catholic church was, and perhaps still is, difficult to penetrate due to the loud and offensive associations it suggests. Virilio's mimetic impulse, however, is not in the application of the bunker aesthetic, but in the "reconciliation" that generated the expression and its experience. This includes his conception of "cryptic architecture", determined through his personal coming to terms with WWII and his exploration of anti-form through *Bunker Archeology*, and his critique of the Enlightenment and "Occidental geometry". The decrepit ruins of the Atlantic Wall, according to Virilio, mirrored the failure of Modernism in the irony of their resemblance to both the architecture of avant-garde movements

³ Adorno, Adorno and Tiedemann 1984: 190.

⁴ *Ibid.*: 164.

and the “ordinary habitat, so very ordinary over so many years”.⁵ Virilio associates the “modern” forms of these ordinary habitats with the biomorphic imagery of hard outer-shells of various types of bodies—dead turtles, abandoned helmets, and tombs—ensuring that the deserted bunker is a glimpse into the inevitable doom of Modernism’s future.

The artistic production of Virilio’s mimetic orientation occurs in his pursuit of anti-forms, through which he initially came to believe in an ominous destiny for modern architecture. According to O’Connor’s reading of Adorno, the mimetic apprehension, as delineated in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, can be understood as an “original imitative capacity through which human beings once sought to apprehend the outer world”.⁶ Virilio’s activity of painting, for example, was this kind of spatial imitation of his world, so that he could “find his place” in it after the war. Adorno and Horkheimer further define that there is not just a process of reenactment within this imitation, but also self-subjectification with obscure environments or roles. They cite a magician’s mimetic impulse as an example: “The magician imitates demons; to frighten or placate them he makes intimidating or appeasing gestures.”⁷ Through painting anti-forms and his archeology of bunkers, Virilio made his perception like that which would have been his in the spaces he wished to understand—enacting an Adornian “mimetic behavior [which] does not imitate something but assimilates itself to that something”.⁸

Virilio’s descriptions of his encounter with bunkers are full of this kind of assimilation and interchange between himself and the architectural objects. The mimetic behavior, as demonstrated by Virilio’s explorations and making of anti-form, is experienced through the act of representing the phenomenological experience artistically and architecturally, and, later, re-experiencing the original pattern of displacement via the representative structure. The architecture of Sainte-Bernadette, for example, is this kind of structure that preserves an ontological mapping of consciousness. The building

⁵ Virilio and Collins 1994: 12.

⁶ O’Connor 2013: 151.

⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer 1972:6.

⁸ Adorno, Adorno and Tiedemann 1984: 163.

does not literally imitate Virilio's personal experience of anti-form, but it recalls the "rupture in the apprehension of the real" provoked through his experience of the abandoned military infrastructure. An excerpt from *Bunker Archeology* illustrates the anti-form as a mimetic orientation toward unknown objects:

The concrete mass was a summary of its surroundings. The blockhouse was also the premonition of my own movements: on arriving from behind a dune I fell upon a cannon—it was a rendezvous—and when I started to circle the fortification to get inside and the embrasure of rear defenses became visible in the armor-plated door opening, it was as if I were a long-awaited guest. ... This game created an implicit empathy between the inanimate object and visitor, but it was the empathy of mortal danger to the point that for many it was unbelievably fearsome. The meaning was less now that of a rendezvous, and more of combat: "If the war were still here, this would kill me, so this architectural object is repulsive."⁹

Though it is subtle, there is a personification of the bunker anti-form in Virilio's recollection of these initial encounters. He finds his movement toward the blockhouse has been somewhat predetermined and considered by the strategic arrangement of architectural components, and thus the nature of his confrontation transitions from a "rendezvous" to that of "combat". Virilio, as we know, persevered in his pursuit of this "repulsive" architecture out of "curiosity" and a desire for personal transformation. He expected that,

...these littoral boundary stones were to teach me much about the era and much about myself. ...I would hunt these gray forms until they would transmit to me a part of their mystery...¹⁰

Jürgen Habermas's description of this transformative relationship, which applies to Virilio and the "littoral boundary stones", is fitting:

Imitation [or mimesis] designates a relation between persons in which the one accommodates to the other, identifies with the other, empathizes with the other. There is an allusion here to a relation in which the surrender of the one to the example of the other does not mean a loss of self but a gain and an enrichment.¹¹

It is clear that Virilio seeks something of himself through the anti-form of the bunker. In making his architecture about similar encounters, he is urging the present and future inhabitants of his work to do

⁹ Virilio and Collins 1994: 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 11.

¹¹ Habermas 1984: 390.

the same. While his work is highly personal, it is also extremely relevant to its historical context. His usage of the bunker and its phase of dereliction could stand alone as an exclusive archeology of Virilio's war experience. However, in suggesting that in his experience of anti-form along the Atlantic Wall he was able to retrace his own dislocation and access original geometries, he considers his discovery an *authentic* universal architecture. In this subjectivity, his proposal for "cryptic architecture" countered that of modernism's claim for universal forms and spatial configuration.

Returning to one final discussion of Sainte-Bernadette, Virilio's architecture of the bunker-church is not about imitating the bunker itself, but about imitating an experience of the bunker that resists the aesthetics of Auschwitz. Where both Virilio and Adorno agree that the creation and perception of art after Auschwitz is perpetuated by the dehumanizing structures of Enlightenment reason, the two seem to also reach consensus that through mimesis one can discover a means of redeeming art after Auschwitz. This connection is visible through their common skepticism of constructivism: the process of knowing the world through systems conceived prior to confronting unfamiliar subjects. As O'Connor clarifies, a constructivist pursuit of knowledge makes "the world fit with its systems", as opposed to the existential approach (through *kraftfeld*) that both Virilio and Adorno advocate is the foundation for encountering the real world.¹² Mimetic structures of encountering art, therefore, are formed through the artwork's "apparitional quality or phenomenality", as Amresh Sinha explains in his essay "Adorno on Mimesis in *Aesthetic Theory*".¹³ The perception of art through the predetermined structures of reason, which Virilio and Adorno identify as oppressive (presentational) systems dominated by the aesthetics of Auschwitz, is "pitiless" and therefore does not constitute an experience of "authentic art". As O'Connor explains, Adorno's main assertion is that "authentic art expresses the destruction of experience in late capitalism without naming it ... by enabling us to have an experience of experience that has become irrational."¹⁴

¹² O'Connor 2013: 151.

¹³ Sinha 2001: 145-159.

¹⁴ O'Connor 2013: 157.

The only acceptance for employing these structures in the production of “authentic art” is that the artwork itself must reference that there is something wrong in this approach. As Adorno writes:

The opposition of artworks to domination is mimesis of domination. They must assimilate themselves to the comportment of domination in order to produce something qualitatively distinct from the world of dominion.¹⁵

In essence, Adorno argues that an artwork can resist “domination” by imitating and at the same time critiquing oppressive structures.

Virilio’s application of the bunker and its “repulsive” architectural forms relate to the comportment of domination. He references a previous experience of domination through the imagery of the Atlantic Wall and the contemporary domination by collective fear. He explains,

...my church at Nevers, ... which is shaped like a bunker, takes that form, because it refers to this collective fear at the end of the world.¹⁶

Architecture, therefore, assumes the comportment of domination through assimilating and critiquing the symbols of this collective guilt and fear. In subjecting the architecture of the church of Sainte-Bernadette to this imagery, Virilio disarms the dominating aesthetic through the “primary architecture” of bodies that can move freely through the space. The architecture of the bunker, as it was designed for the Atlantic Wall, was off-limits. For Sainte-Bernadette, the domination of the bunker is voided by presence of the congregation and their flow through the double ventricle plan. Similarly, the appearance of the bomb shelter is undone by its interior—the giant fracture in the ceiling and the light that penetrates the dark mass expose the architectural container. The movement of people and light throughout the structure generates a mimesis of this domination, through which something other than domination is exercised. Parent’s description of Sainte-Bernadette echoes this ambivalent embrace of domination:

¹⁵ Adorno, Adorno and Tiedemann 1984: 289.

¹⁶ Virilio and Brausch 2011: 60.

...in architecture sometimes one must, even when enthralled by liberty, submit with hands and feet tied to the fascination of the form of others; as always resulting from this, rightly or wrongly, is the development of an imaginary world.¹⁷

However, the treatment of Sainte-Bernadette should not be considered an aesthetization of the bunker. Virilio, in assimilating domination and its subversion through “primary architecture”, seems to also contest the use of aggressive forms without, as he says:

making us directly aware of it, it is acting upon us, it is already spreading before our eyes, its dwellings, temples; permanence without memory of its mentality.¹⁸

Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay is shocking because it screams of this memory of the mentality of domination. The experience of the building, however, exposes the reality of the failure of this mentality. Virilio’s “prospective” architecture of the abandoned bunker is worked out through the oblique function. Once the user has passed through the threshold of the aggressive exterior, the surprising slope of the ground recalls the derelict state of the modernist dream.

Through the “prospective” architecture of war, Virilio choreographs a mimetic orientation toward the imminent future of humanity—the “extermination” of “turbo-capitalist” success.¹⁹ Anti-form, the *oblique function*, Sainte-Bernadette, *Museum of Accidents*, and now a *University of Disaster* (his latest project) expose this “exterminator” as it appears throughout Virilio’s perception of history. His

¹⁷ Parent 1991: 55.

¹⁸ Virilio 1966c

¹⁹ In response to a question about his belief in the idea of “the predator”, Virilio addresses the idea of “exterminator” and the urgent need for a *University of Disaster*: “I think that the predator has already been superseded. The predator occupied the beginnings of history. It was the first type. The second type was the producer, regardless of whether he was a farmer, an artisan or an industrialist. And of course the capitalist is related to both predators and producers. Today, through multinationals and turbo-capitalism, through the tremendous speed of current-day financial markets, we are witnessing the emergence of a third type (like Spielberg’s *Third Kind*)—the exterminator. The exterminator is not like the exterminations of Nazism, it is not linked to racism or fascist ideology, but is the product of the inconsistency of progress. Catastrophe has resulted not from failure but from success. Accidents today arise not from a breakdown—some kind of physical collapse or destruction—but from breakthroughs. Hence the urgent need for a University of Disaster to cope with the catastrophe of success in all its different fields (in energy, computer sciences, genetic engineering, etc.). And the irony of the exterminator is that everything he does is in the name of capitalistic accumulation and yet ultimately the exterminator, true to his name, destroys. The richness of all the world’s civilizations is potentially at risk. The exterminator is one who will ultimately put everything to an end ... and by his success. And this is not just some allegorical figure—already emerging are personalities who are exterminators operating with real power. We need to prepare our resistance. Long live life.” (Tappan and Andrianopoulos 2008: 38.)

architecture, both concrete and conceptual, demonstrates an escalating fear in Virilio himself; and through his work he issues an Adornian warning for the twenty-first-century:

The richness of all the world's civilizations is potentially at risk. The exterminator is one who will ultimately put everything to an end ... and by his success. And this is not just some allegorical figure—already emerging are personalities who are exterminators operating with real power. We need to prepare our resistance. Long live life.²⁰

It may be uncomfortable to “face up” to his depiction of the accelerated present, however, Virilio's church indicates that in the context of post-WWII Europe it was still possible to come to terms with the past through confrontation with the symbols of domination. The mimetic qualities of his architecture place us in tension with objects of oppression and encourage us to undertake collective and personal archaeologies of our perceptions.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

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