Paul Virilio
The Futurism of the Instant: Stop-Eject, trans. Julie Rose.
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Paul Virilio approaches the subject of future environmental migrants, those displaced by conflict as well as by development projects. If earlier eras were about 'sustainable staying-put,' this new era will be one of 'habitable circulation,' which calls into question notions of citizenship and nationhood. Virilio calls the resulting upheavals the 'portable revolution,' which, along with revolutions in transportation and transmission technologies, will lead to what he calls an 'interactive planisphere.' Throughout the work, Virilio moves from the smaller scale (for instance, discussing the loading dock or the train station) to the larger scale (the city as a whole, or the whole world in movement), suggesting that these spaces of movement are ultimately ungovernable, at least in terms of conventional legal governance.

Virilio's book is difficult for a number of reasons. First of all, it is dense: Virilio's prose uses a wide and seemingly disparate vocabulary, strewn with terms from the French which don't properly (or, more accurately, fully) translate into English. Perhaps this is not the problem with the source text itself; perhaps this is the problem with reading Virilio in translation. This is not to say that Julie Rose's translation is lacking: she makes it quite clear what difficulties might lie in waiting for the English reader in her introduction. In fact, Rose's preface indicates the themes of this short but complex book: 'mass population flows, displacement, exodus, exile, expatriation, exurbanism, extraplanetary exploration' (ix). Those readers who are familiar with Virilio's use of language (in translation) might not find his style problematic.

Secondly, Virilio's text is difficult also because of its fragmentary nature. Whereas other writers, Roland Barthes for instance, reveled in the notion of fragmentary writing, Virilio seems to want to present a complete, coherent text. Unfortunately, however, it seems to present itself as fragments. The reader will find solace in reading a few pages and then putting the book down in order to attempt an understanding. In a way, though, Virilio's text mirrors the overarching theoretical ideas contained in the book: Virilio speaks of speed in the early twenty-first century and its effects (its results). His text is formatted for speed: he mentions issues and leaves them, moving on to a new issue with a new paragraph.

Thirdly, the difficulty of Virilio's text lies in its negative outlook on society in the early part of the twenty-first century. While societal criticism is not unwelcome for any reader, it seems that Virilio is fundamentally discouraged regarding the state of the world, its speed, the destruction of the suburban landscape, and the creation of the vertical 'ultracity.'

This is the strength of Virilio's book as well, though. It is an uncompromising look at the power of what he calls *révolution de l'emport*, or what Rose has deemed the 'portable revolution,' a movement enacted because of the increases in the 'payload capacity,' or *capacité d'emport*, of the twenty-first century, in terms of transportation and communications

technologies. It should also be mentioned that, while his tone seems to be negative, it is not without compassion. In the first part of the book, entitled 'Stop-Eject,' Virilio both seems to mourn the loss of suburbs (or the spread of cities, a movement brought about by the introduction and appropriation of the automobile in the 1950s) and to mourn the movement of immigrant and displaced populations to urban centres.

He carries this sentiment to the second part of the book, 'The Ultracity.' In this section Virilio remarks that while there exists movement away from suburbia to the city, as well as a movement of displaced people, there is also the movement up, into what he calls the VHB, that is, the Very High Building. While some of this material seems not to be particularly novel, Virilio's insights are compelling. While the skyscraper seems the ideal urban architectural form (he even calls it a kind of 'space craft' allowing us to leave the planet for more spacious surroundings), it also marks a sort of loss of pedigree or history. In other words, just as immigrant communities, those relegated to transportation by shipping container, constitute a diaspora, so do skyscraper occupants. They are just as uprooted from any sense of attachment to the land. It is an interesting notion, and one applicable to many, especially in the urban West.

If space is problematized in the twenty-first century due to progress in terms of communication and transportation technologies, so is time, as Virilio argues in the third section, 'The Futurism of the Instant.' What he calls 'the balance of computerized terror' leads to a loss of memory – a loss of the past, but also a loss of the future. Virilio argues that the end result is an experience of a kind of perpetual instant.

What Virilio sees as a blight he also sees as the solution: in order to solve problems such as the erasure of space and time and the chronic consumption of the Earth by its occupants, he suggests that we become nomads, to counteract the sedentary characteristics of the Ultracity. In its constant communication and transportation flows one can find *rootedness* in a way. This is a rootedness of global citizenship, a community of all peoples, for the sake of the planet. If Virilio's work seems too negative, he at least offers some glimmer of hope in a method of reversal of what, in other parts of his book, seem to be inevitable results of technological and spatial globalization.

Unfortunately, Virilio does not dwell on this idea for very long, as the dense, fragmented and negative discourse continues. Fundamentally, this book embodies some of its own frustrations. Its prose moves at speeds that can make it difficult for the reader to 'govern,' perhaps mirroring the continuing difficulties in world governance that are due to the increased movements and flows of its citizens. The text seems to embody changes to transmission technology, barely remaining on the page and barely allowing for understanding. But it is in this very complexity that Virilio's point is perhaps made most strongly. Evoking the themes of the book that Rose suggests in the preface, the reader becomes part of these mass population flows, displaced and in exodus and exile.

This work is difficult, dense, and complex, but it certainly is not without its worth. It is cautiously recommended for those interested in exploring global migratory and information flows, and what might be in store for this world, and the 'ultraworld,' in the twenty-first century.

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