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JCST Professor Virilio, as both an architect and a critic how do you link your built work with your writing?

PV Well, first of all, I have carried out very few built works for the simple reason that the idea of the oblique (to which I have long allied myself) was absolutely revolutionary and therefore totally hopeless. All architecture is made on the horizontal and vertical, with the only innovation being the elevator. To pass into the oblique was therefore to enter a third architectural and urban order. That is to say, to no longer engage with the orthogonal and with Euclidian geometry but rather to play with topology and with veiled surfaces – the Möbius strip, Klein Bottle, etc. So with Claude Parent we launched the Architecture Principe group, not looking to construct but hoping to mark a full-stop because it seemed to us that verticality – the tower – had come to a dead-end. Within this idea of the end was the notion that its opposite, horizontality – in the form of the cave – was the origin of architecture, but from the moment that cities started to develop, verticality was introduced. We can see this with the pyramids or the Acropolis: both, in effect, are towers, with one block stacked on top of another, as the only means available at the time for going skywards. As soon as the hot-air balloon was invented, however, or later the airplane or rocket, the tower was finished. It became an absurd anachronism, serving no purpose anymore. I have always favoured a third dimension for the city, but I don't think this means it has to increase its density. I simply think that the third dimension is not the vertical, but the oblique. So, when I see Shanghai today and its 2,000 new towers, or the delirium of towers in Japan, Dubai or the United States, I say to myself that the tower has produced an urban catastrophe. I think that the city is the greatest catastrophe of the twentieth century.

The writing I have done on this subject has largely been informed by the Second World War. I am a child of the Second World War, having been brought up in Nantes I lived through the destruction of the city. The Second World War was my university – through it I learnt of total war and total urban destruction. I also quickly learnt of aerial bombardment, of cities reduced to nothingness – Guernica, Hiroshima, Dresden, Coventry. In 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

Paul Virilio

In Conversation with Juan Carlos Sánchez Tappan & Tilemachos Andrianopoulos

Designed to be the first in a series of encounters revisiting the concept of the oblique, 40 years after the dissolution of Architecture Principe, this interview is part of a larger body of work that I have been researching at ETSAB/UPC in Barcelona, exploring the ideas of technology and resistance in the work of Paul Virilio. I first became interested in Virilio after reading The Function of the Oblique as a student at the AA in 1999, in which Claude Parent was interviewed by former AA director Mohsen Mostafavi. My interest soon developed into a desire to meet the man himself, and talk about his ideas and influences. In April 2005, after several exchanges of letters, Virilio proposed that we meet and conduct an interview in French on 30 May in La Rochelle, France ('Paris', as Julie Rose wrote in the translator's foreword to City of Panic, 'having finally become for him, not so much unliveable, as provincial'). Located on France's west coast between Nantes and Bordeaux, Virilio lives and writes very actively in La Rochelle, an interesting tourist location with an old fortified harbour, medieval city centre and memorable seafood cuisine. Accompanying me was Tilemachos Andrianopoulos, an Athens-based architect and graduate of Solà-Morales' Metropolis programme in Barcelona, and we met for nearly two hours in a café close to Virilio's home, during which he was accessible, generous, funny and full of ideas. —JCST

Cover design for *Architecture Principe* magazine

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.

The Second World War was unlike any other because in it the battlefield was less important than the city. During the First World War, for example, the French and the Allies fought on a line, firing at an opposing German army along a hypothetical construct called the front. But just 25 years later the idea of the front disappeared. Wars were no longer decided on the edge but in the centre, where huge cities could be razed to the ground. Later, after 1945, we lived under the threat of nuclear bombardment – where there is no war, only annihilation. But the city remains at the heart of extreme violence. We can still see this today, in Baghdad and Grozny. We have passed from the geo-strategy of fronts and frontal attacks to a metro-strategy – employed by both the military and terrorists – in which it is the city that is under threat.

In Nantes, terror existed at an apocalyptic, almost mystical level. The war brought with it the quasi-divine idea that the sky could crush you. The planes were beautiful, amazing things. As a child I dreamed of one day becoming a pilot. I mean, obviously, I didn't want to be underneath the bombs but above them, occupying the sky. The other obsession of mine at that time was the notion of the 'blitzkrieg' and the idea that warfare could express itself through speed – the speed of tanks and bombers and of waves of attack. When the Germans named their brand of war 'blitzkrieg', or lightning war, they were creating a moment when for the first time speed became a determining element of modernity.

Both of these wartime fascinations have come to define my work, firstly in terms of my interest in a philosophy of speed – or dromology (named after dromos, meaning a route or entrance-way) – and secondly in

terms of the idea of the catastrophe of speed. And here I cite an important date – 1962. I refer to it in my book *The Original Accident* (2006). It is the date of the Cuban missile crisis. On one side you had the Soviet premier Khrushchev, a man from quite humble, peasant origins, and on the other, American side, Kennedy, the intellectual. As Kennedy's



advisor Arthur Schlesinger noted in his memoirs, ‘the Cuban missile affair was not only the most serious moment of the Cold War, but the most serious moment in the history of humanity’. It was life or death for the planet.

It was during this period that Parent and I designed and built the ‘bunker church’ of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay at Nevers. That is to say, the church was built at the exact moment when the future of the world was most at stake, when all over Europe nuclear shelters were being constructed as part of a defence against anticipated attack. So we too built our own shelter – and I remind you that the concept of sanctuary is part of a whole nuclear vernacular. The military absorbed the word into its logic of nuclear armament – from the moment you have nuclear weapons your country becomes a sanctuary. France became sanctuarised by the power of its arms.

The name of the shelter we designed is significant too – Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay. Saint Bernadette was the patron saint of Lourdes, where she grew up as a shepherdess in the middle of the nineteenth century. Bernadette reported that the Virgin Mary appeared to her in the cave at Lourdes – the cave, as I mentioned earlier, represents the origin of architecture. When people asked her what she had experienced she replied, ‘the cave was my heaven on earth’ – note the inversion. To escape the attention she was attracting, she then travelled to Nevers to join the Sisters of Charity convent, saying ‘I came here to hide myself’. Now, fast forward 100 years and what is the cave? The cave becomes the nuclear shelter. And so the theme of the shelter is something that saves. Similarly, when I photographed all those wartime bunkers 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. You could even go on to say that all defensive architecture is the architecture of survival. This survival is therefore fundamental to architecture because it is about creating a sound structure and offering material resistance. But the symbolism of this resistance also has a political character. The Second World War, for example, 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 whole. To resist or to collaborate is something we find repeatedly in life; resisting 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.

JCST *As an architect I can clearly appreciate the importance of resistance, but what would you say is left for architecture in a world where, as you argue, space has been consumed by time?*

PV Firstly, I would argue that technique, in any artistic or scientific form, is all about acceleration, all about dromology. You can see this everywhere in computer science, in mathematics or in audio-visual technologies. But somehow, architecture has come to oppose acceleration. Why? Well, because it takes at least two years for a building to be built. Everything conspires to ensure that architecture self-destructs – either because the materials are extremely fragile, or are pushed to the limit of their performance. There is, then, an opposition in the modern world between what we could call hyper-technology and the resistance of the architectural. The question should therefore be, what can be done in order to resist, to justify durabili-

ty? One response is perhaps that the new technologies remove us from the physical substance of architecture to the extent that you could argue that they are only about immateriality. We have passed from the real to the virtual. We have passed from the geophysics of materials and their resistance to the virtuality of the internet. In a way, then, architectural substance has surrendered before performance. For example, look at the collapse of the Roissy air terminal in Paris. My friend Paul Andreu constructed a concrete shell – a shell extraordinarily supple and light, at the limit of its material and structural capabilities. This shell then collapsed, but it wasn’t the fault of the architect or the engineers or the state securitas veritas offices who signed off on the structure. The mistake was that the initial resistance was insufficient, but obviously nobody knew this. In architecture and engineering, we tense the chord to the maximum... before it breaks. And this is the typical evolution of any material. What will happen next at Roissy is that a new shell will be constructed in steel, which shows that concrete has already been superseded. We invented reinforced concrete, béton armé, but now we are going to suppress it and have nothing but steel. So, we find ourselves in a situation similar to the one we denounced in the 1930s – ‘art for art’s sake’. It was an expression that considered art as superseded.

TA *Do you think we are in a similar state today?*

PV Yes, absolutely. Now it’s performance for performance’s sake. And in this sense we have entered the phase of the architectural accident. Architecture is no longer about resistance but about accidents. Just look at the World Trade Center; in France it is not permitted to construct a tower without a concrete core, but in the design of the WTC the concrete column had been withdrawn. It was a scandal. If there had been a concrete core, and a Boeing had flown into it, there would certainly have been problems, but it wouldn’t have done what we saw on 9/11. The whole thing was unacceptable. It was an architect’s crime.

TA *Nevertheless, it still stood there for one or two hours...*

PV Which was a miracle, for sure. Without this delay the collapse would have caused 10,000, 20,000 or 30,000 deaths. But it just proves what I have been arguing – and what I exhibited at the Unknown Quantity show in 2002 – that we cannot work on speed in every field without also looking at the idea of the accident. This problem is a major one because, as you suggested, it implies the end of architectural resistance. Look at the recent mania for architectural demolition – we really don’t have the right to do this. Sure, we can change a bad building, but do we have to destroy it?

JCST *Did you see what happened in Shanghai just a week ago? Thousands of buildings demolished. The biggest demolition event in history.*

PV The worst thing is that this has become a permanent phenomenon. Demolition is now systematic. On the one hand we destroy through bombing – levelling cities like Baghdad – on the other we destroy in order to renovate. But in both instances demolition signifies the destruction of architectural resistance. And the result, in terms of building at least, will be a situation that we are already starting to see in Spain – the double permit, the idea that you

will not get permission to construct unless you already have permission to demolish.

JCST *Your manifesto of the oblique principle, along with your various architectural projects, looked, as you said, at an alternative to verticality, horizontality, habitation and perception...*

PV The only mistake Parent and I made (because we lacked the funds) was that we didn’t construct a house according to the oblique principle. Nobody wanted to pay for it. Nobody. We should have built the Mariotti house. It would have been magnificent. At the time, there was a masonry contractor who said he would build a house with us according to the oblique principle. He was partly saying this to generate some publicity for his own firm, but he was convinced he could do it. Ultimately, though, his wife vetoed the project. We should then have looked at building it out of laminated wood. It wouldn’t have been so expensive, and it would have enabled us to integrate the furniture into the floor and walls of the house.

JCST *In light of today’s systematic dependence on new software and on design technologies how would you redefine the oblique?*

PV Today the oblique is everywhere and it’s a catastrophe. But only because of what has been made of it – it’s all blobs, blobs, blobs. Some time ago I wrote that ‘the last element to be revealed in architecture will be the floor’. That is the key. Architecture has always been about the wall, the column, the roof, the dome, the window. The thing that is always overlooked is the floor. It’s seen as something slightly vulgar, or rather base – something we step on, the ground, the earth. The ground may be covered with mosaics or rugs, but it has never had the same rights to architectural autonomy, or even to existence, as something like the window. We look at the traceries in gothic architecture and marvel at those rose windows. And they are fabulous. Fab-u-lous. But the floor is only seen as something I put my feet on. That is to say, the oblique principle applies only in relation to man. It is not just a way to amuse oneself, to make blobs. But all the drawings that Parent and I made did try to explore the floor. It is there while you’re ascending on an inclined surface; while descending; while traversing. And each time there is a position of the body at the point where the oblique favours 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.

TA *Do you see this choreography in any architecture today?*

PV No, and it really troubles me.

JCST *You have the form but not the content.*

PV Exactly. The oblique principle is relevant only because of its relation to the body. 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. It can carry the signature of a great architect

– a Gehry for example – but it’s still just a gadget.

JCST *This raises another question. We know that your principle of the oblique has influenced several architectural practices, particularly in terms of its associations with choreography and its relation to the body...*

PV And above all we can never suppress the oblique. There have always been only three possibilities available to the architect – the horizontal, the vertical and the oblique. And it is the philosopher who tells us this, not the architect.

JCST *...but in your view, is there an architect today who condenses or pushes these concepts further?*

PV No. There’s no one... but wait, there was someone before us. Someone who did push the boundaries – Frederick Kiesler, and maybe Wright at the Guggenheim too (the New York Guggenheim is better than any tower; and obviously I prefer Wright to Le Corbusier). Kiesler’s work was all about theatre – he was a set-designer more than he was an architect. And as I said before, the body is at the point of origin in architecture, and historically wherever we find bodies we find theatre and dance. There is something fundamental here, and it comes down to the idea of the vernacular, of language. The first language was not spoken or oral, but was articulated through the movement of bodies. And here again we find mass and resistance. Theatre and dance play with these ideas all the time. Dance and architecture are therefore very closely allied. Some years ago I ran a seminar at the International College of Philosophy with Derrida, and most of my students were dancers – William Forsythe included. The world’s greatest living dancer actually came to listen to me talk. He must have understood the similarity between dance and architecture, because he surely wasn’t drawn to my own skills – I am a terrible dancer.

JCST *But is there really no one in contemporary architecture who you feel works in this way?*

PV I like Libeskind. But not when he does his towers. I especially like his Shoah Centre project and the Berlin museum. Libeskind is someone I often speak with, and someone I feel close to. We have even worked together. A few years ago, as part of his own designs celebrating the 950th anniversary of the city of Groningen, among a dozen other monuments he asked me to design the project’s central piece. So I travelled to Groningen and looked around the town. In the centre of the old part of the city is the Martinikerk – Saint Martin’s Church. As soon as I saw this building I knew what I would produce for Libeskind – it would be a well, because Saint Martin is the patron saint of wells. And so I made a well, but instead of water, it holds information. Like a photographic archive it is a well of images. Initially it caused a bit of a scandal, but today it is the one monument that everyone visits.

JCST *You talk about an archive of images, but has the proliferation of media today reduced architecture to just an image, or even substituted form as a phenomenology of perception?*

PV Yes definitely, media has forced us to pass from objectivity to

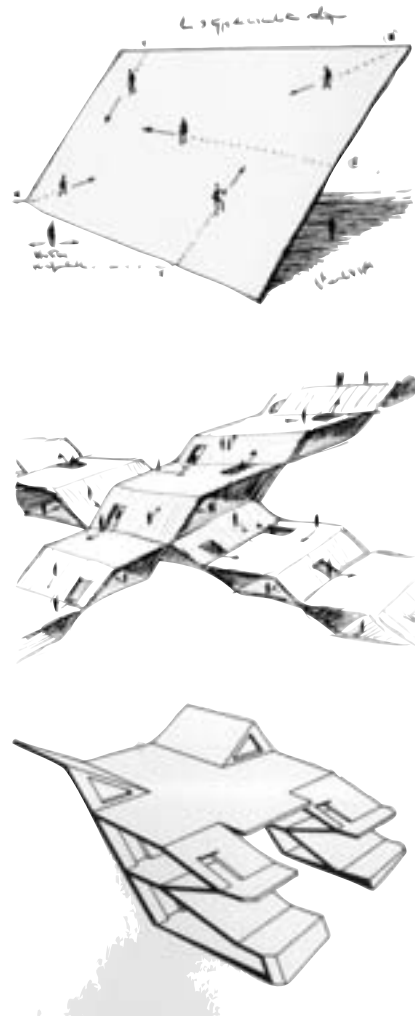
tele-objectivity, and from subjectivity to tele-subjectivity. That is to say, through television, through new technologies, we always see things at a distance now, we even feel things at a distance. Tele is everywhere. But in passing from tangible space to optical space we have lost direct contact with the things around us. Of course, there are advantages – we can now see the surface of the moon, we can see what is going on at this very moment in China or on the other side of the world – but physical, immediate contact has been broken. My teaching at the College of Philosophy was about this idea and the colonisation of tele-presence. Presence has always been a great philosophical problem, one of the great questions. I am not necessarily against the idea of distance, but you have to appreciate that it involves a certain amount of loss. There is no gain without loss. If I develop media, I lose the immediate. The pyramids, temples, cathedrals were all monuments of media. So too are all the stained-glass windows, all the world's statues. It doesn't matter what religion they adhere to – Catholic, Islamic, Buddhist, etc. – all are works of mass media. And today, as the electronic succeeds the monumental, mass media has become the singular religion. So when we denounce religion by saying that it's just a kind of obscurantism, we should realise that today's obscurantism is television. In this age of tele-presence, people also seem to think that the virtual is brilliant. It's not. Alongside the actual it is merely one half of the real. It is not that one is better than the other; there always has to be a balance. It's like with optics (there is always a left and a right) or stereophonics (base and treble). You can never separate them or suppress one in favour of the other.

JCST *The virtual and the reality of speed and distance suggest associations with real time and synchronisation. Would you say that these threaten architecture in any way?*

PV Yes, they represent the end of the world. Not apocalyptically, though (or as Fukuyama would have it, as an end of history), but geographically – literally the end of the world. This synchronisation results in the contraction of our physical environment. You could call this distance pollution. Distance and proportion have long been indispensable to man – something that an architect, more than most, can appreciate. The earth is made up of certain proportions that define us. We are 'earthmen' – born from the earth – more than we are humans. And now speed has reduced our environment to nothing. The speed of supersonic travel, of communications that pass at the speed of light. I mean, we have broken the speed of sound, the speed of heat (through the manufacture of titanium and other new material technologies) and the speed of weight (passing beyond gravity). The way things are going we are polluting not only nature – water,

fauna and flora, etc. – but also greater nature, that is to say, the world's proportions. This is what I have called the grey ecology. There are no colours, there is nothing. In this sense, the real time of the present is a historical catastrophe.

JCST *Would you say that architecture is also fuelling this catastrophe?*



Top and middle Sketch diagrams by Paul Virilio illustrating the idea of oblique circulation, 1966
Bottom Sectional perspective drawing of the Mariotti House, Saint Germain, by Claude Parent and Paul Virilio, 1966, indicating the principle of habitable circulation
Opposite Interior views of the church of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, Nevers, 1964–66. Photos: Gilles Ehrmann

PV No, it's a victim of it. Architecture is there – in the form of the cave – just as the earth is there, right at the beginning of it all. And the earth is the first victim of progress, of acceleration. Somehow architecture is the continuation of the earth. In architectural resistance – regardless of how we interpret it, vertical, horizontal or oblique – it is always the earth that is being constructed. So architecture is the victim just as the earth is the victim. And as I said earlier, the world's proportions are also victims of acceleration, as is architectural proportion. From this you get the endless delirium of towers, as Jean Nouvel would say.

JCST *But at the same time it is only through architecture that we perceive the accident. I mean, most of the photographs in your book The Original Accident show buildings that have been destroyed or towers that have collapsed. So in a way, I see architecture and engineering not only as victims but as the kind of media through which we measure accident.*

PV I remind you that matter, for Aristotle, was a composite of substance and accident. The two have always been linked. Each substance has an inherent accidental potential – for example, water and tsunamis, earth and earthquakes, snow and avalanches, etc. And

although there are museums of substance – of art and of craft, of invention (the train, the airplane, the rocket) and of technology – there are no museums of accidents or of catastrophe, which I find outrageous. No one seems to understand the need for such a thing – theorists and professors included. These institutions – museums of accident, conservatories of catastrophe – could even be brought into the academy in the form of a University of Disaster. Why? Because the university was born out of a need to confront barbarism. Similarly, the University of Disaster could be set-up to oppose the barbarism of catastrophe, whether natural or linked to so-called human genius (for example at Chernobyl).

JCST *Do you see this museum or university of accidents as an essential means of resisting certain kinds of new technology?*

PV The body – corporeality – was always our principal point of resistance, and in many ways it still should be. As I used to say, when the Titanic sank we invented S.O.S –





Claude Parent's sister, Nicole Parent, demonstrates movement on an inclined plane. Photo Michael Charles Gaffier

Save Our Souls (and I remind you that as a Christian I have nothing against souls). But now we need S.O.B – Save Our Bodies. And we need this now more than ever because the body is facing a new threat – genetics, and the cloning of human reproductive systems. After the nuclear bomb and the information bomb, we now have the third incarnation of the worst possible weapon – a genetic bomb. You can now see why the need for a University of Disaster is so urgent. What is coming is worse than the extermination camps. It is the extermination of the world.

JCST *In your book Unknown Quantity (2003) there is a section in which Lebbeus Woods writes, 'The architect is no longer the planner who determines the shape of space in advance, but one who sets up limits'. In your view, what are those limits?*

PV You should really ask Lebbeus. My own response would again be to go back to the importance of the body. If we forget the body, it will mean the end of everything. It will be when teratology – the science of creating monsters – will take over. But this in itself also raises another question – is inhumanity scientific? Inhumanity, not humanity. And the answer is no. It only represents the end. It all started with the nuclear bomb. When Oppenheimer and the other scientists in the New Mexico desert pushed the button they didn't know what kind of a reaction they were unleashing. They knew there was a risk it might never stop and yet they pushed anyway. It all started from that moment. But this is why I am a Christian. Christianity is the religion of incarnation. It is a religion in which God remakes himself as man, in the body of Christ. At this fundamental level it is exactly the opposite of how man has developed – man possessed man and the body, but then loses him. It is dis-incarnation. Technology, in this sense, disincarnates. Teratology disincarnates. By subverting the genetic code, tomorrow we will invent a man-pig, a man-horse, etc. So somehow, the exact opposite of the Christian model has taken over. What was once pure in spirit, unthinkable, singular, concerning man and woman and the body, has all of a sudden been lost.

JCST *Returning to your collaboration with Claude Parent, as a writer and theorist 40 years after you designed and built the church of Saint Bernadette, how do you feel about the work today?*

PV I am still very fond of it, but it's a bit primitive. It is a bit – how should I put it – brutal or rough round the edges. It's like when you see a picture of a foetus in the womb – undefined. But then she grew up into Saint Bernadette. Bernadette herself was a tiny little girl, just one and a half metres tall, who couldn't write and who didn't talk much, yet everyone wanted to meet and speak to her. As I said before, she retreated from all the attention by joining the convent in Nevers. There is a story that one day, three grand ladies from the Boulevard Saint Germain went to Nevers specifically to meet the visionary. Bernadette agreed to see them only in the presence of all the other sisters in the convent. When these three noble women entered the room one of them, a duchess or some similarly ennobled lady, said, 'so show me the visionary'. The Mother Superior indicated Bernadette and the lady exclaimed incredulously, 'is that it'? And Bernadette replied, 'Yes, madame, this is all there is'. And this is

my attitude towards the church we created – yes, that's it, and this is all there is.

JCST *After the 'accident' what's next?*

PV Many people consider me a nihilist – that I'm someone who talks only about catastrophe – which really I'm not. So in response I feel the urge to write a short book on the violence of hope – a small book not on violence, or hope, but on the violence of hope. That is to say a book on ethics rather than aesthetics.

TA *Paul Valéry once said that optimists write badly. Maurice Blanchot replied in L'écriture du désastre that pessimists do not write at all...*

PV Yes, yes, exactly.

TA *Walter Benjamin also writes in One Way Street (1926), '... the exclusive emphasis on an optical connection to the universe, to which astronomy very quickly led, contained a portent of what was to come. The ancients' intercourse with the cosmos had been different: the ecstatic trance. For it is in this experience alone that we gain certain knowledge of what is nearest to us and is remotest to us, and never of one without the other.' And he ends by stating that 'Living substance conquers the frenzy of destruction only in the ecstasy of procreation'. And so my question is, could the accident be a new non-conscious, non-controlled form of ecstasy like the Second World War?*

PV Certainly. Speed is a form of ecstasy, so too is acceleration and life as a whole. That is why we are indeed in a world of philo-folly – not philo-sophy but philo-folly.

TA *Camus wrote that folly is something rare for individuals but for eras and whole peoples it is the rule.*

PV Indeed. The twentieth century is a century of absolute folly – Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Chernobyl...

TA *So you consider it a non-conscious form of ecstasy?*

PV Yes, absolutely. A collective folly. Camus, as you said, has written extensively on this issue.

TA *For Benjamin too it was something almost necessary or inevitable.*

PV Yes, and what was tragic about Benjamin was that he committed suicide. (There is, by the way, a very beautiful monument to him in Portbou, on the Spanish-French border where he died, by the Israeli sculptor Dani Karavan.) But why did Benjamin do it? Well, firstly, it was because he felt there was no hope, but it was also because he didn't believe in the primitive character of the man waiting for him, the 'ferryman', who was meant to take him across the Pyrenean border into Spain. But Walter Benjamin had an urban mind, a developed mind, and was perhaps not primitive enough to realise the nature of the transaction – to be able to cross over into

Spain he needed to pay the man. This is not a criticism. It's a comment on his civility and urbanity. Everyone else was paying. He had the means, but he didn't pay. I don't know if it was only him who made this decision, but it seems like it came down to a choice between either paying or killing oneself (basically, a choice that sums up the whole history of humanity).

TA *You once wrote that 'living in space is dance. For me, that is what architecture should do. The model for architecture is Nietzsche's dancer.'*

PV Yes, but I am not Nietzsche...

TA *But according to Nietzsche, the manner in which a man reacts to the New Testament is an indication of the classic tastes in his body. If 'living in space is dance' then what in your opinion is the relationship between Christianity and dance?*

PV Oh la la! I have to confess that I haven't considered it. But just thinking about it now, one would have to talk about the Dance of the Seven Veils by Salome, who condemns a man to death simply by the beauty of her performance. King Herod asks what he can give her in return for such a wonderful dance, and Salome replies, 'bring me the head of John the Baptist'. John the Baptist had been imprisoned as the precursor of Christ and on Salome's instruction he was decapitated in his cell. In this story we therefore have a direct relation between dance and Christianity. Dancing is a seductive business. But the dance that I am interested in is not one of death but life. We have passed from incarnation to re-incarnation, that is to say, to the resurrection. This also seems to fit with your question in the sense that through the resurrection we reach the sublime image of the dance, since dance is something not performed by man anymore but by a superman. And here we obviously find Nietzsche again, but also, in terms of dance itself, great performers like Nureyev.

TA *If we return again to your dromology, you once wrote that 'We are obliged to re-invent a politics of speed, the milieu of which should be the city, from the moment that the city (polis) and politics are linked... We need a politics of matter and not only of light'. Where do you think that this deep mastery of speed has best been materialised in terms of civic space?*

PV I think that Greek democracy already offered an obvious model, but interestingly, as much as the polis and the city, the power of its governance was evidenced in its ships and navy. Power has always been a direct consequence of speed, and the thalassocracy (or maritime rule) of Ancient Greece was based on a dromocracy (or rule of speed). You can see the same thing in the Middle Ages – chivalric rule (from the French word chevalier, or a man who rides a horse) was all about the speed of a chosen means of physical transport, in this case, the horse.

TA *And it's always the body that is being transported.*

PV Absolutely. The body is always present. Until we achieve some kind of technological miracle and learn to travel at the speed of light, movement will always be limited by the

speed of our bodies and, in architectural or urban terms, by the markers that have traditionally defined that movement – the structures of the city, parcels of land, the hypothetical markers of plot lines and grids...

TA *Tracings in space...*

PV Yes, exactly. And the word trace is also significant – to trace means to cross, to traverse. It means to go from here to there. In this sense it already signifies movement. We have always been bound by these traces, like the east-west orientated decumanus road of Roman planning and its corresponding north-south cardo. Both are limits, just as the circle is a limit and the square. The problem today is that there are no longer any limits. There is no politics of the speed of light. So the question is, is it possible? Because I remind you that the speed of light presupposes the question of the divine – ubiquity, instantaneity, immediacy, all the attributes traditionally associated with God. So is a politics of divinity possible without God? This is the question that defines both fundamentalism and atheism today. It all comes down to illuminism, to the cult of light and its speed. We're living in an illuminist society without knowing it.

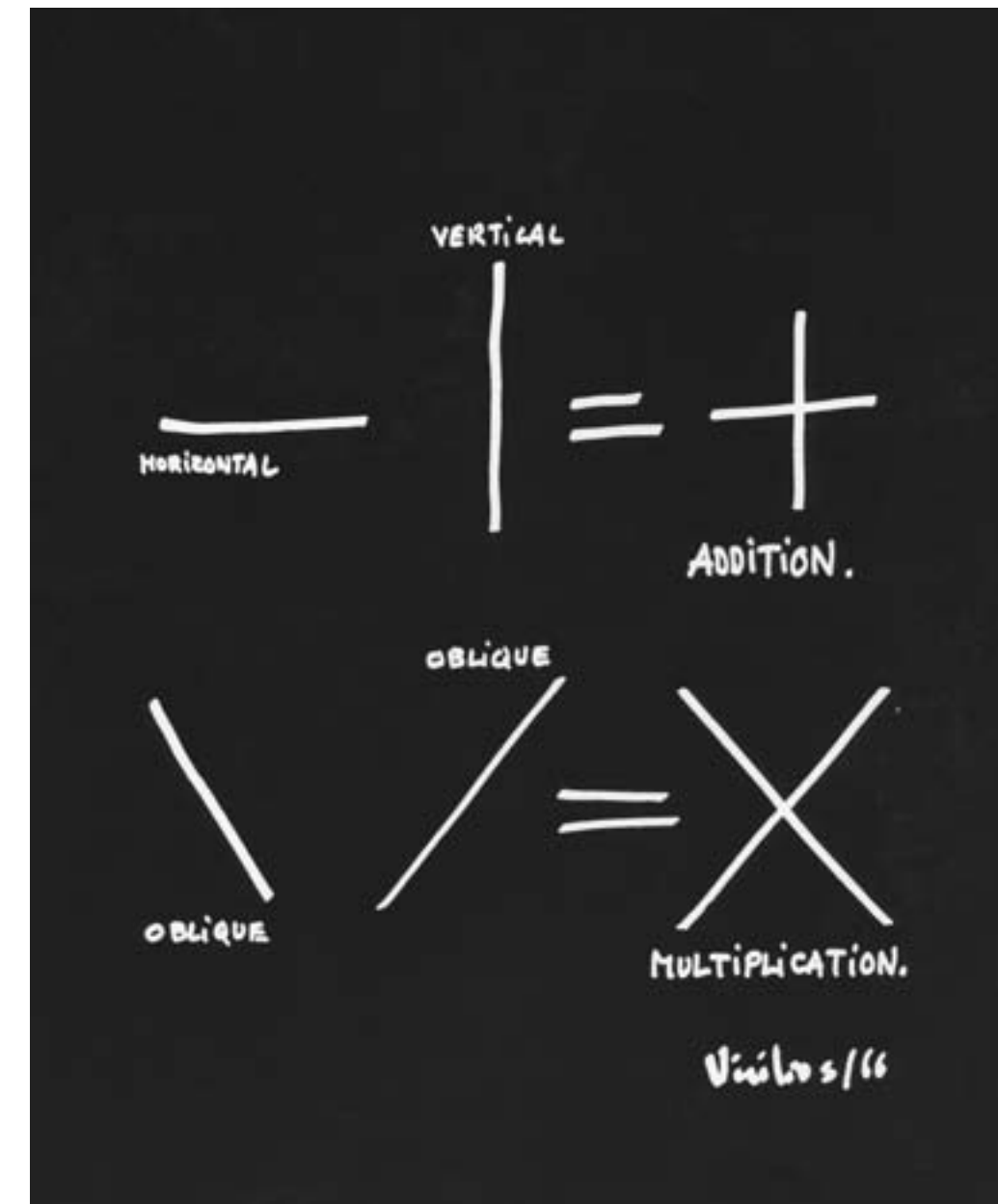
TA *The architectural theorist Sanford Kwinter recently ran a class on the destructive convergence in the contemporary city of financial markets and the markets of knowledge and information by highlighting the question 'who is the predator and who is the prey?'*

PV Ah yes, that's a good question.

TA *Do you believe in the idea of the predator?*

PV 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 to 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 civilisations 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.

Claude Parent (left) and Paul Virilio (right) in the 1960s
Paul Virilio's ideogram of the function of the oblique,
from *Architecture Principe* magazine, 3 April 1966
All images courtesy of Claude Parent



Pedro Ignacio Alonso is an architect who completed his PhD at the Architectural Association on the modernist conceptualisation of architecture as a work of assemblage. He has taught at the AA since 2005, currently in the Histories and Theories Masters programme, and recently received an RIBA Research Trust for his forthcoming study on the Soviet KPD system and the politics of prefabrication.

Tilemachos Andrianopoulos...

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Hal Foster is the Townsend Martin '17 Professor of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University. His landmark edited book, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, identified the end of the modern era and the arrival of postmodernism. His other books include *Compulsive Beauty* (1993), *Design and Crime* (2002) and *Prosthetic Gods* (2004). He lectured at the AA in October 2007 on 'Chat Rooms, Archived Spaces & Other Conundra in Contemporary Art'.

Alex Gino and *Jason Griffiths* run Gino Griffiths Architects and live and work in Southwest USA. They have won several international competitions and have exhibited and published widely including *Architecture*, *JA*, *JAE* and *The Sunday Times*. Alex's work engages perceptual, interactive environments, film-set design and surface finishes. Jason is an Assistant Professor of Architecture at Arizona State University specialising in digital fabrication, small civic buildings and contemporary iconography. Current built work includes a house in the Mojave Desert, California and the ASU Freshman Dining Pavilion. Alex and Jason have lectured widely throughout Europe, the US and Mexico and have taught at the AA, Bartlett, Westminster and the Tech de Monterrey.

Contributors

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Celia Scott is a sculptor chiefly known for her heads of modernist figures, from T S Eliot to Colin St John Wilson and Eduardo Paolozzi. Her work has recently been published in the book *Celia Scott* (2008). She is also an architect and has built a variety of small projects in the UK and USA. Her memorial plaque to James Stirling can be found in the porch of Nicholas Hawksmoor's Christ Church Spitalfields.

Juan Carlos Sánchez Tappan is a Mexican writer, educator and architect with the Barcelona-based practice SOFAR, and holds architectural degrees from the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, the AA and is currently a doctoral candidate at the UPC-ETSAB Barcelona. He teaches on the Metropolis programme in Architecture and Urban Culture, FPC-BAC and as a visiting lecturer at Tung Hai University, Taipei and London Metropolitan University. His writings and design work has been published in *Corporate Fields* (2005), *AAX*, *AD* and *Art4D* among others. He is a member of the Urban Flashes group and is affiliated to Urban Research Bureau BCN.

Georges Teyssot has taught at Princeton University, where he directed the PhD programme in architecture, and currently teaches at Laval University, Quebec. He was the co-editor with Monique Mosser of *The Architecture of Western Gardens* (1991) and editor of *The American Lawn* (1999), published in tandem with an exhibition of the same title at the CCA in Montreal which he co-curated. His recent article, 'Architectural Embodiment: Prosthetics and Parasites' was published in *Perspective, Projections and Design* (2007).

Paul Virilio is a cultural theorist, urbanist and philosopher. In 1963 he formed the Architecture Principe group with the architect Claude Parent, the painter Michel Carrade and the sculptor Morice Lipsi. Among the buildings the group produced is the Church of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, Nevers (1964–66) and projects for houses designed according to the 'function of the oblique', notably the Mariotti House (1966) and Woog houses (1966–1968). He is the author of numerous books, including *Lost Dimension* (1991), *Bunker Archaeology* (1994) and most recently *Art as Far as the Eye Can See* (2007).

Madelon Vriesendorp is an artist, writer, costume designer and co-founder of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture with her husband Rem Koolhaas, Elia and Zoe Zenghelis. Her paintings have appeared in Koolhaas' own book *Delirious New York* (1978) and have been exhibited at the New York Guggenheim and Max Protatch galleries, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Stedelijk in Amsterdam, Berlin's Aedes Gallery and Gallery Ma in Tokyo. She has taught art and design at a number of schools, including the AA and the Edinburgh School of Art and more recently has worked in collaboration with Charles Jencks and with her daughter Charlie on several books and art projects. A retrospective exhibition of her work, 'The World of Madelon Vriesendorp', opened at the AA in January 2008.

Elizabeth Wilson is a visiting professor at the London College of Fashion, University of the Arts, London. She is the author of a number of non-fiction works on dress and other aspects of cultural history, including *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (1985), *The Sphinx in the City* (1991) and *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (2000). Her novel *The Twilight Hour* was published in 2006 and a second, *War Damage*, will be published in 2009.

Christopher Woodward graduated from the AA in 1962 and then worked for Alison and Peter Smithson until 1971. In the 1970s he worked with the Milton Keynes Development Corporation on the planning and implementation of the first phase of Central Milton Keynes. Between 1980 and 2000 he lectured at the Bartlett, UCL. With co-author Edward Jones he is currently preparing a new edition of their *Guide to the Architecture of London* (1983).