# The Virilio Dictionary

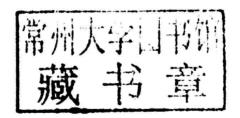


Edited by

John Armitage

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this book to Paul Virilio, who first introduced me to the critical investigation of art and technology through my initially stunned discovery of his *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology* (2006 [1977]) in Northumbria University library, and whose later kindness and understanding has continued to motivate my thoughts, reading and writings.

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### Introduction

# John Armitage

Paul Virilio is one of the leading critics of art and technology working today. He has an exceptional scope of investigation, which includes everything from the city to military architecture, from technology to geopolitics, from speed to ecology, aesthetics, cinema and war. This scope, aligned with a potent and piercing critical intellect, comprises the most exciting thing about studying Virilio.

The Virilio Dictionary aspires to offer a compressed yet understandable introduction to Virilio's key concepts and clarify why his ideas are vital to our critical comprehension of contemporary art and technocultural studies. If we want an awareness of why Virilio's notions are significant, and of the effect they are having on critical theory, art and technocultural studies, we must hang onto two important concepts simultaneously: phenomenology and hypermodernism. For many of his fellow critical theorists, Virilio is one of the world's most important interpreters of phenomenological ideas working in the present period; and his writings on hypermodernism are some of the most powerful examinations of that cultural phenomenon (Armitage 2000; James 2007). Anybody writing on these two subjects will most likely find themselves wrestling with 'Virilian' notions.

Phenomenology is a movement rooted in the work of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) concerned with philosophically examining and methodically enquiring into the argument that reality comprises of objects and events as they are perceived or appreciated in human consciousness and not of anything apart from human consciousness. It has been very prominent in numerous fields of critical, aesthetic and technocultural thought, and has had a specific influence on aesthetic criticism and technocultural studies: a detailed explanation and reflection on phenomenology can be found in the entry on 'Phenomenology'. Hypermodernism, conversely, is the concept I (Armitage 2000) frequently employ to portray Virilio's critical comprehension of the escalated logic of contemporary art and technoculture. It is the manner and the historical era wherein much art and technology is presently being created; a comparable usage of vocabulary sees Postmodernism used to depict the mode of art and technology created throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, or modernism to illustrate the critical works of art and technology created at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries (Jameson 1991; Nicholls 1995). There have not been many efforts to delineate hypermodernism more exactly than this, and the entry on 'Hypermodernism' elucidates these in more detail. In both these important spheres, Virilio's writings have been pivotally and forcefully engaged. His two most well-known books are, arguably, Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology (2006 [1977]) and War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception (1989 [1984]): the first of these is an influential amplification of phenomenological, aesthetic and political analysis, the second an innovative study of the hypermodern disappearance of war into cinema that established the conditions of a good deal of the discussions about contemporary logistics and perception during the Persian Gulf War of 1990-1 and the Iraq War of 2003. These two emphases of Virilio's writings do not signify any transfer of attention. As we shall discover, Virilio's incisive enquiries into the hypermodern 'sight machine' in War and Cinema, for example, are in fact merely the expansion of his enduring phenomenological approaches.

It is as a phenomenologist that Virilio originally came to fame. His insights emanate from and constantly involve a 'hypercritical' viewpoint on art and technoculture, but he is never inflexible, and his allure is not at all confined to those who share his philosophical beliefs. In all that Virilio has worked on, it is the scope and suppleness of his hypercritical methodology, as much as the razor-sharpness of his farsightedness, which continues to gain him so broad a readership. Anyone taken with the aesthetic and technocultural developments of the twenty-first century, with the varied signs of that increasingly valuable idea, hypermodernism, will find his critical analyses of that aesthetic and technocultural logic indispensable reading.

### PAUL VIRILIO: AN INTELLECTUAL PROFILE

Virilio's intellectual biography helps to explain the diversity of his concerns. Born in Paris, France, in 1932, he studied German and French phenomenology at the University of Paris Sorbonne in the 1950s, journeying in Germany and France and studying in addition city planning in the 1950s, and military space and the organisation of territory from 1958 onwards. This Franco-German viewpoint intensified Virilio's feeling for his own Breton (mother) Italian (father) inheritance, and gave crucial contexts to his (*Bunker Archeology* 1994a [1975]) interpretations of the 'Atlantic Wall', the name given by Adolf Hitler during the Second World War (1939–45) to the series of Nazi-built fortifications extending some 1,670 miles along the Atlantic coast of Europe from the Netherlands to

Spain. The Atlantic Wall was an important part of the Nazis' defences, but failed to halt the Allied landings in Normandy in June 1944. Virilio took his interest in the city to the French architect Claude Parent, and together they founded, in 1963, the Architecture Principe group and the journal bearing the same title (Virilio and Parent 1996, 1997). Parent and Virilio worked with their phenomenologically inspired theory of the 'oblique function' so as to examine new kinds of architectural and urban orders. Refusing the customary axes of the horizontal and the vertical, they employed oblique planes to produce an architecture of disequilibrium, in an effort to bring the urban environment into a dynamic age of the body in movement. The oblique function resulted in the building of two main architectural works: the Church of Sainte-Bernadette-du-Banlay in 1966 and the Thomson-Houston Centre of aerospace research in Villacoublay in 1969. For Virilio, his pursuit of architecture carried with it in 1969 the appointment to a professorship and workshop director at the École Spéciale d'Architecture (ESA) in Paris Montparnasse, and membership of the editorial board of the review Esprit in 1970 before, in 1973, becoming director of studies at the ESA. Few architects, save, perhaps, Virilio's good friend, the late Georges Perec (1997), have attained Virilio's level of hypercritique, though, with many instead surrendering to traditional, infertile concepts of space. This standpoint is vital when contemplating Virilio's intellectual profile: his own unconventional vet strong-minded general directorship of the ESA, his devotion to a phenomenologically motivated philosophy of military architecture in the form of the 'archeology' of military bunkers in a country (France) that has, on occasion, been ashamed of such Nazi impositions, even his distinctive and specific mode of exhibiting at museums, researching into war and peace, and writing on military strategy, technology and cultural space, are all indications of his dedication to contemporary geopolitics and the tricky issue of understanding the world of speed and politics, militarisation and the ongoing revolution in the transportation and transmission capabilities of new information and communications technologies (Virilio, Speed and Politics 2006 [1977]). As The Virilio Dictionary concentrates on Virilio's key concepts, it will not look into his secondary notions on, for example, popular culture, defence, ecology or struggles against war (which are published in his earlier books such as Popular Defense & Ecological Struggles 1990 [1978]). But, one detail worth underlining here is that neither Parent nor architecture are individuals or subjects that direct Virilio's contemporary concerns: both an aesthetic figure and a philosopher of the cultural effects of cinematics in the phenomenological tradition, art, philosophy, the humanities and a hypercritical perspective on cultural space are the major subjects where Virilio currently works (e.g. Virilio 2009a [1980]).

In the 1980s Virilio researched into the crisis in the idea of physical dimension, published in English as The Lost Dimension (1991 [1984]). research commenced at the request of the Minister of Equipment and Housing, moving to War and Cinema, a book on the deployment of cinematographic methods utilised throughout the First and Second World Wars. From 1984 he worked on Negative Horizon (2005a [1984]), which scrutinises the relations of speed to politics, culture and society; and, from 1988, following Virilio's 'National Award for Criticism' for his work en bloc in 1987, he wrote The Vision Machine (1994b [1988]), which contends with the 'progress' in computerisation, post-industrial production and human perception. Since then he has been programme director of the International College of Philosophy in Paris (1989) and published numerous book-length treatises, for example Polar Inertia (2000a [1990]), which focus on the current developments in remote control technology, the human and the natural worlds, while nearly all of Virilio's writings have been republished and translated into countless languages. Furthermore, he eventually became the president of the ESA and chief advisor to the French Pavilion Commission for the 1990 Universal Exposition in Seville, Spain, in co-operation with the well-known French intellectual, journalist, government official and professor of 'mediology', Régis Debray (2004). However, Virilio's theoretical stress on the aesthetics of military technology and the media must not conceal the truth that during the 1990s he was working on an extremely broad assortment of books and themes, from his Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light (2002a [1991]), an anthology of his reports on the Gulf War of 1990–1 for newspapers, for instance *Libération*, and technoculture, science, war, the city, defence, to architecture. One of the first volumes to earn him an international reputation was The Art of the Motor (1995 [1993]), which incorporates in-depth analyses of the multimedia revolution and numerous Continental philosophers in the phenomenological tradition. Virilio was one of the original hypercritics of standing to bring in the currently prominent critical perspectives connected with phenomenological theorists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty to a younger generation of European, North American and Australian researchers and readers; but The Art of the Motor additionally involves a thesis of Virilio's own, that critics should focus on the new advances in nanotechnology and virtual reality as much as on the information, speed and duration that are not simple gear changes but embody, not to say disembody, the third dimension of matter, the accelerated rate of the spread of information, and the disintegration of the extension of the dimension of space and the length of the dimension of time. This powerful contention is discussed in the entry on 'The Art of the Motor'. Two years later, Virilio issued another hypercritical explanation of information technology and

the global electronic media, perception and the infantilism of cybernetic misinformation: *Open Sky* (1997 [1995]).

During the 2000s, Virilio published several dazzling books in addition to many substantial interviews. A critique of the new methods of warfare, and its relegation to images on a computer screen, Strategy of Deception (2000b [1999]) enlarged on how Virilio could find fascinating and constructive things in the seemingly culpable insincerity that others have understood as terribly corrupted by the way in which the United States and its allies conducted the Kosovo War (1998-9). Here, Virilio makes an incisive condemnation of the Kosovo War's execution; indeed, his is an important critical opinion that heralds the prospect of analysing beyond the facade of the Kosovo War and into the unknown potentialities of theorising the military encounter. This critical outlook was expanded and demonstrated in one of Virilio's most celebrated books, A Landscape of Events (2000c [1996]), his sequence of commentaries on the cultural disorder of the 1980s and 1990s, of the time of brutality, urban bewilderment, war machines and the speeding up of the experience of postmodern everyday life. This now landmark work is the focal point of the entry on 'A Landscape of Events'.

If A Landscape of Events indicates one of the high spots of Virilio's critical contributions to phenomenological, aesthetic and technocultural theory, and continues to be one of the most influential and extensively cited of his phenomenological aesthetic-theoretical texts, then the 2000s saw him more and more attracted to the phenomena of hypermodernism and hypermodernity. Two books published by the British radical publisher Verso - The Information Bomb (2000d [1998]) and Ground Zero (2002b [2002]) – are among the most commanding of his declarations on the character of hypermodern human 'advance' and technological 'progress' as ultimately destructive powers. Few critics were astonished by his involvement with this theme, because it was taken for granted by many that a phenomenologist of technoculture would be receptive to thinking through and critiquing many of the things that hypermodernism is thought to signify. But Virilio's writings on hypermodernism, such as his Art and Fear (2003a [2000]), which focuses on his vision of the effects of modern technology on the contemporary global state of art and science, politics and warfare, alongside his Unknown Quantity (2003b [2002]) catalogue, published to complement the exhibition he created for the Fondation Cartier in Paris, and which considers the philosophical problems elicited by our confrontation with accidents and their influence on our world, develops his rich phenomenological intellectual tradition. Virilio published far and wide on hypermodern phenomena throughout the 2000s, enlarging his reach from his City of Panic (2005b [2004]), an

exposition on the city as the contemporary target of political and technological dread, the gratuitous erasure of the past, the construction of identikit places, the propagation of gated communities, the ever-widening net of surveillance, and the privatisation of what was public, into *The Original Accident* (2007a [2005]) and other kinds of aesthetic and technocultural production and destruction. *Art as Far as the Eye Can See* (2007b [2005]) is an evaluation of contemporary art and politics, new media technologies, and the general cultural shift into the speed or 'chronopolitics' of mass cultural panic, which Virilio describes as the major characteristics of the twenty-first century. Simultaneously, his concern with and devotion to phenomenological theory and practice has not faded. For instance, a long interview published as *Grey Ecology* (2009) was followed by a study of the phenomenological and philosophical aspects of what he (2010a [2007]) calls *The University of Disaster* or the internment of humanity within the tighter and tighter limits of an accelerating 'dromosphere'.

Since then, Virilio's pioneering intrusions into the debates over hypermodernity have continued, mixed together with more customary phenomenological enquiries. Indeed, it is not actually feasible to isolate these two features of his philosophy. The Futurism of the Instant: Stop-Eject (2010b [2009]) is his critical account of human displacement by war, of the future of human settlement and of migration considered as a component of the accelerating exodus from the world's major cities. Investigating the creation of a circulating world city of transients on the move that will eventually remove us all from our Native Land: Stop Eject (Virilio and Depardon 2008) as we head for the ultimate exile, the exile beyond planet Earth itself, Virilio contends that our departure from planet Earth is a project that the world's crazy technoscientists have been planning for a while. Virilio's hypercritical standpoint has also become more expansive on the city, with interests in the acceleration of uncertainty and history, although some critics, such as the cultural geographer Nigel Thrift (2011), have articulated reservations concerning Virilio's writings in this field. The Great Accelerator (2012 [2010]) is a complex interpretation of hypermodernism and ideas of insecurity and the past, the fading of privacy, and speed; and The Administration of Fear (Virilio and Richard 2012) is a book-length interview on the synchronisation of emotions, the globalisation of affects, real time and the 'propaganda of progress' (Virilio and Armitage 2009).

## KEY QUESTIONS CONCERNING VIRILIO'S WORK

As a rule, the problems confronting a reader inexperienced in 'Virilio studies' (Armitage 2011) are twofold: the first is the frequently multifaceted, constantly all-embracing and, from time to time, obscure (at any rate to many English-speaking readers) critical milieu that Virilio occupies. The second problem is the predicament of reading Virilio's own and very 'French', intense, and, to begin with at least, dense writing style.

Any thorough deliberation on Virilio's texts, theories and concepts must be rooted in the settings out of which they have arisen. Certainly, this is vital for any philosopher, but it is especially critical for Virilio since he brings into play so many often avant-garde aesthetic ideas and such complex technocultural theoretical traditions. This is actually one of the many benefits of reading Virilio: in delving into his writings we unavoidably familiarise ourselves with some of the most important critical movements in 'Continental philosophy', that collection of nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century European philosophical movements that consider themselves as carrying on the legacy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (Beiser 2005), Husserl (Woodruff-Smith 2009) and Martin Heidegger (1978) and which incorporate phenomenology and existentialism, hermeneutics, structuralism and deconstructionism, particularly as compared with 'analytic philosophy' (West 2010). These movements include critical theory, modernism and postmodernism. In thinking over the key questions concerning Virilio's work, the 100 entries within The Virilio Dictionary review the features of these critical traditions that have particular significance for his writings. Entries on the 'Body' and 'Perception' present a number of the important phenomenological notions central to an appreciation of Virilio; and the entry on 'Edmund Husserl' engages with the critical environments of René Descartes and Jean-Paul Sartre.

The first point that countless readers inexpert in Virilio studies make, including the present author on initially stumbling upon Virilio's *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology* (2006 [1977]), is that he is hard to read. This question, of Virilio's idiosyncratic or, better, 'French' and concentrated prose, can set up an obstacle to readers who want a way into his books. Hardly any readers like the Virilian style on first contact, but a lot of them have learned to enjoy his style after several readings: as a fellow phenomenologist, for example, I now find it difficult to conceive that anybody could read Virilio's often at first mystifying, prolifically unsystematic and frequently lengthy sentences without great delight. Virilio's style is hard work but just has to be wrestled with if we are to understand what he has to reveal to us. Detractors have found Virilio's

style monumentally befuddled, unreliable and uninformed; physicists Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont have gone so far as to describe Virilio's style as intoxicated with itself (Sokal and Bricmont 1998: 159–65) while Thrift argues that, although 'there are some genuine insights' in Virilio's work, 'they are wrapped up in a hyperbolic apparatus that sometimes makes it very difficult to locate them' or 'win many over who do not already subscribe to Virilio's vision of an all-but-terminal modernity' (Thrift 2011: 147). The understandable question, predominantly for new readers is: why must Virilio write in such a problematical style?

Virilio proposes two answers that relate to explanation and suggestion. In reality, these two ideas have a broader significance than simply the matter of reading Virilio: they are integral to his speculative attitude concerning reading and writing Continental philosophy. In the 'Fragmentation and Technology' section of Pure War (Virilio and Lotringer 2008), his booklength interview with the French cultural theorist Sylvère Lotringer, Virilio defends his problematical style of phenomenological criticism. He remarks, initially, on his antagonism towards various critical readings founded on a belief in explanation, on a specific kind of critical writing style that he assails as blocking out his own faith 'in suggestion, in the obvious quality of the implicit' (PW, 52). Without doubt, declares Virilio, his work does not obey the rules of transparent, flowing and explanatory urbane writing taught in Parisian architecture schools. But, he enquires, what if urbane architectural writing were a deficient mechanism, what if these notions of lucidity, smoothness and explanation in fact operate as diversions from the reality of the city, persuading readers to speed read architectural texts sooner than think intensely regarding them? He contends that:

Being an urbanist and architect, I am too used to constructing clear systems, machines that work well. I don't believe its writing's job to do the same thing. I don't like two-and-two-is-four type writing. (PW, 52)

In brief, reading about urbanism and architecture ought to be hard: if it isn't deconstructed, it isn't operational. Whether we assent to the suppositions behind Virilio's philosophical position, which shuns translucent methods and machines that function properly, is uncertain. We may, for example, question a phenomenological conviction which implies that going beyond 'two-and-two-is-four type writing' assures its worth as real urban or architectural thought; which considers that building transparent techniques is defective as they are machines that run correctly; that challenging writing is superior because different or even irrational to some extent.

However, there is another facet to Virilio's understanding of his own prose: the suggestiveness of the 'obvious quality of the implicit'. 'I work in staircases – some people have realized this', he pronounces in the same section of *Pure War*:

I begin a sentence, I work out an idea, and when I consider it suggestive enough, I jump a step to another idea without bothering with the development. Developments are the episodes. I try to reach the tendency. Tendency is the change of level. (PW, 52-3)

In this interview with Lotringer, Virilio further discusses his writing in comparable terminology:

In L'Esthétique de la disparition [The Aesthetics of Disappearance], I had the revelation of the importance of interruption, of accident, of things that are stopped as productive [. . .] I handle breaks and absences. The fact of stopping and saying, 'let's go somewhere else' is very important for me. (PW, 53)

The inference is that writing in a complex style is a suggestive event. It conveys the implication that complexity is suggestive, that we discover suggestion in the explanatory power of the 'obvious quality of the implicit', in associating ourselves with staircases, rather than in just giving way to 'two-and-two-is-four type writing'. Furthermore, Virilio implies that we are not yet too lost in 'two-and-two-is-four type writing' since we can still set aside spaces for sentences and ideas as evocative jump cuts wherein the laborious development of concepts is shaken off. This is an appeal to a typically Virilian phenomenological notion. For Virilio, we are increasingly disoriented by 'two-and-two-is-four type writing' as a consequence of our ever more regimented yet sporadic lives in the twenty-first century. Virilio envisages touching the 'tendency', the 'change of level'. And his writing precisely exemplifies the tendency. Consider this, Virilio might say, concerning the aesthetics of disappearance: here we are presented with the artistic suggestion, with the visual revelation, of the cultural significance of the interval (see, for instance, Armitage and Bishop 2013). We are then no longer involved with the smooth functioning of well-oiled machines; we no longer find ourselves content with that functioning which 'drives us more and more to even further functioning' until the 'only thing we have left is purely technological relationships' (Heidegger 1998: 105–6); and the productivity we are concerned with no longer has a simple connection to our continuity or presence. In other words, we must liberate ourselves from 'two-and-two-is-four type writing'. Virilio's use of mishaps, of things that are halted as creative, of fractures, non-existence,

and of 'two-and-two-is-four type writing' here proposes, without really articulating it, that he is akin to the contemporary street car racer making a handbrake turn: that his prose is unusual, distinctive, it has idiosyncrasies and, above all, the quality of suddenly proclaiming that we need to go 'somewhere else', to an 'elsewhere' that reflects his own significant investment of himself in it. This is set against 'two-and-two-is-four type writing', against the translucent style of writing that eschews suggestion and lacks the 'obvious quality of the implicit'. It is an attractive ideal, but it is not the only means by which we can imagine Virilio's 'staircase' style.

We may, for example, imagine Virilio as an increasingly well respected member of the French critical, social and cultural theory machine, a machine that speculates on everything from architecture and the sociology of the city to the origin of social interaction by theorising empirical evidence obtained from books and newspaper reports, interviews, magazines and survey research (Gane 2003). We may, with Thrift (2011: 146), understand Virilio's works and challenging writing style as ways of deterring real people in favour of 'the idea of people' and of speaking merely 'in the name of a putative humanity'. Equally, just as we are persuaded by the French critical, social and cultural theory machine to appreciate our own academic expertise because we have had to expend many hours on French 'theory', we may be convinced to respect Virilio's theoretical and stylistic complexity as we have had to spend hundreds of hours on the concepts that make it up and which allow us to comprehend them.

Focusing on instances of Virilio's paragraphs can help locate a number of these concerns. Chapter 4 of *The University of Disaster* examines the growth of the mobile phone, and Virilio interprets its complexity to exemplify his argument. Close to the end of the chapter, Virilio remarks:

We can now better understand the development of the mobile phone, its sophistication, while we anticipate some day soon wearing intelligent garments, those future 'electronic straightjackets' that will complete the 'chemical straightjackets' once used on detainees, Soviet or otherwise . . .

It is all about paving the way for a universal remote control that will no longer look so much like the remote control involved in instantaneous telephonic virtuality as like the kind involved in the vitality behind being-there, here and now. In such a remote-controlled existence, the individual will be kept in constant contact, at every moment and at every point in their trajectory, so that they will no longer be left with any spare time. In other words, any free time, time for reflexion, for prolonged introspection. For tomorrow we will all be monopolized by the growing outsourcing of our once immediate sensations; we will all suddenly be collectivized in our affects, in our most intimate emotions, slipping and

sliding or, more precisely, 'surfing' as we will then be in a new sort of epidemic of cooperation; the pandemic of a mob once solitary, now plagued with the delirium of a UNANIMISM that the prophets of doom of the twentieth century foretold. (*UD*, 88–9)

What kinds of suggestions can we draw from reading paragraphs such as these concerning our knowledge of the evolution of the mobile phone? Virilio may answer that by obliging us to consider the complexity of the mobile phone he has completed his task; he has made us contemplate the mobile phone not just as a precursor to our wearing of intelligent garments but also as a forerunner to our wearing of electronic straightjackets that will put the last touches on the chemical straightjackets once used on Soviet prisoners. However, there is also a hazard that we may have been too confused even to start this procedure of understanding Virilio's otherwise brilliant characterisation of the mobile phone as an electronic straightjacket, as a form of authoritarian imprisonment, or that we may renounce reading Virilio's paragraphs and turn instead to the propaganda of technological progress he elsewhere disparages as the technique that the mass media employs when presenting new Apple computers and so forth (TAF, 16). Philosophising 'otherwise' is not a normal pursuit, as Virilio himself might state.

The paragraphs I have cited above exemplify another trait of Virilio's prose. The second paragraph, with its discourse of control and instantaneity, vitality, individuality, contact, time, sensations, affect and cooperation, ultimately locates itself within the network of another French critical intellectual, his ideas and theories, so much so that we find it problematical to comprehend what Virilio means by 'the pandemic of a mob once solitary, now plagued with the delirium of a UNANIMISM that the prophets of doom of the twentieth century foretold' unless we are also cognisant of Jules Romains (1885-1972) and the Unanimist movement (Norrish 1958). If we think of this as an admirable means of reminding the reader that Virilio cannot be grasped independently of the philosophy and principles of Unanimism, an early twentieth-century movement that takes thoughts of collective consciousness and crowd behaviour and inserts them into art and literature, we also need to deliberate on the ways it transmits a particular inherent avant-gardism. Virilio has reflected on Romains's Unanimism, appreciates Unanimist thought and understands Romains's founding of the Unanimist movement. If his English-speaking readers especially have not studied Romains's twentyseven-volume (1932-46) series of novels named Les Hommes de bonne volonté (Men of Good Will) – an extraordinary literary mural portraying the adventurous voyage over twenty-five years of two companions, the author

Jallez and the politician Jerphanion, which offers an illustration in literature of Unanimism – or Romains's theatrical productions, for example, L'Armee dans la ville (1908–11), Cromedevre-le-vieil (1920) or Grâce encore pour la terre! (1939-40), even those most sympathetic to the avant-garde may walk away from these paragraphs thinking that both Virilio's theories and Romains's ideals of Unanimism escape them. This places the reader effectively not merely as a critic of art or technology but simultaneously as a critic of the art of French twentieth-century literature and drama. and Virilio (and his model reader) as scholars of Romains, of French theatre and literature, and of the Unanimist movement itself. The actual construction of the second paragraph contributes to this. It begins with a claim that is clear ('It is all about paying the way for a universal remote control [...]'), but then brings in 'instantaneous telephonic virtuality' that we have to relate to 'the vitality behind being-there, here and now' in order that we can understand precisely what has been contended or shown regarding our increasingly 'remote-controlled existence'. The topic of the next sentence (the individual, who 'will be kept in constant contact') is relentlessly assailed with 'information', and this solicits numerous questions (What is individualism? What is the difference between continuous contact and intermittent contact?), but once more it must be thought about in terms of time and space, in terms of an arc in the reader's intellect, until the paragraph's ideas of human time and contemplation disclose themselves. The major futural claim ('tomorrow') involving the coming totalitarian aspects of the mobile phone ('monopolised') and 'the growing outsourcing of our once immediate sensations' is an unexpected move that designates the looming collectivisation of our most personal sensations. The process of absorbing all this, therefore, entails a prolonged exercise of dissecting the components, for instance 'surfing' and the 'new sort of epidemic of cooperation' and then assessing how they affect each other. The model reader will require an acutely avant-garde or hypermodern intellect to be capable of embracing all these opinions on pandemics and mobs, loneliness and pestilence. English-speaking readers in particular may have lost the plot before they arrive at the delirium of Unanimism; they will be required to read Romains, that prophet of doom of the twentieth century, and perhaps reread Virilio to take in what he is predicting. If Virilio is persuading us to read Romains in an attempt to appreciate what he writes, then he is taking the risk that many readers will become annoyed with him and just skip over Romains. Conversely, there is the chance that the 'suggestiveness' of Virilio's paragraph for readers is a kind of 'drama of the group' that we, the readers of Virilio, have comprehended a few of the intricacies of researching Unanimism in the writings of Jules Romains. The next paragraph on the mobile phone reads: