

Speed and Violence: Sacrifice in Virilio, Derrida, and Girard

Mark Featherstone

Sociology / Cultural
School of Social Relations
Keele University
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Staffordshire ST5 5BG
United Kingdom
M.A.Featherstone@staffs.ac.uk

Abstract

Speed and Violence considers Paul Virilio's theory of the accident and seeks to excavate his "originary scene," the moment that produced the technology / accident economy discussed in his works *The Museum of Accidents* (1989), *Politics of the Very Worst* (1999), and *The Information Bomb* (2000a). In consideration of the possibility that Virilio's thesis denies the idea of the originary position, I relate his technology / accident economy to Derrida's deconstruction. In particular the essay examines how Virilio's theory refers to the notion of *différance*. Beyond this examination of Virilio's possible atemporalism, my analysis shifts towards a consideration of the effects of speed. Through a reading that grounds the technology / accident bind in time, the essay looks towards the Girardian concept of the victim in order to suggest that the anthropology implicit in Virilio's dromology (theory of speed) affirms the centrality of the victimary position.

I

Paul Virilio's theory of the accident suggests that when one creates technology one also engineers the faults and mistakes that plague the machine. Virilio shows how technology and the accident are caught in a dynamic relationship, akin to Descartes' (O'Neill, 2000) manic quest to exorcise doubt; the more complex the technology one develops the more evasive the faults that cause the machine to malfunction become. Thus, the invention of new technology represents the attempt to order the disorder of the system and drive out the chaotic influence of the accident. Regarding this technology / accident economy, Virilio writes:

The accident is an inverted miracle, a secular miracle, a revelation. When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck; when you invent the plane you also invent the plane crash; and when you invent electricity, you invent electrocution...Every technology carries its own negativity, which is invented at the same time as technical progress (1999: 89).

Here, Virilio's attempt to see technology as totality explains the idea of the accident as negative invention. Later in the same interview, *Politics of the Very Worst*, he expands his position in order to show how the machine combats error through technological innovation:

...the development of technologies can only happen through the analysis and surpassing of these accidents. When the European railroads were introduced, the traffic was poorly regulated and accidents multiplied. The railroad engineers convened in Brussels in 1880 and invented the famous block system. It was a way to effectively regulate traffic so as to avoid the devastating effects of progress, train wrecks. The sinking of the *Titanic* is a similar example. After this tragedy, SOS was developed, a way of calling for help by radio. The explosion of the *Challenger* space shuttle is a considerable event that reveals the original accident of the engine in the same way as the shipwreck of the first ocean liner (1999: 89).

2

Virilio's reference to the *Challenger* space shuttle as the "original accident of the engine" allows one to understand the moment of the machine's error from a theoretical point of view. It shows how the radical over-determination of the mechanical structure is represented by the accidental event and invites us to see how the crash is constitutive of the violent expenditure of an excessive "supplement," that the crash occurs because the machine has been designed to work at speeds that leave absolutely no room for error. Thus Virilio explains how the excessive pace of progressive technology is limited by the faults the accident exposes. The essential function of the destructive event is to consume the excessive energy of the superabundant machine and prolong the productivity of the technological model. According to this realization it is clear that the destructive accident is also the source of the machine's renewal; its destructive consumption allows for the endless re-invention of the ordered system.

At the synchronic level, we can see how Virilio's theory of technological progress is located within a contextual framework. It is apparent that there is always a

technical structure available for the exploration of the accidental event. However, beyond this analysis of the dynamic technology / accident bind, a theory that can be compared to Bataille's (1991) thesis of excess and consumption, the narrativity of Virilio's account *appears* to follow Derrida's theory of *différance* into the groundless sphere of textuality. Put another way, because Virilio's reasoning suggests that each technological form emerges from the noise and chaos of the accident, while every accident issues from the excessive pace of technology, one seems unable to derive any originary, causal understanding from Virilio's text. For instance, in the *Challenger* example, Virilio's theory implies that the invention of the space shuttle was provoked by the failure of some earlier form of space technology, while its crash led to the invention of later, more complex, designs aimed at driving out the errors that led the space shuttle to malfunction. Although this analysis of the *Challenger* episode grounds the thesis of the accident at the synchronic level, it is difficult to locate any foundational crash or invention at the level of diachronic analysis. In other words, the temptation is to suggest that Virilio fails to excavate the "originary event": did technology predate the accident or should we see the accident as the disordered chaos that provoked the invention of the ordered machine?

In response to this apparent relativism, which has led many to regard Virilio as a post-modern thinker, the aim of this article is to show how we may ground his theory of speed (dromology) in the originary morality of a victimary position. I want to suggest that Virilio's theory of the functional accident as the recuperated negativity that allows for the progress of the non-human machine defines a form of radical subjectivism that can be the locus of a reorganized moral economy in opposition to the anonymity of post-modern machine culture. My article draws on the work of Girard and Derrida as counter-points that may allow one to understand the centrality of this moral dimension to books like *The Information Bomb* (2000a) and *Polar Inertia* (2000b).

In the first instance, the parallels between Virilio and Derrida are clear. Like Derrida's deconstruction, one may suggest that Virilio's technology / accident system appears to refer to a representational game, the oscillation between the free-play of difference and metaphysical presence which Derrida describes through the notion of *différance*. Akin to *différance*, the word that encapsulates the relationship between metaphysical presence and difference through the undecidability of the silent *a*, it is apparent that Virilio's idea of technology incubates the disorder of the accident, the free-play of chaotic energy that threatens to destroy the metaphysical structures of the machine whenever it is unleashed. Moreover, according to Bandera's (1982) reading of Derrida, the silent *a*

that stands at the core of *différance* represents the tombstone, the trace of disorder and chaos that metaphysical structures attempt to drive out. Like Virilio's concept of technology, this analysis illustrates deconstruction's understanding of metaphysics as a disciplinary form of universality. As Derrida's (1981) exploration of Plato's "pharmacy" suggests, the persistence of the absence of meaning, as described by the figure of the tombstone, should serve as a reminder that certainty and presence have never existed apart from such attempts to fix deterministic structure to our thinking about the world. Here, Derrida renounces the vain search for God, the quest for centrality and origin, and reverses the Platonic mission by emphasizing the traces of disorder. Akin to Virilio's theory of the technology / accident relation, such a position is keen to show how the outside is intrinsically linked to the inside. By opposing the aim of Plato's pharmacy, the drive to separate the cure from the poison, Derrida wants to explain how good and bad medicine are always mixed. This is perhaps deconstruction's key discovery: the realization that this mixture, the binding that relates presence and absence, furnishes a place for the maintenance of disorder.

From this comparison we can see that, as with Virilio's thesis of the technology / accident machine, Derrida recognizes that one cannot take absence away from presence because both are part of the same representational game. However, my suggestion is that where Virilio and Derrida separate is on their recognition of *speed*. In contrast to Derrida's sphere of timeless textuality, Virilio's synchronic theory of the accident is driven by a temporal dimension. Girard's thesis on the acceleration of mimetic relations allows us to see how Virilio's concept of speed leads the technology / accident oscillation towards an apocalyptic crash, the critical moment of un-differentiation. By contrast, as Bandera explains, Derrida neglects the theory of speed in his textual analysis. His deconstructive play of *différance* represents a sphere of endless deferral:

3

The point is that, as the game accelerates there will be more and more differences in less and less time. And since their reciprocal differentiation depends on the duration of their deferring, the shorter this duration becomes the less distinctly different they will be from one another. Which means that, beyond a certain time threshold *la différence* begins to work in reverse, against itself, actively promoting a state of general undifferentiation, for there will be a diminishing number of differences capable of making any difference whatsoever. Beyond such a point, *la différence* turns into *l'indifférence*. In other words, the game that Derrida has uncovered in his deconstruction of metaphysics, cannot be postulated

as endless—not because there is anything external to it that would stop it or destroy it, but because it can generate its own destruction *in time* (1982: 322).

In much the same way that Bandera uncovers the destructive potential of *l'indifférence* by subjecting the theory of endless deferral to a critique which shows how distance / time = velocity, Virilio's notion of the technology / accident cycle's apocalyptic conclusion sums up the mimetic crisis that threatens to collapse all technological structures:

...one thing that must be considered here is the preponderant role of the speed of the accident, thus the limitation of speed and the penalties for "exceeding the speed limit" . . . With the current world-wide revolution in communication and telematics, acceleration has reached its physical limit, the speed of electromagnetic waves. So there is the 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 (1999: 92-93).

I want to argue that Virilio's theory of the speed limit mirrors Bandera's analysis of the temporality of *différance*. However, apart from serving as a contextual critique that highlights the limitations of Derrida's textual project, Virilio's dromology also allows one to understand how the theory of the technology / accident relation is able to move beyond the synchronic plane towards the depth of diachronic analysis. That is, whereas Bandera's critique of Derrida shows how deconstruction's theory of timeless textuality must reach the speed of critical mass at some point in time, at a deeper level such an examination subjects the theory of endless deferral to another theoretical inquiry. It is the excavation of this point which allows one to ground Virilio's dromology in the diachronic sphere, the level of analysis that leads towards the anthropology of the originary scene.

Grounding deconstruction in time through reference to the notion of speed, Bandera reads Derrida's project in the light of Girard's anthropology (1986). On this basis, he argues that Derrida's textual system scapegoats metaphysics in order to secure its own textual integrity. In other words, it offsets its own violent demise through the expulsion of the sacrificial object. Here, Bandera explains that, following Derrida's exposure of metaphysical error, deconstruction's endless assault on the remains of presence begins to resemble the collective violence of Girard's scapegoat mechanism. Although the sacrificial object is never consciously consumed, the mechanism that enacts the violence of the destructive event is far from accidental.

The scapegoat is the sign of channeled violence, the consumption of the excessive supplement that averts the descent into the originary violence of the war of all against all. Like Derrida's deconstruction, the project that in Bandera's view both theorizes and repeats the sacrificial performance, Virilio's technology / accident spiral renews the stability of the technocratic collective sphere by expending the excessive energy of the superabundant machine; localized accidents act as conduits that channel the excessive energy of progressive technology away from the possibility of a technological apocalypse. In this perspective, one is led to question whether Virilio's accident is actually constitutive of an accidental event. Although the descriptions of the failures of technology in *Politics of the Very Worst* (1999) and *The Information Bomb* (2000a) allow one to see how the accident is not a ritual performance in the Girardian / Gansian sense, it is still unclear whether the structural functionalism of the technological crash allows it to be categorized as accidental.

Perhaps the answer to the question of the predictability of Virilio's accident is grounded in issues of perspective. On the synchronic level, the destruction of the technological structure could be seen as accidental, while from a diachronic perspective, where speed becomes apparent, such violence would appear clearly governed by the deterministic nature of the scapegoat mechanism implicit in the technology / accident economy. Herein lies the fundamental irony of Virilio's bind: the accidental event acts as the critique of the technological mechanism that creates it, the very same system that its expenditure stabilizes in the progressive mechanism of technology. Virilio's notion of the accident is paradoxical; his use of the term suggests that he regards the errors that destroy technology as strategic contingencies that reaffirm the disciplinary nature of the mechanical model rather than as emancipatory openings which can allow for the birth of experimental political movements, technological explorations of future possibilities for human / machine interaction. This suggests that Virilio's use of the notion of the accident reflects an awareness of a diachronic perspective even though the everyday sense of the term "accident" may lead one to understand his theory as a synchronic system. My claim is that Virilio is well aware of this ironic bind. He knows that accidents *will* happen and it is this recognition that allows him to avoid miming the systematic violence of the technology / accident economy at the level of his own texts.

4

In essence this is the accusation that Bandera levels at Derrida—that deconstruction repeats the violence its author aims to critique—when he argues that deconstruction's assault on metaphysics secures the integrity of the textual sphere, which in turn re-orders the turbulence of the creaking collective. For Bandera,

Derrida's victimization of metaphysics defines deconstruction as both scapegoat mechanism and scapegoat mythology. On the one hand, the destruction of metaphysics allows for the survival of endless textuality, while, on the other hand, endless textuality obscures the violence of the sacrificial scapegoat mechanism by advancing a theory of openness and difference. Following such a realization it quickly becomes a question of whether deconstruction should be seen as a response to the violence of metaphysics' expulsion of writing, or whether deconstruction is itself constitutive of the sacrificial machine, the system that projects the sacrificial object's originary crime back towards the level of causality. For Gans (1997) this question of cause and effect, the argument over which violence came first, ignores the role of mimesis in generating conflictual relations. According to Gans's generative anthropology it is precisely this tension, the bind that exists between the two poles, that is constitutive of the originary scene. Like the debate between deconstruction and metaphysics, Virilio's technology / accident relation can be formulated in terms of Gans's thesis. This diachronic (historical) analysis does not refer to either "technology" or "the accident" as the originary event but rather considers the scene generated by the tension that exists between the two poles.

Gans follows Girard's (1986) thesis of the scapegoat mechanism; both writers share an explicit condemnation of the mimetic violence that over-flows the social at times of excessive speed. However, I want to argue that what separates Girard from Gans is the former's emphasis on the moral position occupied by the victim. Although generative anthropology views the *representation* of the non-human sacrificial object as the guiding principle for a new political ethic, Agamben's study, *Homo Sacer* (1998), allows one to see how the logic employed by the Gansian notion of signification, which acts as a device for the separation of humanity and animality, takes the form of a ban that repeats the founding gestures of those discursive forms that secure the sphere of political discourse through the exclusion of "bare life" (pre-discursive existence, or, in Lacanian terms, the Real). Agamben refers to the figure of the wolf-man, the human / animal hybrid of Germanic myth, in order to show how the space of modern politics is sustained by what he calls inclusive-exclusion. According to this idea, the liminal state occupied by the wolf-man allows it to constitute both an inclusion, by virtue of being half-human, and an exclusion, because of its animal nature. Like Girard's foundational victim, who is able to stand as the inclusive-exclusion by retrospectively referring to both heroism and villainy, Agamben's wolf-man represents the expulsion which grounds the collective order through its embodiment of *homo sacer*, the person "who may be killed yet not sacrificed" (1998: 8).

From this point of view, Gans's commitment to the level of political discourse may reproduce the sado-masochistic machine which excludes / alienates otherness in

order to constitute a sphere for textual contestation. His use of the sign as a marker for the division of humanity and animality threatens to confirm the role of the wolf-man / *homo sacer* as one of inclusive-exclusion by advancing a position which allows it to be at once included in the sphere of humanity, which means that it can serve as a foundational victim for the social order, yet excluded from the level of political signification because of its designated animality. It is this non-human element that prevents *homo sacer*'s entry into the city, the domain of law and order, which would allow its victimary position to be understood in terms of divine / judicial sacrifice, and abandons it to the amorality of the state of nature.

Conversely, Girard's theory, which regards Christ as the exemplary scapegoat, is closer to Agamben's notion of inclusive-exclusion because it moves away from the sphere of symbolic articulation and advocates a thesis based on a consideration of the foundational violence of the collective order. Here, Girard's reading of biblical scripture makes use of Hegel's master / slave dialectic in order to show how the victim represents the independent position, the subjective pole that secures the integrity of the objective social sphere (O'Neill, 1996).

Following Girard's reading of the crucifixion and Agamben's notion of inclusive-exclusion, my suggestion is that it is also possible to ground Virilio's technology / accident spiral in the morality attached to the victimary position. Indeed, McKenna's comparison of Girard and Derrida, *Violence and Difference* (1992), shows how the victim's relation to violence is governed by the effects of speed. As the scapegoat mechanism accelerates, more victims are required to tranquilize the mimetic crisis that threatens to engulf the collective order. Here, Virilio's dystopic total accident reflects at the level of quantity what Girard's exemplary scapegoat, Christ, illustrates on that of quality. Both examples recall the morality of the originary scene, an anthropological discovery that Derrida's timeless textuality prohibits.

II

Derrida's tombstones of presence hide nothing; one is urged to focus on the hole itself rather than anything that metaphysics suggests lay behind it. In contrast, Virilio's accidents commemorate the demise of the victim. As the threat of the total accident deepens, Virilio grounds the technology / accident bind on what we may call an ethic of radical subjectivity. The crash victim's experience of "absolute" victimary subjectivity opens Virilio's relation to originary centrality. Indeed, as if to compare the phenomenological reality of his own position with the mechanical objectivity / textuality advanced by deconstruction, Virilio refers to the endless fractality of quantum physics, the sign system that seems to exemplify the work of Derrida's *différance*:

In trying to reconstitute this cosmological jigsaw in which the doubling of time causes the doubling of infinity, we observe a strange “conception of the world” where the macrocosm is finite and the microcosm has no end, where macroscopic space-time is perceptible not in spite of its size but thanks to its very gigantism, while microscopic space-speed is imperceptible for the opposite reason. On the one hand, we observe an *extensive time* of the infinitely large of duration (space-time), which is calculated in billions of years. On the other hand, an *intensive time* of the infinitely small of time (space-speed) is counted in billionths of a second, and here the theological question of Genesis...is in danger of losing its meaning, at least as far as the “beginning of time” is concerned.

For if there really is an infinitely small of time as there is one of space (as the theory of relativity requires), the first minute of the universe is infinite and a beginning of time has to be sought deep inside the absolute intensity of the instant (2000b: 42).

In this extract from *Polar Inertia*, Virilio notes that although contemporary cosmology has relinquished a narrative Genesis in favor of the infinitely dense play of fractality at a non-scenic origin, he finds an infinite concentration of human time concealed in the detemporalized model of quantum theory in much the same way that Bandera observes the scapegoat mechanism at work in deconstruction. Following Girard's example of the subterranean influence of biblical scripture, Virilio argues that Derrida must rediscover the victim buried beneath the tombstone.

In contrast to this position, writers such as Richard Beardsworth (2000) and Colin Davies (2000) may be seen to exemplify the contemporary ideology that seeks to privilege mechanical objectivity over radical subjectivity. In a recent issue of *Cultural Values*, both these authors defended deconstruction's commitment to textuality by arguing that recourse to theories of victimization, such as those expressed by Girard and Virilio, eliminate difference by excluding the polysemy of symbolic articulation in favor of designated truth claims. Ironically mirroring Bandera's critique of Derrida, Beardsworth suggests that Girard's theory of the foundational murder violates the relationship between primitive society and modernity by claiming that the New Testament's non-violent God stands apart from the violent Gods of primitive society. He argues that by scapegoating non-modern society Girard performs the ritualistic violence his own theories critique:

Girard's thesis of nonviolence inverts into violence by becoming itself violent in order to ensure its own nonviolence (Beardsworth, 2000: 150).

For Beardsworth, Girard's exclusion of violence in order to secure the truth claims advanced by non-violence is itself an act of violence. Beardsworth argues that, in thus *deciding* (from the Latin word "decidere," to cut the throat of the victim), Girard sacrifices otherness and reduces difference in favor of the moral position occupied by the scapegoat; Girard fixes the role of the victim and, by making the indeterminate a negative category of the determinate, denies the free-play of multiplicity. In sympathy with this position, Davies' article "Fathers, Others: The Sacrificial Victim in Freud, Girard, and Levinas" (2000) suggests that Girard's empiricism limits his project in relation to those of Freud and Levinas. He argues that whereas both Freud, in *Totem and Taboo* (1985), and Levinas, in *Totality and Infinity* (1979), assert the potential fictionality, and thus the indeterminacy, of their theories of violence, Girard's fetishizes the reality / mythology dichotomy in his claim to have discovered the empirical truth of the scapegoat mechanism, the satanic system that hides the truth of the violent nature of social organization. Throughout his essay, Davies suggests that Girard's commitment to the single truth of victimization leads him to become entangled in his own scapegoat theory. Davies argues that, in contrast to the "nominalistic" model-construction of both Freud and Levinas, Girard's assertion of the reality of a transcendental position makes him see himself as the prophet of truth who, when his singular truth-claim is not accepted by all, becomes the victim of his own scapegoat mechanism:

This goes together with a sense in Girard's writing, particularly evident in *Le Bouc émissaire*, that he himself, as voice of truth, is the victim of a malicious, wicked attack and misunderstanding tantamount to persecution by his contemporaries (Davies, 2000: 202).

6

Both Beardsworth and Davies explain a process whereby Girard performs his own theory. For Beardsworth, Girard scapegoats alternative truths in order to secure the closure of his own theoretical model, whereas Davies suggests that the rigidity of the Girardian concept of truth leads its author to become caught up in the violent drama of his own scapegoat mechanism. However, both these writers fail to recognize how absolute subjectivity inverts into absolute objectivity and vice-versa. They fail to understand the logic of reversibility according to which the Derridean search for difference leads to a state of undifferentiation, from which emerges deconstruction as a non-human technology that must respect all difference and therefore discern no difference at all. In essence, this ironic reversal follows the Lacanian logic, exemplified by Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors*, which suggests that when one searches for a specific meaning, as with Derrida's quest for

difference, the abyssal nature of the Real will cause that meaning to remain absolutely obscure. Against this eternal obscurity, Lacanian psychoanalysis argues that the only way to comprehend the meaning of the Real, as the viewer of Holbein's skull is well aware, is by focusing beyond the object of desire. This paradoxical strategy of evasion as comprehension, which is summed up by the title of Žižek's book *Looking Awry* (1992), allows one to argue that the strength of the Girardian victimary position lies in the very "weak point" that Beardsworth and Davies are so keen to attack. Girard's empirical truth-claims, the objectivity that Beardsworth and Davies critique, re-establish a moral victimary position, what we may call an ethics of the Real (Zupancic, 1999), by grounding the other's experience within an objective category. Although this strategy appears to follow the logic of Derrida's notion of *différance*, my assertion is that deconstruction's attempt to contain the void of subjectivity is far too deliberate. As opposed to Girard, whose objectivity opens a space for subjectivity by preserving the integrity of the kernel of the Lacanian Real (Girard saves the privilege of the victim's phenomenological experience by looking beyond its place in the symbolic order), Derrida's attempt to "look awry" misses the groundless nature of the subject and, overstating the role of the politics of difference, reinvents a state of mechanical objectivity that recodes individual freedom as an antiseptic category alienated from the subjective kernel of the Real.

This is precisely what Richard Kearney suggests in his article "Aliens and Others: Between Girard and Derrida" (1999), which illuminates an underdeveloped strand of Bandera's critique of Derrida's *différance*. Starting his inquiry from a slightly different angle than Bandera, Kearney argues that the openness to difference Derrida foregrounds in his *Politics of Friendship* (1997) feeds back into the Girardian notions of undifferentiation and disorder by advancing a state of radical disorganization. Stating that politics requires the critical judgment offered by Girard's Hegelian dichotomy in order to offset the violence that accompanies the collapse of social organization, Kearney suggests that deconstruction's hospitality is dangerously open:

If all reading is reading in the dark how can we discern between holy and unholy spirits, how can we distinguish between deities of peace and justice and demonic deities of horror and destruction? In sum, deconstructive non-judgmentalism requires to be supplemented with an ethical hermeneutics capable of discerning between good and evil (Kearney, 1999: 261).

While Kearney's essay allows one to understand how deconstruction advocates a

condition of radical undifferentiation, Bandera's article makes it clear that deconstruction is well aware of the logic that underpins its structural functionalism. In order to make its own voice heard amongst the many available opinions, deconstruction prioritizes its own message over that of others. As Bandera's article points out, critiques such as those of Beardsworth and Davies set out to scapegoat metaphysics in order to secure deconstruction's own centrality. Far from advancing the open system Beardsworth suggests in his article, "Logics of Violence: Religion and the Practice of Philosophy," deconstruction has become the dominant orthodoxy against which others are judged. As Jameson's (2000) work on inclusive / exclusive social formations suggests, violent utopianism is the inevitable fate of the anti-utopian political order:

. . . enough has been said to justify the conclusion that any active or operative political anti-Utopianism . . . must sooner or later reveal itself as a vibrant form of Utopianism in its own right (2000: 392).

In this sense, the Girardian complaint that scapegoat theory is undervalued may be justifiable. Akin to recent critiques of the dominant ideology thesis, such as Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner (1986), which seek to impose an ideological position by foregrounding a non-position, deconstruction's program of absolute hospitality to the Other opens the way for otherness at the cost of critical opposition. One is allowed entrance to deconstruction's space of difference only so long as all subjective particularities (such as Agamben's notion of "bare life") are jettisoned in favor of the mechanical objectivity of the politics of the Cartesian subject / alienated human (Zizek, 1992). For both Girard and Virilio this is an apocalyptic condition. As *The Information Bomb* (2000a) illustrates, the accident stands at the end of the human subjectivity of the self / other binary, the very form of particularity which deconstruction attempts to collapse through the invention of a category of absolute neutrality or total openness.

7

Virilio's example of the Philip Nitschke / Bob Dent case acts as a critique of the dangers of an unquestioning acceptance of the technological / textual colonization of the human body by allowing us to understand how the human / non-human relation reaches critical mass and feeds into the technology / accident machine. For Virilio, the Nitschke / Dent episode (Bob Dent, a terminal cancer patient, consented to computer-aided euthanasia by taking advantage of a remote-suicide machine developed by his doctor Philip Nitschke) shows how technology collapses the man / machine bind and achieves total mastery over humanity through the sacrificial accident. Writing on the conclusion to this zero-sum game, Virilio claims that the

Nitschke / Dent episode suggests comparisons with “Kasparov, the world chess champion, playing a game against a computer specially designed to defeat him” (2000a: 5); both events illuminate the onset of techno-domination, the condition that allows the objective machine to progress at the expense of subjective humanity.

Following Oughourlian’s (1991) theory of mimetic desire, masters and slaves, and the construction of the monadic self, one can see how at this terminal point the machine possesses man. Here the accident, the collision between self and other, renders humanity expendable and seals the fate of the victim. According to Virilio this condition is caused by the over-reliance on technology, a situation which is itself predicated on the ostensibly democratic nature of machine culture. As the Nitschke / Dent case illustrates, the empty form of the technology leads one to assume its neutrality. As we have seen with Derrida and the advocates of deconstruction (such as Beardsworth and Davies), to whom we may add the critics of the dominant ideology thesis (such as Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner), this position ignores the most powerful form of bias: the ideological prejudice hidden deep within the complex structure of the technological / textual form (Zizek, 1994). To extend this equation of technology / textual form and ideology, just as Virilio’s theory of progressive technology illuminates a mechanism that advances the ideological program of late capitalism through the accident and its subsequent consumption of victims, Derrida’s concept of *différance* mimes in the textual realm the post-industrial system’s program of techno-scientific frontierism / exploration. Foregrounding this relation between Virilio’s theory of technology and Derrida’s deconstruction makes clear that the ideological prejudice that is hidden within technology is also present within the form of progressive textuality.

The effect of the ideological misrecognition present at the formal level of technological / textual fundamentalism is two-fold. First, the ideology of the monadic self is inflated as humanity attempts to assert its own position in the face of the increasing dominance of technology / text. However, because this self-augmentation is sought through technology / text itself, the ideological process simply compounds the original problem of over-reliance on non-human forms. In other words, because the components of the ideology of the monadic self are embedded in the structures of technology / text, the attempt to raise the value of humanity in relation to machines through non-human forms of articulation is denied by the circular reasoning employed. Second, the dominance of technology / text as a machine for the extension of the monadic self leads to both a loss of historical memory and the end of political morality. With regard to the loss of memory, Virilio refers to the concept of motion sickness or “kinetosis” to show how the mimetic bind between humanity and technology leads to dizzying speeds that cause the self to become disoriented and decentered. The disregard for political morality, which

Virilio identifies as another category of the crisis of technological high modernity, is an effect of this radical disorientation of the monadic self. For Virilio this condition, caused by the excessive speed of technology, leads to further investment in non-human augmentation and consequently the increased popularity of the political ideologies of the monadic self and the possessive individual. To illustrate this process at work, Virilio considers how technology is able to both cripple and augment the body:

Those disabled in war or injured in serious road or work accidents, victims of terrorism and people who have lost arms, legs, their mobility, sight, speech or virility are all afflicted at the same time by a forgetting, a paramnesia. On the one hand, they more or less consciously repress the unbearable images of the accident which violently deprived them of their able-bodied state; on the other hand, new visions force themselves upon their minds, in sleep or in half-sleep, as a compensation for the motor and sensory privations that now afflict them (2000a: 39-40).

Here we can see how the technological accident leads to the destruction of the body and its subsequent re-formation through non-human augmentation. Virilio shows how, when we are crippled in the world, the technological form re-presents an image of our former mobility. It becomes a symbolic form which at once sustains a deterministic world system and structures humanity's relationship with progressive technology. This theory of cybernetic tranquilization is similarly relevant at the level of textuality. Bandera's critique of deconstruction shows how, in much the same way that Girard's notion of the scapegoat explains how the anesthetization of the social system is secured by the death of the sacrificial victim, Derrida's space of difference and indeterminacy is achieved at the expense of dissenting voices, which are dismissed as totalitarian others.

8

At the level of technology, Virilio provides several examples of this dichotomous condition. In *The Information Bomb* he relates the story of the Inuit boy who discovered that a skeleton on display in the New York Natural History Museum was that of his father. Noting how the appropriation's of the father's skeleton by Columbia University's anthropology department should be seen as emblematic of the opinion that saw peripheral people as lower forms of humanity, he concludes that one should understand such an episode as an illustration of the "transfer of the West's expansionist drives from the exhausted geography of the terrestrial to the human body" (2000a: 55). From the perspective of techno-science, it is clear that this example of the technological colonization of the body mirrors the earlier

critique of deconstruction as the textual colonization of human subjectivity. In this instance, techno-science advances its own goals at the cost of human concerns and empowers those with access to the cybernetic sphere. Virilio finds an analogy between the inflation of technology / text at the expense of corporeality and slapstick cinema, where the attraction of verticality is bound up with its ability to create the illusion that one can survive accidents and emerge unscathed:

Just before the carnage of 1914, American cinema of the Mack Sennett type offered it up for our consumption as comedy, with those short slapstick films in which hosts of vehicles of different kinds (trains, cars, planes and ships) collided, crashed, smashed, exploded and were quickly repaired in a collection of catastrophes from which the heroes emerged without pain and strangely unharmed (2000a: 90).

By extending the comparison of the effects of real accidents with those of textual crashes, Virilio illuminates the ideological misrecognition that occupies a central role in both technological fundamentalism and deconstruction. The failure to understand that techno-textual acceleration, which allows the center to imagine undifferentiation as the onset of a political age without accidents, is predicated on the systematic exclusion of those who are unable to perform at high speed. Both technology and deconstruction hide the savage nature of speed behind the cartoon violence of ideological textuality. At this level of articulation, Virilio's concepts of the accident, absolute speed, and inertia do not signify violent undifferentiation in the Girardian sense of the crisis of degree, but problematize the textual notions of absence and openness we find in Derrida and deconstruction.

III

My thesis is that Virilio's theories of the total accident, the end of modernity, and inertia explain the importance for him of the victimary position. Virilio is resistant to the effects of speed and committed to the cause of those who fail to keep pace with the technological world system. Conversely, he is highly critical of forms of articulation that embrace speed and collapse content in order to organize faster structures. Virilio suggests that this empty form of organization, what he calls the "tendency," is emblematic of the onset of total technology and the emergence of an uncritical appreciation of machines that overstates the neutrality of form. One of Virilio's recent interviews illustrates his association of uncritical technological fundamentalism with political theories of knowledge relativism. He notes, relating an episode which concerned Lyotard:

My friend asked: "Well, Lyotard, what do you have to say about that grand narrative called justice? Is that too a grand narrative belonging to the past?" A fine point indeed! Needless to say, Lyotard was at a loss for an answer. And indeed, to me, even if I accept the demise of the grand historical narrative and ideological narratives in favor of the small narratives, the narrative of justice is beyond deconstruction. . . Justice cannot be divided up, be fractalized on pain of descent into barbarism. We have reached the limit there. (Virilio in Armitage, 2000: 39)

In sympathy with Kearney's critique of Derrida's "alienology" (absolute hospitality towards aliens), Virilio shows how the openness of Lyotard's postmodernism introduces difference at the sacrifice of the recognition of structural power relations. Indeed, his reference to the fractalization of justice leading to the descent into savage undifferentiation appears to support the Girardian thesis advanced by Bandera, suggesting that theories of difference such as Derrida's deconstruction and Lyotard's postmodernism introduce freedom through the consumption of otherness. Those who fail to keep pace with difference become scapegoats, they are dismissed by a discursive construction which hides its "every man for himself" political agenda behind the mask of democratic meritocracy. In essence it is an appreciation of this ideological misrecognition that causes Bandera to see theories such as deconstruction and postmodernism as sacrificial myths.

9

In contrast to the subterranean bias which drives these narratives, Virilio's theory of technology introduces a consideration of structural power relations through a dromological thesis that shows how technology empowers the dominant center at the expense of otherness. The dichotomous notion of techno-stratification (stratification of the technocratic social order into techno-rich / techno-poor) is made clear by texts such as *The Information Bomb* (2000a), which enact the continual separation of the virtual and the actual. Within this binary structure, the virtual is the sphere of high velocity which concerns the center, while the actual remains the province of the low-speed periphery. Indeed, for Virilio it is precisely because the continued success of the former is dependent on the exclusion of the latter that politics should argue against the fascism of speed. Opposing Derrida, whose article on the aporia of speed, "No Apocalypse, Not Now" (1984) suggests that criticism must speed-up in order to keep pace with the movements of the world system, Virilio advises against the pursuit of high velocity. Akin to Girard's *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1987), Virilio views the technological apocalypse as a cataclysmic horizon. As Crogan (2000) points out, although the speed of Virilio's work allows one to see how he writes from within the confines of

the tendency, the attempt to save critical content from the savage effects of speeding structure remains central to his dromological project.

While Virilio tries to slow the pace of the world system from within the confines of the “tendency,” Derrida embraces speed and violence as signs of unrealized potential. In “No Apocalypse, Not Now” he explains how the value of the aporia of speed may lie in its destructive function, its ability to destabilize existing structures and suggest the emergence of new forms of political organization. According to the theories advanced by both Virilio and Girard, such a commitment illuminates deconstruction’s relation to the structures of technological fundamentalism and the machine-like process that allows form to overwhelm the warnings advanced by critical content. Like the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1988) and Manuel De Landa (1991), this theory documents the progress of the technological war-machine. Both Virilio, in his book *Pure War* (1997), and Girard, whose *Theatre of Envy* (2000) compares Hamlet’s desire for revenge to the Cold War nuclear stand-off, show how the military model infects all areas of human experience. Similarly, both thinkers warn against the dangers of embracing high speed by suggesting that we look towards the memorialization of victimary groups for cautionary evidence. While Girard views the New Testament as the “excessive supplement” that has the potential to over-code further episodes of scapegoat violence, Virilio advocates the creation of a *Museum of Accidents* (1989) to allow future generations to remember the horrors of high-modern speed.

Against Virilio’s museum of accidents, which commemorates the victims of technological speed, Derrida’s victimary sign is represented by the spectrality of timeless textuality. The notion of difference detemporalizes the condition monumentalized in the Hiroshima War Museum; Derrida’s spectral signs, ghosts that haunt the dream of verticality, fetishize the fleshy remains of the Keloids, the deformed mutations that populate the Hiroshima archive. Thus Derrida buries the bodies Virilio remembers and chooses the antiseptic level of textuality over the anthropology of foundational violence. Following the Nietzschean realization of the death of God, the thesis that marks the end of humanity’s originary position, Derrida looks to the tombstone, the undecidability of the pyramidal *a*, for security. However, this fetishization of the outside-inside does violence to the victims of the technological war-machine. As Bandera notes, deconstruction erases the victim who generated the pyramidal *a* of *différance* in order to secure the integrity of the textual sphere. Against this process, a repetition of Girard’s theory of the scapegoat mechanism, Virilio’s thesis of the destructive violence of the accident memorializes the victims of the progressive technological system and remembers the dead who lie beneath the tombstones of ideological textuality.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Siobhan Holohan for her constant support and encouragement, and John O'Neill for his invaluable insights and continued direction. His seminars at Staffordshire University continue to inspire my work.

10

Bibliography

Abercrombie, N; Hill, S; and Turner, B (1986) *Sovereign Individuals of Capitalism*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Agamben, G (1998) *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Armitage, J (Ed.) (2000) *Paul Virilio: From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond*. London: Sage.

Armitage, J "From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond: An Interview with Paul Virilio" in Armitage, J (Ed.) (2000) *Paul Virilio: From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond*. London: Sage.

Bandera, C (1982) "Notes on Derrida, Tombstones, and the Representational Game" *Stanford French Review*. Volume 6.

Bataille, G (1991) *The Accursed Share: Volume I: Consumption*. New York: Zone Books.

Baudrillard, J (1983) *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext(e).

Baudrillard, J (1995) *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. Sydney: Power Press.

Beardsworth, R (2000) "Logics of Violence: Religion and the Practice of Philosophy" *Cultural Values*. Volume 4: Number 2.

Borch-Jacobsen, M (1991) *Lacan: The Absolute Master*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Crogan, P "The Tendency, the Accident and the Untimely: Paul Virilio's Engagement with the Future" in Armitage, J (Ed.) (2000) *Paul Virilio: From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond*. London: Sage.

Davies, C (2000) "Fathers, Others: The Sacrificial Victim in Freud, Girard, and Levinas' *Cultural Values*. Volume 4: Number 2.

De Landa, M (1991) *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*. New York: Zone Books.

Deleuze, G and Guattari, F (1988) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Volume II*. London: Athlone.

Derrida, J (1981) *Dissemination*. London: Athlone.

Derrida, J (1984) "No Apocalypse, Not Now (full speed ahead, seven missiles, seven missives)" *Diacrits*. XIV: Summer.

Derrida, J (1994) *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. London: Routledge.

Derrida, J (1997) *Politics of Friendship*. London: Verso.

Freud, S (1985) "Totem and Taboo" in *The Origins of Religion*. London: Penguin.

Gans, E (1993) *Originary Thinking: Elements of Generative Anthropology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Gans, E (1997) *Signs of Paradox: Irony, Resentment, and Other Mimetic Structures*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Girard, R (1986) *The Scapegoat*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Girard, R (1987) *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Girard, R (1991) *Job: Victim of his People*. London: Athlone.

Girard, R (1997) *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky*. New York: Crossroad Publishing.

Girard, R (2000) *A Theatre of Envy*. Leominster: Gracewing.

Jameson, F "Utopianism and Anti-Utopianism" in Hardt, M and Weeks, K (eds.) (2000) *The Jameson Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.

11

Kearney, R (1999) "Aliens and Others: Between Girard and Derrida" *Cultural Values*. Volume 3: Number 3.

Lacan, J (1993) *The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book III: 1955-1956*.

London: Routledge.

Levinas, E (1979) *Totality and Infinity*. The Hague: Nijhoff.

McKenna, A (1992) *Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

O'Neill, J (1996) *Hegel's Dialectic of Desire and Recognition: Texts and Commentary*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

O'Neill, J (1999) "What Gives (with Derrida)?" *European Journal of Social Theory*. Volume 2.

O'Neill, J (2000) "Descartes' Theatre of Dis-belief" forthcoming in *Communication and Cognition*. Ghent: University of Ghent.

Oughourlian, J-M (1991) *The Puppet of Desire: The Psychology of Hysteria, Possession, and Hypnosis*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Scarry, E (1985) *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Virilio, P (1975) *Bunker Archeology*. Paris: Les Éditions Du Demi-Cercle.

Virilio, P (1977) *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*. New York: Semiotext(e).

Virilio, P (1989) *The Museum of Accidents*. Toronto: Public Access Collective.

Virilio, P (1997) *Pure War*. New York: Semiotext(e).

Virilio, P (1999) *Politics of the Very Worst*. New York: Semiotext(e).

Virilio, P (2000a) *The Information Bomb*. London: Verso.

Virilio, P (2000b) *Polar Inertia*. London: Sage.

Zizek, S (1992) *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Zizek, S "The Spectre of Ideology" in Zizek, S (Ed.) (1994) *Mapping Ideology*. London: Verso.

Zizek, S (Ed.) (1994) *Mapping Ideology*. London: Verso.

Zupancic, A (1999) *Ethics of the Real: Kant and Lacan*. London: Verso.