

**Are We There Yet? The Catastrophe of Polar Deceleration in
Cormac McCarthy's *The Road***

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In Cormac McCarthy's novel, *The Road*, a father and his son are trudging on foot, carting their belongings in an old supermarket trolley across what appears to be a post-nuclear America. Desperate to survive the next winter, they are heading south, imagining a warmer climate and perhaps new beginnings. They are making a never-ending journey of gloom:

On the far side of the river valley the road passed through a stark black burn. Charred and limbless trunks of trees stretching away on every side. Ash moving over the road and the sagging hands of blind wire strung from the blackened lightpoles whining thinly in the wind. A burned house in a clearing and beyond that a reach of meadowlands stark and gray and a raw red mudbank where a roadworks lay abandoned. Farther along were billboards advertising motels. Everything as it once had been save faded and weathered.¹

McCarthy hurls the reader into a new post-IT era, in which all infrastructure has been annihilated by a major catastrophic event, an utter regress which echoes Albert Einstein's statement that the fourth World War may well be fought with sticks and stones. In this paper, reading Paul Virilio's theory on dromology—a term he has coined to denote “acceleration of reality”—and particularly on what he names “polar inertia,” I argue, firstly, that *The Road*

exemplifies how the agency of speed in narrative can transcend the aporia of imagining a future. Secondly, I suggest that representations of deceleration in this text reflect on the perils of capitalist pseudo-utopia of consumerism and advanced technology, linking those to Virilio's anti-futurist stand on the notion of "progress."

Virilio is preoccupied with the subject of speed throughout his work. He has coined the term "dromology"—derived from the Greek *dromos*, meaning "race"—which refers to "the science of speed."² In Rob Bartram's words:

Dromology is concerned with the "acceleration" of the social, political and economic world, with the obvious implication that durations of time involved in the transference of people and objects, and the transmission of the images and ideas, have become compressed.³

Virilio has written in *Negative Horizons* that the "movement governs the event."⁴ According to Virilio, speed is a major factor that influences the way we perceive reality alongside the transformation of social, political and military history. He is concerned about the twin evils of information technologies, instantaneity and ubiquity, and their effect on human perception of reality. John Armitage writes that Virilio "sees vision technologies' function as devastating our everyday awareness of human movement," giving the example of the mobile phone, which Virilio sees as "a form of universal remote control."⁵ Armitage suggests that "[w]hat is important about these contentions of Virilio ... is that they alert us to the fact that the universal remote control space of vision technologies serves to obliterate our daily consciousness of motion."⁶ What ensues is an event that Virilio names "the transfer accident"—one example of which is the instantaneous stock exchange crash, as Armitage writes: "Virilio argues that our continued faith in program trading and similar cybernetic structures is mistaken, given the implosion of such real-time systems on Black Monday (October 19, 1987)."⁷ One can only imagine other forms of electronically transmitted mishaps, as instantaneous and ubiquitous as the "accident" depicted in McCarthy's world of *The Road*.

Virilio is concerned with acceleration that defines the development of human history in a constant increasing pattern in the areas of transport and communications, and which is close to reaching a point where further progress is impossible within the human realm. "What are the broader implications for a society which has reached such a stage?"⁸ In the meantime, destructive manifestations of progress can be observed, such as in the case of Colonel Matt J. Martin, the American "Combat Commuter" who operates a Predator drone, dropping bombs on targets in Baghdad

from the safety of his Nevada office: "As he stood up to stretch in a trailer at Creech Air Force Base near Las Vegas, he remembered that his wife had asked him to buy some milk on his way home,"⁹ writes Glenda Kwek in her feature article for a daily newspaper, quoting information from Colonel Martin's book, *Predator: The Remote-Control Air War over Iraq and Afghanistan: A Pilot's Story* (2010). Kwek quotes a military robotics researcher who explained to Peter Singer, the author of *Wired for War*, that the controllers were "modelled ... after the PlayStation because that's what these 18, 19-year-old Marines have been playing with pretty much all of their lives."¹⁰ This line from Kwek's article embodies Virilio's concern about telecommunications' agency for destruction: "When Lieutenant Colonel Martin came face to face for the first time with a drone during his orientation at Creech Air Force Base, an Air Force Lieutenant Colonel told him: "Gentlemen, what you are looking at is the future of modern warfare."¹¹

In *The Road*, McCarthy offers no direct explanation about the actual events that triggered the catastrophe which destroyed North America, other than these words: "The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions."¹² This non-committal description leaves the text open to interpretations, both as pertaining to contemporary reality and the contingency of major catastrophe, and to its symbolic significance. Readers would not be hard-pressed to give a dystopian reading of this implied cataclysm within the zeitgeist of fear and apocalypse. As Tom Moylan writes, "dystopian narrative is largely the product of terrors of the twentieth century."¹³ This is a statement that evidently has carried into the twenty-first.

While, on a physical level, a nuclear holocaust is the first to come to mind, the novel has garnered a range of interpretations, such as the eschatological model, reading it as a biblical realisation of the prophecy of Rapture and the second coming of Christ,¹⁴ and other philosophical models, such as Plato's simile of the sun and the end of civilisation.¹⁵ Some literary reviews raise questions about redemption¹⁶, the limits of humanity,¹⁷ the quest for life's meaning,¹⁸ and climate-change cautioning.¹⁹ It is the genius of McCarthy to have written a futuristic tale devoid of futuristic tropes by constructing a hypothetical image of our present that allows for a broad scope of interpretations about his take on the way humans inhabit Earth, and about the future consequences of this inhabitancy. Fredric Jameson contends that science fiction (SF) "enacts and enables a structurally unique "method" of apprehending the present as history" and that "this is so irrespective of the "pessimism" or "optimism" of the imaginary future world which is the pretext for that defamiliarization."²⁰ In this respect, any text that attempts to imagine the future could be

labelled as the “dreamtime of the present.”²¹ However, while “critical dystopias”—those literary texts which endeavour to awaken the reader into taking action to avert a looming catastrophe—are embedded with a social core, *The Road* can be analysed through a dynamic core, as an exploration and a re-evaluation of the role which the speed of transmission and globalisation play in altering our perception of the world, and, consequently, in eroding the meaning of what it is to be human.

In his theory of polar inertia, Virilio contends that in times of accelerated modernity, in a world of instantaneity and ubiquity, it is time that presides over space. There is less and less reason to go anywhere in a world where the event is globalised and reaches everywhere concurrently, and where “space-speed” replaces “space-time.” Virilio writes in *Polar Inertia*:

[S]peed really is the “transfer accident,” the premature ageing of the constituted world. Carried away by its extreme violence, we do not go anywhere; we merely abandon the *living* in favour of the *void* of rapidity. As a racing driver must first master acceleration, keep his car straight and pay no heed to the details of the surrounding space, so too will it doubtless be for every human activity, both at and away from home. We will no longer admire the landscape but only watch our screens and monitor our interactive trajectory—that is, a “journey” with no distance, a “travelling time” with no actual passing of time.²²

Virilio’s preoccupation with technology and speed is underpinned by his interest in the human body and its orientation within space, and with the way technology alters this orientation, leading at times to “pathological fixity”²³ such as in the case of a man who is literally going nowhere, striving only to remain on the spot while swimming in a Tokyo pool against an artificial current. Another example that symbolises Virilio’s ideas of pathological fixedness is the case of the many people who, desiring to be the first to experience the new millennium, flew over from Australia to New Zealand, where they watched the sunrise from a northern beach at the first moments of January 1, 2000. These are examples where the human body moves at a great pace, only to reach a form of fixity; the man in the pool who consumes techno-science, as well as his own energy, does not move across space but merely in it, and the “first millennium tourists” move in space only to chase the same event that will occur in their place of departure in a matter of hours: the sunrise.

Virilio contends that the degradation of time/space and of *life size* affects our experience of travel in the physical world. We cannot have a

real experience of distance unless we experience the fatigue of the journey, of physically moving in the landscape. In Virilio's words, "The lack of effort involved in the technologies for hearing, seeing or acting at distance obliterates all direction, the vastness of earth's horizon."²⁴

The Road exemplifies an inverted vision of Virilio's polar inertia. Despite their endless walking towards the south in an attempt to escape bitter cold, the man and his child are stranded in a landscape that has been unified by a great accident: their hopes of getting to the warm south are crushed because the weather can never change in this ubiquitous nuclear winter. The sun never comes out and the world is blanketed in a thick layer of grey ash. The signs of destruction are prevalent, and in each ghostly city, mummified bodies and ash-entombed cars reappear as the landmarks of catastrophe. There is no sign of living organisms in nature, save the few surviving humans who are physically and/or morally wrecked. The father and son's movement across the land is akin to walking on an exercise treadmill while aiming to reach the corner shop; their advancement along the road is futile and devoid of hope.

In *The Road*, it can be said that all Virilio's dreams of deceleration come true, albeit with a dystopian twist. The protagonists' awareness of the landscape is a function of their progressive advancement along the road, paced by their strides. Since their advancement in space occurs in linear intervals of time, they are able to perceive each scene as they approach it in relation to the preceding section of the landscape. This mode of proceeding in space allows for the experience of emotional response to the environment. However, the two refugees see their surroundings, unfortunately, as a nightmare in all its gory details. The father's rare escapes from reality take the form of reminiscence: he recalls a "perfect day of his childhood"²⁵ of rowing on a lake with his uncle to collect wood—a time shared in silence and communion with nature. This reminiscing could be read as an act of archiving the present, with its possibilities of selective idyllic deceleration. *The Road*, which is contemporaneous with our reality where deceleration is mostly a chosen pursuit, represents an alternative reality, in which deceleration is not a chosen pursuit but an undertaking that is forced upon its protagonists.

Literature, as an artistic mode of examining the human condition, uses the conflict as its central device: the courageous struggle in the face of adversity, underpinned by the fight of good against evil. Dystopian narratives magnify the element of conflict with their premise that a society that is exposed to worse living conditions than the author's contemporary world will inevitably produce extreme challenges for survival and will also bring out the unthinkable evil that lurks beneath the surface of civility.

Futuristic literature can be considered humanity's dreamtime of the present, where both impossible bliss and possible abjection are made real in the imagination of the reader and thus compel that reader to reconsider the present. To quote Yevgeny Zamyatin, "A literature that is alive does not live by yesterday's clock, nor by today's, but by tomorrow's."²⁶

So how is futuristic literature to express the dreamtime of the present in the 21st century's accelerated modernity? Virilio's theory of speed provides a model for analysing the effects of acceleration and deceleration on humanity. Virilio contends that

[i]f no substance can exist in the absence of an accident, then no technical object can be developed without in turn generating "its" specific accident: ship=ship wreck, train=train wreck, plane=plane crash. The accident is thus the hidden face of technical progress. ... With the current world-wide revolution in communication and telematics, acceleration has reached its physical limit, the speed of electromagnetic waves. So there is a risk not of a local accident in 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.²⁷

In Virilio's work, both the *global accident* and the paradox of polar inertia are embedded within the realm of advanced technology. Virilio warns us about the dangers of an absolute futuristic stance and emphasises the vital need to criticise the agency of technology and its potentially disastrous outcomes. However, he defines himself not as an opponent of technology but rather as "a critic of the art of technology."²⁸ This form of criticism can be applied to the artistic practice of imagining the future.

Futuristic literature can fulfil a role as a space of resistance in times of intense acceleration by presenting us with modes of deceleration, and *The Road* offers these modes across the binary of utopia/dystopia: the reminiscing about the pre-holocaust *utopian* past is presented in scenes of *chosen deceleration* such as the man's childhood image of rowing on a lake or listening to classical music in a concert hall with his (now dead) partner, ruffling her summer dress. However, the text is mainly concerned with deceleration that reflects Virilio's polar inertia, for which I shall propose the term "polar deceleration." Polar deceleration is the opposite state both of polar inertia and of deceleration by choice. In *The Road*, polar deceleration is forced upon humans, as a result of what I call *acceleration peak*. Here, acceleration peak has brought about the worst-case scenario of Virilio's *global accident*—the ultimate accident that cannot be contained within a limited space. In the case of *The Road*, an accident of high

magnitude has occurred simultaneously across North America, plausibly via the fast-wired and interlinked electronic infrastructure. *The Road* represents both the former interconnected world, and that of the Post-IT era in a state of utterly forced deceleration.

It is in this tension between the two modes of deceleration, the one that occurs by choice and the one that is forced upon us, that the *dreamtime of the present* is articulated in *The Road*. This textual dreaming suggests an understanding of how a world of instantaneous and ubiquitous communication, for all its utopian impulse, is also pregnant with dystopia, and furthermore, that literature holds an important role in criticising accelerated modernity.

In keeping its contemporary relevance, the artistic practice of writing the future hardly needs to depart from the present. The future need not be furnished with new tropes in order to be imagined. By crossing the wall of speed, we find ourselves in the other world, that of post-IT, regressing to a primitive state where the notion of techno-scientific advance may never regain its relevance among the few battered survivors of a holocaust. In that place, any new technological development such as a flying car or a cloning procedure is rendered redundant. The author of a futuristic tale merely needs to add *polar deceleration* to the present, as exemplified in the following passage from *The Road*, where the man and his son stop by an abandoned petrol station in a ghost town:

By the door were two softdrink machines that had been tilted over into the floor and opened with a prybar. Coins everywhere in the ash. He sat and ran his hand around in the works of the gutted machines and in the second one it closed over a cold metal cylinder. He withdrew his hand slowly and sat looking at a Coca Cola.

What is it, papa?

It's a treat. For you.

What is it?²⁹

The can of Coke found in a dead, gutted soft drink machine embodies the idea of Virilio's "original Accident": "[t]he kind of accident we bring forth ourselves"³⁰—in this instance, the accident of the last can of Coke. In a world that has come to a halt when capitalism was obliterated together with all its infrastructures, where any consumer items have long been raided and pulled apart for the making of makeshift survival apparatuses, it is by pure accident that the protagonist finds an intact can of Coke, an accident nestled inside the other, man-made global accident that has devastated North America. *The Road*, as well as exemplifying polar deceleration,

represents the ravages of late capitalism and the false-utopian culture it generates. Here, McCarthy seizes the moment when a child tastes Coca Cola for the first time, and likes the drink for its taste, not for its symbolism as a quasi-national beverage as constructed by the power of advertising. I would propose an ideological reading, whereby, clearly, the ingredients of sugar, caffeine and synthetic cola essence are not the object of criticism, but rather the Coca Cola brand as a symbol of American imperialism—an upbeat symbol which attempts to conceal the manufacturers' shadowy corporate practices, and the environmental and social consequences of those practices.³¹

In *The Road*, McCarthy makes a use of the power of the dystopian narrative, encapsulating all the destructive elements of late capitalism in a few words: "He withdrew his hand slowly and sat looking at a Coca Cola," giving these word meaning in the context of the child's twice-repeated question: "What is it?" Indeed, a situation where an American child does not know what a can of Coke actually is spells *the end of the world*. Furthermore, the question "what is it?" stands for the many questions that could be asked about the multiple social, political, environmental and technological significances of a can of Coke, this global mundane object which has disappeared from the face of the earth in the new reality of *The Road*, where the manufacture of commodities has been annihilated.

In times of polar deceleration, each image and each word carries multiple resonances regarding the latent death of capitalism already present in the symbolism of major consumer items in the developed world. A key example in *The Road* is the protagonists' wheeling across America of the supermarket trolley, that basic human-powered vehicle designed for ambling, loading goods and carting them towards the cash register, which, when used outside its legal premises—at times lying upturned on the roadside—becomes a metaphor for modern society's dystopian elements, implying homelessness and misappropriation.

The vehicle in *The Road* acts as a device for examining the economy of speed. The only vehicle operated by an engine is the marauders' truck, which, when breaking down, triggers the first act of killing. Further along the road, an upturned truck lies on its side jack-knifed across a bridge, forcing the protagonists to empty their supermarket trolley and tip it on its side before sliding it underneath the truck, then crawling along with their possessions. The central argument in Virilio's dromological work—that "speed is power"—acquires new meaning in the post-technological world of *The Road*, where it could rather be said that speed was power. Humans ultimately depend on their own body for mobility and survival: in times of danger, even a simple, non-motorised apparatus such as the supermarket

trolley—a mere set of wheels—turns out to be a burden: it often needs to be hidden from sight, and ultimately ditched for the sake of survival, as the human body becomes the only viable vehicle within the ragged terrain and perilous settings.

I would like to conclude with the theme of homelessness that dominates the text and signifies the demise of the notion of the American Dream as embodied in suburbia with its privately-owned dwelling, whose owners spend a lifetime maintaining, improving and filling it up with consumer items providing physical and emotional comfort. Furthermore, the text signifies the demise of the city and, ultimately, of what Virilio calls *sedentariness*.³²

In *The Road*, the protagonists spend most of their nights hidden in the woods. Houses are sites of danger, and to occupy them, one has to be armed and ready to kill whichever unarmed fellow human comes one's way. Those who affiliate with organised gangs of marauders can survive by way of cannibalism and are bold enough to occupy the visible space of a house by relying on the agency of their violence. In the house, they lure, store, execute, cook and eat their prey, while keeping a perpetual watch for potential attackers and prey. To live a domesticated life, one therefore needs to abandon middle-class and religious values that were once at the core of the represented houses. These are values that are still held dear by the homeless protagonists in *The Road*, as articulated here in the father and son's dialogue, after their skirmish with a member of a gang, referred to by the father as "bad guys":

You wanted to know what the bad guys look like. Now you know. It may happen again. My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you, do you understand?

Yes.

He sat there cowed in the blanket. After a while, he looked up. Are we still the good guys? he said.

Yes. We're still the good guys.

And we always will be.

Yes. We always will be.

Ok.³³

The pair enter a handful of houses along their journey, and each of these visits is fraught with caution and fear. In search of vital necessities such as preserved food, clean water, clothing, tools and the like, the desperate survivors that preceded them have repeatedly plundered each of these empty houses since the catastrophe. By the time the protagonists enter

them, there is not much left to recuperate; yet the father still searches desperately and sometimes finds a crucial item, like the woollen blanket that he yanks off a child's mummified body in an upstairs bedroom, or the hidden bunker filled with non-perishable food items and a tank of sweet water, which the pair abandons after a few days, as this underground shelter could become their tomb in the event of its discovery by a random stranger.

One of the houses visited by the protagonists is the father's childhood home, never seen hitherto by his son, who is reluctant to enter, fearing other potentially dangerous plunderers or gruesome discoveries. The state of this house signifies middle-class aspirations that have been toppled: the wire door lying on the floor by the back entry, the kitchen ransacked, walls stripped of their wood lining and gaps in the ceiling. When the father touches the mantelpiece—miraculously still there—he fingers underneath its edge and feels the holes left by the tacks that “once held the Christmas stockings.”³⁴ Although there is no accurate indication of historical time in *The Road*, the setting of the narrative implies that the father/protagonist's childhood may have occurred before the rise of new information and communication technologies in the 1990s. This positions the text into a near future and, it could be argued, into a speculative ambiguous reality in the shadow of the ever-looming man-made catastrophe that defines the contemporary world: published in 2006, the novel could be envisaging a period in the first or second decade of the twenty-first century, while retaining its futuristic aspect.³⁵ McCarthy traces the narrative back to a point in human history that preceded the advance of communication technologies and their impact on the cities and their inhabitants, offering a vantage point to review our trajectory as shaped by technological advance and acceleration.

In an interview with John Armitage, Virilio points out the effects of accelerated modernity on the city, when the “real space” of the city is surpassed by the “real time.”³⁶ He contends that “the structures of geopolitical cities are replaced by trajectories, by acceleration and by the gesticulations of traceability,”³⁷ since they have become “cities of the beyond.”³⁸ According to Virilio, as addicts of acceleration we have surpassed the stage of sedentariness, that transition from ancient nomadism, reverting to a new mode of nomadism where “we are at home both everywhere and nowhere” in this new model of a city.³⁹ Virilio contends that the speed and mobility of communication systems shape those “cities of the beyond,” and that urbanism and suburbanism are replaced by what he calls “exurbia.”⁴⁰ Economies are fragmented and enterprises are outsourced beyond the cities, resulting in “accelerated

urban exodus."⁴¹ As Virilio articulates in *Stop Eject*:

This is the revelation of a fundamentally transpolitical ultracity, where the habitable staying-put of bygone days has abandoned the public square to the parking lot, and to the uninhabitable circulation of each against all; a universal civil war in which the trajectography of real time exchanges has supplanted the place (lieu) of the social bond (lien) of domiciliation.⁴²

The symbolic reconstruction of the image of a row of Christmas stockings hanging from the mantelpiece, within the setting of a ransacked home, is a moment charged with messages about lost innocence and the imperative to redefine many of the values central to the postmodern West, such as the individual pursuit of comfort and wealth, the consolations of consumerism and the false utopia of technical and scientific advance. In *The Road*, homelessness is a manifestation of polar inertia: the protagonist are forever moving on, both visiting and escaping the home, that space which once, in the 'history' of *The Road*, symbolised domiciliation, *return* and *pause* from hurried journeys of quest, as well as a sense of communal living within a neighbourhood.

Virilio contends that "citizenship and civility" depend on "the nature of proximity of human groups"⁴³ and that it is important to expand the notion of *ecology* to include scholarship on "the effects of the artificial environment of the town on the degradation of the physical proximity of beings."⁴⁴ With this argument, Virilio emphasises the effects of "electromagnetic proximity of instantaneous telecommunications," that affect our relationship with each other and our "world of sense experience."⁴⁵

In his book *Open Sky*, Virilio quotes Paul Morand: "Speed destroys colour: when a gyroscope is spinning fast, everything goes grey."⁴⁶ It may be a coincidence that McCarthy paints the world of *The Road* in an endless scale of grey. However, this statement could be read as a metaphor that refers to the smearing of what was once a colourful palette of the diversity of socially and culturally autonomous spaces—which is articulated by Virilio with what he names *grey ecology*.

While the world is mostly preoccupied with *green ecology* and the impact of pollution on our environment, Virilio in effect distances himself from the Ecocriticism of the green movement, and instead is concerned with *grey ecology*, which refers to the pollution of *distances* and of *time duration*. He argues that advanced technology, with its means of transport and communication and its exploitation of the size of the geo-sphere, damages the essential relationship of humanity's organisation within its environment.

Virilio contends that we have lost “our embedding in our native soil, that element of *hic et nunc* (here and now) *in situ*.”⁴⁷ This argument, that the “real time” and the “live time” have surpassed the *here and now*, is at the core of Virilio’s work on dromology. Virilio foresees the alarming consequences of *real time* annihilation of the past-present-future historical sequence: in his foreword to *Native Land: Stop Eject*, he refers to the massive movement of planetary repopulation that will occur in the next fifty years, when a forecasted one billion people will be forced out of their native place for ecological, political and economical reasons. Virilio argues that in times of accelerated modernity, the city has changed from “a place where we elect to live—to a place of ejection.”⁴⁸ He is concerned about the way this new transhumance reshapes human identity from that which is based on belonging to a place to that which is based on movement across the globe, in which the question “where are you from, where do you live?” becomes obsolete—as McCarthy demonstrates in *The Road*.

What is at the centre of *The Road* is not a prediction of the future, but rather the archiving of a moment in our present, when the fundamental imperative to live in the *here and now* has been forsaken for the virtual, and consequently, the destiny of humankind starts unravelling, exposing humanity to the vulnerability of catastrophe, and its ensuing polar deceleration, when humans are condemned to remain in the *here and now* of a nightmarish world. In that horrendous reality, small acts of human kindness, such as the gesture of the orphaned boy’s new adoptive father using a precious spare blanket to cover the father’s dead body, are like the flicker of a candle in the wind: the essence of humanity is redeemed in that gesture, an act which engages the reader in a deeper state of caring for those forlorn survivors—and for our contemporary world. However, the fate of the boy and his new family is in doubt in the dire circumstances of their survival.

The text of *The Road*’s last paragraph represents a doomed world. However, if any sign of hope can be read into it, this can be only done outside the text, as an expression of the reader’s desire to intentionally avert a possible future catastrophe. That text can be read as a literary paraphrase of Virilio’s ideas about deceleration: within an extinct world McCarthy talks about trouts—in the world that preceded this extinction—whose fins’ white edges “wimpled softly in the flow” and whose body “smelled of moss in your hand,”⁴⁹ presenting an image that is unmediated by electronic devices. Furthermore, McCarthy urges us to read the future as encoded within that image:

On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of things which could not

be put back. Not made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery.⁵⁰

Here is the essence of being a human on earth, of experiencing the world as is, in the *here* and *now*, through the transparency of air and water. Reading the future of the world on the back of a trout that is “standing in the amber current”⁵¹ against the speed of a stream signifies a gaze of the pre-technological, which represents an act of voluntary deceleration. McCarthy’s last line in *The Road*, describing living things that “were older than man and ... hummed of mystery” parallels Virilio’s urging to preserve our perception of the magnitude of our geo-sphere.

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NOTES

- ¹ Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 5–7.
- ² However, the term “science” should not be attributed to the nature of physics, but rather taken as “a body of knowledge which concerns itself with speed and with the way in which speed determines or limits the appearance of phenomena.” Ian James, *Paul Virilio*, 1st ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 43.
- ³ Rob Bartram, “Visuality, Dromology and Time Compression: Paul Virilio’s New Ocularcentrism,” *Time Society* 13(2004), n. pag.
- ⁴ Paul Virilio, *Negative Horizons: An Essay in Dromoscopy*, trans. Michael Degener (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), 105.
- ⁵ John Armitage, *Virilio and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 94.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 93–4.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.
- ⁸ James, *Paul Virilio*, 88.
- ⁹ Glenda Kwek, “Combat Commuters: Dishing Out Death with Drones,” *The Age*, June 26 2012, <http://www.theage.com.au/technology/sci-tech/combat-commuters-dishing-out-death-with-drones-20120626-20zjj.html>.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² McCarthy, *The Road*, 54.
- ¹³ Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000), xi.
- ¹⁴ Carl James Grindley, “The Setting of McCarthy’s the Road,” *The Explicator* 67, no. 1 (2008): 11–13.

- ¹⁵ Alex Hunt and Martin M. Jacobsen, "Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Plato's Simile of the Sun," *The Explicator* 66, no. 3 (2008): 155–8.
- ¹⁶ Shelly L Rambo, "Beyond Redemption?: Reading Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* After the End of the World," *Studies in the Literary Imagination, Georgia State University* 41, no. 2 (2008): n. pag.
- ¹⁷ Steve Gehrke, "The Road," *The Missouri Review* 30, no. 1 (2007): 151–2.
- ¹⁸ Thomas H. Schaub, "Secular Scripture and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*," *Renaissance* 61, no. 3 (2009), n. pag.; Erik J Wielenberg, "God, Morality, and Meaning in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*," *Cormac McCarthy Journal* 8, no. 1 (2010): n. pag.
- ¹⁹ George Monbiot, "Civilisation ends with a shutdown of human concern. Are we there already?", *The Guardian*, 30 October 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/oct/30/comment.books>.
- ²⁰ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 288.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 383.
- ²² Paul Virilio, *Polar Inertia*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Thousand Oaks, Calif. and London: Sage, 2000), 76.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 124
- ²⁴ Paul Virilio, *Open Sky* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), 62.
- ²⁵ McCarthy, *The Road*, 12.
- ²⁶ Patrick Parrinder, "Imagining the Future: Zamyatin and Wells," *Science Fiction Studies* 1, no. 1 Spring (1973): n. pag.
- ²⁷ John Armitage, "In the Cities of the Beyond: An Interview with Paul Virilio," *Open: Cahier on Art and the Public Domain*, no. 18 (2009): 105.
- ²⁸ Steve Redhead, "The Art of the Accident: Paul Virilio and Accelerated Modernity," *Fast Capitalism* 2, no. 1 (2006): unpaginated.
- ²⁹ McCarthy, *The Road*, 22.
- ³⁰ John Armitage, "From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond: An Interview with Paul Virilio," *Theory Culture Society* 16, no. 5–6 (1999): 102.
- ³¹ See, as an example: Paul Brown, "Coca-Cola in India accused of leaving farms parched and land poisoned", *The Guardian*, July 25 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2003/jul/25/water.india>.
- ³² See more on Paul Virilio's concept of *sedentariness* below.
- ³³ McCarthy, *The Road*, 80–81.
- ³⁴ McCarthy, *The Road*, 25–6.
- ³⁵ As with George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that was published in 1949 and which retained its status as a futuristic text beyond the year 1984, *The Road* is set to retain its relevance beyond its historical setting.
- ³⁶ Armitage, "In the Cities of the Beyond: An Interview with Paul Virilio," 105.

³⁷ Ibid., 104.

³⁸ Ibid., 103.

³⁹ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 105.

⁴¹ Ibid., 109.

⁴² Ibid., 105.

⁴³ Virilio, *Open Sky*, 58.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁵ Paul Virilio, *The Futurism of the Instant: Stop-Eject*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge, U.K. and Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2010), 30.

⁴⁶ Virilio, *Open Sky*, 59.

⁴⁷ Virilio, *Open Sky*, 58.

⁴⁸ Schaub, "Secular Scripture and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*," 16.

⁴⁹ McCarthy, *The Road*, 307.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 307.

⁵¹ Ibid., 306.