THE TIME IN WHICH NOTHING HAPPENED A memorial to the Battle of Verdun considered through the theoretical discourse of Paul Virilio and his accusations about the violent phenomena of speed. By Henry Dickson. A 120-point thesis submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in partial fulfilment for the degree of Masters of Architecture (Professional) Victoria University of Wellington 2018
A memorial to the Battle of Verdun considered through the theoretical discourse of Paul Virilio and his accusations about the violent phenomena of speed. By Henry Dickson. A 120-point thesis submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in partial fulfilment for the degree of Masters of Architecture (Professional) Victoria University of Wellington 2018.
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In particular Devon Booth without whom this project would not be what it is today.

I feel very grateful that I have had the opportunity to conduct this research and hope to continue perusing these ideas into the future.
Architecture is under attack! Where it could once be understood as a medium of communication which helped society to situate their existential role within society. Today it can be increasingly understood as little more than a spatial device necessitated by humanities inert vulnerability to the exterior landscape. In the face of the post-modern phenomenon of speed, architecture is becoming a tectonic of interference. Cars to pass around it, communications pierce through it and for the people whom exist within it, it increasingly disappears.

While the problems that stem from this remain unclear. Through investigating the work of French intellectual and humanist Paul Virilio, the accidents that this may cause, become slowly exposed. Manifesting themselves beyond just the physical accidents which occur as a direct result of technological progress. But equally as accidental shifts of human consciousness leading to permanent alteration in the ways in which reality is informed.
Due to the fact that, perception, which must be understood as filtered and subconsciously reformatted, is a learned response to the otherwise overwhelming stimulation of both physical and virtual speed.

Virilio proposes that what this will lead to is a profound disconnection between the individuals who experience the speed of hypermodernity and the objective world. A world which is informed by both the unrelenting passing of time but also the historical events which slowly play out over time. The problem with this, Virilio would argue, is that the ability to react appropriately to the events and accidents which make up this contemporary existence, is contingent upon this connection. Therefore it would appear that this problem becomes self-perpetuating. The more speed disconnects individuals from the world around them, the harder it becomes to react to the accidents caused by speed, because these accidents increasingly become perceived, or rather not perceived, as time in which nothing happened.

In direct opposition to this, the fading memory of the battle of Verdun is forced up against this paradigm, providing the necessary groundwork for Virilio’s work to be explored.

Through this dialogue, design conclusions will be reached through the process of designing a memorial architecture, which will be positioned on the site of the battlefield. A process that explores architectures role in returning a collective consciousness back to the battle of Verdun. Whilst simultaneously reconsidering the nature of this responsibility in the contemporary landscape that society has found itself within, only a 100 years after the final shots were fired.
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INTRODUCTION
At the core of this thesis lies the question of time. It links everything that has been done. From the first book that that was picked up to the final lines of the drawings, this theme has slowly revealed itself. For this reason it seems only fitting to present this thesis as honestly as possible by presenting the ideas as they came. For this reason this thesis is presented to follow the lineage of thinking.

This means that as a body of work none of this will make much sense unless it is read from front to back. The narrative that this text follows is the narrative that the thinking followed. Through this, much in the same way as it is possible to follow a design project through endless sketches, the process within this work can be followed through the addition of new and often contradicting theoretical ideas. What this has led to is a document which often feels confusing and convoluted. However, through this a design intention slowly become exposed. Allowing a design to be reached which reacted as honestly as possible to the two defining theoretical element of this work. Which was, as introduced in the abstract, the theoretical and architectural experimentations of Paul Virilio alongside the reality and memory of the Battle of Verdun.

Separate from written component, which is presented in a literary format, remains the design output. It was necessary to separate these elements for two reasons. The first is for the reason that due to the structure of this 'research proposal', the design has already been marked and therefore becomes fairly inconsequential. But more importantly it becomes too difficult to follow the theoretical arguments, which at times feel like little more than just streams of consciousness, when it is split up by design thinking.

As a result of all of this, patience is required for the working through of this thesis. While this has the potential to become frustrating, this frustration almost feels necessary for a project that criticises the speed. In slowing down its audience this thesis provides the space needed to circle around the ideas providing potency to each new idea or design move as it is presented. Due to this, when the project finally reveals itself as a whole, it is hoped that an understanding of why all of this was necessary will emerge.
War was my university. Everything has proceeded from there.

Paul Virilio

It can be said of Virilio’s work, that despite the daunting expanse of it, in a way can all be related back to just a few central points from which most of his work can be navigated. In order to understand these ideas, however, it is first necessary to reflect on the person behind all of these theories.

Virilio was born in 1932, to an Italian Father and Northern French Mother in Nantes, a coastal region of Brittany. This coastal upbringing, Virilio reflected in his later life, in a sense foreboded his tendency to exist on the fringes of the various fields and circles that he interacted. However, the more significant impact, of this coastal upbringing, stems from Nantes role as a major port for the Germans during WWII (Derian 12). Not only did this lead Virilio to experience the speed of the German army who mobilised in the city on the same day that the radios warned of their arrival, but it also left him and his family exposed to the frequent bombardments from his English and American allies. The impact of these experiences, along with his second experience of war when drafted to fight in France’s war with Algeria, must not be underestimated. Virilio’s work is plagued by not only direct references to war but additionally the themes of speed, technology and power within his oeuvre (for which he is better known), all draw connections back to these experiences.

In his later life, after briefly practicing the art of stained glass making, and studying phenomenology under Maurice Merleau Ponty, Virilio moved into a career of practicing and teaching of architecture. It is at this point that Virilio began his work with Claude Parent,
which led to the pair creating what would be later known as the ‘Architecture Principle’ in 1963 (Virilio and Parent 13). This group eventually dissolved as a direct result of Virilio’s involvement in the events of May 1968 and following on from this, despite his significant role at the Ecole Speciale d’Architecture which lasted into the 1990’s, Virilio admittedly lost interest in built architecture. Alternative he began an arduous career in philosophy, cultural theory and social criticism (Derian 12).

This shift is fundamental to recognise as it gifts this project with two avenues of thought, the more tangible architecture of his early career and a more abstract yet evocative theoretical discourse that would be criminal to avoid. Therefore, in a somewhat counter intuitive way, it is fundamental that Virilio’s architecture is bypassed in order for this thesis to take from what Virilio himself would consider to be his greatest contribution to the way in which one might understand the world around them.

Dromology

The first major topic that continually reappears throughout Virilio’s work, is that of the ‘science of speed’, or as Virilio refers to it as, ‘dromology’ (derived from the Greek noun ‘dromos’ meaning race). This concept, which was first introduced in Virilio’s second published book ‘Speed and Politics’, can essentially be understood in two forms.

Physical Speed

The more basic form of Virilio’s argument relates to speed in its physical sense brought about by the industrial revolution. Virilio’s critique of this is that in treating “vision as its basic element”(Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 60), speed

“ostensibly perverts the illusionary order of arrival of information. What could have seemed simultaneous is diversified and decomposes. With speed, the world keeps on coming at us, to the detriment of the object, which is itself now assimilated to the sending of information. It is this intervention that destroys the world as we know it” (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 100).

It is for this reason that speed can be understood as multiplying absence and thereby enabling an aesthetics of disappearance. To understand this one simply needs to consider the nature of high speed travel which enables its patient to forget, as the “little death of the departure” through the “rapidity of displacement” enabled by speed, allows passengers to “disappear into a holiday where there’s no tomorrow, which amounts for each, to a deferred rehearsal of his last day”(Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 65).

The effect of this speed, Virilio later reports, is the “violence of the accident” which is permanently reproduced (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 100). In this context even the threat of death itself becomes perverted, and to individual at the mercy of speed such an event would disguise itself as just a “simple technical accident”(Virilio The Aesthetics of Dis-
appearance 60). Just consider the difference between killing someone in a car crash than in cold blood. Or, in a perhaps more appropriate, the difference between the hand to hand combat of ancient battles compared to the violence and destruction that could be achieved every time an artillery shell is loaded. It is for this reason Virilio recognised speed as leading to the “forgetting, and thus disappearance, of the human body” (LaHood 22).

**Virtual Speed**

On the other end of the spectrum, Virilio asserts that this phenomenon also exists through societies newly acquired digital landscape. In the same way that the accelerated transport of people has ceaselessly distanced individuals from an objective world, the accelerated transport of sign, images and other such virtual consciousness's provoke the same effect. This second function of speed, Virilio understands, in its totality, as the “new vehicles of today” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 32). Where people once experienced speed through their own transport, today they merely need to take out their phone. To Virilio, in this sense, society has become a victim to “fait accompli” of technology, and with no longer a need to travel, except on the spot, they have become condemned to “just relax here and now, in the inertia of immobility regained” (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 42; Virilio A Landscape of Events 62).

![Figure 1.2. The Running Lion Tamer, Etienne-Jules Marey.](image)

In order to illustrate this, in the “Aesthetics of Disappearance”, Virilio used the example of the chronophotography of Etienne-Jules Marey (Fig 2). While Virilio didn't overtly condemn this work, he merely reflected on how through the technological manipulation of space and time through the deceleration of his photography, Marey made his viewer “penetrate into an unseen universe” (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 53). Through this analysis, Virilio was able to tangibly draw a connection between the manipulation of speed, through technology, and its' desynchronising effect on space-time. The issue arising from which, being, that people would become indifferent to “visual disturbances provoked by
rapidity”. Where the “locomotive illusion will be thought of as the truth of vision”, and the technologically enabled “illusion of optics will seem like those of life” (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 50). In this context, Virilio’s fear becomes will the acceptance of the new technologically enabled reality, shift society into a state of “mere spectators of a perceptive and perspective reality about to disappear” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 87).

In Virilio’s book ‘A Landscape of Events’, his essay ‘The Big Night’ provides an insightful way of considering this technological disturbance of reality through reflecting on the invention of public lighting throughout cities which only began to appear in cities towards the end of the 17th Century. The effect of this, Virilio reflected, was that while the streets obviously became a lot safer, “sunrise and sunset lost its purpose” and therefore what had once been considered the “beginning of everything found itself eliminated from our physiology and our consciousness” (Virilio A Landscape of Events 2). As technology progressed into the 20th Century however the effectiveness of this lighting becomes supplemented by the “simulated days of screens, consoles and other ‘night tables’” which has allowed society to “free oneself” from natural lighting (Virilio A Landscape of Events 3). This freedom, however, Virilio bluntly refers to as a “purely negative action”, in the sense that it has enabled society to relegate their relationship to ‘nature’, and “come to resemble moles roaming in a beam of light, moles whose view of the world does not indeed amount to much” (Virilio A Landscape of Events 7).

Through this analogy, Virilio furthers his argument by linking the technical disturbance of reality to a disturbance binary opposing nature and society’s relationship to it. This example of technology substituting the role of the natural environment additionally provides an understanding of what Virilio means when he states that society has become a victim to the ‘fait accompli’ of the speed of technology in the sense that societies fleeting relationship to natural light and time, which was catalysed by the initiator of public lighting, Gariel Nicholas de la Reynie, and was only conceived to improve the public environment but ‘accidently’ shifted it at a reckless speed beyond which society could comprehend the effects of, leaving them with no option but to accept it.

**Speed of the Media**

Virilio’s concept of dromology also extended into his explanation of the media. Much like his accusations about Marey, Virilio considered, the “subliminal comfort” produced through the ‘dromologistical media techniques’ as replacing lived experience with “fantastical tele-present real-time images, and leading ultimately to a complete ‘derealisation’ of the world” (Baldwin 134). Virilio argues that this shift can be traced all the way back to the “moment of high-speed photography was invented” as it was this invention which allowed the “cinematic projection of reality” to become a concrete possibility (Virilio The Vision Machine 61; Virilio The Lost Dimension 63). From this point on, the manufacturing speed of the “fabrication of the world and of a world of artificial images”, created a condition where “a montage of sequences in which the optics of motor illusion re-establishes the illusion of optics” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 63). Virilio reflects upon this in regards to the economic disaster that occurred in 1930’s America where, “The differed time of the cinematographic cbmotor empties the present world of appearances, the ubiquity of which allows millions of spectators to haunt
the auditoriums (cosigned to films like trains to travel) to forget their material plight” (Virilio
The Aesthetics of Disappearance 55).

The inevitable nature of this phenomenon, is that the media was forced to evolve as
when one “technique of distraction) dies” it has to be replaced by “another that is considered
more effective”, in order to achieve the “single basic quest for the prostheses of subliminal
comfort” (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 62). This evolution can be understood most
apparently in cinema, which constantly shifts its preoccupations with the “realism of the
script, vulgaration of the actors, precision of colour photography, cinemascope or Cinerama”,
all of which “is arranged to awake attention” (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance
55). In these regards, screenwriter Ray Bradbury remarked that this attention can simply
be earned by filmmakers by “bombarding (the audience) with images… and accentuating the
details using special effects”, through this Bradbury concluded that the media had come to
understand that “you can get people to swallow anything by intensifying the details” (Virilio
The Vision Machine 14). In order to achieve this the media has come to place a reliance on
the “high rapidity of execution of their montage”, through which the optic-electric capabilities
of what we understand of media today begin to trivialise the comparatively primitive magni-
tude of the ‘rapid vehicle’s effects on our misconstrued perception of reality (Virilio The Lost
Dimension 55). In this sense, to the audience of such media the “bizarre becomes banal and
the common spectacle” and the real becomes disinteresting (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disap-
pearance 66).

General Problems Caused by the Societal Dedication to Speed

Virilio is by no means alone in his concerns around the shifting nature of speed driven
by a technological revolution however his concerns take a further step than many other
theorists. Aldous Huxley, the author of “Brave New World”, for example considers technology
as a neutral entity corrupted only by humanity (Huxley). Virilio, however, would extend that
while this may be the case the problems posed from technology are beyond just those inten-
tended by man but more so those problems that occur from what people fail to even conceive
could occur. This conclusion relates to one of Virilio’s most influential statements that “the
innovation of the ship already entailed the innovation of the shipwreck” (Virilio A Landscape
of Events 54). Referring to the idea that with “each period of technical evolution, with its
set of instruments and machines, involves the appearance of specific accidents, revealing in
negative the growth of scientific thought” (Virilio A Landscape of Events 54). Therefore as the
nature of speed which society subjects itself to evolves, then equally the nature of the accident
that this evolution can, and inevitably will, lead to will change.

Arguably, these changes will increasingly intensify, for instance, just consider the
scale difference between the kind of accidents which society is at risk of today, like the nuclear
disaster at Fukushima, compared to the ‘locomotive’ disasters that would have occurred at
the beginning of the industrial revolution, and at the time would have been considered the
worst possible kind of technological accident. The form of accidents, however, which Virilio
considers more intriguing, yet potentially also more problematic are ‘immaterial’. A simple
example of this could be understood by considering stock market crashes, which society has
become increasingly vulnerable to because of the increasingly claustrophobic nature of the world’s financial system which has become infinitely interlinked and figurative due to the speed of the transactions that inform financial markets. Another example of which is slightly different in nature and more concerning for Virilio was focused on in his essay, ‘Unknown Quantity’, which was very much in line with his essay ‘the Big Night’. In the ‘Unknown Quantity’ Virilio reflects on the fact that over half of the population are no longer able to see the Milky Way, as a result of the ‘false days of technoculture’ caused by the speed of light at which the technical and virtual landscape manipulate societal relations to the physical environment” (Virilio Unknown Quantity 129). For Virilio this accidental result of the loss of visibility of the ‘Milky Way’ is concerning because while it doesn’t cause any physical damage to society or the physical environment, it does lead to a shift in societies existential experience of the world. Therefore as Virilio’s philosophy is predominantly based on a concern for phenomenology, this accidental shift is taken extremely seriously as for him as our existential relationship to the world, is fundamentally more important than the objective state of the world in its physical sense. To put it simply, Virilio believes that “the corruption of sight is the correction of life” (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 104).

In this sense, an even more sinister accident caused by technology are the ones that are not ‘exotic’ but rather the ‘endotic’ in the sense that they physically alter not just people’s perception of the world but rather alter the people themselves (Virilio Unknown Quantity 129). It is perhaps these accidental changes that Virilio was alluding to in his manifesto when he claimed that “we are now on the brink of a metamorphosis of our consciousness”, and in a sense much of what Virilio writes about dromology can be understood as considering these changes (Virilio “Warning”).

One of the most obvious examples of technology exposing society to these kinds of accidents appears in the “Aesthetics of Disappearance”, when Virilio considers the work of neurosurgeon José Manue Rodríguez Delgado, a pioneer of the “electronic phenomenon of thought” who worked on “treating and especially tranquilizing his patients with implants”. Virilio along with Delgado and others in this industry foresee this technology getting to a stage where it would be possible for “a miniscule pastille of silicon (surgically inserted) to give a person instantaneous knowledge of a foreign language or the theory of relativity…” (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 48). This theory of offering a man a memory that would “no longer be his own” for Virilio is one of extreme concern simply for the fact that it would separate man from the “structure of the cerebral organ that has evolved very little for tens of thousands of years” (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 48). From this conclusion, the concern immediately becomes what does this kind ‘accidents’ does this kind of technology expose people to? In an attempt to allow people to ‘keep up’ with the speed of hypermodern existence by interfering with the “speed of our cerebral automatisms”, for Virilio the fear becomes that technology like this will not only cause harm to people because it exposes them to an even stronger form of mind control than that exercised by the Nazi propaganda regime (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 48). But it may also lead to the kind of nihilism, alienation and passivity that not only exists due to the objective truths of the landscape to which we have created for ourselves, but actually caused by these ‘pastilles of silicon’ implanted physically in our brains!
Virilio's interest in the way in which technological speed may have physically altered society and their conscious understanding of the world, also consists of slightly more subtle and indirect ways in which these changes may occur. An example of this is Virilio’s observation that, as an unintended result of developments in the virtual environment, the general population physically interacts with their environment in a very different way than they historically would have. No longer will society need to physically navigate their environment but rather the “whole panoply of the latest technologies invites us suddenly to be stuck at home” (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 63). This perhaps begins to explain the sudden rise in obesity but equally the growth of the fitness industry which allows people to achieve the results of real physical agency in the world, in a filtered, supplemented, controlled, yet incredibly efficient way so as to remove them for as short as time as possible from their screens. Virilio’s concerns, however, extend beyond just this in terms of his considerations about this extreme shift from a society largely controlled by a desire to physically transport themselves and the phenomenon around them to a society who will bear witness to the “large-scale electro-optical illusion that turns the reality of the whole world into a production - the on-the-spot persistence of the witness’s body completing the persistence of his ocular system” (Virilio the Aesthetics of Disappearance 46). In these conditions where a ‘polar inertia’ is exerted on one’s own body as in a static ‘punctum’ the individual becomes assaulted by a “general influx of (optical and sound) information whereby everything converges and concentrates on the being attentive to the no-delay path of images and sounds, the screen suddenly becomes the last ‘visible horizon'” (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 46). Following on from this foreshadowing, it becomes possible to conclude that the ‘teleactors’ become exiles of real space and from ‘vis-à-vis’ contact with our ‘fellow man’ (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 63).

This kind of accident that technologically enabled speed has inevitably led to a contradictory state of Foucauldian power. On the one hand this shift, can be understood as leaving society with feelings of infinite options and possibilities. Consider for example google earth, which can within seconds transfer your consciousness to a vast majority of the habituated world. But on the other hand this technology equally shifts society to experience a new form of existence in which phenomena which happens in “common space, no longer happens now, in common time, but in another time over which no one has any power” (Virilio A Landscape of Events 90). Due to this, as society becomes more vulnerable to this new form of subliminal comfort, Virilio believes the technological ‘hijacking’ sight’, will result in a “bodily loss of control… turning over decision and agency to technical systems” (Baldwin 136).

In order to communicate this idea, in his essay ‘Vision Machine’ Virilio reflected on the shift in the prison system from the panoptic concept of a “central surveillance system in which prisoners find themselves continually under someone’s eye, within the warders field of vision”, to the situation now where inmates “monitor actuality” through televised events (Virilio The Vision Machine 65). When asked about these changes, an inmate reflected that this change makes prison harder as “you see all that you are missing out on, everything you can’t have” (Virilio The Vision Machine 65). For this reason the new form of punishment, following the logic of Foucault who once wrote surveillance and punishment go hand in hand, becomes envy, the “ultimate punishment of advertising”, which is practiced most effectively in the imprisonment of the “cathode-ray tube” (Virilio The Vision Machine 65; Foucault). This situation can therefore be understood to effectively illustrate how technology in fact limits
the way in which society understands and interacts with the world, because it allows people to consider themselves parallel to these prisoners, as society in general is equally subjected by their dedication to the field of a television, a "field in which we are obviously powerless to intervene" (Virilio The Vision Machine 65).

As a counterargument to this, however, is that it equally does becomes possible to find this systems of conditions in which people conduct themselves within general society and the public realm. This again relates back to Foucault in terms of his reflection on the panopticon in 'Discipline and Punish' and increasingly in more ambient ways as reflected by post structuralist theorists like Deleuze and equally to theorists like Tafuri who consider the architecture of entire cities as conforming to existing political conditions. But perhaps a less institutional way of considering this is through the literature of Franz Kafka whose work is inexplicitly linked philosophically to these concepts of order, regulation, bureaucracy and alienation within the public sphere. In his un-finished novel The Castle for instance, which chronicles a protagonist known only as K, who upon being appointed as a land surveyor by the officials of the castle moves into the foreign village which is dominated, both visually and politically, by the castle. Throughout his time in this new landscape, K. is forced to learn and adapt to a system the villagers have long since accepted, yet this process, as considered by Kafka, for an outsider is inexplicitly difficult. Upon arrival to this village K. is not warmly welcomed as he first thought and while the villagers and officials seem to have a vague understanding of his intended role in the village they treat him with caution and express little interest in initiating what K. had initially believed would be a simple transaction. In this sense the barriers that he has to navigate for the most part are not physical or psychological but rather social as he attempts to gain the recognition from the 'castle', an opaque symbol of authority, through negotiating his way through the inflexibility of the villagers and arrogant local officials. Throughout this journey, K. whose motivations are vague, transverses this landscape and as Kafka dictated to his friend Max Brod, his unfinished book would have ended with K. receiving a permit to stay only after exhausting himself to the point at which his effort left him on his deathbed. What Kafka is attempting to convey through all of this, amongst a multitude of other considerations, is existence within a society, like that of the village, is existence within a system. People simply can't exist as they wish because beneath all of the already vague laws controlling its citizens, exists even murkier and subconscious regulations that people learn to abide by, often in relation to an overarching authoritative power. To expose this Kafka needed to approach such an environment through the perspective of K., an outsider, and only then it becomes possible to sympathise with such an individual. In following this perspective of K., the audience is made to feel like those who Plato believed to have re-entered his cave promising of a better world, only to become persecuted for failing to recognise the same authority as the villagers. The novel additionally begins to communicate that naturally abiding to, without questioning this system is necessary for the self-preservation of those controlled by general societal factors. Through all of this Kafka's novel, perfectly enables one to consider how the way in which everyone conduct themselves in the city mirrors the way we conduct themselves in the technological realm in the sense that both hold a system of control over their audience.
Despite these observations, however, Virilio considers the way in which speed will change the environments which individuals grow to perceive will lead to an even greater shift away from personal autonomy. This argument can be substantiated through considering the Roland Barthes essay, “The Death of the Author”, which was very influential to the intellectual climate in which Virilio worked. Barthes argument followed the idea that, rather than the meaning of a text from being predetermined by the author, it is rather defined by the reader themselves. Therefore, following this, as “every text is eternally written here and now”, the ‘systems of control’ to which society abides by can equally be understood as being constantly rewritten by those who endure them (Barthes 145). Meaning that, therefore, it becomes possible to question the extent to which the preordained systems which Kafka eluded to in his novel actually do control the society they confront.

It is here that lies the central difference between the power structures within a feudal society, like the one in Kafka’s novel, and a society preconditioned by speed. As suggested within Sartrean Existentialism people relate to the world in which they exist in the way Barthes would suggest readers relate to a text. In suggesting, “I am condemned to be free”, Sartre suggests that regardless of the situation that an individual is presented, they are free because they are free to choose how to react (Sartre). This is all conditional, however, to the ability of the individuals to react to the essence which they perceive. Therefore, following Virilio’s argument that speed disconnects individuals from these “essences which they perceive”, it would seem that in intensifying the rate of this perception, freedom is stripped from society because they will no longer have the time needed to have the freedom to react. To borrow again from Sartre again, this will lead to a society increasingly condemned to live in “bad faith” (Sartre).

Following on from all of these criticisms, the question becomes how have these conditions evolved to such an intense stage. The answer for Virilio is simply that these technologies, as described in “A Landscape of Events”, provide society its “hidden desire for sensory privatization”, in the sense that it offers “pleasure without risk of contamination”, allowing society to abandon “our fellow man in favour of unknown and distant beings who remain aloof, ghosts of no importance who won't mess up our plans” (Virilio A Landscape of Events 63). The very fact that this technology and the speed that it enables, offers this however is the same reason that it can be ultimately accused of only alienating and pacifying an urban society who are either unable or unwilling to deal with reality. As d’Annunzio or George Muller once considered, speed “allows us to think of nothing, to feel nothing, to attain indifference”, the problem being faced now, however, becoming that technology has become too good at providing this (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 101). As extreme as any of these accusations appear, Virilio, directs that evidence “awaits us in those mass graves that we would like to forget” (Virilio A Landscape of Events 10). The speed that our technological developments have inexplicitly led to this, as it is speed, Virilio condemns, that has meant that “bodies are no longer the ultimate matter” (Virilio A Landscape of Events 10). It is only through considering these places of death, possible to begin to understand Virilio’s interpretation of the magnitude of speed within post-modern society as a ‘hitherto unequal magnitude’, which despite its power is often only a subconsciously considered force and therefore capable of leading to such astronomical devastation (Virilio The Lost Dimension 55).
Picnolepsy

In order to extend his work on Dromology and its effects on human perception, Virilio introduces a condition, which equally effects every member of society, which he refers to as ‘Picnolepsy’. A topic first introduced in his book, the ‘Aesthetics of Disappearance’, which begins suddenly, through an anecdotal description:

“The lapse occurs frequently at breakfast and the cup dropped and overturned on a table is a well-known consequence. The absence lasts a few seconds; its beginning and ends are sudden. The senses function, but are nevertheless closed to external impression. The return being just as sudden as the departure, the arrested word and action are picked up again where they have been interrupted. Conscious time comes together again automatically, forming a continuous time without apparent breaks” (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 9)

Virilio continues that, these occurrences can happen hundreds of times a day and as these absences in present time are never perceived, “neither as a gap nor as a gap displaced”, for the picnoleptic, “nothing happened, the missing time never existed”(Baldwin 141; Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 10). This idea at first may present itself as absurd, however, through considering Virilio’s education under Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who in his final work, ‘The Visible and the Invisible’, investigated the paradoxical phenomenology of nothing, or rather of “the imaginary and the hidden”, it becomes clear that picnolepsy is simply an extension of this work (Merleau-Ponty 229). Understanding this link, which would have presented Virilio with the idea that to see “is always more than one sees”, provides the origin to the notion which picnolepsy relies on, that human perception is made up of a “montage of temporalities” and therefore “conscious time is comprised of constant interruptions” due to the limitations of the human consciousness (Merleau-Ponty 229; Lotringer 48; Baldwin 141). Following on from this premise, as the picnoleptic is simply unable to comprehend all of the complexities of existence, they become forced to, through the very “narratively of consciousness”, “patch up sequences, readjusting their contours to make equivalents out of what the picnoleptic has seen and what has not been able to see, what he remembers and what, evidently he cannot remember and that it is necessary to invent”(Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 10).

Upon introducing this idea, ‘The Aesthetics of Disappearance’ proposes that for ‘self-preservation’ the young picnoleptic must learn to use these “absence mechanisms” as a “reaction against unpleasant thoughts or trains of thoughts” (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 19). In order to achieve this they must therefore learn to “doubt the knowledge and the concordant evidence” of those around them and become “inclined to believe that nothing really exists; that even if there is existence it cannot be described; and even if it could be described it certainly couldn’t be communicated or explained to others”(Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 10). Due to this, the picnoleptic gap can be understood as denying the ‘accident’, in order to allow society to ‘structure’ and ‘idealize’ their consciousness to “helps us to exist in a duration which is our own” (Kelly).
When we start to think of this condition in terms of this it quickly loses its innocence. “If consciousness is a result of … picnoleptic absence” meaning that society “invents” their own “consciousness and experience nothing outside of this invention” the question becomes what is reality, beyond all of our discursive cover-ups? (Baldwin 145). In the same way that the picnoleptic might ‘blank out’ the event of the mug falling, may he also do the same to the more severe ‘accidents’ that they are informed of such as war? detrimentally reconfiguring society’s existential relationship to the world.

The Effect of Speed on Picnolepsy

Later on within the ‘Aesthetics of Disappearance’, Virilio begins to reconnect dromology to picnolepsy. It is perhaps easiest to understand the connection here, by first recalling physical speed. Travelling at high speeds “distanced us from what we’ve taken as the advent of the objective world”, meaning that human consciousness is simply unable to fully comprehend their spatial-temporal environment and therefore the more the physiological condition of picnolepsy is, through aggravation, engaged (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 101). Through this, the “efficiency of speed” leads to “an increasingly delirious experience of the world”, meaning that due to its aggravation of picnolepsy “speed unglues reality” (Baldwin 142; Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 16).

When you again consider this in terms of the hyper-stimulating ‘subliminal comfort’ provided by the virtual speed of media, “a phenomenon without precedent in the mediation of time”, it becomes clear that picnolepsy will only be aggravated further, through the “perpetual hijacking of the subject from any spatial temporal context”(Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 105,01). In this sense technologically enabled speed can be understood as “finally replacing the pseudo-state of rational wakefulness with an artificial condition of paradoxical wakefulness”, allowing the “subliminal” assistance provided by technology to inform the way in which picnolepsy frames our consciousness (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 42). Specifically, this development of high technological speeds will lead to the ‘disappearance’ of consciousness, “the direct perception of phenomena that informs us of our own existence”, which will therefore be increasingly be marked by picnoleptic absence(Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 104).

As a final thought to summarise Virilio’s ideas about the relationship between speed and picnolepsy, a consideration upon Hiroshi Sugimoto’s photography series on theatres-frames provides an intriguing way to reflect upon Virilio’s argument (fig.3). The series follows the simple premise of shooting a “whole movie in a single frame” with “a wide-open aperture”, the effect of which is that all that is left of the film is a shining white screen which illuminates the empty theatre. Therefore Sugimoto’s photo can be understood, much like those of Marey, as through photographic manipulation of time, capturing movement yet expressing it as an singular moment in time. Through this there becomes an inert tension embodied within these photos which begins to capture what Virilio uncovered about the paradoxical nature of
picnolepsy. This commonality exists here in the way that the images express an impossibly accelerated translation of the film, which mutates two hours of footage into the time it takes for the light of the image to be perceived by the audience, yet this becomes rendered as nothingness, in the form of the white screen. In this sense the photography can be understood as presenting the audience with an exaggerated version of the slowness of their consciousness, because while people are capable of experiencing the intricacies of film, as these accelerating entities continue to intersect with each other perhaps our experience of the world will in fact start to mirror more closely the nothingness of these screens. Through this Sugimoto highlights exactly what Virilio was thinking about when writing “The Aesthetics of Disappearance” that the increasing speeds at which we experience the world paradoxically leads society not to experience more but rather, through picnolepsy, to the disappearance of events.

**Lost Dimension**

In addressing picnolepsy, in the ‘Aesthetics of Disappearance’, Virilio can be understood as conducting a theoretic discussion about how dromology might affect ‘real time’. In his subsequent book the ‘Lost Dimension’ and in some of his others to follow, however, Virilio extends his argument to consider the affect that dromology would have on ‘real space’.
The ‘Lost Dimension’ begins by first reflecting upon the way in which the functions of cities changed due to societies shifting reliance on technology. Urban existence, Virilio concludes, is becoming redepolyed away from worker cities, like Detroit, to instead centre on transport agencies, such as international airports (Virilio Th e Lost Dimension 10). Due to this, the spatial conditions of boundaries become prioritized within the new conditions of the cities. But even the nature of these boundaries change, in the way that, “the city is entered not though a gate nor through an arc de triomphe, but rather though an electronic audience system”(Virilio The Lost Dimension 11). The focus here, therefore, becomes not about the urban inhabitants but rather about the attack of the boundary from the phenomenon of speed. What Virilio indicates that this expresses, is beyond just the necessary progression of border protection, but rather a sub conscious fear that perhaps the notion of such boundaries, which were once the ultimate instrument of power, have become inconsequential.

The reasoning for this again returns to the notion of the “acceleration of the optical commutation” enabled by technology, meaning that like distances, aesthetic borders, in all forms, will be abolished “in favour of one ultimate boundary in time”, meaning that the “difference between ‘near’ and ‘far’ simply ceases to exist” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 50,13). Due to this essential deconstruction of urbanistic boundaries, the traditional spatial arrangement of cities based around localised nodes and axial densities equally collapses as the effects of speed (both physically and tele-commutatively) promote the “merger of disconnected metropolitan fringes into a single urban mass” as the “urban figure is no longer designated by a dividing line that separates here from there” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 12,14). Consequently, Virilio foresees a paradigm in which cities will increasingly lose their “authenticity”, as the urban dwellers experiences the shift from being separated within their own city by distance, to being “divided according to aspects of time” as the “depth of real time wins out over the depth of real space of territories” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 15; Virilio A Landscape of Events 47). Due to this the measure of movement becomes “almost exclusively that of a technical vector”, a form of communication which “desynchronises the time from space and passage”, allowing individuals to come “together in time”, yet “inversely, distancing oneself in space” (Virilio the Lost Dimension 58, 74). The effect of this is that, societal consciousness of real space disappears.

Therefore, “the world view based on orthogonal orthodoxy has given way to a new perception, in which the very concept of physical dimension has progressively lost its meaning and analytical power as a form of dissecting or dismounting perceptive reality”(Virilio The Lost Dimension 30). Through this loss, of meaningful engagement with the “geopolitical reality” of urban space, people’s attentions’ are deported beyond the realm of the “human vis-à-vis encounters” where society is left to exist in a “world in which opacity is but a momentary interlude”. Where the “illusion of proximity barely lasts”(Virilio The Lost Dimension16/19).

**Shift into the Virtual Landscape**

From here on, Virilio continues, the hyper-stimulated urban spectator will have no option but to transfer a vast majority of their spatial existence to that of the screen, an inter-
face which Virilio argues has become the new ‘boundary’ of hyper modernity (Virilio The Lost Dimension 12). This interface, the only function of which being speed, will lead the individual to experience a complete disconnection from the existing social fabric, as “our perception of the plane is really only a virtual image, a hologram that emerges… from the excessive dynamics of informatics” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 108). Furthermore, as this “collapsed space with no dimensions” lacks permanence, the reality of the screen is little more than “phantasms of code built on code built on layers of translation and substitution” (Baldwin 135). Therefore the “cathode window” can be understood as capable of displacing the “physical means of communication” in the way in which it alters the “reality of the effective presence of people and things” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 99). Consider for instance the digital interface’s ability to make “what was visibly nothing become ‘something’” or even to bring each viewer the “light from another day and the presence of the antipodal place” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 17). When what was visibly nothing becomes “something,” the greatest distance no longer precludes perception.

In this sense, the spectators of these interfaces, “deprived of objective boundaries” become condemned to exist in this new spatial dimension, in which the city will disappear into a “heterogeneous regime comprised of the temporality of advanced technologies” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 13,14). In effect, this will lead to a dislocation from the mnemonic trace of the real experiences of a city and a re-ordering of the “geometry and the dimensions of physical space”, to the extent that, “distinctions of here and there no longer mean anything.” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 99,13).

The New Role of the Monument

Following on from this notion, that “speed distance obliterates the notion of physical dimension”, Virilio concludes that the most vulnerable typology therefore becomes that of the monument (Virilio The Lost Dimension 18). The origin of this point locates itself back in ‘The Aesthetics of Disappearance’, in the way that Virilio connected the perception of speed to the act of forgetting. This occurs both through his description of how speed aggravates picnolepsy, a condition capable of leading to the disappearance of societies shared consciousness’s, but equally in his presentation of the way that virtual reality provided by technology is constantly accelerating to capture and project a ‘real time’ simulation of the world. From these ideas Virilio presents, rather indirectly, that therefore the “era of the great monuments of the spectacle seems to be over” (Virilio ‘The Aesthetics of Disappearance 64). In the ‘Lost Dimension’, however, Virilio focuses on this idea more thoroughly in noting that the reasoning for this lies in the fact that, a monument, traditionally relies on its own static qualities to communicate a relation to the past, much in the same way that traditional catholic cathedrals communicated through religious ornamentation to their congregation. Therefore such entities simply fail to project themselves onto an audience if speed continues to dominate the individuals who make up the ‘overexposed city’, outside of course of the occasional tourist prone to the artificial seizure of such structure by means of photography (Virilio The Lost Dimension).

This failure to warrant a hermeneutic response to these forms relates, continues Virilio, to the nature of “technological time” which possesses “no relation to any calendar of
events nor any collective memory” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 15). In the same way speed disconnects a societal relation to the past, therefore, the perception of these monuments of the past become devastated by this “pure computer time” which acts as an “unbounded timeless intensity” that constructs a permanent attraction to the immediate present, a temporality dominated by the time spent “waiting from service from a machine” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 15).

In this sense, Virilio argument about the role of the modern monument centres around the notion that speed has meant that the “delineation between past, present and future, between here and there, is now meaningless except as a visual illusion” (Virilio The Vision Machine 31). Due to this, Virilio concludes his thoughts about monuments rather bluntly in stating that “If there are any monuments today, they are certainly not of the visible order” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 21).

**The New Role of Architecture**

This same argument, equally begins to suggest that the role of architecture will shift in the sense that architecture, as a phenomenological entity, similarly structures itself as a stable entity. Therefore like monuments, “urbanism is in decline” in the intense acceleration of telecommunications, allowing dwellings to become “no more than anamorphoses of thresholds” leading to the witnessing of the “paradoxical moment in which the opacity of building materials is reduced to zero” (Virilio The Aesthetics of Disappearance 64; Virilio The Lost Dimension 12). Whilst architecture, once functioned as a socio-political statement and as a function of communication, in the scenario that Virilio proposes, “property boundaries, walls and fences no longer signify the permanent physical obstacle. Instead, they now form an interruption of an emission or of an electric shadow zone which repeats the play of delight and the shadow of buildings”(Virilio The Lost Dimension 18).

What becomes of architecture, Virilio proposes, is therefore not so much a “perceptible and visible chaos, such as the processes of degradation or deconstruction implied in accident, aging and war” but paradoxically an “imperceptible order” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 21). An ‘order’ which is displaced well beyond “being apprehended in any real sense”, due to the intensification of societal “visual unconsciousness”, an “instinctive unconsciousness, denounced by Freud” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 71).

As a way of framing this idea, in “The Vision Machine”, Virilio reflects on Adolf Loos’s celebrated discourse ‘Ornament and Crime’, presented in Vienna in 1908, which Virilio understands as a “manifesto in which he (Loos) preaches the standardisation of total functionalism and waxes lyrically about the fact that ‘the greatness of our age lies in its inability to produce a new form of decoration’” (Virilio The Vision Machine 10; Loos). However, in considering this in relation to his own observations, that “the strategic value of speed’s ‘noplace’ has definitely out stripped the value of place”, Virilio observed that Loos’s metaphor takes on another meaning (Virilio The Vision Machine 31). Refusing ornamentation today, rather than revolting against the crime of ornamentation, Virilio argues reflects the recognition that architecture role as a “poetic carrier has no further raison d’etre” (Virilio The Vision Machine 31).
In this context, Virilio goes on to ask whether “architectonics had been merely a subsidiary technology, surpassed by other technologies that produced accelerated displacement and sidereal projection” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 22). On the other hand, however, it is also fundamental to note that, unlike monuments, architecture will always remain a necessary aspect of human existence. Regardless how distantly the pictoletic consciousness rejects it. The challenge, Virilio concludes, is therefore how can architecture, as “more than an array of techniques designed to shelter us from the storm” but rather a “geodesic capacity to define a unity of time and place for all actions”, sustain its relative cultural significance as it “now enters into direct conflict with the structural capacities of the means of mass communication” (Virilio The Lost Dimension 22).

The Effects of this Shift

Ultimately, the effect of society’s disconnection with the urban environments, at least from the perspective of Virilio, is detrimental to society. While the details of these effects are still largely unknown, much like those effects of speed as discussed previously, Virilio’s discourse following on from these observations considers the ‘accidents’ that might eventuate from this shift. Frustratingly, however, the occasions in which Virilio reflects on his predictions about architecture are few and far between, especially in his more recent work. This is presumably due to the fact that, for Virilio, the idea that speed disconnects society from architecture is far less concerning than some of his other predictions.

In approaching this work within the architecture discipline, however, it doesn’t take much to understand the significance of this argument to the discipline and to begin to understand how this will inevitably change society. Additionally by reading Virilio’s work from this perspective it becomes possible to hypothesise, from his more general ideas about the effects of speed on society, what these changes might be.

Of these possible connections that can be found one of the more significant and reoccurring themes, is the notion that, with the fading away of a public consciousness of architecture so too will architectures role of connecting individuals to the past fade. This is a paramount concern of Virilio, which can be understood not only through his writing but similarly in the very essence of who he is. He is haunted by his past. A past which exposed him to war which he confessed can be understood as his ‘university’ (Virilio and Lotringer, Pure War 24). In this sense Virilio can be understood as paradoxically both being damaged by such events in his past yet intentionally reliving these moments to give urgency and meaning to his work and his life. In doing this he discovered the importance of such practice and therefore accuses the way in which his fellow philosophical Parisian community was able to forget such events as highlighting a fatal trend in hypermodern society. (Virilio, From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond).

Therefore in recognizing that, “universal world time is gearing up to outstrip the time of erstwhile localities in historical importance”, Virilio’s response is to actively challenge these objects of disappearance (Virilio A Landscape of Events XI). In order to do this, Virilio’s first
move is simply to understand the nature of ‘telecommunications’ opposition to the past. The
central reason that this condition exists, Virilio proposes, comes down the idea that the speed
of technology, “gives each moment of our lives more intensity, more depth”, which will lead “to
the detriment of that ‘institution of moment’ dear to Gaston Bachelard” (Virilio A Landscape
of Events 51). It is due to this that in the “era of an over eagerness in our activities, public and
private, pushes us to desire lack or absence over presence” in order to finally obtain a “peace
of nerves for the sick at heart’ that Henri Michaux once yearned for”(Virilio A Landscape
of Events 62). In seeking this out, society is therefore stuck in a paradigm of polarities in which
they are either experiencing the present as either moments of intensity or inversely moments
in which they actively shut conscious experience out.

The problem with this, in these terms, becomes that remembering and just relating
to the past in general is an essential part of human existence. This is an idea which Virilio
extensively documents throughout “The Vision Machine” which criticises the emerging trend
that human perception is being replaced and defined by an artificial form of machine percep-
tion. The text begins by noting that “Viewers do not manufacture mental images on the basis
of what they are immediately given to see, but on the basis of their memories, by themselves
filling in the blanks and their minds with images created retrospectively, as in childhood”
(Virilio The Vision Machine 3). In other words, “to see and understand our present envi-
ronment itself comes from a distant visual memory without which there would be no act of
looking”; therefore as Rudolf Arnheim understands it, perceptual activity “starts in the past in
order to illuminate the present” (Virilio The Vision Machine 62).

It is for this reason, Virilio supposes, that the “last few generations have great diffi-
culties understanding what they are incapable of recreating themselves” meaning that “words
have in the end lost their ability to come alive”, as the speed at which these individuals have
experienced that world has stripped society of the necessary memory of lived experience to
understand these linguistic symbols (Virilio The Vision Machine 8). This argument can be
further extended by considering reading as a metaphor for all phenomenon which like books
and architecture remain unchanged and rely on symbolism to gain subjective substance, all of
which following this logic will become “meaningless” (Virilio The Vision Machine 9).

Conclusion

The question after all of this becomes how architecture can react to this. A pessimist
may conclude that it cannot and that architects as they have many times before will just have
to react to these changes as they come. However it can also be argued, inversely, that archi-
tecture is now in a position of power in the sense that architects now have control over some
of the most vulnerable yet vital aspects of contemporary life. While this may be the case,
however, it can be concluded that the traditional ways in which memorials attempt to connect
individuals to the past no longer remain relevant. Therefore for this project to be successful it
is necessary to conceive of a way in which it can advert attention back to the battle of Verdun
if it can no longer be perceived in any conscious sense.
The argument that this project must therefore take forward becomes an argument about perception. Consider the famous philosophic thought experiment derived from George Berkeley’s work, “A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge”:

*If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?*

While this is of course nothing more than an infallible conjecture it does lead itself to two answers. From the argument put forth by Virilio it would be reasonable to suggest that he would consider that the tree doesn’t make a sound, that the existence of essence is inexplicitly linked to the perception of essence. In order for this project to be worthwhile, however, this perspective has to be rejected. It must be argued that the tree does make a sound in order for it be argued that a place can remain for architecture in a society which no longer perceives architecture.

What this conclusion implies, therefore, becomes that for a memorial to function it must do so through an architecture aware that it only exists outside of the perception those who it encases. For this to happen the most important architectural intervention therefore would become the boundary. The inclination therefore at this stage would become that the best form of a memorial which will revert attention back, would be an architecture of the boundary. An architecture which, through controlling the bodies that we remain trapped within it, for long enough to allow the architecture to expose itself consciously, The occupants will become capable of remebering the Battle of Verdun.

Before any of this can occur, however, it is necessary to first reflect on the nature of the Battle of Verdun…
VERDUN
Figure 2.1. French soldiers in a shell hole near Fort Vaux
Everyone came to Verdun as if to receive some ultimate recognition there; as if all the provinces of all the patrie had needed to join in one particularly cruel and solemn sacrifice among the sacrifices of the war, exposed to the world’s gaze. They seemed to go up the Voie Sacree like some new form of offertory, to the most formidable altar that mankind had ever raised.

Paul Valery, Oeuvres, pg 38

Verdun is a small city in northeast France which lies on the banks of the River Meuse. On autumn of 1914 the city was positioned only 15km south of the German Armies following the German off ensives through Alsace and Lorraine to the south of Verdun and their more powerful attack through Belgium and northern France (Ousby). Despite this Verdun remained relatively safe prior to February 1916 with only a few skirmishes in 1914 and attacks from the flanks at vanquish and Les Eparges in 1915. Due to this, the French divisions in Verdun were made up of older soldiers or those unfit to serve in the front line meaning that the commanders posted in Verdun, began to fear that it was becoming a weak link should it be attacked.

These concern well placed as, following the plans set out by General Erich von Falkenhayn, on the 21st February 1916 the German army attacked. Falkenhayn’s planning of the attack began the year before when he began looking for a site “for the retention of which the French General Staff would be compelled to throw in every man they have” (Ousby 37). The intention of this, Falkenhayn admitted, would be to make the Forces of France “bleed to death - as there can be no question of a voluntary withdrawal” (Ousby 40). Therefore in this appalling and somewhat unprecedented battle the city of Verdun became a site of extreme violence used as bait by the Germans in one of the first major historic battles which focused not on the acquisition of land but rather on the “slaughter the enemy in the largest numbers possible” (Ousby 40). In establishing this plan, Falkenhayn “promised a battle that would be massively involving and murderous for the French yet not for the Germans. He promised a
battle that would be at once decisive and yet low in risk. He promised a battle that would succeed whether it was short or long. And he promised a battle that would be a victory whether Verdun fell or not” (Ousby 41).

Despite Falkenhayn's reassurances, however, the Germans did approach the battle with caution as “Verdun was to be the biggest thing the Germans had conceived, let alone attempted, since the opening moves of the war” (Ousby 43). Due to this the German preparation effort was extensive. The task of carrying out this operation was given to the Kaiser's son, Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, and his Fifth Army, who had remained in the Verdun salient since 1914 (Ousby 43). Once the New Year started in 1916 the Germans conducted the initial stage of the offensive in moving the necessary troops, artillery and supplies up to Verdun, a process that worked surprisingly well through the use of the German railway system which already came within 100 kilometres of Verdun and was extended into the woodland surrounding the salient (Ousby 50). This massive operation remained relatively silent from the French perspective as a result of the Germans using French underground barracks and positioning themselves strategically around the landscape.

Due to this, it was not until February that the French became aware of the attack at Verdun which was, fortunately for them, due to the fact that the German attack was postponed due to poor weather conditions and visibility. By this point however it was essentially too late and by February 1916 the Germans had about 300,000 men and 1,000 artillery pieces at his disposal while even after last-minute manoeuvres and reinforcements the French would have only had 180,000 and 270 artillery pieces defending Verdun (Ousby 60).

**Why Verdun**

The reason that any of this happened in the first place, however, was because Falkenhayn choose Verdun to launch a German offensive. From a practical standpoint a German attack on Verdun made sense because the city was difficult to defend as the only French supply line to it was a narrow railway line and a country road. Furthermore, the Verdun salient, from the German perspective, “constituted a permanent threat, from which an offensive could be launched at any time” (Prost 47).

The more fundamental reason that Verdun was chosen as the site, from Falkenhayn's perspective anyway, seems to be because he believed it to hold symbolic meaning to France (Ousby 36). This idea was based on Verdun's history as a place of conflict, the memories from which were still on the minds of both nations, which can be understood by the emotional significance to which the French invested into the small city (Ousby 34). Specifically it was the memory of the Franco Prussian War of 1870-71, which resonated most with the French when they considered Verdun. This memory, which the French “dwelled on it to the point of bitter obsession”, is of the "humiliating speed of defeat they had suffered in August and September 1870” (Ousby 22). A defeat which led to the “wound that always hurts-inflicted by the loss of Alsace and Lorraine” (Ousby 25). It was due to this that France conducted its extensive program of fortification (within the Verdun salient) in the years since her defeat, which was the evidence needed for Falkenhayn that the French would defend the city at whatever cost (Ousby 25).
To an extent Falkenhayn prediction was right, in the sense that, despite the fact the French could have “profitably withdrawn across the Meuse”, a maneuver which would have “shortened, simplified and secured their front line”. The French defended Verdun as French politicians feared that the “fall of Verdun would have a tremendous impact on public opinion” (Prost 49). Despite this, while Falkenhayn was successful in killing a horrendous amount of French troops, the German’s fighting in Verdun suffered equally an outcome, which Ian Ousby reflected, only “needed time to unfold” (Ousby 45).
12 February: The original date set for the German attack which had to be pushed back due to bad weather; this reduced the German element of surprise and gave the French time to prepare.

21 February: The Germans launched an artillery bombardment on the east bank of the Meuse in the sector of the Cauro and Haumont forests at 7 am, which was followed by an infantry attack of those French lines and a bombardment of Verdun.

23 February: By midday the Germans take Brabant on the bank of the Meuse.

24 February: The Germans move south to occupy Samogneux in the early hour of the morning, and later in the day they take Bois des Caures and push the French back to Bezonvaux.

23 June: The Germans launched an attack on the whole line of the French, which marked the greatest crisis for the French since the beginning of the battle, as by breaking the French line the Germans were only just short of Fort de Souville within five kilometers of Verdun.

7 June: After enduring a week of siege in the most desperate conditions, Fort Vaux was captured by the Germans, after the French defenders ran out of water and supplies.

7 June: Veterans would go on to choose this date as the anniversary when they returned to the battlefields in remembrance.

1916
**July 1:** The French and English launch their infantry attack at the Somme officially beginning what would be England’s largest battle of the First World War.

**11-12 July:** The Germans attempted to advance again, initially with a gas attack and then an attack on Fort Souville. Some troops made it to the roof of the fort but they were eventually pushed further back by the French.

**By this point due to the Germans need to defend in the Somme the officials conceded that they were never going to get to Verdun.**

**July 15:** In defiance of his Command, Falkenhayn issued an ambiguous order to the 5th army to maintain an “aggressive posture”.

**July 1:** The highest commander of the German army suspended operations at Verdun and instructed the 5th army to remain strictly on the defensive.

**14 July:** The French and English launch their infantry attack at the Somme officially beginning what would be England’s largest battle of the First World War.

**28 August:** Due to a disillusionment with Falkenhayn, the German army forced him to resign due largely to his failure at Verdun. He was replaced by Paul von Hindenburg and his chief of staff Erich Ludendorff.

**4 September:** A fire set off by an explosion in the Tavannes railway tunnel, which was being used as a command post, emergency hospital, garrison and place of refuge, led to the death of between 400 and 500 French soldiers.

**19 October:** The French began a pre-attack bombardment, which was controlled by observing balloons augmented by spotter aircraft.

**23 October:** French artillery bombardment increased and with their two new 400mm guns penetrated the concrete roof of Fort Douaumont killing about 50 Germans with further artillery killing over 100 of the Germans who occupied the Fort.

**24 October:** The First French Shortly before midday the French launched their infantry offensive covering three kilometers, the distance it had taken the Germans 4 1/2 months to secure. This resulted in the capture of Fort Douaumont, 6,000 prisoners, 164 machine guns and 15 artillery pieces. The French however did fail to recapture Fort Vaux as they had intended.

**1 November:** The Germans evacuated Fort Vaux anticipating another French attack.

**3 November:** The French finally enter Fort Vaux only to find that it was empty and that the Germans were conceding the battlefield.

**15 December:** After 6 weeks of preparation a final French push was launched, in freezing December weather, over a six mile front. This resulted in the Germans being pushed back to Bezonvaux and Louvemont and then southwest to Vacheresville on the bank of the Meuse, five miles from Verdun.

**4 September:** A fire set off by an explosion in the Tavannes railway tunnel, which was being used as a command post, emergency hospital, garrison and place of refuge, led to the death of between 400 and 500 French soldiers.

**22 October:** The French preparatory bombardment abruptly lifted and thinking an infantry attack had been launched the German artillery began to fire revealing their position. This allowed the French to locate the German artillery positions and smother the German Guns.

**24 October:** The French, eager to proclaim an effective end to the battle, held a premature ceremony to celebrate the end of the fighting. Despite this, the fighting continued and Verdun remained an active site until the end of the war in 1918.

**23 October:** French artillery bombardment increased and with their two new 400mm guns penetrated the concrete roof of Fort Douaumont killing about 50 Germans with further artillery killing over 100 of the Germans who occupied the Fort.

**13 September:** From the German perspective Operation GERICH ended when the newly installed head of the General of Staff, Paul von Hindenburg, ordered the cessation of all offensive operations at Verdun.

**15 December:** After 6 weeks of preparation a final French push was launched, in freezing December weather, over a six mile front. This resulted in the Germans being pushed back to Bezonvaux and Louvemont and then southwest to Vacheresville on the bank of the Meuse, five miles from Verdun.

**28 August:** Due to a disillusionment with Falkenhayn, the German army forced him to resign due largely to his failure at Verdun. He was replaced by Paul von Hindenburg and his chief of staff Erich Ludendorff.

**9 September:** From the German perspective Operation GERICH ended when the newly installed head of the General of Staff, Paul von Hindenburg, ordered the cessation of all offensive operations at Verdun.

**24 October:** The First French Shortly before midday the French launched their infantry offensive covering three kilometers, the distance it had taken the Germans 4 1/2 months to secure. This resulted in the capture of Fort Douaumont, 6,000 prisoners, 164 machine guns and 15 artillery pieces. The French however did fail to recapture Fort Vaux as they had intended.

**3 November:** The French finally enter Fort Vaux only to find that it was empty and that the Germans were conceding the battlefield.

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**1 November:** The Germans evacuated Fort Vaux anticipating another French attack.

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The Experience of War

Verdun was not only unique in what it intended to achieve but equally in the actual conditions of the battle which had a profound impact on everyone involved. The record of these experiences can be best understood through the first person accounts of the battle which can be found in the diaries and reminiscences of the soldiers who served at Verdun. The extent of these sources is immense as close to a third of all of the French serving on the western front visited Verdun and the very nature of this battle in particular made it worthwhile for the soldiers to record their experiences.

The Voie Sacree

The first experience of Verdun that can be found in these texts is in regards to the French soldier’s journey to Verdun, down the 75 km country road from Bar-le-Duc to Verdun which became known as the Voie Sacree (the Sacred Way). The most staggering aspect of this journey was the sheer scale of the operation which could only really be understood in this journey to the battle front. In the opening weeks of the battle vehicles passed up the road at a “rate of one every 14 seconds, day and night”, with elderly drivers, determined to unfit for war, working shifts up to “75 hours at the wheel” (Ousby 4). While many of the soldiers had already experienced the “distinctive atmosphere of chaos and order, muddle and efficiency that goes with mass deployment”, the effect of witnessing the journey down the Voie Sacree left even experienced soldiers powerfully struck by the “sense of being sucked into some vast machine” (Ousby 8).

The second most staggering aspect of the voyage down the Voie Sacree from the perspective of the soldiers joining the battle was witnessing the condition of the troops returning from a tour of duty. In imagining this experience these soldiers may have considered the returning soldiers would have been filled with pride or rather perhaps warning them of the horrors that await but inversely all these men did when marching back from the battlefront, with blank expressions, “on the remote distance or nothing at all, oblivious to the sights around them and even to the surface of the road beneath their feet” (Ousby 13). One officer when reflecting upon these men reported that, “they did not seem to belong to the world of the living any longer or had not yet returned to it” (Ousby 13). Upon perceiving this the “inward gaze of those about to go into battle had retreated further into unreachable profundity” and any form of communication between the approaching troops disappeared (Ousby13). While for some this inward reflection led some to depression, for others it led them to swear to “sell their skin dearly” (Ousby 12). Collectively, however, the response was that nobody was indifferent about what was about to happen to them because “human nature cannot accept the thought of an infinite amount of suffering without fear or revolt” (Ousby 13).

Ultimately it was for these reasons that it was common for soldiers to compare their “journey up to the front with the Stations of the Cross” (Ousby 7). Equally others spoke of the battle as an inferno and made reference to Dante as they Journeyed towards the battle, or borrowed the language of natural disaster to describe what they experienced (Ousby 9). Upon
reaching the frontline of Verdun these soldiers would have again been shocked when they first experienced the nature of the Battle.

A War of Attrition

Some of what they found at Verdun would have been familiar. For instance, like countless other battles of the First World War, the trench played a significant role in Verdun a reality that “announced the war of movement was over and the war of position had begun” (Ousby 29). Upon adopting the trench warfare both armies were equally adopted the tactic of ‘attrition’ which was based on the premise that “if the enemy could not after all be crushed at a blow, it seemed he could at least be worn down to nothing” (Ousby 29). Thus the very premise which the battle was built around relied on an immense level of patience without which the troops on the front line would become a victim of their general frustration. It was because of this that, as Pierre Mac Orlan put it, at Verdun “a Patriotic death was the death of a novice in war” (Prost 55). Furthermore it was because of this tactic of ‘attrition’ that everyone who experienced Verdun had to become “profoundly lax” and “lost any sense of what is human” (Rochelle).

The deeper into the battle that the soldiers came, however, the more Verdun would begin to differentiate itself from other Battles in the First World War. For instance the trenches became increasingly more shallow as the troops approached their enemy until “they were little more than shallow depressions flanked by shell craters” (Prost 64). Henri Nicolle, from the 108th Infantry Regiment, described this journey to up to these ‘trenches’.

“We stepped over the dead and wounded. Not a tree in the Forrest remained intact. Here and there a section and a tank was left standing. Th e rock ground was strewn with grenades, ammunition, weapons, overcoats, corpses and bodies still breathing” (Pericard 276).

Upon arriving to these front lines the troops, for 4 to 6 days, were expected to follow the simple order to move into ‘vaguely organized lines of shell craters’ and to hold their ground at all costs (Pericard 273). Outside of course of a few of “intense but intermittent skirmishes with rifles or, more frequently, grenades”, the primary fear that the soldier had to endure at Verdun came from the ”systematic, persistent, unrelenting, and merciless shelling” (Prost 65). On top of this, this experience, was made even more unbearable for the troops due to the fact that they were “cut off from human society” and remained exposed to rain and the cold in winter, and in the heat of the summer (Prost 65). In addition to this the troops often went hungry and thirsty because the “supply details rarely reached their destination” (Prost 65). It is for these reasons that Antoine Prost stated that like “Auschwitz in the Second World War, Verdun came to symbolize a breach of the limits of the human condition” (Prost 65).

Spatial Dislocation

This “breach” of the human condition, that Verdun is accused of, would have only been exacerbated by the sense that the troops did not know “where the enemy was, or often
even exactly where they were” (Ousby 206). Furthermore, troops often would not even be aware of how “what happened to them in their positions might connect with what happened to other men in other positions, or what might show about the larger fortunes of fighting” (Ousby 8). This would have been a jarring realisation to the troops first arriving after experiencing the scale of the Battle when traveling down the Voie Sacree. Therefore, knowing that 1,000’s of other individuals where occupying a similar position, Verdun was unique in the extent to which the infantrymen felt, “so infuriatingly remote from the gunners supporting them” (Ousby 10). Theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who served as a stretcher bearer, reflected that this situation made the soldiers of Verdun into what he referred to as a “‘monade de guerre’ (war-monad): “a depersonalised element in a supra-individual activity” (Ousby 9).

The Role of Artillery

Equally as guilty as leading to these feelings of extreme isolation was the use of artillery in the Battle of Verdun. As noted before, these weapons where unrelenting and “by day and by night, the hills continually gave off the steady rhythmic din of countless batteries discharging their shells, the noise from which the French borrowed the German word ‘Trommelfeuer: drumfire’” (Ousby 9). By far the most extreme case of this came in the opening Bombardment of the Battle, on the 21st of February, which drove home to the front-line troops their “utter insignificance and powerlessness” (Ousby 206). One soldier, Paul Dubrulle, described specifically what it was like being under such an attack.

“When a shell bursts a few metres away, there’s a terrible jolt and then an indescribable chaos of smoke, of earth, of stones, of branches, and –too often alas! - Of limbs, flesh, a rain of blood. Immediately a frightful concert breaks out, the wounded screaming as if their souls were spilling out of them. For a few seconds you are overwhelmed by extreme horror and then, very soon afterwards, blessed relief. The crisis has passed; you can breathe again for a few moments; you come back to life” (Ousby 66).

This sense of relief however, even after hours of bombardment, as the French faced in the opening day of the battle, only lasted momentarily, with the fear of what the next sequence of shells soon returning. A fear, not just of dying but rather being “suddenly reduced to nothing” (Ousby 67). Eventually the nature of these events would batter troops “minds and senses into numbness” (Ousby 67). In this state, the individuals that the troops became reacted in different ways. “Some began to hope the next shell would finish them” (Ousby 67). Others would simply become “indifferent to the danger” and would “crouch for hours, refusing to move, beside the piles of live shells” (Ousby 67). In more extreme case men “grew openly mad and simply wandered off ” (Ousby 67). However the “most common reaction was also the most natural: men simply withdrew into profound sleep”, leaving their “brain full of torments and dreams” (Ousby 67, 68). Regardless however of the specifics, all the troops under bombardment sank into the “strange world of shadows, itself a sort of death, which still marked them off from the living as they made their way back down the Voie Sacree” (Ousby 66).

The way in which these troops were considered throughout the battle was different han they would be now. Today we would consider that these troops returning from the bat-
tle front were suffering from PTSD (Post-traumatic Stress Disorder). However, in the First World War, the term used was ‘neurasthenia’, a phrase derived not specifically in relation to soldiers but rather from 19th century science. This definition considered these neurasthenic returning soldiers as unable to maintain themselves in a “society definitely organized only consequent, because of this lack of understanding, the reaction to these individuals was not necessary unsympathetic, but rather of “shocked compassion” (Ousby 15). A reaction which probably came about due to the fact that most people considered these a symptoms a result of “weakness of the sufferer”, rather than an inevitable result due to the “horror of the occasion” (Ousby 15).

The troops themselves however reacted to and understood these symptoms in a much different way. They did not speak about ‘neurasthenia’ but rather used their own terms the most common of which being la cafard (cockroach). The trench newspapers wrote of this condition, which can be compared to depression, “without shame or judgement, as a familiar element in the troops’ existence” (Ousby 15). This condition, which came in varying levels of intensities, would suddenly come to troops unaware leaving them, ‘oblivious’ to the events and sites around them. In such a state the troops would often reflect on a vision of home, “as somewhere remote, unreal, lost rather than somewhere you might return to”, again reminding them of their profound isolation (Ousby 15).

The Familiarity of Death

With these bombardments, so too came a familiarity with death. Perhaps the best description of this can be found in Maurice Genevoix's book, La Mort de Pres, in which he explained death stopped being a concept and became “a presence as real, for example, as the presence of a wasp which goes buzzing round your head, withdraws a little, comes back, makes your skin crawl with the brush of its wings, and which, at any moment, can sting, is going to sting” (Geneviox 18). It is for this reason, that at one point or another, Verdun seemed “l'abattoir”, or the “great laboratory of death” (Ousby 249,38). Accounts of this can be found in the records and often described in “fluent and appalling detail” with regularly vows made “never to forget the dead” (Ousby 243). Despite this constant experience of death, however, men continued to subject themselves to the danger of war because, as Sigmund Freud recognised, they could never quite banish the sense that “nothing can happen to me” (Ousby 238).

What did bother the soldiers more than the threat of death was the “thought of their bodies lying unburied, unreachable on the battlefield” (Ousby 243). If you consider that “to treat with respect the bodies of those who we have known… is one of our most elaborately distinct instincts”, the notion of not performing such rituals was devastating for the troops. Especially in the sense that, those that died, did so as a result of fighting for their country implying that these rituals would have “taken on extra meaning” (Ousby 243). Therefore, in witnessing the bodies of the dead disappearing into nothing, without the usual rituals, the “noble rhetoric of death in war” slipped even further out of the grasps of the troops at Verdun (Ousby 246). Despite this however, amidst the chaos of the battlefi eld soldiers inevitably became increasingly indifferent to death. In many cases, for the men at Verdun, death would “appear without meaning” (Ousby 246).
The Pleasure of War

The powerful way in which the battle changed those who served, however, can equally be understood as leading the men to experiences of extreme pleasure, achievement, and meaning. This contradictory notion provides proof that war turns reality, for the men who served, into an existence of binary oppositions.

This can be understood by considering what the French referred to as ‘élan’. At its most basic form this word meant “sheer physical momentum”, and, in its very French use, can be understood as describing one half of the “violent ups and downs” of the French identity. A description of this feeling can be found in the memoir of Second Lieutenant Raymond Jubert when describing his experience on the 9th April on Le Mort-Homme.

Waking up on this clear and bright morning Jubert “sat alone watching the sun chase the mists from the peaks of Le Mort-Homme above him”, considering how “natural beauty somehow seemed to coexist with man’s destructiveness” (Ousby 198). This sunlight, Jubert reflected “acted on him like a tonic” and led him to the realization that people are “never so close to death as on the day when it is most greedy for life” (Ousby 198).

These emotions even remained through the German bombardment around Jubert’s position which were the heaviest since the start of the battle. Struck by the spectacle, romantic in its grandeur, Jubert wrote of what he saw as if the battle was being painted in front of his eyes:

“Brushstroke was being added to Brushstroke in quick succession, dozens at a time. So heavy that they could suffocate you if you were close, from a distance it looked fresh, harmonious to the eye. Thunderclouds floated across the sky; touched with the colour of the morning. The sun has this virtue: beneath its rays death takes on pure beauty” (Ousby 198).

Fortunately, Jubert survived this bombardment but was subsequently ordered to launch a counter-attack. Setting off Jubert and his troops, understanding their role, followed their orders and marched toward the enemy lines.

Morale was always at its lowest in these early stages of the attack, however, as the danger they faced became more real, the “heat of the action… helped to banish fear” (Ousby 200). It is at this point that this sense of élan can be experienced by the troops as they charged into enemy fire and it is this that allowed them to do what “would be impossible for men in cold blood” (Ousby 28). As Jubert got closer, despite the men around him being blown away, he failed to register their fate and a “mood of exhilaration” took hold. Describing the mood at this point second Lieutenant Robert Desubliaux found himself feeling a profound yet savage joy at the thought of “mowing them (the Germans) down in front of me like a harvest” (Ousby 201). In this state he noted:

“Nothing mattered anymore… everything I had gone through, everything that I had suffered, was forgotten; my whole being was possessed by the attack which was about to start. I was waiting for it impatiently, full of the need to kill… to kill without pity” (Desubliaux 291).
Another soldier who served at Verdun described a similar experience of élan after being confronted directly by the Germans and reflecting that it was in fact a “beautiful spectacle” which:

“Lifted me high above the miseries of ordinary existence. In the death of my being I felt I was experiencing one of the greatest moments of my life, an epic moment, when what was selfish and pedestrian was left behind for good, in the service of great causes” (Dubrulle 15).

Despite the evidence of these moments, however, it is important to note two points.

The first was that such moments of élan were “always bound to be brief, and whatever followed them was bound to be anti-climactic” (Ousby 202). Consider again Jubert’s experience which ended with his company reaching the crest of Le Mort-Homme, only to find that the Germans had already made a tactical withdrawal. Furthermore, after feeling the high of surviving the charge, Jubert was in a more vulnerable position than he was to start with, not only having to defend a new trench with the few survivors of his counter-attack, but also having to come to terms with the loss of his fellow troops.

Perhaps the larger tragedy of élan, however, lay in the fact that it was exploited by the French generals. Even in 1916, two years into the war, like many others nations, the French military failed to learn from mistakes and accordingly adapt to the way in which technology changes the nature of war. A huge amount had changed since the Franco/Prussian War of 1870-71 and yet much of the French model of war was still based on practices from the Napoleonic war, which ended in 1815 (Carlin). Specifically, these dated ideas which dictated the French military were developed in Ecole de Guerre founded in 1878. This school advocated not for “strategy or tactics” but rather tried to foster and celebrate a “warrior code” through teaching troops “how to kill with passion” and look “proudly on their own death” (Ousby 28). Even after witnessing the events that took place in the early stages of the war, with this single-minded spirit of off ensiveness, many of the leaders at Verdun still believed that the, “strength of the warrior unleashed- a sheer animal will that could triumph over machinery, however well-built and well-deployed” (Ousby 201). Despite brief moments for troops when élan allowed them to succeed, the troops quickly learned that this strategy was leading to unnecessary suffering. Even if the generals did not. The proof of this failure can be found in the remains which can still be found scattered over the battle grounds of Verdun.

**Conclusion**

The tragedy of all of this provides further meaning to the sentiments of Virilio’s writing. While to go too far into trying to make links between the effects of speed has on contemporary society to the experience of serving at Verdun, would be an almost offensive suggestion to make. The fact remains that links can be found.

What can be seen, at Verdun, is a culture which recognized war as an exercise in culture being simply devastated by a technologically far superior to the naïve and sentimental attitudes which unleashed it. Prior to the Falkenhayn's bombardment on the 21st of February, no battle would have expressed such a great disconnection between the military tactician and the
front-line, generals not only accepted this fate of the men under their command but equally continued to defend their view that courage and military valour would succeed. In this sense Verdun can be understood as a collision between an antiquated view of war and a level of military capability that allowed violence to be conducted on a scale that surpassed the intellectual and ethical abilities of all those involved. Perhaps it is here, in the temporal gap found between culture and technology, that Verdun provides precedent for where Virilio might suggest humanity has found itself today. Are we too enduring a technology greater than what we can comprehend, and thus will this lead to accidents that we may only be able to recognise as such in 100 years time?

In this way, perhaps it is not so vulgar to look to the experience of fighting at Verdun as a way of trying to comprehend the experience of a society today who have ‘overexposed’ themselves to the speed of hypermodernity. For instance, consider the accounts of those who, under bombardment, shifted into a form of sleep, unable to comprehend the overwhelming stimulus of the disintegrating earth around them. Could this not begin to allude to a picnoleptically induced disassociation from space and time. Consider further the enduring effects that this had on the soldiers who shifted further into a radical state of polarities. From the depths of nihilism and alienation to the perverted ecstasy of war. The mentality that war left the soldiers who fought, bears testament to what Virilio warns awaits a society which becomes too dissociated from the stability of real space and time.

The central difference between the experiences of at Verdun compared to the environments which Virilio predicts, is that obviously these phenomena manifested themselves in a far more Violent and physical way at Verdun. No one will be disintegrated by shell fire as a result of the perception of speed as Virilio recognizes it. And no modern picnoleptic will be forced to retaliate and inflict the same suffering on fellow man. However, as apprehensible as this may sound, perhaps that is the problem. Virilio’s urgency stems from his experiencing of a total War when growing up in Nantes, but without these experiences would he have gone on to recognize any of what he understands today. Would Virilio, not unlike everyone else, not have simply fallen victim to the “metamorphosis of our consciousness” that he warned of in his 1966 Manifesto (Virilio “Warning”). The answer to this is of course impossible to know, but what must be taken fourth from this point onwards is this urgency.

The design conclusions that can be taken from this chapter provide further resonance to the conclusions made about the nature of the memorial in the previous chapter. To experience Verdun would be to have an encounter with the ‘sublime’. It would be to lose any sense that any meaning, in the traditional sense of the word, remains in the world. Perhaps this was why so many soldiers who served at Verdun reflected that when it came to describe what they had experienced, “big words soon lose whatever force they once possessed” (Ousby 9). For this reason, the conclusion that the memorial must not communicate through any kind of symbolism but rather force recognition of Verdun through its being. In this way a memorial that processes a imposing, sublime, and unforgiving being, does not just seem but permissible but appropriate.

Probably more importantly, however, this research has provided further insight into the nature of this ‘being.’ The more apparent way in which this will occur comes through the tangible data collected from the mapping exercises. This will provide in a sense all of the site
analysis needed, for a project that disregards the present and rather chooses to associate with the site as an artefact of the past.

Beyond just this, however, this research into the reality of the Battle of Verdun additionally provides criteria for the affect that the memorial should have over its inhabitants. An affect which mirrors the experience the battle had on the soldiers who fought. Obviously to attempt to do this is to attempt the impossible, due to the sheer intensity of the battle. However, what would be a better way to revert attention back to the battle of Verdun than through an architecture that replicated the experience of the battle. While to attempt this in any other circumstance would be unethical, if this project wishes to maintain the urgency of Virilio’s work, this would appear to be the best way forward.

In doing this it is worth noting that the project has the ability to transcend a dialogue with just the Battle of Verdun and rather expose the truths of Virilio’s predictions alongside this. An ability gained due to the similarities recognized between the experience of the Battle and the experience of speed in Hypermodernity. It is, however, fundamental that this argument does not dominate of the overarching intention of this project, to memorialize Verdun. While it is still hoped that this project will lead to an architecture of Virilio and an architecture for Verdun. This is an argument should be left behind.

What does need to be conducted in order to move forward, however, is a reflection on what became of the memory of the Battle of Verdun from its direct aftermath all the way up into the 21st Century…
MEMORY
Figure 3.1. Douaumont Ossuary, Jaques Hardt
Because those who rest here and elsewhere entered the peace of the dead only to institute the peace of the living, and because it would be sacrilege to allow in the future what the dead detested: the peace that we owe to their sacrifice, we swear to protect and to wish it.

Oath of Verdun, 1936

Beyond these events which led to and defined the reality and conditions of the battle of Verdun, what was is equally as important to consider is what became of the memory of Verdun after the battle ended. The date in which this shift from present event to an event of the past occurred, is impossible to say, as the battle of Verdun, of all of the battles of the war, was the “least capable of reaching a clean and shapely finish” (Ousby 253). However, by the end of the fighting, historians suggest that, the fields of Verdun saw a total of 708,777 casualties, an overwhelming portion of which consisted of those whose bodies were never found having been blown to bits or simply vanishing in the mud (Ousby 5). With these figures, Ian Ousby calculated, that spread across the 10 months of most intense fighting, almost one soldier died every minute for the ten months that the battle lasted (Ousby 5).

For those who bore witness to such destruction, the journey out of the shock took a very long time and men often wrote that they could “not ever quite leave Verdun” (Ousby 263). To them, the memory of Verdun was specific to the events in which they experienced and in the same way that they would physically return to the sites at which they had served, these sites would linger in their minds. But beyond just these haunting memories, the returning troops could never leave Verdun because of the alienation they experienced upon returning home. Both from their “innocent pre-war selves and from the people who had not shared the experience” (Ousby 204).

This public misunderstanding of the conditions of Verdun became not only evident
after the battle itself was finished, but ever since its conception in early 1916. Pierre Chaine bitterly noted in his Memoires D’un rat that when it came to Verdun, “anything could be true except what the press was allowed to publish” (Chaine 61). Rather than this truth of the battlefield, what publications like the ‘Bourreurs de Crane’ offered the public was instead sentimental accounts of war which were “insultingly remote” to the “harsh plight in the shell holes of Verdun” (Ousby 8). As Antoine Prost put it, “a reader of L’Illustration would have never known that anyone died at Verdun” (Prost 50). The cause of this, historian Marc Bloch concluded, was not journalistic ineptitude at perceiving the atrocities of war but was instead born out of the “collective perceptions” of the wars of the past (Bloch 54). Understanding this, Ramond Jubert cynically prophesised that “when we get back, it’ll be our turn to tell the story of war, and we’ll be in the wrong” (Jubert 138).

Regardless of this, however, the French felt scarred by Verdun. Even with all of the false publications, by the end of 1916 the French public had no doubt what had occurred there had been sublime. For them in particular, it was always more than just a battle, being rather “a complete war in itself, inserted in the Great War” (Valéry 72). They saw it as the worst battle while it was being fought, and they insisted on seeing it that way ever since. Despite this it is worth noting that the casualties suffered at Verdun do not justify this perception. French died at the Somme between July and November at a far more murderous rate, for instance, and in the first 4 month of the war alone about 307,000 Frenchman died (Ousby 6). However, the cause of this view of Verdun as a ‘national experience’ could have simply developed out of the fact that, between February and December 1916, three-quarters of the French Army served at Verdun (Ousby 6). Th is fact alone, however, still fails to explain why the memory of Verdun became so mythicized.

It is for this reason precisely, that historian Antoine Prost considered Verdun such an interesting case study on how events are transformed into symbols (Prost 45). In his essay “Verdun: The Life of a Site of Memory”, Prost pondered the evolution of Verdun from the final stages of the battle to what it means to French society today. In those initial stages the Veterans were scattered back across the country and “too glad to be back in civilian life”, they failed to worry much about the public opinion of Verdun (Prost 55). With this silencing the combatants, the first attempt to commiserate what happened at Verdun inevitably reflected a heroic and patriotic interpretation of the battle. In some cases, these messages were verbalised before the battle had even finished, such as on September 1916, when French President Raymond Poincaré refer to Verdun as a symbol of “all that is purest, best, and most beautiful in the soul of France” (Cruchard 81). While this of course sounded “rather hollow” to many veterans, whose pride was “laden with emotion, anguish and grief”, others were reluctant to refuse the “conventional homage to their valour” (Prost 53; Ousby 52).

Before the Veterans had to mobilize, however, upon witnessing the conditions of what remained of the battlefields of Verdun the public were finally swayed towards the veteran’s interpretation (Prost 56). With this altering public perception, Verdun no longer stands only for the “the reserves of strength that France can muster in times of crisis” but equally too, amongst other things, the “futility of conflict between nations” (Ousby 17). Verdun became a symbol of both for Frances need to be great and her need not to suffer again (Ousby 262).
Despite these “differing shades of meaning”, ultimately the only univocal truth about the memory of Verdun was its power as a national symbol (Ousby 263). In concluding his essay, Prost hypothesised that, if for nothing else, Verdun became this symbol because of its very nature as a defensive victory. No country would want to celebrate an act of aggression or make efforts to remind themselves of defeats but in turning back the German advance the French effort at Verdun was one that the nation seemed to cling to (Prost 67). With this remaining symbolism, the site of Verdun inevitably became a site which both the Veterans and the general public would regularly return to. On these pilgrimages, often along with their families, veterans would explore on foot the fields which they had served, noting “changes in the terrain since the great battle” (Prost 59). Pierre Mac Orlan, however, noted that those families who followed the veterans quickly became bored which meant that eventually the veterans preferred to return on their own or in groups who marched together (Prost 59).

Many of these pilgrimages were aligned to formal services, such as that of June 23rd, a rather arbitrary date chosen because the more significant July 12th fell to close to Bastille Day. These services, which included a parade though Verdun, a religious service, a review of the troops, and official speeches, which were conducted yearly with special attention given to the 10 and 15 year anniversaries. All these ceremonies, like the veterans pilgrimages, ended with a solemn march to the Ossuary of Douamont. Both these marches and the meditative time spent at the Ossuary itself was marked by silence. As the ‘Statue of Resignation’ at Verdun indicated, “It would have been unseemly to speak in the presence of the dead” (Prost 59). Much in the same tradition as the Fetes de la Victoire, however, “although the dead men were not forgotten, the focus was on celebrating France and its victory” (Prost 60). While this may have been the case, it is important to note that these pilgrimages and commemorations made ‘hundreds of thousands of French people’ aware of what had happened at Verdun (Prost 61). Additionally, as the emotion attached to the memory Verdun faded, so too did the sense of pride associated with its victory. By the national day of mourning in 1936, Participants commemorated, no longer victory, but peace as the supreme value (Prost 59).

The Site Today

Beyond what became of the Battle of Verdun as a symbol of French culture, perhaps a more honest account of what happened at Verdun remains today on the site where the battle took place. Historian William F. Buckingham even goes as far as to suggest that the greatest lasting impact of the Battle has been “the ground over which it was fought” (Buckingham 2). This too, however, was of course subject to the power of time. Directly after the war ended, places like Vaux and the ‘Dead Man’ hill were “nothing but craters, shrapnel, and bodies” (Prost 56). What once was an undulating countryside, dense with forests and trees, became something unrecognisable by the time the artillery had finished.

The village of Fluery bares testament to this. Positioned on a plateau linking Fort Douaumont to Cote de Froideterre, Fluery was before the war occupied by 500 people whose houses and farms stretched along a long, straggling main street. A week after the last inhabitants hastily left on the 21st of February, however, holes had already ripped through the walls of the houses and the roofs had begun to cave in. By the end of March all that could
be found of Fleury were, “piles of gleaming white stones looking more like a quarry than a village” (Ousby 264). After a month of fighting between June and July, during which Fleury changed hands 16 times, what remained was “no longer even a landmark”, but rather, “just a military position” (Ousby 265). As Louis Gillet put it, Fleury had become “nothing… the whole place has returned into dust” (Gillet 157). In the end, the fate of Fleury and 8 other villages destroyed by the battle, would be to remain equally as vacant (Buckingham 258). Even with powerful individuals, such as the president of the republic Raymond Poincare, desiring these villages to “rise again from their ruins”, they were never rebuilt or resettled (Ousby 265). Ultimately the reason this was because the soil had become so sifted, choked with the litter of battle and in parts toxic. Due to this even the multiple attempts to reforest place, like Le Mort-Homme were “doomed to failure” (Ousby 265). To many veterans, this fate “seemed not just inevitable but appropriate”, after all, the battlefield would remain the scar on the landscape that the battle had turned it into (Ousby 265). In this way, in a rather dark yet poetic way, the site belongs, not to the generals or the theologians, but to the dead, many of whom were “left where they had fallen without burial” (Ousby 266).

### The Fading Memory of Verdun

Today, however, it would seem that the site doesn’t even belong to those individuals any longer. Nature, after 100 years since the battle finished, has begun to reclaim the site. Now, while the shell craters still remain visible, many lay beneath a forest which has progressively flattened out the landscape below.

Perhaps more notably however what has changed most about the memory of Verdun is that it is no longer so divided. With René Marie-Martial Moreau, the last surviving veteran of Verdun, passing away in 2008 at the age of 105, so too did the last memory of Verdun as an event experienced in flesh and bone. The only remaining reason to perpetuate the memory of Verdun, is to remind non-combatants of what happened at Verdun in 1916 (Prost 61). While one could argue that for this reason it should become possible for the French to slow down in their commemorations for the battle of Verdun, especially now the centenary has passed. Antoine Prost suggests that it is particularly because veterans “emotionally-laden memories” have been carried to the grave, that it becomes “increasingly necessary to organise commemoration” (Prost 60).

To his dismay, however, Prost recognises that the national memory of Verdun is “receding ineluctably into the past” (Prost 68). The French are of course aware that the battle was horrible but that they eventually won, but, Verdun is “is no longer part of today’s world. With each passing day the ordinary men who suffered and died at Verdun sink deeper into another universe, into a past that is gone forever” (Prost 68). In this way, reflects French novelist Roland Dorgeles, “all the dead will die a second time” (Dorgeles 282).

### Existing Memorials

As a result of the site returning back to what it was before the battle the most sig-
nificant physical traces of Verdun can be found through the memorials which are scattered throughout both the city of Verdun itself and the fields where the battle took place. The first of these began to be built in 1920 by the municipal council, and they continued to be constructed in subsequent years (Prost 54). While they all differ in intention, following the public perspective of the battle at the time of the construction, they all more or less manifest themselves architecturally in the same way. As objects placed on site, often adorned in ornamentation and symbolism, and largely without an inhabitable interior. For all intents and purposes most of these memorials either are or are little more than statues.

A minor exception to this is the Verdun Memorial Museum, which was designed by Brochet-Lajus-Pueyo, completed on for the centenary of the battle. It is currently used as a starting point for a tour around the historical sites of Verdun as well as a space for exhibition about the battle. Architecturally, the museum rather than being designed as a new building, was respectfully built within the shell of a concrete and stone 1960’s building which followed the aesthetic codes of the nineteenth thirties. Due to this, the building offers little to the public architecturally and based on images it is clear that the primary focus of the museum is the exhibits which are being shown and the functional need of the museum. Therefore in terms of understanding architectures role at memorialising the battle, it is only really worth reflecting on the Ossuary of Douamont, which serves as the primary architectural vehicle of remembrance at Verdun. The Ossuary is located in the commune of Fleurydevant-Douamont, close to Fort Douamont.

The idea of constructing a mausoleum had existed since the battle ended, and plans can still be found for a 'national mausoleum for French and allied heroes fallen on the field of honour', which were drawn up in 1916 (Prost 56). This design, however, was never built. Alternatively, Monsignor Ginistry, the Bishop of Verdun, in 1919 proposed an Ossuary at Douaumont. While this idea was similar to the idea proposed in 1916, the big difference was that while a mausoleum implies a certain architectural splendour, an ossuary plainly evokes "anonymous mass burial" (Prost 56). Ultimately, it was deemed that 'architecture splendor' was not as important as bringing together all of the bones which still lay across the battlefield, so a temporary wooden ossuary, in the form of barracks, was built on site (Prost 56). The cornerstone for the permanent Ossuary was placed just a year later on August the 20th, 1920. From 6th to 8th August, 1932 the Ossuary was inaugurated, with the final cost of fifteen million Francs, the majority of which was collected from donations. The design of the Ossuary, which was selected by Jury in 1923, was designed by Leon Azema (fig. 3.2.). It is noteworthy for its unique design which "set it apart from all other war memorials of the First World War" (Prost 58). The reason for this was because the jury, due to having limited funds, deemed the functional qualities, which this unique design allowed, more important than the ossuary following a traditional design. These functional qualities can be observed in the spacious interior of the ossuary which could accommodate major ceremonies but also in the modular structure of the design which allowed the construction to grow as funds were raised. The designs' appeal, however, was also due to the way it separated the religious elements on the edifice from the sections which would store the remains of the dead and welcome visitors. A necessity since the still religious France required commemorative structures to be secular in character (Prost 57).

The design today remains unchanged since its inauguration. From the outside its low
mounded form is intended to “evoke the dyke that the defenders of Verdun hoped to erect against the invading German forces” (Prost 58). Jutting out from this form, in the centre of the building, the tower peaks at over 150 ft above the plateau, functioning neither as a beacon nor a bell tower, intended to “represent an artillery shell” (Buckingham 258). Rather, like a “gigantic cemetery stele”, with a cruciform on each of its 4 sides, the tower and the mound act as an “immense monument to the dead” (Prost 58). From the interior, the building aligns to its exterior as one might expect. The main entrance, beneath the tower, leads to corridors in both directions, along which separate cells are branched off from to store the soldiers’ remains. Within the tower a staircase spirals up to window at the top. The result of this, based on images, is a building which appears somewhat underwhelming in a purely architectural sense when compared to the scale and gravity of the event that it is memorialising. Presumably of course the experience of visiting this Ossuary would be anything but underwhelming, because of its nature as a memorial to the battle, however, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that this has little to do with Leon Azema’s design.

Political Context

Despite this observation, however, it would be unfair to make conclusions of this nature without first considering the memorial in the context of 1932. The Ossuary was of course more important to those who had directly lost as a result of the battle. Alongside the disappearance of these feelings, however, passing time has allowed historians to decipher further
What this has meant, is that the “political symbolism”, manifested through the traditional War Memorials of the early 20th Century, was no longer obscured by the weight of the grief experienced during and directly after the war (Winter 93). This symbolism, very much in the style of the early war commemorations, typically expressed a traditional interpretation of war. An interpretation which rather than dwelling on the “sadder facets of war”, commemorated the war in an “ill-informed and blatantly non-combatant manner” (Winter 81). Whether or not these memorials were intended as propaganda, is still disputed by historians today. Perhaps because memorials simply do not reveal their intentions with much clarity. However, some historians, like George Mosse, go as far as arguing that War Memorials, were exploited by the fascists of Italy and Germany, as places where the nation could worship itself and the “cult of the fallen” (Mosse ch. 5). Antoine Prost also presented a similar argument a 1977 essay, “War Memorials of the Great War”. In which he suggested that monuments, like those found in Verdun, used the collective sense of grief to re-inscribe republican values. From this memorials became the focus for the secular “republican cult”, who believed in a selfless devotion to the freedom of France (Prost 11).

The way in which memorials performed in this way was investigated by Yves Helias, who adopted a Foucaultian framework. Helias’s argument is that war memorials deconstruct death only to then reinvest it with meaning. This new meaning, however, is of course little more than an abstraction: Collective sacrifice becomes “remote from individual extinction” (Winter 94). The result of which being that, memorials express a “collective spirit embodied in the state” allowing the state to affirm its right to “call on its citizens to kill and to die” (Winter 94). In the context of an “economy of power”, war memorials therefore become a force and even a form of political control (Helias 186).

From this, to continue a dialogue within a Foucaultian framework, it becomes clear to recognise that “commemoration represents a struggle over power” (Sherman 5). It would therefore seem that in controlling knowledge, which memorials are capable of doing, memorials emanate power over the subjects that commemorate through them. In this way, the role memorials can be understood as to provide more than just the transfer of “meaning and knowledge accross generations”, but to actually “generate memory and inscribe civil conduct” (Boyer 17).

**The Trench of Bayonets**

The challenge in referring to ideas of this nature, however, is that it becomes very difficult to substantiate them within existing memorials. It is possible to find traces of the political and deceptive nature of memorials through investigating memorials such as the “Trench of Bayonets” memorial located just north of the Douaumont Ossuary. In many ways the memorial, which was inaugurated in 1920, is very successful. minimalist in nature, it consists of a mix of traditional forms with abstract motifs which makes it unusual for its lack of “allegory, figurative art, or ornamentation” (Winter 101). The architect, Andre Vetre, designed the memorial in this way with the intention of “avoiding anything cheap or approaching the fantastic” (Vetre). Through this the memorial hopes to adopt a timeless quality. Very much in the style of Adolf Loos, Vetre’s understands that what his design is memorialising, has an “impressiveness that no monument could ever equal” (Vetre).
Despite this, however, all of these ideas begin to implode in on themselves when you question what this memorial is actually memorialising. The Trench of Bayonets is a site at Verdun where an entire French Infantry Regiment was wiped out on the 12 June 1916. While this is of course a tragedy, this aspect of the history of Verdun is controversial because of how it was built up as something that it was not. The site is referred to as the trench of Bayonets because as the legend suggests a trench full of French Soldiers had stood in there trench, with their bayonets attached, until they were buried by German shell fire, leaving only their bayonets protruding out of the ground (Ousby 266). After the war, however, the veterans “alarmed at seeing the suffering of their comrades overlaid by melodrama and superstition”, exterminated the validity this story. They knew that the regiment had died, like many others at Verdun, in an unheroic and pointless fashion (Ousby 266). Therefore this memorial, which was designed to allow the trench, where the regiment was buried, to communicate through the power and honesty of the site “as it really was”, was in fact only commemorating a lie (Winter 101). Furthermore, even if the events were true, the memorial would still be founded on a lie because the place where the bayonets were found was 30 metres away from where the memorial now lies (Winter 102). While, the reason for all of this could just be that the officials had no way of knowing the nature of the deaths of the men buried in this trench or even where the bayonets where found. It is easy to make the more cynical observation that the notion is men dying heroically in this fashion supported the contemporary political climate of Post WWI France. It justified Verdun not as a disaster but rather as a point of pride.
The Embrace of Unreason

It is important to understand here that there was more at stake than just “two images of the battle” (Prost 56). One only has to look at the cultural climate of France between the wars to understand the lasting effects the war had on its population. Cultural historian, Fredrick Brown, documents this in his book, “The Embrace of Unreason”, which begins with a quote from Sainte-Beuve found in George Eliot’s Impressions of Theophratus Such...

Civilization, life itself is something learned and invented... After several years of peace men forget it too easily. They come to believe that culture is innate, that it is identical with nature. But savagery is always lurking two steps away, and regains a foothold as soon as one stumbles. (Elliot 85)

This is a fitting start to a book which goes on to document how post war France does exactly this and stumbles into not only the Second World War but also a political and cultural climate almost as alarming as that of Germany’s between the wars. If life is indeed something learned it would seem that the lessons from Verdun where lost. Not only did Savagery return in the form of further war but it can all arguably be linked to the events which slowly became buried in the earth of the western front. From an intellectual climate defined by humanistic traditions and rationalistic ideals, a new enlightenment began in favour of submission to authority that stressed patriotism, militarism, and xenophobia (Brown).

Whether this was a result of direct trauma from the war or an effect of the politically manipulated way in which the war was commemorated, Brown fails to speculate. However, if anything can be concluded from this chapter it is that the only true perspective of Verdun remained with the soldier forced to endure weeks under an enemy bombardment. Anything that happened outside this, however, was subject to the collective instability of the French people around this time. Therefore, it would be ignorant to ignore the idea that public misconceptions about the nature of the combat during the war, informed through memorials, where partly responsible for the shifts that Brown documented.

The influence any form of commemoration on the French becomes substantiated simply by considering the vulnerability of the soldier in the direct aftermath of the War. Upon hearing the news of armistice, French medical officer Adam Frantz reported, the army did not react with the “enthusiasm one might have expected”. While Frantz speculated that this was because deep down the soldiers realised that, “neither nations nor men would profit from the great, cruel lesson” (Frantz 183). American officer, Thomas Gowenlock, argued that the men were simply “bewildered by the sudden meaninglessness of their existence”. Numbness by the “shock of peace”, Gowenlock continued, “The past consumed their whole consciousness. The present did not exist and the future was inconceivable” (Gowenlock 206). Within this newfound reality, the cultural shifts towards extremism, retrospectively, seems almost predictable. The French Fascist and German collaborationist, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, who not only recognised but embraced this new landscape, rather ironically wrote that “peace ruins people” (Brown 133). His implication was that war was again a necessity. However a second meaning also arises, the fact that the only reason that Drieu’s extremist view developed as they did was
a result of the uncertainty brought about the peace abruptly experienced at the end WWI. An uncertainty fuelled by the perverted emotions brought about by the proliferation of a false sense of war justified through memorial architecture.

**The Role of Memorials in this Shift**

Perhaps, to suggest that memorials were responsible for this ‘embrace of unreason’, however, is to mistake cause for effect. Of course there is a political element to Post War memorials, but to suggest that memorials swayed political views in post war France seems an almost self-indulgent view from the perspective of an architecture project. The iconography on most of the memorials are fairly ambiguous and it would be hard imagine that the communities mourning the loss that occurred at Verdun would recognise these memorials as having any meaning outside of this sense of loss. After all, as can be seen in the Douaumont Ossuary, the primary function of most memorials to Verdun were to mark the “spot where communities were reunited”, and “where the dead were symbolically brought home” (Winter 98). They grew out of “the very practical need, physical as well as emotional, to bring order and resolution to the chaos of bodies that remained one of the most poignant legacies of the war” (Sherman 74).

This is a perspective which is favoured by Jay Winter. In the closing statements of “Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning”, Winter suggests that any historian who ignores this, misses what was “sadly at the heart of the experience of war for millions”. For this reason, he suggests that in a landscape of “mass bereavement”, politics could be transcended (Winter 224).

**Traditional Forms of Commemoration**

Furthermore it is important to recognise that any political statement that can be found in the memorials to Verdun cannot be overtly condemned because it “helped to mediate bereavement” (Winter 223). The work and personal reflections of German sculptor and artist Kathe Kollwitz, about the loss of her son in Flanders, bares testament to this. Like most other Germans prior to the war, Kollwitz initially recognised her son’s decision to Volunteer, with apprehensive positivity, believing that “back of individual life… stood the fatherland” (Kollwitz 146). However upon learning that “her idealism was misplaced, that his sacrifice was for nothing”, an extra dimension of mourning was added, guilt (Winter 110). A guilt which distanced Kollwitz from her son and led her to believe that “his whole generation had been betrayed” (Winter 111).

Those who remained more ignorant of the reality of the war, however, were able to hold on to the belief that everything they lost was for a cause. In this way memorials which presented false truths about war can be arguably understood as humanistic for the fact that they “enabled the bereaved to live with their losses, and perhaps to leave them behind” (Winter 5). In this sense, can it not be argued that if the is any Power in memorials, rather counter-intuitively, it is to provide mourners a “means of forgetting” (Winter 115).
Modern Forms of Commemoration

In contrast to these traditional forms of commemoration it is also important to note that more modern forms of coming to terms with the war spread throughout the art world. In all forms of self-expression from art to literature to poetry a whole series modernist artists were born out of the war. There is of course no univocal link between these, however, in general terms they rejected “patriotic certainties, ‘high diction’ incorporating euphemisms about battle, ‘glory’, and the ‘hallowed dead,’ in sum, the sentimentality and lies of wartime propaganda” (Winter 2).

This was done, not through obliterating traditions, but rather stretching and exploring them in ways which “alarmed conventional artists, writers, and the public at large” (Winter 2). This cause of alarm was never accidental and often the chief defining feature of modernist art was “a rage against prevalent traditions” (Eysteinsson 8). It would seem that the sentimental prose of Dickens or the soft hews of Monet, no longer had a place in an art world which had experienced the First World War. Rather the “harsher disciplines of Joyce and Picasso, and the paradoxical, esoteric, fractured images of a host of their contemporaries” became the answer to, as T.S. Elliot put it, “the immense panorama of futility and anarchy” which was post war Europe (Winter 4). Rather eloquently the energy of all of this new wave of artists was summed up by James Joyces main character in Ulysses when he complains that “history is a nightmare from which he is trying to awake” (Elliot 177).

The effect of this, again to make further generalisations, was a “multi-faceted sense of dislocation, paradox, and the ironic”: All which worked well to express the “anger and despair” of that generation. But for this reason, unlike the traditional forms of commemoration, the modernist arts “could not heal” (Jay 84).

It is perhaps for this reason that very few First World War monuments aligned to this modernist art world. But it is more likely that it was more to do with the bureaucracy of the committees that organised the construction of the memorials. This does however lead to the question what form would a memorial take if it were marked by the “deconstruction of civilization and reason in the First world war” that the modernist literature and art were? (Bradbury and Mcfarlane 27).

Memory of War

Unfortunately, the answer to this remains unclear, and in considering this completely opposing form of coming to terms with WWI the questions regarding the memory of Battle of Verdun only become cloudier. For this reason it is necessary to make a final departure away from architecture and the Battle of Verdun by considering the underlining intention of all memorials, which is of course to evoke memory. In his book, The Construction of Memory in Interwar France, published in 1999, Daniel J. Sherman reflects upon exactly this. Gathering together various views on memory in general terms and relating them to how the memory of the First World War was “constructed” in the direct aftermath of the war and the effect this had on Post-war France.
The text begins by introducing Benedict Anderson’s idea that the “inability to confront or master certain kinds of memories can haunt nation states, exposing the fragility of their construction, crippling their politics, even destroying them entirely” ref pg 1. In extension to this, Sherman positions this idea through Sigmund Freud’s phylogenetic theory of the psyche. Which suggests that the past inflects the present through the unconscious as a “repository of repressed memories, inaccessible to normal consciousness”, which are “capable of disrupting our conscious lives” (Freud 191).

Sherman counters this idea with the opposing form of memory known as collective memory. Th is concept was largely developed by French philosopher Maurice Halbwachs, Halbwachs, who asserts that “it is individuals as group members who remember”, but only to the extent that they belong to and draw ideas from those groups (Halbwachs 48).

In later chapters, Sherman speculates, that commemoration, in the broadest sense, has the intention of constructing a “coherent version of the past that displaces individual memories” (Sherman 215). In other words, transferring unconscious repressed memories associated with war, into a collective memory shaped through various forms of commemoration. This largely occurs through, as Freud conceives, the process of mourners transferring desire to a new object of commemoration. An “abstraction, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on”, which takes the place of what had been lost (Freud 243). In doing this, much like as how Freud suggests individual memories constitute identities, societies aligned to the new systems of collective memory are collectively constructed by these new social abstractions of the war (Sherman 330).

Sherman speculates it is in this transfer that commemoration gains its political dimension. A dimension that grows out of the “master narratives” that replace individual memory. Narratives subject to a society desperately trying to recapture a meaning in the world that was systematically destroyed by the First World War (Sherman 7).

Sherman argues that the effects of this, in interwar France, can be found in the shift from a France which was on the verge of mutiny at the end of the First World War to the patriotic republic which endured “four years of invasion, devastation, and unremitting loss”, during the Second World War (Sherman 5). As Jean-Jaques Becker put it, “the Republic’s education system had done its work well” (Sherman 5).

This text, however, falls short of reflecting in much depth over what becomes of these memories in the contemporary climate. While to attempt to construct a collective memories out of the individual grief experienced as a result of the First World War was a fairly futile exercise directly after the war. Due to the fact that, as suggested in the previous sections, no form of commemoration could mask the initial weight of individual grief. As time has passed and the veterans have passed away it is difficult to imagine the memory of Verdun exists in any form other than a collective memory. While, in an increasingly fragmented world, the structure that this provides enables a form of the Battle to remain in the French consciousness, it is still necessary to question what form does this memory take?

From this perspective the political potency of Verdun will arguably remain because politics remains embodied within the abstraction which is a collective memory. While the
attempt to locate the cause for the ‘embrace of unreason’ through the memorial architecture of Verdun, retrospectively feels somewhat weak. Especially when it is reintroduced to the conclusion made in the first section which implied that memorials no longer convey meaning. The notion that memorials simply become embodied with meaning feels like a more honest conclusion.

Following on from this assertion, however, the task of designing a memorial suddenly becomes much more complicated. While this conclusion implies that memorials can remain powerful and influential structures to societies which have the propensity to forget.

It also implies that it becomes very difficult to control, through the design of the memorial, the ideas that become formed through a memorial. The implication of which being that the wrong ideas can be taken out of the memories of Verdun, memories which would be propagated by the memorial.

Conclusion

For this reason, the conclusion made in the Virilio section, that the battle of Verdun must at all costs be memorialised, no longer feels like an appropriate conclusion. It was deemed necessary to commemorate the battle for the simple reason that it should allow society to strive towards never to allow such suffering to occur again. To be aware of the destruction that occurs if technology is put against man and the human body is forgotten. However, it would now appear that to remember a lie can just as dangerous and forgetting a truth. Why else would nations, who still carried the destruction of the First World War close to their hearts, prepare so readily for an even greater war less than 20 years later?

All of this, however, does not imply the need to make a departure from Virilio but rather expresses the need to revisit his work. Investigating the Battle of Verdun provided the opportunity to gain some distance from Virilio and consider different angles or ways to approach his work. When reading Virilio the intention was always to look for the architecture within his work. This is why the essay “Critical Space” had such a large influence on all the ideas form within the first section. Despite the fact that it is one of Virilio’s lesser known and generally more inconsequential pieces of writing in one of his lesser known books, “the Lost Dimension”. However at his core, ever since his departure from the architecture principle in 1968, and arguably before even beginning work with Parent, Virilio’s focus remained on the “logistics of perception” (LaHood 26). A form of phenomenology, directly influenced by Virilio’s teacher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which meant that when he began to investigate speed his primary concern was not a concern about the perception of space but rather about the perception of time. Or more specifically a concern that speed has detrimentally redefined the way in which society is informed by and relates to time.

Understanding picnolepsy, is the prerequisite of understanding this idea. Picnolepsy, which was introduced in the Aesthetics of Disappearance and investigated in the first section, introduces the premise that lapses occur within the human consciousness. Not noticed by the individuals that experience these, however, this ‘picnoleptic lapse’ cause’s society as a whole to
disconnect with their immediate present and from the past which allows their consciousness’s to be increasingly self-informed.

The problem with speed, in regard to this, would appear to be the same problem as using commemoration as a tool to generate an abstracted collective memory. Both of these phenomena force the picnoleptic to become distanced further from an objective understanding of reality. Therefore becoming distanced further from the ability to rationally react to the events which become obscured. For both the picnoleptic who falls a victim to speed and the picnoleptic forced to accept a collective memory of war the risk becomes that it is increasingly difficult to reject radical positions.

Following this conclusion, it would seem like the task of designing the memorial becomes even more difficult yet again. It is now clear that it is fundamental that the proposed design cannot allow an abstracted collective memory about Verdun to be formed. A challenge made additionally difficult because of the conclusion that the memories associated with a memorials are defined not by the architecture of the memorial but rather through the memories projected onto the memorial.

At the same time as this, however, the conclusions made in the previous sections still hold true, the Battle must still be memorialised. Furthermore the question of how any of this can occur in a way which allows the memorial to regenerate, to an extent, the experience of the serving at Verdun through the design of the memorial, still remains.

In order for these questions to be answered it is necessary to take one final step and merge together both Virilio and the Battle of Verdun through reflecting upon the architecture of Paul Virilio…
ARCHITECTURE
Figure 4.1. Observation tower camouflaged as church belfry, Paul Virilio
The clearest feeling was still one of absence: the immense beach of La Baule was deserted, there were less than a dozen of us on the loop of blond sand, not a vehicle was to be seen on the streets; this had been a frontier that an army had just abandoned, and the meaning of this oceanic immensity was intertwined with this aspect of the deserted battlefield.

Paul Virilio, Bunker Archeology

In moving forward from these conclusions made about the battle of Verdun this project demands both a return to Virilio whilst also a move away from history and theory towards architecture. Fortunately, this can be achieved simultaneously through considering Virilio’s earlier work with the French architect Claude Parent. This section intends to do just this in tracing Virilio’s architecture through his investigation of the Atlantic wall, to his eventual work with Claude Parent, with a particular focus on the church Virilio and Parent designed in Nevers.

**Bunker Archaeology**

Following the Second World War, during which the French public were restricted from visiting the ocean, Virilio made a life altering discovery in the Bunkers that made up the Atlantic Wall. These forms fascinated Virilio, leading him to walk along the European coastline, documenting the bunkers and ultimately publishing his findings in his 1958 book, “Bunker Archaeology”.

Ultimately, through this process of documentation, Virilio can be understood as “pushing back against history”, despite his understanding that it can be painful to do so (La-Hood 24). The result of this is the unearthing of an ageless architecture, which Virilio argues exposes a sublimity that can be found through these “relics of war, set against the natural
beauty of the Atlantic coast” (Leach 74). In this way, the documentation of the Atlantic wall acknowledges not only architectures ability to posses a link to the past, but equally the importance of the active perception of architecture required for the truths embedded within the architecture to be revealed.

Beyond just this, however, through his investigation into the Atlantic Wall, Virilio’s preoccupation with architecture was extended through his experiences from within the bunkers. Heightened by the extent to which many of these bunkers had irregularly sunk into the beaches bellow them, what Virilio encountered from within the bunkers was jarringly dissimilar. Largely because the bunkers failed to relate to the “bodily proportions” of the Le Corbusier’s “Modulor man”. A principle that had led to a stagnant architectural context in western Europe defined by the pure and unobtrusive geometry of the modernist movement. The result of this is a “peculiar oppressiveness”, about which Virilio went as far as to suggest led to the bunkers’ typological language enables a spirituality through its capacity to allow the “habitat to be intimately joined with the hidden possibilities contained within the individual being” (Virilio “Bunker Archaeology”; Armitage).

The Oblique Function

The progression of these investigations into the Atlantic Wall led to the development of what Virilio would call the “Oblique Function”, an architectural argument which Virilio put
forward with his Architectural collaborator Claud Parent. The “oblique function” was formed through the observation and inhabitation of bunkers which seemed to float, ‘out of axis’ and no longer orthogonally, on top of the surface of the earth” (Virilio “Bunker Archaeology”). In recognising this, Virilio and Parent came to reject “Euclidean architecture”, which understood the body as an “essentially static entity with an essentially static proprioception” (Virilio and Parent, Paul Virilio and Claude Parent 1955-1968 13). In this way, Virilio argued the “anthropometric precepts of the classical era” follow the “bourgeois traditions of the Cartesian inspired Enlightenment, which produced the scientific logic that… rationalized such barbaric operations as Auschwitz” (Cook).

Regardless of the grounds of this accusation, however, Virilio strived for a “new plane of human consciousness”, which he argued could be found in the taking the human body out of “Le Corbusier’s modular box” and rather exposing them to an incline plane (La-Hood 127) (Virilio Architecture Principle”). In doing so Virilio can be found, as he put it himself, to propose a “culture of the body that plays on disequilibrium, that regards man not as static but in motion and takes the dancer as the model of the Human being” (Virilio and Brausch 105). In doing so, based on the phenomenology of perception of Merleau Ponty and Gesalt psychology, spaces become “experienced not through the perception of the eyes, but through the movement of the body”. This, as a direct result of the forces of gravity that become experienced in the descending and traversing of the inclined planes, led Virilio to propose that “architecture is the moving of bodies” (Virilio and Brausch 24).

The drawings and writing that surrounded this period of Virilio’s work expressed an uncharacteristically forward production of work, unburdened by the fairly cynical nature of Virilio’s later theory. Alongside his collaborator Claude Parent, and very much in response to their fellow 1960’s radical architectural community, the Oblique Function was perceived as a solution to the criticisms that Virilio and Parent perceived in the environments that they lived. In this way, the work exudes a youthful energy, an energy that remained present and was considered very seriously by the collaborators, up until the events of May 1968 shifted the paradigms of Virilio’s intellectual trajectory.

The Church of Sainte Bernadette

Throughout this period of collaboration between Virilio and Parent, the most significant of the projects that they completed was the church of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, in Nevers, which was completed in 1966 (Fig. 4.2). The church can be understood as an amalgamation of Virilio’s thinking in terms of both the Oblique Function and his research into the Atlantic Wall, whilst additionally providing insight into the collaborators individual architectural language. Consequently, the church offers this thesis a plethora of material, against which design conclusions can be determined.

The church was initially conceived in honor of Sainte- Bernadette, known for having seen the Virgin Mary in the cave of Massabille, thus providing Virilio a desire to reproduce the architecture of the cave through his design. Beyond just this, however, Virilio found an architectural parallel to the cave in the ‘Atomic Shelter’, which he recognized as a suitable equivalent to Sainte Bernadette’s cave during the years of the Cold War. In doing so, Virilio
stated in an interview with John Armitage, that the church was an attempt to “Christianize the Bunker” (Virilio From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond 32). A statement which seems almost logical after noting his idea that “a church could only refer to the eventuality of total destruction” (Virilio, Strategy of Deception 175). A belief reinforced by Virilio’s observations of ‘Luftschatzaums’ (German Bomb Shelters) converted into churches, in which he found a connection between “places of shelter from danger, and places of worship, which are also places of salvation” (Virilio From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond 32).

The initial appearance of the building that this framework of thinking led to, as described by Claude Parent himself, is “menacing”. With its “opaque concrete carapace”, Parent went as far as to suggest it was “deliberately repulsive in its relation to its surroundings” (Parent 19). Upon entering the church, however, the building transitions from a bunker to reveal the parish body as the “primary architecture” with the pews arranged within two tilted shells in a way that allows “each member of the church body to see everyone in the sanctuary, as opposed to an entirely flat ground plane on which, once seated, the user can only see those in his or her immediate proximity” (Virilio, Cryptic Architecture 77) (LaHood 137). From this perspective, the harsh concrete walls lose their defensive nature but alternatively form a “protective enclosure for the interior… in homage to the life of the church’s patron saint” (Parent 19).

This sense of transition from outside to in, is heightened further still by the way in which the outer shell of the church is ruptured by openings. All of which, from the narrow slots cut into the floor that illuminate the vaults above, to the small windows reminiscent of the “Ronchamp Chapel”, to the transverse lantern skylight which floods light into the nave, were positioned carefully to maintain the cryptic quality of the space (Parent 22). Through this, as revealed through photos of the interior, again reminiscent of a cave, the is a con-
Through all of these references to the Bunker, it can be argued that the church should fundamentally be read as an attempt to “reinterpret memories of close, personal encounters with war and its physical imposition on the landscape” (LaHood 5). This can be seen quite literally through Virilio’s direct referencing of the brutal form and the monolithic character of the Bunkers that Virilio investigated. The result of this, Frédéric Migayrou argues was that the church, “rather violently opened the Pandora’s Box of a still troubled and obscure collective memory” (Migayrou). As a result of this many people in the 1960’s considered this an embodiment of aggressive military architecture. The harsh image of which was, and perhaps still is, offensive due to the building’s supposedly sacred nature as a Catholic Church. In the 55 years that have passed, however, it becomes easy to understand Virilio’s reproduction of Bunker Architecture through the church, as an attempt to “facilitate a post-war reconciliation with the painful and the shameful past” (LaHood 6). Though this, combating a “culture of forgetting”, Virilio’s architecture “expresses his own journey though the past and calls us to do the same” (LaHood 34,35). Virilio’s intention through this becomes to generate, through the architecture of the church, “a place to confront the past and face up to the unknown quantity of future war” (LaHood 132).

Beyond all of this, the primary way in which Parent and Virilio approached the church, in their eyes, was understood as a way to experiment with their theory of the ‘Oblique’. The application of this theory, can be understood through the longitudinal section which shows the two oblique floor plates and the non-orthogonal walls and roof (fig 4.4). While far

Figure 4.3. Interior of the church of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay, Claude Parent
than the speculative drawings of the group, in the church, the inclined building elements can still be understood as leading to 'disequilibrium and instability', through which, the individual would join the collective mass of the congregation in experiencing the 'dynamic and energetic instead of still and constraining' nature of the church.

In regards to Virilio's later theoretical work, this leads to a space that prioritizes 'real human spatial agency', and through this, in relation to Virilio's newer work, prioritizes 'real space' (Virilio "Architecture Principle"). In this way, Virilio almost inadvertently answered his own questions in "the Lost Dimension", which was published nearly 20 years later. While the church could be condemned for creating an intentionally spatially uncomfortable environment, perhaps this the blatancy of the churches projection of itself, onto its congregation, is necessary. While the response by most 1960's architects, who recognised the professions dis-abilities, responded by trying to shock people with an architecture that is "incompatible with their tastes or habits" (Parent). The design of the church reflects the observation that while this "jolts them (the viewers of radical 1960's architecture) out of their general apathy", it "fails to win them over" as "formal tools very quickly lose their edge in a world that is driven by insatiable consumerism" (Parent).

Application of Virilio's Architecture

The effectiveness of the method of fostering a relationship to the past through reproducing bunker architecture, frustratingly, provides little as way of insight to the memorial this thesis is moving towards. As Virilio would later go onto suggest, the use of architectural symbolism is rendered ineffective due to societies perception, in general terms, no longer falling onto architecture as a tool of communication. Furthermore, as the effectiveness of the connections that the church makes back to the German occupation of France could only be achieved as a result of the bunker being so synonymous to that period. With no equivalent architectural typology associated directly to Verdun, to achieve what Virilio achieved with his 'bunker' church is unlikely.

For this reason, while it might appear advantageous to look for an architectural embodiment of Verdun in the vocabulary of the forts that played a role in the battle or perhaps from the void left behind in the wake of the villages destroyed by artillery. In regards to the design of the memorial, such ideas should only remain secondary, as they fail to synchronise suitably to the conclusions made in the previous chapters. It is fundamental that whatever the architecture of the memorial may be, it does not rely on abstract communication.

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In this sense, this notion of the oblique, offers a far more compelling method of considering the design of the memorial, in the sense that it leads to a far more direct form of architecture. An architecture that acts upon its occupants thus fostering a deeper engagement, in both a bodily and through that cognitive sense. Where to rely on architectural typologies of the past is to rely on meaning, the function of the Oblique has nothing to do with meaning. Rather it simply offers a way to forces recognition of substance, architectural substance and yet remains vague enough to allow the mind of to rewrite this substance. In the format of a church this rewriting is obviously that of the ethereal but it could it not equally be rewritten in a way that allows the architecture to form a connection with Verdun.
Beyond the function of the oblique’s unique ability to revert attention, the resulting movement and bodily engagement that the use of oblique surfaces generate differentiates the way in which buildings like the Church in Nevers are remembered by those who experience them. In order to consider this, the work of the philosopher Henri Bergson, proves to be insightful. Bergson, who wrote “Memory and Matter” around the dawn of the photographic age, provided fundamental ground work for twentieth century French thought, through his well-known comparison of memory to early cinema. This comparison, historian Martin Jay recognised, expresses not an embrace of modern technology but rather the belief that the camera epitomized the misconception of memory as a set of images that the mind has captured (Jay). Alternatively, Bergson argued, that memory is constructed as “a temporal continuum involving not only perception but the movement of the body” (Sherman 13). Therefore, regarding the oblique function, as the oblique surfaces lead to a unique bodily movement, buildings of such nature can be understood as leading to a spatial framework which will remain present in the memory of the occupant. In this way, it can be said of Virilio’s church in Nevers, in rejecting an ocularcentric approach the building’s function as a spiritual centre becomes heightened through the experiencing of the oblique that laminates itself onto the memory of its congregation.

In the same terms as this, the memorial should equally be developed in a way to ensure that the experience of the space is marked by movement and a bodily engagement. Through this the design can hopefully begin to approach a solution that will allow the memory of Verdun to live on through the memory of those who inhabit the space.

It would be a mistake, however, to forget that this is no longer the only intention of the memorial. As determined in the concluding notes of the previous chapter, to develop a memorial that perpetuates the memory of Verdun in the form of an abstracted collective memory would be to not only betray the memory of those who served but equally the sentiment of Virilio. For this reason, while the application of an architecture that conducts a heightened sense of movement through its occupants, could be beneficial. Especially if that movement seeks to parallel the physical reality that the veterans would have remembered of their experience. Nothing will be achieved if this memory projects itself beyond the memorial itself or allows itself to be consumed in a way that can be easily deconstructed, in the same way as the oblique function can be dismissed as simply spaces with angled floors and walls.

Alternatively, what the architecture that the memorial must seek, is to remain present exclusively to those who experience it, whilst simultaneously remaining ineffable even to them. In order to ensure that this occurs, it is fundamental that the architecture controls the relationship between those who perceive the proposed memorial and the timeframe in which they perceive it. If, as can be concluded from the previous chapter, architecture is prone to adopt meaning rather than communicates it. The only way in which the memorial can reject the inevitability of it in some way subverting the reality of Verdun that it is trying to memorialise. Is through the constant and unrelenting stripping and rupturing of any sense of meaning that the memorial itself might allow. Therefore, in order for this energy to be captured through the experience of the memorial, due to the nature of human perception, it is fundamental that the memorial presents itself over an extended duration of time.
This alone, however, it would appear, provides a very limited direction from which to move forward. Virilio’s church is so intriguing because of its dialogue between religion, a violent past, and a future that we should shelter ourselves from. However, if the memorial intends to subvert dialogues of this nature than it becomes very difficult to determine the architectural nature of the memorial. In a sense, such a deconstructive approach to the meaning of the memorial brings into question the very existence of the memorial being made up of any architecture altogether.

Despite this, however, as Maurice Halbach’s eloquently stated, “space is a reality that endures.” While, “our impressions rush by, one after another, and leave nothing behind in the mind”, our past is “preserved by our physical surroundings” (Halbwachs 140). Therefore if nothing else, memorial itself must exist. The is no doubt that the memory of what was lost at Verdun must be preserved, and in this sense this project has a responsibility to put forward an architectural response.

For this reason, as the theory has pushed this project into a position were an architectural conclusion must be reached, but in equal terms this conclusion cannot be determined in any way through a narrative that is suggestive of how Verdun might be remembered. It is clear that the only option that remains is that the architectural essence of the design must be determined methodologically. This is of course not to suggest that the myriad of design thoughts that occurred throughout this process will not inform the design. However by this point it has become clear that further theoretical research is not going to lead to any conclusions. Therefore at this stage it is necessary to step forward into the design…
DESIGN
Introduction

Alongside these conclusions about the way in which the battle of Verdun should be memorialised, a consistent effort was put into producing a base of design from which a dialogue between an architecture and theory could be conducted. While these moves simply began as more artistic interpretations of Virilio's theories than architectural representations, a design slowly emerged that can be understood as a building. A building that neither should nor could be constructed but none the less a building which implies inhabitation.

The way in which this transition took place, as concluded in the previous chapter, was through the development of a methodology rather than a direct transition from theory into an architecture. What this allowed was for the theory to be more gradually introduced into the architecture. As a result of this the architectural solution that resulted is in a sense of less important than the final design. Simply for the reason that all the work put into finding the theoretical conclusions manifests itself more through the methodological process than the design itself, which can be understood almost as a controlled accident.

For this reason, only limited focus will be put on the documentation of the final design. From the start of this project it was recognised that architecture no longer communicates meaning in the traditional sense. Therefore, to impose meaning onto the drawings would be counterintuitive. Focus however will be put on positioning the thinking in relation to the timeline of the design. In documenting this alongside recording the nature and intention of each design step it is hoped that the links between the design and the theory become exposed. Allowing the viewer to begin their own dialogue with the elements that make up this project and through this inhabiting the building with the same disillusionment through the drawings as it is implied an inhabitant might have as they navigate the designed spaces.
SCREEN

The first design move made was a simple installation used to help communicate Virilio's theory efficiently for the April review. The installation simply involved putting a cardboard screen over the screen which was playing Martin Scorsese's "Taxi Driver" (A film chosen for its relevant links to the themes of Virilio). Despite the rudimentary nature of this it was ultimately a successful tool of communication.

The limitation to the perception of the film that the screen imposed allowed links to be made to the perversion of the real world that results from traveling fast or experiencing technologically enabled speed. Through this the screen began to provide a way of understanding that perception is in fact self-fabricated because what is seen behind the screen is reformatted subconsciously into full shapes. As well as informed by the past, illustrated through the fact that the screen is less imposing to those how have seen the full screen before because they know what they are watching, having watched the film in full without the screen.

While as a photo this doesn't communicate very well, following the narrative of this, which was very drawn out, the critics became more intrigued by Virilio's arguments as a result of the installation. beyond this however this initial step did not provide much direction forward. While for a brief time the thought of continuing these experiments with film was considered, ultimately this was decided against because it seemed necessary to force a purer architectural argument out of Virilio's abstract architecture theories.
WHAT SPACE BECOMES

Following on from the installation a second more traditional form of representation was used to try and attempt to communicate Virilio's theories. The result of this was six panels which were made with a base layer of photos taken from around the university, with lines drawn over the top of these. On top of this, butter paper panels were incrementally overlaid over each panel.

The intention of this was to represent the objective reality of how space is experienced at speed on the left panels. A more realistic model of what is actually consciously perceived when experiencing speed in the central panels. And, in the final panels, a future where even more of the objective world disappears, as a result of speed.

The success of these panels was that they worked as an interesting experiment in representation. The later stages in particular, in the physical form more so, create the desire to get up close and attempted to read through the butter paper. Through this these collages create a frustrated relationship between the viewer and the viewed.

In addition to this in collaging multiple photos and architectural moments into singular image an interesting dialogue about the representation of time is opened up. A dialogue which continues throughout the design process.

However, to be completely honest, these were accidental results and this experiment cannot be understood achieving much in terms of determining any architectural conclusions.
MODEL

The model started just before the April review as a complimentary piece to the collages. The intention was to model what the central panel was trying to communicate, the reality of how space is perceived at speed. Positioned somewhere within this argument as well is a narrative about the relationship between speed and power which relied on the fact that it followed an orthogonal grid and the wire cut through the wood at consistent 50mm intervals.

Ultimately, however, in terms of the initial intention, this model achieved even less than the collages because while the collages communicated Virilio’s ideas in a painfully obvious way, the initial argument associated with the model simply does not make any sense.

Despite this conclusion, which was recognised fairly early on, the work continued on the model for another 9 months. The reason for this remains slightly unclear however there was a sense that something was being achieved being in trying to complete this model. A point which was unobtainable because there was no limit to the amount of wire that could be added.

Retrospectively, while this as an exercise may appear as futile from a distance. If for no other reason than making this model gave me the space need to think about Virilio and the battle of Verdun, the time invested in this model was worthwhile.
MODEL AS SUPERSTRUCTURE

It did not take long before the question raised of what if the model was not a representation of one of Virilio's concepts but instead an architectural representation in itself. Around the point that the research into Virilio was being concluded and research into the battle of Verdun began, it became clear that whatever form the memorial took, it would have to have to be monolithic in scale and violently imposing on the inhabitants who occupied it in order for the memory of the Battle of Verdun to be memorialised through the memorial.

Therefore, for a period of time the work on the model shifted from being wasted time invested into a failed concept model, to work towards completing what could potentially become the final design. A design in which the wires could become labyrinthine circulation path, the wood larger exhibition spaces and the form would sit defiantly on the horizon tens and maybe even hundreds of miles from Verdun.
Following the conclusions made from the investigation into the memory of Verdun it became clear that the idea of the memorial being a superstructure based on the model would no longer work because the design intention was no longer to simply revert as much attention back to the battle of Verdun. Therefore, rather than using a massively scaled up inhabitable version of the model which would impose its image on as many people as possible. It became vital that the memorial is only perceived by those who invest a duration of time for long enough to not just gain an instantaneous glimmer but rather a genuine connection with the battle of Verdun.

In order to begin to consider this, the model was again subjected to a further photographic experimentation. When the initial photo of the model is perceived, in which the entire model can be fully observed, an understanding of the model can be acquired immediately. An understanding which, as suggested by Gesalt psychology, would merge all the complexity of the model into a singular rectilinear form. Which would obviously lead to the stripping of the communicative power achieved through the complexity of the model.

In the new series of images, however, the limitations to what can be perceived are controlled by the lens of the camera. This allows the complexity of the model to be broken down into a more perceivable state. Meaning that in order to perceive the model in its entirety, if the lens remains close to the model, it would take a lot longer and subsequently the model would have a much more profound impact on the viewer.
The conclusion made from the photography experiment was that the memorial should be fractured over and submerged into the site of Verdun in a way that duplicates the effect of the camera. The question that this leaves, however, is where will the pieces that make up the memorial be specifically positioned on the site. While this decision could be based on a site analysis that relates to the site as it exists today. To do this would be to ignore the fact that the memorial is not attempting to relate to this site, it is trying to relate to the site of 1916.

Therefore, the conclusion was reached that the trench lines which moved throughout 1916 should be used to inform the positioning of the fractures that make up the proposed memorial. A conclusion which was deemed more fitting than simply placing the buildings on the multiple known zones of historical significance, such as le Mort Homme or Douaumont. Simply for the reason that the temporal quality of these trench lines, resonate in a project which focuses so heavily on the notion of time.

On this page the fortified region at the start of 1916 is shown alongside the first 5 days of battle which are shown on the lower map. On the subsequent two pages the approximate positions of the trench line is shown at the end of March, April, May-June and at the end of December are shown. Each one of these lines was drawn, based on data collected from various sources, over the top of a historical site map found in Henry Dugard's book "The Battle of Verdun".
The next step after gathering these site lines was to force them all together into a singular drawing. Over the top of this, a 500m × 500m grid was imposed. What this allowed for was a series of potential sites, shown in the lower drawing, to be gathered from the points where the trench lines intersect the grid.

These points, through this, have an interesting relationship to the battle of Verdun. In a sense they are points of significance due the fact that they are derived from the trench lines. But what the grid does, is to abstract these trench lines further by breaking the lines into points meaning that it becomes virtually impossible to know that they have any meaning without being aware of the methodological process.

The effect of this is that the points take on further meaning. In the sense that, in the same way that the Unknown Soldier relates to every soldier because he remains unknown, because the points have become so arbitrary they begin to relate to every point on the battlefield.

Fundamentally, however, it is important to recognise that while this methodology may lead to this effect, in reality the points have meaning through their being derived from the trench lines. What this creates is a critical tension between the objectivity of the fractures and the experience of geographic ambiguity of the building. A tension which is hoped the occupants of the memorial may dwell on as like the soldiers they will occupy a place which remains unknown to them and out of their control.
ORIENTATING THE FRACTURES

Following the acquisition of the points the next step was to determine the orientation of the fractures. In order to maintain a commitment to a methodological design process, the decision was made to base this on the angles of the sun at specific dates relevant to the battle of Verdun, shown in the adjacent timeline.

The intention of this was that in orientating the building so that they are lit up in a particular way only one day a year, corresponding to these dates, the buildings can relate to the transcendental character of the sun. A phenomenon which will far out last both the memory of and the memorial for the Battle of Verdun therefore providing a certainty that will make it easier to remember Verdun and relate to the soldiers who once served there.
21 February:
The Germans launched an artillery bombardment on the east bank of the Meuse in the sector of the Caures and Haumont forests at 7 am, which was followed by an infantry attack of those French lines and a bombardment of Verdun.

22 May:
The German launched an attack on Fort Douamont on the 8th of May, Nivelle arranged an attack on the Fort consisting of two divisions, the largest concentration that the French had yet mustered, which ended as a chaotic failure leading to 5,500 French casualties.

25 February:
Ft. Douamont fell without a shot being fired exceeding even their own goals discovering that instead of housing 1,000 defenders it only held 50 territorials and lacked most of its guns, this provided the Germans a significant moral and tactical advantage.

- Marshal Petain took command of Verdun and reorganized the front line

8 May:
Nivelle ordered a bombardment of the German occupied Fort Douamont which struck a box of hand grenades which sparked petrol canisters and artillery shells leading to the death of 650 German soldiers.

7 June:
- After enduring a week of siege in the most desperate conditions, Fort Vaux was captured by the Germans, after the French defenders ran out of water and supplies

23 June:
The Germans launched an attack on Fort Souville, on the east bank, which marked the greatest crisis for the French since the beginning of the battle, as by breaking the French line the Germans were only just short of Fort de Souvile within five kilometers of Verdun.

12 February:
The original date set for the German attack which had to be pushed back due to bad weather, this reduced the German element of surprise and gave the French time to prepare

11-12 July:
The Germans attempted to advance again, initially with a gas attack and then an attack on Fort Souville. Some troops made it to the roof of the fort but they were eventually pushed further back by the French.

- By this point due to the Germans need to defend in the Somme the officials conceded that they were never going to get to Verdun

24 October:
The first French attack before midday the French launched their infantry offensive covering three kilometers, the distance it had taken the Germans 4 1/2 months to secure. This resulted in the capture of Fort Douamont, 6,000 prisoners, 164 machine guns and 15 artillery pieces. The French however did fail to recapture Fort Vaux as they had intended

22 May:
After recognising the disaster at Fort Douamont on the 8th of May, Nivelle arranged an attack on Fort Souville by some the officials conceded that they were never going to get to Verdun.

3 November:
The French finally enter Fort Vaux only to find that it was empty and that the Germans were conceding the battlefield

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The process involved in determining these angles and applying them to the site was achieved with relative ease. An online solar calculator was used to determine the angle that the sun would be at either an hour after dawn or an hour before dusk depending on whether the event the date related to happened mainly in the afternoon or in the morning.

Following this this butter paper was placed over the points and the buildings began to be determined based on two factors. The first was that all buildings had to align to the sun angles which were maintained through the use of an adjustable set square. The second criteria was that the buildings had to be orientated so that they faced each other.

The reason for this was because it had been decided that the whole structure would remain entirely internalised and view shafts out of the building would be positioned so that when one of the buildings is looked out of, all that can be seen is another building in the distance. The intention of internalisation of the memorial, as inspired by the similar practice in Virilio’s church, was mainly to ensure that the occupants would maintain focus exclusively on the memorial itself. Beyond this, however, it is additionally hoped through opening view shafts between the buildings, the memorial might be able to disorientate its occupants through abstracting their perception of distance. The effect of this, it was hoped, was that this would to intensify the sense of control which the buildings imposed over the occupants. A sensation strengthened by the sense that many of the openings were orientated towards circular structures which would function as baracades indefinitely protecting the heteropic spaces within from human perception.
Sun Angles used to determine building orientations
The result of this was a series of drawings, which were understood to represent a masterplan of all the fractured elements which made up the memorial as a whole. The long slim nature of these buildings was a result of the fact that the view shaft out of these buildings needing to be narrow.

Additionally smaller side buildings, some of which cut through the main masses, were positioned alongside most of these masses, adding subtle tension to the otherwise very simple forms on the site. While most of these supplementary elements followed the vectors derived from the sun angle, some were sections of circles which were broken up between the various buildings they cut through. Alongside these, circular and ring buildings were positioned on the points defined by the grid. While the nature of these buildings was never defined the intention was always that the zones within the rings would be fully closed off and never perceived.

It was important that through all of this, that no recognisable hierarchy could be observed. With each building on the site proportioned to be as important as any other, it was hoped that, for the occupants wondering between these buildings, no sense of resolution could be found. Due to the memorial failing to imply architecture any sense of beginning or end.
Compounding upon the sense of otherworldliness that this might create, the use of “pure geometry” to determine the building forms was a fundamental part of this methodology. This is due primarily to the violent nature of applying such order to the undulating site of Verdun and to the individuals who would occupy these structures. A violence which would seem to resonate strongly to both the theories regarding speed and war.
In determining this masterplan, at an intentionally reckless speed, the next move was to come to terms with this decision through representing the master plan a second time, through an intentionally far slower process.

This process of drawing this was quite simple. The previous version was scaled up to 1:1,000 and mounted on bench top which was cut to size and placed on the ground. Following this all that was left to do was colour around the outlines, leaving just the buildings paper. This process took about two weeks and required crawling around on the ground grinding pencils into paper in a controlled but frustratingly slow and physical fashion.

The result of this exercise was more about the process of doing than it was about the work itself. Despite this, the sentiment of the process remains embodied on this drawing. In the grainy, imperfect quality of the graphite texturing, time and physicality are manifested, and through this a commitment to what is otherwise a very simple gesture is implied.

In this way the drawing implies an active defiance to the methodology, which up until this point privileged speed over authorship or critical re-evaluation. Therefore, what this contradictory move results in, is a representation that acknowledges the fundamental flaws within this methodology and attempts to introduce an almost apologetic sense of the sublime scale and violent reality of what this project has become.

It was hoped that in doing so, the drawing would imply that regardless of what direction the memorial moves toward, the reality of what it will become will be tied to convoluted and enigmatic objectivity of architecture.
DIGITAL MODELING

Following the completion of the masterplan it felt necessary to gain an understanding of how these buildings would manifest themselves when put on the undulating site of the Battle Field. For this reason, 12.5m contours of the site were digitally modelled and a section of the designed buildings were super imposed over this.

The form of these buildings from the exterior would very much follow the simplistic logic that can be observed in the masterplan. The walls would all be bare and monolithic and from the outside nothing would be revealed about the interior conditions of the buildings.

Ultimately, however, while this exercise was successful in helping to conceive what the memorial might be link on site. As the memorial is attempting avoid the realities of the contemporary site it was determined that the way the memorial looks on site is fairly inconsequential. Furthermore, as the design was intended to achieve all its intentions through the experience of its interior, it was decided that this view of the memorial should not be a part of the final representation of the design.
Following on from this, the next design move was to shift back to
thoughts about the design as a more radical architecture.
This involved considering how all the fractures of the buildings
will link together underground following the geometrical impli-
cations of the master plan.

For this exercise, the same zone as the one modelled digitally was
taken, and all the lines from the master plan were stretched out,
projected in different positions, and endlessly duplicated much
like the wire in the model.

The result of this was a relatively interesting drawing, but before
it had even been finished, however, it became clear that this ex-
ercise was not really leading anywhere, as it was determined in
order to best validate the abstract nature of the theory would be
through an architecture that could be recognised as such. Not just
a building like this which has no regard for the conventions of
architecture.
Following on from this recognition it was decided that the best move forward was to begin to determine the reality of just one of the buildings. The reason that this was determined to be so important, was because it was apparent that the only form of the perception of this building that truly mattered was the perception of the individual roaming around the interior. Furthermore, in the same way that it was necessary to represent the site plan a second time, it was fundamental that the implications of the initial decisions were fully tested through the full development of just one of the buildings, rather than the partial development of many. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to understand, in much detail as possible, the nature of this building and what it would be like for the occupant who experienced it.

The adjacent drawings show the selected building and the existing parameters that the building’s interior would follow. The building's orientation was determined in order to allow the sun to pierce through the space, annually, on the evening of the 7th of June. The date that the German army captured fort Vaux. In addition to this, a curved element cuts through the main building, which can be understood as a segment of a circle which relates to two other building elements adjacent to the selected building. Finally, two separate view shafts add further complexity to the design. The first being the building's own, which orientates spectators towards a view of another building in the distance and means that no obstructions, within the memorial, can get in the way of this view. And, the second view shaft from an adjacent building, which cuts through the selected building, so that another building can be viewed.
SECTION I T E R A T I O N S

Following on from the recognition of these existing parameters, work began, on detailing the interior of the design. This work was done in section which was a direct result of the analysis made on Virilio’s church and due to the long slender nature of the building. In addition to this, working in section was fundamental because it allowed the spaces to be conceived with relative rapidity allowing a disconnection between the design and designer to be maintained.

The effects of the previously noted parameters can be seen playing through these drawings most prominently in the empty angled section starting on the top right corner and cutting through the buildings which was a result of the angle of the sun on the late afternoon of the 7th of June. This angle additionally determined the penetration of building elements all the way along the buildings. In addition to this, building elements where penetrated and subtracted in the upper section of the design providing the opening needed for the view out of this building. Walls were also introduced to follow the curve of the segment of the circle and the angle of the view shaft which cut through the building mass.

In addition to this the building itself had its own agenda which only added to the complication of the final section. This agenda can be viewed mainly in the grid of moment frames, which all the building elements relate to. Beyond this, further geometric intensity is added through the repetition of elements like the large spheres which are mirrored, in both iterations, further along the interiors.
**DIGITAL MODELING**

In order to begin to make sense of all of this, the next step was to digitally model and add further data and detail to the preferred iteration. The most important of these new additions, was the addition of circulation spaces, around and in direct relation to the already determined building elements. This circulation takes the form of both narrow conventional and spiral staircases and narrow pathways which ensure that the occupants will mainly move around as individuals. Labyrinthine in quality, these pathways all interconnect but lead nowhere but to further circulation space or dead ends. The only exception to this is the viewing platform which will orientate the occupants, who stumble across it, towards a distant fraction of the memorial, which is equally made up of endless circulation. In this sense, much in the same way as the oblique floor of Virilio’s church added dynamism to the building, the unrelenting circulation of the proposed museum is intended to leave the occupants constantly moving.

In addition to this a second and third grid of moment frames where added to follow the angled walls and the curved walls respectively, while additional background panels, arches and partitions were introduced to the model. The commonality between all of these elements is that independently they are all simplistic and common architectural components. The reason for this is two-fold. Firstly, following the conclusions made in the theory chapter, that ornamentation loses any power, making any such effort no longer seems worthwhile. But beyond just this, it was hoped that further tension would be added to the experience of the interior, through the uncanny effect that might result in the aggressive composition of commonly recognised architectural components. A tension founded in the notion that, while the occupants will always remain out of place within the memorial, they will never be able to gain the true indifference that would be permitted to them if the spaces felt entirely alien.
FINAL SECTION

What all of this led to, was a comprehensively developed interior of the selected building, which was represented primarily through this sectional drawing. In this drawing most of what needs to be understood about this project can be found.

From a more practical perspective what this drawing accomplishes is that it allows the dynamism generated by the design elements added in the digital modelling stage to be formally introduced. Furthermore, through the hand rendering of shadows in this section, both a spatial and a temporal quality is added to the viewers understanding of the design. Specifically, the drawing represents the shadows of two suns. The light from the sun that will annually cut through the spaces on the anniversary of the Germans capturing of Fort Vaux. As well as a sun positioned in front of the section cut allowing shadows to be projected onto the back of the spaces defining the spatial qualities of the design.

Beyond just this, however, a second reading of time can be found in the drawing, due to its nature as a sectional drawing. In a perspective drawing the observer only requires limited participation because the architecture is presented in a form that can be easily translated into an understanding of real space. However, this section refuses its viewers this luxury and forces them to conceive of the realities of architecture that this section implies in their own minds. Very much in the same way that the intended space will deny the occupants from the ability to fully understanding the geometrical logic that this sectional view demonstrates. Through this, in ensuring that the design is only partially observed in an abstracted format, the drawing begins to allude to the sense of futility that an occupant might experience as they try to navigate and take meaning out of these spaces.
The other major achievement of the drawing was its ability to begin to evoke the scale and quality of the proposed design. At 1:200, the drawing is 1.5 metres long yet every detail down to the handrails were represented. While the drawing consequently took an extensive amount of time, it is successful in the sense that it expresses a commitment to the reality of space as a static entity. Through this, it is hoped that the viewer is reminded that despite the technological logic and commitment to speed that defined this project's methodology. The building should remain understood as such. An enduring phenomenon which disguises its own idiosyncrasies and embodied accidents from those who perceive architecture through speed.

In this way the drawing begins to evoke the brutalist qualities of Virilio's church and through this demands that the memorial be viewed in the same way. In adopting this understanding, the human experience of the memorial becomes revealed. In subversion of the speed that renders substance immaterial, the memorial will be felt by those who endure it. It will provide not a spatial framework that can be burdened by unfounded meaning, but rather a temporal landscape made up of controlled accidents, riving in the circularity of its very narrative. In the consequential rejection of comprehension, what the memorial will leave behind is a memory of Verdun that hopes to do the same. In the minds of those who endure the memorial will exist a fragment of Verdun. A fragment not only haunted by tragedy or anguish but equally by the sense that what happened at Verdun can never again truly be understood.
Figure 6.1. Käthe Kollwitz, Memorial Statues
For a long time, it was very difficult to articulate what this project is about. But by this point the answer to this question has finally been exposed. This is a project about remembering, and as easy as it would be to suggest this project makes any grand statements beyond that, would seem a bit disingenuous. All this project is trying to do is to try to understand is how the battle of Verdun can be commemorated, through the architecture of a memorial, in a way in which the memory serves as a reminder for the mistakes of the past.

The complexity within all of this came through Paul Virilio. While to attempt to answer this question in itself would have been challenging enough. What this project is looking to achieve, when Virilio’s understanding of the physical environment is adopted, becomes almost impossible. But, at the same time, it is through this positioning that this project gains its urgency. Without the initial research that went into Virilio and the conclusions that were made through him, this project would offer little more to the discipline. However, in borrowing so heavily from a source material which has never been so relevant, this thesis can be understood as functioning as a preliminary step towards coming to terms with some of the biggest changes that architecture is currently experiencing. Problems, which warrant a lot more attention from the architectural profession.

Beyond this, however, it is fundamental that this project remains grounded. As compelling as it was to just engage in Virilio’s writing and books about Verdun, as an architectural thesis, all that this can realistically be achieved is in the conclusions made through the archi
tectural investigation. Therefore, the conclusion to this thesis will simply be the conclusions made in regards to whether or not the three design intentions were achieved.

In regard to what became the first design intention, that it is fundamental that people are forced to remember the Battle of Verdun, through the memorial, this design would be relatively effective. This, however, was never going to be that hard to achieve because in embracing the notion that this project would never be built, the design became limited only to its own conditions. Therefore, while there was some ingenuity in the approaches adopted, not much can be concluded from the fact that the design probably would have achieved this intention.

The success of the second design intention, which was to attempt to begin to recreate the atmosphere of the battle of Verdun and through that also the experience of the speed of hypermodernity, in a way that it can be comprehended and reflected upon. Is slightly harder to conclude upon, because it is simply impossible to determine the atmosphere of an unbuilt project. Despite this, it is worth noting that, in attempting to achieve this through a methodological approach which experimented with time, if nothing more, this project makes an honest attempt at achieving this. Largely because rather than through the use of symbolism as a method of communicating the realities of war and speed. A method that Virilio argues has lost its relevance. This methodology simply introduces a level of disconnection between the designer and the design. Meaning that deconstructive quality of both war and speed, also play through the ambiguous spaces that were accidentally determined by systems which remained disassociated from the complicated spatial environment which they defined.

It is when the final design intention is considered, however, that this whole design begins to fall in on itself. Through the submerging and splintering of the building across the site, meaning that the building could never be consciously perceived as an object in its entirety. An effort was made to disguise the building, much like the forts of Verdun, so that the building would only ever expose the memory of the Battle of Verdun, to those who made a concerted effort to engage with the memorial personally.

What this attempt failed to recognise, however, was that, due to the grandeur of the design, the building still could and probably would be fully perceived as an idea. The memorial would, therefore, become occupied without ever being occupied, for the simple fact that the idea of it warrants the attention of those who cannot occupy it. An attention which only extenuates the collective memory of the Battle of Verdun which is of course an abstracted memory of the Battle of Verdun.

Furthermore, this reality was not ignored but rather embraced for a long time. A large part of the reason why it was so important that design was distanced from the designer because this would allow the memorial to transform into an idea that the occupants would not forget. An idea intentionally defined not by the author of the space, but rather by the individual who once occupied the memorial. Therefore, to put it bluntly, this proposal is a failure in regard to this intention, and in a sense, this has become the only intention that really matters. Since, as Virilio would contest, remembering achieves nothing if what is remembered is a lie.
The question, therefore, becomes if the response proposed was the wrong response, then what is the right one? Perhaps, it simply doesn’t exist.

Virilio knew nothing could be done to stop the progression of technology. Therefore, in the same vain, it seems necessary to except the fact that one day the battle of Verdun will be forgotten by conscious minds. Therefore, it appears that the question being asked needs to change.

If an architecture reverts a mass attention back to the Battle of Verdun, then this attention cannot avoid being prescribed an abstracted collective memory, especially as time distances the battle even further. Therefore, the focus of the memorial should not be about stopping the battle of Verdun being forgotten at all. Rather the focus should become solely about creating a memorial that relates as honestly as possible to the realities of war and the losses that it created. Therefore, perhaps it needs to be suggested that it is not an architect’s place to design a memorial to war unless they are capable of expressing the nature of war in a pure and honest way.

Perhaps the argument instead needs to become that the only physical traces that should remain of the Great War are the ones that are already fading into obscurity. That memorials should only be understood as tools which enabled those who directly lost, to move forward with their life. Memorials like Kathe Kollwitz statue of herself and her husband kneeling in the cemetery of her son, asking forgiveness from him, for the mistakes that her generation made (fig 6.1). Because, while these memorials are of course condemned to be forgotten. Those that slow down for long enough to perceive these relics of the past will be equally condemned to see only the grief and suffering that war is.

In this contradiction lies the very essence of Virilio’s work and, perhaps, it is here that some closure can be found in this thesis. From the very beginning, while the question that was being asked was vague, it was always clear that a solution must be found. However, at this point even the certainty of this idea no longer remains, and the question therefore becomes, was the way Virilio’s writing approached, wrong? Perhaps, what should be taken from Virilio, by architects, is not his concerns about the future, because architecture can do little to solve these. But rather his urgency and desire to unrelentingly expose the truths that he perceives around him. The desire not to solve but rather to simply understand the world for what it is. Through this, there is an almost counterintuitively profound sense of humanism that can be found in Virilio’s work. In refusing to propose answers, Virilio’s work also refuses to neglect the inherent lies in that are embodied in any solution. In doing so Virilio reminds his readers the dangers of worshipping an obscured reality. This is a lesson that the French who mourned Verdun only to find themselves in a war even more inhuman only 20 years later should have known. And equally, it is also a lesson that architects need to remember.


---. From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond John Armitage. 1999.


APPENDIX