potential for accident

BEING NUMEROUS

accident (its potential for accident)—it introduces a type of accident, a scale of disaster, into the world that had not existed before. The invention of a technology contains the invention of that technology's severest accident, as well as its minor potential downsides and failings. As Virilio put it, "When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck; when you invent the plane you also invent the plane crash; and when you invent electricity, you invent electrocution ... Every technology carries its own negativity, which is invented at the same time as technical progress." The fact that we presume innovative advancement without damage is hubris worthy of Icarus. As Virilio saw it, technology containing its own accident is "so obvious that being obliged to repeat it shows the extent to which we are alienated by the propaganda of progress."

Virilio's framework rejects a dim binary in which we must deem our current and developing technologies "good" or "bad." Rather, it demands a constant ethical calculus: we must ask of a technological possibility what potential accidents it contains, and whether they are tolerable. It's not always knowable, but it is always askable. And better asked sooner, rather than later. As Virilio pointed out in 1995, high-speed trains were made possible because older rail technologies had produced a form of traffic control that allowed trains to go faster and faster without risking disastrous collisions. The accident had been considered. But, "there is no traffic control system for today's information technology," he wrote then, and again, more recently: "We still don't know what a virtual accident looks like." But he knew this accident would be "ive and and

Newer Older

8th February 2025

Maestoso, doloroso

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a state of constant violence

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