

The Colonization of Time

Technological Conquest □ The Empty Circle □ The Dictatorship of Movement □ An Imperial Mythology □ The War of Time □ Howard Hughes □ The Invalids of Time

These aficionados of movement are the new explorers of the chronological imaginary, settlers of the technological continent.

Just as there was a colonial influence of the means of progressing in space, the *conquista*, colonization, and cultural conquest, there is a colonization, a technical conquest of the means of transportation, of the airplane, of television, etc. I believe that those who volunteer for this kind of trip without destination experience a situation of oneness, of identity ultimately without value, with no other value than to be possessed by one alone. I am one with the world. It's the myth of Jules Verne, but a myth which is no longer in eighty days, which is barely in hours, which is already inscribed in a system of seconds. A day, no longer of passing time, but of speed itself. The day which allows us to witness the other side of the world live on television.

It's the speed of light.

Yes. I believe that it's this kind of day which is tested in that empty circle. That extra day—a kind of false day. The false day of speed that the technology of the Concorde today, and more sophisticated technologies tomorrow, will allow us to achieve.

The false day of speed is one that never quite arrives.

Before, you had to leave in order to arrive. Now things arrive before anyone's leaving. We can wonder what we will wait for when we no longer need to wait in order to arrive. The answer: we'll wait for the coming of what remains. These sentences seem paradoxical, but they aren't: the end of departures, generalized arrivals.... That's what the passengers of the empty circle are trying out, what they're already outlining by hurrying to go nowhere. Of course they still leave and come back for the moment, but they're waiting to be able to arrive without leaving.

Speed is not progression or progress, but the involution of the trip, the "eternal detour" of the same. The will to impotence?

Speed allows for progress in space, only progress in space has been identified with progress in time, in history. And that is really an abuse of language. We know very well that progress in space is not necessarily progress in time. The fact of going faster from Paris to New York doesn't make the exchanges any better. It makes them shorter. But the shortest is not necessarily the best. There again it's the same illusory ideology that when the world is reduced to nothing and we have everything at hand, we'll be infinitely happy.

I believe just the opposite—and this has already been proven—that we'll be infinitely unhappy because we will have lost the very place of freedom, which is expanse. All current technologies reduce expanse to nothing. They produce shorter and shorter distances—a shrinking fabric. Now, a territory without temporality is not a territory, but only the illusion of a territory. It is urgent that we become aware of the political repercussions of such a handling of space-time, for they are fearsome. The field of freedom shrinks with speed. And freedom needs a field. When there is no more field, our lives will be like a terminal, a machine with doors that open and close. A labyrinth for laboratory animals. If the parceling out of territory—of territories of time—is envisioned like that, according to a strict regulation and not a chrono-political understanding, there will be nothing left but absolute control, an immediacy which will be the worst kind of concentration.

Haven't we already witnessed this inversion in the past, with territorial conquest?

As Fuller says, every offensive is exhausted by its very success. We saw this with the Wermacht's advance into the Eastern countries. The advance of logistics, stretching supply routes to the maximum, causes the offensive to wear itself out by its own success. To my mind, something of this nature is happening with the exponential development of vectorization. The infinite acceleration of automotive means: aviation, missiles, the absolute acceleration of railway transportation, the magnetic train, the hydrogen jet, the space shuttle; all of that absolutely exhausts the absolute offensive.

What do you mean exactly by "absolute offensive"?

Absolute offensive is absolute movement in that it is not politically controlled, it is not reasoned out, it is the fruit of technology and nothing else. Technology infinitely promotes speed, and this promotion is absolute depletion to the extent that it's technological progress that decides, and not a rationale. It's not a philosophy of movement. We pass from freedom of movement to tyranny of movement.

The free traffic of goods and persons, the "laissez faire, laissez passer" attitude that defined the space of freedoms—even if they were liberal freedoms, thus not so free after all: would all that become its opposite if pushed to extreme? Are we now condemned to nomadism, at the very moment that we think we can make displacement the most effective means of subversion?

It was believed that freedom of movement led to infinite freedom. I have shown it's not true: there's a dictatorship of movement beyond a certain limit. That's what I mean by exhausted offensive.

It is inversion, its extenuation.

Exhaustion is polar inertia. To the extent that we are in limited surroundings, the exhaustion of absolute movement is practically upon us. Polar inertia means that in not too many years—several decades at most, but certainly less—the world will be so restricted that we will be one on top of the other in time. In space, we'll still be at considerable distances. But audio-visual and automotive relations will have concentrated us into an inertial confinement—which will be the reduction of the world to nothing. Howard Hughes represented this situation very well. It's the breakdown of absolute movement: inertia in a finite world.

The planet is shrinking, but the universe is expanding. Can we make an abstraction of all that surrounds us?

The moon and the stars are all part of the Western imperialist illusion: "The world is not finite, we have conquered America, tomorrow we'll conquer the moon, etc., etc...." It's absurd. Of course there will be people hopping around the stars. But the question now confronts us in geographical limits. If we don't ask it now at least within the limits of the world, exhaustion will be still more absolute.

In other words, the cosmos is a mythology of inertia.

An imperial mythology! The last form of imperialism is to say that the universe remains to be conquered—after having made of world conquest what we did, in other words the depletion of the Third World, etc....

It's an extension of terrestrial war into interplanetary space.

It's an extension of the nineteenth century: an extension into "space." In the nineteenth century, before relativity, one economized time in space. The fourth dimension came very late. Western expansionist policies economize time; the policy-makers don't realize that in geographical space there's a nongeographical time, which is an inertial limit. When there's less than a minute to decide whether or not to push the panic button, we will have reached a limit, which is of the automation of war. The decision for war or peace will belong to an answering machine! Those are time-limits which weren't taken into account in the nineteenth century.

Imperialist designs on the conquest of the star don't take into account the fact that we are limited in time, enclosed in duration as we are limited in space. Modern war has already moved from space into time. It's already a war of time. Of course it will still happen somewhere, but in this place time is much more important than space. Military space is first and foremost technical space, a space of time, a space of the rapidity of attack and reaction. The nineteenth century didn't take time into account, the twentieth is forced to. And the limits are not in space. The time-limit allowed us is draconian, it's time to realize this. We are not at liberty to travel in time.

You often mention Howard Hughes. Do you think he was the first citizen, as well as the first victim, of this capital of dead time?

Howard Hughes is an extraordinary figure because he dreamed of owning the world, and ended up proving that one can become autistic precisely because one owns it all. Everyone thought Howard Hughes was crazy; to my mind, he went crazy from that very sedentariness. He's a man who lived to the limit of polar inertia. He was the first one to close the empty circle, in the thirties, with his Lockheed Cyclone—note that it wasn't a Mystère or a Phantom, it was a *cyclone*.... He came back to the same spot, New York. Howard Hughes was the Lindbergh of the end of the world, a hero of post-modernism. Afterward he invested enormously in aviation, he set up movie studios. He had a hand in everything that appeared at that time having to do with speed, the airplane, and the cinema. He tried to enjoy his omnipresence in the world. First he lived by having several apartments all over the world, each decorated the same way. Every day he was served the same meal,

brought the same paper at the same times, taking into account the differences in time zone. Then that situation became unbearable and he ended up a technological monk in the desert of Las Vegas, without getting out of bed. He spent the last fifteen years of his life shut up in a hotel tower, watching films, always the same ones, especially an old American film on the life of men shut up in "Ice Station Zebra" in the North Pole. He saw it 164 times. I remember this number which shows that for him, inertia had become not only a physical reality (he really was bedridden), but also an object of fascination: he never stopped watching a film that represented exactly that same inertia in a polar city, a city of scientific research, always eating the same dishes, surrounded by the same cars, Chevrolets, as banal as could be. This man had lost the world because he had won it.

Like power, speed must be atoned for. Now, Howard Hughes owed his power to speed. In this, he is doubly exemplary.

What fascinated me about Howard Hughes, more than the man himself, was the fact that he had managed to foreshadow a *mass situation*, the quest for the progress of speed without the knowledge of the engine's exterminating character. Howard Hughes is the metaphor for everything that's now happening in every social situation. He lived inertia and the intensity of supermovement to the death.

The peak of speed is the extermination of space. The end of time is absolute deterritorialization.

Yes, absolute. The tendency is for each place to become rigorously equivalent. And if technological developments continue, we'll have

reached this in two or three generations. Just consider the magnetic train project in the United States, the hydrogen jet and even, very simply, the daily efforts of television—it's already polar inertia. Who are these people fascinated by their electronic windows? There we have a phenomenon of inertia and death on the spot which geographical sedentariness represented for the nomads of the steppes, but which is now situated in time. A sedentariness in dead time.

Movement paralyzes. Movement kills motion. Speed pushes us into a paradoxical space in which all the terms are inverted.

Movement is now only a handicap—a double handicap that we know only too well. A motor-handicap: a man in a car piloted by a driver (until such time as cars are completely automatic, which won't take long) is motor-handicapped. In his own way, he is just as bedridden as Howard Hughes. The man sitting before his television watching the soccer championship live from Santiago in Chile is seeing-handicapped. For example, to be—as we are now—sitting in well-stuffed chairs is a postural comfort. Our muscles are relatively relaxed. They aren't being called upon. It's a postural comfort with respect to the body and to physiological materialness. Now, the prostheses of automotive audio-visual movement create a subliminal comfort. Subliminal, meaning beyond consciousness. They allow a kind of visual—thus physical—hallucination, which tends to strip us of our consciousness. Like the “I run for you” of automobile technology, an “I see for you” is created. The prosthesis grafts itself onto physical movement: it helps us go faster—on a bicycle, a motorbike, in a car. This ends up multiplying the vivacious being, the metaphorical

vehicle that I am: I, pedestrian, passer-by. Subliminal comfort multiplies the speed of consciousness—the speed of the vivacity of reflexion. This multiplication can be pleasant in relative acceleration, that is, within the boundaries of my consciousness; but these boundaries are very narrow, and if, as in certain cases of “invasion of privacy,” someone should use speed to go beyond this, I am conditioned. This in fact is what is called subliminal advertising and, of course, propaganda directed at entire populations. You see an image of which you are not at all conscious. It imposes itself on you without your being able to detect it, because it goes too fast. The prosthesis is completely alienating.