Nevertheless, my experience at the Vincennes Experimental University Center—with the clash between anarchists, Maoists, Trotskyites, lined-up Communists, and traditional Socialists on the one side and simple students attempting to understand all the political and cultural implications of their time on the other—influenced me in such a way that even in a complex question, such as the relationship between art and technology leading to an open-ended virtuality, I take up the case of the latter: the humanist case, which seems to me to prevail in the long run.

Nechvatal: Your spirit differs radically from what I see as typical of French apocalyptic-chic negativism. Take for example recent proclamations by the skeptical—now famously reactionary—technophobe Paul Virilio concerning virtuality (not to mention the eminent Monsieur Baudrillard). Is it your involvement with actual individual artists and their work that makes the positive difference?

Popper: Yes, my personal commitment and working method explain why I have such a different attitude to the art-technology problem than Virilio or Baudrillard. This commitment and method is closely connected with my encounters with artists and their work—and my status as a nonmainstream art historian.

Indeed, when I describe myself as an art historian, I simplify matters—just as I do when I meet someone in the street who asks me who I am and what I do. I thus tend to avoid misunderstanding when I say that I am an aesthete, an art theorist with a degree in the science of art, an art exhibition organizer, a teacher, or an art critic—although I am a little bit all of these things! This personal profile is in fact directly associated with my working method, which establishes the closest relationship possible with the artist. I have applied this method of affinity as I wrote art books, taught art in an experimental university, and organized exhibitions that had an impact on the public awareness of avant-garde artistic issues. This explains also my positive attitude as an alternative art historian who takes a completely different stance than does Paul Virilio. His attitude is based on the assumption that accidents and other catastrophic events are inevitable and can only be recorded by the artists who are unable to propose other possibilities or virtualities. According to him, the work of these artists cannot have any impact politically or intellectually on the course of events, which is of course not at all my opinion.

Perhaps I should add that already in the 1960s I had discovered the existence of several hundred artists in many different countries who largely ignored each other’s work, but who all pursued aesthetic goals with the aid of real or virtual movement and natural or artificial light. One can of course argue that there was something arbitrary in my assumption that their work had sufficient matters in common to be
classed together under the term kinetic (or luminokinetic) art. But my way of proceeding was based on some ideas that were in the air at the time, which justified, in my mind, this kind of procedure. Of course, many of the artists, if not all, were not quite satisfied with this classification, but made use of the term. Some did categorically reject being called kinetic artists. Even though any kind of classification can irritate artists (or others), I think nevertheless that it is necessary to proceed in this way if one wants to situate the work of an artist with regard to timely ideas—thus showing, among other things, the work’s involvement with these timely issues and the way this work engages or transcends them.

After my crise de conscience regarding motion and light, I have tried similar operations based on the assumption that there was a significant relationship to be analyzed between two aesthetic ideas current at the time: artistic endeavors to create works on an environmental scale and spectator participation. This gave rise to Art—Action and Participation, for which I was again in touch with a considerable number of creators—this time also belonging to other disciplines than the visual arts. A similar procedure led me to write Art of the Electronic Age. This type of procedure is also the basis of my present research into virtuality, research founded on the hypothesis that a new departure in technological art has recently been made which can be termed virtual art. For this exploration I have established relations and opened discussions with artists whose inquiries take place within the categories of digital-based projects and environments, multimedia offline compositions, and online works in which interactivity and multisensoriality play a more radical role than before. Here again I fear that some artists will object to being called virtual artists (or artists practicing virtuality), but I still feel that a nonarbitrary classification is necessary and can be regarded as a first step toward a combined mastering of the aesthetic problems of virtual creation.

**Nechvatal:** Do you think that virtual art will continue to unfold under its own weight from the point of view of extended and connected virtuality, with the next set of questions necessarily having to do with how the virtual itself is to be understood and constituted in the future? Or do you see a reactionary resistance to emergent virtualism on the horizon?

**Popper:** I cannot really foresee the future of virtualism. Nevertheless, I have a feeling that political reactions in fields such as ecology and corresponding scientific and technical discoveries made in contemporary and future biological research will alter the general context. The result will necessitate a readapting of the individual to a new synthesized environmental condition. Art research will no doubt both anticipate and assume this situation—and perhaps find a new term for this advanced virtualism.

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