Guest Editorial

Interality and Us

This collection is a follow-up to the seven-article special section of *China Media Research* on interology that was published in April 2015 (Vol. 11, No. 2). We thank Michael Dorland for graciously offering the space to make this collective enunciation possible, and Simon Vodrey and Marilyn Bittman for working diligently to keep us on track.

In a nutshell, interality (間性) as an orientation is an East Asian predisposition and a Western rediscovery. Its articulation as a concept has been in-formed at a subliminal level by the electric and electronic milieu that has been working humanity over for more than a century, and foreshadowed by developments in philosophy, art, modern science, mythology, cultural anthropology, music, literature, literary criticism, psychology, neurophysiology, aesthetics, ethics, media theory, theoretical biology, feminism, and ecological thinking, et cetera.

In the physical world, the ultimate difference between materials, such as that between diamond and graphite, is actually form, which is a matter of interality, or patterns thereof. The word "information," which has "form" in it, is intrinsically interesting. "Information sustains order" is more or less a tautological statement—a useful one nevertheless. To translate the point, patterns of interality make the world the way it is. Persistence in such patterns makes the world intelligible, recognizable, and more or less predictable. Humans' aversion to entropy or appreciation of negentropy all boils down to a will to form. Which is to say, humans are invested in particular patterns of interality.

Once upon a time, information was a rare commodity and travelled at a much slower pace. The process of information encountering other information to produce new information happened only serendipitously and sporadically. New patterns of interality emerged at a pace that made the world moderately fresh but largely familiar. The process has since been accelerating. The synthesis of new information is now conducted strategically and automatically. It has been industrialized, and then computerized. Since behind information resides the will to form and re-form, at some point, there is no telling the difference between re-ordering and de-ordering. The proliferation or overabundance of information renders the world plastic and motivates an interest in "chaosmos." Interality—in the sense of the patterned physical (and extra-physical) bonds that hold the world together—is up for grabs. The world has turned into a Lego game, so it seems; interality has become *the* problematic.

We are witnessing a paradigm shift from sedentariness to neo-nomadism, from solids to micro-interalities (微細間性). Sedentary people are defined by definability itself. They live within structures or relatively stable and predictable interalities. Neo-nomads are shape-shifters and their life is characterized by continuous modulations

and constant adaptation to the shifting codes that bear upon their mode of being. The interalities they face are fluid, if not gaseous. The Lego pieces, the calculi (i.e., pebbles), the bits, the digits, and the pixels—as products of calculation—are subject to reintegration into recognizable shapes and forms through a process of computation. These shapes and forms are programmed to mutate or metamorphose. Everything feels like a sand dune, a swarm of bees, a flock of birds, or a mosaic that transmutes into a different pattern in the next moment when all the pieces flip, creating a new configuration of interalities. For good or for ill, neo-nomadism and cybernetic control are simply flip sides of the same coin. The smart, adaptive mosaic mesh works somewhat like the Lilliputians' net and renders us less human. A boon or a bane, the return of interality is not our choice. The time is ripe. Humans are environmentally conditioned to be sensitive to constantly shifting interalities.

In the long history of humanity, Western civilization as we know it, which is based on alphanumeric codes, feels like an interlude, a deviance. If the Chinese character "間" (the etymology of interality) is ideographic in nature, then so is the new digital code, which is made up of zeros and ones, or yin and yang. By their very nature, ideographs are imagistic, suggestive, ambiguous, and polysemous. As far as meaning is concerned, all they have recourse to is the interality, or interplay, between their constituent elements. The ascendance of technical images at the expense of the phonetic alphabet feels like an ideographic turn, which is arguably a special instance of the interological turn.

Imagism as a poetic movement simply lays bare the paradigm shift; it is also a retrieval of the Chinese linguistic sensibility, which dates further back to a pre-linguistic period—that of the immemorial *I Ching* (*Yi Jing* 易經). If one knows how to do the conversion, an imagist poem is the equivalent of a Zen drawing, or even a single Chinese character—at least in theory. In the realm of filmmaking, the discovery of the Kuleshov Effect and montage was long foreshadowed by a basic linguistic fact: the interality, or interplay, between Chinese characters. In this sense, to say that reading a Chinese text feels like watching a motion picture is to commit anachronism—the order needs to be reversed. But the interological sentiment is right-minded regardless. For our purposes, to claim that the new digital code is ideographic in nature is to imply that the digital age is one that foregrounds interality.

Vilém Flusser (2011a), the late Czech-Brazilian media theorist, teaches us that it is fruitful to bring quantum theory and neurophysiology together. If we think about it, interality is actually central to both. Quantum leaps take place across intervals in the astronomical numbers of nerve synapses that constitute the brain. What the brain registers as a sensation, an affect, or an idea is nothing but a statistical summary of quantum leaps. "What we call perception turns out to be a summarizing of quantum leaps into a representation" (p. 143). Zen meditation, by the way, lowers the threshold of perception. The opening of *satori* (開悟, i.e., sudden, total awakening) is nothing but a mental catastrophe, which happens at a *singular* moment when an astronomical number of quantum leaps are unleashed in the Zen practitioner's brain simultaneously.

But Flusser (2011b) is more interested in a smart society than a smart individual. The kind of society he envisions is telematic, dialogic, playful, adventurous, negen-

tropic, and creative. These adjectives all belong with or flow from interality. In such a society, everybody works with everybody else via telematics to form a global super-brain. Individuals will be the equivalents of nerve synapses. "The superbrain will play internally, it will dream – a universal spectacle as a montage game of tiny parts, a black box composed entirely of darkened rooms, a universal orchestra made up entirely of chamber musicians" (p. 162). The opening of *satori* on the part of the superbrain will be a matter of a global cerebral orgasm, a catastrophic event induced in a maximally interological way. This vision makes Flusser sound like a sanguine futurologist more or less unconcerned with the dark belly of the telematic society, i.e., cybernetic control and machinic enslavement. He is more into the rapturous sensation of freedom that comes with the proliferation of mediated interalities. It is the interologist's job, however, to problematize interality and do so adequately.

The above is a more or less Flusserian account of the historical juncture and existential ground that have called the concept "interality" into being. Next let me say a few words about each article in this collection. The readers are invited to discover on their own the intertextuality and resonances among the articles.

Geling Shang's article on the *Yi Jing* is a philosophical examination of the interological origin and inclination of the Chinese way of thinking. The change-based *Weltanschauung* anticipated the notion of dependent arising (緣起) and the "Doctrine of the Void" (性空論) found in Zen Buddhism.

Kenneth Surin's article is a sophisticated engagement with the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The subject matter of the piece is the immanent beyond that constitutes a milieu for the in-between. The series of terms listed toward the end constitutes a map with which the reader could re-examine the works of Deleuze and Guattari through the lens of interality.

Peter Zhang's article deploys interology as a mode of inquiry to explore the affinities and resonances between Deleuze's philosophy and the Zen sensibility. It is preoccupied with what Deleuze calls "practical philosophy," or philosophy as equipment for living.

Maurice Charland's article foregrounds the constitutive effect of jazz. It problematizes the interality or dichotomy between subject and object and gestures toward the necessity of recuperating the middle voice. The ethos is no different than that of the Zen-spirited master archer invoked in Zhang's article.

Tatsuya Higaki's article offers a critical evaluation of Testurō Watsuji's theory of the two-person community and gives the reader a tangible sense of this Kyoto School philosopher's take on interality/*ma*.

Jean-François Vallée's article offers a media ecological account of the intellectual history of dialogue and uses two intriguing examples to illustrate the hostility of the "Gutenberg parenthesis" toward the dialogic, interalogical mode of writing, thinking, and being.

LuMing Mao's article applies the notion of interality to the field of comparative rhetoric. It makes a case for the art of recontexualization with a view to challenging Euro-American-centrism in comparative rhetorical studies.

The article coauthored by **Hui Wu** and **C. Jan Swearingen** uses interality as a key to unlock the rhetorical wisdom of *Guiguzi* (China's earliest treatise on the art of persuasion). The article constitutes an intervention into the reception of *Guiguzi* among Western comparative rhetoricians.

References

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