

Preface: Interality Studies - An Adventure in Liminal Space-Time

Peter Zhang, Grand Valley State University, USA



[Peter Zhang. Preface: Interality Studies - An Adventure in Liminal Space-Time. China Media Research, 15(4):1-5] 1

A few years back, something improbable happened: after a long period of gestation in a virtual *khora* made up of an intercerebral mental field, the concept of interality 間性 leaped into existence from the Zwischenraum between Eastern and Western philosophies. Since the term was coined by Geling Shang around 2012, a series of foundational texts have appeared, most of which are in English and can be found in the following special section or issues guest-edited by Peter Zhang: *China Media Research* 11.2 (2015), *Canadian Journal of Communication* 41.3 (2016), *China Media Research* 13.4 (2017). Three international symposiums on interality studies have been held, one at Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids, Michigan in June 2017, another at the Communication University of China, Beijing in June 2018, and the third at Guangxi University for Nationalities, Nanning, Guangxi in June 2019. A rapidly expanding community of co-explorers from multiple disciplines has coalesced around the concept.

We see interality-oriented philosophy (IOP) or interology (also spelt as “interalogy,” the Greek-derived literal equivalent being “metaxology”) as a philosophy of the future – a future that is already in the present. Pioneering explorations in philosophy (Husserl, Buber, Heidegger, Flusser, Deleuze, Guattari, Irigaray, Derrida, Serres, Kristeva, Jullien, Desmond, Barad), literature (Symbolism, Burroughs, Butor), art (Pointillism, montage, the discovery of antiformal), the sciences (quantum theory, neurophysiology, ecology, anthropology), and music (Debussy, Cage), along with dramatic transformations in our technologically mediated psychosomatic habitat, have paved the way for the eventual emergence of interality studies. As a threshold-crossing event, the shift from an entity/being orientation toward an interality/interbeing orientation is both an Orientalization and a return. Viewed from the vantage

point of the future, the reign of ontology will most probably look like an unfortunate interruption.

This shift holds the promise of resolving a lot of the practical and theoretical dilemmas humanity has been perplexed with under an entity/being orientation. The biggest promise will be the eventual affirmation of difference, diversity, interdependence, and the life impulse itself. If the process of differentiation is a direct manifestation of *élan vital* or the life impulse, then interality (in the double sense of unoccupied niches in the ecosystem and contrapuntal, symbiotic relationships between life forms) is the ultimate motivator of differentiation. Interality calls upon, affirms, and furthers the life impulse (Zhang & Tian, 2018). Therein reside the ethical undertones and vitalistic nature of interality studies. The whole notion of dilemma dissolves the moment we comprehend the Buddhist logic of tetralemma, which takes us to the spiritual realm 境界 of “neither... nor...” or beyondness.

If we are thoroughgoing in our embracing of an interality orientation, we will rise above and go beyond our narrowly human-centered perspective and recuperate our long dormant cosmic consciousness. Interality studies will be nothing short of such an awakening on the part of humanity. Its ultimate motive is spiritual, rather than technical or professional, let alone profiteering. Eventually, the word “interality” needs to be forgotten in the same way the finger pointing at the moon needs to be looked past. It is just another *upaya* 方便 or expedient means improvised by a spiritual-minded lover of wisdom to shock humanity awake from its karmically induced collective trance. Once we reach the other bank, we let go of the raft 濟岸棄筏. Once we get the intended effect, we let go of the word 得意忘言. We need to adopt a pragmatic attitude toward the concept of interality and see it as a heuristic rather than something to cling to. Its

serviceability resides in the field of virtualities it opens up.

In the 20th century, the term ontology underwent a casuistic stretching in the hands of philosophers like Heidegger. Put otherwise, ontology went through a degree of interology-becoming from within. Or, one could argue that late Heidegger went through a becoming-Oriental in the interzone between him and the Kyoto School. The casuistic stretching reached a bursting point in the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari, whose attention diverged from “to be” to “AND,” “inter-,” “between,” “alliance,” “symbiosis,” “sympathy,” “assemblage,” “rhizome,” and so on. They see in Anglo-American literature the impulse and knowhow to “overthrow ontology” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25). Their work gravitates toward interology. The word “interology” was almost at the tips of their tongues toward the end of the first chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*. Examples of interbeing abound in nature and culture: the wasp and the orchid, linked by the desire for intensities; the strings of the viola d’amore, assembled on the basis of sympathy (in the Greek sense of the word, “vibration-with”).

The concept of the rhizome is in perfect accord with the spirit of interology, which is “throughness” 通. The myriad things prosper when there is throughness. This state of affairs is diagrammed by the 31st hexagram of the *Yijing* (*I Ching*), “Xian” 咸, which is translated as “Reciprocity,” “Influence,” “Mutual Influence,” and “Affect and Affection,” etc. *Xian* is the law of the cosmos. Throughness is precisely what the life impulse desires and aspires after. The schemes contrived by humans often block throughness and hinder the natural correspondence and contrapuntality among the myriad things. The notion of the rhizome entails an ecological sensibility. So does interology. Electronically tagging animals on the verge of extinction will be a futile effort as long as we keep on doing things to disrupt their relational fabric. The notion of interality bears upon the construction of an ecological civilization and the practicing of ecocriticism. Our ecological crisis calls for a radical shift in our Weltanschauung. The shift from traditional ontology to interology may well be the answer. That does not mean we can wish away the technosphere anytime soon. Rather, we should take it even more seriously. Interology entails seeing humanity and technology as co-functioning and coevolving elements of assemblages.

The idea of interality directly applies to the brain, which, like society, is not a tree but a rhizome with a mosaic structure. The brain is to the mind as substance or embodiment 體 is to function or enactment 用. Zen practice lowers one’s pessimal threshold of perception so one is capable of micropereceptions. Put otherwise, it sharpens one’s senses. What we take to be the world is

actually our *sense* of or *relation* to it. Therefore, Zen practice directly modulates our world. The beginner’s mind 初心 is another fruit of Zen practice. It is uncluttered, unbiased, open, empty, receptive, responsive, infinitely vast and infinitely fast, reflecting but not keeping, experiencing but not possessing. In his semi-autobiographical novel, Henry Miller expresses a yearning for it: “I want to become more and more childish and to pass beyond childhood in the opposite direction. I want to go exactly contrary to the normal line of development, pass into a superinfantile realm of being [...]” (1961, p. 139). A precursor of this sentiment can be found in the tenth chapter of the *Dao De Jing*. Pure interality or pure virtuality is the nature of the mind. Its voidness makes it virtuous. Intellectual acquisitions load the mind down and block its throughness or communion with the cosmos. No wonder Laozi points out that the scholar acquires day by day, whereas the Daoist eliminates day by day. Flusser invites us to see contemporary society as a superbrain engaged in a continuous game of chamber music, which involves humans and nonhuman intelligent agents alike. In our networked society, the idea of intercerebrality is not an abstract concept but a lived experience, an immediate sensation. Intercerebrality at once gives us the giddiness of creative engagement and the tediousness of mutual distraction. Chamber music takes preparedness and competence on the part of the participants.

The interzone between different languages is full of problems and potentials. Interologists are well aware of the former but particularly interested in the latter. People tend to bemoan untranslatability and mistranslation. But untranslatability can be very revealing. The absence of an equivalent term in the target language precisely indicates that people wielding and wielded by the source language have a unique way of grasping the world, or perceive a pattern unsuspected by those speaking and spoken by the target language. A bane for the translator may well be a boon for the comparative philosopher. In the case of Kafka’s work, Deleuze would say, the syntax is the message. Mistranslation is a given. Kafka’s syntax itself is an outcome of interlingual involution between German and Yiddish, and may serve to put other languages to flight. A spiritual practitioner may awaken thanks to a mistranslated, misspelled, or misread line. If we hold an anti-Platonistic, sophisticated, Deleuzian, Certeauan, Flusserian, pragmatic attitude, we will be less squeamish and see mistranslation as a way of enriching the original work, or as a way of pulling off the negentropic, informative, and improbable. From this viewpoint, the most faithful translation is also the most stagnant. One thing it upholds and reinforces is the translator’s own authority. This is not to deny the utility of a relatively literal style of translation as one among a whole range of legitimate translations.

The richness of a text is a function of the size of its virtual double. The virtual double is plural by nature. The more intervals, leaps, voids, omissions, ambiguities, and indeterminacies there are in a text, the bigger its virtual double. Empress Wu Zetian's epitaph is made up of pure virtuality since it is wordless. Christmas Humphreys articulates the logic quite well: "[...] the part is greater than the whole. For the whole is complete, which is finite; the part is unfinished, and that is infinite" (1949, pp. 109-110). Humphreys's formulation implies the inestimable significance of what is missing. The missing link, by the way, is deemed as the greatest discovery of the nineteenth century in the West. People in the so-called Far East, however, have been aware of this logic all along. As Laozi puts it, supreme integrity leaves the impression of unfinishedness 大成若缺. Maintaining the rich virtuality of a text may well be the biggest challenge for the translator. Putting an ancient Chinese text into English is often a process of making the text more specific and less suggestive. The degree of ambiguity and polysemy or the amount of virtuality tends to decrease. The concept of interality holds the promise of making translation studies more philosophical. On a separate note, reworking one's own writings in a different language allows one to think up new thoughts. Each language has its own affordances and blind spots. Polyglotism is indispensable for doing comparative philosophy. The introduction of Buddhism to China was a story of localization, hybridization, involution, transfiguration, and divergence. The emergence of Chan from the interzone between Buddhism and Daoism marked the becoming-other of Buddhism, just as Kafka's writing marked the becoming-other of German. As a parting note, translation means more than translation between languages. Swordsmanship lends itself to translation into wild cursive 狂草 calligraphy, or the other way around. Music can be translated into dance. Literature regularly gets translated into life, just as life often gets sublimated into literature.

If the translator inhabits a linguistic contact zone, then the anthropologist inhabits a cultural contact zone. Anthropological discourse does not simply describe difference, alterity, or Otherness. Rather, it invents the latter. To be more accurate, the Other is the anthropologist's projection. Phenomenology teaches us that observation interferes with the observed. Objectivity is unobtainable and fallacious. In the final analysis, it is no more than a style of presentation. What ethnography really documents is the ethnographer's *relation* to the cultural phenomena being documented. Nowadays, old-fashioned anthropology is no longer practicable. Anthropology is becoming increasingly self-conscious and self-reflexive. There is a prevalent tendency to euphemize subjects as collaborators, and to turn the anthropological gaze backwards and inwards. The obsolescence of traditional anthropology does not mean

cultural contact zones are any less interesting or fertile. A training in anthropology can make one more sensitive, aware, and resourceful when it comes to inhabiting and navigating cultural contact zones. For our purposes, the question is, can we imagine an interological anthropology, i.e., one that studies interbeing, co-functioning, coadaptation, and coevolution, one that is no longer anthropocentric but takes humans as constituent elements of assemblages? Is there something about the human condition, such as our interlockedness with human and nonhuman agents, that makes the interological turn in anthropology inevitable? Now is the time to pose and think through such questions.

A few words need to be said about the subtitle, which points in the direction of freedom, creativity, and becoming. A stroll with a Zen-minded companion in the local Japanese garden on a sunny day in April when the cherry blossoms are starting to bloom would be a perfect experiential exemplum of "an adventure in liminal space-time." Zen dharma, let us remember, is non-dualistic. The point is that liminal space-time or interchronotopia is not supposed to be other than regular space-time but at one with it. To be in a liminal state of mind everywhere and at all times: that is the ultimate Zen test, and the tone of post-*satori* experience. Life, however, is a matter of on and off, or mode switching. Without the numerous picnolesies that occur throughout the day, one wouldn't have the sensation of being alive. Interality-oriented philosophy is a philosophy of praxis 實踐哲學. Interality studies needs to be conducted in a way that enhances life. Its praxis is the art of life, or the knowhow to live the extraordinary in the ordinary, the liminal in the quotidian, the virtual in the actual.

Liminal space-time is where becomings happen, where Deleuzian events emerge, where the present lives out its relation with the future. As such, it is where the stakes are and where power seeks to re-inscribe itself. By provisionally suspending and reversing the social order, the carnival serves to reinforce it. Intriguing as Victor Turner's notion of liminality is, the one who goes through the rite of passage is deterritorialized temporarily, only to be reterritorialized into the social fabric soon afterwards. The point of the ritual process is precisely to set aside a liminal space-time to ritualistically purge the excess and unruliness of the initiate. Guattari points out that adolescence "is the entrance into a sort of extremely troubled interzone where all kinds of possibilities, conflicts and sometimes extremely difficult and even dramatic clashes suddenly appear" (2009, p. 132). Adolescence is a fertile ground for becomings. "But, almost immediately, everything closes up, and a whole series of institutionalized social controls and the internalization of repressive fantasies march in to capture and neutralize the new virtualities" (Guattari, 2009, p. 132). Liminal space-time is necessarily a site of contestation between becoming and control, resistance

and power (note that resistance is active and precedes power, which is reactive), excorporation and reincorporation, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, the fugitive and the centripetal, lines of flight and apparatuses of capture, so to speak.

Interology invites us to view the world in relational terms. The five-element theory of Chinese philosophy is a species of interology. So is the philosophy behind the *Yijing*, which, along with the five-element theory, provides the rationale for Daoist internal alchemy. The basic reasoning of the latter goes as follows: the heart's Fire by nature flares upward and, if left unchecked, scorches the lungs; weakened lungs result in increased acidity in the body, forcing the kidneys to work harder to get rid of the surplus acidity; internal alchemy is a matter of driving up the Water of the kidneys while keeping down the Fire of the heart so the two could intermingle and benefit each other, leading to the crystallization of elixir; this configuration is the configuration of life; it is diagrammed by the After Completion hexagram, which is made up of Water over Fire (Zhang & Tian, 2018).

As with the human body, so with the territorial body, namely, our planet, which is now possessed by the demon of Kapital, and the attendant greediness, stupidity, and haughtiness on the part of its human captives. If the Fire of industrial production and exploitative consumption is left untamed, the lungs of the planet (i.e., forests) will be scorched, leading to increased acidity in the atmosphere and soil, higher temperatures, and further shrinking of glaciers. This kind of Fire is debilitating. It's high time that planet earth practiced its own kind of internal alchemy, thereby rejuvenating itself. Planetary internal alchemy entails that environmental conservation (symbolized by the Water trigram) be elevated above industrial production and exploitative consumption (symbolized by the Fire trigram) so it could counterbalance and sustain the latter, thus creating the conditions for the crystallization of the elixir of immortality on the part of the earth. If the natural kidneys (the so-called kidneys in traditional Chinese medicine, by the way, are not self-standing organs but a system that functions in function of other systems) of the planet are irrevocably damaged, no artificial kidneys will save it as there is no place other than its own body where it can piss away the surplus acidity. Developing forestry while downsizing industry and the excessive consumption that drives and is driven by it seems to be the only way out, as far as our extended metaphor indicates.

Chinese words store Chinese people's peculiar ways of experiencing and coming to terms with recurrent situations in the world. In the Chinese imagination, the dragon 龍 image is conjured up as a shorthand way of summarizing natural processes of rain making. This way of thinking is more metaphorical than superstitious, holistic rather than analytic. The idea of the dragon exemplifies the human motive behind naming: humanity

comes up with proper names to symbolically manage forces of which it cannot take account otherwise. Literally speaking, "the territorial body" is a body without organs (BwO). The term itself betrays an anthropomorphic impulse on our part. However, if we are privy to the genealogy 發生論 of language, we will realize that there is no difference in kind between calling a system of bodily processes a kidney and a system of planetary processes a kidney. There is nothing intrinsically right or wrong about applying the five-element theory to the territorial body, or to the Anthropocene (the fact that "Anthropocene" is treated as a proper noun precisely illustrates our reasoning above). What matters is whether this move could help us to get a better handle on the relations or intra-actions (to invoke Karen Barad's notion) among the subsystems making up the larger open system. When we are dealing with something as enormous and complex as the Anthropocene, the five-element theory (which, it is worth reiterating, is a species of interology) as a heuristic gives us a huge advantage over, say, analytic philosophy. The five-element theory, let us remember, is a Daoist theory.

Has the kritikal (the letter "k" here is a rhetorical gesture that invokes ancient Greek practical wisdom although the formulation here points in the direction of ancient Chinese systems-theoretic thinking) moment come for humanity to go through a Daoist becoming? Interology does have a Daoist inclination and emphasis, just as Daoism has an interological disposition. To borrow the vocabulary of Deleuze and Guattari, Daoism constitutes a minor Weltanschauung and entails a minor science, a minor medicine, and a minor way of life, which may well be the way of life of a people to come. Insofar as Daoism coaches an attitude of being in accord with nature, humanity's line of flight from the deteriorating Anthropocene may well reside in a collective internalization of Daoism as a life philosophy, and the attendant overcoming of neoliberalism as a hegemonic life script. A Gramscian passive revolution is in order, so to speak. To be at one with the Dao is to be at one with interality, and to live in the right Way. This is no mere tautology but implies the ultimate *gongfu*, which is a matter of intuitively grasping the Dao and becoming a decorous vehicle for its virtue (i.e., *de*). There is a difference in kind between Daoist *dao-de* 道德 and Platonic morality, to say nothing of the various reifications of the latter. Interality or *jian* 間 is not an average. Rather, it involves "a qualitative calculus of the optimum" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 364-365). At this level of understanding, the distinction between *phronesis*, *prajna*, the mind of Dao, *gongfu*, and the interological sensibility simply evaporates. Insofar as humanity at large has not yet reached this level of understanding, the concept of interality will remain useful as a *upaya* as humanity tries to extricate itself from the karmic energy that drives it from folly to folly.

Can we envision a world to come that rests upon interology as distinguished from traditional Western ontology? Are we ready to elaborate interology as a (practical) philosophy of the future? Do we have the desire, will, and wisdom to recuperate a future that preexisted traditional Western ontology both logically and chronologically? As indicated before, the concept of interality has been called into being by a larger technological, existential, and philosophical milieu. To use Marshall McLuhan's logic, the ground precedes the figure; effects, which are perceived, always precede causes, which are conceived (McLuhan & Carson, 2003, pp. 302-303). There is something critical, world historical, and untimely (in a Nietzschean-Deleuzian sense) about the return of interality and the emergence of interology in the post-everything era. To elaborate interology is to take on the entire history of Eastern and Western philosophies, dive into the bottomless interval, and engage in deep play. Looking forward, one cannot help being carried away with the giddiness of adventure.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks Randy Lumpp, Robert MacDougall, WANG Guangming 王光明, and Blake Seidenshaw for reading a version of the piece and offering valuable feedback. He also thanks William E. Connolly, Stephen C. Rowe, Louise Burchill, Rebecca Hill, and Scott Welsh for sharing their impressions. On a separate note, a comprehensive article along the lines of "The Idea of Interality: A Westside Story" has been evolving in a virtual guise for quite a while. It is about time to actualize

it. It bears mentioning that François Jullien's article, "Between Is Not Being," which was presented by Peter Zhang at the Symposium held in Nanning in June 2019, foregrounds the Chinese ideograph 間 directly and belongs with this collection in spirit. Last but not least, the 4th International Symposium on Interality Studies will be hosted by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) in partnership with Grand Valley State University (GVSU) in 2020, with details to be announced.

Correspondence to:

Peter Zhang 張先廣
School of Communications
Grand Valley State University
273 LSH, 1 Campus Dr
Allendale, MI 49401, USA
Email: zhangp@gvsu.edu

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09/30/2019