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Rethinking Interology with Flusser

"Relations, fields, the ecosystem, gestalt, and structure are replacing object and process, dialectic and project, once and for all."
Flusser (2014, p. 18)

"'I' am the sum of my concrete relationships (a father, a writer, somebody's friend, a taxpayer); if all these relationships are removed, nothing will remain."
Flusser (1987, p. 98)

Arguably interality is the primary preoccupation of Vilém Flusser, the phenomenological-minded media philosopher. This exploration is an attempt to enrich and extend our understanding of interology by foregrounding interological motifs in Flusser's work. The following points will be spelt out. First, Flusser's notion of dialogue as the locus of negentropy or creativity constitutes a strong defense of interology. Flusser turns the term negentropy, which is proper to thermodynamics, toward information theory to mean the creation of new information and the negation of decay. Second, his notion of leisure as the seat of wisdom is an affirmation of interality (in the sense of idleness 閒). Third, Flusser indicates that interality with robots and artificial intelligences will characterize the human condition in the near future, when the interplay between human and artificial intelligences will maximize the creation of new information and result in a passionate state of mind proper to the global super brain, relative to which each individual brain will be the equivalent of a chamber musician contributing to a collective game of interplay, interanimation, and co-creation. Fourth, Flusser indicates that Western civilization as we know it, which rests upon the alphanumeric code and the attendant linear sensibility, will give way to the universe of technical images, which is built upon a dot-interval code. The vocabulary of quantum theory, statistics, probability, cybernetics, and game theory will become increasingly relevant to life in the digital era. Linear thinking will yield to ideographic thinking. As Flusser has it, "The rational, causal, and definitional way of thinking will yield to a thought field that is relational and probabilistic" (2003, p. 53). In a sense, besides the sixty-four hexagrams of the immemorial *Yi Jing (I Ching)*, mosaic and pointillism have long foreshadowed the advent of the digital age. For our purposes,

it bears pointing out that ideographic thinking is a species of interological thinking. In a sense, alphabetic literacy inculcated a sedentary, possessive mentality and an ontological orientation, whereas the current digital code has retrieved and reactivated a nomadic, aesthetic sensibility and an interological orientation. Fifth, from a comparative linguistic perspective, a tentative correspondence can be established between fusional languages 融合型语言 and ontology, isolating languages 孤立型语言 and interology, and agglutinative languages 粘着型语言 and nomadology, respectively. Flusser's work implies that interology is not a regression to the obsolescent past; rather it will help humanity to jump across the abyss it is faced with – the abyss which separates us from post-historical existence – and reach the other bank. The emergence of interology has its world historical necessity. The time is ripe. The effects of interology have long preceded its formulation as a philosophical vision. There is nothing culturally narcissistic about interology. It is not a simple reiteration or reinterpretation of ancient Chinese philosophy. Rather, it is a philosophy of the future.

The article proceeds with the assumption that there are as many interologies as there are interality-oriented thinkers to think with. Rethinking interology with Flusser holds the promise of actualizing a whole ensemble of virtualities immanent in the terministic field of the polysemous concept. Interology Flusser-style comes from a vast intellectual horizon, offers an at once exhilarating and disturbing ethical prognosis, and leaves us right in the middle of the digital sandstorm. It also brings to the fore our positionality vis-à-vis all the programmed and programming apparatuses and nonhuman intelligent agents flourishing around us, and the bedazzling, hyperreal digital doubles of everything, including ourselves. As a thinker committed to human freedom, Flusser invites us to prepare ourselves rigorously, self-consciously, and playfully for a ludic mode of existence. He cautions us against a specific stripe of fascism, functionalism, and totalitarianism, not as a mere doomsayer, but as a well-equipped futurologist whose thought can help steer humanity toward a dialogic, creative, negentropic, celebratory mode of existence, mediated as it is for the most part, which involves coexistence with our artificially intelligent counterparts. Although he uses the word "ontology" (the Greek *onta* means the "things that are") repeatedly, although fusional languages are intrinsically interology-averse, his writing makes interology feel like a matter of course. In his vision for the telematic society, being as interbeing comes off as an immediate sensation. Be it in cyberspace or face to face, the I and the Thou co-arise as a function of one another. On the other hand, as with butterfly and potato, so with humanity and technology. Wherever we cast our glance, we see interdependence, co-functioning, mutual adaptation, and coevolution. Overall, Flusser's work foregrounds interality and affirms interology. For the sake of flow and fluidity,

the following discussion adopts a *taiji*-style, rhapsodic, pointillist textual strategy, partly to involve the reader.

A few words about Flusser's intellectual personality are in order here, especially as it relates to the idea of interology as a Weltanschauung and as a philosophy of praxis. Flusser was a Czech-born Brazilian philosopher and media theorist of Jewish descent who spent the last two decades of his life mostly in France. As a polyglot, Flusser wrote in Portuguese, German, French, and English but Czech was his mother tongue. Inhabiting the space of interlinguality allowed him to rework and develop many of his writings in a different language. Deeply invested in existentialism and phenomenology, he was a cautiously enthusiastic futurologist of the telematic society, i.e., a society of mediated, networked intersubjectivity, which holds the promise for human creativity to come into its own. Familiar with Marx's work, Flusser sees the individual and society alike as abstractions from concrete relations. If the ultimate good of communism is human freedom, then there is something communistic about Flusser's vision for the telematic society, which is veritably a global superbrain (Flusser, 2011b, p. 90). As Toni Negri points out in a conversation with Gilles Deleuze, "In the Marxist utopia of the *Grundrisse*, communism takes precisely the form of a transversal organization of free individuals built on a technology that makes it possible" (Deleuze, 1995, p. 174). Flusser sees a similitude between the structure of the brain and that of society, both of which have a mosaic quality. The interneuronal interval is to the brain as the intercerebral interval is to society. Communication across fissures betokens a functional brain and an intelligent society. Flusser's vision for the telematic society centers on interality. Besides Thomas More's utopia 烏托邦 and Michel Foucault's heterotopia 異托邦, we also need an intertopia 間托邦. Interology implies a political philosophy, an intertopia. The kind of telematic society Flusser envisions is a specific type of intertopia. After traditional, rational-legal, and charismatic authorities, a new type of authority is now with us. It is functionalized, socialized, networked, decentralized, depersonalized, and diffused. For lack of a better term, we can call it "cybernetic authority" for the time being. In a truly telematic society, the intercerebral interval is bridged and becomes a locus of dialogue, creativity, and negentropy. By contrast, in a fascistic society, the intercerebral interval is wedged and blocked, people are dispersed into corners, isolated from one another, entangled by closed feedback loops, and programmed by technical images. Fascism is a recipe for boredom, decay, and entropy. Images that program people, or images as collaborative, creative fabulation (to use a Bergsonian-Deleuzean notion): that is the question.

A new twist in the human condition in the post-industrial age is the highly problematic interality between humanity and the apparatus. The apparatus is a black box that produces information automatically, which is to say, under the control of an embedded program. The mindless user of the apparatus is a functionary, or even a servomechanism. The functionary functions as a function of the apparatus, actualizing the virtualities contained within the program of the apparatus but rarely going beyond that. This docile manner of using the apparatus risks turning the life world into the proper domain of functionalism. As Flusser points out, "everything indicates that functional programs will dominate the post-industrial society, within which the functionaries will function progressively more like invisible cogwheels inside the black boxes" (2013, p. 32). A bit later in the same context, he refers to "Eichmann as model functionary, Kissinger as model programmer, and Auschwitz as post-industrial society" (2013, p. 33). All is to say that there is nothing flattering about these labels. The apparatus is the functionary's dwelling and source of significance. To use Flusser's formulation, "the apparatus has become the only justification and the only meaning of our lives" (2014, p. 16). Post-industrial existence is Kafkaesque and absurd. The situations in Kafka's work "are all gathered around a central problem: around a single man who has been forgotten by an all-powerful, yet careless and incompetent bureaucratic apparatus and who – without the least capacity for anger – seeks in vain to have himself recognized" (2002, p. 154). Flusser notes that "a similar situation could be a fundamental problem in the near future" (2002, p. 154). In this sense, Kafka is a prophetic systems analyst, an allegorist of the apparatus society. The mindful user of the apparatus is a "circuit bender," namely, one who not only works with but also works against the apparatus to generate improbable outputs unintended by the apparatus's program. Circuit bending not only affords the creative irruption of the new or the negentropic, but also produces the circuit bender as a competent player against the apparatus. The Flusserian term, *homo ludens*, means nothing better than that as far as the human condition in the post-industrial age is concerned. In his philosophical self-portrait, Flusser points out, "'Homo ludens' became to me synonymous with 'the New Man' in Marx, the 'Superman' in Nietzsche" (2002, p. 206).

Meaningful dialogue with apparatuses, robots, and artificial intelligences is predicated upon human participants' preparedness, competence, and awareness on the one hand, and readiness to become supra-human or subhuman on the other. Desirable as negentropic dialogues with apparatuses, robots, and artificial intelligences are, they are nevertheless problematic, for the simple reason that working with robots creates the robot man, and that working against is still a species of working with. Working with robots entails becoming somewhat robot-like and going beyond the human scale. Humans are no rivals for robots in terms of stamina, tolerance for tediousness and fatigue, emotional indifference, the

capacity for pure action (i.e., action without reaction), and so on. The robot's action is composed of actemes. It is based on ongoing calculation and computation. One cannot function properly with robots without going through some kind of dehumanization and robotization. Similarly, it is hard to not become an apparatchik when functioning with or within an apparatus, unless one is a post-*satori* Zennist, who sees everything as empty, or unless one is a Daoist capable of thinging things without being thinged by things, to invoke a notion of Zhuangzi. To make things worse, the apparatus also has the capacity to reabsorb and coopt gestures of resistance. As Flusser puts it, "In protest, one despises the apparatus and tries to destroy it, an effort the apparatus recuperates and transforms into its own functions" (2014, p. 17). In a different context, Flusser remarks, "the tendency toward the all-devouring apparatus cannot be resisted, and every resistance results in a further enrichment of the apparatus" (1978, p. 7). Meaningful resistance is predicated upon the capacity to do the kind of meta-analysis that lays bare how the apparatus has been produced and programmed to produce what it produces, including the production of the user as a functionary, as a tentacle of the apparatus, or even as an occasional freedom fighter (a safety valve and a source of feedback by design). Put differently, one needs to figure out how to diagram the apparatus adequately. Resistance needs to be meta-resistance simply because control has mutated into meta-control. Pattern recognition, game theory, cybernetic thinking, and the like are becoming increasingly relevant. Flusser indicates that critiquing apparatus functions constitutes an antifunction, and necessitates the invention of an anti-apparatus, the mission of which is to critique the entire apparatus culture and all its totalitarian tendencies (2002, p. 49). To summarize the point here, in the post-industrial society, oneness with the apparatus is a default condition; playful interality with the apparatus is a problematic accomplishment; critical distance from the apparatus is predicated upon philosophical-minded systems analysis. The apparatus is a false home that conditions us. Inventing an anti-apparatus is an effort to dissolve the conditioning. In the post-industrial society, humanity is challenged to imagine and pursue a life above and beyond the apparatus. To use Deleuze's language, humanity's dignity in the control society resides in the creation of lines of flight. The idea of interality, which connotes openness and beyondness, may serve as an existential gyroscope for the free-spirited.

As a praxis, Flusserian interology takes the form of dialogue, which is Flusser's god term, and humanity's best defense against cretinism. Heavily influenced by Martin Buber, preoccupied with the second law of thermodynamics, Flusser sees dialogue as the locus of creativity, be it inner dialogue, dialogue with the Other, or with artificial intelligence. In terms of overall competence and creative potential, inner dialogue is no match for outer dialogue. If Deleuze posits an involutionary model of dialogue, characterized by ego-loss and becoming, then Flusser promotes a more or less dialectical

model, characterized by synthesis and negentropy. This model directly dispels the mythical aura of creation. For Flusser, the dialogic life is the good life, pure and simple. Arriving at new information through dialogue puts people in a passionate, rapturous state of mind. To couch it in the language of Deleuze and Guattari, in dialogue people "become intense." Insofar as human freedom is consubstantial with the act of creating the improbable and informative, Flusser sees the telematic society as one that affords the socialization of creativity and freedom, which amount to the same thing. He perceives an analogy between mental life in the telematic society and chamber music. Like jazz, chamber music is dialogic in nature. If jazz is a supposedly inefficient process of collective voice finding, then chamber music is a matter of improvisational interplay among virtuosic musicians engaging each other in pursuit of the improbable. If jazz is relatively relaxed, then chamber music is more disciplined and strategic. Discipline and preparation are a must for meaningful participation in the mental ecology in the telematic society. A society that hinders the dialogic creation of new information not only suffers from a profound boredom, it will simply collapse. Jazz is rightfully the soundtrack of democracy, which thrives on a rhizomatic mode of communication, to use Deleuze's lexicon. Fascism, by contrast, furthers itself by impeding lateral communication and trapping its captives into a closed feedback loop. Fascism is interality-averse, so to speak. The tricky part is that telematics can be deployed to reinforce both modes of communication. In real life, the two modes are often mixed together. Our experience on Facebook is a good example. The trickier part is that creativity itself can be functionalized, which is to say, it can devolve into a function of the creative industries as an "apparatus of capture," to use the language of Deleuze and Guattari. Pure creativity serves no ulterior purpose.

More needs to be said about the idea of being as interbeing, which is essential to interology. Interbeing is the law of nature. Speaking of a type of wild potato that grows in Switzerland and a butterfly, both of which have a very specific and strange violet color, Flusser points out, "the butterfly feeds exclusively on this potato. And the potato propagates purely thanks to the butterfly. This means that I can view them both as a single organism, a single case, a single *Bewandtnis*. In this case I can say that the potato is the butterfly's digestive apparatus, the butterfly is the potato's sexual apparatus." (2003, pp. 100-101). The moral is that we should "look at the world ecologically, as a network" and "have respect for complexity, which is opaque" (Flusser, 2003, p. 101). The awakened eye sees symbiosis at every turn: the palm tree and the giraffe, the wasp and the orchid, the Madagascan orchid and the Morgan's sphinx moth, and so on. As with nature, so with society. Names give us the illusion that we have relatively stable identities. Flusser invites us to think differently. He would say, there is no preformed "I." Rather, "the I who is talking to you now [...] is linked to you, and exists at this moment as

a function of [you]" (Flusser, 2003, p. 89). The particular "interzone" in between constitutes both, to use William Burroughs's coinage. What interzone to co-create and inhabit is thus an ethical question through and through. "Who am I?" is a fake question. The real question is "Who am I this time?" The "I" is a transient permutation activated or called into being by an Other in a specific encounter. The Other is not so much apposed to as constitutive of the "I." As Flusser puts it, "We only really become an 'I' if we are there with and for others. 'I' is the one to whom someone says 'you'" (2011b, p. 93). Speaking of the Jewish question as it is addressed in a play by Max Frisch called *Andorra*, Flusser remarks, "I am Jewish for others and, in the end, I act in function of others" (2016, p. 107). The understanding here is well in line with the Buddhist notion of codependent arising 縁起. The term "intersubjectivity" implies interality-specific subjectivities. Interality precedes subjectivity and makes it possible. Interality is concrete and primary, whereas subjectivity is abstract and derivative. As Flusser puts it, "what is concrete in the world we live in are relations [...] what we call 'subjects' and 'objects' are abstract extrapolations from these concrete relations" (1988, p. 6). In a different context, Flusser points out, "*Individual* and *society* are all abstractions. What does exist is an interpersonal relationship, a networking, an intersubjective field of relations, from which I may extrapolate society or the individual" (2003, p. 102). The choice here is not between individuals vs. society. Rather, it is a choice between the ideality of individuals and society alike vs. the realism of relationality and interality.

Flusser indicates that electromagnetism has perforated our walls, terminated our settled existence, eroded our definability, and turned us into paradoxical nomads (i.e., those who voyage in situ). Instead of an ontology, we need an interology and a nomadology. In a marvelous piece on nomads, Flusser points out, "We are fleeting potentials that approach one another so that we may experience each other as a concrete 'I' and a concrete 'you'. We approach each other for our mutual realization…" (2003, p. 51). This observation of his applies to both embodied encounters in real space and discarnate encounters in cyberspace. Prior to a specific encounter, the "I" is virtual and nebulous. It actualizes itself during the encounter and dissolves into virtuality again afterwards. "Within the network everyone is an omnipresent potential" (2003, p. 51). An encounter in cyberspace feels like an instance of mutual conjuring. Cyberspace constitutes a virtual, apparitional social ecology in which encounters tend to proliferate and miniaturize, in which the "I" becomes palpably protean, plural, ephemeral, and perishable. As Flusser has it, "We no longer imagine that we contain some solid kernel (some kind of 'identity', an 'I', a 'spirit' or a 'soul'), but rather that we are immersed in a collective psychic field, from which we emerge like temporary bubbles, acquire some information, process, share, to submerge again" (Flusser, 2006, p. 21). Such a state of affairs naturally privileges experience over possession, fluidity over fixation.

The point is not that ontology was for settled existence in the past and interology is for neo-nomadic existence at present. Rather, networked existence simply makes the validity of interology increasingly obvious. Between the two, ontology is no more than an efficient simplification, and a hegemonic formation. It is parasitic on interology, which it represses.

In his analysis of the texture of technical images, Flusser gets us to realize that the age of technical images is the age of micro-interality. Letters are giving way to numbers, especially binary numbers. The following quote captures the difference between the two codes succinctly: "While letters unravel the surface of an image into lines, numbers grind this surface into points and intervals. While literal thinking spools scenes as processes, numerical thought computes scenes into grains" (Flusser, 2006, p. 21). In a breath, Flusser reveals the difference between one-dimensional linear thinking and zero-dimensional computational-compositional thinking. The latter is a kind of dot-interval thinking. Flusser indicates a correspondence between linear thinking and the Heraclitian flux on the one hand, and computational thinking and the Democritian rain on the other. Technical images render obsolescent Heraclitus's thought and retrieve Democritus's atomism, so to speak. The reason is simple: matter is made up of particles and intervals; similarly, technical images are made up of dots and intervals. In the realm of art, pointillist painting appeared after the invention of photography, but anticipated the invention of TV and digital images. The compositional similitude between matter and technical images bespeaks the relevance of Democritus's atomism in the age of technical images. Also relevant is the age-old mosaic, which becomes pointillism when its pebbles are infinitely miniaturized. Intervals attract attention and motivate completion. They make images involving and cool. There is something Oriental about the use of intervals or the strategy of leaving things out. To follow this logic, the literate West is going through a kind of Orientalization in taste in the age of technical images, which is to say, in post-history. The notion of coolness is more McLuhanesque than Flusserian. The sensibility at least dates back to the *Dao De Jing*. The Chinese mind has apprehended and appreciated the serviceability of absences and intervals all along.

A seemingly idle stroke is in order here. An aesthetics informed by an ontological orientation focuses on things, whereas an aesthetics flowing from an interological orientation foregrounds the intervals and relationality among things. The Japanese dry landscape garden makes a good example of the latter. Paul Virilio became an interologist the moment he discovered antiform in doing still life (Virilio, 2005, pp. 29-32). His newly acquired aesthetic sensibility was well in line with his appreciation of spatial and temporal intervals, and with his notion of grey ecology, which is concerned with the

pollution of distance and the psychological effect of planetary claustrophobia. Scale is part of the experience (notably, the word "experience" is etymologically connected with aesthetics). The kind of micro-interality in technical images is enormous in the sense that it is more or less beyond the human scale. What cannot be experienced consciously ends up affecting and conditioning people at a subliminal level. As technical images are composed of dots and intervals, so the typical mind in the digital age is cluttered with symbolic fragments and intervals between them. The intervals are proliferating in quantity but shrinking in size. If the brain is the screen, as Deleuze has it, then in this age of busyness, there is a striking resemblance between what is projected on the brain-screen and what is projected on the digital screen in terms of density. If the virtue of the mind lies in its receptivity and responsiveness, which is a function of its emptiness, then the deluge of superfluous and redundant information in the digital age really loads the mind down, keeping it from doing what it is capable of doing. Put simply, mental clutter is bad in terms of Spinozan ethics. This line of reasoning points in the direction of leisure, which falls squarely within the domain of interology or interality studies since it literally means a temporal interval. It was not by coincidence that in ancient Chinese, leisure and interval were symbolized by the same ideograph "閒," which is the Chinese etymology of the neologism "interality." Unoccupied space-time would be a good way to encompass both senses, although the concept of interality has a much wider range of meanings. Unoccupied space-time is where the virtual dwells. It allows for pure play and free exploration. Therein resides human dignity and freedom. Traditional Western ontology prioritizes the actual, whereas interology privileges the virtual. Richness in actuality means poverty in virtuality, and vice versa. A retreat is a strategic way of recovering virtuality, or a strategic way of creating a liminal space-time. It is logically self-contradictory, though. As much as it aims to transform work into play, it always subtly turns leisure back into work. That is not to say that we are better off without them.

If the Greek word *phainomenon* means what appears, transpires, and shines through, then interality is precisely the locus of *phainomenon*, as the ideograph "閒" imagistically indicates. There is something phenomenological about the ideograph "閒," since it implies an observer with a specific bodily constitution and a specific psychic archetype. Contemplating the ideograph brings us close to Flusser's phenomenological vision, which he inherits from Edmund Husserl. The vision is highly compatible with interology and Buddhism. For an eyeless creature, there is neither the sun nor the moon as we know it. "The sun" labels a *relation* rather than a thing or an object. So do "color" and "light." As Alan Watts puts it, "color and light are the gift of the eye to the leaf and the sun" (1962, p. 29). Similarly, "the Big

Dipper" really names a *relation* between dipper-using earthlings and a constellation of stars. When a tree falls in the forest but nobody is there, it makes no sound because sound is a *relation*. When we listen inwards, we hear our self-nature. Su Shi 蘇軾 intuited this understanding a long time ago: "There is only the cool breeze along with the bright moon among the mountains. The ears catch one of these, and it is sound; the eyes encounter the other, and it forms colors" (Owen, 1996, p. 293).[1] Deleuze has it right: "The interior is only a selected exterior, and the exterior, a projected interior" (1988, p. 125). Each creature makes its own world depending on the kind of creature it is. If the world is the mind's projection, then one is free to project and dwell in a blissful world insofar as one has developed the capability to control one's mind. No wonder Zen masters are said to have the capacity for unconditional happiness. The notion of "positive energy" is right-minded, clichéd as it is. Oscar Wilde makes a lot of sense when he says, "All criticism is a form of autobiography." A poem about a thing says as much about the poet's spiritual realm 境界 as about the thing per se. The *Ding an sich* (thing-in-itself) is beyond our grasp. We always end up grasping our relation to it. Moreover, "[t]he mere observation of an object by a subject may change the object" (Flusser, 2002, p. 76). Phenomenology Flusser-style is a response to the crisis of objectivity, or a correction of the fallacy of objectivity. The objective point of view presumes "a subject standing above the phenomenon, which is then seen as an object" (Flusser, 2002, p. 76). The phenomenological point of view "does not stand above, but within, the phenomenon to be understood and manipulated" (Flusser, 2002, p. 76). In a sense, the shift from the one to the other is a shift from a visual sensibility to an acoustic one. Hence McLuhan's characterization of phenomenology as "dialectic in ear-mode" (McLuhan & Carson, 2003, p. 332). In an article entitled "Phantom City," Flusser points out, "There is no object without any subject, just as there is no subject without any object" (p. 6). When a newspaper as a problem reaches me, "my body becomes, as a whole, an organ for the sucking in of the newspaper" (Flusser, 2002, p. 80). The moment we encounter an object, the virtuality that is us is transfigured into a specific actuality. Prior to the encounter, we are effectively what Deleuze calls a body without organs (BwO). Object selection and self fashioning are one and the same thing. Instead of subject-object dichotomy, phenomenology points in the direction of subject-object mutuality and interdependence, and poses a challenge to the structure of reality overdetermined by the structure of the standard phrase (i.e., subject-predicate-object) in fusional languages. Flusser points out, "It is said that two different speech-processing functions go on in the brain, the structural and the lexical. The structural is lodged much more deeply than the lexical" (2003, p. 90). In a sense, phenomenology is Buddhism in the guise of Western philosophy. It entails the notion of

subject-object interality 主客間性. Subject and object are functions of each other, as indicated by Gochiku's *haiku*:

"The long night;
The sound of the water
Says what I think" (Watts, 1989, p. 185).[2]

If the praxis of Flusserian interology lies in dialogue, then the spiritual realm of Flusserian interology consists in leisure. Flusser sees leisure (in Greek "*schole,"* in Latin *"otium"*) as "the goal of life, the seat of wisdom" (2011b, p. 149). To use the language of Flusserian media theory, leisure is a matter of suspending time or extrication from linear time. Deleuze would say, leisure is about occupying time without counting, or getting out of striated time to enter into smooth time. Leisure is more or less synonymous with what Henri Lefebvre calls appropriated time, what Victor Turner calls liminality, and what is known as a flow experience in pop psychology. The French expression for orgasm, *le petite mort*, literally means the little death. The point is that true leisure is an intense experience, or a matter of becoming intense. Work differs from leisure partly because in work only part of the person is called upon. When the whole person is engaged, work flips into leisure and play. Flusser traces leisure back to the Greek academy (a leisurely space) and the Judeo-Christian Sabbath (a leisurely time) (2011b, p. 150). Ancient Greeks saw the philosophical life in the academy as higher than the economic life in private and the political life in public (by contrast, Zennists see the spiritual as a virtual double immanent in the quotidian). Judeo-Christians see the Sabbath as meaningless exactly because it is itself the meaning (Flusser, 2011b, p. 150). The protestant ethic, which has everything to do with the cultural climate created by the printing press and the attendant root metaphor of time as a straight line, topples the age-old hierarchy between leisure and work, allowing work to subjugate and absorb leisure. Max Weber's book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, needs to be reexamined in this light. Flusser indicates that the ideology of linear time can only be overcome and liquidated mediumistically. Leisure will regain its primacy over work in our collective unconscious when the reign of books gives way to the reign of technical images, when linear, purpose-bound, left-hemisphere thinking gives way to dot-interval, ludic, right-hemisphere thinking. When Flusser speaks of idle as "an expression for the human capacity to rise above the purposeful" and "the cultural centrality of uselessness and leisure," he sounds like the paradoxical Zhuangzi, for whom leisure has a use precisely because it is useless and unused (Flusser, 2011b, p. 153). "The leisure industry" is a contradiction in terms. Leisure or idleness that loses its purity becomes something else entirely. The post-historical revival of interality is a matter of

course, because interality is both right-brained and right-minded. It should be fitting to end this discussion of interality as leisure with the following idea: The Buddha is a freeman – a man who neither works nor achieves.

Other than a mediumistic, diachronic account of the rise of ontology in the West in the age of alphabetic literacy and the eventual subsuming of ontology by interology in the post-literate era, Flusser's corpus also affords a comparative linguistic account of ontology, interology, and nomadology. Eventually we want to work our way toward tying the two accounts together. Put in a nutshell, fusional languages have an ontological bias, isolating languages inculcate an interological sensibility, whereas agglutinative languages point in the direction of nomadology. As Flusser points out, "The fusional is the world of logically organized situations. The agglutinative is the world of solid and amorphous blocks, of *hic et nunc*. The isolating is the world of mosaics, of aesthetic ensembles" (2018, p. 37). There is nothing monolithic about fusional languages. German and Sanskrit, for example, have agglutinative tendencies, whereas English has isolating tendencies. Regardless, the standard phrase of fusional languages has a subject-predicate-object structure, the subject being the source of action, from which the predicate is pushed out, giving the phrase a projectile, vectorial quality (Flusser, 2011a, p. 64). Each time a phrase is formulated, the being, ontology, or subjectivity of the subject is performed and affirmed, the ideology of subject-object dichotomy is reenacted and reinforced. In the reality ordered by fusional languages, action is the subject's default and expected way of being. That is to say, the subject's ontology realizes itself in action, especially transitive action, the grammatical equivalent of which is the transitive verb in the active form. Flusser defines "'verb' as the type of word that indicates the manner in which the substantive, elevated as the subject of the phrase, finds itself (*sich befindet*)" (2016, p. 89). A little linguistic archaeology can take us beyond the dichotomy between active and passive verb forms, and help us to reach a "neither… nor…" moment. Flusser points out, "In ancient Indo-Germanic and Semitic languages […] there are forms (e.g., the Greek *aorist*), that might be expressed as 'there is a caring for myself and for sheep'" (2011b, p. 129). His point is that shepherd and sheep are both functions of herding and that there is mutuality, reciprocity, or interality between them. Similarly, instead of saying "A man is walking a dog," or "A dog is walking a man," one might say "There is a walking with each other going on between a man and a dog." Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery* is all about overcoming the mentality that finds its expression in the transitive verb in the active voice. Instead of saying "I loosed the shot," the Zen-minded archer would say, "'It' shot" (Herrigel, 1953, p. 76). The following words of Herrigel's directly challenge the standard structure of fusional languages and call for a different mode of expression: "Is it 'I' who draw the bow, or is it the bow that draws me

into the state of highest tension? Do 'I' hit the goal, or does the goal hit me? […] Bow, arrow, goal and ego, all melt into one another, so that I can no longer separate them. And even the need to separate has gone" (1953, p. 88). Flusser indicates that the telematic situation renders obsolescent the distinction between acting and being acted upon. "Everything there is a function of all other functions, so governing is a conjunction of all these functions" (Flusser, 2011b, p. 129). This idea immediately points in the direction of the concept of rhizome theorized by Deleuze and Guattari. The telematic situation makes relevant, and motivates the revival of, the Greek aorist, which has a noticeable affinity with interology. It is reasonable to envision a rekindled enthusiasm for the middle voice (the action is "directed by the self upon the self") and comparative linguistics in general (Burke, p. 274). Instead of saying "I thought up an idea" or "An idea was thought up by me," one could say, "An idea formulated itself in my mind." There is, however, no interest on our part in turning interology into an instrument for functionalism, in the same way Deleuze and Guattari do not want *A Thousand Plateaus* to become the operational manual for late capitalism. For our purposes, part of the point is that the ontological bias in fusional languages is not ahistorical. It may well abate and acquire some nostalgia value in the immediate future. By no means do we suggest that the texture of fusional languages contains no interality. As a matter of fact, the interality is so well defined by formal means such as inflections, the use of conjunctions, and so on that each phrase feels like a continuous, connected line, which is punctuated here and there so the reader could take a tiny breath now and then. To define is to kill. In effect, fusional languages leave the impression of being seamlessly, sturdily, and progressively linear, giving the Western mind its peculiar pulsion and lack of "peripheral vision."

Speaking of isolating languages, Flusser notes, "In some isolating languages (say, in Chinese), there are no sentences, but there are juxtapositions of syllables, and instead of a projectile character, their universe therefore has a mosaic character" (2011a, p. 65). For one thing, isolating languages are rich in interality. Compared to fusional languages, isolating languages feel like abstract art, in the sense that visual, logical connections are left out. In the case of Chinese, given the imagistic nature of the script, to juxtapose syllables is to juxtapose images. Besides a semantic quality, each text also has an aesthetic quality. Meaning does not reside so much *in* words as *between* words. Between the juxtaposed characters, most of which are imagistic in nature, the equivalent of the Kuleshov effect is created. That is precisely how montage works. Reading a Chinese text feels like watching an abstract motion picture. Compared to fusional languages, the interality in isolating languages is far less formalized and full of potentialities (i.e., rich in virtuality). To use McLuhan's vocabulary, fusional languages are hot, whereas isolating languages are cool, elliptical, unfinished, ambiguous, polysemous, inclusive, invitational, and involving.

Since the relationality among words is far less defined, users of isolating languages naturally invest more mental energy in relationality and end up acquiring an interological sensibility. The Eastern mind is not only in the habit of dealing with interality, but also appreciates and expects it. Empty or negative space (*ma* 間 in Japanese) is appreciated in painting, calligraphy, gardening, and so on in the same way that silence is appreciated in conversations and music. In the control society, silence acquires a new significance. As Deleuze puts it, "The key thing may be to create vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control" (1995, p. 175). Deleuze's mention of circuit breakers and Flusser's concern with closed feedback loops indicate that they are thinking the same thought. Indeed, interality is not only the space-time of imagination but also the space-time of Deleuzean events and freedom. It is where aesthetics and ethics become at one with each other. The Zen sensibility resides precisely in interality. This single line deserves a full length treatment in a separate piece. In texts as in calligraphy, interality is the space where the author's energy (i.e., *qi*) and the audience's energy get to intermingle. It is the space of conspiracy (literally, breathing together) and communion, so to speak. As the interological-minded Easterner nurtures emptiness, so the ontological-minded Westerner throws punches and strings bead-like letters. The Eastern mind privileges virtuality and intervals, whereas the Western mind prizes actuality and connectedness. For the Easterner, the Western way often comes off as a bit too rule-bound, heavy-handed, fastidious, entangled, and suffocating. Now that the juxtaposition of symbolic fragments is proliferating in the digital age, the Eastern mind, which has been linguistically trained to deal with intervals and discontinuities, might have an easier time coping with everything. Since many Chinese words are ideographic in nature, the Eastern mind may have a particular advantage when it comes to handling digital codes, which "are ideographic in the sense of making concepts (ideas) visible" (Flusser, 2011a, p. 61).

As for agglutinative languages, Flusser remarks, "In agglutinative languages (e.g., Tupi-Guarani), there are word collages instead of sentences so that their universe (that of which they speak) has a circumstantial rather than a projectile character" (2011a, p. 65). Flusser is referring to the linguistic phenomenon of superwords, "which for us are blocks of [nonanalyzable] *hic et nunc*" (Flusser, 2018, p. 51). For the logical spirit, these superwords "represent a conglomeration of words and half-words (mistakenly identified with the prefixes, suffixes, and infixes of fusional languages), which correspond, vaguely, to our phrases" (Flusser, 2018, p. 33). Collage (from the French word *coller*, "to glue") is literally the right art form with which to characterize agglutinative languages. The implication is that for the Western mind, agglutinative languages either feel like nonsense or feel like modernist art. It is probably easier now for the Western mind to come to terms with agglutinative languages since it has

gone through the shock therapy of modernism. Still, Flusser points out, "the world of agglutinative languages is impenetrable for us. The most we can say is that it is a compact world, consisting of blocks of meaning. For us, this is a chaotic and meaningless world" (2018, p. 34). To accuse Flusser of ethnocentrism is to miss the point entirely. The following quote implies a connection between agglutinative languages and nomadism: "The agglutinative languages did not result in civilizations in the sense we give to this word. The Mongols, the Tartars, the Turks, the Huns, all these ill-defined linguistic groups that erupted periodically into the territory of the two civilizations to sow terror and destruction, represent chaos for us" (Flusser, 2018, p. 50). In *The Freedom of the Migrant*, Flusser indicates a correspondence between digital media and nomadism. Could it be the case that agglutinative languages are a better preparation for the digital sandstorm than isolating languages, even though one may argue that fusional languages may provide the staunchest defense against the digital sandstorm? Is there any similitude between the texture of agglutinative languages and that of digital images? Put otherwise, are agglutinative languages densely pointillistic? Flusser indicates that the superwords "frustrated attempts at articulation" (2018, p. 51). If articulation is a matter of creating interality with subtlety and artfulness, perhaps part of the moral for the interologist is that in the age of generalized shrinking and compression, one needs to hone the art of handling or playing with micro-interalities. Overall, the agglutinative world that points in the direction of nomadology seems to be closer to interology than it is to ontology. After all, collage creates clashes, incongruities, and therefore, interalities. Even if the interalities are compressed out of sight, they will not be entirely out of mind. To summarize our point, in fusional languages, interality is formally bridged; in isolating languages, interality is left open; in agglutinative languages, interality is glued over. The reign of ontology has left behind an afterglow; the undercurrent of interology has emerged; the sandstorm of nomadology is sweeping everything along.

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[1] The Chinese original is: 惟江上之清風，與山間之明月，耳得之而為聲，目遇之而成色.

[2] A plausible back translation would be: 長夜水聲訴我思.