This brief commentary on the need for an open access media theory journal hinges on the concepts, contiguity and interval, and concludes with an exploration of the topological turn as a recent method for thinking through the boundaries of mediation. Contiguity and interval are the terms I choose to describe the most generalizable manifestation of mediation. To theorize media then should be an exciting opportunity for scholars from a broad range of fields to explore the manner in which borders touch and how that touching becomes interrupted. The reason I point to the topological turn is as a creative exploration of how the boundaries of mediated environments are expanding and collapsing in continuous variations, and how these new modes of theorizing are bringing to the table new modes of thinking through the most generalizable definitions of media that theory should be able to offer.

Mediation

Mediation is contiguous, but it is also interrupted. It oscillates between coming together and coming apart. Mediation is impossible without connectivity but through connectivity produces its own possibility for rupture. When mediation implies touching it also implies a space for participation, a space which reinforces the boundaries of mediation as well as their negotiability and flexibility. Mediation means both here and there, placed and displaced, stretching over and outwards while into. Mediation signifies temporality and edges, depth and surface, as well as traces of those surfaces as they rub up against one another in a continuous mosaic. Edge,
contour, expansion, change, sense, sensation of the empirical: this is mediation; it is interference, but everything involved in the interference gathers up in the contiguous. And media theory is empowered by openness and contiguity, while the participation it requires is a negotiation of and a critique of those contiguous formations and deformations. Media theory is not a reflection on the state of “mass media” or “digital media”, but an active engagement with new modalities of contiguity that those media produce, experimenting with space, and experimenting empirically with the concepts that new arrangements make.

Contiguity: A Point of Direct Contact

Media archaeologist, Siegfried Zielinski, has claimed, for instance, that media ‘are spaces of action for constructed attempts to connect what is separated’ (2006: 7), which brings us first to the concept of contiguity. His statement exposes a particular problematic about theorizing media, because media assemble and reassemble new configurations of the experiential, leaving less room for abstractions than concretions; this is an assessment similar to Mark Hansen’s interpretation of Gilles Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism as proffering ‘the conditions for real experience without exceeding the domain of experience, without being, properly speaking, transcendental at all’ (2006: 297). Currently, under the so-called digitization of everything, we are undergoing another renewed sense of the contiguous as this digitization commits to our connections with wholeness: Google Books has scanned over 20 million books and are keen to scan everything ever written (Chalmers and Edwards, 2017); Cornell University’s Macauley Library intends to record and digitally archive the sound of every bird species in the world (Gallagher, 2015); responsive media are becoming attuned to users’ ‘micromoments’ that shape consumer preferences (Ghose, 2017). Media theorists thus have the opportunity to define and redefine (in various guises) this notion of contiguity, which is a notion that holds that all forms of mediation, transduction, or networking involves some form of contact, virtual or actual. That is, contiguous properties are more in the form of media than the content they appear to communicate (to uphold McLuhan’s the medium is the message). To mediate is to participate, and to participate (from the Latin shared in) is to actively engage with the contiguous; participation is creative, embracing supposition,
as well as destructive, resisting and refusing. Is not participation motivated by the anticipation for change and the need to collectively formulate new modes of contiguity in the first place? This is what makes *Media Theory* as a journal so important: shared, open, participatory media represent the invention and reinvention of contiguity, of attempting to connect that which has become separate, to revisit Zielinski. But those rearrangements are impossible without the *interval*: jerks, fits and starts, glitches and skips.

**Interval: An Interruption in Contact**

Mediation is impossible without the persistent interval (the rupture, accident, flub, moment of stupidity found in YouTube Fail Video vortexes and endless 4chan scrolls), that underlies the design and social life of mediation. We are reminded of Paul Virilio’s (2007) warning that every technical design has an accident built into it; further, that every design also anticipates and is built to prevent its own self-destruction. Any conception of mediation (conceived broadly) must include the interval. And the everyday world is often unprepared for the successes or embedded sense of media that the interval produces (e.g., Netflix’s success, or the 3M tape of German WWII intelligence becoming a dominating American entertainment commodity). This unknowability might briefly draw our attention to the paradoxical idea of anticipating unexpected change. In a manner that resonates strongly with Henri Bergson’s *Matter and Memory* ([1912] 2004), the past, present and future are co-constitutive entities whose pre-arrangements remain governed by a particular principle endemic to both interval and contiguity: *participation, which is the requirement for mediation to rearrange itself*. For change to happen, the interval is inserted as unfamiliar patterns and shapes in the mediation experience. Where *sleep* is lately considered to be Netflix’s most significant competition (Hern, 2017), mediation is entirely dependent on continuous variation, which means parts need to be separated, discontinued, discarded, before mediation can be reconfigured. The interval is more than an interruption by a perceptible thing; it is the reorganization of space and time at the most subtle and massive levels simultaneously, the big data on micro-movements. Indeed, if there is a consistent relation between contiguity and interval, it is that of a continuous variation.
Topologies: Variations in Contact

Sha Xin Wei has written recently on topology as an alternative to the contiguity/interval themes commonly found in media theory. Topology has made its rounds lately as a useful analytic filter for mediation, insofar as it represents ‘one of the most primordial modes of articulation available to us’ (Sha, 2013), by complicating the spatial situations in which the continuous change of shape or size of figures renders the geometric properties of the whole relatively unaffected; under the topological perspective, there is no division between the contiguous and the interval, but rather these terms are nodes in a network of continuous variation that underlies an evolving definition of media. Topology cuts through the assumptions of ‘media studies’ that mediation undergo a peculiar alienation from touch, and that its ultimate return to touch is only going to be circumvented and mediated through elaborate technological assemblages. Such a conception seems to suggest a necessity to amplify our ideas of media and mediation. The topological is intended as a challenge to the notion of mediation or the contiguity/interval partition that is so often the point of critique for cultural studies – it presents us instead with the opportunity to theorize media as a fluid and open site. Sha Xin Wei poses the question of the topological by asking that we consider any contiguity to be based on a primordial continuous variation without representation. This exemplifies a push for new filters and methods that emphasize morphogenesis and cultural dynamics over fixity, the anexact: ‘As we dwell in the phenomena, site, event’, Sha writes, ‘we can successively identify salient features of the phenomena, and then successively invent articulations that trace the phenomena. We do not pretend at any stage to completely capture what we articulate’ (Sha, 2013: 223-224). Mediation does not necessarily ‘capture’ what was already present but rather forces voice into perception, every technological assemblage a new orientation.

Openness: Fluid Contact

My account of contiguity and interval is thus characterized by a sensitivity to the ontological, epistemological, and practical effects of interior and exterior relations, and for finding the contours of continuity between otherwise disparate entities, such
as the outlines between connections and their ruptures. Intervals, in conventional wisdom, are taken as fissures in need of mending, as touch is the most fundamental testimony to corporeality, to the presence and co-presence with others. To revisit some of the more commonly accepted foundations of media theory, Marshall McLuhan’s (1955) theory of auditory space is aligned directly with the openness and participation of contiguity and interval. Every extension is reassembled into a new configuration (such as that from a medium to a fold), one that does not place media at a distance from consciousness, but understands media as the reassembled *socius*, wherein which our sense and sensations of the empirical undergo negotiation through participation. Intervals do not stage interruptions. They anticipate the intertwining places of future contiguities. The current dialectic between contiguity and interval is what constitutes auditory space – indeed, *Media Theory* is assuming the responsibility to engage with the further malleability of concepts and ideas that will shape our theorizations, and is engaging with the idea *through* the form that its dissemination is taking shape. In support of openness, McLuhan proposes that contemporary media shape auditory space, which, McLuhan writes: ‘has no favored focus. It’s a sphere without fixed boundaries, space made by the thing itself, not space containing the thing. It is not pictorial space, boxed in, but dynamic, always in flux, creating its own dimensions, moment by moment’ (1997: 41). To theorize media means to live through the micro-moments of contiguity and interval. The visible borders that demarcate territory (outlines of bodies) do not operate in isolation of the intervals that interrupt the space between those bodies that contiguity pushes together.

**Contact**

The theorization of contiguity and interval could use an interval in its own right. The purpose of this short exploration has been to elucidate this pair in the context of media theory, to speak to them separately, and to suggest an alternative that accounts for the topological mediations that a new open access publication in media theory could bring to our field. There is no need to abandon the pair, but there is the necessity to imagine their relations in an increasingly enfolded manner. While there is no lack of venue for a robust discussion of media theory, the field sits in the margins of other disciplines that already have reputed and internationally recognized journals
devoted to them. As discussed above, the topological imagination is one (of many) development(s) in media theorizations that would cast doubt over the continued bifurcation between connection and disconnection that media theory toils over.

What I hope this brief exploration of contiguity and interval might do is provoke more discussions – by no means has there been a lengthy and much needed exploration of how the topological imagination has benefitted media theory (see Phillips, 2013). This topological imagination has caused us to rethink media, body, environment, place, space and time in new ways. Xin Wei’s poetic sensibility to responsive environments is one of many pieces that are currently elucidating the kinetic mobilities of media and mediation, a new corporeality that stands redefined in the context of the digitization of everything, including that very corporeality itself. More research needs to be done to evaluate how contiguity, interval, connection, flow, openness, access, and place are coming together and bursting apart simultaneously. The need for a concentrated environment for media theorizations couldn’t find a more obliging place than such a journal as *Media Theory*.

**References**


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