



Poiesis and Enchantment in Topological Matter (MIT Press)

By Xin Wei Sha

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In this challenging but exhilarating work, Sha Xin Wei argues for an approach to materiality inspired by continuous mathematics and process philosophy. Investigating the implications of such an approach to media and matter in the concrete setting of installation- or event-based art and technology, Sha maps a genealogy of topological media -- that is, of an articulation of continuous matter that relinquishes a priori objects, subjects, and egos and yet constitutes value and novelty. Doing so, he explores the ethico-aesthetic consequences of topologically creating performative events and computational media. Sha's interdisciplinary investigation is informed by thinkers ranging from Heraclitus to Alfred North Whitehead to Gilbert Simondon to Alain Badiou to Donna Haraway to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

Sha traces the critical turn from representation to performance, citing a series of installation-events envisioned and built over the past decade. His analysis offers a fresh way to conceive and articulate interactive materials of new media, one inspired by continuity, field, and philosophy of process. Sha explores the implications of this for philosophy and social studies of technology and science relevant to the creation of research and art. Weaving together philosophy, aesthetics, critical theory, mathematics, and media studies, he shows how thinking about the world in terms of continuity and process can be informed by computational technologies, and what such thinking implies for emerging art and technology.

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Editorial Review

Review

Sha Xin Wei moves fluently between ontological speculation and the pragmatics of designing digital environments; he is equally at home discussing the abstractions of topology and the aesthetics of interactive performance. He embraces the digital while moving beyond its limitations. *Poiesis and Enchantment in Topological Matter* offers us the vision of a world rich in experiences and meanings: a common world that we share, as Alfred North Whitehead once put it, with 'a democracy of fellow creatures.'

(Steven Shaviro, DeRoy Professor of English, Wayne State University)

Sha's conception of topological media presents a radically interdisciplinary and ardently humanistic view of the complex relations among sound, vision, technology, aesthetics, agency, and ethics. Challenging conventionally ocularcentric media discourses, this book demonstrates the centrality of play to the realization of a new generation of responsive artworks that consummate the heretofore secret love between interactivity and improvisation.

(George E. Lewis, Columbia University)

Part of a wave of theorists and artists rethinking digital quandaries in part by reviving Alfred North Whitehead and extending Isabelle Stengers, Sha wields a singular and massively rich synthesis in his "turn to a topological approach to material dynamics"(160). Opening beyond digital limitations both pragmatically and theoretically, this is likely to have enormous impact.

(*Afterimage*)

About the Author

Sha Xin Wei is Associate Professor of Fine Arts and Computer Science and Director of the Topological Media Lab at Concordia University in Montreal and a member of the Sponge art group.

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