



[introducing Arthur Elsenaar and Remko Scha]— Thomas Zimmer

I will begin my brief remarks with a question: What is an *interface*?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* dispatches this entry with uncharacteristic brevity as

“A surface lying between two portions of matter or space, and forming their common boundary.”¹

Perhaps it is because the term *interface*, which came into English usage in the early 1880s, is one of unparalleled ambiguity, apt to be employed as a verb, adjective, or noun, in a remarkable array of circumstances, with an equally diverse range of often conflicting connotations. For example, with the development of early sonogram technologies for medical imaging and diagnostics, a medium was needed to secure a continuum between the body of the subject and the imaging apparatus. The patient had to recline inside a large metal tub or cylinder, which was then filled with a water-soluble gel. The patient had to lie still as sound signals were propagated through this medium and a picture of the resonant densities was made. As this technology evolved it became apparent that all that was needed was a minimal an sonically ‘clear’ surface to establish a continuum between two heterogenous bodies, one human, one technical. In this sense, KY Jelly™ aptly fits the definition of an *interface*.

But the most common notion of an interface is as the visual representation, on a computer’s screen, of its operating system and applications, with the secondary connotation that it is by way of the interface that human users interact with the computer. To this we might add that the term has come to bear certain abstract or conceptual connotations as well. And, since the interface is a surface—physical and/or conceptual—where two or more (biological and technological) entities meet, the term has also acquired a general sense in which it connotes a connection, hierarchy, or relationship of some sort, between or among diverse, heterogenous, elements. In this general sense all of the elements of a projective/interactive environment —ourselves included—constitute an interface, a common boundary within which sense and reflex, simulation and cognition, history and psyche interact.

One may also take an etymological or philosophical approach: the original meaning of the word *face* is *form, visage* or *appearance*, from the Latin *facies*, which also means *front*, or *surface*, a sense retained in the notion of a *façade*; *Inter*, also from the Latin, means *among* or *between* (others, or ourselves, or things). Arthur Elsenaar’s face, a face among others, is also between others, a face animated by interest or desire, compassion or indifference, traced upon its surface, like a rhythm upon a *tympan*, something that must be closed, opaque, in order to open onto something that ordinarily remains hidden. What does it mean—to Arthur, and to Remko, but also to us—to be ‘between faces’ or to be ‘among’ faces? What or who is between us, or among us, as we watch? What is interior, and what is exterior? As Derrida notes a *tympanon* is a cloth stretched tightly over an absence, the open mouth of a drum, which amortizes impressions, which makes types (*typoi*) resonate, which balances the striking pressure of the *typtein*, between inside and outside. Sound, emission, transmission, communication, the *tympan* is the limit which enables all of these, the surface, the face.

With these remarks, it is my pleasure to introduce Arthur Elsenaar and Remko Scha.

1. —“Interface,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, p. 1462