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Trans-, Transing

The prefix trans- comes from the Latin *trans*, or "across," and is used in countless words and concepts today. Examples are the adjectives transcorpo-real, transcultural, transdisciplinary, transgender, transgenerational, transmaterial, transmedia, transnational, and transspecies. What the prefix does to the root word can best be summarized by another example of the use of the prefix trans-: transversality. This noun refers back to the Latin verb *transvertere*, a combination of *trans* and *vertere* ("to turn"). The use of the noun is exemplified in the field of biological anatomy by the *lateral line* found in fish, literally a "touchline" composed of sense organs on each side of fish with which movements in the surrounding waters can be felt, or in popular parlance by *lateral thinking*, or simply "thinking outside the box," referencing a nonlinear creative thinking process that sidesteps linear logic. As a concept in philosophy and cultural theory, transversality can be traced back to the work of the French psychiatrist, philosopher, and activist Félix Guattari. In "Microphysics of Power / Micropolitics of Desire," a paper presented at a conference in Milan, Italy, on May 31, 1985, Guattari writes:

> With Foucault and Deleuze [in the 1960s and 1970s], horizontalness—a certain transversality accompanied by a new principle of contiguity-discontinuity—is presented in opposition to the traditional vertical stance of thought. It should be noted that it was around this same turbulent period that oppressive hierarchies of power were being put into question. It was also a period marked by the discovery of new lived dimensions of spatiality; as seen, for example, in the somersaults of the astronauts, the innovative experiments in the field of dance and, in particular, the flourishing of the Japanese Buto. ([1985] 1996, 174)

So transversality elicits theories and methodologies freed from any obligation to follow hierarchies (**Classifixations**) in organizing thought, objects, or living organisms (including humans). The concept also allows for understanding revolutionary social movements as more complex than just antiestablishment. Moreover, it relates to creative processes by introducing forms of spatial nonlinearity to our analyses of science, engineering, and art. Most importantly, the concept of transversality connects movements in thought, science, and engineering; social movements; and arts and culture in *transdisciplinary* ways and it fights the reductive tendencies of canonical, dualist, and linear orderings. The final ordering systems are considered straightjackets that do nothing but constrain processes of meaning making, subject positioning, and artistic production. Transgender scholars Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore complicate such a choice of the horizontal over the vertical axis. *Transing* as subject positioning does justice to both horizontal **openness** and vertical exclusion and to the fact that the **crossing** of the many sociopolitical practices on the exclusionary vertical axis may create spaces of openness:

> "Trans-" thus becomes the *capillary space* of connection and circulation between the macro- and micro-political registers through which the lives of bodies become enmeshed in the lives of nations, states, and capital-formations, while "-gender" becomes one of several set of variable techniques or temporal practices (such as race or class) through which bodies are made to live. (2008, 14; emphasis added)

In a short piece on translation, solicited for a glossary by the journal initiated by Stryker, *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, historian of gender and sexuality A. Finn Enke illustrates the

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principles of contiguity, discontinuity, and even discontinuation when they place a series of statements alongside each other: “translation transforms us,” “much is lost in translation,” and “translation traffics in power” (2014, 242). Enke argues that transgender subject positions are built and sustained by everyday practices of combining creative plays with translations *from* definitions of transgender that are available in sociomedical worlds and LGBTIA+ communities alike, attempts at making singular trans* lives and bodies legible as transgender by translating singularities *into* what is (sub)culturally available, and **failures** to pass as either male or female, or transgender. The capillary actions between these processes of openness and exclusion show how transversality works and give nuance to the groundwork laid by Guattari.

READING

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