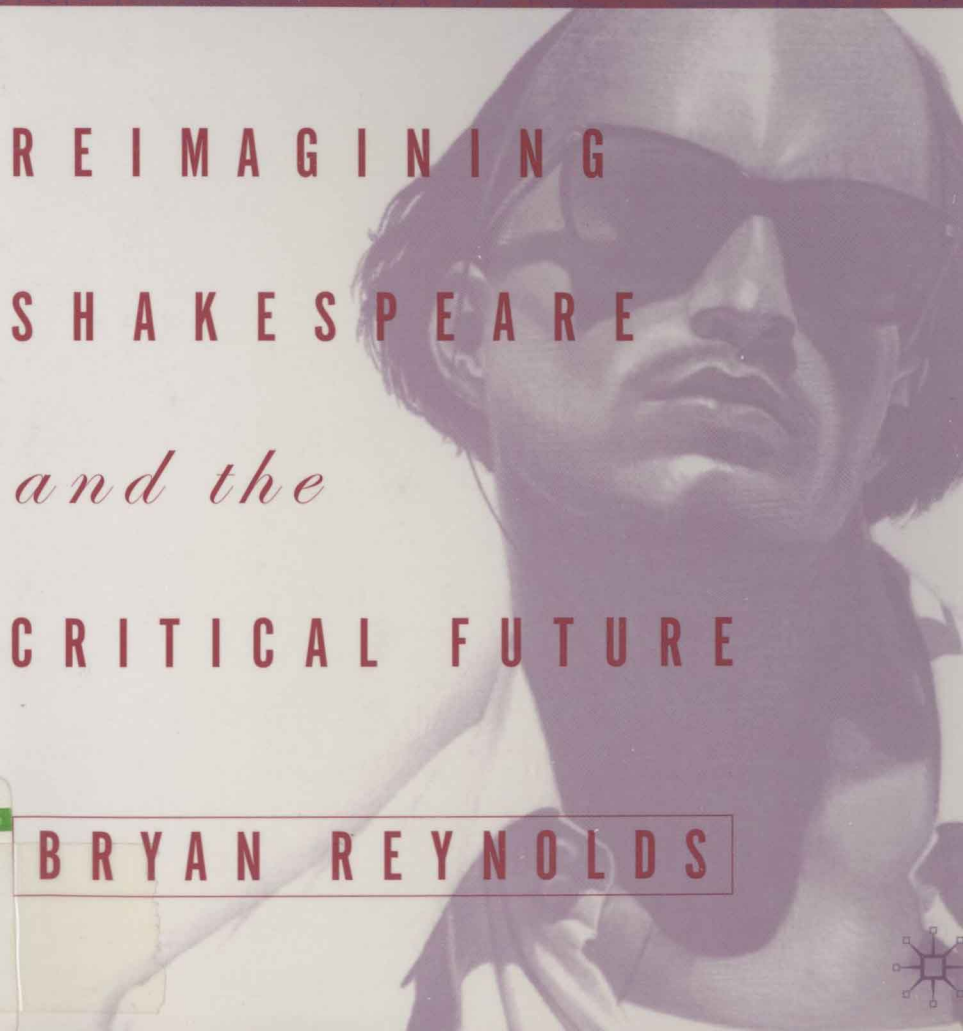
Performing Transversally

REIMAGINING SHAKESPEARE *and the* CRITICAL FUTURE



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Performing Transversally: Reimagining Shakespeare and the Critical Future

BY
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palgrave
macmillan

First published 2003 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN™
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010 and
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England RG21 6XS
Companies and representatives throughout the world

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ISBN 0–312–29331–3 hardback

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Reynolds, Bryan (Bryan Randolph)
Performing transversally : reimagining Shakespeare and the critical future / by Bryan Reynolds.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0–312–29331–3
1. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616—Dramatic production. 2. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616—Adaptations—History and criticism. 3. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616—Film and video adaptations. 4. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616—Stage history—1950– I. Title.

PR3091.R477 2003
822.3'3—dc21 2003051798

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: September, 2003
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America.

Acknowledgments

Collaboration can be a wonderful experience, challenging and gratifying on many levels. The experience of writing this book, however, far exceeded my expectations of how wonderful the experience could be. When I conceived of this project I was not at all apprehensive about the prospect of collaborating with so many people. I was excited by it. But my excitement was driven partially by not the healthiest of reasons. I looked forward to the conflict, to the ideological and methodological struggles, to the battles of egos and wills, as well as to engagement with alternative thoughts and feelings, unanticipated stimulations, surprise accomplishments, developing friendships, and personal growth. I imagined the project being quintessentially transversal, exemplifying transversality by both inspiring and propelling the collaborators into uncharted conceptual and emotional territories. What I got, as it turns out, was all good. In retrospect, I do not lament the lack of conflict. Of course, there were ideological, methodological, and interpretive disagreements, but these were always resolved through enjoyable rhetorical exchanges, often involving much humor ("Are we being transversal yet?"), as well as a little intoxication. From my perspective, this book is a homage to my collaborators, to those whose names are credited in the following pages, and to those unnamed, the many people who had ideas bounced off their heads—often with staggering repetition—by all of us credited folks. It goes without saying that the book could not have been written without my collaborators, and so I am most indebted to them, but also this book could not have been written without the support of many people whom it is my honor to thank here.

In addition to being grateful for all the support given to me by the university as a whole and by the School of the Arts in particular, I am grateful to my colleagues at the University of California at Irvine and in the joint UCI/UCSD Ph.D. Program in Drama and Theater. Of the many UCI and UCSD colleagues who have supported me in various ways during the writing of this book, I am especially indebted to Jill

Beck, Eli Simon, Dudley Knight, Stephen Barker, Robert Weimann, John Rouse, Jim Carmody, David McDonald, Barbara Thibodeau, Cameron Harvey, Ann Pellegrini, Janelle Reinelt, and Robert Cohen. Other colleagues, friends, and family whom I am grateful to include Monty Hom, Rodney Byrd, Julie Kiernan, Todd Wright, Greg Ungar, Karen Weber, Richard Burt, Bill Worthen, Tony Kubiak, Greg Reynolds, Donna Reynolds, Don Reynolds, Marge Garber, David Podley, Mary Dryer, Ian Munro, Matt Grant, Anke Ortlepp, Kirsten Lammich, Margo Crespin, Jennifer Gregory, Barry Crittenden, Jenn Colella, Tom Augst, Scott Albertson, and Kim Savelson. I want to give special thanks to two of my collaborators: Don Hedrick, who made me smile when I needed to and, when I did not need to, made me dance to delirium before entertaining a new idea of mine; and Janna Segal, whose unrelenting upbeat verve, wit, and diligence worked uncannily to keep me focused when my transversal affinities were inclined to take me elsewhere. I am also especially indebted to my editor, Kristi Long, who first listened politely to a sleepless me ramble on frantically over a hardy lunch about the book-in-progress at the Shakespeare Association of America Conference in Montreal, then came to believe in its potential when I showed her several chapters and some fragments, and has now shepherded it—with the help of Palgrave's Farideh Koohi-Kamali and Roee Raz—to the masses. Lastly and certainly most of all, I am grateful to Kris Lang, my partner in all things transversal and not, the best friend a person could ever have, and the love of my life.

Portions of this book have appeared in *Shakespeare After Mass Media*, ed. Richard Burt (New York: Palgrave, 2002), *Critical Essays on Othello*, ed. Philip Kolin (New York: Routledge, 2002), *Shakespeare Without Class: Misappropriations of Cultural Capital*, ed. Bryan Reynolds and Donald Hedrick (New York: Palgrave, 2000), *Social Semiotics: A Transdisciplinary Journal in Functional Linguistics, Semiotics and Critical Theory* 7 : 2 (August 1997), *The Upstart Crow: A Shakespeare Journal* 8 (1993); and are here reprinted by kind permission.

Foreword: Seeing Across Shakespeare

Bryan Reynolds has written a new book about Shakespeare—except that it defies categories, even that of being "about Shakespeare." In many ways, Shakespeare is the pretext for an intervention into postmodern theory that is intent on linking disparate, usually isolated fields. Traversing high and low culture, several media, four centuries, and multiple scholarly schools of thought, this book practices the transversal theory it preaches. Beginning with the events of September 11 and ending with a comic mock dialogue between "ooz" and "zoo" on transversal poetics, Reynolds steers a course among multiple and complex subjects of interest to theater, film, and literary scholars, and more generally, those with interests in cultural theory. A great strength of the book lies in something Reynolds calls the "principle of translucency": it provides a multicoded, multiperspectival discourse that produces for the reader the ability to "see one or two or more things through others while at the same time seeing the others themselves."

Over the past fifteen years, the fledgling discipline of performance studies has developed its relationships to cultural studies, ethnography, theater studies, and media studies while insisting on its own proper object of study—performance—taken in its broadest sense to mean an "embodied enactment of cultural forces" (Jon McKenzie, *Perform Or Else; From Discipline to Performance* [London and New York: Routledge, 2001], 8). Shakespeare scholars have often remained the most literary of scholars, but a significant number of them have broken open new areas of Shakespeare studies—I'm thinking particularly of Jonathan Dollimore, Marjorie Garber, Stephen Greenblatt, Jean Howard, Phyllis Rackin, Alan Sinfield, and others whose approaches have provided a radical realignment of Shakespeare studies with new historicism, cultural studies, feminism, queer theory, and poststructuralism generally. Yet all of these fields have their own identifying marks, their own calling cards, so to speak. Often, academic practices of power and status have seemed to construct exclusions or hierarchies where other more

productive structural relations might have existed. Thus drama (meaning the literary study of texts) has been opposed to theater (meaning the concrete stagings of live performance); live performance has been opposed to film and other media; "performativity" has been debated in terms of whether or not it includes actual performances in its Austinian scope; Shakespeare has been claimed by traditionalists and innovators, and many academics in several fields still struggle with the high/low culture binary.

Refreshingly, Reynolds brushes aside these old grievances to construct a cohabitation of these various terms while not sacrificing the singularity of any. In his chapter on Robert Wilson's *Hamlet*, Reynolds couples this avant-garde theater artist's performance with the rock star Lou Reed's attendance at the performance to begin a multifaceted discussion of issues of textuality (as in Barthes) and of textual authority (as in the scholarly controversy over Shakespeare's quartos). This trajectory links to another strand of the chapter concerned with the nature of theatrical modes of production after mass media. The Wilson/Reed connection supports an insistence that live presence matters—that Wilson and Reed become the authors of their performance events, the media for themselves, for characters, and for the audiences who view them. The only adequate "quotation" of a theater or concert event would be "one that includes the performance of a portion of the event and the actual presence of Robert Wilson [or Lou Reed]." Reynolds desires the reader to be able to think about avant-garde performances and rock concerts in the same moment; similarly, the discussion of what kind of relationship—or not—Wilson's *Hamlet* has to Shakespeare's text entails philosophical questions about the status of authorship as well as the scholarly debates about textual authority that have defined one area of Shakespeare studies. The desire to have his readers think about these issues simultaneously without collapsing them into each other or subordinating them to an orderly whole creates the translucent effect of his scholarship.

Reynolds is primarily interested in developing a theory—"transversal theory"—that offers an optimistic, almost a utopian sense of possibility to cultural criticism, while posing a conception of how human subjectivity changes and morphs. In this sense, it is an attempt to account for novelty in the philosophical sense of that term: how is it that anything new ever actually enters into representation? What do we understand as the constraints but also the unpredictable novel possibilities of representation, cognition, aesthetic experience? Artistic experience can foster empathetic identification, which in turn, can lead to breaking free from

"subjective territory," that space within which individuals are "subjected conceptually and emotionally, that is, developed into a subject by the state machinery of any hegemonic society or subsociety (such as the university, criminal organizations, or religious societies)." In other words, Reynolds claims for art the power to push individuals beyond their limits into "transversal territory" where multiple forms of subjectivity, contradictory feelings and cognitions, and transformative possibilities may be grasped, at least in the subjunctive.

These ideas, then, call on performance as an art form that can most easily produce transversal events, because the embodied enactment of cultural forces produces and elicits empathetic identification that can propel the border crossings beyond subjective space. "Empathy enables people to venture beyond their own conceptual and emotional boundaries, to think and feel as others do or might, and thus expand or transcend their own 'subjective territories.' . . . Transversal movements occur when one entertains alternative perspectives and breaches the parameters of their subjectification." Thus Reynolds focuses on films and live performances that offer maximum provocations for transversal movement. Julie Taymor's *Titus* is a model film, and she develops a transversal aesthetic because she creates her works by combining and proliferating techniques, cultures, and media. Combining masks and puppets with human actors, for instance, gives her representational universe a widely attractive, seductive multiplicity. Blurring the distinctions between cinematic and theatrical conventions, she still keeps both discreetly present, capable of being enjoyed and apprehended simultaneously and yet distinctly.

Among the key terms in transversal theory is the "investigative-expansive mode." In spite of its seemingly clunky terminology, it is crucial to the theoretical enterprise, and is surprisingly flexible. Reynolds and his collaborator James Intriligator recommend this methodology to those approaching either artistry or scholarship; indeed, it seems to operate as a kind of epistemological principle. In brief, the idea is that usually the emphasis in critical thinking is on definition and containment; that is, the subject matter under study is broken down into various parts for analysis, then interpreted or "read" as a coherent and unified whole. Reynolds thinks this coherence is often achieved at the expense of an exploration of the subject's relations to other aspects of its context, relations that may lead toward a more dispersed but imaginative and productive account of the original subject. So by deliberately introducing seemingly tangential ideas, objects, theories and so on into a study of, say, *Othello*, a more complex knowledge of the text or performance may

emerge. Reynolds is an advocate for creating scholarship that evokes the same transversal territory he suggests artworks can create for their audiences. The value of this approach is an increase in complexity of understanding, maximizing the possibilities inherent in the subject, and expanding the horizons of disciplinary thinking.

In his chapter on *Othello*, Reynolds and his collaborators trace the critical tradition of interpretations of Othello as they vacillate between racist affirmations of his barbarous nature (the "true self" shows through in the murder of Desdemona) and attempts to avoid such a racist reading by seeing virtuous Othello (virtuous in Christian, Venetian/Elizabethan terms) ruined by the demonic Iago. Concluding that none of the existing interpretations overcomes fundamental contradictions that remain, Reynolds turns to an essay by Deleuze on sadomasochism to challenge his own analysis that has been largely ideological, turning on conceptions of Christian virtue and Venetian government by considering instead, or rather in addition, a psychoanalytic view of the sadistic and masochistic aspects of the behaviors of Iago, Othello, and Desdemona. His conclusion is that the binary oppositions the play seems to encourage lead to contradictions, and that the point is not to resolve them but to recognize the primary experience of moving through them: "The play is not built on categorizations such as that of Othello as the black man with the white soul and Iago as the white man with the black soul. Rather, it is built on such actions as the audience's realization that their expectations have been contradicted. . . . By contrast, our analysis is concerned primarily with this movement, the process of change, rather than the initial and final states."

Other chapters employ this investigative-expansive mode in various guises. Italian playwright/performer Dario Fo and his wife Franca Rame are praised because their mode of "dramaturgy does not seek a cohesive conclusion or holistic, unified meaning, but rather a dynamic, fluctuating collection of variables that reveal the variability and permeability of dichotomous sociocultural demarcations." In chapter 5, on Polanski's *Macbeth*, Reynolds combines a contextual comparison of the cultural environments concerning witchcraft involved in the original Renaissance performances and 1960s "hippy culture" (also containing elements of witchcraft) that formed the background for the Tate-LaBianca murders and Polanski's film. In a chapter on film acting in film versions of and about Shakespeare, Reynolds calls for a "post-cinematic" film technique, one that would take into account audiences' knowledge of cinematic contrivance and codes, make cocreators of the audiences, and would put performers at the center of the creative

process by emphasizing the actor's "own self-aware textual analysis [and] simultaneous interpretation and execution." This would result, of course, in a dispersed responsibility for making meanings among audiences and artists, and would foreclose the typical director's *tour de force* (one thinks of Kenneth Branagh, although Reynolds doesn't mention him). An investigative-expansive mode of film making such as this better suits an age following that of the dominance of Hollywood cinema, one in which interactive video games, Internet surfing, and self-governed home video has begun to change the nature and desires of viewing, of being an audience.

Throughout the book, Reynolds seeks to confound the tidy limits of just about everything he touches. It is not surprising that the theorists to whom he has the most affinity are Deleuze and Guattari, although he criticizes Deleuze for the stability of his definitions. The emphasis on change, open-ended meanings, and expanding the parameters of the possible applies to Shakespeare performances, historical and contemporary public events, and essays written by scholars on any of these.

Reynolds confounds the usual conception of scholarship in yet another area: that precinct known as the ownership of ideas. This book is written with other people. Most of the chapters are joint chapters. Although Reynolds is the only author in every chapter, D.J. Hopkins and Janna Segal each coauthor two chapters, and five other people are involved in coauthoring chapters—nine if Jonathan Gil Harris and I are counted as well. Reynolds is producing a volume of transversal scholarship that refuses to be contained within the usual author-function of American scholarship in the humanities. This book isn't an edited collection of essays, and it isn't a single-author monograph either. Rather, it has a dominant author and a series of affiliated authors with more limited responsibility for the ideas therein. So how to think about this book—as written by Bryan Reynolds and friends? I like that re-vision of academic creativity. It reminds me of Brecht's work with his collaborators—or what some scholars refer to as the "Brecht Collective"—except that Reynolds credits his cocreaters while Brecht often neglected to do so. To Reynolds's invitation to readers to move into transversal territory as they journey through these pages, let me add my own utopian wish for a co-production of artists, critics, and readers who encounter these ideas in Shakespace. May we make even more out of them than they offer.

Janelle Reinelt
Irvine, California

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Illustrations

Chapter 1

Transversal Performance: Shakespace, the September 11 Attacks, and the Critical Future

Bryan Reynolds

The United States of America's immediate response to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon was multifarious, but mainly it was horrific astonishment. The people of this country wanted to know who was responsible and why the attacks were perpetrated. They also wanted to know what the damage was and how to fix it. We know now that approximately 3000 people were murdered, yet the answers to the rest of these questions will remain uncertain and inadequate. The attacks were products of a vastly complicated history for which there can be no unmediated access, no singular or absolute truth, and therefore no totalizing resolution. Despite the strong desire for retribution and redemption, and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, nothing can undo what has happened. All attempts at restoration can only ever be adaptation, mimicry, and representation. Remains, organic and otherwise, can be processed chemically and/or altered imaginatively to fuel new life through assimilation, fabrication, and/or imitation. In some cases, a life's remains can achieve a powerful symbolic meaning that significantly influences not only the present, but also how we perceive the past, and where we see ourselves in the future.

Moving into the future, forever changed by the September 11 attacks, this introductory chapter considers the positive possibilities not for restoration, but for different kinds of learning and evolution for which the attacks have already become gateways. By analyzing the terrorist attacks as sociopolitical acts framed and executed in ways theoretically and affectively relatable to mass media, theater, music, dance, writing, and other modes of verbal and nonverbal social performance, I want

to address issues crucial to the future of critical inquiry and the particular Shakespeare-influenced "spaces"—past, present, future, hypothetical, theatrical, social, cultural, political, historical, theatrical, textual, and critical discourses and coordinates—through which this book ventures and resounds. It is in such discursive, multidimensional "articulatory spaces," Shakespeare effected and/or otherwise, that critical discourses and coordinates interface, social performances are imbued respectively and relationally with meaning, subsequent communication transpires, and learning is achieved.

Negotiated diachronically and synchronically, articulatory spaces are always constrained by what I call "sociopolitical conductors." These are mental and physical movers, orchestrators, and transmitters, such as educational, juridical, and religious structures, multimedia broadcasting and information sources, and the institutions of marriage and family, all of which promote or oppose partially or predominantly, and often contradictorily, the dominant ideology of the society in which they function.[1] The aggregate of a society's sociopolitical conductors that support the dominant ideology I refer to as "state machinery,"[2] a concept that accounts for the singular and plural, human and technological influences that work tirelessly but ultimately futilely to manufacture societal coherence and symbiosis. An absolute state for both individuals (meaning humans individuated from other humans) and/or the society they comprise is never a real prospect as long as physical movement and change are constant realties, even though the quest for stable states and the fear of achieving them will nevertheless always stimulate solidarities and antagonisms among sociopolitical conductors with different views on what the ideal society and state should be. However manipulated by sociopolitical conductors with diverse views of the ideal world, discourse on the September 11 attacks, occupying certain articulatory spaces, will continue to influence the conductors themselves as it continues to impact all areas of critical inquiry, including the interdisciplinary fields of cultural anthropology, literary criticism, performance theory, and Shakespeare studies in which my own research concentrates.

Transversal theory

To more fully explain the way I would like us to think about the September 11 attacks, I will employ more concepts, in addition to "sociopolitical conductors" and "state machinery," that were originally developed from my research on criminality and theater in early modern

England. These concepts are linked to my own theoretical approach, what I call "transversal theory," that I introduced in my 1997 *Theatre Journal* article, "The Devil's House, 'or worse': Transversal Power and Antitheatrical Discourse of Early Modern England," and have developed in a number of publications, most recently my 2002 book, *Becoming Criminal: Transversal Performance and Cultural Dissidence in Early Modern England*.[3] Transversal theory guides the analyses of this book, and this book is an expansion of transversal theory and the concepts and powers that drive it. When I introduce transversal theory to my students, I frequently begin with the example, a hypothetical case, of an explosion unexpectedly occurring in the university classroom. I want to begin here with this example because of its relevant structural similarities, although obviously on a much smaller scale, to the events of September 11. The comparison, I believe, will enable us to examine crucial variables free from many of the immediate, personal biases that discussion of the attacks commonly invokes.

If an explosion unexpectedly occurred in the university classroom, and the teacher and other students were horribly injured, the once familiar and safe space of the classroom and, by extension, the university, would become, in an instant, radically transformed. If the cause of the explosion was ambiguous, though many students suspected foul play, it might render the students more damaged psychologically than if the source were obvious. The unidentifiable and mysterious is usually more terrifying than the readily discernable; an unknown enemy is always more difficult to comprehend, defend against, and fight. Whether the source of the explosion is uncertain or evident, the explosion itself would produce a drastic shift from familiar and safe to unfamiliar and dangerous, and this sudden transformation would have a disorienting effect on the students for some duration, at the very least. According to transversal theory, what I call the students' "subjective territory" would have been altered.

Subjective territory refers to the conceptual and emotional spatial range from which a given subject perceives and experiences the world; this applies to all individuals living in a society who are, consciously and/or not, self-governing in accordance with their state-sanctioned conceptuality and emotionality.[4] Put differently, subjective territory accounts for the individual human who has been subjugated conceptually and emotionally, that is, developed into a subject by the state machinery of any hegemonic society or subsociety (such as the university, criminal organizations, or religious societies); and thus the individual's subjective territory, and corresponding self-government, reflects his or her socioeconomic positioning. Subjective territory reinforces the

society's sociopolitical conductors that work to inculcate individuals with the appropriate ideology, the ideology that in turn confirms for them their prescribed addresses, their subjective territory, within the society's hierarchical geography. The resulting determination is physical as well as conceptual and emotional; physical constraints (such as traffic laws, ghettoization, and regionalization) influence the conceptual and emotional aspects of subjectivity, just as they are symptoms and extensions of these aspects.

Consider the constructed life experiences, the subjectivity, of people occupying specific social and class identities (male or female; rich or poor; Catholic, Jewish, or Muslim; and so on). Because of commonalities in experience and education, there is typically much interaction, overlap, and imbrication among subjective territories, hence creating a righteous feeling of homogeneity and universality that links a society's members. The system operates self-consciously, indeed symptomatically, with great efficacy: each individual's interiority is networked with triggers that set off feelings of guilt, shame, and anxiety whenever their subjective territory is threatened. Threats result from inadvertently dissident wanderings and slippages, willful conceptual and/or emotional border crossings, or challenges and disruptions imposed by outside forces, such as the destabilizing effects of a sudden explosion. When one moves outside of their subjective territory, conceptually or emotionally, and crosses into the subjective territory of another and/or into unidentifiable territory, and/or finds oneself disconnected from familiarity, one has engaged in what I call "transversal movements."[5]

Transversal movements are feelings, thoughts, and actions alternative to those that work to circumscribe and maintain a particular subjective territory. Most people engage in them to some degree, in one form or another, everyday. People most often move transversally when they empathize or imagine they are empathizing with others. They may actually have no idea of what someone else is thinking or feeling, but they are nonetheless still thinking and feeling atypically in their attempt to empathize, "as if" they are someone else, which pushes them transversally. By occupying, if only imaginatively or ephemerally, the subjective territory of another one's own subjective territory expands and reconfigures. Empathy is also probably the most common way by which people venture into what I call "subjunctive space," the hypothetical space of both "as if" and "what if," which is an in-between space operative between subjective territory and what I have termed "transversal territory."[6]

In subjunctive space, unlike in transversal territory, the subject necessarily retains agency and can self-consciously hypothesize scenarios