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Transcode Manifesto

My body is encoded, coded and recoded always. When my body is projected across the country via the telephone system to talk to a stranger, it is often coded as male by the operator while simultaneously my voice is encoded into a uniform digital system and compressed for its journey. This conversation, to process a payment, centers what is for many the most masculine seeming aspect of my body, in this moment I am transformed removed from the context of my corporeal body I am imagined as male in the mindseye of the equally disembodied voice on the other end. But it's not a transformation for the operator as my body has never been anything to them before the call, maybe then it is simply another facet of the multiple ways my body is being processed and my failure to code my body as feminine within every system. I encode, code and recode my body always. My voice becomes higher, wavelengths shorten in response, posture changes despite this only being a voice call. I am left wondering if I have just reified the codification of voice as gender. Left to wonder how much is this system changing me and how much I might be able to change it in turn. Left wondering what a radical intervention might be in the face of definitional and categorical violence where the ever increasing drive is to define smaller and smaller aspects of ourselves, to separate, catalog and index to encode, code, and recode.

The version of this manifesto that you are reading is the first version, the rough draft, as well as the 3rd or 4th versions whose changes are/were/will be relatively minor or possibly cataclysmic. It is at the same time, the final and most definitive edition. This is

because transcode work at its core refuses a linear understanding of narrative, time, knowledge making, and labor. Instead, transcode work insists upon lingering in the ebb and flow between categories, definitions, and destinations, to see the many iterations and tangents of a work as inseparable from its final product and inscrutable to the logic of cause and effect. How might an ending have affected its own beginning?

In the formulation “A to B,” transcode invests in the liberatory power of the “to” as a space of movement, possibility, and rupture.

The prefixal “trans-” of transcode, meaning: across, beyond, through, changing thoroughly. By lingering in the space of the “to” the linear arc can be disrupted as one finds themselves able to look not only back at the “A” and forward to “B” but also side to side, upward, downward, inward, and off the path. By seating work in this space, transcode opts out of and interrogates the drive towards linear, binary, and static logic, offering a means of imagining otherwise the categorizations and narratives put forth by these logics onto fluid subjects.

Transcode examines code as a base material in culture’s generation of meaning and narrative. Code meaning: “a system of signals or symbols for communication,” as well as “a system of principles,” and “instructions for a computer.” Transcode then is an interruption of and traversal between codes. An effort in placing oneself at the site/sight/cite of meaning making, exposing the codes (structures, processes, laws) which undergird supposedly inherent truths (of gender, of ownership, of land).

- Transcode is numerously trans, meaning it enacts and explores trans in its subjects, methods, themes, and forms.
- Transcode work, while stemming from an interrogation of transgender issues, seeks to hold space for other and multiple trans identity configurations.
- Transcode work is transmaterial, meaning its projects engage a variety of forms which may shift over time.
- Transcode work sees and responds to the violences of codes, taxonomies, and categorical systems.
- Transcode work is expansive in its understanding of bodies, seeing bodyhood as a gesture of recontextualizing subjects and seeing as conceiving of the body as surpassing the corporeal.
- Transcode work engages systems (computer, numerical, political, and etc.) as a way of critically interrogating oppression and control.
- Transcode takes up codes as an artistic material and as a trans methodology. While not only referring to computer code, transcode does view computer code as a material with immense potential in enacting the gesture of trans.