

From: *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash, London: Sage 1999, 194-213.

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Transculturality - the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today

"When we think of the world's future, we always mean the destination it will reach if it keeps going in the direction we can see it going in now; it does not occur to us that its path is not a straight line but a curve, constantly changing direction"

Ludwig Wittgenstein, Culture and Value, 1929

In the following I want to present a concept of culture which, I think, is appropriate to most cultures today: the concept of transculturality. I will contrast it with three other concepts: first with the classical concept of single cultures and then with the more recent concepts of interculturality and multiculturalism. I believe the concept of transculturality to be the most adequate concept of culture today - for both descriptive and normative reasons.

I. The traditional concept of single cultures

As is well known, the traditional concept of single cultures was paradigmatically and most influentially developed in the late 18th century by Johann Gottfried Herder, especially in his *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*. Many among us still believe this concept to be valid.

The concept is characterized by three elements: by social homogenization, ethnic consolidation and intercultural delimitation. Firstly, every culture is supposed to mould the whole life of the people concerned and of its individuals, making every act and every object

an unmistakable instance of precisely *this* culture. The concept is unificatory. Secondly, culture is always to be the "*culture of a folk*", representing, as Herder said, "the flower" of a folk's existence (Herder, 1966: 394 [13, VII]). The concept is folk-bound. Thirdly, a decided *delimitation* towards the outside ensues: Every culture is, as the culture of one folk, to be distinguished and to remain separated from other folks' cultures. The concept is separatory.

All three elements of this traditional concept have become untenable today. First: Modern societies are differentiated within themselves to such a high degree that uniformity is no longer constitutive to, or achievable for them (and there are reasonable doubts as to whether it ever has been historically). T.S. Eliot's Neo-Herderian statement from 1948, that culture is "the *whole way of life* of a people, from birth to the grave, from morning to night and even in sleep" (Eliot, 1948: 31), has today become an obviously ideological decree. Modern societies are multicultural in themselves, encompassing a multitude of varying ways of life and lifestyles. There are vertical differences in society: the culture of a working-quarter, a well-to-do residential district, and that of the alternative scene, for example, hardly exhibit any common denominator. And there are horizontal divisions: gender divisions, differences between male and female, or between straight and lesbian and gay can constitute quite different cultural patterns and life forms. - So already with respect to this first point, the traditional concept of culture proves to be factually inadequate: it cannot cope with the inner complexity of modern cultures.

Secondly, the ethnic consolidation is dubious: Herder sought to envisage cultures as closed spheres or autonomous islands, each corresponding to a folk's territorial area and linguistic extent. Cultures were to reside strictly within themselves and be closed to their environment. But as we know, such folk-bound definitions are highly imaginary and fictional; they must laboriously be brought to prevail against historical evidence of intermingling; and they are, moreover, politically dangerous, as we are today experiencing almost worldwide.

Finally, the concept demands outer delimitation. Herder says: "Everything which is still the *same* as my nature, which can be *assimilated* therein, I envy, strive towards, make my own; *beyond this*, kind nature has armed me with *insensibility*, *coldness* and *blindness*; it can even become *contempt* and *disgust*." (Herder, 1967a: 45) - So Herder defends the double of emphasis on the own and exclusion of the foreign. The traditional concept of culture is a concept of inner homogenization and outer separation at the same time. Put harshly: It tends - as a consequence of its very conception - to a sort of cultural racism. The sphere premiss and the purity precept not only render impossible a mutual understanding between cultures, but the appeal to cultural identity of this kind finally also threatens to produce separatism and to pave the way for political conflicts and wars.

To sum this up: The classical model of culture is not only descriptively unserviceable, but also normatively dangerous and untenable. What is called for today is a departure from this concept and to think of cultures beyond the contraposition of ownness and foreignness - "beyond both the heterogeneous and the own", as Adorno once put it (Adorno, 1984: 192).

II. Interculturality and Multiculturalism

Are then, perhaps, the concepts of interculturality and multiculturalism more able to provide an appropriate concept of today's cultures? They apparently try to overcome some flaws of the traditional concept by advocating a mutual understanding of different cultures. Yet they are, as I will argue, almost as inappropriate as the traditional concept itself, because they still conceptually presuppose it.

1. Interculturality

The concept of interculturality reacts to the fact that a conception of cultures as spheres necessarily leads to intercultural conflicts. Cultures constituted as spheres or islands can, according with the logic of this conception, do nothing other than collide with one another. Their "circles of happiness" must, as Herder said, "clash" (Herder, 1967a: 46); cultures of this kind must ignore, defame or combat one another.

The conception of interculturality seeks ways in which such cultures could nevertheless get on with, understand and recognize one another. But the deficiency in this conception originates in that it drags along with it unchanged the premiss of the traditional conception of culture. It still proceeds from a conception of cultures as islands or spheres. For just this reason, it is unable to arrive at any solution, since the intercultural problems *stem* from the island-premiss. The classical conception of culture *creates* by its primary trait - the separatist character of cultures - the secondary problem of a structural inability to communicate between these cultures. Therefore this problem can, of course, not be solved on the basis of this very conception. The recommendations of interculturality, albeit well-meant, are fruitless. The concept does not get to the root of the problem. It remains cosmetic.

2. Multiculturalism

The concept of multiculturalism is surprisingly similar to the concept of interculturality. It takes up the problems which different cultures have living together *within one society*. But therewith the concept basically remains in the duct of the traditional understanding of culture; it proceeds from the existence of clearly distinguished, in themselves homogenous cultures - the only difference now being that these differences exist within one and the same state community.

The concept seeks opportunities for tolerance and understanding, and for avoidance or handling of conflict. This is just as laudable as endeavours towards interculturality - but equally inefficient, too, since from the basis of the traditional comprehension of cultures a mutual understanding or a transgression of separating barriers cannot be achieved. As daily experience shows, the concept of multiculturalism accepts and even furthers such barriers. Compared to traditional calls for cultural homogeneity the concept is progressive, but its all too traditional understanding of cultures threatens to engender regressive tendencies which by appealing to a particularistic cultural identity lead to ghettoization or cultural fundamentalism.

I cannot further expand on this point here. This would for example require distinguishing between the US-American and the European comprehension of multiculturalism and discussing their different histories, contexts, and related problems. The basic point, however, is in each case, that the concept implies and affirms the traditional conception of cultures as autonomous spheres, and that it's exactly this which emerges in present-day phenomena of separation and ghettoization. It comes to light here just how fatal the outcome of recourse to the old concept of culture can be. The old cultural notion of inner homogeneity and outer delimitation engenders chauvinism and cultural fundamentalism.

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Criticism of the traditional conception of single cultures, as well as of the more recent concepts of interculturality and multiculturalism can be summarized as follows: If cultures were in fact still - as these concepts suggest - constituted in the form of islands or spheres, then one could neither rid oneself of, nor solve the problem of their coexistence and cooperation. However, the description of today's cultures as islands or spheres is factually incorrect and normatively deceptive. Cultures de facto no longer have the insinuated form of homogeneity and separateness. They have instead assumed a new form, which is to be called *transcultural* insofar that it *passes through* classical cultural boundaries. Cultural conditions today are largely characterized by mixes and permeations. The concept of transculturality - which I will now try to explain - seeks to articulate this altered cultural constitution.'

III. Transculturality

1. Macro-level: the altered cut of today's cultures

a. Transculturality is, in the first place, a consequence of the *inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures*. These encompass - as I explained before - a number of ways of life and cultures, which also interpenetrate or emerge from one another.

b. The old homogenizing and separatist idea of cultures has furthermore been surpassed through *cultures' external networking*. Cultures today are extremely interconnected and entangled with each other. Lifestyles no longer end at the borders of national cultures, but go beyond these, are found in the same way in other cultures. The way of life for an economist, an academic or a journalist is no longer German or French, but rather European or global in tone. The new forms of entanglement are a consequence of migratory processes, as well as of worldwide material and immaterial communications systems and economic interdependencies and dependencies. It is here, of course, that questions of power come in.

Consequently, the same basic problems and states of consciousness today appear in cultures once considered to be fundamentally different - think, for example, of human rights debates, feminist movements or of ecological awareness which are powerful active factors across the board culturally.

c. Cultures today are in general characterized by *hybridization*. For every culture, all *other* cultures have tendentially come to be inner-content or satellites. This applies on the levels of population, merchandise and information. Worldwide, in most countries, live members of all other countries of this planet; and more and more, the same articles - as exotic as they may once have been - are becoming available the world over; finally the global networking of communications technology makes all kinds of information identically available from every point in space.

Henceforward there is no longer anything absolutely foreign. Everything is within reach. Accordingly, there is no longer anything exclusively 'own' either. Authenticity has become folklore, it is ownness simulated for others - to whom the indigene himself belongs. To be sure, there is still a regional-culture rhetoric, but it is largely simulatory and aesthetic; in substance everything is transculturally determined. Today in a culture's internal relations - among its different ways of life - there exists as much foreignness as in its external relations with other cultures.

2. Micro-level: transcultural formation of individuals

Transculturality is gaining ground moreover not only on the macrocultural level, but also on the individual's micro-level. For most of us, multiple cultural connexions are decisive in terms of our cultural formation. We are cultural hybrids. Today's writers, for example, emphasize that they're shaped not by a single homeland, but by differing reference countries, by Russian, German, South and North American or Japanese literature. Their cultural formation is transcultural (think, for example, of Naipaul or Rushdie) - that of subsequent generations will be even more so.

Sociologists have been telling us since the seventies that modern lives are to be understood "as a migration through different social worlds and as the successive realization of a number of possible identities" (Berger, Berger and Kellner, 1973: 77), and that we all possess "multiple attachments and identities" - "cross-cutting identities", as Bell put it (Bell, 1980: 243). What once may have applied only to outstanding persons like Montaigne, Novalis, Whitman, Rimbaud or Nietzsche, seems to be becoming the structure of almost everybody today.

Of course, a cultural identity of this type is not to be equated with national identity. The distinction between cultural and national identity is of elementary importance. It belongs among the mustiest assumptions that an individual's cultural formation must be determined by his nationality or national status. The insinuation that someone who possesses an Indian or a German passport must also culturally unequivocally be an Indian or a German and that, if this isn't the case, he's some guy without a fatherland, or a traitor to his fatherland, is as foolish as it is dangerous. The detachment of civic from personal or cultural identity is to be insisted upon - all the more so in states, such as ours, in which freedom in cultural formation belongs among one's basic rights.

Wherever an individual is cast by differing cultural interests, the linking of such transcultural components with one another becomes a specific task in identity-forming. Work on one's identity is becoming more and more work on the integration of components of differing cultural origin. And only the ability to transculturally cross over will guarantee us

identity and competence in the long run (cf. Welsch, 1992c).

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To sum this up: Cultural determinants today - from society's macro level through to individuals' micro level - have become transcultural. The old concept of culture misrepresents cultures' actual form, the type of their relations and even the structure of individuals' identities and lifestyles. Every concept of culture intended to pertain to today's reality must face up to the transcultural constitution.' The gesture made by some cultural theorists, who prefer to cling to their customary concepts and, wherever reality doesn't yield to these, retreat to a "well so much the worse for reality", is ridiculous.

IV. Supplements and outlooks

Having so far developed the general features of transculturality, I would now like to append some supplemental viewpoints and prospects.

1. Transculturality - already in history

First: Transculturality is in no way completely new historically. It has, to be sure, been the case to a larger extent than the adherents of the traditional concept of culture want to admit. They blindly deny the factual historic transculturality of long periods in order to establish the nineteenth century's imaginary notion of homogeneous national cultures. Carl Zuckmayer once wonderfully described historical transculturality in *The Devil's General*: "[...] just imagine your line of ancestry, from the birth of Christ on. There was a Roman commander, a dark type, brown like a ripe olive, he had taught a blond girl Latin. And then a Jewish spice dealer came into the family, he was a serious person, who became a Christian before his marriage and founded the house's Catholic tradition. - And then came a Greek doctor, or a Celtic legionary, a Grisonian landsknecht, a Swedish horseman, a Napoleonic soldier, a deserted Cossack, a Black Forest miner, a wandering miller's boy from the Alsace, a fat mariner from Holland, a Magyar, a pandour, a Viennese officer, a French actor, a Bohemian musician - all lived on the Rhine, brawled, boozed, and sang and begot children there - and - Goethe, he was from the same pot, and Beethoven, and Gutenberg, and Mathias Grünewald, and - oh, whatever - just look in the encyclopaedia. They were the best, my dear! The world's best! And why? Because that's where the peoples intermixed. Intermixed - like the waters from sources, streams and rivers, so, that they run together to a great, living torrent" (Zuckmayer, 1963). - This is a realistic description of a 'folk's' historical genesis and constitution. It breaks through the fiction of homogeneity and the separatist idea of culture as decreed by the traditional concept.

For someone who knows their European history - and art history in particular - this historical transculturality is evident. Styles developed across the countries and nations, and many artists created their best works far from home. The cultural trends were largely European and shaped a network linking the states.

2. Cultural conceptions as active factors in respect of their object

Conceptions of culture are not just descriptive concepts, but operative concepts. Our understanding of culture is an *active factor* in our cultural life.

If one tells us (as the old concept of culture did) that culture is to be a homogeneity event, then we practice the required coercions and exclusions. We seek to satisfy the task we are set - and will be successful in so doing. Whereas, if one tells us or subsequent generations that culture ought to incorporate the foreign and do justice to transcultural components, then we will set about this task, and then corresponding feats of integration will belong to the real structure of our culture. The 'reality' of culture is, in this sense, always a consequence too of our conceptions of culture.

One must therefore be aware of the responsibility which one takes on in propagandizing concepts of this type. We should be suggesting concepts which are descriptively adequate and normatively accountable, and which - above all - pragmatically lead further. Propagandizing the old concept of culture and its subsequent forms has today become irresponsible; better chances are found on the side of the concept of transculturality.

3. Cultural annexability and transmutability

The concept of transculturality aims for a multi-meshed and inclusive, not separatist and exclusive understanding of culture. It intends a culture and society whose pragmatic feats exist not in delimitation, but in the ability to link and undergo transition. In meeting with other lifeforms there are always not only divergences but opportunities to link up, and these can be developed and extended so that a common lifeform is fashioned which includes even reserves which hadn't earlier seemed capable of being linked in. Extensions of this type represent a pressing task today.

It is a matter of readjusting our inner compass: away from the concentration on the polarity of the own and the foreign to an attentiveness for what might be common and connective wherever we encounter things foreign.

Transculturality sometimes demands things that may seem unreasonable for our esteemed habits - as does today's reality everywhere. But transculturality also contains the potential to transcend our received and supposedly determining monocultural standpoints, and we should make increasing use of these potentials. I am confident that future generations will more and more develop transcultural forms of communication and comprehension. Diane Ravitch reports an interesting example: In an interview a black runner said "that her model is Mikhail Baryshnikov. She admires him because he is a magnificent athlete." Diane Ravitch comments: "He is not black; he is not female; he is not American-born; he is not even a runner. But he inspires her because of the way he trained and used his body. When I read this, I thought how narrow-minded it is to believe that people can be inspired *only* by those who are exactly like them in race and ethnicity." (Ravitch, 1990: 354) - Once again: We can transcend the narrowness of traditional, monocultural ideas and constraints, we can develop an increasingly transcultural understanding of ourselves.

4. Internal and external transculturality

Furthermore, the individuals' discovery and acceptance of their transcultural constitution is a condition for coming to terms with societal transculturality. Hatred directed towards foreigners is (as has been shown particularly from the psychoanalytic side) basically projected hatred of oneself. One takes exception vicariously to something in a stranger, which one carries within oneself, but does not like to admit, preferring rather to repress it internally and to battle with it externally. Conversely, the recognition of a degree of internal foreignness forms a prerequisite for the acceptance of the external foreign. It is precisely when we no longer deny, but rather perceive, our inner transculturality, that we will become capable of dealing with outer transculturality.

Incidentally, Nietzsche was already a precursor of the subject-internal, as well as the societal transculturality which are topical today. Of himself he said that he was "glad to harbour [...] not `one immortal soul', but *many mortal souls* within" (Nietzsche, 1980a: 386 [II 17]), and he coined the formula of the "subject as a multitude" in general (Nietzsche, 1980b: 650). For Europe he prognosticated a process of increasing cultural intermixing: "Commerce and industry, traffic in books and letters, the commonality of all higher culture, quick changes of locality and landscape, the present-day nomadic life of all nonlandowners - these conditions necessarily bring about a weakening and ultimately a destruction of nations, or at least of European nations: so that a mixed-race, that of the European man, has to originate out of all of them, as the result of continual crossbreeding." (Nietzsche, 1984: 228 [475]) In Europe "a tremendous *physiological* process is taking place and gaining momentum. The Europeans are becoming more similar to each other; they become more and more detached from the conditions under which races originate that are tied to some climate or class; they become increasingly independent of any *determinate* milieu that would like to inscribe itself for centuries in body and soul with the same demands. Thus an essentially supra-national and nomadic type of man is gradually coming up, a type that possesses, physiologically speaking, a maximum of the art and power of adaptation as its typical distinction." (Nietzsche, 1989: 176 [242])

Nietzsche however also considered such intermixing processes as ambivalent. He distinguished two possibilities: In general hybrid characters, since they "have in their bodies the heritage of multiple origins", will "be weaker human beings: their most profound desire is that the war they *are* should come to an end"; the happiness they yearn for will be "the happiness of resting, of not being disturbed, of satiety". Yet, in others, "the opposition and war" in their nature "have the effect of one more charm and incentive of life"; it is then that "those magical, incomprehensible, and unfathomable ones arise", whose "most beautiful expression" is found in men like Alcibiades, Frederick II or Leonardo da Vinci. Both types "appear in precisely the same ages", they "belong together and owe their origin to the same causes" (ib.: 111 f. [200]).

On the whole Nietzsche ultimately pleaded for future cultural mixing. Features of the erstwhile "enigmas" would belong to tomorrow's normal type. Future culture would be one of intermixing, and the future person a polycultural nomad. Nietzsche had, in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, already said, that one should "work actively on the

merging of nations" (Nietzsche, 1984: 228 [475]). And in his late years he spoke out acerbically against the relapse to "nationalism", "fatherlandishness" or "soil addiction": "What value could it have, now that everything points to larger and common interests, to goad these ragged self-ish feelings? [...] And that in a situation where *spiritual dependence* and denationalization leap to the eye, and the actual value and meaning of today's culture lies in mutual fusion and fertilization of one another!" (Nietzsche, 1980c: 92 f. [235]): Nietzsche can be considered as being a precursor of modern transculturality.

5. Link with Wittgenstein

Philosophically, the one person who provides the greatest help for a transcultural concept of culture, however, is Wittgenstein. He outlined an on-principle pragmatically-based concept of culture, which is free of ethnic consolidation and unreasonable demands for homogeneity. According to Wittgenstein, culture is at hand wherever practices in life are shared. The basic task is not to be conceived of as an understanding of foreign cultures, but as an interaction with foreignness. Understanding may be helpful, but it never is sufficient alone, it has to enhance progresses in interaction. We must change the pattern from hermeneutic conceptualizations with their beloved presumption of foreignness on the one hand and the unfortunate appropriating dialectics of understanding on the other hand to decidedly pragmatic efforts to interact. And there is always a good chance for such interactions, because there exist at least some entanglements, intersections and transitions between the different ways of life. It is precisely this which Wittgenstein's concept of culture takes into account. Culture in Wittgenstein's sense is, by its very structure, open to new connexions and to further feats of integration. To this extent, a cultural concept reformulated along Wittgenstein's lines seems to me to be particularly apt to today's conditions.

6. Transculturality in relation to globalization and particularization

a. Uniformization or new diversity?

Let me turn to a final and crucial point. I want to respond to a potential misunderstanding. You might think that the concept of transculturality is tantamount to the acceptance of an increasing homogenization of cultures and the coming of a uniform world-civilization, and that it assents without objection to this development, whilst conspicuously conflicting with our intuitions of cultural diversity. - But does transculturality really mean uniformization? Not at all. It is, rather, intrinsically linked with the production of diversity. Let me clarify this important point.

As transculturality pushes forward, the mode of diversity is altered. If one doesn't recognize this, then one may - as some critics falsely do - equate transculturality with uniformization. For diversity, as traditionally provided in the form of single cultures, does indeed disappear increasingly. Instead, however, a new type of diversity takes shape: the diversity of different cultures and life-forms, each arising from transcultural permeations.

Consider how these transcultural formations come about. Different groups or individuals which give shape to new transcultural patterns draw upon different sources for this

purpose. Hence the transcultural networks will vary already in their inventory, and even more so in their structure (because even the same elements, when put together differently, result in different structures). The transcultural webs are, in short, woven with different threads, and in different manner. Therefore, on the level of transculturality, a high degree of cultural manifoldness results again - it is certainly no smaller than that which was found between traditional single cultures. It's just that now the differences no longer come about through a juxtaposition of clearly delineated cultures (like in a mosaic), but result between transcultural networks, which have some things in common while differing in others, showing overlaps and distinctions at the same time. The mechanics of differentiation has become more complex - but it has also become genuinely cultural for the very first time, no longer complying with geographical or national stipulations, but following pure cultural interchange processes.

Moreover, these transcultural networks are more capable of affiliation with one another than were the old cultural identities. They include segments which also occur in other networks and thus represent points of affiliation between the different transcultural forms. So the new type of differentiation by its very structure favors coexistence rather than combat.

b. Flaws in the globalization and the particularization diagnoses

It is, I think, the advantage of the transculturality concept over competing concepts that it explains uniformization and intermixing processes on the one side and the emergence of new diversity on the other side at the same time and by means of the same formula. - Let me briefly demonstrate this compared to the two main competing diagnoses in the cultural field today: to globalization on the one hand and particularization on the other.

The concept of globalization assumes that cultures are becoming the same the world over (cf. Featherstone, 1990). Globalization is a concept of uniformization (preferably following the Western model) - and of uniformization alone. But this view can, at best, represent half the picture, and the champions of globalization would have a hard time ignoring the complementary resurgence of particularisms worldwide. Their concept, however, is by its very structure incapable of developing an adequate understanding of these counter-tendencies. From the viewpoint of globalization, particularisms are just phenomena which are retrograde and whose destiny it is to vanish.

But particularisms cannot in fact be ignored. The "return to tribes" is shaping the state of the world just as much as the trend towards a world society. The rise of particularisms is a reaction to globalization processes (cf. Robertson, 1987). It certainly creates an explosive situation, because the particularisms often refine themselves through the appeal to cultural identity to nationalisms producing hatred, purification actions and war. Enlightenment people don't like these particularisms. This is quite understandable. But not sufficient. As concerning as one may find these phenomena, we won't be able to get by without taking seriously the demand for a specific identity. People obviously feel compelled to defend themselves against being merged into globalized uniformity. They don't want just to be universal or global, but also specific and of their own. They want to distinguish themselves from one another and know themselves to be well accommodated

in a specific identity. This desire is legitimate, and forms in which it can be satisfied without danger are to be determined and promoted. Future cultural forms will have to be such that they also cater for the demand for specificity.

c. The advantage of the transculturality concept

This brings me once more to the advantage of the transculturality concept over the competing concepts of globalization and particularization. The concept of transculturality goes beyond these seemingly hard alternatives. It is able to cover both global and local, universalistic and particularistic aspects, and it does so quite naturally, from the logic of transcultural processes themselves. The globalizing tendencies as well as the desire for specificity and particularity can be fulfilled *within* transculturality. Transcultural identities comprehend a cosmopolitan side, but also a side of local affiliation (cf Hannerz, 1990). Transcultural people combine both.

Of course, the local side can today still be determined by ethnic belonging or the community in which one grew up. But it doesn't have to be. People can make their own choice with respect to their affiliations. Their actual homeland can be far away from their original homeland. Remember Adorno's and Horkheimer's phrase "Homeland is the state of having escaped" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1994: 78).

7. Conclusion

With regard to the old concept of culture I have set out how badly it misrepresents today's conditions and which dangers accompany its continuation or revival for cultures' living together. The concept of transculturality sketches a different picture of the relation between cultures. Not one of isolation and of conflict, but one of entanglement, intermixing and commonness. It promotes not separation, but exchange and interaction. If the diagnosis given applies to some extent, then tasks of the future - in political and social, scientific and educational, artistic and design-related respects - ought only to be solvable through a decisive turn towards this transculturality.

Notes

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Document update **3Nov 2000**