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The Middle of Transversal Texts

Program of a Becoming That Never Wants to become a Publishing Company

eipcp

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"The middle is not an average, but is, on the contrary, a place where things are accelerated. *Between* the things does not name any localizable relationship that goes from one to the other and back again, but rather a pendulum movement, a transversal movement, which goes in one *and* the other direction, a stream with no beginning or end, which hollows out both of its banks and flows faster and faster in the middle." (Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari)

"The challenge consists in opening up a virtuoso process, in which the production of insight, the production of subjectivity and the weave of affective-linguistic territorialities are not separated moments, but rather part of a single sequence, which is driven by a thoroughly material desire for the common in light of a situation, in which the common is in pieces." (Precarias a la Deriva)

"Printing, distributing, selling books. Never become a publishing company." (Tiqqun)

The publishing industry is in a fundamental crisis. In its final hours it is beginning to lash out, but only hits itself. Every bit of potentially salable goods is contractually bound by copyright, dissected and valorized piece by piece. The classical formats of knowledge production and distribution are in turmoil, and with them also the traditional rituals of evaluating competence. The radical questioning of authorship, massive attacks on the standards for measuring knowledge, overflowing discussions about plagiarism are unsettling the management. As much as academic apparatuses and cultural industries wrestle with conformity, the traditional forms of knowledge production remain just as incompatible with the new media conditions as with future emancipatory concatenations of writing, translating and publicly negotiating publications. And that which has become hegemonic about mechanisms of exclusion – peer reviews, impact factors, ranking, rigid copyright regimes – results in an increasing pressure to domesticate styles, forms and formats, to valorize and self-valorize – and thus in the obliteration of the power of invention.

The effects of this self-destructive crisis of the publishing industry give rise, at the same time, to questions of new forms of accessibility, of decentral collectivity, the development of alternative publishing formats. The *middle* attains a completely different significance here from that of the sphere of transition between production and reception, as it has been manifested for centuries in the classical form of the publishing company. It becomes a place where things not only emerge, but in which they pick up speed: the middle as a stream, in which the multiplicities write, cross/read, translate, duplicate, distribute.

We are experiencing a paradigm shift from linear-vertical communication to transversality. The straight line from production to reception no longer emerges from today's possibilities of knowledge, text and art production. Transversal production is based on forms of exchange that thwart the hierarchy of knowledge pyramids. However, this paradigm shift is by no means unambiguous. Whether the opportunities of the current transformation can be extended in the direction of an emancipatory turn or rather result as a participation imperative in totalizing the valorization of the knowledge production that has now become so patently cooperative, remains to be seen. Against this ambivalent background, in any case, the middle now attains different and more numerous meanings than the old "middle" of "mediating".

1 The middle arises between languages. Multilinguality and heterolinguality mark the current forms of debate and exchange in knowledge production, far beyond the dual logic of an original text and its translation into the hegemonic language(s). For the multiplicity of minoritarian languages, practices of translation are the commonplace, often far too little visible side effects of publication and discussion in virtual and real spaces. Our own practice in the middle of heterolinguality is based on experiences with the eipcp web journal *transversal*. The multilingual web journal is our basis for an expanded practice of networked translation in multiple directions, working between the languages, and synchronous, multilingual publication.

2 Linked with this practice of multilinguality and translation is the middle of translocality. Especially in the multiple crises that have also spread across Europe in the last six years, it is necessary to overcome localisms and struggle against virulent re-nationalization. On the other hand, the global smoothing of space and time is to be countered by a translocal striating, which does not simply

retrogressively invoke the local knowledge institution, but instead emerges from a multiplicity of local production nodes and moves them. Working between languages only makes sense if it is envisioned in multiple directions, not as a publishing company with a limited language region, not as a one-way street, and not purely in relation to a certain geographic space, but rather as a translocal cooperation of writing and sharing. It is from this that the abstract machines emerge that seek to elude valorization, which cross through national languages and continents, which neither subordinate themselves to the locality nor set themselves above it.

3 The transformations of knowledge production tend to shift and dissolve the separations of writing, publishing, receiving. However, this middle of production does not imply merely new versions of self-publishing or simple notions of interactivity that can be quickly exploited. This is about radical changes to the production apparatuses, which correspond to the new modes of production in cooperation. This applies especially to the shift of positions on the continuum from production to reception that used to be understood as linear. This shift signifies neither completely dissolving the functions of production, publishing, reception, nor the assumption of all these functions by one figure that covers everything. The frequently cited "death of the author" is encompassed more by a becoming-multiplicity of author and producer positions. This applies to writing as well as sharing, negotiating, cross/reading, translating, discussing, deliberating, continuing writing, collective processing, presenting and distributing texts both finished and in the making. This plurality needs no anonymous system of authorities (such as that of the failed peer reviews) that obsessively guards the laws of inclusion and exclusion, but rather a dense interweaving of singularities, whose production of desire sweeps the texts along with it.

4 The same process can also be taken from a different perspective as a raging middle of publication. E-publishing and print publishing, for instance, do not appear here as separate possibilities, but rather as a combined process. Complementary formats of publication comprise not only the seemingly competing traditional books and printed journals on the one hand, e-books and e-journals on the other, but also a whole palette of smaller forms on the web, from blog comments or blogrolls all the way to alternative forms of social media communication. In this sense, the middle of publication signifies a movement away from the distribution and communication of separately produced media toward networked endeavors at different scale levels.

5 At the same time, these differentiated formats of publication also create a new middle of presentation. The new ways of distribution on the net tend to favor notions of a separated reality between old bookshops and new web shops. To the extent that no one can foresee whether future reading habits will further repress the classical book or even make it obsolete (both as a medium and in its tendentially linear structure), there is no priority given to either the printed or the electronic book. Yet even in times of increasing virtualization there is a need for being situated in real spaces. The public spheres generated on the web and in real space are not necessarily in competition or in a hierarchical relationship with one another. Situated knowledge needs situations and concrete sites beyond the web, real spaces, in which intense discussions and exchange arise. However, the presentation in specialized bookshops, in the art field or in the university context is still closely linked with web performance and web-based presentation forms.

6 With practices like Open Access and Creative Commons, a new middle has also been evolving in recent decades with respect to

copyright/legal issues. Here too, the situation shows itself to be fundamentally ambivalent. On the one hand, technological possibilities for sharing, forms of open access, new practices of recomposition open up, but on the other the utilization pressure of the publication industry is also increasing. Here it is a matter of advancing the struggles against restrictive and authoritarian copyright regimes that increasingly threaten to dispossess us: in the worst cases, authors are sentenced to pay for the use of their own works or involved in legal cases about them, users are criminalized, and processing, distorting and remixing are to be prohibited as far as possible. Liberating texts from copyright must be accompanied by new forms of decoupling work and income. If authorship has always been rooted in a collective basis, whether standing on the shoulders of giants or the multitude of postfordist cooperation, legal and economic foundations for this collective basis must be created as a diverse existential basis for the many.

Our practice of the commons, of anti-copyright and copyleft is intended to develop exemplary technical and organizational solutions and make them available for copying, adaptation and viral distribution. *transversal texts* is a text machine and abstract machine at once, territory and stream of publication, production site and platform – the middle of a becoming that never wants to become a publishing company.