

# WHAT TO SAY, AND WHERE TO SAY IT

## Open Letter from Independent Publishers to authors and intellectuals committed to a fairer world

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The age we live in is seeing the devastating effects of human action on nature, communities, and humanity itself. Liberalisation and deregulation, consumerism, privatisation, and market fundamentalism have transformed the world, accentuated the concentration of wealth and resources on a planetary scale, and imposed a dominating and predatory logic on nature, public services, health, trade, industry, etc. This logic is at work in politics, in the world of ideas and thought, particularly through the stranglehold of large corporate groups on the media. Democracy itself has been seriously weakened as a result. There is therefore an urgent need to change the model in order to safeguard the planet and the dignity of its inhabitants.

In the field of culture, there has been a sharp increase in the concentration of cultural production, empowering transnational corporations whose globalised activities in the entertainment industry range from book publishing, music production, audio-visual production, or marketing, to the control of different types of media and Internet access systems. The networks of influence and power that make the “information and knowledge industry” are unique. It is no coincidence that the major publishing groups are among the communication giants and have, or have had, links with the arms industry, water management, the “education business,” and the Internet.

Every editorial project has a cultural and commercial dimension in itself. But the tension between these two poles is extremely strong in the publishing world. Some publishers prioritize writing and reading, which they see as a liberating cultural practice, with all its nuances; while others favour the commercial nature of books, emphasising their market value. Those latter publishers exclude and suppress content and titles that do not generate enough profit in a given period of time.

The independent publishing movement, rich in its diversity and with its limitations, arose in opposition to the concentration and commodification of books and culture. It embodies to a large extent the cultural pole of the world of books. Independent publishers conceive the book primarily as a cultural and social good; on the contrary, multinationals and Internet giants resort to practices that push the commercial dimension of the book and the logics of big capital to the extreme.

Now that we have entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is difficult to dissociate the end from the means: what to say, and where to say it? Thus, we find that many authors seeking to promote debate, creativity and critical thinking, justice and equality are published by large conglomerates with multiple editorial labels. Isn't the transformative power of these works reduced to nothing when they plunge into the workings of the entertainment industry? It is a fact that transnational corporations, whatever their field of action, are the very expression of the system that dominates us. By choosing them as publishers, do we not somehow leave the world of transformative ideas in the hands of those who lay the foundations of the model we criticise? Doesn't that strengthen the control of big capital over the word and our daily lives? Moreover, how can we not question the cross-industry investment of the business groups that own publishing houses? And, are these investments neutral?

On the other hand, the voracious appetite for profit subjects the publishing sector to an ever-quickenening, fundamentally unnatural pace. Creation, knowledge, and technology need time to establish themselves as transforming powers. They are reduced to mere commodities, to futile products.

In the countries of the Global South, these large groups are also the expression of cultural colonialism, which continues to marginalise creation, translation, and local production. Their work reduces the autonomy of local book and cultural spaces, thus undermining bibliodiversity. The means of communication they use and the co-option of cultural mediators encourage the politics that privatise public spaces and cultural expressions themselves. In this sense, we believe it is necessary to strengthen coherence between text and context.

It is clear that independent and academic publishing houses do not have the same impact on distribution, circulation, sales, and collection of copyright as multinational companies. They are part of a rather fragile ecosystem, as independent bookshops, and their vocation is not to be overwhelming or asphyxiating but to respect the “glocal” at a human scale—to support bibliodiversity. These publishing houses are struggling in an economic environment in which culture is not part of the social rights guaranteed by the State. They face obstacles erected by the dominant model with its codes and policies that have become the so-called “common sense”—bestsellers and corporate publications occupy the little space reserved for books in the media, along with the windows and displays of bookstores. Independent and academic publishers also see their development limited, since many of the authors who record large sales end up joining the multinational book companies, tempted by advances on rights, notoriety, and “prestige.” It is not easy to resist these temptations. We understand that. But one thing is certain: this situation makes it difficult to maintain rich and diversified catalogues that require the independent publisher to strike a balance between works that sell less well and those with greater circulation and sales. If we subject the world of books to the criteria of ranking, saleability, and the operation of multinationals, which consider each book as a business in itself, we will end up limiting, if not destroying, the transformative power of critical reflection and diversity.

We are convinced that authors, translators, publishers, booksellers, librarians, journalists, critics, and readers have to act together and in solidarity if we want to change the course of things, break the vicious circle of the publishing sector, give meaning and a *raison d'être* to the book as an instrument capable of bringing about a more just, attentive, and environmentally friendly humanity. Contributing by omission to this dynamic of concentration and domination over one another can, in the long term, undermine the transformative power of our work and strengthen the system in place. It is therefore becoming urgent to question this reality – given the role that each one plays in this unbridled race to destroy and annihilate the other – and to commit ourselves to reviewing our entire mode of operation, in order to fight against the submission of the world of ideas to this extractivism logic.

We therefore call on authors, academics and intellectuals to work on projects whose vocation is to transform the way things are and not to consolidate it, to publish their works in independent publishing houses in their own countries, and to give preference to such houses when it comes to the transfer of foreign and translation rights. In this way, they will prevent their works from continuing to reinforce the domination of big capital and the concentration of corporate groups and transnationals. In order to safeguard the world and human dignity, it is necessary to fight relentlessly against the predatory and insatiable logic of accumulation that prevails in all areas, as an ethos of our time. Books, creation, thought and speech are decisive elements to achieve this.

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