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Translator as Microprocessor

An Anonymous Iranian Collective

1. Factum

Affective Cooperation

A, B, C … Manhattan (Amir Naderi, 1997) recounts the story of the common life of three young girls grappling with various affective situations. Being ordinary women, they try to perceive through cooperation what is going on between them and within their milieu: something imperceptible, an element which reinforces affect and friendship among them, and releases a line of flight from the depth of all the psycho-social compositions and decompositions, which later, in an authentic bond with the anti-capitalistic force of *Manhattan by Numbers* (Naderi, 1993), becomes visible in Occupy Wall Street (OWS). As an immigrant, Naderi feels the suppression in the most multi-layered moments of society and its daily relations, and at the same time gives the American oppressed populations a voice that finds its manifestation fifteen years later throughout OWS and its cooperative and affective climate which, according to Kleist, is a *climate of war*.[1] Through these two movies about Manhattan, Naderi practically foreshadows OWS by posing an absolutely affective problem in the margins of the society, by *translating the affects of the really productive forces and the way they are processed*. Marx, too, regards cooperation as the *basis*

of class and class struggle. According to him, the notion of cooperation is constituted through the physical gathering of workers around machines, but this gathering ultimately produces new political affects among the participants, *common*ers, or ordinary men/women. In this sense, class struggle finds its precondition in the production of new political affects or in the construction of a common ground among singular forces (and not in the circulation of information and the augmentation of informing by means of reproducing existing relations). Hence the realm of common notion, the second kind of knowledge according to Spinoza: creating a constructivist space. This is how we moved from Marx to Spinoza and, through Deleuze, from Spinoza to Nietzsche: a vital question reverberates in our ears, a question of the distinction between ethics and morality, of the regimes of desires and values, one that overshadows our most essential concerns and makes us rethink Life as such, struggle and class, organization, thought and friendship. How do we tie our forces so that our community does not become a gathering together of slaves and the production of a homogenizing, hierarchical, and suppressive space (*subjugated groups*), but rather the constitution of a common, singular, fluid, self-critical space for/by free spirits (*group-subjects*)? It was Klossowski who paved the way for us: the singular is not opposed to the universal, but to the gregarious[2]. Nonetheless, singular and gregarious do not merely manifest theoretical terms or words within books or in the minds of the wise, but refer to an intensive reality felt with blood and flesh: cooperation based on affect and friendship, constituting a common space through being opened up to processes of singularization *and* the production of subjectivity, as well as to self-criticism, i.e. the necessity of reconstituting relations and redefining situations. Thus we started translation – among other activities -- as a collective

experiment with ideas, processing affects, and intensifying differences.

Lethal Wasteland

Thirty-five years of organized suppression along with nearly two hundred years of historical oppression, exploitation, capitalization, devastation, and political deception have turned Iran to a vast wasteland, the appalling vastness of which may also be difficult to imagine. It is hard to describe what has been imposed upon the minds of the marginalized and the suppression that their bodies have undergone. The militarization of spaces and intimidation, generalized imprisonment, increasing benefits for militia, widespread privatization in the service of state forces, increasing control over urban and rural zones in accordance with institutionalized religious criteria, strengthening the nuclear family, delivering schools into the hands of clerical institutions, restricting universities, widespread systemic violence during the first two decades after the 1979 revolution, violent suppression of leftist forces (especially guerillas), the loss of any critical space, organized repression of the working class, the aligning of nationalism with an institutionalized Islamism in recent years -- we are talking about an invasion of sad affects and reactive forces, not only on a molar level, but also on a molecular one. Not only the problems associated with a bizarre leviathan made of a composition between capital, religion, military power, and representative democracy, which rules through its governmental technologies and techniques, but also the micro-pressures coming from the subjectivities produced in this territory. After all, the art of governmentality not only produces its subjects and objects, but also the world in which these subjects and objects reside[3]. The composition of forces in this wasteland has provoked the production of procedures, out of which crippled and

sick subjectivities, impotent ones, castrated and castrating, have arisen, which actually desire the strengthening of the formal and established relations and oppress any alternative blooming from below, from *people's brains*, and look up to the rulers, to the false system of representation. This subjectivity is basically fascistic; and by fascism, we are recalling "the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us"[4]. Our deliriums tell us that the psycho-social space of this territory, especially in recent years after the occurrences of 2009 with all its failures and fears, has become strictly policed: not in the sense that people are beaten with batons or collaborate with the police, but in the sense that provokes a series of procedures, defends a series of values, and makes a series of relations, which altogether only serve to strengthen the government, to continue the current states of affairs, and to reproduce the catastrophe. In his dialogue with Parnet, Deleuze shows a way to overcome this wasteland: "It's a little like Nietzsche said so well, someone launches an arrow into space, [...] or even a period, or a collectivity launches an arrow, and eventually it falls, and then someone comes along to pick it up and hurl it out elsewhere, so that's how creation happens, how literature happens, passing through desert periods."[5]
Interestingly enough, even Khayyam in the 11th and 12th C. came to translate some thoughtful Arabic and Greek texts into Persian, despite all attacks and accusations hurled at him -- accusations of atheism, of lapse in tradition and beliefs, of weakening religion and theology. It is said that in 1979, the year of revolution, an extremely large number of books and pamphlets were published informally, most of which were translated critical texts. M. Mokhtari and M. J. Pouyandeh, as two radical researchers, critics and translators of sociological and Marxist texts, were violently slaughtered in the fall of 1998. We have seen behind us the history

of struggles whose thunder still reverberates and stimulates us: books without the name of translators, white books of the revolution period, pamphlets, affects, and monuments. However, many things have changed while this arrow has been flying.

Being-together

We consider texts like Blanchot's as world[6] and world as a free collective workshop for self-education, play, laughter, and experience. We wondered whether, if text is the world or a laboratory for research without telos[7], or the production of new political affects by means of cooperation, then only one point would remain: organizing our (anti-)pedagogies, increasing our collective intelligence, employing concepts and forging them at the expense of our functions. We learned from Nietzsche that "genuine teachers only take things seriously where their students are concerned – even themselves",[8] and in this sense we tried to learn to understand the act of organization as the relation between multiplicities, between singularities in a new minor composition: a teacher only makes sense in relation to the multiplicities of students, beside them, by their sides, and not beyond them as a superior point, just as the puppeteer (dancer) in Kleist's marionette theatre only makes sense in relation to the puppets, beside their relations and its own multiplicities[9]. Therefore, we didn't want to merely translate texts into Persian (translation as an *actual* performance), but to employ them in the processes of our being-together in order to translate the very affects in a new cooperation-based organization (translation as a *virtual* performance) – that is, the process of translation as reconstruction of concrete living, rethinking the singular and local situation, and at the same time translating the affects: *an affective translation*. Two examples can be mentioned here. First, applying those texts throughout the

production of experimental online radios: recomposing heterogeneous textual fragments within a new sound assemblage in order to sharpen the texts and to present a pragmatic understanding of theory. And second, applying those texts throughout the production of image-thought: experimentation with concepts, images, intensities, events, moods, and the expression of the praxis of theory realized in the construction of some short experimental low-budget films. And hence folding the text into the world: from subjectivity into thought into life.

The pharmacology of socius showed us that our social milieu as a whole is actually immersed in procedures that can open up only to the most reactionary interiorization, and that it excludes the *other* and its all-differentiating nature for the benefit of making a false identity or a fascistic solipsism. So we had to be selective about the texts (affects) and constitute a continuum for our activities: a gentle movement flowing in the Spinozan-Nietzschean current, that which illuminated our lives, animated our affects and experiences, and placed us together; posing the problem of community and the necessity of the *call for* the other; investigating the concepts of love and friendship and investing them actively within the critical body of society; examining the possibility of sociability and constructing a common plan(e); and hence the rise of the (im)possibility of thinking – for the philosopher is first of all a friend or a lover: only friend/lover writes, only friend/lover thinks, only *philia-sophia* allows thought to divide into itself and among friends[10]. *Philosophoi, those affective revolutionaries*. In this sense it is only in the construction of a common and autonomous space that thought occurs and a space for struggle is produced. That is why primarily the post-Nietzschean French philosophers (Bataille, Blanchot, Klossowski), who took up the problem of community in all its widespread aspects, are of great importance for

us and capable of a vital influence on Iran's intellectual sphere. A new function for the concept of cooperation appears: not only the cooperation of an actual body with another actual body, but also a virtual cooperation within thought itself. Hence translation is a process of singularization and individuation, and dramatization, for it can engage in creating new political affects among singularities, cooperation within and without them, and collective spaces for living and struggling and launching multiple processes capable of emancipating life: hence translation-processing, *translator as microprocessor*.

2. Datum

Context: A Short (Hi)story of Creating a Chaoid

"Around three million people in the street." It became the headline of many news agencies on the night of Monday, 15 June 2009; but this was not merely a piece of news, but rather an event that marked the before and the after in our lives. A fraudulent election resulted in a street politics of millions, and we witnessed again how the traditional discourses of the Left were at least challenged and how their discursive boundaries between binaries such as reformist/revolutionary praxis have been blurred. We entered into a chaos, in which the semiotic flows of society suddenly faced the absurdity of the abyss on which they had previously fixated – an abyss appeared after the disappearance of the signifier of a eligible State. Being de-rooted from the territory of representative order, the semiotic chains started to flow in all directions, and a hot pot of social experimentation took shape. In the middle of these processes of experimentation, we happened to meet each other. Through different connections among thrown-off individuals, a machinic assemblage of a *chaoid* functioning in the domain of our collective

life emerged. However, if a chaoid is a machinic assemblage that can cut through the chaos and create an architectural composition, "a provisional organizer of chaos"[11], what was really the chaos then?

Chaos is "a degree of complexity which is beyond the ability of human understanding"[12]. Besides the disappearance of the transcendent signifier of a legitimate representative order, the chaos we are talking about emerged through the forceful introduction of the new in the context of Iranian politics after the 1979 revolution: a massive refusal of the governmental rule in the margins and undergrounds, and an attempt to make the unheard voice of *the non-represented* audible. This chaos, which followed the new, was a creative deterritorialization performed by a temporary collective subjectivity; it was a degree of complexity that was beyond the pre-established existing collective intelligence of Iran's society, and it could only indicate that a *new mass intellectuality is to come*. Thus, our group was a part of this chaos, but decided to organize itself and create a chaoid in a way that could transverse this chaos, could start streaking in order to experiment with alternative relations. This led us to a set of new forms of militancy. Knowledge production militancy was our main field of activism. We translated essays and articles from a certain tradition of thought, such as works by Bataille, Blanchot, Artaud, Ginsberg, Kerouac, Burroughs to essays by Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, Negri, Hardt, and others. We wrote essays on politics, economy, arts and cinema, and we borrowed or re-appropriated from this range of writers to develop a perspective. After a short time, we started to collaborate with other activists in a project of alternative knowledge production. It was called *Parallel Academia* and covered the discourses that have been willingly neglected by Iranian academia, or which have been turned into a "subjugated

knowledge" serving the reproducing goals of the state apparatus. During the same period and inspired by Radio Alice and other free radios in 60s and 70s on the one hand, and Allen S. Weiss's theoretical writings on radiophony and schizophony and also Christof Migone and Gregory Whitehead's experimental radio on the other hand, we started to experiment with the form of radio as a new means of mediation.

After the molar repression became stronger, however, we were compelled to stop our activities. Thus we developed an online form of knowledge production in a format of publishing projects. The projects were specifically designed to actively intervene in the existing discourses, either to attack in order to liberate subjugated knowledge, or to introduce an alternative discourse as a means of conceptualizing and dealing with problematic issues.

Experiments with Forms of Organization

As a group, we had certain forms of organization in front of us. The majority of groups engaged in the revived activities of the left in the 2000s, even among student activists, were practicing party politics or identity politics with hierarchical forms of organizations proper to these forms of politics. Many of the activists still believed in a kind of vanguardist schema, according to which intellectuals should lead and educate the proletariat in the struggles for a revolution. Naturally, revolution was imagined as a spectacular event, conditioned by *the last instance*, as a molar revolution intended to seize power and realize the interests of the mass. There were also certain marginal or even self-marginalized leftist groups, too, familiar with contemporary political theory and forms of struggle. But they fetishized their special narrative of May 68 and counter-culture activities into a very close organizational form and

therefore gradually turned into sects or cults. They had websites and magazines and published their translations and essays freely outside the publication market, but suffered from a self-constructed closure.As a group, we had certain criticisms of these organizational forms. In the former case of traditional leftism, we could see the presence of sexism, ageism, and hierarchical bureaucracy in their activities. Their inability to create new forms was the main reason for the failure of their egalitarian projects. The cure for this malady, we believed, was on the one hand to do away with any kind of illusions about vanguardism, and on the other hand to engage in the time-consuming hard forms of transversal organization and try to create and invent new forms of struggle and collectivity, and alternative forms of knowledge production. With the latter case of marginal sects, we in turn emphasized the openness of a network-based organization, and instead of considering only "the economy of distribution of the product" (in this case, our texts, translations and artworks), we concentrated on "the internal economy of our group": how to not be hierarchical, to not reproduce the present social relations inside our group, and to not let any form of unequal power relations take shape through differences in experience, age, knowledge, sex and so on.

Discursive Interventions

In our experiments with organization, we felt the necessity of a discursive practice, which can provide a means for a new leftist conceptualization of the situation through writing. Translation as a practice, which was perhaps an immediate response to the urgency of the situation before us, gained a perspective. Before that, the wave of translating radical leftist theory that had started during the reformist government (1997-2005) was carried mainly by an epistemological drive. After years of translation, the translated texts

from this tradition started to produce a self-sufficient network of signification without any external point of reference in concrete reality. Therefore, translation as a practice became a source for establishing one's identity around it, and far from being applied to the situation, the texts entered a chain of signifiers that endlessly referred to and deferred each other. But this was only one side of the story. When the 2009 protests began, many of these radical discourses revealed their (im)potentiality – or, in some case, their irrelevance. Wondering what kind of power relations were at work among them, which led to an identity politics, hierarchicization, or market-based (best-seller) translations, we came up with a new problem that there could be no discursive intervention in the social field without applying or situating the texts within our lives. From our point of view, the problem was therefore not the lack of suitable translated texts. Some radical texts were there, more or less, but they had never been put to use, never applied, never *situated*. After 2009, we no longer followed a purely epistemological drive, but searched instead for a perspective based on a *pragmatics* of translation. Our main question was no longer what this or that philosopher exactly says, what this or that text exactly means, what this or that concept exactly refers to. These questions had only secondary importance, if any, in defining the limits of a discourse. What mattered above all was what these texts do, what they are capable of, or what their function is.

Roland Barthes, in his lectures on *How to Live Together?*, explains his fantasy of living together. This living together consists of singularities (neither individual nor collective) being together, but which have, at the same time, their very own autonomous character that he calls *idiorrhythmy*: "The pattern of a fluid element … an improvised, changeable form. In atomism, one manner in which atoms can flow; a configuration without fixity or natural

necessity: a 'flowing' [...] in short, the exact opposite of an inflexible, implacably regular cadence."[13] Our perspective in translation was constructed around a similar fantasy: we have sought this *idiorrhythmy* among the political – as we conceptualize this idea – through the texts that were produced under its name. It is clearly evident in the course of our activities that external factors obviously played a significant role. On the one hand, the omnipresent system of censorship had been intensified to an unprecedented extent and most importantly in the field of publication. On the other hand, profit-based decisions among publishers and the difficulties of entering the symbolic order of intellectuals who regularly publish books, i.e. the social-moral-economic relations that we had to submit to in order to publish our books on a regular basis, became intolerable. Therefore, we refused these suppressive exclusive relations and started to publish some of our books online and through sharing websites. Finally, despite a lot of external intimidation, censorship, repression, and policing, we found out that the greatest problems stem from within: How can a subject-group tend toward its highest fluidity and creativity through revisioning and provisioning, reconstituting and redefining its internal affective relations, which themselves make sense only in a concrete relationship with the outside?

Walking, We Ask Questions[14]

The course of this process, even if the concrete collectivity is dispersed by the distance between its bodies (as around two years ago, some of us left Iran and some had to remain), is open-ended. Still, "as we walk, we ask questions". And we walk through our geography of intensities; we don't look back, we don't regret, we don't want to produce a *past* to look back on. On the contrary, our stroll is selective; our walking is *parrhesiastic*. We have never and

will never make an institution of our "self-critique"; we know that is why this term has been infamous in its history as a means for cleansing.

Parrhesia, to tell the truth, has two directions simultaneously: on the one hand, it goes outward to question constituted power in all of its forms – on a molecular as well as molar level; on the other, it goes inward, it becomes the dual affirmation of life, and therefore, it becomes selective in a Nietzschean sense, in order to put aside the molecular crystallizations of power from organization, and to do away with the reactive forces in practice. However, Foucault insists that parrhesia is a dangerous undertaking. We felt this under a constant shadow of persecution by a highly disciplinary power, as well as the precariousness of our very collective. The danger of losing our point of machining with reality, our collective of friends, is grave. Nonetheless, we always challenged ourselves, in every step, on every project. And there were disparities, sometimes differences that were too radical, and sometimes misunderstandings and personalized polemics that could not be tolerated. Consequently, there were moments of implosion and a loss of collectivity. Failures, of course; regret, never.

For example, in the case of organizing in different projects, one could see the sediments of an unhealthy culture: the hierarchies formed around knowledge or experience, the difficulties in challenging all residual forms of ageism and gender inequalities, personalizing ethical or political concerns, and so forth. Or in other instances, while we were aware that to intervene in different levels of knowledge production, we had to be careful of our selection of projects, there were a few times when we couldn't do it. Although never going into the process won't give one the knowledge of its effects, we had some measures in mind to evade this problem. In order not to lose the referring ties with concrete situations, we had

projects to mediate between translation projects and particular situations. Whether or not we invested enough energy in this, is a question we have to return to.

The fact that we were so cautious about not being trapped in any identity politics should not have prevented us from being even more aware of our situation. While we were claiming *there is no inside* to keep the "and" functioning, the external passive/reactive forces, the seduction of identity politics on the margins, were pushing us onto ourselves.

Thus, those *problems from within* taught us the meaning of a double exodus. Writing about the biblical exodus from Egypt, Blanchot asserts that exodus made "of the slaves of Egypt *a* people"[15]. It is not enough to only exit the State apparatus, to escape from the established societal relations, to deterritorialize the pre-delimited territory of your work, but it is also necessary to institute an alternative relation. Perhaps we share the same question with Gin Müller, who asks: "How does one become a 'transversal bastard'*?* [16]"

Language editing: Aileen Derieg

[1]. Ronald Bogue. *Deleuze on Literature*. New York/London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 120–21.

[2]. Pierre Klossowski. *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith. London: Athlone Press, 1997, pp. 76–9.

[3]. See Maurizio Lazzarato. "From Capital-Labour to Capital-Life". *Ephemera*, 2008, pp. 187–208.

[4]. Michel Foucault. “Preface”. In Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. xiii.

[5]. Gilles Deleuze with Claire Parnet. *L’Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze* (produced by Pierre-André Boutang. Éditions Montparnasse), C as in Culture.

[6]. Maurice Blanchot. “Nietzsche and Fragmentary Writing.” In: *The Infinite Conversation*. Trans. Susan Hanson. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 5th. Ed., 2008), p. 167.

[7]. For a detailed comment on a research without telos refer to Colectivo Situaciones. *On the Researcher-Militant*. Trans. Sebastian Touza (part 1: Research-Militancy Does Not Have an Object). At http://eipcp.net/transversal/0406/colectivosituaciones/en.

[8]. Friedrich W. Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Trans. Rolf Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 58 (part 63).

[9]. Gilles Deleuze. “Two Regimes of Madness.” In: *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*. Trans. Ames Hodges & Mike Taormina. New York: Semiotext(e), 2006, p. 11.

[10]. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *What is Philosophy?* Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 69.

[11]. Franco Berardi (Bifo). *Felix Guattari: Thought, Friendship and Visionary Cartography*. Trans. and ed. Giuseppina Mecchia and Charles J. Stivale. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 11.

[12]. Franco Berardi (Bifo). *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*. Translated by Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009, p. 212.

[13]. Roland Barthes. *How to Live Together?* Trans. Kate Briggs. New York: Colombia University Press, 2013, pp. 7–8.

[14]. This is a Zapatista slogan. Among other sources, it is mentioned here: Notes From Nowhere (ed.). We are Everywhere, 2003, p. 506.

[15] Maurice Blanchot. "Being Jewish." *The Blanchot Reader*. Ed. Michael Holland. Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995, pp. 228-235.

[16] Gini Müller. "Transversal or Terror? Moving Images of the PublixTheatreCaravan". transversal 10/2002. *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*. September 2013 (http://eipcp.net/transversal/0902/mueller/en/).