

Publishing Against the Grain

**Friday morning: Commercial pressure:
anathema to good publishing or essential to it?**

Maarten Valken – Welcome to the Rode Hoed, as this building is called, the red hat. It started out as a hatter's shop. In the seventeenth century it became a Remonstrant church, although services were officially forbidden at that time, so it became a clandestine church. It remained a Remonstrant church until 1957, the oldest and biggest one in The Netherlands, and since 1990 it has become a debating centre. This conference is already the sixth one since we started nine years ago. We were and still are able to organise them thanks to the financial help of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These conferences have become a unique place to meet, to have longer contacts, especially for publishers who have less and less time to talk to each other personally, but also between publishers and translators, and of course for the Dutch authors to get in touch with both of them. The last conferences we started to send around a survey. It was first meant as a source of ideas, but it also turned out to be a very interesting document for the discussions, and we will probably use them later. In the other room as you might have seen there are Dutch books by the authors who are here: Minka Nijhuis who is sitting here, Marjon van Royen, and Jutta Chorus who is joining us later, she will talk tomorrow. These books are not yet translated, although Minka Nijhuis' book has been sold to Germany and will be published later this year, I think...

Minka Nijhuis – September.

Maarten Valken – And was also sold to Spain.

Minka Nijhuis – Yes, it is.

Maarten Valken – Apart from the three authors we invited publishers, foreign and Dutch, literary agents, translators from Dutch to the several languages of the countries the publishers are coming from. Unfortunately, the Polish and the French translators couldn't come, and also Suzanne Biadene from Marsilio wasn't able to make it. But we have a special guest from China, the author Xinran, who was kind enough to accept our invitation. Apart from these participants we also invited some Dutch literary agents and publishers who will follow the programme of the sessions. We'll have three sessions, this morning, this afternoon and tomorrow morning. At today's sessions there will be four and at tomorrow's three speakers, who will give a short speech, about an hour altogether, after which we'll have a discussion for an hour or so. I will introduce the people from the Foundation so if you have any problems or questions you can ask them. First of all Henk Pröpper, our director, and then there are four people you have already seen yesterday: Jaja Holisova, who was indispensable for organising this conference; Barbara den Ouden, who is working at our Translators

House and is responsible at the Foundation for the translators; Mireille Berman, who is a former editor of *De Bezige Bij* and recently joined us for the literary events; and then there's John Müller who's not officially part of the organisation but a very valuable adviser and provider of ideas, and who helped form the programme from the beginning to its final shape. Another colleague, Maria Vlaar, will join us later today. Now I would like to give the word to Maarten Asscher who is our moderator for the conference. He's a former publisher of Meulenhoff and now director of by far the best bookshop of Amsterdam, Athenaeum, which is only a few steps away from your hotel.

Maarten Asscher – Thank you very much, Maarten. And welcome to all of you from my part as well. The sixth non-fiction conference – I haven't participated in all of them, I think I was present at three or four – and I hope to relive some of those memories in the form of a very informal gathering that we will be having here today and tomorrow. The word conference to my mind doesn't describe properly what we intend to do here in this room. It is more I would say a conversation, a professional conversation about how our professional lives work and how they connect with a view to the books that we are writing or selling or agenting or publishing first of all reading perhaps, and translating, which requires reading first. Although I knew a translator whose name I will not mention, who is not present in this room, who always started translations right away without reading the book first and I always thought this was a very dangerous procedure, but he has translated some forty or fifty books in that manner so apparently it is possible. We have an interesting combination here in this room of all the players in the book business: agents, translators, authors, booksellers, editors, people from, well, the various dimensions of the non-fiction book culture. In the discussions I had by way of preparation for this conference with John Müller and with Maarten Valken I was reminded more than once of a quote from Erwin Glikes, the former publisher, he died six or eight years ago if I'm correct. He was publisher of Basic Books, where he started his publishing career with Arthur Rosenthal who founded that company, then he went on to work briefly for Simon & Schuster in America and then founded The Free Press, one of I would say the best non-fiction publishers in America over the past twenty years. And he said a promising book is a movement in some way, a movement that you want people to join. And I think this is an interesting thought that, at least for me, provides a backdrop for the way we might be talking about our different roles in the world of non-fiction book culture. This is specifically true for what we have termed critical non-fiction because critical non-fiction, whatever your definition of it, intends to change something, to introduce new approaches to exciting subjects or to introduce altogether new subjects and critical non-fiction could be described as a sort of small movement, the movement of one author who enthuses an agent, and the agent enthuses an editor, and the editor has to convince a sales manager and then a translator comes into the picture who also invests his or her enthusiasm, and then the sales reps have to join the movement etc. and in the end the reader has to be convinced. This is in a way a chain of enthusiasm that you could well describe in a metaphorical way as a movement, and perhaps not only in a metaphorical way. There are people who say that non-fiction publishing is by definition a form of activism, that you have to believe in the books that you publish, not just because they will be a success, but because they are important and they can change the world and you're not a publisher just to earn money for your shareholders but to make the world a better one. So in a way this movement could – even by those who believe in this more idealistic approach to publishing – be taken in a very literal

way, with of course the problematic consequence that when you publish 250 titles a year there is absolutely no way you can agree with all those stances taken in all those individual books. In general you might say there are two types of publishing, if you will allow me an enormous simplification. One type of publishing looks towards the market and asks what does the market want and we will supply this, and we will look for the best authors to fill the holes in the market. The other type of publishing says here are the best authors, we have discovered them, with the help of authors or translators or by reading important magazines, and now we will approach the market on behalf of this important work and we will try to convince the whole world that this book is worthwhile. This two-sided reality of publishing culture I think also holds true for agents and it holds true even for translators and it certainly holds true for booksellers. And this boils down to the question of how in our time can we make the market work for what we consider as important critical non-fiction, and what cases can we exchange, what experiences can we exchange, what ideas can we exchange to help us in perfecting this mechanism, this orchestrating of movements that are books, the books we work on. There are no ready answers, this conference or rather conversation is not intended to supply us with answers that solve all our problems, that would be dreadful, and I must say I have no programme or formula myself as your moderator, my only role will be to be as helpful as possible in your discussions and I would not like to over-structure those conversations. I will be as mild as possible and only in extreme circumstances, where people speak for twenty-six minutes instead of ten, I will be just and severe. I do want to make sure that all the different players in our field have a proper chance to express themselves and to participate as fully as possible in our conversation, and I think there is a special question here with regard to language. Everybody speaks English. Some like myself speak Euro-English. Others come from countries where English is less part of the curriculum at schools and universities and, well, let's all try to make the English language as democratic as it possibly can be, and for those of us who are accustomed to speaking very fast, please be as generous as possible in the way you handle your perfect English.

So, we don't have to reach any conclusions. I would like this one and a half days to be as inspiring as possible and most of all it should be fun. Because something that is important can also be fun. This morning's session is on the theme of commercial pressure. Is that something that is good for publishing? Or is it something that is anathema? Is it problematical? We have four speakers who will speak in a row for a about ten to fifteen minutes each, then we will have a short coffee break, and then we will immediately continue with a discussion of an hour, an hour and fifteen minutes. We have two microphones for sixty people. So that's very democratic and they will be handed round, so that the registration of what you are all saying is not endangered. I will take care they will fulfil their function. Then it gives me great pleasure to announce as our first speaker this morning, Minka Nijhuis, who's sitting to my right. She's a journalist for the Dutch daily paper *Trouw* and also for various national radio stations. Her work has been published in several magazines and she has quite a track record over the past fifteen years of covering conflicts, armed conflicts in various parts of the world, in Cambodia, Burma, Kosovo, Afghanistan, East Timor and especially Iraq, where her latest book is set. *Khala's House* is the title of that book and she won the best journalistic book of the year award for that. *De Volkskrant* gave a marvellous opinion on Minka Nijhuis's book *Khala's House* when they wrote, 'The author deftly combines events, conversations and background information to

create a thoroughly absorbing tale. This is a dramatic, sometimes hair-raising story.’ I’m very pleased to give the microphone to Minka Nijhuis.

Minka Nijhuis – Thank you. Well I’m actually quite surprised we’re still working here in Holland. As many of you know, I think, with events around Ayaan Hirsi Ali I got the impression everybody was glued to the television, I got so many phone calls and emails over the last few days. So it’s a pleasure to go on with the work. I have to be slightly modest here and say that my book did not win the award... It was shortlisted.

Maarten Asscher – Well it *should* have won the award.

Minka Nijhuis – We can agree on that. But just for the record. I would like to tell you about the making of *The House of Khala* a little bit, a story that I feel, as a small family story, really stands for a much larger story, the story of Iraq, and quite the complex, messy story that it has become. Now, people always ask me to start with: How did you meet the family? And I would really like to share that with you as well, because I think it was such an extraordinary situation. I was already in Iraq for over two months and I had been covering the war, mostly for the newspaper *Trouw*. It’s a job that is very much event-driven, and you feel like you’re pushed around by the news and you get very little chance to really go into complexities, to get to know people, to really get to know the stories. So when I finally came all the way from the north into the city of Baghdad, I agreed with my editors at the desk that it would be time to start searching for a family, to give the readers a break from all the news stories and try to get to put a face to the news. It so happened that I heard in Baghdad that there was a group of actors who had the plan to put together a play. Now it struck me as extraordinary that in a city that was still burning, and there was looting and shooting going around, that actually actors had taken the initiative to perform a play. So that intrigued me and I decide to go there. It was extraordinary. We came to a theatre that was mostly gone. We had to stumble into the entrance by jumping over pieces of broken glass and ceiling that had come down. There was a terrible smell in the building and some people said there was still a corpse upstairs. As the play continued there was also the noise from looters from the back of the building, you could hear that they were still demolishing. It was a confusing play; it was clear that the actors had put it together rapidly and they were trying to depict the story of a dictator who had tried to reach for the moon but fell down by doing so. I’m sure I was not the only one who didn’t quite understand what it was all about, but it didn’t really matter. It was the first time for many, many years the people had a chance to see an uncensored play in their country, and when I went down after the play to ask people for reactions, a woman told me how significant it was that, for the first time in decades, she saw the fate of her country presented truthfully and without censorship. It made her feel human and it made her feel connected to other people again. This woman was Ward who was going to become one of the main characters of the book. She had been confined to her house for many days and was one of the few women who hadn’t fled her area, which was a battle zone for several days, and she was accompanied by her husband who was an actor. He didn’t participate in the play, but he felt out of solidarity for his colleagues he should be there, and he was also very keen to see the new era of a new form of art that he expected to unfold in the new Iraq, the post-Saddam era. They invited me to come along with them to their house and I remember as I was finally sitting on their couch and listening to all their stories

that I felt that I was entering the real Iraq. I felt very strongly about it. I had been covering the war, as I mentioned earlier. It was with a lot of frustration and actually I don't really like the term 'covering the war,' I think it gives people the impression that we cover it like a soccer match, where we get to see the whole field and all the players and I think we don't. What we do is we give the public just a glimpse of the story and a glimpse of reality and I think we actually should be more clear on that. It created a lot of problems that I decided to go to Iraq. Apart from the newspaper there were very few other media that were willing to have people in the field. Many media considered it either too dangerous or too expensive or both. Of course one could argue that it is very respectable to have concern for your people and to make sure that they have the proper insurance, but it struck me as very unusual is that this debate was taking priority over the issue of giving the public the information it is entitled to. It was almost as if it became a debate in itself. I felt it's like a fire police who says well, we only do the small ones, we don't have the money for the big ones and we think it's too dangerous a job anyway. So that's one of the senses of frustration that I am sure added to my determination to continue after I did the stories for the newspaper to make a more lasting story into a book. In all fairness I have to say that even though the debate was late about how we should cover a war, it mostly happened when journalists went home and most of the fighting in Iraq was over, but the debate did take place, better late than never, and we are allowed to work again.

Anyway I started my stories. I wrote five stories about the family in the middle of the ever-continuing chaos in Iraq and it became immediately very clear that these stories had an added value. There were letters to the newspapers, there were phone calls to the editor at the hour that they have available for readers, so people had a tremendous need for more than just the news-related stories. It was also the family itself who made it clear to me that I should continue with this. I wrote five stories for the paper, and when I went home, this was the beginning of May, they were the ones who warned me and said, mind you, this is going to be a very long story, this is only just the beginning. And then I came home and I looked at the stories I had done for the paper, and even though they had received a great response from the readers, I felt: what a shame that they last only for a day. It should be a book, really. The first people to ask how they would feel about having me around as a writer and continue documenting their life, that was the family, of course. So I rang them and I said: now, I've done five stories about your life, how would you feel if I move in with you and I'll document your life. I'll stay with you, I'll live like you do. What would you think of it? And the response was immediately 'yes,' and I said no, think it over, because I'll be there all the time, I'll write everything down, I'll be very annoying. We are all in the business, but how many of you would really want to have a writer around and document everything? I can raise my finger as the first one and say: no, please, I would find it a nightmare. So I told them that they should give it about three days and then I would ring them back and see how they felt about it. Their answer was still yes, and I think there were various reasons for it. After so many years of silence they felt a strong need to tell their stories. It was really something they wanted to pour out. I think especially the woman was very keen on this aspect. She comes from a family where there were writers. She was used to the value of books, used to the value of having history and personal life documented. The husband, the actor, I think he was mostly pleased that he would have a permanent audience. So I think definitely he had some quite selfish reasons for saying yes, and there was Ward's old mother Khala who was in the house most of the time and she was just simply very happy with the company and she was a very good storyteller, she loved telling stories, she loved

telling gossip. That was one of the first things she told me: ‘Gossip, there’s nothing wrong with gossip. It’s like soap, it purifies the heart’. So that was one obstacle less. But then I had to convince my publisher, of course, and I was actually just beginning to write another book and have to confess it’s still not done, so the first response was that they were not too enthusiastic about the idea. There was a worry that it would be one of the opportunity books. I mean it was already clear that more people would write books about Iraq, that it would be merely a compilation of articles rather than a very good story. When it became clear that I was going to do it anyway, he finally agreed. Of course there were many books going to come, but I think some of them were very valid books but for a very specific audience, they were expert books with a lot of analysis and political background and history, much less accessible than the book I had in mind. There were also books by colleagues of course, but many of those were indeed a compilation of articles, and then there were books by colleagues that were very much about what is it like as a journalist to cover the war, and I wanted to do none of it and I realised that there was no foreign colleague who was consistently documenting the life, the daily life, from an Iraqi perspective.

So that’s what I did. I packed my bag and I went to the house of the family in the fall of 2003 intending to stay with them for about two months, and then I still had the possibility to go back for a shorter period later on. It wasn’t easy in the beginning because I remember, on one of the first days of my stay, we ended up at the hairdresser because the mother wanted to have her hair done and she thought I also needed a haircut and we had hardly sat down when there was fighting outside the hairdresser. The hairdresser closed the door, he locked his door and he grabbed his gun and stood next to the door to protect us. And I was so annoyed, because I felt, “Here I am, I’m locked into the hairdresser’s salon and I have no idea what’s going on outside and all my colleagues are outside, and I’m inside. This is terrible. And it was only when I saw the mother sitting in her chair she was like... I’ll never forget. She sat like this [*protects head with arms*] as if she was expecting to be beaten. And that caught my eye, I thought no, I’m doing the right thing, you know, I’m here to document her life and the life of all these people around her. So you know it took me a while to shed those journalistic instincts, but it worked in the end. I don’t want to make it sound like it was a very smooth ride all along, because even though the family was very open to my presence, so much was happening in the turbulence of Baghdad that the story unfolded by itself mostly. Of course there were dilemmas and one of the most difficult ones I would like to talk a little bit more about is that the fact that you live in a house, and on the one hand you’re there as an observer but at the same time you become a participant but I should say, but to some extent an acquaintance or, or almost a friend and how do you deal with that? Is everything your material as a writer, or do you have to draw a line somewhere? I think we all know the example of the Norwegian journalist Asne Seierstad who did I think a very beautiful book and I have a great respect for her work, but who ended up in the terrible situation in which the bookseller of Kabul tried to start a law case against her. And that’s a terrible thing, I mean of course you want to tell the truth, but at the same time it’s not your intention to end up as enemies with a family who have given you their stories and their hospitality. I don’t have exactly the answer to it. I mean, it’s a constant juggle. You try to be respectful and you try to be truthful, but there are moments when I felt: things are becoming too intimate. And I left them out because I thought I had so much material to tell the story I wanted to tell, and how can I justify presenting such intimate details if I feel they are not very crucial to the story? So yes, there were details, there were stories that I decided at least to leave out of the book. Other than

what Asne did. I also decided to write it to some extent from my own perspective, to put myself in as a narrator, because I thought it would make the comments and my impressions about the family less absolute. I think partly what happened with Asne's book is that she wrote it from the perspective of the character, so everything that you read seems like it was as it was, and I think that at least by putting myself into it I would create a little bit more space, so it was clear that it was my conclusion and not necessarily the conclusion of someone else.

And then by the time I left to do my writing I also sat down with the family and said: 'Listen, I'm going home now. If there's anything that you really feel should not be in the book. You've seen me. I've written everything down. I'm not saying I will go along with your request, but we can discuss it.' And I thought it was so moving that they said: 'Well you know, we've had you in the house a long time, we know you, some things might be painful, but such is life, you just go ahead, do as you like.' So I basically had the freedom to follow my own conscience in it. I started writing. I had three months to do it. There was of course as usual, anybody who writes books knows that you have to juggle your finances, so you create some financial space, you know I had three months in which it had to be done. It was a bit tight, but I felt it was possible. When the book came out in Holland it sold quite well and then it sort of faded away for reasons I'm not really clear about. I think it's always to some extent a mystery, unfortunately, why some books do very well and others don't. There was probably a little bit too much of a fatigue also at that point. I'm not really sure. But most of my disappointment actually came from the fact that there wasn't any interest in the US. I really felt that, more than anywhere, that's where the book belongs. I mean, American people should know what's happening to the lives of people that were so influenced by decisions of a government that they supported. From how I understand it, it was a problem that so many books had come out already, and even though editors were willing to acknowledge the fact that this book was something different, they had their own books by their own authors. It's a big obstacle as a foreign author to conquer a foreign market. None of those books had been a tremendous success, so they were also not too keen on adding another one. That sounds pessimistic, but actually in retrospect I'm quite pleased that the book wasn't translated immediately, because what I've been doing since the book came out in 2003, I've followed the family, I've kept going back to Iraq and I think as time was passing by the story became more interesting and more unique in a way, because I'm one of the few people who still has access to an Iraqi family, to daily life in Iraq. I still go to visit them secretly. Even up to two weeks ago I've been able to stay with them despite all the difficulties. The story of Iraq is becoming increasingly dramatic and so is the family story. I mean, all the aspects that we get to see about Iraq, the Sunni-Shia tensions, the daily hardships, the increasing religious fundamentalism, the problems for women, they have all crept into the family's story, so I think that probably explains why recently there has become an interest by foreign publishers. As mentioned earlier, it's already going to be translated into German and it's going to be translated into Spanish. I very strongly feel the book is now more important than ever, because journalism is failing so much. I mean if you look at the way we have to work in Iraq it's very, very hard. We have no other choice than to stay mostly in hotels behind concrete barriers. We can go out for maybe a maximum of a few hours a day, not stay in one place for more than half an hour. A lot of the work is being done by Iraqi journalists, and they rightfully get more of a status, but even for them it's increasingly dangerous and the irony being that even though they do a tremendous job, many of them cannot publish their names, obviously for security reasons. So yes,

I would like to end with a bit of an optimistic note. I think I did the right thing by going against the advice of some and to keep coming back to the family and keep following the story, which I think is more important than ever.

Maarten Asscher – Thank you very much Minka Nijhuis. It is very tempting to right away raise all kinds of subjects you have touched on in your wonderful and even in parts moving story. We will do so later on, and I would like to continue this series of presentations with Mauricio Bach sitting on the extreme right, who is the non-fiction editor of Ediciones Destino in Spain since 2003, wrote books for children himself, and worked as a translator and a literary critic, translating mostly fiction, if I'm correct, rather than non-fiction, but it is as a non-fiction editor that you will speak. Please.

Mauricio Bach – I will try to express some opinions about the book business today, based basically on my own experience and the situation of the book business in Spain. But I think that the situation of the book business in Spain is quite similar to at least the situation of the book business in the rest of the European countries. I have to say that for years I worked as a literary critic, and then about four years ago, when I was thirty-eight, they asked me to join the team of Destino, which is one of the historical publishing houses in Spain that started just after the Spanish civil war. And that was bought by Planeta, which is maybe the biggest conglomerate in Spain. So after years being connected with books, being a critic, and seeing things from the other side, I started to work as an editor, and then I discovered what we can call the dark side. I mean the economic pressure, the commercial pressure and other things. I remember I was really scared about where I am going to start working when I heard at that time that the only way to grow the book business was to sell books in supermarkets, which is a real thing. Then what I can say about this commercial pressure is about my own experience with this big conglomerate, about being an editor of one of the upmarket and literary imprints of this big conglomerate. And the first thing I have to say is that we work with absolute freedom from the political, ideological point of view. We have no pressure at all in this. I have to say that this big conglomerate is a very conservative one, but they really don't make any pressure on what titles we want to publish, so there's no pressure at all in this way. There's only two non-written rules or two non-written taboos: you can't publish a book against the king of Spain, which is the chief of the state, and then, the other one maybe is quite logical, you can't publish a book against the owner of this conglomerate. But for the rest you can do whatever you want. But of course there's another kind of pressure that can finally be a kind of censorship, which is the economic and commercial pressure. What they ask us to do, basically, of course, is to make money, so you have to make money. How you make this money is you own business and you can publish whatever you want, but you have to make money. This is a pressure that I have working for this big conglomerate, but I think it's a pressure even an independent publisher also has, because even if he's the owner of his own publishing house he has to make money to survive and to continue publishing, so this is a pressure I think everyone has to work with these days. Basically this economic pressure, this commercial pressure, every year has the same motto, which is please reduce titles and concentrate on the big ones, which basically means to reduce the more literary, relevant titles and concentrate on the more commercial ones. But you have to fight against this and try not to reduce so much as they want to reduce. I think that the way to do these things is try to combine more commercial titles with other titles which are more culturally relevant, more interesting, but I basically think that, for example, for us we have the very good

experience that we have published very relevant titles, that are working very well, so we are quite happy with this. For example we published the Robert Fisk book, *The War Against Civilization*, which is more than 1,000 pages and it did very well. We also published this year a Japanese classic of the eleventh century, *The Genji Tales*, which is two volumes of about 1,000 pages each, and of the first volume we sold about 12,000 copies, which is a great thing for the Spanish market. We also published for example the political chronicles of a great historical journalist, Catalan journalist, about the Republican period in Spain, which is a book that has almost 2000 pages and is doing very well and we are reprinting it. So you can do serious books and interesting books and do it okay, and there are readers for these kinds of books, but of course you have to do other books that can have more and more readers.

The other thing I wanted to say is that one of the big chiefs of this conglomerate, the person who is in charge of what we call the literary division, which is all the imprints that work for bookshops (because this conglomerate also does encyclopaedias and all kinds of other things) he has a great sentence that he is very proud of, and I'm a little scared of, which is that today publishers, we don't do any more culture but what we do is entertainment. Of course this is not exactly true because there are still in Spain independent publishing houses and independent booksellers, but maybe it is partly true. In the last 20-50 years the book business has changed a lot and it is going to change even more. Then maybe it's true that in part the book business now is doing entertainment and not culture. Maybe one of the options, which is not an easy one of course, is not to try to fight against the market but to use the elements that the new market gives us to try not to sell commercial bad books but to sell serious books. I think that in the non-fiction part this thing that we would call narrative non-fiction, for example, is one way to try to do this, I mean to present a serious matter in a way that is easier to connect for the general reader, I mean not to do an academic book but to do a book that tells about important and interesting things in a different way. And of course we have to try to present culture as an entertainment and so try to do very suggestive and very interesting covers, try to present the writers to the people through interviews and all that, and so try to help the book to sell. This is of course difficult to do, but I think is one of the ways to continue publishing. I really think we are not in the best times to do serious fiction or non-fiction, but I think that there's still hope when you have intelligent and smart and enthusiastic editors working in big conglomerates or as independent editors. So we have to try to adapt to a market that is changing every day and try to make new ways to sell the good books, because in Spain now, never in our history have so many books been sold as now, but of course we have to think what kind of books are the ones that are sold. We really have to try to sell the other ones. That's the only way.

Maarten Asscher – Thank you Mauricio Bach, we will refer to your points later on during this morning's session. As the third speaker in our series of four we have Olivier Rubinstein, who is the head of Editions Denoël in France for eight years now, and has been in publishing even much longer than that. Please.

Olivier Rubinstein – Good morning. First of all please forgive my terrible French accent, as you know French people are very bad at languages. Yes, I've been in publishing business for many years now because I created many different publishing houses, small, bigger, and much bigger and I'm the head of Editions Denoël, which belongs to the Gallimard group. It has belonged to the Gallimard group since the fifties, but I have been head of Denoël for eight years now. We publish about 100

titles a year, we publish a lot of fiction, non-fiction, graphic novels, well it's a general publishing house, but not so commercial. Fortunately or unfortunately, I don't know. So I'm going to try to describe in a brief speech the non-fiction publishing business in France especially. And as head of Denoël the best example I know is mine, of course. A large part of Denoël's output consists of non-fiction works, essentially documents aimed at the general public, studies, pamphlets etc. published in the different collections, as well as essays on history, literature, social studies. For example in the past few years our different collections published the testimony of a French man released from Guantanamo, the French translation of *Freakonomics* by Stephen Levitt and Stephen Dubner, as well as a study into last autumn's urban riots you must have heard about, called *La Mafia des cités*, by a French journalist, and in the same collection we also published the French translation of Bob Woodward's last writings. Last year the Médiations collection published among others a historical study on the Moscow trial in 1977, *Micro-histoire de la Grande Terreur* by a young French-Russian historian, Pavel Chinsky, and a different book on contesting economic liberalism, as well as the last work of a very important art historian who died two years ago, Daniel Arasse. We also publish a lot of translations of literary texts, but that is another subject. Furthermore, we have just launched a quarterly review entitled *Le Meilleur des mondes*, and it's very important to me that Denoël should feature on the French intellectual landscape. In my view an editor is also terrified, he is launching a sophisticated journal in the heart of a publishing house, it is an important step. It has a potential to fuel debate to unite a number of authors and thinkers, both French and other nationalities, around the nucleus of the journal, which is comprised of Pascal Bruckner, André Glucksmann, Olivier Rolin, Pierre-André Taguieff, Marc Weitzmann and other writers.

In its eclecticism our production is quite representative of the way a French publishing house works. Right up until the last few years the sales of essays and documents have significantly outstripped those of novels, and several publishers have diversified by launching new collections of non-fiction works. They are following in the footsteps of the Presses universitaires de France which started out strictly as academic presses and which now publish more and more works in line with current affairs. Moreover, two years ago several publishing houses including Grasset, Flammarion, Denoël, Gallimard etc. launched a collection of small 100-pages pamphlets which are selling impressively well and allow us to broach subjects usually reserved for the press. From this point of view it is worth noting that several small and recently created publishing houses specialised in non-fiction, including Editions Privé and various different publishing houses in France. As I write these lines, the top spot in *Livres Hebdo* (a kind of *Publishers Weekly* in France) bestseller list for essays and documents is occupied by an irreverent biography of Jacques Chirac written by the famous French press columnist, Franz-Olivier Giesbert, who wrote a book called *La Tragédie du président*. This is followed by the confessions of a TV news presenter, a work on philosophy written by Michel Onfray that you must know, a little book of antiglobalizationist inspiration by Éric Hazan, a historical study, *Du bon usages de la guerre civile en France*, which is a real debate for the moment by the historian Jacques Marseille, the pamphlet of an intellectual, *Le Crépuscule des petits dieux* and a book about the story of Coca Cola, *Coca-Cola, L'enquête interdite*. This is a good overview of the current production of non-fiction material. Sales figures for essays and documents are directly proportional to the media coverage a title receives. Very often we see the sales of a title rise significantly after the author has taken part in a television programme, cultural especially, or a radio show. For the good and for the

worst of course, because for example, Thierry Meyssan's work on the 9/11 killings, called *L'Incroyable Imposture (9/11, The Big Lie)*, owes a large part of its success to a widely watched TV programme in which the author appeared while the broadsheet press was criticising the subject of his book. I should remind you it is a book that contests the reality of 9/11 and it sells increasingly well, more than 300,000 copies in French, which is a kind of nightmare for me. The printed press has less impact, except when newspapers and magazines launch a book by making it front page news by putting it on the front cover of a supplement. For example, Denoël felt the benefit of this when *Freakonomics* made the front cover of *Le Monde 2*, the weekly magazine of *Le Monde*. Essays and documents generally benefit from a bigger print run than literary books, and the aim is to put as many copies as possible on display, especially in newsagents and in shops in stations and airports, where books are sold beside newspapers. We have to be as pro-active as possible to avoid running out of stock at all costs. Fnac, which is still the biggest bookseller in France, also plays an important role in pushing the titles that are under debate in the media. A vicious circle follows where the titles that are more low key in terms of media coverage are excluded from the most efficient sales channels. These are books that cannot count on the support of bookshops, which are less disposed to promote titles with a short shelf life. Titles which enjoy exposure in the media may shift impressive numbers of copies in a few weeks, even a few days. I could cite the example of a book published by Denoël three years ago, about the election campaign which focused on the accusation of embezzlement levelled against Jacques Chirac, a book written by a former judge called Éric Halphen, the title was *Sept ans de solitude* and which sold more than 60,000 copies in one week. It must be noted however, that the pocket collections of non-fiction texts are growing all the time, giving a certain life for these texts.

Moving from these generalisations, which any astute editor could make, I would like to broach a subject which is more specific to France, if only by its importance in inter-professional discussion. In the end it led to the release of *Livre blanc sur la judiciarisation de l'édition*, that is an official report by a professional organization, the Syndicat National de l'Édition, the French book trade organisation. For the past few years, French editors of documents and essays have been pursued by clauses in French law which limit freedom of expression. This mostly concerns the rule governing libel as well as respect for individual privacy and the confidentiality of certain information. Judicial and professional confidentiality. These rules were introduced in the nineteenth century to govern the press and are rigorously and indiscriminately enforced by French tribunals, which generally do not take the specification of the book into account, particularly regarding the quantity of fines and court costs, which are very often disproportionate to the offence. If it is beyond debate that editors must face up to their responsibilities when they commit an infraction, it is regrettable that judicial institutions are used by certain individuals as a form of retaliation if a work displeases them. Such was the reaction to an essay of the behaviour of the commercial court, *La Mafia des tribunaux de commerce*, published by Albin Michel. It was a move that caused them several court cases, filled in individually by the very official whose behaviour was criticized in the book. Denoël for example suffered the same sort of harassment following the publication of the book *Ben Laden, la vérité interdite*. It was a book on the economic connections of the Bin Laden network. We have since been pursued in all the countries in which the book was sold, by a Saudi financier whose name was mentioned. The same thing happened at Editions des Arènes following the publication of an inquiry into a financial institution in Luxemburg. You know the story of Clearstream recently there.

In these three cases it is evident that the individual pushed for the publisher's conviction as a way of damaging the publishing house financially. Still today, justice sometimes forbids the publication of a text as a preventive measure, as was the case when an individual used the tribunal to prevent the writing of an unauthorised biography, which Bernard Violet has intended to publish at Grasset. The abusive nature of French law concerning freedom of expression was underlined by a recent decision in the European human rights court regarding a book written by the personal doctor of François Mitterrand and published a few days after his death. In *Le Grand Secret*, Claude Gubler, the former doctor of Mitterrand, described Mitterrand's sickness, which led to the book being banned, which is extremely rare in France, and its publisher, Plon, being heavily fined. Eight years later the court of Strasbourg fined France for violating freedom of expression, pointing out the disproportionate punishment inflicted on the author and on the editor.

The consequence of this growing judicialisation of publishing is that the self-censorship in the publishing house is becoming the knee-jerk reaction of non-fiction editors. I believe that from now on it will be the norm for us to have a manuscript systematically re-read by specialist lawyers who will indicate the litigious passages and advise us on other presentation of the material which will avoid the possibility of a lawsuit. In fact as regards libel, the legal definition of which is very blurred, and violation of confidentiality, the work has to rest on the way that information is presented. This is why we find ourselves amongst books written in the conditional form, which take stylistic precaution and use evasive phrasing. What is lost in terms of style and sometimes in the book's interest, is gained in terms of legal security by the author and the editor. I willingly concede that this behaviour illustrates a typically French hypocrisy. An example might be the enormous amount of work that we, along with our lawyer, put into a book about the minister of the interior Nicolas Sarkozy. When we published this book, which was a great success in all other respects, what we feared was not so much a complaint from Nicolas Sarkozy himself for libel or for a violation of his privacy, but that suits might be filed by one of his collaborators, appearing incidentally in the text, and taking the first opportunity to hinder the publication of an inquiry that might be damaging to the minister. Still on the topic of Nicolas Sarkozy, a small publishing house called First, and it is a really interesting story, has had to pull the release of a book that really related his rather turbulent marital life under pressure from the minister of the interior. This was when the book had already gone to print and the whole print run had to be scrapped. Finally, this book, which should have been a documentary inquiry, has become a novel at another publishing house, *Entre le cœur et la raison*, published by Fayard, once the name and location had been changed. The publication of this book written by a salaried journalist from the press group Prisma, which specialises in magazines, contains a lesson for everyone. The chairman of Prisma subsequently tried to force his paid employees to submit their work to the control of the group, to be politically neutral and above all not to level accusations at public figures in their manuscripts. In the wake of generalized protests, however, Prisma had to retract this statement of self-censorship. Moreover the novelisation of news is becoming more and more common. It is a circuitous way to treat non-fiction in the tradition of Balzac's *roman à clef* paralleling such books as *Bonfire of the Vanities*. Examples include *Mafia Chic* by Sophie Coignard and another book on Chirac written by Eric Zemmour *L'Homme qui ne s'aimait pas*. It is also worth noting that these examples of novels are all concerned with political power, which in a republican monarchy like France remains untouchable. However, even when editing a novel which takes current affairs as a

subject, we must keep in mind the structure of the civil code. We have seen this recently in France when an entirely fictional novel which had a paedophile as a main character, published by Gallimard, was threatened with prohibition by the administrative system, and not the judicial system this time, on the pretext that it constituted a kind of apologia of paedophilia. In another case Mathieu Lindon's novel called *Le Procès de Jean-Marie le Pen* was judged libellous towards the president of the French National Front, even though it was total fiction, starring a militant from the extreme right party. We are still waiting for a decision from the relevant court. As I am going to close this quick overview of the editing of essays and documents in France it is sad to say that in a country that claims to have formed the rights of man, freedom of expression is under threat from those who are responsible for upholding justice and that we are forced to depend on European institutions.

Maarten Asscher – Thank you Olivier Rubinstein. You have talked to us not only about publishing under the usual commercial pressure but even about totally different kinds of pressure that are very relevant to the publication of critical non-fiction. We will discuss your points later on. The last in this series of four is Wolfgang Hörner who started to work for Eichborn Verlag in 1990 as a press officer. He continued his career there from 1996 onwards and he is now a publisher with Eichborn Berlin. Being the publisher of Matthijs van Boxsel's *The Encyclopedia of Stupidity*, of Douwe Draaisma and Mirjam Bolle, Eichborn is relevant to Dutch non-fiction culture. Wolfgang, please.

Wolfgang Hörner – I'm going to talk about two things that are interconnected: financial pressure as a whole, and the pressure you have in the publishing house. If you have a boss who always clads his dislike of your titles in financial arguments because he says, okay, it won't sell so we won't do it. So this comes from a personal background, that I once had a boss who had a very different opinion of what a good book is from me. Although we are friends, we had fierce arguments and I think that on the whole, as well as financial pressure, these fierce arguments are very good for what you do. Although they are nerve-wracking. I am now in the situation of not having a boss any more, I'm deciding exactly whatever I want. And I'm not sure, I think it's not that good actually, I think it's worse. So I'm glad I have some financial pressure, which makes me think very hard about what I do and which book I really want to do and how I want to do it. So again let me start a little bit earlier. When I started my career, having this boss, and always being a bit afraid, I came up with two or three projects which I had on hand which were subsidized. So I came to him, I could easily say, you know, these books are subsidized, let's do them. He said okay. I think these were the three most boring books I have ever done. I said I'll never do a subsidized book again. Because you walk into the trap of saying okay it's fine and you are much more meek on the content, you can't throw out what you want to throw out, because the guy giving you the money says: I will pay for it. So I'll never do this again. I'd rather have, as you say, this kind of movement. You have a book. You say: I think the book is very good and I have to convince others why this book is very good. This is the way a book has to work anyway, in the public, for the bookseller, for the reader. So the idea is that pressure is good for a book and this is based on a somewhat idealistic belief, of course, that a good and really important book will make its way or at least has the potential for the publisher to make something out of it. I think the boring books don't have the potential, the really important books do, otherwise they wouldn't be. I had these rows in the publishing house and I'll give two

or three examples of how it worked. Having books which I thought were really good, were really nice, others thought they were not, and so I had to prove simply that they are. So in one case, which was not a non-fiction book but a fiction book, I got the argument that nobody will be really interested, you won't sell it. So against all the rules I went to my foreign rights department, the rights department, and said: okay, can you sell this book. And they said: maybe, let's do it and then have a look. Of course the boss said: let's first be sure that we can sell it. So I passed them by, went to a colleague directly, made a paperback contract, which caused a slight row in the rights department, but it was definitely proven that there was interest, so we made the book and it was a great success. The other thing was that I had a really difficult book. I like difficult books, books that are difficult to sell, but I like to sell them of course, I don't want to make books for myself but for people to read them or hear about them talk about them. So this is a book by Thomas Harlan who is the son of Veit Harlan, film director for the Nazis. Harlan spent most of his life working out this kind of childhood pain. He went to Poland and worked on the role of Nazis in Poland, in the sixties, when there was no official connection between Germany and Poland because of the Cold War. He dug out about 2,000 law cases against humanity there and sent them to the Fritz Bauer Institut and they were made law courses. And he wrote a novel in his old age on Kulmhof (Chelmno), the first extermination camp. It's a novel which is a great work of art. It's a novel which contains centuries of research really, a lot of new material, and it's a mixture of documentary and novel. So it mixes a lot of documents into a very difficult but very good to read book. And so I came up with this. My boss said this is so difficult, no one will read it and I said okay, it's very difficult, I see the point, but let's do it, it's a unique book. He said: no, ask Harlan to make his biography, this is so spectacular, so there are many other aspects. But this is of course exactly what this author didn't want to do, so I took the book and found a radio doing three radio plays out of this single novel before it was out. Then again I could go to my boss and say okay, look, we have the radio doing three plays out of it, so the thing is financed. We did the book, it was hailed, we sold 3,000 copies, which is good for this really difficult book, and the radio play went through all the German broadcasting stations, we earned a lot of money from it, in fact. So it made you develop ways of getting your book published that I would never have thought of before. Once you are convinced yourself, I think you can convince others, you can find ways to promote the book and I think it's even more important to find the appropriate way of promoting a different book than just saying it's good or stating it's good or being sure why it's good.

We try in Eichborn Berlin to do books we are convinced about, and we think very hard about how to promote them. How to put these books into the market. We also use tricks, which I think is perfectly fine. We have a wonderful author, Hannes Stein, who poses a lot of very provocative political statements and it's very difficult to get these statements into the Germany press. So it was quite sure it would be difficult to make a straight non-fiction book out of it, so we made a book which is a kind of book like a wolf in a sheep's fur. We made a book which is sold as a gift-book more or less. It's called *Endlich Nichtdenker (Non-thinker at last)* and it's a book that takes the form of an anti-smoking book and says, you know, thinking is the most horrible thing you can do: it makes you lonely, you don't have sex, your boss doesn't like you because you know everything better. This book tells you in eight sections how to stop thinking completely. And of course it's completely ironic. Of course it gives Hannes all the ways you know to put his points across and to make polemical statements, to define what non-thinking is. It was a very successful book, which simply by-passed

the press, which I think wouldn't have done a straight non-fiction book by Hannes Stein. Other books need other ways to promote them, for example the Mirjam Bolle book. Mirjam Bolle's letters were written here in Amsterdam during the German occupation. We were a bit late getting the book, so there was a whole wave of books on the Second World War in Germany because of the end of the World War in 1945, and the 60 anniversary of that, so we thought it's not enough to do a decent edition of the book. So we asked the author to come over to Germany – she had never been there till then. She was quite reluctant in the beginning to come over. She spent some of the time in Bergen Belsen as well, which is in the book. But she did, we found a famous German actor to read the passages, and had an exceptionally moving presentation, which then of course was the core of a kind of press incident. People talked about the book much more. Or we had another book which I liked a lot but which was difficult to sell, *Der deutsche Gruß* by Tilmann Allert, a sort of geologist. It's a kind of scientific book in a way showing how the Hitler Gruß, this perverted form of greeting, undermined the whole of a society. It sounds a bit scientific, but what I really liked about this book and what I think makes it an important book is that it showed how a tiny gesture can attack the whole basis of human communication. And he does this very well. Of course the people in marketing said, well this will be hell to sell, and they were in a way right, but again we used a trick. We had a best-selling author who did a book on manners (I think we sold 160,000 copies of this), an Ethiopian prince. So we put Allert and this prince together, talking about greetings, and so of course we had a big public again for a, well, sociological thing, and we had great press for it, and I think I wouldn't have got all of this if I hadn't had all this pressure before, if I hadn't had a boss who always tested me very much, and now I tend to say to the owner of the publishing house: let me do what I want to do and if it doesn't work financially throw me out, but as long as it works let me do what I do. So I think financial pressure is quite good for publishing. I think it makes you inventive, I think it makes you think very hard which book you really want to do and it makes you develop ways, before you publish the books, to decide how you want to put them into the public.

Maarten Asscher. Thank you, Wolfgang. My main task as your moderator is of course to protect coffee, lunch and tea breaks. We'll have a fifteen-minute intermission and then we'll continue with the discussion.

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Maarten Asscher – Right. Are we more or less assembled again? We have forty-five to sixty minutes of conversation on the basis of the wonderful points presented to us by our four speakers this morning. I would like to start with the author on this side of the table, Minka Nijhuis, because that's where it all has to come from, the earliest phase of non-fiction culture. And I was wondering, from your speech I get an impression of an enormous determination that you have for realising the projects that you had on hand. Where does that determination come from?

Minka Nijhuis – Ha, you should ask my parents that. They remember me as a kid who would always do whatever she wanted to. But no, I think, to some extent, especially in the case of Iraq, it really had to do with the fact that I felt, perhaps in this war more than in any other conflict I've been covering, there's such a tremendous gap between what we see in the media and what is the reality on the ground. And I thought well you know, by hook or by crook, publisher or no publisher, I am so

convinced that the story mattered, I felt I had no other choice than to do it. It helped of course a lot also that I had my selfish reasons as well. It was an extremely interesting story. The family had so much to tell and was so keen to tell the story.

Maarten Asscher – With such determination, of course it would be wonderful to meet in publishing houses, in agents' offices, among translators, among critics etc. a similar, well, an interest in your work that matches your own determination. Have you experienced in the whole process of publication of your book a similar determination to make your book into the success it deserves to be?

Minka Nijhuis – Well obviously no, I mean, I find it difficult. It's always a lot easier to do it for other colleagues, I find, than to do it for myself, but as this book is coming along and as the story of Iraq is continuing and I think the family's story is becoming more interesting, I do feel that my determination is increasing. I think also when you start out as an author you probably tend to expect too much from a publisher. You're already so happy that you do have a publisher and you think okay here's the baby and now you take care of it and I'm not the only author who is stumbling along this path of finding out that that's way too simplistic, that you do have to present your own baby and you do have to go out and you do have to defend it. It took me a while to come to terms with it, but I am going to do it and I'm especially determined to make use somehow of my contacts in the States because as I said earlier I very strongly feel that more than anyone, anywhere, that's where this book belongs. I think the same goes for journalism, that sometimes as journalists we do not fight enough with our desks over the stories that really matter. We should spend more time pushing for stories that are relevant rather than feeding the demands of the market. I think in Holland recently we had this very interesting example, where a photographer and a writer headed for Africa and they were going to write about poverty in an African village. Now everybody already starts yawning: my goodness, what a cliché, it's poverty in an African village, we've seen it all before. It came out in the monthly magazine *M* of *NRC Handelsblad* in the supplement, and there was such an overwhelming response from readers, they got hundreds of letters, so I think it's one of the indications that we tend to underestimate the curiosity and the eagerness of the public. They do want stories that are not just infotainment or simplistic. It's our responsibility to tell the story as interestingly as possible and as nicely as possible, but it can be done and I'm also thinking for example of the Dutch writer Geert Mak, who did this history of Europe which is definitely not an easy book to read, it requires quite something, it's hundreds of pages, but it was on the best-selling list for many many weeks. I think we partly as authors and journalists have to blame ourselves for going along too easily with the fact that increasingly the media and publishing houses are corporate business.

Maarten Asscher – But we have a publisher here on my extreme left who loves difficult books, so there is hope for salvation. Wolfgang, why do you like difficult books?

Wolfgang Hörner – I think the books you are not used to are the more interesting ones. Usually it's more difficult to sell them because people are not used to what's in them, either content-wise or the way they are presented or whatever.

Maarten Asscher – But you have found an extraordinary formula in your publishing house where, if I remember correctly, part of Eichborn is almost solely devoted to publishing extremely successful, nonsensical cartoon books, calendars and the famous Arschloch series, and then another part is solely devoted to the finest fiction and non-fiction imaginable.

Wolfgang Hörner – No, I don't think that's true. Also in the small programme for example that Eichborn Berlin does, it's not only difficult, it's also best-selling books, but I just have to be convinced they are real good best-selling books. I don't go for bad, selling books, certainly not, and I think it's always the mixture which makes it. Also, the editor of the humour department, I think he wouldn't do a book just for selling it. He says: you know I have to think it's really funny, although it's useless it's really funny. And it's a way of life of course, it's a way of perceiving the world, of having anarchistic authors, and he has to be convinced of it.

Maarten Asscher – And where does your determination come from?

Wolfgang Hörner – Oh, I think the books, really. They grip me and then you say yes, you want to do it. And it developed. I think I was simply quite lucky to get this part of the publishing house. It's not a real programme, though. I started off doing, which was a strategic idea, German modern literature, because we had a lot of new authors and they seemed to write in a different way, so Eichborn Berlin started off doing that and doing classics and then we grew because it was quite successful so then we said, okay, let's also do non-fiction. And the non-fiction is simply the books which crossed my way and which grabbed me, as you say.

Maarten Asscher – The funny thing about your statement about doing difficult books is that the two examples that you gave strike me as not so difficult at all. Selling a book about the Hitler greeting in Germany.

Wolfgang Hörner – Oh, it's difficult enough.

Maarten Asscher – And selling a book about not thinking. Isn't your attitude a way of redefining the usual problem of publishing: how to make things more accessible than they are.

Wolfgang Hörner – Definitely, and I think it's difficult to sell a book about the Hitler greeting in Germany because it's extremely specialised in a way.

Maarten Asscher – Don't do it here, please...

Wolfgang Hörner – Of course it puts people off, it's a gesture that really puts people off and it's right that they are put off. And the other one, yeah we made it accessible. But Hannes Stein, you know, if he goes into a talk show and says what he thinks, people will say no, we don't want to hear it, so we made it accessible.

Maarten Asscher – Have you experienced similar problems as Olivier Rubinstein has described in, say, legal pressure?

Wolfgang Hörner – Very much so, I think this is a real problem. Over the last few years in Germany more and more publishing house got libelled and we had to go to court, and this is really very expensive of course, this is the main thing. I mean, if you lose a case or win a case it's nice or not nice, but it can cost so much money that a publishing house like ours, which doesn't have such a lot of money and doesn't have a big conglomerate in the back, can be broken by it and it's increasing, it's a tendency, definitely. But there's nothing you can do so far but to change the legal system or to have a person who very closely reads a manuscript before, who has a legal background. We have one and so we try toward that without kicking out passages but reformulating them.

Maarten Asscher – It's probably there where the problems are most serious, in that reformulating. Olivier, you mentioned that writers are forced to write more vaguely, more evasively. That's where non-fiction, in its authenticity, suffers the most damage. I wouldn't like to go against the human rights court, but I must say that if I were the king of France I would also like to prohibit a book by a doctor describing his patient's last years, six days after his death. I think it's a completely unsavoury idea for a non-fiction book, don't you agree?

Olivier Rubinstein – I completely agree. I think I'd never have published this book, you know. The real question is the question of censorship, you know. And the fact that the European court in Strasbourg eight years afterwards decided to allow the publication of this book and it's a real problem that we call *la conservation des preuves*. Is it a problem if I speak in French? *Lentement*? Okay. Forget it.

Maarten Asscher – You seem to be able to speak two languages at the same time, which I think is marvellous.

Olivier Rubinstein – Sure. Okay.

Wolfgang Hörner – Just to add to this point, for example, we also have books where we leave everything in. I'm doing a second Harlan novel now, and it's about the people in Aktion Reinhard, those who had been in Treblinka, Sobibor, Sabba, and again it's a novel now but all their lives are in there, their lives in the war, their lives after the war, in Germany, what they did and it's quite astonishing that all of them still were together and worked together and so on and I'm going to leave all the addresses and all the telephone numbers, everything, I'm going to leave everything in there, since in this case I say, this book isn't a bestseller anyway. The important thing is that it's out, once it's printed the book is there, even if we are forbidden to sell it, it will still be there, and since my radio is with me I got the basic finance for it and even in case it should be forbidden, it's been there and everybody can get it somewhere or know who's interested. We wouldn't do this with a bestseller, we would certainly say we need to sell it.

Maarten Asscher – Minka you mentioned a form of self-censorship yourself, but you did it in a very gentle way. You said there were certain privacy details that I left out using my own moral feeling. Would you still consider this a limitation to your authorship or is it a natural process for you?

Minka Nijhuis – Well no, I mean it's a constant juggling, I find, because as a journalist you're trained and your instinct is to write everything down, but I think it's slightly different when you get the trust of a family and you stay with them for such a long time and you share their intimate life. This is a very personal thing; I know colleagues who have a different approach and who would just write everything down. In this case it was also not about crucial issues, because then I might have taken a different position, for example if the husband was beating his wife every evening, or if I had found out that the grandmother had committed a murder, I mean of course it would have been a nice story but it wasn't the case. Then of course you would write it down. You also make a judgment on how relevant the issue is and how relevant it is to the story that you want to tell.

Maarten Asscher – Is there for you a measure of commercial censorship, the commercial pressure that forces publishers to publish certain kinds of books in certain formats that adapt as well as possible to the market that put certain constraints on you as a writer?

Minka Nijhuis – It's probably even the other way around, in that I've sometimes been asked by publishers, not my own, but publishers whom I encounter who feel that I should for example put more of myself into the story and play a bit more on the aspects of being a woman in dangerous places and how do you deal with all the aspects of practically doing your work.

Maarten Asscher – But isn't there a form of market pressure that would force you to write the book differently than your original idea inspired you to?

Minka Nijhuis – Yeah, I think I would know how to write a book that would sell more easily, but it is just not the kind of writing I want to do. I don't believe in it, I don't like it, it's already done by others, so I don't want to do it.

Maarten Asscher – Good, excellent.

Minka Nijhuis – Very simple.

Maarten Asscher – Mauricio said don't fight against the market and if you want to be a good non-fiction publisher you have to adapt to the market. In the case of critical non-fiction, whatever your definition of critical non-fiction would be, that is hardly possible.

Mauricio Bach – Yeah, but finally you are doing books for people to read so you have to try to come up with books that people want to read. I mean you can't publish books that nobody wants to read. So in the middle, between the reader and the publisher, you have the market with the reader, the bookshops and the press and all of that, so you have to try to adapt to the new situations that are changing this market. For example, publishing houses are of course changing but bookshops are also changing and for example in Spain there are still literary and small bookshops specialising in good literature and serious books but there is an increasing power of these big stores, like Fnac for example, which is also in Spain, and for example the biggest bookshop in Spain is all the small bookshops of a bigger store which is called *Corte Ingles* and the people working there are not booksellers, they are people who

are there and they can be in other places in this big store. And you have to try to adapt to this situation because it is almost impossible to sell books only in the small bookshops. So the situation has changed. For example one thing that is changing absolutely is that maybe twenty years ago the backlist was very important for a publishing house and now the backlist is not so important because you have a book, the book is in the bookshops for about two or three months and if it doesn't work it is finished, really. And because all these big bookshops, they don't work with this backlist, just the small ones like your bookshop here are interested in the backlist, so this for example is a big change today.

Maarten Asscher – What role do translators play for you in the process of finding new books and developing new publishing projects?

Mauricio Bach – We basically work not with translators for this but with scouts. We have scouts in the United States, in England and also in Germany, and sometimes if there are some translators who can propose a book and if it's interesting then we may publish it.

Maarten Asscher – So you are open to suggestions from translators.

Mauricio Bach – Yes, of course. Basically with the small languages, if you have a good translator, for example a translator from Hungarian into Spanish, as it is quite difficult for us to know what is happening in Hungarian literature, or other languages that are difficult to read for a publisher, then it is very interesting if you have a good translator who can recommend you good books. If you don't have that you always have the connection through the English translation, or German translation, or the French translation. These are the major languages for the other small languages.

Maarten Asscher – I have two microphones here, so if anyone wants to join the conversation, please do. Otherwise I would like to ask Olivier Rubinstein whether he is opposed to subsidies as well as Wolfgang, who has bashed subsidies. Do you apply for subsidies? You have just launched this impressive new magazine, *Le meilleur des mondes*. In the Netherlands it would be impossible to launch a magazine of ideas like this, with essays and political articles and important interviews, without subsidy.

Olivier Rubinstein – Really? I was lucky because in terms of what we have talked about, commercial, non-commercial and so on, of course I can do this magazine because I had a good success two years ago with a book by Irene Nemirovsky, *Suite française*. It was a huge success all over the world. So fortunately it gave me a lot of my own subsidy and I don't have to ask anybody to do this kind of magazine. But this magazine for me is very important because on the French intellectual landscape there is a lot of confusion, and I think it's the same in most other countries now and we decided from thinkers, writers, to make this magazine together because there is for me, especially for me at first, there is a real need to understand the world where we live.

Maarten Asscher – And without subsidy.

Olivier Rubinstein – Without subsidy.

Maarten Asscher – Good.

Olivier Rubinstein – Yes.

Wolfgang Hörner – But after I've decided for a project I'm keen for any subsidies. It's just that you have first to decide for it and then you take the money of course.

Maarten Asscher – Well subsidies are intended to make things possible that would not be possible otherwise. So if you think they are possible without subsidy, of course, so much the better. Dan Simon.

Dan Simon – I have questions for everyone. Minka, I just wondered, as a journalist in Iraq, the censorship in the States was of course greater than in Europe and I just wondered if you found that typically in a war zone like that the journalists hang out together, same hotel and that sort of thing, all the journalists are in one or two hotels and I just wondered if you found that the American journalists were similar to the journalists from other parts of the world in terms of their point of view, or did they consciously or unconsciously a little bit represent a sort of pro-American point of view, or were they just your colleagues who represented similar opinions to other journalists?

Minka Nijhuis – I think it was actually both. I think some of the worst journalism that was bordering on propaganda came from US journalists. Clearly you have an example with Fox News. On the other hand I also think some of the best journalism came from the States, I'm thinking of Anthony Shadid from the *Washington Post* who rightfully got the Pulitzer prize for his articles on Iraq. I'm thinking of a colleague of mine who more or less single-handedly covered the war. To give you an example of his determination, he came into Iraq, he couldn't get a visa, so he came from Syria with a little boat. He inflated the boat in the middle of the night and he crossed the river into Kurdistan and did really wonderful stories for *Salon*. And I think, more than anywhere perhaps, in the States there are outside the mainstream media a lot of interesting articles and publications. So it's the worst and the best I would say.

Dan Simon – Thank you. And Olivier I think it's amazing. I didn't know you did this, the journal. That's an amazing statement at this time. I mean in a way it counters nicely what you said about the disappointments of France right now. I don't know any place else that would be doing that right now and I just wondered, was there any justification that was financial, or was it really the company, I guess Gallimard, or several companies coming together and just saying they could justify it for larger cultural reasons and not strictly a bottom line?

Olivier Rubinstein – No it's not at all financial of course because we can expect to sell maybe 3,000 to 4,000 copies in the best way, in the bookshop and with subscribers also. No it could be something for us, a part of this melting pot of thinkers. It could be interesting for a publishing house like mine to have all these interesting people around me, around the magazine you know. It could be something in terms of connections. Because some of these people are published by a lot of different publishing houses of course, and I think they'll continue in that way, but for some particular projects it could be interesting for us to have these people.

Dan Simon – Yeah, thanks for doing it.

Marco Vigevani – I think that the problem you and also other people raised, the problem of the judiciary's role in publishing is very important. In the case of Italy it is one of the many constraints that are imposed not only on the publication of a book or a critical book in terms of documents or politics etc. but also on the diffusion. Because one thing is to publish a critical book with a small publishing house, another thing is that the book goes on TV and is widely discussed in the national newspapers etc. And this is a big problem. I don't think Italy is alone in this, but it has probably gone further than other countries, unfortunately. Because the major newspapers belong to big industrialists or industrial concerns or even the association of Italian industrialists, and they have of course other concerns than the diffusion of their newspapers and the liberty of the press. The TV was controlled until two days ago partly by the government and half by the head of the government personally. This doesn't mean it is impossible to publish critical non-fiction. Take the example of the very good book by Alexander Stille on Berlusconi, very well documented etc. Or the example of a very well known Italian journalist called Marco Travaglio, who published wonderful books, very well documented books. Marco Travaglio goes on TV more often and he sells 100-150 thousand copies, Alexander Stille doesn't go on TV, or very little, because the people in TV are afraid of having him in their talk shows, so he sells 20,000 copies and the book was refused by major publishing houses because of the danger of being caught in a libel case. So it was not published by Mondadori, it was not published by Feltrinelli, it was not published by Rizzoli, it was published by Garzanti, which is a medium-sized publisher which doesn't have the strength of our other biggest publishers. So there is a problem of the many constraints, economic constraints that are imposed on the circulation of critical books. For example the fact that on TV, because of the judicialisation of opinions, let's say, Berlusconi was mainly treated from the point of view of the comedians and the satirical point of view, and this has had a huge impact on the figure of Berlusconi, who is now seen as a grotesque rather than as a serious figure. And this has had a huge impact also on the formation of public opinion in Italy.

Mary Mount – Just carrying on from Marco's point, I was interested about this libel issue and whether Olivier and Wolfgang have now, as a process, most of your non-fiction libel-read. Because I until very recently never had anything libel read. Probably going to be sued tomorrow. Apart from one biography of Primo Levi because his widow is still alive. And I'm aware of another publishing house where they seem on a routine basis to have their books libel read and that seems to me a) incredibly expensive and b) going to produce some very dull books, and I wondered whether this is the case with you two having to do that.

Toby Eady – I'd like to say something on two sides. One about libel. I've just spent nine months on a manuscript which is going to be published on June 1st with libel lawyers. That is a threat in England, that anyone can sue you and publishers are really terrified of that. But equally as an agent I in my turn, by Mondadori, Random House, William Collins, I've been prevented from helping authors have freedom from them with very heavy lawsuits. It goes both ways. When I see these editors talking about the law, each time I say to the editor why don't you do something about it and they say: oh that's our legal department. It does go both ways.

Jan Mets – I'd just like to give an example of this in England. We were happy to publish in 2004 the book by the American author Craig Unger, *House of Bush, House of Saud*, which describes the connection between the Bush administration, the family, and all of them, and the Saudi royals. This book was bought, and there was a large sum of money involved, by Random House in the UK and just by the very threat of the possibility of getting involved in a libel suit they refused it, having paid a quarter of a million pounds for it, and it was published by a small scale independent publisher called Gibson Square. They printed 20,000 copies and nothing happened.

Maarten Asscher – Well there is a definition of news which is: news is what somebody doesn't want you to know. And perhaps critical non-fiction can thus be defined as truths that somebody doesn't want to be divulged that way. The whole problem of libel threats is of course nothing new to the newspaper business. Even half a century or more ago this was a daily care for newspaper editors, editors-in-chief. Does the fact that this problem has now come so forcefully to non-fiction book publishers perhaps also mean that non-fiction book publishing has become more journalistic, that has not only drawn in the newsiness as an advantage but also the problems of news publishing? Do you Minka Nijhuis consider yourself a journalist or a writer or what would you write in your passport if you had to note your profession.

Minka Nijhuis – I never do, because in most of the countries they're not keen on writers or journalists. Both. I would say.

Maarten Asscher – But you have to choose.

Minka Nijhuis – Then I would choose being a writer. Because I can still do both.

Jan Mets – Do you think that this distinction makes sense?

Maarten Asscher – Well it did make sense decades ago. My point is that perhaps the culture of non-fiction and news and journalism and authorship has changed over the decades. Or is that just a feeling?

Toby Eady – I don't think so. I was involved in the *Private Eye* law case, because a client of mine was sued for criminal libel, Patrick Marnham, and he was going to go to prison because the richest man in England was prepared to sue him, and that man also wanted to buy a newspaper and the government then said to him, if you want to buy that newspaper you drop this libel case. But in all that time *Private Eye* would print that week what it wanted to print and go into liquidation at the end of the week so they couldn't be sued.

Dan Simon – I think in the States it's a little bit surprising that we haven't seen more of this yet. And I think it's probably coming. And I think one of the reasons we haven't seen it is that there have been other effective ways for corporate self-censorship and in one very famous case there was a very good biography of George Bush called *The Fortunate Son* which was to be published by St Martin's and in fact they thought it was so good that they bumped it up from a mass market late in the publishing process to be a hardcover original biography and then the Bush machine just went after that and the author it turns out had a criminal record and they went after that. The book was cancelled. A small publisher picked it up, the distributor

wouldn't distribute it and actually the author ended up committing suicide in a hotel room. So they were effectively able to really suppress it without legal action. We have maybe 30% of the non-fiction vetted and one of the reasons that we do it is because that in itself in the States is a legal defence. So if we can go before a judge and say we were responsible about this, we had it legally looked at, we had the author make changes, we weren't frivolous in how we published it, and we have liability, I think most of us have liability policies.

Maarten Asscher – Who pays for this check? Does the author have to pay, or is it the publishing house who pays?

Dan Simon – We pay for it and then the policy protects the authors and us equally, and so the maximum liability to the authors in our case is to share with us the deductible, which I think is ten or twenty thousand dollars maximum, and that could only be taken by us out of earnings. So we can't actually go into the author's pocket but we can withhold earnings on that title. But I want to ask Wolfgang something related to this issue but on the editorial side: when you said that you were going to leave in names and addresses and phone numbers and I take it you're talking about people that some people would consider war criminals. To me, just speaking editorially, it interests me, maybe I'm wrong about it but that's something that editorially I wouldn't do because to me even war criminals have civic rights. And this came up recently with us with an author named Derek Jensen who did exactly that. It's a very radical book and it argues for the end of civilization and he would give names and addresses and phone numbers repeatedly of the kind of thugs who had, for example, pulled down tree-huggers and disgustingly, obscenely threatening them and basically pulling them down and risking their lives and he would say: and that guy lives on such and such a street and such and such an address and here's his phone number and it was one of the few... And I didn't have a problem with him presenting ideas but for him to... You know for me it's a basic matter of civil rights that everybody has, and in the same way that we for example didn't do Bush-bashing books that kind of ridiculed Bush, we went after his policies and went after his criminalities and his impeachable offences, but we never, you know, wanted the conversation to get ridiculous as it did in the States, with a lot of the publishing that happened that kind of trivialised the politics, so that's just an editorial question...

Wolfgang Hörner – It's a little bit different because the people who had these addresses and telephone numbers and so on, all of them are dead. I mean it's Aktion Reinhard... But of course the families might still be there. But I do leave it in, actually, for the people in Salzburg and Stuttgart and wherever it is, to make it real concrete. I mean it's been concrete, these people lived there, nobody sued them, they are dead. I don't know if I would do it really if one could ring them up. I don't know. So I want it to be as concrete as possible.

Xinran – I have a question for each of you. Xinran, author and journalist from China and the UK. Sorry, I can't pronounce your names, so if you don't mind I'll just call you Mr Spain and Mrs Holland. That's much easier for me. That is the Chinese way. And the first question goes to Mr Spain. You say publishing in Spain is quite free. Because my book was published in your country as well, and when I worked with editors, publishers and journalists I found that the censorship sometimes does not only come from government or the professional or the bosses of publishing companies,

sometimes it is delimited by the editors knowledge, or fear. It's very personal. So I found this was not free at all. So when you choose the books, obviously like you say you respect the market, respect the readership, but a readership needs to be led and advised, particularly for other cultures or new subjects. So how do you do this? I'm sure your books are very new and fresh for your readership as well, so as a publisher you need to give them advice and say why you published a book and you need to build up a new market for it. So this is my question to Mr Spain. And my next question to...

Maarten Asscher – Perhaps Mr Spain could first answer this question. Your influence as a publisher, how you influence the market, your readership, your picture of complete freedom doesn't seem to strike home.

Mauricio Bach – Of course you influence the market because you choose what to publish and what not to publish. But of course to be a good publisher I would say you also have to sense where the readers are going and try to connect to them. You can't publish a book that nobody wants to read. So there's an interest now in the Iraqi war. You can choose the best book about the Iraqi war but maybe you don't choose a book about another subject, another matter, that nobody wants to read about. So you influence the market trying to do the best book on a subject, but of course trying to understand which subjects interest the readers.

Xinran – As people say, the popular market is a fast-food market and the best-selling books are about drugs, killings, murders as well. When people talk about Iraq, some people talk about the state system or how much improved or how much it is getting worse, but some will just talk about these kind of points, so how do you judge the best of the books, of the news, of the stories?

Mauricio Bach – Sorry, I don't understand.

Dan Simon – I think I understand: how do you become knowledgeable as an editor about the market, say about China if you're Spanish or an American?

Xinran – Yes, exactly how do you become knowledgeable about the good and the bad?

Mauricio Bach – Sometimes for example you have to trust your scouts or your translators. They are the people who know much about these subjects. And then have confidence in them.

Maarten Asscher – Do you commission books yourself, giving an author...

Mauricio Bach – Yes of course. I think this is one of the things that has changed in recent times. If you are a non-fiction editor you sometimes have to think about this matter and then try to find the author of course. We have commissioned for example two books about China, but not from Chinese but from Spanish authors, but they are really connected with China. One of them was in the Spanish embassy in China and the other one is a specialist in China. But of course you have to understand which are the interesting matters of the moment and then go searching for the author.

Maarten Asscher – Your second question?

Xinran – The second question goes to Mrs Holland. You mentioned that when you were in Iraq at the very beginning that you were driven by the news and most journalists are driven by the news. I'd like to know, who are the news makers and how those journalists during the war check the facts and make sure that it has come from facts? Not by someone just making up the story.

Minka Nijhuis – Yes, of course as I mentioned earlier we're not covering a soccer match where we get to see all the players and the field. What good journalism should do in a war, I think, for many of us, especially someone from a smaller media organisation like me, you're merely an eyewitness, so what you see is what you report and if you're really very qualified and you're an expert on the region and the issue and so on, you can provide some context and analysis, which is often done by the people at the desk. And I find that you maybe should not give in to the tendency of staying with the pack. Because I think there's often in a war, first of all, so much lies and propaganda, and there are so many agendas that are pushing you in certain directions. I try to be on my own as much as I can and follow my own story and make it very clear to the public that that is only a glimpse of the story and it's based on my own account, it's actually what I see. I try to report on the facts and I think it's very limited and if a lot of people are doing it we all get pieces of the puzzle, but I don't think I'm ever under the illusion that we get to see the, well, the truth is a big word, but in many instances in Iraq I think it will take years, it will take years before we know what's really been going on.

Xinran – Thank you. This is why I really admire what you have done, because lots of the journalists in Iraq just sit in the hotel and tell people what is going on there. So sometimes I just wonder is it true, or just by someone hearing like a woman nagging or something. Thank you. The next question goes to Mr France. And my question is: you gave the very interesting statement to us about the publishing situation in your country, but I just wonder what percentage of these numbers are foreign titles, from Asia, or... How many translations? What percentage of books published every year are from Asia, or foreign.

Olivier Rubinstein – You mean in terms of fiction or non-fiction?

Xinran – Non-fiction.

Olivier Rubinstein – Most of them are translated from English and that's about 20 %.

Xinran – Thank you. Based on Europe or Asia or other...

Olivier Rubinstein – European, of course.

Xinran – Oh, Europe. Okay, thank you.

Maarten Asscher – Why of course?

Xinran – Very good!

Olivier Rubinstein – Because the public, the readers in France are, maybe it's a shame, but they are more interested first of all by the French situation, which is very confused at the moment as I say, but it's true also that there are a lot of books translated from English on Iraq as a subject. But most of the non-fiction business in France is typically French.

Xinran – Thank you. Actually I found during my book tour through many countries, France is the best to publish Chinese. Very good, and a long list as well. Next question goes to Mr Germany. You always pick out the difficult books. And everybody knows that when you want to publish a book, the readers get the information not from the publishing house but from the media. So what do you do to make the most difficult book, to make the media feel easy to transport this message to the readers and also that the readers can follow your idea. I think it's like we are taught, you can't play the same cards all the time.

Wolfgang Hörner – First of all, I don't only do difficult books.

Xinran – I see.

Wolfgang Hörner – Eichborn Berlin is in Germany pretty famous for doing very well in selling German recent authors in fiction, really well selling, though original. And it's just, the thing is really, you have to take into account every single book and find out what you can do with it. There's no general recipe for it. I think that's the main point. That's why we said in Eichborn Berlin that we'll have the same people who do the editing do the press work, because I think normally there's an editing department and a press department. We don't have this. So the people know the authors, the people know (well, the people – two of us, two of us and we have some helpers) we know the author, we know the book very well so we know what you can make out of it, and we know the people in the media, we know which person in the media might be interested in the special idea of the book, or a special subject in the book, and so we make it up for every single book.

Xinran – I think this is very important. Sometimes as an author I find it very difficult to work with the editor who has nothing to do with me about the publicity and then the publicist says: I haven't got time to read the book.

Wolfgang Hörner – Yeah, so that's why we do it like this, which is a very good system, and which is a horrible system if you do too many books. Because you have to be very close with the author, very close with the press, and you shouldn't lose any contact, you know.

Xinran – Thank you all.

Maarten Asscher – Thank you for your round of questions, which brings our morning session to a close. We have talked about commercial pressure in a very broad sense, in the sense of the organisational pressure, legal pressure, the pressure of censorship and self-censorship. And so I think within the limitations of our time, which is another form of pressure, we have tried to do justice to our subject. There is not one solution, as I promised you there wouldn't be, but I think Minka Nijhuis came close when she said in her presentation 'I moved in with my subject,' and perhaps that

is what every author should do in a literal or a metaphorical way: move in with your subject. Perhaps that's a lesson authors can teach to agents and translators and editors and publishers and even readers, that moving in with the project at hand is really living with and living for the book in your hands or the manuscript before your eyes is the only way to really discover the determination that you have spoken of so well, Minka. I suggest we move now into our lunch and we will see each other again at two o'clock.

Friday afternoon: Creative publishing

Maarten Asscher – Welcome to the next round of four presentations, after which we will further meet each other in a discussion. And the first speaker this afternoon is Marjon van Royen to the far right here, whose books can be admired in our coffee-room and who as an author is known to many among you. She works for the Dutch daily *NRC Handelsblad* and for Dutch public television and radio. She published her first book in 1998, *Italy on a Monday*, which immediately was a great success. And she now lives, after having roamed various parts of the world, in Rio de Janeiro, where she is working on a new book, this time about Brazil. The microphone to Marjon van Royen please, on the theme of creative publishing, which starts with creative writing.

Marjon van Royen – Well, that *NRC Handelsblad* thing is not true any more, just public radio and television.

Maarten Asscher – And *Vrij Nederland*.

Marjon van Royen – But you always make people bigger than they are. *Vrij Nederland*, yes. Okay listen, I think I'll just start by telling a little story. There's this lovely young Indian woman. She lives in the shantytown, she has two daughters, the oldest is fifteen and the youngest is only six months old. Her man, well, unclear, different mistresses, he comes and he goes, and he hits her sometimes when he feels like it. One day this woman meets a rich *gringa*. In a strange inexplicable way the two become friends: the illiterate Indian and the rich white *gringa*. Sometimes the *gringa* stays over in the wooden shack of the Indian woman and they talk and they talk, under the stars, the dust of the dirt roads in their eyes, the smell of wooden cooking fires in their noses. The Indian woman, whose name is Sandra, tells her new friend about her life, how she came from the mountains to the big town, like so many people do. She was only thirteen, barefoot she came, completely on her own and now she's a cook in a big town, she can make the most wonderful dishes, comforting dishes, mean dishes sometimes too. Sandra tells her friend how she dreamed of having her own little house, her own little shack if it must be, but that is like a flea dreaming of owning a dog, she says. That's the way she talks, in images, a flea dreaming of owning a dog. She will never be able to own a dog or a house, she says, because her shanty town is ruled by mafia gangs, guys who pretend to be the owners of the land and the shacks that people have built there, at the freight border of this gigantic town. The guys are violent, authoritarian and terrorise the community, but Sandra fights them, as the only one, so one day her shack is burnt down, a punishment for being *conflictivo*, the guys say – conflictive. She has nowhere to go nowhere to turn because even the police turn out to cooperate with the guys of the gang. Then her white *gringa* friend invites her to live in her big house, a place full of plants, centuries old patios, babbling ancestor ghosts under the ceiling. So I didn't move in with the subject, the subject moved in with me. In that house the most incredible things happen, happy things but also sad things, like the rape of the oldest daughter by a policeman. There is the kidnap of Sandra's youngest by her husband, not any act of love for the child but a revenge against Sandra, because she decided to divorce him. Eventually the youngest is found in a dump, the youngest who was abducted, and her oldest brings a baby of rape, born into the house. Things settle down, wounds are licked, and again the bad ghosts from

under the ceiling hit. Sandra loses her job as a cook and one week later the raping policeman shows up at the door of the happy home. He claims his fatherly rights over the newborn baby, not because he wants to take care of his child, but because he wants to pressure Sandra's daughter into a false testimony about a murder case he is accused of. Sandra's daughter goes into hiding and the policeman threatens the rest of the women in the house. The *gringa* is swept into the life of ups and downs that is completely normal to the life of Sandra. To her it feels like being Sisyphus, every time having to take the stone up the mountain and when you're up it rolls back down again. Sandra explains that such is life here. The *gringa* is mad. She says: such cannot be life. And so on and so on. What do you think will happen? Will this friendship hold in the end? This is one story. Now listen to the other. In 1912 Mexico was changed by a bloody revolution. Nearly six million people died, more than one tenth of the population. This revolution eventually led to a political system called the institutionalised revolution, seventy years of one party rule in which corruption became endemic. Police abuse in Mexico is widespread and touches over two million people a year. More than fifty percent of the population lives below the poverty line of two dollars a day. And although economic growth was over three percent in the last years, there has been no redistribution of wealth. On the contrary. The gap between rich and poor has widened. Women, who make up more than 60% of the poor population are especially vulnerable to the exclusion mechanisms of the *machista* Mexican society. Now the question: which of the two stories will you remember in ten minutes? I'm quite sure you'll forget the last one, because in the last one you cannot feel anything, nothing comes to life, nobody comes to life. And this is my thesis. Non-fiction today is about giving people a feeling. We sit here because we, of the critical non-fiction, we are good, we make a difference, and we have to be read in this terribly flat and superficial world where there is no real analysis, where there are stupid reality shows, and only short term and emotional hypes. So we can sit here and weep, or be mad, or be very proud of ourselves, we can tell each other how ugly and unfair this outside world is, but we have to be read. That's what I think: we all want to be read. I think we as writers have to do something too. Let me put it as we do in Holland: we have to put our hands in our own breasts.

I think we have to make an effort to tell stories, good stories, well-written stories, stories with a beginning, a plot, and an end. With people of flesh and blood, stories where there are people whom you can identify with, whom you can laugh with and weep with. If you want to remember something, if you want something to have an impact, then you have to embrace it with the emotional part of the brain. That is for a fact. Not just the rational part of the brain. Film and television know it, fiction knows it, and television and film they study it, they act on it, they use and misuse it. A lot is about the emotion a story triggers. And all those young people who presumably don't read any more, they have their brains formed by this way of taking in information through emotion. They make quicker jumps, because they are accustomed to television, to film, and they make more emotional jumps in their minds. Well this is allegedly, someone told me, because modern evolution gives the young more wires in the optical part of the brain, and the optical part of the brain sits next to the emotional part of the brain. Well, our intelligence is here [indicates front of head], so we have to move this a little bit back, and I think this is also for non-fiction writers, it's a fact, and we have to apply to it. That's what I think. If we want to be read, if we want to have any impact at all, well, we'd better join them. Also, we have to target this emotional part of the brain. Paint images, tell stories, make quick jumps too, even if we're a little bit older than those young people, not just the endless explaining, the

endless facts. If we want to just pass on explanations, if we just want to give facts, why don't we open a website? If we want to go on writing books we have to do more, a lot more, we have to do more than just be journalists, we have to do more than just be analysts, we have to do more than just be researchers. We have to be damn good storytellers. Because I'm sure even with internet, the shallow news, the shabby shows and less and less newspaper readers, people still want to hear stories. We don't always remember it because we were young, but everyone liked the stories of *Cinderella*, and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, I mean it is I think it's exactly that universal and perhaps childish hunger for stories that we must and can use.

My bosses at radio and television, they break my balls, especially lately. Because they say: you know we have to reach our public today and young people are the bosses, and young people dictate the market and you know what young people ask themselves, they say, 'What's in there for me? What has this got to do with me?' So the solution my bosses give is, honestly, terrible. They say: let's just make everything local, so people can identify. So if there is a tsunami that overthrows millions of lives in Asia, we focus on the three Dutch involved. If the first Indian president of Bolivia nationalises his gas reserves, a beautiful story I think, we just have to ask ourselves: how are Dutch business interests affected by this move? If we have three million displaced people in Columbia, ah, and they are still there but we do nothing, because there is no local Dutch angle in there. So they handle it like back to the village. I'm sure this is bullshit. I'm sure there are methods to bring the world close to the people. Those methods are the methods of fiction and literature. Try to write such thrilling stories that the reader is captured, that he has to go on turning the pages: and then and then and then, will Cinderella eventually wake up? Make sure that the reader can identify. If you use the craft of literature well, I'm sure the reader can identify with someone as strange and aloof as an Indian woman, or as a cockroach even, or God forbid, an Iraqi.

One great example of this kind of non-fiction is to me what Minka did. She really went behind the scenes; she went behind the mere journalism. Another nice example I know of is called *Random Family*. It's an American book about two Hispanic women in a New York ghetto. And the writer follows them for years. She completely immerses herself in their lives and she writes this book that absolutely reads as a novel. She makes you identify with her characters and at the end of the book you understand for the first time really what life in the ghetto is. Why it is so hard to change some things in those lives, why men go into the drugs business, why women go on having babies when they're fourteen or fifteen years old, why they drink, in short why the ghetto is the ghetto. The book is perfect. Because it reads like a novel and because at the same time everything is real. Is there anything more perfect than having a novel in which everything is real? It uses the method of fiction, there's a beginning, a plot and an end, and at the end you get... It's ten times better than fiction because it's true. I really believe we could make critical non-fiction a winner on the market using these kinds of techniques. Because I'm sure many readers today also prefer a real story to yet another invention made up in the fantasy of someone who is just sitting behind his desk. As a journalist, I always say: The world is so full of stories, before I sit down and invent a story, well, I need to sit in a wheelchair. But that's my personal thing. And by the way, why are reality shows so popular? I think people want reality. But it's a hell of a lot of work to write the kind of non-fiction like this, the kind of non-fiction that reads like a novel. You have to immerse yourself completely in the world of the characters you write about. Like Minka did, a month in the house, like I did in a way, three years of life with this Sandra person, like *Random*

Family. She didn't do four or five interviews, she lived with her characters for many many years, she followed them all the time. So also in this sense, non-fiction is more than journalism, more than this thing we did for years: bundle your articles, rewrite them a little, put a staple in it and there you are. What I talk about is a lot of hard and unpaid work, and I think if we want to be these winners on the market we have to be double artists. We have to manage the art of fact-finding and the art of storytelling. The books we produce must be well written, they must tell a good story and they must also touch universal themes, so that people can recognise themselves in it. And I'm sure they have to be completely true. They have to be fact-checked and checked and checked again. I personally don't believe in characters that are made up of several characters and then you make one person and you give it a name. I really believe the persons have really to exist and they have to be true. If not, we cheat ourselves out of this superior weapon that is non-fiction.

Of course sometimes it's impossible, when you have dictatorships or, like in France, when you really are pursued by judges. I admire for example someone like Laura Restrepo, who is a Columbian writer and in Columbia you're easily killed if you write something someone doesn't like, and I did an interview with her some time ago and she told me: yes, that's how I began to write books, because I did something on this mafia boss, and the mafia boss didn't want me to publish it in a newspaper let alone do something about it on television. And then I said: yes but I did all that work can't I make a book? And he said: oh yes of course you can make a book, who's going to read it? That's how she came into the writing business. And she just changes the name but the story is all true. And the Mafiosi don't bother about it too much because nobody thinks that other people read. The thing is, I really believe non-fiction is superior. I think it's a perfect weapon for bringing down crooks and thieves. I think it's a perfect way to open new windows on the world. I think it's perfect for the sensitization of people or, like you said, to make the world a better place. Only, non-fiction cannot afford to be dull any more. Ahh another diarrhoea of facts, you know. Or aahhh again someone telling from his high horse how things really are. Or ahh again someone writing his exotic travel experiences down. Because if you have a nice travel, you make a blog on internet and that's where it belongs. Our thing has to be more. Instead of travel stories, for example, we have to do staying stories. Like Minka does, like I try to do, like many good writers now, good non-fiction writers do; stories you write after having dived into the lives of people, after having dived into a society.

I think non-fiction writers coming from obscure little countries, like Holland or Poland, are better equipped to write non-fiction because you have to dive in, you have less chance first of all to be caught. If you're a big American, everybody knows the American is there. Or even the English or even the French. If you come from Holland... Where? Poland, Holland? Where is that? That gives you a better opportunity to participate and not to have too much attention centred on yourself. My experience is that it was always good to come from Holland and not from America. Because we are unimportant and we are considered unimportant, so we can do some important observation work and participation work. Okay, I was kicked out of Mexico, even though I was Dutch, so there I didn't do such a splendid job, but for example in my book about Italy I followed Berlusconi for a lot of time. As our Italian colleague here can say, it's very hard to follow Berlusconi, but he didn't give a damn about Holland, so I could do that. And now I do the same in the *favellas* of Rio, I mean there are drugs bosses really controlling the neighbourhood and nobody, not even a Brazilian comes into those neighbourhoods, but I'm running in and out there because I'm just Dutch. So, we little countries are great. The only problem is, the big

countries don't translate us. I mean, Mexico, this book on Sandra could be a great book for the United States, again. They have a lot of Mexicans. It's their neighbour. I describe also the wall being built between the two countries. But none of the Americans want to do it. Or they say: oh that's a good idea, does it sell in Holland? We'll make someone write a book about Mexico. But it will be different, because sometimes I really believe that books written by outsiders, complete outsiders, can make a big contribution. Because people like our colleague from France says: we like mainly French people writing about France. But I think maybe a Dutch person writing about France could be interesting.

Maarten Asscher – Good, thank you. I think we could easily fill the rest of the afternoon discussing the points you have raised, but to my right is Mr Norway . Thank you, Xinran, for this wonderful way... Hans Petter Bakketeig, who is senior editor for general non-fiction at Gyldendal in Norway, where he has spent fourteen years now as editor. Please, Hans Petter, your presentation.

Hans Petter Bakketeig – I'm from Norway, from Oslo, and if you look on the euro coin, at the map of Europe that's on there, we're not even there, so we have vanished into the Arctic Sea. And I think that's an interesting place to start, being a very northern country, or being a marginal country in Europe and a small country. A few words about Gyldendal. It's today Norway's biggest publishing company. It used to be a Danish company, since Norway was a colony and part of Denmark, and all the Norwegian authors were published in Copenhagen at the Danish Gyldendal, or the original Gyldendal. And it's a famous myth of our history, the home-buying of our national authors: Ibsen, Hamsun, Bjørnson and Lie, and that was in 1925, the home-buying of authors, a part of the nation-building of Norway. I shall start somewhere else, with the non-fiction and the critical non-fiction. This guy here is Norway's richest man. His name is John Fredriksen, his nickname is the big bad wolf. He earned his money in shipping, where today he is one of the world's leading ship-owners and now expanding into many other businesses. And a lot of people have become rich with the big bad wolf but he has become even richer at their expense. And it goes without saying this guy never pays taxes, he has little respect for risk, for rules or weaklings. The two journalists who wrote the book, financial journalists, were quickly contacted by the wolf and he wanted to offer them a large sum of money to call off the project. And of course they had to turn it down, to survive as journalists, but only after having checked whether the sum offered was in Norwegian kroner or in US dollars. The wolf even threatened the publisher, Gyldendal, that he would buy the total print run to keep it out of sale. A threat any publisher would give his right arm to hear. The book achieved broad media attention to a secretive trade and brought a public interest to something rarely studied by people outside the trade, and in that way I considered it an important book. An important part of the book was, of course, to reveal some of the methods John Fredriksen has used to gain his fortune. No legal actions were taken against him, but there was a critical debate and new attention on the shipping industry in Norway. And two weeks ago he turned in his Norwegian citizenship and he is now a Cypriot.

Two years ago we published a biography on Knut Hamsun, our famous novelist. This is the first of two volumes, the first volume called *The Swarmerer*, the second one *The Conqueror*. He is regarded as one of our most famous novelists, but since the Second World War and the trial against him, where he was accused of treason, he has been a constant trauma for Norway and the Norwegians. How do we

deal with him? How do we deal with him as a great poet and a great novelist, the man who also presented his Nobel Literature medal to Goebbels and who wrote Hitler's obituary in the leading Norwegian newspaper in 1945. Is there a way for us to handle both the novelist and still take care of the traitor, or the other way around? When the biography was started off as a project in 2000, it was announced as a big project by Gyldendal and the reaction was quite sceptical I would say. Please, not another book on Knut Hamsun! We know his life, we know his books by now. But few had really investigated in depth many of the historical and biographical causes to his ending up as a Nazi sympathiser and also his strong dislike of the British, which is very evident through his whole career and all his statements. And there were many other puzzles to be solved that we as a nation, as a people, were concerned about. And of course, there is a market explanation to this. Knut Hamsun was really a very well received and appreciated author in Germany. The German publisher was the first one to make a collected edition of his works, even before we made one in Norway. But in England he never succeeded with any books really, in terms of sales. So we decided to invest a lot of brainpower and money in the biography. We had a top journalist as the writer, we had a team of the three most knowledgeable Hamsun experts involved, one of whom had collected all his letters and spent all his life as a professor investigating Hamsun's life, and we even had a psychiatrist, who conducted a reconstructive survey of Hamsun's state of mind, based on all the letters and diaries available. Of course this can be debated methodically and in many ways. And the team managed to dig up many new treasures: a large collection of letters that Hamsun himself claimed he had burnt, but more importantly the biography really generated a massive public interest. Everyone wanted to discuss our poet. I think there were something like 300 articles, interviews, reviews that were printed or broadcast per volume. That's really a large number for a press reception, I think. So as a whole it was obvious that our whole people really needed or wanted to deal with a problem that was bugging them. Not that I think you will find any relief, but maybe some new insights into how to see him.

What do books like *The Traitor* and *The Wolf* have in common? I think they are both strong narratives and they have a very clear and very charismatic protagonist. And these guys are not very likeable guys, Hamsun not at all. Still, I believe the readers easily relate to them, like you said Marjon, I think it has something to do with sharing their worries, sharing their dreams, sharing their struggle for life or for money. Why do readers like to read books like these? I basically think it's for the same reason as we read novels, good novels. I think we read these kinds of books just to know that we're not alone, just to transcend our own experiences, to learn about the world. For the book to really shake us, the way of approaching the problems, the insights, the plot of the story must be experienced as profoundly relevant, I think, to us as individuals and as a group today. And I think both the wolf book and the traitor book are both examples of independent, critical biographies, either with a historical or with a contemporary approach. I think both those lines are very important for publishers to follow in order to create powerful books with an impact. And we, the publishers, the writers, we need to take steps to initiate more books on key persons, with politics, business, culture, media, academia and bureaucracy as the main areas. And to look at our historical events and persons of course, like the example of Hamsun, all generations must write their own biographies. A biography is really a book about the present just as much as about the time of the main character.

So I would really stress that point maybe to a point that is beyond the rational. I would claim that the author needs a protagonist for her story, no matter what subject

the book is about. The protagonist could be a hero, a victim, a powerful leader, a villain, or maybe the investigative journalist, the narrator him or herself, like the project we talked about and you talked about. There just has to be someone there for the reader to relate to, to really relate to. And without a protagonist in the story I think the message is lost and the impact of the book is lost.

For this reason I can only talk about my own market, which has some very different aspects to it. For instance very different from the French, I think. The independent biography is a preferable genre to choose to publish critical non-fiction. I think it's also possible to revitalise other documentary genres like the debate book, but it needs some clever storification, as you were mentioning. I really share your point of view there; the combination of profound, good journalism and clever, musical storification. And to mention some examples of books I admire for this, I would state Barbara Ehrenreich's book that you published, Dan, *Nickel and Dimed*. You didn't? Ah okay. And then another example would be, for me, the book by the Australian journalist Anna Funder, *Stasiland*. And Xinran, your book, *The Good Women of China*, really has this formula. In Norway, to say a little bit more about our market, except for history books I think the biography is the only genre label that Norwegian readers relate to when it comes to general serious non-fiction. Other genre labels rest in the dark. I mean you talked about pamphlets and also the essay. The essay exists in Norway but it's not really there for the big public, and the pamphlet is definitely not there. We just had a readers' survey in Norway and the category, well, there wasn't even a category for the pamphlet or debate book in the survey. So in this readers' survey they really state the strong position of the novel in our market and I think that's something you have to take advantage of also as a non-fiction publisher and use the best of the novel merging with the non-fiction.

There is another really obvious fact about being an Arctic, marginal state, Norwegians tend to read Norwegian books. On average we read sixteen books a year; twelve of those books are written by Norwegian authors. Only four foreign books. And why are we so obsessed with ourselves, only being 4.5 million people? I believe apart from us being a young, freedom-loving nation, and a stubborn people who twice has turned down European membership, that the major reason is our forty-year-old literary system, favouring Norwegian fiction. The Norwegian culture council purchases Norwegian fiction for libraries, thus ensuring the economy for novelists and giving Norway an average of thirty fiction debutants per year.

Minka Nijhuis – Are they all good?

Hans Petter Bakketeig – No, they're not all good, and of course they cannot all go on to become novelists. But you ensure that the novelists are there, among those thirty. So this has given us many high-profiled Norwegian authors who are almost celebrities in the media, authors our readers are familiar with and like to read. In Norway we don't have any literary agents, so it's up to the publishers to acquire books and to take on authors directly. For non-fiction, in our market, the trend is to commission more books from journalists, and more books from fiction writers of non-fiction projects. The losers are the laymen, the autodidacts, the one-book non-fiction authors and the academics. They are vanishing from our general market, which is a great problem.

So this is a triple challenge for us as publishers. Firstly I think we have a surplus supply of skilled writers in search of subjects to write about. These thirty debut novelists per year, they don't really have that much, but they are skilled in many

ways when it comes to writing. Secondly we have a surplus demand from the publishers of non-fiction book projects to our journalists, who often, and no offence to the journalists here but speaking of my own journalists in Norway, they need a lot more coaching than some of the other writers when it comes to writing books. I mean we don't have that great a reservoir of wonderful journalists. And thirdly we see this increasing gap between the academic writers and the general non-fiction book industry. That is a fact that worries both the publishers and the universities. Still, I do believe the opportunities are great for commissioning critical non-fiction books. I would say that sixty to seventy percent of the list of non-fiction I'm in charge of are commissioned by us as publishers and there are no barriers to what we can take as initiatives. It's really important for publishers to take more initiatives and involve, maybe also to put together fiction authors and journalists. That's my dream really, to have a combination of the best researcher and the best writer and have interesting books appear. So it's not a matter of writer capacity, it's more a matter of initiative, of method, and of courage amongst the publishers, in order to challenge power and to challenge truth.

Maarten Asscher – Thank you. The microphone is for Mary Mount, editor at Viking Penguin. She worked at Picador before, and for the past four years if I understand correctly you've been at Viking Penguin.

Mary Mount – Just a couple of words about what Viking does at Penguin. Viking is one of two literary imprints, the other being Hamish Hamilton, and we do fiction and non-fiction for a general audience, not specialist or academic. When Maarten very kindly invited me to this conference, I suggested this point which is on the agenda, and when I sat down to think about what I was going to say I thought: why did I suggest this point in the first place? Because the answer to the question should an editor publish books he or she disagrees with, the answer to me is, to my mind it really depends. So what I started to think about more was why we publish what we publish and how we publish what we publish and where do we get our information from as editors? I think a good example of this is that the other day somebody knocked on my door and I opened it and there was this nice lady with a clipboard and she said she was conducting a survey about the great British public, about what media they watched or listened to or read. And I usually shut the door very quickly when someone comes to the door with a clipboard, but because I thought, ah, this is my moment, I can show off about how well informed I am and what classy publications I read. I said: oh yes I'm delighted to accept. So I told her that I read the *Guardian*, which is, if people here don't know is a leftish leaning supposedly high-minded national newspaper; I listened to Radio 4 and Radio 2, which are run by the BBC, which is supposedly independent and high-minded; I watched BBC news; and I was under the age of thirty-five, by which point she'd got about half way down her page of questions and she said, 'Stop, stop stop we've got enough of your kind already.' And that wasn't quite what... I was thinking I was this unique and very interesting individual.

So then I started thinking, well, I work in publishing, does that mean I'm brilliantly capable of tapping in to the average book buyer because I am so brilliantly average, or does it actually mean that I don't know enough about anything very much and where I'm getting my information from on the whole (this is about critical non-fiction, which I see as current affairs or political books as opposed to literary biography or history books) as far as critical non-fiction goes, how am I capable of, as

Xinran put it, actually knowing what I'm buying and knowing enough about a subject, if all my information is coming from these newspapers and these radio stations? And I think what Minka points out about the Iraq war is a glaring moment in Britain about how much we know and how much we don't know, and where we are all getting our information from and how editors are going to be capable of publishing books that lead the way rather than follow it. A particular example of this was what we published in Britain – we hugely overpaid for it, which is slightly embarrassing, but anyway – we published in Britain this terrific BBC journalist who's called Rageh Omar and he was born in Somalia. He follows almost exactly the same back story as Ayaan Hirsi Ali: he's in his late thirties, he was born in Somalia, he left, he's the son of a middle class family, his parents are practicing Muslims (if that's the right expression) and he was a very well known reporter on the Iraq war and we published with great excitement his book about the Iraq war, which was very good, partly because he's black, can speak Arabic and was very trusted by the people he was talking to. And also because he didn't see the place he was reporting from as a sort of weird alien place where everyone was at each other's throats. Anyway we acquired his book and we acquired at the same time another book, which was going to be a charming memoir about his childhood and growing up. And then we had the bombing in London on the 7th of July and over the years since Rageh wrote his book, we've talked a lot and it's been very – which is really the reason for this talk – it's been very enlightening for me to talk to him, about all sorts of issues, about Iraq, about his life as a British Muslim. Anyway he phoned me up and said I really want to meet, to talk about the next book. Rageh's very bad on deadlines, so I thought: ah here we go, all right, he's going to deliver it six months late. Anyhow we met and he was in a great state and he started talking and basically we have been surrounded since 7th July by these – and I'm sure it's very different in different countries, but for Britain – by a complete lack of understanding or indeed voices at all from the British Muslim community. We suddenly realised there was nobody in our media, absolutely nobody writing about, not even just British Islam but about small northern towns which is where the bombers came from. And Rageh, because he's the only black British Muslim who is in the public eye, was constantly being asked these ridiculous questions by people who should know better, people who run the BBC, or run newspapers saying, you know: Why do they want to kill us and what do you think it is about Islam that makes people violent? He was getting more and more enraged and he said there's nothing available. And then there was a crisis moment when *Newsnight*, which is the best news programme on British television started producing these reports that were just full of madmen really, Muslim organisations all saying in strong British accents 'we want to kill all British people'. Finally Rageh said, 'I need to write a book, I need to talk about this, I need to tap in and talk about my own family and growing up in London and my going on pilgrimage'. And suddenly out of these long conversations came a book that we'll be publishing very shortly. It's one of the most moving, revealing, enlightening books about this whole experience and what appals me is that there is nothing else, literally nothing else in our media that is capable of producing this material.

So it got me thinking about what our writers can do, what our books can do, that no other form of non-fiction can do, which radio can't do, which television is clearly not doing and which our newspapers, because they are succumbing to the same market pressures that television and radio seem to be too, is really going deeper and really getting ahead of the game. So for instance, and I'm sure this is true of many publishers in this room, as a result of working with authors over the last year I've

talked about contemporary Libya, the North London orthodox Jewish community, Moscow in the 1980s, the British Muslim view of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, all of these subjects, none of them, not one of them has really been covered in British newspapers in the last five to ten years. And I think that's what really for me... We're in a unique position as editors to have access to people with experiences, with insight, with the kind of creative capabilities that no other form of media has access to. And we should be exploiting that, we should be forging ahead of the market and saying what can we provide that nobody in the grand public knows about. And the idea that they only want what they've had already is completely untrue, as every week is proven by the fact that these very surprising books become bestsellers, because nobody sees them coming. I think the classic example was Naomi Klein's *No Logo* which every publisher I think, maybe someone will tell me this is wrong, every publisher in Britain turned down apart from one. Because everyone said, 'Globalisation? Does anyone really care? Has anyone really read enough about that?' And it wasn't really the subject of the moment. And then of course as soon as that book took off it became the subject of the moment.

And the last point I want to make which is I read a book two days ago that we just got on offer, which Marco and I have just been talking about, which is by an ex-child soldier from Sierra Leone, and it's a remarkable book. It's not particularly beautifully written, but it's absolutely remarkable in its true experience – true as much as anything written down is ever true – but very moving and very personal and very vivid. It's the first time in my experience, and British magazines and newspapers have endless articles about this subject because it's so sort of sensation, it's the first time that I've completely felt that I even slightly understand what this experience is about and once again this week I've been shown another person who has offered another, deeper insight into worlds we know nothing about, and I think that's our responsibility. It's not just to challenge our preconceptions of our time or our place but also of ourselves and where we get our books from.

Maarten Asscher – Thank you very much indeed, Mary. And then Jan Mets to my left, who is celebrating his twenty-fifth year as a publisher this year, aren't you?

Jan Mets – I am.

Maarten Asscher – Good. Congratulations, and the floor is yours.

Jan Mets – Your last words were very good. I think with the topic of this afternoon we have, to begin with, and I do not want to sound too academic, but we have really a definition problem. Like in the 1970s and 1980s there was talk of, say, political books, which basically meant Marxist or New Left, there is now talk of critical books, books against the grain. We are not publishing against the grain and we are not quite sure what we are talking about, and talking about publishing against the grain is as difficult as to define those objectives like critical or political in former days. Is it meant as opposed to the powers that be or rather as opposed to the mainstream of public opinion? And sometimes there is an obvious incongruity between these. For instance: opposing the war on terror and all that comes with it, by the Bush administration and by the British and also by our government. Opposing that may be against the powers that be, but it is certainly not against the mainstream of public opinion here in Europe or in the US. So can 'against the grain' as well be *for* the

powers that be but *against* the mainstream of public opinion? Or vice versa? Isn't against the grain in other words a shallow concept?

I shall try to assess this question on the basis of some experience as a publisher, and as theoretical as it may sound, it comes very close to those last two sentences of Mary's story. When I started publishing in 1981, my first project was not quite a project of quality non-fiction as you would call it nowadays, it was to develop and produce a small calendar. We called it a Peace Diary. Those were the days of the big anti-nuclear movements all over Europe and we published it in cooperation with the organisation in this country that rallied against new steps in the arms race, as it was called. The deployment of the Pershing Twos and the Tomahawk cruise missiles. Maybe it still sounds familiar for some of you. It was a very good publishing opportunity I can tell you. In a certain way against the grain, or at least against the governments that were willing to deploy those new weapons contrary to the will of the majority of the people. But it was absolutely mainstream publishing. Shortly after this our house became, because of all kinds of people who were involved in questions of international politics and to an extent the 20th century history, a sort of platform for all kinds of discussion about these topics. And you know, with friends, a slight annoyance with the *idée reçue* of the time resulted in two collections of articles (no question, we didn't sell them but we did publish them) and there was quite some resonance about them. Two collections of articles. One was against the (to our opinion cheap and shallow) idea of Europe as a victimised entity. Which was very much in vogue in those days. The argument went: at the Yalta conference at the end of the Second World War Europe was divided between the two superpowers: Eastern Europe was occupied by the Russians, by the Soviet Union, and yes Western Europe was maybe not occupied but equally dominated by the Americans. This collection of articles questioned this assessment, which was absolutely uncommon. It will not surprise you that there was very little applause from the side of the peace movement with whom we had published this diary, but I can assure you we continued doing so for another seven years. To an extent the collection of articles was received well in the circles of the foreign policy establishment. That's not quite against the grain, is it? But it *was* the other way round. Another collection of articles originated from frustration about the neglect of the human rights situation in the then communist world, the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries, amongst the left. We are talking about the days that in Poland the communist world was already breaking open around 1980 and the crack-down a year later. In 1985 we celebrated the sixty-fifth birthday of the famous Soviet scientist and dissident Andrei Sakharov. We published a *Festschrift*, a collection of articles for celebration, which contained a sharp verdict on the very nature of Soviet society. A painful publication for those who perceived the USSR (it's not so long ago) as a peace-loving factor, as many of our friends in the peace movement did.

My argument will become clear at the very end. After the fall of the Berlin wall it was time for the new world order, and this new world order was rudely disturbed by the occupation of Kuwait by the Iraqi troops of Saddam Hussein. A large coalition was built of Arab countries, non-Arab countries, under American leadership of George Bush the elder, to roll back the Iraqi troops and the world was sitting in front of their TV sets and were impressed by this clean war. Clean war? Hold on. I still praise the day that Toby Eady, who is present here, offered to me a very small book by an eloquent Iraqi artist, Nuha al-Radi, may her name never be forgotten. In her diary (she was in fact in Baghdad when it rained missiles and bombs and everything) she painted in full colour what was the reality of this clean war. Now this

was generally against the grain because no one wanted to hear about it, but nevertheless we sold an odd 20,000 copies. I realise these are very political titles that very directly deal with a political tendency and political reality, and that book publishing and also non-fiction publishing has rather to do with ideas, with reportage, to the extent of the narrative non-fiction that Marjon was talking about.

It's true, but I just want, because it's true, to give you another example of a publication against the grain that caused anger to the extent that people found that they should not even be published. I have three examples. One is Norman Finkelstein's *Holocaust Industry*. A very well documented, small, academic book about the abuse of Jewish property claims in Europe by American Jewish organisations. As well documented as it was, it was as heavily criticized. Criticized to the extent that the well respected German publisher Piper was denied the moral right to publish it in a *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* newspaper article by the heir of their founders, Ernst Piper, because he was of the opinion that a German publisher should not publish a book in which Jewish organisations in the United States are criticized. Another example is one we did last year, a heavily documented book by Jörg Friedrich, *Der Brand*, the big book on the heavy bombing of the German cities during the Second World War. It was a huge bestseller in Germany and was published in America by Columbia University Press but could not find a publisher in the United Kingdom. It was in one of the reviews, in one of those magazines not with a wide readership, but still, that the question was raised whether we should have published this book at all, that it should not have been published at all. Now I must admit that when people think that books should not be published at all, then it becomes a challenge to do so, not by definition, but it's one of the thrills, I believe.

Against the grain thus includes a sort of mentality. We as publishers have a list, we do not have a programme, so we have no political aims by publishing. But anything that questions or contradicts anything mainstream, or indeed the interests of the powers that be, could be on that list amongst the many other titles that are neither with nor against the grain, as in narrative non-fiction or in historical non-fiction. So I come to the point that publishing needs some bad characteristics. My favourite phrase is always that in publishing you should be stubborn, which is not a very favourable attribute, stubborn not only in the sense that you stand for your author and you do anything to protect them against attacks but also stubborn towards the market. One example is, and tomorrow she will be here, Jutta Chorus, the bright Dutch journalist who did together with Menno de Galan, her colleague, what I think is – and so it is widely considered, so it's not just my opinion – the best book on the whole Pim Fortuyn revolution that struck our country a couple of years ago. And they really had problems to get their research in time and so forth and it would have been... The book came out only nine months after the assassination and I'm quite sure that if the initial plans had worked and we could have published say three or four months after, then we could have sold 40 to 50,000 copies as many as Pim Fortuyn's books themselves have sold at the time. But I do not regret that, for this necessary book, we sold 8,500, less than 10,000 anyway, I'm very proud of having done this best example of political documentary reconstruction, in the best traditions of the American school of the early 1970s, that we have done it the way we have done. So that is stubbornness as well.

Admittedly, another not so favourable characteristic arises, and that is a sense for provocation. Provocation not in the exaggerated form, and very respectable authors have this sense for provocation, but you have to have fun in that. Wasn't it provocative when the very respectable Sebastian Haffner for instance in his small booklet on Hitler in 1978 gave titles to those chapters (it was divided into nine

chapters) like ‘achievements’, ‘successes’, ‘failures’, only later to be followed by ‘crimes’ and ‘treason’. Treason was the worst thing that Sebastian Haffner could think of, even worse than crimes. It is not only the extent to which people can identify with things, but people also have to be provoked and become angry and get challenged in other ways. Yes, and also *schadenfreude*. I cannot deny that it was just big fun to release a biography of the father-in-law-to-be of our crown prince just before this crown prince had his wedding with Maxima Zorreguieta, who was the daughter of a cabinet minister in the period of the *junta* in Argentina. We published this biography exactly a month before the wedding was due, and taking the risk of being considered as party poopers we informed the Dutch readership about what sort of people our royal family had got involved with. A very fair book, by the way, of which this Jorge Zorreguieta was the main source, even, for the author. That was not very nice of us but in a way useful and above all fun, and the idea of a silent Saturday morning in the palace where everybody was reading just one book, our book, gave me a feeling of deep satisfaction. The symbiosis of these political and those mental and psychological elements come close to what people more educated than me would probably define as coming from Socrates or Karl Popper. And I think that any good publishing in non-fiction, also in narrative non-fiction, should basically question things that are generally acknowledged, and that therefore good publishing is by definition against the grain. And in this way ‘against the grain’ and ‘critical’ is not a shallow but a meaningful concept. Editors of the world, stand by your authors who contradict and who expose falsity.

Maarten Asscher – Bravo. That brings us to the very British concept of tea, for which you are all invited and after twenty minutes we will continue this session.

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Maarten Asscher – Where have all the smokers gone? Gone up in smoke, exactly. Those who are present are always right. Marjon van Royen, I would like to start with you, please. You have said that your approach to non-fiction among other things intends to make things local, intends to individualise things so they can be recognised the better by readers. How do you approach the question of context, of historical background, of the greater picture? How do you combine the individual perspective with the larger picture that a reader also needs to make the difference between Mexico and Rio de Janeiro and Africa?

Marjon van Royen – I find tricks to do that. So I’m sitting on my floor and tripping over a lot of paperwork and my cats go away with my paperwork and sit with their bums exactly on that sentence I wanted to read, about a crook who was a president who was murdered. I have to tell about a president who was murdered, but I make sure that the president lies on my floor, for example, in the form of newspaper. Maybe I have to explain that first I wrote half my book and then I threw it away because I didn’t write myself into it. It was all about Sandra and her world, and I had the same thinking as you had in the end: this is not honest. I cannot go into this woman completely, I’m still a *gringa* from Europe with my ideas, so I put myself into the story.

Maarten Asscher – What is critical non-fiction for you? Is that a concept that is relevant?

Marjon van Royen – You have good and bad non-fiction, I think.

Maarten Asscher – But you wouldn't go and live in the street where the raping policeman lives and write a book about him?

Marjon van Royen – Oh, yes, yes. In my new book I've followed for days and days and weeks a guy from the killing squad, who is a policeman by day and killing squad member by night. I follow him, sure. What does it matter? I don't only follow the goodies, you have to understand the baddies too, sure.

Maarten Asscher – What then for you is so important about truth. If you want to tell a terrific story, if narrative is so important, why bother with the truth?

Marjon van Royen – If you want to make an impact in this world, nobody must have the possibility to say: Oh well, that's just an invention. It must be true, it must be checkable. If not, you don't make a real difference. The sensitization can work, but the real... It is never as strong an arm if you fictionalise.

Maarten Asscher – I beg to differ. I would like to mention two books that have changed the twentieth century, our consciousness in the twentieth century completely, and are both works of fiction. One is *The Trial* by Franz Kafka, the other is *1984* by George Orwell.

Marjon van Royen – Ja, okay.

Maarten Asscher – Perhaps we are both right. Hans Petter. Biography. Tell me more about your approach to this genre within non-fiction. Is it a personal thing with you or is it a commercial thing? Why are you so linked to biography as a non-fiction genre?

Hans Petter Bakketeig – Well, I think the main thing of course is the market I work within, and the history of Norwegian non-fiction, let's say back to just after the world war, is still very dominated by biographies and has been for all those sixty to seventy years. It's also the genre in non-fiction closest to the novel, I think, and the novel is in a very strong position overall and I think is somehow mirrored by the biography in our market. I see that is different in different markets, but for Norway it's like that.

Maarten Asscher – Is biography for you the ideal sub-genre in non-fiction?

Hans Petter Bakketeig – I wouldn't really talk about an ideal. I think at the moment, in our era now, it's a time of narrative and of belief in the possibilities of the narrative and that's our framework at the moment, and we have to take advantage of that. I do see that there may be some costs connected with that, things we lose out on by having such praise for the narrative, but if you want to have people read your books, you have to go with the genres that are most vital, and that is at the moment the novel and the biography.

Maarten Asscher – You also publish biographies in translation?

Hans Petter Bakketeig – Some, yes.

Maarten Asscher – Which one did work?

Hans Petter Bakketeig – The last one that did work was Jung Chang's *Mao*. But I would like to stress the difference between the independent and the more authorized biography. We also have of course a genre of celebrity books, as do many markets, but there is a possibility to use this genre with a more critical sense and I really think we can do a lot more and have journalistic effect using this genre at the moment in our market. So I hope my competitors will also do this and that we just pump out more biographies on contemporary personalities.

Marjon van Royen – But why just biographies?

Hans Petter Bakketeig – Well as I said, not only, but I just wanted to state the obvious, that you have to follow the genres that are dominant, that the booksellers know how to use and the people are used to reading.

Maarten Asscher – Do you have the idea that you are using the genre of the biography as part of a larger programme to change things in Norwegian society, or to unmask things or to research things to make political mechanisms visible etc.

Hans Petter Bakketeig – That is the ideal of course, and if we succeed in doing so I shouldn't be the one to say, but as I told you in the break just now, if we look at the journalistic groups we have, the strongest investigative groups we have in Norway at the moment are the economic, financial journalists and for that reason it's easy to encourage very strong, critical books into trade business. They make an impact, they change things, yes.

Maarten Asscher – Mary, I thought your presentation was very powerful, it made quite an impression on me. For some reason I had the feeling you were talking from a minority-of-one point of view in the face of a multitude of subjects that are almost impossible to realise as books because British publishing is not able to cope with them. I was wondering for example how many people with a Muslim background are working in British publishing?

Mary Mount – That's a good question. Penguin is this year doing some programme called 'Diversity in Publishing', which is a very nice idea but it doesn't seem to have affected the actual sorts of people who are employed, most of them being white middle class women. I think it's not just about publishing, it's about the fact that the poorest, most disenfranchised part of any country are not going to be well represented in the media because if their children are well educated or have gone beyond their background, it's usually to try and get a job in medicine or law or something a bit more reliable, and better paid. So I think that's definitely true there are very few voices available. There was an interesting piece done in a newspaper in Britain recently about how a city, the outskirts of a small city in Britain had a lower life expectancy than Iraq, which I found absolutely extraordinary. It was basically alcoholics and smoking a lot and this was at a time when the same newspaper was debating the anti-smoking law. And it struck me that the newspapers, well, the media in general, has changed and we are much much more focused on lifestyle, on rich middle class pursuits and in a way the newspapers are not doing what they used to do.

I mean the *Guardian* used to come out of Manchester, it used to be for young working class people and now friends of mine who live outside London say many people they know don't read a national newspaper, and I think the young people are also reading newspapers much less. So in one way it presents a great opportunity for publishers. I mean just like when Bush got in in America those huge number of political books started selling in a way that political books hadn't sold for years, and that was I think partly because people hadn't found that information available in any other media source. So I think it's an opportunity for publishers, but as you say we also need to encourage people to write the books in the first place.

Maarten Asscher – The thought presents itself that perhaps non-fiction book publishing as we know it isn't doing the right thing, or doing the right thing in the wrong way, to be able to reach out to a larger part of the population. For example, this wonderful series of 'Great Ideas' is at the same time totally established, European, historic, within the limitations of, well, the white, bourgeois, learned culture. Couldn't one publish a 'Great Ideas' pamphlet series at a low retail price for a much wider and a much more varied audience. Is that an issue, or is that totally unrealistic in conglomerate publishing?

Mary Mount – I think the whole idea behind the 'Great Ideas' was the fact that the Penguin backlist... As has been mentioned before, backlist sales have gone down and it was Penguin's backbone and was increasingly becoming less profitable and it was all about front list, and it was about getting those people back to the classics. And the great ideas series was done precisely, and so was the Penguin seventies and the Penguin sixties, to get people to buy these books that were cheap and small, I mean doing what Penguin paperback did originally. I think Penguin has been quite imaginative about trying to reach out to a younger audience. We have an incredible website and we're doing podcasts and blogging, and at that point I have to stop because I don't know what I'm talking about, but we are trying to do that. But I think we do need to be thinking more about how compelling books are, that's obviously the most important thing and how, as Marjon says, how narrative driven, how much they connect. In the end, it's a truism, but it's all dependent on how good these books are, how well written they are, I think. That's it. And how much they get to the public. But I think selling them cheap is obviously a very important part of it.

Maarten Asscher – What is, if I may ask, the single most critical obstacle that you in your professional life as editor, publisher encounter, that if removed would make your life as an editor much more fulfilling.

Mary Mount – I was talking to Wolfgang about this. I mean, I love my boss, I don't want to remove him, but I suppose it's occasionally the moment where I think one should publish a book and the powers that be don't agree. And it's probably a very, very good discipline that there are those powers that be that say: this isn't just for you, you're working for a company that's trying to make books sell. And also I think there is an element in Britain of people trying to dress intelligent books up as being less challenging and I think that's patronising to our audience, because I think people are capable of, and time and time again the market shows they are capable of reading challenging, interesting books.

Jan Mets – Could you give an example?

Mary Mount – Let me think, well, for instance, a biography (this is one of Toby Eady's books so I should be careful) a biography of John Donne that I'm publishing. Which is an example of being able to publish something that is, we're publishing it because it's very good and incredibly well written and very compelling, but there's a sense that we should almost make it not look like a literary biography, and maybe we should be pretending it's something slightly, I mean, if we want to get that big audience. But at the same time it is what it is and it's... That's not a very good example. I think perhaps literary fiction falls more into that bracket. There's a Libyan novel that I'm publishing in a couple of months' time and it's an incredibly powerful, incredibly important novel and I think we are slightly dressing it up to be *The Kite Runner*, which is a good book but is not nearly as good as the book we're publishing. So I think that there's a bit of 'me too' in the way we package and that sort of thing.

Maarten Asscher – Jan, you have no boss, have you? How do you cope with that disadvantage?

Jan Mets – Well I have a business partner.

Maarten Asscher – No I'm serious.

Jan Mets – Me too. No we act as each other's bosses, in a way. Or try to. I think that instead of what would have been maybe more comfortable, leaving each other alone and do your project and... No, instead of that we discuss a lot and we fight a lot.

Maarten Asscher – I think Wolfgang Hörner more or less suggested that even without a boss one needs a boss in one's head.

Jan Mets – True.

Maarten Asscher – As a sort of personified conscience.

Jan Mets – It's true, but at the same time it's also true what I said, that we act upon each other like each other's bosses and, strange as it may seem, it works.

Maarten Asscher – And where the boss inside your head or the boss in the form of your partner corrects you on the commercial side, or you correct him on the ideological side? What is the balance?

Jan Mets – No no no no. Positions change, in the first place, you know, otherwise it would be dull, but... I think you could divide the publications that we do into three: one are his, one are mine and the third is really from both of us. But of course you can incline to discuss only the things that are from both of us, but we really try to be as critical as possible to each other.

Maarten Asscher – Do you consider yourself to be a political publisher?

Jan Mets – No.

Toby Eady – I would say he's a politically aware publisher.

Jan Mets – Thank you, Toby. That is true, yes. No. Political publisher? When I started publishing it was in the time that political publishing was at its summit and already a little bit over it. And political publishing in those days in this country, it was Van Gennep, Sun, I can't remember them all, and those were all separate denominations of a sort of New Left, Marxist, New Marxist, to extents of, well, to anarchist or whatever. That was political publishing. And we came later. I have never considered myself as a political publisher in that sense of the word, which I by the way find not a very proper definition.

Marjon van Royen – But why is this so important, what it's called?

Maarten Asscher – Well, Jan Mets shaped his presentation around the problem of defining critical non-fiction and I wanted to get at...

Marjon van Royen – Because you told him to do so.

Maarten Asscher – No no, no one is told anything here except what his heart or brain or conscience tells him. I wanted to offer to Jan my definition of critical non-fiction and see if we can agree on that. Perhaps you would be kind enough to comment on it. Critical non-fiction is the category of books that not merely wishes to describe, to analyse, or to portray; critical non-fiction books are works in which authors come up with new approaches to existing subjects or with altogether new subjects with a view to making their books into agents of change in the social, political, cultural or academic world. Critical non-fiction books aim at exercising individual influence, not just achieving passive recognition from others. Critical non-fiction books want to be more than written objects of desire for their audiences. They are intended as, in Langdon Winner's phrase, political artefacts. They are political in the sense that they realise that all human life is political. Can you agree on that?

Jan Mets – How ambitious. No, I have difficulty with this. I don't know. What I think and what I tried to point out is, it depends what you want to say with 'critical non-fiction'. What is critical non-fiction, as opposed to what? And my point was, and is, that any good non-fiction publishing, be it journalism, be it essayism, be it reportage, be it of whatever kind, has the process of working on books is a process of constant criticism, a constant criticism within the author him or herself and also between the author and the publisher. And yes, in that sense I think any good publishing should be critical publishing.

Maarten Asscher – But it also has to do with my idea at the start of our morning session, with these two types of publishers, the one who goes with the flow because that's what the market wants and the other who is searching for really new inspiration, new writers, types of writers, types of subjects to convince the world.

Mary Mount – Aren't the two the same thing, in the sense that none of us could publish books that we think will change the world but no one will read, because the two things cancel each other out. So we hope that the books that we buy if we are being high-minded and idealistic are also the books that will sell and appeal to a huge number of people because they are fresh and insightful and provocative and all of those things. But the two go together, I think, in the most ideal circumstances.

Jan Mets – Indeed and I think the only distinction that does make sense is also a distinction I'm not very fond of, but it does make sense, is the obvious distinction between commercial non-fiction and quality non-fiction.

Marjon van Royen – What if the quality sells?

Jan Mets – No, I mean as a category. In the book business we distinguish those, so cookery books and books on gardening are considered as commercial non-fiction and the books on ideas, reportage are considered quality non-fiction.

Maarten Asscher – Yes, by definition. The microphone there, please, for an intervention.

Antero Helasvuo – I'd like to raise one question, because I think you all are people of great achievement and honest intentions and you'd like to better the quality of non-fiction and literature in general. And you just made a distinction between important non-fiction and run-of-the-mill cookbooks and interior decoration and so forth, but what about disinformation? I think it's raising its ugly head at the moment very strongly in this world. And I predict that it's going to be a battleground there because like some decades ago it was more or less like a joke, the bureau of disinformation in the Soviet Union. That doesn't exist as it used to, but now they are founding in the United States similar kinds of organisations whose only purpose is to spread disinformation in the world in all kinds of forms, in forms of films and TV programmes, and non-fiction books too. And they will be professionally produced. What will be the position of the, let's say, honest non-fiction writers and publishers in that respect?

Maarten Asscher – The lies in schoolbooks you mean?

Antero Helasvuo – Yes, and false biographies and false political analysis and war books and so on.

Maarten Asscher – Anyone want to comment on that?

Toby Eady – There's a very interesting point you make. *Reading Lolita in Teheran*, which became a bestseller, actually the first print run was bought out by the American government and distributed. It was a book completely backed by the American government. It was then distributed by it, as a really anti-Islamic, I mean the way Islam should be in an American concept. That's what you're talking about.

Antero Helasvuo – Yes, you put it in very good...

Toby Eady – It's quite common. If you go back to the magazine *Encounter* and the *Paris Review*, they were financed by the CIA, that was after the Second World War, because the real fear then was communism.

Marco Vigevani – But the question is whether they are good or bad books, no?

Toby Eady – Well, I think *Reading Lolita in Teheran* is a piece of propaganda.

Marco Vigevani – No, I think the example that Toby is giving about the fifties, there have been excellent books written about CIA sponsoring the arts and sponsoring against communism etc. It's not automatically everything that is sponsored badly is a bad piece of art or is a bad piece of writing. I think that the problem is what Jan said in his speech that the freedom to accept uncommon, weird ideas, ideas at odds with the general opinion of the well-meaning, our friends. This is the problem. If you think about the reception of Solzhenitsyn in the seventies in Italy, all the well-meaning and well-intended, well-read people in Italy, they thought it was a horrible piece of anti-Soviet propaganda. And so I think it was very courageous to publish it. And nowadays probably there are other things that go against this kind of grain, not only your distinction about powers that be and about the intellectual.

Maarten Asscher – A very good way to unmask institutional lies is to publish pamphlets and essays in magazines. In some countries, series of pamphlets seem to be very successful, in other countries absolutely not. Hans Petter, you said that the pamphlet as a genre, as a book genre is completely in darkness there. Why is that? It's not a lack of urgency in certain topics. We're talking about creative publishing, so publishing pamphlets is an element of creative publishing. What would you encounter if you would start a series of four pamphlets per year provoking the powers that be?

Hans Petter Bakketeig – I think it's a matter of competition between medias. The magazines, the intellectual magazines and also the newspapers would dominate the pamphlets, so that's the arena where the authors have the ability to express themselves in that genre in Norway. This may change but that's the situation at the moment, and the book is not able to compete in time I think as well. We are too slow.

Jan Mets – I tend to disagree. As I can only speak for this country, in the first place I think a pamphlet should never be put in a series. A pamphlet can only be published when there is a real urge, when there is a situation in which a voice needs to express itself. And it can be very successful, I don't know the numbers, nobody from Atlas is here, but this *Doomed to Vulnerability* by Geert Mak that you admire so, as I read in the survey, it must have been 100,000 copies. By the way for the foreign guests, this was a pamphlet as an answer to the general mood in The Netherlands after the assassination of Theo van Gogh. And in cases it can be very successful, but that is the very nature I believe of a pamphlet.

Hans Petter Bakketeig – But then you really need a very strong national incident like this.

Jan Mets – Of course, otherwise there's no need for publishing pamphlets.

Mary Mount – But was it sold everywhere, like newsstands?

Jan Mets – Everywhere. It first came out as a newspaper article in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, which is a small weekly newspaper that is comparable in British terms to say the *New Statesman* and within a week after publication of that newspaper it became a pamphlet, a booklet, I'd say eighty or ninety-six pages. How many did they sell? Lots anyhow.

Maarten Asscher – Are there any other experiences with pamphlet publishing that could be relevant.

Dan Simon – I don't want to be here as a pamphlet publisher, but we really launched publishing in pamphlet form in the United States, and Mary's absolutely right, it started not with 9/11 but with the political moment, with the election of George Bush. But we published Chomsky's *9/11*, which sold almost a million copies around the world, about 400,000 in the United States. The great thing about pamphlet publishing at its best is that when people are desperate for information and people today don't have a lot of leisure time, you as a publisher have the opportunity to do something very thoroughly and very carefully in a short period of time. *9/11* I think went through twenty-two drafts in a period of three weeks, which had it been a 100,000-word manuscript would have taken a year. So you can kind of condense the time necessary and give something to people that they really need at the time they really need it and at a very inexpensive cost, and with good economics as a publisher in terms of your unit cost.

But I want to get back to what Marjon was saying, because I was so happy for what you're saying and I liked it so much, but by way of praising you I have to problematize it. You know in the States, and I think internationally, the political non-fiction moment was a beautiful thing from about 2000 through 2002, in that it was a true moment of conversation, people were desperate for information, very serious books being published in the States by places like Yale University Press, in England by places like Pluto Press, who'd never experienced a mass audience, suddenly had a mass audience for wonderful serious, earnest and well-informed books, and then over the last say three years that moment of political books has been trivialised in various ways and it's passing, it's not where we are right now, and the sales are back down for the most part. But as an American publisher, I want to say a few different things to some of the things you were saying, I think of investigative reporters almost as an endangered species in the States and as an incredibly important resource, the people who actually do what you guys do, which is on the ground reporting from places in a deep way. It's a hard life and you don't get your front page coverage mostly, and you don't get the support of the newspaper mostly, and you don't get the kind of encouragement that you deserve usually, but just problematizing some of the things you were saying, I think in a sense you did yourself an injustice in what you were saying in that it's not just the human stories but it's the human stories together with the facts. You're there on the ground to get the facts right and as Nelson Algren used to say, if there are three bars in a cell window you've got to make sure you write it as three bars and not two. So one of the reasons that you guys commit the kind of time to really being there it's to get the facts right, not just for the human story, it's really the two together that become so powerful and so meaningful. And one of the ways in the past few years I think internationally that non-fiction has been a little bit trivialised is sometimes, and I don't know whether Hirsi Ali who I've just been hearing about is an example of this, but sometimes the people that we end up choosing as a community aren't necessarily the right people. You know whenever you have someone from whether it's Somalia or Iran or wherever it is, there's someone else from that country who's not being given a platform. I think we as a community have been erratic in terms of the choices that we make.

Marjon van Royen – My last point of what I said was that when you come from small countries you have some advantages. It's a little bit provocative but I mean it.

So why don't Americans publish that kind of book? Why is Minka Nijhuis, for example, not published in America?

Dan Simon – I'd really say two things. I would say, as Antero was saying, the community represented here is doing a lot of things right. So, for example, going back to the trivialisation of non-fiction publishing, in the US right now there are three dedicated right-wing imprints at big houses that have been created in the last four or five years. They do books that are unworthy of review and become instant bestsellers because of the Fox network, talk radio phenomenon. They are publishing things that ten years ago would never have been taken seriously or been published because they present an ideological point of view which basically half of the US is interested in, they become instant bestsellers. This community of people is not translating those books. Books like *Men in Black* that was suggesting that the US Supreme Court is a radical, left-wing conspiracy, which was a major bestseller in the United States. These books are not travelling. So there are a lot of bad books that are commercially interesting that are not being translated, not being published around the world. Which is a good sign.

Marjon van Royen – But my question was the other way around.

Dan Simon – I'll get to that, but can I just say that part of the answer is that a certain number of those books do get translated. Not enough. Nowhere near enough, but you know there's a lot of good, there's a lot of struggle on the part of the publishing community to try to choose the better voices. Robert Fisk, who was saying that they're publishing him? It was Mauricio. This Robert Fisk, you know it's a twelve-hundred page book by a very respected journalist and that is being translated around the world. So why isn't there better communication on the part of the US? Well, speaking about the US I would say that we're in a xenophobic moment and people are not only not interested but actually are sort of fearful of these voices, for exactly the reasons that they're good and they tell us the truth.

Marjon van Royen – I don't believe all Americans are like that.

Dan Simon – No of course not, but I mean the culture generally, so in the media for example. When Harold Pinter won the Nobel Prize and gave that wonderful speech and we thought that was going to be this kind of tremendous controversy in the States. It wasn't. You could find it on the internet but it was not covered in the newspapers, it was not newsworthy. And that's Harold Pinter and that's the Nobel Prize. I think practically speaking one reason that it happens less than it should is that in the media it's very difficult to get any attention for foreign authors. And again, if you look at our list we do a great deal of translation, both fiction and non-fiction, and you do it mostly thanklessly and you do it because you believe in it and you can only do so much. So we publish Hwang Sok-Yong from Korea, for example, one of the great writers of our time, and we sell one to two thousand copies. And it's a very expensive proposition to translate, bring him over and all that, so we do as much as we can and we try keep the conversation going.

Marjon van Royen – But maybe you could invent some things like Mr Germany did. Tricks.

Dan Simon – No no you have to use tricks. And we do. Well, the other thing is that, I shouldn't say it, but again if there's an idea and if it can be *not* in a translation... You know in a translation is loses part of the authenticity, so if there is something that you can publish that is already in English it is more likely to reach people, but if the voice is very strong then we do it, and there is a certain amount of it that does happen but not enough. There's a lot of good stuff being published and the market place is very unwelcoming initially to it. And again Maarten I liked your definition very much. But there is no battle between fiction and non-fiction. We need fiction and we need to create an environment in which good fiction can happen, because in order to make good decisions politically etc. people need to love life enough and the question... Kurt Vonnegut sort of suggests that Americans don't love life enough to really make good political decisions and in a way it's the role of fiction to remind us of that, and that's more I think the domain of fiction than non-fiction, but both. You know, we need both, we need both very much.

Mary Mount – But if an author comes along and is writing in a language that is different to the language of the publisher, the first thing obviously that the publisher will want to know is what is the subject? So if the subject is Mexico, for example, if the publisher can't immediately get a sense of what is different, because the publisher is constantly looking for what is different and it's all about often the voice, and the terrible immediate problem about publishing something in another language, particularly in non-fiction is you can't get that voice, so the only thing you have to base it on is the fact that it's about Mexico. So you look and you say, oh well we published a book about Mexico last year. When we published Linda Polman, if I'd gone in and said, 'I've got this marvellous book about the UN, but in Dutch,' my entire office would have just laughed at me and said, 'so what?' But when I came in with some pages which were just exceptionally good, lively, compassionate etc. it was: Here is a great reportage writer. That was the first thing. And then she's exposing the way the UN works in peacekeeping zones. And the other thing that hasn't been mentioned, and I don't know what effect it has here, is that we have *Booktrack*, which is this double-edged sword, which means basically you can find out the sales of any book, over the last I think it's about six or seven years. Which is wonderful in the sense that agents can't say, 'the last book by this author sold 500,000 copies and you look and it sold two,' but the downside of it is that you say, 'I've got this wonderful book about Mexico,' and they go in an unimaginative way back to *Booktrack* and say, 'well you know, Mexico doesn't sell, we've looked it up,' and that sort of information is both great and very damning of subjects, or of writers.

Maarten Asscher – Do you agree with Marjon's point that writers from smaller countries have an advantage over writers from bigger countries in their reporting and writing and fact-finding?

Mary Mount – I think the great thing that happened to British writers is the fact that Britain is no longer significant. I mean they are better at writing about other countries now that they don't have a, some of them don't admit this, but they don't have a role to play. I think that's true. I think that the very exciting development in recent years is that we're getting more voices from those places. So we're getting writers from India writing about India, which for a British market is really interesting because we have relied so much on a kind of Empire view of India, really, in a lot of our popular non-

fiction about India. We're in a very lucky stage from that point of view, but another side of that is, yes, it is possibly better to be unimportant. But then, some wonderful, some of the best writing about Iraq, as Minka said, has come from America. I mean William Langowitch wrote an amazing series of pieces about the green zone in Baghdad. Really terrific. And the *New York Review of Books* is one of the best magazines in the world. So I don't know, I think it comes down to the writers in the end.

Maarten Asscher – Who else, from the audience?

Toby Eady – What you're saying about small countries I totally believe in, because I think you don't carry so much baggage, you don't have such a high opinion of yourself as some countries do in the world, like the English did. Just recently 1,9 million pounds was paid for a book by an English writer writing on the last Mogul emperor, an imperialistic writer. And that is still very much what I call Bournemouth publishing, the sort of bandstands. Why I love Dutch publishing is that for me it has been the most prismatic, and the prism of the Dutch is very different from the English. It is much more curious. When I came back from America to live in Europe, most of my clients were first published in Holland, and the curiosity of Dutch editors was far greater than from English editors.

But one point you've made, which I have fallen foul of many times with Middle Eastern writers, is people just won't publish people with Iranian names, Iraqi names. They prefer to get someone who has an English name, who's never spoken Farsi or Arabic in his life and writes about that country. That they feel safe with. They might have to think differently if they read from an Iranian or an Iraqi.

Dan Simon – It is changing though.

Toby Eady – Ah, just beginning to.

Xinran – I want to thank you because it really made me think since you made this comment about the small country or big country. As for my country, China, is it bigger or small? Russia is bigger or small? You know, Brazil? But how many writers come from them. I'm thinking. Just wondering what you'd say.

Marjon van Royen – I want to put a question. He really said, that in translation things are lost. Please. Could you explain this one?

Maarten Asscher – Now is the moment... Let's have this out.

Marjon van Royen – You can take it back if you want.

Maarten Asscher – No no no. Translating against the current is the theme of our morning session tomorrow, but...

Dan Simon – What was the thing that I said without realising it?

Marjon van Royen – You said, in translation things are lost.

Dan Simon – I know, okay. This is not right. What I was saying, and I prefaced it by saying I don't like to say this, but in the US certainly, very often we'll have, say, a French publisher presenting a very intelligent work on foreign policy that is similar to something that we could have asked an American to write. It's astute, it's correct, and for us to have the additional degree of separation of the translation and, well, just the additional degree of separation makes us say, that's a kind of book. I'm talking about a political tract. Where it's a kind of book that's interesting to us, but to get readers to pay attention to it we would need it written by an American. People would listen. Chomsky they'll listen to, whereas a very distinguished French academician or politician or intellectual saying the same thing is a hundred times more difficult for us. So there we sort of say, no, the work we're going to do in translation is going to be something that's uniquely... that couldn't have come from an American writer, it's a different type of thing. So the type of books that Minka does or that you do, there would be no discouragement from doing it in translation. We would have every reason to do it in translation.

Jan Mets – Then you still have the voice argument that Mary gave whereby as far as I know Americans, there is scarcely any awareness that there are people who speak other languages.

Dan Simon – Or that there is a world.

Jan Mets – And if you come up with an author to do a book trip or a tour or whatever, people with funny accents like I have or have been heard in this audience are not very welcome on the radio.

Dan Simon – No, people with funny accents, they love Andrei Codrescu, the Romanian, he's a commentator on NPR, everyone finds it very charming. Irish accent, a British accent, Dutch accent, fine. What you cannot have is an author sitting next to a translator. They won't do it. Even in radio, they won't do it on television, they...

Maarten Asscher – As an interpreter you mean?

Dan Simon – Yes.

Jeannette Ringold – I would say that one of the biggest things in the US is that there is not even an acknowledgement that there is a translation. Books are reviewed and people pretend that the book has been written in English. Very often there is no acknowledgement of a translation and this goes for very prestigious newspapers and magazines, they just omit it. And that's crucial because they pretend to themselves that everything in the world has been written in English.

Mary Mount – I'm afraid the British are guilty of that, too.

Maarten Asscher – We will certainly continue this point tomorrow morning when we will be talking about translating against the current. As we are nearing the five o'clock hour I would like to suggest that we take up one more subject that was raised from this side of the table, by Marjon van Royen and Hans Petter Bakketeig who both, each in their own way, said that you need a protagonist, that you need a character in your story, and I can understand this from a commercial point of view but I would

hope that it is possible, and also that it is also an ideal of critical non-fiction publishing, to continue to publish important works on the level of ideas and on the level of arguments. Is that theoretical, or old-fashioned, or unrealistic? Marjon?

Marjon van Royen – Yes. It is. And you can do it if you want, but you don't sell. That's it. And you choose yourself. If you just want to be not read so much, then you do it. And if not then you have to deal with it.

Bertram Mourits – There's no protagonist in Geert Mak's *In Europe*.

Marjon van Royen – No, the protagonist is there, it's Geert Mak. And he was already famous. So the book is really going on his fame. Everyone is saying but what is the guy doing? And it is his voice and he goes around, he is very present in the book. And that's why Geert sells. If nobody ever heard about Geert Mak, and he just starts to write *In Europe*, it would sell maybe two thousand copies.

Maria Vlaar – But Harvill is going to do *In Europe* for England. It's not just about the fame of Geert Mak, because nobody in English knows Geert Mak. It's because of the book and the topic of the book, the subject of the book. So I think it's a bit pessimistic to say that you can't have a subject as the main important thing of the book.

Andrew Franklin – It also seems to me that we're talking about critical non-fiction and publishing against the grain, and that precisely means that if there's a rule then you have to set out to break it. So if there's a rule that you must have a protagonist, then we as critical publishers must set out to break that rule and do non-fiction without protagonists.

Maarten Asscher – It would also be very sad for the beautiful genre of the essay and the pamphlet and all philosophical books in general if the protagonist would haunt every book.

Andrew Franklin – It also seems to me that the recent discussion we've been having for the last twenty minutes or so about critical non-fiction is all about politics construed in a very conventional way, about left and right and American imperium and all the rest of it. But actually what Marjon has written about, as I understand it, is a much bigger conception of the political, the great feminist claim that the personal is political. We haven't talked about ecological writing which can be very important against the grain, whatever position you take, feminist writing, there's a whole series which are absolutely key to critical writing but which are not political in that narrow frankly quite boring and predictable way, because so much of critical publishing when it's on politics takes a completely predictable line. You don't really need to read any of those books on Bush to know precisely the position they will take, before you take them. Whereas these other subjects it seems to me open things up much more and are much more challenging and force people to think what is really what we ought to be doing.

Maarten Asscher – Could you imagine a non-fiction book about George Bush on top of the pile that has already been published that is really enormously influential?

Andrew Franklin – Not by this stage, no, I can't imagine. Maybe other people disagree and we continue to be, everyone in this room I'm sure continues to be offered books on George Bush, but now you can just turn them down sight unseen along with the manuscripts written in green ink.

Maarten Asscher – Whereas a short film of 45 seconds showing Bush doing something that he absolutely should not be doing...

Andrew Franklin – A dog. A dog.

Maarten Asscher – Could completely break the man's reputation.

Toby Eady – You're an optimist. This is a conversation I had in America which backs up what we've been saying, which is that when we had the sniper around Washington, I was with a publisher and I said isn't this the time for an American Truman Capote to describe the gun lobby, the whole theory behind this. This is someone I've worked with for nearly forty years and he said you're absolutely right, but we are now saturated with, in quotes, media experts and the media soundbites. We just have too much television, too many immediate experts. But to me that was a real subject of America, something which is almost incomprehensible in Europe is the gun lobby and what that psychologically means in America, the right to hold weapons.

Maarten Asscher – Michael Moore did that perhaps, but not in book form.

Toby Eady – But also, in fact, the background of the two men involved, with the rifles, the people who were doing the killing. It was an extraordinary moment to be in America, and I love America, but it was a moment when you could have examined in that country a very potent political force, which is the gun lobby.

Marco Vigevani – There is something that you said about the feeling – and it also relates to what you Maarten said – that is I think you are right in the sense that this is the way toward which non-fiction is going. Feelings, wonderful stories etc.

Marjon van Royen – No, no, it can be terrible.

Marco Vigevani – No I see a danger, because you can't discuss with feelings. The level of the political debate, of the public debate – and this is also something you said I think Maarten – cannot rely on feelings. I know feelings are very enticing, appetizing etc. Feeling is what we get on TV all the time. Feeling is wonderful but it is also crap and you can't discuss with another person on the basis of feelings. This is a risk, I think.

Marjon van Royen – No, what I said is that it has to give you a feeling, because really I think if it doesn't touch a feeling, you're out of the debate. And I didn't say it has to be *about* feelings. I just said that if we miss that boat that the television is touching, that film is touching, we will miss a whole new generation, because they are educated into getting information in that way. And we can be just old and happy with ourselves, but we will die eventually and then it's over.

Marco Vigevani – I don't think that books should mimic television and film, I think we should do something to be heard more in our own ways in our own languages, with arguments, and reasoning etc. in the media. Because otherwise you say: well you wrote a wonderful book but it's not good for the media, it's not good for the late-night show, it's not good for the talk show it's not good for the reality show. That's where you are ending up.

Marjon van Royen – No, I think we should learn from television and from film. We cannot be on our high horse any more and do as if this thing is not going on. That's why I was talking about the threads in the head of young people. They have a completely different structure of the way they see things, because we come from a typewriting generation. They come from a television and screen generation and we cannot just deny that. And the way we write, modern writing is already much more jumpy than 20 years ago, because we can make quicker jumps, because we are accustomed to looking at films. That's what I mean.

Marco Vigevani – Yes, but listen. Philosophical theories, or I don't know physical theories, or good, sound economical political theories, are not jumpy. They won't be jumpy also in a hundred years because they can't be jumpy. Kant was a famously unjumpy thinker, but the thinkers of today are not jumpy. Montaigne was jumpy, I don't like him.

Maarten Asscher – Montaigne. By the way another author who never used a protagonist except himself. I think you are both right. It is my role to say so, especially at this hour of the afternoon. Indeed we have to adapt to the modern world, to modern technology, to modern emotional culture. But at the same time we should be publishing against the grain. That is what this whole conference was intended to think about and to speak about and it's easy to draw at least this one small conclusion, that the imperative is to be aware of where the world is heading and at the same time to take your own stance and to go against the grain and to break, as Andrew has suggested, to break the rule so as to have the maximum amount of freedom to publish what you think is important to publish.

Saturday morning: Translating against the current

Maarten Asscher – Welcome back to all of you, and a special welcome to Jutta Chorus, who wasn't able to join us yesterday because she had to finish a large article about the Ayaan Hirsi Ali developments over the past days and even hours. Good to have you here on this side of the table to be with us. I of course should not show any bias towards any of the speakers in this wonderful conference, but it gives me special pleasure to give the microphone to Toby Eady with whom I have had the pleasure of working in the past, as a publisher. In introducing him I can tell you, as his modest cv line says, that he has been an agent since 1967, that he runs a small independent agency, and that he has worked in London, New York, China and the Middle East, representing a small group of writers. But I would like to add to that smallish introduction that for me he has been a very inspiring partner in books, because he is one of the editorially and morally inclined agents that I have had the pleasure of working with, but he is also a very astute businessman, as he should be for his authors. And he has a truly cosmopolitan, even worldwide outlook. So I am very happy Toby that you are with us and the microphone is yours, to start off our session this morning on the theme of translating against the current.

Toby Eady – Good morning. I'm not sure what to say after that. I am very grateful to be here among a lot of old friends, people I've worked with, shared ideas with, people who backed my instinct for writers writing in different languages. I met Maarten over twenty years ago with an Italian writer called Kuki Gallmann, but before that, as he occasionally would remind me, or as I would remind him at Frankfurt, he turned down Jung Chang's *Wild Swans*.

Maarten Asscher – You have to be selective.

Toby Eady – You are very selective, Maarten. And I lived in America for fourteen years. When I came back to Europe I worked in London for a bit, for different reasons, but I very nearly set up a publishing house in Holland in the mid-nineties, because I felt it was a far more liberal society, more curious and inquisitive than England. And I'm deeply grateful to be here and I know that all my authors who have been published in Holland would come back saying: I now think I've been published. As to this conference, translating against the grain, I wondered coming here what we would do if a modern Martin Luther decided to translate a major document like the Bible into a different language and how we would accept it today. Because when he started the Reformation he was very much against the grain, and it so happened to be the very beginning of publishing. And I think of publishers as people who do take risks, in a cottage business of people's tastes, which basically is part of the entertainment business, and it's a mistake to think it's just solely for intellectuals and university presses. And without – this is myself as a small agent – having the immense good fortune of meeting in 1978 a writer who was to become probably the biggest historical novelist of his age, I don't think I would have been able to give the time that I have to Chinese and Middle Eastern writers, Italian writers or young writers. And I think that we have to acknowledge that, all of us, that publishing is dependent on the taste of many people. That's really part of one thing I wanted to say. And then the other side of what I've been working on for twenty years is really the problems of translating and taking a story from a completely different background,

spoken or written in a language which has no subconscious base with the language of Europe, which is fundamentally based on the Bible and lateral thinking. If you take working with a Chinese author, even if they're writing in hybrid English, the whole thought process is different. And this is actually something that happens (and critically in Arabic as well) and the way that someone's mind works is very different, and so I'm very conscious of abusing the originality of the language that I work in as an agent. And I know this from the reaction even of my mother who was a novelist, who spoke fluent French and Italian; she denied that the books were hers when she saw them published in French and Italian. They just didn't have the rhythm of how she wrote. And the same can be said certainly for any pictorial language, which is not lateral. When I look at the unsung heroes of publishing, in the field that I really enjoy working in, they are the translators. They have no ego, and yet unless they are incredibly patient, thoughtful and can pick up the rhythm of the original language in their own subconscious, then the book tends to suffer from what Jonathan Franzen brilliantly called a 'tone deaf translation'. And I think it's an amazing job to work with a good translator. They're approaching something they didn't write, they're giving their time, their patience, they get no praise, and they're deeply underpaid. I as an agent decided some years ago after failure with two Chinese writers where top translators were employed by publishers, to pay for the translations of any book I was going to work on. And basically except in France, where I work with Philippe Picquier for Chinese writers, I have books translated into English. But from that translation I have been able, or the agency has been able, to sell Chinese writers in up to thirty languages. And each market is different, each appreciation of the author is different, but they're giving something. The problem of a foreign language in many ways is it's a talking film, where you have to read the subtitles, and if all books were as simple silent movies we'd all be much more united. But that is one side of one of the problems I think with modern corporate publishing, that editors do not have the time to spend or the budget to spend on really working on translations. We've had a few eccentric English publishers like Harvill, where there was this brilliant man, and wonderfully patient and difficult, Christopher MacLehose. But if you look at his list of books, that he was the first person to publish Murakami in English, Valenta, and you go back through the list of what Harvill published, you're looking at *Zhivago*, you're looking at *The Leopard*, you're looking at books that have really lasted. And I was just making a list of books that really influenced me from being a teenager and they would start with *Zhivago*, which I read when I was seventeen, Solzhenitsyn, Marquez, *The Leopard*, Günter Grass, Jung Chang, Kundera, Allende, Murakami, Valenta today, and I cannot think of an English writer of that stature. I would include Philip Roth, because what he is writing about is completely alien to the culture. I live now in England but I did live in New York and understood what he was writing about. And that is the gift of global publishing. And to me – I'm going to flatter the Dutch again – this was the country, when I came back to Europe and started doing what I do, this was the most receptive country. There was one publisher in Germany who alas is dead, Karl Blessing, who backed my judgement from a very early age and he said 'what are you doing this year?' and I said 'Well I've got this book from Iran' and he said 'alright I'll buy it'. Or 'I found this book in Bengal,' 'I'll buy it' and we worked together in editing the books and looking at them for the German market. There is a limit in any country of how many foreign books you're going to read a year and there's a definite limit in a corporate culture that we publish in, in the English language, or a definite reaction in a sales force to publishing someone with a foreign name. And this is a problem. There isn't a market for multiple translations. Any editor

like Christopher MacLehose at the end is seen as an extravagance by modern Random House. He was an extravagance, but he was a brilliant eccentric and man of taste. All of us here in this room ultimately read and publish our own taste. And when you talk about how do you make a book come alive, it's like a love affair, living becomes alive when you read a great book and it becomes alive all over the world, whether it's China, for me particularly China. I'm fascinated by China, I have been since I was seventeen, and it's been a gift to me, a challenge and a gift to me to be constantly met with the unexpected, to be constantly met in dealing with life in a different way. All of us, whether I like or not, and I'm certainly part of it, live in the comfort zone, and when I listen to people talk about their frustration at not being able to get books published on Mexico or Brazil I understand that, and then you see a film like *City of God* and you're transformed. You see Kundera and you immediately understand. And there's a wonderful Czech film, *Trains Closely Observed*. Before the revolution or before the Russians left it was one of the most humorous films I'd ever seen, that Czech humour.

I want to go off on one tangent, because it's a very difficult world for foreign writers, is that Jan Mets, who was here yesterday, was the first publisher of Nuha al-Radi's book on what it was like to be bombed by the Americans, *Baghdad Diary*. He did sell 20,000 copies of that particular book. No one else would publish that book in England. And when I tried to sell it in America in '93, an editor said to me oh it's far too sophisticated, how can this Arab write English? And I said you don't have to be sophisticated to know what it's like to be bombed by the Americans. In 1986 I did the first biography of Khomeini by Amir Taheri who had run a newspaper in Iran which criticised both the Shah and Khomeini. I did get a small publisher to publish it in England. I tried to sell that book in America for a year and totally failed and one of the great editors whom I dearly love looked at me once and said: who do you think in this country will be interested in some obscure Islamic cleric? We ultimately got that book published by a CIA publishing house in Washington. His next book was on Hamas, before Hamas was known, and the book he wrote after that was about the growth of Islam in Russia. And this man speaks six languages, writes in six languages, his name is Taheri, Amir Taheri. Western people don't read him. And that was a real lesson to me on Asia. Then the same thing happened with Kanan Makiya, who asked me to represent him, who wrote *Republic of Fear*. No one would publish that book in America, except the University of California in Berkeley. Once the first gulf war started it became a bestseller and he had to go into hiding. He had been in hiding, living in America.

Even with people who write in English, and they write beautiful English like Conrad did, because their name is foreign we really don't respect them. We only basically unfortunately respect our own cultures. And yet we live in a global society. I look now actually with gratitude at what I've been able to do, thanks to Bernard Cornwell, but none of the books that became sort of household names like *Wild Swans* started quickly. They took a very long time to get going. And in modern publishing if you don't move a book in six weeks or eight weeks it's finished, it's out of the shops. In Holland, which went on to sell over a quarter of a million copies of *Wild Swans*, in the first six months it sold 3,000 copies, in England 5,000 and then it took off in Australia. And this is a point I want to make. There are markets all over the world and once Jung went to Australia, to the Sydney Writers' Festival, her English publisher paid attention to her, because the book sold a quarter of a million copies in Australia because there was an audience that was interested. Because once the white Australia policy had changed, and Chinese, Indonesian, Korean, Japanese was being taught in

their schools instead of European languages, you have a whole cult of young people, and then their parents and grandparents wanting to know why they are learning these strange languages. And when *Xinran* was published in Australia she really felt she was published. And now she has been published in thirty-one languages and maybe the most successful country where she has not visited is Brazil, where she was a bestseller for fourteen weeks.

You mustn't look at one market, you must look at every market, even if it's Iceland or New Zealand, which seem a long way away. If you have a book which is universal and the human condition is universal, that book will work. And you have to go out and find the right editors and agents for that, all over the world. Publishing is about good gossip, and the great books are word-of-mouth books. They are not where you pay 1.9 million pounds for a book on the white Moguls. It's very strange, if you really go backwards, as I have in my own mind, and you take the Harry Potter story. Bloomsbury bought that book for 1,000 pounds. If they'd known what it was they'd have bought world rights. They didn't. They just bought UK rights. It became by word of mouth a bestselling book, a cult. And that's what happens. If you have something that's really good, and universal, in any language, that language talks, and the actual integrity of a book. And the people who really can make that happen are the translators. If you think about *Xinran* or Jung Chang or Wei Wei, they've been published in over thirty languages. That really tells me something. And when I see the royalty statements as an agent I'm just amazed, and I'm amazed how bad the arrogance of English is, because that usually is the smallest royalty statement.

Maarten Asscher – Toby, thank you so much. We will refer to many of your points later on. Next in line is Dan Simon to my left who has worked in many American publishing houses, has even established two of his own if I'm correct, with poetic names like *Four Walls Eight Windows* and *Seven Stories Press*. Dan, tell us about your view on translating against the current.

Dan Simon – I really want to talk about translation, but I want to talk about a couple of other things before we get there. *Seven Stories* is a very small independent publishing house, but we're in New York, and so listening yesterday I kind of feel like we as a publishing house are a little bit analogous to a small European country under the shadow of the larger corporate entities in New York, and we have a history of being aggressive with literature and with political works and succeeding often enough that we have a success trend. Of course we fail 80% of the time, but we succeed I think 20% of the time and that's kind of in the great publishing tradition. And we do probably 25-35 % works in translation, which is madness. So in the spring list we have an Iranian memoir, we have a book by a Tadjik and an American in Afghanistan, we have another book on Afghanistan, we have an Italian work in translation, a work of non-fiction, we have a South African novel. It's very inspiring to hear what Toby was saying and I think it's all true and that's the right point of view but it's very important to emphasise also what the obstacles are, because they're very great for translation and probably the biggest one is time, which we haven't talked about. But you know for the publisher, besides the cost, there's an extra year worked in at least and finding translators is really difficult. We're translating the great Korean writer Hwang Sok-Yong right now and I can't find the Korean translators. I just can't find them.

The obstacles are many, so I think we have to be very clear on why we're doing works in translation, otherwise we get overwhelmed by the obstacles. Inspired by

Marjon yesterday I'd like to tell one story, or two stories. Translation costs go in both directions and we, as a publishing house, would not exist were it not for the fact that we are internationalist and thus have been able to sell translations around the world very effectively and I want to tell one story about that. You've met Asha, I think, everybody here, so Asha's first day at school – and I hate 9/11 stories, but I think this is appropriate and it leads to a translation story – so Asha's first day at school was 9/11, September 11th 2001, and her school is three blocks from the World Trade Center, so we were there at 08.30 in the morning and we heard the bang of the first plane hitting, and we continued getting ready for school, and then the principle came in and said: hey, a plane just hit the World Trade Center. And I said: yeah, right. I thought it was a truck that had had an accident and we went to the corner and looked, and there was a little star in the building that didn't look like much, and we went back and I dropped Asha at school and left and went to my office, which is about nine blocks from the World Trade Center and then by the time I arrived there the school had called and said we're closing the school, you have to go back and get Asha – do you remember? No.

Maarten Asscher – That's how history works.

Dan Simon – And I started walking back, and a few blocks from the school before I arrived there was the orange ball engulfing the building, which was the second plane hitting. And I went and got Asha and brought her, and they had closed down, this isn't commonly known but they had closed down all transportation by that point. You couldn't take the subway out, you couldn't take anything over the bridge, you couldn't drive, so we actually stayed in that neighbourhood and Seven Stories which is nine blocks from there and which has – we're on the ground floor – a store front, so we opened our doors, and Asha was watching on CBS as it was happening, and you know Asha thought it was a great movie and we were standing on the street watching, and I remember being with an architect standing on the corner when the first building came down and he was impressed as an architect by what had just happened, he understood it as an architect, and then people would come in covered with dust and too stunned to ask for anything and we would say: do you want to call home? I remember this very clearly. Do you want to call home? Do you want a glass of water? And they would say, 'er, yeah,' but they weren't coming and asking for anything. And then you couldn't get to the office without crossing barricades. We would come in but it was smoke-filled for the next few days and the next thing we really did was I had lunch on the Thursday, two days later, with Assia Djebar who's an Algerian writer who is very familiar with this kind of phenomenon because about 70,000 Algerian intellectuals I think have been murdered, not dissimilar even, not so differently. And she was... Unlike... There were so many people quickly writing eloquently and Assia, which I thought was brilliant (whom Asha is named after) Assia was talking about just being silent. The first thing we had to do, she felt was right, was just be silent with it. And that has always stayed with me as very important. And we reached out to some of our writers to just give us 500-word texts that we then put on our website and offered as a kind of free download. And Assia wrote something and four or five writers, and we reached out to Noam Chomsky and others and then, and this is where the story goes into translation and what we're concerned with, Noam was being interviewed around the world and not in the US. So he was being interviewed by *El Diario*, by *Le Monde*, by the biggest papers in every newspaper around the world. He was doing radio, Radio Budapest and all this about what had happened, Noam

Chomsky, but not in the US, and so we decided, started working with them in those weeks, using the interviews as the kind of building blocks and created over those few weeks a document. And then it was early October and it was time for Frankfurt and I said 'we're not going to Frankfurt', you know the bombing of Afghanistan had either just started or was about to start. And our foreign rights director, who's French, said of course we're going to Frankfurt. And so I remember Kennedy airport was deserted. Kennedy airport is always busy but it was a cemetery, it was deserted. So there we were in Kennedy airport, flying to Frankfurt with a text that we hadn't had a chance to read it yet, from Chomsky, it was about 30,000 words, these interviews, and we arrived and it was a wonderful experience with our European colleagues and our friends so pleased that we had arrived and that there was a text that was something other than George Bush on CNN, bombing, with a kind of absurd eye for an eye or worse than eye for an eye mentality, and people were very grateful for it. People read it overnight, it was very exciting. A British publisher came in, in a very drab British suit and I said: do you want to read it tonight, give it back to me tomorrow? He came back in the morning in a bright orange suit and said he'd had the most delightful evening he'd ever had in Frankfurt sitting in a café reading it and gave us very good advice on how to publish it. So that became a working translation and that was a very important kind of action that we were able to take, reaching out to the world giving news from America that was nothing other than what people really needed to hear. And it built our relationships with foreign publishers and it's one of the things that we've done that enable us to partake in this conversation, which after all has to be a two-way conversation.

One of the things that Marjon said yesterday, which I think resonated with all of us, is the importance of being from a small country and part of this international conversation and I think the obverse, the other side of that is true, which is that we in the US right now are risking a kind of irrelevancy, blinded by the arrogance of our hugeness. I was in South Africa recently and the US did not appear once in any one section of the newspaper and you had a sense of a reversal of what you've described as what we do to others in a certain way. That was refreshing. But that's part of the battle for us. So America at the same time is at risk of becoming an interesting country again now, because it's so divided. America is not a homogenous country and this is an important fact when it comes to ascertaining the face of literary translation in America. We are the exact opposite. We in America are an amalgam of foreignness; every American is from somewhere else. We are as everyone knows a very young country. And this should be our greatest strength, our one true strength: the ability to receive and absorb foreign influences. It's always been what we've done best. We are also, it's worth remembering, a country founded by criminals and outcasts and we are also a country with ruling classes that always had great trouble controlling the ruling classes. We have a very significant history of things that are forgotten now because they were so completely destroyed, like the workers' movement. It's forgotten now, but even the revolutionary movement was an attempt by the American ruling classes to control the foreigners and the lower classes that were starting to rebel. We're a country of immigrants who ended up feeling they were immigrants no longer. So that all that America is are voices that came here from afar. Obviously this would suggest that literary translation can speak to the very heart of American culture, and if our great strength is our ability to receive and absorb foreignness, then it's only a strength because of certain quality of openness on the part of Americans that goes with it. That openness is our best quality and we're in danger of losing it, right now, of losing it to fear and to hate. If militarism is replacing – and

entertainment was bad enough as our great export – but militarism is replacing entertainment, that’s a fact, put simplistically, as our foremost export, and so I would go so far as to say that we Americans are incomplete without literary translation and other such expressions of cultural openness, without which we lose our own best qualities. So because our history is one of foreignness we require that foreignness to be whole, to be ourselves.

Maarten Asscher – Thank you very much Dan. And third in the row is Jutta Chorus to my right, journalist for *NRC Handelsblad*, who co-authored two important books on The Netherlands in its present historical stage, one about The Netherlands under, or rather with, Fortuyn, and one more recently about the year after the death, the murder, of Theo Van Gogh.

Jutta Chorus – What a political tragedy we’ve witnessed this week: exotic, with a clear beginning and an ending; powerful, exciting, royal, classic. What we saw on Tuesday was Sophocles’ *Antigone* breaking apart. What happened in the fourteen years before? A Somali refugee entered the Netherlands when times were good, when masses of Somali immigrants were granted refugee status, whether they were victims of the civil war or suffered from poverty. She fled from an arranged marriage; she was ambitious and clever. She did everything to improve herself and her skills, and people she met were impressed by her power to achieve knowledge, to cope with the country. They helped her, they fell in love with her, they offered her a place to hide, they flourished in her shadow, they suddenly saw a meaning for themselves. They accompanied her on the red carpet, they helped her get a seat in parliament and on the other hand she used them as her messengers, she used them to stage or support her controversial ideas, because they had powerful positions in the media, or as opinion-makers. They echoed what she said, while she became a provocative member of parliament. Her soulmates also obtained key positions in government, soulmates, friends, intellectuals, members of the resistance group Hirsi Ali, because that was what they sometimes acted like, a resistance group. And their common goal was: ethnic minorities should behave like Dutch citizens. The minister of immigration and integration was also a member of that group, in a way, a spiritual mother. In her politics and policies and in the statement she made at the memorial service at the Dam in Amsterdam after the murder of Theo van Gogh, there she recalled Van Gogh’s free spirit, she supported Hirsi Ali’s free spirit, and what did she say about his murderer, Mohammed Bouyeri? ‘He is not a Dutch citizen.’ Last Monday the minister of immigration and integration decided that her Somali friend was not a Dutch citizen either. Ayaan Hirsi Ali had lied about her name and date of birth when she entered the country. The minister concluded ‘I have to maintain the laws and the rules,’ and she called her friend and said, according to witnesses in the room, ‘I feel sorry for you, but as a minister I have to maintain the laws and the rules.’ ‘I’m devastated, but I’m still fond of Rita,’ is what Hirsi Ali said in a press conference today, when she was asked.

These were the facts. So, why did the minister act as she did? The minister is taking part in a sensational primary to become leader of the liberals in the elections of 2007. Her motto is: not left, not right but straight forward. She wants to be prime minister. Until last week she was tipped as a champion. Her campaign leader learned his job as an assistant to the campaigns of Rudolf Giuliani and Al Gore. He was Pim Fortuyn’s campaign leader and he told me again and again: create a drama and you win. He didn’t have to rub it in. No politician was more dramatic at the time. That’s what the

campaign leader may have told the minister as well: create a drama and you win, although he denies that. Then there is the chairman of our parliament: prominent member of the liberals, friend of Hirsi Ali. He used to send her intimate text messages. One of them said, 'Who's the cute man you're dining with?' On Monday he advised the minister to send her investigation report about Hirsi Ali's false name and date of birth to parliament as quickly as possible, against the advice of the Prime Minister, and shortly after that he leaked this information to the TV news. I'm not clear why he did it.

This story is what should be the book of the year, an important book with a colourful beginning and a dramatic end, with a perfect, mysterious and strong protagonist coming from nowhere, with an inside view of a party that claims to be the most impressive party in The Netherlands, with confidantes and enemies, with friends turned traitor and few, very few, real friends. Would such a book be published? The good news: yes, probably. A good journalist, with enough time on his hands to get to politicians, their advisers and pr officers can get the publisher he wants. But it would be an exception and a charm because there is a lack of critical non-fiction on politics in the Netherlands. To be more specific, there are hardly any revealing portraits of political parties written from the inside, and there is not enough investigative journalism into political and governmental mistakes, while in fact the political battlefield has all the characteristics a journalist could wish for: power, revenge, jealousy. Where is the book on the VVD, the people's party for freedom and democracy, which became a conservative party after the murder of Pim Fortuyn? The party in which controversial politicians like Rita Verdonk, Geert Wilders and Ayaan Hirsi Ali could grow, the party with such a number of both explosive and composed politicians. I don't mean an analytical book that examines discussions within the party, for example Turkey's accession to the European Union. I don't mean a reconstruction of the Srebrenica drama based on newspaper articles. I mean a drawing of characters, the registration of dialogue, how the people talk to each other, what happens in daily life, which tensions are there between ethnic minority members of parliament, about the jealousy, the friendships, that would make politics so much more real, it would open the world of the Binnenhof, it would show the little dramas that will later explain the large dramas.

That's the journalistic challenge: to be there and record. Following a political party or an institution from the inside provides clear insight into the political and social structure of a party, the balance of power, opportunism, altruism. I know it's not easy. Political parties, ministers and their spokesmen all have strict codes of conduct; they only show the world outside what they want the world outside to see. A writer of critical non-fiction should be energetic and detached at the same time. Maintain your contacts, keep your foot in the door, but show the other side of the arena as well. Would such a book be successful in The Netherlands? The bad news: probably not, but it depends. The news has its heydays. Last Tuesday was one of them. Five million people watched the debate on the Dutch citizenship of Ayaan Hirsi Ali in parliament. One million people kept on watching after midnight. Everyone was upset in one way or another: about betrayal, about the injustice, about the carelessness of the minister of immigration, about her resilience the day after, when she said 'Parliament wanted to debate for eleven hours, not me!' It was big news, with a huge impact, people were ashamed to be Dutch, they shared a feeling of solidarity. But two days later the thirst was over. The newspapers and their readers are interested in daily politics: incidents, conflicts caused by politicians or by the media. Recent studies on the reception of news showed increasing indifference towards reliability of the medium that brings the

news. The traditional newspapers are no match for free newspapers. Circulation of the traditional newspapers is dropping. In 1975 Dutch people took 150 minutes a week to read their newspapers; today they spend 30 minutes a week. News ages more quickly than before. What does that mean for the news subjects? It means that the actual shelf life is short. It can be successful, for instance when a political star is the subject, when the reviews are good, when there is media attention, when it's mentioned a lot within a few days, when it's well marketed. When the book is in shops the week before a big trial takes place, as happened with a revealing transcript of the Endstra tapes, it may become a bestseller. The book, *The Endstra Tapes*, is a full transcript of some very revealing secret conversations between the victim of a suspect real estate agent and detectives. But I remember my father, a real news junky, was in hospital. I hoped to cheer him up with a book on the tricks of the Surinam army leader Bouterse, who was on trial in the Netherlands for cocaine smuggling. The trial had just finished, but the book was new. My father raised his arms and said, 'Oh no, please, that's old news.' Will this journalist be properly paid for his hard work? No. If he's lucky he'll receive an advance of €5,000. In the United States an advance is ten times as high because the circulation is higher. There are previews and the book will be sold all over the world. Our journalist in The Netherlands will probably be supported by the Fund for Special Journalistic Projects, a very useful institution that subsidizes interesting projects, but most of these books, and I spoke to a lot of writers of critical non-fiction, do not sell more than 5,000 copies in the Netherlands, that in fact is a lot in this country. If the book is more successful than that, the writer has to pay his royalties back to the Fund for Special Journalistic Projects. If the journalist is really lucky he's employed by a good newspaper with a budget for investigative journalism. But there is another reason why critical non-fiction is not doing so well in The Netherlands. There is hardly any tradition in this field, there are hardly any roots. In the United States there is a tradition, both in investigative journalism and in political campaign literature. Since Theodore White wrote *The Making of the President*, on the first presidential campaign of John F. Kennedy in 1960, American political journalists and writers have developed their own style. White had discovered a gap in the market: writing about presidential campaigns. Ten editions in four years and a new book in 1964. He continued his series through to 1980, the election of Ronald Reagan as president. In 1973 Hunter Thomson wrote his non-conventional, highly subjective *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail* on the campaign of George McGovern, whom he met in the men's room at the Exeter Inn in New Hampshire. He crisscrossed the country, stopped in hotels, shopping malls and factories in obscure midwestern towns. That same year Timothy Crouse's portrait appeared in newspaper and magazine reports on his campaign report *The Boys on the Bus*, one of the best books on campaigns in American journalism. In The Netherlands, Paul van Engen's critical campaign book *The Irresistible Rise and Decline of Jan Terlouw* (1982) was a novelty and an exception. Jan Terlouw, in those days leader of the middle or democratic party, D66, was the first politician to use a publicity agency for his campaign. After publication, Terlouw called Van Engen 'the most unreliable man I ever met'. In 2001 the Dutch reporter Gerard van Westerloo wrote a major feature on the Dutch socialist party PvdA for the monthly magazine of the newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*. He invented a new genre. By interviewing each socialist member of parliament he could draw conclusions about the state of the party. Each interviewee turned out to be unhappy with the position of the party in the political field and about its leader Ad Melkert. The PvdA was in despair. Van Westerloo's reportage book, *Don't Speak to the Driver*, is a classic example of what political journalists can achieve in the

Netherlands. His story inspired me to write a book on Pim Fortuyn and his political career and after that on Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Mohammed Bouyeri, to speak to everyone involved, to watch closely all Fortuyn's movements, to investigate the party's finances. However, the only problem was that Leefbaar Nederland, Fortuyn's first political party, slammed its door to journalists after Van Westerloo's publication. It took me months to open it again.

Maarten Asscher – Thank you very much Jutta Chorus. I think we have three wonderful presentations here as the basis for our discussion after our coffee break, which starts now.

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Maarten Asscher – Jutta, if I may start with a question to you. When you hear Toby Eady praising The Netherlands for its liberal character, its receptive tradition etc. what is your reaction?

Jutta Chorus – I also had a question for him about that. Well, The Netherlands is liberal. I also mentioned the fact that there are always publishers who are enthusiastic about ideas on politics, on books, I think that's not a problem. So the way to the bookshop, that's quite an easy way if you're doing your work as you should do. But afterwards there are not enough readers to make it really really successful. There are exceptions and there are a lot of non-fiction books of course that are really successful, but you have to choose your subject very right. If you are writing about a person with charisma and, as I said, a star, then it will be easier than when you write about the dusty old party. I think that's what people think of politics. But we have a quite conventional way, also in journalism, to write about party politics and we don't use the social side of the process of politics enough. So maybe that will change, that can change the attitude of readers as well, if you do so.

Maarten Asscher – But I also meant my question on a somewhat deeper level, considering the books that you have written on Pim Fortuyn, on the murder of Theo van Gogh, and what you have now been writing these past days about the Hirsi Ali case: do you consider yourself to be living in a liberal and receptive country? Or to put it less mildly, don't you feel a bit embarrassed when people praise The Netherlands as a liberal country these days?

Jutta Chorus – Yes, that's true. I think The Netherlands has a black side and a more superficial side and the strange thing is that you can see a very democratic, tolerant country for years and then suddenly something happens. And I think that's not yet over, because politicians, well, they are people who are trained in looking for gaps to make you feel the same confusion and stir, to cause it, to cause a certain atmosphere in politics that's kind of revolutionary and I think that's threatening for a lot of people in The Netherlands, it's a long time ago I felt this tolerant atmosphere we used to have. That was something of my youth, I think.

Maarten Asscher – That's not so long ago. Toby.

Toby Eady – When was this watershed, in your opinion?

Maarten Asscher – The question is, when did this change, in your idea?

Jutta Chorus – I think when Pim Fortuyn appeared. Well maybe it happened when my father died. I'm not sure if I can make a combination between those two events, but there was only one month between the two events and I was very much aware of shocks. When he was murdered and also when my father died I was emotionally shocked. It was different of course from Fortuyn's death, because that was more of a professional reaction, but it occurred to me that I was shocked again and again and again and again. And last week was the final shock. I can do something with it, I'm a journalist, so it doesn't stir up my life completely, but it has changed my world from the days of the purple [right-wing liberal plus social democrat coalition] government.

Maarten Asscher – Toby, you've been visiting The Netherlands and dealing with Dutch people for many years, have you experienced a change of climate in the past ten years in Holland?

Toby Eady – I think slightly. But I think the point I was trying to make is that England has a sort of arrogance of its own language and it has a frozen curiosity towards the rest of the world. And I felt with young writers, and people who'd never been published before, an immediate desire to learn from them in Holland, instead of this sort of imperialistic attitude the English have to anyone who isn't writing in English. I've two thoughts about when the liberalism stopped. One of the reasons I left America was I could see after Ronald Reagan was elected – I used to teach in the University of Colorado, Middle Eastern politics – suddenly all the criticism, which had been inherent in America and open during the Vietnam war and afterwards, stopped. You didn't dare criticise America any more. And I realised where this was going and for personal reasons I had to go back to England so I stayed there. And I loathed Margaret Thatcher, I mean, I still think she damaged England long term, but short term she made a lot of people very rich. We have lost the liberalism in England that I actually believed in and to get a new labour Prime Minister behaving as he is, going to war in Iraq purely for oil, is one of the most disgraceful occurrences in English history, and I am deeply ashamed by it. And there is no protest in England. There was one march of two million people, which was hardly reported. But in the sixties there were protests and they were quite active. That wasn't just Berlin, Paris, it was in London too.

I feel what's happened in this country is a reflection of basically the fear that 9/11 created in the west and the beginning of questioning. I was at a conference on Hamas, the last conference I went to, and I got so angry at it because the speakers were British intelligence, Americans, one Lebanese, one Egyptian, one or two journalists, and I had handled the first book on Hamas and I had looked after Kanan Makiya and I was sitting in this room with so-called experts who were pontificating from a completely western point of view about Palestine, Israel, Lebanon and Hamas. I was the last speaker and I said if you'd bothered to read Kanan Makiya in the eighties, if you'd bothered to read Amir Taheri in the eighties we wouldn't be sitting round this room. The English comparison of Hamas was, you won't believe it, the IRA. And their expert had been in Northern Ireland. The three Arab countries that had been allowed to be invited to this conference were Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. I was steaming when I left and my wife rightly said to me 'it's lucky you weren't arrested as a terrorist,' when I got home, because I was still steaming. And that is, when you were talking yesterday about good publishing, it's being ahead of the time, it's being aware

of what's happening now and why your country is changing. And of course we're changing because of what's happening. We have to reflect, and we all reflect into fear, and fear is not a liberal feeling. When did this start? One of the things I said to this Iranian, and we were both in New York recently, is that I've really discovered that rich people don't listen.

Marjon van Royen – What do you think about Holland?

Toby Eady – At the moment it's caught between its liberal past and the process of trying to absorb another culture which is seen to be aggressive. And the same, you talk about Holland, I can talk about England and Belmarsh prison and the people who've been locked up there and Tony Blair suddenly saying, 'These Afghans who hijacked a plane to get out of Afghanistan, they shouldn't be returned, they should be given protection in England,' and yet they are criminals.

Maarten Asscher – But Toby, wouldn't it be much more effective, if you want to convert the English, to alert them to what they should be aware of, to – apart from your wonderful work on writers from all over the world – also to seek out the British budding Muslim writers and the young intelligent people that Mary Mount is trying to reach as a publisher and that you might be trying to reach as an agent.

Toby Eady – I question this because (again it sounds boastful) I did the first book on Al-Qaeda, with Jason Burke. No one would buy it in America until St. Martin's agreed to distribute it. He's a brilliant young journalist. When he was nineteen he left Oxford and went and fought in the first Gulf War. He went, not as a stringer, to Pakistan and Afghanistan. He's thirty-two, his new book's going to be published by Jan Mets here, published in England next week. The problem about looking for Muslim writers is – this has just happened to me – Fadia Faqir's book, which we've just sold is about honour killing. She's a young Jordanian who came to England to escape her family and we offered it in England to fourteen publishers and instead of being written in western English it was written internally, the internal mind of an Arab woman, exiled by her family, exiled from her own country, who then comes to another country where no one understands her. She's got natural good will. We sent this book out to fourteen publishers in England, thirteen turned it down and one bought it. She has an Arab-Arab voice, she doesn't have a public-school-Arab voice. But she teaches literature, or did, Arabic and English literature at Durham University. And I said to her: the problem about what you write is that you don't sound like an Arab any more. You've compromised yourself. I mean, we then got the book edited, and then the thing that really stunned me, going back to Holland and England, is that they immediately wanted to call it something like *Brick Lane*. We changed that. Because of Michelle [Hutchison] I met a really brilliant young half-Iranian writer whose book has just been published and will be published in Holland, Yasmin Crowther, and what was fascinating about that was that from the original manuscript the English publisher wanted to make it less *farouche*, less Iranian, so it would be understood in the West. And that is the culture I live in.

Maarten Asscher – Mary. Microphone.

Mary Mount – I just wanted to say that there are – and particularly in fiction – counter examples. I know we're here to talk about non-fiction but there's a British

Pakistani writer called Nadim Aslam who has been published in Britain and America and who writes in a very, in many ways too rich Persian style, but a brilliant book about a Pakistani community in Britain, and he was on the longlist for the Booker, he's been shortlisted for the IMPAC, the most lucrative literary prize in the world. I think there are counter examples. These writers are available. Non-fiction is more problematic, but I think that people are desperate for stories. That's why he sells now when he didn't sell ten years ago when his first book came out.

Maarten Asscher – Thank you. I would like to go to Dan. You have very rightly stressed that the United States is not a homogenous country. That there are so many different voices and ethnic groups and different types of writers. There is I think a widespread conviction that the conglomerate structure of the United States publishing scene somehow mainstreams this variety of voices and writers. Are you optimistic or are you pessimistic considering the market developments and internet developments etc. about the question whether this variety will come through better in the next couple of years or whether the mainstreaming of especially non-fiction publishing will continue as before?

Dan Simon – Do you remember in the, I suppose it was the sixties, Solzhenitsyn famously used to say, 'I come from a totalitarian society' – and he lived outside of Boston Massachusetts at the time – 'I come from a totalitarian society,' and he was speaking to these liberal societies, to us in the US, open society, and to England and Holland, the same would be true, 'but at least in my country we respect literature, we care about literature, whereas here where you can say anything and it's wide open'. He had the sense, and I don't think anyone really would disagree with this, that there wasn't the kind of cherishing of the written word that he loved in his country. And I think gradually since then we now would all agree that we all live to some degree in increasingly totalitarian societies and closed societies, and so I am very optimistic about what that can mean for literature. I'm very optimistic about the fact that because in a certain sense we are in a stagnant and in some ways desperately infertile time politically, there's a sort of depression with our governments and the lack of leadership and the Bush government and Blair etc. There's a kind of sense of our societies closing. The open society is closing. There isn't the idealism, we don't believe in democracy the way that we did, and I'm saying that's an opportunity for literature and for writing. And it is true that when something is absolutely right and marvellous and different and tells a different story, it's wonderful to be the publisher of it because people want it and you're not in the position of saying: listen you've got to write about this wonderful writer we have. People are coming to you and saying: we have to write about whoever it is, whether it's an international voice or an American voice, people get very excited about it when it is just right and saying something different. I think this has been something that's come up in the past few days as well. I read the *New York Times* very early every morning and the *New York Times*, which is a very good metropolitan daily, from a big city, but it has about fifteen or twenty narratives that it tells over and over again and the names change. There's only about fifteen or twenty stories and if it's not one of those stories, they don't cover it, for the most part, and if they do cover it they fit it into one of those narratives. So when somebody's telling a story that's fresh and they understand the story that they're telling, then it's wanted. So part of our job as editors and publishers in a sense is to short-circuit the system. And getting back to the specifics of your question, the internet is really important. In the United States there's now maybe even

a majority of people who don't get their news from the networks, they get it from going online. Maybe it's not a majority but it's a very substantial minority, so you can kind of get around the big gatekeepers. You still need the big media, but you can do a lot with small media. You can do a lot with alternative media. A lot of the radio that we used to discount because it was kind of alternative is now almost as big as the big NPR stations, and that sort of thing, so there's opportunity in that way as well, but I kind of think the main concern has to be in the work itself and I think that if one can sort of keep the conversation true, then these works come out that are really wanted, and then you find a way. And of course the best way to promote is of course word of mouth. That hasn't changed. So when something is really that good and that exciting or that fresh and new, then word of mouth happens and the work is wanted, people want to be provoked and to be given new ideas and to hear new voices.

Maarten Asscher – Thank you. There is one important element in the theme of this morning that is threatened by all this blogging and internet expression. Publishing is also a way to ensure a culture of translation, to invest in translation, because books can be sold exclusively within a certain territory and money can be earned with them, there is a possibility to invest in commissioning a translation, whereas if we concentrate on the wonderful variety of all the bloggers and the websites, how will for example that wonderful Dutch blogger and the view of the Baghdad woman who is bombed and writes a weblog about it, how will that view travel? How will that travel over boundaries if the blogging is to a certain extent replacing the culture of non-fiction book publishing?

Dan Simon – I'm fairly young as a publisher but it makes me feel old, in that there are people we work with, I now even have a younger generation of editors who themselves are too old, you know who are thirty. They're pushing thirty and they're starting to just want to stay at home and, and there's already another generation that I need of twenty-year-olds, who really do this. We're hiring someone now, and I feel now sort of too old to understand it. My young kids are too old to understand it and there's another generation that is really up on it.

Maarten Asscher – Toby, do you have a view on this as an agent?

Toby Eady – I have. Partly because I'm so computer ignorant, I dread it. I want to say two things, one is about translation, but as an agent I do remember that just after computers came in, books became thirty percent longer. What I think it comes down to and what this conference to me is about is the quality of translation. What you say about word of mouth, that is what makes a book work. What makes a book universal is important. What I was saying to you this morning is that in Japan translators are properly rewarded. They get 50% of the royalty. And therefore you have a success, and a book will never be successful without a good Japanese translator. The author shares that success with the translator, because Japanese and Japanese thinking is a completely different way from Western. And until translators are paid properly and respected, everything will be done too quickly, which is a point that has been made, that the pure time invested is not corporate time, in getting a good translation. So if you respect the translators and you pay them, and you do your foreign rights accordingly, that someone has got a market of 4,000 copies or 5,000 copies, and the advance is balanced to that, it's that the foreign publisher should say to the agent: I'm sorry, this is what our market is, this is what we have to pay for a good translator, do

you want your writer to be successful? And until we respect translators, forget it, whether it's blogging or whatever. But it's something I feel very strongly about, because I've spent so much time, which you can't evaluate, working on books which then sell all over the world. And it's that time that a translator gives.

Maarten Asscher – Is there perhaps a word from one of the translators? And could you also go into the time pressure in your job as a translator? Because I know that in Holland, especially fiction translators are put under enormous pressure sometimes with two three or four of them together, having to deliver a translation in six weeks. How do you see this as a future for your profession as a translator?

Eve-Marie Lund – May I first thank Toby for what he has said about us, I think that was fantastic, thank you very, very, very much. And I will also tell you that in Norway now we are in conflict with the publishers. We have a so-called normal contract that hasn't been changed for some years. It hasn't moved. So, it doesn't say that we are on strike because we can't strike, that doesn't work, but we are taking them literally. It says in the contract that they don't want to change that we have to deliver a machine-written manuscript. And so we do. And now that was that. And I want to, before I answer your question, I just want to say that in Norway we are only four million people. Our language is very small, not widely read, but we still have to keep it up. Somebody has to be its guardians. And to make world literature work in Norway you need the translators. I think it was Jose Saramago who said that authors make national literature but the translators make world literature. And I feel very strongly about that. And now back to you, what you asked me about time pressure. I think that goes for the bestsellers. I haven't had that problem very much personally, but I know there are people that do that a lot. Especially the one who translates Harry Potter and Dan Brown, and also Coelho.

Maarten Asscher – Perhaps also with current affairs non-fiction I would say. When there's really a newsy element.

Eve-Marie Lund – When you have to do it quickly, but I think perhaps Hans Petter Bakketeig can say a bit more about that. I'll give it further to Jeannette, but I think that Hans Petter will know a bit more about non-fiction pressure in Norway. Well, I think that was what I had to say and I'll give the mike to Jeannette.

Jeannette Ringold – In my experience, which is translating from Dutch to English, I find that with fiction there is not the huge pressure, because people don't know about a bestseller in Holland, they don't know that Anna Enquist is a bestseller in Holland and when it comes out that's fine. The publisher of course always wants a book much faster than I'm willing to deliver it, especially fiction. It needs time. However, I just signed a contract to do a Dutch book about China, *A Floating City of Peasants*. There had been a delay. It's a book that needs to come out fairly fast because there had already been a six month delay, and so I decided, yes, it would be good to do it in a certain amount of time, so I'm putting myself under a time pressure that I usually don't like but I think the book merits it, and it's not as difficult as a lot of fiction, so one makes allowances. And I've never worked under the pressure of four people to one book, that sounds perfectly awful.

Maarten Asscher – I would like to stick to that element of time but in a different way. Dan, you have talked about Assia Djebar wanting to remain silent for a while after this enormous 9/11 event. On the other hand Jutta Chorus has said news ages quickly and for example the whole story about Ayaan Hirsi Ali, it is in the news today so you write about it tomorrow and the day after tomorrow there are perhaps other things that demand immediate attention. What does this newsiness, this journalistic dimension of non-fiction writing, what does that mean for an author? Jutta, perhaps you would like to write, after Pim Fortuyn and the Theo van Gogh book, you would like to write a book about the Hirsi Ali case that has unfolded this week, but, apart from financial considerations, would you like to write it now, could you write it now, would you rather wait and reflect and publish it a year later.

Jutta Chorus – I have not even thought of writing a book about Hirsi Ali again, because the book *In God's Name*, which I wrote with Ahmet Olgun last year, is partly about her. But I am always taken by the moment, or I am absolutely involved in what's happening as a journalist, so it's a kind of fever I feel when I'm working in these periods and that also counts for subjects that are not in the news at the moment. But I'm always completely absorbed by what I'm writing about, so that means I deliver it as quickly as possible. I look at Jan Mets because he had to wait for the manuscript for a few months. But still, the Fortuyn book was also written in half a year or so, the book on Hirsi Ali and Mohammed Bouyeri was written in a few months, and I want to deliver, I want to know everything in a short time as much as possible and well, you have to be as complete as possible of course, but I'm not feeling quiet or relaxed. I don't recognise the thing you told about 9/11, three blocks further in complete rest talking to an author, because as a journalist I cannot imagine how that feels when such a disaster is taking place.

Maarten Asscher – Would you have liked to have spent more time on the books you have written?

Jutta Chorus – I see especially the second book, that was written in a very short period, I took a lot of time to follow Hirsi Ali and all the people involved, her enemies and her friends in the year 2004. I was able to join the making of her movie *Submission*, so I could see everything I would like to see. When we were finishing our production, the journalistic work, we were making portraits of three protagonists, one portrait of Hirsi Ali, Mohammed Bouyeri and Theo van Gogh, and I think we could have done more. I always want to be very complete, as complete as possible, and because of the time pressure it was difficult to, well, I would have liked to speak to more people. I'm not dissatisfied, but, well, last week there was a television programme *Zembla*. They spoke to her brother and her ex-husband and we also tried to reach those persons but we did not succeed. We spoke to a lot of different people and could make a fine portrait, but I would have liked to speak to those as well. So that's what time pressure sometimes brings. But in the case of Fortuyn I don't see those vacuums. I think we followed his complete political career until his death and we wrote about the falling apart of his party in the months after and this book was completely rounded off, completely fulfilled.

Maarten Asscher – One nightmare is writing or publishing a non-fiction book that comes too late. I have a feeling when I listen to Toby's examples of books that he published, or agented and had published by others, about Hamas, for example, and Al-

Qaida etc, that the other nightmare is to bring about books much too early, so that for some reason or other, no connection is made with them at the appropriate time.

Toby Eady – Absolutely. I think partly because of what you just said, that news gets old. But if you are seen as a fortune-teller of what might happen in the future, which then does happen, you're suspect. One of the great arguments that Amir Taheri uses with me when he's extremely irritated is he says, 'If my name is William Shawcross and I don't speak Farsi, Arabic, Russian, German, French, Spanish, then I can write a book about the Shah which will become a bestseller.' The agony of what is happening in Europe, which considered itself to be liberal, is that we have to absorb other people's thinking, whether it's comfortable or not. There are two arts. We were talking about it this morning before we came here. Journalism is a very great art and writing books is a very great art, but they are different. And what you don't want, endlessly, and when I made that comment yesterday about the Washington sniper, is that we don't have the Truman Capote approach, which is what I think you want to do in Holland at the moment, as a reflection on your society. And that means someone you respect stands out and does that. Capote did it in *In Cold Blood*, and that's what we need, we need people who stand out and take time, because we get rushed. There is much too much instant thinking. There are two pieces in the *Herald Tribune* today, one is by Ian Buruma and one is a leader, about Hirsi Ali, and they are completely different. I would be interested because I find Buruma an interesting thinker, and where he comes from is very different from the leader.

Maarten Asscher – From The Hague.

Toby Eady – Oh, forgive me. But some of his writing on the Far East is to me the best outsider writing about it.

Jutta Chorus – What's interesting in your Truman Capote example is that I think you always have to look for classic settings, so a drama or a comedy or anything that can be timeless. That's also what I meant with what I told you about Hirsi Ali in my text, that if you take it away from the daily news, if you give it quietness and a surrounding of rest and you write it down not panicking, or if you write it down cool, that helps a lot. If you use literary techniques to write it down and if you think about it before writing a couple of newspaper articles with a book cover on it then I think it can be more successful indeed, and that will help the reader as well, but I think it's a combination. Also what I said about giving or showing people's habits, showing their day-to-day dialogues, their fears, and giving it a human touch. That also works, I think. I mean, the new journalism methods, Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe (and he edited an anthology on that), I think that still works, also in The Netherlands. So take your time to try to give it a literary approach and think about the way you write it down.

Maarten Asscher – But that is then a version of Assia Djebar's silence that you need, because you cannot rush into literary techniques.

Jutta Chorus – That's true, that's true. But I was surprised to hear it of this story on 9/11, at the moment those airplanes...

Toby Eady – I think what we all feel with what's happening in Holland today, and to a certain extent in England, is something we don't want to think about, which is that racism is timeless. And I really feel in Europe we had hoped never to be put in that situation again.

Dan Simon – In the States we don't have racism any more. Which is the worst possible thing, because everyone's basic understanding is: well we solved that in the sixties. And so you know the situation of denying you have any problem is a much worse situation than one where you're aware of the problems that you have.

Marco Vigevani – I just wanted to tell you a short anecdote about translation and what translation means in my opinion. Two or three weeks ago in Turin there were three of the most important Italian writers under forty – Melania Mazzucco, Bruno Arpaia and Antonio Scurati and they were discussing everything, they were disagreed on almost everything. The only thing they said in common was: we were raised on foreign literature, so for us Philip Roth, Garcia Marquez, or Günter Grass were more important for our literary education than our own writers (Moravia, Cassola, whatever) and this I think it is very important to keep in mind, because for the writers and also for the readers and to some extent also for the general public, translation is a necessity. So it's like fresh air, you can't say it is too difficult to promote a foreign author, because if you don't read world literature, or if your percentage of translations is too small, then you're losing your own tradition, you're not intermingling with other traditions, and that's a pity. I don't think that Italian literature is in a particularly bad state so that it needs foreign input more than other literatures. So this I think is a problem for countries who don't translate enough. Italy on this side at least has a good record, we translate everything. Second thing is just a short question to Jutta Chorus. She said that one of the problems of good quality non-fiction in Holland is that the money's not there for good research, and the publisher of course cannot pay this kind of money. Who should pay this money? My question is: why don't big newspapers, like in Italy they don't do that, why don't they invest some money in good non-fiction research. Because TV can do that, because it would be wonderful if TV would give some money for good TV programmes, which they don't, at least in Italy and also in other countries, but why newspapers, national newspapers who are making a lot of money, why don't they invest in good research?

Jutta Chorus – They do invest in good research, but that's only research for the newspaper, so good newspapers and, well, there are a few newspapers in The Netherlands which are famous for the amount of money they pay for reporters doing long projects. Well, investigation projects, but everything is for the newspaper, they are aware of people writing books, because people writing books are taken away from the news. They are taken away from the news while writing the book and there is an awareness of people who feel themselves, see themselves as writers. When you're employed by a newspaper you are a journalist and you have to work on a totally different subject the next day and you have to deal with the way journalists behave, and there is an awareness of stars or people who like to shine by writing novels or writing non-fiction in their spare time, so it's not something that they stimulate.

Maarten Asscher – Dan, and then Jeannette.

Dan Simon – I just wanted to say the internet, the participating through translation and even a colloquium like this, but through translation, as Marco was saying in the international conversation, without that we become stupid. It's as simple as that. Some of the things that Toby was saying, you know, so informed by your experience with Chinese writing. I mean if you had gone to that conference on Hamas and hadn't published the book and had the experience that you had – you had some independent knowledge, you might have said this is all great. It makes us smarter, it gives us perspective, and without that we really do become stupider and stupider. Without this kind of counterweight certainly the market place, the pure market place in the corporate publishing that is dominant now, which is 'do what sells, make everything sell, a good book is one which sells, if it sells it's a good book by definition,' which is fairly new. It used to be that we would say: there are good books and there are books that sell. So the international conversation as a counterweight to that is just so necessary, as Marco was saying. I want at the risk of stepping in a little bit, for us though, on the subject of translation, we need a really good translation, an inspired translation that finds the music in the author's voice, that can create a better text in the translation even than the original. And we really look for that. We can't really do what we do without that, and so we work with Gregory Rabassa, who's maybe the greatest into American from Spanish, and Linda Asher and Richard Howard from French and others, and I find that if we have just a workmanlike translation it's a stake in the heart, so we need a kind of ambition on the part of the translators, which again goes with what Toby was saying, and they need to be paid better and all that sort of thing, but you know there's translation, and there's translation and I would say maybe the majority of the time what we get is workmanlike translations, which are very difficult. It's kind of like a break in the chain then, if the music doesn't survive it. So we really need translators who are not just saying this means that and stringing them together, but really searching the music and finding the music and maybe taking some risks creatively also, you know, not irresponsibly but basically really looking to reproduce the music in English.

Maarten Asscher – Thanks. Jeannette?

Jeannette Ringold – Yes, actually I have a question for Dan and then a question for Dan and Toby both. First of all, there seems to be a saturation point when all we hear is either Hirsi Ali, or 9/11, or Iraq. How do you decide to take on another book about Iraq? How do you decide that? And then, and this is for both of you really, how do you decide to take on books in foreign languages, how do you know? What makes you decide to take on a book from Dutch? What do you depend on?

Dan Simon – I'll be very honest, I think it's incredibly arbitrary. There's such a wealth of good material. And I think what typically happens is there'll be someone, a representative of some kind, whom I trust, personally, who'll say 'you've got to publish Annie Ernaux or Assia Djebar,' and it's somebody I trust. And in some cases... You know, we publish Mikael Niemi from Sweden. I couldn't read him, I don't read Swedish, I didn't want a report, that would have been useless to me and I did it somewhat recklessly. And so there is an arbitrariness. I think we're not looking for another book on Iraq, however we are looking for this thing of going deeper. Like Minka, the story there. That hasn't been really told, that kind of a story. There have been a lot of first person accounts from US soldiers, from reporters, but there hasn't been quite something like that, so that's potentially very interesting. We're trying to

further the conversation, so something that's a deep story, and there are other arbitrary things. There's the length of the book. For us to publish, and we've done this, but you publish a thousand page book or even a four to five-hundred page book and it's going to take you maybe two years to translate and it's going to maybe cost you 20,000 dollars to translate. And so you say 'No! Don't show that to me.' I think there are a lot of factors, but I think it's frightening how arbitrary it is.

Maarten Asscher – Toby, would you like to respond to the question, please.

Toby Eady – I'm not a publisher yet, but I'm about to become one in Australia and China, but I just do it on instinct. And I won't represent anyone I don't meet. We've just taken on a brilliant young Chinese writer called Wu Fan. She lives at the moment in America and when she sent this manuscript to me I said: you should get an America agent. No no, she said. So I said, alright. So we flew her over, to meet, and we spent four days going through her manuscript and at the end we decided we could work together. I can only do what I do if I really want to work with that person and they want to work with me. If I'm then going to take it one degree further into different languages, which is what I spend most of my time doing now, then that is a real element of trust. Publishing is a wonderfully curious, idiosyncratic way of living and never boring. I think Andrew Franklin is a wonderful example of a small publisher, and why I loved Holland was its small publishers. You mentioned Teddy White's books. They would never have been published if the man hadn't started a new publishing company. Michael Bessie, who started Atheneum, having been at Harper & Row, and he started with *Le dernier de la juste*, which is one of the great books about the holocaust and the first published, and he published American politics the way that no one had ever published before, and he was small and flexible. I worked with him in the sixties and he was like a mentor to me, and he spoke languages. It was a completely idiosyncratic business of, one hoped, benign autocrats like Maarten when he was running Meulenhoff, with his taste. But I loved coming to Holland then, because England was going into corporate culture. And some of the things said that frighten me is, again about Wu Fan's book, her Canadian publisher said, this book is universal. Her Canadian publisher is an Indian whose family was involved with Mandela and beaten up by the apartheid police, and her uncle was in Robben Island, and she can identify with this book. And we have gone global in that way. It's completely instinct. I once turned Freddie Forsyth down, on his first book, *The Day of the Jackal*.

Maarten Asscher – Xinran, please.

Xinran – As a Chinese author or journalist I want to say something, first of all because we talk about translation, and in China, as you know, we have at least three thousand years of civilization records. We have wonderful books, our first book is from 1300 BC, that's a beautiful poem. Now afterwards, what time the Chinese book come out of China in the last hundred years? Actually, it was Penguin, and this publishing house published classical Chinese literature between 1600 and 1900, but the problem is the book is translated but no one reads it. I think it partly is because of translation, I read it as a Chinese who understand a little bit English, but I couldn't understand what they talk about in that book. We have a famous book called *The Story of the Storm*. That book is about big families, the lives of three generations, in a total of more than 400 dreams. If you know this book you'll know how the Chinese

read a dream about your feet. And also we have about 1190-something dishes in those stories, and all of the Chinese members, the title of the members, in that story as well. But although I've read in English about four versions, I couldn't understand what they're talking about. So I think that this is a translator, Dan was talking about a translator, a good translator. I think a lot of people choose a good translator based on their cv or based on their degree. They come from Oxford or Cambridge or Harvard or something like that. But my understanding from my translators is much more based on the experience and knowledge, how much life you understand. Maybe this person never went to the top university, but she's bilingual, or she understands the lives so she can use her knowledge to expand what she understand from another language. And also she has the capability to rewrite the book into another language, to have the people understand between each other. So I think about Dan's question of how to find a good translator. I think the way a lot of mistakes were made in the past is based on degrees. That really is a waste of time, I think that these are the things I want to point out. And the next one, Mr Italy, Michael, my friend, said Italians are very good about foreign literature. Sorry, I'm against this. I think France is a much better than Italy. Why? Okay, I'll give you evidence as a Chinese. I've been in Italy to many bookstores and in France as well. You can read the book in French in France, but I can't find it in Italy. This is one. Secondly we have famous scholars, Confucius, Tao, Lau Chuang, all of the scholars before BC until 200 AD include Buddhists, you can read in France in French, but are hardly to get from Italy. And a third reason is that after the 1920s a group of scholars from Shanghai and southeast China went to Germany and France, afterwards they went back to China, and they translated a lot of the local writing and also they translated Chinese into German and French. Now France as a country received it so well and a transfer developed, so if you go to the very small festival in Montpellier, a tiny city by the sea, you can see the scholars, the novels, or even thinkers and this kind of boring philosophy in that little town. So I think in this way France is better than Italy. Thank you. Sorry.

Maarten Asscher – You rest your case? Or you would like to...

Marco Vigevani – I would like to point out that Marco Polo discovered China.

Xinran – I thought about this... We had a debate in Milan last year. I was invited to open a library there for Asian people, and the topic was 'if Marco Polo came to China today, what he will do, what he will see? So my answer was a) did he really come to China, this is my first question, because I read the book and the way he talks about it, actually I think he can find from Mongolia or Turkey, at the end of that. Secondly, I think if he come to China today it's not on foot any more, it's by airplane, so he will see differently. And the third one, my third answer is, if he came today I think he would read books before he came, so he would give completely different books to the world.

Maarten Asscher – There is even a fourth argument, to punish Marco even further, and that is that Marco Polo came from Venice and not from Milan. I would like a final serious round. In the eighties a friend of mine was working for the biggest weekly magazine in The Netherlands and they had of course, as any serious publication, a section in the magazine of letters to the editor, but they never got any, so this friend of mine had to write letters to the editor each week to fill the section and to give the impression that there was a lively debate in the Netherlands. I don't think twenty

years later it is necessary any more to invent letters to the editor in The Netherlands. If you look at the op ed pages of the newspapers and the weekly magazines, they are flooded over with responses from both the masters and the learned experts, so-called learned experts and everybody uses the stage to express an opinion. Perhaps that has to do, as Dan suggested, with the gradual closing of our political culture that the democratic opinion culture at the same time is opening up. If you accept this picture, translators could be in a very good position in their respective countries where they work to report on these important issues, these discussions, the really authoritative articles, where the book potential lies, to the publishers they are working for. And my question would be both to Dan as a publisher and to the translators among the participants on that side of the table: are translators sufficiently used as advisers to publishers, also as interpreters of non-fiction culture as it is developing, and do the translators see this as a role that they would like to play and whether there is a possibility to get proper recompense for that role in the form of a fee for readers reports and so on. That is a second point of course, but is there sufficient exchange between publishers outside The Netherlands and the translators as the people who follow newspapers, who follow magazines, who follow the discussions to alert publishers to the subjects and the writers who really have a message?

Dan Simon – No.

Jeannette Ringold – No.

Eve-Marie Lund – No.

Maarten Asscher – How do we organise this, if we agree that it should be organised?

Dan Simon – I know a few translators who really do this, and it's wonderful, one is a guy named Joachim Negroshel, who sends around projects that he knows about and he basically commands an author's royalty. He acts like an author, basically, and the other is Peter Constantine, who is a wonderful translator. We did a book called *The Undiscovered Chekov* with him, stories that had not been known about. And again we treated him as the author. Those were both with out-of-copyright dead authors. It was great. And they're both incredible resources. And there's somebody else, whose name I'm forgetting, in the States, who does that. So there are several who do that, who have an entirely different role and it's wonderful. But there's not enough of that.

Eve-Marie Lund – Well, I have tried that in Norway, some years ago, but I won't do it any more. Because I got reactions like: oh yeah right, so you want to translate that, you want a job for yourself. Well duh! So that wasn't very nice. I sort of tried to start some projects there, from Italian books, from French books, from Dutch books, but it's just not done in Norway.

Dan Simon – It's hard.

Maarten Asscher – Other translators please, with some experiences. All the same? Michelle Hutchison, please.

Michelle Hutchison – No one has mentioned scouts. And many Dutch publishers use scouts to find books from other countries. So couldn't other countries use more scouts to find the inverse?

Maarten Asscher – Other suggestions.

Jeannette Ringold – Oh, I just wanted to say that there are some publishers who trust me who sometimes just ask me what I think of things, and sometimes it's very informal, but it's...

Maarten Asscher – You don't consider it as a logical part of a translator's profession... Or you would like to?

Jeannette Ringold – It would be nice if it were. But it would have to be paid a little bit better than it is, because it just isn't paid sufficiently.

Maarten Asscher – I just wrote a reader's report myself about a Swiss novel, a 600-page novel, for an American publisher who is a friend, and it's very nice that he pays me 110 US dollars for it and I don't have to live by it, fortunately. But on that level, such work is impossible, I agree.

Antero Helasvuo – I think that the publishers in general, they think that the translators don't understand the publishing business. So they're very suspicious of translators' opinions about literature. So if you just make a suggestion they think, well, nobody in our house knows anything about this, so we never heard about this.

Maarten Asscher – What is your suggestion?

Antero Helasvuo – Well if they send scouts to book fairs and so on, they might try a translator sometimes. And I think there's some unfounded suspicion too, that they think translators are looking for their own ends in this business, and that they'd like to translate something that certainly wouldn't sell and so on.

Maarten Asscher – Thank you. Two more.

Wolfgang Hörner – I think I have a direct response because I once did a series of French novels and gave it into the hands of a translator, so I said okay, look what you want and we'll do it. We'll just try it. It didn't work out, but I think it was worth a try, you know, and it doesn't say anything. Every single translator is different and it might have worked out, as well. But I think it's very important to ask translators what they think about texts, because they know, they can read it really properly, they know what the language is about, they know the kind of different literature in the country. So I sometimes rely more on the translators than on other colleagues, who of course want to sell their books.

Maarten Asscher – Thank you. Alexei.

Alexei Siltala – Yes as a Finnish publisher I'm obliged to Antero as a translator. We use, I use, reader's reports occasionally, but in our company we also have scouts in Italy, France, Germany, United States, in England, so sometimes you feel

overwhelmed actually, with reports and information, and sometimes it may happen as Antero pointed out, that there is a translator presenting a wonderful book, but you are either overwhelmed with all the books already, or you feel uncomfortable, at least I feel very uncomfortable, to consider publishing a book that I don't read a word of myself. That's troublesome to me, although sometimes you just have to go for it.

Maarten Asscher – How would you otherwise ever publish a Chinese novel.

Alexei Siltala – Exactly. How do you know I don't read Chinese?

Maarten Asscher – We discussed that late last night, but evidently you were forgetful already.

Alexei Siltala – But I would answer that it's not suspicion, that much, it's those two words: either you have too much information or you are reluctant to publish something you don't understand, actually.

Maarten Asscher – Maarten Valken.

Maarten Valken – What I can say is how we are working, our practice, and maybe it's a partial solution and it probably should be more, is adding sample translations to the material which we make in English about books. It happens more and more that I work together with translators in different countries, that they then give their report on the book also, and so we send the material let's say in combination to different publishers. That seems to be working, in Germany, in France. It very much depends until now on the translators, how active they are themselves, but I think I should do more in that direction also. And maybe it would make you less suspicious, if in that way you get a combination of translated text and different opinions.

Maarten Asscher – And perhaps, Maarten, would it be possible for the Foundation to facilitate a network of translators working in different countries from Dutch into a foreign language, so that they could exchange more easily their opinions, or their signals or their reading reports or reading experiences?

Maarten Valken – I think we can, we are in a position anyway to combine it because we have a Translators' House here where every month we have different translators from different countries and that's already a meeting point where they discuss books.

Maarten Asscher – Does the Translators' House have its own website, where translators can go and have discussions?

Maarten Valken – Yes, we could easily expand into that direction, I think.

Toby Eady – There's nothing like that in England at all. I want to say two things, one is that I've been discussing in China and with the Holtzbrinck group setting up scholarships for translators from English and German and Chinese vice versa, and equally that young editors be given scholarships to work in Chinese publishing houses and vice versa, not that they all, once they learn English in China, go and work for Goldman Sachs. I've just been in China and one of the things I've been asked to do there was... A friend of mine is Harold Pinter's agent and when he won the Nobel

Prize, she was inundated with Chinese offers to publish his books. So I said, well just hold on, ask to see who's going to translate him first before you commit to anything and I will take a member of your staff to China and he or she can meet the Chinese top translators in drama. Out of this evolved something which I picked up from something that you've all been saying, which is that very intelligently, what they're trying to do is a festival of Pinter's plays between China and England in two years' time. Out of it, Howard Gooding said something really interesting, he said: I don't want to commit to a translation, because when we go into it the actors will find the right language. I'd never thought of this. And so every translation in every language is slightly different, to suit that country. So that is what we're actually looking for, to combine a production of say three of his plays in China and then to do the translations against that and evolve them, instead of having what could be tone deaf Pinter translations just gathering dust in university libraries. It was a very educational experience for me and I learned a lot about translation in China and vice versa.

Eve-Marie Lund – I don't think that is just in China, because I have done many plays, radio plays and theatre plays, and I always sit in at the first readings and I come in during rehearsals, because they are changing the texts the whole time. It's a work in progress.

Maarten Asscher – Before we have to close, there is room for one more *cri de coeur* question or comment. Who?

Marjon van Royen – Yes.

Maarten Asscher – I counted on you.

Marjon van Royen – You come from big countries. Well, you come from a dominant language. Is it really true that English speakers and American speakers (because that's who are at the table) are not interested in the little obscure languages coming from little obscure countries?

Dan Simon – Yes. They don't know they exist.

Marjon van Royen – Why?

Dan Simon – They're scared. The word fear came up once during this conference and Toby used it and you know there's a culture of fear right now. There's a bit of the culture of fear, Americans are aware of being hated around the world right now. There's a culture of fear and kind of introversion and of course it's not everyone, of course there are certainly some tens of thousands of people who would say the same sort of things that I'm saying and read other languages and speak other languages and travel, but the general trend right now is that they don't even... There's not the world. There's just all these places that we go on cruise ships and military excursions and do things to and somehow that's enlightening. And we're exporting democracy and you know it's insane. There's insanity.

Maarten Asscher – Mary.

Mary Mount – I think it's from my point of view much more practical. Working for a big conglomerate, which is quite a well-known name, particularly after the two big book fairs of the year, I just get inundated, like Alexei says, with finished copies of books in languages I can't read from around the world. Around my desk I'm ashamed to say there's probably twenty books by different people that I haven't read, and I can't justify to my colleagues to have a report done on every one. And also those reports might not be very good, they might not tell me enough, so it's really to do with a way into these books. I think the Dutch foundation should be applauded beyond any other, I don't know any other country, and Maarten and Maria do a brilliant job of telling you what they think is good for you, and the books that have been mentioned today and yesterday I'm aware of because of their work. But otherwise I just cannot see, and it's pathetic of me probably, but I cannot see how I find a way in. Unless they're huge bestsellers or unless you have a friend you can trust or a translator who you know, or... It's just a practical thing I think, often.

Dan Simon – But it goes without saying, Marjon, that everybody here, the whole trend of the conversation, is that we take very seriously that we have a responsibility to go against that trend. And we try to.

Toby Eady – I just wanted to say, I totally support your anger.

Marjon van Royen – But it's not just about the Dutch. There are Iraqi writers or Vietnamese writers. I don't care.

Toby Eady – Can I just say something? One of the ways to get through the problems of translation, which I've seen and am now becoming involved in, in Japan, Korea and China, is the use of the manga to take western culture. Because it goes over many of the hurdles or steeplechase jumps of translation. It's much simpler and much less expensive. And it's getting to a market to tell a foreign story in a way that people accept. What you've been talking about, we live in a much more visual age, where book sales are diminishing, is this is forty percent of the books, forty percent of what is sold in Japan, Korea and China are mangas, illustrated books. And this gets through many of the barriers of translation.

Dan Simon – And one of the things we all look at closely, by the way, is something that's been translated anywhere. So actually what Xinran said is true, France does have a unique role and very often we'll look at something from some language and say well, we can't read it, oh but there's a French edition, we can read that. But if a book is translated in a few markets, publishers take it with more seriousness as that begins.

Maarten Asscher – Thanks. A very last comment from you? Yes please.

Xinran – Thank you. I liked the last question very much, but I think it's very important that we have to understand why and then try to improve it, either like the Dutch Production and Translation Foundation, I think what you're doing is wonderful, we should go on, I'd like to volunteer for this, you know, for Chinese translators or publishers to listen to these voices. Another thing I think is very important is that reading is a part of our daily life, has become part of daily life, like the three meals we have every day. This is why English speakers don't care about small languages, just

like you like Chinese food but you can't take it every day. After two or three days you fill up or you say this does not suit my stomach. So I think reading foreign languages is a fresh taste. So I don't expect English speakers to take that as their daily meal. So they need like a fresh Chinese takeaway or a French restaurant or wonderful Italian food (I have to say this to the Italians).

Maarten Asscher – I would like to set one thing right about the Netherlands. I don't want to become masochistic at the end of this wonderful conference, but I must confess that receptive though we are, and we are very curious for what happens in the rest of the world, but it is honest to say that the literature or non-fiction culture from Estonia or Korea or Lebanon, is suffering in the Dutch market as well from a considerable lack of interest and it requires enormous persistence on the part of translators and editors and publishers and agents to get these works published in Dutch translation. So let's not picture The Netherlands as a sort of paradise where culture flourishes in all its manifestations and cultures from all over the world. Having set that straight, I would like to thank our three speakers this morning for their wonderful contribution and their share in the discussion we have been having. There is someone I would like to thank in a very special way and I would like your applause for her because she has made wonderful drawings the first part of the morning and then she has made wonderful pictures of all of you and that is Asha. Thanks for your attentive presence and your silent contribution. Then that leaves me to close this conference. I promised you that there would be no conclusions and I won't draw any, but I think we have identified the grain and the grain is more or less as follows. It is: big countries are more important than small countries. The grain is: the name of the author sounds much too unfamiliar. The grain is: last year we already did a book on Mexico. The grain is: we will certainly face a libel suit over this. The grain is: I don't believe in subsidised books. The grain is: the book is interesting but unfortunately it doesn't have a protagonist with whom the reader can identify emotionally. The grain is: translations do not work in our country. The grain is: a book about punctuation will never sell. The grain is: can't you fictionalise this book more? That is the grain we are up against and the grain we should go against. Jan Mets said yesterday: good publishing is by definition against the grain. And he has unmasked the organisers of this conference of course by saying that, but still he is right, and Andrew Franklin in a different vein said: against the grain means, if there is a rule we should test it by trying to break it. And we can test it, this rule, these rules, we can break them by, well, joining the right movement, the movement that supports a promising book, a promising author, an enthusiastic translator etc. And that may be sometimes unrealistic and it may sound like a dream. But let it then be the dream that Marjon van Royen spoke about yesterday when she mentioned the flea dreaming of owning a dog. And I would suggest that we will join forces after this conference in continuing to publish against the grain and one day we may all be fleas owning a dog instead of the other way around. Thank you very much.