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Papercuts: The Horizons of Minor Publishing

Nick Thoburn and Nick Thurston

This chapter is the beginning of an experimental response to the liberal conceptualisation of publishing culture and its imago, print culture, directed as they are to the social reproduction of a bourgeoisie notion of the republic of letters. Together, we are starting an open-ended editorial project that calls for, and listens to, practices that respond to conditions of social crisis, struggle and upheaval by publishing differently. This kind of different publishing works against prescription and definition, and so refuses to be identified as a “field” in any academic sense, let alone as a stable object of study. Approaching it instead as a problem space (in the sense recently re-fashioned by Celia Lury, 2021) we are calling it *minor publishing*.¹ Our editorial project is to be one of encounter, dialogue, sharing, archiving, and new publishing. It will be based on immersion, and sprung by a re-imagining of the function of editorship as a mode of caring praxis (of practice and theory entwined).² As our beginning, this chapter offers no close reading of specific examples, wishing to set aside questions of exemplarity, for now, so we can figure this problem space more clearly. What follows is a first attempt at collaboratively sketching the *what?*, *how?*, and *why?* ideas that animate our problem space: What is minor publishing? How does it become so? Why does minor publishing matter, in every sense of that last word?

Our sketch tangles up those three simplifying interrogators (what, how, why) through four short sections. Indeed, metaphors of entanglement, enmeshment and co-effective dependencies are crucial to any critical description of minor publishing; and that often-maligned method – critical description – is guiding our initial approach to this problem space for a pair of reasons. First, it foregrounds our main methodological challenge, how to pay attention. How can we *attend to* the way publishing practices perform and complicate their politics rather than simply convey a political message or discuss a political topic?³ Which is also to ask, in the case of minor publishing, how does a publishing act stay true to its condition of crisis? Stock critical approaches bypass that first challenge and so do not look at the ground beneath their feet for long enough to respond to the second issue, that of proximity. Our methodological and emotional stance in this new project has a messy

¹ For Lury, a problem “*becomes* a problem as it is investigated”, and is itself in becoming, a methodological space in deformation. As to its research field, it “is not given in advance of a problem, but is rather ever forming and transforming across a problem space” (2021, 2-3, 5). As to the phrase *minor publishing*, this chapter identifies and develops a number of sources, but it draws most directly from Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of minor literature, while displacing the literary in their formulation to open out to the expanded terrain of publishing-as-such. For an extended discussion of minor politics, see Thoburn (2003).

² For an extended discussion of the “editor function” in Foucauldian terms, and its radical inventiveness, see Foley (2021).

³ For a fuller defence of critical description, see Dworkin (2020).

relationship with-and-against traditions of objective distancing, lucky as we both are to have been trained and employed as scholars, and intent as we are on theorising our problem space to some degree.

So, we begin our experiment from a tricky place, one of care and remove. We hope to stay alert to the bind between witnessing and with-nessing, and commit to pushing our bigger project to engage directly with the imbalanced relationship between academic study and the wider world through open-form models of editorship and sharing.⁴ We aim to develop theoretical and practical resources that create a space or crack or “cut” in academic culture for minor publishing to become legible on its own terms to transdisciplinary conversations about publishing as a praxis.

This, our first attempt at critically describing minor publishing as a problem space, lurches a little between voices, between abstraction and plainspeak, between repetition and tumbling metaphors, and at points between critique and polemic. We have kept the grain of these flaws throughout the chapter in part because this is just the beginning of a new experiment – one that deserves more time and scope – and in part because we believe there are things at stake in the project which we do not yet understand. More precisely put, we believe there are radically significant modes of publishing emerging from the extra-cultural spaces of life, in the wilds of known culture, in what Deleuze and Guattari called the “cramped space” of life, wherein scholarly practices of critique still lack the ideas and vulnerability to think and feel and act *with* the radicality at stake (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, 17). The flaws and open-endedness in this chapter are our way – as editors who want to learn, though doing and thinking – of “staying with the trouble”, as Donna Haraway famously put it (Haraway, 2016).

In a 2021 interview about *All Incomplete*, a co-authored follow-up to their hugely influential essay collection *The Undercommons*, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten spoke about their shared desire to “stay afloat and adrift in this common wind”, to write a “peripatetic book of influences and circumstances, and sharedness.” (Harney and Moten, 2021) Our sketch of minor publishing sails in and out of that tailwind, in attitude and theory. It directly takes up Harney and Moten’s understanding of the undercommons as a fugitive form of social energy that coalesces performatively around shared rebellious praxis – a social energy that never fixes a whole-ness like a society or people, and so is constitutively open, broken and infinite, and always performed – never pinned-down enough to be simply stated (Harney and Moten, 2013). We borrow this notion of fugitive social energy as a lever for unthinking the common-sense bind between publishing and public-ness in our problem space, to ask what other kinds of sharing might befit a “counterpublic sphere” (Warner, 2002)

⁴ The notion of “wit(h)nesing” was first distilled by Bracha Ettinger, as part of a psychoanalytic approach to the study of visual cultures, but has been taken up in a number of discourses connected to new materialist ideas about inter-effective relationships. See Ettinger (2005: 69).

that does not want to be assimilated. In doing so, we skip too quickly, per our flaws, from the root of fugitivity in and as Black thought to a broader socio-political category of “the minor”. We do so in this beginning only to show how the undercommons has enabled us to gather concepts of publishability, horizontality, major-minor politics, cutting, and membranes, to better think with and about the political energy that charges our problem space.⁵

1. Publishability

Every publication is a necessary yet inadequate stand-in for the bigger, longer, more disparate enmeshment of processes, people, affects, resources, mediums, and contexts of production and reception, from which it emerges and through which it develops a social life. That fuller mesh is what we call *publishing*. It has various flows of input and output moving through one another, at various times and tempos, which create the specific enmeshment by which we recognise each publishing act as distinctive. Once in the world as an editioned thing, the publication that stands-in for the act develops its own social life, continuing to be transformed and transformative. Or, rather, each copy in the edition begins its own open-ended social life, such that every edition has many lives. This multiplies and twists together the people, conditions and futures enmeshed by the overall *publishing act*.⁶

The publication is a catchall term for “the published”, itself most often represented by a reductive archetype, The Book.⁷ Whereas publishing inherently resists fixity, the publication sells a false impression of things being fixed, offering a composed pause, reproducible in some degree of unitary form. The publication is the historically-privileged output of publishing and oftentimes its primary objective, hence it being necessary; but it is never the sum total of the inputs or outputs that constitute an act of publishing, hence it being an inadequate index. Nor can the published thing be more than one stray coordinate in any attempt to map the limits of what could be published in any particular context – by definition, no publication can exhaust publishing. All the publications in the world are evidence of what has been published,

⁵ *The Undercommons* makes a radical attempt to collaboratively think about studentship, debt, enslavement, and an intellectual commons that exists outside the academy. By remaining of and for this outside (or, *minor*), the undercommons brings into question the common-sense dominant (or, *major*) status of the inside, including academia. In the context of our study, the undercommons offers two keys: (1) a model of the sociality, or social energy, that values the minor position (the “we” in and of crisis) per its own cultural terms; and (2) it surfaces the disconnect between bourgeois notions of public-ness and a deeper politics of the commons, including the unquestioned attachment of publishing to the former (as a “making public”) and the underdiscussed hierarchical tiers of the latter (as having an above and below, like the decks of a ship).

⁶ In this chapter, we use the phrase “publishing act” (*act-ion*) to name the enmeshment of process, practices, resources, people and institutions that inter-effectively co-work to conceive, produce, reproduce, distribute, and promote attention towards an editioned thing. A publishing act can be experienced in different ways, and transformed as such, but it evokes the histories, materials and literacies we associate with print and post-print culture.

⁷ For discussion of the archetype of “The Book”, through Christian, Enlightenment, and colonial articulations, see Thoburn (2016, 112-122).

not everything that could have been published, let alone what could be published. *Publish* derives from the Latin *publicare* (as in, to make public) via the middle English *publicen* (as in, to get rid of, to let go of), describing an active shift, or act of shifting, from the private to the public. If we understand its active form, *publishing*, to signify more than just its commercial namesake, and instead recognise that it names the many and complex processes of “making public” strongly associated with print and post-print culture (including the *counter*- and *anti*-publics of small press and emancipatory publishing, from Martin Luther’s ninety-five theses of 1517 to Kathy Acker’s self-financed novel *Great Expectations*, 1982), then *publishability* would be the general condition for all publications that develop social lives, whether those publications are products, tokens, file-shares or anything else.⁸ The notion of publishability connects individual instances of publishing to the history of what has been published, tethering the specific to general conditions, and framing the possible.

In a pair of extraordinary essays, Rachel Malik devised and applied a framework for theorising the condition of publishability as the operative logic of publishing-as-such. She spatialised her framework through the metaphor of a horizon – a metaphor with 360-degrees of scope plus an infinite and relative regress. Every horizon is a limit or boundary but also a spectrum of possibilities, something or somewhere we are always moving towards but will never reach. Malik called this framework “the horizons of the publishable”. (Malik, 2008, 709)

Here is Malik in the second of those essays, analysing the impact of the Victorian novel on Western literary industries:

The publishable is importantly category-specific. ...[T]here is no book as such, only types or categories of book – even at the highest levels of abstraction. The publishable and its horizons, as I define them, are embedded in this understanding of the book as always being an instance of a type or category. (Malik, 2008, 719)

By virtue of being category-specific, the “horizons of the publishable” are always many, plural, and overlapping, variegating the general condition of publishability. To attend to the horizon of any one type of publishing-as-such, we have to pay attention to the overlap between categories, to *the horizons* and the discursive, social, economic and political contexts in which they co-operate:

⁸ For example, the awkward relationship that many literary cultures have to self-publishing, as decried through the concept of “vanity publishing”, blinds literary-critical discussion to the creatively-critical ways in which “the self” can be put at stake through radical acts of self-publishing. For a fuller discussion of this, see Thurston (2020).

Within any particular horizon, the publishable encompasses what is most likely to be produced and what is least likely: from the highly probable to the barely possible. It likewise shapes reading and interpretative possibilities in equivalently graduated contingency. The multiple horizons of the publishable are complexly historical where history is conceived as change and continuity. (Malik, 2008, 721)

To meaningfully ask, What can be made and experienced in sharable forms from the “cramped space” of life?, we have to figure out what is and is not unique about minor publishing as a type of publishing-as-such. In theorising this typology we meet the same initial barrier time and again, that of vocabulary, or more precisely, what the language we use to talk about publishing pulls our discussions to and from. There are a host of imperfect words used to talk about cultures of sharing that are similar to what we are calling minor publishing, like “coterie” and “DIY”. Malik’s framework is so useful in part because it explains those confusing similarities as the overlaps between types – certain things that certain categories of publishing-as-such have in common, as acts of publishing, given the circumstances they come from and to, plus the reasons they are made and received – or shows the descriptors to be *categorically different in type* – describing different aspects of potentially the same thing.

Common qualities do not preclude differences. Learning to compare the overlaps is key to that first methodological challenge introduced earlier, how to pay attention. Labels with confusing and historically-specific connotations are often used to describe what we are calling minor publishing. Some signal a general intent, like “radical” or “experimental”; as opposed, by intention, to norms, like the “mainstream” or “generic”. Others attach intent to a specific project, like “anti-racist” or “feminist”; as opposed, by intention, to normativities, like “white supremacy” or “patriarchy”. Yet others prove popular because they blur the two, including, most obviously, “avant-garde”.⁹ Any number of these are sometimes used inter-changeably, as if synonymous, when actually they muddle together a description of attitude or spirit with relative value claims about a history of impact. These shorthand labels borrowed from other discourses lack a comparative framework specific to publishing – they pay attention to a limited range of aspects, and none of them attend to publishing qua publishing.

Malik’s framework of publishability allows us to spot the similarities and split the differences between types of publishing acts, rather than work backwards from our valuations about the political or historical impact of particular publications or publishers. Yes, that impact is part of the mesh; but again, publishing is more than its outputs. A publishing act could be both minor and radical because the former

⁹ For example, see *New Literary History* 41:4, John Hopkins University Press, 2010, a special issue dedicated to the legacy of avant-gardism in cultural criticism.

describes its categorical identity in terms of publishing-as-such and the latter describes its historical impact beyond its category status. It is our contention that minor publishing can only be adequately thought, in its full-ness, as a type of publishing act that reflexively challenges the very condition of publishability, not for reflexivity's sake but because the horizons of the publishable are always operatively suppressed by those with the power to reinforce social order. Minor publishing cuts away at traditions which reproduce given social conditions, including the triad publishing-publication-public. Minor publishing pulls against its tether to publishing-as-such, with a social energy we can best describe, for now, as *anti-publishing*.

2. Minor

The sociality of minor publishing is problematic in ways that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's work on Franz Kafka, and Deleuze's work on the cinematographic image, can help us sketch out, via their casting of the major-minor distinction. Minor publishing does not have its source in self-identical individuals or collectives. Quite the opposite, its conditions and qualities reside in the social relations that *cleave through* and *pull apart* any particular individual or collective. We can understand this by comparing the social experience of the "major" to the "minor". The major or majority describes a system of identities that are constituted in and nurtured by social relations, by the self-bolstering security that class, gender, race, sexuality, physical ability, citizenship, age, language, and so forth, confer upon those who inhabit the privileged position in these social configurations. There is a fit between major identity and the social that, paradoxically, gives major identity an autonomy from the social. Insofar as social relations serve to facilitate and bolster major identities, the social appears at a remove, as an inconsequential background for the free play of associating individuals. Hence, Deleuze and Guattari write of the major condition that, "the individual concern (familial, marital, and so on) joins with other no-less individual concerns, the social milieu serving as a mere environment or a background". (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, 17)

A central precedent for Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of the minor is Karl Marx's concept of the proletariat – the impossible, wrenching condition of the class of "radical chains", the "class which is the dissolution of all classes". (Marx, 1975, 256) Marx's envisioning of a class for whom identity is structurally impossible is key to the distinction we carry forward from Deleuze. Compared to major identity, the relation between the individual and the social takes a rather different form in the proletarian or minor condition. Minorities are not defined by the smallness of their numerical size; on the contrary, they are numerically the world's *majority*.¹⁰ Minorities are those

¹⁰ The minor condition is structured, in several senses, by what we are calling a *perversity of scale*: small in reach, limit-less in outlook; massive in quantity, tiny in power; cramped in the immediate, revolutionary in potential. This will be addressed as a central problem in our coming project. As to the problem of number, we are cognisant of the decolonial move to substitute the term *global majority* for minority, as a statement of fact about global population, where *whites* are the clear minority, and as a

who are positioned unfavourably in relation to those privileged major poles of class, gender, race, and so on, such that social relations no longer facilitate coherent and autonomous identity. The social milieu ceases to be mere background and instead floods individual experience, rendering identity unstable or impossible, as life becomes a tangle of conflicting imperatives and constraints without a self-coherent centre of identity. It is the condition of “cramped space”, where “the private affair merges with the social – or political – immediate” (Deleuze, 1989, 218).

This minor experience, not the major, is the properly political condition. Unlike the more or less inconsequential “individual concerns” of major politics – where no political intrigue is “specifically indispensable or absolutely necessary but all become as one in a large space” – cramped space “forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics”. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, 17) Without an autonomous identity, even the most personal, intimate situation is comprised of social relations and experienced as such. What can be expressed from and of this situation is not the uninterrupted outlet of the autonomous self, but rather a fraught diffraction of experience of self-hood displaced through social relations. Minor expression intentionally over-stretches or intensifies this displacement through a process of diffraction.¹¹ The minor expresses a critical relationship to social conditions because it contradicts the supposed universality of autonomous self-hood and the background-foreground relationship between the private and the social that major life enjoys. In turn, minor publishing is different in type from all other categories of publishing-as-such because it never has an autonomously stable source subject at its root. It diffracts the “me” through the conditions of the “we”. This different publishing is a hyper-extension of the diffractive condition. It shares the experience of crisis.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the minor condition finds expression in literature and cinema, as “minor literature” and “minor cinema,” where it is extended, coloured, and complicated by the conditions and qualities of these cultural forms. Rather than feel any theoretical constraint to their philosophy, in developing the notion of minor publishing we want to re-orient their critical sensibility, guided by an understanding of fugitivity that Fred Moten elaborated in his later book, *Stolen Life*, as “a desire for and spirit of escape and transgression of the proper and the proposed. It’s a desire for the outside.” (Moten, 2018, 131) To explain why, our description needs more detail. Minor publishing emerges from a culture of limited resources, of making do. It is a non-professional publishing that makes use of any means possible. In this sense, it appears popular, as in common, as in *of common means*, as if it

rhetorical means of prompting analysis and evoking solidarities at a global scale. We engage the typology of the major and the minor in support of, and learning from, such decolonial moves, where the minor condition – as with Marx’s proletariat – is global in reach and impact and reproduced in constraint, as the antithesis and undoing of the majority subject or the privileged pole of liberal capitalism.

¹¹ For an excellent account of publishing as a diffractive process, see Adema (2021, 41–70).

represented a common position or taste. That appearance is deceptive. Minor publishing does not speak for or to a “people”. Rather, per Moten’s fugitivity, “it moves outside the intentions of the one who speaks and writes” (Moten, 2018, 131). It is impersonal. As is true of the minor position more generally, it cleaves any apparent unity of a people. For minor publishing, recalling Deleuze, “the people are missing” (Deleuze, 1989, 216), and will remain so. It cannot be the source nor the consequence of expression.

The minor condition – its fraught existence, ever pulled out of shape – is the wellspring for the *intensities* that minor publishing generates and bears. By never fixing or articulating a unity of people or purpose, minor publishing instead constitutes a space of action that relentlessly grapples with social relations. This is why minor publishing cannot be formalist, in the sense of introverted, or primarily interested in the form of its own performance merely for form’s sake. It is extrovert, it brings into relation, it opens out, it multiplies; but it does not fix anything. The publishing act turns minor experience outwards, generating forms of uncontrollable and unstable contact with the world. It multiplies the instability, spreads the crisis. Minor publishing is an eruption of and from the position where life is flooded by the social milieu – an eruption somehow rendered in a format that extends (in the sense of, shares and multiplies) the diffraction of subjectivity caused by that flood.

The injustices of racialisation, class, gender, climate crisis, etc, all in concert as an ambient pressure, overbear on form and expression and action. When shared – as a coalescent intensity, energised by composition, reproduction, distribution and presentation – minor publishing cannot create links; rather, it combusts in the social circumstances of its reception, it lets loose. It has the magnetic power of pulling attention to a shared space – at the epicentre of which is the publication it nominates – but only so as to diffract all of the people, ideas and relationships that underwrite the attention it receives. It dismantles the seeming neutrality of its own media forms because publications are an accessory to, even apparatus of, the social conditions that reproduce major life. It refuses, troubles, destroys stable forms (The Book), conflict-cleansed expressions (communication) and the comfort of distracted reading positions (consumption). It traverses and colours the people, resources and institutions it mis-uses. It negates neutrality, showing no regard for interpretation. In the guise of publications, minor publishing channels the flood, breaking “the public” rather than making it, hence its status as an anti-publishing. *Immediacy* is everything; not as a tempo, per se, but as a space in which direct contact can be had, without barrier. It is a *medium* the political spreads into, a medium for identities that are structurally impossible.¹²

¹² “The Latin adjective *medius* has roots in the Sanskrit *madhya* and the Greek *mesos*, all three terms meaning something like “in the midst” or “in the middle.” One could be in the midst or middle of any number of things, some quite concrete – the distance from here to there – and others more abstract. ... “Medium” approaches a recognizably modern sense when, in addition to being a place where ideas or affects can be brought forth, it becomes a way of bringing them forth” (Kafka, 2014, 626).

3. Murmur

This flood has voices – affective voices. The impersonal murmur that Moten attributes to the undercommons rings with an echo of Maurice Blanchot's "infinite conversation", a space and discourse for the language of the political, the "other word" or murmur of the outside (Blanchot, 1992).¹³ Blanchot's ideas of the murmur and the outside are derived from his earlier argument that modern literature performs its politicality through a refusal of transparent communication.¹⁴ His later foray into minor publishing put those ideas to practice in *Comité*, the communist magazine he co-published in October 1968, his editorship of which was also shaped by Marx's vision of the proletariat's non-identity.¹⁵ In its one and only issue, Blanchot anonymously wrote that, "Communism is what excludes (and excludes itself from) every already constituted community," and must find communicative forms adequate to this relation to the outside, to rupture. (Blanchot, 2010, 93) *Comité* was to "strive to bring about the rupture", and to do so "in a *mode* of rupture; hence the necessity of breaking with the traditional habits and privileges of writing" (Blanchot, 2010, 85) – and of publishing:

[E]verything that disturbs, calls, threatens, and finally questions without expecting an answer, without resting in certainty, never will we enclose it in a book, which, even when open, tends toward closure, a refined form of oppression. ... No more books, never again a book, so long as we maintain our relation with the upheaval of the rupture. (Blanchot, 2010, 95)

What Blanchot here envisions is a counter-culture of ruptural publishing at work in the world through fragmentary forms, unfinished forms, forms that cannot be delimited from the world they participate in. These fragmentary forms are inseparable from struggle, conflict and upheaval – they are *minor* forms, in our terms, and their energy is *deforming*. As such, they bear rupture in, through, and with the acts by which they are shared – those anti-publishing acts that work against fixity. Blanchot:

Tracts, posters, bulletins, words of the streets, infinite words – it is not through a concern for effectiveness that they become imperative. Effective or not, they belong to the decision of the instant. They appear, and they disappear. They do not say everything; on the contrary, they ruin everything; they are outside of everything. ... Like words on the wall, they are written in insecurity,

¹³ For an expansive discussion of Blanchot's ideas about the language of the political, see Hart (2010, xxiv–xxix).

¹⁴ For a discussion of the philosophical throughlines in Blanchot's work, see Hart (2010, esp. 9-19).

¹⁵ *Comité* was the organ of the Student-Writer Action Committee, established and active in the French uprising of May 1968. Blanchot was one of its founders and leading lights. *Comité*'s short and fragmentary texts were authored anonymously, a key feature of its disorderly form.

received under threat; they carry the danger themselves and then pass with the passerby who transmits, loses, or forgets them. (Blanchot, 2010, 95)

This ruptural publishing – this “arrest of the book” – is an arrest of transparent or frictionless communication – that is, communication as the channel-cleansed transmission of order. Blanchot inverts this “order word” (*mot d’ordre*), to instead show us “disorderly words”, and demonstrate the potential mode for a disorderly publishing. (Blanchot, 2010, 95) Deleuze sets up the same opposition, later calling that rupture a *vacuum* or *break* in communication, a “vacuole of noncommunication”. (Deleuze, 1995, 175) For both of them, and us, non-communication’s minor status is pitted against the major form of communication-as-order. Orderly communication is efficient because it is cleansed not only of material interference but also of affect. Or, rather, it exercises its affective power to present itself as *affectless*, as the measured civic exchange of the public sphere, which operates over and against the minor to reproduce an inside-outside division. In the dominant cultures of publishing, this affectless model of exchange and consumption tries to subsume what Moten, like Blanchot, envisages as the murmur of the outside. Major publishing culture stays open to “unsafe ideas” so as to strip them of impassioned affect, of conflict, and, ultimately, to commodify them. Civic exchange scores a double victory by holding conflict in a shared community of dispassionate discourse, at once rendering such ideas powerless *and* consolidating its sense of its own liberalism, its pseudo-equality.

Dispassionate discourse is the realm of the rational, liberal and autonomous. It runs on a transactional model of communication, recuperated for public cohesion. Here, publishing culture is a bourgeoisie form of aesthetic expression that reinforces the autonomous major subject while also denigrating or appropriating or flat excluding the minor experience and non-identity. The affective regime – of apparent affectlessness – aestheticises political experience, denying its own function as a medium of political experience. Quite what a counter-aesthetic could be is another problem space, one approached by Sianne Ngai’s brilliant work on *minor affects*, an aesthetic theory of the ubiquitous, everyday emotional field of life under high capitalism.¹⁶ Ngai turns away from those prized affects of the modern aesthetic – the sublime, the beautiful, and their like – all of which celebrate a transcendental ideal of autonomy – to instead pay attention to the unideal, which she playfully calls “ugly feelings” (Ngai, 2005) – envy, irritation, paranoia, disgust, boredom, and the sort. Unlike Ngai, we are not developing an aesthetic theory; but her provocation draws out the crucial role of affectivity in any major-minor distinction. She shows how the ubiquitous and minor can summon an intensity that exceeds the acceptable norms of our social conditions,

¹⁶ This work is spread across three books to date, but framed most relevantly to our discussions in Ngai (2012).

at the perverse scale that is unique to the minor (small in size but related to everything).

This is why we keep talking about experience as flooded, sharing as multiplying, and anti-publishing as diffractive. The *excessive affectivity* of minor expression helps us to re-cast the experience of ruptural publishing as something relentlessly affective, by which everything matters (all material forms and gestures are at play and at stake) in a spirit of *too much*, as too abrasive for a stable public and its preferred forms. It generates friction, charged by fugitive energy – “the call for and from disorder”, as Moten and Harney put it. (Harney and Moten, 2013, 133) Minor publishing is a practice of sharing those “charms of sense” that so displeased Kant in his formulation of the modern aesthetic and its bourgeois subject and public. The intensities of minor publishing are *affective intensities*.¹⁷ It invites all those who experience it into a destabilizing grapple with the material forms, processes, qualities and relationships it “makes public”. Rather than *be* interpreted, its intent is to implicate everything and everyone it connects in the social struggle it channels. The “space” created by ruptural or anti-publishing is a remove in political landscape. This remove is magnetic and diffractive, pulling strangers to the politics of the impossible rather than pulling them together into some unity. This is the material and affective basin of minor publishing, for all those involved in its web of production, reproduction and reception.

4. Cuts

We need to tread carefully here. “Ugly” does not equate to good, nor bad; minor affects are messy, real, and not idealised according to those moral standards which are major by definition. Part of the methodological challenge for our project is to find the best ways to appreciate the “ugly”, or, what might be thought beyond aesthetics as the un-idealised. Whatever else that might involve, it will always require us to let go of any ideals we are measuring minor publishing against – be they aesthetic, moral or political – to “not proceed by addition, but by subtraction, by amputation”, as Deleuze says. (Deleuze, 1993, 204) If the core or ideal of frictionless communication is the autonomous expressive subject, then our “ugly” appreciation needs to find the best way of attending to the affectively impersonal, the affectivity of the murmur, in all its qualitative differences and variations. For Moten as Blanchot, this murmur is a constant and polyvocal noise, a collective exchange that does not separate what is said from the act of saying and cannot be dissected to trace exactly who said what. Minor publishing, as an expression from and of this experience, makes no clear separation (nor ethical or aesthetic prioritisation) between communication and politics, between ideas and affect, between thought and action. The murmur is the

¹⁷ As David Lloyd (2018, 74) writes, the Kantian aesthetic is “the organization of the senses toward an increasing *distance* from the object”, wherein the “Subject without properties” of the bourgeois public sphere is established in contradistinction to racialized and classed others who *suffer* the “charms of sense”, in Kant’s phrase.

voice, or resonant form, of the fundamental energy of the minor, and can never be “proper speech”. In cramped space, there is no unproblematic identity to be inhabited, let alone to be traced back to. For all that is minor, the “social milieu” presents boundaries or impasses rather than enabling possibilities or clear options. Politics thus becomes a process of “tracing a path between impossibilities”, in Deleuze’s words (Deleuze, 1995, 133) – or better, of tracing a path amidst, with, and against impossibilities.

This is not to say that these domains and practices are collapsed into one – thought does not become action, nor is thought diminished in favour of action – but any form, process, or relation structured by minor publishing is provoked, comprised of, and expresses, the maelstrom of political becoming. Anti-publishing *becomes* minor by staying relentlessly open, in form, in duration, in voice – fundamentally open, as a remove – such that the reach of minor publishing may be small, its focus often particular, but its plane of composition is *everything*, is *the world*, the totality of conditions, at scales both abstract and concrete. The affective intensities of minor publishing are the sharable qualities of the encounter between social relations and publishing forms, a multiplication of the “path between impossibilities”. This is how the too-much-ness *matters*. Fragments of everything, and of the overturning of everything, charge minor publishing’s every concern, its excessive affectivity, its disregard for legitimacy, and its inherently utopian or revolutionary quality. The major notion of an autonomous individual communicating themselves to, and being confirmed by, a public of other autonomous individuals, for all its domination and power, is by comparison anaemic and dull, capable only of reproducing social conditions that are without *life*, are cleansed of politics and its risks.

The condensing of excessive affectivity into intensities through minor publishing acts – the affects of joy, pain, horror, despair, rage, and so forth, that course through the minor political – is, therefore, set against the culture of major life constantly *re-printed* on the social imaginary in what Marshall McLuhan famously dubbed “the Gutenberg Galaxy” (McLuhan, 1962).¹⁸ Through a disregard for publishing-as-such, minor publishing pushes the horizons of the publishable in politically unique directions, towards limitless rupture. Here, the prefix “anti-” names an act of dismantling, and the stem “publishing” an act of sharing. The gesture of this anti-publishing is the *cut*. Minor publishing uses different modes of sharing (different media, editioning principles, circulation tactics, and so forth) for different acts of cutting. We call these acts *papercuts* – something diminutive yet painful, caused by mishandling – because of the inherently perverse scale of minor publishing – that its operations, visibility, even impacts, might be small in size, but everything is always at

¹⁸ Although hugely influential across debates about typography, book history, media studies and cultural studies, McLuhan’s notion of the “Gutenberg Galaxy” has been roundly criticised in recent discussions about print culture and fixity, most notably in the expanded field of bibliography. For example, see Kirschenbaum (2008, 56-58).

stake across its plane of composition, all the time. As Karen Barad puts it, “cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility.” (Barad et al., 2012, 52)

5. Membranes

This chapter is itself an act of cutting. It is a cut into book-historical debates and the many discourses that are epistemologically anchored by print and post-print cultural outlooks, from literary studies to information science. But these cuts into academic discourse, and the boundaries they might re-make, are of a different sort from papercuts, those minor publishing projects that our editorial project aims to think with. We have to take responsibility for our cutting in the sense proper to academic discourse, as professional writers of orderly words, in a process that Janneke Adema calls “iterative boundary-making”, in echo of Barad. (Adema, 2021, 38, 204) Adema’s brilliant work on re-thinking the value of the scholarly monograph sets out to deal with a conundrum similar to ours, to understand “how books can be shaped and bound in a way that doesn’t foreclose or demarcate them”. Her project demands she weigh the potential of what she can construct as knowledge against the open-ness of the field she wants to support:

The construction of what we perceive as stable knowledge objects serves certain goals, mostly to do with the establishment of authority, preservation (archiving), reputation building (stability as threshold), and commercialization (the stable object as a reproducible product). (Adema, 2021, 213)

Adema continues:

I want to shift attention to the issue of the cut; to the performative processes of the demarcation of scholarly knowledge, of the fixing we need to do at specific points during its communication. (Adema, 2021, 230)

What would this impetus, this inspiration, mean for us? If the potential of minor publishing need be understood as a horizon (an infinity in 360-degrees), and the affect of minor publishing is to open the floodgates and cut across life (to intend an eruption of minor experience that anti-publishing immediately channels, through the remove it creates), then it seems risky if not foolhardy to try describe it, let alone develop a research agenda around it. Our project might not demand a path between impossibilities, but the ground beneath our feet is unstable.

To re-cap, in the abstract: The minor publishing act creates a displaced channel for immediate contact between the private and social, enforced by cramped space and enabled by publishing forms. This coalesces in the channel, in mediation – in a fission between two anti- posed forms of sociality, the major means of publishing and minor experience of flooded life – as an affective intensity. The publication

magnetises attention to the channel, but the channel stays open and diffracts all that encounters it – all its inputs, its outputs and the attention it is paid. The channel is a remove in the major landscape formed by the publishing act. The publishing act is the endless eruptive release of pressure; and the publication is its privileged registration. The processes that keep the act going, keep it open – like distribution and contextualisation and collection – generate an infinite number of future registrations, extending the perverse scale of the minor (small in size but keeping everything at stake). Minor publishing acts implicate everything in their politics. They entangle and cut at the same time; and they keep at it, through a mix of processes and forms that we have come to distil in our preferred metaphor as *the membrane*.

Deleuze and Guattari write: “The ideal for a book would be to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority ..., on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations.” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 9) Whilst the result of that process matches our aim – forming a field for “exscription”, where “the spillage of meaning” can be encountered, as Jean-Luc Nancy tried to imagine (Nancy, 1990, 48) – for our purposes, “the book” and the “sheet of paper” are here misleading. They epitomise the imago of publishing, print culture, and would lock our outlook to major ideals about authorial subjectivity, liberal politics and dispassionate communication. But if we substitute “book” for *field* and “single page” for *open act* then we can borrow this envisioning to see our problem space as a *field of exteriority*. The substance of this field is the membrane, one laced through the fraught and permeable boundaries of cramped space, constantly changing inter-effectively with those boundaries by cutting back and forth, in Barad’s doubled-sense, all the time.

This membrane – this field of exteriority – is fragmented, folded, sometimes dense and compact, ready to burst open, ready to break down, but always constituted of the outside, with no pockets to protect the self-confirmation of individuals, groups or institutions. The membrane is a porous filter for historical forces, both capturing and tying knots of power, concepts, images, psychic and social joys, ugly affects, rituals, curses, terrors. It does all this in its own necessary yet inadequate, very material ways, made legible by its own *deforming* forms. It does not offer a mirror to the world or a “book of nature” (in the early moderns’ sense). It is not imitative of the world because it is not split from the world. Rather, it is pocked and shredded, full of holes, coagulations, peaks, plains, and ledges. It creates a displaced space for in-mediate contact with fugitive energy, diffracting and magnetising in equal turns. Our problem space is a field of exteriority, a displaced space for deforming forms (a remove in the major landscape) wherein fugitive energy keeps politics alive.

If our editorial project is to *be with* this membrane of minor publishing – to learn from it, and be lead astray from frictionless ideals by it – we intend to approach its *what*, *how*, and *why* in terms of the *problems* that it sets, abuts against, and deforms as it brings itself into shape, into anti-publishing acts. We want to make a vulnerable

approach to minor publishing – one that is affectively and politically open to being changed or re-directed by what we encounter. Our methodology is editorial rather than simply authorial because we want to create a complimentary space of publishing – through “iterative boundary-making” – one wherein the contexts for minor publishing can be approached as a set of *problems to be deformed*.

Minor publishing acts are not dreamt up by individuals or groups, or drawn from a ready stock of acts, processes, or forms. Yes, such projects use what is at hand, what courses through them, and do so with imagination; but they fashion these forms and relations into publishing acts by encountering them as problems, and refashioning them accordingly. In general, problems emerge from encounters in the world, encounters with objects, social forces, events, people, projects, impasses, crises – encounters that provoke thought. There is an “involuntarism” to this kind of thought. “Something in the world *forces us* to think”, writes Deleuze, where this something is “an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*”. (Deleuze, 1994, 139) The formation of a problem is the means to grasping the encounter, to grasp it in thought, to think otherwise. As Deleuze continues, the “strangeness” of an encounter “perplexes” thought, “awaken[s] thought from its natural stupor” and forces it “to pose a problem”. (Deleuze, 1994, 139, 140) The point, to be clear, is not to solve *ready-made* problems, “as if they were drawn out of ‘the city’s administrative filing cabinets,’ ... forc[ing] us to ‘solve’ them, leaving us only a thin margin of freedom”, but to *pose* problems, where posing or “stating the problem is not simply uncovering, *it is inventing*”.¹⁹ (Deleuze 1988, 15) The process is affectively charged. Provoking and unsettling as they are, problems emerge in “a range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering.” (Deleuze, 1994, 139)

If minor publishing emerges through intuiting and grappling with problems, which fashion them into forms and processes, then the anti-publishing act is experimental and faltering. Problems cleave to their fault-lines, tensions, complexities, and limits; the “encounter with limits” conditioning them from within, as Anna Kornbluh put it. (Kornbluh, 2019, 42) In no way are problems *resolved* in or by such anti-publishing acts, which are necessarily groping, incomplete, and open. It is the horizons of this process, of problem-grappling in the membrane of minor publishing, that our editorial project will try to attend to. And we want to do it by submitting to the involuntarism of the encounter, for our project be *deformed*. We want to find and share an upturned model of editing, its praxis premised on vulnerability, with-ness and cutting, one that *enables* papercuts.

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¹⁹ Here, Deleuze is quoting Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind* (1934).

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