

The concept of minority for the study of culture

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ABSTRACT

Critical tools are needed for navigating the concept of minority and its usefulness for the study of culture. This article reflects on the cultural and political purposes that are served when distinguishing between majorities and minorities, and the various historical and intellectual agendas that have shaped these social practices of classification. It begins by examining Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'minor literature' as an anti-sociological reworking of minor and minority, then turns its attention toward the policy-driven sociological traditions of the Chicago School, and how this has informed the contemporary construction of 'minorities' reflected in Australian immigration debates. As a third key paradigm in the study of the 'minor', the article revisits cultural studies' own embrace of the Popular as a site for political struggles over the meanings attached to 'major' and 'minor' social identities. Finally, we consider the range of transformative cultural practices addressed in this Minor Culture special issue, and reflect on the utility of the minor in holding together disparate political projects. There are a range of ways in which the minor might productively imagine or construct collective identities, in ways that do not anticipate, or even desire, majoritarian endings. It is argued that minoritised social categories do substantive political and cultural work, while acknowledging that numerical descriptions of minorities can hide as much as they reveal.

Dreading the minor and desiring the major

Usually in tonal narratives, we are led to desire affirmative, major-key states while dreading the minor. And we are likewise accustomed to defining structural stability in terms of the initial tonic and to expecting that dissonances will be resolved out for purposes of narrative closure. But what about a piece that mixes up these two mechanisms of desire and dread, when clinging to hope spells unstable illusion and certainty comes only with accepting dread? (McClary 1991, 141)

The shift to a minor scale in a Viennese classical music symphony tends to anticipate the restoration of a major scale. Even in gorgeous compositions woven through with natural minor (or Aeolian) lyrics, listeners expect that wobbly minor refrains – melancholic, unsettled, anxious – will segue into steady major statements. Using such contrasts between dissonance and consonance, composers can employ uncertainty in order to heighten subsequent feelings of peace and pleasure (see Rosen 2010, 9). The symbolic overtones of such major/minor schemas have been well documented, and feminist musicologist McClary notes that the major and minor modes are shot through with the gendering of social power relations. In many classical symphonies, the major can become the cipher for a dominant masculinity, such that deviations through the 'feminised' minor only serve to accentuate the power of musical majoritarianism. The minor is never opposed to the major as such; rather, the minor is a thing

to be dominated, and listeners are taught to enjoy this domination. The problem is not one of presence or absence, audibility or silence, recognition or misrecognition – or at least, not at first. Classical symphonies produce the minor primarily as a problem of desire: what do listeners want from the minor, if not a return to the major?

Composers discovered the complex relations between the minor and the major long before social scientists. Since the early 20th century, the contrast between majorities and minorities has provided a powerful model for social scientists interested in social diversity. The origins of ‘minority’ as a social label come not from musicology but from the politico-juridical concept of the dissenting minority¹ and from early twentieth-century studies of predominantly European migrants in North America. Language around ‘majorities’ and ‘minorities’ has come to pervade a range of political and institutional forums across many cultural contexts, but with a consistent emphasis on the power of numbers – too small, too large – to diagnose a range of social ills. However, efforts to define ‘minority’ in the terms of population sizes alone overlook the symbolic resonances of ‘minoritisation’ that the musical model audibly reveals. To call a thing minor implies that its essential quality is its difference from the major; that it has a more temporary existence than the major; that it relates to a plurality of minors only by way of a single major; and that its political futures can be defined in only three ways: integration, assimilation or elimination. The minor is only ever a problem to be resolved in and through the major.

Cultural studies has never been comfortable with the idea of minorities. Demographic numbers cannot explain the political violence that separates majoritarian social formations from the groups they seek to diminish or exclude. Liberal discourses on minority groups conceal *processes of minoritization*. When the category of minority is mobilized – minority group, minority interests, minority vote – political effects come to be mistaken for political causes. For this reason, the study of ‘minorities’ as an a priori frame of analysis is now associated with a horde of intellectual vices. These include the reduction of socially porous categories to fixed identities; the privileging of quantitative over qualitative methods; the trivialization of systemic structures of social oppression and exploitation under the sign of ‘minority issues’; and the naturalization of the nation state as the privileged frame for the study of culture. In intellectual climes energized by the critical power of hybridity and intersectionality, discourses on minorities would seem to contain far less descriptive power than once hoped and far more prescriptive force than usually admitted.

Critical tools are needed for creating viable pathways through the discourse on minorities as a feature of liberal democratic public culture. This special issue therefore addresses, without seeking exhaustive answers to, the following questions: What cultural and political purposes are served when distinguishing between majorities and minorities? To what extent do political struggles over social identities still depend on some minimal conception of either minority or minoritisation? Finally, can concepts such as the ‘popular’ successfully address the pitfalls of majoritarian thinking? The contributors to this special issue of *Continuum* take interest in efforts to make ‘minoritised’ social categories do substantive political work, while retaining the hard-won insight that numerical descriptions of minorities can hide as much as they reveal.

The title of this special issue and the conference that produced it, Minor Culture,² could have been borrowed from many different intellectual traditions. However, if a decisive break must be identified in the meanings attached to ‘minor’, it remains Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975, *Kafka* hereafter). This article therefore begins by examining Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of ‘minor literature’ as an anti-sociological reworking of minor and minority. The article then turns toward those policy-driven sociological traditions that Deleuze and Guattari sought to escape, focusing on the North American sociology of the Chicago School as an exemplar of a liberal integrationist approach to groups understood to be minorities. Along the way, the article notes the ways that social imaginaries around immigration ‘numbers’ participate in broader structures of white nationalism in the Australian context. As a third key paradigm in the study of minorities and minoritisation, the article revisits cultural studies’ own embrace of ‘the popular’ as a site for political struggles over the meanings attached to major and minor social identities. Finally, we consider the range of transformative cultural

practices addressed in this Minor Culture special issue, and reflect on the utility of the minor in holding together disparate political projects.

Minor literature and minor culture

One immediate appeal of *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* for cultural researchers is that it contains no cultural research. Deleuze and Guattari reject positivist accounts of 'minority groups' as stable and bounded cultural objects by pursuing threads of linguistic and narrative invention in the work of Franz Kafka, a German-speaking Prague-based author from an Ashkenazi Jewish family. As a framework for understanding minoritization outside sociological conventions for counting and sorting minorities, the three characteristics of minor literatures given in *Kafka* have proved influential in cultural studies. Firstly, a minor literature 'is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 16). This does not mean that literature written in one place and read in another is necessarily minor, for such movements can easily be territorialized as 'international literature' or 'world literature'. Minor literature must be capable of undoing the classifications and procedures that reproduce territorial borders and State-based geopolitical relations, including those premised on an alignment between identity and nationhood (e.g. 'the Australian novelist'). The second characteristic of minor literatures is that 'everything in them is political' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 17). The minor does not render society as a passive surface onto which protagonists' actions are inscribed. Rather, the social is shot through with conflicts and leakages that illuminate the contingent and open-ended dimensions of community.

Finally, minor literatures should not form canons anchored to Masters. 'Everything takes on a collective value', write Deleuze and Guattari, and 'what each author says individually already constitutes a common action, and what he or she says or does is necessarily political, even if others aren't in agreement' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 17). The minor is not the achievement of individual heroes: it describes a multiplicity. Minor literatures make visible all the collective forces required for liberalism to produce its myths of the autonomous Individual.³ For this reason, there is no moral hierarchy between minor and major works. The minor is a tendency or movement, and in its actual usage, every language 'remains a mixture, a schizophrenic *mélange*, a Harlequin costume in which very different functions of language and distinct centers of power are played out' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 26).

Minor literature can describe sites of experimentation that allow readers to think outside or beyond existing identity formations organised around the nation State. J. Neil Garcia suggests that 'the language of Minor Literature is *postrepresentational* in that it generates styles and possibilities for its users, in contrast to the referential mode of majoritarian literature, which "expresses" an essentialist image of humanity or identity'. (Garcia, 2017 emphasis in original) Minor literature does not present a transparent window onto the lifeworlds of social minorities. The desire for realism and transparency already belies a majoritarian position that claims for itself a ground of neutrality, balance and consensus. Discussing the possibilities of 'becoming-minor' in a reading of Philippine anglophone literature, Garcia suggests that 'Philippine literature in English cannot be simply representational or realistic. Realism is a signifying practice that presupposes a monocultural ground, upon which the "consensus" of representational fidelity can happen' (Garcia, 2017). The promotion of national literatures in the Philippines provides further insights into the spatial interplay between minoritarian and majoritarian movements. As a language minoritized by colonial powers, standardized Tagalog (or Filipino) has now been repurposed for post-colonial nation-building, but at the possible expense of local linguistic diversity across the Philippines. For Garcia, State-building anti-colonial framework is being used to assert the specificity of a national identity while erasing geographical, cultural and religious differences. A minor reading of literature in the Philippines cannot therefore take for granted the territorial unity of the nation state, nor can it rely solely on anti-colonial critique to guarantee the innocence of Tagalog as a privileged literary language.

The concept of minor literature provides an opportunity to question the alignment between social identities and textual forms. Nevertheless, as a brief foray into Garcia's commentary indicates, minor literatures must be understood in relation to the living politics of language itself, which may involve a range

of social, cultural and geographical movements. The epistemological ground of textual interpretation is always moving, not in the positivist sense that new facts are being added, but in the empiricist sense that relations between things are themselves constantly reinvented and reassembled.⁴ To prevent the minor from simply becoming a catch-all for texts that deviate from European literary conventions, some attention must be given to socialized practices of reading and writing. Deleuze and Guattari claimed to reject the demographic conception of minority tied to small and large population sizes, but such determinations are not absent from *Kafka* altogether; after all, the authors are happy to make use of the knowledge that, as an Ashkenazi Jew born in Prague, Franz Kafka did belong to a 'minority' in the sense given by older traditions in sociology. It is to one key exemplar of these traditions that we now turn.

The sociology of minorities

Although highly diverse in their purposes and projects, cultural studies scholars' engagements with Deleuze and Guattari's 'minor literature' reflect a broad discontent with notions of minority offered by sociology. Nevertheless, it is worth keeping in view the aims of the formative early 20th century sociologies of minorities, in order to better understand the strengths and limitations of 'minority' in contemporary cultural research. Chicago School sociologists from the 1910s to the 1930s discovered in minority and majority a powerful distinction for framing studies of predominantly European clusters of newly arrived migrants within North American cities.⁵ The language of majorities and minorities was linked closely to the growing traction of quantitative analysis in the social sciences, and the increasing reliance of the nation state on statistics to guide its practices of liberal governance (see Lingard 2011, 359). Within the 'melting pot' theory popularized by Robert Park and others in the Chicago School, minority groups could be located somewhere in a three-stage cycle – contact, accommodation, and assimilation – with the latter opening onto inter-marriage between groups and possibly complete 'amalgamation' (Steinberg 1981, 47). This 'race relations cycle' was in keeping with musical cycles, by creating space for the special tones of minority groups while positing an irreversible drive towards a melting pot finale.

Chicago School sociology was profoundly humanist in its accounts of minority groups. Whatever the differences between linguistic practices, kinship practices, political beliefs and so on, minority groups were supposed to share essential qualities with majority groups, such that the epiphenomena of cultural variation could eventually recede from significance (amalgamation). Early discourses on minorities were therefore founded on a commitment to egalitarianism as a telos belonging to and enabled by the national body-politic nation. This could also have the effect of trivializing political struggles over cultural practices, by presenting cultural identity as a mere residual difference between smaller groups and larger ones.

In the North American context, the concept of minority was expanded in the wake of the Second World War. Having spent two decades researching urban Jewish communities, Chicago-based urban sociologist Louis Wirth offered a structural account of minorities and majorities in 'The Problem with Minority Groups' (1945) that is worth quoting at length:

We may define a minority as a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination. The existence of a minority in a society implies the existence of a corresponding dominant group enjoying higher social status and greater privileges. Minority status carries with it the exclusion from full participation in the life of the society ... The members of minority groups are held in lower esteem and may even be objects of contempt, hatred, ridicule, and violence. (Wirth 1945, 348)

Wirth foregrounds the character of the political relation between groups, rather than a quantity of attributes perceived as more or less 'different' from the mainstream. Unlike some predecessors, Wirth also came to recognize that there are many parts of the South in the United States where 'the [African Americans] are the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants but, nevertheless, are an unmistakable minority in the sense that they are socially, politically, and economically subordinate.' (Wirth 1945, 349)

By the 1960s, minorities were used almost synonymously with 'African Americans'; but in the 1970s the term came to include a range of groups claiming 'unequal treatment and discrimination', partially

as result of social justice coalitions forged around the Civil Rights Movement (see Berbrier 2002). The subsequent dissemination of 'minorities' as a catch-all term for an ever-expanding variety of social markers cannot be exhaustively summarised here, and involves complex semantic relays between government, popular culture and social activist movements, both within and beyond the United States.

There are good arguments for holding on to the category of the 'minority' conceived within humanist projects for social inclusion and anti-majoritarianism (Amin 2010, 10). Taking examples from the United Kingdom and the European Union, Ash Amin argues that in the age of a new assimilationism, where the right to wear a hijab or build a mosque is subject to hostile forms of contestation, there is a need to maintain the multicultural politics of recognition from a previous era, even though it risks essentializing cultural identities and can display 'a certain smugness of tolerating or bestowing rights on the racialised other' (Amin 2010, 11). In recent decades, the centrality of numbers in structuring public policy has been intensified with the ascendancy of New Public Management discourse. Demographic measurement and assessment of 'minority' populations is used to demonstrate the reach and accessibility of public programmes, to measure the needs of specific constituencies, and to highlight disparities and inequalities between social groups.

Nevertheless, narratives about numerically small groups regularly extend beyond welfare administration to more unweildy political forums. Consider popular debates around immigration policy in Australia, led by newspaper headlines such as 'Asylum-seeker numbers blow out by almost 200' (Wilson 2012), 'Massive increase in asylum seeker numbers prompts former immigration official to urge fresh boat policy' (Masanauskas 2013), 'People are fed up with continued growth in asylum-seeker numbers' (The Australian 2013), and 'The ups and downs of Iranian asylum-seeker numbers in Australia' (Townsend 2015). Despite the framing of 'immigration issues' in relation to increasing or decreasing numbers, collective paranoia around asylum seekers bears little relation to the specific numbers involved,⁶ as interview-based research has indicated (see McKay, Thomas, and Kneebone 2012). Rather, the social imaginary around asylum-seeker numbers is stretched in two contradictory directions. On the one hand, it is commonly believed that there are 'too many' people arriving by boat and that they will radically transform Australian culture (on the 'too many', see Hage 2014, 233). On the other hand, 'Australian culture' is imagined to have remained completely intact after many successive waves of mass migration, for if it had not, there would be no stable national culture to protect from new migrants.⁷ The hostility directed towards asylum seekers therefore involves projective narratives about future dystopias, rather than engagement with the concrete diversity of Australian communities in the present. In particular, refugees bodies are stigmatised as living metonyms for many possible others arriving in the future. Correspondingly, the smaller the groups of actual refugees settled in Australia, the greater the rhetorical power of myths circulating around the deleterious impact of 'more to come' (see Appadurai 2006).

This brief example points toward the semantic over-determinations that give 'minority' somewhat fickle political meanings, from the somewhat benign recognition that some social groups have needs and experiences not adequately catered for by present government policy, to more insidious affirmations of majoritarian nationalism against perceived threats of 'minority' contamination. In particular, anti-immigration rhetoric constantly frames minority identities through an interplay between vernacular and institutional racisms, which produce heightened meanings around 'embodied signifiers' such as skin colour or accent (Yuval-Davis 2011, 13, see also Amin 2010; Fassin 2011, 214). This is not an accidental side-effect of 'minority' as a neutral description of social reality, but rather a systemic result of ambiguities embedded within the term 'minority' itself. The following section suggests that these ambiguities are continuous with broader issues attending social inclusion as the preferred liberal model of political transformation.

Critiquing minoritization

What is the relationship between majorities and minorities? The practices of 'contempt, hatred, ridicule, and violence' described by Louis Wirth cannot be explained as a simple clash of preferences between large groups and small groups. Arjun Appadurai argues that minorities are not simply accidental

additions to national cultures. Rather, the identity of one group can be forged through its capacity to dominate or another. Groups aspiring to majoritarian status fortify themselves by railing against those they consider minorities relative to a national culture. In doing so, these 'predatory identities' reproduce fantasies of a uniform majoritarian culture to be protected from external contamination (Appadurai 2006, 51, see also Hage 1998). For this reason, minority has been criticized as a 'sociological euphemism' serving to depoliticize the forces that produce the effects of minoritization: racism and xenophobia, heteronormativity and homophobia, settler colonial violence and so on (see Wilkinson 2000, 117). Understood from a relational viewpoint, majoritarian formations *need* to discover or invent minorities to dominate. To support strong assertions of majoritarian will, those claiming membership in majorities frequently fantasise that minorities want to take something from them. As Jean-Paul Sartre argued in *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1946),

it is in opposing themselves to the Jew that [anti-Semites] suddenly become conscious of being proprietors: in representing the Jew as a robber, they put themselves in the enviable position of people who could be robbed. (Sartre [1946] 1965, 25)

In the contemporary Australian context, those claiming majority status frequently demand that non-White Australians 'go back to where they came from' or 'start behaving like real Australians'. One becomes a member of the majority by telling others to leave.⁸ In this way, the enjoyment of belonging to a majoritarian formation depends on having minorities to abuse about being minorities.

However, explicit assertions of majoritarian supremacy hardly exhaust the spectrum of practices that uphold majoritarian identities. Even those who perceive minorities as valuable may believe that majorities should retain the power to determine what counts as culturally valuable (Hage 1998, 119–121). Sara Ahmed's *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012) provides a thick phenomenological account of diversity work in the institutional context of higher education, and recognizes that minorities can become sites of positive fantasies for those who claim majoritarian belonging. Burdens are frequently placed on those positioned as minorities to play the role(s) accorded to them, and Ahmed cites the example of physically 'embodying' minority difference for majoritarian institutions:

Institutional passing can thus refer to the political and emotional labour of being the right kind of minority – the ones who do not even think of themselves in these terms, as minorities ... The 'right kind' is also the one who 'can soften' – we might even say soften the blow – who aims not to cause trouble. (Ahmed 2012, 158, emphasis in original)

Seeing its own powers reflected in the happy state of the 'right kind' minority subject, the majority can reaffirm its own legitimacy as the possessive owner of national values and virtues.⁹ In this special issue, Susan Mlcek engages with the relationship between gestures of social inclusion and broader geopolitical imaginaries through a recent incident at an Australian academic conference. At an opening session, both Māori identities and Indigenous Australian identities were explicitly celebrated, but only through the erasure of histories of mobility and migration, including the experiences of Māori communities living in Australia. Here the intention to celebrate diversity remained constrained by the geographical imaginaries that sustain gestures of inclusion, which often ascribe to Indigenous peoples an inherent immobility. Mlcek uses the concept of *anomie* to think through the feelings of unease, discomfort, and out-of-placeness to which mis-interpellations give rise. In this way, the broad challenges of doing transnational decolonial scholarship are linked to gestures intended to produce the effects of social inclusion, while instead amplifying the affects of minoritisation.

As the examples from Ahmed and Mlcek suggest, the ostensible benevolence of minority 'inclusion' is founded on territorialising practices. Majorities insist upon their originary claim to the spaces that they presume to allow others to enter. In settler colonial societies, this dynamic is further accentuated by the majoritarian claim to political and legal sovereignty. In this special issue, Maria Giannacopoulos argues that efforts by the State to 'include' Indigenous peoples can efface the 'foundational violence' that gives the State its power to include and exclude Giannacopoulos 2017, see also Wolfe 2016, 31. Giannacopoulos cites a recently proposed referendum on the constitutional recognition of Aboriginal people, the 'Recognise' campaign, and suggests that it implicitly accords legitimacy to the Australian Constitution and the referendum process as privileged mechanisms for the conferral of national belonging. This does not mean that the Recognise campaign lacks political merit or positive symbolic force. The

argument in Giannocopoulos, rather, is that 'referendums are techniques aiding the legitimization of the expansion of global colonial power', and that they position non-Indigenous Australians as majoritarian subjects who can feel *entitled* to decide whether Indigenous Australians should – or should not – be recognised.

The language of 'inclusion' and 'recognition' is not, of course, restricted to discourses on cultural identities. Rather, it belongs to a broader liberal understanding of democratic political participation, wherein the recognition of identities and differences is understood as a necessary step for the reconciliation of diverse social preferences. Such recognition does not always produce the effects intended. In this special issue, Karen-Anne Wong's study of children's disability in yoga offers a critical account of 'minor' bodily pedagogies as both inclusive and exclusive. Her auto-ethnographic approach allows an analysis of both the physiological and pedagogical frameworks by which normative understandings of children's development and well-being are constructed. Yoga is at once a means to diagnose children and 'to embrace difference and multiplicity' (Wong, 2017). The distinct pedagogical approaches of yoga teachers can help to make children with disabilities feel less stigmatized, but may still exclude them from the social space of the classroom. Strategies of both inclusion and exclusion interact with each other, producing 'minoritising effects' at the same time as they disrupt conventional demarcations between 'normal' and 'abnormal' bodies.¹⁰

Chicago School sociologists hoped that the end point of a minoritizing discourse would be the eventual 'integration' of minorities into a national body-politic. Subsequent social and cultural research has produced more relational accounts of majoritarian and minoritarian movements as political processes, within which the language of 'integration' and 'inclusion' may obscure more profound forms of social violence. Does this mean that all efforts towards collective identity building can be criticized for the Others that they inevitably exclude? Cultural studies has long been preoccupied with these questions as they bear on an object of study that approximates the 'majority' but has never been identical with it: the *popular*.

The people and the popular

Cultural studies has long taken a historical interest in the notion of the 'popular' as distinct from claims about majorities or minorities. In particular, the notion of 'popular culture' is more often understood as a *mode* of cultural production and consumption rather as a description of cultural objects that are preferred by a statistical majority of persons. For this reason, the notion of a 'majority culture' or a 'minority culture' conflicts directly with cultural studies' efforts to understand popular culture as both *symptomatic* and *productive* of social processes.

Nevertheless, the concept of the popular does not come without its own difficulties. In 'Notes on Deconstructing "the Popular"', Stuart Hall registers a tension between the popular as a clustering of cultural goods on a commodity market, and *völkisch* or romantic understandings of the popular as those pre-industrial cultural practices that emanate organically from 'the people'. Drawing on the former perspective, one could show that in a capitalist society the interests of relatively small groups – particularly those with disproportionate influence over media ownership and distribution – are over-represented in the field of cultural production, such that a dominated majority misrecognises its own interests as identical with those of a dominating minority. Drawing on the latter perspective, however, cultural objects and practices only gain traction through negotiation with the everyday lifeworlds of the 'the people', who can craft alternative meanings for received cultural objects (e.g. popular fandoms). These two perspectives are deeply entwined in processes of what Hall calls 'contamination' and 'resistance' (443). For example, tabloid newspapers often claim to speak on behalf of 'the people' through appeals to belonging based on race or ethnicity, and these appeals may subsequently be rearticulated through place-specific political movements (e.g. nationalist parties). At the same time, anti-racist movements may make competing claims about the cultural characteristics of 'the people', although this may still involve imputing a false uniformity to national identities and values (see Gilroy 1987). Hall therefore suggests that 'just as there is no fixed content to the category of "popular culture", so there is no fixed

subject to attach to it – ‘the people’.... The capacity to *constitute* classes and individuals as a popular force – that is the nature of political and cultural struggle’ (1998, 452, emphasis in original).

Within the approach adopted by Hall and others at the Birmingham School’s Centre for Cultural Studies, studies of the popular must begin with social processes and collective movements. Whether majoritarian or minoritarian, social identities need to be located within such processes and movements, rather than positioned as independent cultural wholes. For example, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (1978) rejected then-contemporary efforts to account for mugging as a practice of minority groups directed against the majority. An increase or decrease in practices labelled as mugging in 1970s England could not explain why the figure of the mugger became such a powerful ‘ideological conductor’ for racial paranoia and post-Powellist xenophobia (Hall et al. 1978, viii). The proper unit of analysis was neither the muggers nor the mugged, but rather the configuration of a popular discourse that invited identification with a shared locus of nationalistic belonging, and that allowed the figure of the ‘mugger’ to mark the limits of an imagined social majority. To paraphrase *Policing the Crisis*, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, once one perceives minority not as a fact but as a relation – the relation between practices of minoritization and the reaction to perceived minorities – the conventional wisdoms about minorities fall apart in one’s hands (Hall et al. 1978, viii).

The concept of the popular in cultural studies is opposed to the liberal discourse on majorities and minorities. The former begins with collective practices and explains identity as a provisional ‘effect’ of complex social dependencies, while the latter begins with individual identities and understands collectives as effects of voluntary association between those who ‘share’ the same identity. By allowing for the contingency of identity formations, cultural studies’ interest in the popular provides a useful frame for studies of transnational media cultures that either challenge or reinforce majoritarian commitments to national belonging.

For example, Jess Carniel’s article in this issue examines Australia’s presence at Eurovision, and asks what it means to be a ‘minor’ country in a context shaped by strong populist narratives (Carniel 2017). Australia’s recent Eurovision success potentially makes it a ‘major’ player within the production of a globalized European identity, and highlights the different logics by which majorities and minorities are constituted. In a broad context where the ‘Australianness’ of Australian music is frequently coded as *White* Australianness, what happens when Malaysian-born Guy Sebastian and South Korean-born Dami Im become the symbols of Australian national culture overseas? To what extent does the intelligibility of the ‘minority’ performer depend on shared geographical imaginaries around Australian identity and European identity? Does the increasing elasticity of ‘Europe’ within Eurovision actually undermine the ethno-nationalisms that subtend the European Union project and White Australian settler colonialism?

These questions are further complicated by obscure connections between multiculturalism as a policy framework and the global Popular as a commercial circuit with opportunistic investments in minoritized identities. For example, Australia’s multicultural broadcaster, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), has long been tasked with representing Australia’s ‘minorities’, and has in the last decade been faced with regular criticisms of its increasingly populist agenda and its failure to engage with the interests of its minority constituencies (Ang, Hawkins, and Dabboussy 2008). In this respect, SBS’ promotion of what Carniel (2017) describes as ‘strategic diversity’ through Eurovision helps the station to fulfil its multicultural mandate. The irony is that both Guy Sebastian and Dami Im attained initial popularity through talent competitions on commercial television broadcasters with no cultural mandate.¹¹ SBS’ broadcast of Australian performers at Eurovision therefore brought together two competing logics of cultural diversification: the first driven by the internationalization of Australian media content as a proxy for minority representation (SBS); and the second by the consumer citizenship populism of reality television and live SMS voting. Rather than promoting majoritarian affiliation (as early critics had worried), the unabashed nationalism of *Australian Idol* and *The X Factor* produced artists who appeared to travel beyond the minoritizing labels offered within the national frame – if for only three and a half minutes each.

Carniel’s study of Eurovision points to problems in formulating the relationship between minorities, majorities and the Popular. The perception that an artist represents the preferences of a national

majority is produced through public and commercial institutions that seek to minimise the importance of certain social differences (especially those with uncomfortable political associations) to maximise popular appeal while emphasizing the 'exotic' qualities of others. However, the success of Sebastian and Im points towards alternative popular affiliations and geographical imaginings that refuse simple alignment with domestic categories of majority and minority. In the final section of this article, we examine different relationships between marketization and minoritization for the purposes of cultural production.

Valuing minor culture

The articles in this special issue reflect the forms of cultural instability that unsettle any absolute schematization of majority and minority. The examples considered so far from Garcia, Giannacopoulos, Mlcek, Wong and Carniel depart from the liberal conception of minorities as requiring integration into a majoritarian whole, and point towards important limitations to social inclusion initiatives when articulated in a nationalist frame. The opposition between majority and minority does not account for the emergent kinds of cultural marginality described in this collection, where the minor is always at risk of capture by the major, or redefining the terms on which marginality is defined. Rather than reflecting on how the minor becomes the object of fear or derision, the articles in this collection are interested in minor as an affirmative and generative space.

Todd Honma and Anthony Francoso take a particular interest in the disruptive possibilities of minor culture. They examine the overlapping subcultural, diasporic and transnational influences that shape tattoo artist Chris Brand's practice in Los Angeles, focusing on the use of *Suikoden*: what happens to geographical imaginaries around cultural difference when a fourteenth-Century Chinese tale becomes unexpectedly popular in Edo Period Japan (as *Suikoden*), and is later reworked to feature Chicano heroes in 1980s Los Angeles? Koichi Iwabuchi has explained the global influence of Japanese cultural forms in terms of their 'cultural odourlessness', or the fact that they are devoid of any specifically Japanese cultural content (Iwabuchi 2002, 24, 25). But in the case of *Suikoden*, the aesthetics of violent resistance that informed the original texts still permeate their contemporary American adaptations. Although Brand is neither Japanese nor from the Chicano communities whose bodies he tattoos, Honma and Francoso show that these bodily inscriptions produce important resources for practices of narration at the intersection of differently racialized histories. Brand becomes one among many translators in a minor transnational circuit, where visual aesthetics 'function as a space of possibility to reimagine commonality and cooperation in the face of deep structural forms of political, racial, and economic division' (Honma and Francoso, 2017).

The visceral relationship between an LA-based tattoo artist and Japanese cultural forms contrasts sharply with the multi-platform media world surrounding British comedian and actor Russell Brand. In her account of 'revolutionary' politics in media produced by, Colleen Harmer asks how popular political projects might serve as critiques of capitalism by momentarily disturbing the subjective habits and expectations that saturate market-based societies. She takes up the question posed by J.K. Gibson-Graham about how minor cultural texts might contribute to a 'politics of the "otherwise"' (Gibson-Graham 2003, 53). There is a tension between the apparently radical potential of Brand's politics and his position as a celebrity who benefits in material ways from the social hierarchies and media oligarchies that he frequently denounces. Despite the serious hardships he endured as a child, it is difficult to situate Brand as a 'minor' figure within a broader cultural and political context. But Harmer's commentary does not invite moral judgement; the point, rather, is that the market logics of media cultures introduce a constant dynamism between collective desires to discover minor voices, and the majoritarian structures that capture these desires as sources of revenue.

Working against many of the networked media cultures that support Brand, localized cultural forms and interventions can contribute to less predictable monetizations of 'minor' statements and identities. J.K. Gibson-Graham argue that while culture is routinely characterized as a space of difference, they argue that capitalism is too often understood in terms of an 'economy of sameness' (Gibson-Graham

2003, 54). This means that capitalism becomes a totalizing global order, making it impossible to imagine alternatives. Focusing on examples of small-scale entrepreneurial practices outside the industrial wage-labour system, Gibson-Graham suggest that a globalized 'ethics of the local' is vital for thinking about 'new possibilities of community' that emerge as the nation 'loses its hold on us' (Gibson-Graham 2003, 49). In this issue, Grace McQuilten uses social enterprise case studies to examine intersections between experimental social agendas and equally experimental *economic* practices (McQuilten 2017). Women of South Sudanese backgrounds involved in art and fashion-based enterprises in Melbourne use culture in order to articulate their heritage and identity. Given the kinds of marginalization and social isolation they face, art and fashion play an important role in producing alternative representations of Melbourne's South Sudanese community. As McQuilten notes, however, entrepreneurial activities extend beyond the local and connect to questions of identity and belonging. Community-based arts enterprise – where participants speak, act and create in the name of one's community – have relationships with, but are not completely located within, the institutional logics of curation and valuation that shape the contemporary art world in Australia. The creative labour of South Sudanese women is perceived by others to be cultural expression and heritage maintenance: they produce community art, not Art. The longevity of these entrepreneurial practices for minoritized creative workers therefore need to be understood in the context of established cultural hierarchies for the consecration and exhibition of arts in Australia.

This raises familiar issues around culture and commerce: South Sudanese women in Melbourne are also concerned with earning an income. To what extent can these artists fulfil their social and cultural aims, McQuilten asks, from 'inside the mechanisms of contemporary capitalism'? In the Australian arts sector, culturally diverse artists have long produced politically disruptive works while taking care to navigate the economic constraints they confront once labelled as belonging to a 'minority' or a 'niche'. Rather than characterizing the work of artists from non-Anglo Australian backgrounds as forms of minority expression or 'ethnic art', there has been a move within Australian multicultural policy towards positioning them as part of a culturally diverse mainstream (Khan 2010). In this context, McQuilten's close study of social enterprises points toward a cultural politics less shaped by the liberal language of 'minority inclusion' than by new modes of community affiliation and place-making through an ethics of localised commercial reciprocity.

The role of culture and commerce in transforming the meanings attached to 'minority' cannot be understood in terms of a singular trajectory from the minor to the major. These categories may have some value as points of reference within the political space of the nation, and as broad descriptors for the effects of various kinds of social and economic stratification. Distinctions between the major and the minor also powerfully shape governmental and popular understandings of difference, and inform political projects that seek to contest these understandings. However, the demographic imaginary of majority and minority does not adequately account for the production of the social worlds in which 'majority' and 'minority' acquire their cultural, political and commercial force. The articles in this special issue show that if the concept of minority can still be digested at all, then it remains a moveable feast, sometimes providing a fruitful site for political struggle while all the while at risk of being swallowed up. Or, to put it in the musical terms with which we began, these authors provide tools for listening to minoritarian movements without producing desires for majoritarian endings.

Notes

1. For example, Supreme Court decisions in the United States. See Appadurai (2006, 62, 63) on the dissenting minority.
2. The Cultural Studies Association of Australasia conference in December 2015 at the University of Melbourne.
3. On collective action and the liberal individual, see Wolfe (2016).
4. This also anticipates the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*, the co-authored second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* that followed *Kafka*.
5. In the 1910 census, nearly 70% of Chicago comprised of recently arrived European immigrants. See Steinberg (1981, 47).

6. In 2015, the Australian Government increased its overall refugee intake to the highest levels since the Second World War (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2015).
7. For a discussion of this logic in relation to 'assimilation' debates, see Hage (2014).
8. An example of this is discussed in Hage (2011).
9. On the affects of 'happiness' as a political mediator between majorities and minorities in multicultural discourse, see also Ang (1996).
10. On norms and abnormality, see Stephens (2005).
11. Channel 10 for *Australian Idol* and Channel Seven for *The X Factor*, respectively.

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