

## **The Minor Gesture (Thought in the act) 2016**

**by Erin Manning**

### **Introduction: In a minor Key**

The minor gesture, allied to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the minor, is the gestural force that opens experience to its potential variation. It does this from within experience itself, activating a shift in tone, a difference in quality.

The major is a structural tendency that organizes itself according to predetermined definitions of value. The minor is a force that courses through it, unmooring its structural integrity, problematizing its normative standards.

While the grand gestures of a macro-politics most easily sum up the changes that occurred to alter the field, it is the minoritarian tendencies that initiate the subtle shifts that created the conditions for this, and any change.

It is easier to identify major shifts than to catalogue the nuanced rhythms of the minor. As a result, these rhythms are narrated as secondary, or even negligible. The minor is a continual variation on experience.

The minor thus gets cast aside, overlooked, or forgotten in the interplay of major chords. Each minor gesture is singularly connected to the event at hand, immanent to the in-act.

The minor gesture works in the mode of speculative pragmatism. From a speculatively pragmatic stance, it invents its own value, a value as ephemeral as it is mobile. This permeability tends to make it ungraspable, and often unrecognizable.

The minor gesture is everywhere, all the time. Despite its precarity, it resurfaces punctually, claiming not space as such, but space-of-variation. The minor invents new forms of existence, and with them, in them, we come to be.

These temporary forms of life travel across the everyday, making untimely existing political structures, activating new modes of perception, inventing languages that speak in the interstices of major tongues.

In its movement, the minor gesture creates sites of dissonance, staging disturbances that open experience to new modes of expression, focusing on the phase of realization of the

event, of experience, where it has not yet fully become this or that. The minor gesture is active in this indeterminate phase of the event.

> "Without atomicity, in an arena of pure becoming, there would be no 'elbow room in the universe,' no opening for the disjunctions through which difference is produced."

> – Alfred North Whitehead

The event and the minor gesture are always in co-composition, the minor gesture punctuating process, moving the welling event in new and divergent directions that alter the orientation of where the event might otherwise have settled.

Experience here is in the tense of life-living, not human life per se, but the more-than-human: life at the interstices of experience in the ecology of practices.

From this vantage point of an ecology of practices, it is urgent to turn away from the notion that it is the human agent, the intentional, volitional subject, who determines what comes to be. It is urgent to turn away from the central tenet of neurotypicality, the wide-ranging belief that there is an independence of thought and being attributable above all to the human, a better-than-ness accorded to our neurology (a neurology, it must be said, that reeks of whiteness, and classism).

Neurotypicality, as a central but generally unspoken identity politics, frames our idea of which lives are worth fighting for, which lives are worth educating, which lives are worth living, and which lives are worth saving.

Neurotypicality as such tends to be backgrounded, and so we underestimate both its force and its pervasiveness.

When do we question what we mean by independence, by intelligence, by knowledge?  
When do we honor significantly different bodies and ask what they can do, instead of jumping to the conclusion that they are simply deficient?

My hope is to underscore the mutual indebtedness of the narrative of neurotypicality and the framing of certain bodies and certain forms of life as less worthy. Take blackness. Neurotypicality, Fred Moten suggests, is another name for antiblackness.

The neurotypical stages the encounter with life in such a way as to exclude what cannot fit within its order, and blackness, or what Moten describes as "black sociality," always ultimately exceeds capture.

Insurgent Black life is neurodiverse through and through. This is its threat, that it cannot be properly regulated, that it exceeds the bounds of the known, that it moves too much. That neurotypicality as founding identity politics discounts black life implies, at the limit, that it discounts all life, all generative force, all unbounded, unpredictable, rhythmic, insurgent life.

Neurodiversity is the path I choose here to explore insurgent life. Encouraged by neurodiversity activism, I take neurodiversity as a platform for political change that fundamentally alters how life is defined, and valued.

The neurotypical is the very backbone of a concept of individuality that is absolutely divorced from the idea that relation is actually what our worlds are made of.

A schizoanalytic approach has a belief in the world.

The minor gesture, like schizoanalysis, is operational. It shifts the field, altering the valence of what comes to be. It is affirmative in its force, emphatic in its belief.

The minor gesture is the force that makes the lines tremble that compose the everyday, the lines, both structural and fragmentary, that articulate how else experience can come to expression.

To compose with the minor gesture requires, as Deleuze cautions, the prudence of the experimenter, a prudence awake to the speculative pragmatism at the heart of the willing event. Study and research-creation, both developed in the first chapter, are techniques for experimental prudence, a prudence patient enough to engage with that which experimentation unsettles, a prudence attuned to the force of the in-act.

The minor gesture is the activator, the carrier, it is the agencement that draws the event into itself. It moves the nonconscious toward the conscious, makes felt the unsayable in the said, brings into resonance field effects otherwise backgrounded in experience.

It is the forward-force capable of carrying the affective tonality of nonconscious resonance and moving it toward the articulation, edging into consciousness, of new modes of existence.

This capacity to actualize, at the edge of the virtual where the actual is not-yet, is what makes the minor a gesture: the minor is a gesture insofar as it punctuates the in-act, leading the event elsewhere than toward the governant fixity of the major.

### **The Undercommons**

(A concept coined by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney)

The register of the minor gesture is always political: in its punctual reorienting of the event, the minor gesture invents new modes of life-living.

It moves through the event, creating a pulse, opening the way for new tendencies to emerge, and in the resonances that are awakened, potential for difference looms.

Life-living is a way of thinking life with and beyond the human, thinking life as more-than-human. Deleuze's concept of \*a life\* resonates strongly here, a life defined in his last ode to living as the flux of liveliness coursing through existence unlimited.

The undercommons is an emergent collectivity that is sited in the encounter. Allied to the minor gesture, it is an activator of a tendency more than it is an offering of a commonality.

Neurotypicality involves a hierarchization of knowledge, based as it is on a belief that favors normative forms of instruction and segregates knowledge according to accepted ideas of what serves society best.

This: in order to get grants, scholars and artists within the university are asked to frame their own work according to perceived use-value.

The challenge, as Bergson underscores, involves crafting the conditions not to solve problems, or to resolve questions, but to illuminate regions of thought through which problems-without-solutions can be intuited.

SenseLab has taken it on as a problem, asking how the hyphen between research and creation opens up the differential between making and thinking.

This differential, we argue, needs to be kept alive in its difference—philosophy does not require artistic practice any more than art requires philosophy. Different practices must retain their singularity. At the same time, when they do come together, as with research-creation, it is important to inquire into what the hyphenation does to their singularity. We find research-creation to be a fertile field for thinking this coming-into-relation of difference.

Problems that arise include:

- How does a practice that involves making open the way for a different idea of what can be knowledge (\*poieisis\*: knowing through making)?
- How is the creation of concepts in the context of the philosophical itself a creative process?
- How can we bring the different registers of art and philosophy, of making-thinking together in ways that are capable of honoring their difference?
- In what ways does the hyphen make operational interstitial modes of existence?

Creating fields of inquiry for reframing how knowledge is practiced beyond typical forms of academic use value.

Group speculative practice / research-creation / study – an act that delights in the activation of the as-yet-unthought.

What emerges is never an answer, what emerges is patient experimentation, an other mode of encounter.

## WHAT ART CAN DO

To begin with research-creation is to immediately situate the force of the minor gesture in the activity of the differential. The differential, the active hyphen that brings making to thinking and thinking to making, ensures that research-creation remain an ecology of practice.

The minor is active, not inert. It is a force that courses through the major even as it calls it into question, problematizing its assumptions, its practices, its techniques. The minor is the force of the not-quite. It is a quality, a manner, a mode of perception. Always a mode of experience, the minor is a movement that does not stand still long enough to define itself. It complicates the field in which it moves.

The minor gesture does not aspire to change the world in grand ways. It is immanent to the field it alters. The minor gesture is a nudge, a hesitation, a fracturing of a dominant order. The minor gesture emerges in the interstices, in the middle of experience.

A minor gesture is what we experience when an event alters its own field of operation through a microperceptual shift. The minor gesture is not about resistance, though resistance may be its effect. The minor gesture moves through tendencies. Thought is not a planning machine. It is a feeling body, moving with worlds in the making.

Technique is the practice of entering into relation with that which exceeds the procedural. What if thought is not about what can be known, but about how thought in the act alters its own conditions? A field of experience is always a field of variation. A technique is a political act to the extent that it engages the minor.

The minor calls forth what else experience could be. The event fractures thought, requiring an attunement to how else it could emerge. The minor gesture operates through divergence. The minor gesture cannot be captured once and for all. Minor gestures remain mobile, and what they open onto cannot be predicted.

The minor gesture brings the field to the edge of what it can do. The minor gesture makes felt the dynamic movement of thought-in-the-act.

Thinking with the minor requires thinking with the more-than. It is a mode of moving that is alive to tendencies at the edge of perception. The minor mode of attention is a sensing-feeling, a way of moving-with the world as it shifts. The minor gestures through an ecology of practices, a way of living in the between.

This is a politics of tending, a care for the minor movements that shift experience in the making. What is thought not yet? What are the edges of experience that call forth new forms of perception? How can we attune to the in-act of events?

In thinking with the minor, there is an insistence on an ethics of attention. It is not about what is known, but about how we enter into relation with what is coming to be. To move with the minor is to allow the event to think itself anew.

The minor gesture activates tendencies that might otherwise be disqualified by dominant modes of thought and practice. It makes perceptible the field's own potential for variation. The minor gesture does not oppose the major; it moves transversally across it, opening it to its own alterity.

The minor calls forth techniques that are relational, immanent, and always in process. It is about tending to the forces that shift experience before they consolidate into recognizable forms.

Techniques associated with the minor do not seek mastery. They are about entering into attunement with the event's own rhythms, allowing thought and action to emerge in concert with the world's unfolding.

Where the major organizes, systematizes, and stabilizes, the minor gestures toward the virtual, toward the conditions of emergence. It trusts the not-yet, the still-forming, the barely perceptible. The minor gesture values divergence over consensus. It moves thought toward the edges of its own intelligibility, where new modes of existence might be invented.

To think with the minor is to think with the excesses that trouble order, that refuse containment, that insist on the force of difference as the motor of change.

## **Summary of Minor Gesture by Erin Manning (Key Ideas)**

### 1. The Minor vs. The Major

- The major organizes experience through dominant, normative structures.
- The minor courses through these structures, subtly disrupting and reconfiguring them.
- The minor gesture doesn't seek dramatic revolution; it shifts experience quietly, through variation and tonal difference.

### 2. Nature of the Minor Gesture

- It acts within experience itself, changing it from inside.
- It is immanent (arising from within) and speculative (inventing its own value without needing external validation).
- It emerges in the indeterminate phase of an event – when possibilities are still open.

### 3. Microperceptual Shifts

- The minor gesture alters the field of experience through micro-shifts in perception.
- It's not primarily about resistance, but about enabling alternative tendencies to surface.

### 4. Relation to Neurodiversity and Social Norms

- Manning critiques neurotypicality (the assumption that certain ways of thinking and being are "normal").
- Neurotypicality is linked to structures of whiteness, classism, and ableism.
- Black sociality (Moten) and insurgent Black life embody the threat of the minor by exceeding regulation and normativity.

### 5. Life-Living and More-than-Human

- Life is thought of not as individual, but as life-living, relational, and more-than-human.
- Thought is a feeling body, not just a cognitive machine.

## 6. Technique and the Minor

- Technique is not mastery; it's about attunement to the rhythms of the event.
- Engaging with technique politically means caring for what remains emergent and relational.

## 7. Schizoanalysis and Speculative Pragmatism

- Manning links her concept of the minor gesture to schizoanalysis (Deleuze and Guattari) – a method that believes in the world's continual becoming.
- Speculative pragmatism values experimentation over solution-finding, staying with what unsettles.

## 8. Research-Creation and the Hyphen

- Research-creation keeps alive the tension between making and thinking.
- The hyphen between "research" and "creation" symbolizes the active differential – it fosters new ways of knowing without collapsing art into philosophy or vice versa.

## 9. The Undercommons

- (From Fred Moten and Stefano Harney) – The undercommons is an emergent collectivity activated in encounters.
- It aligns with the minor gesture, operating without predefined commonality, privileging difference and divergence.

## 10. Political and Ethical Implications

- To work with the minor gesture is to engage in a politics of tending: caring for emergent possibilities.
- It's an ethics of attention to what is not-yet-known.
- It insists on the generative, relational force of life beyond control and predictability.



rhizomatic mind map:

- 🌱 Nonlinear structure: You can create nodes anywhere, not just in a top-down hierarchy – just like Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome: connections without a centralized order.
  - 🔗 Endless linking: You can connect any idea to any other idea in multiple directions – lateral, circular, divergent – perfect for mapping shifts in perception.
  - 🎨 Visual richness: Miro allows color coding, arrows, icons, different shapes – making very elaborate and living maps.
  - 🔄 Expandable canvas: You're not limited by space – the canvas is infinite. Your research map can grow endlessly over time, like an evolving ecosystem.
  - 👥 Collaborative: If ever you want, you can even collaborate in real time with others (but for your doctorate, it's also great just working alone).
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- Break your ideas into *rhizomatic nodes* (not categories – movements of thought!)
  - Create *microconnections* across nodes (instead of classic "branching")
  - Keep the map open, mobile, and *generative* (adding new shifts as your research grows).
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- and **small descriptions** for each node.
  - Suggest **visual structures** based on your research.
  - Help organize it into **phases of growth**, like a real rhizomatic garden.