BOOKS & JOURNALS
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Chapter Title: One Manifesto Less: MATERIAL TEXT AND THE ANTI-BOOK

Book Title: Anti-Book

Book Subtitle: On the Art and Politics of Radical Publishing

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Published by: University of Minnesota Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt1j7x9vm.5

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One Manifesto Less

MATERIAL TEXT AND THE ANTI-BOOK

> One can speak out only through the mouth, but the book's facilities for expression take many more forms.
>
> —EL LISSITZKY, "Our Book"

> The impossibility of thinking of an aesthetic medium as nothing more than an unworked physical support.
>
> —ROSALIND KRAUSS, *"A Voyage on the North Sea"*

The communism of writing and publishing that is developed in these pages is against the book, it is "anti-book," but not, as you might imagine, as some kind of manifesto tilted at a media form on the wane and packaged with the hubris of the technological "new." For neither manifestos nor technological functionalities are the most promising means to a communism of textual media. *Anti-Book,* rather, is a critique of the book that is immanent to its medium or to the forms of textual media more broadly conceived. Allow me to explain a little by presenting a first approximation of the concept that orients this book in its encounters with experimental political publishing.

An anti-book is a work of writing and publishing that critically interrogates its media form. That is to say, it is a self-reflexive textual work. But reflexivity here is not confined to the domain of text and literary form. Anti-books test, problematize, and push to the limits their *full materiality,* or significant aspects thereof, where the materiality of a book comprises the dynamic interplay of textual content and media form, a critical and generative relation operative at scales both concrete and abstract. This materiality includes physical properties and technological affordances, certainly, but also signifying strategies, graphical arrangements, and sensory

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qualities, all of which are interlaced with publishing paradigms, linguistic structures, and economies and practices of production and consumption. And such materiality is *political.* Anti-books articulate the encounter between communist thought and experimental practices of writing and publishing, where these encounters are not contained within social movements but emerge—albeit in a fragmentary and occasional fashion—across the terrain of textual media, a terrain where the commodity form plays a role no less commanding than it does for the audiovisual. In foregrounding the formal and sensory qualities of textual media, the anti-book is also an *aesthetic* figure; this is the "art" of political publishing, one that occasionally takes leave of the textual dimensions of textual media altogether. As to the sociohistorical context of the concept, the anti-book might be said to have troubled textual media since the invention of the Gutenberg letterpress and the generalization of print, but it comes to the fore and takes on particular qualities in the digital media environment, as anxiety about the "future of the book" and the proliferation of communication platforms impress on collective consciousness the material specificities of text.

This is a minimum definition of the anti-book. Yes, it is somewhat stripped down, but that quality is inherent to its purpose. For with these lineaments of the anti-book, I seek not to clarify and contain the many and various features of works that might be identified as such, to establish a definite class of anti-books, but to provide an abstraction, a conceptual map, that can concentrate attention on concrete experiments in political writing and publishing, in all their rich materiality and multiform variety. While the concept of the anti-book is a guide to such works, a focalizer, it is not, hence, an ideal type; indeed, the abstraction is itself necessarily open to destabilization and modification by the publishing experiments it surveys. The chapters that follow this introductory chapter all concentrate on such concrete experiments in political publishing and writing, each of which is interlaced with one or more concepts of its own: communist objects, the rhizome-book, anonymous authorship, diagrammatic publishing, unidentified narrative objects, to name some of these. In its focalizing work, the concept of the anti-book is at once immanent to these other concepts, emerging from them and drawing alliances between them, and swallowed up by them, as they do their own work without such assistance.

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Whereas the other chapters in this book explore the features of the anti-book through particular empirical projects, this introduction seeks to place the concept in relation to three domains or problematics in writing and publishing, domains that pertain to the concept of the anti-book as sites of its emergence and intervention. The domains in question are art experiments with the form of textual media that go by the name of "bookworks" or "artists' books"; communist writing and publishing, especially with regard to the passing of the workers' movement and the commodity forms of text; and the "post-digital" mutations and publishing potentials of contemporary textual media. To different degrees of emphasis, each of these comprises theoretical orientations, points of aesthetic and political problematization, and concrete practices. All three have in their margins produced a formulation of the "anti-book," but it is in the interplay of these domains that the concept as I use it arises—not exactly at their intersection but at various and discontinuous points of proximity and interference between them. Before considering these domains, let me first introduce the broad orientation toward writing and publishing that extends throughout this book, the notion of "material text."

MATERIAL TEXT

The material forms and qualities of writing and publishing have long remained marginal to the academic study and popular understanding of text. There have certainly been significant and persistent exceptions, but Andrew Murphie grasps well the situation in his remark that "publishing as a process (as opposed to the contents published) has tended to be seen, only occasionally, out of the corner of one's eye."[1] When material forms of text *are* present to conscious articulation, more often than not they feature as clichéd artifacts that are coextensive with or insufficiently distinguished from the textual genres that they typically carry, as Lisa Gitelman notes: "Say the word 'novel,' for instance, and your auditors will likely imagine a printed book, even if novels also exist serialized in nineteenth-century periodicals, published in triple-decker (multivolume) formats, and loaded onto—and reimagined by the designers of—Kindles, Nooks, and iPads."[2] This situation is, however, undergoing considerable change, change associated

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in large measure with transformations in technology as the dominant form of media has shifted from one organized by the affordances of print and paper—albeit that these have been highly various, comprising multiple forms and technologies of reproduction other than the codex and letterpress—to those of digital and online media. It may have been the very ubiquity of print media that kept its material forms away from critical attention, as if this had the normative effect of making the *particular* conventions of print appear to be *universal* features of textual expression, and unremarkable as such. Consequently, as N. Katherine Hayles argues, as print ceases to be the default medium of publication, "the assumptions, presuppositions, and practices associated with it are now becoming visible as media-specific practices rather than the largely invisible status quo."[3]

Or, if we approach this question from the perspective of digital and networked media, it may be the particular properties of the latter that have brought new attention to textual matter. With the media forms and commercial platforms of e-mail, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Tumblr, and so forth, made continuous and fully mobile by the smart phone, writing and publishing have not only become interlaced with social practice in myriad and mutable ways but features of media form persistently push into the frame of content—we are not "writing," so much as tweeting, messaging, commenting—making a felt appreciation of media form increasingly common, even necessary, while radically unsettling the distinction between form and content. Think, for example, of how the structural function of the Twitter hashtag—"inline metadata" that aggregates and organizes the multiplicity of Tweets in the expression of trend patterns and "ambient affiliations"—is an immanent feature, and consciously so, of the text that participants construct and consume.[4] Bucking trends toward thinking the *immateriality* of digital text, Kenneth Goldsmith draws the plausible conclusion from such developments that "never before has language had so much *materiality*—fluidity, plasticity, malleability—begging to be actively managed by the writer."[5]

Whatever the causes, it is now more commonly recognized that an exclusive focus on semantic content is an inadequate means of grasping the full meanings and effects of text. For, as Michele Moylan and Lane Stiles describe it, texts are not "disembodied mental constructs

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transcending materiality, culture, and history," "there is no such thing . . . as a text unmediated by its materiality."[6] Concern with the materiality of text has a foundation in the discipline of book history and is now central to more recent developments in digital humanities and speculative computing.[7] These intellectual fields are too large and various to review here, but I will draw from them a few themes that situate my approach to material text.

If there is a shared ground to these different disciplines and perspectives, it is that any written work is a product of the interplay between textual *content* (the words, concepts, rhetorical structures, literary forms, etc., that are read in the work) and *medium* (the affordances, qualities, and constraints of its physical materialization and structure as artifact, technology, and social and institutional form). Both content and medium are of course highly various in themselves and interlaced in complex and mutable relations of codetermination, making the broad distinction useful only as a heuristic for approaching the particular features of any given work of textual matter. Any particular material text is a multiform entity, with many different and divergent meanings, effects, and scales of operation. As Hayles argues, it is thus "impossible to specify precisely what a book—or any other text—is as a physical object" (where "physical" here denotes the material features or media forms of the work, including "the social, cultural, and technological processes that brought it into being").[8] Her solution to the potentially confounding effect of this field of difference is to attend to the ways that *particular works themselves* interrogate and mobilize their material forms and relations, a category of works she names with the term "technotext." A technotext emerges "when a literary work interrogates the inscription technology that produces it."[9] Insofar as the materiality of a work is in this way "bound up with the text's content," it "cannot be specified in advance" but is, rather, an "emergent" condition.[10] A technotext, in other words, at once interrogates and produces its material form. At this point we need to bring in a third determining element to the text's emergent materiality alongside content and medium, that of the *reader,* her "interactions with the work and the interpretive strategies she develops—strategies that include physical manipulations as well as conceptual frameworks."[11] Indeed, it may be the reader that makes a technotext, because a text that does not reflexively address its material

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forms can be made to do so by the act of reading and interpretation. So, while Hayles's concept of technotext foregrounds works that critically reflect on their material forms, she notes that ultimately *any* text can be understood in these terms, given that all texts are mediated and actively consumed, whether they reflexively embody this or not.[12]

Such interplay between content, medium, and reader generates a complex and open material text, but it is not of course without determination. If a technotext is an interrogation of the specific logics and constraints of its material conditions—its particular forms of textual inscription but also its broader social, economic, and technological relations—it is also a *product* of these. Needless to say, these logics, constraints, and conditions are no less complex than any individual material text and so cannot be easily mapped in the abstract, but a considerable body of research has done much to explore their broad parameters. For instance, if we follow Roger Chartier, the organizing structures of the medium of "the book" and its associated discursive formations can be understood as a conjunction of three interlaced innovations: the *codex,* which replaced the scroll in the early Christian era, establishing the book as the basic unit of written work and as a textual object distinct from all others; the *unitary work,* which arises in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and integrates book, work, and author; and the arrival of the moveable type *printing press* in the mid-fifteenth century, which generalizes print and the book as the dominant technology for the mass reproduction of the written word.[13] These are not only technical forms but are integrated with forms of property (notably, the "author" as means by which unitary works are established as units of property) and patterns of reason (the linear or deductive form encouraged by the movement of textual inscription onto a page) as well as with the different forms, functions, and hierarchies of media object (book, newspaper, magazine, pamphlet, poster, letter, bureaucratic document, etc.) and functions of the written word (legal, aesthetic, political, etc.).

Thus are some of the determinations of the media form of the book, which order the production and consumption of writing in particular ways. But the productive role of the *reader* is no less subject to determination. While various in each instance, the meanings of books, and the subjects of reading, occur within patterns that are established by the discursive

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and institutional forms of literature (and other textual genres) and the marketing mechanisms of the publishing industry, as the study of most best sellers, for example, will readily reveal.[14]

These social, economic, and technical logics and conditions all affect the *meaning* of a text, but this is not their only arena of social impact; we should equally attend to the *nontextual* impact of textual materials and their institutional forms. As the product of particular logics and conditions, a media object is also their bearer, at once consolidating and extending the social relations associated with its production, circulation, and consumption. Pursuing this line of reasoning, significant research has associated the material texts of print media with particular features of modernity: the role of print in the formation of nationalism, for instance, or in the French Revolution.[15] The most influential instance of this is Elizabeth L. Eisenstein's argument that the printing press and "print culture" were agents of standardization, dissemination, and fixity that had considerable impact on the progress and intellectual structure of the Protestant Reformation, the Renaissance, and the Scientific Revolution.[16] In the course of her argument, Eisenstein provides an intriguing possible explanation for the historical lack of critical attention to the material forms of print that I noted earlier, for here the specific material qualities of print culture served as it were to *dematerialize* the medium of the book, as effects of stabilization meant that, as Daniel Selcer presents Eisenstein's thesis, "texts were no longer defined by the particularity of their material form":

> Rather, their ubiquity, their (in principle) infinite reproducibility, and the stabilization of the conventions governing their format and appearance allowed for what we might call their *dematerialization,* whereby particular books and other printed matter became mere exemplars of a now inviolate authorial content that reappeared as an identical page each time another object with the same title and printing-house genealogy was examined or a new print run undertaken.[17]

Eisenstein's influential thesis has not gone uncontested. In response, Adrian Johns in *The Nature of the Book* makes a compelling case that far from simplifying the material forms and relations of text, the complexities of production and circulation associated with the expansion of print

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may rather have "*destabilized* texts," to quote Selcer again, by "opening a myriad of new avenues through which readers may approach texts and by rendering more complex the chain of sovereign authorial production that connects authors to their texts and texts to their readers."[18] Johns does not refute that there are strong tendencies to fixity, though he invites us to consider how this was not an intrinsic property of the technical forms of print but an emergent, contingent, and unstable product of the manifold labors and representations of the individual and institutional actors involved in printing, publishing, and reading over time and space.[19] Techniques of accreditation took a central role, as the practices of particular individuals, institutions, and readers generated and conferred veracity on works that were in fact prone to piracy and careless printing. Eisenstein's error slips in because such practices were subject by internal pressures to make it *appear* as though stability had a technological source, the labor of print publishing being necessarily dedicated to "effacing its own traces," because only in this could print "gain the air of intrinsic reliability on which its cultural and commercial success could be built."[20] Johns's suggestion, then, is that Eisenstein, taking the myth of technological standardization as fact, succumbed to this effacement. And so, while nominally recovering the materiality of print, she did so in a manner that abstracted its technological form from its material labors, uses, and contexts, whereas a full materialism would proceed on the basis of their codetermination.

Concordant with this thesis, Johns invites renewed critical attention to *piracy* and the "dangers" presented to fixity, in so doing proffering a highly variegated picture of the field of early modern print, one less governed by the interpretive paradigm of norm and exception.[21] The immanence of piracy to the early publishing industry was such that anomalous forms and activities were less exceptions to fixity and uniformity than constant sources of disruption to, and spurs to the development of, the epistemic structures of knowledge, authorship, and accreditation and to the economic and publishing paradigms of the book trade. I ask you to keep Johns's thesis in mind in what follows. The aims and practices of piracy do not map onto those of the anti-book, but Johns's thesis is a significant inspiration for my argument insofar as it shows that if standardization and fixity are a feature of publishing—as I spend some time arguing—

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publishing, both digital and print, is also characterized by much material complexity, anomaly, and disruption, qualities central to its politicization.

BOOKWORK

Holding to Johns's injunction to attend to the situated, complex, and multiform materiality of publishing, I will turn now to the first of the three domains with which the concept of the anti-book is in critical exchange, the *artists' book* or *bookwork* (terms I use interchangeably). The artists' book is a mode of aesthetic production that takes as its object the physical, formal, and institutional qualities of the textual medium of which it is constituted. As Johanna Drucker defines it in her seminal book on the many manifestations of this art form, an artists' book is an original work that "integrates the formal means of its realization and production with its thematic or aesthetic issues."[22] Its field is playfully presented diagrammatically by Clive Phillpot, who has tracked this aesthetic form (and its changing nomenclature) since its inception (Figure 1).[23] The share of the field with which we are concerned is here labeled "book art" and "book objects."

Before developing the notion of the bookwork further, I want to place it in the broader camp of what Rosalind Krauss calls the "self-differing medium," for this helps further specify the materiality in question. A self-differing medium is constituted when the conventions and structures that determine the medium of a particular artwork are themselves taken up in the work in a fashion that alters those determinations, as the work comes to specify itself and hence becomes self-differing.[24] The medium, then, "is something made, rather than something given," or made as much as it is given.[25] There is no direct correspondence between a work's medium and its content, but more a *baggy fit,* allowing it a certain degree of latitude in the way it responds to its material forms, even as in doing so it becomes a successful work only insofar as it constitutes their necessity to itself. Moreover, and this is a feature of Krauss's argument that is especially pertinent for the concept of the anti-book, her understanding of the medium is not confined to its physical substance (as it is in Clement Greenberg's canonical definition of medium-specificity) but can also take

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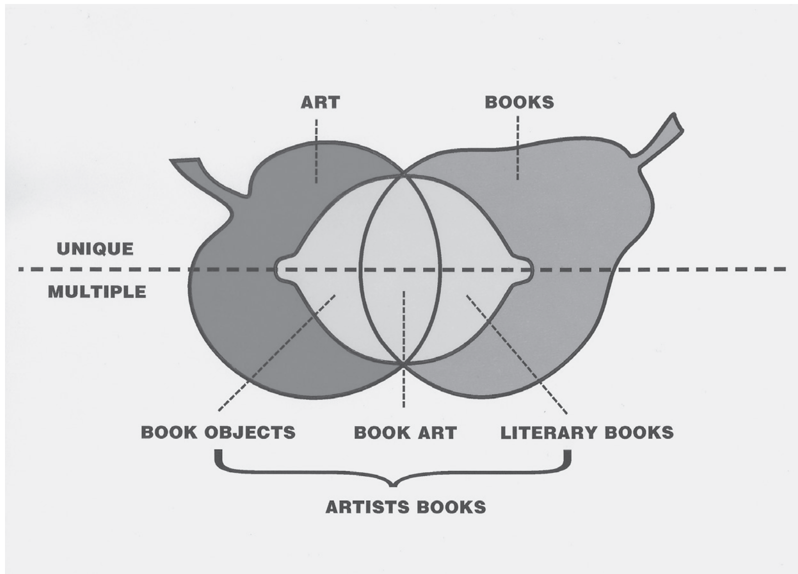

Figure 1. Clive Phillpot, "Artist Books Diagram," 1982. Courtesy of Clive Phillpot.

an epistemic form, including rules, logics, and paradigms, and tends not toward a progressively more refined adequacy to a medium's singularity (again, in contrast to Greenberg) but to an open and recursive emergence through successive loops of self-interrogation.[26]

There is clearly some comparability between the bookwork qua self-differing medium and Hayles's concept of technotext that I introduced previously. But constituted in the field of plastic arts rather than literature, the concept of the self-differing medium is sometimes more useful for my purposes, because it explicitly sets its sights on the full breadth of the material and formal qualities of a book, without any necessary priority given to its *text.* Ulises Carrión conveys this aspect in describing the bookwork as an "autonomous space-time sequence," a "self-sufficient form" that "consists of various elements, *one of which might be a text.* . . . In a book of the new art words don't transmit any intention; they're used to form a text which is an element of a book, and it is this book, as a totality, that transmits the author's intention."[27] Although text will usually play a central role in bringing into expression the material forms of a particular bookwork, *often it will not,* being at most a catalyst to the bookwork's array

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of expressive features and effects. Guattari helps clarify this point. He suggests that to place such attention on the expressivity of materials is not to undermine the importance of text, or to "minimiz[e] the role of the text and of the writing machine in the putting to work of these mute redundancies," but is rather to allow for the autonomy and polyvocality of different expressive materials, against the linguistic "overcoding" of text.[28]

Drawing this discussion into explicit alignment with this book's guiding term, if not yet its concept fully formed, it was these kinds of recursive and open-ended relations among the breadth of a book's materiality, along with the associated experimental impulse, that led Richard Kostelanetz in the 1970s to designate artists' books as "anti-books."[29] Rather than "succumb[ing] to the conventions of the medium," Kostelanetz argued that the artists' book confounds received reading practices and "envisions what else 'the book' might become." As such, it "is likely to strike the common reviewer as a 'non-book' or 'antibook.'"[30]

This emphasis on experimental engagement with forms and material qualities may appear paradoxical, because the emergence of the artists' book as a named phenomenon is closely associated with 1960s and 1970s conceptual art and the move *away* from the art object into dematerialized practice.[31] Certainly the artists' book traveled along with the tendency for art to become concept and theory, as paradigmatically exemplified by the journal *Art-Language,* but it held on to the material terrain of the production and consumption of such art/theory and other linguistic/aesthetic operations. In this, artists' books can be distinguished from conceptual art, and also in their often critical relation to the commercial instrumentalization of art, as part of what Lucy Lippard calls "a broad, if naïve, quasi-political resistance to the extreme commodification of artworks and artists."[32] For while conceptual art claimed its dematerialization to serve critique of the art commodity—as Krauss puts it in her polemic against conceptual art, postminimalism, and relational aesthetics, conceptual art "abjures" the aesthetic object as "mere commodity"—in fact, as Alexander Alberro has shown, it tended to reproduce the values and perceptual frames of an increasingly dematerialized capitalism that was taking off through marketing and advertising.[33]

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This is not to say that artists' books took textual matter to be in and of itself external to relations of authority and capital. As Gwen Allen argues, for many practitioners and theorists of this art form, "the page is not a neutral or universal space—a 'museum without walls'—but is shot through with various institutional and ideological forces," operating to codify and consolidate hierarchies of authorship and structures of aesthetic value.[34] Handling the practical critique of such forces while cleaving to the materialities and social relations of text entailed a range of practices and orientations. The artists' book emerged as a mode of art practice that was relatively inexpensive to produce and consume, multiple and hence potentially nonauratic, reasonably accessible, at least insofar as it was encountered in everyday life and at readers' own rhythms, and peripheral to the gallery system and conventions of the art establishment, with the latter's integration of critical and commercial structures of value.[35] It has also been constituted in relation to networks of politics and sociality, where the mobility that is intrinsic to the form of the book, as well as the participatory nature of small-scale book production and of exchange, has been associated with particular events, alternative institutions, or political currents. For these kinds of reasons, artists' books have sometimes been understood as "democratic multiples," but these books, at their best, have tended not to construct or partake in the universal field of some generalized democratic "public" but have functioned as media specific to particular problems, themes, or minorities and have often been acutely aware that the democratic polity operates through the *exclusion* of their terms. The adoption of the artists' book by feminist and queer political scenes is particularly notable in this regard.[36]

Naturally, the bookwork has not escaped the circuits of commercial value and the star system and has come to be a relatively established art practice. But in the qualities I have been describing, it also contains a considerable impulse to *nonidentity,* breaching the bounds of the media forms and practices that it designates. That quality is apparent in Lippard's grappling with an adequate definition, where she comments that "artists' books are best defined as whatever isn't anything else. They aren't quite photobooks, comic books, coffee-table books, fiction, illustration."[37] And yet they are not distinct either; as Phillpot argues, artists' books lose something

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essential about their form and intervention if they are treated "as separate from other books" or hived off into an institutional, art-oriented collection separated from books more generally conceived.[38] I would run with this and suggest that the promise of the artists' book is that it loses distinction as a circumscribed genre to emerge within and across *all* textual media as a condition or quality of formal experimentation. The point has been made recently in Michael Hampton's *THEARTISTSBOOKANEWHISTORY* (an edition by the artists' book project Banner Repeater, run by Ami Clarke, whose project space has the uncanny appeal of being located on the platform of a working train station, Hackney Downs platform 1). Hampton's expanded and decentered history of the artists' book, whose narrative order is fragmented by its published form as a folded A2 sheet, opens to such a diverse range of works, materials, and methods that it performs his speculation that, as the medium of the book cedes the data management function to the computer and so frees up its experimental capacities, the borders of the artists' book will become indistinct, "no longer circumscribed by art world protocols, and steganographically indistinguishable from the book itself."[39] I will pick up this point later under the theme of "post-digital publishing," but what I draw from it now is that on the terrain of *political* textual media, *Anti-Book* shares this boundary-breaking orientation. The anti-book is not a distinct body of practices and works but the experimental condition of communist publishing, where communist publishing is not a circumscribed field of social movement media but designates a potential—a potential charged with conflict and politics, certainly—of all textual production.

Having sketched the principal features of the bookwork qua self-differing medium, I would like to provide an illustration with Kostelanetz's irregular serial publication *Assembling* (1970–87), which he founded with Henry James Korn as something of a hybrid of magazine and book (they use both terms to describe it). Given that it was established by writers interested in the literary avant-garde, *Assembling* was never going to be held to established genres of textual expression, but the magazine's challenge to constraints of form was manifest as much in its physical and design characteristics as in its texts. It was anomalous indeed; in Allen's evocative description, *Assembling* was "a chaotic and uneven (in every sense of the

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word) mix of art, poetry, and other kinds of texts and documents with inconsistent margins, fonts, and layouts, printed on a heterogeneous range of papers, from colored construction paper to college-ruled notebook paper."[40]

Assembling entered the field of the bookwork as a problematization of the "editorial/industrial complex" of commercial publishing, whose economic and aesthetic paradigms functioned as a bar to the publication of experimental writing.[41] It did so as a "counter-editorial" experiment whereby the "restrictive, self-serving nature of traditional editorial processes" were surrendered in a commitment to publish all and any submissions the editors received, following each issue's invitation to writers and artists to submit, ready for publication, "otherwise unpublishable" works on paper (for the first issue: up to four sheets of 8.5" × 11" in multiples of one thousand for an edition of the same number, one of which was Ed Ruscha's "Chocolate," a thousand sheets of paper marked with a smudge of that confection).[42] In this way the contributors were compelled to take on many of the practical and design functions previously the preserve of the publisher, so becoming their own self-publishers as they learned the reproduction methods most conducive to their work. *Assembling* also surrendered its property rights, returning copyright to the contributors. With these characteristics in mind, we might understand *Assembling* as a work that held together simultaneously the processes of assembly *and* disassembly. Contributions were pulled into each bound issue, while the concentrating functions of editorial, publishing infrastructure, and copyright were pushed out or distributed to contributors and the unity of form and content was found in the magazine's very disunity, as it "gain[ed] its cohering definition (which is approximately repeatable) from its unprecedented diversity."[43] Not that *Assembling* was wholly without consistency, for each issue's call for contributions invited works along a theme (as an example, "our place in nature and nature's place in us" for number 12). But even these thematic concerns were handled in the assembling manner, where, given that there was no editorial evaluation, each issue theme was expected to "appear sporadically through the magazine—a flexible motif recurring through the collage, appearing in widely different forms."[44]

If that was the coherence of the magazine—a disassembling assembly, if you will—the conventional relationship between published work and

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reader was caught up in a similar dynamic, in a printed entity that was more to be "enjoyed" than "evaluated," that could "be read backwards, as well as forwards, or from the middle outwards," where "the leaps from one chapter to the next are so great" that it might best be read in a fragmented fashion, "in circumstances that encourage discrete pauses."[45] And just as centralized editorial judgment was surrendered, the function of evaluation was devolved to the reader in what may have been a disconcerting experience:

> Many readers feel the need to be reassured by an authority figure; feel that a work must be consecrated by some sort of expert; feel the need to be told what is good and what is not. *Assembling* makes no such assurance; publication in *Assembling* does not consecrate or validate anything. Instead, it returns the responsibility of judgment to the reader, where it belongs.[46]

One might have expected this unedited heterogeneity to result in the devaluation of art practice in an unregulated banality, but if the remit of *Assembling* for the "unpublished and unpublishable" was a negation of editorial evaluation, it was less a refusal of quality than an injunction to unconstrained experiment. As the call for the ninth issue put it, "*Assembling* offers every contributor an unparalleled opportunity not only to transcend editorial restrictions but also to surpass his or her previous work with a singular contribution that will stand out from the surrounding pack."[47]

Assembling was constituted as an anti-book, then, across its textual, editorial, commercial, formal, and physical properties. Indeed, it expressed the anti-book's recursive and anti-identitarian sensibility not only in these aspects of textual and media form but in its self-understanding as a publishing project; as Kostelanetz wrote in the first issue, "in the end, . . . we should like to find the dissemination of experimental writing changed so radically that *Assembling* would have no further need to exist."[48]

COMMUNISM, WRITING, PUBLISHING

The second domain of intervention of the anti-book is the material culture of communist writing and publishing, especially with regard to developments in communist thought after the passing of the historical workers'

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movement and to the capitalist conditions of textual media. It is here that *Anti-Book* is most directly located. If I seek to fashion an anti-book orientation and sensibility from the domain of the bookwork, it is to draw out and develop the *bookwork of communism*—though I make this point with the strong proviso that the conjunction contains an impulse toward nonidentity.[49] The conjunction of communism and bookwork does not designate a specific body of works, nor a depoliticized aestheticization of communist publishing, but interference between the two domains toward an expanded understanding of the materiality of communist textual expression.

The term *anti-book* has arisen in the domain of communist publishing too, as a description Guy Debord applied to *Mémoires,* the communist bookwork he constructed with Asger Jorn in the late 1950s, which famously embodied its critical valence in its covers of heavy sandpaper. I will save consideration of that work until chapter 3 and instead set out the broader features of the anti-book intervention in relation to the domain of communist writing and publishing. It is useful to this end to work with an essay by Régis Debray, "Socialism: A Life-Cycle," published in translation in *New Left Review* in 2007.[50] Though ultimately unsatisfactory, Debray's piece is striking for its account of the imbricated or "ecological" relation between "socialism" (his inclusive term for the ideological spectrum of the historical workers' movement) and its media forms, helping to orient our attention to the materials and forms of political text.

Debray's essay is grounded in his broad thesis that we cannot grasp the nature of conscious collective life without understanding "the material forms and processes through which its ideas are transmitted," its "mediological" "ecosystem."[51] His articulation of this thesis here is that the media ecology of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century workers' movement was wholly integrated with, and patterned by, the material and intellectual culture of print, of which a guiding image is the alignment of the inauguration of the First International (1864) and the invention of the rotary press (1867), which multiplied the speed of impressions tenfold. All the components are here for a rich materialist ecology of socialist media: printers, typographers, print runs, distribution circuits, text durations, books, newspapers, parties, intellectuals, reading habits, and pedagogic

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styles. The printer is something of a nexus, the "pivot" of socialism as "a worker intellectual or an intellectual worker"—the very word *socialism,* as if to confirm the point, coined by a typographer, Pierre Leroux. And the newspaper is the privileged media form.[52] Here Debray's thesis dovetails with Lenin's account of the preeminent organizational power of the party newspaper (a point I return to in chapter 5), but Debray's analysis of the immanent relation between print and socialism has considerably more ontological and epistemological reach.[53] Not only newspapers, Debray assesses the place of letters, fliers, illicit newssheets, pamphlets, journals, books, archives, libraries—the historical workers' movement was a veritable weave of text and textual forms. And for Debray, this was intrinsic to the social production of revolutionary politics, a culture of reading and writing through which the abstraction of thought could break with the sense impressions of the immediate present and open the possibilities for thinking revolution: "Writing collectivizes individual memory; reading individualizes collective memory. The back-and-forth between them fosters the sense for history by unearthing potentials within the present, creating backdrops and foregrounds; it is fundamental for the idea of socialism."[54] Let me step from this to reflect a little on the place and value of writing to communism.

Statements like Debray's here are not uncommon. Vilém Flusser argues, for instance, that movement between the production and consumption of writing is not only key to the capacity of writing to carry collective meaning but, in so doing, and in its capacity to form a linear movement through time, writing is also the *essence* of politics: "the truly political gesture is to write and publish texts. All other political engagement follows from and submits to texts."[55] Naturally, I consider the production and consumption of writing and publishing to have a significant role in political composition, though my enthusiasm is more tempered, and I would frame it rather more critically. As the title of Flusser's book *Does Writing Have a Future?* suggests, his affirmation is framed as a defense, or at least a specification, of writing in the face of ascendant screen media. The context of Debray's argument, as we will see shortly, is not dissimilar. My argument differs somewhat. In affirming the political value of material text, *Anti-Book* in no way approaches writing as a residual technology

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under threat from the ascendant image; with the ubiquity of text–screen interfaces and the social media platforms of Twitter, Facebook, and so on, we may not be "deeper in words than we've ever been," but text is hardly on the wane.[56] If writing is not under threat, neither is it to be wholeheartedly affirmed or placed in as pivotal a place as it is in Debray and Flusser. Writing and publishing are in fact rather *ineffectual* political means. The ever-expanding volume of revolutionary text should confront communist writers with a degree of introspection as to the value of our endeavor. Gilles Dauvé and Karl Nesic memorably put it like this:

> There's little chance that a person who's never once felt the urge to blow anything up will write meaningful subversive stuff. But the same is true of a person who has never felt some derision when looking at bookshelves full of revolutionary books and archives, or at the infinite availability of similar books and archives on the Internet. There's no relevant theory without an awareness of the limits of words in general and theory in particular.[57]

Moreover, while revolutionary politics would seem to be inextricably entwined with writing and publishing, at times "indistinguishable from its expression in print," as Kevin Gilmartin notes of radical protest in early-nineteenth-century Britain, this is an overdetermined historical outcome, not an inevitability.[58] It comprises different causes, for example, the elevation of publishing as a political practice in its own right that was attendant on its state repression in the early years of the workers' movement, or the possibility that writing and publishing afford of practicing politics, or feeling that one is doing so, in times when the horizon of collective action is limited. And the prominence of publishing in radical history should not blind us to the latter's strong and significant oral and audiovisual forms or to the fact that text will likely be ever more interlaced with such forms in the future.

It is important to register also that the relation between revolutionary politics and writing has by no means always had progressive outcomes. For all that the cultures of publishing opened new dimensions and possibilities in radical politics, they also had significant class and gender effects of closure and exclusion. James Vernon makes a convincing case that as the balance of radical expressive culture in Britain tipped toward print media

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during the nineteenth century, print, championed as "the universal tool of reason," was in fact "far from universal."[59] Print and its cultures did not herald the arrival of mass politics, as is the received account, but tended "to reconstitute the public political sphere in an ever-more restrictive fashion, excluding groups believed to be 'irrational' like women and the illiterate poor from public political debate."[60] A significant role was played by legislation, which sought to shift the locus of political subjectivity onto the possessive individual of the bourgeois polity, with measures that "privileged the uses of print in order to erode the public and collective character of oral and visual politics with a conception of politics as the private affair of (male) individuals."[61] Even in the more radical currents, it seems that the cultures of writing and print were overburdened by Enlightenment rationalism, which served to generate a field that was somewhat desiccated in comparison to the "pungent oratory" and radical themes of the oral culture from the same quarter, as Iain McCalman describes his disappointing experience of reading this press from the 1819–21 period.[62] Returning to the twentieth century, radical print also contains a troubling pedagogical orientation, in the ascendant model of socialism as the "raising of consciousness," a model accompanied by an often hallowed respect for the intellectual and the corresponding division between leaders and led. This is a division central to Lenin's model of the party and its textual plane of composition, the newspaper, with its one-way communication between writer/party and reader/masses.[63] It is a division, as I consider in chapters 3 and 6, that was found as extreme in the grotesque compound of intellectual and tyrant that characterized state communist regimes, where "the most philistine despot found himself wreathed in the laurels of knowledge."[64]

Returning to Debray, the *temporality* of print has a significant place in the further specification of his socialist media ecology. It took a full twenty-five years for the first French edition of *Capital* to sell out, and yet the slow take-up of Marx did not unduly affect the global impact of his work. Marx was saved from oblivion, Debray asserts, by "the backwardness of cultural circuits in relation to those of market production."[65] If this notion of retarded cultural production is suspect—I will argue shortly that market relations were intrinsic to modern publishing from

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the start—comparison between nineteenth-century publishing and now lends support to his thesis. For the speed of turnover today is such that books have little time with which to establish themselves in the market before they are lost in the Niagara flow of publication, and beyond the bounds of the book, the rapid cycle of obsolescence of online media is of course intrinsic to its corporate and subjective forms.

With this comparison, we move into Debray's explanation for the demise of the socialism–print ecology. It is the *ubiquity* of media that is decisive—in the form of television, though the inclusion of social media (which postdates Debray's text) would not upset his thesis. Socialism, Debray suggests, survives in its ability to carve out an independent milieu against a hostile environment; newspaper, party, clandestine cell, counterculture are all constituted in relation to forces that besiege them from the outside. But the ubiquitous media of television collapses that separation: "The homogenization of symbolic flows tends to dissolve non-conformist nuclei into a common hegemonic gas. Television, now the principal interface of all social groups, erodes the boundaries between inside and out, and levels access to information."[66] Without such boundaries, socialism is lost in the ubiquity of information, as, it seems for Debray, is *all* emancipatory politics, left behind in the predigital age: "Behind the 're' of reformation, republic, or revolution . . . there is a hand flicking through the pages of a book, from the end to the beginning. Whereas the finger that presses a button, fast-forwarding a tape or disc, will never pose a danger to the establishment."[67]

Appealing as Debray's thesis is for its close attention to the material forms and social lives of political textual media, it is considerably flawed. Not least of its problems lies in interpreting the rise and fall of the workers' movement in this way exclusively through the lens of media form, for it was a complex, overdetermined entity, fully interlaced with mutations in capitalist social relations as a whole, and should be analyzed as such. But if it is reductive to explain the collapse of the workers' movement by the rise of television, Debray is correct that the substantial social subject that was the workers' movement has met its end. There is a melancholic quality to his assessment of the passing of this "great fallen oak," but that is not the way I understand it.[68] The demise of the workers' movement

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would seem to be the end of the possibility of socialism understood as a substantial subject, an independent or autonomous movement that in its bounded sociopolitical forms, its identity, offers a living, breathing alternative to capitalism. But for the political perspective of *Anti-Book,* on the contrary, the end of the workers' movement (and the forms of Taylorist and Fordist industrial capitalism of which it was the special product and antagonist) is the condition for an *invigorated* communism. I will take a moment to develop this point, to flesh out a little the references I make in subsequent chapters to a communism without identity.

The temporal arc of Debray's media ecology broadly pertains to the period and form of working-class struggles that the French communist journal *Théorie Communiste* has called "programmatism," where communist futures were to be founded on social relations formed in present modes of struggle, such that communism was the affirmation of an existent proletarian subjectivity. In their words,

> programmatism is . . . a theory and practice of class struggle in which the proletariat finds, in its drive toward liberation, the fundamental elements of a future social organisation which become the *programme to be realised.* This revolution is thus the affirmation of the proletariat, whether as a dictatorship of the proletariat, workers' councils, the liberation of work, a period of transition, the withering of the state, generalised self-management, or a "society of associated producers."[69]

Marx in his more visionary moments pointed beyond the framework of programmatism, positing the proletariat as the class not of self-affirmation but of *self-abolition.* It is a formulation, as in this example from *The Holy Family,* that crackles against his time and ours: "The proletariat . . . is compelled as proletariat to abolish itself and thereby its opposite, private property, which determines its existence, and which makes it proletariat. It is the *negative* side of the antithesis, its restlessness within its very self, dissolved and self-dissolving private property."[70] But up until the 1970s, the nature of the class relation, or the capitalist organization of production and reproduction, was such that the working class was socially determined to recognize itself as a positive identity, amassed and concentrated in factories and industrial cities, and affirmed as such first through its

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independent institutions, by which it gained organizational power and social respectability, and later through its political and legal recognition within the social democratic state. Under these conditions, the program of revolution was carried within the working class on the basis of its role as provider of labor. This is the transhistorical understanding of labor that was intrinsic to the workers' movement, labor "that constitutes the social world and is the source of all social wealth," as Moishe Postone's critique characterizes it.[71] In so taking a historically specific feature of capitalism alone to be a universal human condition, the resultant politics necessarily took its field of contestation to be *distribution of the products of labor* and not *critique and abolition of labor and its subject,* a "new mode of politically administering and economically regulating the *same* industrial mode of production to which capitalism gave rise."[72]

Hence the apparent autonomy of the working class from capital, as established in the institutions of the labor movement, turns out to have been the specific form of its *integration with capital,* as its institutions and motivations fashioned an affirmative subject out of that which was imposed by capital and so all too easily came to merge with the motivations of capitalist development. As such, the workers' movement "loses its way" not so much in being insufficiently revolutionary but in having a content that was insufficiently differentiated from that of capitalist revolution.[73] Of this tendency, the state-led and totalitarian industrialization of the Soviet Union, which far exceeded in rapidity what market capitalism could have achieved, is the most acute moment, Bolshevik "counterrevolution" as "the accomplishment *against* [*proletarians*] of *their* revolution."[74] This, then, is the structural impasse of the workers' movement, whereby "the proletariat seeks to liberate against capital its social strength which exists *in* capital" and exists there only.[75] Even in its more radical variants that come after 1917 as a challenge to the counterrevolution of Bolshevism, communism was still formulated as a question of *organizational form*—most emblematically, the "workers' council" versus the Leninist party—rather than as practical critique of the *content of work* and capitalist social relations, or, it is the same thing, of itself as subject of labor.[76]

For *Théorie Communiste* and others in the "communization" current, it is only now that this horizon of the affirmation of labor and the positivity

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of working-class identity can be overcome, after the cycle of struggles of the late 1960s and early 1970s (where the "refusal of work" within the sphere of labor, and struggles over social reproduction among women, racialized groups, and others structurally marginalized by that sphere, signaled the crisis of the programmatic affirmation of workers' identity) and the subsequent restructuring through globalization and neoliberalism. This is in large measure because what Marx called the "real subsumption" of labor in capital has reached a stage where capital no longer needs an affirmative subject of labor—having found the rigidities of national labor markets, the welfare state, collective wage bargaining, and so forth, to be obstacles to valorization—and is instead increasingly self-positing. There is simply no ground on which to found a positive and enduring workers' identity or to project its coming into being as a revolutionary subject. The global fragmentation of labor; the long-term decline in real wages; the move to the heart of the wage relation of flexibility, precarity, and under-unemployment; the extension of super-exploitation and informal work attendant on the tendential rise in "surplus population"—from all this comes "the impossibility of the proletariat to relate to itself positively against capital: the impossibility of proletarian autonomy."[77] In other words, class—the condition of needing to sell one's labor, whether achieved or not, and of being dependent on those whose labor power is enabled by the unpaid work of social reproduction—is evacuated of positive identity and becomes increasingly experienced as an external imposition, and apparent as such.

This is of course experienced as a resounding defeat, that which is registered in Debray's essay, but for *Théorie Communiste,* it is also a considerable opportunity, for now the class relation has itself removed the obstacle of the self-affirmation of workers' identity. Grounding communism in a defeat of this magnitude might sound like a parody of the forced and deluded optimism of Trotskyist sects or of the progressive logic of traditional Marxism, but communization theory is fully cognizant that the prospects look brighter for barbarism than for communism. The point, rather, is that if struggles amid our crisis of social reproduction tip in anticapitalist directions—and the structural impasses presented to any other route out of the crisis suggest that they just may—they will no longer

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be caught by the self-defeating limit of workers' identity, that communism now cannot but be the immanent rupture of capitalist social relations.

But where, then, is communism located? If a program founded on the affirmation of workers' identity is now lost, communism turns instead on encounters with the *limits* to identity, on the structural impasses, complicities, and exclusions that condition sectoral identities, social movements, racialized and gendered groups. Here the limit is less a boundary that solicits transgression than the immanent horizon of self-overcoming. It is the challenge to and dissolution of the subjectivities that populate capitalist society as its integral product and necessary anchor, *including* the identities of struggle. "The theory of communization alerts us to the limits inherent in . . . struggles, and indeed is attentive to the possibilities of a real revolutionary rupture opening up because of, rather than in spite of, those limits."[78] And again, emphasizing now the seemingly paradoxical presence of communization *within* struggles, "communization occurs only at the limit of a struggle, in the rift that opens as this struggle meets its limit and is pushed beyond it."[79] It may appear a surprising association, but as a politics of limits, communization can thus be understood as a sociohistorical specification of Maurice Blanchot's characterization of the wrenching nonidentity of communism: "Communism is what excludes (and excludes itself from) every already constituted community."[80]

Returning to our theme, how can we conceptualize the place of *textual media* in such a communism without identity? Clearly it cannot take the shape of an integrated ecology of political subjects, institutions, and autonomous media forms, for this is lost with the loss of the workers' movement. A communization media theory—to imagine such a thing for a moment—might be expected to turn to the determinate conditions and limits of the ideas, textual expressions, and media forms arising in contemporary struggles and movements. But *Anti-Book* takes a different approach, pivoting from the terrain of struggles to the terrain of textual media, indexed as it is to experimental practices in media form. In this, *Anti-Book* both shares features with and departs from communization theory. It shares the insistence on the nonidentity of communism, communism as the self-abolition of the proletariat that is immanent to the social relations of capitalism. As such, the anti-book experiments explored

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here emerge immanently to particular encounters between communist thought and media form, as they draw into focus, trouble, and undo the subjectivating and commodifying forms of textual media in capitalist societies. As a communist critique of writing and publishing, the anti-book is situated, various, discontinuous, and resistant to effects of integration and identity, even as, or because, it is caught up in the media relations and forms of capitalism.

As to this book's difference to communization theory, in being grounded in experimental political publishing and not in struggles as such, the nonidentity of communism is freed up to develop across diverse modalities of sociomaterial being—sometimes developing in close proximity to common themes in communist politics (when I take up the question of the textual and authorial dimensions of the party, for example), other times moving in less common arenas (regarding sensory relations to objects, diagrammatic modeling, the passional dimensions of signs, the indirect voice of myth and media editorial). And while I associate these with a communism against and beyond workers' identity, they are not indexed to it as the outcome of a determining structural limit of the present moment. Indeed, taking advantage of the discontinuities and experimental pockets of the history of writing and publishing, I mostly draw examples of anti-book practice from periods that were broadly conditioned by the programmatic form of workers' identity. Some of these projects arose in critical scenes that intimated the critique of this identity, in others the challenge was more direct, while some had no direct relation to communist thought at all but have much to offer an expanded communism of textual matter all the same.

In none of this does *Anti-Book* suggest a *prefigurative* theory of communist media; I contend only that communist writing and publishing, in its immanent critique of the forms of capitalist media, can be developed beyond the domains and powers of ideas and concepts alone to become a more fully materialist site of experimental practice. In their small way, these practices articulate a wrenching pull toward postcapitalist modes of being but are only this insofar as they operate amid the conditions of life—or of writing and publishing—determined by the capitalist mode of production. To enumerate the features of such practices and group

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them here under the abstraction of the anti-book would contradict the aim of this concept to push in the other direction, to encourage attention to the specificities of particular projects. Instead I want to move now to situate the broad argument of this book in opposition to two aspects of textual media: the textual form of the "manifesto," which could plausibly be described as the primary textual correlate of programmatism, of the workers' movement as historical subject; and the capitalist structures of mediated communication, in social media and in the history of the book.

ANTI-MANIFESTO

My casual opening remark that *Anti-Book* is not a manifesto could have taken a more systematic form, and with some cause. For the anti-book breaks with this mode of political writing that has for so long, and all too easily, been adopted by leftists that it is as if it is the *natural* form for self-consciously political writing to take. What, then, is this textual form, and what is wrong with it? In its revolutionary or avant-garde mode, the manifesto is a purloined textual form, appropriated from the institutions of state and church where it served as a means to disseminate injunctions backed by force. As with its form in such institutions, the revolutionary manifesto articulates authority, and yet this authority is of a peculiar kind, for it is wholly fabricated, having no basis in existent institutional power. This feature is patently clear in Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto,* arguably the founding text of this modern genre of radical writing. One need simply to juxtapose its claims to meet the "nursery tale of the Spectre of Communism with a Manifesto of the party itself," a manifesto that proclaims no less than the inevitable triumph of world communist revolution, with the actuality of its birth, initial impact, and institutional setting, as a work commissioned by a few dozen émigré radicals in the back room of a London pub and which, after some influence in the 1848 German revolutions, went largely unnoticed for some twenty years.[81] This gap between claim and reality must be overcome if the manifesto's proclamations are to hold any plausibility, and it is this overcoming that is key to the manifesto's specific textual procedures, hitched, as Martin Puchner has argued, to a particular subjective form.[82]

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The modern manifesto works by constructing a political subject through the diagnosis and presentation of the subject's historical emergence and future actualization. In turn, in a performative loop, this projected future flourishing of the subject lends authority to the text in the present where the subject is lacking. The manifesto works, in other words, in the future perfect; its claim to authority in the present *will have been* sanctioned by the actualization of its subject in the future. It is a performance for which a certain theatricality—the staging of the authority that it lacks—is at once necessary and necessarily ever excised.

Yet the manifesto is a decidedly twentieth-century textual form, one made redundant not so much by the waning of its performative power caused by overrepetition (though boredom with the manifesto form must surely set in eventually) but by the historical loss of any referent that might plausibly serve as its subject.[83] For a communism, and a state of global struggles, that operates through the immanent rupture of identity rather than the programmatic coming to presence of a collective subject, the manifesto form is politically ineffectual, without purchase on the conditions of social being. And yet, perhaps in concentrating on the classical form established by Marx and Engels, I have taken the manifesto's structure too literally and missed the particular qualities it has taken in other contexts. It is worth considering the arguments of some of the manifesto's advocates, pertaining to the twentieth-century avant-garde and feminist writing. Shifting our attention to the avant-garde, Alain Badiou makes the case that a manifesto is a "rhetorical envelope" that protects and nurtures "*something other than what it overtly names or announces.*"[84] Its function is not to realize its promise per se but to "devote every energy" to the otherwise "precarious and almost indistinct" nature of real action in the present, action that has the evental or convulsive quality of the coincidence of its instantiation with its undoing.[85] For Badiou, then, "we should not be surprised by the correlation between vanishing works and staggering programmes," for it is precisely the ephemeral quality of real action, and not a coming substantial subject as such, that the manifesto envelopes and offers to the future.[86]

It is an appealing formulation, though one that should be treated with some circumspection. On shifting scale from the rhetorical structure of

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the manifesto's emerging subject to the more micro and intimate level of the "vanishing works" it nurtures, it is not at all clear that the manifesto's claim is in fact so radically altered. For the avant-garde manifesto is historically indexed less to "precarious and almost indistinct" evental action than the identitarian tendencies of vanguard organizations, where the group functions like a microcosm of the announced subject that, in the latter's absence, it must stand in for as substitute. As often as not, these "staggering programmes" have been alloyed with subjectivities that are as equally staggering in their pompous self-regard. Here the manifesto form has been more a means of establishing the ideology, subjectivity, and boundaries of vanguard groups than of confirming their evental undoing, with the concomitant tendency to degenerate, as Debord has it, into "party patriotism," "theoretical paralysis," and "wooden language" as the group calcifies against the exterior world that it must of necessity appraise as distinct and hostile or as having fallen short of its idea.[87]

However appealing is Badiou's formulation of the manifesto as a textual agent of the convulsive event, partisans of the latter would do better, then, not to seek a new manifesto but to subtract this integrating and self-bolstering textual form from the field of political writing—to create "one manifesto less," in Deleuze's framing—so as to reflect and confirm the demise of the unitary political subject and, with it, the politics of the avant-garde.[88] That said, something of a subtractive procedure can be conducted within the manifesto form itself, through a deconstruction or ironizing of its formal techniques and subjective patterns, now shifting us to a third mode of manifesto production. Janet Lyon and Kathi Weeks have argued compellingly that this has been a route often pursued in feminist manifestos, with Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," for example, standing out as an indubitable success.[89] Attention to such ironizing textual procedures in particular manifestos would work against the weight of my discussion of the manifesto thus far, which has presented only a conceptual formalization. To correct this in line with the method of *Anti-Book* would necessitate engaging not only with the textual procedures and qualities of particular manifestos but also with their *extratextual* dimensions, their many materialities. As an indication of what this might entail, we can consider the singular example of Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto.*

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As all self-respecting manifestos, Solanas's text launches against its object with a vertiginous clarion call: "'Life' in this 'society' being, at best, an utter bore and no aspect of 'society' being at all relevant to women, there remains to civic-minded, responsible, thrill-seeking females only to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation and eliminate the male sex."[90] Yet the subject that is indicated here, and unfurls riotously through the text's pages, functions as much to undercut the standard revolutionary agent of the manifesto form as it does to establish any kind of proto-separatist constituency. The apparent universality of the political subject of the generic manifesto is achieved in no small part by hiding its gender particularity, a task performed in the abstraction of gender neutrality. In this it shares the gendered structure of the bourgeois public sphere, as Melissa D. Deem describes it, whose "logics of invisibility and abstraction render the male body invisible while simultaneously condemning the female to hyperembodiment."[91] In *SCUM Manifesto,* that abstract universality is overturned by Solanas's vicious particularization of the male body as a decrepit and debased biosocial form. Conversely, freewheeling SCUM women—"funky, dirty, low-down SCUM gets around"—who have "seen the whole show" of embodied sexuality, take on, in Deem's words, the "frictionless" role previously reserved for men.[92] Yet the chance of establishing an alternative subject on these grounds is simultaneously undercut by the excision of all but a handful of women who would meet the exacting standards of the text's "Society for Cutting Up Men." For the effect of this is less to establish a privileged point of aggregation, a SCUM groupuscule, than to undo the subject of woman, to remove the possibility that this subject might act as a living alternative to patriarchal society, because that would be a brake on the situated unfurling of feminist politics. As Lyon acutely frames it, and in a manner resonant with my preceding discussion of the nonidentity of communism,

> Solanas's "we" is strategically singular: anything more inclusive would preclude the possibility for random action in the name of feminist anarchism; anything more inclusive would fix identity, thwart performativity, register a sexed normativity. Anything more inclusive would, in short, reify a category called "women" whose political history would most certainly outstrip its utopian possibilities.[93]

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That is the textual effect of *SCUM Manifesto,* or a part of it, but what of its broader sociomaterial forms? Commercially published by Maurice Girodias's Olympia Press in August 1968, shortly after Solanas's near-fatal shooting of Andy Warhol, this book did a considerable job of refashioning and reduction of Solanas's material text. At least, Solanas objected to it. In 1977, she committed the most unusual act of defacing the copy (Olympia Press's second edition) held by New York Public Library, in effect disowning her published work by striking out the author's name on the covers and replacing it with that of Girodias, a move that is all the more arresting for the extent to which the looming face on the cover binds the book to Solanas as author (Plate 1). But this was a commercial publisher's construction of the author. Girodias was guilty, Solanas wrote here, with an intensive script that in places punctures the page, of inflicting "sabotaging typos" on the text (the addition of punctuation in the *S.C.U.M.* of the title for one, and as Breanne Fahs describes it, the removal of her playful and erratic use of punctuation, grammatically distorted sentences, and marginalia).[94] And Solanas's defacement of the book moves also against the marketing of dissent: against the book's market-oriented form as a work of scandal, as secured in the first Olympia Press edition's salacious and opportunistic paratextual framing through the Warhol shooting, and against its positioning in relation to an existent subjectivity of "Women's Liberation militants," as the aim of Vivian Gornick's introduction is described on the back cover, with this collectivity and Gornick's name receiving at Solanas's hand the appellation "flea."[95]

By contrast, the first edition of *SCUM Manifesto,* published in fall 1967, is a considerably more awkward entity, a "luminously scummy creation," as Sara Warner and Mary Jo Watts have it.[96] It has qualities that were neither "captured nor preserved" by the Olympia edition, the latter functioning more as an act of substitution and erasure than of publication, or as publication *as* "manipulation and sabotage," to adopt the terms of Solanas's defacement.[97] Her first edition was a self-published mimeograph of 21 A4 pages, stapled once at the top left. In contrast to Olympia Press's perfect-bound book, it carries something of the ephemeral and viscerally noncommercial quality intrinsic to much radical and fringe publishing of the time, with its covers adorned not with the consumer-seducing

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visage but a rather more estranging typed-text comprising the author's name, the work's title, a brief abstract, the publication date, and (I will comment on this anomaly shortly) a copyright notice.[98] Reading across the critical and popular works devoted to Solanas, it is apparent that the ephemeral quality of this edition holds considerable attraction, and in ways that are not always progressive. Dana Heller shows that in Mary Harron's Solanas biopic, *I Shot Andy Warhol* (1996), the ephemerality of the manifesto ("blurry mimeographed pages lost in the gutters of the 1960s," as Harron imagined it) is commandeered to figure the decline and eclipse of print media and radical writing at the expense of the ascending order of the image.[99] Here Solanas and her encounter with Warhol are not taken up within the complexities of her situation but are simply made to personify the losing party in a confrontation of technologies of cultural reproduction, the "poverty of print [that] cannot possibly stand up to the opulence of the silkscreen," the "originality and impermanence of print" that fails against the "enduring order of Factory-reproduced images."[100] As Heller points out, that Solanas would likely not have apprehended her story and that of radical print media in this way is starkly apparent from the considerable emphasis *SCUM Manifesto* places on new technology, its "vision of a world in which mechanization and systems of mass (re)production would render work, sexual intercourse, and the money system obsolete."[101]

I develop a more critical account of print ephemerality in chapter 2, but to continue the discussion of Solanas's manifesto, let us agree that ephemerality is not in itself enough to constitute the self-published edition as a "SCUMMY thing," to use a phrase that Warner has unearthed from Solanas's archive, an extratextual articulation of her politics.[102] For that, other aspects of her manifesto must come into play, of which I will consider only the relation of writing to money and work—or "unwork," as the manifesto describes the sabotage of labor.[103]

Solanas's material text was interlaced with money, but in embodied, gendered, and proletarian ways somewhat different from the articulation of money in the Olympia Press edition. She sold it by mail order and on the streets of Greenwich Village priced at $2 for men and $1 for women, thus performing a reversal of the gender inequality that is intrinsic to

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the universal equivalent of money.[104] This performance gains traction because money had an inescapable hold on Solanas's life and writing, the street-corner and mail order sales of her texts serving, albeit rather unsuccessfully, to finance her precarious and often homeless existence, along with panhandling, prostitution, and the occasional writer's fee.[105] We see this hold and its contradictions poetically displayed if we contrast Solanas's efforts to *repel a political constituency* of sympathetic readers—following the hitherto discussed logic of the manifesto's text—with her mocking invitation to her enemies to *sell* a 1977 self-published edition as quasi-commodity. The following is taken from two different advertisements that she placed in *Village Voice* and the feminist newsletter *Majority Report*:

> Olympia Press went bankrupt and the publishing rights to *SCUM Manifesto* reverted to me, Valerie Solanas, so I'm issuing the *CORRECT* edition, *MY* edition of *SCUM Manifesto*. . . .
>
> I'll let anybody who wants to hawk it—women, men, Hare Krishna, Daughters of the American Revolution, the American Legion. Maurice Girodias, you're always in financial straits. Here's your big chance—Hawk *SCUM Manifesto.* You can peddle it around the massage parlor district. Anita Bryant, finance your anti-fag campaign selling the only book worth selling—*SCUM Manifesto.* Andy Warhol, peddle it at all those hot shit parties you go to. . . .
>
> Everybody, make big money selling the anti-money system *SCUM Manifesto.* Don't defend it, don't interpret it, don't even like it. Just SELL IT! SELL IT! SELL IT![106]

Solanas's steadfast commitment to copyrighting her text can also be seen in this context.[107] It is a contradictory and depoliticizing move to copyright a manifesto, claiming individual proprietary rights over a text that purports to speak from a position of universality, but as Solanas's proprietorial claim departs from the politics of the manifesto form, it finds a place in the proletarian condition of her writing, her effort against all odds to be a writer and to earn a living as such. Solanas wrote to survive, while seeking means of survival that freed her up to write. Writing *as* work, writing as an *escape* from work—these pull in different directions, certainly, but both carry Solanas's political reversal of her abject existence that is the fulcrum

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of "SCUM" in its nonacronym mode, a politics apparent for example in her text "A Young Girl's Primer on How to Attain the Leisure Class." It was published initially in the *Playboy*-esque magazine *Cavalier* in 1966 (under a different title) and then compiled with her play *Up Your Ass* in a self-published "SCUM Book," as is the handwritten imprimatur.[108] This "primer" poses the "typically feminine dilemma of carving out . . . in a male world a way of life appropriate to a young girl of taste, cultivation, and sensitivity," to which it offers the somewhat less orthodox solutions of panhandling, charging for conversation, shoplifting, and prostitution: "There must be nothing crass—like work. However, a girl must survive."[109] Hawking her textual product on the streets was not so different from panhandling—a reversal of abjection that is here mediated by self-published print. And yet it was clearly no solution to her condition. The abject reality of Solanas's life displays the gendered and classed nature of writing, or the impasse that the cruel amalgam of gender and class can present to writing, an impasse that was no doubt confirmed for Solanas in the occasional moments of interest in her writing from those who could provide access to a market—from Girodias, Warhol, the *Village Voice*—as she fell back into abjection from encounters that could not, in any case, have had outcomes adequate to the impossible subject of her manifesto. Shooting Warhol may have been as much a product of the limits to women's proletarian writing, a magical solution, as it was of Solanas's critique of men, of a propensity to violence, or of mental instability (not that these dimensions of her life were unrelated). It was a magical solution she put into words in a subsequent phone call to Warhol: "I want you to drop all criminal charges, pay twenty thousand dollars for my manuscripts, put me in more movies and get me booked on Johnny Carson. If you don't, I can always do it again."[110]

It is apparent, then, that the modern political subject of the manifesto can be successfully unworked and that shifting from the terrain of a manifesto's text to its sociomaterial relations allows other qualities and effects of writing and publishing to come into view and open to political intervention. And yet even in such ironizing achievements, the manifesto's subject remains, negatively, as the object of critique, acting as a constraining attractor, a situation that leaves ironizing manifestos ever more without

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purchase the more the subject they undo is itself undone by the social relations that remove the grounds of its existence. Unlike the subjects of the classical and avant-garde manifesto, feminist problematization of subjectivity and the conditions of collectivity is of course sociopolitically salient, but its passage and intervention in textual form is, I would argue, no longer best taken by the manifesto. Describing Haraway's adoption of the manifesto form as "perhaps an obvious choice," given the socialist feminist intent of the text, Weeks quotes Lyon thus: "To write a manifesto is to announce one's participation, however discursive, in a history of struggle against oppressive forces."[111] But what happens when the obvious choice is *not* taken, when the political dimensions of writing and publishing are developed in altogether different directions? One might respond that the solution to the limits of the manifesto is to turn attention from the textual content of manifestos to their material qualities and effects—the direction I have taken regarding Solanas, or that I take in chapter 4, regarding the anonymous authorship of the *Communist Manifesto*—but that begs the question, why, then, write manifestos at all, and not develop textual procedures of more critically inventive and pertinent kinds? This book concerns these other kinds of experiments with text and media form, though for now, I will continue a little more with a critique of the manifesto, so as to situate it more firmly in the contemporary conjuncture, specifically in the media dimensions of recent struggles.

A certain dissatisfaction with manifestos plays out in *Declaration,* a recent e-pub pamphlet by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri on the global uprisings of 2011. The media form of *Declaration* exhibits political qualities. Written and published amid upheaval and crisis, of which it seeks to diagnose dominant features, it was self-published, priced cheaply at 99¢, and initially available only digitally, as if to match the urgency of the text with speed of distribution—though, as others have noted, unlike much of the online critical material associated with the crisis, *Declaration* still requires monetary exchange, is subject to a copyright license, and is bound to the proprietary format of Kindle.[112] There is a certain urgency also in its graphic design, with the stripped-back cover based on the first page of text—in Courier font with the title picked out, as if on the hoof, in yellow highlight—pulling in the reader without delay.[113]

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Given our habits, these are design qualities that might well indicate to readers that they are encountering a manifesto, but Hardt and Negri are quick to disabuse that assumption, opening *Declaration* with the words "This is not a manifesto."[114] "Manifestos," they continue, "provide a glimpse of a world to come and also call into being the subject" of that world. They "work like the ancient prophets, who by the power of their vision create their own people." But this form has reached its terminus, Hardt and Negri suggest, because contemporary social struggles "have reversed the order, making manifestos and prophets obsolete. Agents of change have already descended into the streets and occupied city squares, not only threatening and toppling rulers but also conjuring visions of a new world."[115]

For all that this resonates with my argument, Hardt and Negri's explanation of the manifesto's obsolescence is not wholly adequate. It is itself too consonant with the formal structure of the manifesto: the projected people *have now arrived,* can create their own visions, and hence no longer have need of the manifesto's projections. It is not that Hardt and Negri are incorrect in observing a more immanent relation between the textual output of recent struggles—the Arab Spring, the Spanish Indignados, Occupy, and others in the "movement of the squares"—and their grassroots actors, a more *tactical* than representational orientation to this media. Prominent exemplars are the Egyptian pamphlet *How to Revolt Intelligently*—which seemed to strike a chord for its use of diagrams to circulate tactics rather than text to describe ideological goals—Occupy's refusal to make representational "demands," and the significant place of social media in recent political organization. The U.S. movement against the murderous structural racism of police and state, known for a time through the Twitter hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, is a crucial example of the latter, as was the use of social media in reporting the Israeli state's maiming and murder of Palestinians in Gaza in July–August 2014, a partial outmaneuvering of the formidable Israeli propaganda machine.[116] But while this more immanent mode of textual political mediation does indeed seem to have navigated past the manifesto mode of political representation, it hardly describes the arrival of a self-representing subject, a conclusion all the more confirmed as the Arab Spring became contained and overrun

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by highly repressive regimes. Rather than declare the realization of the manifesto form, we would do better to move outside of its explanatory and rhetorical structures altogether.

AGAINST COMMUNICATION

Hardt and Negri do in fact make tracks in this direction, for there is a second dimension to their assessment of contemporary media politics, a call to intervene immanently in the media forms of contemporary communication. Elsewhere in *Declaration,* they pick up on the critique of communication that Deleuze develops in his analysis of "control society."[117] "Speech and communication have been corrupted," Deleuze remarks in a 1990 interview with Negri. "They're thoroughly permeated by money—and not by accident but by their very nature."[118] And, in another text: "If there is no debasement of information, it is because information itself is a debasement."[119] In part, this describes communication as *command,* the reduction of expression to the linear exchange of unambiguous signals, whereby the signifying field is flooded with clichés and order-words, a "psychomechanics" of automatic response.[120] But it also entails a popular compulsion *to communicate*: "Repressive forces don't stop people expressing themselves, but rather force them to express themselves."[121] A dozen years before the rise to dominance of the compulsive communication of social media, this is an impressionistic yet prescient observation. Drawing on it, Hardt and Negri argue that the diffusion of social media and its integration with socioeconomic life have created a dominant subjective form of the "mediatized," a fragmented and distracted capitalist subjectivity absorbed in a perpetual present of communication, participation, feedback, and attention.

Here they are in the company of a significant body of research that has addressed the capitalist dimensions of social media, the co-implication of mediated sociality and subjectivization with new forms of commercial capture and control. Jodi Dean's cogent critique in *Blog Theory* and elsewhere of the subjective forms of what she calls "communicative capitalism," for example, attends to something like a preconscious compulsion encoded in the sociotechnical infrastructures of social media, with the real time

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immediacy of attention, connection, and user production that is inscribed in each platform's mundane functionality, front-loaded as they are with "status" and "timeline" functions that incite users' interaction.[122] In the ever additive pursuit of links, likes, comments, followers, friends, shares, page views, and so on, the *act* and *quantitative volume* of communication come to displace *what* is communicated, a kind of general equivalence of indiscriminate communication: "unlike a message, which needs to be understood, a contribution is just an addition," "a fundamental communicative equivalence" where "each message is communicatively equal to any other."[123] And this comes with its own affective bind, as users are captured in compulsive repetition, fueled by "tiny affective nuggets," "a smidgen of attention" from each communicative act, momentarily relieving the ambient anxiety that is part and parcel of curating a successful personal profile, a profile that is in turn at once a training ground for the entrepreneurial self and a weak compensation for otherwise precarious lives.[124] True, the point can be overstated; meaning remains, though now in a slippery and ephemeral form, and biographical narrative is key to the self-disclosure intrinsic to Facebook, for example, as Beverley Skeggs and Simon Yuill stress.[125] But these serve social media's infrastructural imperative of quantitative expansion, not the other way around.

A book such as mine on the many materialities of text would not proceed far if it opposed mediatized subjectivity and extralinguistic association per se; the problem is that this is an *incapacitated* subjectivity, which is reciprocally constituted with a particular business model, one integral to its software architecture. As Robert W. Gehl and others have shown, users produce, supply, and rank online media content for free, at once generating the content that attracts user attention and granular marketing data about the tastes, preferences, trends, and values associated with that attention, to be sold and mined as differentiated audience to advertisers, now in real time.[126] Hence, on one side of the interface, social media compels compulsive individuation and self-disclosure, while on the other side, it generates revenue by "simultaneously 'dividuating' that data into multiple aggregate representations to be monetized as targeted ad space," as Skeggs and Yuill put it.[127] And, in the case of Facebook, this economic model is integrated with financialization through stock trading

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based on monopoly control of its data, tax avoidance, and diversification and expansion well beyond the firm's original structure, including into mobile communications infrastructure, financial services, and drone technology.[128] Social media, then, is "*class* media," as Dean stymies the cozy associations of this collective noun.[129]

All this incitement to communicate on the technical and affective plane of the interface dovetails with the heralded values of our time, as discourses of participation, communicative democracy, and freedom of expression offer no line of opposition but serve to further arouse and sanctify our communicative subjection.[130] That the multi-billion-dollar information firms such as Google, Apple, and Facebook emblazon themselves with such values (while of course resolutely guarding their proprietorial rights to data) should be indication enough of the need for circumspection. Granted, one might respond with good reason that social media nonetheless offers ample possibility for political use by those with different values, namely, that it enables greater and broader access to the production, dissemination, and consumption of critical news and ideas; speedy and networked modes of organization at local and transnational scales; rerouting around corporate news agendas; and rapid circulation and intensification of political passions. The examples given earlier of Occupy, the Arab Spring, and #BlackLivesMatter illustrate these points. Yet too often in celebrating activist and political *use* of social media, analysis fails to attend to the way that nominally critical use can leave untroubled, or even extend, social media's incapacitating subjective and economic forms.[131]

I register here this critique of the subjective forms and business models of social media communication, forms and models to which *Anti-Book* is opposed, but this book does not add to this burgeoning research field. My focus, rather, is on critical alternatives, and those that are often located, as I argue toward the end of this chapter, in "post-digital" domains adjacent to digital media. On this terrain of experimental textual matter, the critics of social media tend to make less headway—though see the important research associated with Amsterdam's Institute of Network Cultures, especially the Unlike Us network, and Coventry University's Centre for Disruptive Media.

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I will continue with Dean here, because as well as providing a cogent critique of communicative capitalism, she is a prominent figure in the recent return to "communism" in political theory that has been associated with Badiou and Žižek, and so we might reasonably look here for a communist media practice.[132] Yet while Dean is herself a keen blogger of radical content, her formulation of communism is organized around a stark dichotomy between media activity and direct action, where the former disperses in amorphous circuits of compulsive communication and the latter concentrates a collective subject in physical space that institutes a "division" or "cut" in the status quo, a cut that is necessarily also enacted with the circuits of social media.[133] In response to what must be a nagging question of whether there are *any* possibilities for "a media politics that does not merely circulate contributions," Dean evokes an apparent range of options, but they are hardly convincing, even I think to her: "from the cultivation of critical media competencies and local, face-to-face, street-level activism to the organization of covert cells of communist hackers."[134]

One more possible means of a counter media practice is noted in *Blog Theory,* that of the medium of the book, which Dean comes to while marking the apparent perversity of using a book, with its slow writing and publishing schedules, to develop a critique of social media, with its rapid technological transformations and revelry in the ever new. But herein lies its political value. The book's very slowness, she argues, enacts the cut in circuits of compulsive communication that enables thought to emerge, a structure of intervention that she intriguingly associates with the "slowdown," from the classical repertoire of workplace struggle: "As an object whose form installs delays in sampling and syndication and whose content demands postponed gratification, the book mobilizes the gap of mediacy so as to stimulate thought."[135]

Appealing though this point is for shifting attention to media forms adjacent to social media, it has two significant problems. First, as a move into media politics, it is woefully dematerialized. Whereas capital requires intricate and complex technoaffective mediations to arouse, interpolate, and nullify human biosociality in communicative patterns conducive to its perpetuation, here the book's politics lies only in the possibility of

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better "thought," whose ground is a subject refounded on signification (the return to "symbolic identity" against the rootless "imaginary identity" of social media, in Dean's Lacanian formulation).[136] If unconvincing, it has a certain logic in her argument. Having made the strongest of cases for the critique of media form, where critical content is rendered irrelevant, or worse (because it fuels the subjective compulsions and market paradigms of communicative capitalism no less than any other content), Dean seeks to found a media politics on content now *shorn* of media form. But how, then, is content to be generated and carried, beyond immediate "face-to-face activism"? Here the book steps in as a medium that facilitates thought and meaning without getting in the way—a medium perfectly married to the signifying forms and capacities that it apparently carries. This leads to the second problem, for if the book is hence a medium without any medium-effects, as it were, it is implicitly a medium outside of capitalist social relations, relations that would be grasped in and through an appreciation of its media form. But in fact the medium of the book has the strongest of capitalist pedigrees, as I consider in what follows. This is not to say that there is no mileage in investigating the comparative speed and slowness of different media forms—indeed, it is a feature of my argument in subsequent chapters—but to appeal to the slowness of books as facilitator of thought, while leaving their capitalist forms untouched, is clearly inadequate for a communist media politics.

In any case, is the medium of the book today really so slow? The intermediation of textual media and the broader communicative patterns of contemporary capitalism are such that books cannot be understood as actually so separate from the compulsions and anxieties of the social media field, the "temporal take-over of theory [which] displaces sustained critical thought, replacing it with the sense that there isn't time for thinking."[137] Insofar as books, particularly those by writers with high social media profiles, are reviewed and promoted in social media and marketed through the promotional algorithms of Amazon, Facebook, and the like, the book demands to be understood less as a *cut* from communicative capitalism than as a particularly effective vehicle for extending it, multiplying connectivity, feeding communicative compulsions, and exhausting readers (and authors too, no doubt) in equal measure.

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BOOK AS COMMODITY

Notwithstanding the intensity and extent of the capitalization of communicative capacities and mediums today, it is not a new phenomenon. I want to take a little time to sketch how the commodity form has accompanied the medium of the book since the inception of modern capitalism, for, as I indicated earlier, the point is often missed. The pages of *Anti-Book* explore many and various formal and material features of writing and publishing against the commodity forms of textual media, but an understanding of the more generic condition of the book qua commodity can stand as a background to this study of anti-book publishing, a condition that later chapters gesture toward as they make their particular arguments or that they refine and extend in specific contexts.

There is a strong tendency in the popular imaginary to see books and the culture of text as forms and practices that transcend the realms of capital; it is, Ted Striphas suggests, "one of the most entrenched myths of contemporary book culture."[138] If the spiritual quality of the book plays a part here, as I discuss in chapter 3, it is also a function of the broad tendency of capitalist societies to accord works of "culture" a transcendent value beyond that of economic utility (a value that in reality is far from extraeconomic, being interlaced with class distinction and functioning as rationale and resource in any number of state and corporate schemes of governance, plunder, and profit).[139] Of this tendency, books are perhaps the privileged instance, so much identified as repository and receptacle of culture—of the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic good and true—that they become indistinct from it.[140] This transcendence of books does not happen all by itself, of course, but is a discourse that has played a central part in institutions of the book and learning, not least the publishing business. As Trish Travis argues, publishing has couched its advanced *industry* in a discourse that presents books as objects immune to commodification, "goods which pretend not to be goods at all."[141]

It is not a uniform picture, however. Laura J. Miller makes a nuanced case for considering the supposedly extraeconomic, elevated culture of books to have been historically achieved by drawing distinctions against certain classes of books, those books associated with the young, the working class,

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and women (dime novels, romances), whose commercial nature was this time *foregrounded,* proffered as index of their appeal to base and popular desires, as books that "reduc[ed] culture to a profane commodity while emphasizing whatever would appeal to the largest audiences."[142] It is an important reminder that critique of the commodity form of the book needs to be careful so as not to replicate the tropes of bourgeois distinction.

Yet this observation does nothing to challenge the fact that print, popular *and* elite, existed from its earliest days as an industry, "governed by the same rules as any other industry," where the book was first and foremost "a piece of merchandise," as Febvre and Martin decisively put it in their canonical study of the emergence of the printed book.[143] And in this, books have by no means been reluctant players; books have not only kept up the pace, as any good commodity, but have often been quite the innovators across numerous fields. Indeed, the printed book was the first uniform and repeatable mass industrial commodity—not comprising measured quantities of indeterminate volumes, as Benedict Anderson clarifies the point with regard to other early industrial commodities such as textiles or sugar, but a volume in its own right, a distinct and self-contained object.[144] In combining moveable alphabetic type (a repurposing of metal-processing techniques employed since antiquity for minting coins) with a mechanical press (as adapted from that used in pressing wine), the Gutenberg letterpress shifted the manufacture of books from the self-directed movements of the scribe to mechanical process, subject to the rhythm of the machine, and so marked "the line of division between medieval and modern technology."[145]

We see in this also the proximity of printing to the move during the late eighteenth century to constitute and divide intellectual and manual labor, as was integral to the emergence of the capitalist form of "abstract labor," toward the creation and generalization of which mechanical process was oriented. As such, the mechanical press enabled a transformation in the organization of labor as work tasks took on the quality of the assembly line, subdivided according to roles and parts in the production chain, and subject to the dictates of productivity that the conjunction of mechanism and time enforced. For example, at the close of the sixteenth century, it has been estimated that a pressman, one role in the print workshop, had

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to take off on average twenty-five hundred sheets in a fourteen-hour day, a rate of one sheet every twenty seconds.[146] This is probably a considerable overestimation; we should avoid projecting the extent, uniformity, and intensity of today's division of labor into the past, as D. F. McKenzie counsels.[147] But the theoretical principle of the transformation of labor associated with mechanical print is not in doubt, and by the 1830s, this was established to the extent that it was the copperplate engraving of the printing trade (and not, say, the textile mill) to which Charles Babbage turned to illustrate the logic of modern industrial production (in his theories of mechanical process and the division of labor that informed Marx's analysis of the same in the *Grundrisse*).[148] Tending toward uniformity and equivalence, books could now be manufactured in considerable quantities, as is what happened; it appears that between 12 million and 20 million books were printed before 1500 alone, a mere half-century after the invention of the Gutenberg press.[149]

This movement toward abstract labor in the print house was interlaced with developments in the labor of writing, which took a different direction. As Tim Ingold has argued, efforts to decompose skill into the creative intelligence and imagination of *art,* on the one hand, and the habitual bodily technique of artisanal *labor,* on the other, revolved in large measure around the status of engraving, "whose natural affiliations [were henceforth seen to] lay with the printing trade," with labor and technological reproduction.[150] From the late eighteenth century, the writer thus came to be seen "as an author rather than as a scribe," divorced from the multisensory production of "lines" to instead become a composer of intellectual "texts," an "author engaged in verbal composition."[151] In contrast, the job of the printer became merely "to run off innumerable copies of the author's work." The author became "a literary artist," the printer "a typographic artisan."[152]

If we move from the *production* of books to the complementary pole, we find, as part of the nexus of capitalist social relations of which the mechanical press was both product and bearer, that the mass production of print is contiguous with the first signs of mass *consumption.* Indeed, the rise of the bourgeois class, with its expanding demand for technical and literary text, was a significant social push for the invention of the

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Gutenberg press, the latter a technical solution to a social problem that was taxing inventive minds all across Europe.[153] Once established, early print media were associated with a host of mechanisms for the maintenance and cultivation of reading publics, from the simultaneous production of different books so as to avoid heavy losses if one failed to concentration on best sellers, of which Martin Luther's texts were perhaps the first, binding together Protestantism and the early print industry (a conjunction I return to in chapter 4 through Luther Blissett's novel *Q*).[154] The publication of heretical texts, for which publishers could be put to death, was also as much a question of meeting demand and cultivating markets—especially necessary at times of economic downturn, when demand for books would rapidly fall off—as it was an expression of political aims or any other of the desires and values that were amalgamated in the decision to publish. The printed book was closely associated also with the development of copyright, for which the author-function—with its associated cultural values of individual "creativity" and "originality"—emerges as product and guarantor, as I discuss in chapter 4.

All the same, my emphasis on the print–capitalism nexus should not indicate indistinction between the two, blinding us to the variations and contradictions of this nexus or its relative density as compared with other industrial sectors. Although the book industry has played a pioneering role in the development of capitalist production and consumption, it has not always been at the leading edge. Indeed, its socioeconomic structure remained wedded to petty-commodity production for some time after generalized commodity exchange had taken hold elsewhere. In the development of its specifically modern form, a pivotal role is played by copyright. The Statute of Anne (1709) and the series of legal decisions culminating in the judgment of *Donaldson v. Becket* (1774) shifted copyright from a right of the publisher to make physical copies to the right of the author over the text as "incorporeal property."[155] Henceforth, text—the labor and product of writing—was an alienable commodity like any other, a development that N. N. Feltes shows to have been integral to the nineteenth-century shift from the petty-commodity production of books as luxury goods to generalized commodity exchange, with the arrival of what he calls the "commodity-text."[156] Here, mass-produced books and mass bourgeois

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readership were constituted in "simultaneous and reciprocal" relation, with both, moreover, emerging as expressions of the social relations of capital, as it extended and intensified the production of surplus value through the publishing industry.[157] The outcome was of course neither inevitable nor unilinear; in Feltes's Althusserian conceptualization, the commodity-text is an overdetermined, differential network. As such, it invites consideration of the interplay between literary content and commodity form. Serial production was the dominant formal feature, as the nineteenth-century book moved from the luxury three-volume novel to book serials, periodicals, and part-issue novels—a development that maximized sales volume and integrated readers through the punctual consumption of discrete parts of a whole, building up effects of interpellation through the unfurling of the rich and varied detail of setting, character, and action that seriality allows.

Innovation on this front continues throughout the life-span of the book industry, as Miller, Squires, and Striphas have shown.[158] In the development of consumer credit, for instance, books pioneered debt-driven purchasing, where their esteemed cultural value eased consumers to overcome the negative moral connotations of debt. More recently, books have had a pronounced presence in just-in-time, warehouse-based online retail, for it was the rationalized capitalist structure of books and the book industry, exemplified by the sophisticated logistical mechanism of the International Standard Book Number (ISBN), that encouraged Jeff Bezos to found Amazon.com on the sale of books and not another commodity.[159] And in the realm of the e-book, the book industry is currently at the forefront of technical and legal developments in rent and control, where systems of digital rights management stymie the reproducibility of digital text by locking ownership to individual consumers and time-limited contracts.[160]

We should inquire further of the "people of the book," the book and its *class.* I have noted already the reciprocal relation between mass-produced books and bourgeois audiences in the emergence of the modern book commodity. Looking more closely at that class of readers, it is apparent that the culture of books and of reading has been intimately associated with and patterned by a complex of cultural values that designate and solicit class distinction and separation. George Steiner grasps well a number of

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the dimensions of this complex. After noting that the book, in its "classic phase," is a "privately owned object," he writes,

> A man sitting alone in his personal library reading is at once the product and begetter of a particular social and moral order. It is a *bourgeois* order founded on certain hierarchies of literacy, of purchasing power, of leisure, and of caste. . . . The classic act of reading . . . is the focus of a number of implicit power relations between the educated and the menial, between the leisured and the exhausted, between space and crowding, between silence and noise, between the sexes and the generations.[161]

As we have seen, it is often lamented today that digital and online media, and the distracted and fragmented forms of attention with which it is correlated, are eroding the autonomous practice of concentrated, deep reading and, as research on neural plasticity appears to indicate, the very cognitive capacity for such.[162] It is a development compounded by the loss of leisure time associated with the extension and intensification of work across the span of the waking day (including the extension of pseudo-work for those formerly designated as "unemployed," now subject through workfare and punitive welfare regimes to the discipline of work, if not quite its content). But Steiner's comments should remind us how much the norm of deep reading has always been a classed capacity and resource. That is not to deny the significance and value of practices and institutions that countered this condition—we should recall here the centrality of cultures of text to the political associations of the historical workers' movement, for example, and that reading was considered enough of a threat to the class power of the Southern slave regime that slaves who were caught teaching others how to spell were commonly hanged—but to register that the historical norm of book culture has a strong bourgeois hue and a considerable role in the maintenance of class distinction.[163] To extend this point with regard to the particular media form of the novel, James Thompson has shown how it facilitated the bourgeois construction-in-separation of the economic and domestic spheres and hence of the social as cleaved by gender.[164] The eighteenth-century novel encapsulates, imagines, and projects an apparently noneconomic sphere of the domestic, where totality is grasped, but only as marriage, and literary form, such as the perceived

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objectivity of "free indirect discourse," presents a picture of closure and authority. More generally, the novel enabled "a nascent, heterogeneous, and fragmentary middle class to envision itself as coherent, unitary, and stable before such coherence and stability came into being."[165]

This appreciation of the class and gendered distinctions of book culture invites consideration of its other stratifications, not least of which concerns the role of the medium of the book in colonialism. Relativizing our notion of the book, Walter Mignolo assesses its place in the history of colonial conquest in Latin America. Like Deleuze and Guattari, as I show in chapter 3, he considers the integration of religious authority with the book to have been less a particular manifestation of this media form than an *integral feature* of its historical emergence, the book as stand-in for God:

> One could surmise that "the idea of the book" may have entered into the system of representation of graphic semiotic interaction at the point when "writing" gained its autonomy from orality and the "book" replaced the "person" as a receptacle and a source of knowledge. It is quite comprehensible that when the word was detached from its oral source (the body), it became attached to the invisible body and to the silent voice of God, which cannot be heard but can be read in the Holy Book.[166]

Once established in this form, and no doubt derived from these features of autonomy and spiritual truth, the book was subsequently projected as a universal standard across time and space. Mignolo shows how, starting in the European Renaissance, books became entwined with an evolutionary model of thought that understood the codex to be an achieved form that had existed *in potentia* since the inception of writing and hence the standard against which other forms of writing and technologies of inscription should be assessed. A series of equivalences were drawn, whereby "true writing" is alphabetic writing, writing is indistinguishable from the idea of "the book," and this identified with the medieval and Renaissance codex. As with time, so with space: this is the model that accompanied the colonial and missionary encounter with non-Europeans, whose writing systems and signifying practices were viewed through the European lens to be inadequate "books" and thus to be burned as works of the devil

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and/or substituted with the material and ideological forms of the Western codex. As Mignolo insists, then, it is not in the *content* per se but rather in the *form* of the book that colonial power was manifest—albeit, as we will see in chapter 3, that this was a form that downplayed the significance of its material instantiation in favor of a fixation on the spiritual unity of its content.[167]

A more recent instance of the colonial impact of the form of the book is provided by its place in the deligitimization and destruction of the distributed textuality of Australian Aboriginal peoples. Like Mignolo, McKenzie invites us to appreciate the "nonbook" textual forms of non-European cultures, in this case where landscape is dotted with organic and geological features that are embedded in narrative structures and symbolic forms. Here the "real absurdity" lies not in treating rocks as textual forms but in the importation into such symbolic systems "of a single-minded obsession with book-forms."[168]

POST-DIGITAL PUBLISHING

A contemporary account of the many materialities of political publishing needs a way of handling the relationship between print and digital media; this is where *Anti-Book* finds its third broad domain of intervention. If colonialism provides an opportunity to relativize the normative standard of the book, digital networked media institute a more direct and pervasive decentering, suggesting, as Jay David Bolter puts it in *Writing Space,* that "like the specializations on outer branches of an evolutionary tree, the printed book is an extreme form of writing, not the norm."[169] In the early enthusiasm for digital media, Bolter and others foresaw that new network functionalities—notably, the branching and nonlinear structure of hypertext—might serve to realize the potential of avant-garde and experimental writing and publishing, to realize the "antibook," as he describes it, where "antibooks . . . disrupt our notion of how a book should look and behave before our eyes."[170] For Bolter, this realization would simultaneously remove the critical ground from predigital experimentation, as the (now digital) medium shifts from resistant object of critique to one of facilitation. Take Derrida's work of textual and graphic experimentation,

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Glas (which reads Hegel in relation with autobiographical writing by Jean Genet), as Bolter describes it:

> In the printed *Glas* the network of relationships that normally remains hidden beneath the printed page has emerged and overwhelmed the orderly presentation we expect of a printed book. In the World Wide Web, on the other hand, the many relationships among textual elements simply float to the surface. An antibook like *Glas* would no longer be an antibook in an electronic edition, because it would work with rather than against the grain of its medium.[171]

It is of course true that digital and online media dramatically alter the field of writing and publishing, but, twenty-five years after *Writing Space,* it is apparent that our situation is less one of the realization and suppression of the anti-book in digital hypertext than one where the anti-book finds new conditions within which to gain far-reaching traction, to move beyond hitherto established confines. Contrary to the picture of a rhizomatic release of digital hypertext, core aspects of the object of the anti-book's critique have come to proliferate, innovate, and intensify at quite some pace. Established mechanisms of the author-function and the capitalist forms of publishing have a renewed vigor in contemporary textual media, and these are interlaced with born-digital instruments of capture and accumulation, not least of which, ironically, is the linking function of digital hypertext, as we have seen in the case of social media. Concurrently, the effect of digital media to decenter the printed book, loosening much textual media from the hold of the data management function, has freed up its other capacities, which serve as the terrain for a renewal of the critical sensibility of the anti-book, now less bound to specialist fields and potentially released across the broad terrain of writing and publishing. This terrain, then, is at once transformed by digital media and includes print media as an integral part.

It is this last point that I focus on here, for it is key to understanding how this book approaches the contemporary relation between print and digital media. To do so, I will push against another figure that Bolter employs to characterize the changed status of the book: "the late age of print."[172] It is an expression more recently taken up by Striphas to characterize the

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condition I have been describing where the preeminence of the book has waned, relative to the wealth and diversity of digital audiovisual and textual media ("it seems difficult to imagine books shouldering much world-historical responsibility any more"), at the same time as it has been transformed by digital technology and the broader changes in production and consumption associated with post-Fordism.[173] Striphas has a keen sense of the intermediation of communicative media, but the characterization of this condition as "the late age of print" is unhelpful. It conveys a strong impression that we are living through a period of epochal change from one media form to another, a "period of transition," as Striphas has it, the "passing" of the "Age of Print" for Hayles.[174] No doubt there is considerable truth in this naming of the contemporary as a particularly transformative period in the movement from paper to pixel; as I write, e-books, only a credible mass phenomenon since 2007, have overtaken print books in sales volume.[175] And yet such temporal framing does a disservice to the content of this body of research, for it channels the complexity of contemporary media forms into a linear narrative of change, and one that downplays the significance in the present of the medium that is deemed to be passing.

Anti-Book parts with this linear characterization of the passing of the printed book and proceeds instead on the understanding that *the digital future of the book has already arrived,* wherein print media has a fully contemporary place. We live in a time of "post-digital" publishing, as Alessandro Ludovico and Florian Cramer have characterized the situation, where digital technology has transformed all aspects of media such that, in Kim Cascone's words, its "revolutionary period . . . has surely passed."[176] The post-digital "describes the messy state of media, arts and design *after* their digitization (or at least the digitization of crucial aspects of the channels through which they are communicated)."[177] Not only have smart phones, tablet computers, e-books, e-mail, and social media become ubiquitous and thoroughly enmeshed with social life but online digital media have also colonized their prehistory, as *print itself has become digital,* paper publishing now traversed and articulated by the most advanced technologies, infrastructures, and compositional paradigms. Cramer offers an illuminating image, if a little tongue in cheek, to convey the character of this transformation: "Paper publishing has largely become

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a form of Digital Rights Management for delivering PDF files in a file sharing–resistant format (but also, a more stable form of long-term storage of digital content than electronic storage)."[178] To make the more general case, today's printed books are composed, manufactured, marketed, distributed, reviewed, and debated through media that are thoroughly digital in their structure. And so printed books are not the last vestiges of predigital publishing but are forms of "post-digital print," where the relationship between print and digital media is no longer characterized by linear succession but is one of *hybridization,* a complex and variegated set of publishing relations and forms, at once interlaced and specific. With this hybridization comes a loosening of the boundaries and authority of the book, which is now only one form among an interlaced and variable set of media forms, where publishing has come to infuse social life and is increasingly indistinct from writing and mediated communication more generally conceived. Murphie is right, then, to describe *mutability* rather than postprint as the essence of publishing today: "Publishing is now a generative, recursive network of events, with multiple forms of feedback into the ongoing mutation of forms of publishing themselves."[179]

One of the benefits that accrue from approaching the field of publishing in this way, rather than as a linear succession of mediums, is that it encourages attention to the potential contemporaneity of *any* medium, "old" and "new" alike. Such is apparent in a recent Banner Repeater pamphlet by Nina Power, *A Pamphlet about a Book about a Blog,* which discusses her experience of publishing a printed book, *One Dimensional Woman,* from writings that had first appeared on her blog, *Infinite Thought.* The title and published form of this work reverse the linear order of the "new," so serving to bring blog, book, and pamphlet into contemporaneous juxtaposition. Power's text has the same post-digital effect in considering the difference *and* interplay of these mediums while addressing the changes that digital media has introduced into writing and the difficulties and experimental possibilities that arise when writing migrates across them: "if making the transition from blogs to books was problematic, making it from Twitter will be even more interesting."[180]

Older media can in these ways, hence, be fully part of the present, but they can also have a structuring effect on the *future.* As Simon Worthington

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puts it, "there is already a lot of 'book' in the digital—the vector of incursion moving as much from print to digital as it does from the digital into our notionally stable, 'enshrined' cultural form of the book."[181] Certainly the book has been decentered from its dominant cultural position in the realm of textual media (though newspapers, job printing, documents, and so forth assured that it was never *quantitatively* dominant), and yet, as Derrida has it, in the new media environment, the "figures" of the book continue to impact the digital field. He makes a good deal of the inherently figural quality of the book, where a series of metonymies shift *biblion,* the Ancient Greek root of "book," meaning a *support* for writing (itself derived from *biblos,* the internal bark of the papyrus), toward *writing* in general, and only then to *book,* whose artifactual form was originally not the codex but the scroll. I have counseled already, following Mignolo, against seeing the book as a linear progression of forms of textual inscription; the modern codex *is* a distinct and particular entity, compared, say, to the scroll. But the history of the figures of the book suggests, all the same, that there is slippage and mutation in the physical forms that count as books. And so there is nothing fundamentally ersatz about an electronic reading device being called a "book." Electronic readers may well come to shrug off the book as a means of self-classification, but they may not, given all the features of books and book cultures with which they are interlaced; the book as unit of discourse, pagination, bodily habits of reading, page turning, bookmarking, the prescribed rhythm of reading, modes of legitimation, the author-function, proprietary regimes—all these are prolonged into the terrain of the e-book and digital publishing.

I do not mean to suggest that such interplay between print and digital media is an inherent good. In the face of the digital restructuring of textual media, Derrida seems to take comfort from the living on of the book (where "we can trust in the conservative, even fetishistic impulse" to "sanctify—sanctify once again—the book, the aura of culture or cult of the book"), whereas an anti-book orientation would be more critical, for which Johanna Drucker's research is instructive.[182] By contrast to Bolter's notion that digital hypertext is the *realization* of the aesthetic promise of experimental print, Drucker argues compellingly that the aesthetic potential of digital text has in fact been *hidebound* to the clichéd

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and reductive iconography of the book that abounds in culture, with "too much emphasis on formal replication of layout, graphic, and physical features and too little analysis of how those features affect the book's function."[183] It results in aesthetic forms and design applications that are often *less* complex and dynamic than the three-dimensional object of the codex, the branching structure of hypertext contrasting less than favorably to the "n-dimensional" reading of the printed page, as Jerome McGann has described the "multivariate" potential of the page for multiple, layered, and discontinuous meanings and semiotic interactions.[184] Drucker calls instead for a "diagrammatic writing" of new textual mediums and semantic effects that is truly responsive to the spatial and graphic potential of fungible electronic environments, a move that would break the conservative hold of book iconology on digital media while allowing books to continue their work of experimentation, apart and, no doubt, in interplay with digital diagrammatic writing.[185] Again, we see here the post-digital difference and interplay of mediums in their specificity, which Drucker embodies in her own practice as researcher and practitioner in both the digital realms of speculative computing and printed artists' books. Other compelling experiments in this post-digital terrain include work on "hybrid publishing" and the "unbound book" at centers like Leuphana University's Hybrid Publishing Lab, Amsterdam's Institute of Network Cultures, and Coventry University's Centre for Disruptive Media, where the unbound book, as Gary Hall describes it, develops "the book as something that is not fixed, stable and unified, with definite limits and clear material edges, but as liquid and living, open to being continually and collaboratively written, edited, annotated, critiqued, updated, shared, supplemented, revised, re-ordered, reiterated and reimagined."[186] I should mention also the astonishing resource of experimental post-digital publishing curated by Silvio Lorusso, the Post-Digital Publishing Archive.[187]

I take up some of these themes of hybrid and unbound publishing with regard to magazine form in chapter 5, but this book is more strongly informed by a different aspect of the post-digital. Here the post-digital signifies a critical distance to digital media and its commercially induced pull of the "new," what Lorusso calls "an obsessive quest for future models," where the space that experimentation and innovation is sought "frequently

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corresponds to the narrow ecosystem of the newest device or platform."[188] In this sense, with Cramer again, "the term 'post-digital' can be used to describe either a contemporary disenchantment with digital information systems and media gadgets, or a period in which our fascination with these systems and gadgets has become historical."[189] Regarding the presence of print in post-digital publishing, it is not, for example, a revival of mimeographed zines but "zines that become anti-blogs," even as zines are at the same time transformed by the ethical and organizational conventions of online and open source cultures.[190] This is a feature of the considerable interest in print publications that has accompanied the expansion of digital media, where the post-digital is characterized by an experimental focus on the materialities, aesthetics, and properties of printed media. There is a historical dimension to it, apparent in high-profile exhibitions in London, for example, on the dissident Surrealist journal *Documents* at the Hayward Gallery in 2006 (where the *journal* took center stage rather than the movement), Futurist and avant-garde books at the British Library in 2007–8, and bookworks at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2008. This historical focus might have suggested a last gasp of interest in print publishing, its specific qualities becoming visible at the moment of its demise, had it not been accompanied by a burgeoning practitioner field of small-scale print publishing—in art and critical theory circles but also in more overtly political scenes. Examples of the latter include *STRIKE! Magazine* (2012–), which has the rare distinction of being the last paper newspaper in Fleet Street, London's traditional home of the print industry; *LIES: A Journal of Materialist Feminism,* a queer and antiracist project framed compellingly as "a communist journal against communists"; *Letters: An Anti-Political Communist Journal* (2007–), experimental in both content and form; *Chto Delat?* (2003–), newspaper of the Russian art and activism group of the same name; and *Tiempo Muerto* (2012–), an anarchist arts and letters newspaper from Mexico City. This realm of print publishing is also sustained by a wealth of small press and self-publishers' fairs and centers. To name a handful of these with which I am familiar, London's Publish and Be Damned, DIY Cultures, Small Publishers Fair, London Art Book Fair, the London Anarchist Bookfair, New York's NY Art Book Fair, and bookwork centers like Minnesota's Open Book; New

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York's Printed Matter and Franklin Furnace; and London's bookartbookshop, Book Works, London Centre for Book Arts, and Banner Repeater.[191]

In the post-digital manner that I have been describing, such contemporary print projects tend to be highly attentive to the particular aesthetics and social relations of printed matter, holding a critical and reflexive distance from digital and online media, while also utilizing digital capacities. For instance, while the Chto Delat? group publish online, they see the organizational, social, and sensory qualities and effects of the printed newspaper—a Russian and English bilingual publication in print runs of one thousand to nine thousand, distributed for free at exhibitions and political events—as a key dimension of their practice. Or take the small press AND Publishing (2009–), which focuses on the aesthetic and political capacities of the print technology of print on demand (a publishing process I discuss in chapter 5), whose digital capacities enable the publication of printed artists' books "without having to compromise and conform [to] the conventions of a mass market."[192] And a number of small press publishers employ open source business models where books are simultaneously available as purchasable hard copy and free downloadable e-pubs, as is the case with Open Humanities Press, Punctum Books, re.press, Minor Compositions, and Open Book Publishers.

No doubt there are reactionary elements at play in contemporary print scenes, of a future-canceling "retro" culture, and class dynamics also, what Jess Baines describes as a striving for social distinction through technical specialism and aesthetic rarity, as posited against the perceived plebian accessibility of digital and online media.[193] But my thesis is that burgeoning cultures of print also carry a post-digital sensibility, where paper, pixel, and critique of media form open out into a complex field of publishing potential unconstrained by the depoliticized fixation of the technological "new." Let me stress that in no sense do I aim to map this field, which is developing in numerous exciting directions that I have not addressed here. The contribution made by *Anti-Book* to the contemporary field of post-digital publishing is to introduce and extend specifically communist problematics as they pertain to the many materialities of text.

Anti-Book carries a post-digital sensibility, then, with explorations of paper and print publishing taking a dominant place in many of the chapters

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that follow. Some of these, notably the works I consider in chapter 3, come from a time before digital publishing. My point in approaching these with a post-digital eye is not to say that differences of media history and sociopolitical conjuncture are now collapsed by the post-digital condition, as if these works have been made wholly contemporary. Rather, their salience is as historical instances of experimental material text that indicate alternative trajectories through the largely text-bound history of political textual media. These trajectories in part become visible because of the perceptivities that are opened by digital media, which, as Derrida put it, might "liberate our reading for a retrospective exploration of the past resources of paper, for its *previously* multimedia vectors," but this is only insofar as they are also grasped by contemporary problems in the politics of material text.[194]

In the chapters that engage with digital media, I refrain from discussing the dominant social media platforms of Twitter, Facebook, and their ilk. It is not that I see no possibility here for the articulation of critical content or for political network effects, but their technical forms, subjective patterns, and business models have something of a black hole effect with regard to media alternatives, sucking too much textual production into their distributed core. And so I have chosen to look elsewhere for experimental media form, to small press and self-published writing projects. This is not to say that I subscribe to the common notion of media "independence" or "autonomy," as if a writing and publishing project could exist outside of capitalist relations (a point I develop in chapter 5). Rather, I am developing a view from the margins with the aim not of staying marginal, or marginal for the sake of it, but of unsettling the center, even if only marginally.

CONTENT

It remains for me to outline the content of the following chapters. Each chapter explores the politics of a particular media form, where these are sometimes media platforms—pamphlet, book, and magazine (chapters 2, 3, and 5)—and other times media forms of a more structural or literary nature, such as the author, or rather the author's undoing through

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anonymity (chapter 4), and mythopoesis (chapter 6). I count all of these as "media forms," as instances of "material text" (a field that of course includes many forms not encountered here, or only marginally so: poem, slogan, communiqué, newspaper, leaflet, letter, autobiography, blog). The focus of the book is European, with a few examples drawn from China, Russia, and the United States. Clearly the book makes no claim to universal coverage; at most it is a critical sampling of an open field.

Chapter 2 is an exploration of the media form of the self-published pamphlet. As with all the chapters, and in keeping with Hayles's call for "media-specific analysis," I seek to hold together two aims: to develop an understanding of the specificity of this media form and to approach this specificity as only ever situated—enmeshed in, emergent from, and expressive of specific social contexts and political problematics.[195] We find the specific media form of the pamphlet, then, only in the many, various, and open-ended specificities of its instantiation and problematization. This chapter approaches and contributes to this form-in-variation through a specific problematic that was introduced into art and material culture by the Russian Constructivists in the early years of the Soviet Revolution, a problematic that Christina Kiaer has called the "socialist object," where revolutionary politics was to entail the liberation not only of the human but also of the *object*—the object as "comrade," to employ Alexsandr Rodchenko's formulation.[196] Here, however, with the aid of Walter Benjamin's affirmation of the "useless" and anthropological work on fetishism, I draw the object away from the productivist orbit of Constructivism to develop a concept of the "communist object," a concept that I then bring into relation with three publishing and archiving projects: Unpopular Books, 56a Archive, and Infopool. Although I concentrate on the pamphlet as object, I do not leave the textual content of these projects entirely behind; rather, following Adorno, I seek to find points of "mimesis" between the pamphlet objects and their political orientations, paratextual elements, and, occasionally, specific arguments. Here my choice to refrain from close engagement with the specific textual content of the pamphlets is a deliberate product of the chapter's formulation of the communist object. In other chapters, readers may find themselves wanting more detailed discussion of the textual content of the works considered, for detailed

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engagement with content is sometimes a casualty of this book's aim to engage with the broader materialities of text which are more usually left aside and unnoticed. I hope you think it a price worth paying.

Chapter 3 explores the problematic of the political book, situated at the point where the book as a political medium intersects with books that are expressly political. I focus on the properties of four works: Mao Zedong's Little Red Book, Russian Futurist books, Antonin Artaud's paper "spells" or *gris-gris,* and Guy Debord and Asger Jorn's *Mémoires.* The analysis draws strongly on Deleuze and Guattari's typology of the form of the book, which grasps the intersection of signifying and subjective processes, sensory forms, expressive qualities, and politics. The field of modern books, as Deleuze and Guattari approach it, is inherently political, patterned by three competing structural forms or "abstract machines": the "root-book," the "fascicular root-book," and the "rhizome-book." Though their concepts of root and rhizome have become widely influential, very little research has sought to explore the specific relation of these concepts to the media form of the book, and even less has deployed them in empirical investigation of actual books, a deficit that this chapter seeks to address. The critique of Mao in this chapter contributes to what amounts to a minor theme of *Anti-Book.* While communism features in this book in the specific context of the politics of writing and publishing, I occasionally approach it more broadly, and in critical relation to that which has often gone by the name—in this instance, in relation to Mao and the Cultural Revolution, a politico-philosophical system and a historical sequence that has had not inconsiderable presence in contemporary efforts to revive a so-called communism for our times.

Chapter 4 shifts from a focus on media platforms to consider the literary forms of anonymous and pseudonymous collective authorship, approached as a political challenge to the author-function. The chapter begins with a critique of the author-function through Marx and Foucault and teases out their respective accounts of the politics of anonymity, where anonymity is not a case of dropping one's name but is a complex and situated production. I pursue this through a number of writing projects and problematics: the collective pseudonym of Luther Blissett and his novel of the Radical Reformation, *Q*; Bernadette Corporation's pseudonymous

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novel *Reena Spaulings,* through its interplay with Michèle Bernstein's *All the King's Horses,* her breezy fictionalization of life with her comrade and husband Guy Debord; and, taking a prompt from the radical journal *Tiqqun,* the theme of anonymity in Marx's formulation of the "party," where certain practices in communist writing and publishing are drawn out through consideration of the May 1968 journal *Comité,* within which Blanchot had a pivotal role, and the communization journal *Endnotes.*

Chapter 5 returns to consider a particular publishing platform, in this case the magazine. But here the focus is exclusively on a single publishing project, the London-based art and politics magazine *Mute.* What makes *Mute* such an enticing project for my purposes here, and justifies dedicating to it a full chapter, is the extent to which it established a critical and practical self-differing orientation at the heart of the magazine. In this chapter, I take as my entry point one of *Mute*'s more enigmatic strap lines, "Proud to Be Flesh," to develop a model of *Mute*'s publishing practice that I call "diagrammatic publishing." This model attends to the complex of publishing platforms, participatory mechanisms, aesthetic styles, editorial and commissioning paradigms, temporal modes, and commercial structures that compose the magazine, understood not as an integrated and centralized medium but as a distributed and open entity that is immanent to neoliberal social relations. *Mute* is not "autonomous," then, or "independent"—those oft trumpeted and rather tired designators of political publishing—but a publishing project that revels in its critical immersion in the technosocial flesh of the world, with all its complicities and contradictions.

Chapter 6 takes up the specific literary form of political myth as it is constructed in the writing practice of Wu Ming, collective author of five novels and a large body of political texts published in print and online mediums. Myth is a terribly compromised political phenomenon, one that political theorists and practitioners might reasonably avoid like the proverbial plague—all the more so if they are interested in communism, given the brutality associated with the political myths and personality cults of orthodoxy. I begin with this structure of the cult of personality in Mao and its interpretation by Badiou. If the Chinese and Soviet authorities invested in and propelled the cult of personality, it was always

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a touchy subject, given that Marx coined the expression to help *excise* this formation from the communist movement. I follow Marx's lead here, but that does not mean we should drop myth from the repertoire of political writing and publishing. This chapter shows how alternative models of communist myth might be developed, paying attention to a fragmented and decentered form of mythopoesis—the power of "the false," as Deleuze has it, the "story-telling function of the poor."[197] This chapter explores the particular textual and media procedures by which such myth is constructed, focusing especially on Wu Ming's epic fiction and their method of the "unidentified narrative object."

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