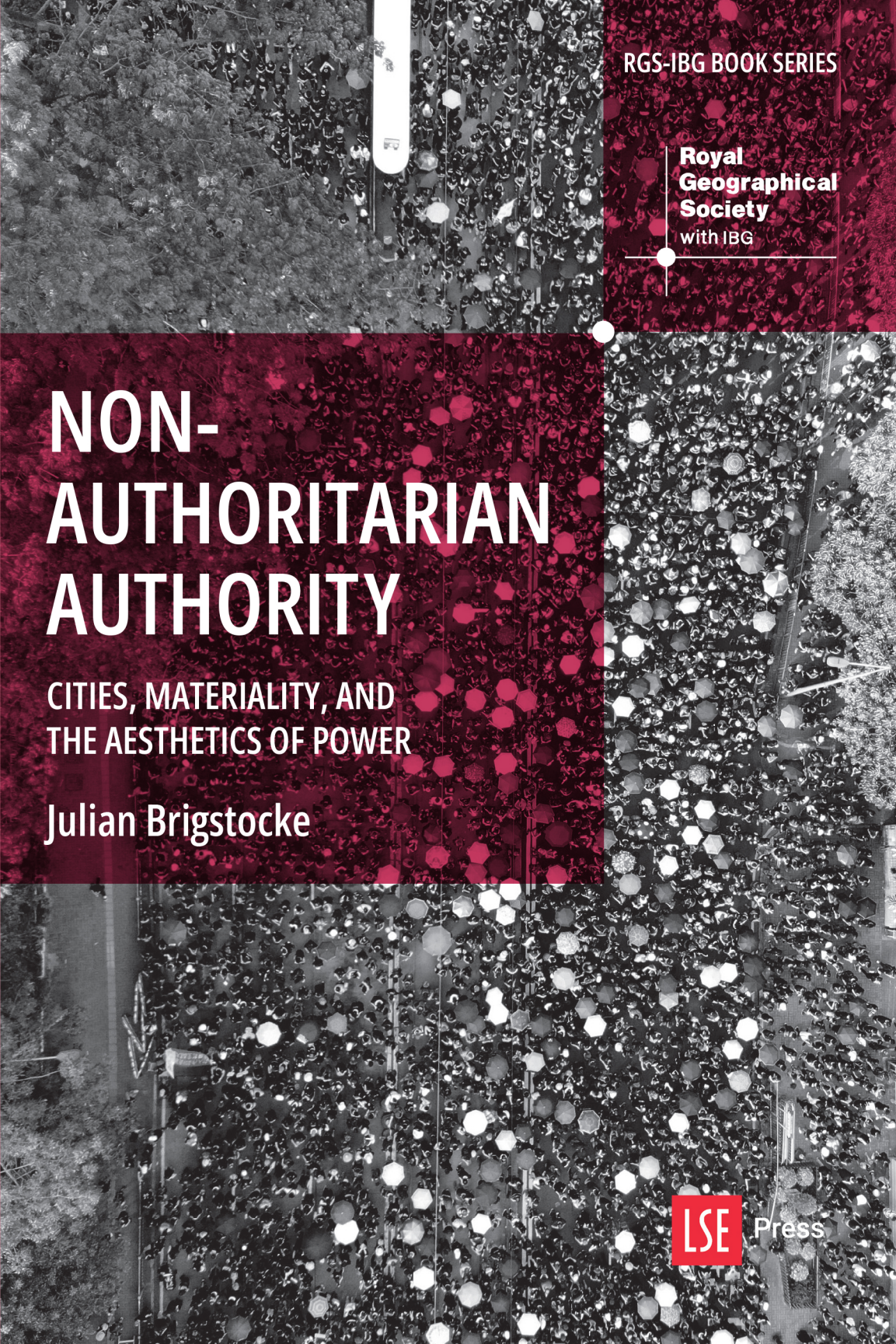
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NON-AUTHORITARIAN AUTHORITY
CITIES, MATERIALITY, AND THE AESTHETICS OF POWER
Julian Brigstocke
LSE Press

Nonauthoritarian Authority

Cities, Materiality, and the Aesthetics of Power

Julian Brigstocke

LSE Press

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About the author

Julian Brigstocke is a Reader in Human Geography at Cardiff University, UK. His interests focus on the spatialities of authority, power, and violence, through post- and decolonial, feminist, and nonrepresentational lenses. He is interested in experimental, embodied, and creative research methods, including experiments with the forms of academic writing.

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1. Authority and modernity

Follow me

Nonauthoritarian Authority is a study of the spaces, materialities, and aesthetics of authority in cities of modernity. More than this, it is an attempt to reimagine the possibilities and potentials of authority in spaces of authoritarianism or violence. Authority, it is safe to say, is not a concept with many positive connotations. The word suggests ghastly dictators and trigger-happy police, not to mention all the disciplinarian teachers, nit-picking officials, stifling bureaucracies, deadening evaluation metrics, and over-demanding bosses that populate so much of everyday life. I share these worries. I hope to contribute to efforts to transform hierarchical, colonial, patriarchal authority structures. Whilst I have learned much from antiauthoritarian political thought, this book will envision a more positive role for authority – when radically reinvented and restructured – than most anarchist thinking does. If this sounds conservative, I will do my best to convince you that it is not. I too am appalled at the forms of everyday authority that enrol people into political, economic, and ecological systems that damage or destroy the possibilities for living well in an enduring world. Life-sapping forms of authority are ubiquitous: everyday life is filled with people, agencies, bureaux, objects, signposts, technologies, apps, algorithms, adverts, audits, metrics, advisors, consultants, police, forecasters, league tables, surveillance devices, opinion columns, government agencies, guidebooks, lifestyle magazines, and TV shows, all claiming to give you advice that you might freely choose to follow, telling you where you ought to go and what you ought to do, not to mention what you should consume.

It is hard to overstate how important authority is as a way of coordinating everyday life in modern societies. Authority is a way of organising groups of people that enables them to retain their freedom and agency, rather than coercing them (Allen 2003; Arendt 1961; Connolly 1993). Yet, current research on the spatialities of authority is limited in several ways. Spatial theory has placed much more emphasis on the language of power (e.g. Crampton and Elden 2007; Keith and Pile 1999; Peet 2007; Sharp et al. 2000a) than on the analysis of authority (e.g. Allen 2003; Amoore 2013; Brigstocke 2014; Bulkeley 2012; Sassen 2006; see Brigstocke et al. 2021). This book offers a corrective to this imbalance. It sets out a new way of thinking about the spaces of authority, one that sets out to pluralise authority through expanding the range of things that can exert authority, and the kinds of methods that can

investigate them. By engaging with philosophical paradigms such as speculative philosophy, feminist new materialist theory, decolonial aesthetics, and 'new authority studies' (Blencowe, Brigstocke, and Dawney 2013, p. 1), I outline a new approach to the study of authority. The theoretical and philosophical arguments of the book emerge out of close engagement with an extensive set of archival, interview-based, quantitative, and arts-based data acquired over several years of empirical fieldwork. The methodologies used (described in detail in the Appendix) are experimental but rigorous in their application of speculative concepts to generate new kinds of data (e.g. biosensor data) and to use traditional forms of data (archival materials, interview data, observational data) to uncover new kinds of agency and authority. Always, the aim is to pluralise authority, an objective that is epistemologically rooted in a feminist ethos of pluralising objectivities (Blencowe, Brigstocke, and Noorani 2018; Blencowe 2012; Haraway 1988; Harding 1991).

Nonauthoritarian Authority is partly a diagnosis of capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal spaces of authority, developing a perspective rooted in materialist feminisms (Alaimo 2010; Baraitser 2017; Colebrook 2014; Dixon 2015; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017), post-colonial aesthetics/aesthesis (Blencowe 2025; Chuh 2019; Jackson 2018a; Jazeel 2019; Lloyd 2019; Spivak 2012; Venn 2006; Yusoff 2024), and critical accounts of the spatialities of power (Allen 2003; 2016; Blencowe, Brigstocke, and Dawney 2016; Sharp et al. 2000b). At the same time, it extends recent engagements between critical theory and new materialist and speculative theory (Rosa, Henning, and Bueno 2021), engaging in a speculative search for different, impossible or implausible forms of authority, dispersed across different kinds of experience that may exceed the limits of the human subject. These nonauthoritarian forms of authority may be capable of disclosing shared, common worlds in new ways. Structured through a series of entwined exercises in pluralising authorities, the book explores how authority functions through a kind of *political alchemy of feeling*: a way of combining diverse kinds of experience (perceptual, emotional, non-conscious, affective). Understanding the micropolitical twists and distortions of everyday authority, it argues, requires an analysis that gets to grips with how authority is bound up with shared judgements and sensory regimes that disclose the common and create or subvert forms of common sense.

My analysis of the spaces of authority in the book introduces a new approach to studies of the spatialities and temporalities of power and authority. The novelty of this theoretical perspective lies in how it exemplifies a distinctive analytical and philosophical perspective. There are three elements to this. First, the book rejects the very widespread assumption that authority is necessarily conservative, dominating, or the domain of the political right. Its key argument is that radically reinvented authorities – what I will call 'nonauthoritarian authorities' – are important for enriching the world through creative, pluralist, non-hierarchical spatial relations. This is significant because it changes the stakes and goals of critique: it is not enough to oppose authority; we must reinvent it. Second, the book rethinks authority in ways that depart

from the most influential existing accounts of authority by decentring the human subject, enabling me to acknowledge a far greater range of authorities, including the spatial practices of nonhuman actors. The significance of this is that it opens up new ways of valuing, recognising, and caring for nonhuman life. Finally, the book offers a new perspective to debates around the spaces and politics of aesthetics (Dikeç 2015; Edensor 2005; Gassner 2019; Hawkins 2013; Hawkins and Straughan 2015; Papastergiadis 2006; Williams and Keating 2022b) by showing how authority is grounded in embodied judgements of sensory experiences and in experimental/creative relationships with the limits of experience. Nonauthoritarian authority, I will suggest, emerges through transformations in the feeling of, or sense for, 'realness' (Arendt 1961, 1968, 1998; Curtis 1999). This means rejecting any lingering assumption that modern authority is primarily rationalised or bureaucratic, instead focusing on the importance of emotions, affects, perceptions, and feelings – that is, on *experiential* authority (Adlerova 2024; Blencowe 2013; Blencowe, Brigstocke, and Dawney 2013; Brigstocke 2014; Dawney 2013, 2020; Lea, Philo, and Cadman 2016; Millner 2013; Noorani 2013) – in enabling authority to gain or lose its grip.

Exercises in thinking

So, welcome. I will be your guide on this journey. We will travel far and wide in search of novel guides and new authorities. You will get your money's worth. Of course, it is a dangerous journey, full of demons. But you will be quite safe. Just do what I say. Always follow me closely, and don't stray from the path. Don't dawdle at the back. If I tell you to do something, do it quickly and don't ask questions. I have your best interests at heart. If you follow me closely, you'll be fine. You'll be well looked after. I know the safest routes and the best hiding places. You'll come back a new person!

OK, I might as well warn you now: I do not know where we are going or how to get there. I get lost easily. My experiments tend to end in failure. We will be starting with small beginnings and mundane practices, before moving to more glamorous vistas and spectacular landscapes of authority. For now, our aim will be to practice the miraculous capacity of *beginning,* or what Hannah Arendt and later philosophers refer to as the condition of 'natality' (O'Byrne 2010). Yet I don't know *where* to begin. To be honest, I am rather unsure of myself … I have a sinking feeling we are going to lose our way. I certainly won't be able to lead you with the unerring confidence and self-possession that you probably want from a guide. I am embarrassingly deficient in charisma. I lack mastery, or foresight, or any of the other qualities people usually expect from an authority figure. I feel as lost and confused as you do. Would you like to lead the way for a while? No? Well, then, I shall do my best. It may be a question of the blind leading the blind. It is safe to assume that our argument is unlikely to take a straight path, from well-founded premises through logically sound

arguments to valid conclusions. Since we are feeling our way and don't know where we are going, we may end up walking around in circles, perhaps even getting stuck in the mud and sand. Perhaps our best approach in a case like this is to proceed through small experiments or exercises that help us learn how to encounter and pluralise spaces of authority in new ways. In each exercise, our aim will be to learn to respond inventively to the provocations of a plural, heterogeneous world of human and nonhuman action. In doing so, our experiments may contribute something to broader efforts to develop new ways of researching, writing, and thinking the social (Back and Puwar 2013; Berlant and Stewart 2019; Kilby and Gilloch 2022; Pandian and McLean 2017).

In *Between Past and Future,* Arendt (1961) suggests that the dramatic transformations of authority in modernity – in particular, the decline of metaphysical forms of authority that ground the fleeting sensory world in transcendent foundations, structures, or traditions – require humanity to confront afresh the basic problems of being together. The only way of proceeding in a situation where we have no stable authorities to follow, Arendt argues, is to proceed in modest steps, through a series of practices and exercises (Arendt 1961). The aim of such exercises is to undergo an *experience of thinking*, for it is the activity of thinking that offers the best training in building new, plural forms of authority out of the rubble of metaphysical, transcendent, hierarchical authorities. Such exercises, I propose, must be inventive and speculative. Arendt writes of her own essays: 'they do not contain prescriptions on what to think or which truths to hold…. Throughout these exercises the problem of truth is kept in abeyance; the concern is solely with how to move in this gap [between past and future], the only region perhaps where truth eventually will appear' (Arendt 1961, p. 14). Taking inspiration from Arendt, I study the spaces and aesthetics of authority by staging a series of exercises in thinking. These exercises might even be thought of as *spiritual* exercises, insofar as they aim less to state the truth about what authority is, than to search for ways of becoming *worthy* of the truth. Arendt wrote of St Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* that they are 'exercises of imagination' that should be highly pertinent to thinking about the methodologies of the humanities (Arendt 1994, p. 404; see Wolken 2018). An important tradition in later 20th century philosophy, especially feminist and post-colonial theory, also adopted theory or philosophy as a kind of spiritual practice (e.g. Anzaldúa 1987; Foucault 1992; Glissant 1997; hooks 2001; Irigaray 1991). In recalling this tradition, I wish to ask how writing about authority necessarily involves an ongoing critical reflection on the authority of the text, the authority of the author, and the 'poetics of knowledge' through which a text makes a claim to authority (Rancière 1994).

The routes we take, then, will be plural and varied. There will be no linear logical argument. Each exercise circles around similar points and difficulties, but from a different perspective or practice. The aim will be to see how authority might emerge from dynamic spatial encounters, rather than stable grounds or solid foundations. We will do our best to start in the middle (Abrahamsson 2018; Dubow 2020) and to build our foundations

on unstable grounds. Maybe we can together learn something, however modest, about the art of following (cf. Hand 2005) – a far more interesting skill than the so-called 'art of leadership'. Authority is a question of guiding and following – of learning who or what to be guided by, and when, as well as how to guide others.

The aim of the book, therefore, is to devise a series of experiments in pluralising authority. These experiments are relatively self-contained and need not be read in order. They involve, for example, styling authorial voices that reject mastery (Chapter 1); attuning myself to emergent authorities in everyday spaces of informal authority (Chapter 2); theorising the possibilities for nonhuman and nonauthoritarian authority (Chapter 3); inventing new aesthetic figures of authority (Chapter 4); searching for different ways of reading and encountering theoretical texts (Chapter 5); parodying the voice of authority associated with astrology columns (Chapter 6); writing multiple narratives through a 'disjunctive analysis' that refuses the authority of singular conceptions of reality (Chapter 7); thinking about thinking while running (Chapter 8); writing through fragmentary forms that respond to the nonhuman authority of unstable materials (Chapter 9); and composing new syntheses of feelings that enact an alternative sense for reality (Chapter 10). Each chapter practises, always risking failure, an experimental ethos towards guiding and being guided by others.

Why we desire authority

One reason authority is so discomforting is that, according to most definitions, it is something we submit to more or less freely (Allen 2003; Arendt 1961; Connolly 1993; Kojève 2014; Sennett 1980). If you submit to authority – for example, if you follow the advice of your doctor, or lawyer, or teacher – you do so voluntarily. This means that when you obey authority, you only ever have yourself to blame. You take an active role in your own submission. Authority is a paradoxical and ambivalent form of social coordination that involves the freedom to obey. If you follow authority, you are not doing so because you are coerced, but because you are willing to be guided by the authority figure, based on some quality in them that makes them (apparently) worthy to guide you. They have something that you don't – greater wisdom, or wealth, or richer experience, or affinity with the divine or the transcendent, or access to the true levers of power. Even if this makes you envious or resentful, you may still follow them. Yet, you have the option not to. Nobody's *making* you do it. You're just being a big child. Grow up!

One solution is to reject authority altogether: to live independently, to live as an *enlightened* person, in the sense used by Kant, as someone who does not live in 'tutelage' – an adult child, eager to take instruction from others – but who has the courage to make independent use of their own powers of reason (see Osborne 1998). Down with authority! String up the guides! However,

let me give you two reasons why we shouldn't, at least not yet. First, we *need* authority, or something similar it. Contemporary societies are bewilderingly complex entities. For cooperation to be secured, there needs to be agreement in the basics of how things work, and authority is the name given to one form of cooperation that isn't imposed through coercion but is followed freely (Connolly 1993).

More than this, however, and more problematically, we also *desire* authority. Authority is an elusive social relation which, like seduction, plays on our deepest conscious and preconscious emotions and drives. Authority burrows around in our inner psyches, surfacing here and there, in unpredictable places. Indeed, the distinction between authority and seduction is hazy: if we follow the etymology of the two words, authority leads us onto the correct path, but seduction leads us astray. This assumes, of course, that there *is* a correct path. Yet many of us have no clear idea of where we are going, or how we want to get there. Many are lost, disoriented, in the chaos of modern life. I count myself among such lost souls. This generates a desire for better guides to help us find our bearings and set our compass. People or institutions or technologies that can convincingly claim that they will lead us onto a better path can have an incredibly strong, magnetic attraction. Finding our own way is often tiring, stressful, terrifying, or humiliating, especially for those who live in conditions of chronic insecurity, violence, or poverty, and who are made to feel that their plight is the result of their own bad choices. Most human beings feel a need to be cared for, including a need to receive guidance, advice, and wisdom. Authority is highly ambiguous and ambivalent, since it is a response to human vulnerability and our dependence on others (Harrison 2008).

Authority and Enlightenment

Arendt, in one of her 'exercises in thinking' in *Between Past and Future,* observes that 'authority has vanished from the modern world. Since we can no longer fall back upon authentic and undisputable experiences common to all, the very term has become clouded by controversy and confusion' (Arendt 1961, p. 91). Arendt explored shifts in how authority was conceptualised across European history, tracing its prehistory in Ancient Greek thought, its origins in Roman thought and practice, and the astonishing longevity of the Roman structure of authority binding authority to tradition and religion across much of European history. In modernity, however, Arendt observes a slow unravelling of this threefold knot of authority, tradition, and religion, with the Enlightenment critique of religion, the destruction of tradition in industrial modernity, and finally the loss of trust in authority. This unravelling of the authority–tradition–religion triad has its philosophical counterpart in the decline of the metaphysical structures of thought which posit a gap between appearance and reality – between what *is* and what *appears*. This shift has many obvious advantages, not least the opportunity to create new spaces

for freedom and invention. Arendt was always clear that her philosophical aim was to *participate* in the destruction of metaphysics, not to oppose it or to rebuild a new metaphysics, even if too many people have read her as harbouring a nostalgia for Ancient Greek or even Roman thought (Arendt 1961; see Villa 1996). Yet she was also clear that the decline of authority also has dangers, since it risks depriving human experience of the dimension of *depth*. This flattening of experience offered an opportunity for imperialism and then totalitarianism to occupy the political space previously occupied by the authority–religion–tradition triad. During much of the 20th century, totalitarianism proved itself best placed to take advantage of the decline in authority. Thus, Arendt believes, the challenge is to find ways of recovering the dimension of depth in human experience, inventing novel ways of living together, and thus inventing new kinds of authority – or at least, something very like it – capable of nurturing and protecting the capacity to exercise freedom in a plural, heterogeneous, durable world.

Arendt's critique of the loss of depth in modern human experience extended arguments in critical theory around the nature of authority and authoritarianism in modernity. For example, it links clearly to Walter Benjamin's 'speculative critique' of experience and his attempt to invent new kinds of experience with temporal depth (Caygill 1998). Arendt's genealogy of authority also resonates with the Frankfurt School's large-scale study of *Authority and the Family*, including Herbert Marcuse's [1936] (2008) history of authority, where he tells a history of Enlightenment thought through the concept of authority, starting from the theology of the Protestant Reformation, via Enlightenment philosophy, culminating in the relation between anarchist theory and defences of the totalitarian state in the sociologies of Sorel and Pareto. Marcuse, like Arendt, views the notion of authority as a key to understanding the paradoxes and contradictions of the Enlightenment, where the celebration of reason led to the victory of irrational violence and authoritarianism. Enlightenment thought, he suggests, poses a problematic relationship between freedom (for rational thought and choice) and submission (to a just authority, without the exercise of reasoned judgement). Across the history of Enlightenment, from Luther and Calvin to Kant to Sorel and Pareto, Marcuse notices a strange dynamic where a kind of antiauthoritarian sentiment proves compatible with, or paves the way for, authoritarianism. For Luther and Calvin, for example, the radical rejection of earthly power is accompanied by absolute submission to divine authority. For Kant, the antiauthoritarian 'motto' of Enlightenment (Dare to know! Have courage to use your own reason!) is restricted to the 'public' use of reason, and authoritarian obedience is required everywhere else. Marcuse, writing during the 1930s acceleration towards global catastrophe, argued that authority is key to understanding the disastrous contradictions of modernity (see also Walker 2022).

What then, is to be done with this troubling yet unavoidable notion of authority? Is another authority possible? Perhaps authority might be reinvented as something akin to the attitude towards reality that Marcuse

associated, in *Eros and Civilization,* with Orpheus: the singing god, a figure of a non-repressive order where subjectivity and objectivity, humankind and nature, are harmonised. Such a nonauthoritarian, non-repressive authority would enact an experience of a world that is not to be mastered, controlled, and foreclosed. Order would emerge via 'the voice which does not command but sings; the gesture which offers and receives; the deed which is peace and ends the labor of conquest' (Marcus 2023, p. 124).

Pluralising the geographies of authority

In the 21st century, authority continues to be radically contested, challenged, reformulated, and redistributed. As traditional authorities decline and new authorities come to prominence, it is strikingly hard to find any *positive* vision of authority at all, from any side of the political spectrum (Glaser 2018, p. 59). A generalised antiauthoritarianism is leading to, or responding to, a shift in structures of authority across many areas. Traditional authority figures such as politicians, religious leaders, scientists, judges, civil servants, academics, journalists, and other 'experts', find their authority challenged with increasing fervour. Supposedly 'antiauthoritarian' political leaders have increasing influence. Diverse new authorities acquire greater weight, from credit rating agencies and other spokespersons for 'the market', to populist leaders, celebrities and influencers, social media, new forms of dispersed intelligence, algorithmic life, nonhuman actors, and much else. Meanwhile, authority is an object of fascination in popular culture. In the UK, for example, television ratings have for years been dominated by shows that require contestants to submit their talents to the authority of celebrity judges, or else require celebrities to humiliate themselves before the tyrannical authority of viewers.[1] In politics, meanwhile, 'antiauthoritarian' and neo-authoritarian movements, on the left and right, dominate the agenda in countries across the world. These phenomena point to a pressing need to re-evaluate the nature and geographies of modern authority.

Although power is a concept that is central to contemporary geography, the closely related concept of authority remains 'curiously unexplored' (Bulkeley 2012) and 'neglected' (Blackstock et al. 2017) within the discipline. This is a significant omission, given that questions of authority, including where it is exercised, how it is authorised, and who practises it, are vital for understanding changing spatialities of governance in contemporary societies (Allen 2003; Bulkeley 2012). Various studies, however, have explicitly focused on authority, arguing that it is increasingly privatised (Cutler et al. 1999); internalised (Dean 1996; Huxley 2006); fragmented (Sassen 2006); diffuse and deterritorialised (Agnew 2005; Green 2016); and automated and depersonalised (Amoore 2013; Beer 2017). Such work counters any narratives about the declining importance of authority for today's world, and presents a picture of overlapping domains of authority exercised by competing bodies,

including state institutions, legal systems, non-governmental organisations, supranational entities, social movements, private companies, new technologies, criminal organisations, and everyday cultural practices. As global society takes on an increasingly neo-authoritarian tone, there is an urgent need for a clearer analysis of how authority acquires its force. What inspires trust and confidence in authority? Why do subjects willingly acquiesce to it? What distinctive spatialities are involved in the practice and recognition of authority, as distinct from other forms of power, influence, and control? How is authority experienced and practised at embodied, subjective, or affective registers?

Since the 1980s, geography has embraced the language of power and resistance, but has been more suspicious of the vocabulary of authority, which can seem to imply a conservative appeal to fixed order, stable structures, or prior authorisations. It is tempting to view authority as inherently repressive and prohibitive – as encapsulated by the distanced and objectifying gaze of patriarchal, colonial, and aristocratic landscapes of authority, for example (Cosgrove 1985; Harris 2003; Kenny 1995; Rose 1995; Withers 2000). Yet my suggestion will be that authority can also be experimental, lively, constructive, disruptive, or revolutionary. Moreover, emergent forms of authority are often constituted in and by challenging authority (Luxon 2013; Sennett 1980; Brigstocke 2014). A richer theorisation of the spatialities of authority, as distinct from power, has much to offer social analysis. The lens of authority opens useful perspectives for thinking about the spaces and politics of aesthetics, the emotional experience of power and influence, and the ways radical, subversive, or experimental spatial practices can meet the desire for guidance, education, advice, and stability.

Authority is being reinvented and contested across multiple spatial domains, from the rise of the authority of algorithms and artificial intelligence, to the growing acceptance of the authority of nonhuman life, to changes in the distributions of expertise, to the growing significance of participatory authority (Brigstocke et al. 2021). Of central importance to my analyses in this book is the ever-increasing salience of *experiential* forms of authority. Authority is a relation that usually gains its force from emotional relations such as trust, respect, love, or fear (Sennett 1980). Theorists of authority often stress that authority is earned through performance and recognition of personal attributes or ethical qualities such as courage, strength, wisdom, foresight, fairness, creativity, objectivity, or impartiality (e.g. Kojève 2014). Authority is also associated with more unnameable affects; Griffero (2018), for example, points to the importance of ineffable experiences, akin to the experience of the numinous, in creating a distinctive experience of 'atmospheric authority' based on a combination of attraction and repulsion. Thinking with authority as an atmospheric relation helps reveal the spatiality of authority as a relation between actors that is dispersed and diffuse (Lea, Philo, and Cadman 2016). It allows dispersed, material forms of agency to emerge, while maintaining the position of the sensing body as the conduit through which they become apprehended. The 'engineering' of atmospheres (McCormack 2018) does powerful political

work in the manufacture and governing of consent, for example in producing the imagined community of the nation, or the authority of the state (Adey et al. 2013; Dawney 2018; Fregonese 2017; Sumartojo 2016). Atmospheres help authority to secure its own authority (Closs Stephens 2024).

In contrast to Weberian accounts of authority that presuppose it to be rationalised and emptied of affect, recent social and cultural geographies of authority have emphasised the importance of 'experiential authority': forms of authority that gain their force through either intensities of experience or collective experiments with experience (e.g. Adlerova 2024; Brigstocke 2014; Millner 2013). These accounts of authority emphasise that it is a relation that is embodied, dispersed, affective, and tied to experiences of vitality, growth, and the outside (Blencowe 2012, 2013). Dawney (2013, 2018), for example, charts the emergence of powerful 'figures of authority' who are listened to (and hence granted authority) because of the intensity with which experiences have affected them – for example, the experience of grief or suffering. Lea et al. (2016), similarly, theorise authority in ashtanga yoga as distributed, relational, and multiple, rather than inhering in the figure of the teacher. Such theorisations offer a picture of how authority gains force through intensities of experience, as well as through practices of experimenting with experience (Luxon 2013; Noorani 2013). They also highlight that authority is not simply a relation between two or more people; rather, it is a distributed relation whose force depends upon the distinctive material and affective qualities of specific places.

Is it possible to resist with authority (Brigstocke 2021)? Whilst there is good reason to be critical of the discourse of resistance, which posits a resistance/domination binary, it is helpful to reframe the question in terms of authoritative speech or actions that challenge existing relations of power. As Judith Butler observed in relation to Rosa Parks' act of refusal on a racially segregated Montgomery bus, 'it is possible to speak with authority without being authorised to speak' (Butler 1997, p. 157). Authoritative speech and actions are not always legitimised by external authorising institutional structures, but sometimes gain their force from other, immanently produced criteria and standards (cf. Lovell 2003). A crucial characteristic of speculative forms of authority is that new forms of authority have to be judged by their own newly created criteria for judgement. This is one of many reasons why a speculative search for nonauthoritarian authority must stretch the limits of possibility. To resist with authority is to invent a new authority and to escape the logics of authority which are tied to patriarchal and colonial figures such as father, master, leader, and judge (see Chapter 4). Resisting with authority, in such cases, brings together forces and affects in ways that produce micropolitical effects contrary to power or control (Fox and Alldred 2016). In such cases, authority, I will suggest, gains its force and its capacity to inspire recognition through an augmentation of immanent, collective capacities and experiences, and hence a disclosure of the common – a shared ground for experience, judgement, and 'ideas of objectivity' (Blencowe 2013). People willingly follow

authority, and resistance becomes authoritative, when it succeeds in convincing others that it will nurture, nourish, and augment them.

Our aim in these exercises on authority will be simple: to experiment with as many ways of *pluralising* authority as we can come up with, contesting its authoritarian reduction to singular logics and practices. The book is a speculative exercise in pluralising authority and theorising the possibilities for a kind of egalitarian 'nonauthoritarian authority'. This term may seem either contradictory (if you think authority is, by definition, authoritarian) or else tautological (if you follow the popular usage of 'authoritarian' as another word for tyranny or rule by violence, which actually *destroys* authority). Hannah Arendt's (1961) essay on authority, a key touchstone for this book, insisted on a precise definition of authority that distinguished it from any kind of coercion, violence, or threat, so that authority is anything but 'authoritarian' in the popular usage of the term (see also Arendt 1971). Arendt would view the term 'nonauthoritarian authority' as conceptually incoherent. Yet I remain committed to the value of the concept of 'nonauthoritarian authority': primarily because far from being incoherent, it captures the ambivalences and ambiguities of authority; but also because it stays much closer to how the terms are used in everyday discourse. Arendt had little success in shifting the usage of the word 'authoritarian' so that it would no longer be broadly interchangeable with 'tyrannical', 'coercive', or 'dictatorial' power. I thus prefer to restrict the term 'authoritarian' to these varieties of coercive regimes of power that rule through violence but also leave space for the exercise of forms of authority that are linked to, but still distinct from, state violence. From this perspective, the concept of nonauthoritarian authority is coherent and indeed necessary, naming a form of social coordination that effectively guides behaviour but in ways that are *not* – unlike authoritarian authority – closely linked to coercive, violent, or tyrannical forms of social coordination.

Authority and violence are broadly incompatible. Yet, although authoritarian regimes may use violence, they do not entirely destroy authority: there is always room for the exercise of agency, no matter how 'constrained' (Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011). In fact, authority and coercion can easily slip into each other and reinforce each other. Moreover, fear can be a potent source of authority (Sennett 1980). It is possible – even common – to allow yourself to be guided by authorities that you know to be harmful or damaging to you (Benjamin 1988; Berlant 2011; Brown 1995). Authoritarianism may successfully claim authority, but it does so in ways that deplete the subject who obeys it, rather than nourishing them. This book will argue that 'authoritarian' forms of authority reduce authority to singular, homogeneous forces and figures: to a single leader or party, or a single foundational event, or a singular logic; or a singular figure or 'conceptual persona': master; leader; nation; subject; market; father. Authority becomes dangerous and authoritarian when it is the *only* authority within a given context, or when it strives to exclude all competing or overlapping authorities, or when it takes on an aura of permanence, omnipresence, or omnipotence, or when it claims to nourish you but really only

depletes you. Nonauthoritarian authorities, by contrast, arise from processes of pluralisation, so that a given practice is never determined by one single logic or person or figure or office, but is oriented through a congregation of multiple, temporary, intersecting, overlapping authorities, each winning consent through new alchemies of feeling. In Chapter 2, for example, I will observe how on a routine space of everyday authority such as a cycle path, authority is a continually shifting outcome of habits, laws, norms, embodied feelings, random encounters, and emotional and affective rhythms.

Towards a speculative geography of authority

Oh dear, I am faltering. Have we made a false start? I'd better be honest with you. I'm not confident that I can pull this off. I'm probably not the best guide for a journey of this complexity. Frankly, I have no idea where we are going. Most of the time I feel lost and confused. I have no gravitas. I am anchorless and rudderless. I have no master plan. I would prefer to go home. At the very least, I will have to appeal to many higher authorities.

Nonauthoritarian authority can be contrasted with authoritarianism, understood as 'a set of practices that revolve around control, discipline, and univocal authority' (Koch 2022a, p. 2). Authoritarianism tries to master, control, or profit from a future that it makes knowable (or unknowable) through singular logics. By contrast, nonauthoritarian authority works with and towards a future that is composed of an abundant plurality of forces, and hence is novel or implausible. It breaks with the order of probabilities. It labours towards a future that is not predetermined by present actualities, but inheres as latent potentialities (Savransky, Wilkie, and Rosengarten 2017, p. 8). In its emphasis on pluralising the present and creating multiple worlds within the present, nonauthoritarian authority is an inherently *speculative* affair, in the sense that it requires 'a style of thinking that prioritises an openness to what thought might become, and which therefore reconfigures the empirical beyond what seems given in an immediate experience' (Williams and Keating 2022a, p. 2). Speculation is a practice that 'reformulates the problems that can be staged as part of empirical enquiry' (Williams and Keating 2022a, p. 2). From this perspective, a speculative approach to authority seeks to formulate new problems and cultivate generosity towards how thinking can escape the boundaries of established territories of thought, taking a distance from calculative or probabilistic logics. In the face of a mounting pile of social, political, psychic, and environmental catastrophes and escalating authoritarianism, '[w]hat we need to activate today is a thinking that commits to a possible, by means of resisting the probable – fighting any interpretation subscribing to the irresistible nature of unbounded capitalism as if that were our immutable destiny, even the conduit conveying the message of progress and emancipation, whereas in fact it denotes the desertification of our worlds and our inability to think that what we care about might have a future' (Debaise and Stengers 2017, p. 18).

This book seeks to conceptualise forms of nonauthoritarian authority that escape calculative logics associated with progress, futurity, and mastery. Instead, it seeks authority and its corollary, the ability to care for the world, in more improbable, emergent, or incipient places and practices, including from the centre of authoritarian practices. This kind of speculative critique – disassembling the logics and aesthetic forms of authoritarianism to release utopian speculative potential – requires a process of learning, cultivating, and affirming trust in the world. Nonauthoritarian authority strives to multiply worlds, possibilities, and potentials, and this requires learning to exercise a new sense for reality and cultivate new kinds of trust. Trust is a 'generous response to the passional and generative feeling of reality – feeling itself, like itself, in the plural. Trust, in short, characterises a living attitude of consent to the world' (Savransky 2021, p. 59). Trust breathes life into other modes of existence, helping to make possible what it trusts in (Savransky 2021, p. 60). So, nonauthoritarian authority must cultivate an 'ecology of trust', an 'ecological regeneration' with affective, existential and ethical dimensions that are pragmatic, mutualistic, and generous, 'binding heterogeneous beings who need each other but each for its own reasons' (Debaise and Stengers 2022, p. 409). *Nonauthoritarian Authority* seeks to cultivate this kind of ecology through its speculative search for forms and genres of non-anthropocentric authority that pluralise worlds, realities, and the embodied *sense* of reality, or the feeling of 'realness'.

Philosophically, the exercises in this book draw out speculative moments in a more diverse set of literatures than is commonly associated with recent writings on the speculative turn.[2] It aims to stage theoretical conversations between diverse philosophical literatures. From Hannah Arendt, I draw insights into the nature and possibilities of non-metaphysical or post-foundational forms of authority, and the importance of aesthetics in stylising a new sense for reality that makes us sensitive to the provocations and demands of a plural world (see Chapters 3–5). From Sylvia Wynter's work on undoing the 'genre of Man' (Scott and Wynter 2000), I explore how neurophysiological redescriptions of bodies, emotions, and affects may help us move towards a way of understanding and practising authority that redefines the human in important ways (see Chapter 7). From Edouard Glissant's archipelagic thinking, I find ways of understanding how to respond to the authority of nonhuman materials in the context of colonial and neocolonial violence (Glissant 1997; Wiedorn 2018) (see Chapters 4 and 9). From Michel Serres, I find inspiration in his commitment to a thinking of plurality through experimentation with aesthetic forms and genres of scholarly writing (Watkin 2020) (see Chapter 9). From critical theorists Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, I find resources for a post-humanist aesthetics of authority that accounts for how authority emerges from the bottom up, through self-organising systems (Kluge and Negt 2014) (see Chapter 10). From Matthew Hannah (2019) I have learned much about the spatial politics of attention (see Chapters 7 and 8). From John Allen (2016), I have learned to think about the 'topological' spatialities of power

and authority (see Chapter 3). As imperfect guides, none of these writers will lead us where we wish to go. However, they may help us to orientate ourselves better within the problem space of the crisis of authority in modern societies.

Structure of the book

Nonauthoritarian Authority is a series of exercises, experiments, and excursions on authority in multiple empirical sites. Its empirical sites, spanning historical and contemporary case studies, start from a scene where authority is in question or in crisis. What unites the different parts of the book is not a single empirical site but a *process* (oriented towards experimentation with form, style, and genre); a theoretical *method* (rethinking authority through a speculative emphasis on pluralising possibilities and attending to barely sensed phenomena); and an *ethical and political orientation* towards speculatively working towards the impossible, the improbable, and the unlikely. The book is less a monograph than a polygraph: a writing of plurality, through plural writing. Rather than developing a singular 'theory of authority' across the book – surely this would itself be a homogenising, authoritarian gesture? – I approach spaces of authority in a more plural way, through a series of experimental exercises in thinking. These unfold through diverse empirical situations where authority is in question, in crisis, or asserted through an aggressive authoritarianism. The book does not cohere around a single empirical site, but around a distinctive analytical method. Throughout the book, a picture emerges of plural, dispersed, inventive authority relations across diverse empirical situations, even in situations of authoritarian closure.

The empirical case studies chart a story of authority and authoritarianism moving across key spaces of modernity, and key sites of authoritarianism: 19th century Paris, 20th century Hong Kong, and 21st century Rio de Janeiro. I also focus on a space of less spectacular and more banal, everyday authority: a cycle and footpath near my home in Bristol, UK. The order of chapters moves in reverse chronology, starting in the present (Bristol and then Rio) before moving to 20th century Hong Kong and 19th century Paris. This enables me to explore different strategies for deconstructing and speculatively reassembling the authority of modernity and Enlightenment. The book develops its arguments through discussion of detailed empirical work in Paris, Hong Kong, Rio de Janeiro, and Bristol, UK, conducted over a period of several years (see the methodological note in the Appendix). The book is partly situated in the tradition of studies of 'spaces of modernity' (e.g. Dennis 2008; Frisby 1985; Gilroy 1993; Harvey 2003; Hetherington 2002, 2011; Ogborn 1998; Pile 2005; Pred 1995; Reeh 2004). I focus on analysing, deconstructing, and speculatively reimagining the aesthetics of authority in key cities of modernity of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. My encounters with these empirical spaces are themselves outcomes of authority, such as the kind of opportunities for international travel and mobility associated with the

privilege of a long-term academic position within a UK university, with access to UK research funding. My interest in the first empirical site, a community of favelas in Rio de Janeiro, arose out of strong desire to engage with and contest the authority structures associated with the necropolitical spaces of 21st century modernity: slums, favelas, and camps (Mbembe 2017, 2019). Through academic friendships and collaborations, I was then able to establish and consolidate networks with favela activists and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in and beyond Rio de Janeiro.

The second empirical case study focuses on a vanguard city of neoliberal experimentation: 20th century Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a perfect case study for understanding the materialities of authority because it was a flagship site of neoliberal experimentation during the 20th century and is a stark symbol of the centrality of land and property in creating colonial and post-colonial authority. My interest in Hong Kong was sparked by a teaching role on an undergraduate fieldwork course there, which enabled me to witness events such as the Occupy Central with Love and Peace social movement, as well as to engage closely with environmental and political activists and social campaigners. These experiences sparked an interest in uncovering alternative sources of authority within this paradigmatic space of the 20th century urban spectacle, so closely associated with the rise of neoliberalism, as well as with contrasting visions of colonial (British) and neo-colonial (Chinese) authoritarianism.

The final case study came out of my interest in dismantling the aesthetics of authority associated with an iconic city of industrial modernity. The focus on late 19th century Paris emerged from a feeling that, despite the large volume of writing about the urban landscapes of Paris, there was something important about the *experience* of authority in this key case study of modern urbanism – especially the fascination with synaesthetic experience – that had not been fully recognised or discussed.

The selection of case studies thus derives from opportunities derived from the hierarchical authority structures of the globalised university. Yet other authorities were at play too: the authority of friendships; of emotional encounters; of the atmospheres of the cities themselves; of the bureaucratic colonial authority that produced such meticulously archived and catalogued historical records in Hong Kong and Paris. As an analysis of authority in modern cities, the book is thus partial and contingent on various entrenched and emergent authority structures related to the contemporary system of higher education.

By way of a brief introduction to the topic, Chapter 2 briefly takes us to our first empirical space of authority, the Bristol to Bath railway path in southwest England, in which I use vignettes of participant observations in this everyday space of mobility and leisure to discuss the diversity of authorities and the importance of everyday, micropolitical, barely registered forms of authority. Observing an everyday space where authority is largely taken for granted helps me to practise my skills in attentiveness and attunement, getting to grips with the habitual, embodied, and practical channelling of attention through which

much authority takes place. By observing the huge variety of authorities at play in everyday public spaces, including embodied, incipient, and not-yet-fully-formed authorities that influence action, we see that authority is rarely something that is finished or fully structured, but is always in formation and transforming in response to fluctuations in the social environment. Authority is not a stable relation but continually born and reborn in an intricate dance of encounters and lures.

Chapter 3 lays some theoretical ground for the book, reviewing and critiquing dominant ways of thinking about the spaces of authority, and sketching out a tentative and revisable definition of authority. It suggests that, because authority works partly by defining what authority *is,* an important preliminary task is to redefine authority in ways that open the possibility of multiple, dispersed, nonhuman, and nonauthoritarian forms of authority. It proposes a way of thinking about authority which defines it as a non-coercive relation of guidance based on recognition of certain inequalities in access to reality. It is important to link authority to political aesthetics, since authority plays a key role in giving form and order to objects of perception, thus enabling things to appear in a shared, common world. A political aesthetics of nonauthoritarian authority demands analysis of spatial practices that reinforce, revise, or contest the nature of the 'common': the shared grounds of judgement.

The remainder of the book is divided between shorter theoretical exercises (Chapters 4–6, 8, and 11) and in-depth empirical studies (Chapters 7, 9, and 10). Whilst each chapter affirms that authority emerges at the intersection of multiple registers of feeling, including thought, perception, affect, emotion, attunement, and materiality, certain chapters place greater emphasis on one than another. Chapter 4 is an exercise in speculative 'figuring': creating a new diagram of authority that seeks a creative path away from anthropocentric notions of authority. Reading with and against Alexandre Kojève's (2014) *The Notion of Authority*, which describes authority in terms of the figures of the father, master, leader, and judge, the chapter proposes four speculative counter-figures: attentiveness; care; attunement; and birth. These figures are taken up, adapted, translated, and transformed across the remaining chapters.

Chapter 5 is a short exercise in reading, engaging with Arendt's text 'What is authority?' through a secular adaptation of the practice of *lectio divina*. The aim is to think critically about the practice of reading, developing a form of reading that recasts textual authority by using the text to stage a personal encounter with truth. In this way, the chapter pluralises textual authority through a practice of reading a text in its capacity to provoke personal reflection, rather than for philosophical or theoretical elucidation. In doing so, it suggests a reading of Arendt's text that sheds light on the importance of cultivating a new *sense of reality*, a 'common sense' attuned to plurality and exposure to a diverse world of abundant, excessive appearances.

Chapter 6 is another short exercise, adopting the tongue-in-cheek genre of the horoscope to question the relationship between authority, authorship, form, and genre, drawing on Adorno's account of the authoritarian personality

as well as Simmel's work on individuality and social forms. It reminds the reader that any writing about authority needs to confront the author's own authority. In fact, authorial authority is closely related to form in that both form and authority simultaneously constrain and enable ways of encountering and responding. The chapter draws on Simmel's sociology of form, as well as more recent work exploring the forms of preconscious experiences, to suggest that pluralising authority requires a close engagement with form and genre in academic writing. This chapter creates a theoretical foundation for the formal experiments in later chapters.

Chapter 7 moves into the detailed empirical work, shifting geographical focus to a site of authoritarian state and criminal violence in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The chapter explores how authority is embodied, especially in situations of authoritarian, racialised violence and exclusion. Making experimental use of biosensors to track how authority functions at preconscious layers of cognition and affect, as well as qualitative data about residents' lived experiences of authority, the chapter asks how authoritarian violence prints itself on the surface of the body, how the violent bordering of the city constructs authority by channelling affective and physiological processes, and how residents' everyday practices and mobilities recreate and rebuild forms of nonauthoritarian authority. The chapter uses an experimental form to evoke a pluralist epistemic authority that explores how nonconscious, biophysical processes can play an important role in responding to, reconfiguring, and reshaping authority. By using a 'disjunctive' form that escapes authoritarian forms of 'either/or' logic and reason through inhabiting a logic of 'or … or … or …', the chapter is a speculative exercise in locating authority in the gaps, ambiguities, and ambivalences in knowledge and experience, rather than in certain foundations and singular narratives.

Chapter 8 is another shorter exercise, responding to Arendt's question, 'where am I when I think'?, as well as Deleuze's sketch of the 'image of thought', through a run along the Bristol–Bath railway path. The chapter asks how responding to barely registered, incipient, more-than-human voices and provocations in the landscape can lead us towards a new way of thinking about the relation between authority, subjectivity, and 'thinking things'.

Chapter 9 turns to a detailed empirical study of bureaucratic authoritarianism in colonial and post-colonial Hong Kong, shifting focus from human embodiment to nonhuman materiality. The chapter is an exercise in posthuman attunement (Brigstocke and Noorani 2016b), striving to be attentive to the distinctive forms of movement and drift associated with a key material for creating the material foundations of colonial and post-colonial authority in Hong Kong. Focusing on whether and how it is possible to respond to the authority of nonhuman materials, the chapter uses a kind of imaginative mimicking of sand's distinctive forms of movement to stylise a poetics of knowledge that disrupts the concreted aesthetics of colonial authority in Hong Kong, and instead seeks a speculative force of nonauthoritarian authority in the gaps and absences of granular drift. It shows that attending to the agency

of nonhuman materials can trouble the aesthetics of colonial authority by seeking a proliferation of smaller, incipient, micro-ecological authorities.

Chapter 10, the final major empirical study, returns to a well-documented site of geographical analysis: 19th century Paris. The aim here is to explore how elite authority was constructed through forms of architecture that dramatised a renewed sense of national vigour through an arrangement of the *senses* (through synaesthetic architecture) and through an industrial production of *feeling* (through the arts). Focusing on the Palais Garnier's role as a key public monument and 'factory of emotion' in the early Third Republic, Chapter 10 is an experiment in pluralising authority by disassembling the complex and authoritarian syntheses of feeling in the monument, experimentally reassembling diverse sensations and emotions. In opposition to the authoritarian ordering of sensation and emotion through totalising attempts to unite and unify them into artificial syntheses that are not oriented towards reality, the chapter seeks nonauthoritarian authorities through a pluralising fragmentation of sensory and emotional experience.

The book closes with some 'Speculative provocations for a nonauthoritarian authority' (Chapter 11), distilling these wide-ranging attempts to capture various forms of incipient, barely sensed, provisional authority into a series of provocations. Nonauthoritarian authorities, it argues, are always plural, provisional, experimental, and grounded in an active attention and attunement to the greatest possible diversity of human and nonhuman voices, provocations, and lures.

Notes

[1] In the UK, television ratings have recently been dominated by competitions such as *Strictly Come Dancing*, *The Great British Bake Off*, and *Britain's Got Talent*, which involve contestants submitting themselves to the appraisal, and sometimes ridicule, of celebrity judges. Another popular show, *I'm a Celebrity … Get me Out of Here!*, reverses this relationship, granting viewers the authority to choose which contestant will suffer humiliating punishments. Several publicity-hungry UK politicians have competed, mostly on the political Right, including Nigel Farage, Matthew Hancock, Nadine Dorries, Edwina Currie, Robert Kilroy Silk, and Lembit Opik.

[2] Contemporary speculative geographies frequently draw on philosophers such as Deleuze, Guattari, Haraway, Stengers, Whitehead, and William James. However, I am particularly drawn to the rich engagements with speculative experience we find in critical theory: for example, in Walter Benjamin's speculative quest for an experience without a subject (Caygill 1998); Theodor Adorno's (1973) evocation of the 'speculative moment' in negative dialectics; Alexander Kluge's and Oskar Negt's (2014) speculative and posthumanist use of theory as montage; and

Ernst Bloch's 'speculative materialism' (Moir 2019). More recent critical theory has also been argued to bear strong affinities with the speculative 'new materialist' thinking associated with theorists such as Jane Bennett (2010) and William Connolly (Connolly 2011; see Rosa, Henning, and Bueno 2021). In phenomenology, too, writers have found speculative insights in the work of philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty and Alphonso Lingis (Wylie 2006), leading towards more explicitly speculative 'post-phenomenological' styles of theorising (Simpson 2025). However, the speculative elements of Hannah Arendt's phenomenology, especially in *The Life of the Mind* (Arendt 1978), are under-examined. The present book seeks to identify and expand on speculative potentials within and across these theoretical registers, moving from the well-established literature on authority within humanist phenomenology and critical theory to ask how posthumanist and speculative philosophies could shed new light on the problem of modern authority.

2. Attuning to emergent, everyday, ordinary authorities

Instructions: *In this book, I set myself several exercises in thinking. As I am trying to become an authority figure, I thought I should include some instructions, in case you would like to join in. The first one is simple. Find an everyday, ordinary place. Spend some time there and register all the different ways in which bodies, signs, materials, and atmospheres guide your behaviour: not through coercion, but by advising, suggesting, provoking, or inciting you. What different kinds of authority can you identify? How do they make themselves felt? Do you follow them consciously or unconsciously? Are their rules explicit or implied? How are they registered? How does one gain supremacy over another? Who or what practises these kinds of authority?*

Authority and orientation

To start things off, let's take our bearings. Authority, I suggest, is always a question of orientation, of directing bodies and shaping patterns of attention and care (Ahmed 2006; Hannah 2019). Our first exercise is to stop for a moment in an everyday, ordinary place, and to practise our capacity for attentiveness: registering the diversity of authorities competing for attention in a small, everyday space. (For a related exercise, observing the atmospheric 'lawscape', see Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2014). The goal here is to think about how authority emerges as a spatial, distributed phenomenon, stretched across multiple materials, actors, and spatial relations.

We find ourselves in a busy space of everyday encounters: an unremarkable, prosaic place, a few metres from my home. By starting in this everyday place, I ask how authority takes shape in everyday encounters, shared feelings, banal interactions, and momentary connections (Anderson and Harrison 2010; Simpson 2021; Thrift 2008). Why start here? Not just laziness, I promise. Before getting too far with our journey, I feel that if I am to win your trust, I should show you my home patch.

We are on the Bristol and Bath Railway Path in England. This is a three-metre wide, 13-mile long asphalt track, following a disused railway line running from the centre of Bristol to Bath, lined by hedges, trees, flower beds, allotments, community gardens, fields, artworks, graffiti, signs, carparks, and banners hanging from the overhead bridges. Towards the centre of Bristol, the path is heavily used by bicyclists, walkers, joggers, and children on scooters

and bikes. It is a shared-use path, and all users, despite travelling at very different speeds, are expected to share it amicably and safely. I can find myself on the path several times in a day: tearing to the train station on my bike for my commute to work; ambling along it with my children on the way to nursery; going for a run; walking into the city centre. This is a dynamic everyday space, always in flux. It is an emergent, shifting field of bodies, materials, and sensations: a diverse and dynamic gathering of multiple co-constituted elements, human and nonhuman, fleetingly coalescing into events, registering institutional effects, lived experiences, materialities, affects, sensory forms, and diverse energies and desires (Stewart 2014). The path is a composition, a looping refrain of mixed, diverse rhythms. It is a shelter, a place of supposed safety and conviviality, away from cars and traffic. It is a place where authority is distributed across multiple sites and sources, stitched into the fabric of ordinary events and encounters through an alchemy of feeling that pulls at the body's sensory, emotional, and affective life.

Before we tackle some key philosophical arguments, my aim in this chapter is briefly to explore some ways authority may play out in concrete, everyday, ordinary situations. So, let's stop to observe some of the ordinary comings and goings of the railway path.

Authority and encounter

A bicyclist moves to the other side of the path to overtake a couple of pedestrians. Another bicyclist, flashing yellow Lycra, hurtles towards her in the other direction. We witness an encounter of conflicting technologies and speeds and comportments: thin, spinning wheels gripping a sticky bituminous crust; cold hands making tiny, unthinking, habitual adjustments to the handlebars; a tired body, thoughts wandering and distracted; two friends walking, lost in conversation; a cold wind blowing in the face, lowering heads and eyes; a near collision, a bike swerving hurriedly back onto the correct side of the path, walkers stopping to give her space to move into. A ripple of tension that briefly flows across the air, mud, and grass, but flattens almost immediately. A moment later, the non-incident is already forgotten. It has barely registered. But could we still speak of a kind of authority here? This would be a distributed authority where various bodies respond unthinkingly to the demands and provocations of other materials, bodies, and events. We see a choreography composed in relation to the norms, expectations, and rules of the path (e.g. always to stay on the left-hand side of the path, as road traffic does in the UK). Authority is assembled in the *event itself* and the encounters that make it: dynamic, emergent, and made up of heterogeneous human and nonhuman materialities.

Encounters on the railway path can be tense. In one survey, 52% of surveyed people reported feeling frustration about another path-user on the day they were surveyed (Delaney 2016, p. 137). I witness cyclists shouting at

pedestrians several times a week. The section we are on now, near my house, is exceptionally busy, with up to 1,800 people per hour using it during peak times (Sustrans 2019). However, at only three metres wide, and without a separation between pedestrians and cycles, it does not conform to best design practice for shared-use paths (Department for Transport 2020, p. 68).[1] Observe here a solar-powered traffic sign flashing up if cyclists pass too quickly: 'cyclists slow down'. A few yards later, we see a pedestrian crossing by an exit point near a primary school. Interventions such as these aim to use gentle forms of advice to address the much-debated problem of cyclists on racing bikes whizzing down the path dangerously fast. The advice is often less explicit, though: on parts of the path leading to key junctions, an abstract 'intensifying pattern' is painted on the path, the aim being to help people understand their speed and encourage them to slow down in the busiest areas of the path. Although this is not mentioned in the official designs of the path, it seems clear that the designs have a childlike quality to them, subtly reminding hurrying commuters that many small children use the path. The authority relation, in this case, is not entirely explicit and not followed consciously: it plays on unconscious associations and perceptions.

Apart from these occasional signs or pedestrian crossings, there is little official guidance about how cyclists and pedestrians should behave, or who has right of way. Regulatory frameworks around the use of shared paths are almost non-existent (Delaney 2016). State authority gives little direction about the use of the path. The UK Highway Code, for example, says nothing about how pedestrians should share space with cyclists. The only advice to cyclists is that they should be cautious when passing pedestrians. The 1991 Road Traffic Act merely states that cyclists should ride 'carefully' and 'considerately'. The latest Department for Transport advice on shared-use paths only advises that signs with legends such as 'share with care' or 'give way to pedestrians' may be used, and that 'periodic information campaigns can help remind all users to be considerate to others' (Department for Transport 2020). Apart from a few pedestrian crossings, therefore, there is little official advice about how to coordinate behaviour in the shared use of paths such as this one. This means that on the railway path, as with so many busy, everyday places of coordinated social behaviours, the forms of authority guiding behaviour are largely implicit, habitual, emergent, and often contested. This may not be a surprising point, but it is one that is not reflected in dominant theorisations of authority, which place too strong an emphasis on the conscious and willed aspects of authority. Yet in cases such as these we may, contrary to many accounts of authority, follow authority *voluntarily* without necessarily doing so *consciously* or intentionally.

Authority and the state

In some ways, the railway path materialises the longer history of changing forms of state authority (Brice 2021). It traces the route of the former railway

line, closed in the late 1960s as part of the Beeching Cuts in which about a third of the UK rail network was permanently closed as a cost-saving measure (Loft 2006). A decade later, volunteers turned it into the first UK cycle path: volunteer labour had to make up for the withdrawal of the state. Now, with environmental issues gaining more prominence, the local government is working hard to improve cycling infrastructure (Sustrans 2019). Some colourful flags hang from an electricity wire. They are adverts for a local government consultation process. 'Safer?'; 'Dangerous overtaking'; 'Gloomy?'; 'With my child and balance bike'; 'ONE PATH BS5. Get involved.' A QR code. A reminder that state authority is certainly present here, this time in the form of a community consultation process. A few months later, more signs appear, all offering advice rather than setting rules: 'use your bell', 'left is best', and so on. Authority is exercised through non-coerced guidance and advice from the state.

After some violent incidents on the railway path, a group of 'Reclaim the B2B' activists hold a demonstration on the path. They arrange meetings with the police and then perform a demonstration on the path, banging pots and pans and making as much noise as possible. Community authority is enacted through noise and movement. For the next few days, police community support officers make themselves visible on the path. The intrusion of coercive state authority – always present, but rarely directly visible on the railway path – is jarring, disquieting.

Plural authorities

A sticker on the railing, strategically placed by the exit leading to the local day care centre, informs me: 'When you tell your child they are eating the bodies of animals, they will be heartbroken'. The sticker claims authority in the form of a provocation: it makes a claim on my attention, directly aiming at the body's feelings and emotions, the dread coming from the possibility of breaking my own child's heart. I find it affecting and disturbing, even at the same time as feeling manipulated and irritated at its simplistic approach to complex issues.

A blackberry bush, up the grass verge on the edge of the path, during our walk home from nursery during rush hour, calls out to us. The kids are obsessed with picking blackberries at the moment. Is it too much to say that the bush exerts authority over us? Is it guiding us, exercising agency? Either way, we respond to its call. My son jumps out of the pushchair and climbs the verge to pick the fruit. I join him, leaving the pushchair parked on the side of the path. A cyclist whizzes past, shouting out and cursing about the pushchair. As a performance of authority – guiding me about the correct behaviour for the railway path – his words fail to hit home. Why should I listen to what the cyclist had to say? What has he done to earn my trust or respect? By speeding past and shouting insults without stopping, with a dreary insistence on having the last word, he has done nothing to prove himself *worthy* to speak the truth. The claim to authority has failed, even if it leaves me in a bad mood.

On another day, tired, and walking home from work after a long day, I succumb to the authority of the news feed on my smartphone, immediately connected to dizzying and hypnotic relays of information, images, and comment across the globe. The astonishing amplification of my awareness of events across the world comes at the cost of numbing my senses to my immediate surroundings. I have become one of those annoying, zombie-like pedestrians who don't look where they are going and ignore the multiplicity of calls and provocations from the bodies and atmospheres along the path.

In the space of a few yards and a few ordinary moments we have already identified several different lines of authority: different kinds of advice, provocation, demand, lure, exhortation, plea, attention capture. They play on different kinds of reason, emotion, materiality, history, and institutional structure. They exert authority because they solicit or demand a response without *compelling* a response. They compete for my attention (Hannah 2019). They intervene in fields of visibility, feeling, and practice. Some appeal to my conscious decision-making, but others work at the level of habit, working through mechanisms of action, physiologically ingrained, operating automatically when certain cues are given (Bridge 2019).

One thing is clear: we do not see here a neat picture of logically ordered spheres of authority, each exerting influence over a clearly defined territory. Instead, we see relations of authority briefly flickering in and out of existence, in response to ever-changing choreographies of bodies and materials and atmospheres. We observe authority overlapping, stretching, receding. We see authorities exerted at a distance (the authority of the state, for example) coinciding and competing with the authority of objects, bodies, and materials that are immediately close by. Authorities intersect and oscillate. As I walk along the path, some authorities become more prominent than others, without this really reflecting their significance.

Micropolitics of authority

Oh dear, are you disappointed? Were you hoping for something more exciting? Gleaming spectacles, iconic buildings, contested monuments, seductive commodities, scowling dictators…? Bear with me a moment. For now, it is important to stay closer to the everyday places where authority unfolds non-representationally through repetition, performance, and habit. In a place such as the railway path, authority is always intimate and hard to grasp. It unfolds through delicate powers of influence, invitation, and provocation. It follows a rhythm of guiding and following, invitation and reply, demand and response. It seeps into the skin. It beguiles the habits, perceptions, and emotions of the body. To feel our way into this kind of mutual implication of authority and place, we need sensitive attunement to the variations of the body and the interfaces of skin and world. Such awareness discloses authority as something always in formation, always insinuating a shift in orientation, a change

in direction, or a twist in composition (Dewsbury 2012, p. 76). Such micropolitical changes may seem slight or inconsequential but are the beginnings out of which new relations and power structures are formed.

In all these observations, authority could be seen to be a relation that is ambiguous (Connolly 1987), embodied, and fugitive. It disappears as quickly as it appears. Its hold is never secure, and its outcomes are never certain. Authority assumes that there are reasons to act, but those reasons are frequently obscure. It grips the soul in ways that resist explicit thought, deliberation, or representation (Ronell 2012). But this grip is never total or irresistible and does not preclude the possibility of reflection and resistance. Bodies improvise in a place and time, adapting themselves to the incitements, provocations, and imperatives of places, practices, and events. A bodily encounter in a place of ordinary, everyday authority does not work through force or domination, but through softer arts: advising, provoking, demanding, grabbing attention. Thinking about authority at a microscalar level, we begin to see how authority relations emerge in a crumpling of the human subject, as one form of 'beginning' amongst many, within multiple rhythms and durations of places, objects, and materials.

You look a little unconvinced. Perhaps you are one of those who believe that authority is always a question of bureaucracy, institutions, standards, rules, offices, targets, reviews, incentives, algorithms, data, passports, league tables, cost–benefit analyses, spreadsheets, databases, certificates. I hope to show that there is more to it than this. I do not always understand why I allow certain authorities so much sway over my life, or why I reject others with such horror. I feel the pull of authority, but am not always able to locate its sources or to understand its force. When I attempt to rationalise authority, I often seem to find myself, not escaping it, but bound even more tightly into it. My powers of reason are themselves bound up in the authority relations that guide me (McCarthy 1990; Olsson 2007). Without rethinking authority at a micropolitical and non-representational level, and without recognising the forms of banal, ordinary authority that guide us through much of our everyday lives, it will be impossible to understand, challenge, or reinvent the more visible, contentious, and overtly politicised forms of authority. Authority is never singular; it is not rooted in stable foundations; it is partial, fragmentary, provisional, and spatially dispersed. To develop a speculative geography of nonauthoritarian authority, I must inhabit the swirling currents of unconsolidated grounds, unnamed affects, unformed thoughts, and unregistered sensations that form the fleeting, endlessly multiplying grounds of authority. For now, let's take a seat. I'm tired. Let's move onto our next exercise.

Note

[1] Since drafting this chapter, a renovation of the cycle path in 2023 has widened parts of the railway path.

3. Spaces and aesthetics of authority

The problem of authority raises itself as soon as we acknowledge that the nonrational, embodied, affective, distributed, and/or habitual aspects of cognition and action are not an embarrassment to enlightened reason, but are essential and valuable aspects of the human condition (Anderson 2014; Pile 2021; Simonsen and Koefoed 2020; Simpson 2021; Thrift 2008). If people were wholly 'rational', in the limited sense of acting only according to conscious chains of logical reasoning, authority need no longer exist, because all actions could be rationally deliberated through persuasion (or else violently imposed). But in a reality where we don't always know why we act, where conduct is shaped by complex rhythms of emotion and feeling, where behaviour is shaped as a coalescence of myriad human and nonhuman forces, and where reason is embodied and distributed, the notion of authority (or something like it) becomes almost inescapable. We *do* follow guides without conscious reflection: the only question is how these forms of submission might be attached to guides that nourish and augment us, rather than diminishing or devaluing us.

My intuition is that making sense of the rapid changes and crises characteristic of the present era, and moving beyond an Enlightenment model that posits disembodied rationality as the only vehicle for freedom, requires circling back to the problematic notion of authority, a concept that speaks to the existential need for guides to follow, for advice to heed, for caring and being cared for, for accepting the help of others in orienting their lives and dreams, and for taking on the responsibility of guiding others. Although critical theory rightly views authority with a great deal of suspicion (see Alford 2017; Worrell 2017), due to its acceptance of inequalities and its association with authoritarianism and unfreedom, it is important to acknowledge that authority also speaks in powerful ways to life's fragility: to the fact that every living being is born, helpless, in a world that pre-exists them, and which is irrevocably transformed by each new arrival in it (Arendt 1998). Everyone needs to be cared for. None of us makes autonomous, reasoned decisions about everything we do. Each one of us needs to find reliable guides. Yet too often, we bind ourselves to authorities that deplete us, or destroy others, or that poison the very world that shelters us. What is needed, I will suggest, is a speculative reinvention of authority. An aesthetics of nonauthoritarian authority must strive to understand the entanglement of authority, space, and time, and in doing so offer fresh insights into our understandings of feelings, bodies, sensation, and the experience of power.

What is the difference between power and authority?

As I use the term in this book, authority is not the same thing as power. Drawing on Arendt (1961, 1963), Connolly (1987, 1993), Sennett (1980), and Allen (2003, 2016), I see authority as something far more limited and restricted than power; it is one distinctive *form* of social coordination. Authority coordinates socio-spatial relations through a form of voluntary submission or deference, based on trust in or respect for an actor's superior capacity or expertise. For example, I usually follow the advice of my doctor, even though I am free not to do so, because I trust their skill and knowledge. In this respect, authority should be contrasted with other practices of social coordination such as domination, persuasion, coercion, force, violence, manipulation, seduction, incentivisation, and conditioning. I thus follow Arendt (1963) in suggesting that any definition of authority needs to be precise and clearly contrasted with both coercive power and persuasion through arguments. Authority is not merely a type of power, where power is viewed in some general way as any situation where agent *A* gets agent *B* to do something. In fact, authority often has a tense or conflictual relationship with power: think, for example, of the climate crisis, where the authority of climate scientists and environmental activists rubs up against the power relations that gird continued fossil fuel consumption. Instead, authority is best seen as what Connolly (1993) calls a *coordinate* of power: authority may be a resource for power; or it may undermine power; or it may simply coexist with power relations.

Since the 1980s, the social sciences and humanities have embraced the language of power but remain far less comfortable with the concept of authority. Developments in theories of power have gone a long way towards breaking the habit of thinking about power along a juridical or command–obedience framework, where power is conceived narrowly in terms of how a sovereign or state imposes its will on its subjects. Such models of power tend to view it as a purely restrictive, oppressive force, and assume a spatial model where power radiates outwards from identifiable centres (e.g. Peet 2007), or where resistance is opposed to power (Keith and Pile 1999). Other accounts (e.g. Allen 2003, 2016; Crampton and Elden 2007; Sharp et al. 2000a) view power more positively, recognising that power is accepted precisely because it can be productive and creative: power, as Foucault puts it, 'traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse' (Foucault 2002, p. 120). Yet the corresponding move has not fully been made with authority, which in much social scientific writing still tends to be framed as intrinsically repressive and dominating. The term 'antiauthoritarian' is often used as a general term of praise in the same contexts where being 'anti-power' would be dismissed as naïve or conceptually incoherent.

Perhaps the most important theoretical influence on geographical analysis of authority is Max Weber's account of authority as legitimate domination. Weber makes a clear distinction between power and authority. According to

Weber, power (*Macht*) is a generalised phenomenon: 'Power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis upon which that probability rests' (Weber 1968, p. 152). By contrast, authority (*Herrschaft*) relates specifically to institutionalised command, and is one of the most important *sources* of power, along with coercion and discipline (Haugaard 2018). Authority, according to Weber, is the probability that a command will be obeyed voluntarily, due to belief in its legitimacy. Authority is thus a form of legitimate domination. There are three main grounds for legitimacy in Weberian theory: rational ('resting on a belief in the legality of normative rules'); traditional ('resting upon established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions); and charismatic ('resting upon devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person') (Weber 1968, p. 328). According to Weber, bureaucratic, 'rational-legal' authority is the dominant mode of authority in modern Western capitalist societies. Such authority is rule-bound, impersonal, cold, calculating, and emptied of emotion and affect.

Much contemporary thinking about authority reproduces key elements of Weberian theories of bureaucratic authority, characterising it as a form of legitimate domination, and/or assuming that modern authority is almost exclusively sited in institutional settings. Yet the Weberian account of the difference between power and authority is problematic. In the first place, construing authority on a model of institutionalised command and obedience denies the possibility that authority can be characterised by dynamic, critical, and/or creative or playful exchanges between the parties involved (Luxon 2013). Crucially, the model of authority as institutionalised command also denies the possibility of exerting 'illegitimate' authority. Yet the observation that authority can be illegitimate is a key insight of affect theory, where accounts of wounded attachments (Brown 1995), cruel optimism (Berlant 2011), the bonds of love (Benjamin 1988), and affective intimacies (Weston 2017) show that people easily bind themselves to authorities, although – or even *because* – they experience these authorities as illegitimate and damaging. Conversely, a key insight of feminist performativity theory is that sometimes a speech act can carry authority even when it comes from a position that is not accorded the 'legitimate' authority to speak. Authoritative speech and acts may derive from factors such as embodiment and affective relationships that have nothing to do with what it is permitted to say or do. Subversive acts of resistance and rebellion can carry authority and weight despite being illegitimate from the perspective of dominant institutions of power, authority, and domination. Judith Butler makes this point in the context of Rosa Parks' celebrated act of refusal on a racially segregated Montgomery bus, suggesting that 'in laying claim to the right for which she had no prior authorization, [Parks] *endowed a certain authority on the act*, and began the insurrectionary process of overthrowing those established codes of legitimacy' (Butler 1997, p. 147, emphasis added). Thus, we should

recognise that 'it is possible to speak with authority without being authorized to speak' (Butler 1997, p. 147). Nonauthoritarian forms of authority are not only possible, but extremely important for social change.

In contrast to Weberian theory, Foucault suggests that an expanded notion of power should lead us to shift attention away from supposed 'centres' of power towards the more diffuse workings of everyday cultures, techniques, embodiments, and practices. The analysis of power 'should not concern itself with the regulated and legitimate forms of power in their central locations…. On the contrary, it should be concerned with power at its extremities, with these points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional forms and institutions' (Foucault 1980, p. 96). Developing further the spatial implications of this Foucauldian approach to power (Crampton and Elden 2007), Sharp et al. conceptualise the spatialities of power through a language of 'entanglements' and 'knots' (Sharp et al. 2000b). Here, the notion of 'entanglement' conveys 'the threadings, knottings and weavings of power…. [R]elations of power are really, crucially and unavoidably spun out across and through the material spaces of the world. It is within such spaces that assemblages of people, activities, technologies, institutions, ideas and dreams all come together, circulate, convene and reconvene … and it is only as a consequence of the spatial entangling together of all of these elements that relations of power are established' (Sharp et al. 2000b, p. 24). While there is much to admire in this formulation, I also feel that something is lost in its resistance to formal distinctions, which means that each configuration of power/resistance must be analysed in terms of its specific threading and knotting of different kinds of practice, materiality, and normativity. What is lost here is the ability to differentiate clearly between the different *forms* of social coordination. Although entangled geographies of power do distinguish between different rationalities of power (including sovereign power, disciplinary power, pastoral power, biopower, governmentality, and parrhesia), each of these involves complex entanglements of power, authority, violence, manipulation, and persuasion. In Foucauldian analysis, conduct is guided by a wide variety of authorities and agencies that target everyday forms of practice and experience, often through reference to expert knowledge. External authority and truth discourses become folded into the interior of subjects, so that people come to work on themselves in ways that internalise authority (Rose 1999). Yet looked at in this way, it becomes very hard to make a useful distinction between power and authority, since power is everywhere, and authority is implicated in all forms of truth.

The problem here is that authority implicitly becomes generalised as an almost universal modality of control, marginalising other practices such as persuasion, manipulation, seduction, incentivisation, and coercion (Allen 2003). This leads to a lack of clarity over the spatial mechanisms through which power is internalised across dispersed populations, and a lack of attention to subjects' critical, embodied, and affective relations with authority – as if people simply internalised authority without question or resistance. In a context of increasing suspicion of, and rejection of, expert authority, this

is hardly a reliable assumption. It also fails to ask how experimental, creative, radical, or subversive spatial practices might invent, build, and nurture new and more egalitarian relations of authority. Moreover, this failure to differentiate between different modalities of social coordination makes it hard to account adequately for the *lived experience* of power and authority. For example, it makes a profound difference to my experience whether I perceive something as authority (which I submit to willingly) or as manipulation (which I submit to unwittingly). Value-laden distinctions between authority, coercion, manipulation, seduction, power, and persuasion – despite the difficulties in establishing clear analytical boundaries between them – are a fundamental aspect of people's experience of space, power, agency, and politics.

The importance of authority in this context is that authority is a form of coordination that, unlike closely related practices such a manipulation and seduction, makes space for agency and freedom. With authority, subjects freely choose not to exercise their own judgement about a particular action, but instead allows themselves to be guided by someone else or something else – a trusted guidebook, a teacher, a friend, a doctor, a website, a newspaper, even an atmosphere or ambience (Griffero 2018). Authority does not require foregoing judgement and critical evaluation; instead, it means shifting judgement about an individual action to a broader evaluation of who/what the reliable guides are in specific contexts. Unlike coercion, manipulation, or seduction, where obedience is commanded against the subject's will, and also unlike persuasion where ultimately both parties agree and so no obedience is required, authority is a form of submission that is actively willed. It is a relation of obedience in which people *retain* their agency and freedom. This idea might seem paradoxical, but it is central to the notion of democracy, for example. Democracy presupposes that conflict can be channelled into forms and structures that people accept and submit to even when they disagree with the specific outcomes. Thus, it can resolve conflicts whilst still allowing all parties to retain their freedom. Democratic processes command authority to the extent that citizens trust the processes and structures for transforming antagonism into agonism (Haugaard 2010). If people start losing trust in those mechanisms, democratic authority starts to collapse, and the experience of authority (where freedom and agency are retained) is deformed into an experience of coercion.

Another reason why it is so hard to separate authority from power is the historical importance of the notion of sovereignty. As Arendt recalls, Roman thought had no difficulty distinguishing power and authority, and the two were institutionalised in different bodies (Arendt 1961, p. 122). In premodern Europe, the two were also institutionally separated to some extent in the power of the sovereign compared to the authority of the Church. In modernity, however, theories of sovereignty started to collapse power and authority together. In the Hobbesian tradition of political philosophy, sovereignty is supreme, indivisible, indisputable, and absolute. Sovereignty is a form of power that seeks to incorporate authority into itself, collapsing power and authority together,

so that the sovereign commands absolute power *and* absolute authority. This conflation of power and authority continues in the various histories of the state's attempts to command authority *through* the monopolisation of power. The idea here is that power, just because it is in power, is acknowledged as the sole authority and, conversely, the sole authority is by definition the sovereign power (Straehle 2020). This is a trait of tyrannical regimes, which, in attempting to use shows of strength to command authority, end up violently negating it. The history of sovereignty shows us that the conflation, or superimposition, of power and authority can be extremely dangerous.

What is authority?

What, then, *is* authority? The question is harder to answer than it sounds. Part of the problem is that one of the things authority *does* is define *how and where* authority should be recognised. By defining authority, the author is always already practising authority. Perhaps for this reason, many of the most important theoretical texts on authority offer very limited positive definitions of authority, choosing instead to explore it through historical, genealogical, or deconstructive perspectives (e.g. Arendt 1961; Benjamin 1978; Derrida 1990; Marcuse 2008; Ronell 2012). Such work leaves open the problem of authority in the present day as something whose very nature remains to be recreated or reinvented. In doing so, such texts evoke a kind of processual authority, where a nonauthoritarian authority emerges out of an ongoing critical sensibility (Osborne 1998). Whilst aligning myself with these processual understandings of authority, my feeling is that authority-as-process should be explored, not only through historicising and deconstructive approaches to authority, but also through engaging with *speculative* forms and styles of thinking.

Yet we need to start somewhere. So, let us take some first steps towards a broad characterisation of authority. First, authority is relational. No one 'has' authority and no one 'lacks' authority: authority is not a thing or a possession. Authority is a relational achievement of spatial practices involving many actors, materials, spaces, institutions, and embodiments. More specifically, authority can be viewed as a relation of guidance, where 'guidance' can be taken to include any practice that helps someone orient themselves in time, space, and the social field (e.g. through practices such as advice, education, provocation, lure, and demand). Authority, in this formulation, is emphatically not about giving people orders, or coercing them to do things. To be a meaningful concept, authority needs to be used in a more restrictive sense. Arendt's historical account of authority reminds us that authority has often taken the form of 'wise counsel'; Arendt recalls the Roman definition of authority as more than advice but less than command – advice that cannot safely be ignored (Arendt 1961, p. 123). The authority of doctors over their patients, for example, is a relation that emerges out of the patients' respect for the doctors, the institutional setting, the qualifications and training of the

doctors, the physical and affective space of the surgery, and myriad other factors. Patients are always free to ignore their doctor's advice but would usually be foolish to do so.[1] Advice is also central to contemporary formations of financial authority and the governance of indebtedness (Kirwan 2019a).

Second, authority is a relation between free 'actors'. Authority can only be followed freely; if it is coerced, it has become a different form of social coordination. There is no need to assume a specific interpretation of the term 'free' here beyond the capacity to exercise agency (though different conceptions of freedom will result in different conceptions of authority). Agency may be individual, collective, pre-individual, or nonhuman, and is constrained by myriad structural factors. However, as recent debates around 'constrained agency' have explored, even in cases where individual agency is extremely limited it can still be exerted through practices such as coping, reworking, resisting, and so on (Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011; Scott 1985). Moreover, I argue in Chapter 7 that agency may be free without necessarily being consciously willed; consent can take place at more embodied, non-conscious registers of experience. Finally, I say that authority takes place between free 'actors' – rather than between free 'people' – because it is important to leave open the possibility of nonhuman authority. The term 'actors' leaves room for recognising the authority of diverse nonhuman entities (Brigstocke and Noorani 2016a). 'Actor', as I use the term, refers to any human or nonhuman 'cognitive assemblage' that is capable of exercising agency and judgement (Hayles 2017).

This means that coming up with an adequate account of nonauthoritarian authority means addressing difficult questions about the nature of nonhuman agency. Authority is a concept with a tradition of theorising that is strongly humanist. This humanism denies important aspects of the materialities of authority. This is a point made by Marxist materialism, in its critique of how individual human authority becomes an illusory substitute for the authority of capital (where capital, in Marxist thought, is understood as a social relation that appears in certain material forms and arises from the material production process). 'New materialist' theories, by contrast, insist on a radically non-anthropocentric materialism in which agency is always a distributed phenomenon (Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Barad 2007; Bennett 2020, 2010; Connolly 2011; Coole and Frost 2010; Fox and Alldred 2016). New materialisms see agency as an emergent property of interactions among bodies, materials, and technologies (Braidotti 2013). This has profound implications for thinking about the authority relation, since authority can no longer be thought of as a simple relation between two individuals with their own self-contained agentic powers; instead, authority becomes a far more diffuse relation that gathers a wide network of distributed agencies. Fully responding to this speculative new materialist account of agency requires a profound recasting of the concept of authority. For, whilst authority always requires agency, this agency may be highly complex and dispersed across complex cognitive systems of judgement. If, following Hayles (2017), we replace the human/nonhuman binary with a different cut between actors (defined as those capable

of cognition, i.e. choice, meaning, interpretation, and judgement) and agents (defined as those with agentic powers, but not cognition, such as tornadoes or earthquakes), this opens a way of thinking about authority that does not recognise it in *anything*, but does recognise it in a far wider variety of processes, forms of life, and systems than the standard humanist accounts of authority do. It also puts into question the grounds of the authority to make judgements about what can exercise authority. Part of what a speculative aesthetics of authority might do is to contest existing partitions between what is considered cognitive and non-cognitive (see Chapter 9).

A key question remains. What motivates actors to recognise authority? Authority is etymologically related to the Latin *augere*, to augment. This suggests that authority may gain its force from its (perceived) capacity to augment the world or the self: to enlarge or enrich life. Perhaps we recognise authority, therefore, to the extent that doing so promises to enrich us – to augment our capacities or to enliven the world. Thus, authority is typically motivated by recognising another actor's capacity, strength, wisdom, or expertise in a particular area. Teachers have authority because they can impart knowledge; doctors command authority because they have the expertise to make us better; spiritual leaders are granted authority because they can help us live better. Authority derives from a claim to a superior grasp of a *reality* beyond the subject. This is why authority has often been (and still is) closely linked to religion, for example (Blencowe 2025), and why post-Enlightenment authority has been so closely tied to scientific knowledge. Both are institutions that connect people to a reality beyond the subject. Blencowe (2013) argues that authority is constituted through the proximity it claims to an objective reality existing beyond subjective experiences and standpoints:

> Objectivity understood in broad terms (as a source of judgement beyond subjective perceptions, positions or understanding; as reality beyond individual knowledge; as the outside of both community and thought) is an essential condition of authoritative relationships. 'Ideas of objectivity' … serve as focus points, anchors, for experience, enabling us to escape our finite singularity and to occupy worlds in common. Authoritative relationships, voices and statements enact connections with those ideas, playing upon inequalities in our closeness to objectivity (Blencowe 2013, p. 10).

Authoritative relationships, voices and statements thus feed off perceived inequalities in our connection to reality.

Such claims to being closer to the heart of reality (whether 'reality' is construed as spiritual life, or economic vitality, or health, or intense lived experiences, or community, etc.) typically reinforce patriarchal, colonial, elitist structures of power that frame the white, male, wealthy body as the ideal locus of authority. Notions of objectivity often appear as a way of dismissing the experiences of marginalised people as mere subjective opinion, holding no

weight against the towering 'objective' view of the sanctified experts of science. This means that a crucial task for inventing nonauthoritarian authority is multiplying the forms of objectivity and the feeling for reality that these objectivities bring (Blencowe, Brigstocke, and Noorani 2018). Feminist theory has long shown that objectivity is not a single thing or perspective (Haraway 1988; Harding 1991). Speculative theory argues that reality itself is irreducibly plural (Savransky 2021). Similarly, feminist new materialisms teach us that *material reality itself* is in significant part constituted through practices of paying attention, observation, and measurement (Barad 2007). The authority claimed from proximity to any singular conception of objectivity and reality, therefore, can and must be reappropriated through an experimental attitude or ethos that, by allowing all manner of practices and types of subject to participate, multiplies the forms and conditions of authority (Stengers 2000).

Thus, in contrast to commonplace geographical characterisations of authority that equate it with institutionalised command, sovereignty, or legitimate power, I propose a more limited and specific initial characterisation of authority as a relation of guidance that takes place between free actors and is performatively enacted by recognising inequalities in access to reality (including truth, objectivity, and/or experience). In this definition, 'guidance' refers to any practice that helps actors orient themselves in time, space, and the social field (e.g. through practices such as advice and education). 'Actor' refers to any human or nonhuman cognitive assemblage capable of exercising agency and judgement. 'Free' implies the capacity to exercise agency and the absence of coercion or manipulation. 'Performatively enacted' means that authority is constituted solely in and through the practice of recognition; the moment consent is withdrawn, authority vanishes. Finally, 'recognition' refers to respect for, or acknowledgement of, the unequal relation; recognition need not be conscious and willed but may be preconscious and affective.

The main conclusion I draw from all this is that although authority is strongly associated with the reduction of the plural to the singular through an authoritarian imposition of single conceptions of objectivity, objective knowledge, and reality, it does not need to be this way. A speculative account of nonauthoritarian authority can emerge out of collaborative and experimental spatial practices that *multiply* the forms of objectivity and reality. Authority need not impose singularity and homogeneity, but can also generate diversity, difference, and multiplicity. Authority can pluralise worlds. Many kinds of expertise, wisdom, objectivity, and truth *can be* and *are* recognised, and acquire the weight of authority.

Authority and antiauthoritarianism

The approach to authority outlined here learns much from, but also takes a certain distance from, anarchist and antiauthoritarian geographies. Anarchism is a politics and body of thought oriented towards opposing authority. In that

sense, the anarchist project is seemingly opposed to my emphasis on pluralising authority, and anarchist thought would condemn the idea of nonauthoritarian authority as inherently contradictory. Indeed, unlike anarchists I am sceptical of the possibility or desirability of eliminating all forms of authority – just as I am sceptical of the desire to eliminate power. Yet I would also suggest that the distance between the two perspectives is smaller than it sounds. Anarchism's antiauthoritarianism is focused primarily on political hierarchies and state authority: Springer (2016, p. 50) observes that 'the state … forms the primary locus of anarchist thought'. Anarchism also opposes social structures of authority that are closely linked to or underpin the authority of the state – for example, the authority structures associated with the patriarchal nuclear family (Ince and Barrera de la Torre 2024, Chapter 1). Yet anarchism does not actually oppose *all* forms of authority. In practice, anarchism targets forms of political and social authority that are hierarchical, centralised, and fixed. To take one example: in Springer's 2014 polemic essay on 'why a radical geography must be anarchist', he starts off with a general statement that 'Anarchist society' is 'a society which organizes itself without authority' (Springer 2014, p. 249). Later, he suggests that for anarchism 'all authority is deemed illegitimate' (Springer 2014, p. 260). Yet elsewhere in the essay, important qualifiers are added. For example, he writes that anarchist practices 'proceed non-hierarchically and free from *external* authority' (p.253, emphasis added). Later, he suggests that anarchist practices are 'free from coercion or *imposed* authority' (p. 253, emphasis added). Beyond the 'antiauthoritarian' headline, therefore, he implicitly mobilises a series of distinctions between different kinds of authority that are more or less desirable. Generally, anarchism focuses on opposing hierarchy, State authority, external authority, and coerced/imposed authority. Yet the need for qualifiers such as 'external' authority and 'imposed' authority admits the possibility of forms of authority that are non-hierarchical, not attached to the state, and which are internal and voluntary. These are broadly the kinds of authority that I am calling 'nonauthoritarian' authority. Yet anarchism, always deeply distrustful of the notion of authority, has arguably not done enough to make sense of those alternative possibilities for authority. Or rather: it *has*, but by placing great emphasis on the importance of consensus decision-making, it typically refuses to name them *as* authority.

For example, a large amount of thought has gone into understanding the internal structure of autonomous groups and social movements, and their experiments with effective horizontal forms of organisation (Shantz 2020). Sutherland, Land, and Böhm (2014) argue that the absence of individual leaders in social movements must not be taken to imply the absence of leadership. Rather, leadership is present in these groups, but in forms that are distributed and temporary. By implication, some kind of willingness to be guided by others – some kind of authority relation – must also be in play. As Pickerill observes, '[l]eadership need not be hierarchical; indeed, it is often more effective if it is not and even if consensus is being practiced, there

will always be people who others wish to follow. Rather, it is about enabling leadership to be organic and having checks against power' (Pickerill 2017, p. 254). Moreover, where individuals do take on some level of leadership role in autonomous organisations, practices such as role rotation ensure that these are temporary and cannot be consolidated into any kind of stable authority. A key insight to take from anarchist theory about nonauthoritarian authority, I suggest, is that nonauthoritarian authority may exist but it is always temporary, provisional, and revisable in nature.

One of the clearest accounts of anarchist authority that I have come across is found in a classic anarchist text, Mikhail Bakunin's [1882] (1916) *God and the State*. Bakunin wrote that authority 'is a word and a thing which we detest with all our heart' (Bakunin 1916, p. 28). However, again he soon starts to qualify this, emphasising that anarchism does not reject all authority, but only *external* authority. He is happy, for example, to defer to the authority of nature, or what he calls 'the inevitable power of the natural laws which manifest themselves in the necessary concatenation and succession of phenomena in the physical and social worlds' (Bakunin 1916, p. 28). Slavery to natural laws is no slavery at all, Bakunin suggests, because such laws 'constitute the basis and fundamental conditions of our existence; they envelop us, penetrate us, regulate all our movements, thoughts, and acts' (Bakunin 1916, p. 28). The key point, Bakunin goes on, is that anarchism is really about rejecting singular, absolute authority. To avoid this, Bakunin observes, 'I do not content myself with consulting a single authority in any special branch; I consult several; I compare their opinions, and choose that which seems to me the soundest. But I recognise no infallible authority … [and] I have no absolute faith in any person' (Bakunin 1916, p. 32). This motivates him to work towards a state where 'there is no fixed and constant authority, but *a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and above all, voluntary authority and subordination*' (Bakunin 1916, p. 33, emphasis added). Bakunin's perspective on authority in this passage – an ethos oriented towards pluralising authority in all its forms, and opposing all singular or consolidated forms of authority – comes very close to my own position.

However, the passage also exemplifies something that was a major issue in much early anarchist thought, and arguably still has traces in contemporary thinking: an uncritical acquiescence to the authority of 'nature' or closely related notions such as 'organic' or 'spontaneous' organisation. According to Bakunin, whilst anarchism is wholly opposed to the singular authorities of God and law, it is compatible with submission to the authority of nature – and by extension, the authority of the scientists who speak 'for' nature. This leads him to an extraordinary conclusion: 'We recognize, then, the absolute authority of science … [which is] legitimate because rational and in harmony with human liberty' (Bakunin 1916, p. 34). For contemporary readers, this notion is deeply problematic, even when Bakunin explains that in an anarchist society, science is not the preserve of elite 'savants', but must 'spread among the masses' and 'become the property of everybody' (Bakunin 1916, p. 62).

In the wake of the Foucauldian critique of power–knowledge, which shows how knowledge is inseparable from power, we are aware of how 'external' and hierarchical authority is folded into relations of scientific expertise and truth, and this would remain the case, at least to some extent, even if science were democratised in the way Bakunin envisages. It is impossible to view 'nature' as having any kind of intrinsic moral authority, or science as being a neutral interpreter of nature's laws (Daston and Vidal 2003). Indeed, as I have explored elsewhere, some early anarchist social movements put a lot of energy into critiquing how 'nature', 'life', the 'organic', and 'evolution' were used to coordinate authoritarian, biopolitical forms of state control; they strived to radically reimagine what 'nature' 'life', or 'creativity' could mean – and hence what authority could mean – in an anarchist society (Brigstocke 2014).

Recent anarchist thought has a much more sophisticated approach to nature–society relations. Nevertheless, the problematic distinction between 'natural' authority and 'artificial' authority is arguably often implicit. Murray Bookchin's eco-anarchism, for example, presupposes the notion of a singular, non-hierarchical, 'organic' society that existed before the emergence of hierarchical societies, and where humans were 'part of the natural world. They were neither above nature nor below it, but within it' (Bookchin 1982, p. 5, cited in Hall 2011). These kinds of ideas fail to register the extent to which notions of nature, life, creativity, and spontaneity are themselves imbued with deeply complex and hierarchical authority relations (as explored in Foucauldian accounts of biopower, for example). An anarchist pluralisation of authority requires pluralising nature, scientific objectivity, and even reality itself. Thus, I learn much from various strands of anarchism that, far from idealising communities living 'spontaneously', naturally, or organically (such as Indigenous communities), instead emphasise a decolonial 'radical pluriverse' (Ince and Barrera de la Torre 2024) that multiplies and decolonises the forms of authority that compose worlds and realities (De la Cadena and Blaser 2018; Escobar 2020; Ferretti and Barrera de la Torre 2024). Relatedly, some ecological-anarchist thinking moves beyond the dualisms such as human/nature and civilisation/wildness that have characterised much anarchist thought. In doing so, they are starting to shift anarchism's anthropocentricism, insisting that non-hierarchical thinking and organising must extend to the nonhuman world of animals and spirits (Hall 2011). I would suggest that even if this work still does not use the language of authority, it can be read as pluralising authority in ways that start to reinvent the aesthetics of authority, and to find new ways of creating a rich sense for reality.

Authority and space

A challenge for a study of dynamic, everyday, experimental, and more-than-human practices of authority is to avoid falling back into spatial logics that assume authority to involve sovereign command over a specific, spatially

bounded sphere of influence with an identifiable centre. Instead, in this book I see authority as orienting actors within spatio-temporal relations of distance and proximity, presence and absence, transcendence and immanence, memory and anticipation. Understanding how multiple practices of authority relate to each other and co-construct each other requires grappling with the aggregated and topological spatialities that this produces.

Much work in philosophy, sociology, and political theory frames authority in largely temporal terms, seeing authority as what binds us to the past through tradition or memory, or else as what guides us into the future, through foresight, anticipation, and planning (e.g. Connolly 1993; Kojève 2014). One recent sociological history of authority fails to make any mention at all of space, place, landscape, or environment (Furedi 2013). Geographical scholarship, however, reminds us that authority is always inherently spatial, both producing space, and produced by it. Indeed, questions of authority, including where it is exercised, how it is authorised, and who practices it, are vital for understanding changing spatialities of governance (Allen 2003; Bulkeley 2012).

The spatialities of authority have changed dramatically in recent decades. Authority has become increasingly privatised (Cutler, Haufler, and Porter 1999), problematising any lingering assumptions abound the state as the central locus of authority. This privatisation of authority is part of a broader trend that we might describe as a fragmentation or multiplication of authority. We do not live in a world where a single authority has jurisdiction over a clearly defined territory, or where there is agreement about who or what the authorities on a particular issue are. The authority of the institutions of the nation state coexists with a multiplication of partial, specialised, normative spatial orders. Sassen (2006) describes this change in spatialities of authority as a shift from the centripetal articulation of the singular nation state to a less legible centrifugal logic that unglues the different normative orders held together by the nation state. With the proliferation and rescaling of authority, multiple overlapping domains of authority emerge, exercised by diverse bodies, including state institutions, legal systems, non-governmental organisations, supranational entities, social movements, private companies, criminal organisations, and everyday cultural practices. This is complicated further by a trend towards increasing automation of authority, where life-changing judgements about threats or credit-worthiness are increasingly made by computer algorithms rather than being subjected to individual judgement, thereby making lines of authority hard to identify or contest (Amoore 2020; 2013). We might also observe a trend towards recognising the authority of increasingly diverse bodies of nonhuman actors, as well as not-yet-living actors, leading to new spaces and temporalities of governance (Brigstocke 2015).

By distinguishing authority from related but distinct forms of social coordination, it becomes possible, as Allen (2003) argues, to consider the spatial logics of each distinctive form of coordination (see also Dovey 1999). Each has its own distinctive spatial rationalities. Allen (2003) suggests that a distinctive

feature of authority is its frequent reliance on spatial relations of *presence* and *proximity*: to work, authority must make its presence felt. 'Authority's constant need for recognition implies that the more direct the presence, the more intense the impact … proximity and presence have a significant part to play in the successful mediation of authority relations when confronted with a diverse and dispersed civic population (Allen 2003, pp. 148–49). This is a valuable and insightful starting point for theorising authority's spatial forms. However, Allen's account of authority's spatialities loses sight of more enigmatic and non-representational registers of authority. Authority is often highly elusive: it gains hold of us in ways that resist explicit thought, reflection, or representation (Ronell 2012). It has a kind of 'mystical force' (Benjamin 1978), or functions as a form of 'social magic' (Bourdieu 1996; Derrida 1990). We do not always know *why* we desire to be guided by a particular authority. This means that if authority requires presence – or rather, what Rose (2006) describes as 'dreams of presence' – this presence is enigmatic and elusive. It reaches towards the 'outsides' of knowledge and experience. Authority can involve not just presence and proximity, but also, simultaneously, absences and distances. This is captured well by Walter Benjamin's accounts of aura, for example, as 'a strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be' (Benjamin 2002, pp. 104–105). Authority acquires strength by connecting individuals to dynamic spatio-temporal forces and processes that are greater than themselves. These might be metaphysical foundations such as God, community, nation, or empire. Or they might be immanent biopolitical processes such as biological life, economic life, experiential life, or spiritual life (Blencowe 2012). They might even be a shared experience of a *loss* of transcendence, communion, or metaphysical grounds (Kirwan 2013).

Work in science and technology studies such as Papadopolous' (2018) research on experimental practices and Weston's (2017) exploration of new intimacies between humans, animals, and their surroundings in a high-tech ecologically damaged world, enables us to see authority as a spatial production-in-the-making, influenced by framing political–economic conditions, but never finally decided. A nonauthoritarian politics of authority, from this vantage point, actively produces publics, commitments, affects, issues, and forms of democratic engagement through how they are composed, mediated, and performed. Thus, authority relations are always open to being recomposed, precisely because they are grounded in the 'always-contingent and compositional nature of the social world' (Chilvers and Kearnes 2016, p. 31). Such accounts lodge questions of politics, including the nature of political disagreement and action, and the conditions for the constitution and disclosure of new collectives, claims, and commons, at the heart of geographies of authority (Millner 2020).

Conceptual vocabularies for describing the spatial forms of these relational, performative, and compositional accounts of authority need to go beyond languages of fragmentation, overlapping spheres of authority (Sassen 2006), the rescaling of authority (Brenner 2004), or extraterritorial authority

(Elden 2009). These languages do not entirely escape from geometric presuppositions that assume power and authority to unfold over pre-existing space, rather than to co-compose space (Allen 2016). Moreover, none of these framings give a clear picture of the distinctive spatialities of authority in contrast to other forms of social coordination. What is needed is a way of theorising authority that commits itself to asking how spatial relations are composed and endure during conditions of perpetual change. Moving beyond overly geometric spatial frames of authority towards more topological ways of thinking (Allen 2016) requires attending to authority's dynamic spatialities and its continually shifting connections to other forms of control such as manipulation, seduction, power, and coercion. This kind of non-geometric analysis emphasises how authority can be distorted, stretched, folded, and knotted, forming relations that survive the process of distortion, but in a transformed way. Understanding how duration and stability are produced *through* change and transformation (rather than against them) is a key problem for theorising modern authority, in contrast to dominant ways of thinking about authority as a relation that is static and stabilising. Such non-geometric figures of authority may help us get to grips with an important element of the experience of authority, where it is linked to forces that appear simultaneously present and absent, both proximate and ungraspable (Brigstocke 2013). Allen (2016) calls for forms of topological analysis that show how certain processes succeed in reaching across diverse domains, as well as how one modality of control such as authority can be stretched into another, such as manipulation or coercion. Conceived in this way, authority can be understood as a practice that enacts new forms of proximity, distance, and presence through the distortion (e.g. stretching, folding) of reach.

For an aesthetics of authority

In conceptualising the possibilities of a nonauthoritarian spatial practice of authority, I wish to connect authority to another equally problematic concept of Enlightenment thought: aesthetics. This book comprises a series of speculative exercises in theorising a nonauthoritarian aesthetics of authority. In thinking authority in conjunction with aesthetics, the book asks whether, rather than viewing authority as a relation that is *inherently* unequal, unfree, or uncritical, we might do better to ask how authority could be practised creatively in ways that are more egalitarian, more emancipatory, and better able to care for a world facing multiple ecological crises. Such an authority, perhaps, may be implicit within Foucault's notion of an 'aesthetics of existence' or 'art of living'. Such an art of life, according to Foucault, offers a distinctive way reactivating the Enlightenment as an exit or way out: 'a modification of the preexisting relation linking will, authority, and the use of reason' (Foucault 1984b, p. 35). Foucault's reactivation of the ethos of Enlightenment as an attitude towards the present led him to speculate about the possibilities for living

life in ways that are not tied to the truths and knowledges determined by powerful authorities and institutions, but instead formed according to immanent aesthetic criteria – the goal being not to lead a life that is true, but one that is beautiful (Brigstocke 2013; Osborne 1998). Truly collapsing life and art, however, would require practising authority itself as an artwork. Rather than being 'for' or 'against' authority, a spatial aesthetics of authority would ask how authority can be followed and demanded through more creative, experimental, and provisional spatial relations. To speak of an aesthetics of existence is to ask how to multiply the 'bannisters' that can guide and support life.

From the perspective of an aesthetics of existence, the subject cannot be seen as a stable substance. Rather, it is a *form* – a form that is not primarily or always identical to itself. An aesthetics of existence or 'art of life' can be redescribed as a formal experiment with spatial practices of authorisation and recognition. These practices condition the possible and actual forms of selfhood. What I have in mind in evoking an aesthetics of authority is foremost an ethos of creativity or experimentation towards how we follow and practice authority – and towards the composition of that 'we'. It is more than this, however. The 'aesthetic' not only refers to the domain of the arts, but more broadly to the presentation of the world to the senses. Talk of an aesthetics of authority, therefore, raises fundamental questions about how authority is tied to sense, sensation, and embodied experience. Modern authority is often tied to forms, qualities, intensities, or transformations of experience (Blencowe, Brigstocke, and Dawney 2013).

Because authority is reducible neither to command and law, nor to reason and logic, the authority relation presupposes forms of judgement that are embodied and affective. Analysis of spaces of authority requires a grounding in political aesthetics, and in the non-representational spaces and materialities of embodied judgement. I view authority as playing an important role in giving form and order to objects of perception, thus enabling things to appear in a common, shared world (Dikeç 2015, p. 5). Linking authority to political aesthetics recalls an Arendtian tradition that emphasises the need to generate forms of 'community sense', shared judgement, and practices that build and protect spaces for the constitution, disclosure, and contestation of a common world (Arendt 1982; Rancière 2004). From this perspective, authority is a relation that generates common grounds for experience, judgement, and plural forms of reality and objectivity. In this spirit, I argue for an approach to authority that addresses the problem of how feelings and experiences are materialised, collectivised, shared, transformed, experimented with, and intensified. A political aesthetics of authority demands analysis of spatial practices that reinforce, revise, or contest the nature of the 'common'.

A central concern of Rancière's politics of aesthetics is the construction of the common, and its contestation through the assertion of the 'supplementary part' or 'part-with-no-part' who are excluded from dominant aesthetic orders and hence made invisible and inaudible (Rancière 2004). Developing the

spatial implications of Rancière's thought, Dikeç argues that space becomes political where it is transformed into a 'polemical place where a wrong can be addressed and equality can be demonstrated. It becomes an integral element of the interruption of the "natural" (or, better yet, naturalised) order of domination through the constitution of a place of encounter by those that have no place in that order' (Dikeç 2015, p. 172). By contrast, space is a kind of 'police' when it serves to organise powers, to distribute places and roles, and to legitimise this distribution. It is easy to view this framework in binary terms, with 'police' equivalent to the imposition of authority and 'politics' as the disruption and subversion of authority (e.g. May 2008). Yet Rancière does not exclude the 'supplementary part' from authority; rather he suggests that they *authorise themselves* by disrupting the established partition of visibilities. Chambers (2013) helpfully argues for a more nuanced way of understanding police and politics that does not construct them as a binary opposition, but recognises that each depends on the other: 'For Rancière, there is no politics without police', and crucially this means there is no politics without authority.

Part of the aim of my emphasis on a political aesthetics of authority is to ask how nonauthoritarian forms of authority might be co-constituted through speculative, experimental, more-than-human practices that test the forms and limits of experience. Authority is a relation that presupposes recognition of some form of inequality, and therefore it always sits in tension with a politics of equality. At the same time, practices of equality often require *building* spaces of authority to make them possible. Millner (2013) makes this point in her account of the aesthetic politics of irregular migration, which offers a powerful way of connecting authority to work on the politics of aesthetics. Millner argues for the importance of a distinctive kind of 'experiential authority' which uses the authority of experience (in this case, of refugees) to assert a dispute within a specific space of common investment. In a departure from readings of Rancière's politics of aesthetics which emphasise the contingency and singularity of political moments of interruption and disruption, Millner argues for the importance of showing how

> the reconfiguration of aesthetic forms of ordering is not just about breaking (sovereign, police) orders, but also about producing new opportunities for the generation of authority. Disruption and difference make experience possible, but the crucial point for politics is how conditions of disagreement are fostered and sustained (Millner 2013, p. 92).

In theorising the aesthetics of authority, my aim is to foreground the possibilities for creative, embodied, and experimental reworkings of authority, as well as to emphasise the importance of embodied affects and judgements in the testing and contesting of authority. Here I draw on recent geographical accounts of authority that, extending longer traditions of work in feminist theory, analyse the spatialities of 'experiential authority', a form of authority

that gains its force either from *intensities* of experience or collective *experiments* with experience (Blencowe, Brigstocke, and Dawney 2016). Such forms of authority are embodied, dispersed, affective, and tied to experiences of vitality, growth, and the outside (Blencowe 2012). Dawney (2020, 2018, 2013), for example, charts the emergence of powerful figures of authority who are listened to (and hence are granted authority) because of the intensity with which experiences have affected them – such as the experience of grief or suffering. The authority that these lived experiences can confer derives from how their bodies, by touching the limits of subjective experience, come to materialise specific objectivities around which others can organise their emotional attachments. These bodies become focal points for a circulation of affective experiences of being-in-common. Lea et al. (2016), similarly, theorise authority in ashtanga yoga as distributed, relational, and multiple, rather than inhering in the figure of the teacher. Such accounts show how authority gains force not simply through intensities of experience, but more importantly, through practices of collectively experimenting with experience (Noorani 2013). This is an idea that I explored in a research monograph on the embodiments of authority in late 19th century cabaret culture, where 'experimental embodiments' were used to create new experiences of life and reality, and hence a new aesthetics of authority (Brigstocke 2014). Such work highlights that authority is not simply a relation between two or more people; rather, it is a distributed relation whose force depends upon the distinctive material and affective qualities of specific places.

Race, humanism, and speculative aesthetics

Aesthetic theory is closely bound to an anthropocentric, northern European worldview that centres human perception. Recent speculative and new materialist theory has posed a powerful challenge to this rooting of reality in human perception. 'What would it mean', asks Katherine Hayles, 'to imagine an aesthetics in which the human is decentred and inanimate objects, incapable of sense perceptions as we understand them, are included in aesthetic experience?' (Hayles 2014, p. 159). Her answer is that aesthetics need not centre human experience, but is a key tool for escaping anthropocentricism, since this requires

> an imaginative projection into the worldviews of other objects and beings, based on evidence about their ways of being in the world, although with the important caveat that these are analogies and should not be mistaken for an object's own experience (Hayles 2014, p. 178).

Indeed, recent work on the politics of aesthetics challenges frameworks that reinforce human-centred conceptions of the world, treating the aesthetic

instead as a diverse field of sense, sensation, and judgement that is shaped by numerous forces and agencies, both organic and inorganic (Hawkins and Straughan 2015), and which disrupts the 'common sense' ordering of experience (Burdon 2022). From this perspective, aesthetic creation can create new relations and invent new forms of 'resingularised' subjectivity (Dawson 2022).

This raises the question of the status of 'experience' in the practice of nonauthoritarian authority. As I discussed earlier, appeals to experience are often important in claiming authority. Speculative aesthetics, however, problematises the very concept of experience, as a phenomenon that apparently 'belongs' to the human subject. I suggest working with an expanded concept of experience, which is not enclosed within a bounded human subject, and is not reducible to sensation, perception, feeling, emotion, affection, thought, consciousness, or intentionality. To think of experience in this way would be to accord too much weight to the bounded human subject. Instead, I view subjectivity as an emergent outcome of some (but not all) experiences. The subject emerges out of experience, rather than being the precondition of experience. As I use the term, experience is to be thought of as a historically specific convergence of material, social, affective, and environmental processes. Experience occurs at a point of intersection between multiple and contingent forces, including: embodied sensation and affect (in all its technically mediated dynamism, vitality, and creativity); memory and habit; discursive practices that define the boundaries of knowledge, thought, and intelligibility; normative frameworks of behaviour (e.g. morality and ethics); and potential modes of existence (cf. Foucault 2010, pp. 3–5). Understanding experience in this multi-dimensional way means that experience always has both a critical *and* a speculative element: critical, because its actual limits are conditioned through actually existing forms of actual power; speculative, because experience is always partial and never complete, meaning that experience encompasses 'potentiality' as well as 'actuality'. Thus, experience is never completed by how it is felt in lived experience (see also Shaviro 2012).

A key challenge for a speculative account of nonauthoritarian authority comes from postcolonial scholarship pointing to the marginalisation of race and colonialism in post-humanist research. For example, one important line of thought focuses on reviving a new humanism based on a utopian appeal for all people to be able to fully develop their capacities. Gilroy appeals to a 'post-humanist humanism' that distances itself from dominant colonial modes of humanism as well as from anthropocentricism, but without renouncing the humanist vision of the world (Gilroy 2018). Wynter, too, evokes a 're-enchanted humanism' or 'counter-humanism' that opposes itself to the scientific reductionism of modern racist humanisms (McKittrick 2015; Scott and Wynter 2000). Similarly, Chuh outlines a vision of an 'illiberal humanism' that mobilises an aesthetic politics that disassociates from the order in which racism, dispossession, and impoverishment become part of a liberal 'common

sense' (Chuh 2019). Such an illiberal humanism seeks aesthetic forms that challenge the authority of the modern racist liberal order, for example through forms of decolonial aesthetics (Ramos 2018).

Some critics suggest that aesthetics is *irretrievably* tied into logics of colonial domination. Lloyd (2019) recalls the central importance of aesthetic philosophy to the colonial rationalities that contrast 'civil' (or 'civilised') human beings against undeveloped racial others (see also Jackson 2016). In the Enlightenment philosophy of writers such as Kant and Schiller, this logic separates pathological racialised subjects – tied to their materiality and subject to mere presentation of stimuli – from 'aesthetic' subjects endowed with the ability to order, structure, and make sense of stimuli (Lloyd 2019, p. 43). Implicit here, Lloyd argues, is a border between the Civilised subject (capable of ordering sensation through representations, judgement, and 'common sense') and the Savage, Primitive, Negro, or Black (figures of pathological affectability, falling short of these capacities). Race and materiality are tied together in this aesthetic regime of representation through a dualism between the Primitive, locked into sheer affective materiality, and the Civilised, capable of taking a distance from materiality and hence shaping and ordering it.

An alternative approach, however, is to work with and subvert these problematic genealogies that tie the aesthetic to the production of the Enlightenment ideal of the human (white, male, bourgeois, heterosexual). Spivak, for example, calls for work carrying out a 'productive undoing' of the aesthetic through a 'sabotaging' of Enlightenment ideals of 'aesthetic education' (Spivak 2012, p. 1). Spivak reappropriates the colonial Enlightenment idea of aesthetic education in her post-colonial project of enabling pedagogies that foster non-coercive rearrangements of desire and train the imagination of everyone. The arguments in this book are offered in a similar spirit of deploying the theoretical framework of speculative aesthetics in an act of sabotaging any authoritarian forms of authority that legitimise a racialised, classed, and gendered human subject. Here I am guided by a tradition of work establishing productive points of connection between anti-humanist, feminist, and post-colonial critiques of the modern figure of man (Amin 2012; Jackson 2018a; Saldanha 2007; Singh 2018; Yusoff 2018). I take inspiration from this work to attempt a generative recasting of critique, away from a negotiation of limits of experience and cognition, towards speculative narratives that open new channels of thought, experience, and practice. Such a speculative aesthetics of authority aspires to 'forms of invention, experimentation, commitment, possibility, and vitality [that] can cultivate flourishing in terms of how worlds and their resonant domains are variously and differentially bound together' (Jackson 2018b, p. 14). An anti-humanist aesthetics of authority can help evaluate the multiple asymmetries within human–earth relations, reaching towards a politics of an egalitarian, hybrid, more-than-human commons (Bresnihan and Millner 2023).

Conclusion

In the context of acute political, social, environmental, and ecological crises, the changing nature of authority – characterised by Arendt as the 'capacity for building, preserving, and caring for a world that can survive us and remain a place fit to live in for those who come after us' (Arendt 1961, p. 95) – is an urgent issue. Resisting assumptions that authority is necessarily elitist or always antithetical to freedom or equality, this chapter has argued for an approach to authority that sees it as a relation that is ambiguous, productive, and a precondition for pluralism. In limiting action, authority also provides direction, support, and guidance. This is why authority is always a spatial practice. Authority is a vital element in practices that create the spaces, worlds, and frames that make radical or disruptive assertions of equality possible. In this chapter, I have argued for the need for a *speculative aesthetics* of authority that views following and exerting authority as a practice that requires creative, imaginative, and pluralising forms of evaluation and judgement. This raises the question, however, of what kinds of aesthetic figures could be mobilised to reimagine authority in these ways. This is the task of the next exercise in thinking.

Note

[1] Under certain conditions doctors may be allowed to coerce someone, for example in psychiatric care, or in intensive care units where patients are too ill to give informed consent. In some situations doctors are even involved in executing prisoners. However, in these cases there is a shift into a different modality of coordination such as coercion or violence – they are not forms of authority, even if their power to coerce *derives* from their authority as a doctor.

4. Four speculative figures of authority: attention, care, birth, attunement

Instructions: *Experiment with proposing one or more aesthetic figures that express or embody new kinds of authority, contrasting them with established figures of authority such as the doctor, shepherd, father, master, and leader. Try to diagram ways of exercising or responding to pluralised forms of authority that nurture a different sense for reality.*

Kojève on the notion of authority

In much political and social theory, authority rests on a set of clear human-centred borders: between actor and object; between voluntary action and involuntary action; between human and nature; between (artificial) World and (natural) Earth; between leading and following; between commanding and obeying; between cause and effect (e.g. Arendt 1961; Green 1990; Kojève 2014; Raz 1990). Take, for example, philosopher Alexandre Kojève's [1942] (2014) book *The Notion of Authority*. It is an interesting work because it offers a very clear and systematic theorisation of authority as a distinctively human social relation. Yet it is a conception of authority that consistently reduces plurality to unity and reduces space to time. In experimenting with alternative figurations of authority, I find Kojève's text an especially clear statement of the kind of 'authoritarian' authority that I wish to move beyond. Kojève's account of authority stands out as one of the most important positive accounts of authority in 20th century thought, in contrast to the historicising approaches of theorists such as Arendt (1961), Marcuse (2008), and Foucault (Dean 1996). I find Kojève's flawed text a useful starting point for understanding dominant spatial figurations of authority – and how to move beyond them.

According to Kojève (2014), authority involves an asymmetric, unequal relationship of ordering and compliance. Unlike many other forms of compliance, authority is followed willingly and freely. If you can get me to do something, and I voluntarily and consciously renounce any opposition to you, then you are exercising authority over me. 'Authority is the *possibility* that an agent has of *acting* on others (or on another) without these others *reacting* against him, despite being *capable* to do so' (Kojève 2014, p. 8). Kojève gives us an example: if I can make you leave my office simply by saying 'Get out!', I am exerting authority; if I must persuade you or argue with you or use force to

make you leave, I do not exert authority, since I am forced to change my own behaviour. This is what distinguishes authority from other forms of social coordination such as violence, coercion, persuasion, seduction, and love.

Kojève's way of thinking about authority denies the possibility of combative, playful, or dialogical relationships between the two actors (cf. Luxon 2013). The relationship is one-directional: actor *A* commands and actor *B* obeys freely and voluntarily, without any kind of opposition or reaction. This conceptualisation of authority also assumes a simple relation between human *A* and human *B*: no consideration is given to the role of nonhumans in the exercise or recognition of authority. This also means that Kojève cannot recognise the constitutive role of *spatial* relationships in the exercise of authority. He conceptualises authority purely in relation to time. Kojève has nothing to say about the materiality or embodiment of authority. His approach assumes that to seek authority in nonhuman life, objects, materials, places, situations, or encounters would be futile and meaningless, since such entities are incapable of exercising free agency.

Kojève insists that authority is a distinctively human relation. He gives several reasons for this. Most importantly, authority is an ordering of time and can only exist in a world with a temporal structure. This temporal structure is part of the human world, to be contrasted with the perpetual present of static objects and the endless repetitions of biological life (Kojève 2014, p. 48). Unlike objects and nonhuman animals, human time stretches into the future through desire and will, which are in turn based on memory and habits from the past, to intervene upon the present. Moreover, only humans are invested with the capacity for spontaneous origin or genesis, from which authority derives. Kojève is clear that only agents who are held to be *free* and *conscious* – only humans – can command or obey authority (Kojève 2014, p. 8).

Within the production and reproduction of authority, an important role is played by aesthetic figures. Common figures invoked when theorising authority in Western political theory have included the shepherd, the teacher, the priest/pastor, the doctor, the father, the helmsman, the warrior/soldier, the expert, the worker, and the author, amongst others (Foucault 2010). On the one hand, aesthetic figures play a key role in the circulation and reproduction of hierarchical and patriarchal forms of authority, serving as 'vehicles for the generation of collective affects that shape bodies, desires and sensations' (Dawney 2022, p. 27). Lacoue-Labarthe goes so far as to associate the figure, when integrated into politics, with the authoritarian or totalitarian desire for a mythological figure to organise a national community (Lacoue-Labarthe 1994, p. xxi). In contrast to Lacoue-Labarthe's insistence on deconstructing or de-figuring the figure, my feeling is that speculative 'counter-figures' can play an important role in refracting and reimagining power and authority relations. Speculative figuration, roughly akin to what Haraway calls 'speculative fabulation' (Haraway 2016), is a practice that provides 'an experimental, playful and creative means for thinking outside of binaries and developing new forms of embodied subjectivity' (Dawney 2022, p. 30). Speculative figures

are forms of narrative that disrupt hierarchies and divisions such as human/animal/machine. Speculative fabulation is a form of worlding, a commitment to reimagining dominant understanding of the world through narratives or practices that blur boundaries between realism and fantasy, science, and imagination (Kraftl 2022; Patchett 2022).

Kojève's book is an example of the tendency towards thinking authority via aesthetic figures, or 'conceptual personae' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994). Kojève believed that authority is of utmost importance because authority precedes the state and determines the various possibilities of the political (see Varela 2018). In other words, Kojève believes that authority conditions the forms and possibilities of politics. What is needed, he suggests, is an analysis of authority that diagrams the different possible forms of the political. To do so, Kojève constructs four principal figures of authority, each also marking a way of relating to time (and thus, implicitly, to space): master; leader; father; judge. My intention in this exercise is to rethink and speculatively reimagine each of these figures of thought, taking guidance from feminist, postcolonial, and post-humanist thought. In each case, I aim to shift the figure away from a human figure towards a *spatial process* that includes both humans and non-humans. In place of the authority of the master (who puts the present at risk), I propose the figure of attentiveness, which instead of risking the present, suspends it through more-than-human temporalities. In place of the authority of the leader (who anticipates and controls the future), I propose the figure of care, understood as an affective recalibration of our relationship with human and nonhuman life and materials. Care does not aim to control the future but to open up a foreclosed future, rethinking what things *could be*. In place of the figure of the father, I propose the figure of 'birth'. This counter figure does not only question the assumed gender of the authority of the past, but multiplies the very notion of cause, conceiving birth not as a singular origin but as a miraculous event of beginning that emerges from and summons a plurality of human and nonhuman forces (Serres 2000, 1995a). Conceived in this way, authority does not draw on the past as a solid foundation through tradition, roots, or inheritance, but draws on it through a kind of remembering that is attentive to colonial violence and its destruction of roots. Such memory works horizontally and plurally, through mixture and 'creolisation' (Glissant 1997). Finally, in place of the authority of the judge, whose contemplative judgements rely on eternal values and principles, I will propose a counter-figure of 'attunement', an embodied form of contemplation that evaluates the world through sensuous experimentation, imagination, and attentiveness to forms of time beyond human temporality.

Authority of the present: attentiveness

Kojève's first figure of authority is the master, deriving this figure from Hegel's master/slave dialectic and the struggle for recognition (see Kojève 1980).

Here, authority is earned by embracing risk and demonstrating courage. It comes from the master's ability to overcome his animality and to risk death. This is a form of authority, according to Kojève, that is tied to the present. An action challenges something else in the present; it puts the present at risk. However, the figure of the master ties the present to a form of authority whose place is imagined as the battlefield. It is a figure of authority that reduces the element of risk in the present to a singular logic of violence, possession, mastery, and recognition. This logic of mastery is also a worldless logic: Kojève does not think to ask *where* the master and slave fight it out (Serres 1995b, p. 3), a failure that is symptomatic of his general failure to recognise the importance of spatial relations in the practise of authority.

The figure of the master is an obviously problematic image of authority for those on the political left, with its connotations of patriarchal and colonial violence, possession, and domination. However, arguably it is equally problematic to turn to its opposite and affirm the authority of the victim. The authority of suffering is deeply embedded in Christianity-influenced culture. In Christianity, 'The last shall be first, and the first last' (Matthew 10:16), and the crucifixion of Jesus is the paradigm of sacrifice, with lepers and the poor interpreted as symbolically united with Christ on the cross and made sacred through it (McGrath 2020). Echoes of this sacralisation of suffering are found within discourses that reverse the epistemic discrimination that makes denigrated people less trusted due to their supposed lack of ability, intelligence, morality, or sincerity. Affirming the authority of the victim, by contrast, involves an assumption that oppressed groups have a *superior* standpoint, gaining wisdom and expertise through their exposure to the sharp end of global inequalities and discrimination, and hence their proximity to the vital heart of reality (Blencowe 2013). Dawney (2013) develops this point in her analysis of the affective politics of figures endowed with 'experiential authority' through forms of suffering such as grief and trauma. Experiential authority, she writes, 'involves the production and performance of particular truths through the testimonial and through the incomplete communication of traumatic experience' (Dawney 2013, p. 41). It functions via affective resonances that are mediated through media ecologies that feed off stories of suffering. Such authority can be powerful and is often justified: it is true that people with profound or difficult experiences do often understand things better and acquire a wisdom that others do not. This becomes problematic, however, when it becomes tied to broader identity categories, such that someone has to speak 'as' or 'for' that group in order to have their wisdom authorised (McGrath 2020). This can lead to damage-centred forms of experiential authority, whereby marginalised people struggle to find ways of asserting authority without only being valued for their stories of suffering (Adlerova 2024). This can have the perverse effect of encouraging individuals or communities to understand themselves and present themselves as damaged and depleted (Tuck 2009).

What kind of authority might courageously disrupt the present without relying on either the virtues of the master (violence, strength, possession, control) or the qualities of the victim (suffering, pain, exclusion, sacrifice)? Escaping the dialectic of authority between mastery and victimhood requires stepping away from any struggle for recognition. The authority of the present requires the courage to unlearn the colonial and patriarchal ideal of mastery, seeking the fuzzy grounds in between predetermined identities (Singh 2018). Such an authority would stem from a different kind of courage: the courage to drift away from pre-established identities and terms of reference, and instead to cultivate attentiveness to practices and spaces that are experimental, hesitant, and discomforting. Rejecting a dialectic of mastery and victimhood leads us to embrace a new form of authority based on 'a practice of being uncomfortable in the world' (Singh 2018, p. 151), of not feeling at home in the world, or of exile (Dubow 2020). This is because discomfort encourages a kind of *attentiveness* that is fundamental to a renewed spatial practice of nonauthoritarian authority.

The discomfort of a poor fit between self and world is a condition that is common to marginalised, exiled, and displaced subject positions. As a long tradition of anticolonial theory has argued, occupying an uncomfortable space that is simultaneously inside and outside can give people an especially clear view of modernity and its ills (e.g. Anzaldúa 1987; Gilroy 1993). Discomfort is an orientation that encourages a strong, embodied attentiveness to the fit between bodies and world. Sara Ahmed argues that whiteness, for example, is typically experienced as a kind of taken-for-granted 'good fit' with the world that has been constructed around it and for it, and that this comfort can result in a lack of feeling for difference and exclusion (Ahmed 2006). Similarly, Puwar (2004) writes that white bodies inhabit 'somatic norms' that make non-white bodies feel out of place. This means that sideslipping the ideal of mastery requires a close attentiveness to and even cultivation of discomfort (Singh 2018).

To cultivate discomfort is to practise a kind of attentiveness to the world that derives from neither mastery nor suffering. Attentiveness to the world and to others presupposes a willingness to learn from them, to be transformed by them, and to entertain their definitions of a problem. Attentiveness is a way of lending authority to others, by allowing oneself to learn from them. In a protected bubble of easy comfort and security, attention is all too easily captured or diverted, and other perspectives closed off. Contemporary debate often features worries about an infantilising capture of attention associated with modern cultural forms such as social media, the internet, on-demand TV, computer games, and 24-hour news. In the 1930s, Walter Benjamin suggested that the barrage of sensation and information in modern urban culture leads to a destruction of forms of authority based on 'aura'. More recently, Katherine Hayles worries of an ongoing shift from deep attention to hyper attention (Hayles 2012). Bernard Stiegler (2010) takes up a similar theme, linking a cultural attention disorder to an ongoing crisis

of authority, in the form of an infantilisation of society. Instead of building children's attention through intergenerational and cultural practices like stories, Stiegler argues, we now simply sit them in front of 'technologies of stupidity' (Stiegler 2010).

Others, such as Michel Serres (2015b), are more hopeful about changes in technologies of attention. Yet it is hard to deny that contemporary societies do have a serious problem with attention. How else can we explain societies' wilful reluctance to pay attention to the ongoing global environment catastrophe, despite our increasing capacity to foresee, observe, and measure this damage? As Isabelle Stengers has observed, our societies appear to be suffering from the same blindness that we attribute to the numerous past civilisations who collapsed after destroying the environment on which they depended (Stengers 2015, p. 61). This is not a question of a decline of attention; it is about channelling and redirecting attention. Thus, Hannah (2019) draws attention to the importance of a political economy of attention, demonstrating the profound political implications of the *directional selectivity* of attention. Because attention is limited, where we direct our attention has important implications for social reproduction. How, then, to decide where to direct our scarce attentional resources?

Recognising the importance of a political economy of attention in the creation of authority, I suggest, should lead us to a fuller emphasis on the art of attentiveness (see also Stengers 2015). Shifting the issue from the capacity for attention to the art of attentiveness is important because it emphasises that there is nothing and no one in the world that can be defined as intrinsically worthy of attention. Seeing attentiveness as a speculative art emphasises the obligation to refuse pre-existing distributions of what must be attended to and what may be neglected, and instead to hesitate and attend to what lurks in the interstices (Savransky and Stengers 2018; Stengers 2015, p. 62). Practising an art of attentiveness involves consciously taking on an obligation to imagine and evaluate connections between phenomena we normally keep separate. For example, as Vikki Bell argues, a speculative political ecology that takes seriously the demands of nonhuman life requires a 'new mode of attention' where '"Our" questions can still be asked, but with an attentiveness now to how they may curtail, sometimes brutally, the possibilities for other modes of appearance and for their renderings of the problem' (Bell 2017, pp. 191–95). According to Bell, deciding when these limitations on what emerges are or are not acceptable is a task that is ethical, practical, technical, and speculative. Yet I would add that it is also fundamentally aesthetic, in the sense that it is a judgement that cannot appeal to criteria of truth or morality, but only to immanent, embodied judgements. The art of paying attention, I am suggesting, is a key element of an aesthetics of authority, since it is by cultivating new forms of attentiveness, and inhabiting a discomforting fit between self and world, that we learn to be guided by others whose voices are usually silenced, whose demands are usually not heard, or whose problems are usually not recognised.

My question, then, is how can authority derive from an identity position that is neither 'for oneself' (master) nor 'for others' (slave), but one of attentiveness, an openness to learning, hesitation, and suspension? Authority is fundamentally a question of where we direct our attention: whether we allow it to be directed away from a plural, diverse, more-than-human world, or whether we cultivate an art of listening to marginalised human and non-human voices (Brigstocke and Noorani 2016a). This kind of authority, born of discomfort, displacement, exile, or a 'poor fit' between self and world, speaks to the fragility and vulnerability of life, to its need for care (Gunaratnam 2013; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Schrader 2015). Here, the kind of spatial relation implied by authority's need for presence and proximity (Allen 2003) is transformed into a flickering, unstable presence where time is not lived as a straight line into a progressive, improving future, but is *suspended* through a more-than-human temporality of hesitating, staying, enduring, and remaining (cf. Baraitser 2017).

Authority of the future: care

Kojève's second figure of authority is the leader. The leader's authority arises from prudence, good sense, and forethought. The authority of the leader arises from an ability to see better than others and to have a broader and more profound view of things. In particular, the leader can foresee the future and construct a solid path towards it. For this reason, the authority of figures such as the teacher, expert, soothsayer, and prophet all derive, Kojève argues, from this figure of the leader. The authority of the leader comes from their ability to anticipate and hence control the future. The leader has a clearly defined *project* that promises to create an easy, safe path into a knowable future. The authority of the future manifests itself, through the project, in the capacity to know and define and control what is to come. It is connected to recognition of their skill in managing and ordering contingency. Through anticipatory governance, the authority of the leader derives from their capacity to make a frightening or uncertain future controllable, via practices such as calculating, imagining, and performing futures (Anderson 2010).

If the authority of the leader derives from the ability to master and control the future, what kind of authority is suited to a future that is experienced, not as scarily open and contingent, but rather as oppressively predetermined, foreclosed, and damaged? We might think here of the increasingly common experience of indebtedness as a defining experience of contemporary subjectivity (Adkins 2018; Kirwan 2019b). Or we could point to the growing sensibility of futures being foreclosed by climate change, ecosystem destruction, and the enduring impacts of pollutants such as radioactive material, plastics, and chemical pollutants. Moreover, Baraitser (2017) suggests that an experience of time has become common where it is perceived as neither eventful nor contingent, but as inert or static. She draws attention to the kinds of futures

called into being through temporal figures such as 'waiting, staying, delaying, enduring, persisting, repeating, maintaining, preserving, and remaining' (Baraitser 2017, p. 13). Common to many of these temporalities, which are strongly feminised, is the *absence* of 'project' but the importance of care: care for other people, as well as infrastructures, systems, spaces, environments, nonhuman lives. So, in place of the leader as someone who determines a navigable path towards a defined future, might we speculatively refigure authority as a form of *care* that is necessary to support everyone who struggles to navigate a future that is suspended or receding? Doing so perhaps requires us to recognise and practise a kind of 'feminist authority' (Applebaum 1999; see also Jones 1991) that recognises and learns from the wisdom of those who are tasked with projectless, non-goal-oriented practices of care.

To centre care and caregivers in figuring authority is to emphasise the importance of emotion, friendship, and love as grounds of the political. It is also to emphasise the condition of vulnerability that is an essential part of all life (Harrison 2008). Vulnerability is the space in which the inevitability of being exposed to the world is palpable to the one who is thrown into it (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2011, p. 6). It connects to what Arendt calls the condition of natality: the fact that everyone first comes to the world naked, exposed, and vulnerable. The need to be cared for – and the need to care for others – is part of what it is to be alive, and care should be privileged as one of the most importance sources of wisdom, advice, and guidance, as well as a key condition of possibility for the political.

The figure of care can be contrasted with the figure of the doctor, who is an archetypal figure of authority in Western thought as far back as Plato, and who figures a rationalised, project-based temporality. The authority of the doctor is the authority of the expert who has unique insight and knowledge that is lacking in the subject of authority. This an authority born of a hierarchical distribution of expertise, where some people know best and others are ignorant. Similarly, it must be contrasted with paternalism, a structure of authority associated with a kind of 'false love' or disingenuous care where a boss or leader or institution purports to stand in for the authority of the father, but without any of the love, care, respect, and intimacy associated with genuine paternal authority (Sennett 1980).

The kind of care I have in mind here involves collaborative, hesitant practices that enable people to orient themselves to a future that is ominous, suspended, or foreclosed – where a way of navigating into the future has to be found *in the absence* of clear foresight or vision, and where 'making do' and 'getting by' are all that can realistically be hoped for (Baraitser 2017). The labour of care, repair, and maintenance is too often devalued and reduced to figures of stoic, maternal kindness. This is a patronising devaluation that makes no attempt to *learn from* or *be guided* by caring professionals. (In the UK, the Clap for Our Carers movement during the COVID-19 pandemic was perhaps the most spectacular recent exemplar of this.) A speculative account of authority starting from care, therefore, begins by recognising the exploitative

gender relations embedded within contemporary practices of care, as well as the structures of inequality and injustice that systematically denigrate and devalue caregiving. Here, the future is not the endpoint of a clear path from the present; the future is a speculative experiment in the art of the possible (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017).

Authority of the past: birth

Perhaps the most complex figure of authority in Kojève's thought is the figure of the father as 'origin' or 'cause' of the present. This is an untenable patriarchal construction of authority. Kojève (2014, p. 28) suggests that it is phenomenologically tied to the authority of tradition, God, creation, the author, and the elderly. What links them is their nature as a singular 'cause' that creates a later 'effect'. The authority of the father, according to Kojève, derives from his capacity to *create* something new in the world. Generally, 'cause' always holds authority over 'effect'. The authority of the father is tied to the past through inheritance and tradition. This patriarchal construction echoes classical constructions of the male form imposing itself on female matter. It is also an implicitly colonial figure, because it effectively strips the possibility of authority away from those whose traditions and histories have been uprooted and fractured by slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and other forms of violence. A speculative figure of authority deriving from the past, therefore, cannot be grounded in tradition and roots, but only in an acknowledgement of the *destruction* of history, tradition, and rootedness, and a suspicion of privileging 'causes' over 'effects'.

Unchaining authority from the father and tradition requires pluralising the notion of 'cause'. Rather than grounding itself in tradition (and related notions like filiation and inheritance), authority must be reimagined as a different way of relating to the past, one that is horizontal, plural, and dynamic. I suggest that one way of achieving this is to shift attention from singular *causes* towards the spatio-temporal figure of *birth* – where birth is not a singular origin, but a miraculous event of beginning that is emergent from, and also calls forth, multiple coalescing human and nonhuman forces (Serres 2000). For Hannah Arendt, the capacity to begin is the one miraculous capacity of the human, and is ontologically rooted in the fact that every human being is born into the world as a unique being, so that with every birth something uniquely new comes into the world (Arendt 1998, p. 178; O'Byrne 2010). The condition of being born, of being a 'beginner', grounds the capacity for action: creating new beginnings, enabling an 'infinite improbability' to break into the world and create a gap between past and future (Arendt 1961, p. 169). This is not a question of exceptional human creativity, a term that once again introduces a heroic singular origin. The capacity for beginning is grounded in the fact that *every living being* miraculously enters the world as a beginner.

Arendt's very Eurocentric account of authority figures birth as a quasi-miraculous interruption of the line from past to future, giving a modern, non-metaphysical authority the task of protecting and securing the capacity for birth, rebirth, renewal, and beginning (Honig 1993). Yet from a post-colonial perspective, Arendt neglects the relationship between birth, violence, and trauma. Arendt's understanding of the fracturing of the past is grounded in her analyses of imperialism and totalitarianism, in particular the Nazis' destruction of plurality. She draws a troubling distinction between the Holocaust and imperialism in Africa, suggesting that the Holocaust involved the murder of 'civilised' victims by equally 'civilised' killers, thus raising moral questions about murder, whereas the genocide and enslavement of African populations involved violence against purely 'natural' people viewed as lacking history and culture, such that the idea of connecting their killing to discourses of murder seemed ridiculous (Arendt 1968, p. 192; Dossa 1980; Owens 2017). Whilst I don't agree that Arendt was endorsing these distinctions, rather than trying to explicate their racist logic, I would certainly argue that Arendt's account of 'world' and 'worldlessness' does too little to account for the political agency of those whose worlds have been systematically destroyed over several centuries.

Arendt's rich but flawed notion of human birth as a miraculous capacity for beginning can be contrasted with the far more ambivalent figure of birth in the writings of Édouard Glissant. Glissant, locating his thought in the experience of the Caribbean archipelago, routes the authority of the past – history, tradition, memory – through the trauma of the Middle Passage. Shortly after quoting poet Derek Walcott's line 'sea is history', Glissant describes three abysses of modern Black subjectivity: Africans' violent exile from a homeland; the tortures of confinement in the slave ship; and the depths of the ocean, into which so many slaves were thrown overboard. These abysses mark an epistemological trauma of loss. For those who survive the crossing, this is followed by the traumatic new beginning of life in the plantation. The primary figure of birth, for Glissant, is the slave ship, and all subsequent births are linked to its (non)-memory: 'This boat is a womb, a womb abyss. It generates the clamor of your protests; it also produces all the coming unanimity.… This boat is your womb, a matrix, and yet it expels you. This boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under sentence of death' (Glissant 1997, p. 6). The ocean also figures a traumatic birth:

> the entire ocean, the entire sea gently collapsing in the end into the pleasures of sand, make one vast beginning, but a beginning whose time is marked by these balls and chains gone green (Glissant 1997, p. 6).

As a spatial figure of traumatic birth, the ocean is marked by the absence even of corpses, their only traces being the green iron shackles at the bottom of the ocean. Thus:

> [t]he dead mark the living and their sense of what it means to go on, but as a peculiar and utterly devastating absence: the balls and chains gone green…. Birth is marked with this time as an absence more absent than loss and its traces (Drabinski 2019, p. 52).

The survivor who makes it to the glittering sandy shores of the Caribbean is born to a new *non*world, 'an end of the terror and beginning of the terrifying, the life of trauma for the living' (Drabinski 2019, p. 52). Whereas in Arendt's writing birth is exposure to a world that is protective and nurturing, Glissant situates birth as exposure to the terrors of a violent *non*-world.

A new figure of the authority of the past must reject the figure of the father as singular cause, origin, and tradition. In place of tradition and memory, the past can ground authority in the kind of horizontal links that Glissant calls 'relation'. Relation is an 'anti-universal' that counters the universalising modern order of discourse and the colonial figure of man (Wynter 1989, p. 639). It achieves this through a poetics of radical specificity that affirms that every identity is extended and constituted through relation with the other (Glissant 1997, p. 11). This kind of relationality holds together violently separated phenomena (Chandler and Pugh 2022, p. 3). To affirm birth as a source of authority, therefore, contributes to the labour of disconnecting identity from roots, tradition, and filiation (Glissant 1997, p. 17). Instead, the figure of birth can be connected to 'errantry', or errant thought, which 'silently emerges … from difficult, uncertain births of new forms of identity that call to us' (Glissant 1997, p. 18). Thus, the authority of the path can be summoned through forms of memory that work horizontally through 'creolisation', where harmonies and disharmonies between cultures give birth to new interactions, new non-hierarchical value systems, a novel kind of consciousness, and wildly unpredictable results (Glissant 2020, p. 119).[1]

In place of the figure of the father as 'cause', we have arrived at a new speculative figure of *birth*: birth as miracle; birth as errant thought; birth as mixture, deviation, and drift. As a figure of authority, birth is inherently ambiguous, since it may refer either to birth into the violent non-world described by Glissant or into the sheltering world of human artifice theorised by Arendt. Nevertheless, acknowledging birth as a source of authority can draw on the force of creativity, beginning, and relation, without succumbing to awe before static lines of tradition, inheritance, or roots. Nonauthoritarian authority does not turn to the past to find roots or foundations, but nurtures memories of the past that affirm plurality, openness, and the imaginative synthesis of differences.

Authority outside human time: attunement

The fourth and final figure in Kojève's phenomenology of authority is the judge. Deriving from this figure is the authority of the just or honest man, the

arbiter, the auditor, and the confessor. (We might also place Simmel's (1950) figure of the stranger in this company.) This type of authority derives from justice and equity. The judge demonstrates excellence in impartiality, objectivity, and disinterestedness. This can confer authority on someone even if they do not occupy formal institutional positions, for example as an appointed judge or arbiter. Qualities of justice, fairness, and impartiality can carry their own authority, separate from state power. According to Kojève, this is an authority that is tied to a temporality of eternity, or a negation of time (Kojève 2014, p. 50). Unlike the leader, master, and father, the judge does not act, but judges the present from a *contemplative* standpoint. The judge does not appeal to anything temporal, but to eternal principles applicable to past, present, and future. Whilst the content of principles of justice do change over time, as Kojève (2000) explains in *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right*, eternal justice is what legitimises the authority of the judge (Nichols 2007, p. 57). Kojève here once again theorises authority in a way that reduces plurality to unity: a singular notion of objectivity and impartiality.

Time, in Kojève's thought, means human time: he suggests that nonhumans live time in a completely different 'world' to humans. This leaves open the speculative possibility of decoupling authority from 'eternal' human values and instead linking it to nonhuman and more-than-human times. A fourth dimension of nonauthoritarian authority, I suggest, is *attunement*: a form of aesthetic tuning in to nonhuman temporalities (Brigstocke and Noorani 2016b). Attunement is a connection where actors actively 'tune in' to each other's rhythms, forms, and vitality. Attunement is closely related to 'resonance', a concept which has become prominent in recent critical theory (Connolly 2008; James 2019; Rosa 2019) and political ecology (Bresnihan and Millner 2023). However, whereas resonance is primarily a phenomenon of amplification (one system vibrates at a frequency that makes another system vibrate with greater amplitude), attunement involves playfully mediating difference. Attunement is a playful mediation across different, incommensurable registers of experience.[2] It is a creative traversal across difference. Attunement helps create a form of authority that responds positively to difference, to strangeness, and to the barely discernible. As a kind of authority, attunement works through connection, empathy, sensitivity, and attentiveness.

By using the term 'attunement', I partly evoke the kind of affective, playful 'tuning in' to other people's emotional states that is explored within development psychology (Bolis, Dumas, and Schilbach 2023; Stern 2010).[3] Here, attunement between mother and infant is core to the formation of attachment, and thus shapes the nature of the authority relation between parent and child. Stern (2010, 1985) characterises attunement in terms of a translation of affects that enables the infant to develop a sense of inter-subjectivity, of occupying a world that is distinct from, but shared with, their mother.[4] Attunement helps infants recognise that internal feeling states are shareable with other humans, and thus to develop a sense of inter-subjectivity: of sharing a common world.

Beyond this child–mother relationship, however, I expand attunement to include a much broader 'tuning in' to nonhuman processes, atmospheres, and temporalities. Attunement is arguably a key process within human–animal relations (Despret 2004), for example, and Lasher argues that attunement 'is one of the primary ways that humans and their animal companions communicate. Animals and humans sense each other's bodily and subjective states through all of the perceptual systems working together' (Lasher 1998, p. 131). Materials and technologies are also key for generating empathetic multispecies attunement, as well as for connecting to spirits, materials, and other nonhuman actors (Blencowe 2016). Attunement does not presuppose the possibility or desirability of 'harmony' with nature, at least not if harmony is understood in the sense of resolution and consonance. Attunement to nonhuman processes is likely to be more associated with dissonance, suspension, and distance. For example, Morton explores the challenges of attuning to environments when objects, forces, and spirits that exceed the spaces and times of human experience press themselves upon us with compelling force (Morton 2017, 2013). For example, entities that inhabit unimaginably vast temporal frames such as the climate, nuclear waste, fossils, and plastics, can only phase in and out of human perceptibility. According to Morton (2013), these disorienting temporalities defy cognition, making attunement deeply strange, uncanny, and uncertain. Attunement speaks not only to relations, but also to the absence of relation and the demands placed upon us by the wholly other.

As a speculative reimagining of authority, attunement draws attention to how ephemeral bodily states can tune in to nonhuman temporalities. Such attunements make it possible to lend authority to a far greater variety of entities. Authority is not solely human; it is or can be distributed across a wide range of actors. We need not only recognise the authority of the judge who evaluates through distance and disinterestedness. We must also affirm that authority can emerge out of a sensuous engagement with difference through attunement. This kind of contemplation pluralises worlds, judgements, and feelings.

Conclusion

In this exercise, I aimed to diagram new speculative figures of authority that work through and against Kojève's phenomenology of authority. We have ended up with four figures, shifting from human figures to spatial processes: *attentiveness* (in place of the authority of the master); *care* (in place of the authority of the leader); *birth* (in place of the authority of the father); *attunement* (in place of the authority of the judge). These four speculative figures of authority refer in turn to present, future, past, and more-than-human time. What links these figures is a common emphasis on grounding authority in plurality and a sensitivity to emerging, incipient feelings and connections. We will test out these figures in later chapters.

Notes

[1] To rephrase this point in Glissant's own language, we might say that the authority of the past is summoned through a 'digenesis', in contrast to a 'genesis' (a succession of filiations and inheritances) (Glissant 2020). Unlike genesis, digenesis is a pluralising mode of authority that works horizontally and rhizomatically through pluralisation and creolisation.

[2] In Kant's aesthetic theory, attunement is what leads to the experience of beauty, which arises from an attunement (*Stimmung*) of the two representational powers, Understanding and Imagination (Thonhauser 2021). For Kant, attunement is a kind of playful mediation between different faculties, the freedom of the Imagination and the lawfulness of Understanding, with neither faculty gaining supremacy over the other. In this sense of the word, attunement refers to a free, playful traversal across difference. Arendt (1982) argued that this part of Kant's thought, whilst associated with aesthetics, was his true political philosophy.

[3] Stern calls these emotional states 'vitality affects'.

[4] Attunement between parent and infant, Stern argues, occurs through three primary forms: the level or contour of intensity (e.g. between an infant's physical behaviour and a mother's vocal behaviour); time (e.g. when a mother's nodding head and an infant's gesture follow the same beat or rhythm); and shape (when a spatial aspect of behaviour is abstracted and rendered in a different act) (Stern 1985, p. 146).

5. *Lectio divina* – reading Arendt's 'What is authority?'

Instructions*: This is a reading exercise. Make sure you are sitting comfortably. Breathe slowly and deeply. Ask the world to speak to you, through the passage that you are about to read. In this first reading: listen. As you read the passage, listen for a word or phrase that attracts you. Allow it to arise from the passage and speak to you. Sit in silence repeating the word or phrase in your head. Then say the word or phrase out loud. In the second reading, ask how this word or phrase speaks to your life and why it has connected with you. In the third reading, ask what the world is calling from you.*

Reading for life

In previous chapters, we encountered authority in ways that revealed it as a form of social coordination that is ordinary, embodied, distributed, and emergent within everyday spaces, encounters, and objects. In this exercise, I would like us to develop these ideas further by asking how authority connects to our practices of reading (cf. Jeyasingh 2024a). I worry that you and I are a little disconnected from each other. Perhaps reading a text together, having an object that is shared between us, might help us establish a rapport. The passage we will read is by Hannah Arendt, from her essay 'What is authority?' (Arendt 1961, pp. 91–142). I would like us to experiment with reading it, not through theoretical or philosophical analysis, but through an adaptation of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*. This is an ancient Christian practice of contemplation through a sacred text (see Hall 1988). Through this exercise we will aim less for philosophical insight than to use the text as a meeting place for a personal encounter with the world. See this exercise as a practice through which you attempt to renew yourself by giving yourself up to the authority of the text *in its encounter with you*. The point of this is to pluralise our ways of responding to, learning from, and reworking the authority of canonical texts. This means engaging with a text as a contemplative practice. By doing so, the text may acquire a different kind of authority. We generate an experimental recasting of textual authority that stages the text as a personal encounter with the truth. This is a way of reading that strives to recognise an alternative form of textual authority through its capacity to provoke personal reflection. So, our ambition here should not be deep philosophical or conceptual insight, but to use the text as a way of exploring relationships with life.

First reading: listen

By way of an example, I will talk you through my own encounter with the passage. However, what is important here is your own reading, your own staging of an encounter between text and life.

> Authority, resting on a foundation in the past as its unshaken cornerstone, gave the world the permanence and durability which human beings need precisely because they are mortals – the most unstable and futile beings we know of. Its loss is tantamount to the loss of the groundwork of the world, which indeed since then has begun to shift, to change and transform itself with ever-increasing rapidity from one shape into another, as though we were living and struggling with a Protean universe where everything at any moment can become almost anything else. But the loss of worldly permanence and reliability which politically is identical with the loss of authority does not entail, at least not necessarily, the loss of the human capacity for building, preserving, and caring for a world that can survive us and remain a place fit to live in for those who come after us (Arendt 1961, p. 95).

For Arendt, the loss of authority in modernity is closely connected to the decline of tradition and sacred foundations. These threaten to leave experience anchorless or empty and, most importantly, to destroy the capacity to *care* for the world and the performances of freedom – the miraculous births – within it. Authority was a form of social and political coordination that helped create the dimension of depth in human experience, serving to confer longevity and durability on political worlds. It helped to *anchor* reality, linking human experiences to a thread that led back to the great, beautiful deeds of immortals. Authority was conferred to people or institutions tasked with protecting and amplifying these sacred foundations. However, Arendt has no intention of resurrecting this kind of authority: she is no apologist for Ancient Greece or Rome (see Villa 1996). She explicitly affirms her participation in the *destruction* of metaphysics, and thus the destruction of the centuries-old Roman model of authority. Such authority cannot protect freedom, since it grounds experience in a single foundation and not in exposure to plurality (Honig 1993). So, in this passage Arendt emphasises that the loss of authority does not mean that people have lost their ability to care for the world. Rather, it poses the challenge of imagining what possibilities exist for caring for a world and recovering an experience of depth when one important model for doing so (foundational, metaphysical authority) is broken.

After reading the passage several times, one phrase starts to attract my attention: 'the loss of the groundwork of the world'. I repeat it, in my head and out loud: the loss of the groundwork of the world. I notice myself filling with familiar despair, reflecting on how so-called 'antiauthoritarian' political

movements have capitalised on the well-justified distrust of authority in the neoliberal era by establishing movements that accelerate the destruction of liveable worlds. The rise of such supposedly antiauthoritarian movements testifies to a political loss of capacity to build, preserve, and care for the world. Are these antiauthoritarian movements really antiauthoritarian, though? Or do they merely redistribute authority by referring it back to singular racialised, classed, and gendered figures of 'the nation', 'economy', 'freedom', etc.?

Second reading: pondering

Read the passage a second time. As you read the passage again, ask how this word or phrase speaks to your life and why it has connected with you. Sit in silence and then frame a single sentence that begins to say aloud what this word or phrase says to you.

Rereading the passage I ask myself what it is saying about my authority as a teacher or as a parent. Is it saying that it is groundless, arbitrary, a lie? What should the basis of this authority be? Should I reject the very desire for authority and attempt to interact with students and children as full equals? Yet, if I treated everyone as equals and refused to offer or receive guidance, wouldn't this relinquish my duty to take responsibility for the world by caring for others?

'The loss of the groundwork of the world'. I think this phrase picked me out because I found the conjunction of the three nouns – loss, groundwork, world – surprising. The very idea of the groundwork of the world is jarring because I am used to thinking of the world as *grounding me*, not as something I need to worry about grounding. The word raises the question of what holds the world together. What is the foundation of the foundation? I ask myself what could form the groundwork of a restless, Protean 'world of becoming' (Connolly 2011). In a world of ceaseless change, can any distinction at all be made between the miraculous 'births' brought about through human agency, and births brought about by other – nonhuman, material – processes? Arendt thinks that only human actions can achieve greatness, claim immortality, and create a meaningful gap between past and future. However, my instinct is that any ideal of earthly immortality, even the kind of eternity claimed by a beautiful artwork, is tarnished and devalued by climate change and the exponential growth of near-immortal pollutants (plastics, concrete, pesticides, forever chemicals, radioactive waste). Arendt's text prompts me to ask, thinking at a diagonal to her own humanism, how authority can be styled in ways that are *not* based on human exceptionalism, and which affirm a plurality of guides and wisdoms. Might this kind of pluralist authority help ensure the emergence of a rich connection to nonhuman others, and to reality itself?

I reflect further on the kind of authority that I try to practise as a teacher, as a parent, as a friend. I am aware of how authority folds into my body through raced, gendered, and classed structures of power. Embodying multiple forms

of privilege, I know my words and actions frequently carry an authority that is conferred through historically embedded, institutionalised inequalities. Where does this leave me? I reflect on how, as a feminist committed to a politics of equality and plurality, I might construct pedagogic authority in ways that encourage dialogue, exchange, respect, and experimentation (Brigstocke 2020). I think about how as an empirical researcher, I could listen more and talk less in the field. I see creative listening and attunement as key techniques for amplifying and respecting nonhuman voices, or through participatory practices that learn from the wisdom (not just the experiences) of marginalised groups. I think about how, as a parent of small children, I might learn to become better at listening to them, respecting their feelings, being receptive to the advice and wisdom they offer me.

I worry about what kind of authority figure I can be when I don't have any answers, when I feel lost and confused, when I am searching for guidance myself. How can I offer stability to others when I am floating adrift? How can I lead others towards understanding, when I have little confidence in my capacity to understand anything about this world of perpetually shifting forms? How can I teach people to be guided by nurturing authorities, when I allow myself to be guided by authorities that I know to be harming me (addictive technologies, consumerist desires, lazy ideas, unhealthy habits)?

I start thinking about what might be needed, in a post-metaphysical context that cannot attempt to recreate stable grounds, to amplify the capacity to care for the world. Arendt's answer to this relies on thinking about the world as an artificial, material human construct (Arendt 1998; Last 2017; Luttrell 2015). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Arendt's emphasis on the importance of artificial human worlds for creating a stage for freedom to appear fails to fully consider the forms of appearance associated with those who are born into a world of trauma and violence. Reading this passage, though, my attention is drawn towards the kind of alienation that it captures: the loss of a feeling for reality. This decline in the experience of 'realness' is an impoverishment of experience. One factor behind this loss of a sense for reality is the building of societies designed, as Curtis (1999, p. 24) puts it, 'to protect us from the plural heterogeneous quality of experience, from the intrusion of the surprising, the unusual, and the new'. In such a world of borders, walls, segregation, defensive architecture, social media bubbles, echo chambers, and fetishised notions of 'home' and nurturing domesticity, people are cut off from exposure to plurality; they are not called or challenged by others or events. We are anaesthetised to the sensory abundance of a varied, plural world. One of Arendt's key insights into the politics of aesthetics is that it is a sensitivity to and responsiveness to *plurality* – to the 'encroachment of others' (Sjöholm 2015) – that creates a sense of reality.

According to Arendt, a key precondition for collective action is a kind of 'sixth sense', which creates a feeling of 'realness'. Arendt's guiding insight across her work is that developing and maintaining this sense – which is crucial for resisting tyranny – requires exposure to plurality. In *The Human*

Condition, for example, Arendt (1998) sets out a theatrical account of politics, highlighting the importance of a public realm or 'space of appearance' where everything that appears in public can be seen, heard, and evaluated. The paradigmatic space of action is the public realm, where political speech can be heard and responded to by a community of equals. The public realm is of paramount importance for creating a feeling for reality, because being seen and heard by others – and by ourselves – actually *constitutes* reality (Arendt 1998, p. 50). Thus, whilst political attention to inequality and exclusion tends to focus on 'biological' privation – lack of access to food, shelter, services, education, and security – Arendt's ontology of appearance draws attention to an even more fundamental privation, which is a loss of the capacity to appear, a capacity that everyone is endowed with through the simple fact of having been miraculously *born* into the world and interrupting its course. This invisibility constitutes a kind of expulsion to unreality.

Our passage makes clear that the capacity to care for the world has not been lost and nor has the sixth sense been entirely dulled. Whilst Arendt was notoriously suspicious of the encroachment of matter on human political affairs (Last 2017), her accounts of world and worldlessness also offer a passionate defence of the importance of 'things' for creating the element of durability within human affairs. Without this durability, action could have no meaning, since there would be no stage from which to evaluate it, and to prevent it from immediately disappearing into nature's ceaseless flux. Durable worlds – very closely connected with authority in Arendt's thought – are vitally important for allowing action to acquire meaning and weight. Without a durable material world (a stage) upon which to appear, a rich sense for reality is impossible. Thus, 'world' stands for the durable and public nature of human life. It is produced through human work and is full of objects that endure beyond the repetitive rhythms of biological life – architecture, artworks, institutions, ideas, culture. These objects provide a common world that, if cared for, bind people together, creating a shared stage for action: a space for freedom to appear.

There is something about Arendt's way of thinking about the world in this passage that resonates with me. Perhaps it might be the experience of alienation that it expresses. In contrast to the Marxist theory of alienation, Arendt's thinking of a loss of world (and, relatedly, a loss of earth) is not so much a loss of *self* as a loss of *reality* or objectivity (Blencowe, Brigstocke, and Noorani 2015; Luttrell 2015). The loss of world is a dulling of the sense for reality. Arendt's account of alienation describes a powerful kind of disconnection that sometimes resonates with me: a sense of numbness; a sense of loss of a feeling for reality, of anything positive binding me to others; a feeling of vertigo at the monstrous deformations of the world, where objects, infrastructures, and institutions both bind people together and seem hostile to the flourishing of life. I feel the bewilderment of living in a reality that is nonsensical. I feel horror before a world where human immortality is guaranteed, not by great works and deeds, but by mass species extinction, imperishable toxic waste, and climate collapse. The passage speaks to my hopelessness in feeling bound

to others by a common world that is poisoned and poisonous (cf. Pignarre and Stengers 2011). It connects to the sense I have of feeling unable to offer any useful guidance or advice to others, to my children, to my students, about how to flourish in a damaged world (Tsing et al. 2017). I feel that I live in an obscure, shadowy world. I fear the forces that inhabit the darkness.

What the phrase says to me is that I must work to revitalise my feeling for reality, and that doing so requires me to attempt to find or co-construct new, partial, caring, plural worlds in which utopian fragments of hope can reassembled (Dawney, Blencowe, and Bresnihan 2017).

Third reading: action

As you read the passage for the last time, ask what the world is calling from you. What is it that you need to do or consider or relinquish or take on as a result of what the world is calling from you?

What, then, to do? Arendt is clear that the decline in metaphysical, neo-Roman structures of authority has not destroyed the human capacity to care for a durable world – even if it does offer plenty of opportunities for totalitarianism, as the history of the 20th and 21st centuries clearly shows. The passage speaks to me most strongly in its call to invent new ways of creating worlds through staging and witnessing plurality. Cultivating a sense for reality, a feeling for what precedes me and will endure beyond me, requires witnessing and responding to the performances of those who have been marginalised and excluded. To take a leap beyond Arendt's humanism, I feel that it means cultivating forms of attentiveness, care, and attunement that expose me to the appearances, the miraculous beginnings, of diverse human and nonhuman others. It means seeking new relationships with the spaces, objects, materials, and actors that co-compose plural common worlds.

I recall that in Arendt's late work, some moves towards a less humanist approach can be discerned, and I wonder how it might help me reflect on possibilities for rethinking authority. In *The Life of the Mind,* Arendt's (1978) account of individuation makes it clear that appearance is not merely a human phenomenon but applies to everything that exists. Arendt offers an account of appearance that collapses the ancient metaphysical hierarchy of 'being' over (mere) 'appearance'. Against this metaphysical tradition, Arendt affirms that 'to be' simply *is* 'to appear'. Because the idea of 'appearing' presupposes the existence of others to appear *to*, this means that being is intrinsically plural. Plurality is the condition of singular being:

> Being and Appearing coincide. Dead matter, natural and artificial, changing and unchanging, depends in its being, that is, in its appearingness, on the presence of living creatures. Nothing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a spectator (Arendt 1978, p. 19).

In this way, Arendt's account of appearance implies a kind of aesthetic vitalism (Brigstocke 2025). Arendt asks,

> Could it not be that appearances are not there for the sake of the life process but, on the contrary, that the life process is there for the sake of appearances? (Arendt 1978, p. 27).

Not only humans, but also nonhuman life and inanimate matter all *appear*, and their reality derives from their capacity to appear to living beings. This affirms a clear separation between the living and the non-living. Arendt is also clear that different species of life appear to each other in different ways, thereby establishing clear separations between human and nonhuman life. Yet perhaps we could take Arendt's argument a step further and suggest that part of the alienating impoverishment of appearances is precisely the fracturing of society into borders between human and animal, and between life and non-life. A rich sense of reality requires sensitivity to durable worlds that are co-created *across* the borders separating humans and nonhumans.

Maybe, then, this emphasis on witnessing nonhuman appearances is how I am to reimagine my relationship with authority. Etymologically, authority is related to *augere*. This is usually translated as 'to augment' or 'to increase'. Arendt (1961) suggests that traditional authority worked by 'augmenting' sacred foundations through extending traditions. In her study of the American Revolution (Arendt 1963), she explores how authority was inaugurated through continuous reaffirmation of and amendments to (augmentation of) the constitution, so that the 'foundation' of authority is dynamic and changing. Yet Benveniste argues that the translation of *augere* as 'augment' is problematic, since 'to augment' implies an augmentation of something that already existed before, whereas the Latin *augere* had a stronger meaning:

> not the increase in something which already exists but the act of producing from within itself; a creative act which causes something to arise from a nutrient medium and which is the privilege of the gods or the great natural forces, but not of men (Benveniste 2016, p. 429).

Might this meaning of authority be speculatively repurposed and reappropriated, such that authority becomes a relation that *augments our sense for reality*, through inventive acts that are neither the privilege of humans nor of gods, but emerge out of dispersed, more-than-human attentiveness and attunement? Is it possible to stylise and care for forms of authority that augment the possibilities for mutual exchange, learning, and evaluation between multiple human and nonhuman actors? This kind of authority would practise care for the world through a form of listening and attunement to marginalised and excluded human and nonhuman others (Brigstocke and Noorani 2016a), witnessing and amplifying their distinctive appearances.

As I read and reread Arendt's text, the world calls to me as a demand to recognise or claim authority in ways that pluralise and nurture encounters with human and nonhuman others, opening experience up to the greatest possible diversity of standpoints and perspectives, encouraging imaginative, caring, and playful relationships with the earth. Above all, it calls me to work on enhancing my capacities for listening and attunement. It calls me to work on developing a kind of 'good taste' as the basis for a speculative nonauthoritarian authority: learning to choose my company wisely among people, things, spaces, and thoughts (Arendt 1961, p. 226).

This experiment in thinking has explored how a distinctive way of reading theoretical texts might reconfigure the authority of the text, author, and reader. Just as important as reading, of course, is writing. The next exercise thinks about how writing (especially form and genre) must be a key practice in developing a speculative aesthetics of authority.

6. Authority, authorship, form, and genre: a horoscope for the neurotic and paranoid

Instructions: *Experiment with pluralising authorities by stylising a new written form for your writing. Explore the link between authorship and authority, asking yourself how varying voice, form, and genre can help rethink and pluralise authorities.*

Authority and the 21st century resurgence of astrology

This is all terribly embarrassing. I honestly don't like telling you what to think. I can't claim to have mastered my subject material. To be honest, I find it as mystifying now as I did when I started thinking about this. I suspect all these years of study have taken me backwards rather than forwards. I do understand if you'd rather not come any further with me. Let's be blunt: it would be a relief. You are a bit of a burden. I don't want to be responsible for you straying from the path, and I fear your judgement. But here we are, we've come this far together, so let's see if an authority figure such as myself – and however uncomfortable I find it, to author a text is always to claim authority – might be useful despite my dearth of skills in mastery, leadership, charisma, or judgement. Perhaps there is something to learn from indirection or misdirection.

I can't help feeling our intellectual work together is getting a bit flabby. So, let's get into training, and crank up our thoughts per hour ratio. I thought I might try to learn a little from more successful authorities. So let me pitch my product. I have invented a device to help us: a fitness tracking wearable device. But this isn't just any old fitness tracker! No. Its genius is to combine two techniques of authoritarian control in one simple device. Thus, I introduce to you my *astrological* fitness tracker, a device that connects your training needs to your own individual personality, written in the stars. It exploits two growing industries – the ever-expanding health industry, and the surprisingly rapid growth in astrology amongst the 18–24 age group – in revisiting classic critiques of authority in early critical theory.

The newspaper horoscope is a form of advice to the reader based on reading the stars. It was invented in the 1930s (though the art of astrology is thousands of years old), and quickly became hugely popular, soon becoming part of the furniture of tabloid (and many broadsheet) newspapers, along with the

crossword and weather forecast. Some journalists have suggested that interest in astrology amongst young people in the UK and USA is rising rapidly (Farrar 2021; George-Parkin 2021; Page 2023). Astrologers on Instagram, X, and TikTok have become celebrities with hundreds of thousands of followers. One writer notes that the rise in astrology over the recent decade or so has paralleled the rise of the 'wellness' industry, and suggests that the two are closely linked:

> As we look deeper inside and try to improve and ultimately understand ourselves, our zodiac signs provide a template to comprehend who we are and what we need on a deeper and more meaningful basis (Farrar 2021).

The device will track your thought count, heartrate, and much more, connecting these in real time to the movement of the stars, so that you know exactly when the Sun or Moon are entering your sun sign or rising sign. That way, my device can keep you updated in real time about the shifting astral alignments that will help you get the best out of your mental fitness programme.

Astrology and the authoritarian personality

Aries – gentle workout

- Thoughts count: 375
- Heart rate: 96 bpm
- Narcissism level: low
- Paranoia level: medium
- Time in app: 3 minutes

It's September, Aries, and you're enjoying that back-to-school energy. Now that the lover planet Venus is entering healing Virgo, you're keen to work on your love life. But sometimes you worry that your first love, Geography, can seem a bit tired and unresponsive. It's time to put some firecrackers into that relationship! There's never been a better time to commit yourself to a riotous multiplication of the social science's genres, forms, and claims to authority.

The beauty of this astrological fitness tracker is that it simultaneously exploits two contrasting key elements of what Adorno et al. [1950] (2019) called the 'authoritarian personality': a fetishisation of quantitative data; and superstition. In his 1950s collaborative work with American sociologists to understand the latent fascist tendencies of the American population, Adorno came up with a survey that would look as similar as possible to conventional public opinion surveys, but instead of asking overt questions about whether respondents held, for example, racist attitudes, the survey instead aimed to track nine *latent* signs of authoritarian personality. These nine variables in the authoritarian 'syndrome' were: conventionalism; authoritarian submission;

authoritarian aggression; anti-intraception (a fear of feeling); superstition and stereotypy; power and toughness; destructiveness and cynicism; projectivity; and an excessive concern with sex and sexuality. The aim was to gather information that could map relationships among apparently unrelated variables and make predictions about which members of a population were most likely to turn to authoritarianism, using these predictions to create classifications of subjects for further analyses and interventions in the future. Weigel (2022) observes that the study anticipated contemporary forms of data science that use algorithms and machine learning to create personality types by exploring connections between apparently unrelated personality characteristics – though whilst Adorno and his collaborators' study identified personality types in order to target them for interventions that might prevent them from slipping into fascism, modern data science is mostly interested in directing behaviour through micro-targeted advertising.

Adorno was struck by the observation that some of the items with the greatest ability to predict a subject's score in the authoritarianism survey related to superstition. In his study of newspaper horoscopes, Adorno writes that 'The astrological ideology resembles, in all its major characteristics, the mentality of the "high scorers" of the "Authoritarian Personality"' (Adorno 1994, p. 163). Astrology is another way of creating personality types, through the idea that your star sign determines aspects of your character and personality. Adorno was fascinated with the 'pseudo-rationalism' of astrology, which combined technical-sounding detail about star charts with personal advice that was strikingly mundane. This kind of advice was authoritarian rather than merely banal, he suggested, because it encouraged a highly problematic relationship with authority. The horoscope projected social forces onto the stars, which determine everything in advance, and thereby represent social forces that are natural and impervious to questioning. At the same time, it encouraged readers to turn to these oppressing forces for help. Astrology thus programmed individuals to reproduce the irrational contradictions under which they lived, as well as to take pleasure in the experience of being coerced (Weigel 2022, p. 163).

Authority, compulsivity, and paranoia

Taurus – intense workout

- Thoughts count: 54
- Time in app: 7 mins
- Average heart rate: 90 bpm
- Narcissism: high
- Paranoia: high
- Well done! You have gained your advanced passivity badge.

Expect satisfaction in sensual pleasure when your ruling sign, romantic Venus, enters dedicated Virgo. This may leave you feeling bursting with creativity.

Geography is awash with new forms of writing, from montage to geopoetics, from collage to dance, from anonymous authorship to more-than-human co-writing (e.g. Cresswell 2019; D'Ascenzo 2025; Krupar 2013; Magrane et al. 2019; Pred 1995). Do these new forms succeed in challenging the authority of the author? How? Might a geography of ever-multiplying forms and genres help to interrupt authoritarian personalisation in contemporary critical and speculative theory?

According to Adorno, striking features of astrology's latent authoritarianism were its encouragement of compulsivity and paranoia. The pseudo-personalisation of the horoscope encouraged readers' narcissism by flattering them, whilst also provoking anxiety by raising threats that the reader must protect themselves from. The result of this was compulsivity, which prevented readers from understanding their own dependence in most areas of their lives:

> Just as advice from the stars enhances irrational authoritarian dependence and submissiveness … [n]umerous recommendations of the column which make a major affair of the painstakingly strict fulfilment of requirements and tasks which are actually meaningless and have very little influence on reality are plainly encouraging compulsive behavior (Adorno 1994, p. 87).

In this sense, astrology directly anticipated the kinds of authority exercised by contemporary digital culture, which is notorious for creating and profiting from compulsive forms of behaviour. Weigel (2022) asks how the 'authoritarian personality 2.0' updates authoritarian psychology from conformism to compulsivity using algorithmic media. Not only leisure time but also many people's working lives (from delivery drivers to nannies to journalists to any kind of self-employed person or employee who needs to create a 'personal brand') are algorithmically mediated, encouraging a form of compulsivity which plays off the same psychologically damaging combination of narcissism and anxiety. In addition to compulsivity, Adorno suggested that astrology also promotes paranoia. If a subject becomes unable to experience particularity, because capitalist mass production has transformed the object world into a set of stereotypes, it becomes impossible to distinguish which parts of experience come from themselves, and which come from others. This makes it hard to encounter people as they are, rather than through prejudice. So, by asking readers to view their own experiences as having been predestined by the stars, and by appealing to occult authority without making it possible to test it or even directly to encounter it, astrology encourages individuals to project their fears and fantasies onto others. Thus, astrology 'has to be regarded as a little model of much greater feeding on paranoid dispositions … it is a symptom of retrogression of society as a whole' (Adorno 1994, p. 166). So, astrology columns arguably anticipated the kinds of authority exerted by contemporary algorithmic digital culture, which are highly adept at creating compulsive forms of behaviour by combining rewards with threats, as well as promoting

paranoid dispositions by constructing an unbridgeable gap between inner and outer, between experience and object.

In praise of hesitation, uncertainty, and confusion

Gemini – rest day

Spontaneous, playful, and endearingly erratic, dear Gemini, you are driven by insatiable curiosity. You may be known as the social butterfly of the zodiac, but even you will need some rest this month, because your ruling planet Mercury begins its backward dance, going retrograde in Libra. Expect miscommunications and delays, especially if you allow your writing to *say* one thing, but *do* something else. Form, style, and genre make powerful contributions to epistemic authority. Do you feel a slight disconnect, a feeling that antiauthoritarian or egalitarian ideas are too often expressed through rigid, hierarchical academic forms? The conventional social science research article too often styles an authorial voice that is oppressively confident, certain, knowledgeable, and masterful. Shouldn't there be more room for writing that expresses hesitation, uncertainty, confusion, lack of confidence, playfulness, or refusal of mastery? Shouldn't this be expressed at the level of authorial voice and authority?

Anti-systematic forms of writing

Cancer – steady workout

- Thoughts count: 265
- Time in app: 18 mins
- Average heart rate: 37 bpm
- Narcissism: high
- Paranoia: high
- Well done! You have gained an advanced theory badge.

Remember, dear crab, staying connected to your friends is helpful for your love life. When Venus, the ruler of romance, enters practical Virgo, you should begin those intimidating conversations you've been putting off. It's a good moment to return to those geographies of power and authority that emphasise difference, contingency, rupture, negativity, multiplicity, affect, or care. You need to stick up for yourself and stand up to those authorial voices that are singular, masterful, and combative. It is OK that you, Cancer, with that endearing diffidence of yours, feel hesitant and unsure, and that your thinking travels in disorderly drifts. Why shouldn't these feelings find form in your writing?

In an essay about the forms of academic writing, Adorno critiques the emphasis in 1950s philosophy on the universal, the enduring, and the originary. He contrasts the closed structures of academic philosophy with the open

and playful form of the essay, characterised as a 'speculation on specific, culturally pre-formed objects' (Adorno 1991, p. 29). The essay, he suggests, produces knowledge through a form that is playful, exploratory, and discontinuous. Above all, he suggests, the essay form is diametrically opposed to Descartes' rules of method, which emphasise carefully delimiting a topic, breaking knowledge up into simple parts, building knowledge up from the simplest to the most complex, and working towards a comprehensive overview that exhausts every aspect of the topic. By contrast, the essay is anti-systematic, accentuating the fragmentary and the partial. It refuses to offer definitions, outlines, and summaries. This is because in the essay, thought does not proceed in a single direction. Instead, the moments of thought are interwoven like a carpet, the fruitfulness of thoughts depending on the density of the texture (Adorno 1991, p. 38). Rather than aspiring to totality or comprehensiveness, the essay works from the passions and a childlike willingness to take inspiration from others.

> The essay reflects what is loved and hated instead of presenting the mind as creation *ex nihilo*, on the model of an unrestrained work ethic. Luck and play are essential to it. It starts not with Adam and Eve but with what it wants to talk about; it says what occurs to it in that context and stops when it feels finished rather than when there is nothing to say. (Adorno 1991, p. 30).

Form, style and genre, Adorno shows, play a crucial role in constructing claims to epistemic authority.

Authority and the authorial persona

Leo – recovery workout

- Thoughts count: 753
- Time in app: 320 mins
- Average heart rate: 120 bpm
- Narcissism: very high
- Paranoia: medium

A fierce lion with fabulous hair, your passion projects tend to be awesome. When Venus, ruler of abundance, enters hardworking Virgo, you are likely to see praise for your academic talents. But your talents will be wasted if you don't act fast. So, now is a great time to think hard about what kinds of persona you wish to present to the world. After all, every author uses their writing to convey a distinctive persona that dramatises a specific form of authority: 'everyone writes as someone, affects a character, adopts a persona who does the talking for them' (Becker 1986, p. 33). These personae too rarely receive attention or analysis. Yet each makes a claim to authority. Some authors use overly complex language to appear clever and sophisticated. Others emphasise their esoteric

expertise, writing as though their audience knows almost as much as they do about the topic, and offering a barrage of detailed knowledge that overwhelms the reader into accepting their argument. Others invoke the participant-observer 'I-was-there' persona of 'experiential authority': the appeal to unique experience born of the researcher's insider status (Clifford 1983). Others fill their writing with opaque technical language. Still others emphasise their similarity to 'ordinary' non-specialists, portraying themselves as 'ordinary folk' using plain language. Each of these personae makes a demand on the reader to be read and evaluated in a certain way. Each makes an implicit claim to authority. We could add more: the reflexive persona, sharing aspects of their own lives to establish rapport with the reader; the militant persona, grounding their authority in the strength of their convictions and the commitment of their actions; the artist persona, grounding their authority in creativity and imagination. We could go on. The point is that as soon as your finger touches the keyboard, as soon as you risk authorship, you are making a claim to authority. So, fierce lion, what kind of authority do you claim for yourself?

Academic writing, form, and genre

Virgo – intense workout

- Thoughts count: 1243
- Time in app: 740 mins
- Average heart rate: 150 bpm
- Narcissism: very high
- Paranoia: medium

As the romantic planet Venus enters your sign, Virgo, you should try to worry less. If you allow yourself to dwell on your anxieties, you might not fulfil your potential! Yet sometimes you can't help feeling a disconnection with your one true love, geography. Its forms feel too rigid. Perhaps with your encouragement, your loved one can learn to loosen up a little and express itself a bit more. But to do so, you will need to help them shake off their old, shabby forms and discover a new look.

Few contemporary social scientists subscribe to the notion that epistemic authority should emphasise universality, closed systems, or timeless truths. Yet the form of the typical social science academic journal article seems to me to convey precisely these ideas. We start with an introduction, carefully setting the parameters of the article, defining key terms, and summarising the argument to be defended. These steps imply a Cartesian method of beginning at the beginning, circumscribing and defining a field, and building a coherent, neatly structured argument by moving step by step from premises through to empirical evidence to conclusions. We then move into a literature review, explaining how the article 'builds on' previous research, again presupposing a model of knowledge in which each contribution makes an incremental

addition to a slowly expanding edifice. Obligatory here is a deluge of citations, paying one's dues to the insiders (who command deference), and relegating others to the ignominy of oblivion.

Partly this is about staking claims to ownership: by obsessively cataloguing ownership of ideas to others, the author claims ownership of whatever crumbs of insight are left over. Yet partly it is also about enabling the author to displace the risk of authorship and authority to the security of a well-established, unassailable intellectual community.

This move is a problematic one: the lone, vulnerable, testable authority of a single author, easily challenged and dissented from, is dispersed into the opaque but weighty authority of the academic system as a whole. Politicised citational practices are undoubtedly important here for redistributing these boundaries more equitably by increasing citations of (and thus the authority of) writers inhabiting marginalised identities (e.g. Mott and Cockayne 2017; Smith et al. 2021). However, I'm not sure this overcomes the broader problem that a culture of innumerable citations disperses epistemic authority in problematic ways, partly legitimising a text through its lines of (supposedly) transparent filiation and descent. This is a fiction: in reality, despite the number of citations in this book, for example, a vast number of other influences go unacknowledged (conversations, novels, teaching, movies, music, newspapers, social media, etc.). Sometimes, cited sources may have had little if any genuine impact on the author's thinking.

Yet academic citations enable a text to acquire a distinctive kind of authority, borrowed from the vast weight of research that it cites. Texts become increasingly hard to challenge or critique, because responsibility for so many of their ideas are passed on to a higher authority. Indeed, Jeyasingh (2024b) provocatively argues that a politics of citation should not stop at including marginalised subject positions, but should interrupt supposedly transparent lines of influence. Instead, it should

> intervene in citations at the preindividual level of relations and processes, aspiring not towards transparency of linear and systematic disciplinary (re)production but instead to express the complex terrain or earth upon which our thinking takes shape. (Jeyasingh 2024b).

Next, a methods section defends a systematic, coherent process of data collection, privileging the idea of systematic 'method' as the ground of knowledge. Again, this typically emphasises a linear process of research that clearly differentiates between defining a problem, collecting data, and interpreting the data to make robust conclusions. Finally, analysis sections – heavily compressed and truncated, due to the vast number of words necessary for the earlier sections – present the findings of the research, sometimes 'applying' theories to empirical data that are thereby assumed to be elemental building blocks of knowledge, the Cartesian rock and clay that will provide a stable ground for knowledge. Finally, a conclusion turns the article full circle, tying

up all the loose threads, completing a neat and tidy architecture, and offering a convenient summary of the findings (preferably one that eliminates the need to read the rest of the article, thus saving everyone some time, since in any case the conclusion is the final destination of a linear series of steps that only gain meaning from their final destination).

This description of a 'typical' social science journal article is a caricature – and I do understand that in reality there is great diversity in forms, genres, and styles of social science writing – but I still feel it represents formal aspects of social-science writing that are very commonly seen, sometimes even in writing that explicitly disavows the search for systems, totality, comprehensiveness, or linear progress. Put simply: there is too often a contradiction between form and content.

Form is a claim to authority

Libra – no activity recorded

Get excited, Libra, because your season begins this month. When your ruling planet Venus, goddess of love, beauty, and abundance, enters detail-oriented Virgo, don't be surprised if you start obsessing over your latest beauty routines. Yes, that can even include a makeover of your writing styles.

Form, whether conventional or experimental, always makes a claim to authority. Most importantly, form is a kind of enabling constraint. It is disturbing because it imposes limits. It contains and constrains – and thereby enables – authorship. Like authority, form is a limit that makes possible an enduring structure that does not immediately collapse in on itself. Thus, inventing new forms can be (and often is) a political act, contesting authority by challenging structures of constraint.

Forms have several other typical features (here I draw extensively on Levine 2015). For example, they are infinitely varied. Literary theory has developed a sophisticated vocabulary for distinguishing between written forms, focusing on variations in genre, rhyme, rhythm, meter, frequency, duration, focalisation, description, suspense, and much else.

Yet forms are not self-contained; they overlap and intersect. Just as multiple authorities compete, overlap, and combine to create complex topologies of authority, forms may overlap and combine in complex ways. Indeed, forms are highly portable: as abstract organising patterns, forms can easily be moved to different contexts, in which their impact may be very different. Thus, forms are historically and geographically situated: their political work varies across time and place. Form reflects and responds to contemporary political conditions (Jameson 1971). Finally, form is not only the province of representation: non-representational affects have form and generate form.

> Affect is not the place where something immediate and automatic and resistant takes place outside of language. The turning to affect … does not obliterate the problem of form and representation. Affect is

not where reading is no longer needed (Brinkema 2014, p. xiv; see also Pile 2021).

Alienation and over-objectification

Scorpio – rest day

- Congratulations! You made it through your first week of training! Don't forget to make a note of your mood and stress level, and check your astrological alert messages.

At the end of the month, rebel planet Uranus went retrograde. This should prompt you to shake off your unhealthy habits. You know your writing is tired, stiff, and unhealthy. Listen to your body! You might be feeling a kind of alienation called 'over-objectification' (Simmel 1997), where objective forms can no longer be appropriated into the understandings and creative actions of subjects. If we call 'objectivity' the forms through which people share experiences, including objects, standards, established practices and genres and styles, then 'subjectivity' denotes the individual experience of life: the desire, dissatisfaction, striving, and enjoyment that create endless restlessness and reinvention. Subjectivity seeks meaning, breaks forms, works towards new ones. Thus, cultural development takes place in the movement back and forth between objectivity and subjectivity. Alienation is what happens when this movement breaks down. Over-objectification occurs when an objective form can no longer be appropriated into the understandings and creative actions of subjectivity. Has this happened to your academic writing? Beware, Virgo – this may do irreparable damage to your love affair with academic social science.

Neo-formalism, aesthetics, and speculative analysis

Sagittarius – heavy workout

- Thoughts count: 759
- Time in app: 97 mins
- Average heart rate: 70 bpm
- Narcissism: very high
- Paranoia: very high

Sagittarius, you're governed by Jupiter, the lucky planet of expansion. This month is all about personal growth. Remember, Sagittarius, a support system outside of romantic relationships is crucial to your well-being. If you start to feel overwhelmed, give your friends a call, and remember that you're never alone. Don't be afraid to ask for advice! If you heed your friends' wisdom, your writing may grow into new forms.

What is the relationship between social form and aesthetic form? Is it time for a neo-formalist turn in the social sciences? In Simmel's interactionist account of the social, no thing or event has a fixed meaning; its meaning arises from interactions with other things and events (Levine 1971). This sounds broadly like contemporary relational accounts of society and space. Yet there is a key difference. Simmel tasks social analysis, not with tracing networks and relations, or with analysing the 'contents' of objects or experiences, but with identifying the abstract social and spatial *forms* that constitute stable outcomes of distances separating subject and object.

This emphasis on forms reveals an aesthetic dimension in all social interaction that we do not immediately perceive in everyday life. Social analysis becomes a practice that nurtures the capacity to experience an individual phenomenon with all the fullness of its reality (Frisby 1985, p. 45). Resisting the temptation to try to get closer to phenomena by representing them more vividly, or by using theory or creative expression to express things that escape or exceed representation, this approach requires *abstracting* from the phenomenon. The analyst should avoid the twin perils of distance (establishing an illusory objectivity and mastery, as widely critiqued in feminist epistemology) and presence (establishing an illusory immediacy, as if we could express events in their taking-place-ness) (see Rose 1993; Rose 2025; Wylie 2009).

Through abstraction, theory transforms and translates the world, and this shift makes it able more fully and deeply to encounter its reality. In this sense, gaining a richer sense of reality does not come from expressing embodied aspects of life or expressing things that 'cannot be put into words'; it comes from tracing the forms that shape their meaning.[1] Crucially, this means that social analysis acquires a role that is fundamentally aesthetic and speculative: its goal is not to *reflect* or *describe* experience, but to *transform* it by tracing the forms that enable and constrain it, with a view to moving beyond those limits.

In this kind of neo-formalist approach to social analysis, the task of social science moves closer to art than science. Analysis of forms is not at all the same thing as analysis of structures. Whereas structural analysis reveals hidden, objective, pre-existing structures, formal analysis requires an investigation of how patterns, rhythms, and refrains generate force and sense. Whereas structural analysis aims to represent existing structures, formal analysis creatively transforms or extends its object or analysis, thereby itself generating new forms. In this kind of neo-formalism, the process of analysing meaning becomes intertwined with the practice of *creating* meaning.

Pluralising forms

Capricorn – heavy workout

- Thoughts count: 7523
- Time in app: 953 mins
- Average heart rate: 135 bpm

- Narcissism: very high
- Paranoia: manageable

When Venus, the planet of love, enters Virgo, you feel philosophical about love. This could mean contemplating a different relationship format. After all, you're a cerebral sign, Capricorn. You are feeling uncomfortable, worrying about the danger of falling into a problematic form/content distinction, and the overly structuralist account of the social this might imply. A deep thinker, you have no wish to reproduce a tired way of thinking that sees everything as a compound of matter and form, where form (abstract, active, mental, and masculine) is imposed on a formless lump of material (concrete, passive, inert, and feminised).[2] Don't worry, clever Capricorn, you don't need to abandon the entire concept of form. Instead, you should multiply it and pluralise it. Insofar as form is an expression of authority, the goal of pluralising authorities must also be to pluralise forms, focusing less on static forms than on processes that *generate* form (Deleuze and Guattari 1988; Guattari 2013; Ingold 2013).[3]

Metaphysics for dunces

Aquarius – light workout

- Thoughts count: 712
- Time in app: 23 mins
- Average heart rate: 90 bpm
- Narcissism: stratospheric
- Paranoia: low

When the romantic planet Venus enters Virgo, the healer of the zodiac, this will prompt transformations of your love life. Sceptical? That's no surprise: you've always had a rebellious personality, Aquarius. It is in your power, after all, to reject the authority of my horoscope. Authority is always bestowed, never enforced. By experimenting with the form of the astrological fitness tracker, I hoped to explore the authority of form and the forms of authority through a genre that is at once more playful, open, and unfinished than usual, but that also critically inhabits forms of authoritarianism that are themselves unfinished and unserious. Adorno is at pains to remind us that part of the appeal of fascist authoritarianism is its unseriousness, showmanship, and clownish buffoonery (a point also made by Foucault 2003). Similarly, the astrology column acquires its force *through*, not despite, its lack of seriousness.[4] It is parallel to advertising, where not 'believing' in an advert does nothing to prevent people from acting as consumers.

Perhaps we must call the experiment a failure. You don't seem to have been taken in by my 'metaphysics of dunces' (Adorno 1994, p. 175). Perhaps I didn't play on your narcissism or paranoia effectively enough. You're too clever for

those tricks. Or are you? Perhaps the horoscope has done its job: helping identify forces and forms behind an authoritarian 'syndrome', to avert or heal it. After all, part of what authority does, when it is working well, is to offer guidance about how to consent to or reject authority. By rejecting my authority, aren't you also submitting to it?

Abandon stale forms

Rest day: Pisces

With the equinox coming up, as well as the season of Libra (the sign of balance and justice), it's never been more vital to ensure that you're getting enough sleep and rest. Pisces, you'll need it: when the lover planet Venus enters creative Virgo, the stars will shower your love life – and your academic writing – with fairy dust. Throw caution to the wind, wise Pisces. You're a natural dreamer with big imagination and lots of empathy. So, play your part in making social sciences cast off their attachment to stale forms and genres. Risk plunging into new speculative adventures of form, genre, style, and authorship; it may do wonders for your love life.

Conclusion

Adorno and his colleagues' methodology for measuring authoritarian attitudes was heavily critiqued by contemporary readers (e.g. Hyman and Sheatsley 1954), and the flaws of the study are widely acknowledged. Weigel (2022) has shown how their methodology anticipated highly problematic forms of data science that generate personality types in order to attempt to manipulate behaviour through advertising and social media algorithms. Their study justified the rigidity of their division of the world into 'high' and 'low' scorers on the authoritarian index by the assertion that contemporary society has destroyed individuality and replaced it with mere types:

> There is reason to look for psychological types because the world in which we live is typed and 'produces' different 'types' of persons. Only by identifying stereotypical traits in modern humans, and not by denying their existence, can the pernicious tendency towards all-pervasive classification and subsumption be challenged (Adorno et al. 2019, p. 747).

The study suffered from egregious issues of confirmation bias, since it assumed these types do really exist, and then explained away evidence that might complicate the typology, for example by critiquing and refusing any contrary evidence from 'highs' (through appeals to psychoanalytical ideas of 'denial'), without applying the same kind of critique to 'lows' (Martin 2001).

The Authoritarian Personality raises questions around whether any attempt to examine psychological traits scientifically is a worthwhile, interesting, or valid enterprise. In the following chapter, I take that question in a different direction through a discussion of an art–geography–neuroscience collaboration examining attempts to quantify affective responses to authoritarian policing. At the same time as critiquing the idea that affects – and authority more generally – could be measured scientifically, I will ask whether tools of quantification might not still be used creatively to prompt and provoke new questions, ideas, and provocations.

Notes

[1] Consider, for example, Simmel's analysis of the figure of the 'stranger', a distinctive 'ideal type' of authority. Here, Simmel analyses a distinctive 'form' of sociality. The stranger is a formal structuring of subjectivity, where various 'contents' (desires, instincts) gain recognizable social shape.

[2] This is a perspective known as 'hylomorphism', which was a central idea in Aristotle's philosophy of nature.

[3] Ingold (2013) describes these as 'morphogenetic' processes, in contrast to Aristotelian hylomorphism. This is also broadly the perspective of Félix Guattari's (2013) *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, for example, which starts from the premise that 'there are Flows; the world presents itself in the form of fluctuation' (Guattari 2013, p. 75). This form is figured through a recasting of the form–matter–substance triangle into a far more dynamic assemblage of 'primary matter', 'proto-machinic form', and 'proto-enunciative substance', where the dimensions of the primary matter of a flow and its proto-machinic form are always reversible and in flux. Thinking in terms of form as something dynamic, variable, and differentiating, not a static architecture, enables a more dynamic understanding of the ever-changing relationship between (and reversibility of) form, matter, and substance. A similar idea is explored in Deleuze and Guattari (1988), which theorises matter in terms of a dynamic duality of content and expression, where both content *and* expression have matter, form, and substance. They thus pluralise form beyond the form/content distinction. Indeed, one provocative reading of Deleuze suggests that an 'extreme formalism' – binding form, formlessness, and the extreme – lies at the heart of Deleuzian ethics (Kaufman 2012).

[4] I'm sure I don't need to labour the point that this connection between buffoonery and authoritarianism resonates strongly with contemporary political experience.

7. Atmospheric authority and emotional borderwork in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro

With Lidiane Malanquini, Maira Froes, Cristina Cabral, Gabriela Baptista

This chapter develops an analysis of authority through reference to a key site of 21st century modernity: the favela. Favelas, along with related spaces of marginalisation such as slums, shantytowns, camps, and prisons, are key centres of 21st century biopolitical and necropolitical authority, where global regimes of international and internal bordering divide people into 'valued' populations and 'discounted' or 'surplus' populations, a division that broadly maps onto old racial divisions between coloniser and colonised (Mbembe 2019; Mezzadra and Neilsen 2013). Chatterjee (2004) observes that authority works in a different way for marginalised populations than it does from those who enjoy the rights and obligations of 'civil society'. He argues that marginalised populations

> make their claims on government, and in turn are governed, not within the framework of stable constitutionally defined rights and laws, but rather through temporary, contextual and unstable arrangements arrived at through direct political negotiations (Chatterjee 2004, p. 57).

This means that understanding authority in the 21st century requires refocusing attention away from formal citizenship, rights, the state, institutions, and bureaucracy, towards the fragmentary, piecemeal, improvised, and partial forms of authority – often in the context of chronic urban violence – associated with those living in peripheral communities (McFarlane 2021; Simone 2018). For this reason, it is essential for analyses of authority in the 21st century to start at the peripheries, rather than at the 'centre'. That is part of the aim of this chapter.

The chapter pluralises authority by listening to the voices of marginalised women facing routine authoritarian police and gang violence in a Brazilian favela, and asking how they respond to, negotiate, and transform authority, especially within the internal borders of the favela. The research is situated in the Maré community of favelas in the north zone of Rio de Janeiro. Like

most favelas in Rio, Maré is splintered into different territories by drug trafficking gangs and militias (Bueno 2018; Ferreira and Penna 2005; Hamann-Nielebock and de Carvalho 2008; Wilding 2012). The main boundaries between rival factions are relatively clear and stable, but violent skirmishes around the border areas are frequent. The internal borders of the favela are typically policed by armed teenage boys around the *bocas de fuma* (drug-selling stations). The Maré is also the site of extraordinarily aggressive, invasive, and militarised police operations (Silva 2009). The gendered nature of this everyday conflict, and how it impacts upon embodied feelings, emotions, and authority structures, needs to be understood more fully (Krenzinger et al. 2021; Rocha 2012; Wilding 2012).

The chapter also pluralises authority by experimenting with a disjunctive form that contests the academic demand to reduce complex evidence to a single authoritative narrative. The chapter offers *three different cuts* of the same research, with an emphasis on different styles of analysis and analytical techniques. This disjunctive form pushes in the *opposite* direction to methodological 'triangulation': instead of converging on a single truth, the aim is to multiply narratives, truths, and objective forms, advancing a feminist and post-colonial epistemology focused on multiplying objective knowledges (Daston and Galison 2007; Haraway 1988; Harding 1991; Mohanty 1995). The first cut focuses on women's lived experiences of authority in the favela; the second cut explores the material embodiment of authority; and the third cut focuses on the atmospheric constitution of authority in the favela. These do not add up to a single coherent narrative, but give space to places where the data, and interpretations of the data, conflict with or contradict each other.

FIRST CUT: WOMEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AUTHORITY

Favelas, borders, and authoritarian violence

Brazil's favelas are splintered and fragmented into multiple territories controlled by rival criminal factions and militias. Borders separating favelas from the formal city are policed through forms of spatial stigma that mark out those living in the peripheries as 'discounted', devalued lives (Mbembe 2019). The borders of the favela mark out those living in the peripheries as disposable and killable. Routine use of lethal violence by police and everyday harassment combine with the violence of narcotics gangs to create a climate of authoritarian terror among the urban poor (Wacquant 2008). Systematic anti-Black violence is concentrated in the country's favelas (Alves 2018; Da Silva 2010; Flauzina 2006; Nascimento 2016). Whilst men suffer higher levels of lethal violence, women also suffer lethal violence as well as exceptionally high levels of non-lethal violence (Barbosa 2001; Krenzinger et al.

2021; Krenzinger et al. 2018; Manzi and dos Santos Coroa dos Anjos 2021; McIlwaine et al. 2025; Romio 2009; Santiago, Gonçalves, and Augusto 2019). The impact of violence is not just from the immediate physical effects of violent police encounters, but from subtler, slower forms of violence, intimidation, suffering, and grief (Smith 2016, pp. 185–86). This violence has profound impacts on women's mobility, a key aspect of the right to the city (Wilding 2012).

How is authority experienced in a context of gendered and racialised state and armed violence? I will explore this through an analysis of women favela residents' embodied lived experiences of urban mobility, in particular the distinctive forms of attention that are required when walking around the favela. I will ask how women experience chronic state violence and armed violence and how this impacts their abilities to practise forms of nonauthoritarian authority such as care and friendship. I begin by exploring phenomenological accounts of how authority is embodied, linking these to debates around human and more-than-human agency. The next section sets out the methodology (explored in more detail in the Appendix), before moving to four sections drawing on empirical data addressing the lived experiences of women and their mobility within and beyond the favela. These sections focus respectively on the force of atmospheric authority in the favela; the ordering and channelling of attention; the importance of care in co-constructing authority in the community's border spaces; and the role of criminal groups in building and consolidating authority. The aim is to highlight the role of women's everyday practices and mobilities in transforming, shaping, and de-escalating the tense authority structures, despite the authoritarian forms of state and gang violence structuring the neighbourhood.

Authority and the body

How is authority embodied? Recent accounts of the spaces of authority in 'new authority studies', echoing various strands of feminist theory, emphasise the importance of 'experiential', embodied authority: forms of authority that gain their force through intensities of and/or collective experiments with experience (Adlerova 2024; Brigstocke 2014; Dawney 2018; Lea, Philo, and Cadman 2016; Millner 2013). Such accounts of authority emphasise that it is embodied, dispersed, affective, and tied to experiences of vitality, growth, and the outside (Blencowe 2013, 2012). Dawney (2018, 2013), for example, charts the emergence of powerful 'figures of authority' who are listened to (and hence granted authority) because of the intensity with which experiences have affected them, such as those of grief or suffering. This work offers a picture of how authority emerges out of distributed, more-than-human intensities of embodied experience. It also highlights that authority is not simply a relation between two or more people; rather, it is a distributed

relation whose force depends upon the distinctive material and affective qualities of specific places.

It may be helpful to briefly contextualise these debates within some influential accounts of how authority is embodied. Fanon (1986) writes about how conditions of colonialism lead the authentic 'corporeal schema' of the lived body to be contradicted by a racialised, dehumanising 'epidermal schema': a racialised regime that pins identity on skin colour. Similarly, Young (1990) points out how a woman in a patriarchal society lives a contradiction: as a human, she is a free subject who takes part in transcendence, but as a woman in a patriarchal society, she is denied this transcendence, and this is expressed in women's constrained forms of bodily comportment, motility, and spatiality. Yet both perspectives imagine the possibility of a fully human and authentic embodied experience, and in doing so they risk falling back on several problematic notions: of a universal human body freed from power and authority; of taking 'experience' as an unproblematic ground of reliable knowledge; and of a strict division between humans and nonhumans.

Another influential approach to the embodiment of authority, associated with Foucault, views authority as 'enfolded' into – internalised within – the body (Dean 1996; Rose 1999). Thus, the body becomes an expression of authoritarian authority, shaped by institutionalised norms, discourses, truths, and practices of the self. From this perspective, experience and the body are not the foundations of authority but the *product* of authority.[1] This move requires reconceptualising bodies' materiality as an effect of regulatory norms that govern how they materialise (Butler 1993, p. 236). Yet this way of thinking about authority seems to make too many assumptions about how successful authority is, as if authority could shape a body's materiality in ways that could not be transformed whenever consent to authority is withdrawn.

Focusing on the lived experience of authoritarian forms of social coordination by the state as well as by criminal groups, an analysis of experiential authority can ask both how bodies come to embody authoritarian forms of control, enabling authoritarian violence to win a certain kind of legitimacy, but also how they find room for agency, resistance, and resignification of violent urban border spaces. As recent theorisations of political agency emphasise, space for social and political agency opens up in the indeterminacy between the 'who' (the relatively autonomous subject) and the 'what' (the subject as constituted in and constrained by the social world) (Häkli and Kallio 2014). Thus, the possibility for marginalised subjects to contest or claim authority also inheres in this indeterminacy between the who and the what.

Disjunctive methods

This chapter draws on multiple semi-structured interviews with 12 adult women living in the Maré community of favelas. See the Appendix for a

detailed account of the quantitative and qualitative methodological techniques used. The participants discussed their experiences of everyday mobility within the favela, as well as describing in detail one or two specific journeys that were undertaken with an electrodermal activity (EDA) sensor. The research aimed to understand the embodied, lived experience of authority in a violently bordered urban environment, and to understand the emotional circuits of fear, stress, comfort, and other emotional relations around the favela's border spaces. By doing so, the research contributes to a feminist analysis of violence 'from below' (Fluri 2009), hoping to understand how women's agency and labour transforms the experience of authority in the favela, making room to breathe in a stifling regime of atmospheric terror (Fregonese 2017).

Atmospheric authority

Patrícia has lived in the Maré since she was little. A single mother with two daughters, she works as a cleaner. Her daily journey, first to her children's day care and then to work, takes her across the borders between communities controlled by different criminal groups. In describing her experiences of moving around the favela's border regions, Patrícia emphasises how stressful walking in the border region is, especially when accompanying children. Very high levels of attentiveness are required to navigate the favela safely. Managing stress and fear requires directing all her attention to the ambience of the urban environment:

> I feel unsafe at any moment, because these things [shootouts] happen at any moment; every time we go by … [I am] very watchful, looking at everything, always focusing … because it [a shootout] happens at any moment … Yeah, at any time, we must pay a lot of attention, be very watchful (Patrícia, interview).

Mobility within the favela is directed through a diffuse form of authority that guides and directs residents' conscious attention. This requires a carefully calibrated attunement to the affective and emotional composition of the city (Stewart 2011). Authority functions by directing attention: it is materialised through 'detailed directional movement of embodied attentional engagement with surroundings that can in turn rarely be understood as innocent in the arrangements of affordances and solicitations (as well as withholdances and discouragements) they offer' (Hannah 2013, p. 244). In the streets of the favela, authority is partly created by channelling attention in ways that shift it towards certain phenomena (e.g. potential risks or signs of trouble) and away from others (everyday conviviality, building relationships, social connections). This makes a field of authority that is full of tension, disconnection, stress, and isolation.

Although Patrícia says that she can cross the borders between different criminal factions' territories relatively easily, the borders are still clearly spaces of tension.

> Look, for me … there's no problem, you know? Because I move around anywhere … The boys [guarding the border] may look … If he looks and he doesn't like your face, if he sees you crossing, it's already trouble. It's not much of a problem for me, because they know I come here to work, but I think that if it were, like, normal, me going back and forth every day, if they didn't know, they would have a kind of mistrust. You know? (Patrícia, interview).

The threat of violence, threaded into the seams of the everyday, demands constant vigilance. The ever-present danger is of getting caught up in the crossfire during a police raid. Such traumatic experiences guide residents' orientations within the favela. However, fear can be reappropriated, restyled, and re-armed. One interviewee, who had witnessed her teenage son – unarmed and wearing his school uniform – being shot and severely injured by police, lives in constant fear of her family being caught up in another shootout. She is determined to put fear to good use:

> Here as well as in any other place … I walk around armed. I don't mean in the sense of being armed with a weapon. It's a manner of speaking, because I'm afraid of being somewhere and a shootout starting at any moment … After what happened to [my son], I walk around armed in that sense. Armed to protect myself, wanting to protect my family. Scared. That's the weapon I mean: fear (Juliana, interview).

Here, fear becomes an embodied resource for successfully navigating and orienting herself within an authoritarian, asphyxiating urban environment. Fear contributes to the emergence of an authority based on active, embodied, and exhausting hyper-attentiveness. In other words, we see authoritarian state violence embodied in women's ways of psychologically 'arming' and distancing themselves through emotional and affective relations of fear.

Wounded attention

The story of Letícia, a 28-year old recovering drug user, also illustrates how violent bordering can impose very authoritarian forms of control. For Letícia, the favela's authoritarian internal borders create forms of fear and anxiety that make it impossible to move outside a stigmatised territory known as 'Crackland'. This undermines her capacities to form connections with others. Letícia has suffered a history of gender-based violence, including sexual abuse

as a child, and violence from her current partner. Although she spends much of the day walking around the community, she never crosses from the favela into the formal city, and she also takes long detours to avoid crossing into areas controlled by rival armed groups. For Letícia, these borders are sites of fear and violence. When asked if she is afraid to cross the boundary into the territory of a different criminal faction, she replies:

> I am, I am, I don't go that way, I don't walk around there. I've never been there and I never will. Because I'm from this side, the guys over there know who's who … they'll take me in there, they'll tell me … they'll do mean things to me (Letícia, interview).

Unlike the other women interviewed for this study, who felt relatively free to cross into communities controlled by rival criminal organisations, Letícia does not have a job or other legitimate 'excuse' to cross the boundary, and as a known drug user and occasional sex worker, suffers high levels of stigma within the patriarchal gang culture of the favela. Fearful of gang members within and beyond the territory, Letícia is compelled by authoritarian power structures to stay in place, leading a life that is very spatially constrained and cut off from social ties and connections. This produces a borderland whose forms of violence, authority, and coercion are individualising, alienating, and profoundly isolating. As Letícia puts it, 'I don't ask for nothing, but I also don't give nothing. This asking business doesn't work.' She is cautious of 'phony' people 'who say they're your friends … and nobody is nobody's friend, just God and family, of course … few people are true, are honest, get it?'

Like Patrícia, Letícia describes how the tense and hectic sights and sounds of the favela demand extremely attentive forms of engagement with the city. Her language evokes a form of attentiveness that is more introspective and fatalistic, based less on close observation of the urban environment and more on intuitive judgements about the character of the people around her. She is afraid of crossing the boundaries of the community, but within her own territory she feels confident and fearless:

> No, I'm not afraid, because I'm the kind of person who when I walk on the street, I'm a very observant person, I observe everything … Like now, I'm talking to you and paying attention to outside. If I see meanness in people I feel it right away, it's God, my Guardian Angel is very powerful, I feel it right away, get it? … No, because if it [violence] happens it's going to be with God's permission (Letícia, interview).

Letícia's story, like Patrícia's, shows us that one important way authority is embodied in a space of violence is through directing attention. Violence shapes and constrains the forms of voluntary guidance. What her story also teaches us is that differences in women's angle of orientation reflects their contrasting social status and identity. Whereas Patrícia's attention is directed towards

the wider urban environment, Letícia's attention is directed towards people around her – to intuitive judgements about soul and character – in response to the fear of being deliberately targeted by those around her. Distrustful of *any* external authority, Letícia embodies the authoritarianism of the state and of criminal gangs by relying on the authority of gut instinct, intuition, and faith.

Practising nonauthoritarian authority through care

In Maré, women often enjoy greater levels of mobility than men, since they are authorised by members of the armed groups to cross the borders of the favela into rival territories. This is an interesting counterpoint to the usual gender inequalities in mobility. The price of this, however, is having to expend a great deal of feminised affective labour and care in building emotional relationships with trafficking gang members. Take, for example, Aline, a grandmother and wheelchair user whose son was hospitalised for three months after being shot by police at a protest against police violence. Asked about her experience of crossing an extremely volatile border space marking the boundary between three different criminal factions, Aline explains:

> It's normal. For me, it's normal. I normally come and go … If they [the boys guarding the favela's internal borders] bother me, I say right away, 'It's nobody's fault we live here and so-and-so lives there'. … If I have to say something, I will. I'll say, 'I've been living here for many years, no one ever bothered me, why are you going to bother me now?' Do you see? And, the same way I know people here, I know people over there too. Sometimes they call me 'Auntie'. Every time, they call me 'Auntie': 'Hi, Auntie, how are you?'. I answer, 'Hi, son' … Like yesterday, the girl who was with me was startled. The boys went, 'Hi, Auntie'. They jumped up when they saw me, so she was scared. He said, 'Take it easy, I'm just talking to my aunt. Hi, how are you?' I answered, 'I'm fine.' A normal coming and going thing (Aline, interview).

Aline's authority to cross the community's borders is performed through the emotional labour of de-escalating a tense atmosphere. Authority, in this case, is asserted through the performance of a caring, 'aunt'-like persona to the armed teenage boys. This affective labour co-produces authority in ways that make the border less tense and stifling. Yet this is a risky business. Aline emphasises that although she is friendly to the young men, it is essential not to be *too* friendly, otherwise she could be accused of favouring a particular side:

> I'm not familiar with them … I go straight by, because you know how it is, we have to avoid it, so tomorrow you're in the clear to be able to speak, because if you have … I chat with people there, I came

> here, I chat with people here, you know? I'll be asked about it, from both sides, so I try to avoid it… (Aline, interview).

Asserting the authority to cross the borders of the favela, therefore, is a complex task requiring acute emotional attention. It requires being friendly but not too friendly, nurturing a less hostile, more family-like atmosphere, whilst not overstepping an invisible limit where she could be accused of siding with one group over another. Indeed, Aline's story suggests that women may take advantage of their greater level of mobility (compared to most men living in the community) to perform forms of care and affective labour that keep fragile social connections alive. Aline tells us that she sometimes agrees to pass on messages between boys in different territories. If they become involved with a gang, boys are immediately cut off from school friends who live in rival territories; they are banned from having further contact with them. The violent bordering of the favela destroys fragile social connections. Aline mentions that she is often asked by young gang members, when she crosses into a rival territory, to send a message to their friend.

> Like, saying very quiet, 'Oh, Aunt, tell so-and-so I said hi'. It's so sad. There are people who were raised together, who are there, who grew up in a project and now they can't even talk to each other, even though there's still a feeling … Then they send a message and sometimes I can say, 'Oh, so-and-so … my regards … I saw your mother' (Aline, interview).

Delivering messages between members of rival gangs keeps threads of social connectivity alive and serves to soften the favela's borders. Doing so, however, is risky, and constitutes another form of gendered emotional labour.

Aline's story teaches us how authority at the favela's borders is co-constituted, not only by the armed groups, but also by women going about their everyday lives, keeping fragile social connections alive as they cross the borders. Women such as Aline transform and soften authority relations at the border through practising care and by maintaining social infrastructure.

Finding comfort in atmospheres of violence

One striking feature of our conversations with women living in Maré was how many interviewees switched from describing the favela as a space of terror (during shootouts), to describing it as a space of safety and comfort. In this section of the chapter, I wish to ask how that sensation of comfort is connected to dominant authority structures in the favela, particularly the authority of the criminal factions. The sensation of comfort is partly constructed by the local armed groups who enforce security and enact harsh, violent punishments for infractions within the community. Our participants mostly viewed the police

with hostility, as agents of terror who treat residents as threats to be contained, rather than as citizens with rights to protection and security. One interviewee told us:

> Yeah, I feel unsafe, scared … It was announced that the favela has been pacified [during the 2014 military occupation of Maré]. But we, the people in here, know that's only on paper, right? … it's not like that. They [the police] terrorise us and they leave (Sandra, interview).

In practice, the police rarely enter the favela other than for armed raids, and so it is mostly left to the armed groups to resolve conflicts and maintain order. In communities where the state is largely experienced negatively as a source of violence and contempt, armed groups represent a channel of authority that is largely uncontested (Bueno 2018; Da Silva 2010). This social order plays an important role in constructing the borders between the favela and the formal city. Criminal gangs provide a degree of security to residents, through a structure of authority that is patriarchal, unaccountable, violent, and simultaneously able to impose authoritarian meanings on this violence (Wilding 2012).

All our interviewees emphasised that they felt most nervous when leaving the favela and entering the formal parts of the city, where the familiar authority structures binding their community had no force. One woman told us that in Maré,

> women can walk around in peace; no one bothers them. You can put a bed sheet on the street and lie there the whole night in your nightgown and no one will bother you … In here, I can be wearing a gold necklace, my purse can be full of cash, I can enjoy myself all night, I can do anything … Now, if you go outside [the favela], you have to change: either you won't carry money outside, or if you go, you have to somehow hide it on your body. So, like, it's unsafe out there (Juliana, interview).

For those who live in the favela, places stigmatised as spaces of terror, the violent bordering of the city means that it is the *formal* city that is the primary space of fear and insecurity.

Many residents are reluctant to turn to the police for help or to report a crime, since they view the police as aggressively targeting them rather than offering protection. As one interviewee told us,

> the way the police treats favela residents is very bad, very strange. I remember the case of a lady … her partner assaulted her and she went to the UPP [Police Pacification Unit]. When she got there, they told her to go look for some laundry to do, because they had better things to do, you know? (Maria, interview).

Another woman had her house illegally entered and ransacked by police, but was too scared to report it to the authorities, because she believed that if she filed a report, the police would come back to punish her. 'I'm scared', she told us. 'That's why I didn't look and I didn't complain or anything, I kept to myself, but I even wanted to move [house], because I was scared'.

Whereas the authority of the police is viewed by most favela residents as illegitimate and terrorising, the armed groups have a level of legitimacy because, in contrast to the arbitrary and unpredictable nature of state violence, the narcotics gangs ensure some degree of consistency, stability, and effectiveness. When incidents occur in the favela, many women turn first to the local gang members:

> Oh, [if I was assaulted] I would go to someone in the community … Because I think it would be safer than the police. At the police, people would talk. They would try to find the person, but if they didn't, they would make a report and that would be all. The person could come back and do it again … you know? The drug dealers would look to see if he was around. If he was, they would catch him and straighten him out. You know? But the police … maybe nothing would happen (Beatriz, interview).

Thus, in contrast to the inability or unwillingness of the police to make a positive intervention, the effectiveness of the gangs' forms of justice and conflict resolution grants them a degree of authority.

The justice the criminal organisations enact is swift and often brutal. Someone found guilty may be talked to, beaten, expelled from the community, or executed. Justice is dispensed quickly, sometimes arbitrarily, but gains legitimacy through its (perceived) pragmatic effectiveness:

> When it's an issue like, couples fighting, like … when there's a problem in the community, I honestly think they handle it better than the police do, you know? … Drunk people problems, husbands hitting their wives, you know? When there's a problem at home. I think they handle any kind of problem as long it's in the community. You know? … They make it fast … They go straight to the trial; it's like this or that. Let's say there's a fight, they call them and say: this is how it goes, if it happens again, it's going to be like that. If it's a rape, they quickly eliminate the person straight away, right? (Ana, interview).

The sense of comfort and relative security experienced by residents within the favela is a symptom, not just of the authority of the armed groups, but also of the rigidity of the border separating the favela from the formal city. Whilst it might sound strange to speak of comfort in an atmosphere of violence, Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2014) reminds us that atmospheric bordering

can lead to a situation where outside, beyond the border, there appears to be no air to breathe whatsoever. The result of this is that the 'inside' feels like a space of comfort, in contrast to the asphyxiating atmosphere of the 'outside'. Insofar as comfort is linked to belonging, therefore, atmospheres of conflict and violence can succeed in creating an experience of comfort and authority *through* processes of violent bordering. In this way, violence gains legitimacy and binds residents closely to the armed groups who maintain order and security within the favela (Wilding 2012).

Nonauthoritarian authority in spaces of authoritarian violence

Whilst much of this chapter is a critique of state and criminal violence and the authoritarian imposition of meanings upon that violence, implicit in the chapter's methodology and analysis is a commitment to amplifying the everyday (nonauthoritarian) authority practised by residents of the favela. This is visible in how our respondents performed feminised emotional labour within the community, particularly around the territorial borders between rival criminal factions.

The chapter also speculatively searches for authority in the gaps between different narratives about the favela. Through a disjunctive style of writing that echoes and subverts the disjunctive splintering of communities, cities, and democracy itself in Brazil, the chapter's form is designed to work with, not against, gaps and absences in the story. In places, interviewees' accounts of their lived experiences do not clearly align with, or directly contradicted, the physiological patterns of their EDA. Through disjunctive writing, analysis can authorise and augment these differences without trying to explain them away or minimising their importance. The method of disjunctive writing strives to *pluralise* authority by stylising an inclusive, affirmative disjuncture: holding together different datasets and different stories in their irreducible difference from one another, in a way that makes a difference, or which creates something new.

SECOND CUT: MATERIAL EMBODIMENTS OF AUTHORITY

Introduction

This chapter turns to the material embodiments of authority in a space of authoritarian violence and control. It asks how women living in a community of favelas in the north zone of Rio de Janeiro *embody* authority in their movements across tense internal border spaces of the city. The relationship between authority and the body is a key aspect of authority that the book has not yet addressed in detail. It is crucial, because authority functions through

an alchemy of feelings that knots together complex combinations of perceptions, emotions, affects, and thoughts. My aim in the chapter is to stage an exercise in pluralising authority by turning to the biosocial rhythms of the body. The chapter draws on an experimental research method using quantitative measures of EDA, which indicate the levels of activation of the body's sympathetic nervous system (the unconscious 'fight or flight' mechanism), whilst out in the city, rather than in the kinds of laboratory-controlled conditions associated with the use of this method in psychology. Learning from phenomenological theorisations of 'flesh' as a potent anti-racist and anti-patriarchal figuration of embodiment (Alcoff 2000; Pinto 2017; Spillers 1987; Weheliye 2014), I propose *skin* – a border that is sensuous, porous, and inherently multiple – as an alternative figure of attentiveness, care, attunement, and birth (see Chapter 4) in improvising nonauthoritarian authority in the context of authoritarian policing and urban violence.[2]

One way the chapter pluralises authority is by moving past the conventional way of thinking about authority as a relation that presupposes conscious consent (e.g. Allen 2003; Arendt 1961; Green 1990; Kojève 2014; Raz 1986; Weber 1968). Instead, I aim to show how authority is folded into embodied rhythms through forms of consent that cross the borders between biology and sociality. This involves a multiplication of authorities, where bodies respond to and enact authority through plural, overlapping, partly conflicting circuits of recognition and consent. To achieve this, the chapter expands the concept of authority by recognising agency in non-conscious physiological processes. In Chapter 3, I suggested that authority requires agency, but that agency can be associated with any 'cognitive assemblage' (Hayles 2017). Therefore, authority does not necessarily require *conscious* consent. This insight leads, I suggest, to a more complex understanding of authority that shows how consent to authority may work at nonconscious, affective registers, without necessarily falling into manipulation or seduction.

The analysis of gender, violence, and authority in this chapter starts from a feminist materialist approach to 'thinking through the skin' (Ahmed and Stacey 2001). I start with skin because gendered and racialised urban borders distribute authority in ways that use skin as a marker of identity, target the skin as an object of violence, and also *enrol* skin in producing the authority of the border, partly through their mobilisation of the body's autonomous nervous system. Skin is the largest organ of the body, and has several functions, including immunity, perception, and controlling body temperature. The levels of sweat on the skin also reflect unconsciously controlled changes in the body's autonomic nervous system, which is responsible for unconscious processes that regulate the internal environment of the body (Dawson, Shell, and Filion 2007). An important component of the autonomous nervous system is the sympathetic nervous system, a rapid response mobilising system that facilitates immediate action (the 'fight or flight' response). Increased sympathetic 'fight or flight' activity is associated with indicators such as sweating,

increased heart rate, and blood pressure. When bodies are stimulated, the skin sweats more, leading to measurable changes in the electrical conductivity of the skin. The result of this is that variations in individuals' affective responses are expressed in measurable changes in the electrical conductivity of their skin.

The idea that affects can be quantified is extremely contentious, given influential definitions of affect that characterise it as inevitably escaping representation (Massumi 2002). The problems inherent in any attempt to quantify affects become even more acute when we take account of the violent and abusive history of attempts to scientifically measure Black bodies (Anderson 2012; Stepan 1982), a history that finds its echoes in the present through regimes of biometric testing that underpin the racialised global border regime (Bhattacharyya 2018; Mbembe 2017; Mezzadra and Neilsen 2013). Yet theorists of race have also emphasised the potential of biophysical accounts of bodies to disrupt the colonial order of knowledge (Wynter 2015). My suggestion is that creatively playing with and pluralising figures of authoritative, singular, 'scientific' knowledge is a useful (if risky) way of rechannelling such methodologies in more radical directions. The use of biometric technologies in this chapter makes no strong claims to scientific validity, although the study was conducted as rigorously as possible given the impossibility of reproducing laboratory conditions (see the Appendix). Instead, it draws on biophysical data as indicative creative prompts to further conversation, interpretation, and speculative analysis. The methods were a key part of a participatory arts installation, exhibited at the Multiplicidades International Digital Arts Festival, that enabled visitors to creatively explore the quantification and visualisation of biometric data for themselves (Brigstocke and Cabral 2015).

My aim is to show how authority in the favela is embodied and reappropriated partly through a *channelling of attention* at various scales of embodiment (cf. Hannah 2019). It achieves this by placing extremely high emotional and attentional demands upon women living in the favela. 'Attention', here, is conceptualised through a feminist lens that locates attention, not solely in perception and conscious awareness, but also in nonconscious biophysical rhythms (Frost 2020). The organisation of embodied attention in the favela, I will suggest, works by shaping gendered rhythms of emotional self-regulation.

Authority and the body

To say that authority is embodied is to place authority within the nonrepresentational realms of habit, emotion, affect, perception, and the unconscious (Anderson and Harrison 2010; Bissell 2011; Bridge 2019; Dewsbury 2012; Pitts-Taylor 2016; Simpson 2021; Thrift 2008). This puts strain on many influential definitions and theorisations of authority, which emphasise the importance of voluntary consent in creating the authority relation, in

contrast to other forms of coordination such as manipulation. This is perhaps the reason why work on the politics of affect sometimes seems to assume that its key modality of control is manipulation (e.g. Thrift 2008). As discussed in Chapter 3, because authority presupposes agency, a revised conception of authority is needed when agency is no longer restricted to consciously acting human individuals, but can be attributed to any cognitive assemblage that emerges out of conjunctions of human and non life with the agential power of other non-living materials and technical systems. If agency is an outcome of interactions among bodies, materials, and technologies (Braidotti 2013), this transforms the authority relation into something diffuse and multiple. There are echoes here of the psychoanalytical recognition of the importance of the unconscious in practising and recognising authority (Pile 2021). However, the approach I advocate also stresses the importance of other material social, material, and biological processes in making authority. My suggestion is that a speculative account of nonauthoritarian authority must respond to the multiple forms of agency distributed within and across bodies, including the agency of non-conscious, neuro-physiological processes.

This speculative account of nonauthoritarian authority works with an understanding of bodies as complex configurations of forces, at once social, symbolic, and biological. Embodiment emerges out of 'an elusive transient happening: something composed through differentiation occasioned, or actualised, out of an affirmative understanding of our fleshy, fluid life force' (Dewsbury 2000, p. 483). My approach is to avoid seeing biology and the social as in any way separate and discrete systems. This means treating bodies as porous, multiple, and exceeding discursive closure (Frost 2016).[3] In this way, it is possible to avoid falling back on the singular authority of 'the body' as a coherent and bounded and unitary subject or object (Cohen 2009; Pitts-Taylor 2016).[4] Rather, I follow Pile in stressing the 'multiplicity, indeterminacy and mutability' of 'bodily regimes' (Pile 2021, p. 174).[5]

This way of understanding embodied authority extends new materialist accounts of the 'attentive body' (Frost 2020), which argue that life processes *at every scale of embodiment* are capable of creative forms of meaning-making, knowing, and intervening. As epigenetic science shows, body and environment shape each other even at the level of bodies' genetic codes. Agency occurs, Frost argues, at every level of embodiment, even in cellular and molecular processes. Extending Frost's argument, we can say that authority shapes bodies' biosocial processes and rhythms, but also that bodies exert and transform authority at the level of nonconscious neurophysiological judgements. The key insight here is that authority is not only a question of conscious, willed guidance and submission, but also of forms of agency and recognition that are exercised at molecular physiological scales. Authority insinuates itself into, and is produced out of, every aspect of embodiment, including genetic transmission. Conversely, non-conscious neurophysiological processes guide the body's emotions and feelings. In doing so, they respond to, shape, and resist the exercise of authority.

I am proposing here a speculative reimagining of the very notion of authority, perhaps moving it beyond something that some readers would recognise or accept as counting as authority. Yet part of what authority *does* is define what authority *is*, and I suggest that pluralising authority also requires accepting strange and perhaps uncomfortable notions of what authority might or could be. In my speculative recasting of authority, it is not situated solely at the level of conscious reflection and will, or entirely in the kinds of unconscious drives studied by psychoanalysis, but *also* at nonconscious levels of biophysical materiality. Whilst authority always requires consent, I argue that consent may be given through the agency of material processes that are partly or entirely nonconscious.

This multiplication of authority's embodiments poses several difficulties. First, if consent is a necessary condition for authority, but consent may be preconscious and unwilled, how is it possible to differentiate authority from other forms of social coordination? If consent is not necessarily conscious, how can we tell the difference between consent and lack of consent? Here we are faced with the topological spatiality of authority: the capacity for forms of social coordination to be stretched and distorted into new shapes and novel forms, whilst remaining the same. Authority can easily shift into coercion or manipulation, and the boundaries between the two may be fuzzy or undecidable. To begin answering these questions, I recall the etymological link between authority and augmentation. In Chapter 5, we saw that what authority augments is *a sense for reality*, a feeling of heightened participation in a shared, common world. My suggestion now is that at the level of nonconscious physiological processes, consent can be understood in terms of an *augmentation of embodied capacities* for attentiveness, care, attunement, and birth (see Chapter 4). Authority is stretched into coercion at the point where submission to authority destroys, wounds, or undermines bodies' shared capacities, rather than augmenting them.

Disjunctive methods

The research methodology of this chapter is informed by ongoing debates around the need for creative responses to understanding the interface between city, society, and brain (Fitzgerald, Rose, and Singh 2016). Extending research on biosociality (Callard and Fitzgerald 2015; Ingold and Palsson 2013; Pykett 2018; Pykett, Osborne, and Resch 2020), the chapter makes experimental use of physiological data derived from participants' EDA, which is a measure of the levels of electrical conductivity on their skin. In doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the biosocial nature of authority, as well as correcting the emphasis on the Global North in studies of biosociality.

Working with physiological data opens interesting and creative possibilities for work exploring the embodied, material dimensions of authority. For this research, the participants, all women living in the Maré complex of favelas in

Rio de Janeiro, were asked to wear an electrodermal biosensor: a small box strapped to their wrist, with two sensors attached to two of their fingers.[6] The participants then started an ordinary journey which they frequently take in the community, and which is part of their everyday life. Unlike more sophisticated biosensors (like brain-scanning electroencephalography sensors, for example), this device is unobtrusive, making it ideal in a space where concerns around security and anonymity are paramount. A GPS tracked the participants' location, and these data were linked to the biometric data. The data offer insight into the nonconscious rhythms of women's physiological affective states, and how these rhythms changed as they moved across different areas of the city, including the border regions separating the territories of armed groups. In this way, it becomes possible to see how skin, as a dynamic and active component of the interface between body, city, and soul, actively co-creates the atmospheric authority of the city's border spaces.

The research extends recent experiments with tracking people's emotions or affective states across space (e.g. Birenboim et al. 2019; Nold 2009; Osborne 2019a; Osborne and Jones 2017), using a qualitative and experimental approach that contrasts with the more common positivist emphasis of work in this area. EDA data are very challenging to interpret. The data offer the researcher quantitative information about levels of affective arousal. However, they tell us nothing about the quality of the affect, or how it is experienced at a subjective level. In the quantitative data, an episode of joy may look the same as a feeling of fear, and recalling a memory may be indistinguishable from reacting to an external stimulus. This means EDA data are useful only if they prompt the researcher to work *with* the ambiguity and uncertainty of affective life, rather than trying to eliminate these ambiguities. Physiological data should not be used as a privileged source of authority for pinning down the 'objective truth' of a city's emotional or affective life. Nevertheless, technologies enabling researchers to read the body in new ways have promise as *experimental* research tools that can elicit rich emotional and narratives from research participants (Beljaars 2022; Osborne 2019b; Osborne and Jones 2017). Such studies do not use biometric data to mobilise the body as an authoritative source of data that somehow 'speaks for itself'; instead, they use them as generative and experimental tools for speculative analysis.

I steadfastly avoid interpreting the quantitative data by asking questions along the lines of 'what really happened, and why?', or 'what does it really mean?'. This would be a kind of reasoning that assumes the form of 'either/or'; 'true/false'; 'it happened or it didn't'; 'what did it really mean?' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004). Instead, the aim is to experiment with pluralising authorities by asking whether the quantitative and qualitative interview data might instead be reassembled through an *inclusive and affirmative* disjunctive synthesis that works with and multiplies gaps and absences (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p. 84). This requires being guided by the discontinuities between disjointed terms, rather than the urge to resolve or erase them. My approach embraces the pluralising formulation 'either … or … or', not the restrictive formulation

'either/or', which fixes borders and boundaries, and reduces authority to the singular. This is the logic that guides the form of this chapter. Its disjunctive form, splitting the analysis into three separate stories and analyses, aims to pluralise authority by multiplying the 'objective' stories that can be told by these data, and undertaking a speculative search for epistemic authority in the gaps *between* narratives and objectivities.

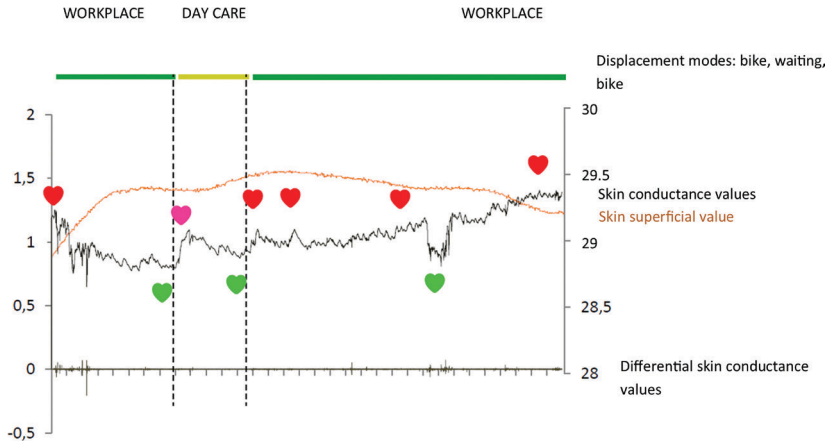
The next four sections of the chapter focus on the stories of four research participants. In the first two stories, we see how the chronic violence of the favela shapes women's affective self-regulation, in one case clearly causing a great deal of harm. In the third story, we begin to focus on how women reframe, challenge, and negotiate authority through their emotional and affective labour in 'softening' tense internal borders of the favela. In the fourth story, I explore how the violence of armed groups in the favelas establishes authority by generating an experience of comfort within the favela, which contrasts with the feelings of fear when leaving the favela and moving into the formal city.

Atmospheric authority

Patrícia takes a bicycle journey from her workplace in the favela to drop off her daughter at day care and later, in the evening, returns home again. Each time, she crosses two borders dividing the territories of different criminal factions. The rhythms of this tense atmosphere fold into Patrícia's body, mingling in unpredictable ways with nonconscious physiological responses. Authority folds itself into and under the skin. It moulds – and in turn is moulded by – the neurophysiological architecture of bodies encountering other bodies. Figures 7.1 and 7.2 show graphic representations of Patrícia's physiological data over two journeys. How are we to interpret these data? Rather than trying to connect individual peaks and troughs to specific events (linking each peak and trough to an idea of what 'really happened'), a more useful approach is to look at the broader rhythms of emotional self-regulation. By 'emotional self-regulation', I refer to bodies' capacities to manage and control their own moods (emotions and affects), a capacity which the electrodermal system contributes to in important ways (Silvestrini and Gendolla 2007). I approach self-regulation as a relatively autonomous process that cannot or should not be given specific meanings by linking biophysical events to specific lived experiences or emotions.

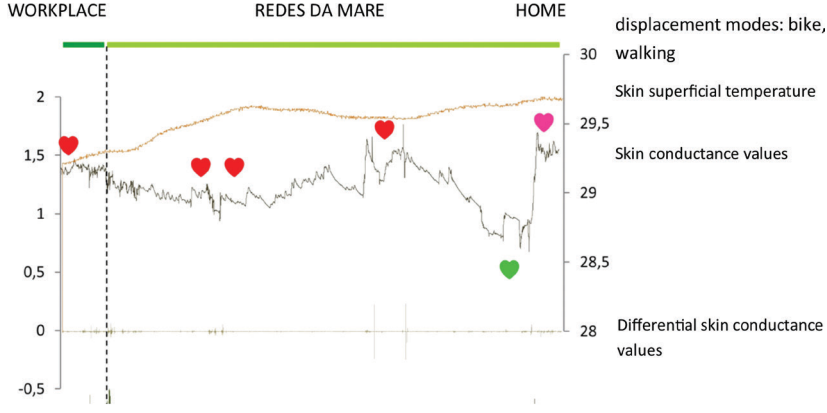
These rhythms of Patrícia's affective responses offer insight into how her sympathetic nervous system responds to, adapts to, and actively co-constructs authority in the city's border spaces. In the graphic representation of EDA, two aspects of the data are particularly important: changes in the 'phasic' levels and changes in the 'tonic' levels. The phasic levels are the fast-changing elements, responding to changing stimuli. The tonic level is the slower-changing baseline. We also see changes in skin temperature, where low temperature is

Figure 7.1: EDA measurements during Patrícia's journey to drop off her daughter at day care



Source: Maira Froes.

Figure 7.2: EDA measurements during Patrícia's journey home in the evening



Source: Maira Froes.

a possible indicator of stress. One key feature is 'autonomic variability': the difference between the highest peaks and the lowest troughs of affective activation. This is because the levels of autonomic variability give an important insight into the sympathetic nervous system's *capacity to be affected*.

Several striking aspects of Patrícia's EDA are noticeable. First, during her journeys across the favela, her levels of sympathetic arousal are high, also showing quite strong autonomic variability. The journey generates high levels

of sympathetic arousal. It is very stimulating; it imposes considerable affective and cognitive demands. Second, Patrícia's autonomic variability (her body's range of sympathetic responses) appears to be highest during the journeys with her daughter. When she stops at day care, her levels of arousal decrease, and show higher levels of variability. This is an indication she is feeling more relaxed: in a calm state, the body's affects are more supple and responsive. When she is with her daughter in the most dangerous border spaces of the favela, Patrícia's levels of emotional stimulation show high variability: her sympathetic nervous system responds with agility to the attentional demands of the favela. She is very alert, performing high levels of mental workload. By contrast, when she arrives at work, Patrícia's skin temperature lowers, her tonic level of sympathetic arousal is high, but her affective responses fluctuate quickly though not strongly. These rapid but shallow reactions are consistent with high levels of stress.

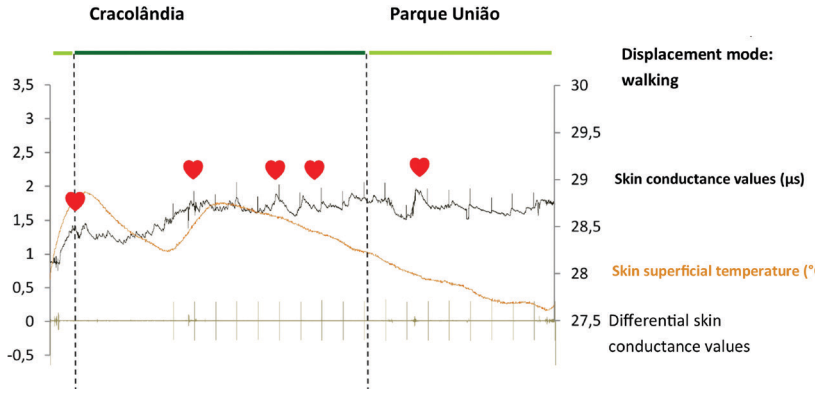
We can see that the streets of the favela make demands on attention that enrol bodies' physiological systems in contributing to embodied authority. The labour of social reproduction (in this case, the journey to drop a child at day care) becomes visible in terms of the extraordinarily high levels of cognitive labour it demands. By focusing on the physiological rhythms of the 'fight or flight' response, we see that authority is not stamped upon the skin, but is co-created through a dynamic interplay of body, skin, and environment that channels and directs attention in certain directions, to the exclusion of others.

Wounded attention

Letícia takes a journey, by moped and by foot, around her local neighbourhood (see Figure 7.3). Looking at Letícia's EDA, we see it looks flatter than Patrícia's, with much lower variability. It exhibits variable rhythms and magnitudes. It responds to a continuous succession of events that create rapid but shallow peaks and troughs in her state of stimulation. The amplitude range of these responses is very small. Letícia's EDA registers numerous rapid but small changes in her state of affective stimulation. Various events, likely to be of differing significance or importance, all appear to have similar effects. Her tonic level of arousal (the baseline curve) shows little variation. Letícia's journey involves a frenetic series of stimulations that cause momentary affective response, but the broader rhythm of her autonomous nervous system is highly attenuated.

It would be easy to misinterpret this relatively shallow curve as indicating a state of tranquillity and calm. However, from the perspective of affective self-regulation, the most striking aspect of Letícia's electrodermal data is the very low level of variability on this journey. Her body appears to be dealing with the atmospheric authority of the favela by reducing its responsiveness. It is not an absence of affective stimulation that leads to the flatter readings, but

Figure 7.3: EDA measurements during Letícia's walk around her neighbourhood



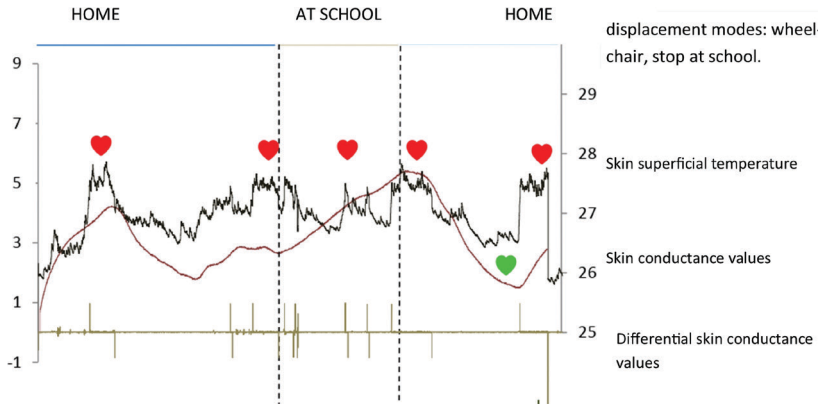
Source: Maira Froes.

a state of acute tension that makes her body less responsive to those stimulations. Moreover, returning home does not induce any kind of slackening or relaxation. The low variability of the affective responses indicates a state of tension which lowers the capacity to be affected. In fact, Letícia's physiological data look consistent with a neurophysiological state known as 'autonomic hyporeactivity': a reduced activity of the autonomous nervous system that is associated with conditions such as acute depression or chronic pain (see Sarchiapone et al. 2018). Body, city, and border come together in a form of atmospheric authority that imposes rhythms of continual attention and stress response, resulting in a wounding of the body's capacity to be affected.

Letícia's EDA registers a neurophysiological enfolding of authority, so the street becomes a space of exhausted watchfulness and diminished emotional response. These neurophysiological rhythms form an important but underacknowledged part of the urban economy of attention. Attentiveness to materiality, distributed agency, and embodiment suggests that attention is an attribute, not merely of conscious intentional attitudes, but also of bodies' own active material agency. For this reason, the politics of attention (Hannah 2019) must not only be conceptualised in terms of conscious perception and emotion, but also at the level of autonomous, non-conscious bodily processes.

Indeed, Frost extends this argument to the cellular and molecular level, arguing that bodies' capacities for attention and interpretation of their environments extend all the way down, such that no flesh is inert or unthinking (Frost 2020, p. 8). Working with an extended conceptualisation of embodied attention, I suggest that our participants' EDA data help illuminate elements of a distributed biosocial architecture of authority, where authority is internalised through the bordering of city, community, and subjectivity via distributed bio-social assemblages linking body, city, soul, attention, and atmosphere.

Figure 7.4: EDA measurements during Aline's walk to school and back home



Source: Maira Froes.

From this perspective, the politics of authority is as much a question of embodied rhythms of attention as it is a question of conscious perception and intention. Authority in a space of authoritarian violence is constituted through nonconscious forms of consent and obedience that function through changes to the rhythms of the autonomous nervous system. In Letícia's case, authority is embodied as a wounding of the capacity to affect and to be affected.

Practising nonauthoritarian authority through care

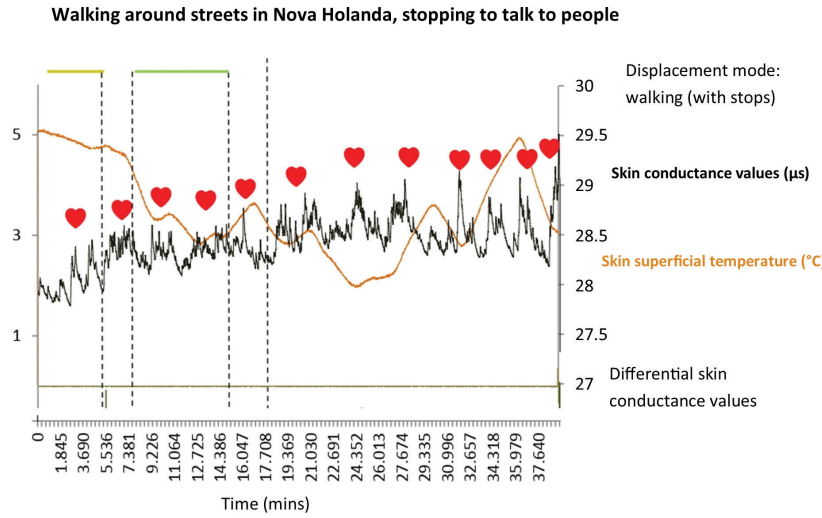
Aline is a wheelchair user and primary carer for one of her grandchildren. Her grandson wheels her from home to school, passing through an area of acute conflict. Aline's baseline level of affective arousal is very dynamic. There is a lot of variation, both in skin conductance and in skin temperature. We see a large difference between the highest and lowest level of the tonic curve. As they pass through some of the most volatile areas of the city, we see large jumps in her levels of affective stimulation: when she crosses the border spaces, Aline's levels of stimulation are extremely high. When she arrives at school, Aline relaxes, and her levels of excitability increase. Here, Aline's neurophysiological responses have become more elastic and register greater changes. Going back home by herself across the conflicted border, her physiological rhythms become more constricted, and her skin temperature lowers, indicating heightened levels of stress. She has significant fluctuations in EDA: the border region is evidently a place of great tension. As she returns home, her levels of stimulation quickly drop, and her skin temperature goes up again; here we see her relaxing in the safety of home.

We see here a form of embodied authority in which Aline's physiological responses respond exceptionally actively and dynamically to the stresses of navigating a dangerous border space. Aline's body is very switched on, and her affective responses are supple. Her sympathetic nervous system is highly adept in the rhythms of emotional regulation that are required to safely navigate the community's border regions. With Aline, her use of a wheelchair intersects with her age and gender to code her body as unthreatening, shaping an affective neurophysiological capacity that is controlled and sensitive. This equips her to perform significant amounts of emotional labour in softening the atmospheric atmosphere of the border. Her physiological data indicate that she is performing a very high mental workload, with strong levels of affective stimulation, but without falling into the kind of stress reaction that reduces cognitive and affective capacities (Borghini et al. 2020).

The highly dynamic rhythms of Aline's sympathetic nervous system are indicators of the high levels of adaptability required for women to exert authority within the favela's border spaces. Feminist work on the plasticity of the brain emphasises the brain's creative capacity both to receive form and to autonomously generate new forms (Malabou 2008). The brain is simultaneously formed by its environment and has the capacity to create new forms. In fact, if we choose to recognise the agency of all matter, this implies a need to conceptualise the whole body, not just the brain, as characterised by plasticity (Sparrow 2014). This entails understanding authority in terms of the interaction between body and environment, with bodily sensation and affect emerging as relational effects of encounters between bodies, borders, skin, materials, environments, and atmospheres. However, affective plasticity is unevenly distributed, making plasticity a key logic underpinning the construction of race, gender, and class (Pitts-Taylor 2016). Whereas highly valued bodies (white, male, wealthy) are framed in this colonial logic as energetically self-forming, the bodies of those in the urban peripheries, marked as superfluous and discounted, are dismissed as passively absorbing external environmental factors, lacking active capacities for self-formation, self-creation, and authority, their bodies seen as 'rigid, inflexible, overly reactive, and insufficiently absorptive' (Schuller and Gill-Peterson 2020, p. 2).

The physiological profiles of participants such as Aline help us develop empirical counter-narratives to racialised ways of imagining bodies' capacities, since they offer evidence of extremely dynamic forms of physiological adaptability, mobilised to assert the nonauthoritarian authority necessary to successfully navigate and transform the city's volatile border spaces. Aline has suffered deeply traumatic events whilst walking in the favela, but this trauma does not show itself as a wounding of affective capacity. Instead, it manifests as an agile capacity to respond to, intervene in, and even repair the community's violent borders. The neurophysiological data help us see how women living in favelas, far from being passive receptacles of dominating power, may be skilled, active authorities who help to co-produce the favela's borders. Yet they are forced to expend high levels of emotionally taxing labour in softening

Figure 7.5: EDA measurements during Mariana's walk around the neighbourhood, stopping to talk to people



Source: Maira Froes.

the threatening ambience of the favela's border spaces. Through this labour, women's affective capacities are harnessed and made productive in the neoliberal fractured city.

Finding comfort in atmospheres of violence

Mariana works for a residents' association, and as part of her job she routinely takes walks around the favela, stopping to talk to residents about their day-to-day issues and problems. She feels very comfortable walking around the area and has the authority to go almost wherever she likes, crossing borders between armed groups with ease. Her neurophysiological activity (Figure 7.5) is cyclical. Her tonic curve has little variation, indicating that her levels of affective and cognitive activity are stable throughout her journey. Her patterns of sympathetic response are even and reliable. Her EDA readings exhibit variable kinetics and magnitudes, with sympathetic arousal consistently high (though this may be within the range of normal variation for her individual physiology – controls in laboratory conditions would be needed to be certain about this). Stimuli are broadly homogeneously effective along the route. Her readings show relatively low autonomic variability, meaning there is quite a small difference between the lowest and highest peaks of affective stimulation. Whilst her tonic level of arousal is very stable, the phasic components are very rich, with variable magnitudes and release times. Her superficial skin

temperature is also very varied. Overall, her physiological readings show a strong capacity to respond to environmental demands. Her neurophysiological readings register high levels of cognitive and emotional demand being placed on her, but also elastic responses to these demands. In other words, Mariana's body is switched on all the time but succeeds in managing and regulating these demands very successfully. Her body shows very strong affective resilience.

Mariana's profile offers another clear counterexample to any assumptions that violent bordering would necessarily lead to a loss of affective capacity. Through fine-grained analysis of the relation between urban environment and affective capacity, we see that for some residents, whilst mobility within the border spaces of the favela requires very high levels of cognitive and affective work, their bodies' sympathetic nervous systems respond exceptionally sensitively and dynamically to the urban milieu. Most of them, with the important and troubling exception of Letícia (discussed above), exhibited EDA profiles that showed high levels of affective resilience.

This relative comfort and ease in moving around the favela, despite the fear of violence, is a distinctive physiological response to the atmospheric authority of the border. The exceptionally strong sense of community and belonging in Maré is expressed in, and contributes to, the reproduction of the authority of the armed groups who control life within the favela. This authority is created, not from belief in the legitimacy of the armed groups, but from their pragmatic achievements in creating an environment that is relatively stable and predictable. This is in contrast to the police raids, which are wholly unpredictable, uncontrolled, and create terror. The authority of armed groups is achieved through the creation of an affective atmosphere of comfort despite the stresses of the urban environment.

Thus, the stresses of navigating an urban environment that is violent in terms of both the punctual violence of firefights and the slow, structural violence of poverty, exclusion, and lack of services, don't necessarily result in damaged affective life. However, they do contribute to the forces and pressures keeping favela residents 'in place', making leaving the favela feel overwhelmingly stressful or frightening. The attentional demands of mobility within the favela take the form of high levels of affective resilience. This affective resilience results from sensitive attunement to a damaged urban milieu created through racist state terror and the violent, patriarchal authority structures of criminal organisations.

Nonauthoritarian authority in spaces of authoritarian violence

Life within the favela is ordered through forms of authority that are closely linked to authoritarian violence. For some, this is intensely wounding. Yet there is always space to exert agency. Far from necessarily leading to affective

debilitation, the stressful demands of the favela can lead residents to develop highly sensitive, supple, agile emotional physiologies. This requires us to dismiss racialised discourses that associate marginalisation and exclusion with low levels of affective plasticity. At the same time, we can see that this heightened affective capacity is enrolled in the emotional labour of co-constructing authority, particularly when women take on the feminised labour of easing and relaxing the tense atmospheres of the community's internal borders. Authority functions through a channelling of attention both at the level of lived experience and in shaping non-conscious rhythms of autonomic affective self-regulation.

This chapter has experimented with speculatively amplifying a kind of limited nonauthoritarian authority exerted at the level of the neurobiological processes of the sympathetic nervous system (which controls the 'fight or flight' response). Whilst one respondent (Letícia) clearly embodied the debilitating effects of authoritarian authority at the deepest levels of her biological responses, others showed a remarkable capacity to rechannel the traumatic experience of violence and atmospheric authority to build exceptionally sensitive capacities for emotional regulation, attentiveness, and care. Their sophisticated attunement to the atmospheric authority of the favela enabled them to transform it in subtle ways through their close attention to others, including members of criminal factions, but also members of the community more broadly.

In her work on undoing the 'genre of Man', charting the historical shift from theological to biological descriptions of the human, Wynter (2015) draws on neurobiology as a potential way of breaking out of the dichotomy between biological and cultural theories of embodiment. She argues that our awareness of 'neuroplasticity' – the creative capacity of the nervous system to change and adapt itself in response to internal or external stimuli by reorganising its structure, functions or connections – represents the condition of possibility for a new understanding of being human as praxis not substance (McKittrick 2015). By coming to a fuller awareness of our neuroplasticity, Wynter suggests that a new descriptive statement of Man becomes possible, as 'We-the-ecumenically-Human' (Wynter 2015). Contemporary neuroscience, she argues, offers a new answer to the question 'who are we?'. It makes visible a level of being human as 'dually biological and metabiological', with a capacity for self-invention that enables humans to emerge as hybrid living beings who can enact themselves as humans, consciously and creatively creating a new kind of ' "intercommunal" community' (Wynter 2015, p. 294).

There are very good reasons to be wary of the use of biosensing methodologies in favelas, given the long history of scientific authoritarianism and racism, including the dehumanising treatment of poor and Black bodies as repositories of data to be extracted. Nevertheless, the work of philosophers such as Wynter (2015) and Malabou (2008) indicates that creative speculative potential can also be found in biosocial or biocultural redescriptions of

the human. Such a redescription of the human also requires a shift in how we think about authority, pluralising our conceptions of it so that authority is no longer always a relation of individual, conscious deference. Instead, authority may involve forms of unconscious consent that are physiological effects of changing material, social, atmospheric encounters and embodiments. Here, authority helps to create a sense of reality, not just by making a common world perceptible, but by augmenting bodily capacities. This chapter has identified a wide range of physiological responses to navigating the city, from very high levels of emotional and affective resilience, to distressing levels of affective debilitation. The aim here is not to ask why some are resilient and some are not, but to offer insights into the specific embodiments and lived experiences of authority in contexts of chronic violence and marginalisation. In doing so, we can move towards new geographical understandings of how authority is embodied at different scales within spaces of marginality and stigma.

THIRD CUT: ATMOSPHERIC AUTHORITY

Introduction

This chapter experiments with an *atmospheric* form of analysis that responds to the authority of skin: an affective, perceptual, and attentional surface upon which consciousness only occasionally and fleetingly passes. Exploring a paradigmatic site of necropolitical, authoritarian violence in the 21st century city – the Maré community of favelas in Rio de Janeiro – the chapter styles a form of writing that traces aspects of the affective atmosphere of the favela, as it impacts upon preconscious affective rhythms, conscious thoughts and feelings, and more-than-human, dispersed relations of authority. My concern in this chapter is to explore the convoluted, distorted, topological spatialities of authority created through violent bordering.

My emphasis on affective atmosphere (Adey et al. 2013; Anderson 2014; Closs Stephens 2024; Fregonese 2017; Griffero 2018; McCormack 2018; Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2014; Sumartojo 2016) enables me to draw out relations between, within, and across bodies: to sensuous, affective scenes of touching and mingling between flesh, city, technology, atmosphere, and community. Linking authority to skin helps draw attention to the close relationship between bodies and borders (Billé 2017; Connor 2004; Serres 2008). Rather than asking how the violent splintering of the city stamps power upon the body, I ask how bodies perform active labour in *co-producing* authority at urban borders, constructing a form of 'atmospheric authority' – a topological mingling of body, authority, and environment – that encourages a distinctive form of attentiveness to the social environment.

Thinking with skin's active role in attentiveness to affective atmosphere, my suggestion will be that authority, skin, and urban border are co-composed through intersecting materials and processes: embodied infrastructure,

affective atmospheres, bordering practices, technologies, buildings, bullets, clothes, ecologies, emotions, buildings, bricks, guns … as well as the mundane rhythms of everyday practices. This emotionally and affectively charged landscape is a 'topological' space (see Chapter 3) in which organic skin touches, enfolds, and mingles with the atmospheric, technologically mediated skin of the city (Griffero 2018). Skin is a border region between city and soul (Serres 2008). It is the site where atmospheres make an impression (Ahmed 2006, p. 9). Bodies respond to a material and emotional atmosphere that envelopes them, guiding their capacity to affect and to be affected. The city's climate of authoritarian violence seeps into the skin's surfaces and lesions, moulding the affective physiology of the body. At the same time, skins are enrolled into performing active labour and co-producing urban borders. Thus, in lingering on the materialities of skin, a speculative critique of embodied authority traces the folds of a landscape that bears the scars of violent bordering, but also is invested with potential and possibility.

Authority and the body

How is authority materialised in urban spaces? If authority is made of multiple discursive, material, and physiological processes, are these processes in sync with each other, or do some aspects of embodied authority conflict with others? To what extent are the various authorities of the body in tension or opposition? Do physiological processes of authority always express themselves in conscious feelings or emotions? I wish to explore some of these issues through a methodological experiment with understanding the *atmospheric* constitution of authority. The aim is to gain insight into the embodied, physiological, material circulation of authority within a favela in Rio de Janeiro.

To conceptualise the intersection between authority and urban space, a useful starting point is anthropologists' discussions of 'charismatic space' and the 'charisma of the city', which refers to the 'soul' or mythology that is emitted from the city's buildings, infrastructures, historical sites, and anonymous crowds (Hansen and Verkaaik 2009; Terlouw 2010). Charisma is a key form of affective authority theorised by Weber, but the notion of charismatic space expands charisma beyond the province of inspirational leaders, to something more spatially diffuse. This notion of charismatic space is an important step in understanding how the force of charisma can be distributed across multiple spaces, actors, and agencies. Adey (2013) helpfully links urban charisma to related work on 'affective atmosphere', writing about how

> the megacity tends to have been lent a certain kind of atmospheric charisma in the dust, din and dirt, the dark and gloomy oppressive settings or kaleidoscopic colours, dances of light that make megacities the most effervescent of urban forms (Adey 2013, p. 293).

The link established by Adey between spatial charisma and affective atmosphere is helpful in reconsidering the aesthetics of authority. Affective atmospheres, broadly, refer to the 'ambience', 'feel', or 'mood' of a place. They work through forms of attunement (see Chapter 4). Such atmospheres traverse distinctions between peoples, things, and spaces. They cannot be located to a single source, but are emergent from a complex ecology of power involving many different actors and agencies. The concept of atmosphere captures the 'in-betweenness' of, or tension between, subject and object. It evokes something that is neither subjective (a psychological, intentional phenomenon), nor an objective thing out there in the world (e.g. an environment or milieu) (Bille, Bjerregaard, and Sørensen 2015). Rather, atmospheres are 'quasi-things', existing as what Bohme calls 'spaces insofar as they are "tinctured" through the presence of things, or persons, or environmental constellations' (Bohme 1993, pp. 121–22). An atmosphere is not free-floating, but 'proceeds from and is created by things, persons or their constellations'. Atmospheres are not objective, but have a thing-like quality, because they belong to the thing that articulates their presence. They are not subjective, because although they are sensed through bodily presence and attunement, this sensation reveals the atmosphere rather than being equivalent to it. Atmosphere evokes an experience of the in-betweenness of subject and object in which emotional and sensorial experience are central. Thus, atmosphere is a way of capturing the kinds of authority that *place* exerts over human subjectivity at emotional and aesthetic levels.

Disjunctive methods

A crucial theme in this chapter is the violent splintering of the city into different territories: not only the split between favela and asphalt, but also the partitioning of favelas into territories of competing armed groups, including narcotics trafficking organisations and militias. Engaging creatively both with this bordering of the city and with the bordering of the body itself into different zones, organs, senses, and physiological processes, this chapter experiments with a disjunctive methodology and written form (Deleuze and Guattari 2004) that undermines this authoritarian bordering by pluralising forms of evidence, synthesis, analysis, and geographical writing. The chapter is an experiment in forming a style of writing that might communicate certain aspects of the atmospheric, topological spatialities of authority. This requires asking how we can speculatively think the world through the materiality of words. Writing not only describes and represents the world as it appears to us, but can think 'beyond' our world, stretching words and meanings, to enact an 'oscillation of writing between the functional, the speculative, the worldly and the cosmic' (Roberts 2019, p. 645). This task is especially pertinent for feminist and anti-racist analyses that aim to resituate and reimagine global divisions and borders. Thus, this chapter offers an analysis of forms of

atmospheric authority circulating within spaces of marginalisation in the contemporary necropolis (Alves 2018).

Atmospheric authority

Crossing the border from the formal city to the Complexo da Maré, a community of 14 favelas in the north of Rio, a shift in atmospheric authority immediately touches you. New rules are in play: car windows are wound down, headlights turned off, speed lowered, so that the occupants of the car are clearly visible and can be seen to be no threat. Photography is strongly discouraged: the outcome of accidentally taking a snapshot of the wrong person or activity could be catastrophic. A torsion in the geographies of authority is immediately apparent. Relations of distance and proximity are stretched beyond recognition; moving a few yards from Avenida Brasil into the Maré, the body immediately senses that it must be guided by different rules and norms. As a *gringo* lacking a strong enough feel for this, my colleagues barely let me walk more than a few metres unaccompanied, so I always have a chaperone to keep me out of trouble. We spend hours walking and driving around a community with a vast amount of variation: bustling, vibrant markets with some of the best restaurants in Rio; middle-class areas of quite high-quality housing (we chat with residents who remark on the irony that in Rio the only people rich enough to live in houses are the super-rich in the South Zone and some favela residents); areas of extreme deprivation, homelessness and drug addiction; areas in contested gang territories, riddled with bullet holes, disconcertingly quiet.

Leaving the car and walking down a busy market, mopeds buzzing around everywhere, the street hums with the comings and goings of everyday social life. The convivial urban ambience is warped by the presence of teenage boys nonchalantly displaying handguns and rifles, guarding their posts at the *bocas de fuma* (drug-selling stations). Occasionally a car with blacked out windows rolls past slowly, rifles pointing out of each window, allowing time for each passerby to look down the barrel of the gun as the vehicle moves past, agonisingly slowly. The world twitches. Atmosphere meets skin, a mingling of body and environment, a point of orientation or angle of entry within the atmosphere. A body walking down the street, holding hands, undergoes cascading surges of acetylcholine, sending chemical messages to the sympathetic nervous system, releasing noradrenaline and then adrenaline, releasing receptors on peripheral tissues that trigger fight-and-flight responses. Eventually, a shift in consciousness is registered. A memory bubbles up.

Patrícia tells us:

> there was one time I came to work, I got really scared. There was an operation, and the Skull [military police armoured vehicle] came into the main street. That's how it is … I was scared, I didn't want to

> come through, but since I had a lot of work, I had to come … When I went by, when I turned the corner … the shoot-out broke loose (Patrícia, interview).

These traumatic events live with Maré's residents for the rest of their lives, inhabiting their bodies, shaping their attitudes towards state authority.

> I think the police should really provide us with safety. You know? But they don't, they don't care, they just want to know that it's written in their little piece of paper that they came here, they did the operation, they arrested this, they arrested that (Patrícia, interview).

Atmospheric authority pervades the community, inescapable, encouraging but without forcing a specific set of actions and reactions. The pressure is to stay at home, to remain isolated, alienated, disconnected. Leaving the house to go to work or to see friends requires mental resilience, and resistance to the atmospheric authority of the city.

Wounded attention

For Letícia, atmospheric authority is constituted through a spatial superimposition of the global and the local. Her life is exceptionally spatially constrained, and as she navigates the streets, danger is everywhere. No one is trusted, everything is risky. As a drug user, Letícia inhabits in the deepest layers of her body an exceptionally globalised identity, connecting her to a complex commodity chain that is key to many forms of authority, not least the authoritarianism of state violence. For Letícia, atmospheric authority is tinctured by cravings, which collapse multiple temporalities (anticipation, recollection, waiting), affective conditions (insecurity, fear, anxiety, grief), and material conditions of poverty, exclusion, and precarity (see Månsson et al. 2024). Mingling with these feelings is trust in a kind of spiritual authority that relies on intuitive attunement, and finds resources for courage in a kind or fatalism or acceptance:

> if it happens it's going to be with God's permission, everything happens with His permission and I don't fear nobody, I'm not afraid of ghosts, I'm not afraid of human beings, I'm not afraid of anyone or anything, I mean I'm God fearing, Him I fear, because a God-fearing woman will be blessed. And what ticks me off is meanness, get it? Because God is God and He escaped; who am I to escape? (Letícia, interview).

For Letícia, atmospheric authority is an exceptionally heavy weight keeping her in place. But even for Letícia, there is space for resistance, agency, and refusing the authority of violence. Letícia develops her own reconfigured

experience of authority, based on a conjunction of faith with gut instinct. Whilst occupying a subject position that is ignored, denigrated, and abused, Letícia finds space for negotiating authority and asserting dignity within the space of her own community.

Practising nonauthoritarian authority through care

For Aline, the spatialities of authority are shaped by her use of a wheelchair. Two bodies and a wheelchair make their way along the street, negotiating bumps, blocks, and obstacles, feeling frustration at the difficulty of everything.

> It's hard because … it's not the community; it's the lack of access. You want to go into a store, there isn't any access. If you don't have the good will of going in and depending on other people's help, you don't have any access (Aline, interview).

Atmospheric authority is composed through a relational network of care, helping others and relying on the help of others. It becomes a question of knowing the easiest routes, with the fewest obstructions, joking with street traders as she weaves around the stands, a body habituated to subtle movements and dexterous manoeuvres. The threat of sudden bursts of violence from police raids is always present, because Aline cannot always get out of the way so quickly. Yet, when a terrifying police raid does suddenly spring up around her, bullets flying in all directions, the distribution of capacities transforms and deforms the usual structures of ability and disability:

> A guy that was with me, his legs froze … The criminals were coming and the police were coming too, so I got caught up in the middle. And he got nervous, his legs froze; he said his legs were sweating and he couldn't move and he grabbed the chair; I had to push him with the wheelchair, so that he could get into that alley and hide (Aline, interview).

In an authoritarian atmosphere of terrifying violence, the composition of authority – who guides whom – takes on new shapes through new distributions of capacity. Aline performs a new kind of authority in precisely the situation where she might appear to be most vulnerable.

Finding comfort in atmospheres of violence

Atmospheric authority in the favela is constituted through a mosaic of varied, intersecting, often conflicting, and frequently changing sources of authority. Authority does not radiate from any centre, but stutters in and out of existence in superimposed and continually deforming and reforming waves. Criminal

gangs, despite their brutal violence, conservative values, and arbitrary dispensing of justice, also offer support, care, conflict resolution, and even a source of hope (for respect, wealth, autonomy). The state claims authority through violence: targeting the community, terrorising it with military vehicles, helicopters, weapons, and searches. On the other hand, legally the constitution guarantees residents many rights, which even if they cannot be accessed in practice, can still be used as sources of authority to legitimise campaigns and demand changes. Meanwhile, a range of civil society organisations, churches, and community groups offer care, support, advice, counselling, training, education, spiritual guidance, and many other kinds of authority. There is huge pride in and fondness for the community, despite the problems. Changing authority structures become materialised in and synonymous with the fabric of the city, from the winding paths of the famous hilltop favelas to the higher quality roads in Maré that came with military occupation. The Maré borders the main highway from the airport to the rich South Zone of Rio, but high walls have been erected to make the favela invisible. Only in a few places, where parts of the wall have failed, can travellers gain a glimpse of the favela. Yet the traffic fumes fill the community. Atmospheric authority is materialised in conjunctions of particulate matter, dust, asphalt, brick, sprawling electricity lines, the endless hum of motorbikes, the sound of fireworks, of music everywhere, of hope, and faith, and fear, and joy.

Nonauthoritarian authority in spaces of authoritarian violence

Atmospheric authority is a kind of urban charisma that shapes feelings, sensations, and emotions without determining them. Atmospheric authority is partly embodied through directed attention (Hannah 2019). Such authority is materialised in rhythms of noticing, perceiving, feeling, and attuning to elements of the social environment. Urban subjects are kept in place through a bordering of body and city, imposing rhythms of attention that reproduce hierarchical structures of gender, class, race, and sexuality. This is a process that functions at various conscious and nonconscious levels of embodied practice. Atmospheric authority shapes attention not only by directing 'lived experiences' such as perception, emotion, and consciousness, but also by shaping non-conscious neurobiological rhythms. Authority shapes body, skin, and capacities. Yet even amidst the asphyxiating atmospheres of chronic authoritarian violence, there is room to negotiate, reframe, and restyle authority. Each of our research participants engaged in the practice of nonauthoritarian authority by intervening in the atmospheric authority of the city's border spaces, whether through reinterpreting them by weaponising fear (Juliana), through finding courage to move around the city in love of God (Letícia), carrying out affective labour at the border between armed groups in order to soften tense atmospheres (Aline), or developing

exceptionally acute emotional skills to make mobility within the city possible (Mariana).

As an experiment in pluralising authorities, this chapter has explored a disjunctive analysis that inhabits the gaps between different kinds of knowledges. It has also explored how authority is embodied and materialised at different registers of cognitive activity, and in doing so has highlighted the capacities of marginalised and racialised subjects to renegotiate and reframe authority (cf. Perry 2013), practising experimental and tentative forms of nonauthoritarian authority through micropolitical acts of enduring, caring, and reshaping the charismatic authority of the favela.

Notes

[1] Foucault writes: 'The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration' (Foucault 1984a, p. 83). Similarly, Butler writes that 'what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect' (Butler 1993, p. 2).

[2] Spillers' account of flesh is a way of simultaneously marking violence and articulating a Black feminist methodology from the perspective of the embodied, emotional, social, and cultural relations that this violence creates (Pinto 2017). Her concept of flesh aims to recreate the possibilities of Black women and Black feminism. Drawing on Spillers, Weheliye (2014) argues that flesh opens up a space for generating new ways of thinking Black political subjectivity and possibility. He sees flesh as a key resource of biopower, but is also interested in what its capacity to retain its materiality and its possibility to become something else outside of dominant discursive regimes. Alcoff (2000) suggests that Merleau-Ponty's account of flesh holds great potential for a feminist phenomenology that avoids invoking dualisms between subject/object, body/world, past/present, and perception/imagination.

[3] More specifically, I suggest that bodies are: porous; plastic; distributed; topological; and composed of internal multiplicities. They are 'porous' because they are constantly in exchange with the environment through breathing, eating, drinking, sweating, bleeding, excreting, etc. They are 'plastic' because their form is not fixed but is shaped by the environment, as well as shaping that environment. They are 'distributed' in that embodiment encompasses numerous socio-technical processes that far exceed the limits of the skin (tools, clothes, food systems, power systems, living environments) and these processes are a constitutive part of embodiment. They are 'topological' in that their surfaces are twisted,

folded, and stretched in ways that deform singular linear boundaries and surfaces, confusing the distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' and between 'proximate' and 'distant'. Finally, by saying bodies are composed of 'internal multiplicities', I mean that 'the body' is not isomorphic or self-identical, but is made up of multiple psychic, conscious, preconscious, habitual, affective, and neuro-physiological systems and processes (Pitts-Taylor 2016).

[4] The very notion that the self is contained within, or 'has', a clearly bounded body is a naturalised legal and political fiction that can be philosophically traced to John Locke's notion of self-ownership (see Cohen 2009). This idea arose in a very specific context, and was intended as a liberal rationale for opposing sovereign violence. As such, unitary notions of 'the body' or of subjects 'having' a body bears traces of that violence, in their conceptual uprooting of body from earth.

[5] Pile's (2021) study of bodies, affects, the 'aesthetic unconscious', and the 'clash of bodily regimes' works through a psychoanalytical approach that is quite different from the theoretical angle of this chapter, which is more post-phenomenological. Nevertheless, I have learned much from and am guided by Pile's insights into the multiplicity of the body and of the skin, and by his ideas about how power and authority are constituted through 'bodily regimes that never completely enfold the body or people's experiences' (Pile 2021, p. 174).

[6] Documentation describing the full technical specifications for the sensor is available at https://www.shimmersensing.com/product/sfrehimmer3-gsr-unit/.

8. Landscapes of thinking, or, where am I when I think?

Instructions*: Find a place where you think well: your desk; your favourite café; a walk; a bathtub; a train carriage; maybe even a cabin in the woods. Where are you? Why have you come here? Try to follow your paths and styles of thinking here. How does* where *you think affect* how *you think? What kinds of authority and influence does your thinking respond to in different places?*

Warm-up

For our next exercise, we return to the Bristol and Bath railway path, shifting our focus slightly from authority and the body to authority and thinking; the 'thinking thing' is, after all, one of the key figures of authority in European philosophy. This path is one of the places where I do a lot of my thinking. Thinking, after all, does not just happen 'in the head'. Thinking and associated practices – brooding, ruminating, contemplating, pondering, meditating – are spatial. Thinking is embodied and emplaced, in the sense that thinking is a complex set of interactions between body, brain, and environment (Naughton 2022). In this exercise I ask whether pluralising authority must not also mean pluralising the figures through which we think thinking. Thinking has long been tied, in the Western metaphysical tradition, to the authority of the sovereign subject, and has often been assumed to have some kind of intrinsic moral direction – so that 'stopping to think' is likely to orient action in the right direction (Bissell 2011). As explored in the previous chapter, such ideas have been challenged in powerful ways by perspectives that emphasise the intelligence of the sensing body and ways of knowing *without* (reflective) thinking (Dewsbury 2003). The question of how and where thought takes place is an invitation to rethink the geography of authority by reconceptualising the places of thinking (e.g. Bissell 2011; Dewsbury 2003; Roberts and Dewsbury 2021). It is striking, however, that critical theory, with all its emphasis on the body, tends to refer more to embodied *knowing* than embodied *thinking.* Yet an awful lot of thinking goes on that is not directly connected to knowledge. What, then, of the geography of thinking? Critiquing the image of thinking as a self-conscious internal dialogue, in this exercise we shall test the idea that thinking is much more than that, if we don't lose our way.

For this exercise you'll need to put your running shoes on. We won't do any thinking today without the help of rubber and ethylene vinyl acetate shielding

and cushioning our skin from this part of the skin of the city. The chapter performs an agility and mobility associated with running, and its style may be marked by inconsistencies, drifting off, slipping up, slowing down, speeding up, and shifting from lightness to heaviness (taking inspiration from Tan 2020). Let's start off nice and slow: I'm rather unfit. Nothing too draining, just perfect for letting thoughts drift and circle and swerve. I have spent far too much time sitting at my desk recently, my thoughts and words becoming slow and bogged down. While running, my thoughts flow in a different way, tuned by the atmosphere of the path, oriented by the weather, the ground, the sounds of birds or the rhythms of music in my headphones, and sometimes quietening altogether. I find myself here thinking about how, by responding to different kinds of authority, thinking itself might become a space of mixture and plurality, of multiple passages between inside and outside, body and environment.

Thinking with your sole

As we run, feel yourself becoming more sensitively attuned to the surfaces under your feet, to small changes in the weather, to your skin as it begins to sweat, to the rhythms of your breathing. Below the surface of consciousness, your running body becomes 'a loose-limbed assembly of kinetic intelligence' (Lorimer 2012, p. 86). Your foot, as the main point of contact between body and earth, is highly sensitive: the sole is an important sensory organ. If you are running with good form, your foot will find the ground before the weight of the body is upon it. Then the foot has a moment to sense the surface, and to send messages to the brain via the tibial nerve. This helps orient the body to manage variations in the terrain, and to achieve the remarkable feat of – mostly – remaining upright (Viseux 2020). What kind of thought is happening as the body reacts to these variations in the skin?

In 1953, Hannah Arendt gave a lecture at New York University titled *Breakdown of Authority*, the notes of which are preserved in the Arendt archive in New York. Arendt tells her students that despite the breakdown of traditional authority and of sacred foundations, vestiges of authority can still be found in the law and the expert. Yet these figures subordinate authority to the rule of *movement* and *things.* According to her lecture notes:

> This breakdown of authority representative of breakdown of all personal authority. We have still remnants of authority in Law and Expert. But the expert no real person who takes responsibility. He is supposed to know and through him the things themselves take command … His authority has kept growing; he is in absolute command (Arendt 1953).

So: things are running things now. When things take charge, Arendt views it as a de-politicising replacement of democratic *opinion* (including authority)

by coercive *truth*. Whereas opinions can be judged and seen in various aspects from different points of view, truth has a despotic character, since it is unchangeable: politics cannot change what is true, even if it wanted to (Barbi 2018). Yet could there not be a different lesson to learn from the growing authority of things? Arendt assumes that for things to take charge, this really means that the 'experts' appointed to speak for them take charge. What, though, if things *themselves* call out to me, make demands on me, lure me, guide me, issue imperatives to me? And what if I in turn, can be augmented, enriched, enlivened, by responding to their demands? Perhaps the distribution of authority beyond the human offers more hopeful futures than Arendt's vision of a destruction of the political by the repetitive rhythms of the social.

We are finding our pace now, and seem to be roughly in sync, keeping nice and slow, maintaining a conversation. I enjoy conversations while running: they can drift more freely and jump around and can also slow into silence without embarrassment. The dialogue flows easily and gently. Ideas come and go. Everything is held lightly.

In Western philosophy, the figure of 'thinking' is very closely linked to authority, insofar as thinking is associated with the bounded, sovereign subject. In the 1600s, Descartes answered the problem of how we can truly know anything with the suggestion that the one thing I can be sure of is that I am a thinking thing (*res cogitans*). Descartes' mind–body dualism makes thinking a figure of absolute interiority, in contrast to the substantial body, the *res extensa*. For him, thinking is the foundation of knowledge – of epistemic authority – and thus the bounded, interior, self-conscious subject becomes the single and fixed point of knowledge. This epistemological authority is soon translated into other kinds of authority, since the rigid division of subject and object created by Descartes justifies the notion that human subjects should be 'masters and possessors' of objective nature. Later, Kant's characterisation of thinking created an even more anthropocentric vision of the world, a 'Copernican revolution' where reality itself comes to revolve around the thinking self, since it is reason that bears the transcendental power to give spatial, temporal, causal, and purposive form to reality. Kant also places thinking at the heart of the meaning of Enlightenment. He identifies Enlightenment with the ability to think for yourself, without the guidance of another. Thus, thinking would make following authority – reverting to 'tutelage', a childlike state of immaturity – unnecessary and shameful. Foucault has shown how Enlightenment thus establishes a false dichotomy between two types of thinking: reasoned (Enlightenment) and irrational (authority). Foucault refers to this as a kind of 'blackmail' where one is forced to accept a

> simple and authoritarian alternative: you either accept the Enlightenment and remain within the tradition of its rationalism … or else you criticise the Enlightenment and then try to escape from its principles of rationality (Foucault 1984b, p. 43; see Osborne 1998).

Perhaps being childlike and immature is not the worst thing for thinking things. I recall Walter Benjamin (2005) writing about the 'mimetic faculty', and the astonishing ability of children imaginatively to inhabit the life of inanimate objects. An important step in pluralising authorities is pluralising the figure of thinking, or what Deleuze (1994) calls the 'image of thought'. So let's steer the question towards thinking about thinking as a spatial practice. If thought is not located 'inside' a subject with a clear, fixed boundary, where is it? To repeat a question asked by Arendt (1978): where am I when I think?

Listening being

As we pass through the tunnel, who can resist the urge to sing, to call out, to snap our fingers, to ask the landscape to 'speak' back to us? Landscape responds to human presence in ways that are dynamic and dispersed. Click your fingers, and the landscape responds to you (Blesser and Salter 2009, p. 16). Sing a few notes in the tunnel, and the space returns your echoes. I am a source of sound, but not a source of light; listening enables a more reciprocal way of thinking with things. Coming out of the tunnel, hear how the more open space changes the sound, subtly emphasising certain resonances and timbres. Or stay silent, and the landscape also is silent. We are immersed in the landscape's aural response, which has no clearly discernible location (Blesser and Salter 2009, p. 16).

We are aiming in this exercise to practise thinking as something that does not just occur 'inside the head', but through engaging with the landscape, with the human and nonhuman thinking things that we encounter on the way. Practising thinking as listening, we are not questing for certainty, closure, identity, representation, or the familiar (Lipari 2010, p. 359). Listening as a form of thinking helps to counter the often abstract, distanced, totalising engagement associated with other kinds of thinking. Unlike vision, for example, sound demands to be heard, and rebuffs attempts to reduce its complexity from visual distance. Sound 'keeps on being demanding and presses for a different criticism' (Voegelin 2010, p. 27). By listening to the landscape, out thinking is oriented by landscape encountered as a 'mosaic' of heterogeneous sensuous spaces (Serres 2015a, p. 155). We are learning to recognise new authorities, complex calls and demands, knotted temporalities. We respond to things, and witness things responding to our actions. Listening reveals a landscape that is made up of a cacophony of calls, reaching out to us, provoking us, making demands upon us (Lingis 1998).

Running/thinking

It has started to rain, and our conversation has stilled, as we focus on our movements along the increasingly slippery route. The rain is cooling, and the sensation on the skin is pleasing to me. For a few minutes we try to dodge the

puddles until our feet are wet enough that we just charge through them. Do our thoughts also become more fluid? I become lost in a stream of consciousness, a torrent of ideas, ideas flowing past each other in a rush. Might running be reconfigured as a poetic spatial practice for exploring how we engage with self and others, how we think and write (Tan 2020)? Can running help the practice of thinking respond to the demands and provocations of nonhuman 'things'?

As we run, my attention is drawn to the skin: sensing the variations in the ground, sweating, cooling, prickling, rubbing. How does thinking also take place on the skin? Might thinking inhabit the boundaries of the self, the topological surface where inside and outside mingle, mix, and transform one another? Could doing so relocate authority away from the individual subject as spatial 'centre', towards more diffuse spatial forms?

The boundaries of the self are commonly figured through skin. Pile (2021) explores the psychoanalytical idea that the ego is modelled on the infant's experience of skin, and is a mental projection of skin. But if the ego provides a psychic skin that envelopes the body and makes it coherent, thus giving a three-dimensional 'shape' to the ego, this covering is rarely complete. Pile draws on Bick's (1968) argument that infants, when feeling a sense of incoherence, disintegration, or inability to distinguish interior and exterior worlds (perhaps due to the absence of a caregiver), patch themselves up with a kind of improvised 'second skin'. As the ego comes to function as a skin, acting 'as a boundary, a wrapping, an interface, a protective covering, a permeable layer, a filter, a sense organ, and so on' (Pile 2021, p. 56), it acquires a three-dimensional shape, but one that frequently needs to patched up and sewn together. This can lead to what Pile calls a clash of bodily regimes, where skin, skin–ego, and second skin chafe against each other. In this way, the experience of our multiple skins becomes a key psychological ground of the experience and practise of authority. I am energised by the possibility of finding in skin a new, plural, nonauthoritarian model of authority.

Descartes did his thinking in isolation, in a simple, cosy, stove-warmed room. Kant too did his best thinking in the warmth: he is said to have spent much of his evenings thinking whilst sitting next to the stove and gazing out of the window at the steeple of Löbenicht church (Wasianski 1804). Michel Serres points out that Descartes' spatial act of thinking, creating a semi-sacred space for thought in which the possibility of conversation, communication, and interruption are eliminated, as well as all weather and all movement, is fully congruent with his *style* of thinking, which simplifies the object of study by eliminating anything that is mixed, obscure, or confused (see Watkin 2020). Much the same could be said for Kant and his need to have a fixed, single point of view to orient his meditations. Of course, thinking has its place outside too: there is a long philosophical genealogy linking thinking to walking (Gros 2014). Yet walking allows thinking to move at a comfortable pace, and to remain comfortably within the boundaries of the skin. Running encourages a style of thinking that is more dynamic, active, fluid, and accident-prone. As

running begins to oxygenate the cells in my body, imaginative possibilities start opening up. As I wonder where I am when I think, many ideas quickly present themselves. I am in my body. I am in the elements, responding to their call. I am in a rhythm of repetitive contact between sole and ground, step by step, step by step; I am in my lungs, struggling a little; I am in my quadricep and calf muscles, beginning to heat up. I am a body in a state of invention.

'Where am I when I think?'

Arendt (1978) asks a question that turns out to be central to her late political theory, which can be read as a kind of response to what she earlier diagnosed as a breakdown of metaphysical authority: 'where am I when I think?'. In a couple of pages of *The Life of the Mind*, she runs at breakneck speed through a multitude of spatial images of thought. When thinking, I am nowhere (Arendt 1978, p. 200). I am homeless. I am in the void (1978, p. 200). Thinking is an activity of withdrawing from the world, and thereby makes possible an *inter-ruption* of the world: a new birth. Then Arendt moves on to suggest another image: when I think, I am on a 'thought train' (1978, p. 201). If this makes me think of doom-scrolling on my commute to work, Arendt has in mind the movements of a 'train of thought', a movement that she believes is always discursive, linguistic, and metaphorical. The train metaphor would also suggest that thinking is linear: travelling at a diagonal, as she puts it (Arendt 1978, p. 209). Soon, Arendt offers yet another image. When I think, I am in the 'quiet of the now in the time-pressed, time-tossed existence of man' (1978, p. 209). Or finally: I am in the 'quiet in the center of a storm which, totally unlike the storm, still belongs to it. In this gap between past and future, we find our place in time when we think' (1978, p. 209). Arendt's approach to the life of the mind and her notion of thinking as a kind of temporal break seems to dematerialise and disembody the activity of thinking. This separation of thinking from the world of appearances fails to recognise the extent to which thinking itself is a spatial practice that is worldly and world-making.

For Arendt, the place of thinking, this quiet potential-filled interval between past and future, is put in danger by the breakdown of Western metaphysical/traditional authority. In some ways, authority doesn't prevent thinking but protects a space for thinking, a space where withdrawing from the world is possible. The collapse of authority risks creating a space for forms of totalitarianism that are only possible when people s*top* thinking. Arendt's analysis of fascism emphasises its thoughtlessness – its use of clichés, stock phrases, slogans, and conventional codes of expression. This thoughtlessness functions as a kind of insulation from plurality, and hence a retreat from reality. It is an aestheticisation of the sense of reality. Thinking is an *exposure* to reality, not a protection from it, and Arendt insists that thinking is a practice that must be demanded from every person. This demand to think has nothing to do with intelligence or stupidity (a point later developed in very interesting

ways by Rancière 1991). Whereas 'intelligence' is a value-laden attribute that is socially produced through unequal power relations, thinking is an imperative deriving from the condition of natality and the miraculous capacity to interrupt the flow of the world. In the wake of the breakdown of metaphysical authority, thinking is a crucial practice for exposing subjects to reality, since thinking is an essential part of the capacity to see the world from the perspective of plurality: of multiple points of view of a common world.

Yet as our feet leave the bouncy stiffness of the asphalt, up a muddy hill, getting into our stride, finding our pace, breathing harder, must we not affirm that thinking most often occurs in a messy, muddy, mixed space of many rhythms and directions and shapes, not in a calm space of withdrawal from the world? As we run, I find it hard to imagine thinking as a diagonal; it feels more like slipping and sliding … breathlessly holding open a space between past and future, yes, but also encountering it as a chaotic, noisy space in which we respond to the authority of many competing calls. The run is becoming tiring now, and conscious thought is beginning to dissolve, becoming absorbed into the flow of aching muscles, laboured breathing, responses to the uneven ground and the variations in the weather.

Much thinking about the spatialities of thinking, or how thinking takes place, works with a resolutely anti-Cartesian notion of thinking as an immediate, embodied, non-representational process. A key idea here is that making sense of reality is not always a question of manipulating representational words and images, that intelligence is distributed and relational, and that making sense of the world is a practice that involves a multitude of nonhuman participants. Percept and affect, perceiving and feeling, *are* forms of thought. From this perspective, attention to embodied movement is important because it leads us to pluralise the practices and processes that we count *as* thinking (McCormack 2014).

From a vitalist point of view, thinking is a manifestation of a vital force that courses through the non-organic life of sensation (Roberts and Dewsbury 2021, p. 10). This idea dramatically separates thinking from human self-consciousness, seeing it instead as a shock from outside that is registered through sensation. In stark contrast to Arendt's curiously de-spatialised way of figuring both thinking and authority, which appears to reproduce an Enlightenment investment in thinking as something intrinsically benevolent or progressive, Deleuze imagines thinking as 'the claws of a strangeness or an enmity which alone would awaken thought from its natural stupor or eternal possibility' (Deleuze 1994, p. 139). Thinking, here, is not a defence against irrational violence, but is itself a kind of creative violence on the self. All thought is involuntary thought, arising through – or rather, *as* – visceral encounters. Thought trespasses on the body from the outside. Descartes was wrong: we cannot count on the certainty of a self-conscious thinking self; we can only count on the contingency of encounters which *force* thought to occur (Deleuze 1994, p. 139). Something forces us to think.

I wonder if we have two different visions of things taking charge in play here, and two different visions of plurality. In one version (Arendt's), things taking charge means that thinking pauses, and truth (despotic, unitary, authoritarian) starts to rule over opinion (plural, democratic, nonauthoritarian). In the vitalist version (Deleuze's), things taking charge means that things trespass upon and do violence to body and self, but it is this intense embodied encounter that *forces* thought.

Something *provokes* me to think

Anyway, here we are, running together, thinking hard but very much in the world. I am tired now, and sweating, and feeling a rush of energy, though I am beginning to get a tingling feeling on the skin of my hands, and I know I will start to crash in a few minutes. So let's enjoy it while it lasts. I'm not sure my sporadic jogging regime has ever allowed me to reach the kind of ecstatic 'flow state' that regular long distance runners speak of (Koski 2015), but my body feels light, and sensitive, and open to a plurality of sensations, calls, demands, and lures from the wooded landscape we are now running through. I do not feel like my thinking is either withdrawing from the world or that the world is forcing anything upon me. Rather, as I run through the trees, I respond to the sensory and affective demands of the landscape's materials, objects, and atmospheres. I remember Lingis's (1998) description of how human sensation awakes immersed in a sensory, elemental field. I feel my body reaching out into the support offered by the ground; I respond to the qualities of the light and the weight of the shadows; I become increasingly sensitive to the feeling of warmth or cold, and to the dampness of the atmosphere; I listen to the birds, and look out for kingfishers or sparrowhawks as I run along the banks of the Frome river. I feel that all the elements of the landscape are calling out to me, making demands of me to witness their exuberant *appearance* in the world. The joy of sensation, here, comes from a reaching away from myself, from perception, from affection, and exercising freedom by responding to the directives from the environment (Lingis 1998, p. 4). This seems to me less a question of violence (as Deleuze suggests) than one of *authority*: the body, *a* body, responds (or not) to the calls, demands, and summons of nonhuman life and materials. The materiality of things, write Anderson and Wylie (2009), is 'interrogative': questioning, demanding, inciting, provoking. This seems to me a better vocabulary than violence. To the extent that we respond to these questions, and respect them, our ways of listening to and responding to nonhuman things are co-constructing a new form of authority: distributed, elemental, material, inventive, resolutely plural.

My legs are tired, now, and I am becoming careless. I slip in the mud, and find myself spreadeagled on the floor. No damage done. And isn't this how thought works: the subject thrown before the object, humiliated in front of it? Michel Serres observes that the etymological origin of 'subject' in Latin

(*sub–jectus*) 'designates someone thrown underneath, trampled, pillaged, stoned, lynched, sacrificed' (Serres 2018, p. 140). Thinking is not in the head, but is a muddy mess emerging out of humiliation and humus, and a willing abasement of the subject. Thinking is not the foundation that underpins the authority of the sovereign subject; thinking is what allows the subject to be born, or reborn, to begin again, in and out of its very disappearance. Thinking is a figure of birth: through thinking, we are born again and again. Yet the subject can appear only if it disappears, annihilated by the object (Serres 2014, p. 121).

Here, we are pluralising both birth and mortality. We are also taking a different angle on Arendt's worry that things themselves now command too much authority. My subjectivity is a subjection, an act of humility to the object, that occurs through the act of thinking. Thinking does not, as Arendt suggests, withdraw me from the world, but throws me willingly and joyfully before the object. Thinking is not coerced as Deleuze implies; much of the time, nothing at all *forces* me to think. Thinking is a response to authority, to the plural, heterogeneous calls of multiple human and nonhuman actors. Things lure me, entice me, entreat me to think. Yes, maybe they force me too, sometimes, but when they do so, this is a kind of coercion (whether benign or harmful), not nonauthoritarian plurality. Mostly, things are not taking control; but things *are* calling out to me, making demands of me, and asking questions of me, and I would be wise to respond to these calls. The border between subject and object is never fixed; complex social practices, through substitution, displacement, and exclusion, redistribute the relation between subject and object. Authority has *never* really been founded on sacred, permanent foundations; its foundations are fragments, movements, gaps, drift (Lehtonen 2020).

Thinking, as a response to the demands of landscape, is partly a question of attentiveness. Yet embodied attention is always selective; it is impossible to attend to everything, and some things are necessarily foregrounded and others ignored (Hannah 2019). Some demands acquire more weight in perception than others, and this selection process – which interrogatives are listened to, which are merely heard, and which are silenced altogether – is a deeply political question. Inequalities are folded into perception. After all, if 'things are exorbitantly exhibitionist' (Lingis 1998, p. 68), and each thing makes demands on us, then many of these demands must be left unheard. The cacophony of calls that make demands on us require perception and sensation to exercise judgement: not a conscious, discursive judgement, but a material, sensuous judgement that is part and parcel of the life of the sensation. Each thing summons us into its own setting; it also asks us to turn our attention away from the others. In responding to the authority of things, embodied thinking *evaluates* what levels to attune to and which demands to respond to. Landscape, as a form of authority, is an unequal patterning of attention. No matter how open I aim to be towards the multiplicity of landscape, I will never be able to attend to everything. Most of a landscape's demands, questions,

and provocations go unanswered. Authority is folded into thinking through the channelling of attention, which attends to some elements, and casts off the rest as 'social dark matter': 'the weighty mass of what we are not doing, not engaging with actively, critically or creatively, *at any and every moment*' (Hannah 2019, p. 176).

Comfort as thoughtlessness

Oh dear, I'm too unfit for this, let's pause for a breather and a drink of water. As we think with things, trying to allow things to enter thought, I try to orient my attention to new phenomena, bringing some elements of 'social dark matter' into the light. But as we rest, I find myself returning to my subjective interior. I am conscious of my own limitations: of what I don't, can't, or won't hear or think. Reflecting on my positionality, I remind myself that as a white, able-bodied, middle-aged man, it is easy to forget how well this place fits me, and how comfortable I am within it. The railway path is oriented towards activities (running, cycling, commuting, pram-pushing) that fit seamlessly into my social world. I rarely feel uncomfortable. I have few worries about being attacked, harassed, or abused, or of wearing the wrong clothes, or of taking up too much space. I feel entitled to use the path and to take up space on the path, and for my children to do the same (even when they occasionally take up space in ways that are inconvenient for others). This comfort, this wearing of a space like a well-fitting sweater, is a kind of thoughtlessness. I inhabit a 'somatic norm' (Puwar 2004), a form of authority that grants me a largely undisputed right to occupy the space, but in doing so, makes many aspects of the place silent to me. I know, of course, that some bodies do not fit so well. My whiteness, for example, 'is an orientation that puts certain things within reach … not just physical objects, but also styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits.' (Ahmed 2006, p. 126). One aspect of the embodied experience of whiteness is the feeling of living and working in a place that fits me well, where my 'corporeal schema' is not reduced to an 'epidermal schema' (Fanon 1986), where place is contoured to my own habits and orientations and thoughts.

As we stand here, resting, I am becoming increasingly conscious of my thoughtlessness, a result of my situated, intersectional orientation towards the world. I have read Facebook posts reporting episodes of racial abuse occurring on the path; but I have never witnessed one, let alone experienced one myself. I read reports of assaults on the path, and know that the path can feel threatening or uncomfortable; but I have never suffered any anxiety about it myself. I know that many disabled people report feeling unsafe using the path, but I have never experienced this. I hear the landscape speaking to me, yet I have to remind myself that there is much 'social dark matter' that remains unheard due to my limited orientations and perspectives. I strive to multiply thought but am paralysed by the task.[1]

Thinking with the skin

We are nearly home now, slowing down, breathing heavily, and everything is laboured and sodden. My feet are sore and unresponsive, feeling weighed to the ground. I start noticing scratches and bruises on my legs; I don't know where or when I received them. I find myself circling back to Arendt's question: where *am I* when I think?

I return to the feelings on my skin. Many of us like to imagine our skin as defining the boundaries of the self. Things that visibly leak through this boundary – sweat, spit, blood, snot, vomit, pus, mucus, sperm, faeces, urine – often provoke disgust or horror (Kristeva 1982). (A fascinating exception to this is tears; see Brinkema 2014.) Skin is seen as a meeting place – and defensive wall – between self and other, between interiority and exteriority, between being and world. Skin is a central metaphor for the idea of the self as bounded and sovereign. But what if the skin, far from marking a limit at which self ends, were a mixed and plural surface that connects a chorus of subjectivities, objectivities, and sensations? What if the skin were a porous, topological surface, the place where exchanges are made, where encounters occur, where sense and the senses mingle? What if the skin were 'a developing, composite mixture of body and soul', where 'the body traces the knotted, bound, folded, complex path, between the things to be known' (Serres 2008, p. 27)? A skin that folds into, through, and across the spatialities and temporalities of experience becomes not a container but a synthesiser of *relations*: plural, heterogeneous, sensuous (Manning 2013, pp. 1–2).

Thinking as a way of responding to the authority of things requires placing oneself between them, 'in the midst of their mixture, on the paths that unite them' (Serres 2008, p. 80), exploring how things touch each other, how they mingle, how they encounter the body, how they intersect. Skin is this surface of mixture, of mingling, of joy and pleasure and maybe a little humiliation before the object. Skin is both organic and inorganic, it is a surface where multiple materials, technologies, objectivities, and subjectivities touch, where I mix with the world which mixes with me. It is a surface of consciousness and language, but only fleetingly, sporadically. As a thinking thing, skin is sensuous, vulnerable, and exposed. It is so easy to puncture skin, just as thinking punctures the subject (Dewsbury 2007). Skin makes judgements and evaluations, not in a manner of a judge evaluating evidence, but through feeling, mixing, inventing, and attuning. Most of the time, thinking is not an internal monologue or a linear 'thought-train' (Arendt 1978); thinking slides around, it is sensuous and receptive, of the earth (humble) and of the skin (milieu) (Connor 2004; 2010b).

We have arrived home, and to be honest I think I've overdone it a bit. You've pushed me too hard. My muscles are aching and my heart is pounding. My skin has lost its tingling alertness, and is now itching and hurting and revealing all the stings and blisters acquired on the way. This is evidence, if any is needed, that this exercise in thinking has not taken place within the

closed borders of a bounded thinking subject. On this run, speculatively pluralising authority by pluralising thinking, we see that thinking is neither an interior internal dialogue nor something forced by the violent trespass of the outside. Instead, thinking revealed itself as a sensuous, selective response to the noisy calls of plural, heterogeneous calls and demands, both human and nonhuman. This response always excludes much more than it includes, always relegates most calls to the oblivion of social dark matter.

'What if', wonders Martin Savransky, 'we were to characterise this obscure art of thinking as a kind of adventure of wandering toward an "it thinks!", toward an event that is not simply awaiting the thinker but itself in the making, shaping the thinker that risks engendering it?' (Savransky 2018, p. 613). Similarly, Roberts and Dewsbury evoke modes of thinking that do not mediate a supposed chasm between subject and life, but search for the 'unrecognizable', exploring intensities of life that escape the boundaries of organic experience, becoming 'an expression of vital forces that takes shape in and through the non-organic life of sensation' (Roberts and Dewsbury 2021, p. 7). As a thinking skin, humiliating itself before the object and moving towards the 'it thinks', thinking enacts a nonauthoritarian authority whenever it becomes capable of crafting an art of listening to the strange, plural, unrecognisable calls of human and nonhuman others (Brigstocke and Noorani 2016a).

The next two chapters, guided by my learning in this exercise about responding to nonhuman materials, take things a step further, staging an exercise in responding to the authority of a nonhuman material, sand, that has played a key role in the architecture of colonial authoritarianism in Hong Kong. Yet by listening to the forms of movement within sand's granular flow, I hope it may become possible to uncover hidden forms of authority in the gaps between things.

Note

[1] I am guided here by Kincaid's argument that, 'In ontological frameworks like post-phenomenology, [the] task of accounting for positionality is both necessary and urgent. Because such paradigms are concerned with ontology – what the world is – it becomes ever more important that we do not abandon critical concepts of epistemology which necessarily shape the kinds of ontologies we construct and relate to' (Kincaid 2021, p. 6). However, in dwelling on the limitations of my listening skills in this space of everyday authority, I suggest that this attenuated perception and experience is not quite ontological *or* epistemological: it is neither about the nature of reality nor the possibilities of knowledge. Rather, it is aesthetic: it is embodied through the way reality presents itself to the senses – including the 'sense for reality' – and makes itself available to selection, judgement, and evaluation.

9. Granular authority, bureaucracy, and the aesthetics of sand in colonial Hong Kong

This chapter is a speculative exercise in pluralising nonauthoritarian authority through responding to the authority of nonhuman materials. My aim is to outline a materialist analysis of authority via a discussion of the unstable grounds of a unique city associated with British colonial and Chinese neo-colonial authoritarianism. Hong Kong is a key site of experiments in 20th century capitalism, taking a role in the vanguard of neoliberal urbanism, even if it actually departed from the path taken by dominant strains of neoliberalism in some important ways. Hong Kong, perhaps more spectacularly than any other city, dramatises the centrality of land and land reclamation to the reproduction of colonial authority. Hong Kong is a city that existed between the 1997 handover over sovereignty to China and the 2020 National Security Law in a strained space 'between colonialisms' (governed through the unique 'one country, two systems' agreement, recognising China's sovereignty but guaranteeing Hong Kong's relative independence). In Hong Kong, grounds are perpetually claimed, reclaimed, concretised, and destabilised. Thinking with the materialities of Hong Kong's urban infrastructure, I will draw attention to the role of a distinctive material, sand – granular, unstable, multiple – in the story of Hong Kong's colonial foundations. Spatially, the chapter uncovers the hidden granular spatialities latent below the concrete skin of the city. The writing in the next chapter will attempt to *grind down* these concrete surfaces through devious drifts, ghoulish accretions, and granular flows. It tackles the sandiness of power, the surfaces of authority, and the multiplication of grounds. It inhabits interstitial states between solid, liquid, and gas. It cultivates a sense for reality by analysing and dramatising forms of reclamation: reclamations of land from sea; reclamations of identity, minerality, memory, futures, truth. If there is a turbidity or cloudiness to the writing, this comes from an attempt to think with and through the drift of sand through water, land, and air. This means styling a speculative, nonauthoritarian authority through attentiveness to nonhuman agency, mixture, and difference. Above all, it requires a speculative experiment with responding to the authority of the granular materials that constitute a key part of the infrastructural life of the city. The argument will contest or undermine the reduction of authority to urban spectacle in Hong Kong's monumental high-rise urban landscapes. It also critiques the consolidation of authority through the 'spatial fix' of land reclamation,

at the intersection of rationalisation (rule by bureaucratic authority) and myth (the illusion that profit can appear magically out of nowhere, simply by pouring concrete into the sea). In their place, it offers a speculative vision of a kind of topological authority that is not tied to a territorial centre, but to *granular flow*. By seeking authority in the gaps between things, in the latent potential for granular, semi-choate fluidity implicit within all consolidated concrete structures, the chapter's conceptualisation of authority seeks an affinity with the spatialities of the 'water revolution' of 2019–2020, which erupted in protest against a new extradition law which would undermine human rights protection in Hong Kong, since citizens could henceforth be deported to China at any time.

Part 1 of the chapter starts by linking authority to debates around the elements and around nonhuman agency, before moving on to discuss the specific material that is the focus of this chapter: sand. The next two sections offer a critique of authoritarian colonial authority in Hong Kong, focusing on the importance of bureaucratic authority and land reclamation for the colony. Part 2 of the chapter is an exercise in responding creatively to the authority of sand's granular flows through an archival study of the Colonial Sand Monopoly. The exercise begins by portraying contemporary Hong Kong as a ruined sandscape of authority: a dynamic heap of pulverised rock and eroded life. We then move on to consider the aesthetics of sand. The final two sections intersperse a historical geography of the Hong Kong Sand Monopoly with contemporary debates around Hong Kong's ongoing sand supply crisis, as well as responding to the events of the water revolution. In doing so, I search for conceptual forms that respond to the authority of sand by locating the granular life hidden within concretised, solid aesthetics of the modern (post)-colonial city.

PART ONE

Thinking elementally

My aim in this chapter is to ask how thinking with sand may help disclose and contest the common in new ways, thereby helping to amplify a sense for reality by attuning to the authority of fluid, shifting, plural, and fragmented grounds. In doing so, my aim is to experiment with cultivating a sense for reality that emerges by imaginatively listening to a plurality of human *and* nonhuman actors. What happens, I wish to ask, if I consent to a strange experiment in petromorphism, enabling thinking to happen by humiliating myself before a heap of ground-down stone and shell? Or, '[w]hat if stone, so often thought uncommunicative in the density of its materiality, can also be affect-laden, garrulous, animated?' (Cohen 2015, p. 51). Reanimating a sensitivity to the charismatic nonhuman authority of sand may perhaps reveal sand as 'a substance possessed of mobility, artistry, desire, story' (Cohen 2015 p. 53), even as

I translate such a pre-modern sensibility into a distinctively modern story of capitalist urban development, colonial and neo-colonial extraction, and post-colonial revolt.

Spatial theory has recently taken increasing interest in the active agency of nonhuman materials in making up subjectivity, agency, and responsibility (Clark 2011; Cohen and Duckert 2015; McCormack 2018; Neimanis 2017; Peters, Steinberg, and Stratford 2018; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Weston 2017). This approach to theorising involves questioning the elemental presuppositions within the texture of thought. Our thought is not ours alone but is made of the things that assemble our lives and bodies, as well as those things that make our worlds thinkable. These things open our bodies up to experience, feeling, and sensation (Jackson and Fannin 2011). In the same way as I am a 'body of water' (Neimanis 2017), so I am a sandy body, since my body is already sandy, vitrified, concretised, cemented, and microchipped. Thinking with sand helps me to play closer attention to those granular materials that co-compose the human body and its forms of agency. I am also mindful that '[g]eology is a mode of accumulation, on one hand, and of dispossession, on the other, depending on which side of the geologic colour line you end up on' (Yusoff 2018, p. 15).

Formally, the writing in Chapter 10 learns from, but also departs from, traditions of narrating the city through montage (Benjamin 1999; Cresswell 2019; Goldsmith 2016; Pred 1995) and writing in fragments (McFarlane 2021). Walter Benjamin was attracted to montage (a violent juxtaposition of fragmentary materials) partly because it destroys the authority of the author. He envisaged new anarchic forms that build essentially fragmented experiences. In his fragmentary texts, authority becomes radically unavailable to the author (Benjamin 1999, 2016). The reader is left to sift through the fragments of meaning, to make their own connections, their own judgements, and hence to create their own forms of textual authority (Martel 2014, p. 8). However, I am not convinced of the possibility or desirability of fully dissolving the authority of the author (see Chapter 6). My hope, instead, is to style a form of speculative theorising that *multiplies* forms and sources of authority – including sources of authorial authority. Multiplying authority means recognising and affirming authority, not just in human relations and products, but in broader ecologies and nonhuman actions. So, thinking with the material agency of sand, I ask what journeys might come from taking its drifts and leaps as a source of authority: drawing on sand as guide, teacher, and as part of my own body. In doing so, I recognise and performatively enact a variety of nonauthoritarian authority that is multiple, mixed, unstable, fluid, and shape-shifting. What I hope to achieve is a rethinking of geographies of authority through a materialist reading of the colonial and post-colonial city, one that views Hong Kong through a lens that is focused on Hong Kong's multiple, fragmented, unstable, irreducibly *sandy*, grounds. (Lenses, too, are made of melted sand.)

Sand and the infrastructure of modernity

Sand, the most heavily consumed resource in the world after water and air, is a material that co-composes the infrastructure of modernity. With growing recognition of the serious environmental effects of sand mining, as well as the huge amount of greenhouse gases released through cement production, sand is now emerging as a neglected but urgent environmental issue (Beiser 2019; UNEP 2019). Sand also plays an important part in the constitution of daily life. It has a central role in tourism and recreation, for example (Carruthers and Dakkak 2020). Sand has a playful aspect to it, inviting imagination and creativity: for example, Jungian psychotherapy views sandplay, an embodied connection with the earth element, as a powerful window into the unconscious (Bradway and McCoard 1997). At the same time, sand is the base for materials such as cement and concrete which 'bind urban politics, the environment, the economy and the quotidian practices of urban dwellers' (Choplin 2020, p. 1979). Urban infrastructures in modernity are ever more reliant on sand. Sand is an important component of concrete, cement, glass, asphalt, microchips, and much else, from toothpaste to wine (Beiser 2019; UNEP 2019). This reliance on sand is amplified in cities whose infrastructures are tied to huge land reclamation projects that pour vast quantities of concrete into the sea to create new land. In fact, shortages of sand are now acquiring a prominent place in global geopolitics and environmental debates. The baleful environmental and social impacts of sand extraction for export to sand-hungry countries such as Hong Kong and Singapore have led countries in Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, to ban exports of sand.

Through an archival exploration of Hong Kong's Colonial Sand Monopoly, this chapter documents the importance of sand for securing the authoritarian authority of the British Empire, and in recent years, of China. A key argument is that sand was (and is) the material foundation for the concrete used in Hong Kong's vast land reclamation projects, themselves a key foundation of the economic growth that (supposedly) legitimised the colonial bureaucracy's authority. Thus a steady supply of sand was a necessary condition for the continuing authority of the colonial administration, a condition that was challenging to meet at key times in Hong Kong's history, and also in the present day. In contrast to commonplace ways of seeing sand as infinite and without history – which enable the sense that land reclamation magically creates land and profit out of nothing – I foreground the role of sand extraction in forms of colonial and neo-colonial dispossession and enclosure, adding to a body of work emphasising the materialities of state enclosure and accumulation by dispossession in imperial history (Harris 2004; Harvey 2005; Vasudevan, McFarlane, and Jeffrey 2008). Such dispossessions must be seen in the context of Hong Kong's distinctive forms of colonial domination, which worked through a racialised aesthetics of anti-political bureaucratic authority. Bureaucratic government in Hong Kong worked through a

continual production of space by concretising and consolidating fluid matter, creating relatively stable quasi-grounds for endless growth and accumulation. All this was grounded in an aesthetic regime of aloofness, efficiency, and racial superiority.

After contextualising and theorising the study in Part 1, Part 2 presents an experimental form that attunes itself to the authority of sand's distinctive materialities and forms of flow. Through a disjointed narrative form that resonates with sand's distinctive form of movement, a kind of hopping motion called saltation, I strive to think with and through sand as a guide for learning to see and encounter the modern city. This speculative pluralisation of authority treats sand as a guide rather than as an inert material. Attuning itself to sand's nature as mixture and multiplicity, and elaborating a kind of granular spatial theory influenced by Michel Serres, the chapter searches for ways of finding authority, not in spectacle, territory, monumental architecture, or transcendent foundations, but in *drift*: more precisely, the semi-choate and the in-between, the minimal angle of deviation between equilibrium and chaos (Serres 2000). Such a speculative account of authority demands a new way of engaging with the narrative forms of critical theory, imaginatively enacting sand's distinctive forms of drift in the logics, rationalities, and spaces of critical analysis.

First, before moving onto the story of sand's key role in the infrastructural life of colonial Hong Kong, it is necessary to understand the distinctive forms of bureaucratic authority that have governed Hong Kong for much of its history.

Bureaucratic authority, imperialism, and race

Authority in a colonial city such as Hong Kong was founded, to an extent with few historical parallels, on bureaucratic principles of efficiency, rationality, and economic growth. From its 19th century colonisation until the 1980s, when the British started to bring in limited democratic reform, Hong Kong was run as an autocracy, with a British civil servant at its head, at the top of a small (in number) but powerful layer of colonial bureaucracy that was dominated by the white minority. Hong Kong has been characterised as a 'pure administrative state' and as an 'ideal-type version' of the 'bureaucratic polity' (Harris 1988; Lau 1982). One author could write in the 1980s that:

> Hong Kong's bureaucracy is remarkable in its continuity, stability, efficiency in delivering services, respectable status in society, relative freedom from corruption, and political legitimacy. In a society characterized by sociocultural and ideological heterogeneity, the bureaucracy is a potent political institution maintaining order in society … The bureaucracy is the only repository of legitimate political authority in Hong Kong (Lau 1982, pp. 25, 27).

Colonial Hong Kong was characterised by an almost total monopoly of political power by the administrative bureaucracy. The white minority and various co-opted elites crafted an ideology of a perfectly efficient administrative and managerial state, with an aspiration to eliminate politics through administrative efficiency (Chiu 1997). Racial inequalities were a taken-for-granted aspect of this, with racial segregation enforced through zoning laws until 1946 (Lai and Yu 2001). Bureaucrats in colonial Hong Kong wielded an exceptional degree of authority. In the absence of any kind of democracy, civil servants not only implemented but also *made* policies, taking on the role of the politicians in Western democracies. The colony became synonymous with a paradigm of rational, efficient, effective, bureaucratic governance.

In Chapter 3 I critiqued Weber's influential account of bureaucratic authority. Here, I wish to consider an alternative analysis of bureaucratic authority. Hannah Arendt's analysis of bureaucratic authority connects it closely to the racial logics of imperialism. In the 19th and 20th centuries, Arendt suggests, politics became reconceptualised as the administration of society conceived as dynamic life processes. Life became the ultimate value in modernity, but usually it is the life of society that is valued (such as its dynamic economic processes, as well as social welfare), rather than the lives of individuals. This lent itself to bureaucratic domination: state and government gave way to politics as pure administration, a move that effectively destroys the political space of appearance (Arendt 1998, p. 45).

> As we know from the most social form of government, that is, from bureaucracy … the rule by nobody is not necessarily no-rule; it may indeed … even turn out to be one of its crudest and most tyrannical versions (Arendt 1998, p. 40).

Arendt's account of bureaucracy aligns with recent accounts of 'biopolitical' authority emphasising the importance of the life process for modern authority (Blencowe 2012) and can be contrasted with the tradition of Weberian sociology, where modernity's dominant form of authority is bureaucratic and rational, largely supplanting traditional and charismatic forms of authority. According to Weber, bureaucracy is characterised by instrumental, calculative modes of reason, and is rules based, transparent, and impersonal (Weber 1968). Arendt similarly focuses on the dominance of instrumental reason, from which individual moral and aesthetic judgement – and hence plurality – is excluded. Unlike Weber, however, Arendt emphasises the importance of imperialism and racism to bureaucracy, arguing that it was in imperialism that bureaucratic forms of rule started to be developed to its extremes. Imperialism invented in different places structures of rule based on bureaucracy (e.g. Egypt) and racism (e.g. South Africa). When the two logics were combined, this helped to shape the possibilities of totalitarianism (Arendt 1968). What differentiated modern imperialism from earlier colonialism was its pursuit of endless growth, which meant colonies were not thought of as

desirable ends in themselves, but as mere means for some larger historical purpose (Arendt 1968). This enabled bureaucracies that were ever more aloof, inhuman, and distanced from the people they governed. Imperial bureaucrats had little interest in their subjects but were motivated by their ambition to embody and nurture great, dynamic forces of historical progress, far greater than themselves. Such bureaucracies were contemptuous of politics, prizing quiet, impersonal, anonymous efficiency and effectiveness above all else.

Hong Kong's model of colonial government clearly exemplifies these logics of administrative authority, albeit through a modified post-war biopolitics where the life process would be increasingly conceptualised in terms of economic life. My goal is to reimagine the life of the colonial city, and to pluralise the authorities hidden within this universalising picture of efficiency and reason. First, however, it is necessary to understand the material foundations of Hong Kong's distinctive form of bureaucratic authority.

Land reclamation as the spatial foundation of Hong Kong's bureaucratic authority

It is no secret that Hong Kong's colonial development was centred on a political economy of land. Hong Kong is famous for its compact, high-density, high-rise 'volumetric' urban design (Shelton, Karakiewicz, and Kvan 2013), and for its exceptionally high land prices. Along with Singapore, Hong Kong is almost unique in its use of an economic model that combines very low taxation with a carefully managed land policy that relies on increasing land prices to generate large amounts of government revenue. The government owns almost all land, renting it to the highest bidder on 50-year leases. Release of land is carefully controlled and paced to ensure the highest possible revenue for the government. Land is allocated to the highest bidder: no other factors (e.g. whether a bidder has any plan to enrich Hong Kong's social, cultural, or environmental life) are considered.

Part of Hong Kong's mystique is its reputation, ever since the Opium Wars, as a bastion of swashbuckling, aggressive free trade, and as an experimental site for free-market policies that were often diametrically opposed to the policies enacted domestically by its colonial masters. This reputation was consolidated during its 'economic miracle' between the 1950s and 1970s, and by Milton Friedman's idealisation of 1970s Hong Kong as a paradigm of free-market capitalism in action. In fact, Hong Kong's economy was much less laissez-faire than the neoliberal ideologues portrayed. The state has carefully shaped and regulated Hong Kong's economy: for example, through a vast public housing and New Town programme which provides public housing to 28% of the Hong Kong population (Census and Statistics Department 2024); the construction of the MTR metro system (a very profitable private company, with the government as the major shareholder); and the control of food prices, for example through restrictions on the price of rice (Schiffer 1991).

Mizuoka's (2018) study of Hong Kong's political economy insightfully synthesises these two narratives into a picture of 'contrived laissez-faireism', which emphasises the role of the state in artificially creating and regulating the *conditions* for laissez-faireism. In Mizuoka's analysis, the bureaucratic colonial government of Hong Kong combined 'market fundamentalism' with careful control of the conditions of the market. The key mechanism that it used to achieve this was the control of land.

Hong Kong is known for its scarcity of land, which forces building ever further upwards. Yet anyone who takes a bus around Hong Kong's New Territories will immediately observe that there are large areas of brownfield land that are very sparsely developed. Moreover, three-quarters of Hong Kong is set aside as Country Parks that cannot be developed – despite Hong Kong planners showing scant interest in any other kind of environmental issue. Mizuoka (2018) argues that the colonial government long understood the benefits of deliberately creating land scarcity, which created the conditions for a fiercely competitive laissez-faire economy, and generated large amounts of government revenue from renting land at ever-increasing prices. This form of laissez-faireism leads to the dominance of large property developers in Hong Kong society. With land prices so high, only very large conglomerates with access to huge amounts of capital can afford to compete in the land auctions. This leads to the consolidation of property ownership amongst a handful of super-wealthy elites, who control the commercial sphere, and exert a disproportionate influence in the political sphere. As Poon (2011) recounts, Hong Kong is controlled by a handful of wealthy individuals and companies who benefit from, and have a powerful influence over, land and competition policies. Real estate is dominated by a small number of companies who control every aspect of supply, construction, and management, and who collaborate to shut out other entrants to the market. This culture of duopolistic competition was a crucial enabling factor for the continuing dominance of the white minority. Of the Chinese majority, the wealthy winners were co-opted into the colonial apparatus, whilst the losers did not see that their fate was a manipulated outcome of apparently laissez-faire competition. In this way, '[a] direct ethnic confrontation between the British and Chinese was thereby skilfully averted' (Mizuoka 2018, p. 255). Land thus becomes a key foundation of colonial bureaucratic authority.

Within this political economy of land, a pivotal role is played by land reclamation (Jamieson 2017, 2021). Land reclamation – the creation of new, perfectly flat land by pouring vast quantities of concrete into the sea – has been central to Hong Kong's development since the early colonial era (Ho 2018; Ng and Cook 1997). Major recent, ongoing, and proposed reclamation projects using money from the land premium include the US$18 billion new airport runway, the US$11 billion Guangzhou–Hong Kong high-speed railway link, the US$19 billion Hong Kong–Macau–Zuhai bridge, and the US$64 billion 'Lantau Tomorrow' artificial island construction project. Approximately 6% of Hong Kong is now reclaimed land, and

this land accommodates about 27% of Hong Kong's population, as well as 70% of its commercial activities.

Part of the emphasis on land reclamation over other means of land supply can be explained by the economic logic of the land premium (Ng 2006; Ng and Cook 1997). Because most lease revenue comes from the initial lease, the government has huge gains to make from developing new land rather than releasing existing land. Another reason is that land reclamation releases land in ways that minimise social conflict, dialogue, and negotiation. Developing brownfield or low-density land in the New Territories requires negotiating with large numbers of property owners, as well as encountering difficulties with indigenous land rights. As Grydehøj suggests:

> Land reclamation has become a favoured strategy for coastal and island city development in part because it is a means by which elite actors can create new urban spaces while bypassing many of the tensions and contestations that result from attempting to claim a portion of the existing urban space for new purposes (Grydehøj 2015, p. 107).

One of the most striking aspects of land reclamation is how it echoes colonial logics of *terra nullius*. Land reclamation has a kind of magical quality – appearing to create land, and hence profit, almost out of nothing at all. The purely 'rational' bureaucratic authority of the colonial state functions side by side with the more magical, mystical elements that are so often central to the workings of authority. Because reclaimed land appears to have no history, and is sustained by no memory, it seems to escape resistance to privatisation and enclosure (Grydehøj 2015). Land reclamation is a form of accumulation by dispossession that magically escapes conflict. In doing so it encloses possible futures – perhaps more egalitarian, anti-capitalist futures – from the urban sea space. This enclosure involves a homogenisation and centralisation of authority.

What, then, might it mean to pluralise authority in this context? My aim in Part 2 of this study is to challenge this enclosure by rejecting its sorcery, its witchcraft – its apparent capacity to create land and profit from nothing, without cost or harm to anyone. Of course, land reclamation does not really create land out of nothing. Thinking from a materialist perspective, we are reminded that land reclamation is made possible by the extraction, sale, transportation, and use of vast quantities of building materials, especially sand. Sand, far from coming from nowhere, is extracted through processes that can cause huge amounts of damage to local environments. Moreover, I will show that the history of colonial Hong Kong demonstrates not only the central importance of sand in the composition of authority in the territory, but also how sand was a key part of colonial dispossession. In the archives, we see evidence of sand extraction leading to the destruction of indigenous residents' land, fields, and livelihoods. In this sense, an exploration of the history of sand

in Hong Kong offers a window into the mechanisms of colonial rule, and the relation between construction, land reclamation, and accumulation by dispossession. This helps us see the contemporary geopolitics of sand in terms of a continuing series of enclosures and dispossessions.

The forms of theory

The task I set myself in Part 2 of the chapter is to theorise nonauthoritarian authority though a speculative form of writing that does not seek authority in stable foundations or solid ground, but recognises incipient forms of authority that are shifting, multiple, fragmented, and mixed. I do so through an ethos of attunement to the material agencies of sand. My question is whether thinking with the sandy substrate of Hong Kong might generate an analysis that disrupts the authority of Hong Kong's racialised aesthetics of extractive capitalism by unearthing unsettled, shifting grounds, working with the elemental swerve of matter (Serres 2000) to undermine material practices of consolidation and colonial closure. The essay is thus an exercise in pluralising authorities through attunement to, and recognition of, more-than-human materialities and temporalities (Brigstocke and Noorani 2016b). Working with ideas around granularity, mixture, and 'saltation' (a 'hopping' motion of granular flow), my intention is to pluralise authorities by working with the gaps and discontinuities between things – the tiny in-between spaces – and with the elemental drift of matter (Serres 2000).

Building arguments on such unstable, shifting ground demands ongoing critical engagement with the *forms* of theory (e.g. Berlant and Stewart 2019; Boyd and Edwardes 2019; Cresswell 2019; Kilby and Gilloch 2022; Magrane et al. 2019; McFarlane 2021; McKittrick 2020). Formal experiments are especially important in expressing the experiences of colonised people, where the ground of reality has already been destroyed, demanding expressive forms that can articulate and heal the wounds of systematic racism and dispossession. An importance influence on the chapter is Glissant's (1997) *Poetics of Relation*, which exemplifies a thinking from the shoreline: its forms constitute a tidal poetics formed from alluvial deposits of sand, silt, and mud (Wiedorn 2018). Glissant's writing is an invitation to a geo-philosophy that stylises a new kind of authority based on connecting flows of water, sand, time, bodies, violence, and memory.

In Part 2, the argument and narrative moves in hops and leaps: sometimes settling in heaps, sometimes swirling in the wind, sometimes clouding the water. Sand drifts in several ways, but its most common form of flow is the hopping motion referred to as saltation. Evoking this form of flow means styling a granular mode of presentation (Jamieson 2021, 2024), articulating sand as a semi-chaotic mixture of heterogeneous materials. This generates a discordant mixture of styles, voices, forms of expression, and narrative form. At times the writing is bound by the cement of theory and exegesis; at others,

it jumps around in its fluid medium. Some of the grains are tiny; others are large. Learning from the process of saltation and saltation bombardment (Warren 2013), the writing jumps across different voices, spaces, temporalities, and scales. It owes a debt to Benjaminian transfigurations of the city of modernity as ruin (Gassner 2019; Leslie 2006), but rather than blowing the city to rubble through montage, it transfigures it into a sandy *heap.* Once the wind stops blowing, saltating sand settles into intricately patterned heaps. The significance of this shift from rubble to heap is that it invites a different form, moving from Benjaminian shock and juxtaposition towards an aesthetics of connection, mimesis, and drift (Lavery, Pelissero, and Pinder 2018). In transfiguring the city as ruined sandscape, I stylise a more granular speculative reimagining of the city as a heap of pulverised matter: 'a spiraling, growing pile of pieces, parts, zones, fragments, slivers, particles, elements, outlines, seeds, kernels, clusters, points, meters, knots, arborescences, projections, proliferations, and dispersions' (Nancy and Barrau 2014, p. 52).

PART TWO

A cemetery of sandscapes

Follow me! Let me guide you around this fluid landscape, a landscape of concrete and cement and glass and light and sea and rock and trees and smoke and smog and cardboard. Let me show you this cemetery of rock and shell. Let your feet sink into the surface of things and feel

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Let me guide you around this hall of mirrors, its dense landscape of skyscrapers, gleaming in gold, grey, green, white, and blue, reaching out to each other in an endless circuit of distorted reflections. Buildings thrusting into the sky, vanishing in the clouds. What a spectacle! Each a miracle of engineering. Symphonies of sand, light, glass, air, information. Miracles of steel frames, reinforced concrete, outrigger systems, mega-columns, vast foundations six metres thick, tunnelling deep into a concrete sea that

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Let us begin in the noise: here, standing on an overpass on Harcourt Road, near the government buildings in Admiralty, looking out towards central Hong Kong. Peering out over 11 lanes of traffic, feel the noise rumble through your body, an arrhythmic din of cars, buses, and lorries, fossil fuels burning, horns sounding, crankshafts revolving at 2,000 revolutions a minute. Sinking into the surface of things, drifting through the dreamlives of debris (Olsen 2017), feel the traffic racing across a bed of sand. Below the black, uniform asphalt surface lies a teeming multiplicity of ground-down rock: quartz, feldspar,

amphiboles, micas, chalcedony, sanidine, orthoclase, microcline, plagioclase, muscovite, biotite, glauconite, pyroxene, all ground down over thousands of years, drifting inexorably towards the sea, their movement interrupted but not arrested. Supporting the weight of all this traffic is a sticky bituminous layer, somewhere between 28 and 50 cm thick, above additional layers of sand and gravel bound by cement. The bituminous layer must be thick enough, and the sandy sub-layer stable enough, to reduce the likelihood of failure (Hong Kong Highways Department 2013). For this, a thick concrete base layer is needed. All in all, about 90% of a road is made up of sand and gravel, reaching deep under the surface of the city towards

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Let me show you this city of two million discontented bodies surging through tightly packed streets, calling for democracy, freedom, and independence, opposing the recolonisation of Hong Kong by an authoritarian power. Two million people who refuse to see wealth creation as the sole reason for Hong Kong's existence, and who will drown out the violence of the police, gangs, and triads with songs of love, autonomy, and protest….

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violence, excess, chaos … noise. Noise is relation, passage, variation, invention. It is the groundwork of the possible; but it is also the excess of force that grinds it down (Serres 2008).

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The noise emerges from a riot of connected processes: noise from the engine, transmission, and exhaust; vibration of tyre walls; compression of air within the contact area of the tyre with the road surface; the snapping out of tread blocks as they leave the road surface (Hong Kong Highways Department 2016). Every moment, dozens of vehicles pass under your feet, all the same but also each one unique, a varied mixture of colours, sizes, sounds, speeds, passengers, and moods. In the sultry Hong Kong heat, bouncing off the surface of the road, they are like grains of sand in a concrete desert. Some lorries are so slow and heavy that the bridge trembles underneath you. The desert soon narrows into new gulleys of cement, as if carved out by a glacier and frozen into a motionless river.

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Thousands of protestors move slowly along the asphalt, a single, continually varying body, united in their fury at a government that is too obsequious to

the bidding of China and to real estate tycoons. They are drops of water in a concrete sea, parting swiftly to allow ambulances through, dispersing in a moment when the police arrive to break them up, but quickly reforming elsewhere. No leaders, no central organisation, merely a technical assemblage of chat forums, Telegram chat groups, Airdrops, and Bluetooth. An 'open-source protest' (Lam 2019).

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that sand plays a vital, active, under-theorised role in the constitution of modern urban infrastructure and hence in the architecture of colonial and post-colonial authority

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city as a living archive of sand that has been bound, poured, melted, claimed, concretised, reclaimed, hydrated, formed, reformed, smashed, crumbled, ruined. Tracing the skin of

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Benjamin teaches us to see the modern city as ruin, through a ruined form (Leslie 2006, p. 108). The desires of the past appear in the present as rubble and debris. But this ruin also contains the material out of which a new order can be constructed. There are utopian fragments scattered among the debris. Stoler asks us not to direct our attention to ruins as monumental relics of the past, but to what people are left with: 'to what remains, to the aftershocks of empire, to the material and social afterlife of structures, sensibilities, and things. Such effects reside in the corroded hollows of landscapes, in the gutted infrastructures of segregated cityscapes and in the microecologies of matter and mind' (Stoler 2008, p. 194). My aim in ruining the city is to destroy Hong Kong's spectacular aesthetics of authority, and instead to embark on a speculative search for authority in the dreamlives of debris, in the gaps between things, in the corroded hollows.

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Viewing the colonial city as ruin, as a cemetery of sandscapes, we see life ground down: an incessant, inexorable process of erosion and weathering. Sand chronicles the remains of the earth's crust from long erosions over thousands of years. Such sandy residue is 'both the ultimate substance of the world and the negation of its luxuriant and multiform appearance' (Calvino 2014, p. 3).

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The fate of all monuments, all stone, is to be ground down, sooner or later, into sand and then dust. This city, passed down like a diamond from one colonial power to another, has become a cemetery of jewels, a graveyard of rocks imported from across the world and consolidated, homogenised, bound, and moulded.

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Alongside this ruinous gaze, navigating this sandy archive, I hope to understand how, in a world that has been ground down, I 'can still find in sand a foundation and model' (Calvino 2014, p. 9). In reducing monumental authority to crumbled sand, new utopian energies can be sensed: mixture, multiplicity, drift. In doing so, I am speculatively evoking a different kind of spatiality of authority, not tied to territory, monuments, or geometry, but to topological spatialities: drift, distortion, gaps, swerve.

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a uniquely Hong Kong identity: not Chinese, not Western, but infused with the Hong Kong spirit: freedom-loving, hard-working, competitive, independent

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bland corporate skyscrapers that are self-referential, self-absorbed, and indifferent to the city around them. Buildings that are at once conspicuous and disposable. They will not last long, and they appear as landscapes that are already about to disappear (Abbas 1997), giving way to something else taller, deeper, newer, shinier, more profitable. Buildings whose lack of commitment to long standing echoes their lack of commitment to employees, urban communities, the environment, or

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sand has an important role in surfacing the everyday, wrinkling the skin of the city. A UN report warns that sand is a foundational material of global economies, yet is forgotten and uncared for (UNEP 2019). Sand is one of the most heavily consumed resources on Earth. It is a material foundation of modernity, forming a core ingredient of concrete, cement, asphalt, glass, microchips, and much else. Modernity is built on the assumption that sand is a limitless resource. And yet

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Each building, and the land it lies on, is a 'contortion of the unconsolidated' (Bobbette 2016). Hong Kong's history of landslides and unstable ground has prompted a battle with the heterogeneity of the earth, through almost continuous projects of concreting and re-concreting Hong Kong's surfaces and slopes. Similarly, the skyscrapers are largely made up of concrete (a mixture of sand, water, and cement), poured around a gridwork of steel rods, which strengthen the concrete against bending motion caused by the wind. Wrapped around the structure is more sand, this time in the form of reinforced glass: sand melted in furnaces to the temperature of molten lava, homogenised, refined, annealed, and tempered. Within the buildings, we find a labyrinth of microchips, also made from sand: pure quartz that

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might help give shape to a postcolonial history of Hong Kong's stolen grounds? Hong Kong has always been an in-between space, a mediator, a connector. In colonising Hong Kong, the British were motivated less by territorial gain than by commercial interests, using the Opium Wars to forcibly open a lucrative market in China. In the years before and after the 1997 handover of sovereignty to China, Hong Kong engaged in a prolonged questioning of its identity, culture, history, and future (Abbas 1997; Chu 2013; Mathews, Ma, and Lui 2008). These sparked major political controversies around heritage and memory (such as the protests about the destruction of the Star Ferry Pier), as well as two major non-violent uprisings: the Umbrella Revolution of 2014, and the Water Revolution of 2019–2020. In summer 2020, the process of recolonisation or 'mainlandisation' accelerated sharply with the passing of an authoritarian National Security Law, imposed by China and bypassing Hong Kong's legislature, effectively ending the 'one country, two systems' arrangement that had guaranteed Hong Kong's autonomy since 1997. Hong Kong is now rapidly being absorbed into mainland China. This only reinforces Chu's observation that 'it is urgent and critical for Hong Kong to have a new mode of writing about postcoloniality from a different perspective' (Chu 2018, p. 57).

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> Hong Kong's cityness – that is, its international or cosmopolitan status – is indistinguishable from the violence that established it as such, namely, British mercantile imperialism … Together with its coloniality, then, economics and commerce are Hong Kong's 'origins': there has never been any alternative social framework in the territory in modern times (Chow 1998, p. 176).

§

Almost as soon as the British landed in Hong Kong, they began reclaiming land from the sea. Soon after the first marine lot sales in Hong Kong (in 1841, a full two years *before* Hong Kong was ceded to the British Empire in the Treaty of Nanking), the new marine lot owners started reclaiming land from Victoria Harbour, able to gain 'free' land because of the vagueness of their land sale terms (Ho 2018). By 1851, the colonial administration was also beginning more systematic land reclamation projects. Colonial Hong Kong thus emerged through two complementary myths of *terra nullius*: not only the notorious myth that pre-colonial Hong Kong was a 'barren rock' with no inhabitants; but also the myth that it was possible to magically conjure new land – and vast profit – out of the sea.

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sand is deeply intertwined with capitalist and colonial logics of extraction, land speculation, and financialisation

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harbours a cauldron of microscopic life between its grains

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glitters in the raucous multiplicity of mixture, variation, granular flow, semi-chaotic form, saltation bombardment

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finding in the fabric of the urban landscape not merely a ruin, but a teeming potential, a vast heap of mixtures and multiplicities, of colours and discordant sonorities

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The world is running out of building sand. Global extraction rates far exceed replenishment rates, and the volume of sand extracted from rivers, beaches, and seabeds (often illegally) poses substantial threats to river and marine ecosystems. We face a tragedy of the sand commons (Torres et al. 2017). Yet Hong Kong's bureaucratic authority has always assumed a paradigm of infinite sand resources to support the magic trick of creating land and profit from nothing. Across the world, about 40–50 billion metric tonnes of sand and gravel are extracted from quarries, rivers, coastlines, and seabeds every

year (Peduzzi 2014), and the construction industry accounts for over half this volume (UNEP 2019).

§

Here, on Harcourt Road, we are standing on land that was only recently reclaimed from the sea. About 27% of Hong Kongers live on reclaimed land, and 70% of its commercial activities take place on reclaimed land. Throughout its history, Hong Kong's prosperity has been supported by an almost continuous series of reclamation projects that create land by pouring vast quantities of sand and concrete into the sea (He 2018). Hong Kong's dramatic economic and population growth, its place in the vanguard of neoliberalism, is grounded on a continual production of new grounds and sandy surfaces (Lai, Chau, and Lorne 2016; Ng 2006; Ng and Cook 1997), continually shedding

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one of Hong Kong's many skins (Xi 2018): the skin of a colonial ruin of ground-down grounds, of pulverised stone, of continually moving foundations

§

ask how authority in Hong Kong's dynamic landscape is produced through regular material acts of regrounding and resurfacing, each transformation relying on more sandy substrate. Every resurfacing of the social creates an increasingly volumetric, multi-level city, a city where the very notion of ground has little meaning as it develops an increasingly three-dimensional, volumetric architecture (Frampton 2012; Shelton, Karakiewicz, and Kvan 2013).

§

search for abrasive energies within the flows and rhythms of this treacherous, unstable, playful, shape-shifting, infinitely varied mixture

§

city as a living anarchive of sand that has been bound, poured, melted, claimed, concretised, reclaimed, hydrated, formed, reformed, smashed, crumbled, ruined

§

a monument to consumerism, colonialism, and greed. A space of disappearance, bound up in extractivist imperialism (Mezzadra and Neilson 2019), both in the contemporary era as an importer of sand from elsewhere in Southeast

Figure 9.1: Land reclamation works, Hong Kong, 1933

Source: F. Hagger collection, image courtesy of Special Collections, University of Bristol Library (www.hpcbristol.net).

Asia, and in its colonial history in which sand extraction contributed to the devastation of its waters and the dispossession of its indigenous inhabitants. It is a sandy ruin: a cemetery of mountains, a graveyard of fluid rock, drifting

An interview

SAND: What do you want from us?
JULIAN: An interview.
SAND: What is an interview?
JULIAN: An attempt to gain an insightful glimpse of another (Adams and Thompson 2016, p. 17).[1]
SAND: Why are you interested in us?
JULIAN: You make the world as I know it possible. You make up the ground I walk on, the buildings that shelter me, the windows I look through.
SAND: You dig us, melt us, blast us, mould us, petrify us into consolidated forms. We, who link you to the shadowy origins of life itself.
JULIAN: Who are you?
SAND: We are lithic and organic, rock and bone, granite and silica and shell and mineral. We owe our existence to millions of years of weathering and decay. We are what remains of cataclysmic collisions of continental basements. We are the washed-up residue of dead mountains. Most of us settled here in the immense floods of the Quaternary period, until we were dug up by your kind over the last hundred years, and fused into concrete and glass and asphalt.

We are mostly chemically inert, which you find useful for combining us with cement to make concrete. Some of us have recently travelled great distances: dug up from seabeds, rivers, and mountain tops in China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines. Who are you?

JULIAN: I come from the country that seized you during the Opium Wars of the 1840s, bringing about China's so-called Century of Humiliation. I am from the country which in 1972 conspired with China to take Hong Kong off the United Nations list of 'Non-Self-Governing Territories', depriving Hong Kongers of the right to self-determination granted by the UN's 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. I first came here almost randomly, to make up the numbers on a teaching team. I became fascinated and disoriented by Hong Kong's relationship with the ground (Frampton 2012), which was unlike anything I had experienced before. I also witnessed the stirrings of Hong Kong's Umbrella Revolution and was swept away by the surge of energy during these protests.

SAND: What do you want from us?

JULIAN: I want to learn to respond to the authority of neglected things. I am fascinated by learning from materials that are so mixed up, and so fluid, that it never occurs to people that they might have a history.

Metaphysics of sand: on authority as such

In traditional Western epistemology, knowledge and authority are figured as the opposite of sandy: they are grounded in the more stable moods of solid rock. Sand, on the other hand, is a treacherous, deceiving ground that must be avoided at all costs. It is the domain of ghouls and hyenas. But in lumbering across these untrustworthy grounds, might we find a place from which to critique the concrete foundations of the colonial city? Solids and foundations reduce plurality to the unitary. It is not a question, however, of rejecting the solid and placing trust in the fluid. Rather, guided by Serres (2000), I am experimenting with attuning my thinking to the turbulence between states, and finding new births in the gaps: in the intermediary states between solid and fluid, in inchoate order, in aggregate mixtures, in granular flow. Returning to the sandy skin of the city

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Nonauthoritarian authority, or 'authority as such', must do without metaphysics:

> Without gods, without God, without the Holy Ghost, without first or final authority … Inclination, instability, authority as such is its driving force without a primary force. Every form, every order

> produces itself or reproduces itself, mutations and variations, by temporarily stable/unstable structures of self-regulation (Serres 2000, pp. 179–80).

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The idea that authority requires stable foundations is rooted in Western metaphysics and theology, which state that authority must be assembled on stable rock, not treacherous sand. Saint Matthew writes:

> '[E]veryone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.' When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. (Matthew, 7:21–29, *New International Version*).

At the onset of modernity, Descartes uses a similar metaphor:

> I kept uprooting from my mind any errors that might previously have slipped into it… my whole aim was to reach certainty – to cast aside the loose earth and sand so as to come upon rock or clay (Descartes 1988, p. 34).

What if, disenchanted with the modern promise of certainty and solidity, we choose to place trust in more ambiguous, treacherous, playful materials?

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a multiplicity that can never be fully concretised and homogenised, a potentiality that makes itself visible in cracks, drifts, the minimum deviation from states of equilibrium

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we refuse to let Hong Kong slowly merge into China. We see white elephant infrastructure projects everywhere, binding us ever more tightly into a Pearl Delta megacity. Millions of tonnes of sand, in the form of concrete, cement, and asphalt, binding Hong Kong to the mainland, so that our protests will once again be too late: protests against something that has already happened….

§

concrete is produced by mixing aggregate (sand and gravel) with a paste of cement and water. The paste coats the surface of the aggregate, and a chemical reaction called hydration causes the paste to harden and the mixture to gain strength. In concrete, the multiplicity of materials that make up sand are homogenised and consolidated. Contingency is arrested and can be controlled to create structures in almost any imaginable form.

§

Colonial authority is materialised through a continual *surfacing and resurfacing* of the everyday (Simone 2011).

§

> The sand of the cycles is the same,
> And infinite, the history of sand;
> Thus, deep beneath your joys and pain
> Unwoundable eternity is still the abyss…
> In the minutes of the sand I believe
> I feel the cosmic time (Borges 1964, p. 58).

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> Sand is a substance that is beautiful, mysterious, and infinitely variable; each grain on a beach is the result of processes that go back into the shadowy beginnings of life, or of the earth itself (Carson 1955, p. 125).

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Protestors against the National Security Law: let us take inspiration from Bruce Lee! He advises us:

> I said empty your mind. Be formless, shapeless, like water. Now you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup. You put water into a bottle, it becomes the bottle. You put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now water can flow, or it can crash. Be water, my friend.[2]

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metaphysical tradition that likes to think of rock and concrete as symbols of the enduring, of everything that is safe and secure. Yet the hardest of rocks shatter and wear away when ground down by frost, rain, or water. A grain of

sand, on the other hand, is almost indestructible. It is what remains after years of grinding and polishing, weathering and drifting. Rocks are worn away by erosion; some disappear in the solvent action of water; others are ground down in the riverbed. Some may come to rest in or near riverbeds. Eventually, after a few hours or after millions of years, they always return their journey towards the sea, where they are incessantly moving

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sand is almost equally at home on land, water, and air. It drifts and creeps and hops and jumps and flies. It transgresses boundaries, jumps scales

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The demand to ground authority in foundations, whether existential, spiritual, political, or epistemological, implies that one does not lay foundations in water or wind or mud or sand (Serres 1995a, p. 108).

§

Sandy thinking grinds down any aspirations to authoritarian monumentality. Sand reminds us that the fate of all monuments, all authority, is to be ground down into sand and dust.

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> There is opacity now at the bottom of the mirror, a whole alluvium deposited by populations, silt that is fertile but, in actual fact, indistinct and unexplored even today, denied or insulted more often than not, and with an insistent presence that we are incapable of not experiencing (Glissant 1997, p. 111).

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sand dramatises the creation – and eventual decay – of form out of variety, mixture, and plurality. Sand draws me towards a cosmic pessimism: I see that all materials and all forms are eventually pulverised into tiny and numerous particulate matter

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and embrace the mystery of pulverised substances, materials oozing somewhere between solidity and fluidity: '… flowing water, silent oil, sticky honey, paste, mud, clay, powder, and dust…' (Bachelard 2018, p. 16).

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Solids teach us about form and assembly, and liquids teach us about change and mixture. What do semi-solid, semi-fluid substances such as sand and mud and dust teach us?

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thinking as multiplicity, mixture, and infinite variety, amplifying a form of authority that is guided by the miraculous births that take place in the discontinuities, gaps and voids between things

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the miniscule gaps between grains of sand on the beach in which a world of life can be found

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> And, of all of these dishesive matters, sand is surely the most untrustworthy, the most shifting and shifty (Connor 2010a).

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Authoritarian states will crumble into dust

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thinking as sand, tracing the emergence of nonauthoritarian authority through fluidity, turbulence, deviation, saltation

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The swerve – the deviation, the drift – marks the indeterminacy of all material and cultural forms. Authority is born from drift and deviation. It is constituted out of tiny angles of difference from equilibrium. There would be no things, no solidity, no concrete, but for the elemental drift of all matter (Serres 2000, p. 91).

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Thinking with sand, we gain an apprenticeship into being guided by unstable mixtures, heterogeneity, and separation.

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A new way of relating to the granular force of authority? An authority that is mixed, temporary, passing, contingent, emergent

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Might we learn to find authority in this nascent state, in the minimal angle between equilibrium and drift? Is there an authority to be grasped in the discontinuities between individual grains? Might thinking with sand help us find the force of authority, not in concrete foundations, but in the topological space of granular flow to which all concrete will one day return?

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We seek speculative forms of authority that have nothing to do with solid grounds, eternal structures, or metaphysical truths: a nonauthoritarian authority emergent from mixture, granular flow, variety, drift

The Colonial Sand Monopoly

Sifting through the archives of Hong Kong's Colonial Sand Monopoly, which was established in 1935 to ensure a secure supply of sand to enable Hong Kong's construction boom, I find traces of a long history of dispossession of Indigenous Hong Kong villagers by sand digging. This history shows the extent to which Hong Kong's economic growth, the key ground of authority in colonial Hong Kong, relied on the bureaucratic administration of sand supplies. However, as the colonial administration dug up villagers' beaches, needing ever-increasing amounts of construction sand to feed Hong Kong's building boom, villagers found their paddy fields engulfed with sea water. Colonial sand extraction deprived Indigenous villagers of their livelihoods, leaving them destitute and

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1933, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Colony of Hong Kong:*

> The demand for sand continues to be keen … The denudation of the beaches in the District by sand thieves continues to cause concern. In spite of much hard work and extra precautions on the part of Police launches, and heavy sentences on offenders when convicted, the nuisance is still only partially checked. Maximum penalties are now being exacted in an effort to stamp out this offence.[3]

Figure 9.2: Workers in a gravel quarry, Hong Kong

Source: F. Hagger collection, image courtesy of Special Collections, University of Bristol Library (www.hpcbristol.net).

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1937, New Territories:

> Northward, navigation is impeded by rocks, and villages are mostly small and unimportant, except Tai Pak and Yi Pal … These are Hakka villages. The villagers here protected their fine beaches by piling stones in the water 100 yards off shore, so that sand junks could not get near; if they did, the villagers repelled them with guns (Schofield 1983).

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1931, E.R. Hallifax, Colonial Secretary:

> [O]bservation of the Crown foreshores in the Colony tends to the conclusion that the sandy beaches from which sand has been removed under Government permits do not recuperate to any appreciable extent, and that sand in the Colony must be more carefully conserved … It is not at present proposed to withdraw or refuse permits to take sand in proper cases, but all applications for permits will require careful consideration.[4]

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2018, Mr Abraham Shek, Hong Kong Legislative Council:

> With these 1700 hectares of reclaimed land, we are blessed with an opportunity of a lifetime, not only to design but to actually build a sizable residential and commercial hub from scratch. If we do it right, President, ELM [East Lantau Metropolis] can emerge as an envy of the world.[5]

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1920, E.W. Hamilton, responding to complaints from villagers about sand digging:

> … [It] would be thoroughly bad policy to take any action which will hamper building in the Colony or increase the price thereof. I have visited the place with the Building Authority who tells me the sand is singularly good quality. It remains then to decide on a definite line of action.[6]

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sinking into the sand and the mud, the boggy ground, neither solid nor fluid, semi-choate, drifting, forming patterns, attuning, a passionate embrace, the joy of the multiple, raucous, noisy, jumbled, mixed, myriad (Serres 1995b).

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In 2011 alone, 34.48 million cubic metres of sediment were extracted from the Mekong river in Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam (Bravard, Goichot, and Gaillot 2013). Of that quantity, about 90% was sand. This sand is exported to nearby countries like Singapore, China, and Hong Kong. Devastating environmental impacts are well documented.

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1935, An Ordinance to Protect the Sand Supplies of the Colony and to Regulate the Sale of Sand:

> No person may take sand from any land, foreshore or sea bed, not under lease from the Crown, without having previously obtained a written removal permit or sale and removal permit applicable to such sand from the Controller of Stores.[7]

Any person contravening the law shall be liable to a fine of one thousand dollars and imprisonment for six months.

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In 1935, Hong Kong's acute sand crisis culminated in the formation of the Colonial Sand Monopoly. All Hong Kong sand was now placed under the control of the colonial administration, and digging for sand without a permit was made illegal. The government fixed the price of sand, allowing itself a small profit from the sale. The formation of the Colonial Sand Monopoly is testament to the importance of controlling the extractive infrastructure underlying Hong Kong's growth. It is well understood that control of land has long been the heart of Hong Kong's political and economic governance (Mizuoka 2018; Poon 2011); what is less well explored are the histories of the materials themselves (though see Bobbette 2016; Ho 2001; Lai, Chau, and Lorne 2016). Construction needs trumped every other consideration, and Hong Kong's sand monopoly did little to protect villagers' livelihoods.

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1922, Sha Lo Wan, Lantau Island:

> Sand shortage was serious from 1924 to 1926, when concrete was coming into fashion for building, and between the demands of builders, and the interests of New Territory cultivators of land behind the sand banks, there was acute conflict, which sometimes grew into a shooting match. One such conflict took place at Sha Lo Wan in Northwest Lantau; this village was very jealous of the fine sandbank protecting its fields, and had licenced gun owners; so the crews, who had no permit for that beach, were driven off without their sand (Schofield 1977, pp. 154–55).

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1965, Sha Lo Wan, Lantau Island:

> Work has started on the removal of sand from a small bay on the north coast of Lantau Island … The villagers of Sha Lo Wan have expressed some anxiety about the removal of sand from the area and, in particular, from the beach in front of the village.[8]

Exhaustion

The Colonial Sand Monopoly maintained exclusive control over the colony's sand reserves, operating at a small profit, for almost 50 years, during a period of rapid growth in population, wealth, and urban development. During the 1950s, a private enterprise called the Yau Wing Company stepped up to fulfil the surging demand for sand on behalf of the colonial government. On its own

initiative, it took the gamble of purchasing (at great cost) modern barges and dredgers, and in 1960 it offered to carry out a free sand survey for the colonial administration, knowing that it was the only company with the means to dig for any sand that it discovered.[9] This survey found a large quantity of sand on Hong Kong's seabed. In return for the geological survey, Yau Wing was given a contract renewal for three years without having to tender. After this, it received several further government contracts to supply additional sand from China. Its dominance of the sand market eventually proved highly controversial. By the 1960s, the Monopoly was fiercely attacked, due to the uncompetitive nature of its contracts. By the end of the 1960s, Hong Kong's sand supplies were all but extinguished, and it had to import sand to fulfil its construction needs.

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1956, Controller of Stores:

> During the year complaints have been received about the quality of the sand which is provided by the Stores Department, but I am afraid that it will have to be realized that the sand resources of the Colony have been so desperately depleted during the past few years because of the enormous demands for building, that it is becoming more and more difficult to supply good quality building sand … The alternative is to import, and Government will place no hindrance in the way of those who can bring in sand from elsewhere.[10]

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1965, Legislative Council:

> The truth is that the present situation arises largely from the fact that the business of sand collection has now grown so large, so professional and so highly capitalised that the Sand Monopoly contract is now almost analogous with a public utility, and it has become almost as difficult to change the sand contractor as it is to change, for example, a bus company every year or so.[11]

1965, Hong Kong Standard:

> [I]n at least one sector of its affairs Government still operates in a manner which is highly questionable. Any monopoly in a key commodity needs to be handled with great care by Government … It seems most unsatisfactory that the original sand contract should

> have been arranged by private treaty in a manner so veiled from public scrutiny … Making arrangements behind closed doors may have been a satisfactory way of doing things at one time in this Colony's history. This is no longer true today.[12]

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1969, Legislative Council:

> The Government has had the future of the Sand Monopoly's present arrangements for the supply of sand under review for some time. However, the position remains complicated by the fact that the only continuing sources of supply are external to the Colony.[13]

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1971, Lua Fau Chan:

> Racketeers have been cashing in on tons of sand dredged from the seabed off the coastal villages of Lau Fau Shan. The sand poachers are netting lucrative profits in stealing Government property. The racketeers' activities were exposed this week by an official of the Ha Tsuen Rural Committee who preferred to remain anonymous. The racketeers had been dredging the sand in Lim Wan, near Pak Lai, according to the official … 'The poachers usually start work early in the morning and leave with lorry-loads of sand by mid-day', the official said. 'The sand is sold to construction firms in the rural areas and the profit is highly lucrative', he added.[14]

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In 1981, the Colonial Sand Monopoly was finally disbanded, returning sand to the open market, at first sourced mainly from China and, more recently, from other nearby countries. In interviews with one of the only environmental activist organisations to take an interest in the supply of sand, I am told that although many neighbouring countries have banned sand exports, the supply chains of sand are opaque, and illegal sand importation is rife. My interviewee shows me vials of recent construction sand which they have forensically traced to Vietnamese beaches. With Hong Kong's sand supplies exhausted, the geography of colonial dispossession has expanded over greater distances. The movements of Hong Kong's unstable grounds have acquired a wider, more expansive geography, exporting social and environmental dispossession to neighbouring countries.

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2013, Dong Nai River, Vietnam:

> … [I]llegal sand exploitation by local residents and authorities along the Dong Nai River has increased rather than diminished in the last decade, despite efforts to ban it … Although illegal sand exploiters, after being detected by inspectors, rammed their boats against barriers or even resisted those who were on duty, no one was arrested … [L]ocal residents who have lost land to the river because of sand exploitation said the situation was hopeless. Farmers in Bien Hoa city's Quyet Thang Ward said their pomelo and mango gardens located along the river disappeared due to landslides … Land erosion caused by sand exploitation has narrowed land plots of local residents and even swept away several houses (VietnamNews 2013).

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thinking as multiplicity, mixture, and variety, and labouring with the discontinuities, gaps and voids between things

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Whereas solids teach us about form and assembly, and liquids teach us about change and flux, thinking with granular materials leads us on a path towards the limits of experience, towards the impalpable and invisible, the relation between atom and void (Bachelard 2018).

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The mute world, the voiceless things, the inert foundation supporting the shimmering spectacle, all the things that humans have ignored, are starting to find their voice and impose themselves on our awareness (Serres 1995b, p. 3).

§

2018, Hong Kong Airport:

Building work on the third runway suffers major delays, and astronomical cost overrun, due to difficulties with sourcing enough sand to carry out the land reclamation.

> Apart from the Mainland sources, the reclamation contractor has been exploring other overseas sources of sand supply. A trial delivery from Malaysia has arrived in early November 2018. Further deliveries from Malaysia and the Philippines are also being arranged.[15]

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2018, Malaysia:

> …Malaysia's newly elected prime minister once said that illegal sand miners were 'digging up Malaysia and giving her to other people.' During his previous term in office, he tried to fix what he viewed as an aggressive assault on Malaysia's heritage: the selling of its sand … [I]t appears the ban was at best only minimally effective, and in most years completely illusory (Banergee 2018).

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2018, Legislative Council, Mr Leung Che-Cheung:

> Apart from possible impacts on marine ecology, reclamation will not affect the interests of anyone. Then why do they oppose reclamation?[16]

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an abrasive force in this nascent, sandy state, in the minimal angle between equilibrium and drift. There is an energy to be grasped in the discontinuities between individual grains and atoms … in turning away from thinking with concrete foundations, into the granular flow to which all concrete will, one day, return. I am guided by semi-solid matter: mixtures, granules, varieties, angles, drift

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history is co-extensive with nature, and knows no progress. Equilibrium is only ever temporary, and always declines into drift. Nature and history can only be seen as they are written: as birth, as drift.

Settling

In this chapter I have offered a speculative experiment in responding to the authority of sand, a material that played an underacknowledged role in the foundation and reproduction of bureaucratic authority in colonial, post-colonial, and neo-colonial Hong Kong. Exploring the key role of sand in modern extractivist capitalism, as well as attuning my thinking to a disruptive energy in sand's distinctive spatialities of granular drift, I have attempted to transfigure the Hong Kong skyline, an iconic landscape of bureaucratic authoritarianism, into a ruined sandscape: a cemetery of pulverised, ground-down materials. Sand does not come from nowhere, but has a history – a

history that is frequently bound up with colonial and neo-colonial forms of environmental dispossession and devastation. Hong Kong is a city that continually regrounds and resurfaces itself through construction, concretisation, and consolidation. This resurfacing of the everyday is a powerful form of enclosure (Grydehøj 2015).

The chapter has shown that authority can be pluralised by responding to the authority of nonhuman materials and their topological, drifting spatial forms. Doing so may help us cultivate a richer 'sense of reality' based on attunement to the granular flows of neglected materials. Colonial authority in Hong Kong mobilised a form of bureaucratic, rationalised authority that was partially legitimised by, and founded on, the administration of land reclamation (pouring sand into the sea) to drive breathless economic growth. By establishing a playful, mimetic relationship with the material foundations of the city, it is possible to undermine the aesthetic construction of this singular authority, and instead cultivate an attentiveness to and care for the granular, mixed, semi-choate authorities implicit within the consolidated, concretised, yet always unstable grounds of the contemporary colonial city.

Notes

[1] Etymologically, the word 'interview' derives from the French *entrevoir* (to have a glimpse of) and *s'entrevoir* (to see each other).

[2] The quote is from a Bruce Lee TV interview circulated widely across social media.

[3] 'Report on the New Territories for the Year 1933', Appendix J, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Colony of Hong Kong during the Year 1933*, p. 20.

[4] Colonial Secretary E.R. Hallifax, 27 March 1931. 'Stone and Rubble on Foreshores', Hong Kong Government Records Service, HKRS58-1-135-75.

[5] Mr Abraham Shek, Hong Kong Legislative Council Debate, 'Motion of Thanks', 9 November 2018.

[6] 'Unauthorized Removal of Sand From Foreshore Near Mui Wo, Lan Tao Island Proposed Resumption of Lots 511 & 547', Hong Kong Government Records Service, HKRS58-1-95-10.

[7] *An Ordinance to Protect the Sand Supplies of the Colony and to Regulate the Sale of Sand,* passed into law in 1935. https://perma.cc/K3CZ-9GN5

[8] Newspaper clipping, unidentified source, 1965. Hong Kong Government Records Service, 'Stores Department – Sand', HKRS931-6-392.

[9] See the account by the Financial Secretary, in Legislative Council, 26 March 1965, as well as various letters in HKRS931-6-392.

[10] 19 February 1956. 'Price of sand – 1. Petition from Ho Lu Kwong, Chairman of the Building Contractors Association Ltd. Against the increase of .... 2. Claim for refund in respect of increase in price of sand.', Hong Kong Government Records Service, HKRS229-1-194.

[11] HKRS no. 70; D-S No. 3-562.

[12] Clipping from the *Hong Kong Standard*, March 13 1965. In Hong Kong Government Records Service, 'Stores Department – Sand', HKRS931-6-392.

[13] 'Reply by the Honourable The Acting Financial Secretary in Legislative Council on Wednesday, 2nd July 1969'. In HKRS931-6-392.

[14] Clipping from 'Poachers take to sand and reap huge profits'. *South China Morning Post*, 27 May 1971. In Hong Kong Government Records Service, 'Stores Department – Sand', HKRS931-6-392

[15] *Update on the Development of the Three-Runway System at the Hong Kong International Airport*, 30 November 2018, Legislative Council Paper No. CB(4)274/18-19(01)

[16] Mr Leung Che-Cheung, Hong Kong Legislative Council Debate, 'Motion of Thanks', 9 November 2018.

10. Authority, modernity, and the factory of emotions

This final exercise in pluralising authority charts an alternative genealogy of the aesthetics of modern authority, returning to perhaps the most famous urban landscape of modernity: 19th century Paris. In doing so, it aims to set out an alternative account of the aesthetics of authority in modernity. In dialogue with influential accounts within critical theory of how authority in European industrial, imperial modernity was expressed in spatial forms such as the Paris Arcades, London's Crystal Palace, cinema, the Wagnerian total artwork, and the 'mass', this chapter explores an alternative genealogy of modernity focusing on the industrial production of feeling in elite bourgeois cultural spaces. Through a study of the architecture of the Palais Garnier in Paris, an opera house that was intended to be a key centrepiece of Haussmann's Second Empire Paris but only opened its doors for the first time during the more austere days of the early Third Republic, the chapter will argue that the building was a diagram of bourgeois, elite, patriarchal authority that manufactured intense sensations, feelings, and affects that were oriented *away from* reality. This argument extends the theoretical reflection in earlier chapters on the close connection between authority and the 'sense for reality' (Chapters 3 and 5).

A guiding idea in the chapter will be that authority organises and creates hierarchies of embodied feelings. I use the term 'feeling' here to include compounds of perceptions, emotions, affects, and sensations. My aim is to critique the reduction of plural, heterogeneous sensations to single, hierarchically organised architectures of feeling. The chapter experiments in pluralising authority by searching for elemental forms of feeling that are more attuned to reality than the kinds of sensation associated with the industrial production of feelings. My suggestion will be that the Palais Garnier, with its architectural devices for synthesising feelings and the senses, offers a model of a kind of authoritarian experience, enacting what Marx called a 'sense of having'.

I draw on the theoretical and creative ideas of Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, finding in their work a rich source for imagining nonauthoritarian authority, one that intersects with, whilst remaining distinct from, related lines of thought on geographical aesthetics that engage with Deleuze and Rancière (e.g. Dikeç 2015; Pile 2021; Williams and Keating 2022b). In dialogue with Negt and Kluge, I ask whether nonauthoritarian authority might emerge through a new arrangement of feelings where synthetic, disorientating

feelings – especially what Marx called the 'feeling of having' – are taken apart, and where new configurations of elementary feelings have the opportunity to amplify the sense of reality (Dawkins and Loftus 2013).

The chapter aims to show how monumental architecture can be a synthesiser of intense feelings, using all the sensory registers. This synthesis models an authoritarian organisation of the sensory and emotional life of the imperial, patriarchal nation. Like Chapter 9, part of the theoretical work is destructive: undoing the aesthetic logic of a key monument of elite, patriarchal, colonial 19th century authority, which worked partly through a vast accumulation of intense sensations and feelings. At the same time, the chapter experiments with a speculative move: evoking an anti-monumental 'general assembly of feelings' (Hansen and Poor 1990, p. 106), in which this diversity of complex feelings has its hierarchies dismantled, its foundations undermined, and where a plurality of elementary feelings have space to find their different speeds, rhythms, and affinities.

In focusing on a space of elite bourgeois culture, there is arguably a danger of reinstating or revalorising conservative bourgeois culture. Yet my intention is to take a key monument of European authoritarian architecture and critique its model of aesthetic authority, to excavate fragmentary forms of nonauthoritarian authority within its ruins. In doing so, I extend a long tradition of critiquing elite spaces of modernity (e.g. Dennis 2008; Harvey 2003; Hetherington 2002; Pile 2005), as well as a minor tradition of engagement with opera within critical theory and post-structuralism by figures such as Kracauer (1972), Adorno (Leppert 2020), Kluge (1983), Deleuze and Guattari (1988), Lacoue-Labarthe (1994), Žižek (Žižek and Dolar 2002), Sennett (1977), and others.

In the following section, I offer a theoretical discussion of modern capitalist urban culture, contrasting established spatial archetypes such as the Paris Arcades and London's Crystal Palace with the Palais Garnier, which I suggest reveals a distinctive aesthetic structure of feeling of elite, colonial, patriarchal authority. I then move on to a historical discussion of the Paris Opéra, through a succession of fragments that break down complex syntheses of feeling and seek to uncover moments of minor, more elementary feelings, attending to new kinds of nonauthoritarian authority in these fragmented emotions.

Aesthetics of immersion

Opera may be an obscure starting point for an exercise in geographical analysis of authority (though see also Aspden 2019; Sternberg 1998; Woolf 1988). As with every chapter in the book, the roots of this can be found in my own interests, instincts, and the kinds of authority that I embody. As a keen musician, I have an abiding fascination with music's capacity to produce intense feelings. Opera is a form that amplifies these feelings to enormous – but sometimes very artificial, unnatural-feeling – proportions. In fact, my focus on opera as

a lens on modernity has some strong intellectual precedents: critical theory has long focused on opera as a revealing reference point for understanding the spaces and aesthetics of authority in modernity, not only because opera has been so closely associated with the authority of the nation (Fulcher 1987), but also because it prefigured key elements of 20th century spatial culture, most obviously cinema. In this section, I explore how theorists informed by the Frankfurt School tradition, especially Adorno, Benjamin, Sloterdijk, and Kluge and Negt, have connected opera to broader political questions around modernity, authority, and what I call the 'aesthetics of immersion'.

Opera, the pinnacle of 19th century European high culture, was a clear precursor to cinema, both in its combination of music and drama and in more specific techniques such as the use of the Wagnerian leitmotif. Previously associated with the aristocracy, opera shifted during the 1800s to a more bourgeois audience. Opera prefigured numerous other spectacles that focused on organising monumental, emotionally intense syntheses of perception and emotion. A recent history of the Frankfurt School marks out Weill and Brecht's 1930 satirical opera *Rise and Fall of the City of the Mahogany* as a central reference point for critical theory (Jeffries 2017, pp. 125–37). Adorno took this opera to be an exemplar of what antiauthoritarian modernist art could be, and labelled it the first surrealist opera.

Opera is a cultural form devoted to organising the passions and to coordinating the senses through a highly immersive form of spectacle that produces intense feelings. Adorno's influential critique of Wagner and the 'total artwork' saw in it an expression of the sensuous logic of capital, or the 'phantasmagoria', which he called a 'magic delusion' whose law is 'the occultation of production by means of the outward appearance of the product' (Adorno 2005, p. 74). In other words, the making of a thing (and hence the labour that goes into it) is not visible in its appearance, giving it a kind of magical quality. Adorno argued that in Wagnerian musical drama this is achieved through the intensification of colour and tone at the expense of structural elements. The highly modern elements of Wagnerian music – its chromaticism and dissonance, for example – are used to produce music as mere 'sonority': a rich spatial embrace of musical colour and texture, lacking genuine movement and progression. In his early study of Wagner and his well-recorded anti-semitism, Adorno critiqued him for perfecting an art of creating magical-seeming effects through a static, spatialised aesthetic of total immersion, which he viewed as a template for authoritarian forms of mass culture. For Adorno, Wagner's musical drama experientially dramatises the authority of the commodity, or what Marx called the 'sense of having', which hides use value behind exchange value (Andreotti and Lahiji 2016; Pile 2005).

In *The Arcades Project,* Walter Benjamin (1999) developed related ideas by investigating the phantasmagorical character of the modern city through the Paris Arcades, passages protected from the elements with iron and glass, thus offering people a comfortable space to loiter and gaze at the spectacle of commodities on view in the shop windows. The Arcades, he suggests, transformed

the street, the urban exterior, into a kind of bourgeois interior, enveloping consumers in a dreamlike, intoxicating atmosphere of luxury and desire. This aesthetics of immersion had a bewitching, magical effect, an effect that it shared with spaces of modernity such as 'winter gardens, panoramas, factories, wax museums, casinos, railroad stations in which phantasmagoria was the basic mechanism through which they reactivated the mythic forces in the dynamics of capitalism' (Benjamin 1999, L1, 3). Like Adorno, Benjamin sees in the phantasmagorical authority of the modern city a model of alienated senses, feelings, and experiences.

According to Sloterdijk (2013), however, Benjamin underestimated the scale of the phenomenon. Sloterdijk suggests that it was Dostoevsky who truly appreciated the political implications of the bourgeois fascination with aesthetic immersion. In *Notes from the Underground*, Dostoevsky [1864] (1999) used the Crystal Palace as a central image in his critique of Western rationalism, portraying it as a 'house of life' barely less dystopian than his [1861] Siberian *House of the Dead* (Dostoevsky 2001). The Crystal Palace was a gargantuan iron and glass structure, built in London for the 1851 Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations. On display were over 100,000 objects, displayed along more than 10 miles, by over 15,000 contributors. Extending Dostoevsky's critique, Sloterdijk takes the Crystal Palace as a spatial model of a modern aesthetics of power. Although Benjamin frequently mentioned the structure, he interpreted it as a kind of giant arcade. Sloterdijk critiques this, suggesting that the Crystal Palace really mobilised a different spatial imagination that was far more prophetic for the 20th and 21st centuries.

> [W]hile the elitist arcades, which never reached a large scale, served the 'cosification' and urbane mise-en-scène of the world of commodities in a sheltered promenade, the gigantic Crystal Palace … already anticipated an integral, experience-oriented, popular capitalism in which no less than the comprehensive absorption of the outside world in a fully calculated interior was at stake. The arcades formed a canopied intermezzo between streets or squares; the Crystal Palace, on the other hand, invoked the idea of an enclosure so spacious that one might never have to leave it (Sloterdijk 2013, p. 175).

In Sloterdijk's critique of aesthetic immersion, the 21st century Global North has now constructed a vast, continental 'crystal palace' of secure consumption, peace, and health. This vast world interior of capital is not a physical architectural structure; its walls are mostly constructed through systems of generalised exclusion, as well as militarised bordering practices. The interior of this hothouse is a consumer society where money provides access to anything, and where there is a general unthinking expectation of security without struggle. Outside this securitised hothouse, however, in a global system of

'universal apartheid' (Sloterdijk 2013, p. 194), the large majority of global citizens are excluded from its comforts and security, often cast aside into slums, ghettos, refugee camps, favelas, detention centres, and prisons.

Sloterdijk's analysis of the aesthetics of immersion focuses, as critical theory has often done, on boredom as a primary feeling of bourgeois modernity. In Sloterdijk's globalised crystal palace of universalised 'pampering', life can be lived without challenge: the primary feeling is 'cosiness' and the primary emotion is boredom. This is a feeling that relishes any disturbance as an exception, prompting a relentless drive for 'experiences' or 'intensity' (see Anderson 2021). However, without questioning the insight that boredom and distraction are salient feelings in the modern sensation of authority, I feel it is important to attend more closely to spaces that produce authority by intensifying feelings and hierarchically organising them. In fact, if we turn back once again to the Opéra Garnier – described in Leroux's novel *The Phantom of the Opera* as 'the true home of phantasmagoria' – we might be inspired by Alexander Kluge's (Kluge 1983) intriguing suggestion that 19th century opera was a kind of industrial 'power plant' of the emotions to sketch out an alternative genealogy of modern authority. Just as the Crystal Palace put every conceivable technology and commodity on display, the 19th century opera house created a community of every recognizable human emotion and feeling. The task of the opera house/emotion factory was to take valuable raw materials (elementary human feelings) and process them into valuable consumable goods. The opera house could thus be argued to be a direct counterpart to the Crystal Palace in the realm of human feelings. Whereas the Crystal Palace accumulated the material products of industrial labour and displayed them in a vast, intoxicating spectacle, the opera house put every conceivable human feeling on display, showing that industry, capital, and culture could multiply and control even something so private and anarchic as human feeling. The problem is that capitalist industry manufactures feelings that do not fully respond to key needs, drives, and desires. It creates artificial, synthetic compounds of feelings that do not orient the subject towards reality (Kluge and Negt 2014). It overproduces some feelings, and leaves others underdeveloped. Yet feelings harbour potentially explosive, disruptive forces, because their needs are not met within alienated capitalist modernity.

This discussion of capitalist urban culture and the aesthetics of immersion helps us understand why an elite form of 19th century urban culture might offer insights into the aesthetics of modern authority. Viewed as an exemplary site of industrial feeling-production in the 19th century, the Palais Garnier becomes a kind of spatial model of authority, specifically a particular *feeling* of authority. I will show how the building was designed to enact an architecture of perception where a confusion of sensory registers contributed to a powerful 'sense of having' through an accumulation of complex, synthetic, contradictory feelings. I will suggest that we see here a model of colonial, patriarchal, bourgeois authority stylised through a synthesis of the senses into a single but synthetically organised totality.

Like all the chapters in this book, my aim here is to find a way of pluralising authority: in this case, the authority of feelings and sensation. This requires opening spaces in which undervalued, subterranean, unnameable feelings might coalesce into a kind of 'general assembly of feelings', one that is the opposite of the kind of synthetic unification of the senses associated with the total artwork. The fragmentary form of this chapter disassembles problematic compounds of feeling, opening spaces for subterranean, undervalued feelings to come to light, and to respond to the authority of feelings with their own self-regulating dynamics. Devin Fore writes:

> When bound up in complex, alloyed forms, emotions begin to function in illogical ways, becoming 'unrecognizable to our judgment'. In their elemental state, however, they are exceedingly precise and anything but irrational. Being based in the haptic surface of the skin that is our source of direct contact with the world, feeling … is wholly inclined to reality (Fore 2014, p. 43).

Glory

The Opéra was a symbol of national regeneration. Looming at the heart of the city's business district, the monument fits in seamlessly with the architectural style of the surrounding buildings, whilst also being bloated with an extravagant ornamentation that flashes dazzling hues of gold down the length of the Avenue de l'Opéra. With a sheer ornamental excessiveness that challenges any passerby to deny its status as the pinnacle of 19th century French culture, the building is often taken to be representative of the worst excesses and decadence of the Second Empire. Planned as a key monument of Haussmann's redesigned Paris and heralded as 'one of the seven wonders of the great city' (Gauthier 1867), it opened its doors for the first time in 1875, five years after the fall of the Empire. The building is considered the clearest example of 'representational architecture' in 19th century France (Van Zanten 1994). By refocusing attention away from its symbolic fabric to its contribution to a sensory geography of feeling, we see how the building's way of organising the senses could embody a narrative about the regeneration of the damaged authority of the Nation.

The new Opéra had been intended to be one of the crowning glories of the Second Empire and of the modernisation of Paris: a symbol of the nation's wealth, power, and cultural superiority. The façade (enclosing an empty shell within) was first unveiled to the public on 15 August 1867 – a public holiday that marked the birth of Napoléon Bonaparte on the same date in 1769. The monument represented a profound shift in the symbolic centres of authority in Paris. One newspaper reported that:

> the new Paris, that of Monsieur Haussmann and Napoléon III, seems finally to have received its coronation. It has found in this

> monument the brightest, most extravagant picture of its destiny and the symbol of its genius. This great city has thus found its quintessential expression. Paris has had several of these in succession. Its monumental centre, if one dares say so, has followed its moral centre. Originally, it oriented itself around the Cathedral; during the monarchy it gravitated towards the Louvre; after the revolution, the Hôtel de Ville. Must we admit that today the heart of this mighty city, which once beat as the heart of the world, is today an opera house? Must our glory consist, from now on, above all in the perfection of our public entertainments? Are we nothing more than the capital of elegance and pleasure? Has the great and terrible Paris of the past lost its memories of its history as well as the ancient names of its roads, and has Monsieur the Prefect of the Seine succeeded in making it the Masked Ball of Europe? (Scherer 1867, p. 1).

Yet by the time the monument opened its doors, it had become far more semantically ambiguous: in some ways, it was already an anachronism. Still, observers were generally happy to adopt it for the new Republic, despite it sitting uncomfortably within the new emphasis on sobriety, 'moral order', and distaste for the excesses of Louis-Napoléon's regime (Locke 1974). After the Opéra's lavish inaugural gala on 5 January 1875, one observer wrote that:

> France can be proud of the spectacle which it gave to Europe on Tuesday, a triumph too for our dear city of Paris. Such a celebration for a people who were dying of hunger four years ago is more than a consolation for their pride; it is the start of a rebirth (de Lasalle 1875, p. 1).

In addition, the decision to invite the Lord Mayor of London as the guest of honour, rather than a member of royalty, was seen 'to sum up well the definitively democratic spirit of the society in which we live' (Anon. 1875, p. 471). The Opéra was able to become a symbol for the rebirth of the nation according to more austere, Republican bourgeois values.

In the wake of humiliating military defeat and civil war, the arts offered both conservatives and progressives a way of reviving national pride and respect. As Camille Doucet, president of the Institut de France, put it:

> The glory of our arts will avenge the mourning of our arms. When the cannon is reduced to silence, better voices are heard; when the bloody battle has ceased, noble struggles begin (cited in Pasler 2009, p. 234).

Opera had an important role to play in this, for the popularity of French dramatic music across the world was believed to be a testament to the glory of the nation. Opera was thus a technology of national regeneration, and this was

one reason why the Palais Garnier was happily accepted by much of the elite as a symbol of Republican political culture, despite its strong associations with the Second Empire. Shortly before the Opéra was completed in 1875, a journalist wrote that 'Garnier's bright and splendid building blends perfectly with the image we will one day hold of the imperial age' (Anon. 1874).

The Opéra Garnier's aesthetics of luxury and excess was a clear testament to the modern fixation with glorification of the nation and the state. At one level, the Opéra had a very straightforward role: transforming the cultural landscape of Paris to convey an image of the authority of the nation, empire, and state, glorifying them in a spectacle of extravagant riches, feelings, and sensations. It is one of the central monuments of the urban landscape of authoritarian, elite authority in 19th century Paris. In the absence of the king, glory is dislocated from royal transcendence to the realm of commodities and the arts (Santner 2012). Many contemporary commentators described the Palais Garnier as a 'secular cathedral'. They were right: it was a space for a liturgy that performed an 'ecstatic union between political subjects, commodities, and spectacles, in a generalised movement of the *fetishization of things* and the *glorification of abstract identities*' (Lavenz 2023). Yet within all this gaudy excess, this embarrassment of riches, this elitist, nationalist, imperialist pride, is it possible to find even here traces of more elementary feelings struggling to attune themselves to reality? If the Palais Garnier is a cathedral for the glorification of the nation (and thus empire, patriarchy, and capital), can we pause to shatter the complex compounds of feeling embedded in its architecture, and discover more elementary feelings? Perhaps we could see here traces of an elementary desire for *collective* luxury, a luxury from which no one is excluded (Lefebvre 2014). Such collective luxury cannot be a question of conspicuous consumption, but of an economy of use where the object is not destroyed (consumed) by use, but is *enhanced* by it, ensuring there is enough for all (Stanek 2017, p. 484). The desire for luxury is not inherently elitist; it becomes so only when luxury is linked to consumption and destruction.

Political alchemy

The Opéra Garnier is a paradigmatic landscape of elite authority. And yet: authority, despite appearances, always grows from the bottom up. One of the roles of authority is to coordinate the disparate attributes and components of subjectivity, which occupy multiple dimensions (sensory, intellectual, psychic, emotional, physiological, social). Kluge and Negt's (2014) *History and Obstinacy* offers an archaeology of senses and feelings as they have developed over thousands of years. Reading with them, we encounter the subject as an unstable coalition of multiple self-organising components, not a coherently organised totality. Some of these traits have been massively amplified by capitalist culture, whereas others are unused and dormant. Some are flexible but others are obstinate. These self-organising capacities are found at every scale,

from the rhythms and structures of cellular life to the capacities of the nation (an argument I also explored in Chapter 7). Traits that can be monetised are identified, cultivated, and over-developed. Others are left fallow, distanced from the authority of the ego, taking on a truculent subterranean existence of their own.

Kluge and Negt (2014) suggest that capital's colonisation of the body's capacities is always compensated for by what they call 'obstinacy' (*Eigensinn*). Excluded capacities, taken out of circulation from the authorised coalition of capacities known as the subject, are undervalued and thus underestimated, ready to be unleashed as sources of revolutionary energy. The real subjects of history are not individuals or classes, but subjective capacities. Always bubbling under the surface of the bounded, psychologically constituted subject is a diffuse, unconscious, powerful mass of neglected subterranean traits. If authoritarian authority is the holding together of the psychological *ego* in a stable coalition of capacities, a pluralising nonauthoritarian authority emerges from the surfacing of excluded, fragmentary, subterranean feelings and capacities.

Illusion

Perhaps we should ignore all the ornamentation and endless gold, and get straight to the heart of the matter: the building is an illusion. Behind the extravagant ornamentation and plasterwork lies a brute iron skeleton, hidden from view, which supports the extraordinary weight of the building. The architectural style has a nod to classicism but without any of classicism's elegant proportions: its 'brontosaurian ungainliness' has nothing to do with classical aesthetics (Higonnet, Higonnet, and Higonnet 1984, p. 401). The Opéra is a marvel of modern architectural technology whose cutting-edge iron construction methods are hidden from view, sheltered behind plaster walls. Architecturally, the Palais Garnier is a delicate box of plaster placed inside an enormous iron frame. One of the most modern buildings in Paris, in technological terms, is disguised as one of the most traditional.

Colour

The design of the building was already testament to the waning power and status of Napoléon's Prefect, Haussman (Van Zanten 1994:396). Garnier was strongly critical of Haussmann's creation of a city of dreary monochrome. For Haussmann, an unwavering insistence that the colour of the city remain a uniform grey was essential to achieving the unifying effect and easy legibility that he desired. But for Garnier, this unnecessarily drab aesthetic code was stifling:

> I dream of the day when tawny shades of gold will spangle our city's monuments and buildings. We will then stop building big straight

> streets that, although beautiful, are as cold and stiff as a dowager. Our streets will become less rigid and, without hurting anyone, a man will be able to build his house as he pleases, without worrying about whether or not it fits in with his neighbour's. Cornices will shine with the colours of eternity; gold friezes will sparkle on façades. Monuments will be decorated in marble and enamel, and mosaics will make the city vibrate with colour. This will not be garish. It will be true opulence. Once people have become accustomed to the city's marvellous, dazzling nuances, they will demand that our clothes be redesigned and brightened up as well, and the entire city will be harmoniously bathed in silks and gold. But alas! I look around and see a sombre grey sky, renovated houses, and dark shadows trudging along the endless boulevards. In short, I see Paris as it really is (Garnier 1869, pp. 159–60).

Let us pause here and give space to an elementary feeling – a sensuous delight in colour, in variety, in a dream of a city of sensory richness and beauty – before it becomes caught up in a complex assembly of poorly fitting, authoritarian feelings and sensations. Garnier's vision of a city of collective luxury and polychromatic variety is compelling insofar as it diagnoses and offers an alternative to the dreary, totalising uniformity of Haussmann's designs. It is possible to isolate here an elementary feeling for reality that is inclined towards colour, plurality, and difference. In his early writings, Walter Benjamin explored a speculative philosophy of colour, imagining a chromatic articulation of experience in which sensibility and understanding collapse into each other, and the subject that contains them dissolves into experience, collapsing the distinction between the gazer and the gazed upon (Caygill 1998, pp. 11–12). Perhaps we may find, at the core of Garnier's fantasy of a polychromatic urbanism, an elementary feeling oriented towards an infinite, speculative experience of utopian immersion in colour.

Turn out the lights

The building was designed with one thing in mind above all else: light. One journalist, describing the main public foyer, reported:

> It is here that Mr Charles Garnier deployed all the resources of his colourist architectural imagination. Not only did he cover the columns, the cornices, the ceilings with all the shades of gold, but he called to his aid painting and statuary that transformed the Grand Foyer into a hall of the Thousand and One Nights…. This foyer was blazing; the Sun of Africa has no more rays than the twelve chandeliers of this immense hall (Monselet 1875, p. 19).[1]

This celebration of light extended into the auditorium, where the seating area was lit up as well as the stage. This is the opposite approach to Wagner's festspielhous in Bayreuth, which opened one year after the Opéra Garnier. In Wagner's vision of the operatic spectacle, everything is subordinated to the lyric drama. The lights are turned off, the orchestra is hidden, there are no pillars or other obstacles to the eyeline, and the audience listens in total silence, entirely absorbed in the drama. Garnier's operatic spectacle of aesthetic immersion is equally totalising, but sketches an entirely different diagram of authority. Here, everything, not least the musical performance, is subordinated to the building itself, a living assembly of materials, feelings, meanings, and desires that combine to create a monstrous 'sense of having'. The auditorium is brilliantly lit, and the members of the audience are as much a part of the spectacle as the dramatic performance. The architecture of the Opéra is constructed as a space in which the audience are designed to be seen in the best possible light and profile. Members of the audience are ornaments of the building's performance of itself. The musical performance cedes priority to the even more intense drama of spectators on display.

The display of spectators within the auditorium stages a carefully curated hierarchy. Each space has a clear place in the order of rank and privilege. The architecture is designed to frame the spectators like a picture. Yet thinking beyond how the building dramatises privilege and hierarchies, we can discern a more elementary feeling: a desire to appear; a desire to exist; a desire for the performance of freedom to be staged and witnessed and evaluated (see Chapter 5). This desire to appear to others, when untethered from social hierarchies of class, race, and gender, is a fundamental orientation towards reality.

As a model of aesthetic immersion, the design was a failure. Within a few years, the auditorium lights were turned off, redirecting attention away from the spectators and the architecture and towards the performance. The bourgeois visitors no longer enjoyed being part of the spectacle or participating in the drama, and preferred to retreat silently into the dark (Sennett 1977). At a stroke, the whole architectural principle behind the building was negated. A model of total immersion in the lyric drama – making the audience as invisible and silent as possible – won out.

Perfect darkness

The Palais Garnier was celebrated for its extravagant use of light. Yet it is also associated with sheer darkness. The Palais Garnier sits over a vast 'lake' (really, a water tank), immortalised by Leroux's novel *The Phantom of the Opera*. While the foundations were being built, groundwater filled the site too quickly to pump out, and Garnier came up with the idea of using a huge cistern to enable him to lay the substructure; once filled, the tank could help with water pressure and support the structure. According to the tourist guides, the only people now allowed to visit the tank are firefighters who come from all over

Paris to train in its conditions of perfect darkness. The site is used to model a rescue operation in a flooded subterranean carpark. The Opéra houses one of the darkest spaces in the whole of France.

Anticipation

When should the curtain be raised or lowered? If the curtain is lowered during the overture, this intensifies the music. When it is raised, the music becomes absorbed into the drama. Until 1875, control over the curtain – the 'frame' of the drama – was the remit of the stage manager. The Palais Garnier was the first to pioneer an electric curtain, which the conductor himself would activate by pushing a button (Kreuzer 2018). Now, the conductor was taking increasing control over the stage and the framing of the spectacle, shifting his control beyond the musical elements towards something more total.

Be the protagonist

Siegfried Kracauer [1938] (1972) argues that the Second Empire found its clearest cultural expression in the light satirical operettas of Jacques Offenbach. If the Second Empire was an operetta (light, frivolous, hedonistic, satirical, pleasure-seeking), then the Third Republic was closer to Grand Opera (the kind of spectacle performed in the Palais Garnier), weighed down by death, defeat, fate, scientific progress, technological utopianism, and virulent anti-Semitism. In that sense, the Opéra Garnier certainly was more closely aligned with the Third Republic than the Second Empire. But if it offered a new take on the old idea of the city as theatre, then this was its staging of a plurality of operatic spectacles: the operatic drama, but also the spectacle of the audience, of the dancers, and of the building itself. Everyone in the building could enjoy the feeling of being part of an intense, glittering, luxurious spectacle. The Palais Garnier was a synthesiser of sensations, a factory of overwhelming feelings.

Atmospheric authority

Garnier's emphasis on colour implies a very different vision of urban order to Haussmann's. Gone is Haussmann's attempt to make the city's hierarchies readable at a glance. Garnier has no interest in legibility, only in *atmosphere*: light is not intended to give clarity, or to convey a publicly accessible meaning. It is used to create an ambience, a feeling, an immersion in space.

The building of the Paris Opéra preceded by at least a decade the fascination with synaesthesia (the unification of, or transferral between, visual, aural, tactile, and olfactory modes of sensing). This kind of displacement of the senses was a preoccupation of the Symbolist movement of the late 1880s

and 1890s (Dann 1998). However, in his discussion of his use of colour in the Opéra, Garnier explicitly evoked synaesthetic principles as a way of providing experiential unity (Mead 1991). He invoked the colonial imagery of an 'oriental mirage', a narcotic stupor into which the colours of the auditorium, mingling with the rest of the senses as a 'sweet perfume', would transport the users of the building:

> When the vapours exhaled from the lungs of the spectators, and those which escape the lighting fixtures, come to soften a little the rays of light that penetrate them and are agitated insensibly by the currents that carry them, there is in this sort of vibration of the air, causing to vibrate in turn the gold highlights of the ornament, something like the effect of an oriental mirage; first the eye begins softly to be charmed, then imagination follows in a sort of dream; one lets oneself be invaded by a sentiment of well-being, because the coloured reflections that are produced in this almost monochrome setting, far from having a painful intensity, only glisten as if murmuring in the light, and shine upon lulled gazes. It is thus that a sweet perfume, which one hardly suspects, embalms with sweetness the spaces that it fills with its scents (Garnier 1878, pp. 175–77).[2]

Synaesthetic experience, or a broader unification of the senses, is in the Palais Garnier an architectural principle that conjures a feeling of contact with the absolute or the transcendent, a quasi-mystical experience that overcomes the divided self or nation. This is a knowingly illusory synthesis, a 'mirage', a temporary sensual relief from differences and boundaries. Yet the pleasure of this experience also helps us identify a hidden, more elementary feeling, one which reaches out to a transcendent, speculative experience that does not overcome differences but infinitely multiplies them. This is a feeling that seeks to shatter the senses into speculative new configurations and forms, rather than uniting them into a single totality.

In Garnier's vision for the interior of the building, the Opéra radiates the same kind of oriental aura that was so popular in the plotlines of 19th century Grand Opera. The typical plot, applicable to various spectacles commonly seen at the Palais Garnier, goes as follows:

> Young, tolerant, brave, possibly naive, white-European tenor-hero intrudes, at risk of disloyalty to his own people and colonialist ethic, into mysterious, dark-skinned, colonised territory represented by alluring dancing girls and deeply affectionate, sensitive lyric soprano, incurring wrath of brutal, intransigent tribal chieftain (bass or bass-baritone) and blindly obedient chorus of male savages (Locke 1991, p. 263). Adorno describes it in a slightly different way: Western man becomes infatuated with exotic foreign woman, seduces her and then returns home (cited in Koch 2012).

The Palais Garnier unifies the senses by overloading them, piling sensation onto sensation, creating a sensory overload that conjures up hedonistic, 'oriental' sensuality and sexuality. The music of the performance mingles with the colours of the auditorium, the glitter of the gas lights and the spectacle of the other members of the audience, lulling the passive onlookers with a warm, intoxicating spatial embrace. The experience is to be direct, unmediated, unified, absolute. The synaesthetic space produced by the arrangement of colour, light, bodies, and spaces smooths over conflict or tension, giving each spectator an active role in a drama of luxury and glory. It is a factory devoted to producing a 'sense of having': claiming the richest sensations and the grandest, noblest emotions.

For Garnier, synaesthetic architecture could unite sensible and mental experience:

> in spite of yourself, this tonality which surrounds you already renders you more fit to feel the harmonic beauties [of the music]; this setting in which you are plunged for the duration of the performance has on you, and without your knowledge, a certain, positive influence, even though it does not try to impose itself on your sight, on your attention, and even though it penetrates you and stimulates you without you suspecting it. The music of sounds is certainly quite grand and powerful; but the music of tones also has its strength and persistence; it is this music of colour that insensibly modifies your thoughts and even your actions; it is this red, white, blue, black or green tonality which, when it dominates and continues for a long time, gives to your imagination and to your heart a happy or sad, lively or melancholy cast; rose-coloured thoughts is not a vain phrase, any more than seeing life all in black (Garnier 1878, pp. 177–78).

This kind of fantasy of transcendence overwhelms a more elementary desire for a transcendent experience that is diverse, multiple, and overcomes the limits of the modern subject – an experience where transcendence is tethered to spirituality, not the destructive logic of the commodity.

High-rise constructions of feeling

The culture industry assembles feelings into preformed ideological cliches. Kluge argues for the importance of examining these 'highly synthetic compounds' for their 'elemental components' (see Fore 2014, pp. 42–43). Western culture erects 'high-rise constructions' of emotion that must be dismantled into their constituent blocks. When assembled into complex, mixed up forms, emotions begin to function in illogical ways, becoming unrecognisable to judgement. But when they are disassembled and reconnected to the body's sensuous encounter with material spaces, feelings are *inclined to reality.* Feelings are based in the skin, our source of contact with the world, and are key for forming

critical judgements about it. In these individual judgements, feelings never err. When artificially combined, they misfire, because their timing becomes damaged. They are no longer able to respond to the demands of the present. The task of a speculative account of nonauthoritarian authority becomes to dismantle the totalising assembly of feelings that constitutes the authority of the subject, and to authorise those 'concealed, covered-over, contorted qualities in human beings' that are grounded in the intelligence of the body, its sense of reality, founded in the skin's contact between self and world (Schulte et al. 2014, p. 70). Similarly, the task of a politics of the senses is not to invent a revolutionary subject, but to reorganise the existing (yet neglected and undervalued) human capacities and invigorate their emancipatory potential (Fore 2014, p. 55). Identical traits are found in radical and reactionary assemblies of feeling; the task of critical analysis is to carry out a kind of political alchemy that experiments with finding the right configuration of subjective traits.

The pleasure of submission

The spectacle of the Opéra building became one in which the individual details of the architecture, ornamentation, painting, and sculpture were subordinated to a single, dazzling whole. The model of authority was one of a sensuous submission to a single principle and demand. Garnier admitted to caring little about the content of the paintings and sculptures he commissioned, even though he had some of the most renowned academy artists in the country at his disposal (Mead 1991, p. 177). The important thing was for the artworks to be of suitable size, colour, and tone to blend in perfectly with their architectural environment. Individual artistry had to be sacrificed for the effect of the whole:

> In this case one should not consider the paintings and sculptures to be special and personal works that can be isolated and form a complete whole … they must lose a part of their individual character, to constitute only true decoration…. (Garnier 1878, p. 110).[3]

Garnier gave the artists strict instructions as to the exact nature of the compositions that they were to produce:

> the architect, to conserve the general harmony and to give to each of his productions its significance and its proper importance, must impose on the artists not only the exact dimension, but also the subjects, the silhouettes, the general tones, the effects and the style of the composition (Garnier 1878, p. 111).[4]

Garnier would not tolerate any stylistic discrepancy that might lessen the effect of the transcendent experience that he was trying to create through his architecture. The iconography of these artworks was of very little interest to

him, and was largely of a predictable and conventional kind, such as allegorical statues of the various art forms that the Opéra united. Everything was subordinate to the architectural effect – and hence, the authority of the architect.

Festivity and pleasure

In Garnier's Opéra, ornament is everything. Not just in the abundance of gold leaf, statues, paintings, patterns, and fabrics, but in its transformation of the *audience* into visual ornaments of the building. The Palais Garnier was a space to see and to be seen. Garnier made the audience participants in a larger operatic performance. During the early stages of the concert, one writer observed, 'the theatre was still half full, the hall, staircase and foyer jammed with people', and the box of one of the most distinguished guests, the King of Spain, remained empty (Roche 1875). The real spectacle was the crowd itself arriving, mingling, and competing for attention. Newspaper reports of the gala gave detailed portraits of the distinguished guest list, the extraordinary prices paid to secure a seat, the vast crowds of curious onlookers gathering outside to watch the display, the street lighting required to illuminate the spectacle, and the large police force required to keep order.

Garnier devoted a lot of effort to creating the best possible sight lines for this public spectacle. Every aspect of the Opéra was focused on giving the best possible profile to the spectators sitting in the auditorium and milling around the public foyer and the grand staircase. The spectators were to perform their own theatrical production. In this way, the building would come to life. Garnier wrote:

> On every floor the spectators leaning on the balconies will adorn the walls and will, so to speak, make them come alive, while others climb up and down the stairs and add still further life … everything will have an air of festivity and pleasure, and without realizing what is owed to architecture for this magical effect, everyone will participate in it, and everyone will thus render … homage to this great art, so powerful in its manifestations, so elevated in its results (Garnier 1878, pp. 64–66).[5]

One writer described the effect as:

> … irresistible. Gold and light marry together naturally and create a glitter that I cannot convey any idea of. The young and beautiful women who promenade during the intervals often appear like Venus in its passage around the Sun (de Lasalle 1875).[6]

The Opéra uses space, light, and colour to turn the audience (especially women) into glittering and mobile ornaments. Audience members chatted,

watched each other, and mingled in the corridors during the performance. This transformation of the 1,900 audience members into architectural ornaments involves a very different aesthetic to the kind of middle-class 'mass ornament' that Siegfried Kracauer (1995) analysed in his essay on early 20th century Tiller Girls. Kracauer argued that the emergence of the mass ornament – large groups of people assembled into moving geometric shapes, and watched by mass audiences – should be regarded as the 'rational and empty form of the cult, devoid of any explicit meaning' (Kracauer 1995, p. 84). Such aesthetic orderings of people, he argued, are rationalised, abstract masses, drained of meaning: such human ornaments are aesthetic reflexes of a prevailing mechanistic economic rationality. The aesthetic of the mass ornament in the Paris Opéra may be no less cultish, but it is more organic and fluid. It is not an ornament of geometric clarity, but an ornament of overwhelming excess, everything flowing into everything else, expanding the 'sense of having' to astronomical proportions, and giving each audience member symbolic possession of the whole spectacle.

Yet the ornament too is an elementary feeling that is oriented towards reality (Reeh 2004). As an object that is purely superficial, without depth, the ornament can offer a unique perspective on reality, especially when brought into new combinations of other fragments. When separated from an aesthetics that imposes a false unity and synthesis on the accumulation of ornaments, the ornament speaks to the superficial, fragmented aspects of lived experience. In contrast to the drive to seek depths and unity, the ornament is oriented towards reality, because

> apparently trivial and insignificant manifestations are the essential, indeed the only, points of access to that which lies below, to the fundamental conditions prevailing in a society at any given time (Gilloch 2015, p. 64).

Beyond the reduction of human life to rationalised ornament, an elementary feeling can be detached that is oriented towards a form of pluralised knowledge in the form of a kaleidoscope of fragments.

War, love, fate

It can't be said of many opera houses that they made a major contribution to the war effort. During the 1870 siege of Paris by Prussia, however, the half-finished opera house was used as a food warehouse and hospital. On its completion, war would go on to take centre stage in the operatic spectacle. At the heart of the spectacles were stories about family: parental authority, romantic love, filial duty. These familial issues were tethered to big historical narratives around war, revolution, religion, liberation, and national destiny, exemplifying a biopolitical rationality linking the intimacies of family life directly to

the life of the nation. One of the key points of Kluge's critique of 19th century opera is its tendency to glorify violence, defeat, and fate, and to profit from human misery. It ties the sensual pleasure of intense feeling to imperialism, patriarchy, and death. The extraordinary range of human emotions manufactured in the power plant of emotions is cut short by its poverty of endings and its glorification of fate: almost invariably, part of the redemptive moment of the Fifth Act is the death of the heroine. The critical task for the sensuous factory of emotion thus becomes to accomplish a 'disarming of the Fifth Act' (Kluge 1983), dismantling the totality and the grand gesture, and liberating the intense feelings created so movingly in opera, freeing them from their confinement within totalising, patriarchal narratives of national glory.

On the Opéra's opening night, passions boil over. The programme is a selection of music from four operas in the French Grand Opera tradition:

- Daniel Auber's *La Muette de Portici*. In the Fifth Act, the heroine hurls herself into the glowing lava of Mt Vesuvius
- Fromental Halévy's *La Juive*. In the Fifth Act, the heroine throws herself into a cauldron of boiling water. Her identity concealed, she had been accidentally condemned to death by her father
- Giacamo Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*. In the Fifth Act, the heroine, disguised as a Protestant, is shot by her father's troops after he orders the massacre of the Huguenots
- Gioacchino Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*. This drama also revolves around the possibility of a father killing his child. During the uprising of the Swiss against the tyrannical Hapsburgs, Tell is forced to accept a sadistic challenge: shooting an arrow through an apple balanced on the head of his son Arnold. He succeeds, and Arnold survives. However, Arnold has to abandon his love affair with a Hapsburg princess to fulfil his oath to fight for the independence of the Swiss nation.

In the factory of emotions, French Grand Opera's intensification of feeling is a kind of over-production of feeling. It manufactures vast quantities of intense sensation that become devalued and are of little use for everyday life. Kluge sees 19th century opera to exalt feeling whilst glorifying violence and defeat, and to profit from human misery (Flinn 2012). Opera can put into practice an extraordinarily powerful emotional stimulation, and this is what makes it so relevant to other contemporary cultural forms. Yet the kind of Grand Opera performed at the Opéra Garnier deals only with impossibly 'big' emotions, continually expanding and intensifying them, and dramatising their struggle for precedence, worrying about the appropriate hierarchy of feelings (what should come first: love or duty; father or nation?). In doing so, it discards all the obstinate, illogical, hard to name and hard to describe feelings that do not fit into the predetermined scenarios and institutions of opera. It trades in grand feelings that have little use in everyday settings.

The narratives of Grand Opera tie the embodied, reality-facing pleasures of intense feelings and emotions to historical, reality-denying temporalities of fate, ruination, war-as-love and love-as-war, and thereby, ultimately, to death (as a kind of greater life). 'The great operas begin with the promise of intensified feeling and in Act 5 we count the dead' (Kluge 1983). Thus, the analytical task becomes to *disarm the Fifth Act*: to disentangle the intensification of feeling from ill-fitting totalities celebrating fate, violence, historical progress, or national glory.

Assembly of feelings

The key move is to disrupt the technique for isolating and amplifying feeling in the 19th century. My method in this chapter is to apply this to the architectural spectacle which, in the Paris Opéra, superseded the operatic performance. By doing so, it might be possible to speculatively stage a brief performance where 'a momentary general assembly of feelings would be continually in session' (Hansen and Poor 1990, p. 106). This kind of circulation of a plurality of feelings undercuts the narcissistic subject who is governed by organised hierarchies of emotion and perception. This is not about emancipating feelings, but allowing a plurality of self-organising feelings to come into contact with each other, rather than entering into melodramatic struggles for precedence (Hansen and Poor 1990, p. 106).

Marble

The central social stage of the Palais Garnier is the Escalier d'Honneur (Staircase of Honour), a kind of 'monument within a monument' (Nuiter 1875, cited in Brevik, p. 30). The staircase quickly became the most celebrated feature of the Opéra; it came to be regarded as 'a synecdoche, a representative not just of the edifice as a whole, but of Parisian modernity itself (Brevik-Zender 2015, p. 30). The staircase dramatises a feeling of cosmopolitan grandeur supported by an imperial geography of extraction. It features a riot of multicoloured stones. Violet, white, and blue marbles are imported from Italy. Brocatelle is delivered from Spain. Black stone comes from Belgium. Scotland delivers granite. Green stone is imported from Sweden. Finland supplies red porphyry. Jasper comes from Mont Blanc and the surrounding Alpine areas. Finally, onyx is imported from the Oran region of Algeria. The onyx is used prominently, in the curving balustrade. This spectacular use of onyx stages Paris as an *imperial* city and contributes to the orientalising ambience of the monument.

Onyx was a widely used metaphor for colonial desire. In French colonial literature, for example, onyx is a material that regularly figures the beauty of the 'comely black' (Milbury-Steen 1980).[7] Some of the audience, too, take on

the physiognomy of marble, embodying their role as living ornaments of the architectural spectacle. One newspaper writes:

> Perhaps the fashion this year is to put on a face of marble for every occasion. So the fashion is well observed, and we encountered many people pretending to find all these gathered riches the most natural and predictable thing in the world. But at bottom this attitude is not really sincere (de Lasalle 1875).

Silk

Brevik-Zender (2015) draws attention to an advertisement, published four days after the opening of the Opéra, for a new fabric called *Nouvel-Opéra*, made of silk brocade using the latest modern technologies, suitable for clothing or for use as fabric wall coverings, drapes and door curtains, padded seats, and so on. The advert suggests that consumers might bring the lavish luxury of the Palais Garnier home with them by using the silk for furniture, wall coverings, and curtains. This created a connection between the urban monuments of the city and readers' homes.

> More provocatively, the very name of the fabric implied that, in donning a garment made from the silk, one could metaphorically 'wear' the opera house itself, an abstract mapping of urban space onto the body by way of clothing (Brevik-Zender 2015, p. 33).

The structure of ornamentation is reversed: now the reader wears the Opéra as clothing, rather than being themselves a living ornament of the building. If disentangled from the desire for status, wealth, and luxury, a different elementary feeling is at play: a desire to reclaim the city for human uses and purposes.

Reflection

Part of the benefit of being a subscriber to the Opéra was privileged access to certain spaces in the building. Most highly prized was backstage access: admission to the *foyer de la danse*. This was the room where the young ballet dancers warmed up, rehearsed, and dressed (ballet was a key part of Grand Opera). The wall between the stage and the foyer could also be removed so that the room became part of the spectacle. Far from being a plain part of the backstage, this room showcased some of the most elaborate wall and ceiling decorations to be found in the entire building. Subscribers greatly valued access to the foyer, where they could watch the young girls undressing and rehearsing. Such was the desire to gain entry to the foyer that a register had to be kept to control the numbers of people entering it (Theresa 2000, p. 136).

Any gentleman who subscribed to three performances per week was automatically placed on the list, as well other important guests (Theresa 2000, p. 139). Once they had gained access, gentlemen were free to watch the dancers and to arrange sexual liaisons. 'Backstage at the opera was the veritable fiefdom of wealthy men, who treated the ballet dancers as a kind of game preserve' (Herbert 1988, p. 104).

One account of Garnier's building considered entry to the *foyer de la danse* to be the most exciting part of the evening:

> What an adorable spectacle the foyer de la danse is! The vast mirror at the far end of the room permits one to take everything in at a single glance. It is as though attached to the far wall there were a gigantic painting, and the figures within the painting had suddenly become animated (Mortier 1879, p. 21).

The foyer thus offered an almost cinematic experience, in which spectators could watch the backstage spectacle in the mirror, enabling them to see everything going on within a single glance, whilst being able to distance themselves from the other figures in the foyer.

In Mortier's description of the foyer, the erotic investment in the spectacle is palpable:

> The black suits approach their goddesses a little timidly this evening. The brightness embarrasses them. And then, it's so shimmering, so luminous, so pretty; silk, satin, sequins, jerseys, bare arms, bare shoulders do so well in this environment, that one watches much more than one talks (Mortier 1879, p. 21).[8]

The orientalist architectural performance of the Palais Garnier restages a reduced version of Grand Opera, offering the wealthier members of the audience a chance to play the hero's role in the classic Grand Opera plot of a seduction of exotic women. This is an authoritarian totalisation of feelings, where the 'sense of having' extends beyond the spectacle to impose itself on everything and everyone in the building.

Bastard style

Garnier appears a little embarrassed about the *foyer de la danse*'s association with the prostitution of teenage dancers. In Garnier's descriptions of the aesthetic principles of the decoration of the room, the ornamentation itself takes on whatever character the patron desires:

> To help the composition, and above all the diversity of the successive décors, it was indispensable that the foyer de la danse, if it was

> going to be useful, had a, let us say, mongrel character … Without attempting the impossible, I wanted at least to find an undecided style that could, conventionally, attach itself to epochs and places most commonly used in the operas. It is thus that a little shamelessly I had to introduce a bastard style to the foyer so that it could be adapted, without too many improbabilities, to Spanish, Italian, German or French architecture of the last two or three hundred years' (Garnier 1878, p. 196).

Assembly of feelings

The Palais Garnier played a prominent role in the urban landscape of authority of late 19th century Paris. As a representation of authority, the building affirmed an urban landscape of imperial order, authority, and national pride. Within the building itself, authority was modelled and performed in complex ways. The architecture was devoted to an excess of light, colour, luxury, and ornamentation. The totalising aesthetic principle transformed people, especially women, into glittering ornaments. The hierarchical granting of privilege of access – with entry to the *foyer de la danse* being the most coveted – modelled a societal partitioning of roles according to class and gender. The spectacles within the theatre dramatised intense feelings, synthesised into bloated contests between love and duty and between family and nation, and often ending with a heroine's violent death at the hands of her father. In each case, authority is staged as an all-encompassing totality, a monstrous compound of sensations, perceptions, affects, and emotions, evoking an illusory transcendence, and all controlled and dramatised by a singular authoritative figure or principle.

The architecture of the Palais Garnier, a central monument of modern Paris, modelled a totalising aesthetics of authority, one which simultaneously intensified feeling and subordinated it to a single organic architectural whole. In his vision for the building, the architect articulated a synaesthetic vision in which all the senses would mingle and coalesce in creating a singular diagram of atmospheric authority, dominated by light and colour. Not only the senses mingled, but also emotions: the Opéra was one of the grandest expressions of a cultural form, the pinnacle of 19th century high culture, dedicated to manufacturing complex compounds of emotion. As a cultural 'power plant' of the emotions, the Opéra produced emotions that were synthesised into complex alloys that bound family love and romance to historical narratives of fate and national destiny. More subterranean, minor feelings were suppressed.

The construction of the building through a spectacular aesthetics of immersion dramatises how authoritarian (elite, patriarchal, colonial) authority is tied to the life of sensation and feeling. Authoritarian forms of authority can be constructed by synthesising emotions and feelings through a kind of alchemy that over-produces certain feelings and undervalues others. Yet latent within these compounds are genuine, elementary feelings and intensities

that could, if recombined speculatively in the right way, result in a release of radical, nonauthoritarian authority. Negt and Kluge's collective attempt in both their theory and their creative practice to experiment with creating new combinations of elementary feelings offers an intriguing alternative vision of a speculative impulse within critical theory.

My argument is that a fruitful way of pluralising authority is to experiment with new alchemies of feeling, experimenting with creating different compounds of feeling, and thereby gesturing towards what Kluge called a speculative general 'assembly' of feelings. Trapped within the authoritarian spectacle we see traces of elementary feelings that are oriented *towards* reality: the speculative plane of perception opened up by polychromy; the will to appear and to witness the appearances of others; the desire to reclaim the city and its monuments in the services of life; the drives of erotic desire; a desire for transcendence; a search for meaning; a pursuit of intense feelings, sensations, and emotions. If in the Palais Garnier these appear in synthetic, reactionary compounds, a speculative critique of the Opéra such as the one attempted here can identify, amplify, and experiment fragments of feelings that are more oriented towards reality. These elementary feelings are crucial ingredients in the making of nonauthoritarian forms of authority based on new rhythms of affective, emotional, and perceptual life.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the forms of authority enacted within a building that was a central component of the landscape of authority in 19th century Paris. Focusing on the interior of the architecture rather than its external role in the wider Parisian landscape, the chapter critiqued the hierarchical ordering of sensation diagrammed by the building. The aim was to give space to a subterranean plurality of feelings and perceptions materialised by the Opéra building. The fragmentary form of this chapter pluralises authority by taking apart the unified, synaesthetic, authoritarian ordering of the senses and paying attention to individual elements of feeling. Thus, whilst the empirical focus of the chapter is a monument to a kind of totalising authoritarianism in the realm of the senses and emotions, the chapter's style of analysis has staged a more horizontal organisation of individual elementary feelings. A nonauthoritarian assembly of feelings is a question of redistributing feelings in ways that pluralise them and give them new space to touch, interact, and respond to each other without being subsumed into grand, totalising narratives, compounds, and temporalities. This is one way we might interpret the imperative to disarm the 'Fifth Act', a call which can be applied more generally to any cultural forms that manufacture industrial compounds of feelings and sensations. In the realm of feelings, a nonauthoritarian authority trusts that feelings, when disassociated from artificial compounds such as the 'sense of having', are fundamentally oriented *towards* reality.

Early in the chapter, I suggested that the Opéra Garnier building (and similar buildings) could be regarded as a kind of counterpart to the Crystal Palace in the genealogy of European, imperialist modernity. Whereas the Crystal Palace collected vast collections of commodities, the Palais Garnier ran vast production lines of intense feelings. These are two sides of the phenomenon noted by Benjamin and Sloterdijk, a bourgeois modernity experienced as a kind of aesthetic immersion, a luxurious, cosified interior entirely cut off from the outside world, shielding its denizens from reality, rather than exposing them to it. If the Palais Garnier is indeed an important counterpart in the realm of feelings to the place the Crystal Palace occupies in the history of commodities, as I am suggesting, then its actuality consists in the aesthetic production of a totalised 'sense of having' that produces intense feelings and sensations in ways that shelter people from reality, rather than exposing them to it. Whereas Sloterdijk's global Crystal Palace is characterised by coziness and boredom, adding the Opéra as its cultural counterpart helps us see how the world interior of capital can also be a space of exaggerated intensities of feeling that are oriented towards nationalist melodrama and glorification of death. Whereas Sloterdijk asks us to wonder whether in the 21st century entire continents have been constructed on the model of the Crystal Palace, a focus on the 19th century opera house might make us wonder whether 21st century politics does not also bear disquieting affinities with the aesthetic orderings associated with the nationalist, patriarchal melodramas of 19th century French Grand Opera (Muelrath 2018).

Notes

[1] '*C'est ici que M. Charles Garnier a déployé toutes les ressources de son imagination d'architecture coloriste. Non-seulement il a couvert de toutes les nuances de l'or les colonnes., les corniches, les plafonds, mais il a appelé à son aide la peinture et la statuaire pour faire du grand foyer une salle des Mille et une Nuits. / Nous ne savons si le gaz continuera à être largement déversé dans les tuyaux des lustres et des candélabres … ce foyer était flamboyant; le soleil d'Afrique n'a pas plus de rayons que les douze lustres de cette immense salle.*'

[2] '*Lorsque les vapeurs qui s'exhalent des poitrines des spectateurs, et celles qui s'échappent des appareils d'éclairage, viennent à tamiser un peu les rayons qui les pénètrent et s'agitent insensiblement avec les courants qui les transportent, il y a dans cette espèce de vibration de l'air, faisant vibrer à son tour les taches d'or placées sur les saillies des ornements, comme un effect de mirage oriental; les yieux commencent dabord par être doucement charmés, puis l'imagination les suit dans une srte de rêve; on se laisse envahir par un sentiment de bien-être; car les reflets colorés qui se produisent dans ce milieu presque monochrome, loin d'avoir une intensité blessante, miroitent seulement comme s'ils murmuraient la lumière, et rayonnent aux regards*

apaisés. C'est ainsi, qu'un doux parfum que l'on soupçonne à peine, embaume avec suavité les espaces qu'il remplit de ses senteurs.'

[3] '*Il ne faut pas dans ce cas considérer les peintures et les sculptures comme des oeuvres spéciales et personnelles qui peuvent s'isoler et former un tout complet … elles perdent en partie leur caractère individuel, pour constituer seulement une vraie décoration*'.

[4] '*l'architecte, pour conserver l'harmonie générale et pour donner à chacune de ses productions sa signification et sa juste importance, doit-il imposer aux artistes, non-seulement les dimensions exactes, mais encore les sujets, les silhouettes, les tons généraux, les effets et le style de la composition*'.

[5] '*A chaque étage les spectateurs accoudés aux balcons, garnissent les murs et les rendent pour ainsi dire vivants, pendant que d'autres montent ou descendent, et ajoutent encore à la vie. Enfin en disposant des étouffes ou draperies tombantes, des girandoles, des candélabres ou des lustres, puis des marbres et des fleurs, de la couleur partout, on fera de tout cet ensemble une composition somptueuse et brillant qui rappellera en nature quelques-unes des splendides dispositions que Véronèse a fixées sur ses toiles … tout aura un air de fête et de plaisir, et sans rendre compte de la part qui doit revenir à l'architecture dans cette effet magique, tout le monde en jouira et tout le monde rendre ainsi … hommage à ce grand art, si puissant dans ses manifestations, si élevé dans ses résultats*.'

[6] '*Pour ce qui est du foyer, il est irrésistible. L'or et la lumière s'y marient d'inclination et produisent un scintillement dont on ne peut se faire l'idée. Les femmes jeunes et belles qui s'y promenaient pendant les entr'actes figuraient autant de fois le passage de la planète Vénus sur le soleil*.'

[7] For example, Pierre Loti, in a bestselling novel, writes of one character: 'She was the Khassonke ethnic type in all of its purity with her delicate little Greek face, skin as smooth and black as polished onyx, sparkling white teeth, and an extreme liveliness in her eyes' (cited in Milbury-Steen 1980).

[8] '*Les habits noirs s'approchent un peu plus timidement, ce soir, de leurs divinités. Cet éclat les gêne. Et puis, c'est si chatoyant, si lumineux, si joli; la soie, le satin, les paillettes, les maillots, les bras nus, les épaules nues font si bien dans ce milieu, qu'on regarde beaucoup plus qu'on ne cause*.'

11. Speculative provocations for a nonauthoritarian authority

So, here we are. We have gone through a lot of exercises together, got lost together, but made it to the end. I know for sure you didn't skip any chapters. Hopefully we have learned a little about how to respond to, acknowledge, or even create authority in new ways. We have explored new ways of thinking about the spaces and aesthetics of authority, emphasising a speculative proliferation of authorities by learning to attend to, care for, and attune ourselves to new kinds of voice and neglected forms of agency. I hope I have convinced you that this search is a vital one if we are to learn new ways of orienting ourselves within the disorienting spaces of modernity. By way of a conclusion, then, perhaps it is time to try to thread together some of the lessons we have learned in a series of provocations.

1. Authority is one of the most important forms of social coordination binding complex networks of human and nonhuman entities. Its forms are changing rapidly and dramatically. There is a risk that the growth of right-wing antiauthoritarianism is laying the groundwork for a proliferation of forms of social organisation that replace authority (including democratic authority) with violence, manipulation, and coercion.
2. Authority is a spatial practice. Authority emerges in everyday spaces and places out of ordinary encounters, materialities, and patterns of attention. Authority is built through spatial, embodied relationships that materialise relations of presence and absence, distance and proximity, origin and destination. Nonauthoritarian authority is the outcome of material practices that configure bodies in ways that facilitate mutual trust, respect, and listening across borders and boundaries.
3. Authority is not power. Authority is a form of guidance, enacted through practices such as advising, provoking, warning, demanding, and questioning. In the authority relation, an agent willingly allows herself to be guided by another. This is typically grounded in inequalities in access to, or sense for, reality. Authoritarianism monopolises and stabilises this inequality. Nonauthoritarian authority pluralises worlds: it recognises, affirms, and co-constructs multiple realities, structures of experience, and objectivities.
4. Authority emerges from the bottom up. It is a product of intersecting self-organising systems at multiple scales, including the

micro-ecologies of the nonconscious body, and taking diverse spatial forms. It coalesces temporarily within everyday spatial practices which bring together institutional effects, embodied experiences, materialities, forms, feelings, energies, and desires. Everyday authority is an emergent outcome of spatial practices that compose varying forms of advice, provocation, demand, and lure. Such practices *demand* a response but do not *compel* a response. They compete for attention, intervening in orders of visibility, feeling, and thinking. Authority is rarely stable, but flickers in and out of existence, as specific compositions of bodies and feelings shift and distort.

5. Authority becomes authoritarian when it is homogenised, unified, and monopolised. This results in (and is enabled by) a kind of alienation that takes the form of a diminished sense for reality, where subjects shelter from the plural, heterogeneous, discomforting demands of human and nonhuman others.
6. Nonauthoritarian authority is a practice of guiding and following that is plural, dispersed, temporary, and co-created by many actors, both human and nonhuman. Nonauthoritarian authority is based on mutual respect, attunement, and active exposure to reality. It involves dynamic interchange between the parties involved, not blind obedience. Nonauthoritarian authority augments a communal sixth sense, a sense for reality that is attuned to a plurality of perspectives, voices, feelings, and affects.
7. Nonauthoritarian authority does not appeal to stable foundations or metaphysical, super-sensory realities. It builds itself on unstable, shifting grounds, and on the gaps and absences between multiple realities and knowledges.
8. Nonauthoritarian authority cannot be imposed through force, coercion, or violence. Its weight, and also its fragility, lies in the fact that it has to be granted freely. The powerful cannot be forced to recognise the demands of the marginalised. They must be provoked, taught, enticed, or lured into responding to the demands of those who are different to themselves. The powerful need the courage to expose themselves to the guidance of others. Speaking 'truth to power' is a question of synthesising distinct compounds of feeling, demonstrating courage and sincerity to build relations of trust. Relations of trust help build a sense for reality where all parties can take the courageous step of exposing themselves to multiple perspectives.
9. Whereas authoritarian authority can be constructed through impersonal institutional or bureaucratic forms of legitimacy, nonauthoritarian authority emerges only when an authority figure demonstrates their *worthiness* to be granted authority.
10. One task of critical theory must be to enrich the sense of reality. It should pluralise authority through experimental practices of listening with, and responding to, marginalised or devalued voices.

These voices may be both human and nonhuman. This is a project that has both critical and speculative dimensions. It is critical, in that it traces the historical and contemporary limits of authority, with the aim of disrupting and dismantling them. It is speculative, in that it tries to move beyond those limits, imaginatively enacting forms of authority that are unrecognizable as such. It is a task that both engages with the world as it is, and conjures a world that is impossible, improbable, or nascent.

11. Authority is elusive. It often resists conscious reflection or representation. We do not always know why we are drawn to be guided by a particular authority. Sometimes we allow ourselves to be guided by authorities that we know to be damaging us.
12. Authority is social magic. It is the result of a mysterious alchemy of feelings. Its force is often enigmatic and ambiguous. It reaches towards the outsides of life and lived experience. It cannot be known in advance. Crafting a nonauthoritarian authority requires an orientation towards practising new syntheses of perception, emotion, materiality, affect, and feeling, as well as the good humour to accept that many attempts at the impossible may cross into the domain of the absurd.
13. Authority presupposes agency and recognition. However, neither agency nor recognition presuppose conscious reflection. Because all matter has agency, authority is enacted at scales beyond and behind conscious intentionality. Our embodied feelings, affects, and sensations may respond to authority differently to our conscious lived experiences.
14. Nonauthoritarian authority makes the roles of guide and guided provisional and reversable. Appealing to no foundation, no ground, no banister, no handrail, nonauthoritarian authority is a form of collective orientation that is uncertain, hesitant, fleeting, and always provisional and revisable.
15. Antiauthoritarianism challenges the dominant spatial forms of modern authority, which have long been (and remain) elitist, patriarchal, colonial, unaccountable, patronising, demeaning, and technocratic. This critique of authority is vital, and this book has contributed to in its critiques of colonial urbanisation, authoritarian architecture, and affective atmospheres of state terror. Yet this must be supplemented with a more speculative project, one which takes up the challenge of reimagining or reinventing authority in ways that are more egalitarian, more attentive to marginalised voices, and better distributed across diverse human and nonhuman assemblages. A new authority is possible and is necessary. This nonauthoritarian authority will be a form of social coordination based on respect, openness to plural perspectives, and listening to and with marginalised voices and nonhuman actors. It may look very different to

the kinds of places and practices that are usually associated with authority. We could, if we wanted, call it by a different name. One way or another, authority or something like it will be needed if we are to pluralise the voices, calls and provocations that make themselves genuinely *heard* in a raucous world of ceaseless noise.

16. Authority does not unfold within space. No entity has sole authority over a defined territory. Authority co-composes relations of distance, proximity, presence, and absence. Authority creates spatial forms, stretching and folding space as it does so, enabling it to create durability and stability through change and transformation. Authority is a practice that enacts proximity, distance, and presence through a topological distortion of reach. In a place such as colonial Hong Kong, for example, specific ways of managing land were a foundation that enabled colonial authority to persevere through a deliriously rapid process of creative destruction of the landscape. Yet a nonauthoritarian authority can be conjured by dwelling with and responding to the gaps, cracks, and flows of unconsolidated materials underlying the apparently stable concrete foundations of the colonial city. In contemporary Rio de Janeiro, similarly, state violence and gang violence create spatial contortions that impose a durable authority structure through security practices that continually stretch and deform the boundaries of the community. Yet by shifting attention to the neurobiological rhythms of women living in favelas, it becomes possible to see how marginalised people negotiate, assert, and transform authority through the multiple forms of agency distributed within and across bodies.
17. We should not appeal to the authority of 'the body', because no one has 'a' body. What we call 'the body' traces many different circuits of authority that connect, diverge, and coalesce in unpredictable and unstable alchemies of feeling.
18. Nonauthoritarian authority is aesthetic in nature. It is grounded in complex *judgements* about how to guide others and how to be guided by others. These judgements involve complex syntheses of feeling, emotion, and perception. Judgements command a kind of authority, an obedience in which freedom is retained. Nonauthoritarian authority affirms the capacity to respond to particulars through an imaginative inhabitation of multiple perspectives. An aesthetics of nonauthoritarian authority is the *opposite* of a retreat into subjectivism or individual creativity; it is a voluntary submission to the perspectives of plural actors who encroach upon the subject and force them to change. It is not that something forces me to think; it is that I willingly humiliate myself before the object that demands, provokes, or lures thought.
19. Pluralising authority requires finding new or better ways of giving attention to the cacophonous plurality of voices and appearances that

call out to be witnessed. In academic writing, pluralising authority can take place through a diversification of its written forms. This book is a series of experiments with forms, styles, and genres for theorising authority. It includes attempts to, for example: create narrative voices that reject mastery (Chapter 1); write in forms that respond to the authority of granular drift (Chapter 9); parody the authority of an astrology column (Chapter 6); find new ways of reading theoretical texts (Chapter 5); write through multiple narratives that refuse the authority of singular conceptions of reality (Chapter 7); or compose new compounds of elementary feelings that enact an alternative sense for reality (Chapter 10). What is most important is the ethos underlying each form: an ethos towards practising – however imperfectly, and always risking (or achieving) failure – an experimental approach to rethinking how we relate to others.

20. Nonauthoritarian authority comes about through practices of attentiveness, care, birth, and attunement. Authorising voices and appearances means paying attention to them. Deauthorising others may involve explicit rejection, ridicule, or denunciation; or more often, it simply involves focusing attention somewhere else.
21. Following authority is not (necessarily) shameful or childish. What is more shameful or childish is the fantasy that anyone could always think, evaluate, and make judgements without the support and guidance of others. When we acknowledge our vulnerability, our reliance on others, our mutual co-dependence, we affirm the need for authority.
22. Pluralising authority requires multiplying the forms, genres, and styles through which academic knowledge (a key form of authority) is articulated.
23. Resistance is not always opposed to authority. A key part of the art of resistance is learning how to resist with authority.
24. Nonauthoritarian authority requires respect for, and openness to, plurality and difference. It will not allow authority to become petrified into permanent forms. Nonauthoritarian authority cannot be assimilated to singular figures such as nation, market, father, or master. Pluralising authority multiplies the forms of belonging, identity, and community, including communities linking humans to nonhuman others.
25. In a society of nonauthoritarian authority, authority is reinvented as an attitude of attunement between human life, nonhuman life, and non-living materials. Such a non-repressive authority creates order through a voice that listens rather than commands; a body that touches rather than wounds; a gesture of care that refuses the violence of mastery; an act that pluralises worlds.

Appendix: Methodological note

The methodological approach of this book is eclectic, and the analytical style is sometimes playful. Nevertheless, each theoretical and methodological tool is chosen and used thoughtfully and rigorously. Speculative geography requires a questioning of the tools, techniques, and devices used to create knowledge, and in particular, the nature of the empirical that they help construct. Social science has recently paid close attention to performative, nonrepresentational, creative, and live research methods (Back and Puwar 2013; Boyd and Edwardes 2019; Hughes and Lury 2018; Law 2004; Vannini 2015). Speculative research methods must learn much from these approaches, and also make important shifts: from critique (tracing the limits of knowledge) to speculation (transgressing those limits); from the probable to the possible; from repeating established methodological rules to devising questions and research techniques that may prompt novel and inventive responses (Rosengarten and Savransky 2017, p. 113). Speculative methods respond to the demands and requirements of a particular empirical situation, a situation that is partly constructed through the methods that are used to question it.

> If the challenge of speculative research is to explore and make perceptible futures by experimenting with possibles, the task of empirical research shifts from the capture of measurement, determination and regulation which effectively foreclose possibilities, to questions around and efforts towards the luring of the potentiality of experiences (Wilkie, Savransky, and Rosengarten 2017, p. 113).

Writing as method

A key research method used to lure the potentiality of experience in the book is *writing*. I find it perplexing that more emphasis is not placed in methods training on the importance of writing *as* a research method, as opposed to something that happens after the empirical research is finished (a point also made by Cresswell 2019). In this book, form, genre, and style are used as speculative methods for revealing speculative possibilities. Whether through the genre of the horoscope (Chapter 6), or through a description of a run (Chapter 8), or through a granular form enacting a creative mimesis of saltating sand grains (Chapter 9), or a disjunctive form (Chapter 7), or a

fragmentary form (Chapter 10), each chapter aims to *show* not just *tell,* and to explore writing as an adventure in thought (Dewsbury 2014). Writing is a methodology for uncovering speculative possibilities for discerning authority in unlikely places: for example, in everyday, ordinary encounters (Chapter 2); in the drifting movements of nonhuman granular materials (Chapter 10); in novel kinds of authorial voice (Chapter 6); in a novel configuration of elementary feelings (Chapter 10); in the rhythms of preconscious biophysical and affective processes (Chapter 7). Encountering these speculative possibilities occurs through a methodology of writing that starts with the question of form and genre. How can academic writing evoke kinds of authority that are situated in unlikely and hard to discern places, removed from the conscious individual human subject? The forms and genres used in the book were arrived at through an experimental, iterative writing process that paid careful attention to the limits and possibilities – the kinds of authority – that are imposed by different styles, forms, and genres. In each chapter, the form of writing is carefully theorised and connected to the kinds of speculative possibility in discussion.

Each chapter attempts – however imperfectly – to develop a style capable of expressing the incipient authorities it attunes itself to. Style, here, is 'a matter of learning to explicitly attend to the various shifting expressions of objects and how those expressions contribute to how a situation works' (Ash and Simpson 2019, p. 144). Crafting a style is attempting to take a passage into new territory; '[t]o move, while writing, from one point of the universe to another' (Serres and Latour 1995, p. 71). Style here is always a question of risk, and *risk* and *exposure* are key sources of authority (see Chapters 4 and 5). Serres writes:

> A unique style comes from the gesture, the project, the itinerary, the risk – indeed, from the acceptance of a specific solitude … Repetition of content or method entails no risk, whereas style reflects in its mirror the nature of the danger (Serres and Latour 1995, p. 94).

Biosensor data and qualitative research in the Maré complex of favelas

Chapter 7 draws on empirical fieldwork undertaken in the Maré complex of Favelas. The chapter analyses data from mobile biosensors in conjunction with qualitative interviews. By working with electrodermal activity (EDA) readings of women conducting routine journeys in the Maré, the chapter extends innovative mobile biosensing methodologies to a very challenging fieldwork site that sees high levels of authoritarian state and criminal violence.

EDA refers to small changes in levels of perspiration that cause tiny variations in the electrical conductance of the skin. The amount of perspiration expresses unconsciously controlled processes in the autonomic nervous system, which regulates the internal environment of the body through

autonomous, unconscious physiological processes (Dawson, Shell, and Filion 2007). Higher activity in the sympathetic nervous system is associated with biophysical indicators such as perspiration, higher heart rate, and changes in blood pressure. Greater affective or emotional stimulation leads the skin to perspire more, resulting in measurable variations in the electrical conductivity of the skin (Critchley 2002).

The project worked with 12 research participants, all adult women, of varying socio-economic background, living in the Maré district of favelas. We conducted qualitative interviews and measured journeys within the favela using a Shimmer3 portable biosensor, attached to their wrist under a sleeve. The sensor gathered quantitative data on skin conductance levels, skin temperature, and displacement (using a tri-axial accelerometer and gyroscope). Participants remained motionless for a few minutes, to establish their biometric baselines, and then travelled on a route that they chose themselves as one of their ordinary, routine journeys in the favela. The biosensor is unobtrusive, making it ideal for our purposes here, where ensuring the security and anonymity of research participants was a key concern. For most journeys, a GPS was also used to track the participants' location and these data were linked to the biophysical data. (One participant declined to use the GPS, due to safety concerns.)

Our primary question was whether the biophysical data could give us useful insight into the preconscious rhythms of women's affective responses to the environment as they moved around the city. In addition, we conducted one–two hour qualitative interviews with the women immediately after their journey, but *without* showing them visual representations of the biophysical data beforehand, thereby avoiding the temptation to impose representational meanings on non-representational affective processes.

Portable biosensors are now widely available. However, as Osborne and Jones (2017) argue, too often the approach is positivist or quasi-positivist and is not supported with qualitative analysis. This is a problematic approach given how hard EDA data are to interpret. Indeed, Poplin (2020) argues that we should be wary of saying that EDA indexes 'emotions' at all, arguing that 'additional research needs to be invested to better understand how these and other measurements can be translated into emotions' (Poplin 2020, pp. 131–32). Poplin's critique, however, still assumes that EDA can and should be 'translated' into subjective emotion. I wish to question this assumption, suggesting that EDA gives us insight into embodied affects but should *not* be seen as directly recording lived emotions.

EDA data offer quantitative information about levels of arousal of the sympathetic nervous system. However, these data tell us nothing about the *quality* of the affect, or how it is experienced at a subjective level. Peaks in sympathetic nervous activity might be linked to heightened emotional response, or to high cognitive demands, or both at once (Dawson, Shell, and Filion 2007). They might be triggered by external stimuli or internal mental processes such as thoughts and memories. Thus, far from providing any kind of scientific

certainty about the meanings of affects, EDA data are useful only to the extent that they help us to work experimentally, cautiously, and creatively with the ambiguous and non-representational registers of affect. They should not be used to impose singular representational meanings on bodies' affective lives.

Given the large number of uncontrollable variables in walking around an urban environment, and our emphasis on exploratory rather than positivistic renderings of the human body, we did not (and could not) establish laboratory-style controls. We stress that these mobile biophysical data, acquired outside laboratory conditions, do not achieve the standards of scientific validity. When treated with the appropriate level of caution, however, and in conjunction with qualitative data, biophysical data do offer useful performative and experimental tools for understanding embodied affects. Our approach rejected the temptation to determine the meanings of individual phasic events (i.e. specific peaks in sympathetic activation), which is the usual approach within psychological and market research (i.e. 'was there an affective response at the moment an image of a puppy appeared on screen?'). Instead of this 'representational' approach, I suggest that EDA data can most productively be used through analysis of the wider nonrepresentational patterns and rhythms of sympathetic activation, to learn lessons about the forms of affective resilience discernible in participants' biophysical responses. By analysing broader rhythms of sympathetic activation, rather than ascribing meanings to specific peaks and troughs in the data, we learn much about how moving around the favela's border spaces impacts the body's affective resilience, defined here simply as the body's ongoing capacity to affect and to be affected.

As well as quantitative biophysical data, the research draws on one–two hour qualitative interviews with the research participants about their journeys. Rather than showing interviewees their EDA readings and discussing them, and risk succumbing to the temptation to impose representational meanings on specific peaks in the data, we wished to allow lived experiences and preconscious affects a level of analytical autonomy and separation. Through a focus on the broader rhythms of affective activation, the aim was to identify and creatively work with – not overcome – gaps, disparities, and discontinuities between qualitative and quantitative data sets. This makes it possible to treat urban affect as relatively autonomous from lived experiences and emotions urban emotions, but as still impacting on embodied states and practices.

The biophysical data were acquired from a wearable Shimmer3 multi-sensing device, including a GSR+ (galvanic skin response) unit for electrodermal conductance or skin conductance (SC) measurements (μS), a three-axis accelerometer, and a superficial thermometer. The software used was Consensys v 0.4.4. The belt sensors were positioned on the index and middle fingers of the non-dominant hand of each participant, three to five minutes before starting the record. Raw data corresponding to the simultaneous measures, sampling time intervals of 19.5 ms, or 51.2 Hz, were recorded on an SD memory card and later downloaded via desktop software. The participant was instructed to keep relaxed, and immobile, for the first three to

five minutes before recording and starting the routine commute. No filter has been applied. Records were mainly analysed through exploratory data procedures restricted to the determination of a basic statistical referential, accompanied by visual inspection.

We performed a frequency analysis of SC magnitude classes, for which the bin interval was defined as the tenth fraction of the standard deviation of the arithmetic mean determined for each of the SC series of values. Histograms suggested up to four distinct amplitude classes in the SC recordings, assuming near Gaussian distributions for each class, as well as the predominant contribution of values compatible with the visually suggested components of the tendency of the tonic.

Global fit trendlines were also determined for SC data series plots, enabling calculation of the Pearson correlation coefficient R^2 through least squares regression analysis simplified by linear combination, assuming polynomial linear models, with best fitting orders found between 3 and 6. R^2 values determined for each of the six continuous recordings scored, predominantly, above 0.7, with just one around 0.5. Although tonic components tend to weigh more heavily in the overall determination of best-fit trendlines, these are subjected to the significant mathematical influence of phasic and/or nontypical SC dynamic events, especially when prominent in frequency and magnitude throughout recordings.

Basic statistical parameters were determined from analysis of the SC data series, including maximum and minimum, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation of the mean. In addition, the same parameters were determined for results of an increment analysis, which consisted of surveying calculated differences between consecutive SC data points. Also, frequency distributions were raised for these incremental data, with evidence of just one Gaussian class.

Such basic statistical parameters were also applied to the data series corresponding to the surface temperature of the skin and the Z axis of the accelerometer.

Although simple bimodal distributions of SC magnitudes were discarded, as mentioned above, we opted once again to extend the exploratory data scanning to compare averages of the non-paired skin conductance recordings we had in the study, using the two-sample *t*-test ($\alpha = 0.05$), assuming mostly unequal variance. For this, we performed a screening of variance, comparing records in pairs, that preceded the *t*-test. Unequal variance prevailed, except internal comparisons of back-and-forth paths corresponding to a single woman. All possible *t*-test pairings among the six recordings comprising the present study have determined *P* values tending to zero, as expected.

Archival research on Hong Kong's Colonial Sand Monopoly

Chapter 9 relies on detailed archival research in the Hong Kong Public Records Office, taking place between 2016 and 2020. The Public Records

Office has an excellent digitised catalogue, and I searched the catalogue for any records mentioning 'sand' in Hong Kong's archives. This produced few enough results that I could look at every folder that came up in the search. Several folders concerned details around where sand could be stored, which was not the focus of my study, but others gave detailed accounts of the origins, practices, and end of the Colonial Sand Monopoly. The archival documents included petitions from Indigenous Hong Kong residents, lengthy bureaucratic debates about the best way to solve the sand crisis, numerous accounts of conflicts around sand that the Controller of Stores had to attempt to address, and debates around the move to end the sand monopoly and open up to private suppliers. One archive folder also contained very useful newspaper clippings pertaining to the Colonial Sand Monopoly over a period of several decades.

After the closure of the Colonial Sand Monopoly, sand supply shifted to private suppliers. Archival records for these suppliers were not available, and present-day practices in sand supplies are very secretive and commercially sensitive. Thus, it is hard to gain reliable data about contemporary sand-extraction practices, especially given the prevalence of illegal sand extraction and importing, which can be seen in the huge difference between official sand importation figures and the actual amount of sand used to fulfil Hong Kong's construction requirements.

I also conducted qualitative interviews with eight environmental activists and NGOs who campaign about sand supply issues in Hong Kong. These informants provided crucial information about the contemporary issues around sand extraction and importation, the environmental harm of sand mining, and the problems with artificial sand production. Interviews were recorded and anonymised.

I further drew on extensive newspaper and social media sources in tracing the developments of the 2019–2020 Water Revolution in Hong Kong. These were all easily available online.

Archival research on the Palais Garnier

Chapter 10 draws on archival materials consulted in Paris, especially the Bibliothèque Nationale, where I systematically consulted contemporary newspaper accounts of the events, including the unveiling of the building's façade in 1875 and the public opening of the building in 1881. I also made use of the Opera Library archives, which has a useful store of musical, iconographic and archive records concerning the activity of the Paris Opéra, where I found helpful documents, including information about the programme for the opening night at the Opéra. Garnier's own published writings about the building were also key sources of information informing my analysis.

Participant observations on the Bristol to Bath railway path

Chapters 2 and 8 are primarily theoretical chapters, but they also make use of some simple participant observations and auto-ethnographies undertaken on the Bristol to Bath railway path between 2020 and 2023. I spent periods of time sitting on one of the benches on the path at a busy intersection and watching the ordinary encounters and events that took place there. I also walked lengths of the railway path taking detailed observations about signs, markings, graffiti, and posters that offered some kind of guidance about how to behave on the railway path, and taking photographs. I further monitored Facebook posts over four years on the Bristol and Bath Railway Path – OnePath public group, a very active group of over 3,000 Facebook users, on which people post about safety issues, advice about using the path safely, grumbles about inconsiderate path users, updates on the condition of the path, volunteering, community consultations, protests, and much else.

Research ethics

All the empirical research in this book was carried out in accordance with Cardiff University's Human Research Ethics Policy, with approval for the empirical research in Brazil granted by the School of Geography and Planning Research Ethics Committee (SREC) on 22 November 2019. The archival research was exempt from formal ethics review, since it was based on publicly available data and did not involve potentially identifiable data or sensitive information, or any make findings that could harm individuals or groups. The use of this data complied with Cardiff University's 'Framework for the Ethical Review of research using Secondary Data or Publicly Available information only'. Similarly, formal ethical approval for the theoretical chapters was not needed, since no human or animal research was involved.

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NON-AUTHORITARIAN AUTHORITY

CITIES, MATERIALITY, AND THE AESTHETICS OF POWER

Julian Brigstocke

Authority is not a word with many positive connotations. It suggests power-hungry dictators, trigger-happy police, stifling bureaucracies, and monumental urban landscapes. In *Nonauthoritarian Authority* Julian Brigstocke argues that in these shattered times, anti-authoritarianism is not enough: a radical, speculative reinvention of authority is needed. He introduces the idea of non-authoritarian authority: a form of power that pluralises marginalised and hidden voices, recognises diverse agencies, and amplifies heterogeneous demands.

Engaging with key philosophical debates around materiality, experience, feeling, agency, and landscape, *Nonauthoritarian Authority* stages a series of experiments with thinking, reading, researching, and writing non-authoritarian authority. Dramatising a speculative search for barely sensed, dispersed authorities, Brigstocke's experiments in thinking explore the intrinsically spatial nature of authority, through empirical studies of violent urban borders in Rio de Janeiro, colonial material infrastructures in Hong Kong, monumental architecture in Paris, and everyday spaces of encounter in the UK.

Offering an intricate and playful reflection on the relationship between authority, urban forms, and writing, each exercise in thinking links form and genre to a distinctive way of imagining authority. Each chapter simultaneously critiques a form of authoritarian authority and searches for a new, nonauthoritarian authority within the rubble of the old.

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