

Chapter One

Introduction: Bodies, Affects and Their Politicisation

It is impossible to discuss the relationships between bodies, affects and politics in the abstract: that is, abstracted from the material and ideological conditions of their production, from the processes of politicisation and depoliticisation that bring bodies and affects into, or keep them away from, politics (to paraphrase Harvey, 1993, p. 41). To introduce this book, then, I will start with the story of a particular neighbourhood in West London. It is a story worth telling in its own right, for it involves social murder, as Labour MP John McDonnell put it. However, my purpose is to show how bodies, affects and politics have been entangled at various moments in the area's recent history. But, more than this, I want to argue that there are different regimes of bodies, affects and politics operative in these moments – and it is in the clash between these regimes that different forms of politics can emerge. The problem that animates this book, then, is this: how are we to understand these regimes and what are we to make of them?

Lancaster West Estate, North Kensington

In 1972, work began constructing the Lancaster West Estate in North Kensington, London. The Estate was intended to redevelop part of the Notting Hill area, which had become notorious for its slums, poverty and criminality. This reputation has, for decades, been racialised. Since the HMT *Empire Windrush* first docked (in 1948), the neighbourhood's cheap rooms for rent had proved attractive to new

immigrants from the Caribbean (see Phillips and Phillips 2009). Notting Hill also attracted ruthless slum landlords, such as (most infamously) Peter Rachman. By the 1950s, local white people, especially working-class Teddy Boys, were starting to display hostility towards black people moving into the area. In the summer of 1958, there were increasing attacks on black people as well as the rise of right-wing groups, such as the White Defence League; its slogan, 'Keep Britain White'. On Sunday 24 August 1958, armed with iron bars, table legs, crank handles, knives and an air pistol, a gang of white young men bundled into a battered car and drove around Notting Hill for three hours on what they called – in a ghastly echo of lynching culture in the South of the United States – a 'nigger hunt' ('The Nigger Hunters', *Time Magazine*, 29 September 1958, p. 27). They attacked six Caribbean men in four separate incidents: nine of the gang were arrested the following day in the nearby White City estate, after their car was spotted by police. (Later, in September 1958, to their shock, they were each sentenced to four years in prison by Mr Justice Cyril Salmon.)

The following Friday, 29 August 1958, Majbritt Morrison, a white Swedish woman (who would later author *Jungle West 11* about her experiences) was arguing with her Jamaican husband, Raymond Morrison, outside Latimer Road tube station (which is situated on the western edge of the Lancaster West Estate). A crowd of white people gathered to protect a white woman from a black man (see Dawson 2007, pp. 27–29), despite Majbritt herself not needing nor wanting to be defended. A scuffle broke out amongst the gathering crowd, Raymond and some of Raymond's Caribbean friends. On Saturday 30 August, a gang of white youths spotted Majbritt leaving a dance, recognising her from the evening before they started hurling racist abuse – and milk bottles. Someone hit Majbritt in the back with an iron bar. Yet, she stood her ground and fought back, but, when she refused to leave the scene, the police arrested her. The situation quickly escalated. Soon, a 200-strong mob of young white men was rampaging through the streets of north Notting Hill (half a mile or so to the east of the tube station), armed with knives and sticks, shouting 'down with niggers' and 'we'll murder the bastards' (reported in *The Independent*, 29 August 2008 and *The Guardian*, 24 August 2002, respectively). The mob attacked police with a shower of bottles and bricks. This led to five nights of constant rioting (until 5 September), fuelled by the arrival of thousands of white people from outside the area, and by the retaliation of the local Jamaican population, which eventually armed themselves with machetes, meat cleavers and Molotov cocktails.

Ironically, these events were described at the time as the Notting Hill Colour (or Racial) Riots, implying that these riots were the fault of, and conducted by, black people – when, in fact, black people were the target of white riots. Indeed, it was only the Jamaican fight back that brought the riots to an end, with the police singularly failing to control the situation. Afterwards, the Metropolitan Police refused to acknowledge white racism as a cause of the rioting, despite the testimony of officers on the ground to the contrary. Of the 140 arrested during the riots, 108 were charged with offences, with 9 white youths eventually being

sentenced: each was given the ‘exemplary’ punishment of 5 years prison along with a £500 fine. One response to the riots was the creation of a Caribbean Carnival, first held indoors on 30 January 1959, by Claudia Jones – a Trinidadian activist, who had been deported from the United States in 1955, having famously written about the subordination and struggle of Negro women from a Communist perspective (Jones 1949; see Boyce-Davis 2008). The Caribbean Carnival was an important precursor to the now world-famous Notting Hill street carnival, itself policed as if it were a riot in 1976 and 1977.

Partly as a consequence of the so-called ‘Colour Riots’, the 1960s saw the north Kensington area embody a reputation for poor housing, drug use, prostitution and violence. Of course, this is characteristically an unfolding story of class and racial inequality, with factions of the white working class remaining antagonistically opposed to the developing Caribbean community, yet with new working- and under- class solidarities being formed across racial lines, through cultures associated with sex, drugs and music. This reputation was consolidated in novels, such as Colin MacInnes’ *Absolute Beginners* (1959), which is set against the background of the riots, where race and racism are unavoidable. The area’s evident social inequalities and antagonisms also attracted filmmakers.

In 1970, in advance of the imminent destruction of the original street layout by the development of the Lancaster West Estate, John Boorman filmed *Leo the Last* on a set built on Testerton Road. The film dramatically dealt with issues of class and race conflict. In the film, Leo, an exiled prince from a foreign country, becomes a Marxist after he witnesses the exploitation of his poor black neighbours by rich white landlords. Rallying his neighbours together, Leo stages an uprising, quickly overcoming the intellectual classes (in the form of a doctor and lawyer). However, the capitalist class (in the form of rent collectors, shopkeepers and shareholders) proves harder to defeat. Leo retreats to his house. Eventually, Leo is forced to flee, burning down his house (repeatedly) in the process – an uncanny portent of the tragedy to come. Within a couple of years, Testerton Road (along with much of the surrounding area) would be demolished by the wrecking ball of slum clearance and redevelopment. Following Boorman, we might think the wrecking ball represents the inevitable victory of capitalism over the working class, with the antagonisms of race and class flattened by the bulldozer.

Although the Lancaster West Estate redevelopment required the displacement of about 3000 people, few were against the plan to replace the crumbling Victorian housing stock. The original plan was a grand design, involving the creation of a modern housing estate with workplaces, shops, offices and amenities, with improved access to the Latimer Road tube station. The master plan was drawn by Peter Deakins, who had been involved in the first stages of designing the Barbican Centre. Though the grand plan would never be fully realised, building went ahead. The initial phase, starting in 1970, would construct three ‘finger blocks’ (three- and four-storey housing blocks) and a tower block to the north of the site. The finger blocks had large, enclosed, open spaces with children’s play areas.

One finger block, Testerton Walk, replaced the former Testerton Road. The finger blocks were seen as tower blocks laid on their side, with internal walkways to keep the housing as compact as possible and a central covered walkway to provide access. To the north, the finger blocks were anchored by a single tower block, designed by Nigel Whitbread applying principles derived from Le Corbusier and the modernists. Building of the tower block began in 1972 and was completed two years later. The first four of the 24 floor tower contained commercial and administrative units; on the remaining 20 floors, there were 120 one- and two-bedroom units, six dwellings on each floor, to house about 600 people. This building would be named Grenfell Tower (as it stood on Grenfell Road).

London's Burning

By the 2010s, nearing forty years after the Lancaster West Estate had been completed, Notting Hill was best known for its flamboyant Afro-Caribbean carnival, a saccharin romantic comedy film, and massive inequality: popstars, super models and politicians lived in multimillion-pound homes, ordering the latest 'flat white' coffees and quaffing Chenin Blanc wine from South Africa, while the new model estates of the 1970s visibly deteriorated. The area had become trendy, with beautiful and exclusive and increasingly expensive private housing sitting side by side with the rundown Lancaster West Estate. In 2012, Westminster Council began an £8.7M renovation of the Grenfell Tower, which received new windows, a new heating system and, on the outside, aluminium cladding was introduced to improve the block's appearance and rain-proofing. The renovation was completed four years later in May 2016. A new story of class and race had been set in motion.

At 54 minutes past midnight on 14 June 2017, the emergency services received the first reports of a fire at Grenfell Tower. Starting in a faulty fridge-freezer on the fourth floor, the fire quickly engulfed the Tower Block. The fire burned for 60 hours, despite the attendance of 70 fire engines and over 250 firefighters. The fire killed 72 people, in 23 of the tower's flats, mostly above the twentieth floor.

On 21 May 2018, the Grenfell Tower public inquiry began, after completing its procedural hearings in December 2017. (Complete proceedings are available online at grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk and on YouTube.) It opened with a commemorative hearing, with testimony from the relatives of all the dead. Along with the memories and feelings of the relatives, the inquiry included pictures and videos. There are many stories in the fire – all are heart-breaking.

Marcio Gomes was in tears as he recalled the excitement that news of his wife's pregnancy had brought the family. Hours after the fire, he was holding his stillborn child in his arms, while his wife and two daughters lay in a coma having escaped from their twenty-first floor flat at around 4 in the morning. He told the hearings on its first day: 'I held my son in my arms that evening, hoping it was all a bad dream, wishing, praying for any kind of miracle...that he would just open

his eyes, move, make a sound'. The family had plans for Logan; he was going to be a superstar; he was going to be a football fan, supporting Benfica and Liverpool. Marcio added, 'He might not be here physically, but he will always be here in our hearts forever [...] Our sleeping angel he was. We let him go with the doves so that he can fly with the angels. We are proud of him even though he was only with us for seven months'. Later that day, the West End Final Extra edition of the *Evening Standard* chose Marcio's words for its headline: 'I Held My Son In My Arms Hoping It Was A Bad Dream', reinforcing this with a picture of Grenfell Tower in flames. This front page replaced the earlier West End Final headline: 'Grenfell: Don't Make Us Wait 30 Years for Justice', which (curiously) had no accompanying pictures of the tragedy.

The change in the headline might, on the surface, seem innocuous for both are highly emotional: one headline speaks to the families' angry demand for justice, while the other picks up on the families' unbearable loss. These two stories have the same source – yet, in this moment, the unrelenting anger that inhabits the demand for justice is replaced by the unspeakable grief and horror of the tragedy. Perhaps, maybe, because a story about the tragic loss of a child would have more appeal for the *Evening Standard* (a free paper that relies on advertising revenue) than the demand for justice. Yet, although the headlines both draw on Marcio's words, the switch in headlines represents the first signs of the separation of different strands of the Grenfell story: with the raw emotion of unbearable loss becoming detached from the rage-filled demand for justice.

That said, in this moment, anger and grief and hope and love and justice and truth are not yet cauterised from one another. Listen to Emanuela Disaro, mother of Gloria Trevisan, a young Italian architect who was trapped on the twenty-third floor by flames coming up the single stairwell. In a phone call on the night of the fire, Gloria had told her mother, 'I am so sorry I can never hug you again. I had my whole life ahead of me. It's not fair'. Speaking through a translator, Emanuela told the inquiry on 29 May 2018 that she had taught her children not to hate, but that she felt a lot of anger: 'I hope this anger is going to be a positive anger. I would like this anger to help to find out the truth of what happened'. A positive anger would, Emanuela hoped, lead to justice.

Anger, Truth, Justice. Intimately connected. Yet the *Evening Standard's* West End Final edition headline suggested that this might not be enough: bound up in the demand for justice was the feeling that justice should also mean not having to fight for justice. Maria 'Pily' Burton, wife of Nicholas, was the seventy-second victim of the fire: although rescued by firefighters from the nineteenth floor, she eventually died in January 2018 after months of medical care. Nicholas voiced the concerns of many of the bereaved. He told the *Standard*: 'We should not have to fight so hard to be heard, but every step of the way so far has been a battle. You look at the Hillsborough families, still suffering after almost 30 years. We have to make sure we don't have to wait 30 years for justice' (*Evening Standard*, 21 May 2018 West End Final, p. 4; West End Final Extra, p. 5). The demand for justice and truth may be

embedded in and motivated by anger, grief and suffering, but it also reaches out to feelings of sympathy, generosity and urgency. Or, their lack.

Nicholas Burton's reference to the Hillsborough families is highly significant. Hillsborough refers to the deaths of 96 Liverpool fans, crushed to death on the Leppings Lane terraces of Sheffield Wednesday Football Club on 15 April 1989. In fact, if justice is the punishment of those held to be responsible, the Hillsborough families will never see it. Criminal trials associated with the disaster only began on 14 January 2019. Indeed, as a forewarning for those seeking justice for Grenfell Tower, the original intention to prosecute six people, including four senior police officers (including the chief constable), weakened. In the end, only two of the six faced trial: David Duckenfield, the police officer in command on the day, and Graham Mackrell, former Sheffield Wednesday club secretary and safety officer; charges including gross negligence manslaughter (Duckenfield) and breaches of safety regulations (Mackrell). The outcome of the trial, on 3 April 2019, was under a fortnight short of the thirtieth anniversary of the tragedy. While Graham Mackrell was found guilty of a single health and safety charge, and later fined £6,500 (with £5,000 costs), the jury could not agree a verdict for David Duckenfield. At his retrial in November 2019, after over 13 hours of discussion, the jury eventually found Duckenfield not guilty. Afterwards, the Hillsborough families asked a simple question: given that the 96 people killed at Hillsborough were found to have been unlawfully killed, who will be held to account? No one will ever be convicted of their deaths.

In the immediate aftermath of the Grenfell fire, the families and survivors were already acutely aware of the struggle for justice in the wake of the Hillsborough disaster. Indeed, groups from both tragedies would meet each other and share some of the same lawyers. In many ways, theirs is a shared struggle over truths: not just over what happened and whose testimony counts, but also over how these truths are to be interpreted and contextualised.

Justice for Grenfell

After completing the commemorative hearings, on 4 June 2018, the Grenfell inquiry began to hear evidence about the events that led to the tragedy. The fire had begun when a Hotpoint fridge-freezer had caught fire in Flat 16, Floor 4, where Behailu Kebede lived. It was Kebede who had first called the emergency services, asking them to come 'quick, quick, quick'. Representing him was a lawyer who had also represented families at the Hillsborough inquiry, Rajiv Menon QC. Towards the end of a prepared statement, Rajiv Menon rounded upon the remit of the inquiry. He noted that the judge, Sir Martin Mason-Brick, was unlikely to reverse his earlier decision and take the wider context into account. However, Menon was not to be deterred. It is worth hearing him at length (video is available at www.youtube.com/channel/UCMxYjfZsqLa8DanN0r2eNJw. Extract from minute 30:30 to 35:51):

There are certain stark irrefutable facts that one cannot simply ignore about the underlying social, economic and political reality and conditions that culminated in 71 people dying from smoke and fire in a high rise residential building, and a seventy-second person dying a few months later, in one of the richest boroughs in one of the world's great cities in one of the richest countries in the twenty-first century. It is no coincidence that this fire occurred in a building consisting of social housing and former social housing purchased under the right to buy scheme and not in one of the posh swanky high-rise residential buildings around London that cater to the extremely wealthy. It is no coincidence that this fire occurred in a building owned by a Tory flagship borough that has been at the forefront of promoting austerity cuts and deregulation and promoting business and profit over health and safety....

Off camera, someone in the audience shouts 'Justice for Grenfell'; others clap in support. The presiding judge, Sir Martin Moore-Brick, turns to the audience and solemnly insists that there will be no (further) interruptions of proceedings. Menon continues:

... It is no coincidence that the vast majority of the residents of Grenfell Tower were first or second-generation migrants and refugees, the remaining residents being largely local people with long-standing roots in the north Kensington area. Amongst the 72 that died, 23 countries and more were represented. So, race and class are at the heart of the Grenfell story whether we like it or not, whether the inquiry acknowledges it or not, whether the terms of reference are extended or not. Consequently, we say that what happened at the Grenfell Tower in the early hours of June last year was as political as it gets and symbolic of a deep inequality in our society.

The parallels between the Grenfell Tower and Hillsborough tragedies are not connected to the high number of victims, nor to the length of time that public inquiries take, nor to the uncertain possibility that anyone will ultimately face what Menon calls 'real justice' and 'real accountability'. The parallels lie in deep and persistent inequalities in society, especially around class. Indeed, for writers such as Gordon Macleod (2018) and Stuart Hodgkinson (2019), the core of this inequality is to be understood in the context of a systematic neoliberal assault on the welfare state, which has rendered public housing marginal, neglected, devalued and stigmatised. They point to the way that the local council, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, ignored regular complaints by the residents of Grenfell Tower about its safety, including the lack of a sprinkler system. To this is added the actions of an austerity-driven ruling Conservative Party and unscrupulous private contractors. This view positions Grenfell in a long history of neoliberal assaults on the working class, especially on conditions of work and housing, since Thatcherism in the 1980s (see de Noronha 2019; and also Radical Housing Network, Hudson and Tucker 2019). Indeed, Hillsborough is easily seen as part of this assault.

As importantly, there is a shared struggle not only to voice the injustice, but to have their voices heard and recognised. Those voices are heard in moments.

All too often, justice is undermined by a logic of blame: the claim for justice – formed around a much wider experience of inequality and injury – reduced to a demand for someone to be held responsible. Just as the police had sought to blame the victims, Liverpool fans, for their own deaths at Hillsborough, so the finger of blame has begun to be pointed at the firefighters for their supposed failure to evacuate people from the burning tower.

The parallels in the aftermath of the tragedies also lie in the difficulty of making anger, truth and justice stick together, especially over long periods of time. The parallel lies in the ease with which political institutions can detach heart-break from anger, anger from the demand for justice, and justice from the political will to change public institutions, such as the police (Hillsborough) or the council (Grenfell): for example, by circumscribing the terms of reference of inquiries. Facts and affects are cauterised from one another: justice de-politicised by its gradual assimilation into the legal process. Thus, broader questions about what justice looks like – which are as political as it gets – are transmuted into narrow socio-technical questions, about cladding, about cost efficiency, about sprinkler systems. These are, of course, important issues, but this transmutation effectively converts the politics of social change into a politics of small changes.

What replaces justice is, as we have seen, heart-breaking. Yet, the over-riding heart-break of the tragedy can itself shape how we understand what went before. It can be easy only to see the tragedies that led up to the tragedy, making the tragedy appear inevitable, the only possible outcome of all the injuries and inequities that went before. Yet, Grenfell Tower, as a microcosm of London life, has more than one story to tell.

Tower of London

For most news outlets, including the BBC, and the Inquiry itself, the single most important story about Grenfell is the story of the fire and its victims: its causes, its shockingly quick spread up and around the tower, the horror of the escape... and tragic, heart-breaking, unbearable death. Yet, out of this story emerges another story: the story of a tower that was teeming with life, giving us a glimpse of a different kind of London – not broken, but getting along. To show this, let's turn to the BBC's remarkable reconstruction of the twenty-first floor (which was chosen by the BBC because it was emblematic of the fine line between life and death) for a *Newsnight* special, put together by Katie Razzall, Sara Moralioglu and Nick Menzies, broadcast on 27 September 2017 (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cY_fgeeCzc). The report contains interviews with residents, talking about their beautiful homes. A BBC News webpage recounts the story:

Two IT workers. A civil engineer. A hospital porter. A charity worker. A management consultant. A supervisor in a clothes shop. A market stall employee and part-time

student. A beauty salon owner. A retired waitress. Ten adults and five children lived on the 21st floor of the Grenfell Tower. Nine of them survived the fire. Six of them – and one unborn baby – perished. (www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/Grenfell_21st_floor. Last accessed July 2020)

As Rajiv Menon observed at the inquiry, the story of Grenfell was wrapped up in histories of class, race and social inequality (see also Shildrick 2018). After the fire, these grand narratives were replaced with ordinary stories about family, home, work and living alongside different people. Like all other floors (above the fourth floor), the twenty-first floor was organised into four two-bedroom flats and two one-bedroom flats. The two-bedroom flats each had a corner of the tower, with the one-bedroom flats sandwiched between them. All had access to a central lobby, with lifts and a single stairwell. The Gomes family – Marcio and Andreia and their two primary school-aged daughters, Luana and Megan – lived in Flat 183. Like many residents, they enjoyed living in the tower. The flats had big rooms for the family, but the kids would also play in the tower's communal spaces. Marcio and Andreia are first generation migrants from Portugal. They had lived in the tower for 10 years, but still considered themselves 'newcomers', as many of their friends had been in the tower more than 20 years. Marcio works in IT, while Andreia is a supervisor in a clothes shop. In the tower, Marcio observes:

The diversity was great, you'd meet all sorts of different people – Irish, English, Arabic, Muslim, Portuguese, Spanish, Italians. You'd get to see different cultures. You'd go up in the lift with lots of different people; you'd talk; the kids would play. The tower itself was a community; it was very family oriented. It's been portrayed as a poor tower, a broken tower. It was far from that.

The Gomes family escaped because they were woken by Helen Gebremeskel and her 12-year-old daughter Lulya, who lived in Flat 186, a two-bedroom flat diagonally opposite Flat 183. Helen Gebremeskel was born in Eritrea and arrived in the United Kingdom as an asylum seeker when she was a child. She had been living in the tower for 20 years, but only moved into Flat 183 in 2014. She had spent the last few years renovating and decorating her new home. Helen Gebremeskel is the managing director of, and hairstylist at, H&G International Hair and Beauty Salon. Lulya's best friends were the Choucair family, which lived on the twenty-second floor. On the night of the fire, they had called Bassem Choucair to tell them to get out. The Choucair family did not get out; all died in the fire.

Helen Gebremeskel decided no one was coming to help, so made the decision to leave, against the advice of the emergency services (following accepted procedure). By the time she and Lulya went to the Gomes' flat, the fire had already been burning for over half an hour. Thick black smoke forced them all back into the Gomes' flat. For two hours, they attempted to keep the smoke out: they opened the windows, ran the bath and shower water. At around 3.30 a.m., the Gomes bedroom caught fire. The six of them wrapped themselves in wet tea

towels and sheets to make their escape. Although they made it down through the horror of the stairwell, Lulya, Luana, Megan and Andreia were put into induced comas and treated for cyanide poisoning. This is when (as we heard above) Andreia's baby boy, Logan, was stillborn.

In Flat 182 lived the El Wahabi family, which had turned their flat into what neighbours described as a 'mini Morocco'. The father, Abdulaziz, worked as a porter at University College Hospital, while his wife, Faouzia, worked for the Westway Trust, which seeks to utilise the space underneath the Westway flyover for community benefit. They lived with their three children: Yasin, a part-time accountancy student at Greenwich University; Nur Huda, who had just completed her GCSE exams and loved football; and Mehdi, who attended a local primary school and enjoyed judo. Helen Gebremeskel had seen the family escaping at around 1.30 a.m., but then the family had opted to return to their flat. They called the emergency services, which told them to stay in the flat. All five died in the fire. Abdulaziz's sister, Hanan, and her family lived in Flat 66 on the ninth Floor, but they all made it out.

On the twenty-first floor, there were two one-bedroom flats. According to Razzall, Moralioglu and Menzies, the occupancy of Flat 184 was uncertain. They reported rumours about a woman from the Philippines, illegally in Britain, living there. It later emerged that the flat was occupied by Mustafa-Sirag Abdu (see news.channel4.com/2017/grenfell-tower/). He is a civil engineer from Ethiopia. He left the moment he heard about the fire. Ligaya Moore, a 78-year-old grandmother, lived in Flat 181. She had lived alone since the death of her husband, Jim, several years ago. She had moved to London from the Philippines in 1972 and had worked as a nanny and a waitress. No one saw her that night. It only adds to the tragedy that her absence became the stuff of rumour; rumour with a racist tinge.

Flat 185 had been bought from the Council under the right-to-buy scheme in 2000 by the tenant Nigerian-born Tunde Awoderu. A few years later, Awoderu moved out, and the flat became private rented accommodation. He was now vice-chair of the Grenfell Leaseholders' Association. Flat 185 was one of 12 privately owned flats in the tower. Eleven days before the fire, Stewart Lee, a 29-year-old IT engineer, and boyfriend Julian Ng, a 30-year-old management consultant, moved into Flat 185, paying the over £1700 a month rent between them. Both Stewart and Julian were born in Britain. On that night, Julian was working in Crawley. It was Stewart's birthday, so he decided to take the day off and to stay with Julian at his hotel. At 3 a.m., Tunde called them, very concerned about their safety. In shock, they watched the tragedy unfold on their smartphones (as reported in the *Pink News*, 14 June 2017).

These are stories about previously unheard voices, speaking in unfamiliar ways. Tower blocks are overwhelmed stories of poor housing, unemployment and social deprivation. Indeed, as Ida Danewid has shown, placed in an international context, Grenfell can be seen as a consequence of wider forces of racial

capitalism that is reconfiguring colonial and postcolonial relationships within London (2019). From this perspective, Grenfell is more than just 'Empire coming home', it is about the way racial capitalism is shifting people and capital around the world, involving a racist global necropolitics in which the lives of black people do not matter. Indeed, the relationships within the tower were diverse, geographically; they stretched to places far away, to Morocco and to Ethiopia, to Italy and to the Philippines. Yet, Grenfell also domesticated the global: showing how migrants had settled in London, revealing migration to be homely and familiar, ordinary (www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-44395591). The testimonies of those living on the twenty-third floor, whether they intended to or not, made it clear that these homes were beautiful, the people in the blocks were hard-working, and they had created bonds of friendship and community. Evidently, too, this was not true for everyone: some people were isolated, not able to turn to friends, their families far away. Grenfell holds more than one story, at the same time.

People had settled into London life, working nearby, going to school, moving within the tower and within the neighbourhood. The tower block was diverse, socially: alongside young urban professionals were public sector employees and charity workers. A system of 'self-evident facts' (as Rancière puts it, 2004, p. 7) about tower blocks was being systematically shaken: the block's many jarring stories were demanding to be heard. In Rancière's terms, this amounted to a challenge to the distribution of the sensible: that is, a regime of perception and understanding through which people, ideas and things are assigned a 'proper place' in relation to other people, ideas and things. In particular, dominant narratives of class and race – intimately connected to notions of social housing, refugees, migrants and tower blocks – were being directly challenged. Not just through stories about community and hard work, but affectually through stories of love, family, hope and unassimilable trauma and grief (see also Doherty 2018).

Following Rancière (2000), we can also argue that, in the aftermath of the fire, bodies were torn from their assigned places and a form of free speech and expression emerged. For a few days, these bodies caused a disruption in the ordering of relations of power, not by revolution or riot, but by affect: that is, affect was having political effects (following Massumi 2002, p. 40). The hurt and pain and loss and anger simply overwhelmed the political response, with its focus on emergency services, its desire to convert the fire into a set of technical questions of fire-proof properties of cladding and architectural design, and into amounts of money (£5 million, up front). These affects cut across forms of cultural and religious identity, altering questions of belonging and hierarchy: the Grenfell Tower fire brought new subjects into the field of perception. Working class, migrant and refugee, and community voices were being expressed, heard and spread. Grenfell, then, is a story about voices lost – and voices gained. More, perhaps most importantly, the story of the tower is also a struggle over what justice looks like.

As Political as It Gets

Grenfell's stories of loss, pain and grief are exacerbated by another story: the failure of the council and government to respond adequately to the tragedy, both in the days after and the following months, with survivors still living in temporary, unsuitable accommodation. In this story of Grenfell, venal political indifference is pitted against the strength of the community (see Madden 2017).

As people were being taken to hospitals across London, as the fire was still burning, and as the council failed to comprehend or respond to the scale of the tragedy, people from the surrounding area were already starting to donate food, water, bottles, blankets, clothing, nappies, toys at St Clement's Church, the Al Manaar Muslim cultural heritage centre, the Notting Hill Methodist Church and the Westway Sports Centre as well as Kensington Town Hall. As the council floundered in its response, the communal response was immediate...and it was as compassionate as it was angry. These were the resources out of which a strong community emerged. Politicians were keen, too, to show how much they cared.

Leaders of both the major political parties visited the Grenfell Tower scene on the morning of 15 June. At 10 a.m., Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May made what was called a 'private visit', meeting members of the emergency services. A couple of hours later, Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the Labour opposition, arrived at the scene. The contrast between the two visits could not have been starker, and people were quick to point this out on social media. On BBCTV news, images of Jeremy Corbyn listening to local people voice their anger and putting his arm around a distressed woman inside St Clement's Church were juxtaposed with Theresa May's seemingly dispassionate conversations with groups of firefighters and police. People were quick to criticise Theresa May for not meeting residents, for not being prepared to take their anger and pain. More, she was condemned for talking to people via TV about how the government would do everything it could to help and rehouse them. She was being condemned as much for not listening as for not talking; as much for failing to be open to people's anger and pain as for a seemingly dispassionate display of compassion. Perhaps in an attempt to seem more human and humane, just before 2 p.m., Theresa May announced that there would be a full public inquiry. During the morning, the official death toll figures had risen from 12 to 17. No one thought the death toll would stay at 17; many thought it would rise into the hundreds. The sense that officials were underestimating the tragedy only intensified the anger on the streets around Grenfell Tower.

While Theresa May was announcing the public inquiry, freelance journalist Mario Cacciottolo, writing for the BBC, was reporting the views of local residents (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-40291372>). He spoke to Maria Vigo, who had lived opposite the tower for 11 years. She told him: 'There was a lot of anger on the school run this morning. There's a lot of separation between the classes, and people are telling me that it's down to social cleansing'. She complained about

being priced out of the area by the rising cost of basic amenities. She blamed gentrification. 'This area's always been working class. It's starting to become a bit less so now, and the working class are feeling that they're being left without a voice. The council isn't listening to us. We don't want a pretty building. They should ask us 'what do we need'? Or 'what would we like'? In the rich borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Grenfell Tower stood in an area (surrounding the Latimer Road tube station) that ranks amongst the poorest 10% in England.

As Mario Cacciottolo wandered around the streets surrounding Grenfell Tower, he discovered another story. He spoke with Christina Simmons, who had lived near the tower for 27 years. She explained: 'People are coming together and rallying together. I didn't realise we had so many Eritreans and Somalians; they've come out to offer support'. The growing pride in the community response did not mask the problem. Christina added, 'They don't listen to us. We're being neglected and ignored. I'm bloody angry'. Then, on a more hopeful note, 'Maybe this'll bring us all together'.

A day later, the relief effort of the council had not improved. The communal effort, meanwhile, was now enormous, with makeshift relief centres at the Westway Sports Centre and St Clement's Church straining under the weight of goodwill. While the Queen and Prince William calmly met volunteers, local residents and community representatives at the Westway Sports Centre, a large angry crowd gathered outside St Clement's Church, where Theresa May was due to meet victims of the disaster. As she appeared, clear on the TV reports were shouts of 'coward' and 'shame on you'. Some broke through the police cordon to shout at the Prime Minister as her car whisked her away. It is not clear whether Theresa May heard them.

The fire at Grenfell Tower exposed the growing social inequality in the area and tensions around gentrification as well as the indifference and unpreparedness of the local council and the Conservative Government (although they would protest otherwise). Yet, the fire also changed the way the area was seen and heard. Perhaps the most remarkable shift was prompted by the communal response: the tragedy operationalised a community that was previously latent and fragmented. Indeed, the escalating acts of compassion crystallised what appeared from the outside to be an impossible community. Significantly, community was quietly articulated through faith-based organisations – especially St Clement's Church and the Al Manaar Muslim heritage centre – and expressed (informally) in religious terms (see, e.g., Everett 2018).

On a wall of the Latimer Community Church, in an echo of other tragedies in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, people wrote tributes and messages, and left flowers (see www.getwestlondon.co.uk/news/west-london-news/gallery/tribute-wall-grenfell-tower-community-13191587; and, www.standard.co.uk/news/london/hundreds-of-harrowing-messages-left-on-wall-at-grenfell-tower-fire-scene-a3565521.html). At the centre of one panel, underneath a wicker heart, in multicoloured felt pen, were the words: 'Pray for our Community'. Surrounding these

words were messages of love, grief and hope, written in English and Arabic. Many of the messages were drawn upon religious themes, practices and iconography to articulate a sense of community: 'No words can truly describe the pain, the fear, the sense of being lost – only emotions to be felt – the heart felt prayers of the whole world are here and with time and peace will heal and reunite loved ones'. Another read: 'What a wonderful response to a horrible tragedy. May we continue to give so that no one is in lack. This is the kingdom of Jesus Christ'. Alongside it, someone had written: 'May Allah grant all the highest ranks in jannah, and all the survivors the strength to carry on'. It wasn't just that the fire had revealed the different faiths in the community, it was that the commonalities amongst the seemingly incommensurable faiths had become the grounds upon which people were acting together. Theologically different ideas about the soul and heaven found common ground in the articulation of a desire that people's souls would find heaven and rest in peace. Gifts and giving were at the heart of a now operative impossible community, underpinned by expressions of love, hope, help, resilience, sympathy and strength.

The operability of community was often expressed through ideas of togetherness and unity: 'Bonds formed in fire are difficult to break – our community will always stand together'. And, on another panel, simply: 'WEARE1'. On the other hand, community was also what set people apart from the rich and the powerful: 'May their souls rest in peace #PPPpoorpeoplepolitics', 'People help the people'. And, there was also a palpable sense of anger and a desire to see justice: 'Why did this need to happen?', 'Theresa May where are you, your people voted you in, Justice for Grenfell, Jail Those Responsible'.

The operative community quickly was becoming two-sided: one side, joining the people together, while at the same time separating the people from the rich and the powerful. The demand for justice similarly faces in two opposite directions at once. One demand is faced towards the law. This is the demand for the causes of the tragedy to be identified and the people responsible to be held accountable: this is what Rajiv Menon calls 'real justice' and 'real accountability' (see above). Theresa May's quick declaration that there would be a public inquiry addresses this demand: yet, the public inquiry also utilises the limits contained in this demand for justice – the inquiry's remit would not extend to wider questions of race, class and social inequality. Yet, that circumscription of the inquiry itself creates a contestable limit. Another demand faces away from the law as the law itself is the source of injustice. This demand for justice chains the tragedy to longer histories of racism, social inequality and deprivation. It is glued to a sense of injustice that calls into question the meaning of justice. In this, Hillsborough is a marker of what justice does not look like. It does not look like the legal process and the rule of law. It does not mean years of struggle against 'the system' by heart-broken, nearly exhausted, resource poor, working families. It does mean taking into account – and redressing – long histories of class, race and wider social inequalities (as Gordon Macleod, Stuart Hodgkinson and Ida Danewid, amongst many others, argue).

Tell Me What Community Looks Like

In his analysis of a fire at the Imperial Foods plant on 3 September 1991 in Hamlet, North Carolina, David Harvey observes:

We here encounter a situation with respect to discourses about social justice which closely matches the political paralysis exhibited in the failure to respond to the North Carolina fire. Politics and discourses both seem to have become so mutually fragmented that response is inhibited. The upshot appears to be a double injustice: not only do men and women, whites and African-Americans die in a preventable event, but we are simultaneously deprived of any normative principles of justice whatsoever by which to condemn or indict the responsible parties. (1993, p. 53)

The parallel between the Imperial Foods fire and the Grenfell Tower fire is uncanny. Yet, it is also misleading. In fact, the inquiry – which is capable of identifying those responsible (as with the Hillsborough inquiry) and making recommendations for changes (such as, most likely, new fire regulations regarding cladding materials) – focuses the political response on technical matters: thus, ‘real justice’ and ‘real accountability’ are exactly what can be delivered, while looser, more unruly, notions of justice become marginalised and silenced: literally, as Moore-Brick’s rebuke of the audience at the inquiry demonstrates (see above).

Brilliantly, the community has turned these silencing strategies on their head. Silence has become a means through which to remember the tragedy, to reconfirm a commitment to remember what happened and to struggle for justice (see Charles 2019). On the fourteenth of every month, since the fire, there has been a ‘silent walk’ to pay respects to those who died. It starts at Notting Hill Methodist Church and follows a path towards the Lancaster West Estate. On the first anniversary of the fire, not only was there a nationwide minute’s silence in the morning, there was also a silent procession at noon to the ‘wall of truth’ at the Maxilla Social Club, followed by an afternoon silent procession to the Methodist Church, ending with an evening silent walk starting at the wall of truth. The silent walks are more than an act of remembrance, however. They express the solidarity of the community; they also symbolise the way that community voices continue to be ignored (see www.grenfellconnect.org.uk). Significantly, after the walks, there were also prayers and remembrance at the Al Manaar Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre.

In contrast, the Justice4Grenfell campaign, along with the Fire Brigade’s Union, organised a more conventional protest march on the Saturday, 16 June 2018, immediately following the silent walk that marked the first anniversary of the tragedy. Assembling outside Downing Street (residence of the British Prime Minister), the march began with speeches decrying the council, the government and the contractors who installed the cladding on the tower. More importantly, the speakers each affirmed the need to look back over the longer history of the tower. They talked about how the tower had been built to high standards, yet had

been left to decline through decades of under-investment under successive political regimes. They vented fury at austerity urbanism that the Tory-led council had embraced with enthusiasm – focusing its attention on profits, rather than living standards and safety. The silence was powerful, the speakers affirmed, but they wanted this protest to be noisy. From Downing Street, the march wound its way past the Houses of Parliament. The Houses of Parliament are currently undergoing a £3.5–7Bn refurbishment, ironically, partly prompted by fears that the risk of fire is so great that the building is a death trap (reported by *The Guardian*, 31 January 2018).

At the Home Office, the government department responsible for overseeing the conduct of councils, the march paused. Here, speakers condemned the government's politics of race, which casts migrants as a problem and as unwelcome in the United Kingdom. Speakers pointed to the Muslim community that had been the first to respond to the fire, running towards the fire while the politicians ran away from it. The politics of justice, in this form, pits itself not just against the injustices perpetrated by Conservative Governments, but against the politics of government in general, Labour and Conservative, that have failed 'the community'. As the marchers left, they chanted: 'Tell me what community looks like/This is what community looks like' (Figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1 The Justice for Grenfell March to mark the first anniversary of the Grenfell Tower fire, 16 June 2018, as it passed the Houses of Parliament a second time (on the way back from the Home Office). Source: Steve Pile.

The speakers on the march drew clear parallels between the anti-migrant discourse of Brexit (on both the remain and leave sides), the scandal of the Windrush generation (who had become collateral damage in Theresa May's 2012 creation of 'a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants' in the United Kingdom, but especially from early 2018 onwards) and the systemic underinvestment and marginalisation of the Grenfell community (see Bradley 2019; and, El-Enany 2019). So, when the march asked what community looked like, it was not simply making visible an affective community forged by compassion, grief and anger, it was pointing out that the body of the community was forged out of racial and religious diversity. This community incorporates invisible and visible differences.

The Grenfell Tower tragedy altered a pervasive narrative about Muslims and community in London that had become dominated by suspicion and fear. For example, in the wake of multiple terrorist attacks – an attack at London Bridge by three Muslim men less than two weeks before the Grenfell Tower fire had killed eight people – Muslim communities were constantly being asked to account for their relationship to Islam. The Grenfell Tower tragedy uncouples the relationship between Islam and terror in two significant ways. On the one hand, the stories of the survivors are about the lives of ordinary Londoners: making their homes beautiful, working hard, getting on, looking after family, and living in a community of friends and strangers. This ordinariness undoes a divide between Muslims and everyone else. This is evident in the 'wall of truth', which does not discriminate between faiths and backgrounds (see www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/grenfell_tower_wall). On the other hand, Muslims were prominent in organising and providing support. The Al Manaar Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre is now a symbol for Islamic generosity, aid, support, community. Consequently, when Muslim Aid produced a report in May 2018 praising the voluntary sector for its response to the fire, while also being critical of the council response, it was widely reported by national news media (see, e.g., www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-44295397).

In the wake of the Grenfell fire, we can see that the normal conventions through which local people are rendered visible and invisible, heard and unheard – and, the common frames through which their bodies and lives are understood and interpreted – were, however temporarily, suspended. Instead, unheard stories were told and listened to: stories about migration, race, class, family that all challenged received understandings about tower block life and the composition of community. In part, the shock to the system turns around the event itself and the affective intensity of the moment. Yet, we can also see the ways that affects enabled the crystallisation of an operable community, forged around a shared sense of injustice and a demand for justice. It is therefore worth noting that one of the first marches in London, on Sunday 31 May 2020, to protest the death of George Floyd (in Minneapolis) ended at Grenfell Tower. In silence. As someone wrote Black Lives Matter on the memorial wall.

Body Politic

Before the fire, there were long histories of class, race and social inequality that were all refracted through notions of violence and poverty. Grenfell exposes these: its anger is intimately connected to them. Yet, it also exposed the ordinary affects of family, work, humour, hope, childhood and so on (see Highmore 2011; and Stewart 2007). Communal solidarity formed around the tragedy, not only through anger and feelings of sorrow and generosity, but also around these ordinary affects. This underscores Rancière's injunction to see politics as a form of experience, not in its exceptionality, but in its everydayness. This asks us to pay particular attention to ordinary life in Grenfell Tower, as a political moment that invites us to consider how people are assigned to places and to a place in life.

Following Rancière, we can see the emergent stories and voices from Grenfell Tower as a challenge to the distribution of the sensible (2004, p. 8; see Dikeç 2015): that is, a recasting of common sense understandings of race, class and religion. In Rancière's terms, this recasting was forced by marginalised and excluded bodies challenging accepted ways of understanding those bodies, as if from the outside of a bodily regime (to use Fanon's expression) that seeks to define bodies and assign them a proper place in the scheme of things. In these terms, a bodily regime defines, and is defined by, the senses: not just the visible and the invisible, but all the ways that things are sensed or not, understood or not. Bodily regimes are about how the senses are defined and lived. Significantly, bodily regimes are produced and reproduced by the drawing of an epistemic boundary that differentiates between the sensible and the insensible. This boundary enables a distinction between people who are inside a community of shared sensibilities and those who are outside:

The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space this activity is performed. Having a particular 'occupation' [both an activity and a space] thereby determines the ability or inability to take charge of what is common to the community; it defines what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common language, etc. (2004, p. 8)

The distribution of the sensible, for Rancière, is as political as it gets:

It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around properties of spaces and possibilities of time. (2004, p. 8)

Let us not romanticise the Grenfell Tower tragedy, nor mark it as some upheaval in the constitution of the political. Yet, the fire, however temporarily, not

only illuminated the boundary between who could speak and who could be heard, who was visible and who was invisible, what community looked and sounded like, it also meant that this could be contested...and contested anew. Indeed, a flurry of documentaries on Grenfell made visible and gave voice to the community, the histories of injustice and inequality, and also gave voice to the survivors and relatives (see Sborgi 2019). As Eddie Daffarn, who lived on the sixteenth floor of the Tower, in the 2018 documentary *Grenfell* (by Minnow Films, shown on BBC1 on 11 June 2018), put it:

I was very proud to live there, and it's just a tragedy that we're, you know, not able to show people, you know, what we were actually like [...] Justice. Reparation. These words are really meaningless without fundamental change. Grenfell can represent a turning point in history. A change in how society views communities that live in social housing. That, they are listened to and respected, because had we been listened to and respected at Grenfell, it would not have happened. It's as simple as that.

These kinds of justice, rooted in life itself, are justice from outside a political regime that defines justice from above, that constricts justice in and through the legal system and public inquiries that focus on socio-technical systems. But they are also coexistent with it.

In this light, disturbances in the distribution of the sensible may not be the consequence of those outside the regime suddenly becoming visible to those inside the regime, but a clash between multiple, already-existing distributions of the sensible and regimes of the body (see also Rancière 2004, pp. 46–47). This is the analysis that I will pursue in this book. This book explores both the coexistence of bodily regimes, and also the relationship between them. Of course, coexisting bodily regimes (around class, race, gender, sexuality and so on) can be mutually supportive, integrated and coherent. Ideas such as intersectionality have been developed to account for this. However, I am more interested in the ways that bodily regimes fail to 'add up' to a single coherent integrated system of privilege and power. Indeed, I am most interested in those moments and places where bodily regimes clash. This is what I see in the Grenfell Tower tragedy. It exposed the distribution of different voices and bodies, yet it also offers new stories – stories that do not add up to a singular understanding of the event, nor that can be closed down around pre-determined understandings of those bodies, of affects or of politics. Rather, the tragedy reveals the *indeterminacy* of bodies, affects and politics – and it is in this that its radical possibilities lie. Like Hillsborough, Grenfell simply refuses to settle down, to be quieted.

For Rancière, political subjects are produced by fissures in the distribution of the sensible. It is through these fissures that a political process can be unleashed that opposes or resists the sensible order. The sensible order is an organisation – in Rancière's terms, a police order – of bodies into 'a system of coordinates that define modes of being, doing making and communicating that establishes

the borders between the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, the sayable and the unsayable' (Rockhill 2004, p. 93, in Rancière 2004). The sensible order assembles and parcels up people, assigning them to a proper place within modes of perception, but also in modes of knowledge, agency and passivity. The sensible order produces self-evident truths about the way things are: creating modalities of what is visible and what is audible, creating modalities of what can be thought, said, made and done. However, Rancière acknowledges that contradictions can be generated between orders of the sensible, for example, between the visible and the sayable. He terms this silent speech: a hidden layer of meaning, awaiting expression, beneath the orders of speech and visibility.

Rancière's central insight – about the organisation of bodies and the senses into regimes of the visible, the sayable and the actionable – must be altered in the light of Grenfell. As well as seeing hidden layers of meaning, we must rather register those moments when regimes of the body and the sensible clash or rub up against one another. These frictions and clashes occur between regimes that are organised at many different points in the experience of power relations, of affects and of bodies. They are not somehow outside or beyond systems of organisation of bodies, affects and power relations. Rather, these systems are open, porous, incomplete and mutable in ways that consistently fail to close down experience around a singular distribution of the sensible. Here, I follow work by Mustafa Dikeç (2005, 2015) and Divya Tolia-Kelly (2019). For both Dikeç and Tolia-Kelly, Rancière affords the opportunity to include excluded people in an understanding of, respectively, urban politics and the politics of the museum. Significantly, in Dikeç's and Tolia-Kelly's work, those excluded people are further marginalised on grounds of race through the production of space. Thus, for Tolia-Kelly, the exclusion of racialised artists is achieved through a particular colonial distribution of the senses (see also Tolia-Kelly 2016). Dikeç, meanwhile, shows how the built environment is used to marginalise racialised groups, especially immigrants, to an (im)proper place: for example, by housing them on the peripheries of cities or making access to the city's social and physical infrastructure difficult or even impossible. Bluntly, racialised subjects are pushed to the edges of cities and museum spaces – and thereby rendered voiceless, unseen and unintelligible.

Critically, this form of exclusion does not solely operate by policing space such that people are simply placed beyond the city or the museum, rather there is a topological ordering space. This topological ordering of space ensures that people can be socially excluded even while they are spatially proximate (on this, see Allen 2003; and especially 2016). Thus, even while racialised subjects are inside the city and the museum, they are kept socially distant, either by the racial segregation of urban space or through the production of white museum spaces (see also Bressey 2009, 2014). For me, taken together, what Dikeç and Tolia-Kelly reveal is that two orders of the sensible can coexist, even as they are held apart. Indeed, it is their coexistence that ensures that the distribution of the sensible has to be

policed, sometimes brutally (see Dikeç 2018) and, arguably, sometimes with housing policy and/or with malicious neglect, as the Grenfell and Hillsborough tragedies show.

More than this, regimes of the sensible are not just organised vertically, from above, but also horizontally, between and amongst people. Significantly, what this brings into view is that the clash of regimes is not just conducted at the border of the different means of organising and policing of who can and cannot speak, be seen or not, can action or not, but is also brought about by the existing together of different ontologies, epistemologies and experiences of speech, vision, action and so on. To show that this becomes operative through bodies, affects and politics is the work of this book.

From this perspective, it is in these clashes within and between regimes of bodies that political subjects emerge. Thus, we cannot see political subjectivities as always already forged and fixed. Rather, regimes of the body, themselves, reveal that bodies remain stubbornly indeterminate, even while they furiously seek to fix and stabilise them into their proper place (as Rancière shows). The enemy of politics, in this view, would be to convert the indeterminacy of the subject into a politics of identity, where all things are already known and fixed in place. Instead, I will seek an account of politics that is grounded in both the overdetermination and the indeterminacy of affects, bodies and identities. By overdetermination, I mean the ways that bodies and identities can be *determined many times over* by structures of meaning and power – which I will refer to, in aggregate, as bodily regimes. Politics can, and does, emerge in opposition to these overdeterminations. However, in this book, I wish to emphasise the ways that politics emerges both through the tensions between various forms of determination and also through indeterminacy.

Understanding Bodily Regimes: Between Rancière and Freud, between Overdetermination and Indeterminacy

As we have seen, the approach I take to thinking about the overdetermination and indeterminacy of bodies, affects and identities draws on Rancière. Rancière's notion of the distribution of the sensible invites an analysis of bodies, affects and politics that focuses on the unconscious ways (which he calls an aesthetic regime) that the bodily senses are structured, such that only certain people are noticed, listened to and understood. I have previously suggested that aesthetic regimes (the unconscious structuring of the sensible) are multiple, inconsistent, mutable and (can) occupy the same space.

The idea that the processes of unconscious structuring are many has three implications that are significant for my approach. First, an account of the unconscious, and unconscious processes, cannot be restricted to singular functions and

outcomes, such as repression and the Oedipus Complex (see Chapters 4 and 5). Second, unconscious structurings (plural) of the sensible might be in tension or conflict with one another (see Chapters 2 and 3), albeit in ways that are not easily perceived or that might be opaque or hidden or even repressed. Third, conflicts and tensions within and between unconscious structurings requires a dynamic understanding of unconscious processes, capable of illuminating and understanding the mutability of distributions of the sensible – and, for my purposes, of bodily regimes (as in Chapters 6 and 7). My approach builds on Freud's account of the unconscious, yet this requires some recasting. Thus, Rancière's discussion of Freud is instructive and illuminating – as it, helpfully for me, sets up the analytic architecture of this book.

Rancière's intention, in writing *The Aesthetic Unconscious* (2001), is to understand Freud's use of the Oedipus myth. This discussion does several interesting things for me: first, in answering the question of why Freud chooses the version of the myth that he does, Rancière provides both a demonstration of the effects, and affects, of specific aesthetic regimes and also (I argue) an example of the coexistence of aesthetic regimes; second, this then enables a re-evaluation of the place of the myth in Freudian thought, which allows me to de-privilege Oedipus in my version of Freud; and, thus, third, this opens up new avenues of thought for thinking with Freud about bodies, the unconscious and the distribution of the sensible.

In *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, Rancière boldly asserts that Freud's understanding of the unconscious is predicated upon a particular aesthetic regime (p. 7). This aesthetic regime, for Rancière, creates a very particular set of dichotomies between thought and non-thought, between knowing and not-knowing, between seeing and blindness, between listening and hearing, between logic and sense. To substantiate his argument, Rancière turns to Freud's discussion of the Oedipus myth, which provides Freud with a cornerstone for understanding the sexual anxieties of childhood, especially concerning castration (see Pile 1996, ch. 4). Rancière is especially interested in which version of the Oedipus myth Freud selects. I am persuaded by Rancière's argument that this selection is significant and telling.

Freud's account of the Oedipus myth is first spelt out in detail in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, under the section dealing with dreams about the death of loved ones (1900, pp. 275–278). He briefly outlines the myth, which involves both the unwitting fulfilment of a prophecy and also the vain efforts of people to avoid threatened disaster. Briefly, in Freud's telling of the myth, King Laius of Thebes gives his infant child to a servant to get rid of because of a prophecy that Laius will be killed by his own son. Unable to kill the child, the servant gives the baby to a shepherd, Polybus. The child, Oedipus, grows up ignorant of his origins. Oedipus, later, kills Laius at a crossroad, not knowing that he has killed his father. Then, he marries Queen Jocasta, Laius' widow and also his mother, and becomes king of Thebes. Oedipus' life begins to unravel when a plague hits Thebes. Oedipus sends his brother-in-law, Creon, to the oracle at Delphi to discover the reason for the plague. Creon tells Oedipus that the problem is that the murderer

of Laius has never been caught. Oedipus vows to find the murderer. He sends for the blind prophet, Tiresias. Tiresias is blunt: 'You yourself are the criminal you seek', he tells Oedipus. Oedipus simply cannot see how this can be true. In the ensuing argument, Oedipus mocks Tiresias' blindness, and Tiresias retorts that it is Oedipus who is blind. As Tiresias leaves, he mutters that the murderer is son and husband to his own mother, brother and father to his own children, and a native of Thebes. Long story short, through a series of misdirections and revelations, eventually Oedipus comes to know that he is the murderer that he is seeking – and once he comes to a full realisation of his situation, he (famously) tears out his own eyes.

Why this version of the myth, Rancière asks? Other versions were available to Freud: for example, in 1659, Corneille wrote his own version; and, in 1717, Voltaire completed a version while in prison for 11 months (*The Aesthetic Unconscious*, ch. 2). For both Corneille and Voltaire, Rancière asserts, the original myth was not only too incredible, but also too gory for the sensibilities of their audiences. It was just implausible that Oedipus would not know that he was the murderer after being told so, bluntly and unambiguously, by Tiresias. More than this, the tearing out of his own eyes was plainly too literal and too explicit. Corneille and Voltaire sought to create more mystery around the identity of the murderer by introducing new, additional suspects. And they made sure that Oedipus' denouement occurred off-stage, unseen by the audience. Freud selected neither of these versions of the myth, nor indeed other versions; such as Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus: A Tragedy* (1679), which centres on the love affair between Oedipus and Jocasta and portrays Oedipus as noble and heroic. Against expectation, Freud's choice, Rancière argues, has nothing to do with incest (although Voltaire reduces the significance of incest in the story); it is instead about Freud selecting between aesthetic regimes.

In fact, Rancière argues, it would have been easier for Freud to have chosen either Corneille's or Voltaire's Oedipus, for these operate within the dominant representational regime of aesthetics, where characters and situations are taken literally. For both of them, it was simply impossible for audiences to suspend their disbelief when Oedipus cannot believe what Tiresias tells him. They believed their audiences simply would not understand that Oedipus was 'in denial' (as it is now popularly termed). Interestingly, this was apparently not the case for restoration period English audiences, as Dryden and Lee's version followed Sophocles' plot closely. Either way, for Rancière, neither incest nor Oedipus' ability to hear or see the truth is at the heart of Freud's choice. Rather, Freud chooses Sophocles' Oedipus because the classical aesthetic regime (as Rancière calls it) places defects in the subject at the heart of tragedy. This sense of flaws in people's characters provides Freud, in this view, with the ability to imagine unconscious processes, such as denial and castration anxiety.

Building on this observation, Rancière is now able to contrast the classical aesthetic regime with today's dominant regime, the representational aesthetic

regime. The pivotal difference between the representational and classical aesthetic regimes is the way they render the truth visible and invisible. Rancière argues that Freud selects the classical regime precisely because Oedipus cannot see his own truth, even when it is pointed out to him. This performs a particular cut through seeing and not seeing, the sayable and the unsayable, hearing and understanding, through knowing and not knowing. On one side, there is the knowing subject, Laius, who seems to be king of his own destiny; and, on the other side, there is a not-knowing subject, Oedipus, who cannot even be king of who he is. It is the movement between these contradictory positions that animates the tragedy and what draws Freud to it. This is significant for Rancière.

And, for me, too. Rather than Oedipus being a lesson in what happens if you break the incest taboo (knowingly or not), this is about the relationship between knowing and not knowing, seeing and not seeing, hearing and not hearing (see Chapters 2 and 3): that is, the relationship between conscious and unconscious thought processes (see Chapters 3 and 4). And, as we see (in Chapters 5 and 6), between a repressive unconscious and a communicative unconscious. In particular, the (classical or representational) aesthetic regime is connected to the ideas of overdetermination and indeterminacy, where overdetermination is about how meaning is determined many times over through the distribution of the senses (that creates ways of knowing, seeing, hearing, feeling and so on) and where indeterminacy is a product of the epistemic cut between knowing and not knowing, seeing and not seeing, hearing and not hearing, feeling and not feeling and so on. My approach to these issues is empirical. The relationship between bodies, affects and politics is not to be decided in the abstract or in advance, but in context.

Rancière also asks why Freud draws upon Oedipus at all. That is, why does Freud draw upon a fictitious character from a stage play to model psychic structures? This question can be usefully extended: why does Freud draw on Shakespeare's Hamlet (immediately following his discussion of Oedipus in *The Interpretation of Dreams*) or other artistic products, such as Michelangelo's statue of Moses (Freud 1913), Leonardo da Vinci's painting of *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* (Freud 1899), 'The Sandman' horror story by E.T.A. Hoffman (Freud 1919, which also establishes a connection between eyes and the fear of castration), and the like? For me, these examples perform two significant functions. First, these examples, for Freud, bear witness to unconscious processes through the aesthetic forms they take. Second, they reveal that unconscious processes bleed through life, in all its forms: that is, given the focus of this book, through bodies, through affects and through politics. Thus, as this book is to bear witness to the 'aesthetic unconscious' of bodies, affects and politics, I draw on a range of examples: I have selected Freud's case studies (Chapters 4, 5 and 6), autobiography (Chapters 2 and 3), novels (Chapter 2), Hollywood movies (Chapter 5) and art (Chapter 7). Importantly, for my argument, the unconscious is not confined to a particular space, such as the consulting room, and especially not to the brain or the mind of the individual.

The Oedipus myth is normally taken as significant because it places repression, sexual anxieties associated with parents and the body, at the heart of the analysis of the symptom. However, what Rancière highlights is the way Freud traces the slippages between knowing and not knowing, between hearing and not hearing, between seeing and not seeing. So, the imperative that this book follows, drawing on both Rancière and Freud, is two-fold. First, to map out the coexistence of different distributions of the sensible and their policing – which I will call *bodily regimes* (following Frantz Fanon, see Chapter 2). Second, to chart the ways that these coexistent bodily regimes are imbricated and experienced, especially including the ways that these create tensions and antagonisms for the subject (building from Chapter 2 to Chapter 3). In Chapters 2 and 3, I lay particular emphasis on the role of skin as a target for, and a manifestation of, coexisting bodily regimes. These two chapters are an asymmetrical pairing, showing how people can, and cannot, inhabit the uncomfortable imposition of bodily regimes differently.

The coexistence of bodily regimes can imply that they are somehow discrete, such that there cannot be movement through or across bodily regimes; more than this, that bodily regimes are somehow confined to bodies themselves – and not ‘of the world’. Chapters 4 and 5 explore the topologies and topographies of psychic space. In these chapters, we learn about the slippages between bodily regimes, as the world touches upon the psyche and as the psyche touches upon the world. Significantly, this involves the shifts and whorls of affects through the body and the social. To understand this, these chapters draw heavily on the idea of the Möbius strip. The strip is mostly understood as a way to describe the inversion of inside and outside (and is aligned therefore with the torus and the Klein bottle). However, key to these chapters is the movement along the strip that creates the inversion. It is movement that creates the tension between overdetermination and indeterminacy (at each point). Significantly, the strip also necessarily has width, which requires factoring in lateral movement – as an additional dimension of indeterminacy.

To understand the indeterminacy of bodies and affects, I focus on unconscious communication in Chapters 5 and 6 – following Paul Kingsbury and my identification of the unconscious and transference as two of the four fundamentals of psychoanalytic geography (2014, Ch. 1). These chapters take us far from an Oedipally-centred version of Freud. Instead, these chapters develop a model of Freudian thought that is focused on the ways that thought and non-thought (as in thoughts in the unconscious) are produced and repressed, but also represented, circulated and communicated. This brings us fully into a model of the subject that is radically open to the other, which necessarily begs fundamentally questions about the nature of the distribution of the senses, where no distribution – or bodily regime – can be taken as read. This then takes us (in Chapter 7) to the art of Sharon Kivland. Here, we are back on Rancière’s terrain, the aesthetic. However, we are now attending to the indeterminacy of bodies, affects and politics that arises from the dynamics and disruptions of the aesthetic unconscious. This brings

us full circle, back to the politics of bodies and affects that emerge from the clash between bodily regimes. However, what we now know (from the chapters within the book) is that these clashes emerge not just from the split between thought and non-thought (etc.), not solely from the coexistence of different forms of splitting (i.e. the coexistence of distributions of the sensible, of bodily regimes), but from the movement along, across and between them. With this idea, it will be possible to return to Grenfell (in the Conclusion in Chapter 8) to think once more about the interweaving of bodies, affects and politics.

The next two chapters focus on skin, both as an overdetermined location where identity, difference and experience are seemingly settled and known, but also where class, race, gender, sexuality and the relationships between them are revealed to be mutable and indeterminate.