

Authority & Transgression

MH Editors

In *Modern Horizons* 7th issue, we've gathered seven essays that explore the theme of "Authority & Transgression".

Ours is a particularly relevant time to think about authority and transgression in all of their given and potential forms, and to think these terms now is above all to set forth a series of questions which may help clarify their meaning for us and relationship with each other in our daily lives and imagination. Politically, in local communities and globally, authority is undergoing a transformation, becoming less legitimate while at the same time becoming more powerful and violent. This is a dangerous trend for many reasons, one being that it skews and disfigures real, possible forms of authority. Additionally, hyperreal authority's tendency toward abuse and despotism is often witnessed—and even enjoyed—with cynical awareness, from behind the fourth wall of social media. As cynicism infiltrates everyday life and becomes a defining symptom of our time, critique becomes less valid and even less possible. On the other hand, recent forms of transgression seem to betray the term's etymology of going beyond or across rule, law and authority, and instead seek to destroy from within or subvert from below, forgoing any potential continuity of/or community. One could call this a nihilistic form of transgression opposing a recklessly utopian, pseudo-fascist authority—to recall our 2016 issue on these themes. What would a community that embraces or has room for rather than fears transgression look like? Would there be a sense of authority (or integrity) in this community?

While the current climate urgently calls for serious discussion of ideas and forms of authority and transgression, we should not limit our scope to the present. We wish to think about the ways authority and transgression are manifest historically. Is authority taken or granted? If so, who or what bestows authority? Does authority rely on time, as in tradition (cf. our 2015 issue "Conversations with Tradition") or can it (ostensibly) appear without precedence? What are the personal and social benefits of having and/or adhering to authority? Can it be self-regulating, that is can authority safeguard itself from being abused, or is external moderation required? If so, where does *this* authority come from? Perhaps, to put it simply, transgression—and its possibility—is the only true form of regulating authority. Yet is this transgression's only motivation? Does it have to be particular or is there such a thing as a general transgression? What is its role in identity- and community-building? Is there such a thing as transgression for transgression's sake? And, finally, what is at stake when it becomes authoritative, or rather *authoritarian*? These questions are of course not simply answered, but to consider them at length allows us to begin to comprehend the complex matter of authority and transgression and how they both belong together and measure each other.

In this issue, some of the essays address questions of authority and transgression outside of a strictly political realm. How can literature, film, painting, and music offer alternative ways of thinking about authority and transgression? What does it mean to call an image or a text authoritative? In what ways has art been used and abused for authoritative and/or transgressive ends? In terms of spiritual life, while it is easy to find examples of authority gone awry, which forms of spiritual or theological authority can contribute to and maintain a presence to life?

When thinking about authority and transgression in these (perhaps) less pragmatic terms, one ought to address the question of limits and what is possible. It is too easy to define authority as that which sets limits, and transgression as that which crosses them. Authority, understood as the exercise of power and knowledge, transgresses that which precedes it; transgression adheres to an authority that is other than the one it exceeds. Is the idea of limit, then, what defines both authority and transgression as codependents bound by prescription? If so, limits seem to exist because of the possibility, real or imagined, of their invalidation. Hence the importance of literature and art for exploring the resilience of limits and the ways they are or may be transgressed. Historically, both authority and transgression have always been motivated by and have mobilized texts, images, ideas and language. How do they create or disavow meaning? Are certain forms of knowledge and esthetic expression more likely to be authoritative? Do others tend to be more transgressive?

In order to recognise and define proper forms of authority and appropriate forms of transgression, what languages or grammars are available to us? What types of spaces (public, private, artistic, intellectual, spiritual) are or could be made to be available to cultivate proper, necessary authority and to allow for appropriate, equally necessary transgression? What kinds of communities are open to different forms of both authority and transgression? Is form necessarily authoritative? If so, then the authority of language (its structure) would have an innate transgression in order to enact itself, in order to explore and think about life and its open possibilities. How does this play out in time? Or rather, is it only over time that recognition and definition can be established? That is, is duration essential for thinking about appropriate form? Conversation, over time, will help discern some of the trickier aspects of our theme, rather than rejecting one (often authority) and favouring the other (often transgression). The essays in this issue do just that: further the conversation from a variety of perspectives and voices.