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Living a Feminist Life
To the many feminist killjoys out there doing your thing:

THIS ONE IS FOR YOU.
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Living a Feminist Life is structured in three parts. In part I, "Becoming Feminist," I discuss the process of becoming a feminist, and how consciousness of gender is a world consciousness that allows you to revisit the places you have been, to become estranged from gender and heteronorms as to become estranged from the shape of your life. I start with experiences I had growing up, exploring how these individual experiences are ways of (affectively, willfully) being inserted into a collective feminist history. In part II, "Diversity Work," I focus on doing feminist work as a form of diversity work within universities, as the places where I have worked, as well as in everyday life. I show how questions of consciousness and subjectivity raised in the first part of this book, the work required to become conscious of that which tends to recede, can be understood in terms of materiality: walls are the material means by which worlds are not encountered, let alone registered. I explore experiences of being a stranger, of not feeling at home in a world that gives residence to others. In part III, "Living the Consequences," I explore the costs and potential of what we come up against, how we can be shattered by histories that are hard, but also how we become inventive, how we create other ways of being when we have to struggle to be. The history of creativity, of bonds made and forged, of what we move toward as well as away from, is a history that we need to keep in front of us; a feminist history.

It is the practical experience of coming up against a world that allows us to come up with new ideas, ideas that are not dependent on a mind that has withdrawn (because a world has enabled that withdrawal) but a body that has to wiggle about just to create room. And if we put ourselves in the same room, how much knowledge we would have! No wonder feminism causes fear; together, we are dangerous.
feminism itself can be understood as an affective inheritance; how our own struggles to make sense of realities that are difficult to grasp become part of a wider struggle, a struggle to be, to make sense of being.

In the process of describing how I became a feminist, this opening part of the book also offers a feminist approach to some keys areas of concern within feminist theory and beyond: the role of sensation in knowledge formation; the sociality of emotions; how power operates through directionality and orientation; and how to think about happiness, as well as the relationship between will and force. I show how becoming feminist is also about generating ideas about the worlds we encounter. Feminist theory, in other words, comes out of the sense-making process of becoming feminist and navigating a way through a world.

The figures of the feminist killjoy and willful subject are considered in this part of the book primarily in terms of how they relate to some of my early experiences of becoming and being a feminist. These figures will pop up all over the place. They are everywhere.

Feminism is sensational. Something is sensational when it provokes excitement and interest. Feminism is sensational in this sense; what is provocative about feminism is what makes feminism a set of arguments that is hard to deliver. We learn about the feminist cause by the bother feminism causes; by how feminism comes up in public culture as a site of disturbance.

When you speak as a feminist, you have to deal with strong reactions. To be committed to a feminist life might require being willing to elicit those reactions. When you speak as a feminist, you are often identified as being too reactive, as overreacting, as if all you are doing is sensationalizing the facts of the matter; as if in giving your account of something you are exaggerating, on purpose or even with malice. In this chapter I accept that feminism begins with sensation: with a sense of things. I want to explore how feminism is sensible because of the world we are in; feminism is a sensible reaction to the injustices of the world, which we might register at first through our own experiences. We might work over, mull over, these experiences; we might keep coming back to them because they do not make sense. In other words we have to make sense of what does not make sense. There is agency and life in this making. In this chapter, I share some of the experiences that led me to feminism, which I would describe as a bumpy rather than smooth process of coming to register something that is difficult; these experiences provided the raw materials of my feminist instruction.
SENSING WRONGS

A sensation is often understood by what it is not: a sensation is not an organized or intentional response to something. And that is why sensation matters: you are left with an impression that is not clear or distinct. A sensation is often felt by the skin. The word *sensational* relates both to the faculty of sensation and to the arousal of strong curiosity, interest, or excitement. If a sensation is how a body is in contact with a world, then something becomes sensational when contact becomes even more intense. Perhaps then to feel is to feel this even more.

Feminism often begins with intensity: you are aroused by what you come up against. You register something in the sharpness of an impression. Something can be sharp without it being clear what the point is. Over time, with experience, you sense that something is wrong or you have a feeling of being wronged. You sense an injustice. You might not have used that word for it; you might not have the words for it; you might not be able to put your finger on it. Feminism can begin with a body, a body in touch with a world, a body that is not at ease in a world; a body that fidgets and moves around. Things don’t seem right.

Many of my early experiences of feeling wronged, as a girl, involved unwanted male attention. Things happened. They happened again. Already we sense some consequences: if becoming feminist cannot be separated from an experience of violence, of being wronged, then what brings us to feminism is what is potentially shattering. The histories that bring us to feminism are the histories that leave us fragile. Feminism might pick up (or more hopefully pick up against) from the experiences that leave us vulnerable and exposed. Feminism: how we survive the consequences of what we come up against by offering new ways of understanding what we come up against.

Feminist work is often memory work. We work to remember what sometimes we wish would or could just recede. While thinking about what it means to live a feminist life, I have been remembering; trying to put the pieces together. I have been putting a sponge to the past. When I think of my method, I think of a sponge: a material that can absorb things. We hold it out and wait to see what gets mopped up. It is not that memory work is necessarily about recalling what has been forgotten: rather, you allow a memory to become distinct, to acquire a certain crispness or even clarity; you can gather memories like things, so they become more than half glimpsed, so that we can see a fuller picture; so you can make sense of how different experiences connect.

There is one time I remember, very acutely, still. I was out jogging, just near my home. A man whirled passed on a bike and put his hand up the back of my shorts. He did not stop; he just carried on cycling as if nothing had happened, as if he had not done anything. I stopped, shaking. I felt so sick; invaded, confused, upset, angry. I was the only witness to this event; my body its memory. My body its memory: to share a memory is to put a body into words. What do we do when these kinds of things happen? Who do we become? I kept on going. I began jogging again, but it was different: I was different. I was much more nervous. Every time someone came up behind me, I was ready, tense, waiting. I felt differently in my body, which was a different way of encountering the world.

Experiences like this: they seem to accumulate over time, gathering like things in a bag, but the bag is your body, so that you feel like you are carrying more and more weight. The past becomes heavy. We all have different biographies of violence, entangled as they are with so many aspects of ourselves: things that happen because of how we are seen; and how we are not seen. You find a way of giving an account of what happens, of living with what happens.

This you is me. You seem to receive the same message again and again: the flasher at school who keeps returning; the time you walk past a group of boys and girls on the way home when one of them shouts out to you to come back because you are "fuckable," and they all laugh; that time you come across a man masturbating under a tree in the city parklands who tells you to come and take a look and comes after you when you hurry away; the time when you are walking down a street with your sister and a man jumps out of the door exposing himself; the time you are waiting at a bus stop and a group of men in a car stop and ask you to get in, and you run away and they start jeering and shouting; the time when you fall asleep on a long flight under a blanket and you wake up with a man's fingers all over you. I remember each of these occasions not only as an experience of being violated, but as a sensory event that was too overwhelming to process at the time. I can still hear the sound of the voices, the car as it slowed down, the bike that rushed past, the door that opened, the sound of the footsteps, the kind of day it was, the quiet hum of a plane as I woke up. Senses can be magnified, sometimes after the event.

At the time, each time, something happens. You are thrown. These experiences: What effects do they have? What do they do? You begin to feel a pressure, this relentless assault on the senses; a body in touch with a world can become a body that fears the touch of a world. The world is experienced as sensory intrusion. It is too much. Not to be assaulted: maybe you might
try to close yourself off, to withdraw from proximity, from proximity to a potential. Or perhaps you try to deal with this violence by numbing your own sensations, by learning not to be affected or to be less affected. Perhaps you try to forget what happened. You might be ashamed. You might stay silent. You might not tell anyone, say anything, and burn with the sensation of a secret. It becomes another burden: that which is not revealed. Maybe you adopt for yourself a certain kind of fatalism: these things happen; what happens will happen; whatever will be, will be.

The violence does things. You begin to expect it. You learn to inhabit your body differently through this expectation. When you sense the world out there as a danger, it is your relation to your own body that changes: you become more cautious, timid; you might withdraw in anticipation that what happened before will happen again. It might be your own experiences that lead you here, to caution as withdrawal, but it might also be what you have learned from others. You are taught to be careful: to be full of care as to become anxious about the potential to be broken. You begin to learn that being careful, not having things like that happen to you, is a way of avoiding becoming damaged. It is for your own good. And you sense the consequence: if something happens, you have failed to prevent it. You feel bad in anticipation of your own failure. You are learning, too, to accept that potential for violence as imminent, and to manage yourself as a way of managing the consequences.

You are taught to care for yourself by being careful about others. I remember a policeman coming to our classroom one time, to teach us all about what they called "stranger danger." The lesson was given as it is usually given, as a simple instruction: don't talk to strangers. An image was conjured in my mind, derived not only from my own experience but from this instruction, of a shadowy figure with a "grey mac shimmering at your feet" (Ahmed 2000, 19).

The police, in evoking the stranger, also gave me a body in which to deposit my anxiety. If the stranger could be anyone, the stranger was someone I recognized; somebody I could look out for. Stranger danger is an effective as well as affective script: some bodies become dangerous, others endangered. As girls you learn to be cautious and careful in public spaces with that caution and care directed toward those who do not belong, whose presence or proximity is illegitimate. The stranger loiters. The stranger becomes a container of fear.

Violence becomes instruction when it is accompanied by a narrative, an explanation. When you have learned something, when you have received the message of this instruction, your feelings are given direction and shape. Your body reacts in the right way. Iris Marion Young (1990) in "Throwing like a Girl" asks how girls come to be "like girls" through how they come to inhabit their bodies. Girls come to take up less space by what they do, and by what they do not do. Girls come to restrict themselves through restricting how they use their bodies. Young calls this restriction an "inhibited intentionality," using the example of how girls learn to throw, by not getting their bodies behind an action.

Becoming a girl is here about how you experience your body in relation to space. Gendering operates in how bodies take up space: think of the intense sociality of the subway or train, how some men typically lounge around, with their legs wide, taking up not only the space in front of their own seat but the space in front of other seats. Women might end up not even having much space in front of their own seats; that space has been taken up. To become accommodating, we take up less space. The more accommodating we are the less space we have to take up. Gender: a loop, tightening.

A world can shrink when we shrink. Judith Butler (1993) taught us to think of "girling" as a social mechanism. A baby is born: we might say, "It's a girl!" or "It's a boy!" Even before birth: we might watch on the screen to see whether it's a girl or boy, where that is decided by virtue of the absence or presence of a penis. The attachment to gender rests from the very beginning on phallocentrism: on the penis as the decisive of the future, two sexes as two paths: the sexual binary as fate, as fated, as fatalism. Even when we critique the sex-gender distinction, even when we learn from feminist critiques of this distinction (Gatens 1993; Butler 1990), we know that that distinction works as a form of sequencing: as if from sex, gender follows. We could call this sequencing "gender fatalism," as implied by the assumption that "boys will be boys." I remember that utterance "boys will be boys" as one often made by adults, often with a nod of the head and an intonation of forgiveness: an unruliness explained by the example of how girls learn to throw, by not getting their bodies behind an action.
Sex is given as an assignment; homework. No wonder mere description (it’s a girl; it’s a boy!) provides the basis of a task (being boy! being girl!) as well as a command (You will be boy! You will be girl!). To receive an assignment is to be a given a sign: boy or girl. This or too is doing something, registering as opposition; one or the other. A sign: what means or denotes something. Right from the very beginning matter and meaning are deeply entangled; it is not matter (sex), then meaning (gender). You are in being assigned x or y also being assigned to a group; an assignment is what you receive from others that will determine how you are positioned in relation to others. We are more than these assignments right from the beginning.

We can feel at home in an assignment; or not; more or less. An assignment also means a task; like homework. To be assigned a sex in this binary system is a way of being directed toward a future, as I explore in more detail in chapter 2. Perhaps gender becomes more work for those who feel less at home in their original assignments. We might, early on, not be at home in a body by not being at home in a sign. And we might be perpetually reassigned; reminders of our assignment punctuate our lives like grammar. So of course girling moments do not stop happening, even after we are pronounced girls. As Judith Butler elaborates, “the girling of the girl does not end there” (1993, xvii). Rather, “that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities” (xvii). It is not simply that the sign denotes something. What matters is who addresses you through the sign; how you receive it.

Girling is enacted not only through being explicitly addressed as a girl, but in the style or mode of address: because you are a girl, we can do this to you. Violence too is a mode of address. Being girl is a way of being taught what it is to have a body: you are being told; you will receive my advances; you are object; thing, nothing. To become girl is to learn to expect such advances, to modify your behavior in accordance; to become girl as becoming wary of being in public space; becoming wary of being at all. Indeed, if you do not modify your behavior in accordance, if you are not careful and cautious, you can be made responsible for the violence directed toward you (look at what you were drinking, look at what you wearing, look at where you were, look look). You can be made responsible whether or not you have modified your behavior in accordance, because gender fatalism has already explained the violence directed against you as forgivable and inevitable. The violence of judgments that tend to follow violence against women and girls has been documented by feminists over generations. Documentation is a feminist project; a life project.

**FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS**

When did you begin to put the pieces together? Perhaps when you put the pieces back together you are putting yourself back together. We assemble something. Feminism is DIY: a form of self-assembly. No wonder feminist work is often about timing: sometimes we are too fragile to do this work; we cannot risk being shattered because we are not ready to put ourselves back together again. To get ready often means being prepared to be undone.

In time, with work, things begin to make more sense. You begin to recognize how violence is directed: that being recognized as a girl means being subjected to this pressure, this relentless assault on the senses; a body that comes to fear the touch of a world. Maybe you learn from that, from what that repetition does; you realize retrospectively how you came to take up less space. You might express feminist rage at how women are made responsible for the violence that is directed against them. Feminism helps you to make sense that something is wrong; to recognize a wrong is to realize that you are not in the wrong.

Becoming feminist: how we redescribe the world we are in. We begin to identify how what happens to me, happens to others. We begin to identify patterns and regularities. Begin to identify: this sounds too smooth. It is not an easy or straightforward process because we have to stay with the wrongs. And think about feeling: to direct your attention to the experience of being wronged can mean feeling wronged all over again.

We need to attend to the bumps; it is bumpy. You had already sensed something amiss. Maybe it was an uneasy feeling at first. As Alison Jaggar describes, "Only when we reflect on our initially puzzling irritability, revulsion, anger, or fear may we bring to consciousness our ‘gut-level’ awareness that we are in a situation of coercion, cruelty, injustice or danger" (1996, 181; see also Spelman 1989). A gut has its own intelligence. A feminist gut might sense something is amiss. You have to get closer to the feeling; but once you try to think about a feeling, how quickly it can recede. Maybe it begins as a background anxiety, like a humming noise that gradually gets louder over time so that it begins to fill your ear, canceling out other sounds. And then suddenly it seems (though perhaps it is not sudden) what you tried so hard not to notice is all you can hear. A sensation that begins at the back of your mind, an uneasy sense of something amiss, gradually comes forward, as things come up; then receding, as you try to get on with things; as you try to get on despite things. Maybe you
do not even want to feel this way; feeling wrong is what brings a wrong home. Attending to the feeling might be too demanding: it might require you to give up on what otherwise seems to give you something; relationships, dreams; an idea of who it is that you are; an idea of who it is that you can be. You might even will yourself not to notice certain things because noticing them would change your relation to the world; it would change the world to which you exist in relation. We have to stay with the feelings that we might wish would go away; that become reminders of these things that happened that made you wary of being at all.

Perhaps there is just only so much you can take in. Perhaps you take in some things as a way of not taking in other things. As I have been putting a sponge to my own feminist past, I remembered another conversation. It was with a teacher of mine at university, Rosemary Moore, who taught the first feminist classes I took: Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in 1988; Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in 1989. I hadn't thought about this conversation for a long time, though it is probably not true to say that I had forgotten it. I asked her whether my essay for the course had to refer to women or gender. Her answer was that it didn't but that it would be surprising if it didn't. Why did I ask her this question? I had come to university hoping to study philosophy. I was especially interested in what I called "scepticism," philosophies that proceeded by doubting what is as a way of questioning what's what. Sadly, philosophy at Adelaide University was pretty much straight analytical philosophy and scepticism was dismissed as self-refuting in the first lecture of Philosophy 101. To study the kind of work I was interested in, I ended up in the English literature department because there they taught what was referred to as "theory." And I chose the women's writing courses not because I was interested in feminist theory (even though I was passionate about feminism) but because I was interested in critical theory. I was interested in how we know things, in questions of truth, in perspective and perception, in experience and subjectivity. I wanted to ask how I know that what I see as green is what you see as green; those sorts of questions were my sort of questions.

Yes: I chose women's writing because I wanted to do critical theory. Our teacher was engaged with and by Lacanian psychoanalysis. If we began there, that wasn't what kept my attention; it was 1980s feminist literary theory and from there, feminist philosophy of science and feminist epistemology. I ended up writing my first feminist essay for that course. So why did it happen this way around: from critical theory to feminist theory, given that I thought of myself as a feminist and had been such an outspoken feminist growing up? I think there was only so much feminism I could take in. I had thought that to be philosophical or to ask questions about the nature of reality was not to do feminism: that feminism was about something particular not general, relative not universal, that feminism was about questioning and challenging sexual violence, inequality, and injustice and not the nature of reality as such. I did not understand that feminism was a way of challenging the universal. I did not appreciate how questioning sexism is one of the most profound ways of disrupting what we take to be given and thus learning about how the given is given. Feminist theory taught me that the universal is what needs to be exploded. Feminist theory taught me that reality is usually just someone else's tired explanation. So if in my introduction to this book I suggested that feminist theory is what gets you there, to the classroom, we might note how feminist theory can be what gets you out of there. By this I mean: I thought I wanted to be in the theory class; feminist theory taught me that that was not the class for me. Feminism is my theory class.

We learn also: how we recognize sexism or racism here can be a way of not recognizing it there. A location can be a reduction. Becoming feminist involves a process of recognizing that what you are up against cannot be located or reduced to an object or thing (which could then be discarded so we could start up again). The process of recognizing sexism was not smooth or automatic. I had multiple false starts because there was so much I resisted: I could take feminism in only bit by bit. Maybe there was only so much I could take in because it meant recognizing that I had been taken in. You can feel stupid for not having seen things more clearly before. You have to give up on a version of yourself as well as a version of events. And maybe we need to remember how hard it is to acknowledge that a world is not accommodating you because of the body you have. I didn't want feminism to be everywhere, as I didn't want to encounter these limits; I wanted there to be places to go where I could just leave my body behind.

If becoming feminist is not a smooth process, if we resist what we encounter because it is too much to take in, this is not to say when we do let go it is just difficult. When you begin to put the pieces together, it can feel magical: the wonder of the clicking moment, when things that had previously been obscured begin to make sense, when things fit into place. You blink and the world reappears: clarity can feel magical. For me reading feminist theory was a series of continuous clicks. And later, teaching women's studies was such a delight as you can participate in other people's clicking moments: what a sound it makes; how important it is that this sound is audible to others.
Finding feminism can be empowering as it is a way of reinhabiting the past. It is personal. There is no question: it is personal. The personal is structural. I learned that you can be hit by a structure; you can be bruised by a structure. An individual man who violates you is given permission: that is structure. His violence is justified as natural and inevitable: that is structure. A girl is made responsible for his violence: that is structure. A policeman who turns away because it is a domestic call: that is structure. A judge who talks about what she was wearing: that is structure. A structure is an arrangement, an order, a building; an assembly.

We need structure to give evidence of structure. To catalog instances of violence is to create a feminist catalog. I think one of the reasons I find the project *Everyday Sexism* so important and compelling is that it shows how the cataloging of instances of sexism is necessarily a collective project.\(^3\) The project involves the creation of a virtual space in which we can insert our own individual experiences of sexism, sexual violence, or sexual harassment so that we show what we know: that this or that incident is not isolated but part of a series of events: a series as a structure. These recent feminist strategies have revived key aspects of second-wave feminism; we are in the time of revival because of what is not over. Consciousness-raising was also about this: reaching a feminist account, as an account for oneself with and through others, connecting my experience with the experience of others. We need a deposit system to show the scale of sexism. When there is a place to go with these experiences—and feminism is about giving women places to go—the accounts tend to come out: a “drip, drip” becomes a flood. It is like a tap has been loosened, allowing what has been held back to flow. Feminism: the releasing of a pressure valve.

Feminism can allow you to reinhabit not only your own past but also your own body. You might over time, in becoming aware of how you have lessened your own space, give yourself permission to take up more space; to expand your own reach. It is not necessarily the case that we take up this permission simply by giving ourselves permission. It does take time, to reinhabit the body, to become less wary, to acquire confidence. Feminism involves a process of finding another way to live in your body. We might learn to let ourselves bump into things; not to withdraw in anticipation of violence. Of course I am describing a difficulty; I am describing how ways of resolving problems can enact the problems we are trying to resolve. We know we are not responsible for resolving the problem of violence; changing how we relate to the world does not change the world. And yet in refusing to withdraw, in refusing to lessen how much space we take up, in insisting on taking up space, we are not receiving the message that has been sent out. In order to put the pieces together, you cannot but get the message wrong, the message that makes a wrong a right. No wonder then, as I explore later, to become a feminist is to be perceived as in the wrong.

As we begin this process of putting ourselves back together we find much more than ourselves. Feminism, in giving you somewhere to go, allows you to revisit where you have been. We can become even more conscious of the world in this process of becoming conscious of injustices because we had been taught to overlook so much. A world can flood once we have let it in, once we have unlocked the door of our own resistance. Feminism too can become a flooding experience: one book read that leads to another, a trail that leads you to find feminism, more and more feminism, new words, concepts, arguments, models: patriarchy, phallocentrism, rape culture, the sex-gender system. In finding feminism, you are finding out about the many ways that feminists have tried to make sense, already, of the experiences you had, before you had them; experiences that left you feeling all alone are the experiences that lead you to others. We still have sorting to do: some of these ways of making sense make more sense to you than others. But I will always remember that feeling; a sense that there are others like you out there, that you are not on your own, that you were not on your own. Your own difficult history is written out in words that are sent out. I often think of reading feminist books as like making friends, realizing that others have been here before.

Even if you still feel pain, frustration, and rage, even if you feel these feelings more as you have given them more attention, they are directed in a different way. Knowledge is this achievement of direction. Your feelings are directed neither at some anonymous stranger who happened upon you (or not only), nor toward yourself for allowing something to happen (or not just), but toward a world that reproduces that violence by explaining it away.

**PROBLEMS WITH NAMES**

Feminist consciousness can feel like a switch that is turned on. Turning off might be necessary to survive the world that we are in, which is not a feminist world. Feminist consciousness is when the on button is the default position. Unless you turn it off, you are on. Perhaps this is the reverse of the usual setting, where you have to be switched to be on. No wonder: it can be exhausting. Sometimes it might even seem that it is as or even more tiring to notice sexism...
and racism than to experience sexism and racism: after all, it is this noticing that makes things real. And at times, it can be tempting to think: it would be less difficult if I could just stop noticing sexism and racism. It would be easier to screen things out. Personally I don’t think that is an easy option. And I don’t think that it is always available as an option: because having let the world in, screening it out, would also require giving up on the subject you have become. I think this is a promise: once you become a person who notices sexism and racism, it is hard to unbecome that person.

If a world can be what we learn not to notice, noticing becomes a form of political labor. What do we learn not to notice? We learn not to notice some suffering, such that if the suffering of those deemed strangers appears, then it does so only dimly, at the edges of our consciousness. In fact this is another way we learn about the figure of the stranger: strangers are not simply those we do not recognize but those we recognize as strangers, not only those you do not know but those you should not know. As a child you might have been taught to turn away from homeless people on the street, to screen out not only their suffering but their very existence. They are not anything to do with you. Hurry on, move on. We are learning not only whose suffering should affect us, or how we should be affected by whose suffering; we are busy exercising the very distinction between friends and strangers, creating that distinction, between those who matter and those who do not. It is a distinction predicated on violence. It is a distinction enforced through violence. We are learning to screen out what gets in the way of our occupation of space. Once you have learned this something, you don’t notice this someone.

If we have been taught to turn away, we have to learn to turn toward. Audre Lorde taught me how turning toward what is difficult, which can be a what with a who, is politically necessary, even if this turning can at times feel like we are making life more difficult for ourselves. She teaches us how some difficulties — when we come up against a world because of the body we have — resist being comprehended when they are experienced. In *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde describes the words *racism* and *sexism* as “grown up words” (1984a, 152). We encounter racism and sexism before we have the words that allow us to make sense of what we encounter. Words can then allow us to get closer to our experiences; words can allow us to comprehend what we experience after the event. We become retrospective witnesses of our becoming. Sexism and racism: if they are problems we have given names, the names tend to lag behind the problems.

Having names for problems can make a difference. Before, you could not quite put your finger on it. With these words as tools, we revisit our own histories; we hammer away at the past. It took a long time for me to get to the point where I could even describe how race and racism had structured my own world. Reading black feminist and feminist of color scholarship allowed me to revisit my own past, to occupy that past. I was brought up in Australia in a very white neighborhood. I went to a very white school (is there something very “very” about whiteness? One wonders.). There were just a few of us of color; we didn’t quite know what to do with each other, though we knew we had something to do with each other. I had a white English mother and a brown Pakistani father who had kind of let go or almost let go of his own history in order to give us children a chance in a new world.4 We had no Pakistani friends, but there was an occasional visit to Pakistan, and visits from Pakistani aunts. But they were occasional, fleeting moments, ones that did not leave me with a possibility I could grasp. I was brown, visibly different but with no real account of that difference; no real sense of where it or I was coming from. I kept feeling wrong, being treated as in the wrong, but I did not know what was wrong. Something was wrong. How to acquire the words for this something?

I had to leave home before I could find these words. I had to leave so I could come back again. I was writing a chapter of my PhD thesis on subjectivity. I needed an example. I remember looking around the room as if something lying around might provide me with inspiration. It is funny to recall this because later on I would turn to an object that was nearby; the table, an object that was to become another kind of writing companion (Ahmed 2006). As I was glancing around, it came back to me. A memory intruded into the present as if by its own will. I was ready for the intrusion. I recalled an experience I had when I was fourteen years old, walking home along a street in Adelaide. Two policemen in a car pulled up next to me. The first asked, “Are you Aboriginal?” It turned out there had been burglaries in the area. Racism: how an association between Aboriginality and criminality is turned into a question. I will pick up this association in due course. The second policeman then quipped, “Or is it just a sun tan?” Although given as a quip it was a hostile address, and it was an unsettling experience at the time. It was an experience of being made into a stranger, the one who is recognized as out of place, as the one who does not belong, whose proximity is registered as crime or threat. Once I recalled this experience, so much else came back to me; a drip, drip became a flood.

The police at the school were friendly and taught me to fear strangers for my own protection. The police on the street were hostile and taught me that to become a stranger is to be stopped by how you are addressed. We learn from
this difference: my first instruction was an instruction into whiteness and not just femininity. It is a white female body that is assumed to be vulnerable and in need of protection from others. In the second encounter, I was danger, not endangered; a brown body is not perceived as a fragile female body. My different experiences with the police show how the stranger is a racialized figure. What happened to me partly depended on how I would pass into or out of this figure. I return to this instance in chapter 5, to reflect on how I was able to start up again, and how being able to start up again was a form of class as well as racial privilege. But let’s think about the stranger as a racialized figure. The racialization of the stranger is not immediately apparent; after all, we are taught the stranger could be anyone. My stranger memory taught me that the “could be anyone” points to some bodies more than others. You are stopped because they think you are Aboriginal; you are allowed to start up again when you pass as white.

Feminist and antiracist consciousness involves not just finding the words, but through the words, how they point, realizing how violence is directed: violence is directed toward some bodies more than others. To give a problem a name can change not only how we register an event but whether we register an event. Perhaps not having names is a way of turning away from a difficulty that persists whether or not we turn away. Not naming a problem in the hope that it will go away often means the problem just remains unnamed. At the same time, giving the problem a name does not make the problem go away. To give the problem a name can be experienced as magnifying the problem; allowing something to acquire a social and physical density by gathering up what otherwise would remain scattered experiences into a tangible thing. Making sexism and racism tangible is also a way of making them appear outside of oneself; something that can be spoken of and addressed by and with others. It can be a relief to have something to point to; otherwise you can feel alone or lost. We have different tactics for dealing with sexism and racism; and one difficulty is that these tactics can be in tension. When we give problems their names, we can become a problem for those who do not want to talk about a problem even though they know there is a problem. You can cause a problem by not letting things recede.

We need to acquire words to describe what we come up against. Becoming feminist; finding the words. Sexism is another such word. It often arises after the event: we look back and we can explain things that happened as sexism. To name something as sexist does not make something there that was not there before; it is a sexist idea that to describe something as sexist is to make something sexist. But naming something as "sexism" does do something. It modifies a relation given that it does not create something from nothing. Connections can be what we have to struggle for, because there is so much silence about sexism: sexism makes it costly for women to speak about sexism. Because, after all, to name something as sexist is not only to name something that happens as part of a wider system (to refuse to give what happens the status of an exceptional event), but it is also to give an account of that something as being wrong and unjustifiable. To name something as sexist is not only to modify a relation by modifying our understanding of that relation; it is also to insist that further modification is required. When we say, “That’s sexist,” we are saying no to that, as well as no to the world that renders such a speech or behavior permissible; we are asking individuals to change such that these forms of speech and behavior are no longer acceptable or permissible.

Not just individuals: the point is that individuals are encouraged and rewarded for participating in sexist culture. It might be a reward given through affirmation from peers (the egging on that allows a group to solidify over how they address others as imposters). But institutions also enable and reward sexist behavior: institutional sexism. Sexual banter is so often institutionalized. You might participate in that banter because it is costly not to participate; you become the problem, the one who is disapproving or uptight. You are treated as policing the behavior of others simply by virtue of not participating in that behavior. Not participating can be judged as disapproval whether or not you make that judgment. You are judged as taking something the wrong way when you object to something. When we give an account of something as sexist or racist, we are often dismissed as having a faulty perception, as not receiving the intentions or actions of others fairly or properly. “I didn’t mean anything by it,” he might say. And indeed then by taking something said or done the wrong way, not only are you wrong, but you are understood as committing a wrong against someone else. When you talk about sexism and racism, you are heard as damaging the reputation of an individual or an organization. I return to this issue of damage in chapter 6 in my discussion of brick walls.

Sometimes it might be to our own advantage not to have a problem with how we are addressed. Another time, a rather long time ago when I was still in Australia, a woman told me how in a job interview a man asked her where she was from (some of us are always asked this question, as our being is in question, as I explore in chapter 5). She explains; she gives an account of herself.
As I have suggested, when you narrate something as sexist or as racist you are outraged when she told me this, but she shrugged it off: she said it was a compliment; she was offered the position. What a history I suspect is implied here: a history of how we shrug things off. To get on, you get along. I would use words like racism and sexism to describe how she becomes an exotic spectacle, but for her these words would probably have been experienced as impositions, as coming from the outside, as potentially requiring her to give up an opportunity that was available, to give up something, all over again.

These are complicated scenarios; you can receive some benefits by adapting yourself to a system that is, at another level, compromising your capacity to inhabit a world on more equal terms. I think for many women, becoming willing to participate in sexist culture is a compromise, even if it is not registered as such, because we have been taught (from past experience, from what we come up against) that being unwilling to participate can be dangerous. You risk becoming alienated from all of the existing structures that enable survival within an institution, let alone a progression. Here we can say: resistance to recognizing something might be a way of coping with or living with that thing. Resistance to recognition can be a form or manner of recognition; recognition as a form of resignation, even.

Sometimes: surviving the relentlessness of sexism as well as racism might require that you shrug it off, by not naming it, or even by learning not to experience those actions as violations of your own body; learning to expect that violence as just part of ordinary life; making that fatalism your fate. Sometimes: we have to teach ourselves not to shrug things off, knowing full well that by not doing something we will be perceived as doing too much. When we start using words like sexism and racism, words that make what we are asked not to notice all the more real, we sense there will be consequences. We sense the pain that might follow, as well as the punishment. Part III of this book reflects on living a feminist life as living with the consequences of being feminists who are willing to give problems their names. But I want to make a start here by turning to the figure of the killjoy. She has been waiting (rather impatiently) to speak to us.

**BECOMING THE PROBLEM**

As I have suggested, when you name something as sexist or as racist you are making that thing more tangible so that it can be more easily communicated to others. But for those who do not have a sense of the racism or sexism you are talking about, to bring them up is to bring them into existence.

**When you expose a problem you pose a problem.**

It might then be assumed that the problem would go away if you would just stop talking about it or if you went away. The charge of sensationalism falls rather quickly onto feminist shoulders: when she talks about sexism and racism, her story is heard as sensationalist, as if she is exaggerating for effect. The feminist killjoy begins as a sensationalist figure. It is as if the point of making her point is to cause trouble, to get in the way of the happiness of others, because of her own unhappiness. I turn to the question of happiness and unhappiness in chapter 2. But note how the feminist killjoy begins her life as an antifeminist figure: we are retooling her for our own purpose.

Let me retell my story of becoming a feminist by turning to the figure of the feminist killjoy. I would begin this story with a table. Around the table, a family gathers. Always we are seated in the same place: my father one end, myself the other, my two sisters to one side, my mother to the other. Always we are seated this way, as if we are trying to secure more than our place. We are having polite conversations, where only certain things can be brought up. Someone says something you consider problematic. At first you try not to say anything. But they keep saying something. So maybe you respond, carefully, perhaps. You say why you think what they have said is problematic. You might be speaking quietly, but you are beginning to feel wound up, recognizing with frustration that you are being wound up by someone who is winding you up. The feminist killjoy appears here: when she speaks, she seems wound up. I appear here. This is my history: wound up.

However she speaks, the one who speaks as a feminist is usually heard as the cause of the argument. She stops the smooth flow of communication. It becomes tense. She makes things tense. We can begin to witness what is being locked in this dynamic. The problem is not simply about the content of what she is saying. She is doing more than saying the wrong thing: she is getting in the way of something, the achievement or accomplishment of the family or of some we or another, which is created by what is not said. So much you are supposed not to say, to do, to be, in order to preserve that we. And yet, even if she is not supposed to react this way, her reaction is, at another level, willed. She is after all being wound up by someone who is winding her up. The family is performed by witnessing her being wound up, spinning around. Look, look at her spin! To make her the cause of a tension is another way of preserving...
the illusion that without her, the family would be civil. I think those of us who have been killjoys around family tables probably know this; how useful we are as containers of incivility and discord.7

Whenever we speak, eyes seem to roll, as if to say, well, you would say that. From these experiences we can condense a formula:

**Rolling eyes = feminist pedagogy.**

Eyes seem to roll wherever you go, whatever you say. In fact, you don’t even have to say anything before eyes start rolling. It can seem as if eyes roll as an expression of collective exasperation because you are a feminist. Becoming a feminist is often about being lodged in a *because*. She says that because she is a feminist; or, even more strongly, she is only saying that because she is a feminist. In the introduction, I described how practicing feminism is about developing our feminist tendencies (becoming the kind of person who would be willing to speak out about sexism and racism). We can see now how feminism is refuted or dismissed as simply a personal tendency, as if she disagrees with something because she is being disagreeable; as if she opposes something because she is being oppositional. Feminists are then judged as being unable to help themselves, as if to be a feminist is to function on automatic pilot.8 Feminism is treated as a removal from the world rather than engagement with the world. We are talking about how feminists are removed from the world because of the nature of their engagement; how feminist accounts are discounted as sensationalizing the facts of the matter.

We can appreciate, then, how the sensations that lead us to feminism are often the very same sensations that follow being a feminist. Through feminism you make sense of wrongs; you realize that you are not in the wrong. But when you speak of something as being wrong, you end up being in the wrong all over again. The sensation of being wronged can thus end up magnified: you feel wronged by being perceived as in the wrong just for pointing out something is wrong. It is frustrating! And then your frustration can be taken as evidence of your frustration, that you speak this way, about this or that, because you are frustrated. It is frustrating to be heard as frustrated; it can make you angry that you are heard as angry. Or if you are angry about something and you are heard as an angry person (an angry black feminist or an angry woman of color), then what you are angry about disappears, which can make you feel even angrier. If feminism allows us to redirect our emotions toward different objects, our emotions can become their objects. We are dismissed as emotional. It is enough to make you emotional.

And then of course the objects we are objecting to are reaffirmed as inappropriate objects for critique or complaint. I remember one time we were talking over the family table about the film *Kramer vs. Kramer*. I remember questioning how the mother is demonized. I make that point, that rather obvious feminist point, which is hard not to make once you have acquired a feminist tendency. And then: the noise, the noise! “Oh can’t you just let us enjoy this lovely sweet film”; “Oh can’t you see how special the relationship is between the father and son, how cruel she is”; “Oh you are always looking for problems,” and so on. Feminists: looking for problems. It is as if these problems are not there until you point them out; it is as if pointing them out is what makes them there.

**We become a problem when we describe a problem.**

One time much later than my other killjoy moments over the family table, I was having dinner with my sister and her (then) partner. He began saying things about Aboriginal people and how they would complain about the army moving a rock because it was sacred. He was deeply offensive. I responded. Maybe I used the word *racism*. I can’t remember if I used that word, but it was on my mind. Racism was on my mind because racism was in the room. Whatever I said, he became very angry, but an anger that took the form of silence and stares. He sat there, steely faced, for the rest of the dinner, not touching his food. Waiters hovered nervously. We spoke politely around him. When I woke the next morning, my mother called, and she had heard that I had put him off his food. When will you ever learn—I could hear those unuttered words.

**Poor him**

**Mean**

Memories of being a killjoy at the table flooded back to me, a burning sensation on skin; recalled as being the one who puts others off their food. You sense that an injustice follows pointing out an injustice. Another dinner ruined. So many dinners ruined. That flooding: it happens. It still happens. Feeling wrong, being wrong; being wronged. If sensation brings us to feminism, to become a feminist is to cause a sensation.

**CONCLUSION: ALIENATION AS SENSATION**

The feminist killjoy first came up for me in a painful and difficult situation. I have learned so much from returning to some of my early experiences of this assignment. In chapter 2 I complicate the scene of her arrival to show how...
the killjoy does not simply come up because of what she brings up. But it is important to start with my first sense of her as a figure, how she came up, for me; how she spoke to rather than simply of that feeling of alienation, of being alienated, from a world, a family, a set of arrangements. If you say something and eyes roll, you might end up in a state of wonder and disbelief: how can they not see it, what is right in front of us? You learn to doubt reality as such, because you doubt their reality, this reality. When you question sexism and racism it is hard not to question everything.

That is another promise.

To be a feminist can feel like being in a different world even when you are seated at the same table. If that is the case, then to be a feminist is to be in a different world. So much is reproduced by not being noticed: by receding into the background. What had receded into the background comes alive when you no longer participate in that recession. No wonder: the family becomes a more tangible thing the more you are alienated from it.

If the feminist killjoy comes up in a conversation over the table, she brings other things into view, including the family, as well as the table, as a series of arrangements. When feminists are dismissed as sensationalist, we experience the world as all the more sensational; what is ordinarily overlooked or looked over appears striking. The world registers yet again as sensory intrusion; the events you might have tried to forget come more and more into focus as you make feminism your stance. The past is magnified when it is no longer shrunk. We make things bigger just by refusing to make things smaller. You experience the world on a different scale.

The experience of being feminist is often an experience of being out of tune with others. The note heard as out of tune is not only the note that is heard most sharply but the note that ruins the whole tune. Of course it sounds negative: to ruin something. We are heard as negative: ruining something; dinners, as well as photographs, as I explore in chapter 2. We need to ruin what ruins. We could think of ruining not only as an activity that leads to something collapsing or falling down but as how we learn about things when we dismantle things, or by dismantling things.

I think of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. This is a text that begins by dismantling the happy family, by literally sentencing it to death: the nuclear family, the white family of the picture book, becomes garbled when the punctuation of the story is removed. I would describe the narrator of this novel, Claudia, as a black feminist critic. She is studious not only about whiteness but also about gender. She teaches us about intersectionality in how she pokes things; how she pokes around in things. In one scene Claudia reflects on how it began:

It had begun with Christmas and the gift of dolls. The big, the special, the loving gift was always a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll. From the clucking sounds of adults I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish. . . . [What was] supposed to bring me great pleasure, succeeded in doing quite the opposite. . . . [I] traced the turned-up nose, poked the glassy-blue eyes, twisted the yellow hair. I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable. . . .

I destroyed white baby dolls. (1979, 13–14)

Claudia encounters the doll she is supposed to wish for, that she is supposed to love, as an unlovable thing. Attunement is here a technique of power: by clucking, adults are trying to tell her the appropriate ways of handling the white baby doll. Attunement matches an affect with an object. Claudia knows by their clucking that she is supposed to love the white baby doll. Claudia's misattunement is expressed in how she handles the thing (she pokes and twists the doll rather than clucking), a handling that will, no doubt, be registered by others as violence and aggression; as disaffection, disloyalty, ingratitude. If misattunement is expressed as a mishandling of things, then misattunement is worldly. Objects bring worlds with them. In Claudia's case, she is alienated not only from dolls as things but from patriarchal whiteness that elevates such things as lovable things. To be misattuned is to be out of sync with a world. Not only that: it is to experience what is in tune as violence. Claudia could also be described as a black feminist killjoy: she dismembers rather than clucks at what she has been given to love, the white baby doll; she uses the gift to generate counterknowledge.

If alienation is sensation, it is not then just or only the sensation of negation: of experiencing the impress of a world as violence, although it includes those feelings. Alienation is studious; you learn more about wishes when they are not what you wish for. We can think of alienation then as wonder: we wonder about things; we marvel at their assembly. The dolls we do not want are not simply discarded or left behind, lifeless limp rags left on the table. When dolls are dismembered, they are the object of our attention; we learn not only what they are like (the turned-up nose, the glassy-blue eyes, the yellow hair) but from them what we are supposed to like or even be like; from them we learn about the very stuff of human aspiration. It is when we are not attuned, when we do not love what we are supposed to love, that things become avail-
able to us as things to ponder with, to wonder about. It might be that we do destroy things to work them out. Or it might be that working them out is perceived as destroying things.

When we sense a wrong, we withdraw from a wish. Having a sense of things as palpable things is thus not unrelated to having a sense of injustice. A feminist life is how we get in touch with things. How astonishing.

In chapter 1, I explored how becoming feminist puts us in touch with a world through alienation from a world. I want to build from this discussion of the sensational nature of feminism by developing an account of what I had begun to notice through feminism: how power works as a mode of directionality, a way of orientating bodies in particular ways, so they are facing a certain way, heading toward a future that is given a face. As you become aware of how the social world is organized, norms appear as palpable things. I think of those times, say, when you walk into a toy shop and it is striking. You might pick up the vacuum cleaner, a toy vacuum cleaner, and feel like you are holding the future for girls in a tangible thing. You can pick up a toy gun, and also feel this: the future for boys held as a tangible thing.

Norms become striking: holdable as palpable things. Once we are stricken, there is still much work left to do. The hardest work can be recognizing how one’s own life is shaped by norms in ways that we did not realize, in ways that cannot simply be transcended. A norm is also a way of living, a way of connecting with others over or around something. We cannot “not” live in relation to norms. In this chapter, I thus explore how feminism can be experienced as life alienation, how we can become estranged from the lives we are living in the very process of recognizing how our lives have been shaped or have taken shape. This analysis of power as directionality will enable me to introduce the feminist killjoy in another way.
TRAFFIC SYSTEMS

I want to begin with another of my companion texts, Virginia Woolf’s ([1925] 1996) extraordinary novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. She will keep coming up in this chapter because I think we need to be curious about this novel and why it holds such a place in feminist imagination. It is a novel set in one day. It is about an immersion in a day, one day, in the ordinary; one day as another day; every day as another day. Mrs. Dalloway is busy. She is throwing a party. She walks out into London, down the street, to get some flowers for her party; what an ordinary thing. There she is: out and about. She looks up to the sky and sees a plane making letters. Like those nearby, she strains to try to make out the letters. What are they going to be; what is it going to say? Woolf captures something here, how sociality can be achieved temporarily—you happen upon those who happen to be walking down the same street at the same time; you are passing by others who are passing you by, but just for a moment, just a moment, you look up at the same thing. She captures something: the oddness of a connection, the queerness of a gathering.

Mrs. Dalloway, she is busy; she is occupied. But she too can be distracted by what she encounters, looking up, not forward; distraction is how she is thrown into a common world, thrown off her track, her purpose. Suddenly in the middle of her day, when she is immersed in what she is doing, she has another sense of herself. She becomes aware of her own body as what she is wearing: “But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing—nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” ([1925] 1996, 14). This being Mrs. Richard Dalloway: in becoming wife, she loses herself. When it is no more, she is no more: no more marrying, no more having children now; becoming woman, being no more. Becoming Mrs. Dalloway is a form of disappearance: to follow the paths of life is to feel that what is before you is a kind of “astonishing and rather solemn progress.” You are just going the same way others are going.

She is walking with others when she catches sight of her own disappearance. We learn with Mrs. Dalloway how life itself can be understood as a path or a trajectory. There are points you should reach, points that become like punctuation: how we stop and start, how we measure our progression. We proceed in a direction through reaching certain points. A path gives life a certain shape, a direction, a sequence (birth, childhood, adolescence, marriage, reproduction, death). How we begin, how we end, what happens along the way.

When we share a direction, the traffic flows. Up Bond Street: Mrs. Dalloway, or should we call her Clarissa now; she is part of the traffic. Let’s think of that traffic; human traffic, cars, bikes; roads as well as pavements. Traffic is organized. There are rules that enable us to travel more safely, rules that help us to avoid bumping into each other; rules intended to ease our progression. Some of these rules are formal or written down; other rules are more informal; they are habits, ways of acting and being in relation to others that have become second nature over time. When you are a stranger — maybe you are a tourist, or just newly arrived, and you don’t know these unwritten rules (How can you? There is nothing to consult) — you can become quite an imposition, a burden, a thing. You feel awkward, as locals frown at you as they bump into you because you are not going the right way, or because you pause or hesitate when they are busy, or because you stop to ask directions; they are hurrying, going the way they are going, getting somewhere. It is when Mrs. Dalloway herself is hurrying — she has to get the flowers for the party — that she is distracted. Something can be revealed in these moments of distraction.

Once a flow is directed, it acquires a momentum. A crowd is often directed by the machinery of man-made geography, as well as timetables, by the political economies that render life and work more separated for more; transportation becomes necessary for work. There is congestion because there is a pattern. A pattern is the generalization of tendency. Once a momentum is acquired, it is directive. You can be carried along by the force of a direction. You are getting off a busy commuter train and you are making your way to the exit. So many others are making the same way. A “with” can be simultaneously mobile and thick. When there are so many, you have a crowd, a thickening, a density. You are carried by that flow: it might even save you energy. But if you drop something, if you have to stop for some reason, the crowd thickens; a crowd can frown. You become an obstacle; an inconvenience. And you would then experience that flow as a tangible thing: what stops you from stopping; what slows you down.

A crowd is directed. Once a crowd is directed, a crowd becomes directive. We are directed by what is in front of us; what is in front of us depends on the direction we have already taken. In my book *Queer Phenomenology* (Ahmed 2006), I suggested paths are good to think with. Take the phrase “a path well-trodden.” A path can be made by the repetition of “being trodden” upon. We
can see the path as a trace of past journeys. When people stop treading, the path might disappear. On the one foot: we walk on the path as it is before us. On the other foot: it is before us as an effect of being walked upon. A paradox of the footprint emerges. A path is created by being followed and is followed by being created. We can use a path insofar as we do use a path. Can is here a consequence of doing. If we can because we do, then we do can rather than can do.

To sustain a direction is to support a direction. The more people travel upon a path, the clearer the path becomes. Note here how collectivity can become a direction: a clearing of the way as the way of many. Perhaps there is encouragement just in this: you are encouraged to go in that direction when the progression is eased. When it is harder to proceed, when a path is harder to follow, you might be discouraged; you might try to find an easier route.

Remember Mrs. Dalloway: becoming Mrs. Dalloway as like the steady and solemn progress of bodies going in the same direction along a street. Our lives might be directed in some ways, rather than others, because of this easing of progression. Leaving a well-trodden path can be so difficult: it can mean leaving a support system. I am tempted to redescribe what Adrienne Rich (1993) called “compulsory heterosexuality” in these terms: compulsory heterosexuality is a traffic system as well as a support system. The route is kept clear through collective labor: the attempt to stop too many obstacles from getting in the way. You are given support by others when you follow the route: as long as your choices are different sex (and sometimes more: a suitable match is often same class, same race), your loves can be celebrated collectively; your losses are mourned collectively. Stopping and starting: at the same points. What some scholars call “homonormativity” (Duggan 2003; Halberstam 2005) is the politics of trying to make being gay about reaching the same destination: stopping and starting at the same points. Gay marriage: (can be) another way of reaching the same destination.

And yet it is important to remember that life is not always linear, or that the lines we follow do not always lead us to the same place. It is not incidental that the drama of life, moments of crisis that require a decision, is represented by the following scene: you face a fork in the road, and you have to decide which path to take. This way or that one, you must decide. And then you go one way. Maybe you go that way without being sure that’s the right way to go. Maybe you go that way because the path seems clearer. The longer you proceed on this path, the harder it is to turn back. You keep going in hope that you are getting somewhere. Hope is an investment that the paths we follow will get us somewhere. Turning back risks the wasting of time, as a time that has already been expended or given up.

Sometimes what happens is not simply a matter of a conscious decision. Something unexpected happens that throws you. You feel thrown when you are thrown off course. You might be redirected by an unexpected encounter; a little sideways movement can open up new worlds. Sometimes encounters might come as the gift of a lifeline; other times they might not; they might be experienced purely as loss. What happens when we are knocked off course depends on the psychic and social resources we have behind us. Such moments of being thrown off course can be experienced as a gift, as opening up a possibility; or they can be traumatic, registered as the loss of a desired future, one that you are grasping for, leaning toward.

We might sense how a life has a shape when it loses shape. Think of how Mrs. Dalloway comes to apprehend her own life as if it is a stranger’s life. She becomes aware of becoming Mrs. Dalloway as an inevitable and solemn progress toward a point she has already reached. In chapter 1, I considered how feminist consciousness is achieved. Perhaps feminist consciousness becomes means becoming aware of one’s life as a marvel or even marvelous. Being estranged from one’s own life can be how a world reappears, becoming odd. You might become conscious of a possibility once it has receded. In Mrs. Dalloway’s consciousness, other people, other possibilities, flicker as memory. To become conscious of possibility can involve mourning for its loss. You can feel the sadness of what could have been, but was not to be. Maybe we realize: it would have been possible to live one’s life in another way. We can mourn because we didn’t even realize that we gave something up. The shape of a life can feel like a past tense; something we sense only after it has been acquired.

But we might also know this: we can leave a life. It is not too late to leave a life. Many feminist books that are what I called feminist classics in my introduction are stories of women who leave a life. Some of these texts are lesbian classics: stories of women who realize, perhaps later on in life, that being a lesbian is not something you had to give up. Not giving up: feminism can be experienced or narrated as the loss of a desired future, what you are grasping for, leaning toward.

I think one of the reasons that I became interested in the very question...
of direction was because in the middle of my life, middle as muddle, I made a dramatic redirection. I left a certain kind of life and embraced a new one. I became a lesbian. I had tried heterosexuality. Rather like Mrs. Dalloway’s description of her relation to her own body, heterosexuality was something I was wearing. When you have to try hard to convince yourself of something, it usually means you are not convinced. Heterosexuality did not fit. When I was wearing it, I found it wearing. In pursuing a path partway, in turning back, I learned about that path. To leave a path can be to leave a life even though when you leave heterosexuality you still live in a heterosexual world. But this is what leaving heterosexuality felt like: leaving a life, leaving a life that is supported; leaving a world where your being is supported. You have to create your own support systems, as I explore in more detail in part III. Queer and feminist worlds are built through the effort to support those who are not supported because of who they are, what they want, what they do.

THE PATH OF HAPPINESS

It is a loop: we are directed by what is in front of us; what is in front of us depends on how we are directed. And it is here we can think of how happiness is itself understood as a path. A path, remember, can be what you follow in order to reach somewhere. How do you know which way to go? What are you hoping for in going for? As I explored in my book The Promise of Happiness (Ahmed 2010), happiness is often assumed to be an end point: as what we want to reach, as the point of life, the aim of life. The path we should follow is the path that would lead us to happiness.

Some things, more than others, are assumed to lead to happiness. A path might be cleared by the very expectation that happiness is what you should reach. Maybe these are the very points that Mrs. Dalloway experiences as having reached: marrying, having children, now. For example, the child might be asked to imagine happiness by imagining certain events in the future, such as the wedding day. The wedding day is imagined as the “happiest day of your life,” before it happens. Maybe this before is also how and why: how the day happens; why it happens.

How quickly we learn: for the child, especially the girl child, her happiest day will be the moment of marrying. What I have called gender fatalism is tied to happiness: Girls will be girls; girls will be happiest when they get married. Maybe that “will be” can also be heard not only as prediction but as a moral instruction: not only will she do this, but she will do this happily. The happiness path becomes a straight path: what leads you in the right way, to the right destination. So we might think today that heterosexuality is no longer the only option. But a cursory glance at images and narratives of happiness in popular culture teaches us that old investments can be sustained through minor alterations and variations in form. The happy stories for girls remain based on fairy-tale formulas: life, marriage, and reproduction, or death (of one kind or another) and misery. Maybe there are compromises; maybe there is a diversification of styles of feminine accomplishment; maybe heterosexuality can now be done in more ways than one; but the investments remain rather precise.

We encounter this precision everywhere. Even small children are talked about as having heterosexual futures, often through reading their conduct in heterosexual terms (“He is one for the girls”; “He will be one for the girls”). The future is solidified as something that can be grasped or refused. When you refuse to grasp something, it is often understood as because you failed to get it. What we could call presumed heterosexuality means that not to be presumed as heterosexual, you have to unbecome one. Such an unbecoming is narrated as the loss of the possibility of becoming happy. And then: it is assumed you are trying very hard not to be sad. Sad: it is a consequence we are supposed to avoid. It is a judgment as well as a feeling. How sad; she is sad.

Happiness: what we end up doing to avoid the consequence of being sad. Happiness is a way of being directed toward those things that would or should make you happy. Happiness can thus also be a form of pressure. Pressure does not always feel harsh. A pressure can begin with a light touch. A gentle encouragement: Go this way, go that way. Be happy, don't be happy. Are you having children? When are you having children? A concerned look. Questions, questions: insistence on a when: when will this happen, this will happen when. Questions can be wrapped up with warmth, even kindness: she will be so much happier when, so when?

Not to be heading in the right direction can mean being put under pressure, or under more pressure, whether or not that pressure is intended. Maybe we can feel this more, this gradual increase in pressure as time goes on. We need to describe what this feels like: the opposition that you encounter to your own opposition (where this opposition is not something you want, but something you are judged as being because of what you want). As I noted earlier, you can come up against a momentum when you are not going the right way. This is why we can talk of oppression as something that can be felt or experienced; oppression as a tangible thing. Marilyn Frye takes us back to
the root of the word *oppression*, which is from *press*: “The press of the crowd; pressed into military service; to press a pair of pants; printing press; press the button. Presses are used to mold things or flatten them or reduce them in bulk, sometimes to reduce them by squeezing out the gases or liquids in them. Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing’s motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilize. Reduce” (1983, 54). Oppression: how we feel pressed into things, by things, because of who we are recognized as being.

To be is to be pressed. It might be the words of a parent or a friend, or the way an image of a good life is screened in front of you; you can experience images as weights, as heavy. Expectations, eyes raised, when. A pressure is the ratio of force to an area over which it is distributed. You feel forced, when you experience a requirement as being imposed upon you. Maybe fewer people are more forced because more people are less forced.

Maybe then, maybe then, if you start going in the right direction you experience a relief of pressure. You feel a lessening, a reduction or removal of pressure, as when a hand that was holding you down is gradually withdrawn. You might go faster as your passage is eased. Eventually you are going that way of your own accord. When you no longer have to be pushed, in order to proceed in that direction, you do not experience yourself as having been pushed. As I explore in chapter 3, this is how being willing can be a consequence of force; you become willing to avoid being forced. In willingly proceeding in the right direction, you experience a relief from pressure. How often do we proceed one way in order to be relieved of a pressure to go that way? One wonders. But sometimes we won’t change direction; we accept the pressure; maybe we even become used to that press. Maybe a pressure becomes part of us at the moment we have been relieved of pressure.

We need a feminist account of such techniques of redirection. Happiness is one technique for redirection. One very feminine boy I knew was encouraged to play sports. His mother was worried he would be teased by his peers for being “sissy.” She imagined his future as a future of unhappiness; a future of being teased, left out, hurt. She wanted him to man up to avoid this consequence. Eventually, the little boy did start playing sports; he began to love sports, to enjoy them. The little boy now plays sports with other little boys. He has pretty much discarded his soft cuddly toys, leaving them behind as a way of leaving one version of himself behind. Maybe he is even happier; who knows? When it is hard to know; who knows?

What does it mean to redirect children out of fear that they would be unhappy? Of course we can understand these desires for redirection; we can understand the anxiety about a child going in a direction that might be harder or more difficult. We want him to be happy; perhaps we cannot bear his sad face; I mean, who could? But what do we want when we want a child’s happiness? What does it mean, what does it do, to say, “I just want you to be happy?” The intonation can vary: sometimes these words are said in frustration. I want you to be happy, so don’t do that! Don’t be that! But in a way, the desire for the child’s happiness seems to offer a certain kind of freedom, as if to say, “I don’t want you to be this, or to do that; I just want you to be or to do whatever makes you happy.” The desire for the child’s happiness seems to be predicated on a kind of indifference. A *whatever* seems open; like giving someone an empty box that can be filled with the content of her own desire.

But remember how the fear of unhappiness gave content to a future: not being boy enough meant being hurt, damaged by other boys who were boy enough. To want happiness is to want to avoid a certain kind of future for the child. Avoidance too can be directive. Wanting happiness can mean wanting the child to be in line to avoid the costs of not being in line. You want a boy to be a boy because not being a boy might be difficult for a boy. Boying here is about inclusion, friendship, participation, approval. Boying here is about avoiding the cost of not being included. To want happiness for a child can be to want to straighten the child out. Maybe sometimes, too, a boy might “self-boy,” realizing that he might have more friends, enjoy himself more, if he does the same things that other boys do. I will return to the idea of self-boying and self-girling in due course.

Not to want your children to be unhappy can mean in translation: not to want them to deviate from the well-trodden paths. No wonder then that in some parental responses to a child coming out, this unhappiness is expressed not so much as being unhappy about the child being queer, but as being unhappy about the child being unhappy. Queer fiction is full of such speech acts in which the parents express their fear that the queer child is destined to have an unhappy life. One example is from Julie Ann Peters’s novel *Keeping You a Secret*. Here a mother laments after her daughter comes out: “I want her to be happy. That’s all Tom and I ever wanted for our kids. We want so much for our kids to grow up and have things we never had. We have high hopes for you. Expectations, dreams. Then, something like this” (Peters 2003, 190). Note how first the mother says that happiness is all she ever wanted for her child. The happiness wanted then becomes: wanting the child to have the things that she
did not have. Wanting happiness becomes a high hope: a hope for a certain kind of life for the child. Becoming lesbian, “something like this,” is imagined to compromise not only the happiness of the child, but the happiness of the parents, who gave up a certain kind of life in the hope the child would have that life. To disappoint an expectation is to become a disappointment.

We can pick up on this implied relation between happiness and debt: if the parents gave up happiness for you, then you must give them their happiness back. This is how: if some people come first, their happiness comes first. Parents might want for the children what they think would cause their happiness when it is really their own happiness they are referring to. No wonder then that the social struggle within families involves a struggle over the causes of unhappiness. Perhaps the parents are unhappy as they think their daughter will be unhappy if she is queer. They are unhappy with her being unhappy. The daughter is unhappy because they are unhappy with her being queer. Perhaps the parents would then witness the daughter’s unhappiness as a confirmation of their fear: that she will be unhappy because she is queer. Even happy queers would become unhappy at this point.

Perhaps these debts of happiness become even more powerful or heavy for immigrant families like my own. You are constantly being reminded of what your parents gave up for you: their home, their country, their status, their family. You need to pay them back by living the life they gave up for you. And if you do not: how selfish; how could you; don’t you know what we have done for you? If you happily deviate from an expectation, your joy becomes a theft of theirs. But it is more complicated, inevitably. Certainly if you are a queer child of a migrant family, a brown one at that, a Muslim one or mixed Muslim one at that: it is more complicated than this. As I argued in The Promise of Happiness (Ahmed 2010), the unconventional child of the migrant family provides a conventional form of social hope. The queer child might be described as an unconventional child, who has to struggle against her family to come out. In the case of a brown migrant family, the family is imagined as a dead weight: there is an expectation that her family will be more oppressive, less tolerant; less supportive of her freedom. To be directed toward happiness is to be directed away from your family, who come up in the national imaginary as what or who are holding you back or holding you down. And then custom and culture become things that this brown queer child has to leave behind; happiness is assumed to require getting out. Translation: happiness becomes proximity to whiteness. Camel Gupta (2014) notes how it is sometimes assumed that brown queers and trans folk are rescued from unhappy brown families by happy white queer and trans communities. We are not a rescue mission. But when you deviate, they celebrate. Even happy brown queers would become unhappy at this point.

MISDIRECTION AND DISAFFECTION

If we do not change direction to avoid causing unhappiness, we cause unhappiness. The killjoy comes up again here. You might receive this assignment just because you do not want what others want you to want. And it can seem that by not wanting what other people want (which is also what they want you to want), you are somehow rejecting and devaluing their wants.

We can return to the family table. The family gathering around the table; these are supposed to be happy occasions. We work hard to keep the occasion happy, to keep the surface of the table polished so that it can reflect back a good image of the family. This labor eliminates the signs of itself: to polish is to remove traces of polish. You can get in the way of family happiness just by not polishing the surface. Not wanting the right things becomes tarnishing that surface.

No wonder: I was already a killjoy before I began speaking up. When I was growing up, I found the requirement to be a girl oppressive. I found dresses, and girly styles, irritating. In my mid to late teens I was regularly called a tomboy, although, looking back, I was just a girl not that interested in being girly, in dresses, or makeup, or talking about boys (I am sliding heterosexuality in here because heterosexuality often slides in here). That a not-girly girl is called a tomboy teaches us how restricted girl can be as a category of emergent personhood. If you experience being a girl as a restriction, you do not have to say anything. An affective disposition can speak for you, on your behalf; a grumpy face, or other nonverbal signs of resignation when you are asked to wear a dress for a special occasion. I remember many battles over dresses.

Party.
Dress, sigh.
Down, downer.

The feminist killjoy comes up without you having to say anything. You can kill joy just by not being made happy by the right things. Or maybe whether you are happy or not is not the question: you have to appear happy at the right moments. How many times have you been told you ruined the photograph because of your grumpy face? So many dinners ruined; so many photographs; holidays too. You can kill joy by not looking happy enough. If you are already
known as a feminist, then not looking happy enough will be referred back to the fact of feminism, as if not smiling in the photograph is a political protest (whether or not it is). Feminism can be gender trouble (Butler 1990): you can be seen as not a girl—or a not-good girl or a not-happy girl—by virtue of how you act. Marilyn Frye argues that oppression involves the requirement that you show signs of being happy with the situation in which you find yourself. For Frye, "anything but the sunniest countenance exposes us to being perceived as mean, bitter, angry or dangerous" (1983, 2). Perceptions can be sticky. Not smiling enough: being mean.

Not smiling at the party was for me something to do with who I was required to be at the party: wearing a dress, looking pretty, even singing on command. Sometimes I felt like a clown, other times a machine, sometimes a show pony. I suspect my resignation about human beings, my sense of this requirement as a burden, my identification of parties with downers (what a party pooper!), was also a resignation about human beings. One of the reasons I love horses so much—there are many queer stories to tell about girls and horses, as Elspeth Probyn (1996) has shown—was because they represented an escape from humans and, thus from the requirement to be a girl. I will introduce you to my horse Mulka in my survival kit. He had quite a role to play in freeing me from a sense of requirement. I was profoundly shy growing up, and my sense of human sociality was of something from which I was barred: almost like a room with a locked door for which I did not have the key. Perhaps that was it: gender seemed like a key to a lock, which I did not have, or which I did not fit. Looking back, I think I decided to self-girl when I went to university, as I was exhausted by not fitting or not fitting in. I have no doubt that my own exhaustion was as much to do with being surrounded by whiteness as it was from being alienated by gender; an exhaustion with difference. I remember the very first time I went to a boutique hairdresser after I left school at the age of eighteen. It was a quite deliberate decision. I looked in the mirror sadly and waited for a different version of myself to appear. I knew enough to know: inclusion might require becoming more willing to occupy femininity and to make it my own. I knew enough to know: this option was not available to everyone. Sometimes, then, we might redirect ourselves to relieve ourselves from pressure, from the sadness of not participating in something, or of feeling alone or cast out. We might worry that it is our own future we are cutting off.

This is difficult: I am not saying that to align yourself with something makes you wrong or your desires less authentic. I am certainly not saying being girly as a girl is only or just about fitting in even if, for me, it began that way. You might even feel an obligation to "de-girl" when being girly is not deemed right or appropriate. As Ulrika Dahl (2013) explores, in some feminist spaces, being girly as a girl can make you not fit in; to use the terms I work with in chapter 3, you might have to become willful to be willingly feminine in feminist spaces. I think now I can enjoy being girly (though I still do not wear dresses; I just don't like how they feel) because it is not something that is required, nor is it assumed by myself (or others) as a way of directing attention to boys. A queer girl stretches the meaning of girl.

So I am not suggesting self-girling is inauthentic. I am reflecting upon how we resolve those moments when we become conscious of being in or out of line with others. Feminism heightens consciousness of there being lines at all and thus requires us to make decisions when before decisions might have been made before us, or even without us. Sometimes we are tired or we experience an anticipatory exhaustion: we line ourselves up to avoid the consequences of being out of line because we have been there before and we can't face it anymore. And then when that line unfolds, other things happen along the way. Other times we might realize: we are willing to pay the costs of not being in line because getting in line would compromise too much. And we might find, too, other things can happen along the way.

We know about alignment as a mechanism because of an experience of being out of line. I turn to alignment in relation to institutional politics in part II. I want to stay here with the question of gender. Once you haven't got something right, there are lots of ways to get things wrong, and not all of them are intentional. I often got gender wrong or just got things wrong, whether or not I meant to. One time, when I was in my early twenties, I sent a congratulations card to my sister after the birth of her child. We spoke on the phone, and she said rather crossly, "Why do you always have to make a feminist point?" I had gotten her a blue card. She had had a girl. The thing was: I didn't do this intentionally. I hadn't meant to make a feminist point; I hadn't even noticed the color of the card. But that presumes, perhaps, a having become feminist, having already reached a feminist point: that you do not recognize immediately that the color system is a gender system. When the gender system does not become a habit, you have failed to be habituated. And that is how feminism can be lived: as the failure to be habituated to a gender system.

A gender system is not at work simply in how you do or do not express gender: it is also about how you perform within a wider system that matches meaning and value to persons and things. Once you have properly accommodated to this system, you can be unthinking; you can pick up the right
are not as happy as you expected to be. Disappointment can also involve an anxious narrative of self-doubt (Why am I not happy by this? What is wrong with me?), or a narrative of rage against a world that promises happiness by elevating some things as good. We might become strangers in such moments. When you are alienated by virtue of how you are affected, you are an affect alien. A feminist killjoy is an affect alien. We are not made happy by the right things.

AN UNHAPPY ARCHIVE

It is time to return to Mrs. Dalloway. You will recall how Mrs. Dalloway becomes aware of the trajectory of her own life; how she witnesses her own disappearance as she walks up Bond Street. Getting married, having children become not only things she has done, things she has accomplished, but how she loses herself along the way; how she ceases to be Clarissa, with so many possibilities in front of her. Marrying, having children now: these are not only punctuation points, they are also moments of ceremony; what women do in order to be happy. Mrs. Dalloway does not feel happy. She might not know how she feels; she might not reveal her feelings to herself or to others; but she does not feel happy. She becomes alienated from her own life, conscious of possibilities only after they have been given up, possibilities that shimmer like the old friends she remembers in the passage of her day.

Feminism is full of stories like this: of women who are not made happy by what is supposed to make them happy. This is not to say unhappiness is everywhere, but rather that the expectation of happiness, the expectation that women should smile and the world will smile with them, is what puts so much on hold; a life on hold. The expectation of happiness does not necessarily create unhappiness but it might make unhappiness harder to bear. In the late twentieth century, feminist sociologists such as Ann Oakley wrote at length about how the expectation that in becoming mothers women will become happy worked to pathologize unhappiness. She describes "post-natal depression" as "a pseudo-scientific tag for the description and ideological transformation of maternal discontent" (1980, 277). The romantic myths of childbirth as maternal bliss make maternal blues a social as well as biological problem.

This early feminist work emphasized the importance of women telling their own stories that dislodged the happiness myth, stories that are not simply about unhappiness but about the complex, ambivalent, and messy feelings that women have. There are stories of women workers too, for example, in
Arlie Hochschild’s ([1983] 2003) *The Managed Heart*, women who have to smile as their job, who are as alienated from their smiles as factory workers would be from their arms, when those arms are given in service to the industrial machine. I return to the question of labor (and arms) in chapter 3. Here I want to explore how happiness is what you can be required to perform in private as well as public spaces. I am sure many girls and women have heard comments like “Smile, love, it could be worse” when they walk out and about without cheerfulness planted on their faces. Smiling becomes a feminine achievement. But smiling can also be what you have to do to compensate when you are perceived as not feminine enough. You might have to soften your appearance because (or when) you are perceived as too hard. A black woman or woman of color might have to smile all the more because she is perceived as angry or too assertive: smiling then becomes what you have to do in order to dislodge an expectation. Expectations can be confirmed by the very effort to dislodge them. Even a smile can be too assertive if you are already judged as being assertive.

Happiness as a form of emotional labor can be condensed in the formula: making others happy by appearing happy. The labor is most successful when you become as happy as you appear; the more you strain, the more your smile would seem strained. Feminism might be what we need to resist this formula. By this I do not mean that to become feminists is to aim to make others unhappy. Rather you are no longer willing to appear happy, or to become as happy as you appear, in order to make others happy. Feminism might matter at the other end of the formula. By this I mean: you are not made happy by the appearance of happiness. We acquire, as feminist feeling, sympathy for women who are not happy when they are meant to be happy. Feminist sympathy involves a different direction to unhappiness. We would understand unhappiness not as the failure to be happy and thus as causing yet more unhappiness, but a refusal, a claim, a protest, or even just some ordinary thing, a texture of a life being lived. To be sympathetic to unhappiness is often to be perceived as unsympathetic. I think of the film *Waitress* (dir. Adrienne Shelly, 2007). Jenna, an unhappily married woman, arrives at a doctor’s office and says she is pregnant. The doctor responds sympathetically by offering her his congratulations. His sympathy is not in response to how she does feel (miserable) but rather to how she should feel (happy). She is alienated by his sympathy, even though that sympathy is in accordance with an everyday judgment (that pregnancy for married women is a happy event). The waitress is alienated by virtue of her response to being pregnant, such that to be in sympathy with her response of alienation (to offer your condolence) would be to share her alienation: “Poor you, stuck with him.” A feminist sympathy is sympathetic to an alienation from happiness.

Affect aliens sympathize with alien affects. We can be alienated by sympathy when sympathy is given in accordance with an expectation of how we should feel rather than how we do feel. I think that is why there has been such an outpouring of feminist sympathy for Mrs. Dalloway’s predicament. Feminism might involve the cultivation of sympathy for women who are unhappy with the situation they find themselves in. It is interesting that in Clarissa’s case it is not clear what she is unhappy about. For Clarissa the rather uncanny sensation of becoming Mrs. Dalloway as a loss of possibility, as an unbecoming, or becoming nothing at all, does not enter her consciousness in the form of sadness about something. The sadness of this book—and for me it is a sad book—is not presented as a point of view. Mrs. Dalloway does not explain the causes of her grief. She is too busy getting ready for her party. So much sadness revealed in the need to be busy. So much grief expressed in the need not to be overwhelmed by grief.

And it is at the party that Mrs. Dalloway is put in touch with grief. It is not her grief but the grief of a stranger, somebody she does not know, that takes her away from the party. Lady Braddock says to Mrs. Dalloway, “‘Just as we were starting, my husband was called up on the telephone, a very sad case. A young man (that is what Sir William is telling Mr Dalloway) had killed himself. He had been in the army. I thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here’s death, she thought” (Woolf [1925] 1996, 279). In the middle of the party, words accumulate as a narrative, telling the story of a death, of a suicide, of a man whose suffering was too much to bear. The reader has already been witness to his death as well as his suffering. Clarissa has not witnessed his death, but she imagines it, almost as something happening to herself: “always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt” (280). When she is given the details of his death, his death becomes flesh: “Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with the thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness” (281). The violence of an encounter becomes a violence she encounters. It is not simply that Clarissa is being empathetic, but that at this moment, a death becomes real or material because it has been allowed in. A death spreads as words into worlds. What is
striking about Mrs. Dalloway is how suffering enters her consciousness from the edges, through the arrival of another, who is a stranger, an intruder, who has not been invited into the room. Suffering enters not simply or only as self-consciousness—as a consciousness of one’s own suffering—but as a heightening of consciousness, a world-consciousness in which the suffering of those who do not belong disturbs the atmosphere.

It is at this point, the point when consciousness becomes worldly, that we open up what it means to consider feminism as an unhappy archive. We would not simply be thinking of unhappiness as a feeling that goes from the inside out; the unhappiness lodged in a figure such as the housewife; nor even as a feeling shared through empathetic witnessing. Rather we would be exploring how we can become more attuned to what is already in the world; to the violence of a world that can be obscured by life’s chatter. The arrival of suffering from the edges teaches us about the difficulty of becoming conscious of suffering. It is hard labor to recognize sadness and disappointment when you are living a life that is meant to be happy but is not happy, which is meant to be full but feels empty. It is difficult to give up an idea of one’s life when one has lived one’s life according to that idea. We learn not only that consciousness of unhappiness is achieved but also how such consciousness puts us in touch with the world; allowing a world to pierce a seal, what I call the happiness seal. So much inequality is preserved through the appeal of happiness, the appeal to happiness. It is as if the response to power and violence is or should be simply to adjust or modify how we feel; for instance, by transforming a social relation of exploitation into a personal feeling of empowerment.

Feminism: how we break through a happiness seal. Even when unhappiness is a familiar feeling, it can arrive like a stranger, to pierce the stillness with the “thud, thud, thud” of violence. In the case of Mrs. Dalloway, it is a stranger who disturbs the familiar. But she still has something to do with it. Maybe, just maybe that is why this day matters so much: she was getting ready, to allow her past to flicker with life; she was getting ready to be undone. A seal is broken through a combination of forces. And so, in the middle of her party, something other than happiness happens. If a stranger disturbs the familiar, being a stranger can become familiar. I will return to experiences of being a stranger in chapter 5. Just note that when you recognize yourself as the stranger, you become estranged not only from happiness but from yourself. You might be the one whose arrival causes a disturbance. What then is disturbed? Audre Lorde, who offered us one of the most powerful feminist critiques of happiness (I will turn directly to her critique in my killjoy survival kit), shows how the past can be what is disturbed:

Tensions on the street were high, as they always are in racially mixed zones of transition. As a very little girl, I remember shrinking from a particular sound, a hoarsely sharp, guttural rasp, because it often meant a nasty glob of grey spittle upon my coat or shoe an instant later. My mother wiped it off with the little pieces of newspaper she always carried in her purse. Sometimes she fussied about low-class people who had no better sense nor manners than to spit into the wind no matter where they went, impressing upon me that this humiliation was totally random. It never occurred to me to doubt her. It was not until years later once in conversation I said to her: “Have you noticed people don’t spit into the wind so much the way they used to?” And the look on my mother’s face told me that I had blundered into one of those secret places of pain that must never be spoken of again. But it was so typical of my mother when I was young that if she couldn’t stop white people spitting on her children because they were Black, she would insist it was something else. (1984b, 17–18)

To remember violence is to bring the sound of violence into the present, that “hoarsely, sharp, guttural rasp.” But a memory can obscure the violence brought up. For Audre Lorde’s mother cannot bear to speak of racism, and creates an impression that the violence directed toward her black child is random. When the child reminds her mother about what happened, or what she thought used to happen because that was what she was told used to happen, when she brings it up in conversation, she has ventured into “one of those secret places of pain.” When violence is no longer dismissible as random, violence is witnessed as directed: toward a black body, for Audre Lorde, toward her own black body, shrinking from its sound. Some forms of taking cover from pain are meant to protect those we love from being hurt. That cover still fails. When the cover fails, racism is revealed. Another way of saying this: the past can be what is sealed. When the seal has been broken; pain floods in.

To reflect on how we take cover from pain is to return with a different handle to the question of consciousness explored in chapter 1. We are learning how we learn not to be conscious of what happens right in front of us. Even when something happens to us, an event that is traumatic, we are not witnessing what is happening because of the handle we are given to make sense of it. We could use the term “false consciousness” to describe this process of
taking cover. False consciousness here would not refer to something an individual suffers from: as if she herself screens out what gets in the way of her own happiness. Rather we would use this term to show how there is something false about our consciousness of the world. We can thus inherit false consciousness. Feminist consciousness can be thought of as consciousness of the violence and power concealed under the languages of civility, happiness, and love, rather than simply or only consciousness of gender as a site of restriction of possibility. You can venture into the secret places of pain by recalling something. You can cause unhappiness by noticing something. And if you can cause unhappiness by noticing something, you realize that the world you are in is not the world you thought you were in.

CONCLUSION: A FEMINIST INHERITANCE

The sadness of a feminist book: it is pedagogy. Mrs. Dalloway: she touches a nerve. Feminism: living in proximity to a nerve. When I think of how Mrs. Dalloway is evoked and recalled, I think of how sadness can be an inheritance, a feminist inheritance. I think of all the books that caught my attention not just because of the sadness they expressed, but because of the rebellion they enacted in this expression. It can be rebellious not to be made happy by what should make you happy. This sadness is not always or only about a personal revelation; even when eyes well with tears, those tears do not always form words. It is a sadness that can be too difficult to reveal to ourselves, let alone to others, because it is sadness with the world and thus sadness in the world. So often this sadness is distributed in things that surround a body; her body, allowing a space to be registered as confinement, as restriction. So when I spoke of feminism as sensory intrusion in chapter 1, here we might think of how becoming feminist puts us in touch with all that sadness, all those emotions that represent a collective failure to be accommodated to a system as the condition of possibility for living another way.

When we are being accommodating, when we are busy, we might not notice certain things. Perhaps this is why feminist readers can pick up so much from Mrs. Dalloway: we are not quite in the lives we are supposed to be in. Take the film The Hours (dir. Stephen Daldry, 2002). In one scene, Laura Brown, an unhappy housewife in the 1950s, is reading Mrs. Dalloway. A book becomes a feminist companion; it is a trace of a history that is not gone, of a past that lingers. Laura’s sense of companionship with Mrs. Dalloway derives from a desire not to be in her life, to be suspended from its time and rhythms: she wants to spend time with the book to avoid spending time with her husband and child. It is a day, one day. It is another day. It is her husband’s birthday; but Laura wants to be with Mrs. Dalloway, to take her to bed. Later, when her husband has gone, her friend Kitty arrives and asks her about the book. Laura says of Mrs. Dalloway, “Because she is confident everyone thinks she is fine. But she isn’t.” Laura identifies with Mrs. Dalloway by sharing her grief, as a grief that is not revealed to others. It is as if she says: like you, my life is about maintaining the appearance of being fine, an appearance which is also a disappearance.

Like you
I am not fine
Like you

What happens when domestic bliss does not create bliss? Laura tries to bake a cake. She cracks an egg. The cracking of the egg becomes a common gesture throughout the film, connecting the domestic labor of women over time. To bake a cake ought to be a happy activity, a labor of love. Instead, the film reveals a sense of oppression that lingers in the very act of breaking the eggs. Not only do such objects not make you happy; they embody a feeling of disappointment. The bowl in which you crack the eggs waits for you. You can feel the pressure of its wait. The empty bowl feels like an accusation. Feminist archives are full of scenes of domesticity, in which domestic objects become strange, almost menacing.

An empty bowl that feels like an accusation can be the beginning of a feminist life. In other words, to begin a feminist life is to hear an accusation; it is to hear that others understand you as failing to carry out your duties in the right way. But despite that accusation, you persist in living your feminist life. You keep going. And perhaps this is also why you pick up that book, or see that film, and find solace in an empty bowl. It is how you know you are not alone. When the happiness seal is broken, when violence has intruded into scenes of bliss, we begin to hear the ghosts of feminists past. The feminist ghosts clamor around; they surround; we listen.

To break the seal is to allow the past into the present. A feminist past becomes proximate; it is brought closer to you. Feminism: how we inherit from the refusal of others to live their lives in a happy way. But our feminist ghosts are not only miserable. They might even giggle at the wrong moments. They might even laugh hysterically in a totally inappropriate manner. After all, it can be rebellious to be happy when you are not supposed to be happy, to follow the paths happily that are presumed to lead to unhappiness: not marrying, not...
having children, now. She is called by some childless; she calls herself child-
free. She multiplies the objects upon which she bestows her affections. An
affect alien is made happy by the wrong things. So often her happiness is dis-
credited: seen as selfish, silly, or inauthentic, as a substitute for the real thing.
But she persists with it. It might take willfulness to persist with it. And it is to
willfulness that I now turn.

3 / WILLFULNESS AND FEMINIST SUBJECTIVITY

A feminist history is affective: we pick up those feelings that are not supposed
to be felt because they get in the way of an expectation of who we are and
what life should be. No wonder feminism acquires such a negative charge:
being against happiness, being against life. It is not simply that we first become
feminists and later become killjoys. Rather, to become feminist is to kill other
people’s joy; to get in the way of other people’s investments. In living a feminist
life, we learn about judgments. We learn from how they fall. Words surround
us, thick with meaning and intensity. We hear these words. We learn from
what we are called. It is a feminist calling.

Words surround us, thick with meaning and intensity. In this chapter, I re-
fect on willfulness as one such word that surrounds us, a pointed or sharp
word. Feminists are often called willful; judged as being willful, as suffering
from too much will. Why willful? Let me share with you a typical definition
of willfulness: “asserting or disposed to assert one’s own will against persua-
sion, instruction, or command; governed by will without regard to reason;
determined to take one’s own way; obstinately self-willed or perverse.” To be
called obstinate or perverse because you are not persuaded by the reasoning
of others? Is this familiar to you? Have you heard this before?

It is familiar to me. I have heard it before. Just the word feminism is heard
as an assertion of will “against persuasion, instruction, or command.” If fem-
inists are often called willful, then feminism is understood as a problem of
will: a way of going one’s own way, a way of going the wrong way. The word
**Willfulness** exists in close relation to other words, such as stubborn, obstinate, and contrary, as words that imply a problem of character. If feminists speak of wrongs, this speech is understood not only as unreasonable, but as a product of having an obstinate and unyielding nature. I will be building on my discussion in chapter 1 of how speaking of a wrong is heard as being in the wrong. When I refer to “feminist subjectivity,” then, I am considering how feminism is diagnosed as a symptom of failed subjectivity, assumed as a consequence of an immature will, a will that has yet to be disciplined or straightened out.

**Willfulness:** a way of addressing whose subjectivity becomes a problem. This perception of feminist subjects as having too much will, or too much subjectivity, or just as being too much, has profound effects on how we experience ourselves as well as the worlds we come up against. If to be a killjoy is to be the one who gets in the way of happiness, then living a feminist life requires being willing to get in the way. When we are willing to get in the way, we are willful. In this chapter, I first explore the figure of the willful girl before reflecting on how willfulness has been, and can be, taken up by feminists in doing our collective work. I explore how willfulness is not only what we are judged as being but how we convert a judgment into a project.

**WILLFUL GIRLS**

To become feminist can often mean looking for company, looking for other girls, other women, who share in that becoming. This search for feminist companionship began for me through books; I withdrew into my room with books. It was willful girls who caught my attention. Some of my most loved characters turn up in this chapter. In writing my book *Willful Subjects* (Ahmed 2014), I formalized my pursuit of willful girls into a research trajectory. Once I began to follow the figure of a willful girl, I found she turned up all over the place. It was by following this figure that I came to encounter new texts, ones that had a ghostly familiarity, even if I had not read them before. One of these texts was titled “The Willful Child.” It is a grim story, and a Grimm story. Let me share this story, for those of you who have not read it before:

Once upon a time there was a child who was willful, and would not do as her mother wished. For this reason God had no pleasure in her, and let her become ill, and no doctor could do her any good, and in a short time she kept coming up, acquiring a life of its own, even after the death of the body of which it is a part. Note that the rod, as that which embodies the will of the parent, of the sovereign, is not deemed willful. The rod becomes the means to eliminate willfulness from the child. One form of will judges the other wills as willful wills. One form of will assumes the right to eliminate the others.

What is striking about this story is how willfulness persists even after death: displaced onto an arm, from a body onto a body part. The arm inherits the willfulness of the child insofar as it will not be kept down, insofar as it keeps coming up, acquiring a life of its own, even after the death of the body of which it is a part. Note that the rod, as that which embodies the will of the parent, of the sovereign, is not deemed willful. The rod becomes the means to eliminate willfulness from the child. One form of will judges the other wills as willful wills. One form of will assumes the right to eliminate the others.

We might note here how the very judgment of willfulness is a crucial part of the disciplinary apparatus. It is this judgment that allows violence (even murder) to be understood as care as well as discipline. The rod becomes a technique for straightening out the willful child with her wayward arm. I return to this wayward arm in due course. She too has a feminist history. She too is a feminist history.

This Grimm story forms part of a tradition of educational writing that Alice Miller (1987) in *For Your Own Good* calls “poisonous pedagogy,” a tradition that assumes the child as stained by original sin, and which insists on violence as moral correction, as being for the child. This history is condensed by the brutish maxim “spare the rod, spoil the child.” Just consider that in this story the only time that the child is at rest is when she is beneath the ground. When the child gives up or gives up her will, when she stops struggling against those she must obey (her mother, God), when she is willing to obey, she will be at ease.
Becoming willing to obey would avoid the costs of not being willing. A willing girl, who does not appear in this story, is willing to obey, which is to say, she is willing not to have a will of her own. The willing girl does not appear, but she is the one to whom the story is addressed: the story is a warning of the consequences of not being willing to obey. In the original Grimm story the child is not given a gender; and sometimes in English the story is translated using "he," although the child is usually "she." I would make an argument out of this usually: willfulness is assigned to girls because girls are not supposed to have a will of their own. Of course boys act in ways that might be judged willful. It is useful to note that the meaning of willfulness in "the positive sense of strong willed" is described by the Oxford English Dictionary as both obsolete and rare. The negative senses of willfulness are deeply entrenched. Willfulness thus has more of a feminist than a masculinist sense.

Perhaps boys are more likely to be described as strong willed and girls as willful because boys are encouraged to acquire a will of their own. Another willful girl who might help us to make sense of the gendered nature of the assignment is Maggie Tulliver. Maggie appears in George Eliot's (1860-1965) The Mill on the Floss and has been one of my co-travelers in my journeys into the histories of unhappiness as well as willfulness. As I noted in my introduction to Willful Subjects (Ahmed 2014), I first embarked on my research into willfulness because I was so struck by how Maggie's will was used to explain what was behind her troubles. We might put this in another way: Maggie seems willingly to get into trouble, which is not the same thing as saying she has any choice in the matter.

When girls exercise their own will, they are judged willful. The novel contrasts Maggie and her brother Tom, not by suggesting Maggie is willful and Tom is not, but by showing how although they both act in ways that might ordinarily be designated as willful, Tom escapes the consequences of being judged in these terms: "Tom never did the same sort of foolish things as Maggie, having a wonderful distinctive discernment of what would turn to his advantage or disadvantage; and so it happened, that although he was much more willful and inflexible than Maggie, his mother hardly ever called him naughty" (Eliot [1860] 1965, 59). The narrator here describes Tom as even more willful or inflexible than Maggie but as not suffering the judgment. Tom is allowed to get away with it; Maggie not. Gender becomes a matter of consequence. The same actions have different consequences for boys and girls.

We learn from this: to suffer the cost of a judgment can be about who you are rather than what you do. Maggie is already designated a problem child (a girl who is not willing to obey) such that if there is a problem, she is assumed to be the one behind it: "It was Mrs. Tulliver's way, if she blamed Tom, to refer his misdemeanour, somehow or other, to Maggie" (114). This is how the judgment of willfulness falls: figuring who is behind the problem creates a figure, the one who is behind a problem; you might catch someone lurking just because you expect to find her there. Willfulness falls on the fallen.

If Maggie is led astray by her will, it is the will that provides Maggie with a solution. A key moment in the text is when Maggie reads a Christian book about the renunciation of will and has an epiphany. The answer to her troubles is to give up her will, which means for Maggie to stop making herself the center of things: "It flashed through her like the suddenly apprehended solution of a problem, that all the miseries of her young life had come from fixing her heart on her own pleasure as if that were the central necessity of the universe" (306). Maggie decides that her misery is tied to her own inclination; her own willful will is a will that is wanting. She willingly gives up her will as a way of giving up what she wants.

From the point of view of the parents, their daughter has become good because she has submitted to their will: "Her mother felt the change in her with a sort of puzzled wonder that Maggie should be 'growing up so good'; it was amazing that this once 'contrary' child was becoming so submissive, so backward to assert her own will" (309). Note how becoming good is about not being contrary; it means straightening one's wayward ways, no longer opposing one's own will to the will of others. The mother can love this daughter, who can support the family by staying in the background: "The mother was getting fond of her tall, brown girl, the only bit of furniture now in which she could bestow her anxiety and pride" (309). When you treat someone like furniture, you put them into the background. To recede into the background requires giving up a will other than the will of others, or learning to will what is willed by others. Renunciation can be thought of as will work; you have to work to recede, or work to become part of the background. To be willing to obey is to be willing to recede. Perhaps femininity as such becomes a willing resolution. If femininity becomes a problem of will, then femininity is to be resolved by will. Girls must be willing to give up their will.

Maggie of course fails to solve her problem; even becoming willing to obey is judged as a symptom of willfulness (she is too willing to be willing), and she hurries toward her unhappy fate. For girls, what follows being willful is unhappiness or death. There is another story about Jane, a willful girl, which teaches us how willfulness is used to describe some kinds of girls and not others. Will-
fulness thus becomes a warning to girls: not to become that kind of girl. We begin with Jane herself: "Jane was a willful girl. She did not submit cheerfully to those whom it was her duty to obey, but was always contriving to how she could have her own way, as much and as often as possible" (Trowbridge 1855, 16). Note here how obedience is associated with good cheer; to be willing is to be happy to obey. She is happily willing or willing happily. The girl who does not cheerfully submit is the girl who insists on getting her own way.

This story of the willful girl borrows from old lexicons. What happens? The girls from the school are told by the teacher not to go to the orchard. The teacher makes this command because the apples in the orchard are ripe and she knows the girls will be tempted to eat them. Jane disobeys: she eats the apples. She wants them; she has them. Eating the forbidden fruit, the story of Jane, becomes a thread in the weave of the stories of willful women: returning us to Genesis, to the story of a beginning, to Eve's willful wantonness as behind the fall from Grace. The willfulness of women relates here not only to disobedience but to desire: the strength of her desire becoming a weakness of her will. In the history of willfulness, women are found wanting.

From this story we get another sense of the kinds of girls who are diagnosed as willful. When Jane is "determined" to go to the orchard and eat the apples, she declares her intent by exercising the language of injustice: "She declared that it was very unjust in their teacher not to permit them to play there" (17). The declaration of injustice, we might note, becomes, in the story, yet another piece of evidence of the child's willfullness. Maggie, too, when she speaks of injustice is heard as being willful. She speaks out against the injustice of her extended family's lack of compassion in response to her father's loss of the mill; she is described as bold and thankless (Eliot [1860] 1965, 229). Speaking out against injustice becomes yet another symptom of willfulness; and being heard as such is dismissed as such.

In the end, Jane's friend Lucy tries to dissuade Jane from her course of action, but her "obstinate will" carries her in this direction, as if her will has acquired its own will. She is carried by her will to the wrong place. Willfulness becomes here a will weakness: an inability to stop yourself from doing the wrong thing. So what happens to Jane? The teacher, when realizing Jane has disobeyed, does not address her as the guilty party but a class of children as if they are all guilty parties. She gives them a lesson on the right of some to wrong the happiness of others. And the moral lesson is assumed by Jane as the willingness to become willing: "She also resolved that she will try never to be willful again" (20). Jane assumes in the firmness of a resolution a will to eliminate willfulness from her own character.

I can hear something in Jane's forgotten but familiar story. I can hear how willfulness is used to judge a girl who is becoming feminist. Her will becomes a willful will insofar as it is defined against a collective or general will. Her will is deemed to get in the way of what the collective wills. A willful will becomes identified as the will to govern the others. Her willfulness, in other words, is interpreted as a will to power, as if protesting against something masks a desire for that very thing. And then when she speaks the language of injustice, that speech is heard as just another way she imposes her own will on others. The language of injustice is treated as a screen behind which a will lurks: a will that is wanting.

WILLFUL FEMINISTS

The word willfulness surrounds us when we become feminists. Already by taking up the unhappy fate of three willful girls from folklore and literature, we have acquired a handle on why this is the case. To be willful is to have a will that is wanting. By implication, feminists are judged as willful women as a way of dismissing feminism as a screen behind which a will lurks: a will that is wanting.

The word willfulness implies the problem with being feminist is feminist being. To be filled with will is to be emptied of thought: as if speaking about injustice, about power, about inequality, is just another way of getting your way. Those who get in the way are often judged as getting their own way. It is a way of diagnosing critique and opposition as self-interest (having too much subjectivity, being too much). No wonder that this figure of the willful girl, the one who is becoming feminist, who speaks the language of injustice to mask her own desire or will for power, creates such a strong impression.

She certainly made an impression upon me. I lived with that impression. I picked up the figure of the willful girl and put her into words because I had been her. I too had been called a willful child. It is not just concepts that sweat; figures too; they become containers for what is difficult, even excruciating.
A figure is evoked by just a word because that word carries a history with it. I remember what it felt like, that word. I remember how it falls, harshly as an accusation. I know how that word is used because it was used against me. Words can be tools. Words can be weapons.

My father would often call me willful when he was being violent. I was one of three sisters but the only one that my father was physically violent toward; I experienced that violence as being singled out. I find it hard now to disentangle this violence from my memories of becoming feminist. There was one experience when I was beaten with my own ruler. The ruler had holes in it: intended as different shapes you could trace onto paper; squares, circles, triangles. Those shapes became shapes left on my own skin; squares, circles, triangles. I remember that feeling of being marked by violence in the very shapes of my childhood. This history enacted on our bodies is one that we carry with us.

I think of this embodied history as my own history of willfulness. And that too is a challenge to the discourse of stranger danger, which assumes that violence originates outside of home. Stranger danger could be used to retell this story as the story of the violence of the Muslim father. Here the story becomes complicated: it is a feminist of color kind of complication. When we speak of violence directed against us, we know how quickly that violence can be racialized; how racism will explain that violence as an expression of culture, which is how racism and religion become entangled. Violence would then again be assumed to originate with outsiders. Some forms of violence become cultural, and other forms of violence remain individual and idiosyncratic: the some of this distinction is racism. I return to the racism at stake in this potential reframing of my own story in chapter 7. We must still tell these stories of violence because of how quickly that violence is concealed and reproduced. We must always tell them with care. But it is risky: when they are taken out of hands, they can become another form of beating.

Willfulness comes up in part as a mechanism for justifying violence by those who are violent. And why I mention this here, this very ordinary experience of violence directed against girls and women by fathers or husbands within the supposed safety of home (that this is ordinary is why we must mention it) is that my own father's blows were always accompanied by words. He would ask insistently punishing questions: Why do you want so much? Why are you never satisfied? Why do you not do better at school? In other words, being judged as willful was a technique for justifying violence in the midst of violence. You are being punished for your subjectivity, for being the being you are. You can be beaten by a judgment.

And then: you become the cause of the violence directed against you. I did work out what to do, and found my own ways of stopping it. I began to scream really loudly when he went for me. He would stop very quickly after I screamed. Why did this work? So often people do not recognize their actions as violent; we know this. Hitting a willful girl, after all, has been justified as discipline and moral instruction: for her own good. By screaming, I announced my father's violence. I made it audible. And I learned from this too: becoming a feminist was about becoming audible, feminism as screaming in order to be heard; screaming as making violence visible; feminism as acquiring a voice.

Willfulness: the acquisition of a voice as a refusal to be beaten. My memories of being called willful relate to experiences at school as well as at home. In one instance, I recall contradicting the teacher (on a point about grammar). I learned that the teacher has a right to be right and the first right meant that even if the second right was wrong, the teacher was right. I learned the wrong of this right. I was sent to the headmistress's office for my disrespectful attitude to the teacher's authority. I often ended up in that office: the fate of many willful children, one suspects. I find it curious that the sore point was grammar. These experiences were perhaps a lesson in the grammar of the will.

There was another time as well during a pe class (How I hated pe classes!) when some of us got in trouble for being disruptive. I can't quite remember how or why we were being disruptive, though I do know I used to want to wiggle out of sports whenever I could. But rather than punishing some of us, the teacher punished all of us (I was reminded of this experience by Jane's story). We were all sent to the library to write an essay about sports. I much preferred the library to the playing field and happily wrote an essay on horseback riding. I took care and pride in this essay. But in the middle of the essay, I wrote a paragraph about why I thought it was wrong to punish all for some. My teacher found that paragraph. She could not understand why I would complete the task while protesting against the task. Again: back to the headmistress's office. These experiences are wearing: you come to understand how you are judged as being wrong for pointing out a wrong. You become a spoilsport. It is not only that we ruin their sport. To be called willful is an explanation of why we ruin things. We are assumed to cause our own ruin, as well as to ruin things for others. This assumption is expressed in the story of being spoiled; as if we get our own way because we have been allowed to have our own way.
Indeed it is the perception of having had our own way that leads us not to be spared; that leads in fact to the rod, to the law, to punishment.

A history of willfulness is a history of violence. An experience of violence might lead us to a sense of things being wrong, and when we sense things being wrong we are punished by violence. A feminist history is thus also a history of disobedience, of how we risk violence because we sense something being wrong. This history seems to condense in a set of figures: from Eve to Antigone. These figures are not the whole history, but they have a history, a feminist history as a history of women who pulse with life before law.

If feminists are willful women, then feminism is judged as a product of those who have too much will or too much of a will of their own. This judgment is a judgment of feminism as being wrong, but also an explanation of feminism in terms of motivation: the act of saying something is wrong is understood as being self-motivated, a way of getting what you want or will. Virginia Woolf (1920) wrote of a room of one's own, a room we have to fight for. We can think of feminism as having to fight to acquire a will of one's own.

Of course now when we hear the expression "a will of one's own," we might assume this claim as an assertion of the primacy of an individual. But own can be rebellious in a world that assumes some beings are property for others (being for others): to claim to be one's own or to have a will of one's own can be a refusal to be willing to labor or to provide services for others. Perhaps willing women means being willing to be for. When you are assumed to be for others, then not being for others is judged as being for yourself. Perhaps willfulness could be summarized thus: not being willing to be owned. When you are not willing to be owned, you are judged as willing on your own. This is why willfulness as a judgment falls on some and not others. It is only for some that ownness is rebellion; only some owns become wrongs. Remember Maggie and Tom: when boys are inflexible they are becoming themselves, becoming own as being supported rather than having to support. For some, ownness is a command not only to own oneself but to own oneself through others.

We sense why willfulness is such a useful charge. Through this charge, feminists become the cause of the problem we cause; almost as if to say, to become feminist is to cause a problem for oneself by making oneself one's own cause. Subjectivity (as a fantasy of self-causality) becomes something we have to give up. A solution thus becomes: not to cause oneself problems by making oneself the cause of oneself or by making oneself one's own cause. A solution thus also becomes: to make one's own cause the cause of others, to make one's own cause the happiness of others. The killjoy is one who does not make the happiness of others her cause. When she is not willing to make their happiness her cause, she causes unhappiness. My killjoy manifesto rests on these principles.

There are two senses of causality at stake here. Something is a cause when it brings about certain effects and something is a cause when it is being pursued. I suspect that when willfulness becomes a feminist character diagnosis, both senses of cause are in operation. A feminist is caused by her own will (such a will is a willful will, an error of motivation in how we begin or proceed), and she takes her own will as her cause (such a will is a willful will, an error of consequence in the end that is being aimed for). When a feminist will is described as a willful will, then a feminist is diagnosed as beginning or ending with herself. Her willfulness or obstinacy means that she makes the world about herself.

This is how to become feminist is to be assigned as being willful: you are not willing to recede. The costs of willfulness as a diagnosis are high; I think we know this. And from our own experience of these costs, we also learn how power works: how power works through will, not simply against will. You might become willing to avoid the costs of being willful. In chapter 2, I explored how bodies are directed toward certain ends. We can certainly rethink these processes in terms of will. Someone says, "Are you going to let me or do I have to make you?" We can hear in this statement a will directive: if you are not willing, you will be forced. Being forced to do something would be worse than doing something willingly, even if you are not willing to do something. When willing is a way of avoiding the consequence of being forced, willing is a consequence of force. Once you are willing to do what you have been compelled to do, less pressure needs to be exerted. To become willing offers a relief from pressure. To refuse to become willing requires accepting more and more pressure (the effort to make you do what you are not willing to do). Willfulness might be required to refuse to become willing.

The will as such becomes a moral technology. We can return to the Grimm story. The story warns girls of the danger of having a will of their own. Indeed, we might note the diagnosis of the story is medical as well as moral: to be willing would be to avoid becoming ill. Willfulness becomes that which compromises the health or well-being of the child. If feminism encourages girls to have a will of their own, then feminism becomes bad for health as well as happiness. Feminism becomes a diagnosis: what stops or prevents girls from giving up their will, or what in giving girls permission to desire leads to girls becoming agitated by their desires. Becoming willing is here: accepting one's fate, willing as fatality. Feminism as a form of activity becomes the cause of
illness. We can be made ill by a diagnosis of being ill. So many feminist women lived their lives at the border of sanity. Feminists have paid a high price for the failure to give up their will and their desire. A feminist history is thus hard to disentangle from a diagnostic history, a mad history, or a history of madness. Not only have feminists been agitators, many have, in agitating, crossed the border between sane and mad, a crossing that has led to confinement and death. Many feminists became what Shayda Kafai (2013) calls astutely “mad border bodies,” bodies that expose the instability of the distinction between sanity and madness in how they travel through time and space.

I want to turn here to another one of my companion texts: Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” ([1892] 1997). “The Yellow Wallpaper” could be read as a feminist rewriting of the Grimm story. Gilman was herself diagnosed with neurasthenia, a nervous order, and has since been understood as suffering from postnatal depression. The treatment for neurasthenia is rest; it is a reduction of stimulus. The treatment of a mental condition is close to the requirements of femininity for middle-class and upper-class women: activities become disturbances, thoughts become agitations, life an endless series of distractions from the task of getting well or being well. “The Yellow Wallpaper” is a story of an unnamed woman, who suffers this very diagnosis; whose husband is a physician; a woman whose cure is rest. Right from the beginning she exercises the faculties she is supposed to rest: she is “absolutely forbidden to ‘work.’” She counters, “Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, the pattern mover because the woman behind it shakes it. She becomes the woman behind it. And so: her own life, her own freedom from the restriction of rest, becomes bound up with the life of the wallpaper. She gets out by pulling the wallpaper off the wall, by changing the pattern: “I’ve got out at last,” said I, ‘in spite of you and Jane. And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!” (15).

What is narrated as death in the Grimm story becomes, in this feminist rewriting, liberation; under the ground, behind the wall. She escapes by taking on the very assignment she has been given, by making herself ill, by stimulating her own will and desire with activity. Feminist willfulness: when we change the pattern, we become aware of other women too, whose willfulness might be behind how the world shakes. If, as I discuss in chapter 2, we can become attuned to the ghosts of past suffering, we can also be energized by the words that have been put down; by the collective refusal to put down our pens. The feminist writer can be embraced as part of a feminist history of willfulness. In the next section, I explore how willfulness can be reclaimed as a collective source of energy, a way of being sparked into life by others, and how this reclaiming requires opening up the drama of willfulness beyond the domestic sphere.

RECLAIMING WILLFULNESS

Willfulness is used to explain how subjects become the cause of their own unhappiness. Perhaps then feminism involves being willing to be willful. To claim to be willful or to describe oneself or one’s stance as willful is to claim the very word that has historically been used as a technique for dismissal. Not surprisingly, feminist histories are full of self-declared willful women. Take the
Willfulness: an act of self-description. Alice Walker describes a “womanist” in the following way: “A black feminist or feminist of color . . . usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered ‘good’ for one . . . responsible. In charge. Serious” (2005, xi, emphasis in original). Alice Walker suggests here that the word willful conveys what being a black feminist or feminist of color is all about. Black feminists and feminists of color might acquire certain qualities because of what they fight against. The very behaviors that are dismissed as weakness or immaturity become not only strengths but signs of not being willing to be subordinate. She is serious, she knows things; she is responsible.

A womanist is a willful woman. To claim willfulness as womanist provides an alternative commentary on the grim history of will. As James Saunders notes, “The emphasis is on ‘willful’ because for so long, so many black women have not been considered to be in possession of their own free wills” (1988, n.p.). Any will is a willful will if you are not supposed to have a will of your own. A willful will is what you will need when it is presumed you do not have a will of your own. And: willfulness becomes a judgment when some refuse to be owned.

Alice Walker explicitly identifies black feminists or feminists of color in evoking what womanism is about. I am pondering her words as a nonblack feminist of color and the generosity of the implication that feminists of color are part of this tradition. I need to be responsible in receiving that implication; I need to recognize that there are important differences in our histories. For Walker also makes clear that womanism derives specifically from black culture, language, and history. Womanist is from “the black folk expression of mothers to female children, ‘You acting womanish, i.e., like a woman’” (Walker 2006, xi). To be woman is not to be girl or girlish, “i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious” (xi). Black folk expression might offer an alternative to the Grimm story. In the Grimm story, the daughter is deemed willful because she disobeys the mother. The daughter is likely to be understood as irresponsible and silly. In black folk expression, the daughter’s willfulness is womanist: responsible and serious. Womanism gives expression not to the disobedience of the female child, but to how she is becoming woman.

Willful womanism thus offers us another handle on the story of the willful girl. In the Grimm story, the girl who is deemed willful (from the point of view offered by the fable) is going out on her own limb; she separates herself from her family, an act of separation that is sustained by the transfer of willfulness to her arm, which appears as a limb on its own. The mother appears on the side of the rod / God: she takes up the rod to stop her daughter’s arm from coming up. In a willful womanist rewriting of the story, the mother would be on the daughter’s side. Willfulness becomes a connecting tissue between mothers and daughters; it is a style of being or a behavior that mothers recognize in their daughters, “outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior” (Walker 2005, xi). That connection might even be the source of disobedience. After all, as Christina Sharpe reminds us, “in North American slavery black women were regularly separated from their children, who were sold away or sent to other women in the plantation to be taken care of” (2010, 18). When histories demand a separation (mothers from daughters, people from people), willfulness might be required to refuse or resist that separation. Read through this history, reclaiming willfulness would involve not only a protest against violence but a demand for a return: a return of the child who had been wrenched from her family; a return of the severed arm.

When separation becomes a command, willfulness is what returns; willfulness not as severance but as perseverance. When the arm perseveres, when it keeps coming up, it sustains a connection; willful womanism could be understood as a manifestation of that connection. After all, Alice Walker insists that a womanist is not a separatist (2005, xi). She is referring of course to the accusation that a womanist, as a black feminist, separates herself from black men. Walker insists throughout the body of her work that it is not separatism to point out violence committed against black women by black men within their homes and communities; even if that point can be heard as separatism, even if it remains risky and complicated to point out that violence given the ongoing existence of racism directed against black men as well as black women. It is because a willful womanist is responsible and in charge that she exposes sexual as well as racial violence, wherever and whenever it happens; she exposes the violence because she is concerned with the survival of people. If she comes up because she is necessary for collective survival, then she is a record of that survival.

In the Grimm story the drama of willfulness might appear to be restricted
to the drama of the family. But other sources of authority are evoked: the doctor, God. The police are not in the story because the police are the rods. It is these other sources that open up what it means to reclaim willfulness. If we think of willful womanism as a rewriting of the Grimm story of the willful girl, we are showing how poisonous pedagogy has its roots in the ruling of people as well as the domination of children. We know after all that the enslaved and the colonized were positioned as children, as those for whom discipline was moral instruction, who were not supposed to have a will of their own; who must be willing to obey.

The Grimm story is there. She is there; she is right there.

There she is.

Education was of course one of the crucial technologies of colonial rule. The Grimm story of the willful child could also then be understood as circulating throughout the empire. The willful child is also the story of the subaltern: she is addressed as a member of the subordinate class. She is insubordinate when she refuses to be a member of that class. The demand to be willing is here articulated as the demand to obey the colonizer (who takes the place of the parent): the rod comes to embody his sovereign will. The willful child would function as an early warning system for subalterns at large: she is warned of the consequences of insubordination; her fate is a warning. In persisting, she converts that warning into a promise: she is not willing to be subordinate. As Gayatri Spivak (1988) famously argued, the subaltern does not speak. We might add: she does not speak to us directly through the archives provided by folklore and fables. Perhaps her arm speaks. Even then the arm cannot be understood as testimony. If we hear arms, we do so only through other limbs. The arm: a ghost, a menace, a trace.

If she persists, she is willful. And her arm comes up. When a history is not over, the arm comes up. The arm testifies to the survival of willfulness after the death of the body of which it is a part. This is why willfulness acquires different valences when understood as a black feminist and feminist of color inheritance. The violence that we have to survive is not only gender-based violence, or violence that might take place at home; although it includes these forms of violence. It is the violence of enslavement, of colonization, of empire. It is the requirement to give up kin, culture, memory, language, land. We reclaim willfulness in refusing to give up; and in refusing to forget the severances that have been performed and narrated as the spread of light to the dark corners of earth; to persevere embodies that refusal.

We have to embody that refusal. Histories are still. In the United Kingdom today, brown and black children of the (formerly) colonized are still managed by exercising the figure of the willful child. That figure functions to justify violence: the administration of sovereign will as the elimination of willfulness. For example, when the so-called riots happened in the summer of 2011 — that is, the protests that began in response to the police murder of an unarmed black man, Mark Duggan, a killing later justified by law as lawful — the willful child quickly came up. I return to the significance of being unarmed in chapter 6. Just note: the protests were explained away by politicians and mainstream media as being a result of the failure to discipline the children, as a result of the failure to use the rod. The brutish maxim, "spare the rod, spoil the child," becomes "spare the rod, spoil the nation." The rod reappears as a melancholic object, a lost object: as that which must be exercised because it has been too quickly given up, as that which would give coherence to the national body by straightening out the wayward child.

We must learn from where and when the willful child comes up. As soon as she appears, the rod comes quickly after. She tells us what might happen if we refuse to give up. She tells us what we become when we keep coming up, when we protest against the violence of the rod, when we challenge how some are beaten as if beating is a right: black bodies, brown bodies. Some have to become willful to survive a history. We cannot "not" start there, which is to say, here. We have to become willful to say this history is still; that it has not gone; that it goes on. I turn to how willfulness is required to insist on what is not over in chapter 6. We can just say, here, hear: the wayward arm in this grim story is speaking to us. She is trying to speak to us. She has something to say to us. Listen.

One history of will is a history of the attempt to eliminate willfulness from people; those deemed a different class, a different race. Given this, willfulness might be required to recover from the attempt at its elimination. Willfulness is not only a judgment that leads to punishment; it is a punishment. Willfulness can also be a protest against punishment; protest and punishment share the same terms. The term willfulness is a charge not only in the sense of a burden and an accusation but also as a load and a responsibility: it is how we carry something forward. When we are charged with willfulness, we can accept and mobilize this charge. Willfulness then becomes a charge in Alice Walker's sense: being in charge. To accept a charge is not simply to agree with it. Acceptance can mean being willing to receive.

A charge can be energy you receive. In chapter 2, I have referred to the mo-
mentum of a crowd. Let’s think more about the experience of going the wrong way in a crowd. Everyone seems to be going the opposite way than the way you are going. No one person has to push or shove for you to feel the collective momentum of the crowd as pushing and shoving. For you to keep going, you have to push harder than any of those who are going the right way. The body going the wrong way is in the way of the will acquired as momentum. For some bodies, mere persistence, “to continue steadfastly,” requires great effort, an effort that might appear to others as stubbornness or obstinacy, as an insistence on going against the flow. You have to become insistent to go against the flow. You are judged to be going against the flow because you are insistent.

Willfulness: a life paradox. You might have to become what you are judged as being. You might have to become what you are judged as being to survive what you are judged as being. The consequence of the judgment requires that we fulfill that judgment. It can take energy and effort not to go with the flow. We can thus distinguish between willfulness as a character diagnosis (as what is behind an action) and willfulness as the effect of a diagnosis (as what is required to complete an action). Sometimes you can stand up only by standing firm. Sometimes you can hold on only by becoming stubborn.

Willfulness becomes a style of politics when we are not willing to go with the flow; when we are willing to cause its obstruction. However, this is not a story of a lonely person fighting against the tide of social traffic. No: this is not that story. Loneliness might be what we are threatened with if we persist in being or doing what we are being or doing. We must not be intimidated by threats of what or who we lose. To reclaim willfulness is how a we can be brought forth by the willingness to go the wrong way. Alice Walker (2005, xi) stresses how womanism is also about connections between women, loving connections, between those who recognize in each other that willful stance. Loving connections are live connections, electric connections. A charge can be what you receive from proximity to others who have themselves received that charge. Proximity can be what you struggle for; separation what you fight against. In other words, the charge itself can be a connection: a way of relating to others similarly charged. The language can be our lead: if willfulness is an electric current, it can pass through each of us, switching us on. Willfulness can be a spark. We can be lit up by it.

We can be lit up by it. And so: we demonstrate; we strike. Demonstrations and strikes only work when there are enough bodies. You aim to stop things: the flow of an economy, people getting to work, the flow of traffic. Bodies, in becoming barriers, are stopping something from moving that would otherwise be moving. A barrier is only possible if enough gather; you can only counter a momentum by achieving a countermomentum.

We might also be willing to stop the flow of a conversation. This is why feminist killjoys are willful subjects: when we speak, a flow is stopped. A feminist flow can be what we stop. And this is why reclaiming willfulness as a feminist inheritance requires centering on the experiences of black women and women of color. Because, so often we are heard as stopping the flow of a feminist conversation. As Audre Lorde describes so well, “When women of Color speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with white women, we are often told that we are ‘creating a mood of helplessness,’ ‘preventing white women from getting past guilt,’ or ‘standing in the way of trusting communication and action’” (1984a, 131). To speak out of anger about racism is to be heard as the one who is standing in the way, who is blocking the flow of communication, who is preventing the forward progression sometimes described as reconciliation. We have to be willful to bring racism up within feminism, as I discuss in more detail in chapter 7.

We might have to become willful to keep going, to keep coming up. Willfulness is thus required in ordinary places: where we live; where we work. Willfulness too is homework. Throughout this book I share examples of the willfulness required just to be something or to do something (see especially chapters 5 and 9). Sometimes: to be something or do something, you are fighting against something. It is important, however, that we not reduce willfulness to againstness. There is a family of words around willfulness (stubborn, obstinate, defiant, rude, reckless), which creates a structure of resemblance (we feel we know what she is like). This familialism also explains how easily willfulness is confused with, and reduced to, individualism. We need to resist this reduction. The reduction is how willful subjects are dismissed.

And yet a dismissal can be an opportunity. It is because willfulness is assumed to stand out, to be so striking, that it becomes possible to act willfully by not standing out at all. She might be plotting. She might know how she tends to appear (whatever she says, whatever she does). She might resist a tendency that is not her own. She might not go on a smile strike, or she might smile in order to strike. She might pass as willing in order to be willful. I return to the question of willful passing in chapter 4.

Indeed, we should note here that even if to be willful is to have too much will we are often called willful when we are not willing. If feminist will is will that is wanting, feminist will is also will that is unwilling. When we are not willing to participate in sexist culture, we are willful. When we are not will-
ing to participate in racist culture, we are willful. When we are not willing to adjust, we are maladjusted. Perhaps willfulness turns the diagnosis into a call: do not adjust to an unjust world! As with other political acts of reclaiming negative terms, reclaiming willfulness is not necessarily premised on an affective conversion, that is, on converting a negative into a positive term. On the contrary, to claim willfulness might involve not only hearing the negativity of the charge but insisting on that negativity: the charge, after all, is what keeps us proximate to scenes of violence. In willingly receiving the charge of willfulness, we stay close to those scenes of violence; as we must.

**CONCLUSION: A FEMINIST ARMY**

The arm: it came up in a story of violence. The striking arm of the Grimm story: the arm comes alive after death. The arm is life after death. Before the Grim ending, the arm is held up in a moment of suspension. The arm becomes, despite the morbid nature of this story, a signifier of hope; the arm in suspension is still rising. Even after the willful child has been brought down, something, some spark, some kind of energy, persists. The arm gives flesh to this persistence. The arm has to disturb the ground, to reach up, to reach out of the grave, to make a grave, making the tomb, that burial. Willfulness is persistence in the face of having been brought down. We have to reach the arm to carry that spark, to feel the pulse of its fragile life. We catch the arm in that moment of suspension.

Mere persistence can be an act of disobedience. And then: you have to persist in being disobedient. And then: to exist is disobedient.

And it is not that the child is willful because she disobeys but that the child must become willful in order to disobey. In order to persist with her disobedience, the child becomes her arm. Perhaps it is not that the arm inherits willfulness from the child. Perhaps the child inherits willfulness from her arm. Her arm: a willful becoming. She claims her arm as her own. No wonder the arm in the Grimm story appears all alone. This is how the story operates most powerfully as ideology: the implication that disobedience is lonely and unsupported. We can willfully hear the story as a plea: to join arms, to show the arms as joined. We assemble a feminist army in response to this plea. A feminist army of arms would pulse with shared life and vitality. Feminist arms do not lend their hand to support the familial or the social order. We support those who do not support the reproduction of that order. The arm that keeps coming up might not be willing to do the housework, to maintain his house, to free his time for thought. When women refuse to be helping hands, when we refuse to clean for him, up after him, when we refuse to be his secretary, the keeper of his secrets, his right hand, we become willful subjects.

We can understand why, of all her limbs, the arm matters. An arm is what allows you to reach, to carry, to hold, to complete certain kinds of tasks. Arms are identified throughout history as the limbs of labor or even the limbs of the laborer. Arms are supposed to be willing to labor. But not all arms. Arlie Hochschild describes how "the factory boy's arm functioned like a piece of machinery used to produce wallpaper. His employer regarded that arm as an instrument, claimed control over its speed and motions. In this situation, what was the relation between the boy's arm and his mind? Was his arm in any meaningful sense his own?" ([1983] 2003, 7, emphasis in original). When the laborers' arms become tools in the creation of wealth, the laborers lose their arms. To become his arm is to lose your arm. The factory owner does not only acquire the laborers' arms; he has his own arms freed. We can hear another sense in which arms are striking. To go on strike is to close your fist, to refuse to be busy. When workers refuse to allow their arms to be the master's tool, they strike. The clenched fist remains a revolutionary sign for labor movements, internationally. The arm in the grim story belongs to this history, too: the arm is a revolutionary limb; a promise of what is to come, of how history is still but not yet done.

A feminist does not lend her hand; she too curls her fist. The clenched fist contained within the sign for woman is a key image for the women's liberation movement. The clenched fist is a protest against the sign woman (by being in the sign woman) as well as resignifying the hands of feminism as protesting hands. Feminist hands are not helping hands in the sense that they do not help women help. When a hand curls up as a feminist fist, it has a hand in a movement.

Arms remind us too that labor, who works for whom, is a feminist issue. Labor includes reproductive labor: the labor of reproducing life; the labor of reproducing the conditions that enable others to live. Black women and women of color; working-class women; migrant women; women who have worked in the factories, in the fields, at home; women who care for their own children as well as other children; such women have become the arms for other women whose time and energy has been freed. Any feminism that lives up to the promise of that name will not free some women from being arms by employing other women to take their place. Feminism needs to refuse this division of labor, this freeing up of time and energy for some by the employment of the limbs of others. If the freeing up of time and energy depends on
other people’s labor, we are simply passing our exhaustion on to others. We
can recall bell hooks’s critique of Betty Friedan’s solution to the unhappiness
of the housewife, to the “problem that has no name.” hooks notes, “She did not
discuss who would be called in to take care of the children and maintain the
home if more women like herself were freed from their house labor and given
equal access with white men to the professions” (2000, 1-2).

When being freed from labor requires others to labor, others are paying
the price of your freedom. That is not freedom. A feminist army that gives
life and vitality to some women’s arms by taking life and vitality from other
women’s arms is reproducing inequality and injustice. That is not freedom.
For feminism to become a call to arms, we have to refuse to allow the arms
to become dead labor. We have to refuse to support the system that sucks the
blood, vitality, and life from the limbs of workers. We need to hear the arms
in the call to arms. A call is also a lament, a passionate expression of grief and
sorrow. I suggested earlier that willfulness might be not only a protest against
violence but a demand for return: a return of the child, a return of her arm.
We can begin to understand what is being demanded: a demand for return is
also a demand for recognition of the theft of life and vitality from bodies; from
arms. It is a demand for reparation.

A call of arms is thus a recall. We can recall Sojourner Truth speaking to the
suffragettes, having to insist on being a woman as a black woman and former
is said that Sojourner Truth, during her insistent speech, “bared her right arm
to the shoulder, showing her tremendous muscular power” (cited in Zackod-
nick 2011, 99). In Women, Race and Class, Angela Davis notes how Truth in
pointing to her arm is challenging the “weaker sex” arguments that were being
used by those who opposed the suffragette cause. These were arguments
that rested on flimsy evidence of flimsy bodies: “that it was ridiculous for women
to desire the vote, since they could not even walk over a puddle or get into
a carriage without the help of men” (Davis 1983, 61). Sojourner Truth in her
speech as it has been recorded by others evokes her own laboring history: “I
have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns and no man could head
me.... I have borne thirteen children and seen them most all sold off to slav-
ery” (99). The muscularity of her arm is an inheritance of history; the history
of slavery shown in the strength of the arm, the arm required to plow, to plant,
to bear the children who end up belonging to the master.

The arms of the slave belonged to the master, as did the slaves, as the ones
who were not supposed to have a will of their own. Remember: any will is a
willful will if you are not supposed to have a will of your own. Of course we
cannot simply treat the arm evoked here as Truth’s arm. The arm does not
provide its own testimony. It was Frances Dana Barker Gage, a leading white
feminist, reformer, and abolitionist, who gave us this well-known account of
Truth’s speech as well as her “arm testimony.” This account is itself a citation:
our access to Sojourner Truth’s address is possible only through the testimony
of others; to be more specific, through the testimony of white women. We
learn from this to be cautious about our capacity to bear witness to the labor
and speech of arms in history: we might be able to hear the call of arms only
through the mediation of other limbs. This mediation does not mean we can-
ot hear truth. Patricia Hill Collins notes this lack of access as a “limitation”
in her account of Truth’s speech: “Despite this limitation, in that speech Truth
reportedly provides an incisive analysis of the definition of the term woman

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forwarded in the mid-1800s" (2000, 12). Collins thus treats Truth's speech as an example of an intellectual at work: Truth deconstructs the category woman by exposing the gap between her own embodied experiences as an African American woman and the very category "woman" (12–13).

In different hands, arms can become deconstructive limbs, or intersectional points. Arms can embody how we fail to inhabit a category. Arms can be how we insist on inhabiting a category we are assumed to fail. Arms can throw a category into crisis. The arms go on strike when they refuse to work; when they refuse to participate in their own subordination. No wonder we must look to the arm, if we are to understand the history of those who rise up against oppression. Arms: they will keep coming up. Willfulness: how some rise up by exercising the very limbs that have been shaped by their subordination. And: it is those women who have to insist on being women, those who have to insist willfully on being part of the feminist movement, sometimes with a show of their arms, who offer the best hope for a feminist revolution.

The arms that built the house are the arms that will bring it down.

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**PART II Diversity Work**

In the first part of this book, I explored some of my own experiences of becoming a feminist. I have been considering how we generate feminist theory by living a feminist life. Life can be our work. We work in our life. To live a feminist life is also to be a feminist at work. In this part of the book, I thus turn to the question of feminist work. My own working life has been based in universities: I was a student for around ten years and I have been an academic for over twenty years. What I know is shaped by where I have been located. So the university provides the setting for many (but not all) of the examples in this part. I hope, however, my discussion of being a feminist at work will be relevant to other working environments. Most of us with feminist commitments end up working for organizations that do not have these commitments. We often acquire commitments to do something because of what is not being done. To work as a feminist often means trying to transform the organizations that employ us. This rather obvious fact has some telling consequences. I have