

“Everyone should  
read this book.”  
—bell hooks



# Living a Feminist Life

SARA AHMED

You note the connection between the strong arms of the black woman (who has to insist on being woman) discussed in chapter 3 and the strong arms of the butch lesbian (who has to insist on being woman) discussed here. These arms can, of course, belong to the same body. Throughout feminist history many women had to insist on being women before they became part of the feminist conversation. Trans women have to insist on being women; trans women often have to keep insisting, again and again, often in the face of violent and repeated acts of misgendering; any feminists who do not stand up, who do not wave their arms to protest against this misgendering, have become the straightening rods. An antitrans stance is an antifeminist stance; it is against the feminist project of creating worlds to support those for whom gender fatalism (boys will be boys, girls will be girls) is fatal; a sentencing to death. We have to hear that fatalism as punishment and instruction: it is the story of the rod, of how those who have wayward wills or who will waywardly (boys who will not be boys, girls who will not be girls) are beaten. We need to drown these antitrans voices out, raising the sound of our own. Our voices need to become our arms: rise up; rise up.

We can make an army connection: if gender norms operate to create a narrow idea of how a female arm should appear, a white arm, a slight arm, an arm that has not labored, an arm that is delicately attuned to an assignment, then many who understand themselves as women, who sign up to being women, will be deemed not women because of their arms. It is the arms that lead us astray.

Arms not only have a history; they are shaped by history; arms make history flesh. No wonder arms keep coming up. It is the arms that can help us make the connection between histories that otherwise do not seem to meet. There are many arms; arms that are muscular, strong, laboring arms, arms that refuse to be employed, striking arms; arms that are lost in service to the industrial machine; broken arms.

**Intersectionality is arm.** \*

**Intersectionality is army.**

## CONCLUSION 1 *A Killjoy Survival Kit*

Becoming a killjoy can feel, sometimes, like making your life harder than it needs to be. I have heard this sentiment expressed as kindness: as if to say, just stop noticing exclusions and your burden will be eased. It is implied that by not struggling against something you will be rewarded by an increasing proximity to that thing. You might be included if only you just stop talking about exclusions. Sometimes the judgment is expressed less kindly: disapproval can be expressed in sideways glances, the sighs, the eyes rolling; stop struggling, adjust, accept. And you can also feel this yourself: that by noticing certain things you are making it harder for yourself.

But the experiences we have are not just of being worn down; these experiences also give us resources. What we learn from these experiences might be how we survive these experiences. Toward the end of chapter 9 I raised the question of survival. Here survival is how I begin; it is the start of something. Survival here refers not only to living on, but to keeping going in the more profound sense of keeping going with one's commitments. As Alexis Pauline Gumbs suggests, we need a "robust and transformative redefinition of survival" (2010, 17). Survival can also be about keeping one's hopes alive; holding on to the projects that are projects insofar as they have yet to be realized. You might have to become willful to hold on when you are asked to let go; to let it go. Survival can thus be what we do for others, with others. We need each other to survive; we need to be part of each other's survival.

To be committed to a feminist life means we cannot not do this work; we

cannot not fight for this cause, whatever it causes, so we have to find a way of sharing the costs of that work. Survival thus becomes a shared feminist project. So this tool kit contains my personal stuff, what I have accumulated over time; things I know I need to do and to have around me to keep on going on. We will accumulate different things, have our own stuff; we can peer into each other's kits and find in there someone else's feminist story. But I think the point of the kit is not just what we put in it; it is the kit itself, having somewhere to deposit those things that are necessary for your survival. Feminism is a killjoy survival kit.

We could think of this feminist survival kit as a form of feminist self-care. However, to think of a killjoy survival kit as self-care might seem to be a neo-liberal agenda, a way of making feminism about the resilience of individuals.<sup>1</sup> I discussed the problem of resilience in chapter 7, the way in which we are asked to become resilient so we can take more (more oppression, more pressure, more work). But this is our problem: feminism needs feminists to survive. We might still need to be able to take it, the pressure we are put under when we refuse to take more, when we refuse to put up with a world.

Feminism needs feminists to survive: my killjoy survival kit is assembled around this sentence. It is a feminist sentence. And the reverse too is very true: feminists need feminism to survive. Feminism needs those of us who live lives as feminists to survive; our life becomes a feminist survival. But feminism needs to survive; our life becomes a feminist survival in this other sense. Feminism needs us; feminism needs us not only to survive but to dedicate our lives to the survival of feminism. This book has been my expression of my willingness to make this dedication. Feminists need feminism to survive.

Audre Lorde, in her extraordinary poem "A Litany of Survival," addresses those who were "never meant to survive," those for whom survival requires creativity and work; those for whom survival is politically ambitious. Let me share a few lines from\*this poem:

For those of us who live at the shoreline  
standing upon the constant edges of decision  
crucial and alone  
for those of us who cannot indulge  
the passing dreams of choice  
who love in doorways coming and going  
in the hours between dawns (1978, 31)

Here through the art of light description Lorde evokes for us a "those of us," a those of us who live and love on the edges of social experiences, in doorways, shadows, those of us who fall like shadows fall, the fallen, those for whom coming into full view would be dangerous, those for whom survival might require not coming out in the full light of day.

#### **Survival can be protest.**

And then: how we care for ourselves becomes an expression of feminist care. Audre Lorde, as one might expect, helps us to differentiate survival from other styles of self-orientated politics. Lorde writes, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (1988, 131). This is a revolutionary, extraordinary sentence. It is a much-loved, much-cited sentence. It is an arrow, which acquires its sharpness from its own direction. It is from the epilogue to Lorde's *A Burst of Light*, a piece of writing so profound, so moving, that it never fails to teach me, often by leaving me undone, beside myself (that's why, as you will read, this book is in my survival kit). This writing is made up of fragments of notes put together as Audre Lorde learns that she has liver cancer, that her death can only be delayed, as she comes to feel that diagnosis in her bones. The expression "a burst of light" is used when she comes to feel the fragility of her body's situation: "that inescapable knowledge, in the bone, of my own physical limitation" (Lorde 1988, 121).

*A Burst of Light* is an account of how the struggle for survival is a life struggle and a political struggle. A death sentence is not only about what Jasbir Puar (2009) has called "prognosis time": it is not (or not only) about experiencing your death as imminent. When you are not supposed to live, as you are, where you are, with whom you are with, then survival is a radical action; a refusal not to exist until the very end; a refusal not to exist until you do not exist. We have to work out how to survive in a system that decides life for some requires the death or removal of others. Sometimes: to survive in a system is to survive a system. Some of us have to be inventive, Audre Lorde suggests, to survive.

#### **Others: not so much.**

When a whole world is organized to promote your survival, from health to education, to the walls designed to keep your residence safe, to the paths that ease your travel, you do not have become so inventive to survive. You do not have to be seen as the recipient of welfare because the world has promoted your welfare. The benefits you receive are given as entitlements, perhaps even as birthrights. This is why I describe privilege as a buffer zone; it is how much you have to fall back on when you lose something. Privilege does not mean we

are invulnerable: things happen; shit happens. Privilege can however reduce the costs of vulnerability; you are more likely to be looked after.

Racial capitalism is a health system: a drastically unequal distribution of bodily vulnerabilities. Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes racism thus: “the state-sanctioned or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (2007, 28). Being poor, being black, being of color puts your life at risk. Your health is compromised when you do not have the external resources to support a life in all of its contingencies. And then of course, you are deemed responsible for your own ill health, for your own failure to look after yourself better. When you refer to structures, to systems, to power relations, to walls, you are assumed to be making others responsible for the situation you have failed to get yourself out of. “You should have tried harder.” Oh, the violence and the smugness of this sentence, this sentencing.

A health system is also a support system. The more precarious you are, the more support you need. The more precarious you are, the less support you have. When we say something is precarious, we usually mean it is in a precarious position: if the vase on the mantelpiece were pushed, just a little bit, a little bit, it would topple right over.<sup>2</sup> That position—of living on the edge—is what is generalized when we speak of precarious populations (see Butler 2015). Living on the edge: a life lived as a fragile thread that keeps unraveling; when life becomes an effort to hold on to what keeps unraveling.

When I think of this, I think of how fragility as an effort to hold on can become more revolting; how fragility can be militancy. Throughout *A Burst of Light* Audre Lorde compares her experience of battling with cancer (and she is willing to use this militaristic language; she is willing to describe this situation as war) to her experience of battling against antiblack racism. The comparison is effective, showing us how racism can be an attack on the cells of the body, her body, her black body, an attack on the body’s immune system; the way in which your own body experiences what is outside itself as inside itself; death from the outside in. A world that is against you can be experienced as your body turning against you. This is why for Lorde caring for oneself is not self-indulgence but self-preservation. It is rebellious to fight for life when you have been given such a deadly assignment.

In this statement that caring for oneself is not self-indulgence we can thus hear a defense. Audre Lorde is defending self-care. What from? From whom? From, one might suspect, those who dismiss caring for oneself as an indul-

gence. Self-indulgence tends to mean being soft on one’s self, but also can mean yielding to one’s inclinations. Recently I have heard much feminist work being dismissed on these terms. Feminism: too soft, too safe, too focused on identity politics or individual suffering. Feminist student activism in particular has been dismissed like this: safe spaces, trigger warnings, self-care, all taken up as evidence of being coddled and weak. One thing I know from working in universities: student movements might be teaching us how attending to fragility, the histories that render some more fragile than others, can be a source of militancy.

And yet Audre Lorde could be read as a critic of self-care. After all, she gave us a strong critique of how structural inequalities are deflected by being made the responsibility of individuals (who in being given the capacity to overcome structures are assumed to fail when they do not overcome them). Her work explores how caring for oneself can become a technique of governance: the duty to care for one’s self is often written as a duty to care for one’s own happiness. In *The Cancer Journals* she shows how making our own happiness our first responsibility can be how we turn away from injustice. Lorde asks, “Was I really fighting the spread of radiation, racism, woman-slaughter, chemical invasion of our food, pollution of our environment, and the abuse and psychic destruction of our young, merely to avoid dealing with my first and greatest responsibility to be happy?” (1997, 76). Audre Lorde has given us the answer to her question.

We have something to work out here. Audre Lorde writes persuasively about how caring for oneself can lead you away from engaging in certain kinds of political struggle. And yet, in *A Burst of Light* (1988), she defends caring for oneself as not about self-indulgence but self-preservation. She is making for us a distinction. She is sharpening a tool. This kind of caring for oneself is not about caring for one’s own happiness. It is about finding ways to exist in a world that makes it difficult to exist. This is why, this is how: those who do not have to struggle for their own survival can very easily and rather quickly dismiss those who attend to their own survival as being self-indulgent. They do not need to attend to themselves; the world does it for them.

For those who have to insist they matter to matter, self-care is warfare. We could think here of #blacklivesmatter, a movement with a hashtag; a hashtag can be snap; a movement begun by black feminist and queer activists Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi to protest against how black lives do not matter, how black deaths are not mourned, how injustices against black

people are not recognized. Mattering for some requires and involves collective agency: “Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, black undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all black lives along the gender spectrum.”<sup>3</sup> You have to affirm that some lives matter when a world is invested in saying they do not.

Protest can be a form of self-care as well as care for others: a refusal not to matter. Self-care can also be those ordinary ways we look out for each other because the costs of protesting are made so high, just as the costs that lead to protest remain so high. In directing our care toward ourselves, we are redirecting care away from its proper objects; we are not caring for those we are supposed to care for; we are not caring for the bodies deemed worth caring about. And that is why in queer, feminist, and antiracist work, self-care is about the creation of community, fragile communities as I explored in part III, assembled out of the experiences of being shattered. We reassemble ourselves through the ordinary, everyday, and often painstaking work of looking after ourselves; looking after each other.

We need a handle when we lose it. A killjoy survival kit is about finding a handle at the very moment one seems to lose it, when things seem to fly out of hand; a way of holding on when the possibility you were reaching for seems to be slipping away. Feminist killjoys: even when things fly out of hand, even when we fly out of hand, we need a handle on things.

#### ITEM 1: BOOKS

You need your favorite feminist books close to hand; your feminist books need to be handy. You need to take them with you; make them with you. Words can pick you up when you are down. And note: it is often books that name the problem that help us handle the problem. Kick-ass feminist books have a special agency, all of their own. I feel propelled by their kick.

Books in my tool kit include *Sister Outsider*, *A Burst of Light*, *Zami*, and *The Cancer Journals* by Audre Lorde; *Feminist Theory* and *Talking Back* by bell hooks; *The Politics of Reality* by Marilyn Frye; *Gender Trouble*, *Bodies That Matter*, and *Precarious Lives* by Judith Butler; *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf; *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot; *Rubyfruit Jungle* by Rita Mae Brown. Yes I know this list includes a lot of books by Audre Lorde and Judith Butler. Their words reach me. Their words teach me.

Wherever I go, they go.

#### ITEM 2: THINGS

A feminist life too is surrounding by things. Living a feminist life creates feminist things. We all have tendencies; we might be a feminist hoarder, keep every little poster, button, scrap of paper from a meeting; or we might not. But think of how a convention is a thing maker (the wedding photographs, the signs of a reproductive life that can gather like weights on walls). We need to have things too; things that gather around, reminders of a feminist life, happy objects even, reminders of connections, shared struggles, shared lives. We might have more or fewer things, but a feminist needs her things.

Surround yourself with feminism. In a conversation with Gloria Steinem, bell hooks describes how she surrounded herself with her precious objects, feminist objects, so that they are the first things she sees when she wakes up.<sup>4</sup> Think of that: you create a feminist horizon around you, the warmth of memories; feminism as memory making. Feminism too leaves things behind. Things can also be how you handle what you come up against: you are reminded why you are doing what you are doing. Things are reminders.

Our feminist politics makes things as well as breaks things.

#### ITEM 3: TOOLS

A survival kit is also a feminist toolbox. What are your feminist tools? Mine include a pen and a keyboard, a table; the things around me that allow me to keep writing, to send my words out. Maybe a survival kit is also a toolbox. We need to have things to do things with; a killjoy needs more tools, the more she is up against. Maybe she uses her computer to write a blog. A tool: a means to a killjoy end. The blog itself becomes a tool; it is how she can extend her reach; how she can find a community of killjoys. A feminist end is often a new means. We need more means available the harder it is to achieve our ends. We need to diversify our tools, expand our range; we need to become more and more inventive, because so often when we do one thing, we find ourselves blocked. She has to keep going when she is blocked; she can pick herself up again by picking something else up, maybe something she finds nearby. Of course, then, a feminist killjoy approaches things as potentially useful things, as means to her own ends. She has a use for things. She might not be using things the way she is supposed to. She might queer use or find a queer use for things. Her killjoy survival kit, to fulfill the purpose for which it is intended,

will itself become another useful thing. But hand that survival kit to another, and it might not be quite so useful. In fact: a killjoy survival kit might even be deemed as compromising the health and safety of others. In fact: a killjoy survival kit might be deemed useless by others.

A feminist tool is sharp; we need to keep sharpening our tools. When we speak, we are often heard as sharp. Hear her: shrill, strident, the killjoy voice. A voice can be a tool. And yet somehow sharp can become blunt. One person once turned this bluntness into an insult, describing me “as not the sharpest tool in the house [of being].” I turn the insult into a willful aspiration: to make feminist points requires being willing to be blunt. My own citation policy in this book is a case in point.

In my previous chapter I described lesbian feminism as willful carpentry. So yes we need feminist carpenters, feminist builders; we need to make feminist buildings by not using the master’s tools, as Audre Lorde notes, most willfully, by proclaiming unflinchingly that the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. We might need feminist tools to make feminist tools. We can become tools; we can become bricks, feminist bricks.

Of course, sometimes a feminist has to go on strike. To strike is to put your tools down, to refuse to work by working with them. A feminist sometimes refuses to work, when the conditions of working are unjust. A tool can be what she puts down when she is striking.

#### ITEM 4: TIME

Did your heart quicken when you read that e-mail? Did your fingers quicken when you typed that response, as if driven by the force of your own rage? Do you have a sense that this is happening to you, and that you are caught by hap, and shudder because of what happens? Whatever you decide, whether to send something, or not, say something, or not, pause, breathe; take some time. Slow down. Frown. You might still send it, but you will be glad you have given yourself room to decide; you will be glad.

Time also means having time out. Even when you have willingly accepted the killjoy assignment, you are more than this assignment. Take breaks; do other things, with things. Time out might be required for time in.

Time out from being a killjoy is necessary for a killjoy if she is to persist in being a killjoy. Being a killjoy is not all that you are, and if you are too consumed by her, she can drain too much energy and will. Come back to her; she will come back to you: you will, she will.

#### ITEM 5: LIFE

There is so much in life, as we know, things that are ordinary or just there, beautiful things, to love; those things that come and go; things that are all the more valuable because they are fragile. Being a killjoy is too occupying, if it takes you away from the worlds you are in; the rise and fall of the sun, the way the trees are angled like that, the smile of a friend when you share a joke, the cold fresh water; the feel of the sea as immersion; the familiar smells of spices cooking.

Twice in my life an animal has come into my life and made life feel more possible, made life vibrate with possibility: when I was twelve, it was Mulka, a horse who was with me for almost thirty years (I mentioned him in chapter 2), always there even when we were living on separate continents. Mulka saved my life, of that I am sure, helped me to find another path when I was hurtling toward a miserable fate. He brought with him a world, a world of horsey people, in the Adelaide hills, a world apart from school and family. He brought with him Yvonne and Meredith Johnson, who in caring for him when I was away, cared for me. And then there was Poppy, our puppy, who came into my life while I was writing this book. It is the first time I have shared a life with a dog. She makes everything better. She brought with her so much, so intent on the task of being herself; a bounding presence who keeps me in the present. She wiggled her way into my affections. She also wiggled her way into this survival kit. She will wiggle right out again. Of that too, I am sure.

To survive as to be: to be with Mulka; to be with Poppy; to be in a present; to be out in the world; to be alive with a world.

Life matters; we are killjoys because life matters; and life can be what killjoys are fighting for; life requires we give time to living, to being alive, to being thrown into a world with others. We need to be thrown by how others are thrown. We need to be unsettled by what is unsettling. We need to let life in, in all of its contingencies. I think of this as being open to hap. And, as I suggested in chapter 8, to affirm hap is a kind of snap; we snap a bond that decides for us the kind of shape a life should have to count as a good life. But that does not mean breaking our bond to life. To snap a bond is for life. We believe in life all the more when we have to struggle for life, whether we have to snap, because we have to struggle to exist or struggle to transform an existence.

Being involved in a life project is affirmative. That is what those of us assigned killjoys know too well; yes we are assigned negative, but in being willing to receive that assignment we are affirming something. We might have different words, names, for this something.

## ITEM 6: PERMISSION NOTES

There is only so much you can do. I have in my killjoy survival kit some permission notes to step back when it is too much. I noted in chapter 7 that you can learn to choose your battles wisely, but battles can also choose you. You don't always know when you can or will use your permission notes even when you have given them to yourself. But the mere fact of having them there, as a way you give yourself permission to exit a situation, can make the situation more bearable. You can leave; you can grieve.

I have already described how I left my academic post. I resigned because I gave myself permission to resign. That's not the only reason. But you need to be able to leave a situation, whether or not you do leave that situation. Being able to leave requires material resources, but it also requires an act of will, of not being willing to do something when it compromises your ability to be something.

I also have in my kit some sick notes. Do you anticipate that an event or meeting will be compromising? Do you feel you will be upset without being able to do anything? Well, put some sick notes in your kit. Use them sparingly, but given that we can be sick from the anticipation of being sick, the notes express a political as well as personal truth. Of course that is not to say that what we anticipate will happen will happen; of course not. But sometimes, just sometimes, we are not willing to take that risk. Be willful in your not willfulness. Always.

## ITEM 7: OTHER KILLJOYS

I think other killjoys are an essential part of my killjoy survival kit. I know it might sound odd to put other people in a place you have designated as your space (in a bag, I keep thinking of bags; how can we breathe in bags?). But I cannot think of being a killjoy without the company of other killjoys. This is not about identity; it is not about assuming a community of killjoys (I have discussed the problem with making this assumption). Rather, it is about the experience of having others who recognize the dynamics because they too have been there, in that place, that difficult place. This is not to say we cannot become killjoys to killjoys. We can and we do. And that is just one more reason that other killjoys need to be part of our survival kit. It helps us to recognize how we too can be the problem; we too can be involved in erasing the contributions or chances of others.

I learned this lesson recently when my own participation in a conversation

on black British feminism was challenged by black women who saw me as participating in their erasure from public spaces and discussions. I responded too quickly and became defensive, hearing their voices as part of the same chorus of what I would call more questionable critiques that positioned brown women as gaining position by taking up places that did not belong to them, which used the familiar narrative that women of color use diversity as a career advancement. I heard as a killjoy. And that stopped me from hearing killjoys, those who were getting in the way of what I thought of as a lifeline: black British feminism as my intellectual community. Staying close to other killjoys is thus not about being on the same side. It is how we can ask more of ourselves; it is how we can be and stay vigilant.

Our crossness can and should be directed toward ourselves. We get things wrong. I did. And I do.

## ITEM 8: HUMOR

A close kin of the figure of the feminist killjoy is the figure of the humorless feminist: the one who cannot or will not get the joke; the one who is miserable. Oh the proximity of kinship! Of course, we refuse to laugh at sexist jokes. We refuse to laugh when jokes are not funny. I consider this point to be so vital that it forms the fourth of the ten principles of my killjoy manifesto. But we do laugh; and feminist laughter can lighten our loads. In fact we laugh often in recognition of the shared absurdity of this world; or just in recognition of this world. Sometimes we make jokes out of the points left severed, the bleeding arteries of our institutional knowledge. Sometimes we laugh with each other because we recognize that we recognize the same power relations.

What I am implying here: lightening our loads becomes part of a killjoy survival strategy. When we are dealing with heavy histories, lightening becomes a shared activity. When we are dealing with norms that tighten the more we fail to inhabit them, making it difficult to breathe, loosening becomes a shared activity. Part of the work of lightening and loosening is sharing: because diversity work is costly, we have to share the costs of doing that work.

My interviews with diversity practitioners that I drew on in part II were thus full of laughter. Like the time a diversity practitioner talked about how she just had to open her mouth in meetings to witness eyes rolling as if to say, "Oh here she goes." How we laughed as killjoys recognizing that killjoy moment. Or like the time a diversity practitioner told me of how a friend asked, "Are they related?" about a photo of her (all white male) management team. How

we laughed, at that moment, at that exposure of how institutions work as kinship structures. When we catch with words a logic that is often reproduced by not being put into words, it can be such a relief. We recognized that each other recognized the logic. Laughter, peals of it; our bodies catching that logic, too.

We don't always laugh, of course. Sometimes we have to let the full weight of a history bear down on us. Sometimes we need to let ourselves be down. But sometimes this sense of being down can convert into energy, because we can laugh at it; because what we come up against gives us the resources to bear witness, to expose things, to bring things to the surface, so they can be laughed at.

To laugh at something can be to make something more real, to magnify it, and to reduce something's power or hold over you, simultaneously.

#### ITEM 9: FEELINGS

Our emotions can be a resource; we draw on them. To be a killjoy is often to be assigned as being emotional, too emotional; letting your feelings get in the way of your judgment; letting your feelings get in the way. Your feelings can be the site of a rebellion. A feminist heart beats the wrong way; feminism is hearty.

One male professor where I work kept telling me, telling others, that he did not get the feminist killjoy; that she made no sense to him. He kept saying it repeatedly. Explain it to me. Really he was saying: explain yourself. And he kept saying things like, she doesn't make sense because we have women who are senior managers. In other words, he thought the right feminist feeling would be joy, gratitude even, for the good fortune of our arrival and progression. We have to be willing to be experienced as ungrateful, to use this refusal of joy as an exposure of what we have been commanded not to express. There was an implication in his refusal to get the feminist killjoy that my organizing of my own intellectual and political project through her was an institutional disloyalty; one that would potentially damage the institution.

I think of Adrienne Rich's (1979) killjoy invitation to be "disloyal to civilization." Our emotions are opened up when we refuse the commandment to be loyal and joyful. We don't always know how we feel even when we feel something intensely. Put all those feelings into your kit. See what they do. Watch the mess they stir up. A survival kit is all about stirring things up and living in the stew.

#### ITEM 10: BODIES

It is true, it is wearing. We can be worn down as well as becoming down. Bodies need to be looked after. Bodies need to be nourished and fed. Feminism too can be thought of as a diet; a feminist diet is how we are nourished by feminism. In my killjoy survival kit I would have a bag of fresh chilies; I tend to add chilies to most things. I am not saying chilies are little feminists. But you would have in your kit whatever you tend to add to things; however you adapt dishes to your own requirements. If we have a diversity of bodies, we have a diversity of requirements.

And this item is related to all the others. Bodies are the mediating relation. When we do not survive, we become body; a body is what is left. A body is behind. A body is vulnerable; we are vulnerable. A body tells us the time; bodies carry traces of where we have been. Perhaps we are these traces. A killjoy has a body before she can receive her assignment.

Bodies speak to us. Your body might tell you it is not coping with what you are asking; and you need to listen. You need to listen to your body. If it screams, stop. If it moans, slow down. Listen. Feminist ears: they too are in my survival kit.

So much energy is involved in the struggle not to be compromised by an existence. But as I have noted throughout this book, claiming the figure of the killjoy, saying in this situation or that "I am her" can be energizing; there is something about her, a sense of vitality, perhaps, a sense of rebelliousness and mischief, perhaps, naughtiness, even, which might be why and how killjoys keep circulating, keep proliferating; she seems to be popping up everywhere. As I said in an earlier chapter, if we pick her up, she picks up.

And that too is why bodies must be in our survival kit. Bodies that prance; bodies that dance; "bodies that matter," to borrow Judith Butler's (1993) terms; bodies that have to wiggle about to create space.

**Wiggling is in my survival kit.**

**Dancing, too.**

Bodies that dance: how often feminists have claimed dance as essential to their liberation. One might think of Emma Goldman's famous statement, "I won't join your revolution if I cannot dance." Or I think of the film about the survival of Audre Lorde, *The Berlin Years*, and its final sequences that show Audre dancing, sequences that seem to capture so well the generosity of her black feminist spirit. I think of the dancing at Lesbian Lives conferences that I have



enjoyed over the years (the talking), but the dancing is what I recall most quickly). A dancing feminist body, a dancing lesbian body, dancing black and brown bodies; the affirming of how we inhabit bodies through how we are with others. We are here, still. Anyone can dance with anyone to form a collective. I am not saying killjoys have a specific genre or style of dancing. I am not saying that there is a killjoy dance. (Though maybe, just maybe, there is a killjoy dance.) Perhaps in her stance is a certain kind of prance; perhaps in the energy that saturates her figure, she becomes an assembly.

**Look at her move: what a movement.**

And, in putting dance in my killjoy survival kit, I am saying something affirmative. Is there a contradiction here? When I am joyful, have I ceased to be a killjoy? Dance can be how we embrace the fragility of being thrown. And joy too is part of killjoy survival, without any question. We need joy to survive killing joy; we can even take joy from killing joy. And so too is the erotic part of my kit, the kind of erotic that Audre Lorde spoke of with such eloquence; a feminist killjoy in being charged up is warmed up; she is an erotic figure. She might come to be as or in negation, but that negation trembles with desire; a desire for more to life, more desire; a desire for more. Feminist killjoys tend to spill all over the place. What a spillage.

**Feminist killjoys: a leaky container.**

**And so:**

**Be careful, we leak.**

We can recall again Shulamith Firestone's (1970, 90) call for a "smile embargo" in her revolutionary manifesto, *Dialectic of Sex*. She wants us to stop smiling as a force of habit; something that has become involuntary; to stop smiling until we have something to smile about. A smile boycott would be a collective action; it would only work if we all stopped smiling. Not smiling becomes a feminist strike. I will return to this striking feminism in my killjoy manifesto. But note too how Firestone's call is also a call to open up the erotic, to release the erotic from the habit of happiness that directs life down a "narrow, difficult-to-find alleyway of human experience" (1970, 155).

I explored in my chapter "Feminism Is Sensational" how feminism can be a coming alive to a world that had been closed off by the requirement to live your life in a certain way. Things come to life when they are not overlooked. So it is important to say this: we need to allow ourselves to be sad and angry; when joy and happiness become ideals, sadness becomes too quickly an obstacle, a failure to achieve or approximate the right feelings. Sadness can require a permission note (item 6). But at the same time, joy can be part of

a killjoy survival kit. I personally don't need a permission note for joy; in my own experience, joy is culturally mandated even if it can be the site of rebellion (the collective joy of dissent); but if you do need to give yourself permission to be joyful, write yourself one. I think joy can only be part of a killjoy survival kit when we refuse to give joy the status of an aspiration. When joy becomes aspiration, then joy becomes what a killjoy has to kill. But even if survival for killjoys requires refusing to make joy (or its heavier friend happiness) into an aspiration, it does not mean we have an obligation to be sad or unhappy either. A killjoy is not joyless.

To return to Emma Goldman, to her book *Living My Life*, she affirms the freedom to dance when she is told not to dance; she dances and is told that it is not the right time to dance, because of the "death of a dear comrade" ([1931] 2008, 56). As she relays the story, she says a young boy with a solemn face whispered to her, "It did not behoove an agitator to dance." Goldman affirms at this moment dance as an affective rebellion against the requirement to be mournful; against the requirement not to live in her body through joyful abandon. This is what I call an affect alien moment. A killjoy survival kit is also about allowing your body to be the site of a rebellion, including a rebellion against the demand to give your body over to a cause or to make your body a cause. Maybe not dancing, too, can be what a body does; refusing to dance when dancing becomes a requirement, standing back, to one side, stopping.

**AND FINALLY: A KILLJOY SURVIVAL KIT**

Putting together a killjoy survival kit can also be a survival strategy. My killjoy survival kit is in my killjoy survival kit. Writing a feminist manifesto too might be a survival strategy. My manifesto, up next, is in my kit. In writing a feminist manifesto, you must first read other feminist manifestos. What a joy! Manifestos are "companion species," to borrow a description from one of Donna Haraway's (2003) manifestos. Reading manifestos is also in my killjoy survival kit. A kit can be a container for activities that are ongoing; projects that are projects insofar as they have yet to be realized.

**A killjoy: a project that comes from a critique of what is.**

**Speaking of projects:**

**We are our own survival kits.**