



BROWSE

OR

[Browse](#) > [Philosophy](#) > [Political Philosophy](#) > [Theory & Event](#) > [Volume 15, Issue 3, 2012](#)

## A Willfulness Archive

**[Sara Ahmed \(bio\)](#)**

### Abstract

This essay assembles a willfulness archive by following the figure of the willful subject around: tracking where willfulness goes, and in what and in whom it is found. The figure of the willful subject appears in literature, fables, educational treatises and moral philosophy, becoming recognizable as a figure, one we recognize in an instant. The essay considers willfulness as a relation of part to whole: willful parts are not willing to support and carry the whole. The essay concludes by exploring willfulness as a style of politics, where parts in **willing** are not **willing** to support and carry the whole.

There is a story called "The Willful Child."

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 lay on her death-bed. When she had been lowered into her grave, and the earth was spread over her, all at once her arm came out again, and stretched upwards, and when they had put it in and spread fresh earth over it, it was all to no purpose, for the arm always came out again. Then the mother herself was obliged to go to the grave, and strike the arm with a rod, and when she had done that, it was drawn in, and then at last the child had rest beneath the ground

([Grimm and Grimm 2009](#): 258).

What a story. The willful child: she has a story to tell. In this Grimm story, which is certainly a grim story, the willful child is the one who is disobedient, who will not do as her mother wishes. If authority assumes the right to turn a wish into a command, then willfulness is a diagnosis of the failure to comply with those whose authority is given. The costs of such a diagnosis are high: through a chain of command (the mother, God, the doctors) the child's fate is sealed. It is ill-will that responds to willfulness; the child is allowed to become ill in such a way that no one can "do her any good." Willfulness is thus compromising; it compromises the capacity of a subject to survive, let alone flourish. The punishment for willfulness is a passive **willing** of death, an allowing of death. Note that willfulness is also that which 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. Willfulness involves persistence in the face of having been brought down, where simply to "keep going" or to "keep coming up" is to be stubborn and obstinate. Mere persistence can be an act of disobedience.

How can we think the relation between willfulness and the will? In the story, it seems that will and willfulness are externalized, that they acquire life by not being or at least staying within subjects. They are not proper to subjects insofar as they become property, what can be alienated into a part or thing.<sup>1</sup> The different acts of **willing** are reduced to a battle between an arm and a rod. If the arm inherits the child's willfulness, then what can we say about the rod? The rod is an externalization of the mother's wish, but also of God's command, which transforms a wish into a *fiat*, a "let it be done," thus determining what happens to the child. The rod could be thought of as an embodiment of will, where the sovereignty of will is the right to command. And yet, the rod does not appear under the sign of willfulness; it becomes instead an instrument for its elimination. One form of will seems to involve the rendering of other wills *as* willful; one form of will assumes the right to eliminate the others.

How can we account for the violence of this story? How is this violence at once an

## Theory & Event

[Volume 15, Issue 3, 2012](#)

### Research Areas

[Philosophy > Political Philosophy](#)[Social Sciences > Political Science > Political Theory](#)

### Recommend

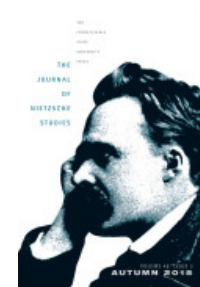
Email a link to this page

[© Get Permissions](#)

### Frequently Downloaded

[View Citation](#)[Save Citation](#)

### Related Content

[Living with Solomon](#)  
[Living with Nietzsche: A Reply to Tubert and Soll](#)

account of willfulness? The story belongs to a tradition of educational discourse described by **Alice Miller in *For Your Own Good (1987)*** as “poisonous pedagogy,” a tradition which assumes the child as stained by original sin, and which insists on violence as moral correction, as being for the child.<sup>2</sup> This violence is a visible violence, we might say, one that it would be hard not to notice. The story is pedagogic in another sense: it teaches us to read the distinction between will and willfulness as a grammar, as a way of ordering human experience, as a way of distributing moral worth. We can also trace how the distinction between will and willfulness is exercised in a more liberal tradition of thought, in which the violence of accounting for willfulness is less visible.

This story, “The Willful Child,” is a finding. I found it because I was following the figure of the willful subject: trying to go where she goes, trying to be where she has been. It was another figure, related, or perhaps even a relation, a kind of kin, that of the feminist killjoy, who first sparked my interest in this pursuit. Feminist killjoys: those who refuse to laugh at the right points; those who are unwilling to be seated at the table of happiness (**Ahmed 2010**). I became interested in how those who get in the way of happiness, and we call these those killjoys, are also and often attributed as willful. In witnessing the unruly trouble making of feminist killjoys, I caught a glimpse of how willfulness can fall, like a judgment on the fallen. This essay is an attempt to give my glimpse of the willful subject a fuller form.

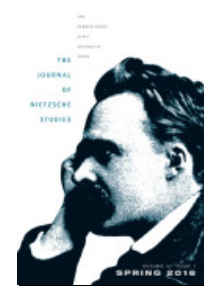
To fill in this form, I assemble what I call “a willfulness archive.” The Grimm story is a thread in this archive. What do I mean by a willfulness archive? We could hear in the oddness of this expression a stretching of the meaning of archive, or even an evacuation of the archive. There is no building in which the documents of willfulness are deposited. Or is there? Perhaps a document is a building, one that houses or gives shelter. A willfulness archive would refer to the documents that are passed down in which “willfulness” comes up, as a trait, perhaps even as a character trait. Even if the documents are not contained in one place, they could be described as containers. We could draw here on Jacques Derrida’s exemplary reflections on archives as *domiciliation*, where the documents in being given a place are guarded, are put under “house arrest” (1996, 2). If documents can be buildings, then they can be where an arresting happens. Perhaps it is the willful subject who is under arrest. To arrest can mean not only to “cause to stop” but can also be used figuratively in the sense of to catch or to hold. The willful subject is under arrest in coming to appear to a watchful eye, to the eye of the law, as the one who *has* certain qualities and attributes. To be arrested is not here to be stationary: the one who is “held up” is the one who wanders, who is wayward; who turns up by turning up in all the wrong places.

In assembling a willfulness archive, it is important we do not assume that willfulness simply describes a disposition: although as a description (of disposition) it might have certain effects (on disposition). It is important we do not assume we find willfulness in the places it has been deposited. We are following a depositing rather than finding what is deposited. My aim in gathering these materials together is to give an alternative hearing of willfulness. Accounts of willfulness often create the impression of lonely subjects, who are living rather precariously out on a limb, and my hope is that by putting these accounts together willfulness becomes more audible as a noise.

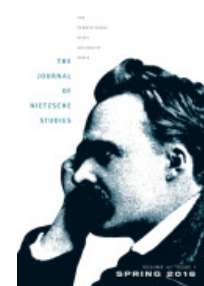
Let’s take a typical definition of willfulness: “asserting or disposed to assert one’s own will against persuasion, instruction, or command; governed by will without regard to reason; determined to take one’s own way; obstinately self-willed or perverse” (*OED*). To be called obstinate or perverse because you are not persuaded by the reasoning of others! Is this familiar to you? Have you heard this before? If willfulness is an attribution, a way of finding fault, then it can also be *the experience of an attribution*. Willfulness can be deposited in our bodies. And when willfulness is deposited in our bodies, then our bodies become part of a willfulness archive.<sup>3</sup> To follow willfulness around requires moving out of the history of ideas and into everyday life-worlds. If we inherit this history, it is a history that gets under our skin.

### Straightening the Will

We might assume a strict differentiation between will and willfulness, as a story of the differentiation between the rod and the arm. A story of differentiation always begins as



### **Nietzsche’s Will to Power: Biology, Naturalism, and Normativity**



### **Julius Bahnsen’s Influence on Nietzsche’s Wills-Theory**

You have access to this content

Free sample

Open Access

Restricted Access

Jump

a story of proximity. Willfulness “comes up” as that which must be eliminated from the will. Perhaps the will is willful in advance of becoming will.

The project of eliminating willfulness can be understood as moral as well as pedagogic. Accepting as he does Novalis’ description of character as “a completely fashioned will,” John Stuart Mill concludes that the task of moral education must be “the education of the will” (1979: 453). The history of educational philosophy from John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (first published in 1693) onward, could be described in terms of the development of an education of the will. Locke offers a set of pedagogical methods for the parents of young children. He suggests that “awe” is crucial to directing the child. To be in awe of those with authority is how authority can be given: “A compliance and suppleness of their wills, being by a steady hand introduced by their parents, before children have memories to retain the beginnings of it, and will seem natural to them and work afterwards in them, as if it were so, preventing all occasions of struggling or repining” (2007, 34). The aim of this **willing** compliance is to save the child trouble (the kind of trouble perhaps described in the Grimm story, where you might recall the only time the child is at rest is when she is beneath the ground).

Jump

Compliance or obedience is described in terms of straightening the will: “Where a wrong bent of the will wants no amendment, there can be no need for blows ... a manifest perversion of the will lies at the root of their disobedience” (63). Disobedience is narrated as the wrong “bent” of will. When straightening the will becomes a moral imperative, it suggests that the will is already bent. Can this history of will be retold as queer history, a history of the wayward and the wandering? The will is associated by Lucretius with swerving atoms that do not stay on the straight line, by Augustine with sin, and with the capacity to leave the right place, by Descartes with error (to err is to stray). The moral and affective landscape of the will might appear differently if we notice that it is littered by waifs and strays. The will, we might even say, has a queer potential.<sup>4</sup>

A potential is also a threat. If the pedagogic aim is to achieve compliance, then the will becomes both an object and a method of education: what it works on, what it works through. In the eighteenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile* was crucial for how it redefined the purpose of education in relation to will. The will of the child remains the object of the educator’s will. Unlike many other such treatises of the time, however, Rousseau emphasized the importance of not subjugating the child’s will: he argues that the child should “never act from obedience but from necessity,” suggesting that words such as “obey,” “command” “duty” and “obligation” be excluded from the vocabulary of the educator (1993, 62). For Locke, the child’s will must become compliant through awe; for Rousseau, the child must be encouraged to develop its own will more freely (although as we shall see the freedom of will involves another form of compliance). As Simon Dentith argues, Rousseau’s educational philosophy is “more famous for encouraging children in their own self-will than discouraging it.” (2004, 55). One crucial aspect of his argument was that the child will not learn by being compelled by the will of others. Rousseau notes in a footnote: “You may be sure the child will regard as caprice any will which opposes his own or any will which he does not understand” (65). And yet, at the same time, the will of the child is presented as a problem that needs to be resolved; by implication, the will of this child will be misdirected without proper instruction.

Rousseau is explicit about how the “child’s will” can be directed without being compelled. In one rather notorious example, the narrator in *Émile* describes how he undertook the charge of a child who “was accustomed not only to have his own way, but to make everyone else do as he pleases” (101). He calls this child “capricious” (this charming word derives from a wild goat, a rather appropriate figure for willfulness). The narrator describes how whenever the child wanted to go out, his tutors would take him out. The child’s will thus determines what happens; the child’s will is the ruler of the house. When the child insists on going out, the narrator does not go with him, but nor does he forbid the child from going. When the child goes out (exercising his own free will), the narrator arranges for people to oppress and tease the child (although he also arranges for a stranger to follow him and ensure the child’s wellbeing – the implication is that he does not want to harm the child even if the lesson must be

experienced as severity). In other words, he arranges for the child to experience *first-hand* the unpleasant consequences of insisting on his own will. The narrator comments rather triumphantly that he had “succeeded ... in getting him to do everything I wanted without bidding him or forbidding him to do anything” (105). The child thus comes to will what the tutor wants him to will, without that will being made the subject of a command. Rousseau suggests the child must *come to will freely what the child must will*: “There is no subjection so complete, as that which preserves the form of freedom: it is thus that the will itself is taken captive” (100). It is not enough in this economy to be obedient you must be so under your own free will.<sup>5</sup> The subjection of will can thus take place under the sign of freedom. It is quite clear from the example how freedom of will is preserved as an idea that works to conceal the work of its creation. The child is made to will according to the will of those in authority without becoming conscious of the circumstances of this making.

## The Will of the Part

Jump

The relation between will and willfulness can be reposed as a relation between the general will and particular will. I want to draw here on the work of the seventeenth century French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal.<sup>6</sup> In his *Pensées*, Pascal associates the particular will with self-will. The will is a kind of tendency to tend toward oneself. As he puts it: “everything tends toward itself. This is contrary to all order. The tendency should be toward the general” (1993, 126). Will provides a way of thinking the relationship between the particular and the general. We could consider the “part” of the particular: the word derives from the Latin *particularis* “of a part” from *L. particula* “particle”. The particular will names a will of a part. Pascal attributes danger to the **willing** part in the following way:

Let us imagine a body full of thinking members. If the foot and the hands had a will of their own, they could only be in their order in submitting their particular will to the primary will which governs the whole body. *Apart from that*, they are in disorder and mischief; but in **willing** only the goal of the body, they accomplish their own goal

(115, emphasis mine).

If a part is to have a will of its own, then it must will what the whole of the body wills. The body part that does not submit its will to the primary will of the body causes disorder and mischief. The part that is apart causes the unhappiness of the body of which it was a part.

One could learn so much from Pascal’s mischievous foot. The willful part is that which threatens the reproduction of an order. As Pascal describes: “If the foot had always been ignorant that it belonged to the body, and that there was a body on which it depended, if it had only the knowledge and the love of self, what regret, what shame for its past life, for having been useless to the body that inspired its life ... ! What prayers for its preservation in it! For every member must be worthy to perish for the body, for which alone the whole is” (115). To be a thinking member of a body thus requires *you remember you are part of a body*. Willfulness thus refers to the part that in **willing** has forgotten it is *just a part*. The consequences of such forgetting are shame; the part that is ignorant of its status as part would compromise the preservation of the whole.

Pascal’s mischievous foot belongs to the same history as the arm in the Grimm story. A rebellion is a rebellion of a part. The rebel is the one who compromises the whole, that is, the body of which she is a part. When we think of this whole we think of “the organic body,” but we also think of how the social has often been imagined as being *like* a body, as a sum of its parts. The idea of the social body has a long history. As Mary Poovey notes in her book, *Making a Social Body*, this very idea is “historically related” to the classical metaphor of the body politic (1995, 7). She suggests that “the social body” acquires significance as a more inclusive metaphor than that of the body politic, as it gave a part to the laboring poor who had previously been excluded, who were “not part” precisely because they were deemed to compromise the health of the body. Poovey concludes: “the phrase *social body* therefore promised full membership in a whole (and held out of the image of that whole) to a part identified as needing both discipline and care” (8). To be a part is to be the one who receives a promise, the promise of membership.

If to be a part is to be the recipient of a promise, then to become part is a demand to be worthy of reception. What is being demanded? Think of the part in participation: to be a part can require participation. Take, for instance, Hegel's argument that "limbs and organs of an organic body are not merely parts of it; it is only in their unity that they are what they are and they are unquestionably affected by that unity, as they also in turn affect it" (1975, 191). Indeed, for Hegel, organs and limbs "become mere parts, only when they pass under the hands of the anatomist, whose occupation, be it remembered, is not with the living body but with the corpse" (192). To become a mere part would participate in a scene of death. Affect becomes crucial to the scene of participating in life: an affective unity. The parts are in sympathy, or must be, for life. Mary Poovey refers to the work of medical scientist Robert Whytt who describes the relation between each specialised part of the body as sympathy, "by which he meant communication of the senses among the organs" (79). Poovey suggests that this model of internal sympathy became the basis for models of social sympathy: bodies become sympathetic to each other *as parts of the social body* (81).

Sympathy can be understood as accordance: the verb "accord" derives from heart. A sympathetic part is an agreement with heart. The idea that parts are sympathetic not only *describes* how parts relate to each other, but also *prescribes* what parts must do, both for other parts, and for the body of which they are part. To become a part is to inherit this prescription; it is to acquire a function. *The part must be willing to do what it is assumed to be for.* Sympathetic feet – feet that are in sympathy with the whole body – must be **willing** to walk. Sympathetic arms must be **willing** to carry.

To become part is thus to acquire duty. Pascal described this duty as a death duty ("the part must become worthy of perishing for the whole body") but we can also think of this duty as a life duty: the part must be **willing** to preserve the life and happiness of the whole. A life duty is a will duty. The part must not just obey; they must be **willing** (we could return to Rousseau on this point: obedience comes "under" free will). In Malebranche's *The Search After Truth* to be a member of a body means that some parts must be **willing** to be feet as well as hands, and thus to obey a command: "All the members of the body cannot be its head or its heart; there must be feet as well as hands, small as well as great, people who obey as well as those who command. And if each should say openly that he wants to command and never to obey, as indeed each naturally wishes, it is clear that all political bodies would destroy themselves and that disorder and injustice would reign over all" (1997, 333). The idea that parts must be sympathetic to the whole is thus a demand for obedience. Not to obey would threaten anarchy. A willful part threatens to break the whole apart.

Given the social is imagined as a body with parts, then some bodies more than others will be thought as the arms and feet of the social body. The New England reformer Samuel Gridley Howe, for example, describes "the laboring classes" as "the feet of society; they support and carry the whole social body" (cited in Klages 1999, 44). A sympathetic laborer is **willing** to support and carry the whole: becoming the feet of the social, becoming also the arms and hands.<sup>7</sup> Willfulness as a diagnosis could be a historical record of moments in which some parts fail in their duty *as parts* to carry and support to the whole body. The part/whole distinction becomes a **willing** distinction: not simply a distinction between part and whole, but between parts, between those who are willing and those who are not. This is why we cannot have a general logic of the part.<sup>8</sup>

Arguably all parts of the whole would be diagnosed as willful if they are not **willing** to provide this support. But we learn that some parts who are **willing** "the goal" of the whole body escape the diagnosis. [Remember Pascal: "they accomplish their own goal."] If the will of some parts is accomplished by the general will, then those parts might even be given a certain freedom not to be supportive. Let's take two contrasting examples. In the current landscape of cuts to public spending in the UK a much repeated speech act is that we must all "tighten our belts." Of course the ones who make the command are probably not themselves tightening their belts. But those who resist the command, who call into question the right of or in the command, are deemed as self-willed, or even as selfish, as putting themselves (or perhaps even their own stomachs) over and above the general interest, as compromising the very capacity of the nation to survive, or flourish. Willfulness can designate what a collective body cannot or will not stomach, creating the very indigestible part.

The second example: we might think that in the current financial climate, the bankers would be judged as willful, as putting themselves (and their own stomachs) before the general interest. But even if this judgment is made (by some certainly not by all) that judgment is rarely expressed in action: after all, the bankers have kept their bonuses. We can ask why even if we know why. Capitalism is understood as the whole body, as what parts must be **willing** to reproduce. And capital is identified as the life-blood of this body: as what *must be* kept in circulation *no matter what (or who)*, as if without capital or blood being pumped through, the whole body would not flourish. The function of the banks as **willing** parts (as accomplishing in their “own goal” the goal of the whole body) stops any judgment of willfulness from being followed through.

When the will of a part is assumed to compromise the life of the whole, then it is the life of the part that is compromised. The distinction between the general and particular will, between will and willfulness, however unstable, becomes a life and death distinction. I suggested earlier that the arm that keeps coming up inherits the willfulness of the child. Perhaps it would be closer to the truth of the Grimm story to say that the willful child bends her will in the way of an arm. If the willful child is the one whose will is not directed in the right way, toward the preservation of the family, then she would acquire life only from death, as if her life would be a killing of the body of which she is a part. I want to stress here how significant it is that willfulness is deposited in the figure of the child. The figure of the willful child appears everywhere in our literary and scholarly archives also under the sign of the strong-willed or spoilt child (think the brutish maxim: *spare the rod spoil the child*). The location of the threat of willfulness relates to the promissory logic of the family. The child after all is the one who promises to extend the family line, which requires the externalization of will as inheritance (to bequeath one’s property is to write a will). The family line becomes the rod: a technique for straightening the child out. The death of the willful child is required for the birth of a willing child the one who, in being **willing** to reproduce the family, receives its inheritance.

Does the willful child still appear? One respondent to a paper in which I referred to the Grimm story says “the rod” was very eighteenth century, implying the story of the rod, which is also the story of the child, was simply behind us. But if this child is behind us, she is also in front of us. In political and popular responses to the riots that took place in the UK in the summer of 2011, how quickly this figure was conjured up. The rod was restored as the proper instrument for moral correction; commentators regularly referred to the failure to discipline the children, as if the riots were caused by nothing other than sparing of the rod. The brutish maxim is translated: *spare the rod, spoil the nation*. One Labour MP David Lammy is reported to have said: “If parents were allowed to hit their children, the riots wouldn’t have happened.”<sup>9</sup> This is a typical commentary posted during the riots: “Schools are no longer allowed to discipline children by using any kind of physical force, and parents who slap or use the rod to discipline an errant child face prosecution from their own children.”<sup>10</sup> The errant child is here an alarming consequence of the prohibition of the rod. The wayward children became in one violent phrase: “feral inner-city waifs and strays.”<sup>11</sup>

The rod enters the national imaginary as a melancholic object, an object whose loss is still mourned, an object which is thus retained as a national idea or ideal: in *mourning the rod*, it is as if the rod once kept the body of the nation whole (as if there were no riots in the time of the rod); it is as if the rod *would have* restored this body, as if the rod *could have* prevented the masses from revolting. The rod participates in the fantasy of the nation as a “whole social body,” a technique for its restoration that might require a rehearsal of the scene of its destruction. A rod can thus be exercised at the very moment it is announced as lost: the law became a national rod, a way of punishing and disciplining the willful children. The law became moral right: the right of the national body to take “a hard line” as if in self-preservation, as if that line was necessary for life.

## Becoming Background

I suggested earlier that the moral of the Grimm story is that the child must straighten itself out. It is not necessarily the case however, that straightening requires a visible force, in other words, a rod. **Willing** can involve a process of alignment in which the mechanisms of force are not brought into view. We might think of force as the capacity

to make people do something against their will. But force can shape what is “with the will” rather than simply what is “against the will.” Force can take the following form: *the making unbearable of the consequences of not willing what someone wills you to will*. A condition of bearability can be to will freely what you are willed to will.

Being **willing** might require **willing** oneself to will as the other wills you to will. We could think of this will imperative in terms of “conditional will,” when we make our will conditional on the will of others, or when we will on condition that others are also willing.<sup>12</sup> The speech act, “I will if you will” condenses the conditionality of will into a promise to will if the other wills. It might seem that conditional will involves a relation of care and reciprocity. Perhaps it can. But if certain people come first – say parents, but also hosts or citizens – then their will comes first. This being first is not always obvious or explicit. Indeed the host might say that they will “will” only if the guest wills, thus appearing to give the guest a certain precedence: “if you will, then I will.” A promise to will, can become a demand given this precedence: “you will, so that I can will.” If the guest won’t will, then the host who wills the guest to will so they can will also cannot will: “if you won’t then I can’t.” The guest must will if the host is to will what they will to will: “you must be **willing!**” When you are **willing**, this “must” loses the sign of its force. This is why some force is not experienced as force as it involves a sense, nay even a feeling, of being **willing**.

To become **willing** can involve a conscious renunciation of “a will of one’s own.” We can approach this “ownness” not as what one has but as what one has acquired. In other words, to become **willing** might involve giving up what you have acquired as your own.<sup>13</sup> In George Eliot’s novel *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie Tulliver a willful heroine has an epiphany. The answer to her troubles is to give up her will, as an act of giving up desire and inclination: “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” (1965, 306). 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). Her mother evokes Maggie’s willful past: to be contrary is to oppose in nature, direction or meaning. To become submissive is to let your will go back. The mother can thus love this daughter, who supports 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 the whole.

Receding is, we learn from Maggie’s plot, or her lot, hard work. In **willing** yourself to recede, you are still **willing**. The narrator explicitly address the reader on this point: “from what you know of her, you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and willfulness..., even into her self-renunciation” (308). **Willing** oneself not to will can still be diagnosed as willfulness even when we try and escape the diagnosis. This work, which we can call simply “will work,” can be understood in relation to what **Arlie Hochschild (1983)** describes as “emotional labour,” when subjects close the gap between how they do feel and how they should feel. One of Hochschild’s examples is the bride on her wedding day, the “happiest day of her life” who does not feel right, in other words, who does not feel happy. The bride tries to convince herself that she is happy although there can be nothing more unconvincing than the effort to be convinced.

Will work is not only the effort to close a gap, but also to find the closure convincing. Perhaps we are convinced when the effort to be convinced disappears: **willing** comes to be experienced “happily” as spontaneous. It is interesting to observe here that the word “spontaneous” which is now often used to refer to something that is without premeditation or effort, derives from the Latin *sponte* “of one’s own accord, **willingly**.” So we are really talking tautology: **willing** comes to be experienced “happily” as willing. I noted in *Queer Phenomenology* the paradox of how with effort things can appear effortless (2006, 56). The appearance of **willing** might require the disappearance of the laboring effort.

Jump

Jump

It might seem that parts just happen to be **willing** in the same way, at the same time; willing as synchronicity. But synchronicity conceals another history of being in time; the time of precedence, when some parts are required to make adjustments to be “in time” with others. It is useful to note here that Schopenhauer, a philosopher who, as Deleuze describes makes will into the very essence of things (2006, 77), considers will as a kind of *consciousness of obstruction*. He suggests: “Just as a stream flows smoothly on as long as it encounters no obstruction, so the nature of man and animal is such that we never really notice or become conscious of what is agreeable to our will. On the other hand, all that opposes, frustrates, and resists our will, that is to say, all that is unpleasant and painful, impresses upon us, instantly, directly, and with clarity” (2004, 3). We could say that when will work “works” parts are in harmony or agreement. When **willing** “agrees” with what is willed, the part recedes, becoming part of a background. When will work does not work, the will of the part is *too full*: willful. Willfulness might “come up” *when an act of willing does not agree with what has receded*.

In another George Eliot novel, *Romola*, about a character of the same name, we learn the costs of not receding. Alas, poor Romola. She attempts to flee from a marriage based on deception, a marriage in which she loses both heart and inheritance. She is stopped by a monk who says: “You wish your true name and your true place in life to be hidden, that you may choose for yourself a new name and a new place, and have no rule but your own will. And I have a command to call you back. My daughter you must return to your place.” To leave her place, to leave her place of subordination, is to have no rule but the will. The monk describes Romola as a “wilful wanderer, following [her] own blind choice”; as the one who is “seeking [her] own will” or “seeking some good other than the law [she is] bound to obey” (1994, 66). This figure of the willful wanderer is one that we can follow around, appearing as the vagrant, the vagabond, the one turns up by turning up in all the wrong places. Indeed the arm that comes up in the Grimm story could be the arm of the vagrant. The arm coming out of the grave is a common motif in fairytales and folklore, and has been referred to a widely held superstition concerning trespass on consecrated land. No wonder that a willfulness archive is a wandering archive, an archive without a fixed abode.

To break free from duty is narrated as willfulness, as wandering away from the right path, the straight path. To break from the bond of marriage or family is regarded as self-willed, as putting yourself before others. We could note as an aside here how queerness is often regarded as self-regard, turning away from the straight path as a turning toward oneself. We could note also how the self-regard of heterosexuality can be concealed under the sign of the general will, because this particular will has already been *given expression* in the general will. Giving up a will that does not have a general expression is what allows you to inhabit the familiar, or to recede into the background. A queer phenomenology can teach us what or who recedes in the generalization of will.<sup>14</sup>

The figure of the willful wanderer shares a history with the wretch. Wretched in the sense of “vile, despicable person” was developed in Old English and is said to reflect “the sorry state of the outcast.” The sorrow of the stranger is pedagogic not because it teaches us what it is like or must be like to be a stranger, but because it might estrange us from the very happiness of the familiar. There can be unhappiness in the failure to recede. Being **willing** to cause unhappiness might even turn willfulness into a political cause.

### Willfulness as a Style of Politics

Feminist, queer and anti-racist histories could be thought of as histories of those who are **willing** to be willful; who are **willing** to turn a diagnosis into an act of self-description. Let’s go back: let’s listen to what and who is behind us. 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, emphases Walker’s). Julia Penelope describes lesbianism as willfulness: “The lesbian stands against the world created by the male imagination. What **willfulness** we possess when we claim our lives!” (1992, 42, bold Penelope’s). Marilyn Frye’s radical feminism uses the adjective willful: “The willful creation of new



meaning, new loci of meaning, and new ways of being, together, in the world, seems to me in these mortally dangerous times the best hope we have" (1992, 9). Willfulness as audacity, willfulness as standing against, willfulness as creativity.

As we know from assembling a willfulness archive, willfulness usually takes the form of a charge. Can what we are charged with become a charge in Alice Walker's sense, a way of being in charge? If we are charged with willfulness, then we can accept and mobilize this charge. To accept a charge is not simply to agree with it. Acceptance can mean *being willing to receive*. We can 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*). To stand against the world, to create something that does not agree with what is already given, might require willfulness. Sometimes you can only stand up by standing firm. Sometimes you can only hold on by becoming stubborn.

Jump

We all know 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 a 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 who is "going the wrong way" is the one that is experienced as "in the way" of the will that is 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 and you are judged to be going against the flow because you are insistent. A life paradox: you have to become what you are judged as being.

How do know which way things are flowing? Usually by not going that way. Let's think of institutions. They are crowds; and they have orientation devices that direct the flow of human traffic in particular ways. I want to draw briefly from some examples I collected as part of my research on diversity work within institutions (see [Ahmed 2012](#)). Diversity is a rather mobile word. How often it is said! It might appear that diversity is part of an institutional flow. And yet a common experience of diversity practitioners, those appointed to institutionalize diversity, is that of the institution as wall. One practitioner says: "so much of the time it is a banging your head against the brick wall job." How interesting that a job description is a wall description. Diversity work is an experience of coming against something that does not, and seemingly, will not move. Let's take an example of an encounter with an institutional wall:

When I was first here there was a policy that you had to have three people on every panel who had been diversity trained. But then there was a decision early on when I was here, that it should be everybody, all panel members, at least internal people. They took that decision at the equality and diversity committee which several members of SMT were present at. But then the director of Human Resources found out about it and decided we didn't have the resources to support it, and it went to council with that taken out and council were told that they were happy to have just three members, only a person on council who was an external member of the diversity committee went ballistic – and I am not kidding went ballistic - and said the minutes didn't reflect what had happened in the meeting because the minutes said the decision was different to what actually happened (and I didn't take the minutes by the way). And so they had to take it through and reverse it. And the Council decision was that all people should be trained. And despite that I have then sat in meetings where they have just continued saying that it has to be just 3 people on the panel. And I said but no Council changed their view and I can give you the minutes and they just look at me as if I am saying something really stupid, this went on for ages, even though the Council minutes definitely said all panel members should be trained. And to be honest sometimes you just give up

(diversity practitioner, UK).

It seems as if there is an institutional decision. Individuals within the institution must act as if the decision has been made for it to be made. If they do not, it has not. A decision made in present about the future (under the promissory sign "we will") can be overridden by the momentum of the past. The past becomes like a crowd: a momentum that directs action without being given as a command or even in a way that resists a command. Note that the head of personnel did not need to take the decision out of the minutes for the decision not to bring something into effect. Perhaps an institution can say "yes" when there is not enough behind that "yes" for something to be brought

about. The institutional wall is when a will, “a yes,” does not bring something about, “a yes” that conceals this “not bringing” under the sign of “having brought.”<sup>15</sup>

It is only the practical labor of “coming up against” the institution *that allows this wall to become apparent*. To those who do not come against it, the wall does not appear: the institution is experienced as a **willing** “yes”: as open, committed and diverse. Diversity work is all the more difficult as it means coming up against what does not even appear to others. We could consider diversity work in two senses: firstly, diversity work can refer to work that has the explicit aim of transforming an institution; and secondly, diversity work can be what is required, or what we do, when we do not “quite” inhabit the norms of an institution. When we fail to inhabit a norm (when we are questioned or question ourselves whether we are “it,” or pass as or into “it”) then it becomes more apparent, rather like the institutional wall: a sign of immobility or what does not move.

## Jump

An institutional norm is also a social category. A category can be a house; as that which gives residence. Some have to “insist” on belonging to the categories that give residence to others. Take the category of Professor. An example: we are at a departmental meeting with incoming students. We are all talking about our own courses, one after the other, each coming up to the podium. Someone is chairing, introducing each of us in turn. She says, this is Professor *so-and-so*. This is Professor *such-and-such*. On this particular occasion, I happen to be the only female professor, and the only professor of color in the room (the latter was not surprising as I am the only professor of color in the department). When it is my turn to come up, the Chair says: “This is Sara.” I am the only professor introduced without using the title professor. What do you do? What to do? If you point this out, or if you ask to be referred to by the proper name, you are having to insist on what is simply given to others; not only that, you heard as insistent, as or even for that matter as self-promotional (as insisting on your dues). Not only do you have to become insistent in order to receive what is automatically given to others; but your insistence confirms the improper nature of your residence. We do not tend to notice the assistance given to those whose residence is assumed.

We tend to notice categories when we come up against them: when they do not allow you to flow through space. Willfulness might be bound up in some way with an experience of againstness. If willfulness comes up as “against” it is important that we not reduce willfulness to againstness. It is this reduction, after all, which allows the willful subject to be dismissed, as if she is only going “the other way” *because* she is for being against. 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 is how an arresting can take place (remember one of my opening suggestions: it is the willful subject who is *under arrest*). It also explains how the charge of willfulness is confused with or reduced to that of individualism. Take the veil debates: if we describe the Muslim woman who covers as willful it might seem that we are reading her action in terms of a Western idea of individual freedom and dissent. Alternatively we might be challenging the Western idea of the Muslim woman as submissive, as submitting to the will of others. But I want to suggest that to recognize the action of veiling as individualism is to misrecognize the act (to conflate what is necessary to complete an action with what is behind an action). The charge of individualism thus misses what is at stake in the charge of willfulness: after all, in liberal multicultural secularism, individual idiosyncrasies are permitted. Multiculturalism might even be structured as a fantasy of permission. A diversity of individual parts is permitted, or even encouraged, on condition that each part is **willing** to participate in national culture, where participation requires an agreement with a common end or purpose. Perhaps the nation can have diversity as its skin (a happy skin of many colors) as long as underneath we beat to the same heart.

Willfulness involves the saturation of parts (to be charged with willfulness is to acquire a negative charge). It is then as if the veil itself becomes a willful part, *the part that refuses to take part in national culture*; a stubborn attachment to an inassimilable difference. Willfulness can be required to sustain an attachment, one that might previously have been experienced as habit, as a second skin. Stubbornness might be

required to hold onto something when you have been asked to let go. Or stubbornness might be an effect of holding on. It is crucial that we don't assume the willful part always takes the form of an individual subject although it can take this form: an object, a people, a culture, a practice can be described as willful simply by persisting, if this persistence is deemed a threat to a general existence.

If you are not going the way things are flowing you might need to become willful to keep going. A flow is also an effect of bodies that are going the same way. To go is to gather. A flow can be an effect of gatherings of all kinds: gatherings of tables, for instance, as kinship objects that support human gatherings. We can pause here and note the willful part can also be a limb, a table, a jug: any bits of matter can be designated willful if they do allow the completion of an action for which they are assumed to be intended. The queer table might certainly show us the promise of willfulness, of how objects can be re-assembled by not supporting an action that has been agreed (see [Ahmed 2006](#)). A queer experience: you are left waiting at a table when a straight couple walks into the room and is attended to straight away. I might be tempted to call this a female experience: as if without a man present at the table, you do not appear. For some, you have to become insistent to be the recipient of a social action, you might have to announce your presence, wave your arm, saying: "Here I am!" For others, it is enough just to turn up because *you have already been given a place at the table before you take up your place*. Willfulness describes the uneven consequences of this differentiation. In response to this description of a queer experience, someone suggested it reduced queerness to self-assertion, the "I am" as what or who is "here." But who is heard as assertive? Which acts of will are deemed self-willed? We can learn to become cautious about how self-will can be used to dismiss the claims of others. *You do not need to become self-willed if your will is already accomplished by the general will*.

Things might appear fluid to those who are going the way things are flowing. An attribution of willfulness also involves the attribution of negative affect to those bodies that get in the way, those bodes that "go against the flow" in the way they are going. Conversations are also flows; they are saturated. We hear this saturation as atmosphere. The willful subject shares an affective horizon with the feminist killjoy as the ones who "ruin the atmosphere." A colleague says to me she just has to open her mouth in meetings to witness eyes rolling as if to say "oh here she goes." My experience of being a feminist daughter in a conventional family taught me much about rolling eyes. Say, we are seated at the dinner table. Around this table, the family gathers, having polite conversations, where only certain things can be brought up. Someone says something you consider problematic. You respond, carefully, perhaps. You might be speaking quietly; or you might be getting "wound up," recognizing with frustration that you are being wound up by someone who is winding you up. However she speaks it is the one who speaks as a feminist who is usually heard as the cause of the trouble, as disturbing the peace. You become mouthy. Perhaps we are called mouthy when we say what others do not want to hear; to become mouthy is to become mouth, reduced to the speaking part as being reduced to the wrong part.

The feminist killjoy and the willful queer carry the weight of the spoilt child into the scene of adulthood, as spoil sports, the ones who "spoil" the happiness of others. Queer feminist histories are thus full of self-declared willful subjects. Think of the Heterodoxy Club that operated in Greenwich Village in the early twentieth century, a club for unorthodox women. They described themselves as "this little band of willful women," as Judith Schwarz reveals in her wonderful history of this club (1986, 103). A heterodoxy is defined as "not in agreement with accepted beliefs, or holding unorthodox opinions." To be willful is to be **willing** to announce your disagreement, and to put yourself behind a disagreement. To be in disagreement might mean to be judged as disagreeable. Feminism we could say is the creation of some rather disagreeable women.

A queer feminist history of will could be thought of as a history of willful parts: parts that are not in agreement with what has been generalized as will; parts that *in willing* are *not willing* to reproduce the whole. Think of *Jane Eyre*: Jane, who can only speak back to her tyrannical aunt Mrs. Reed when her tongue acquires a will of its own: "I say scarcely voluntary for it seemed as if my tongue pronounced words without my will consenting to their utterance" (1999, 21). Perhaps a willful part gives its will to other

Jump

parts in refusing to obey: a willful gift as a feminist gift, a queer gift. If our tongues can acquire will, then willfulness can bypass intentionality. Our tongues can disobey for us, a way of summoning an impulse into intent, a summoning which then, perhaps only retrospectively, is given the force of intent.

We might need summoning if our aim is to get in the way of a residence; we might need to be open to being summoned by the disobedience of parts. Political histories of striking, of demonstrations, are indeed histories of those **willing** to put their bodies in the way, to turn their bodies into blockage points that stop the flow of human traffic, as well as the wider flow of an economy. When willfulness becomes a style of politics, it means not only being **willing** not to go with the flow, but also *being willing to cause its obstruction*. One could think of the hunger strike as the purest form of willfulness: a body whose agency is expressed by being reduced to obstruction, where the obstruction to others is self-obstruction, the obstruction of the passage into the body. A history of willfulness is a history of those who are **willing** to put their bodies in the way, or to bend their bodies in the way of the will.

Jump

Willfulness might also involve a **willingness** to *assume the sign* of willfulness. Consider Eve Sedgwick's description of queer politics in terms of voluntary stigma: "the conscious and willful marking of oneself as 'tainted' as a particular communicative and performative strategy grounded in visibility politics and practiced in the context of AIDS activism" (1998, 115). There is something deeply evocative about Sedgwick's account of her involvement in political struggle. She recalls one moment: "I got there late and hugged and kissed the students and friends I hadn't seen in a few weeks, and Brian gave me his sign to carry. I can't remember – I hardly noticed – what was on it – even though when I was a kid I remember that most of the symbolic power of the picket lines used to seem to inhere in the voluntary self-violation, the then almost inconceivable willed assumption of stigma, that seemed to me to be involved in any attempt to go public as a written-upon body – an ambulatory placard – a figure, I as a child, could associate only with the disciplining of children" (2003, 29).

To be involved in a protest can mean both to sign up to willfulness, and to be **willing** to carry this sign for others. The willed and voluntary assumption of stigma can be understood as a political art: a way of performing the body, a way of re-inhabiting the streets. As political art, we are not so much talking about the content of the sign, or of the sign as having a denotative function. The placard which, like the rod, is intended for straightening the child provides the means to wander: perhaps the rod becomes the arm, refusing the demand to be straightened out. The word "demonstrate" shares its root with "monster." Together bodies can become monstrous. Bodies in alliance can generate, as **Judith Butler (2011)** has suggested a new public, one that is not supported by existing institutions or law, one whose very persistence might be necessary to achieve a supporting ground. Actions that aim to reach for their own grounds can be considered part of our willfulness archive. We might even imagine an alternative army of the wayward: hearing in the Shakespearean expression "hydra headed willfulness"<sup>16</sup> the promise of monstrosity, the promise that like the monster Hydra, who acquires two heads from the loss of any one, the blows we receive will create more disobedient parts.

In promising the monstrous, willfulness does not create a simple harmony of parts, even in the headiness of those moments of anticipation. Willfulness could be understood as a necessary horizon *for* politics, as what cannot be overcome by the participation *in* politics, even in those forms of participation predicted on a refusal to be part. The experience of protest can be the unifying sound of a shared "no," but that does not mean all parts participate in that "no" in the same way. An example: a demonstration against the English Defence League, a far right group with an anti-immigrant and anti-Islam stance, took place recently in Tower Hamlets, East London. Prior to the march, the LGBT activist and human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell announced his **willingness** to demonstrate as a gesture of solidarity with Muslims. He wrote the following invitation or request to the queer community: "I urge everyone to support the Saturday's protest against the far right English Defence League (EDL), as it attempts to threaten and intimidate the Muslim community." He also indicates his own will to be present under, we might say, the queer sign: "I will be there with a placard reading: Gays and Muslims UNITE! Stop the EDL."<sup>17</sup>

The sign might seem to promise solidarity between willful parts: Gays and Muslims, those whose particular will is not expressed by the national will (although note how this “and,” in assuming the parts as apart, can make Gay Muslims disappear). In a follow up article, Tatchell refers again to his placard. This time he makes clear that the sign has two sides.<sup>18</sup> On the other side is the following: “Stop EDL and far-right Islamists. No to ALL hate.”

We realise the significance of these different sides of the placard if we read the narrative. Tatchell uses the occasion of recalling the experience of the march against the EDL (an organization that has an anti-Islam but “gay friendly” stance) to speak out not against the EDL, which recedes or becomes background, but against what he calls Islamic fundamentalism. In fact Tatchell uses the occasion to argue that Islamist goals are “much more dangerous” than that of the EDL. One has to note that Tatchell is adopting here the very language of the EDL. It is easy to identify the problems with this identification of Islam as the “bigger threat” in the context of a protest against those who perceive Islam as the “bigger threat.”

Jump

But how does one read the insistence on the right to be visible as a gay man in a protest, to carry a queer sign? One could say surely he is right; surely queers have a right to gather whenever and wherever. But travelling under the queer sign can become part of the management of the racial space of the nation. As **Jin Haritaworn (2010)** has noted in a sharp critique of gay imperialism, the use of kiss-ins near mosques by mainstream LGBT groups in Berlin shows how what appears as an assertion of a sexual minority can function as the assertion of a racialized majority. Travelling under the queer sign becomes a way of occupying political space and of claiming territory as one’s own residence or home. This is how the content of this sign does come to matter: the queer sign is not empty in the sense that it cannot be filled by anybody. The queer sign becomes aligned with the state apparatus, a happy sign, depending on the unhappiness of the Muslim other; it can achieve its status as voluntary stigma by **willing** the very signs of an involuntary Islamic homophobia. The Muslim others become unwilling citizens: unwilling to integrate, unwilling to love the love that is **willingly** (although conditionally) endorsed by the nation.<sup>19</sup>

It might appear that organizing under the queer sign requires insistence. And yes, sometimes, maybe even often, it does. But sometimes it does not: *you might feel like an arm but act like a rod*. This is a complicating point: one that I am **willing** to concede complicates my argument. *The very assumption of willfulness can protect some from realizing how their goals are already accomplished by the general will*. It can be whiteness that allows some queers to accomplish their goals; it can be the unseeing of whiteness that also allows some queers not to see how they appear to others when, for instance, they carry a sign that makes Islam proximate to the EDL; it can be unseeing whiteness that allow some queers not to see how that very proximity can be a threat. What is assumed as a willful queerness can be a **willing** whiteness. **Jasbir Puar’s (2007)** important critique of homonationalism could be read as an account of how wayward queers can and do become the straightening parts. This kind of queer politics aims to become part of the nation where partness is achieved *by or through the very projection of willfulness onto others*.

It is important to describe the racism of this projection. But to describe the projection of willfulness as racism is to be heard as willful. When queers of color talk about racism in queer politics, we become killjoys, as if this very talk is what prevents us from being seated at the queer table. Audre Lorde explores so powerfully the figure of the angry person of color, the one is always getting in the way of a social bond. As she describes: “When women of colour 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’” (1984, 131). To speak out of anger about racism is to be heard as the ones who are stopping us from getting along; the ones who are blocking the flow of communication, who are preventing the forward progression sometimes described as reconciliation.

Racism becomes a willful word: going the wrong way, getting in the way. I am speaking of racism in a seminar. Someone comes up to me afterwards and puts her arm

next to mine. We are almost the same color, she says. No difference, no difference. You wouldn't really know you were any different to me, she says. The very talk about racism becomes a fantasy that invents difference. She smiles, as if the proximity of our arms was evidence that the racism of which I was speaking was an invention, as if our arms told another story. She smiles, as if our arms were in sympathy. I say nothing. Perhaps my arm speaks by withdrawing.

To talk about racism is to become the cause of the problem you reveal. When racism recedes from social consciousness, it appears as if the ones who "bring it up" are bringing it into existence. To recede is to go back or withdraw. To concede is to give way, yield. People of color are often asked to concede to the recession of racism: we are asked to "give way" by letting racism "go back." Not only that: more than that. We are asked to embody a commitment to diversity. We are asked to smile in their brochures. We are asked to put racism behind us as if racism is behind us. The narrative exercised is not necessarily that we invent racism, but that we preserve its power to govern social life by not getting over it. I have an alternative. I call it my willfulness maxim: *Don't look over it, if you can't get over it.*

Jump

### Conclusion: A Call to Arms

A history is condensed in the charge of willfulness. We can not only accept this charge but keep it alive. The arm that keeps coming out of the grave can signify not only persistence and protest, or perhaps even more importantly persistence *as* protest, but also a line of connection to others. The wayward arm could be heard as a call to arms. The call sounds differently if the arms are heard as subjects of the call. The call *to* arms as the call *of* arms.

A call can be a recall: Just recall Sojourner Truth speaking to the suffragettes in 1851, as a black woman and former slave: "Ain't I a woman," she says. "Look at me," she says, "look at my arm." And in brackets, in the bracket of history, it is said that Sojourner Truth at this moment "bared her right arm to the shoulder, showing her tremendous muscular power." 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 plough, to sow the field. The arms of the slave belonged to the master, as did the slave, as the ones whom who are not supposed to have a will of their own. No wonder we must *look to the arms*, if we are to understand the history of those who rise up against oppression.

Arms become unsympathetic, or disagreeable, when they are unwilling to complete the actions they are assumed to be for. In becoming unsympathetic, the arms call. A willful ear might be required to hear the call of arms. A call can mean a lament, an accusation; a naming, as well as a visitation (in the sense of a calling upon). The willful part, who comes apart, who does not will the reproduction of the whole, who wills waywardly, who wills wrongly, plays a crucial part in a history of rebellion. For some, willfulness is necessary for an existence to be possible. When willfulness is necessary another world becomes possible.

But we will need, we still need, to proceed with caution: willfulness is not a ground upon which we tread. When willfulness becomes a ground, translating a wrong into a right or even into righteousness (to be righteous is to be morally upright), then arms can become rods, coming up only to straighten things out. After all when arms come up, they disturb the ground. Can we learn not to eliminate the signs of disturbance? Disturbance can be creative: not as what we aim for, nor as what grounds our action, but as the effect of action: disturbance as what is created by the very effort of reaching, reaching up, reaching out, reaching for something that is not yet present, something that appears only as shimmer, a horizon of possibility. When the arms refuse to support and carry, they reach. We do not know what the arms can reach.

---

#### **Sara Ahmed**

Sara Ahmed is Professor of Race and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Her publications include: *Differences That Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism* (1998); *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000); *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004); *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects and Others* (2006); *The Promise of Happiness* (2010); and, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012). She is currently completing a book for Duke University Press entitled *Willful Subjects*. Sara can be reached at [cos01sa@gold.ac.uk](mailto:cos01sa@gold.ac.uk)

## References

- Ahmed, Sara. (2012). *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . (2010). *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . (2006). *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects and Others*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Arendt, Hannah. (1978). *The Life of the Mind*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company.
- Bronte, Charlotte. (1999) [1847] *Jane Eyre*. Wordsworth Edition: London.
- Butler, Judith. (2011). "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street." *Transversal*: [www.eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en](http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en)
- Davis, Michael. (2006). *George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Psychology: Exploring the Unmapped Territory*. London: Ashgate Publishing.
- Deleuze, Gilles. (2006). *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. London: Continuum Publishing.
- Dentith, Simon. (2004). "George Eliot, Rousseau and the Discipline of Natural Consequences," *The Victorians and the Eighteenth Century: Reassessing the Tradition*, edited by Francis O'Gorman and Katherine Turner, 41–56. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Derrida, Jacques. (1996). *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Translated by Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Eliot, George. (1965). [1860] *The Mill on the Floss*. New York: The New American Library.
- . (1994). [1862–3] *Romola*. Oxford University Press.
- Frye, Marilyn. (1992). *Willful Virgin: Essays in Feminism, 1976–1972*. Crossing Press.
- Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. (2009). *The Complete Grimm's Fairytales*. Translated by Margaret Hunt. Digireads.Com Publishing.
- Hage, Ghassan. (1998). *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in Multicultural Society*. Annandale: Pluto Press.
- Hallward, Peter. (2009). "The Will of the People: Notes Towards a Dialectic Voluntarism". *Radical Philosophy*. 155: 17–29.
- Haritworn, Jin. (2010). "Queer Injuries: The Racial Politics of 'Homophobic Hate Crime,'" *Social Justice*. Spring edition.
- Hegel, G.W.F. (1975). [1830] *Logic*. Translated by William Wallace. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . (2005). [1821] *Philosophy of Right*. Translated by S.W. Dyde. Mineola, NY: Dover.
- Hochschild, Arlie. (1983). *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Intimate Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Husserl, Edmund. (1989). [1976]. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy second book*. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Klages, Mary. (1999). *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Locke, John. (2007). [1693] *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. New York, Dover Publications.
- Lorde, Audre. (1984). *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Trumansburg: The Crossing Press.
- Lütke, Alf. (1995). [1989] *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Translated by William Templer. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Malebranche, Nicolas. (1997) [1674–5] *The Search After Trut*. Translated by Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marx, Karl. (1990). [1867] *Capital: Volume 1*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin Classics.
- Mill, John Stuart. (1979). *Collected Works, Volume 27*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press.
- Miller, Alice. (1987). [1983] *For Your Own Good: The Roots of Violence in Child-Rearing*. London: Virago Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. (1990). [1889] *Twilight of the Idols*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books.
- Pascal, Blaise. (2003) [1669] *Pensées*. Translated by W.F. Trotter. New York: Dover Publications.
- Penelope, Julia (1992). *Call Me Lesbian: Lesbian Lives, Lesbian Theory*. Crossing Press.
- Poovey, Mary. (1995). *Making a social body: British cultural formation, 1830–1864*. University of Chicago Press.
- Puar, Jasbir. (2007). *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Riley, Patrick. (1988). *The General Will Before Rousseau: The Transformation of the Divine into the Civic*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Rancière, Jacques. (1994). *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Translated by Julia Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Robbins, Bruce. (1993). *The Servant's Hand: English Fiction from Below*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Rose, Nikolas. (2007). "Governing the Will in a Neurochemical Age." In *On Willing Selves: Neoliberal Politics vis-à-vis the Neuroscientific Challenge*. Edited by Sabine Maasen and Barbara Sutter, 81–99. Houndmills: Macmillan.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. (1993). [1762] *Émile*. Translated by Barbara Foxley. London: Everyman.
- . (1998). [1762] *The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right*, Translated by H.J. Tozer, Wordsworth Classics.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. (2004). [1844] *On the Suffering of the World*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books.
- Schwarz, Judith. (1986). *Radical Feminists of Heterodoxy*. Chicago: New Victoria Publishers.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. (2003). *Touching Feeling: Affect, Performativity, Pedagogy*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . (1998). *Tendencies*. London: Routledge.

Jump

Walker, Alice. (2005). *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*. London: Phoenix.

Zornado, Joseph L. (2001). *Inventing the Child: Culture, Ideology and the Story of Childhood*. New York: Garland Publishing.

## Notes

**1.** Property has been defined in relation to the will. Hegel defines property as “a person putting his will into an object” (2005, 10). Marx suggests that “Commodities are things, and therefore lack the power to resist man. If they are unwilling, he can use force: in other words, he can take possession of them. In order that the objects may enter into relation with each other as commodities, their guardians must place themselves in relation to one another *as persons whose will resides in those objects*, and must behave in such a way that each does not appropriate the commodity of the other, and alienate his own, except through an act to which both parties consent” (1990, 178, emphasis added). We can note as an aside here how being unwilling leads to force (if they are unwilling they can be forced) which immediately shows us how being **willing** can be a way of avoiding being forced (and can thus be a mode in which force operates). Marx shows how commodities establish social relations amongst property holders: guardians relate to each other through how their will resides in objects. In this sense, property relations are **willing** relations. In both descriptions, property is how the will of some is extended (by the evacuation of will from objects: to become property is to have no will of your own) suggesting an intimate relation between a will economy and political economy. We could consider how objects as well as subjects might be attributed with willfulness. Willfulness might be attributed to objects when they do correspond with the will. So, for example, we might swear at the object that appears when it does not do what we will it to do, or when it does not allow us to do what we will to do. The object thus appears full-of-will when it has not been emptied of content other than our will. The attribution of willfulness thus shows us how objects have lives other than the ones we give to them. And, given this, willfulness might represent a moment of crisis in the very system of property: willful objects *refuse to provide residence for human will*.

**2.** Alice Miller draws on the earlier work of Katharina Rutschky which describes this tradition (problematically) as “Black pedagogy,” and which has as its primary aim “the domination and control of the child all for the child’s own good” (see [Zornado 2001](#), 79). As Joseph L. Zornado points out, following both Rutschky and Miller, this pedagogy rests on willfulness: “because the child is willful, stained by original sin and destructive, the adult must enact decisive and punitive measures so that the child will not grow up ‘full of weeds’” (79). Rutschky is describing a specifically eighteenth century German tradition, whilst Alice Miller suggests it has a wider Euro-American frame; and that over time the violence of the discourse has become submerged. I should note here that Alice Miller describes the liberal educational philosophy of Rousseau as continuous with poisonous pedagogy, suggesting that even if Rousseau has a radically different view of the child’s nature, he still positions the child’s will as problem (1983: 97).

**3.** With thanks to Flavia Dzodan for her question after I gave this paper in Amsterdam on January 20 2012, which led to this formulation.

**4.** I will be developing this argument about the queer nature of the will in the longer project from which this paper is drawn. Although the research began as a study of willfulness, I will reflect on the emergence of will as a category of thought, given that willfulness cannot be understood without reference to the will. The research thus follows the work of [Hannah Arendt \(1978\)](#), in offering a genealogy of will, but a genealogy in which the willful subject is given priority. It is this prioritisation of willfulness, I will argue, that allows us to expose the queer potential of will. In the longer project, I will also be engaging with the more established critiques of the will as sovereignty that we would associate with Adorno and Nietzsche as well as Arendt. But I do not want to read the distinction between will and willfulness in these terms: in considering willfulness as an *assignment*, I do not wish simply to *assign* the willful subject to history by reading her through established critiques of the sovereignty of the will.

**5.** Using Foucauldian language, we might say “the will” becomes an object of governance. Nikolas Rose argues: “will in the context of the government or self-government, is something that can be acted upon” (2007: 81). What we learn from *Émile* (a text that somewhat surprisingly is not referred to by Rose either in this article or in his earlier genealogy of freedom) is that will is both an object of governance, and what is supposed to govern: it is will that is called upon to work on the will; it can be the subject and object of a command. I am interested in thinking more about the “call of the will.” For example, we might call upon the will in a situation of difficulty, as if our will is another person, someone who can hear our call, someone who is encouraging us by saying, “come on, you can do it,” or even commanding us rather less kindly “keep going!” The figure of the trainer as a “will enforcer” might thus embody something that is already at stake in our relation to will: the need to think will’s externality in order to be **willing**. It might be interesting to consider the relationship of this structure of will to the Foucauldian model of self-discipline as a kind of internalisation, where the subject takes on or takes in the routine gaze of the other, by disciplining itself. Here the model would be flipped: as a kind of externalisation, the other is asked to take on the routine gaze of the self by **willing** the self. Paradoxically it is through externalisation that the phantom of the will’s internality comes into being (a phantom that Nietzsche rightly calls into question (1990)), such that **willing** is bound up with the very creation of a boundary between the inner and the outer.

**6.** The idea of “the general will” enters political philosophy primarily via Rousseau, though it has a much longer genealogy, in which it is transformed from a theological to secular idea (see [Riley 1988](#)). In my view the best way to reflect on the general will/particular will distinction is through working through the primary metaphor of the social body, which is a metaphor also used by [Rousseau \(1998, 15\)](#). In the longer project, I will offer critiques of Rousseau’s model of the general will and the revival of that model in [Peter Hallward’s \(2009\)](#) work. Rousseau differentiates the general will from the “will of all”: the latter includes

Jump



particular or private wills, whereas what generalizes the will is “not so much the number of voices as the common interest which unites them” (1998, 32). Note also that he suggests “every individual may, as a man, have a particular will contrary to, or divergent from, the general will which he has as a citizen” (18). I hope to offer a different account of the relationship between generality, particularity and divergence, by showing how the generalizing of the will requires the projection of contrariness onto some parts *and not others* (which means that for some parts, citizenship *is* the achievement of a particular will). Rousseau argues that the general will is always right, though he does introduce the possibility of error as the error not of will but of judgment: “the judgment that guides it is not always enlightened” (39). In my account of willful parts, I show how assuming the potential of the general to be wrong is necessary for any political right: this potential to be wrong cannot be overcome precisely because the general fails to express the will of all parts, whether understood in terms of number or interest (in other words, the very gap between “the general” and “the all” can be rewritten *positively* as the gap of willfulness). This does not suggest that we should not aim for a general, but that we must not assume its actualisation at any given moment of political time. I want to suggest that willfulness can be imagined as a political horizon that we cannot and will not transcend. To imagine willfulness in this way would be to keep open the space for parts that are apart; we would not assume apartness or not partness as a threat to the general, but as a sign of its non-exhaustion and openness to futurity. And indeed, if we take up the part of willful parts, we can hear the voices of collective resistance differently, not as assembling a new general body whose rightness is assumed, but as saying “no” to what has been deemed the general body, as refusing to participate in that very body. The final section of this essay considers how the refusal to be part or to take part involves participation.

**7.** In the longer project, I will be examining the primary synecdoche for the worker (and more specifically for those *in service*): the worker as hand. See [Robbins 1993](#).

**8.** My argument locates a wrong in the very requirement to become part and contrasts with, but in my view does not contradict, Jacques Rancière’s model of wrong as “the part of those who have no part.” (2004, 38). I would suggest Rancière’s argument implies a gap between two ways of being part: those who are parts of a social body but have no part in a political body. We can draw here on Mary Poovey’s *Making A Social Body* where she discusses the emergence in the nineteenth century of a distinction between the social body “and the political domain, to which the concept of a body politic properly belongs” (1995, 8). My focus on wrongs concerns the membership of the social body: being counted as parts of this body is how some parts are given a supporting and thus subordinate role in the preservation of the life and happiness of a whole. We can relate the wrong of “becoming part” directly to the naturalization of the division of labour. My aim in following the willful subject around is also to re-theorise antagonism and disagreement at the level of the social. In the following section, I show how the requirement to become part (as a **willing** requirement) is often what disappears from view as an effect of labour, thus creating the impression of the social as harmony and synchronicity.

**9.** David Lammy made this statement on radio in January 2012. The comments were immediately picked up by *The Daily Mail*. See: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2093223/Labour-MP-David-Lammy-Smacking-ban-led-riots.html>

**10.** <http://www.mihirbose.com/index.php/riots-are-elsewhere-so-thought-britain-till-the-hoods-came-out-in-london-and-beyond/>

**11.** This comment was made by the British tabloid journalist Richard Littlejohn and was widely repeated across the media: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2025021/UK-riots-2011-The-politics-envy-bound-end-flames.html>

**12.** My arguments about conditional will can be related to my discussion of conditional happiness, defined in terms of how one person’s happiness is made conditional on another’s ([Ahmed 2010](#): 56–59). I would be tempted to argue that conditional happiness rests on conditional will: to make one’s happiness conditional on another’s depends on being **willing** to make this condition.

**13.** When we use the word “own” we are most likely to hear ownership: what is my own as what belongs to me and not to others. I wonder whether the word “own” can stray by signifying “strayness” in the same way that willfulness can. It is useful to note here that the English word “willful” in the Grimm story is a translation of the German word “*eigensinnig*” which is also sometimes translated as “stubborn.” This word has been crucial in the work of the German social historian Alf Lüdtke, in his investigation of the tactics for survival and resistance employed by German workers in the early twentieth century. He notes “they occupied space and time *for themselves*, and demonstrated their willfulness” (1995, 227, emphasis added). *Eigensinnig* or “self-willed distance” is a way of creating a space of one’s own, of coming apart, or becoming apart from a structured and oppressive environment. Here “ownness” is what allows a survival of “belowness.” Lüdtke points out that *eigensinnig* exists alongside other strategies including workers’ camaraderie. His work usefully shows how “ownness” can be a way of *withdrawing* from the “pressures” of an oppressive world and can even become part of a project world making project. In the Grimm story “ownness” is a rebellion from a command. Just remember: the wrong of the arm is that it ends up **willing** on its own. In the case of rebellious action, “ownness” can also be a diagnosis: a way of implying rebels act out of self-interest or as a way of denying the extent of support for rebellion. And finally we can reflect following Virginia Woolf on feminism as the claim for a “room of one’s own.” We need rooms of our own when the dwellings in which we reside are built by and for others. For those deemed to belong to others (for example, women as men’s own) “ownness” can be a radical action; a refusal to be owned. An act of will is diagnosed as willful *when you are not supposed to have a will of your own*.

**14.** Phenomenology has been concerned with what recedes from consciousness or becomes background. Edmund Husserl considers “the world from the natural standpoint,” as a world that is spread around, or just around, where objects are “more or less

familiar, agreeing with what is actually perceived without themselves being perceived" (1989, 100). The familiar is that which we tend to pass over: to be in agreement with what is perceived allows something not to be perceived. We can rethink the familiar through the category of will. What recedes is *what is in agreement with what has been generalised as will*. This argument explicitly relates recession as an ordinary feature of experiential life to the distribution of power. A queer phenomenology explores how norms can become background when you "successfully" inhabit them (when your particulars are aligned with what is generalized). A body can be what is "in agreement." See also the conclusion to *On Being Included (2012)* which introduces the idea of a "practical phenomenology" exploring how aspects of institutional life tend to recede into the background unless you come up against them.

**15.** Please see chapter 4 of *On Being Included (2012)* for a development of this argument on institutional will. I explore here how institutional will can be related to institutional habit drawing on Hegel (a habit is how an institutions *keeps willing that which no longer needs to be made an object of will*).

**16.** This expression is used in Shakespeare's *Henry V*.

**17.** <http://www.petertatchell.net/politics/protest-against-the-edl-defend-the-muslim-community.htm>

**18.** <http://www.petertatchell.net/politics/tatchell-gets-muslim-hostility-&-support-at-anti-edl-demo.htm>

**19.** Citizenship could be understood as technology of will, a demand that would-be citizens give their allegiance to the national body by aligning their particular will with the national will. A crucial figure in anti-immigrant discourse is that of the "unwilling migrant" or more specifically the migrant who is "unwilling to integrate." If we recall that the word "integrate" derives from the Latin for "whole," then we can see how the demand for integration is a demand for others to become parts of that whole whereby becoming part is understood as being *for* what the whole deems the part is *for*. For a good discussion of national will, see **Hage 1998**, 108–109.

Copyright © 2012 Sara Ahmed and The Johns Hopkins University Press

Jump

## Welcome to Project MUSE

Use the simple Search box at the top of the page or the Advanced Search linked from the top of the page to find book and journal content. Refine results with the filtering options on the left side of the Advanced Search page or on your search results page. Click the Browse box to see a selection of books and journals by: Research Area, Titles A-Z, Publisher, Books only, or Journals only.

## Connect with Project MUSE

[Join our Facebook Page](#)

[Follow us on Twitter](#)

Project MUSE | 2715 North Charles Street | Baltimore, Maryland USA 21218 | (410) 516-6989 | [About](#) | [Contact](#) | [Help](#) | [Tools](#) | [Order](#)

©2016 Project MUSE. Produced by [The Johns Hopkins University Press](#) in collaboration with [The Milton S. Eisenhower Library](#).