AFFECTIVE SUBJECTS

6 The Western feminist stories I have been concerned with require and produce a heroine who is continuous with her past and remains the subject of a familiar present and future feminism. She is the subject of the story told, her trials and tribulations constitute the hurdles overcome. The individual narrative is driven by the extent to which she is characterized as abandoned, successful, betrayed, respected, tenacious, frustrated, or otherwise, and reader engagement is in this sense also saturated with affect: we do or do not identify with the subject of narrative and its objects. As I have suggested throughout part 1, these narratives are contested; they are staged as refutations and resentments of other positions, subjects, and narratives. The arguments circle around subject status, are as much about identifying pretenders to the position of feminist subject, as they are claims to occupy that position. The right to be the heroine, in other words, is one of the main prizes fought over within Western feminist nar-

ratives of progress, loss, and return. Western feminist return narratives are particularly interesting in this respect, insofar as they allow an affective resolution to these contests over history, meaning, and subjectivity. Return narratives allow the feminist present to be shared by subjects with different readings of the same history, with one prerequisite: that each subject acknowledge that her own singular position was previously too emphatic, lacked nuance, and now needs revision.

To restate this argument briefly, return narratives ask subjects of Western feminist progress narratives to admit that they may have been too hasty in rejecting earlier approaches as essentialist and to acknowledge that important feminist political insights have been lost, while they ask subjects of loss narratives to admit that they were too hasty in dismissing important critiques of essentialism's exclusions. Theoretical and political resolution in return narratives relies on agreement that the cultural turn was an abstraction too far, and requires mediation of the twinned affects of hope and despair that characterize progress and loss narratives respectively. In return narratives, then, a broader range of feminist subjects can occupy the Western feminist present, but only on the basis of a shared sense of what has come before. As discussed throughout this book thus far, the affective manifestations of this historiographic investment are a shared sense of loss at feminism's demise and a shared hope that a reinvigorated feminism may be possible in the future. That the subjects of that future feminism will be the same as those concerned with its progress or loss now is never questioned. Indeed, so strong is the attachment to the subject of a Western feminist return narrative being the one to reinvigorate feminist theory and politics that the twinned affects of keen loss and muted hope that underwrite this history are set on textual replay, lest other perceptions of the past and present suggest a different future.

Further, as I argued in chapter 4, "Amenability," the narrative insistence on feminism being over and in need of recovery in the familiar, slightly altered, form that marks return narratives means that the distinction between postfeminist discourses and Western feminist stories about our own recent past comes to rest on the overburdened significance of that feminist subject. If these overlapping narrations of the social world coincide in terms of their historical markers and juxtapositions, the difference must lie in the feminist subject's capacity to reinvigorate rather than abandon what has come before. The difference between a progressive agenda and co-

optation is thus the desire for that *return* to feminism. The answer to the problem of loss that Western feminist storytelling relies on is a redoubling of the affective attachment to that lost object and to one's authority to determine where it may be found, with what methods, and by whom. As I have tried to show in this book, there are particular costs to a presumption of shared agreement about the proper subject of the Western feminist present because it produces a common history that she is presumed to inherit. As we have seen, that history is marked by oppositions between materiality and culture, politics and theory, and good and bad feminist subjects, and relies particularly on a separation between poststructuralism and feminism, whether positively or negatively inflected. Such oppositions produce a history of feminist theory caught into decades and pit racial and sexual meanings and identities against one another. In return narratives the damage done to feminism by a poststructuralism over-associated with sexuality can be rectified by a return to the more pressing concerns of a racialized materialism writ in global terms. As discussed at length in previous chapters, Western feminist storytelling thus instantiates similar chronologies and oppositions to those taken up by postfeminist discourses, in which feminism is also over, sexual freedom constitutes gender equality's ambivalent yet transcendent sign, and continued gender inequality exists elsewhere in cultural or geographical arenas that lag behind.

It is not only a question of overlap, however. In my view, it is precisely the extent to which Western feminist storytelling invests in an absolute difference between a feminist and a nonfeminist position that consolidates rather than alleviates its amenability. It is precisely in the construction of a particular heroine through generational, political, and geographical deflection of contest over feminist meaning that the conditions of overlap emerge. It is precisely the endowing of one feminist subject and not another with the capacity to take feminism forward that produces the shared narrative of feminism as over in the first instance. It thus makes little sense for me to propose a proper *feminist subject* to resolve the power dynamics I have been mapping throughout this book, appealing though that pull may be. This would be as likely to instantiate a singular history as the narratives I have been examining and would circumvent an exploration of the political grammar of Western feminist theory that enables the relationship among Western feminist subjectivity, affect, and historiogra-

phy in the first place. Instead, in this chapter I want to think through what happens when we trouble the relation between subject and object that lies at the heart of Western feminist storytelling. I take this line, not with a view to getting rid of the feminist subject (as if one could), but in order to explore both how to make visible the entanglement of feminist subjectivity, temporality, and exclusion, and in closing, to approach the subject from perspectives that might allow her to signify otherwise, as the subject of an/other political grammar, one of entanglement rather than freedom.

This interest has been present throughout the book, indeed. I have been concerned with exploring and challenging the relations among subject, history, and exclusion in the dominant narratives of Western feminist storytelling in various ways. The tactic of citing journal and time over author constituted a direct attempt to situate repeated claims that might otherwise appear to be individual, shifting analysis away from the subject (who is right or wrong) and onto the political grammar that makes up the narrative strands of feminist stories. This tactic might be thought of as one of diffusion, perhaps, an attempt not to settle disputes but to ask after the terms under which only certain arguments can occur and recur. In chapter 5, I experimented with renarrating feminist storytelling by intervening more directly in the making of the feminist subject of a particular present. Here I "recited" Judith Butler's representation as the theorist both responsible for the transformation of feminism (whether positively or negatively valued) and as primarily reliant on male antecedents, particularly Michel Foucault, for the development of her own critical trajectory. I sought to interrupt the hetero- and hom(m)o-citational practices that provide a separate teleology to feminism outside poststructuralism in order to allow Butler to signify as a different kind of feminist heroine. By suturing her to Monique Wittig instead, I sought to reveal a lesbian materialist history to feminist poststructuralism and to reference a more complex feminist past, present, and future than existing narratives usually allow. In practicing recitation, I hoped to precipitate the imagining of feminist subjects as inheritors of contradictory legacies that cannot be resolved by a return to a fabricated past free of contest.

There are two primary issues that arise from that experiment that I want to take forward to think through Western feminist subjectivity as tethered to temporality and geography in this chapter. The first is the intention to disrupt rather than dismiss the feminist subject. In the last chapter I sought to interrupt the political grammar that produces a recognizable feminist

subject in the present, one whose history cannot be tampered with. The process of recitation was instead intended to allow subjects to emerge whose presence disrupts the generationally determined, damaging spatiotemporalities I have been mapping. I proposed a potential set of realignments that do not simply invest these institutionalized histories with alternative affects, but scramble their component parts in ways that, I hope, resonate to allow a shadow life to be glimpsed, one version of the possible. While imagined and temporary, a feminist subject of the recited present emerged as one with a material queer history, or one carrying the burden of a particularly feminist abstraction. Recitation thus reconfigured the relationship between past and present by focusing on what I took to be formative hauntings; in the process a different subject, one who has not "lost" feminism, began to be visible. This is one subject among many possible feminist subjects, not a singular necessity to pin our hopes on. We cannot, of course, abandon subjectivity, but we can call it to account (in ourselves as much as in others) and explore other modes of historical and textual signification.

The second issue to take forward is the motivated nature of both subject construction and its critique. Recitation cannot supply an alternative history to displace narratives of progress, loss, and return, but should be thought of as a way of *recombining* half-submerged narrative traces from the starting point of political exclusions haunting the present. Yet equally important in this respect has been the recognition of that starting point as engaging my own attachments, my own reading history. I have a motivated relationship to the question of both feminist history and subjectivity, and part of my interest in critiquing these dominant narratives has been that my own status as a feminist subject lacks coherence without this recitation. In highlighting what I consider formative exclusions in feminist political grammar, then, I am also highlighting my own stakes in the field of Western feminist theory. But this is not so much an admission as it is a confirmation of my sense that engaging the political grammar of Western feminist storytelling requires relinquishing a fantasy of neutrality.[1] This is part of the paradox of unravelling the conditions under which Western feminist subjectivity comes to signify in the narratives I have been analyzing; the closer one comes to unpacking its emergent force and misplaced presumptions, the more it seems one is brought up against one's own affective attachments.

Starting from these insights, this final chapter continues to explore the

paradoxes of subject construction as a central feature of Western feminist storytelling. Instead of starting from and attempting to dislodge the narrative building blocks of Western feminist narratives of progress, loss, and return, this chapter engages the subject/object relation that anchors this historiography more directly. For if, as I have argued, the prioritization of a singular Western feminist subject instantiates a particular version of history, it also produces objects (or even other subjects) in the present, whose histories are simultaneously written in what Sara Ahmed has called the moment of "encounter" (2000a). To reconsider a subject/object relation in the Western feminist present, then, may be to imagine other histories and *intersubjective* relationships that are less routine or overdetermined than those I have been unpicking. As part of this approach, I am interested in pushing at and identifying the *limit* of Western feminist subjectivity in a given context. My aim towards the end of the chapter is to home in on the narrative gaps that one cannot rush to fill in: pauses, if you will, in the grammatical construction of subject. Through this final chapter, my concern is with where the limit to the fusion of space, time, and subject in Western feminist theory might be found.[2]

In the first sections of this chapter I explore two related feminist efforts to transform the subject/object distinction, those that focus on empathy and those that focus on agency. Both conceptual developments reflect existing interest in challenging the priority given to the "one who knows" within feminist theory. While theorists of empathy point to the importance of intersubjectivity (the capacity to feel with/for others), theorists of agency extend our understanding of who counts as a subject in the first instance. Feminist theorists such as Lorraine Code (1995b), Patricia Hill Collins (2000), and Sandra Bartky (2002) have theorized empathy as a technique for challenging the myopic world view of the Western feminist subject. A shared focus on empathy for these authors stresses the importance of the feminist researcher extending her view beyond her own subjective concerns and imagining the world, or knowledge, through the eyes of the other. It contrasts autonomy with intersubjectivity and finds the latter to be both more valuable and more in tune with the collective practices and the epistemological judgments marginalized communities make (see particularly Collins 2000). The shift to an intersubjective epistemology is one I generally support, but in this chapter I explore ways in which the practice of empathy often manages rather than transforms the subject/

object distinction I am identifying as a barrier to telling Western feminist stories otherwise. While empathy encourages the proliferation of feminist subjects in the present, it relies on an extension rather than diminution of the subject's capacities and on recognition of agency in the other who is being empathized with. It is always marked by that which cannot be empathized with and draws that limit as a self-evident boundary for what (and who) can be included in feminism itself.

This chapter is equally interested in what happens when empathy fails, when recognition of agency in the other falters, or when misrecognition prevents the development of intersubjectivity. Here I focus on the importance of affect once more, since failed empathy is often expressed through a resurgence rather than diminution of feeling. I theorize ways in which the breakdown of empathy produces a crisis mediated instead by prioritizing "bodily knowledge." Turning from empathy and agency to horror, I suggest that "the unspeakable," that which produces a ripple of visceral horror in the subject, *frames* rather than exceeds the subject/object relation and allows for the continued coherence of a Western feminist subject's narrative in the face of potential rupture. My inquiry asks after what the unspeakable reveals about subjective investments in what can be included in Western feminist stories and after the role affect plays in the constitution of a Western feminist subject's place and time. In the final pages of this chapter I start from those moments of affective intensity to see if they might shed light on what is obscured when we accept the terms under which the Western feminist subject remains intact. What kind of politics emerges at this limit, and the place of the encounter with what remains unreadable for the feminist subject?

EMPATHY

Western feminist theory has long been concerned with challenging a singular focus on the subject as the one who knows. As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, one way in which feminist theorists have sought to extend the boundaries of the feminist subject has been through theorizing empathy as a mode of linking to others and as promoting intersubjective relations over and above individual status in relation to knowledge and practice. In this respect feminists invest in empathy because of its capacity to move the subject beyond the limits of her own

vision. In terms of my critique of the over-investment in the subject of feminism, then, and in the attempt to disrupt the political grammar that produces that subject as one with a singular history, empathy seems worth exploring further as a potentially useful concept.

At its heart, feminist concern with empathy represents an exploration of the best way of developing ethical relations to other people and has been developed particularly strongly in the context of reflections on epistemology and research practice. Thus the question of empathy has been key to feminist perspectives on the production of knowledge, forming a central part of the foundational critiques of objectivity that are understood to lie at the heart of androcentric academic practice (e.g., Alcoff and Potter 1993; Harding 1993). Empathy is understood both as a way of challenging the subject/object distinction that grounds the social sciences for example and as a way of confronting the authority of the speaking or writing subject who represents others (Roof and Wiegman 1995). The empathetic critique is twofold, suggesting the importance of *feeling as knowing* on the one hand, and thus the importance of the researcher or knower as embodied rather than abstracted; and on the other hand, it emphasizes the importance of moving beyond the subject and towards intersubjective practices and modes of knowing (Skaerbaek 2004; Skaerbaek, Duhaček et al. 2006). Ann Oakley's foundational essay on the importance of empathy in interviewing women remains exemplary of both interlocked concerns. For Oakley (1997 [1981]), establishing genuine relationships with her interviewees, getting them to open up to her and share information from a position of trust, forms the core of her critique of the "smash and grab" mode of empirical observation favored by masculinist social science. In Oakley's analysis, it is the ability to feel as and with others that forms the basis of intersubjective trust and that allows for the emergence of a different *quality* of knowledge, as well as its extension to include hitherto marginalized subjects.

The intersubjective dimension of knowledge generation at all stages of the research process is also vital to Sandra Harding's discussion of "strong objectivity" (1993), Nancy Hartsock's development of "standpoint epistemology" (1998), and Lorraine Code's insistence that feminist theorists take "subjectivity into account" (1993). All three theorists emphasize researcher empathy as critical for politicizing knowledge from the margins and for calling into account its own purported neutrality.[3] At the heart of

the critique of objectivity, then, lies not simply an emphasis on subjectivity per se, as is sometimes suggested (Hekman 1990; Hekman 1999), but on relationality. In this respect a Western feminist knowledge project has prioritized the ability to appreciate the other, to render them a subject in, rather than object of, the research process. Patricia Hill Collins puts empathy still more fully front and centre in *Black Feminist Epistemology* (2000), echoing Oakley's insistence on the ability to empathize as a condition of being understood as trustworthy. Collins understands empathy as central to African-American community formation, and real dialogue as the basis for evaluation of knowledge claims within those communities. In this she joins other U.S. feminists of color who stress empathy as necessary for white feminist engagement across cultural, ethnic, and racial privileges (in particular Lugones 1990), a point I return to below. Importantly for my argument here, the development of empathy is thus understood as a direct critique of dominant feminist historiography in that it foregrounds the relationship between the occupation of a subject position and the exclusion both of other subjects and their histories. Hill Collins makes this relation explicit in her emphasis on empathy as already central to the knowledge practices of the marginalized communities she is concerned with, and thus as demonized as the basis of knowledge in contexts of privilege.

Despite the importance of developments, there are many persuasive critiques of feminist empathy in terms of both its emphasis on feeling and its intersubjective dimensions. It is considered problematic when perceived as deriving from women's natural capacities to feel with or for others, for example, or as a positive endorsement of their socially instilled intersubjective capacities. In particular, feminist critics have pointed out that empathy is frequently assumed to arise from self-evidently common interests among women, rather than being worked for, and is unable to account for clear differences of location that require considerable work to overcome or that may remain blocks to understanding (e.g., Bar On 1993; Bailey 2000).[4] These assumptions are likely to lead to sentimental attachment to the other, or worse, substitution of one's own interests for those of the other. Caren Kaplan, for example, argues that declarations of empathy tend to precede the incorporation of difference, rather than signaling enduring respect for the same (1994). Thus empathy may be dismissed on the basis that it extends the self into the other, reinforcing subjective

starting points instead of transforming them, allowing for a gobbling up rather than a genuinely subjective or epistemological movement precipitated by engagement with the other.

Such critiques seem reasonable, certainly, and I share the concern about women's "natural capacities" for feeling. But they have been countered by arguing that these gestures of incorporation are characteristic of *failed empathy*, a "lazy and false empathy in which we take the other's place" (Dean 2003: 96). Such critiques might thus be said to say less about empathy itself and more about the ways in which one may fail to achieve it: a case in point would be "sentimental attachment" as a poor substitute for real empathy. Lorraine Code addresses these concerns directly, insisting that "good empathy" transforms objects of study into living beings and subjects, while "bad empathy" seeks instead to tell someone how they feel (1995a). In bad empathy the subject's needs and expectations are projected onto the other; in good empathy the subject responds to and respects the other as a subject.[5] In Code's view empathy is akin to a feminist "ethic of care" that values intersubjective experience as part of what is and can be known and is an important way of recognizing knowledge as embodied but not static.[6] Bad empathy keeps things as they are; good empathy transforms intersubjective relations. Following Simone de Beauvoir, Code insists that empathy helps to describe and engage particular rather than abstract instances and people, and is thus capable of generating accountable rather than universalizing knowledge. Thus, Code remarks further that "empathy at its best preserves yet seeks to know the 'strangeness,' respects the boundaries between self and other that the 'forbiddenness' affirms" (1995a: 141).[7]

This emphasis on the difficulties attending "good" rather than "bad" empathy is taken up by María C. Lugones in her landmark article "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception" (1990). Lugones argues that if white Western feminists are interested in bridging racial, ethnic, or religious differences (across space or time), they need to accept that this will not be straightforward. She emphasizes the importance of *discomfort* in the process of "travelling towards the other" in her piece, which also stresses that one need not leave home to make this journey. Indeed, for Lugones, lack of discomfort in the genuine attempt to reach out across difference is itself suspect, indicating a potential lack of real transformation on the part of the subject. The presence of discomfort may thus also

be a way of judging empathy's integrity, the difference between good and bad modes. Lugones's work has been taken up by theorists endeavouring to speak or think across cultural and geographical differences among feminists (Sylvester 1995), and in particular to speak or think about practices of female genital cutting (FGC), where questions of incommensurable experience are often starkly brought to the fore in Western feminist accounts (Gunning 1992; Davis 2004a; Pedwell 2007). The consistent tone of these engagements with Lugones, despite other differences in approach, is of the inevitability of that discomfort in empathizing with unfamiliar, specifically non-Western, practices. Indeed, the question of empathy for white Western feminists very often arises specifically in relation to cultural or religious practices thought of as pushing against the limit of what might be considered feminist. As a result it features regularly in considerations, not only of FGC, but also of the meanings of Muslim women's covering practices, for example, where concern is with how far these practices are examples of difference as such and how far examples of patriarchal imposition.[8] In these respects empathy is understood as a way of extending not only the Western feminist subject's perspective, but also which subjects and practices are included in a feminist present and past.

To extend the definitions a little further, then, good empathy will emphasize the independent life of the other subject; bad empathy will project itself onto the other who can only become a subject in the empathetic one's image, and always subsequently. Empathy can be the mechanism through which Western feminist subjects transform their own comfort as subjects in order to appreciate and understand the other, and in the process perhaps a different understanding of the temporal and geographical diversity underwriting feminist subjectivity—or feminism *tout court*—may emerge. Thus, for a range of feminist epistemologists, empathy can help mitigate forms of representational violence that shore up existing power relations between and across sites separated by time and space, as well as between individual subjects. This account seems eminently reasonable; it stresses the work that the Western feminist subject must do in order to recognize other subjects and simultaneously refuses to let her off the hook in terms of responsibility for location, history, and feminist myopia. Yet it remains unclear what the motivation for the Western feminist subject to put herself through this discomfort might be. Interestingly, in an earlier co-written piece with Elizabeth Spelman, Lugones speculates

on possible reasons for undergoing this disorientation, given that it would be easier, and surely more pleasant, not to do so (Lugones and Spelman 1983). Rejecting altruism as a sufficient or appropriate reason (a potential instance of bad empathy, presumably), one laudable incentive proposed is friendship. Friendship is here understood as a prior or emerging investment in the wellbeing of the other person, one that folds one's own happiness into that of others. In this sense, empathy follows a prior intersubjective investment rather than producing it, and the difference between comfort and discomfort can thus be temporarily as well as temporally resolved.

This identification of friendship as one possible reason among others—love, care, necessity, perhaps—to precipitate empathy in the Western feminist subject raises rather than settles several questions I have about its transformative capacities, however. And these questions also seem resistant to being resolved through the distinctions between good and bad empathy upon which so much feminist work in this vein relies. In the first instance, I remain unconvinced that it is always possible to tell the difference between good and bad modes of empathy, particularly when affective attachments are in play. Friendship is complicated, as we know, and not always innocent of projection; I am often drawn to people who remind me of what I think of as good aspects of my own character, for example. Love is at least as complicated, as is care, since these are dynamics in which each participant may feel variously put upon or cherished, and in which I would hazard once more that one cannot always tell the difference. In this sense, it seems insufficient to separate out good from bad empathy, since the insistence that only the former can produce real, honest, politically appropriate intersubjectivity seems at least ill attuned to the actual nature of intersubjective dynamics. But even if we could, for a moment, imagine the difference as absolute and thus good empathy as a clear way of challenging the singular investments and myopias of the Western feminist subject, there are other difficulties with this model I want to explore below.

First, there is a de facto temporality to this process that remains insistent, and that I want to unpick. It has been suggested that the subject called upon to be empathetic and thus precipitate herself into intersubjective relation with, rather than subjective evaluation of, the other must at some level have a prior attachment to the other in order to recognize her as an other-who-will-become-subject. As Lugones indicates, some

affective relation—she focuses on friendship, but does not rule out other attachments—would ideally be in place in order to make the uncomfortable move that will not be reification or projection. And in that respect, as indicated above, attachment usually precedes, rather than being produced by, empathy. If no actual attachment exists, the other that the subject will come to empathize with will need to be transformed in a different way. The relationship is thus a temporally bound one, insofar as it is the other that will become a subject in the eyes of the empathetic one, grammatically speaking, rather than the other way round. It is a relationship between subject and other-subject, then, where I use the term "other-subject" to describe this process of the other's becoming, a process that the empathetic subject has by definition already achieved. The term describes not only a temporal relationship, but also the empathetic subject's viewpoint rather than that of the other-subject in any empirical sense (who may have other ideas about the nature of the relationship in both temporal and hierarchical terms). Empathy does little to challenge the temporal grammar of the Western feminist subject, in other words, even as it suggests ways of expanding the subject's horizons.

Second, although shifts in subject position through empathy are important, they do not really get to the conditions under which (good or bad) empathy can arise or to the conditions under which it is bound to fail. The inclusion of more subjects in the field of knowledge, and a more dynamic relationship to them, is surely a boon for feminist theory, but the conditions of recognition of the other-subject often appear to be entirely in the subject's hands, whether or not an affective attachment already exists. Indeed, rather ironically, good empathy might be said to enhance rather than diminish the powers of the empathetic subject, requiring renewed marshalling of existing reflexive skills and the learning of new ones, in the desire to extend subjective recognition appropriately. Empathy thus in many ways reinforces the *position* of the subject, however the subject herself may have altered, and in this respect preserves the capacities of the subject who can reflect on both self and other.[9]

And there is a further difficulty I want to end this discussion of empathy with, and that is the assumption of reciprocity. The feminist literature on empathy acknowledges that the other-subject may not wish to be so recognized when the empathy is "bad," but it is always assumed that "good" empathy would be appreciated. Indeed, an assumption of reciproc-

ity is what regulates empathetic temporality, since it is key to final mutual recognition of subjects in the present of feminism. But what if the other-subject is not interested in intersubjectivity or refuses the terms of empathetic recognition? To be empathized with could be a horrific prospect, one resulting in the dissolution of self, when the empathetic subject is associated with violence, for example. On this particular point, I have been much influenced by Dasa Duhaček's work on citizenship and intersubjectivity in contemporary Serbia (2006a; 2006b). Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Duhaček highlights the importance of a commitment to generous citizenship without an assumption of reciprocity, since to expect the latter is to ignore the historical and political reasons why this may not be able to be given. Duhaček's development of feminist ethics in this context centres on responsibility over reciprocity in order to mark the historical and political conditions under which certain subjects come to be the ones in a position to extend recognition, while others are not. To expand Duhaček's framework here, even if all the other conditions necessary for good empathy to arise are in place, incommensurabilities of location and perception may well disrupt the subject's ability to transform herself through feeling as/for the other-subject. The other-subject, in other words, may not be interested in sharing.[10] Thus, while I think that existing work on empathy offers a rich starting point for challenging the status of the Western feminist subject as singular heroine of dominant feminist narratives, it cannot be claimed to resolve many of the problems inherent in the subject/object relation I am concerned with here. It is likely to reinforce rather than unpick the position of the empathetic subject, and cannot account for historical or contextual stumbling blocks that frame the possibility of intersubjective relations. I return to the question of what happens when empathy fails later in the chapter, as this lack offers a productive way of thinking about the limit of Western feminist subjectivity; but for the moment, I want to turn to the question of agency and recognition that has implicitly informed the discussion thus far.

AGENCY

The ability to empathize with an other-subject requires a dynamic of recognition that is ultimately, as discussed above, in the hands of the empathetic subject. If good empathy requires an ability to recognize oth-

ers as subjects with lives not reducible to the political, ethical, or ontological frames of the subject, then we need to inquire after the conditions under which that recognition occurs. If, as Nancy Fraser argues, recognition is one of the conditions of democratic participation (1996; 1997; 2001), there are prior questions to be asked about the basis of that recognition. What, in other words, enables recognition, and what prevents it? I want to suggest here that the primary condition implicitly or explicitly required for recognition of other-subjects in feminist theory is the presence of agency. If empathy concerns the subject's ability to feel outside of their own experience and requires a commitment to the possibility of intersubjectivity as the basis of ethical engagement with the world, agency concerns the ability to act as a subject in the first instance. And, of course, this means that the two are linked, in that subjects must be understood to have some measure of self-possession or autonomy in order that empathetic engagement not be a transfer of the subject's own qualities (and hence bad empathy). What I have been calling the other-subject must first be seen as independent both of the subject and of other others and must fit the criteria for being an agent in the Western feminist subject's eyes. While empathetic engagement necessitates some transformation of self on the part of the subject, the burden of proof remains firmly on the part of the other-subject to display requisite agency before empathy is even possible.

The feminist literature on agency is by now quite vast, and I will not attempt a full overview here.[11] But I do want to point to some ways in which the question of agency is key to the relationship between subject and object in Western feminist theory and to the political grammars of Western feminist storytelling I am concerned with. Even in my brief discussion in this section so far, I have made certain claims about agency that are in fact highly contested. Thus, I have already conflated agency with "self-possession," "independence," and "autonomy" in ways that have been variously critiqued as privileging a Western liberal model of political resistance or as a structuralist analysis of power that is ill adapted to an understanding of its complexities. My statements of fact assume that agency marks and can be read primarily through signs of resistance, and it asserts a version of independence that privileges freedom from rather than attachment to context and other subjects. Such a view also presupposes that an example of agency cannot simultaneously be an example of

something else, which enhances a focus on co-optation of a pure politics rather than the amenabilities I have been more interested in unravelling in this project.

Kalpana Wilson provides a useful reminder of why agency as a concept has been so important to feminist theorists (2008), highlighting its history as vexed from a socialist feminist perspective in particular, within which suspicion of agency arises from its focus on individual rather than collective capacities and on an economic model of "individuality" that values only one's ability to enhance (others') capital accumulation. In a rather different vein, Judith Butler's conclusion to *Gender Trouble* also argues for a view of agency detached from individuality on the basis that its over-association with individual capacity ignores both the vagaries of power and the ways in which power acts to make individuals *feel agented* as part of how it operates (1990: 142–49). Despite these well-founded suspicions about agency, both Wilson and Butler note from their different perspectives that one cannot simply jettison the concept of agency because of its potential masking of other social factors. To do so would be to leave subjects in a double bind: subject to power in whatever form and unable to critique it or free oneself from its grasp without raising the spectre of false consciousness or co-optation. Feminism itself—minimally, the belief that gender relations can and should be transformed—has at its centre the assumption that individuals and collectives may act counter to dominant interests while still being subject to their effects, of course. And in this respect agency is bound to remain important, if complex or compromised, within feminist theory.

One of the primary reasons for a continued emphasis on agency concerns this issue of oppressive relations and individual or group capacities, but with a particular focus on challenging discourses of victimization *within* feminism. Such work sees assumptions about where and when women are culturally or socially duped as needing further analysis, and homes in on moments or contexts in which women exercise agency as of primary significance. I am thinking here of Kathy Davis's critical investigations of women's agency in cosmetic surgery (1994; 2003), or the range of writing exploring sex worker agency (O'Connell Davidson 1998; Doezema 2001; Andrijasevic 2003; Agustin 2007). While not ignoring adverse social and political conditions, these theorists advocate taking women's agency seriously precisely in order to understand how power works. Whatever the

differences, what these approaches share is a poststructuralist inflection, in terms of understanding power as negotiated rather than fixed and through attention to representation as key to how meanings are made. Thus Julia O'Connell Davidson and Rutvica Andrijasevic are as interested in how subjects are represented as *agency-less* as they are in where instances of agency may be found.[12] In this respect recent work that prioritizes agency is likely to foreground the investments of the researcher or writer in denying agency to particular individuals or communities and in tracking how theoretical perspectives need to change in order to account for complex models of subjectivity and power.

These combined efforts to critique a feminist "victimization thesis" and pay attention to modes of representation often implicitly or explicitly reference Chandra Mohanty's landmark article "Under Western Eyes" (2003 [1988]), in which she locates the question of agency as part of colonialism. Mohanty critiques Western feminist representations of "Third World Women" as devoid of agency, as passive victims of localized patriarchies and global imperialism. In her analysis of development publications, Mohanty explores the ways in which the gaze is central to the framing of non-Western contexts as lagging behind in terms of gender equality. Representations of who has agency and who does not, for Mohanty, are thus key to temporal and spatial hierarchies in Western feminist theory. Following Mohanty, debates about the meaning of agency and its intersubjective dimensions have been critically tied to debates about culture and difference. Thus transnational feminist scholars have interrogated the ways in which the denial of agency to certain (non-Western) subjects is better thought of as a product of a Western imagination rather than the result of analysis of particular practices, histories, and affects. In a similar vein, Uma Narayan has also asked who we are listening to in order to come to the conclusion that women are subsumed under patriarchy; she suggests that we think carefully about who speaks for tradition, and in whose name (1997; 2000). And Nadje Al-Ali responds to the relentless circulation of Western media images of Iraqi women as passive, oppressed shadows by providing intricate histories of Iraqi women's individual and collective resistance (2005; Al-Ali and Pratt 2008). These theorists, and many others, have emphasized women's actual resistance to the conditions that oppress them as a mark of agency and thus of subject status deserving of recognition.

A linked, but slightly different challenge to the limitations of Western feminist ideas of agency has come predominantly from scholars critical not only of the transnational unevenness of requirements to evidence agency, but also of the assumption that this is best demonstrated in resistant mode. Work in this genre emphasizes agency as likely to be formed through attachment rather than resistance to prevailing norms and builds on the critiques of Western political theory's conflation of autonomy and agency. Saba Mahmood's work is instructive here (2005). Via ethnographic work on the Islamic piety movement in Egypt, Mahmood argues that agency should not measured by its distance from norms, but rather at a contextual level through an examination of how norms are practiced and negotiated. In the process of challenging Western feminist assumptions about *where* agency may be identified, Mahmood's work also queries the autonomous foundations of agency as peculiarly Western, suggesting instead that agency may be practiced and experienced as shared or intersubjective.[13] Sumi Madhok takes the critique of Western modes of agency in a slightly different direction by exploring the practices of rights workers in South Asia. Also through an empirical approach, Madhok demonstrates that these workers' conscious negotiations of the norms they cannot directly challenge constitute a form of agency, offering a persuasive critique of what she terms the "action-bias" of current Western theories (2007).

Western feminist failure to see agency in unfamiliar others is characterized as one of two forms of myopia, then: a failure to see resistance in unfamiliar modes and an insistence that independent resistance is agency's primary sign. In many respects this work to expand the meanings of agency has been highly successful, empirically extending the range of practices understood as indicative of agency and critiquing a Western feminist gaze that seeks only to recognize its mirror image. This work goes a long way towards challenging Western feminist presumptions about who needs saving, from what, and by whom. These interventions do more than force a re-evaluation of current transnational dynamics too. They suggest different histories of feminism in which the Western feminist subject of a return narrative is not the only heroine, or in which the other-subject does not require or want recognition in order to thrive. A re-evaluation of agency appears, then, to have the capacity to disrupt the Western feminist political grammar that I have been concerned with.

But before cracking open the champagne, I want to reflect a little more on the limits of a focus on agency, however reconceptualized, for offering an/other political grammar for Western feminist theory. The first lingering doubt I have about the expansion of agency as offering a way out of Western feminist myopia concerns the exceptionally broad take-up of agency as critical trope, particularly in contexts where the object of critique is feminism. Readers will perhaps be familiar with the antifeminist accounts by writers such as Katie Roiphe (1993) and Christina Hoff Sommers (1994; 2000), who insist that second wave feminism created a victim culture that must be wholly jettisoned if women are to be strong, agented figures in the modern world. For Roiphe and Sommers, feminist attachment to misery and victimhood prevents relationships between women and men, and leaves men unable to express desire for women or assert their own needs without being labelled misogynists. In a different vein, Wilson (2008) revisits Mohanty's figure of the oppressed "Third World Woman" to highlight that transnational development agencies have now adopted "agency" as their primary mode of representation of women. For Wilson, institutions like the World Bank rely on characterizations of women as efficient and responsible (in contrast to men) in order to advance their own neoliberal agendas. Women's "reliability" is thus naturalized as part of their investment in economic development, rather than contextualized as a feature of their primary responsibility for childcare, say, and the oppressive conditions under which women are able to exercise limited choices disappear from view. Agency is thus mobilized discursively as the *opposite of inequality* rather than as part of the negotiation of power relations in constrained circumstances. Ironically enough, then, in both contexts, a failure to embrace agency as characteristic of women's position can be marked as indicative of an anachronistic attachment to sexual and economic inequalities that have now been transformed, reinforcing the very colonial temporalities we are interested in disrupting.

There are aspects of this discursive mobilization of agency as inequality's opposite that also inflect some of the feminist reconsiderations discussed thus far. To return to Mahmood's account of women involved in the "politics of piety" movement in Egypt, my second reservation is that there is a sense that evidence of agency will self-evidently mediate against hasty judgment of practices such as veiling. This assumption also constitutes agency in inverse proportion to harm, and in this respect as a self-

evidently positive force. Yet this is rather odd, since surely agency in itself does not tell us much about the political or ethical *quality* of practices thus characterized: one can be an agent of violence against others, just as one can be an agent for change. In this respect the presence of agency in individuals or groups does not really tell us much about what one might say next, does not necessarily determine whether or not one might want to advocate for or against a particular practice. In short, the fact that women in the piety movement are clearly agented does not mean a feminist could not strongly advocate for abolishing that movement, though it may (and this remains important) alter the basis on which that case is made.

Indeed, this problem of judgment does continue to haunt debates about veiling practices associated with women's Islamic piety in particular. Thus agency may be identified in the political donning of head coverings as part of regime resistance historically (e.g., Afshar 1993; 1998), or as a form of resistance to the imposition of Western norms in officially secular contexts contemporarily (Özdalga 1998; Scott 2007). Alternatively, agency may be located, as in Mahmood's work, in the active and willing participation in religious practice, rather than in resistance to it, as discussed. And of course there is some overlap among these arguments for a given author. Yet extending definitions of agency to include additional practices may simply defer rather than defuse the moment of feminist judgment. On the one hand, Western feminists may simply not accept arguments that situate veiling in these histories of action and affirmation; on the other, they may accept an extended vision of such practices to include veiling as agented.[14] But even in the latter case, which might be understood as a successful challenge to the limit of Western feminist recognition, it is usual to establish a hierarchy or continuum of covering practices. Thus, Western feminist perspectives tend to mark a distinction between covering of the hair but not the face, or covering of the hair and face but not the full body or the eyes, in terms of acceptability. Or there might be an endorsement of covering for politically resistant reasons, but not when insisted upon by a patriarch, say. Such responses continue to affirm one version of agency over the other on the basis of what can be recognized as such by the empathetic feminist subject.

A hierarchical ordering of which practices count as agented means that the question of judgment is shifted rather than resolved. And this deflection of judgment leads to a third reservation about the usefulness of a

focus on agency as the basis for recognition of other-subjects. Agency cannot be endlessly extended to all practices, however resignified, if it is to retain any kind of meaning. It will always operate as a limit to the relationship between the subject and object of inquiry, even if the limit is obscured. If all veiling practices were universally understood as signaling agency in their wearer, for example, a question mark would surely hover over some other practice. Proliferation of which practices may be included does not in itself resolve questions about the basis on which agency is determined, or by whom. Will there not always be others who fail to fit even the most extended definition? In this respect the status of agency as privileged marker of subject status seems misplaced, since it overdetermines the importance of agency in intersubjective relations: for who would claim to exercise continual agency, even within expanding parameters, I wonder? An over-emphasis on agency as the basis for recognition within feminist theory, then, seems to rely on the subject's capacity to extend their horizons to an infinite degree. While flawed, the Western feminist subject need only become *less myopic* about what falls within the range of practices understood as agency in order for recognition to be more democratic. Yet, as suggested, embedded in all the above developments of agency, is the spectre of the limit, both of agency itself (in the self and other-subject) and of the subject's capacity to reach new horizons. In each case, the presence of agency is understood to warrant renewed respect and attention, as though its lack would equally warrant a turn away.[15] In fact, it seems to me that the fetishization of agency within Western feminist theory can often be a way of avoiding the inevitability of judgment, of what happens when agency cannot be the basis of empathetic recognition.

TEMPORALITY

One central way in which the question of agency as the basis for empathetic recognition is mediated, that is, as inevitably raising the spectre of limit, is through a return to the temporalities of the subject I have been exploring throughout. As indicated in this and previous chapters, the Western feminist subject of return narratives becomes a subject of a particular history, one in which feminism has been lost and must be found again. Where it will be found is instructive, since it is through interven-

tions "elsewhere" in contexts assumed (much more broadly than within feminism alone) to lag behind Western feminist equality agendas that a feminist subject will be able to redeem herself. So far in this chapter, I have highlighted how a focus on empathy, while an important way of foregrounding intersubjectivity as key to possible historical and political transformations, instantiates a dynamic between the empathetic subject and the other-subject (who can become a subject only under certain conditions). I have used the term "other-subject" as a way of representing the temporal and hierarchical difference between intersubjective positions in this relationship. My point here is that this is a vision of the one who will be empathized with from the perspective of the subject thus empathizing, not a description of an empirical relationship. Indeed, it is precisely the refusal on the part of real subjects that disrupts this intersubjective dynamic. But the imagined time lag is important, I think, because it describes both a temporal problem of localized empathy, which is always about a relationship in the making, and figures larger problems of temporality in Western feminist storytelling as suggested.

A focus on agency, in contrast, offers the hope of tracing different histories of a range of possible feminist subjects, but as discussed above, leaves a Western feminist subject position largely intact. The relentless search for agency to populate the feminist present shifts the limit of recognition rather than engaging the conditions under which it arises more directly. If agency needs to be present in the other-subject for empathetic recognition not to be a projection of the subject's own needs and expectations, then those who occupy the other side of the limit linger on the outskirts of the feminist scene, threatening to disrupt intersubjectivity if they cannot be made sense of. These others cannot, of course, simply be abandoned within a feminist ethics of intersubjective value: an attempt to fold them back into the precarious present must be made. And in fact, where agency is disputed from a Western feminist position, empathy can still be theorized as central to recognition of the other-subject, if what is recognized is *shared objectification* rather than autonomy. Thus I can put myself in the other's shoes even when their agency is in dispute precisely on the basis of a shared experience of objectification. This is, I think, the basis of arguments such as Leti Volpp's (2001) that compare practices of *un-freedom* across cultural, geographical, and religious sites.[16] Where these comparisons are contemporaneous, they tend, as discussed

above, to be hierarchized on the basis of better or worse harms, rankings that are themselves based on Western narratives of progress, loss, or return.[17] More often, the shared objectification approach does not take place contemporaneously, but links two distinct times and places—the Western feminist subject's past and the other woman's present—in order to be able to imagine a common future. In the case of full veiling or FGC, for example, our own patriarchal past becomes the basis for recognition: we recognize in the other the objectification that we once experienced (Gunning 1992). Thus Western feminists can continue to empathize on the basis of their having also experienced *lack of agency* at a point in the past now over. In a slightly different temporal twist, the Western feminist subject recognizes that the disputed practices concerned were imposed through colonialism rather than through choice (e.g., Davis 2004a). Empathy beyond agency, then, involves a Western feminist subject who can reach back into her own past in order to recognize other-subjects in the present. In doing so, not only is her certainty about where agency lies affirmed, so too is her clarity about where Western feminism has got to. Even if ongoing conditions of objectification are identified in the Western feminist present, these temporal tricks allow these to be theorized as anachronisms, as pertinent to a past that Western feminism has now resolved.

In the various modes of empathy discussed so far, discomfort may be allayed by prior investment in the other's wellbeing, by the extension of agency to mean a broader range of practices, or by asserting a temporal difference that empathy can help transform. In each case, the subject remains intact, if altered. Empathy, then, may undo a subject/object relation, replacing it with a subject/subject relation, but those on either side of the slash are not equal; they are held apart by relations of recognition that are temporally as well as spatially managed. I recognize you; you meet *my* criteria for recognition; I arrived here first among eventual equals. To rephrase, in the historiographic terms that have concerned me throughout this book, empathy as the basis of feminist claims to knowledge and an ethics of intersubjective transformation underwrites rather than challenges the linear temporality that produces that knowing feminist subject in the present. Indeed, I want to state more directly that these empathetic moves precisely enable a Western feminist subject to occupy that position in the plural, sophisticated, yet political present. They describe the limit rather than the resolution of a desire for intersubjectivity.

But what of those moments or relations that cannot be so managed, nor put into narrative according to the established grammar of Western feminist stories? What of the stumbling blocks to empathy that cannot be rerouted via imagined histories of "the West"? What about those practices that cannot be recognized as part of agency—present or future—without the concomitant demise of the status of the one who recognizes? What of practices that cannot be recuperated into the subject/object (or subject/subject) relation by overpopulating a present or future with so many unequal subjects? Looking back can only go so far, it seems to me, towards equalizing intersubjective relations, insofar as this approach too will encounter its limit, will encounter practices or other-subjects that cannot be given a history without disrupting the narrative of the Western feminist subject. The subject may be forced, perhaps, to encounter a history in which she is not recognized or not recognized in ways that she may be content to rest with. She is not so much being expected to open herself up to include, recognize, or relate to the other-subject, nor is she being asked to be accountable for the temporal and spatial effects of her othering practices, important though these requirements may be. The Western feminist subject may, instead, be confronted with a far worse scenario: that she may not be the subject of history at all.

In this understanding of the temporal limit of Western feminist subjectivity, I take my cue from Gayatri Spivak (1999b). Writing of a conference that she was involved in organizing on "Europe and its Others" in 1982, Spivak remarks upon the committee's shocked response to her alternative suggestion of the title "Europe as an Other" (1999b: 199). She understands that "shock" as an interruption to the presumption that however roundly critiqued, the European subject remains at the centre of history. I am convinced that Spivak's resultant proposition—that Western feminist theorists need to interrupt their presumptive status as subjects to alter the grammar of the subject—is a sound one. Not in the sense of a simple inversion, in which the subject turns over the opposition, gaining a perverse pleasure from a chosen objectification that remains reliant on dualism, but through a consideration of how one might figure in an other's history. Indeed, this chapter could be thought of as an attempt to extend Spivak's insight in terms of how one might textually approach the importance of imagining oneself other, rather than seeking endlessly to ward off the limit enshrined in the subject/object relation that governs Western

feminist storytelling. One possibility I want to explore in the rest of this chapter starts from that "shock" that Spivak highlights, from those "interruptions" to the political grammar of the Western feminist subject that force the limit into view.

Shock turns quickly to horror, and in what follows I explore the role of this particular affect in filling the gaps left open by the grammatical failure to secure the subject. When faced with that which cannot be empathized with, when faced with a history that cannot be absorbed into one's own, when faced with the dissolution of the self, affect rushes in to protect, to secure the subjective limit that allows for continued coherence. In this sense horror is not an affect like any other, but one that precisely marks the extent of what the subject can bear. Horror, that which exceeds narration or speech, is always rendered a property of the other rather than the self, of course, as we know from popular culture. In the horror movie genre, the inexpressible lurks in the imagination and in the homestead. It is that which must be guarded against, but which reveals the faultlines or excesses of the everyday. Crucially, the horror genre has been theorized as revealing cultural anxieties about race, sexuality, and gender (Clover 1993; Creed 1993; Halberstam 1995; Eadie 2001), the half-forgotten others that lurk in the shadows and confront the typically white, heterosexual, and suburban subjects with what it is that they have (sometimes literally) buried. Horror thus marks the return of the repressed and its vanquishing restores harmony, even if only temporarily.[18]

Feminist theorists have similarly theorized horror in terms of temporality, as a sign of a haunting of the subject or narrative that cannot be fully eradicated. Most famously, Julia Kristeva situates horror as a visceral response to abjection, to the remembered connection to others and to the socially unacceptable (1982). The abject must be left behind in the psychic development of the subject if she is to be a proper social being, but its presence lingers of course, producing cultural representations of horror of the kind indicated. For Kristeva, the abject is stored in memory, and thus the boundary between past and present is essential in order to retain present subjective integrity. For postcolonial theorists, in contrast to Kristeva's more limited prototype of the universal subject, the horror expressed at the abject that has been left behind in the Western subject's past is more directly politicized. From Franz Fanon (1991 [1952]) through to Ranjana Khanna (2003), abjection folds the psyche and colonial history

together, marking individual and collective development as social as well as familial. For Fanon, the racial unconscious of white and black subjects in colonialism is a mirroring, such that black subjects and collective and political projects must come to terms with self-loathing as part of their constitution in modernity. For Khanna, Western (post)colonial subjects are haunted by a colonial past that cannot be mourned but prevents genuine openness in the present. Further, the political danger lies not in the melancholia of what cannot be incorporated, but in the transformation of that which cannot be mourned into an external object, into *pure past*.

Gayatri Spivak also theorizes a version of the abject that forms part of this postcolonial tradition. For Spivak, "the subaltern" signifies as that which lies outside of the subject/object relation and can be written back into dominant narratives in deconstructive mode (1999b). Spivak reflects most famously on the colonial horror at the figure of the Indian sati (the immolating widow), the one whose death is consistently cited as evidence of pure nature savagery. The sati is, for Spivak, an abject figure that hovers over the Western subject/object relation. She represents a primitive past that must be guarded against for Western subjectivity to retain its sense of itself as civilized. Recognition of the other-subject in the present, here, is thus dependent on his or her being *not-sati*, a subject who has left behind such barbarism, such excessive attachments. Temporality is central to Spivak's understanding of Western subject/object relations, then. Where for Kristeva, the temporality of *individual* development is the primary object of analysis, for Spivak, the temporalities of the subject and colonialism are always intertwined and cannot be thought separately. Indeed she conceives of "the West" itself as having relational meaning to "the Rest" only through its own "willed autobiography . . . [that] still masquerades as disinterested history" (1999b: 208) and considers Kristeva's work to be thus implicated.[19]

The transformation of that which cannot be managed into the subject's past is already familiar from the discussion of agency. Thinking about the temporality of horror via postcolonial theory foregrounds the central role of affect in repeating linear histories of "the West," however. It foregrounds the psychic and political investments of the subject in refusing to accept spaces as shared and narrates subjectivities as linked through violence as much as through empathy. In this respect a focus on a located horror is a similar move to the citation tactics developed in the last chapter. It reveals

what is expelled from narrative in order for the political grammar of the subject to remain intact, and it understands that horror as situated and political, rather than abstract and universal in the Kristevan vein.

Postcolonial theorists do not stop at the horror, however, precisely because of its colonial weight and representational force.[20] Thus the abject is both feared and desired because subject status is conditional on creating and recreating a fantasy life for it, one that can never quite carry its excessive burden. For Spivak, failed writing or speech in the Western subject is a site of possibility because of what is thereby revealed, both about what comprises the unspeakable, and also the limits of subject/object relations. The opportunity for transformation lies not in attempts to become or befriend the other (contra Spelman and Lugones), which will always be fraught with misrepresentation, but in attention to "the site where the line between friend and foe is undone" (1999b: 194).[21] And following recitation, here I want both to illuminate what it is that situated horror reveals and to imagine an alternative historiography starting from that point.

AFFECTIVE RESOLUTIONS

Let us now examine some instances in Western feminist theory where horror is used to negotiate the unspeakable that hovers over the subject/object relation and that threatens to undo the certainty of who the Western feminist subject is and where she has come from. In identifying instances of Western feminist horror (rather than horror in general), I have been particularly struck by the expression of "gut reactions" that delimit arguments about recognition, and in this respect the resurgence of bodily knowledge as the basis of judgment, precisely where empathy fails. Indeed, this centring of the body within affective disruptions to narrative coherence constitutes evidence of two kinds. The perceived violation or restriction of the bodily boundaries of another—through obscuring it in relation to religious covering practices, or through direct intervention in the examples of FGC and transsexual surgeries that I discuss here[22]—is frequently the catalyst for empathy. But if it fails, for any of the various reasons already discussed, then a bodily shudder, the experience of horror, closes off empathy and naturalizes the limit of connection across time or space.

The experience of horror that causes a temporary break in Western feminist subject/object relations may precipitate a straightforward judgment of the other-subject or practices concerned as unacceptable. In other words, the experience of horror may well mark the stopping point of the deferral of the limit discussed above. This is very clearly the case in some responses to FGC, in which the horror itself is repeated textually as evidence in several ways. Paradigmatically, Mary Daly's early account of "African Genital Mutilation" designates cutting practices as "Unspeakable Atrocities" in her chapter title (1978), and she begins by stating, "There are some manifestations of the sado-ritual syndrome that are unspeakable —incapable of being expressed in words because they are inexpressibly horrible" (1978: 155). Daly underscores her horror by providing a startling level of detail of different cutting practices in contrast to her declaration of their inexpressibility: she dwells at some length on their relative severity and the forms of individual and collective violence necessary for their enactment. Similarly, Fran Hosken provides example after example of cutting practices worldwide, collected in her extensive, later updated, report (1994 [1982]).[23] The report is filled with detailed eyewitness accounts of FGC practices that teach horror to the reader, if they did not already experience it.

This repetition of the unspeakable has several effects. It transmits the horror to the reader, producing agreement about the limit of who can be considered to possess agency, who and what can be brought intact into the present of feminist subjectivity. But it also constitutes evidence of the harm itself, representing the mutilated as wholly acted upon. On the one hand a portrayal then, and one Chandra Mohanty directly critiques as contributing to hierarchical subject/object relations (2003 [1988]), yet at the same time an affective transfer that catches the reader and precipitates a mirrored encounter with the limit. In similar vein to Mohanty, Martha Nussbaum points out that this representational repetition characteristic of discussions of FGC risks fetishizing the practice, and she endorses the view that on occasion "the fascination with FGM contains at least an element of the sensational or even the prurient" (1998: 126). And this is indeed the contradiction: on the one hand, FGC practices are too horrible to describe; on the other, the reader or audience must be schooled in their horror if they are to take the same stance.[24] Indeed, despite her warning, Nussbaum herself repeats descriptions of scenes of forced cutting of young girls in her

short chapter on the subject, a narrative choice in line with her argument against unhelpful dissembling and the importance of a clear stance against cutting practices.

As in Western feminist representations of FGC, the horror of transsexual mutilation is often fetishized through such repetition of detail, most notably in Sheila Jeffreys's work (2002a). Images and descriptions float before the reader's eye, varying only slightly and producing a feeling of nausea that only this level of relentless reiteration can accomplish. To turn away in that moment would, rather ironically, be an admission of lack of care. In a similar vein, Germaine Greer presents what she believes to be a witty account of her own horror when expected to shake a transsexual woman's hand (1974). Importantly, Greer assumes shared feminist revulsion at what she describes as the large, hairy male-to-female transsexual hand that she recoils from touching. For Greer, this horror is both objective—the hand is self-evidently horrible—and subjective—a feminist will know that this is a masquerade and fail to be convinced. The horror itself is enough to justify lack of empathy, since it marks an other already beyond the pale. The irony of course is that the distinction relies on an investment in a natural female body that might otherwise be considered suspect from a feminist perspective, as Myra Hird similarly notes of Tamsin Wilton's over-reliance on a menstruating female subject to mark the trans/woman distinction (Wilton 2000; Hird 2002). The feminist present and future must be spearheaded by a female-bodied subject. The use of horror to mark an absolute distinction between feminists and transsexuals also positions transsexuals as aggressors, as actively seeking to undermine feminism.[25] And in both a Kristevan and Spivakean sense, this is not simply paranoia: Greer's shudder marks the extent of what can be incorporated within a feminist narrative of which she is to remain a coherent subject.

The judgment arising from horror in both examples is of barbarism, the experience of which cannot be transformed into agency; and that barbarism clearly marks the limit of what a Western feminist subject can be expected to "allow for" as part of the feminist present. It highlights a clear limit to empathy and resolves any ambivalence about that relationship. Jo Doezema makes a similar point about Western feminist responses to the position of the "Third World Prostitute," describing the force of horror as creating "wounded attachments" that belie the separation that the affective recoil enacts (Doezema 2001).[26] This mode is extremely common:

one morning in the final stages of editing this book, I awoke to Geraldine Brooks' comment in a broadsheet article on Muslim women's human rights that "I find the kind of moral relativism that justifies practices such as female genital mutilation disgusting and fatuous" (2009). My concern here is not whether or not FGC should be stopped or by whom, but with the affective basis of the judgment. Brooks' somewhat throwaway disgust (the article does not otherwise discuss FGC) marks the limit of Western feminist subjectivity in two ways, in fact. It marks a limit in order to produce clear judgment, and it also frames her more open argument about religious veiling as one that can be taken seriously as nonrelativist. Her affective certainty here allows her reader to consider her less absolute position elsewhere.

Horror not only marks Western feminist narratives in which a final judgment of the limit of the subject/object relation is the result, however. While less likely to utilize the *repetitive* mode discussed above, a more ambivalent position will also mobilize shock or horror in negotiating the limit of how far agency may be extended. Thus, Isabelle Gunning begins her article that argues for the importance of cross-cultural empathy in consideration of FGC with the following preamble:

> In the spring of 1990, I re-encountered a practice that I had for many years found distressing, that of female genital surgeries. . . . As I started my research, I continued to feel anger and revulsion at the practice and a strong desire to see it eradicated as quickly as possible. (1992: 189)

In her article, the "distress . . . anger and revulsion" she feels becomes a primary resource for adjudicating between practices, either now or in the past. Her revulsion, then, precipitates a hierarchical and temporal ordering of the kind discussed earlier, so that she can be clear about which practices are acceptable or unacceptable for feminism. There is a similar process at work in Kathy Davis's response to Wairimu Njambi's article in *Feminist Theory*, a piece that focuses on the potential pleasures of FGC in social context (2004). The three theorists asked to respond are broadly sympathetic to her line of argument and mark their appreciation of her insistence on the importance of respect for cultural difference and interpretation in FGC debates (Castañeda 2004; Davis 2004a; Henry-Waring 2004). All three remark too on Njambi's useful emphasis on African women's agency in seeking circumcision, on the ways that such an analysis is helpful for

making sense of a range of practices usually thought of as harmful, and for linking histories and forms of cutting cross-culturally. In a supportive tone, then, Kathy Davis confirms that "feminists in the west need to listen to the voices of women who engage in genital cutting, need to involve themselves in self-critical analysis of their own histories of colonialism and racism, and should treat female circumcision as a cultural bodily practice" (2004: 305). Yet all three theorists also stress the importance of "taking a stand" against relativist arguments that suggest *any kind* of FGC practice may be acceptable.

As Gunning did, Davis begins her response with her confession:

> Female circumcision—or genital cutting—among African women evokes a contradictory mix of feelings in me, as it does with many feminists, ranging from a vicarious "ouch" to anger at patriarchal structures, which control women's bodies and sexuality, to curiosity about why women defend and even embrace a practice which is painful and dangerous to their health. (2004: 305)

That "vicarious 'ouch' " guides Davis's assessment of certain practices and not others as acceptable within a feminist framework and underwrites her theoretical argument that the alternative to this judgment, namely cultural relativism, encourages an "indifference to the suffering experienced" by women undergoing the practice (2004: 305). Davis's "ouch" is represented as what allows her to empathize with other women's suffering. It links her body to those of others; she experiences their pain at the level of her own body. But this "ouch" also marks off certain practices and bodies as unacceptable prior to the encounter with the other-subject under consideration. It is a response to "female circumcision" in general. It is an anticipated "ouch" that she does not actually experience and that creates for her the requisite distance to inspire curiosity about a practice her affect makes her doubt the ability to defend. In other words, Davis's affect provides conditions—theoretically, an antirelativist stance—that determine the limits of the empathy they also generate.[27]

As Claudia Castañeda suggests in her own response to Njambi's article, the division of practices into the more or less violent, the more or less agented or acceptable, is precisely a way of mediating the horror of "the unspeakable" in work on FGC. Castañeda argues that a focus on practices deemed "less harmful" (2004: 314) allows for comparisons to be drawn between Western and non-Western "speakable" practices, but does not

circumvent the question of how to consider "the unspeakable" in ethical or intersubjective terms. Following Castañeda, I contend that it is the ranking of FGC practices via horror that pushes abjection back beyond the subject/object relation where it belongs. Rather than producing clear-cut judgments, as in the examples above, the affectively determined ranking allows for empathy through bodily experience in relation to some practices, but marks a limit beyond which the subject cannot go. It also marks all practices as fully known and readable from the subject position.

As in the FGC debates, horror at transsexual surgery is also expressed by those more generally sympathetic to its subjects and their claims to authenticity. In her argument with Tamsin Wilton mentioned above, for example, Myra Hird defends transsexual subjects against a final judgment of their unnaturalness, but follows in the queer tradition of seeing transgender realignments as more progressive than surgery (2002). Surgery is a self-evident ill that belongs to the past of a progressive feminism that allows a proliferation of genders (Hausman 1995). The agency of the transsexual taking up surgery is certainly avowed, but the contradiction between its horror and its necessity can be resolved in the long run. In the process, it is the other-subject who must transform themselves once again, rather than the empathetic feminist subject.

But horror is not only something experienced by other people, of course. I feel it too. It marks the limits of my own empathetic intersubjectivity just as surely as it does Daly's, Gunning's, Jeffreys's, and Hausman's. I have already mentioned being *startled* and feeling *nauseous* at the repetitions of horror in feminist accounts of both FGC and transsexual surgeries. These are not neutral responses, but draw me into an intersubjective encounter of my own. They confront me with the same potential limit to subjectivity and force me to consider how far my own empathy might extend, and when I will retreat to "save myself." I am as invested as the theorists of FGC I find easiest to critique. I too crave the repetition of the horror, coming back to the texts and experiencing a bodily satisfaction at the certainty of what I will find there. I feel sick. I feel sick at the descriptions, sick at my affect, want to gag. I put the texts down, come back to them later. The same thing happens, and the feeling starts to have a guilty pleasure of its own. Intellectually, I prefer the vacillations of Davis and Henry-Waring, and thus the hold the repetition has on me is amplified by my shame.[28] Shame here relies on those "horrors" I am drawn to not being a part of my subjective present, of course; it marks the temporality of my

own subjectivity as surely as it does that of those I have been engaging. We are attached, the fantasy of the other and I.

Engaging the author's horror as I have been produces a relationship to the author in the reader, too, provokes a visceral reaction that reminds me of Susan Stryker's rage at attempts to deny the history and subjects of transgenderism (1994). To continue to think through some of my own affective responses rather than those of other Western feminists, let me try and track my own affect in relation to some of the narratives I have been examining in this section. When reading Sheila Jeffreys I am enraged at the ease of her judgment, protective of the subjects she renders as objects. I am furious, and rightly so I insist, when Tamsin Wilton prefers to reify a menstruating female body rather than conceive of a range of possible bodily "origins" to gender identity. But reading my excessive (and dismissive) affects as altruism or protectiveness as I have oddly phrased it here may be misplaced. I am also astonished that I have to read such nonsense, astonished that such work is published in this day and age. Has this argument not already been had, and been won? The encounter with the author's horror, then, also forces me to come face to face with my own certainty as inheritor of a Western feminist progress narrative, a certainty now tempered with paranoia: perhaps these theorists are making a comeback? Outrage (a kind of combination of rage and astonishment), then, indicates that I am more attached to a progress narrative—within which transsexuals are recognized agents, certainly, but which is much less troubled by transgendered subjects if it is honest—than I might like to admit. The pleasure in occupying that narrative high ground is tempered by the realization that progress narratives emphasizing fragmentation are not necessarily any more appealing to transsexual subjects than loss or return narratives in this respect. My own horror, in other words, also affirms a limit to subject/object relations in Western feminist theory in the face of a possible disruption to my status as its author. Horror intervenes in both contexts to cast out the abject, to reconfigure my feminist subjectivity as coherent, and to mark others as fully readable within its singular temporality.

CONCLUSION

Returning to Spivak's invitation to consider "Europe as Other," we might want to start from these moments of affective rupture in an attempt to trace narrative otherwise. It seems to me that there are two different ways

of doing this when we start from what horror forecloses. The first concerns the way in which the other-subjects represented in these affectively overloaded accounts will always be in excess of their descriptions. In this respect, a serious, ethical engagement with transsexual subjectivity might minimally start from an acknowledgment that surgery may be experienced as both past and future freedom for the subjects concerned. What is rarely considered in Western feminist accounts of transsexuality, for example, is the pleasure of transsexual surgery, the inseparable significance of it to becoming a transsexual subject. As Jay Prosser indicates in his reading of transsexual autobiographies, transsexual subjects frequently embrace their surgery, relish the scars, and remember the process as formative of, rather than a by-product of, transsexual subjectivity (1998). In contrast, disgust and horror are reserved for the experience of the wrongly sexed body and its expected relationship to gender. And to return to Njambi, what cannot be contemplated in the range of Western feminist accounts discussed above is that the practice of FGC may be experienced neither as an oppression to be left behind nor as an unspeakable horror or even unpleasant necessity. What is inconceivable is that any FGC practice may be actively embraced, pleasurably anticipated, and experienced as a marker of becoming adult or becoming a member of a desired community. Other subjects have other histories they author, it seems.

But thinking from affect into the other-subject may not only be a question of allowing for subjectivity without the necessity of recognition in extant feminist terms. It may also require an acknowledgment that one is already in the history of the other-subject and not in ways that fit with the desire for heroism. Njambi's and Prosser's pleasures may also remake us *as others* in narratives of subjects with different spatio-temporalities. This points us to the potential importance of a politics of difficulty, of entanglement, in which one is the impediment and not the solution. Is there a way of seeing through another's eyes historiographically rather than empathetically, I wonder? If we think for a moment about the limit figure for Western feminist theory of the fully covered Muslim woman, the one that cannot be incorporated into the comparative Western frame, might we ask how starting from horror alters subject/object relations in a slightly different way. If we imagine the liveliness of this "figure" looking at us, what does she see? Perhaps she sees, as Joan Scott tells us, that a Western feminist narrative of achieved secular gender equality is predicated on our availability to a

(structurally) heterosexual male gaze (2007). She no doubt sees that sexual liberation and gender liberation are curiously intertwined in Western feminist subjectivity; and no doubt she sees a denial of that as central to the critique of her covering. Or, in the context of FGC, Western feminist horror that marks the limit to the subject/object relation is attached to the infibulated woman, as we know. But for her, perhaps, a Western feminist narrative requires a life and body unmarked by pain, requires subjection to belong to the past. The horror precludes facing the ways in which we have not left gender inequality behind at all, perhaps. My visceral shudders instantiate an affective fantasy I can live with. Yet in her eyes, I am more similar to the antirelativists or feminist imperialists, perhaps even colonists, than I would like to acknowledge, projecting a fantasy in order to keep my gender and raced subjectivity intact. And what of the transsexual subject? What does s/he see? Perhaps similarity rather than difference between hostile and favorable feminist accounts, both of which rely on a negation of enjoyment of the surgeon's knife. S/he recognizes perhaps instead the surgeon, or the hormone-giver, who recognizes the subject s/he strives to embody as well as be.

But I am getting carried away. These figures do not see me, tell me, warn me, or chide me. They do not reveal layers of history that my subject status requires I deflect. I have, despite Spivak's warnings, raced off to find my "real Caliban . . . forgetting that he is a name in a play" (1999a: 118). Such reversals do little to alter the presumptions of Western feminist subjectivity, overloading the alternative with an excess of intentionality, constructing her or him as peculiarly aggrieved. Such visions require no work, only admission, on my part. I am in danger of inventing another history that tells me the truth about myself. Starting from rather than ending with affect in this chapter certainly indicates a different history to a feminist subject/object relationship and may interrupt the political grammar of the Western feminist subject, even if only for a moment. Recognition of Western feminist horror as another subject's potential pleasure may disrupt spatial and temporal accounts that have a singular subject in the present. But this cannot be the basis for the writing of an alternative, better, history. This would be masochism indeed. But further, it would be to allow other subjects to carry the burden of feminist judgment and of possible feminist futures in ways that refuse accountability for the amenabilities of feminist stories that have been my concern throughout this book.

Instead, what I want my exploration of affect to do here is point to the limit of self-knowledge, and invariably of knowledge of the other, as the starting point of political engagement. I want to point to the entanglement of the space of the present encounter (imagined or real) as the space of work, rather than the space that must be cleaned up in order for judgments to occur. Refusing to resolve the limit, as with recitation, may open up a vision of what is lost when we invest in progress, loss, or return narratives and to remake history from that perspective. Judgments that are based in the protection of a singular vision of a Western feminist past, present, and future are bound to reproduce rather than challenge the amenability of Western feminist political grammar. They make it impossible to challenge assumptions about inequality in anything other than the most banal ways. Staying with the limit, I want to suggest, offers a space for feminist engagement that assumes amenability of feminist stories and subjects rather than seeking first to separate these out from the complex conditions of contemporary gendered meaning. Perhaps we can break with Western feminist narratives of progress, loss, and return, not because we love others as ourselves, but because we would like a present and a future with some unpredictability in them.