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INTRODUCTION

Why Happiness, Why Now?

Happiness is consistently described as the object of human desire, as being what we aim for, as being what gives purpose, meaning and order to human life. As Bruno S. Frey and Alois Stutzer argue, “Everybody wants to be happy. There is probably no other goal in life that commands such a high degree of consensus” (2002: vii). What they are describing is perhaps a consensus that happiness is the consensus. Do we consent to happiness? And what are we consenting to, if or when we consent to happiness?

Even a philosopher such as Immanuel Kant, who places the individual’s own happiness outside the domain of ethics, argues that “to be happy is necessarily the wish of every finite rational being, and this, therefore, is inevitably a determining principle of its faculty of desire” (1788/2004: 24). And yet Kant himself suggests rather mournfully that “unfortunately, the notion of happiness is so indeterminate that although every human being wishes to attain it, yet he can never say definitely and consistently what it is that he really wishes and wills” (1785/2005: 78). If happiness is what we wish for, it does not mean we know what we wish for in wishing for happiness. Happiness might even conjure its own wish. Or happiness might keep its place as a wish by its failure to be given.
The Happiness Turn

What do I mean by “the happiness turn”? It is certainly the case that numerous books have been published on the science and economics of happiness, especially from 2005 onward. The popularity of therapeutic cultures and discourses of self-help have also meant a turn to happiness: many books and courses now exist that provide instructions on how to be happy, drawing on a variety of knowledges, including the field of positive psychology, as well as on (often Orientalist) readings of Eastern traditions, especially Buddhism. It is now common to refer to “the happiness industry”: happiness is both produced and consumed through these books, accumulating value as a form of capital. Barbara Gunnell (2004) describes how “the search for happiness is certainly enriching a lot of people. The feel-good industry is flourishing. Sales of self-help books and CDs that promise a more fulfilling life have never been higher.”

The media are saturated with images and stories of happiness. In the UK, many broadsheet newspapers have included “specials” on happiness and a Bbc program, The Happiness Formula, was aired in 2006. This happiness turn can be described as international; you can visit the “happy plant index” on the World Wide Web and a number of global happiness surveys and reports that measure happiness within and between nation states have been published. These reports are often cited in the media when research findings do not correspond to social expectations, that is, when developing countries are shown to be happier than overdeveloped ones. Take the opening sentence of one article: “Would you believe it, Bangladesh is the happiest nation in the world! The United States, on the other hand, is a sad story: it ranks only 46th in the World Happiness Survey.” Happiness and unhappiness become newsworthy when they challenge ideas about the social status of specific individuals, groups, and nations, often confirming status through the language of disbelief.

The happiness turn can also be witnessed in changing policy and governance frameworks. The government of Bhutan has measured the happiness of its population since 1972, represented as Gross National Happiness (Gnh). In the UK, David Cameron, the leader of the Conservative party, talked about happiness as a value for government, leading to a debate in the media about New Labour and its happiness and “social well-being” agenda. A number of governments have been reported to be introducing happiness and well-being...
as measurable assets and explicit goals, supplementing the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with what has become known as the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI). Happiness becomes a more genuine way of measuring progress; happiness, we might say is, the ultimate performance indicator.

Unsurprisingly, then, happiness studies has become an academic field in its own right: the academic journal Happiness Studies is well established and a number of professorships in happiness studies now exist. Within academic scholarship, we have witnessed a turn to happiness within a range of disciplines, including history, psychology, architecture, social policy, and economics. It is important to witness this turn, reflecting not simply on happiness as a form of consensus but on the consensus to use the word happiness to describe something.

Some of this work has been described under the rubric of “the new science of happiness.” This is not to say that the science of happiness is itself new; many of the key texts in this area offer revivals of classical English utilitarianism, in particular, the work of Jeremy Bentham with his famous maxim of “the greatest happiness for the greatest number.” As Bentham explains in A Fragment of Government “it is the greatest happiness of the greater number that is the measure of right and wrong” ([1776] 1988: 3). Bentham is himself drawing on an earlier tradition, including the work of David Hume as well as Cesare Beccaria and Claude Adrien Helvétius. The science of happiness shares a history with political economy; just recall Adam Smith’s argument in The Wealth of Nations that capitalism advances us from what he might call “miserable equality” to what we could call “happy inequality” such that “a workman, even of the lowest and poorest order, if he is frugal and industrious, may enjoy a greater share of the necessaries and conveniences of life than it is possible for any savage to acquire” ([1776] 1999: 105).

Of course, nineteenth-century utilitarianism involves an explicit refutation of such a narrative, in which inequality becomes the measure of advancement and happiness. Bentham, following Alexander Wedderburn, describes the principle of utility as dangerous for government: “a principle, which lays down, as the only right and justifiable end of Government, the greatest happiness of the greatest number — how can it be denied to be a dangerous one? dangerous to every Government, which has for its actual end or object the greatest happiness of a certain one” ([1776] 1988: 59). Despite this belief that every person’s happiness should count equally (the happiness of many refuses to elevate the happiness of any one), the utilitarian tradition did uphold the principle that increased levels of happiness function as a measure of human progress. Émile Durkheim offered a forceful critique of this principle: “But in fact, is it true that the happiness of the individual increases as man advances? Nothing is more doubtful.” ([1893] 1960: 241)

One of the key figures in the recent science of happiness is Richard Layard, often referred to as “the happiness tsar” by the British media. Layard’s important book Happiness: Lessons from a New Science, first published in 2005, begins as a critique of the discipline of economics for how it measures human growth: “economics equates changes in the happiness of a society with changes in its purchasing power” (ix). Layard argues that happiness is the only way of measuring growth and advancement: “the best society is the happiest society.” One of the fundamental presumptions of this science is that happiness is good, and thus that nothing can be better than to maximize happiness. The science of happiness presumes that happiness is “out there,” that you can measure happiness and that these measurements are objective: they have even been called “hedonimeters” (Nettle 2006: 3).

If the science of happiness presumes happiness as being “out there,” then how does it define happiness? Richard Layard again provides us with a useful reference point. He argues that “happiness is feeling good, and misery is feeling bad” (6). Happiness is “feeling good,” which means we can measure happiness because we can measure how good people feel. So “out there” is really “in here.” The belief that you can measure happiness is a belief that you can measure feelings. Layard argues that “most people find it easy to say how good they are feeling” (13). Happiness research is primarily based on self-reporting studies measure how happy people say they are, presuming that if people say they are happy, they are happy. This model both presumes the transparency of self-feeling (that we can say and know how we feel), as well as the unmotivated and uncomplicated nature of self-reporting. If happiness is already understood to be what you want to have, then to be asked how happy you are is not to be asked a neutral question. It is not just that people are being asked to evaluate their life situations but that they are being asked to evaluate their life situations through categories that are value laden. 9 Measurements could be measuring the relative desire to be proximate to happiness, or even the relative desire to report on one’s life well (to oneself or others), rather than simply how people feel about their life as such.
It matters how we think about feeling. Much of the new science of happiness is premised on the model of feelings as transparent, as well as the foundation for moral life. If something is good, we feel good. If something is bad, we feel bad. The science of happiness thus relies on a very specific model of subjectivity, where one knows how one feels, and where the distinction between good and bad feeling is secure, forming the basis of subjective as well as social well-being. Cultural studies, as well as psychoanalysis, may have an important role to play in these debates by offering alternative theories of emotion that are not based on a subject that is fully present to itself, on a subject that always knows how it feels (see Terada 2001). Cultural and psychoanalytic approaches can explore how ordinary attachments to the very idea of the good life are also sites of ambivalence, involving the confusion rather than separation of good and bad feelings. Reading happiness would then become a matter of reading the grammar of this ambivalence.

Happiness research does not simply measure feelings; it also interprets what it measures. Measuring happiness primarily generates knowledge about the distribution of happiness. Happiness research has produced databases that show where happiness is located, which are largely predicated on a comparative model. Happiness databases show us which individuals are happier than others, as well as which groups, or nation-states are happier than others. The science of happiness makes correlations between happiness levels and social indicators, creating what are called “happiness indicators.” Happiness indicators tell us which kinds of people have more happiness; they function not only as measures of happiness but also as predictors of happiness. As Frey and Stutzer argue in Happiness and Economics, social indicators can predict how happy different kinds of persons will be, creating what they call “happiness psychograms” (2002: 7).

One of the primary happiness indicators is marriage. Marriage would be defined as “the best of all possible worlds” as it maximizes happiness. The argument is simple: if you are married, then we can predict that you are more likely to be happier than if you are not married. The finding is also a recommendation: get married and you will be happier! This intimacy of measurement and prediction is powerful. The science of happiness could be described as performative: by finding happiness in certain places, it generates those places as being good, as being what should be promoted as goods. Correlations are read as causalities, which then become the basis of promotion. We promote what we call in the first chapter “happiness-causes,” which might even cause happiness to be reported. The science of happiness hence redescribes what is already evaluated as being good as good. If we have a duty to promote what causes happiness, then happiness itself becomes a duty. I will explore the significance of “the happiness duty” throughout this book.

This is not to say that happiness is always found. Indeed, we might even say that happiness becomes more powerful through being perceived as in crisis. The crisis in happiness works primarily as a narrative of disappointment: the accumulation of wealth has not meant the accumulation of happiness. What makes this crisis a “crisis” in the first place is of course the regulatory effect of a social belief: that more wealth “should” make people happier. Richard Layard begins his science of happiness with what he describes as a paradox: “As Western societies have got richer, their people have become no happier” (2005: 1). If the new science of happiness uncouples happiness from wealth accumulation, it still locates happiness in certain places, especially marriage, widely regarded as the primary “happiness indicator” (see chapter 2), as well as in stable families and communities (see chapter 4). Happiness is looked for where it is expected to be found, even when happiness is reported as missing. What is striking is that the crisis in happiness has not put social ideals into question and if anything has reinvigorated their hold over both psychic and political life. The demand for happiness is increasingly articulated as a demand to return to social ideals, as if what explains the crisis of happiness is not the failure of these ideals but our failure to follow them. And arguably, at times of crisis the language of happiness acquires an even more powerful hold.

Positive Psychology

Given that this new science rests primarily on self-reporting, it involves an important psychological dimension. Within psychology, we can also witness a happiness turn. Much of this work is described as “positive psychology,” which begins as an internal critique of the discipline. Michael Argyle argued that “most work on emotions in psychology has been concerned with anxiety, depression and other negative states” (1987: 1). Or as the editors of the volume Subjective Well-Being argue, following Ed Diener, “Psychology has been preoccupied less with the conditions of well-being, than with the opposite: the
determination of human unhappiness" (Strack, Argyle, and Schwarz 1991: 1). While the science of happiness "corrects" the tendency of economics to focus on economic growth at the expense of happiness, the psychology of happiness "corrects" the tendency of psychology to focus on negative feeling states at the expense of happiness.

We can start with Michael Argyle's classic The Psychology of Happiness (1987). He defines the project of his book as follows: "This book is primarily concerned with the causes and explanations of positive happiness, and how our understanding of it can be used to make people, including ourselves, happy" (1). We can immediately see how happiness becomes a disciplinary technique. Positive psychology aims to understand "positive happiness"—by providing explanations of its causes—as well as to use this knowledge about happiness to create happiness. Positive psychology aims to make people happier. Positive psychology is positive about positive feeling; it presumes the promissory nature of its own object.

At one level, this seems a wise counsel. Surely, feeling better is better, and we all want to feel better? Surely, all knowledge should be transformative and predicated on an impulse to improve life worlds and capacities for individuals? What is at stake here is a belief that we can know "in advance" what will improve people's lives. Making people happier is taken up as a sign of improvement. The very "thing" we aim to achieve is the "thing" that will get us there. Positive feeling is given the task of overcoming its own negation: feeling positive is what can get us out of "anxiety, depression and other negative states" (1). To feel better is to be better—positive psychology shares this presumption with the economics of happiness. Here there is a stronger argument: to feel better is to get better.

Argyle relies on self-reporting as an objective measure of the subjective: "We shall rely to a large extent on subjective reports of how people feel: if people say they are happy then they are happy" (2). He then describes certain institutions as good insofar as they are likely to promote happiness: "the greatest benefits," he suggests, "come from marriage" (31). Happiness involves developing a certain kind of disposition: "Happiness is part of a broader syndrome, which includes choice of rewarding situations, looking on the bright side and high self-esteem" (124). Individuals have the project of working on themselves, governing their souls, to use Nikolas Rose's (1999) terms. Such projects are described as forms of "enhancement" and include "mood induction techniques," which can "become a habit" and thereby "have more enduring effects" (203). In contrast, unhappy people are represented as deprived, as unsociable and neurotic: "Unhappy people tend to be lonely and high in neuroticism" (124). Individuals must become happier for others: positive psychology describes this project as not so much a right as a responsibility. We have a responsibility for our own happiness insomuch as promoting our own happiness is what enables us to increase other people's happiness. One of my key concerns in this book is to explore what follows from the idea that we have a responsibility to be happy for others, or even simply from the idea that there is a necessary and inevitable relationship of dependence between one person's happiness and the happiness of others.

Unsurprisingly, positive psychology is now a huge popular as well as academic field: many cross-over books now exist that instruct people on how to become happier, forming a generalized culture of expertise. Take the work of Martin Seligman, who has written books on positive psychology and also runs the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania. Like Argyle before him, he offers a critique of psychology as it has made "relieving the states that make life miserable" more of a priority than "building the states that make life worth living" (2003: xi). He describes the role of positive psychology as providing "guideposts" for "the good life" (xi). Happiness is often described as a path, as being what you get if you follow the right path. In such descriptions, happiness offers a route, and positive psychology helps you to find the route: "This road takes you through the countryside of pleasure and gratification, up into the high country of strength and virtue, and finally to the peaks of lasting fulfillment: meaning and purpose" (xiv). Happiness becomes a form of being directed or oriented, of following "the right way." Seligman does not simply describe happiness as a reward, as being what follows a life well traveled, but also as being a quality of a person. Happiness is a kind of trait. He closely identifies happiness with optimism (see chapter 5). Happy people are more optimistic as they "tend to interpret their troubles as transient, controllable, and specific to one situation" (9–10). Seligman also suggests that happy people are more altruistic: "when we are happy, we are less self-focused, we like others more, and we want to share our good fortune even with strangers" (43). You might note here that correlations (happiness with optimism, and happiness with altruism) quickly translate into causality in which happiness becomes its own cause: happiness causes us to be less self-focused, more opti-
mistic, which in turn causes us to be happier, which means we cause more happiness for others, and so on.

Not only does happiness become an individual responsibility, a redescription of life as a project, but it also becomes an instrument, as a means to an end, as well as an end. We make ourselves happy, as an acquisition of capital that allows us to be or to do this or that, or even to get this or that. Such a means-based model of happiness is at odds with classical conceptions such as Aristotle’s work, which I will discuss in chapter 1, where happiness is “the end of all ends.” Positive psychology involves the instrumentalization of happiness as a technique. Happiness becomes a means to an end, as well as the end of the means.19

Happiness becomes, then, a way of maximizing your potential of getting what you want, as well as being what you want to get. Unsurprisingly, positive psychology often uses economic language to describe happiness as a good. Heady and Wearing, for example, describe the “relatively stable personal characteristics” which account for some people being generally happier than others, which they call “stocks,” including social background, personality, and social networks (1991: 49). Happiness gets you more in the bank; happiness depends on other forms of capital (background, personality, networks) as well as acquiring or accumulating capital for the individual subject.

One of the most recent proponents of positive psychology is Alan Carr, whose work also crosses the border between popular and academic readerships. Carr also describes the project of positive psychology in terms of the twin objectives of understanding and facilitating happiness and subjective well-being (2004: 1). Positive emotions “like pleasure or contentment tell us something good is happening” (12). He argues that happy and unhappy people “have distinctive personality profiles” (16). A happiness profile would be the profile of the kind of person who is most likely to be happy, as we can also see in the following classic description:

happy persons are more likely to be found in the economically prosperous countries, whose freedom and democracy are held in respect and the political scene is stable. The happy are more likely to be found in majority groups than among minorities and more often at the top of the ladder than at the bottom. They are typically married and get on well with families and friends. In respect of their personal characteristics, the happy appear relatively healthy,

both physically and mentally. They are active and openminded. They feel they are in control of their lives. Their aspirations concern social and moral matters rather than money making. In matters of politics, the happy tend to the conservative side of middle. (Veenhoven 1991: 16)

The face of happiness, at least in this description, looks rather like the face of privilege. Rather than assuming happiness is simply found in “happy persons,” we can consider how claims to happiness make certain forms of personhood valuable. Attributions of happiness might be how social norms and ideals become affective, as if relative proximity to those norms and ideals creates happiness. Lauren Berlant has called such a fantasy of happiness a "stupid" form of optimism: "the faith that adjustment to certain forms or practices of living and thinking will secure one's happiness" (2002: 75).

For Carr happiness profiles are also profiles of social forms as well as individual persons: he suggests that certain types of families "promote the experience of flow" by optimal levels of clarity, centering, choice, and challenge (62). If certain ways of living promote happiness, then to promote happiness would be to promote those ways of living. Thus happiness promotion becomes very quickly the promotion of certain types of families. The idea of "flow" to describe the relationship between happy persons and happy worlds is powerful. Deriving primarily from the work of Mihály Csikszentmihályi, flow describes the experience of an individual engaged with the world, or involved with the world, where the world is not encountered as alien, as an obstacle or resistance. "The best moments in our lives" Csikszentmihályi suggests, "are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times — although such experiences can also be enjoyable, if we have worked hard to attain them. The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile" (1992: 3). He argues that "in the long run optimal experiences add up to a sense of mastery — or perhaps better, a sense of participation in determining the content of life — that comes as close to what is usually meant by happiness as anything else we can conceivably imagine." (4)

When the subjects are not "in flow" they encounter the world as resistant, as blocking rather than enabling an action. Unhappy subjects hence feel alienated from the world as they experience the world as alien. I suspect that Csikszentmihályi can teach us a great deal about the phenomenology of happiness as an
intimacy of body and world. What if to flow into the world is not simply under-
stood as a psychological attribute? What if the world "houses" some bodies
more than others, such that some bodies do not experience that world as re-
sistant? We might need to rewrite happiness by considering how it feels to be
stressed by the very forms of life that enable some bodies to flow into space.
Perhaps the experiences of not following, of being stressed, of not being ex-
tended by the spaces in which we reside, can teach us more about happiness.

Unhappy Archives

I will not respond to the new science of happiness by simply appealing for a re-
turn to classical ideas of happiness as eudaimonia, as living a good, meaningful,
or virtuous life. Examples of such arguments are evident in work by Richard
crets of Happiness that we have become "Deaf to the wisdom of the ages" and
that "we deny ourselves the chance of finding a happiness that is meaningful" (1).
He suggests that "we’ve settled, nowadays for a much weaker, much thinner,
happiness," which he describes as "mere enjoyment of pleasure" (1). Critiques
of the happiness industry that call for a return to classical concepts of virtue not
only sustain the association between happiness and the good but also suggest
that some forms of happiness are better than others. This distinction between
a strong and weak conception of happiness is clearly a moral distinction: some
forms of happiness are read as worth more than other forms of happiness, be-
cause they require more time, thought, and labor. Noticeably, within classical
models, the forms of happiness that are higher are linked to the mind, and
those that are lower are linked to the body. In Schoch’s description a “weaker,
thinner” happiness is linked to “mere enjoyment of pleasure.” Hierarchies of
happiness may correspond to social hierarchies that are already given.

If higher forms of happiness are what you get for being a certain kind of
being, then the being of happiness would certainly be recognizable as bour-
geois. We could even say that expressions of horror about contemporary cul-
tures of happiness involve a class horror that happiness is too easy, too ac-
 cessible, and too fast. We just have to remember that the model of the good
life within classical Greek philosophy was based on an exclusive concept of
life: only some had the life that enabled one to achieve a good life, a life that
involved self-ownership, material security, and leisure time. For Aristotle the
happiest life is the life devoted to “contemplative speculation,” as a form of life
that would only be available to some and not others (1988: 13). The classical
concept of the good life relied on a political economy; some people have to
work to give others the time to pursue the good life, the time, as it were, to
flourish. Arguably, such a political economy is essential rather than incidental
to the actualization of the possibility of living the virtuous life.

Ideas of happiness involve social as well as moral distinctions insofar as they
rest on ideas of who is worthy as well as capable of being happy “in the right
way.” I suspect that an attachment to happiness as a lost object involves not
simply a form of mourning but also an anxiety that the wrong people can be
happy, and even a desire for happiness to be returned to the right people (the
people with the time and privilege for philosophy, perhaps). To consider hap-
iness as a form of world making is to consider how happiness makes the world
cohere around, as it were, the right people. It is no accident that philosophers
tend to find happiness in the life of the philosopher or that thinkers tend to
find happiness in the thinking of thought. Where we find happiness teaches us
what we value rather than simply what is of value. Happiness not only becomes
what is valued but allows other values to acquire their value. When happiness
is assumed to be a self-evident good, then it becomes evidence of the good.

This book proceeds by suspending belief that happiness is a good thing. In
this mode of suspension, we can consider not only what makes happiness good
but how happiness participates in making things good. I have taken it as given
that happiness involves good feeling, even though I would challenge some of
the models of good feeling offered in the science of happiness. This is not to
reduce happiness to good feeling. The association between happiness with
good feeling is a modern one, as Darrin M. McMahon (2006) shows us in his
monumental history of happiness. We have inherited this association such that
it is hard to think about happiness without thinking about feeling. My task is
to think about how feelings make some things and not others good.

In considering happiness in this way, my book can be situated within the
feminist cultural studies of emotion and affect (Berlant 2000, Sedgwick 2003,
2007, Woodward 2009). If much of this work takes “bad feelings” as the start-
ing point—shame, hate, fear, disgust, anger, and so on—then this book starts at a different point, with good feeling, although I do not assume that the distinction between good feeling and bad feeling will hold (and, as we will see, it does not). Developing the arguments I made in _The Cultural Politics of Emotion_ (2004), I explore how feelings are attributed to objects, such that some things and not others become happiness and unhappiness causes. Feelings do not then simply reside within subjects and then move outward toward objects. Feelings are how objects create impressions in shared spaces of dwelling. Building on my approach in _Queer Phenomenology_ (2006), I explore how we are directed by the promise of happiness, as the promise that happiness is what follows if we do this or that. The promise of happiness is what makes certain objects proximate, affecting how the world gathers around us.

In order to consider how happiness makes things good, I track the word _happiness_, asking what histories are evoked by the mobility of this word. I follow the word _happiness_ around. I notice what it is up to, where it goes, who or what it gets associated with. If I am following the word _happiness_, then I go where it goes. I thus do not go where the word _happiness_ does not go. The risk of using this method is that I could give the word _happiness_ too much power in order to challenge the power happiness can give. My method does have this limitation: if my aim is to describe what kind of world takes shape when happiness provides a horizon, then I will not be exploring worlds that take shape under different horizons. In my view, there is such a general emphasis on happiness as the point of human existence that we need to ask what follows from this point. We will also need other kinds of critical and creative writing that offer thick descriptions of the kinds of worlds that might take shape when happiness does not provide a horizon for experience.

In describing my method in these terms, it should be clear that I am not producing a new concept of happiness. Claire Colebrook following Gilles Deleuze differentiates a philosophical concept from an everyday concept. Rather helpfully for my purposes she uses the concept of happiness to make her point. As she describes: "Our day-to-day usage of concepts works like shorthand or habit; we use concepts so that we do not have to think" (2002: 15). A philosophical concept of happiness, she suggests, "would not refer to this or that instance of happiness: it would enact or create a new possibility or thought of happiness" (17). Philosophy brackets the everyday or ordinary and thinks with extreme forms, such as found in modern art. This book in contrast explores the everyday habits of happiness and considers how such habits involve ways of thinking about the world that shape how the world coheres. I want to attend to how happiness is spoken, lived, practiced; happiness, for me, is what it does.

This does not mean I bracket philosophy. After all, the history of philosophy could be described as a history of happiness. Happiness could even be described as the one philosophical teleology that has not been called into question within philosophy. François Jullien argues persuasively that philosophy's submission to the idea that happiness is the goal of human existence is the point at which "its inventiveness is nowhere to be found" (2007: 104). I would abbreviate the status of happiness in philosophy in the following way: happiness is what we want, whatever it is. Disagreement seems restricted to the content of this "whatever," which is perhaps how happiness retains its role in philosophy as the placeholder of human desire. I think of philosophy here not only as a body of texts that describe themselves as inheritors of philosophy, and that engage with philosophical histories, but also as a "happiness archive": a set of ideas, thoughts, narratives, images, impressions about what is happiness. Happiness appears within ethical and political philosophy, philosophy that aims to describe the good life. Happiness also appears in the philosophy of mind. In this book I draw in particular on the empiricist account of the passions offered by John Locke.

To speak of philosophy as a happiness archive is not to say that happiness can simply be found in philosophy or that happiness exhausts the project of philosophy, as its only horizon of thought. And it is not to say that all philosophy rests on the conviction that happiness is necessarily good. We can find philosophers who challenge this conviction; a countertradition has much to teach us about happiness, whether in the dark pessimism of writers such as Alfred Schopenhauer or in the claims that we should be morally indifferent to happiness that we find in the formalist ethics of Immanuel Kant. Other philosophers write themselves as being against specific traditions of happiness—for instance, utilitarianism—by placing their hope not in unhappiness, or indifference to happiness, but in other ways of thinking about happiness. One can think of Nietzsche's affirmation of the happiness of the über-man, which he opposes to the happiness of serfs in such terms. And if we think of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis as philosophy, or if we read their psychoanaly-
sis as offering a psychoanalysis of the happiness of the philosopher-subject, then we learn so much about the emptiness of the promise of happiness, as an emptiness that haunts the subject in the very restlessness of its desire. 21

To read for the habits of happiness thus involves reading philosophy. How do I read philosophy? We could contrast my method with Darrin M. McMahon’s Happiness: A History, a book that gives us so many threads to unravel. He begins with the question “How to write a history of something so elusive, so intangible—of this ‘thing’ that is not a thing, this hope, this yearning, this dream?” (2006: xi). This is a good question with which to begin. We can also ask: what does it mean to think of happiness as having a history? How or why would we write such a history? Who or what would belong in this history? McMahon’s history of happiness is premised on the belief that thinking about happiness means thinking about how different ideas of happiness have been conceptualized over time. He calls his history of happiness an “intellectual history” (xiv).

It is useful to note that Darrin McMahon describes himself as being for “methodological pluralism” (xv), suggesting that his history is one history of happiness that should exist alongside others: “there are infinite histories of happiness to be written” (xiii). He implies that such histories would be told from more specific viewing points as “histories not only of the struggles and pursuits of the peasants, slaves, and apostates mentioned by Freud—but of early-modern women and late-modern aristocrats, nineteenth-century bourgeois and twentieth-century-workers, conservatives and radicals, consumers and crusaders, immigrants and natives, gentiles and Jews” (xiii). Different histories, we might imagine, unfold from the struggles of such groups.

The Promise of Happiness does not supplement McMahon’s history with a history told from a specific viewing point, as a particular history within a general history. I want to think about how the intellectual history of happiness—as a history of an idea—can be challenged by considering what gets erased if we take a general viewing point, where to see what is erased would change the view you see from this point. In other words, this general history of happiness could itself be considered rather particular. Just note how women appear or don’t appear in McMahon’s intellectual history. In the index, we have one reference to women, which turns out to be a reference to John Stuart Mill’s The Subjection of Women. Even the category of “women” refers us back to a male genealogy, to philosophy as white male European inheritance. Treating happi-

ness as an intellectual history amounts to becoming indifferent to how differences matter within that history, troubling the very form of its coherence.

Unhappiness remains the unthought in much philosophical literature, as well as in unhappiness studies. 22 Its neglect can partly be explained by the assumed transparency of the “un”: the presumption that unhappiness is simply not, not happy, defined only by the lack of happiness, as the absence of its presence. I aim to give a history to unhappiness. 23 The history of the word unhappy might teach us about the unhappiness of the history of happiness. In its earliest uses, unhappy meant “causing misfortune or trouble.” Only later, did it come to mean “miserable in lot or circumstances” or “wretched in mind.” The word wretched also has a suggestive genealogy, coming from wretch, referring to a stranger, exile, or banished person. The wretch is not only the one driven out of his or her native country but is also defined as one who is “sunk in deep distress, sorrow, misfortune, or poverty,” “a miserable, unhappy, or unfortunate person,” “a poor or hapless being,” and even “a vile, sorry, or despicable person.” 24 Can we rewrite the history of happiness from the point of view of the wretch? If we listen to those who are cast as wretched, perhaps their wretchedness would no longer belong to them. The sorrow of the stranger might give us a different angle on happiness 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.

I thus offer an alternative history of happiness not simply by offering different readings of its intellectual history but by considering those who are banished from it, or who enter this history only as troublemakers, dissenters, killers of joy. In the first chapter of the book, I draw on the intellectual history of happiness as a resource to consider how happiness is attributed to objects. My aim is not to offer an account of different philosophies of happiness but to develop my own approach to how happiness makes some things and not others seem promising. What I call “unhappy archives” emerge from feminist (chapter 2), queer (chapter 3), and antiracist histories (chapter 4), as well as in socialist and revolutionary modes of political engagement (chapter 5). The first three of these chapters take the negativity of a political figure as their organizing trope: the feminist killjoy, unhappy queer, and melancholic migrant. These figures have their own political histories, which are unfinished, leaky, and shared. The figure of the angry black woman, for instance, must appear and does appear in the chapters on feminist killjoys and melancholic migrants. There are risks in
organizing a book around figures, as if the intelligibility of the figure preserves the coherence of a history. Chapter 5 is framed differently, taking "the future" as its opening question, and considers the significance of what I call "happiness dystopias" for the imagining of alternative futures. I could have taken the figure of the "raging revolutionary" as my title, but didn't. That figure seems to gather too much, thus saying too little.

I call the archives that I draw on in these chapters "unhappy archives." It is not simply a question of finding unhappiness in such archives. Rather, these archives take shape through the circulation of cultural objects that articulate unhappiness with the history of happiness. An unhappy archive is one assembled around the struggle against happiness. We have inherited already so much from authors who have challenged the very appeal of happiness — and yet these authors are never or rarely cited by the literatures of happiness. These archives do not simply supplement philosophy and its happiness archive. They challenge it. My aim is to follow the weave of unhappiness, as a kind of unraveling of happiness, and the threads of its appeal.

Of course, I still had to find my objects, make choices, include some things, and exclude others. I have thus assembled my own archives out of the unhappy archives we have inherited. In the chapter on feminist killjoys, almost all the books I cite I first encountered in women's writing courses in the late 1980s — books that stayed with me, in part as they showed so powerfully the sadness implicit in becoming conscious of gender as loss. Others texts I read more recently and had been moved by them, noticing how happiness and unhappiness were doing things. The Well of Loneliness is such an example, a book I engaged with in Queer Phenomenology, commenting then on its thematicization of heterosexuality as unthinking happiness (2006: 105). Still other books were books I happened to be reading at the time of writing this book, which gave me a new angle on what I was thinking. Andrea Levy's work is one example of such a happening (I was so struck by how well she describes the jolting experience of becoming conscious of racism), and Nancy Garden's Annie on My Mind is another, with its demonstration of how parents express a fear of unhappiness in response to the queer child. Uncannily (or so it felt at the time), I was reading that book on the plane to Vancouver in 2006 to deliver my first paper drawn from my happiness research. Some of my experiences as a reader and viewer shaped my desire to write about happiness — seeing Bend It Like Beckham at the cinema in 2002 was one of the experiences that made me want to write about happiness (it was the happy image of reconciliation the film offers in its ending that captured my interest).

Other examples I found through talking to people in formal events such as seminars and conferences, as well as informally. Someone suggested I read Our Sister Killjoy after I gave a talk at Kent University. In chapter 5, I discuss The Joy Makers: I was lucky enough to be given the book by the author, James Gunn, who was in the audience when I gave a paper on happiness at Kansas University in 2007. Reading The Joy Makers led me to reread Brave New World and to consider its political demand for "the right to be unhappy." The generosity of strangers is behind so many of these arrivals. Of course, I cannot give you the story of the arrival of every object. But it matters, how we assemble things, how we put things together. Our archives are assembled out of encounters, taking form as a memory trace of where we have been.

Every writer is first a reader, and what we read matters. I think of myself primarily as a reader of feminist, queer, and antiracist books — these books form the intellectual and political horizon of this book. I would describe these books as my philosophy books in the sense that they are the books that have helped me to think about how happiness participates in the creation of social form. But my archive does not just include books or films. If you follow the word happiness you end up everywhere! So my archive is also my world, my life-world, my past as well as present, where the word happiness has echoed so powerfully.

One of the speech acts that always fascinated me is "I just want you to be happy," which I remember being said to me an awful lot when I was growing up. Writing this book has given me a chance to wonder more about what it means to express "just want" for the happiness of another. But this is just one kind of happiness speech act. There are many! Others you will encounter in this book include "I'm happy if you are happy," "I cannot bear you to be unhappy," "I want to make you happy," "I want to see you being happy," and "I want to be the cause of the happiness that is inside you." How often we speak of happiness! If my task is to follow the words, then I aim to describe what kind of world takes shape when it is given that the happiness of which we speak is good.

The question "what does happiness do?" is inseparable from the question of how happiness and unhappiness are distributed over time and in space. To track the history of happiness is to track the history of its distribution. Happi-
ness gets distributed in all sorts of complicated ways. Certainly to be a good subject is to be perceived as a happiness-cause, as making others happy. To be bad is thus to be a killjoy. This book is an attempt to give the killjoy back her voice and to speak from recognition of how it feels to inhabit that place. I thus draw on my own experiences of being called a killjoy in describing the sociability of happiness. So many of the discussions I have had about this research have involved “swapping killjoy stories.” I remember one time at a conference table when we were discussing being killjoys at the family table. The conference was organized by the Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association in 2007, and it was the first time I had been to a conference in Australia as a person of color from Australia where I felt at home. I now think of spaces created by such conferences as providing new kinds of tables, perhaps tables that give support to those who are unseated by the tables of happiness.

I know that I risk overemphasizing the problems with happiness by presenting happiness as a problem. It is a risk I am willing to take. If this book kills joy, then it does what it says we should do. To kill joy, as many of the texts I cite in the following pages teach us, is to open a life, to make room for life, to make room for possibility, for chance. My aim in this book is to make room.

CHAPTER ONE

Happy Objects

I might say “you make me happy.” Or I might be moved by something in such a way that when I think of happiness I think of that thing. Even if happiness is imagined as a feeling state, or a form of consciousness that evaluates a life situation we have achieved over time (Veenhoven 1984: 22–23), happiness also turns us toward objects. We turn toward objects at the very point of “making.” To be “made happy” by this or that is to recognize that happiness starts from somewhere other than the subject who may use the word to describe a situation.

In this chapter, I want to think about how objects become happy, as if happiness is what follows proximity to an object. Happiness involves affect (to be happy is to be affected by something), intentionality (to be happy is to be happy about something), and evaluation or judgment (to be happy about something makes something good). If happiness creates its objects, then such objects are passed around, accumulating positive affective value as social goods. 1 In particular, this chapter will consider the family as a happy object, as being what good feelings are directed toward, as well as providing a shared horizon of experience.
Affect, Objects, Intentionality

I do not begin by assuming there is something called happiness that stands apart or has autonomy, as if it corresponds to an object in the world. I begin instead with the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and what I call "the drama of contingency," how we are touched by what comes near. It is useful to note that the etymology of happiness relates precisely to the question of contingency: it is from the Middle English word hap suggesting chance. The word happy originally meant having "good 'hap' or fortune," to be lucky or fortunate. This meaning may now seem archaic: we may be used to thinking of happiness as an effect of what you do, as a reward for hard work, rather than being "simply" what happens to you. Thus Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi argues that "happiness is not something that happens. It is not the result of good fortune or random choice. It is not something that money can buy or power command. It does not depend on outside events, but, rather on how we interpret them. Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated and defended privately by each person" (1992: 2).

Such a way of understanding happiness could be read as a defense against its contingency. I want to return to the original meaning of happiness as it re-focuses our attention on the "worldly" question of happenings.

What is the relation between the "what" in "what happens" and what makes us happy? Empiricism provides us with a useful way of addressing this question, given its concern with "what's what." Take the work of the seventeenth-century empiricist philosopher John Locke. He argues that what is good is what is "apt to cause or increase pleasure, or diminish pain in us" ([1690] 1997: 216). We judge something to be good or bad according to how it affects us, whether it gives us a pleasure or pain. Locke uses the example of a man who loves grapes. Locke suggests that "when a man declares in autumn, when he is eating them, or in spring, when there are none, that he loves grapes, it is no more, but that the taste of grapes delights him" (216). When something causes pleasure or delight, it is good for us. For Locke, happiness is a form of pleasure: "the greatest happiness consists in the having those things which produce the greatest pleasure" (247). Happy objects could be described simply as those objects that affect us in the best way.

Happiness thus puts us into intimate contact with things. We can be happily affected in the present of an encounter; you are affected positively by something, even if that something does not present itself as an object of consciousness. To be happily affected can survive the coming and going of objects. Locke is after all describing the "seasonal" nature of enjoyment. When grapes are out of season, you might recall that you find them delightful; you might look forward to when they will be in season, which means that grapes would sustain their place as a happy object in the event of their absence. However, this does not mean that the objects one recalls as being happy always stay in place. Locke observes, "Let an alteration of health or constitution destroy the delight of their taste, and then he can be said to love grapes no longer" (216–17). Bodily transformations might also transform what is experienced as delightful. If our bodies change over time, then the world around us will create different impressions.

It is not that good things cause pleasure, but that the experience of pleasure is how some things becomes good for us over time. Locke's argument here is consistent with the models of passion in Descartes and affect in Spinoza: despite key differences in how they theorize the mind-body relationship, these philosophers show us how objects acquire value through contact with bodies. For Spinoza, "We call a thing good which contributes to the preservation of our being, and we call a thing evil if it is an obstacle to the preservation of our being: that is to say, a thing is called by us good or evil as it increases or diminishes, helps or restrains, our power of action" ([1677] 2001: 170). If an object affects us in a good way with joy, then it is good for us. Descartes argues that objects do not excite diverse passions because they are diverse but because of the diverse ways they may harm and help us ([1649] 1989: 51). Whether something harms or helps us is matter of how we are affected by it. As Susan James suggests, "The evaluations of good and harm contained in passions directed to objects outside the mind are therefore not in the world, waiting to be read" (1997: 103).

To be affected by something is to evaluate that thing. Evaluations are expressed in how bodies turn toward things. A phenomenology of happiness might explore how we attend to those things we find delightful. As Edmund Husserl describes in the second volume of Ideas, "Within the joy we are 'intentionally' (with feeling intentions) turned toward the joy-Object as such in
the mode of affective 'interest'" ([1950] 1989: 14). Some things, you might say, capture our attention. To give value to things is to shape what is near us, generating what Husserl might call "our near sphere" or "core sphere" ([1946] 2002: 149–50) as a sphere of practical action. This sphere is "a sphere of things that I can reach with my kinesthesis and which I can experience in an optimal form through touching, seeing etc." (149).

Happiness might play a crucial role in shaping our near sphere, the world that takes shape around us, as a world of familiar things. Objects that give us pleasure take up residence within our bodily horizon. We come to have our likes, which might even establish what we are like. The bodily horizon could be redescribed as a horizon of likes. To have "our likes" means certain things are gathered around us. Of course, we do encounter new things. To be more or less open to new things is to be more or less open to the incorporation of things into our near sphere. Incorporation may be conditional on liking what we encounter. Those things we do not like we move away from. Awareness might help establish the edges of our horizon; in rejecting the proximity of certain objects, we define the places that we know do not wish to go, the things we do not wish to have, touch, taste, hear, feel, see, those things we do not want to keep within reach.

To be affected “in a good way” thus involves an orientation toward something as being good. Orientations register the proximity of objects, as well as shape what is proximate to the body. Happiness can be described as intentional in the phenomenological sense (directed toward objects), as well as being affective (having contact with objects). To bring these arguments together, we might say that happiness is an orientation toward the objects we come into contact with. We move toward and away from objects through how we are affected by them. After all, note the doubling of positive affect in Locke’s example: we love the grapes, if they taste delightful. To say we love what tastes delightful is not to say that delight causes our love but that the experience of delight involves a loving orientation toward the object, just as the experience of love registers what is delightful.

To describe happiness as intentional does not mean there is always a simple correspondence between objects and feelings. Robin Barrow is right to argue that happiness does not “have an object” the way that some other emotions do (1980: 89; see also Perry 1967: 71). Let’s stay with Locke’s example of the man who loves grapes. Grapes acquire meaning for us, as something we can consume, grapes can be tasted and “have” a taste, even though we cannot know whether my grape taste is the same as yours. The pleasure evoked by the grapes is the pleasure of eating the grapes. But pleasures are not only directed toward objects that can be tasted, that come into a sensuous proximity with the flesh of the body, as a meeting of flesh. As I have already suggested, we can recall the pleasure of grapes as a memory; we can simply think about the grapes, as a thought that is also a feeling, even when we do not have the possibility of eating the grapes. We can just recall pleasure to experience pleasure, even if these pleasures do not involve exactly the same sensation, even if the impressions of memory are not quite as lively. Pleasure creates an object, even when the object of pleasure appears before us. The creativity of feeling does not require the absence of an object.

We are moved by things. In being moved, we make things. An object can be affective by virtue of its own location (the object might be here, which is where I experience this or that affect) and the timing of its appearance (the object might be now, which is when I experience this or that affect). To experience an object as being affective or sensational is to be directed not only toward an object but to what is around that object, which includes what is behind the object, the conditions of its arrival. What is around an object can become happy: if one receives something delightful in a certain place, then the place itself is invested with happiness, as being “what” good feeling is directed toward. Or if you are given something by someone whom you love, then the object itself acquires more affective value: seeing it makes you think of the other who gave you the gift. If something is close to a happy object, then it can become happy by association.

Happiness can generate objects through proximity. Happiness is not simply about objects, or directed toward objects that are given to consciousness. We have probably all experienced what I would call “unattributed happiness.” You feel happy, not quite knowing why, and the feeling can be catchly, as a kind of brimming over that exceeds what you encounter. It is not that the feeling floats freely; in feeling happy, you direct the feeling to what is close by, smiling, for instance, at a person who passes you by. The feeling can also lift or elevate a proximate object, making it happy, which is not to say that the feeling will survive an encounter with anything. It has always interested me that when we become conscious of feeling happy (when the feeling becomes an object of thought), happiness can often recede or become anxious. Happiness can arrive
in a moment and be lost by virtue of its recognition. Happiness as a feeling appears very precarious, easily displaced not only by other feelings but even by happiness itself, by the how of its arrival.

I suggest that happiness involves a specific kind of intentionality, which I would describe as “end oriented.” It is not just that we can be happy about something, as a feeling in the present, but some things become happy for us, if we imagine they will bring happiness to us. Happiness is often described as “what” we aim for, as an endpoint, or even an end-in-itself. Classically, happiness has been considered as an ends rather than as a means. In Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle describes happiness as the Chief Good, as “that which all things aim at” (1998: 1). Happiness is what we “choose always for its own sake” (8). Anthony Kenny describes how, for Aristotle, happiness “is not just an end, but a perfect end” (1993: 16). The perfect end is the end of all ends, the good that is good always for its own sake.

We don’t have to agree with the argument that happiness is the perfect end to understand the implications of what it means for happiness to be thought in these terms. If happiness is the end of all ends, then other things (including other goods) become means to happiness. As Aristotle describes, we choose other things “with a view to happiness, conceiving that through their instrumentality we shall be happy” (8). Aristotle is not referring here to material things or physical objects but is differentiating between different kinds of goods, between instrumental goods and independent goods (6). So honor, pleasure, or intellect we choose “with a view to happiness” as being instrumental to happiness, and the realization of the possibility of living a good or virtuous life.

If we think of instrumental goods as objects of happiness, important consequences follow: Things become good, or acquire their value as goods, insofar as they point toward happiness. Objects become “happiness means.” Or we could say they become happiness pointers, as if to follow their point would be to find happiness. If objects provide a means for making us happy, then in directing ourselves toward this or that object, we are aiming somewhere else: toward a happiness that is presumed to follow. The temporality of this following does matter. Happiness is what would come after. Given this, happiness is directed toward certain objects, which point toward that which is not yet present. When we follow things, we aim for happiness, as if happiness is what you get if you reach certain points.

Promises

The biography of a person is intimately bound up with objects. We could say that our biographies are biographies of likes and dislikes. Locke argues that human diversity means that our “happiness was placed in different things” ([1690] 1997: 246). Freedom becomes the freedom to be made happy by different things. If we are made happy by different things, then we are affected by different things differently.

Are we simply made happy by different things? To think of happiness as involving an end-oriented intentionality is to suggest that happiness is already associated with some things more than others. We arrive at some things because they point us toward happiness, as a means to this end. How do we know what points happily? The very possibility of being pointed toward happiness suggests that objects are associated with affects before they are even encountered. An object can point toward happiness without necessarily having affected us in a good way.

It is possible that the evocation of an object can be pleasurable even if we have not yet experienced an object as pleasing: this is the power after all of the human imagination as well as the social world to bestow things that have yet to be encountered with an affective life. Things might have an affective life as a result of being given or bestowed with affect, as gifts that may have been forgotten. An object might even be given insofar as it is assumed to have an affective quality, for example, as if to give somebody x is to give them happiness.

We might assume that the relationship between an object and feeling involves causality: as if the object causes the feeling. A happy object would be one that causes our happiness. In The Will to Power, Nietzsche suggests that the attribution of causality is retrospective ([1901] 1968: 294–95). I might assume, then, that the experience of pain is caused by the nail that is lying near my foot. But I only notice the nail given that I experience an affect. The object of feeling lags behind the feeling. The lag is not simply temporal but involves active forms of mediation. We search for the object: or as Nietzsche describes “a reason is sought in persons, experiences, etc. for why one feels this way or that” (354). The very tendency to attribute an affect to an object depends upon “closeness of association” where such forms of closeness are already given. We apprehend
an object as the cause of an affect (the nail becomes known as a pain-cause, which is not the only way we might apprehend the nail). The proximity of an encounter might be what survives an encounter. In other words, the proximity between an affect and object is preserved through habit.

We can loosen the bond between the object and the affect by recognizing the form of their bond. The object is not simply what causes the feeling, even if we attribute the object as its cause. The object is understood retrospectively as the cause of the feeling. Having understood it in this way, I can just apprehend the nail and I will experience a pain affect, given that the association between the object and the affect has been given. The object becomes a feeling-cause. Once an object is a feeling-cause, it can cause feeling, so that when we feel the feeling we expect to feel, we are affirmed. The retrospective causality of affect that Nietzsche describes quickly converts into what we could call an anticipatory causality. We can even anticipate an affect without being retrospective insofar as objects might acquire the value of proximities that are not derived from our own experience. For example, with fear-causes, a child might be told not to go near an object in advance of its arrival. Some things more than others are encountered as "to-be-feared" in the event of proximity, which is exactly how we can understand the anticipatory logic of the discourse of stranger danger (see Ahmed 2000).

We can also anticipate that an object will cause happiness in advance of its arrival; the object enters our near sphere with a positive affective value already in place. The proximity between an object and feeling coheres in how that object is given. Objects can become "happiness-causes" before we even encounter them. We are directed toward objects that are already anticipated to cause happiness. In other words, the judgment that some things are good not only precedes our encounter with things but directs us toward those things.

So rather than say that what is good is what is apt to cause pleasure, we could say that what is apt to cause pleasure is already judged to be good. This argument is different from Locke's account of loving grapes because they taste delightful: I am suggesting that the judgment about certain objects as being "happy" is already made, before they are even encountered. Certain objects are attributed as the cause of happiness, which means they already circulate as social goods before we "happen" upon them, which is why we might happen upon them in the first place.

We anticipate that happiness will follow proximity to this or that object. Anticipations of what an object gives us are also expectations of what we should be given. How is it that we come to expect so much? After all, expectations can make things seem disappointing. If we arrive at objects with an expectation of how we will be affected by them, this affects how they affect us, even in the moment they fail to live up to our expectations. Happiness is an expectation of what follows, where the expectation differentiates between things, whether or not they exist as objects in the present. For example, the child might be asked to imagine happiness by imagining certain events in the future, such as the wedding day, the "happiest day of your life."

The very expectation of happiness gives us a specific image of the future. This is why happiness provides the emotional setting for disappointment, even if happiness is not given: we just have to expect happiness from "this or that" for "this and that" to be experienceable as objects of disappointment. Our expectations come from somewhere. To think the genealogy of expectation is to think about promises and how they point us somewhere, which is "the where" from which we expect so much. We could say that happiness is promised through proximity to certain objects. Objects would refer not only to physical or material things but also to anything that we imagine might lead us to happiness, including objects in the sense of values, practice, styles, as well as aspirations. Doing x as well as having x might be what promises us happiness. The promise of happiness takes this form: if you have this or have that, or if you do this or do that, then happiness is what follows. In Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche interprets what I am calling the promise of happiness as the basic formula of religion and morality: "Do this and this, refrain from this and this—and you will be happy!" ([1889] 1990: 58).

The promising nature of happiness suggests happiness lies ahead of us, at least if we do the right thing. To promise after all is to make the future into an object, into something that can be declared in advance of its arrival. Hannah Arendt describes how: "Promises are the uniquely human way of ordering the future, making it predictable and reliable to the extent that this is humanly possible" (1972: 92). Think of the promise as a situation, and of what do we think. We think of a promise made by someone to someone that might take the form "I promise to." A promise can be a declaration of will, that the person who promises will do something or not do something. The promise is an assurance, a positive declaration intended to give confidence and trust that an expectation will be met. John Austin in How to Do Things with Words describes
speech acts that successfully bring about an action as happy performatives. For the promise to be happy would require good intentions: the one who promises must intend to keep the promise, such that the structure of intent is the condition of possibility for the promise to promise ([1962] 1975: 40). For a promise to be happy might also depend upon certain conditions being in place that would allow the person to keep it. A promise can be happy in a situation in which what we will happens, where what we will is willed for another, even when that other is my own self conceived as the recipient of my promise. The promise is also an expression of desire; for something to be promising is an indication of something favorable to come. So in receiving what you have been promised, something good has happened to you, where the happening fulfills an expectation of what should have come to you given that the promise has been promised. Promises ground our expectations of what is to come.

This imagined situation does not exhaust the lived horizon of the promise. In other words, promising is not always a speech act, or something someone gives to someone. The speech act "I promise you" slides into "the promise of," where the promise is an impression of something, as being what would be given by being given that thing. The promising thing (which is an idea of something as being promising) might be proximate to the loved other who says, "I promise to" or "I promise you that." So if someone I love promises me something, that thing can embody the promise of love. The slide between the "I promise to" and "the promise of" is how promises are distributed, or shared. The promise of happiness is what makes some things promising, as if to share in things is to share in happiness. When something promises happiness, we have an idea of that thing as being promising. In receiving that something, we imagine the good things that will follow.

Or we could say that if we desire happiness, then we follow its promise. Lauren Berlant suggests thinking of objects as a "cluster of promises" is another way of thinking about the object of desire (2008a: 33). Do objects cluster around the promise of happiness? We desire x because x is desirable. The desirability of x is that it promises us happiness. Importantly, desire is already double. We desire x, and we desire x because we desire x, where x is happiness. Even if we desire different things we would have in common the desire for happiness: as John Locke describes, "Though all men's desires tend to happiness, yet they are not moved by the same object" ([1690] 1997: 247). Happiness as a word thus gathers different objects together. Happiness becomes a container for the diversity of such objects. We could speculate that happiness by giving permission to want in diverse ways also contains diversity within specific forms. Happiness by providing a container in which we can deposit our wants might also contain those wants.

If happiness is what we desire, then happiness involves being intimate with what is not happy, or simply with what is not. This is why for Locke the causation of delight (the happy object) is no simple matter. If happiness is what we desire, then happiness involves what Locke calls uneasiness. We experience uneasiness in "the absence of anything, whose present enjoyment carries the idea of delight" (217). His argument is not simply that happiness makes us uneasy. He suggests that something does not become good for us "until our desire . . . makes us uneasy in the want of it" (234). Given this, for Locke, uneasiness is what drives human action: it is what accounts for the push and pull of human feeling. So even though Locke argues that happiness is what we want or aim for, as the end point of human action, he actually suggests that uneasiness is more compelling: "a little burning felt pushes us more powerfully than greater pleasures in prospect draw or allure" (234).

Psychoanalysis of course has taught us about this intimacy between desire and anxiety; the orientation toward the good becomes a form of pressure in a world in which the good cannot exhaust the realm of possibility. Freud argued in Civilization and its Discontents that happiness "is quite incapable of being realized; all the institutions of the universe are opposed to it" ([1930] 2004: 16). However we understand this opposition to happiness, we could say the contingency of happiness is also what makes it difficult to achieve. Happiness cannot eliminate the hap of what happens. Happiness means living with the contingency of this world, even when we aim to make happiness necessary.

Desire is both what promises us something, what gives us energy, and also what is lacking, even in the very moment of its apparent realization. There can be nothing more terrifying than getting what you want, because it is at this moment that you face what you want. For Slavoj Žižek this terror would be because you don't "really" want what you want; he argues that happiness is "inherently hypocritical" or a form of self-deception (2002: 60). I would say that getting what you want can be terrifying because what you want is not simply "ready" as an object; this lack of readiness is what makes the desired object so desirable. Not getting what you want allows you to preserve the happiness of "the what" as fantasy, as if once we are ready, we can have it.
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The obstacle to desire hence performs a psychic function in preserving the fantasy that getting what you want would make you happy. Lacan's analysis of courtly love demonstrates the fantasy-preserving character of obstacles. As he describes it, courtly love is “an altogether refined way of making up for the absence of sexual relation by pretending that it is we who put up an obstacle to it” (1982: 141). Courtly love puts an obstacle in place of love, which preserves the fantasy that we would have love if only the obstacle did not get in the way. Likewise, the very obstacle to happiness is what allows happiness to be sustained as the promise of the good life: as if happiness is what we would have, if that thing did not get in the way. The obstacle could be redescribed as the unhappy object; by being the thing that gets in the way, we imagine happiness as being what will happen “on the way.” The obstacle can also be a missing thing. As Jonathan Lear suggests, “People tend to fantasise that if they just had this missing thing, it would make them happy” (2000: 23), such that “happiness is that — whatever it is — which makes life desirable and lacking in nothing” (27; emphasis added).

Indeed, the very promise of happiness may acquire its force by not being given by the objects that are attributed as happiness-causes. The happy object circulates even in the absence of happiness by filling a certain gap; we anticipate that the happy object will cause happiness, such that it becomes a prop that sustains the fantasy that happiness is what would follow if only we could have “it.” The happy object, in other words, is a gap-filler. The promise of the object is always in this specific sense ahead of us; to follow happiness is often narrated as following a path (it is no accident that we speak of “the path of happiness”), such that if we follow the path we imagine we will reach its point.

Happiness becomes a question of following rather than finding. If the pursuit of happiness is augmented as a constitutional right, then happiness becomes “whatever” is pursued and hence achieves its affectivity by not being given or found. The promise of happiness is the promise that the lines we follow will get us there, where the “there” acquires its value by not being “here.” This is why happiness is crucial to the energy or “forward direction” of narrative. Happiness may be preserved as a social promise only through its postponement: so we imagine that the happiness we were promised will eventually come to us, or to those who follow us. Happiness is what makes waiting for something both

endurable and desirable — the longer you wait, the more you are promised in return, the greater your expectation of a return.

A happy object accumulates positive value even in situations of unhappiness: we can live with disappointment by imagining the promise of happiness will be given to those who follow us. Parents can live with the failure of happiness to deliver its promise by placing their hope for happiness in their children. Happiness can involve a gesture of deferral, as a deferral that is imagined simultaneously as a sacrifice and gift: for some, the happiness that is given up becomes what they give. To be given happiness is thus to stay proximate to the scene of giving up.

Good Habits

Objects not only embody good feeling; they come to embody the good life. How is the good life imagined through the proximity of objects? Locke evokes good feeling through the sensation of taste. As he describes: “For as pleasant tastes depend not on the things themselves, but their agreeableness to this or that palate, wherein there is great variety; so the greatest happiness consists in the having those things which produce the greatest pleasure” (1690: 1997: 247). Locke locates difference in the mouth. We have different tastes insofar as we have different palates.

We can see here that the apparent chanciness of happiness — the hap of what happens — can be qualified. It is not that we just find happy objects anywhere. After all, taste is not simply a matter of chance (whether you or I might happen to like this or that) but is acquired over time. As Pierre Bourdieu showed in his monumental Distinction, taste is a very specific bodily orientation that is shaped by what is already decided to be good or a higher good. Taste or “manifested preferences” are “the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference” such that “aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent. Aversion to different lifestyles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes” (1979: 1986: 56).

So we learn to differentiate between higher and lower objects by learning to discern what tastes good and what is disgusting; delight and disgust are social as well as bodily orientations. When people say, “How can you like that?” they make their judgment against another by refusing to like what another likes,
by suggesting that the object in which another invests his or her happiness is unworthy. This affective differentiation is the basis of an essentially moral economy in which moral distinctions of worth are also social distinctions of value, as Beverley Skeggs (2004) has shown us. What “tastes good” to us can reveal whether we have “good taste.”

To become oriented means to be directed toward specific objects that are already attributed as being tasteful, as enjoyable to those with good taste. I have suggested that the objects we encounter are not neutral: they enter our near sphere with an affective value already in place, which means they are already invested with positive and negative value. Bodies also do not arrive in neutral: the acquisition of tendencies is also the acquisition of orientations toward some things and not others as being good. If we do not simply find happy objects anywhere, we also do not simply inhabit the right kind of body. We acquire habits, as forms of good taste, that differentiate between objects in terms of their affective as well as moral value. We have to work on the body such that the body’s immediate reactions, how we sense the world and make sense of the world, take us in the “right” direction.

The distinction between good and bad taste, or even the distinction between having and not having taste, is in part secured through the status of the object. So to have good taste would be directed toward things that are already attributed as being good. But having good habits is not simply about the kinds of objects you enjoy; it is also about the nature of your relationship to objects. Take Bourdieu’s critique of Kantian aesthetics. Bourdieu argues that for Kant simple forms of pleasure are “reduced to a pleasure of the senses” in the “taste of the tongue, palate and the throat.” The lower senses are lower because they depend on the body, and an object is lower if it “insists on being enjoyed” (1979; 1986: 489). Pure taste is thus directed in the right way toward things that allow the subject to be free from any involvement with an object. Pure taste becomes disinterested. To have good habits is to be oriented in the right way toward the right objects (not to insist on being proximate to objects that insist on enjoyment), and which would allow a fantasy of transcendence from the bodily domain to be sustained. To work on the body such that you have the right reactions allows the body to disappear from view.

Bourdieu’s “vulgar critique” of Kantian aesthetics is to redescribe the aesthetics of pure taste as the “occupational ideology of those who like to call themselves ‘creators’” (491). The aesthetics of pure taste transforms an ideology into a creation. Norbert Elias usefully describes the formation of good habits as “the civilisation of the affects” (1939; 1969: 166). The civil body acquires its civility by the “restraint of affect-charged impulses” (210). Civilized happiness belongs to the bourgeoisie whose freedom is self-narrated as freedom from impulsive inclinations.

Consider the film Educating Rita (1983, dir. Lewis Gilbert). This is a film about education as self-transformation. Susan, a working-class girl, becomes Rita (she takes the name from Rita Mae Brown, author of the book Ruby Fruit Jungle, which I discuss in chapter 3), through a process of being educated in literature. The narrative dramatizes how becoming civil is not simply about learning to read the right books or learning to appreciate the right objects but is about developing a different relationship to those objects. So in the first instance Rita learns by swiching affections, by learning to appreciate some things, or to appreciate the difference between pulp fiction and literature. But by the end she becomes free from any such affection. She says, “You think you did nothing for me. You think I ended up with a whole lot of quotes and empty phrases. Well, all right. I did. But that wasn’t your doing. I was too hungry for it all. I didn’t question anything. I wanted it all too much so I wouldn’t let it be questioned. Told you I was stupid.” Her hunger for knowledge about x becomes symptomatic of her failure to transcend the working-class habitus that makes becoming educated desirable in the first place.

For Rita to become educated requires that she become free from hunger for things, from insistence on and in enjoyment. Having become free, Rita can now choose, with the capacity for choice being organized through tropes of indifference: “I might go to France. I might go to London. I might just stay here and carry on with my studies. I might even stay here and have a baby. I don’t know. I will make a decision. I will choose.” Becoming civil converts the language of “must” to the language of “might” and eventually to the language of will and choice. We end up with a fantasy of a moral and middle-class subject as the one who is without habit, who will and can choose insofar as they are imagined as free from inclination.

Happiness becomes a moral injunction, as a will to will, through the disappearance of its habit. A good habit appears and thus disappears as freedom. Or we could say that freedom becomes a habit. In thinking of the habits of happiness it is useful to note how Locke withdraws from the relativist implications of his model of the diversity of happy object choices. He suggests that while we
are free to find happiness in our own way, the paths of happiness will take us toward a higher good: "for that being intended for a state of happiness, it must certainly be agreeable to everyone's wish and desire: could we supposed their relishes as different there, as they are here, yet the manna in Heaven will suit everyone's palate" (253). So although we might find different things pleasing, we will be directed "in the right way" by happiness, as that which finds its realization in the universal delight of the manna in heaven. Even if happiness can be found in different things, happiness should still take us in the right direction. So for Locke "men may and should correct their palates" (255). The concept of correctible tastes suggests that happiness is about learning to be affected by objects in the right way. The very possibility that we can affect our affections by action, or through will or reason, becomes the basis of an ethical imperative.

It is useful to return to Aristotle given the emphasis he places on habit or habituation in his ethics. As many scholars have pointed out, for Aristotle happiness cannot be reduced to good feeling or what Deal W. Hudson calls "well feeling" (1996: xii): rather, happiness or eudaimonia refers to "the good life" or the virtuous life, which is a life-long project or achievement. Aristotle suggests that it is a point of "pretty general agreement" that "living well" and "doing well" are the same as "being happy" (1998: 3). Happiness relies on activities that generate "good character" and hence on what is called habituation, "the result of the repeated doing of acts which have a similar or common quality" (Smith 1998: ix). The good life is the life that is lived in the right way, by doing the right things, over and over again.

However, feelings do have a crucial role in Aristotle's model of habituation. For the good man will not only have the right habits but his feelings will also be directed in the right way: "a man is not a good man at all who feels no pleasure in noble actions; just as no one would call that man just who does not feel pleasure in acting justly" (11-12). To be good one must feel the right way, or as Julia Annas describes in her Morality and Happiness, the virtuous agent "will act rightly and will have the right amount of appropriate feeling, where this will be a moderate amount" (1993: 61). The virtuous agent will not only feel pleasure and pain where appropriate, in relation to the right objects, but will also experience the right amount of such feeling, where the right amount is the "mean," which means not too much or too little. Being good becomes then about how one feels feelings: "to feel them when we ought on what occasions, toward whom, and why, and as, we should do, is the mean, or in the other words, the best state, and this is the property of virtue" (Aristotle 1998: 27). Aristotle's portrait of the good man, who has moral character, is hence a portrait of a sentient man whose pleasures are "just right," as we can see in the following description:

the man of Perfected Self-Mastery is in the mean with respect to these objects: that is to say, he neither takes pleasure in the things which delight the vicious man, and in fact rather dislikes them, nor at all in improper objects; nor to any great degree in any object of the class; nor is he pained at their absence; nor does he desire them; or, if he does, only in moderation, and neither more than he ought, nor at improper times, and so forth; but such things as are conducive to health and good condition of body, being also pleasant, these he will grasp at in moderation and as he ought to do, and also such other pleasant things as do not hinder these objects, and are not unseemly or disproportionate to his means; because he that should grasp at such would be liking such pleasures more than is proper; but the man of Perfected Self-Mastery is not of this character, but regulates his desires by the dictates of right reason. (54)

A happy life, a good life, hence involves the regulation of desire. It is not simply that we desire happiness but that happiness is imagined as what you get in return for desiring well. Good subjects will not experience pleasure from the wrong objects (they will be hurt by them or indifferent to them) and will only experience a certain amount of pleasure from the right objects. We learn to experience some things as pleasure—as being good—where the experience itself becomes the truth of the object ("it is good") as well as the subject ("we are good"). It is not only that the association between objects and affects is preserved through habit; we also acquire good tastes through habit. When history becomes second nature, the affect seems obvious or even literal, as if it follows directly from what has already been given. We assume that we experience delight because "it" is delightful.

The literalism of affect slides into the literalism of the moral economy: we assume something feels good because it is good. We are good if it feels good. In other words, when we are affected in a good way by what is attributed as being good, we become the good ones, the virtuous and happy ones. Happiness allows us to line up with things in the right way. As Jacques Lacan suggests in
Ethics: "Moral experience as such, that is to say, the reference to sanctions, puts man in a certain relation to his own action that concerns not only an articulated law, but also a direction, a trajectory, in a word, a good that he appeals to, thereby engendering an ideal of conduct" ([1986] 1992: 3). Happiness directs you toward the good, while creating the impression that the good is what gives you direction.

Sociable Happiness

If we learn from the promissory nature of happiness, we learn that happiness is about how some things are made into goods, before we happen upon them. To be directed toward such good things is to be directed in the right way. It is important that we share this direction with others. The fan club or hobby group makes explicit what is implicit in social life: that we tend to like those who like the things we like. This is why the social bond is always sensational. If the same objects make us happy—or if we invest in the same objects as if they make us happy—then we would be directed or oriented in the same way. To be affected in a good way by objects that are already evaluated as good is a way of belonging to an affective community. We align ourselves with others by investing in the same objects as the cause of happiness.

The role of affect as a shared orientation is clear in classical philosophy. For instance, Socrates in Plato’s Republic asks, “Isn’t it the sharing of feelings of pleasure and distress which binds a community together—when (in so far as it is feasible) the whole citizen body feels more or less the same pleasure or distress at the same gains and losses” (1998: 176). We do not have to assume such feelings are what we have in common. Rather, the social bond is binding insofar as feelings are deposited in the same object, which may then accumulate value as happy or unhappy objects: a group may come together by articulating love for the same things, and hate for the same things, even if that love and hate is not simply felt by all those who identify with the group.

The more happy objects circulate, the more they accumulate affective value, as signs of the good life. But what happens when happy objects circulate? How do happy objects sustain their promise in the absence of happiness being given? Consider that the word promise derives from the Latin verb promittere, suggesting “to let go or send forth, to put forth” as well as “to promise, guar-
antee, or predict.” The promise of happiness might be what sends happiness forth. When objects are promising, they are sent out or sent forth; to promise can mean to pass around a promise.

Is happiness sent forth? Does the promise of happiness mean that happiness is passed around? If we were to say that the promise of happiness means that happiness is sent forth, we might also suggest that happiness is contagious. David Hume’s approach to moral emotions rests on a contagious model of happiness.26 He suggests that “others enter into the same humour, and catch the sentiment, by a contagion or natural sympathy” and that cheerfulness is the most communicative of emotions: “the flame spreads through the whole circle; and the most sullenly and remorse are often caught by it” ([1748] 1755: 250–51; see also Blackman 2008). A number of scholars have recently taken up the idea of affects as contagious, drawing in particular on the work of the psychologist of affect Silvan Tomkins (Gibbs 2001; Brennan 2004; Sedgwick 2003; Probyn 2005). As Anna Gibbs describes: “Bodies can catch feelings as easily as catch fire: affect leaps from one body to another, evoking tenderness, inciting shame, igniting rage, exciting fear—in short, communicable affect can inflame nerves and muscles in a conflagration of every conceivable kind of passion” (2001: 1).

Thinking of affects as contagious does help us to challenge what I have called an “inside out” model of affect (Ahmed 2004: 9), by showing how we are affected by what is around us. However, the concept of affective contagion does tend to treat affect as something that moves smoothly from body to body, sustaining integrity in being passed around. When Sedgwick argues that shame is contagious, for example, she suggests that proximity to someone’s shame generates shame (2003: 36–38). The implication of such arguments is that affects are sustained in being passed around: shame creates shame in others, and happiness creates happiness in others, and so on.27 I wonder whether the concept of affective contagion might underestimate the extent to which affects are contingent (involving the “hap” of a happening): to be affected by another does not mean that an affect simply passes or “leaps” from one body to another. The affect becomes an object only given the contigency of how we are affected. We might be affected differently by what gets passed around.

If contagion can be described as a “natural sympathy,” to use David Hume’s term quoted earlier, then to be sympathetic would be to return feeling with like feeling.28 To be sympathetic would be to feel like. If the model of contagion
describes the body-to-body process of being affected in terms of the passing of like feeling, then it also generates an idea of social feeling as feeling like. And yet, social feeling does not give feeling a definite content. So what is feeling like actually like?

We can take the example of atmosphere. We might describe an "atmosphere" as a feeling of what is around, which might be affective in its murkiness or fuzziness, as a surrounding influence which does not quite generate its own form. At the same time, in describing an atmosphere, we give this influence some form. We might say the atmosphere was tense, which would mean that the body that arrives into the room will "pick up" tension and become tense, as a way of being influenced. When feelings become atmospheric, we can catch the feeling simply by walking into a room, from a crowd or the collective body, or from being proximate to another. Returning to happiness, we would say that to sympathize with another's happiness would be to feel happiness. For happiness to be atmospheric you would be affected happily by walking into a room in which happiness has already been given in return. You would be "lifted up" by inhabiting what has been shared, a sensation of well feeling or good feeling, however murky.

But do we pick up feelings in quite this way? Consider the opening sentence of Teresa Brennan's book The Transmission of Affect: "Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and 'felt the atmosphere'?” (2004: 1). Brennan writes very beautifully about how the atmosphere "gets into the individual," using what I have called an "outside in" model, also very much part of the intellectual history of crowd psychology and the sociology of emotion (Ahmed 2004: 5). However, later in the introduction she makes an observation that involves a different model. Brennan suggests that "If I feel anxiety when I enter the room, then that will influence what I perceive or receive by way of an 'impression' (a word that means what it says)” (6). I agree. Anxiety is sticky: rather like Velcro, it tends to pick up whatever comes near. Or we could say that anxiety gives us a certain kind of angle on what comes near. Anxiety is, of course, one feeling state among others. If bodies do not arrive in neutral, if we are always in some way or another moody, then what we will receive as an impression will depend on our affective situation. This second argument suggests the atmosphere is not simply "out there" before it gets "in": how we arrive, how we enter this room or that room, will affect what impressions we receive. To receive is to act. To receive an impression is to make an impression.

So we may walk into the room and "feel the atmosphere," but what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival. Or we might say that the atmosphere is already angled; it is always felt from a specific point. The pedagogic encounter is full of angles. How many times have I read students as interested or bored, such that the atmosphere seemed one of interest or boredom (and even felt myself to be interesting or boring), only to find students recall the event quite differently! Having read the atmosphere in a certain way, one can become tense: which in turn affects what happens, how things move along. The moods we arrive with do affect what happens: which is not to say we always keep our moods. Sometimes I arrive heavy with anxiety, and everything that happens makes me feel more anxious, while at other times things happen which ease the anxiety, making the space itself seem light and energetic. We do not know in advance what will happen given this contingency, given the lap of what happens; we do not know "exactly" what makes things happen in this way and that. Situations are affective given the gap between the impressions we have of others and the impressions we make on others, all of which are lively.

Think too of experiences of alienation. I have suggested that happiness is attributed to certain objects that circulate as social goods. When we feel pleasure from such objects, we are aligned; we are facing the right way. We become alienated — out of line with an affective community — when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are attributed as being good. The gap between the affective value of an object and how we experience an object can involve a range of affects, which are directed by the modes of explanation we offer to fill this gap.

We might feel disappointed. Disappointment can be experienced as a gap between an ideal and an experience that demands action. We can return to the example of the wedding day: the "happiest day of your life." What does it mean for such a day to be anticipated as being the happiest day when the day is actually happening? We might say that the day happens because of this anticipation of happiness. But however the day happens, when it does happen, happiness must follow. As Arlie Russell Hochschild explores in her classic book The Managed Heart, if the bride is not happy on the wedding day and even feels "depressed and upset," then she is experiencing an "inappropriate affect" (1983) 2003: 59) or is being affected inappropriately. You have to save the day by feeling right: "sensing a gap between the ideal feeling and the actual feeling she tolerated, the bride prompts herself to 'be happy'” (61).
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The capacity to "save the day" depends on the bride being able to make herself feel affected in the right way or at least being able to persuade others that she is being affected in the right way. When it can be said that "the bride looked happy," then the expectation of happiness has become the happiness of expectation. To correct our feelings is to become disaffected from a former affection: the bride makes herself happy by stopping herself being miserable. Of course we learn from this example that it is possible not to inhabit fully one's own happiness, or even to be alienated from one's happiness, if the former affection remains lively, or if one is made uneasy by the labor of making yourself feel a certain way. Uneasiness might persist in the very feeling of being happy, as a feeling of unease with the happiness you are in.

The experience of a gap between the promise of happiness and how you are affected by objects that promise happiness does not always lead to corrections that close this gap. Disappointment can also involve an anxious narrative of self-doubt (why am I not made happy by this, what is wrong with me?), or a narrative of rage, where the object that is supposed to make us happy is attributed as the cause of disappointment. Your rage might be directed against the object that fails to deliver its promise, or it might spill out toward those who promised you happiness through the elevation of some things as good. Anger can fill the gap between the promise of a feeling and the feeling of a feeling. We become strangers, or affect aliens, in such moments.31

We can also feel alienated by forms of happiness that we think are inappropriate. Take the example of laughter in the cinema. How many times have I sunk desperately into my chair when that laughter has been expressed at points I find far from amusing! We do not always notice when others sink. One can feel unjustly interpelled in such occasions: the gestures of discomfort and alienation do not register; they do not affect the collective impression made by the laughter. To an outsider, it might simply appear that the audience found the film funny, and that the laughter was contagious, affecting everybody.

The example reminds us that even when "a crowd" is experienced as if it has "a mind of its own," this does not mean that those in the crowd experience the crowd in the same way. Turning to Gustave Le Bon's classic account of crowd psychology, it is interesting that he stresses the importance of direction: "When defining crowds, we said that one of their general characteristics was an excessive suggestibility, and we have shown to what an extent suggestions are contagious in every human agglomeration; a fact which explains the rapid turning of the sentiments of a crowd in a definite direction" (1895) 2002: 14; see also Blackman and Walkerdine 2001. Note that Le Bon does not suggest here that sentiments simply spread; rather what spreads are "suggestions" that in turn direct sentiments in a certain way. We have already seen how sentiment involves directionality, or a way of being directed. What is striking in this model is the presumption that the crowd both preexists this shared direction (the crowd turns) and is an effect of that direction (the turning of the crowd is how sentiments cohere).

And yet, experiences of being in a crowd do not necessarily mean that we are all directed in the same way. Early work in media studies shows that experiences of being in a crowd often involve a sense of not participating in a shared event, for example, of not being able to "see" whatever is in the direction the crowd faces (Lang and Lang 1969). The crowd may appear with a mind of its own only from the point of view of being outside the crowd, watching "it" in the unfolding of an event or spectacle. Alien bodies who do share the affective direction simply disappear from such a viewing point. We cannot even assume that those who appear directed "in the right way" feel the same way about the direction they are facing.

Good and bad feelings can be generative, even if they do not simply spread. When people feel bad, they can certainly bring other people down. They might complain, worry, and convey anxiety or hurt, or express pessimism about the future. The expressions can be repeated by others, as a form of return, which will affect what impressions we have of that space. Expressing bad feeling can even become habitual in certain times and places, as a way of belonging to an affective community. The use of complaint as a form of social bonding would be a case in point. Good feelings are also affective. A person who is "in a good mood" can bring others up. Smiling, laughing, expressing optimism about what is possible will affect others. It is not that you necessarily catch the feeling but that the experience of being with and around a person in a good mood gives a certain lightness, humor, and energy to shared spaces, which can make those spaces into happy objects, what we direct good feelings toward.

Then again, good feelings do not simply generate good feeling. We can be asked to smile in order to occupy certain spaces as a form of emotion work (Hochschild [1983] 2003). In such cases, happiness becomes a technology of self-production, which can intensify bad feelings by keeping them on hold. Or,
if someone feels bad and encounters somebody being cheerful, it can feel like a pressure and can even be painful: as if that person is trying to "jolly you up." Happy moods are precarious, even when they are generative. Sometimes what you encounter cannot extend the good feeling; then you lose the good feeling and you are "brought down." Such moments of loss are quickly converted into anger: you become angry as the object not only hurts but has taken your good feelings away. Happiness is precarious and even perverted because it does not reside within objects or subjects (as a form of positive residence) but is a matter of how things make an impression.

So when happy objects are passed around it is not necessarily the feeling that passes. To share objects, or have a share in objects, might mean simply that you share an orientation toward those objects as being good. What passes is the promise of the feeling, which means that feelings lag behind the objects that are assumed to contain them. Objects become saturated with affects as sites of personal and social tension. The passing of happy objects may generate forms of antagonism even when we share an orientation toward those objects as being good.

What passes through the passing of happy objects remains an open and empirical question. After all, passing can be used to convey not only processes of sending over or transmitting but also "the process or fact of changing from one state to another." Like the game Chinese whispers, perhaps what passes between proximate bodies might be affective because it deviates and even perverts what is "sent out." Indeed, returning to Le Bon, if it is suggestion rather than sentiment that spreads, then "what happens" involves spreading the word. If words mutate as they are passed around—as we know they do in gossip and rumor as well as suggestion—then to spread is to pervert. What interests me is how affects involve perversion and what I would describe as conversion points.

I am not suggesting here that affects simply get converted as they pass around: for instance, in the conversion from good to bad feeling, or from excitement to anxiety, and so on—though such conversions do happen. Rather, I want to suggest that objects become affective as points of conversion. Good and bad feelings accumulate "around" objects, such that those objects become sticky. Objects become ambivalent in the conversion between negative and positive feeling states: "happy objects" can become "unhappy" over time, in the contingency of what happens, which is not to say that their happiness no longer persists as an impression, available as memory. We do not know in advance what forms such affective conversions take. One of my key questions in this book is how such conversions happen, and "who" or "what" gets seen as converting bad feeling into good feeling and good into bad. We can think of narrative as a form of affective conversion. Through narrative, the promise of happiness is located as well as distributed. To make a simple point: some bodies more than others will bear the promise of happiness.

Happy Families

I have suggested that happiness involves a way of being aligned with others, of facing the right way. The points of alignment become points of happiness. The family, for example, is a happy object, one that binds and is binding. We hear the term "happy families" and we register the connection of these words in the familiarity of their affective resonance. Happy families: a card game, a title of a children's book, a government discourse; a promise, a hope, a dream, an aspiration. The happy family is both a myth of happiness, of where and how happiness takes place, and a powerful legislative device, a way of distributing time, energy, and resources. The family is also an inheritance. To inherit the family can be to acquire an orientation toward some things and not others as the cause of happiness. In other words, it is not just that groups cohere around happy objects; we are asked to reproduce what we inherit by being affected in the right way by the right things.

The happy family is both an object (something that affects us, something we are directed toward) and circulates through objects. The family photograph album might be one such object: the picture of the family as happy is one way in which the family is produced as a happy object. That these objects are on display, that they make visible a fantasy of a good life, depends on returning such a direction with a "yes," or even with gestures of love, or witnessing these objects as one's own field of preferred intimacy. To preserve the family you must preserve certain things. Simone de Beauvoir describes how: "The ideal of happiness has always taken material form in the house . . . Within its walls the family is established as a discrete cell or a unit group and maintains its identity.
people do not like the same things. Those who are like can find things delightful that I do not like. The word "peculiarity" suggests a "peculiarity of classification or arrangement," and a "peculiarity of arrangement" might be a way of being directed toward somebody else's wants. The generosity can be a way of being directed toward somebody else's wants. The generosity
of encouragement can hide the force of being directed somewhere. And once you are there, you can get stuck there. I think we know this.

Consider the word *influence*, which can be defined as "the exertion of action of which the operation is unseen or insensible (or perceptible only in its effects), by one person or thing upon another." To be influenced is to be directed in one way or another, where we cannot quite see the point of pressure. With prohibitions, we can usually notice the pressure point, the harshness of being brought up against what you are not. There is no doubt about the power of the "no words;" the "don't do that;" or "no that's wrong" that might be articulated in anticipation of the deviation of the child's desire (those "just in case" no's that almost want the act of deviation to acquire a sense of retrospective justice) as well as in response to deviation. We can hear that "no" in part as it asks us to stop doing something. It might be harder to hear the "yes words"—the "yes," or the "yes that's good," or the "yes that's a good way to be"—because the words seem to "go along" with or affirm what we are already doing. To think about happiness is to think about the role of affirmation. To affirm can mean to state or assert positively, as well as to establish, confirm, or ratify. To be affirmed is to be given positive encouragement, which might be what confirms a certain order of things or creates order out of things.

We are affirmed by happiness: we go along and get along by doing what we do, and doing it well. Happiness means here living a certain kind of life, one that reaches certain points, and which, in reaching these points, creates happiness for others. The family is after all "where" the child is cultivated, where the child learns the right habits, which, in turn, render some objects as happy for the child. In *Family Happiness*, the children "were being brought up under the old order, which required that parents inspire all manners of good habits in their children" (31). If parenting is about orienting the children in the right way, then children must place their hopes for happiness in the same things. The family becomes a happy object if we share this orientation.

Happiness involves here the comfort of repetition, of following lines that have already been given in advance. For Polly, this path is described as the straight path (193). Happiness involves the labor of staying on the right path. When Polly deviates, the world falls apart: she loses "her place in her marriage, her place in her family, her place in herself" (78). By not being oriented toward the "family table," she becomes disoriented, losing her place in the world. When Polly deviates from the path of making others happy, she disturbs everything; she even causes disturbance. She herself is even disturbed at this point. She becomes an affect alien. The affect alien is the one who converts good feelings into bad, who as it were "kills" the joy of the family. The following three chapters of this book will explore happy families from the point of view of those who are alienated from its promise: feminist killjoys, unhappy queers, and melancholic migrants.
In 1960, the problem that has no name burst like a boil through the image of the happy American housewife. In the television commercials the pretty housewives still beamed over their foaming dishpans... But the actual unhappiness of the American housewife was suddenly being reported... although almost everybody who talked about it found some superficial reason to dismiss it. BETTY FRIEDAN

CHAPTER TWO

Feminist Killjoys

BETTY FRIEDAN in The Feminine Mystique identifies a problem that has no name by evoking what lies behind the image of the happy American housewife (1966: 19–20). What lies behind this image bursts through, like a boil, exposing an infection underneath her beaming smile. Friedan proceeds by exposing the limits of this public fantasy of happiness. The happy housewife is a fantasy figure that erases the signs of labor under the sign of happiness. The claim that women are happy and that this happiness is behind the work they do functions to justify gendered forms of labor, not as a product of nature, law, or duty, but as an expression of a collective wish and desire. How better to justify an unequal distribution of labor than to say that such labor makes people happy? How better to secure consent to unpaid or poorly paid labor than to describe such consent as the origin of good feeling?

And yet, who or what do we see in this image of the happy housewife? She is, as Friedan points out, a fantasy. Even as fantasy, however, she evokes the embodied situation of some women more than others. After all, many women at this time were not housewives: for some women to work at home would be an aspiration rather than situation. bell hooks in Feminist Theory points to this exclusivity of the happy housewife, even when understood as fantasy:

“When Friedan wrote The Feminine Mystique, more than one-third of all women were in the workforce. Although many women longed to be housewives, only women with leisure time and money could actually shape their identities on the model of the feminine mystique” (2000: 2). Friedan’s solution to the unhappiness of housewives—that they should be liberated from the house—has consequences for those women who could not shape their identities around the feminine mystique. As hooks points out, “She did not discuss who would be called in to take care of the children and maintain the home if more women like herself were freed from their house labor and given equal access with white men to the professions” (1–2). While the fantasy of the happy housewife conceals the signs of domestic labor under the sign of happiness, the fantasy of the housewife becoming happy through being liberated from the home might also conceal the labor of other women, who might be required to take over “the foaming dishpans.”

When we track this figure of the happy housewife, we need to think of what the figure does, and how that figure works to secure not just ideas of happiness but ideas of who is entitled to happiness. White liberal feminists such as Betty Friedan taught us that proximity to the fantasy of the good life does not mean proximity to happiness. Sheila Rowbotham describes how “in the writing of the early years there is a struggle to assert a separate identity and challenge the house as a fantasy of happiness” (1989: 3). Black feminists such as bell hooks teach us that some women—black and working-class women—are not even entitled to be proximate to the fantasy, though they may be instrumental in enabling others to approximate its form. We can consider not so much how happiness as such is distributed (this would forget what was important about the second-wave critique of the unhappiness concealed by the figure of the happy housewife) but the distribution of relative proximity to ideas of happiness. Or we might speculate that what is unequally distributed is the feeling that you have what should make you happy, a distribution of the promise of a feeling, or the feeling of a promise, rather than the distribution of happiness, as such.

Have images of happy housewives been replaced by rather more desperate ones? While there is a diversification of affects tied to the figure of the happy housewife, which gives her a more complex affective life, it does not necessarily dislodge the happiness that is presumed to reside in “what” she does, even in descriptions of relative unhappiness. Unhappiness can function as a sign of frustration, of being “held back” or “held up” from doing what makes
her happy. Explanations of relative unhappiness can function to restore the power of an image of the good life in the form of nostalgia or regret for what has been lost.

The happy housewife retains its force as a place holder for women's desires and could even be said to be making a return. Take the following passage from Darla Shine's *Happy Housewives*: "Being home in a warm, comfy house floating around in your pajamas and fuzzy slippers while sipping coffee as your babies play on the floor and your hubby works hard to pay for it all is not desperation. Grow up! Shut up! Count your blessings!" (2005: 15). Shine conjures for the reader a very specific image of what makes housewives happy. In conjuring this image—of leisure, comfort, and ease—she calls for us to return to a certain kind of life, as if this was the kind of life that women gave up in embracing feminism: her fantasy of the happy housewife is as much a white bourgeois fantasy of the past, a nostalgia for a past that was never possible as a present for most women, let alone being available in the present. Shine argues that women have become invested in "being desperate" and have been betrayed by the feminist movement that has "dropped the ball for women at home" (19).

Alluding to the program *Desperate Housewives* as an example of what women do not want, Shine encourages us to adopt a new image: "I want mothers everywhere to dismiss this horrible image of desperation and come together to promote the image of the happy housewife" (6). This new image comes with a commitment to specific values: respect; pride; confidence; passion; friendship; a clean beautiful home; and, most importantly, a close relationship with your children" (2). While mothering is a crucial element here in this manual for happiness, so too is marriage, as an institution described in terms of heterosexual intimacy: Shine suggests that "you will never be a happy housewife if you're not intimate with your husband" (53).

Shine's book is unexceptional. On the Internet, we witness a new generation of bloggers who take on this identity of "the happy housewife." These bloggers use the opportunity of the public space generated by new technologies to make public their claim of happiness. This claim is also an insistence on the error of feminism and on the importance of instructing women on how to be happy; happiness is being good at being a housewife, as well as what follows being good. Such blogs typically include recipes, tips on doing housework, thoughts on mothering, as well as belief statements that register the happy housewife as an important social role and duty that must be defended, as if the speech act ("I am a happy housewife") is itself a rebellion against a social orthodoxy. The image of the happy housewife is repeated and accumulates affective power in the very narration of her as a minority subject who has to reclaim something that has been taken from her. This affective power not only presses against feminist claims that behind the image of the happy housewife was an unspoken collective unhappiness but also involves a counterclaim that happiness is not so much what the housewife has but what she does: her duty is to generate happiness by the very act of embracing this image.

In this political context, it is not surprising that research in happiness studies has "shown" that traditional housewives are happier than their working counterparts, as the American journalist Meghan O'Rourke explores in her aptly named article "Desperate Feminist Wives" (2006). By implication, it is feminism that gives women the desires that have made them unhappy. This chapter will offer a different way of understanding the relationship between feminism and unhappiness. I begin by reflecting on how happiness was used historically as an argument for sustaining a gendered division of labor, taking as a starting point the work of the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau on education. My argument challenges Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd's claim that the happy housewife was a feminist myth—what they call "a myth of a myth"—through which the feminist subject could generate the housewife as "the other" (2004: 2). I suggest that the happy housewife has a very long genealogy, and that she emerges as a figure at least in part as a response to feminist claims.

By providing a genealogy of the happy housewife, we can reflect on the political landscape in which the figures of the unhappy housewife and the feminist killjoy emerge. My suggestion is that we can reread the negativity of such figures in terms of the challenge they offer to the assumption that happiness follows relative proximity to a social ideal. I focus not only on the affective power of these figures but also on feminist consciousness as a form of unhappiness, suggesting that earlier feminist languages of "consciousness-raising" and even "false consciousness" may be useful in an exploration of the limitations of happiness as a horizon of experience.
Happiness, Education, and Women

In the previous chapter, I argued that happiness functions as a promise that directs you toward certain objects, as if they provide you with the necessary ingredients for a good life. Happiness is a form of orientation: the very hope for happiness means we get directed in specific ways, as happiness is assumed to follow from some life choices and not others.

If happiness is an affective form of orientation, then happiness is crucial to education, which can be considered an orientation device. The child—who we might recall is considered by John Locke as a blank slate—is the site of potential. What happens to the child will shape what the child can become; the child's presumed emptiness becomes an imperative to shape its becoming. Education becomes about directing such potentiality; about steering the child in the right direction. Or to use a metaphor from horticulture, education is about cultivation, whereby, through tending the soil, you encourage the plants to grow in some ways rather than others. To educate is to orient, which is why education plays a central role in debates about happiness. Nel Noddings describes how "happiness should be an aim of education, and a good education should contribute significantly to personal and collective happiness" (2003: 1).

Since classical times, the role of education as a form of orientation has been explicit. In Republic education is described as "the art of orientation" (198: 245). Education should "devise the simplest and most effective methods of turning minds around. It shouldn't be the art of implanting sight in the organ, but should proceed on the understanding that the organ already has the capacity, but is improperly aligned and isn't facing the right way" (245-46; emphasis added). Education provides a way of getting the would-be subject to face the right way such that they can receive the right impressions. Education involves being directed not only by being turned around but by being turned "the right way" round. To turn minds around is an educational imperative only given the presumption that the would-be subject is improperly aligned.

The promise of happiness involves being "turned around." We can see how happiness involves turning in Rousseau's Émile ([1762] 1993), a book which has been described as "haunted" by Plato: Rousseau himself considered Republic "the most beautiful book on education that had yet been written" (Strong 2002: 135). Émile is told in the first person, by a narrator whose duty is to instruct a young orphan named Émile, in order that he can take up his place in the world. Education for Émile is about becoming a good man. Within this book, happiness plays a crucial role: the good man does not seek happiness but achieves happiness as a consequence of virtue. This book had considerable influence on European thought and became a key reference point within feminist debates. Rousseau offers a model of what a good education would do for his Émile, but also for Émile's would-be wife Sophy, whom he introduces in the fifth book. Rousseau's argument was that women and men should be educated in different ways that enabled them to fulfill their specific duties as gendered beings.

In this book, education for Sophy is about what she must become in order to be a good wife for Émile. Happiness provides a script for her becoming. As Rousseau explains, the aim for woman is "to be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy; these are the duties of women for all time, and this is what she should be taught while she is young. The further we depart from this principle, the further we shall be from our goal, and all our precepts will fail to secure her happiness or our own" ([1762] 1993: 393). Any deviation from gender roles defined in terms of women being trained to make men happy is a deviation from the happiness of all.

For Rousseau the good woman has a duty to keep the family together, to preserve the integrity of its form. Rousseau asks us to "imagine a virtuous and charming wife, adorned with such accomplishments and devoting them to her husband's amusement; will she not add to his happiness? When he leaves his office worn out with the day's work, will she not prevent him seeking recreation elsewhere? Have we not all beheld happy families gathered together, each contributing to the general amusement?" (404). Subjects do not participate equally in the "general amusement." Women must learn to make men happy in order to keep families together, in order to prevent recreation from taking place elsewhere. It is women's duty to keep happiness in house.

The good woman is good in part because of what she judges to be good, and hence how she aligns her happiness with the happiness of others. The good woman is made happy by what is good. As Rousseau describes: "She loves virtue because there is nothing fairer in itself, she loves it because it is a woman's glory and because a virtuous woman is little lower than the angels;
she loves virtue as the only road to real happiness, because she sees nothing but poverty, neglect, unhappiness, shame, and disgrace in the life of a bad woman; she loves virtue because it is dear to her revered father, and to her tender and worthy mother; they are not content to be happy in their own virtue, they desire hers; and she finds her chief happiness in the hope of just making them happy” (431). The complexity of this statement should not be underestimated. She loves virtue as it is the road to happiness; unhappiness and disgrace follow from being bad. The good woman wants to be happy and hence wants what is good. The good woman also loves what is good because this is what is loved by her parents. The parents desire not only what is good; they desire their daughter to be good. The daughter is good to give them what they desire. For her to be happy, she must be good, as being good is what makes them happy, and she can only be happy if they are happy.

Statements on the conditionality of happiness — how one person’s happiness is made conditional upon another’s — ensure that happiness is directive: happiness becomes what is given by being given as a shared orientation toward what is good. It might seem that what I am calling “conditional happiness” involves a relationship of care and reciprocity: as if to say, I will not have a share in a happiness that cannot be shared. And yet, the terms of conditionality are unequal. If certain people come first — we might say those who are already in place (such as parents, hosts, or citizens) — then their happiness comes first. For those who are positioned as coming after, happiness means following somebody else’s goods.

The concept of conditional happiness allows me to develop my argument about the sociality of happiness. I suggested in the previous chapter that we might have a social bond if the same objects make us happy. I am suggesting here that happiness itself can become the shared object. Or to be more precise, if one person’s happiness is made conditional on another person’s happiness, such that the other person’s happiness comes first, then the other person’s happiness becomes a shared object. Max Scheler’s differentiation between communities of feeling and fellow-feeling might help explain the significance of this argument. In communities of feeling, we share feelings because we share the same object of feeling (so we might feel sorrow at the loss of someone whom we both love; our sorrow would be directed toward an object that is shared). Fellow-feeling would be when I feel sorrow about your grief although I do not share your object of grief: “all fellow-feeling involves intentional reference of the

feeling of joy or sorrow to the other person’s experience” (Scheler [1913] 2008: 13). In this case, your grief is what grieves me; your grief is the object of my grief. I would speculate that in everyday life these different forms of shared feeling can be confused because the object of feeling is sometimes but not always exterior to the feeling that is shared.

Say I am happy about your happiness. Your happiness is with x. If I share x, then your happiness and my happiness is not only shared but can accumulate through being returned. Or I can simply disregard x: if my happiness is directed “just” toward your happiness, and you are happy about x, the exteriority of x can disappear or cease to matter (although it can reappear). Alternatively, because I experience happiness in your happiness, I could wish that our feeling of fellowship in happiness amounts to being happy about the same things (a community of happiness), such that x becomes shared as a happiness wish. Of course, if the object that makes you happy is my happiness wish, then this would be precarious basis for sharing something (as wishing to be happy about x can also be an admission that one is not simply happy about x). In cases where I am also affected by x, and I do not share your happiness with x, I might become uneasy and ambivalent, as I am made happy by your happiness but I am not made happy by what makes you happy. The exteriority of x would then announce itself as a point of crisis: I want your happiness to be what makes me happy, but I am reminded that even if my happiness is conditional on yours, your happiness is conditional on x and I am not happy with x. In such occasions, conditional happiness would require that I take up what makes you happy as what makes me happy, which may involve compromising my own idea of happiness (so I will go along with x in order to make you happy even if x does not “really” make me happy). In order to preserve the happiness of all, we might even conceal from ourselves our unhappiness with x, or try to persuade ourselves that x matters less than the happiness of the other who is made happy by x.

We have a hint of the rather uneasy dynamics of conditional happiness in Emile. For Sophy, wanting to make her parents happy commits her in a certain direction, regardless of what she might or might not want. If she can only be happy if they are happy, then she must do what makes them happy. In one episode, the father speaks to the daughter about becoming a woman: “You are a big girl now, Sophy, you will soon be a woman. We want you to be happy, for our sakes as well as yours, for our happiness depends on yours. A good girl
finds her own happiness in the happiness of a good man” (434). Sophy’s father offers a happiness commandment: it is for the sake of her own happiness and the happiness of her parents that she must find happiness in the right place, which is in the happiness of a good man. So it is not simply that groups cohere by taking up the same objects as the causes of happiness; some subjects are required to take up the happiness causes of others. In this case, for the daughter not to go along with the parents’ desire for her marriage would not only cause her parents unhappiness but would threaten the very reproduction of social form. The daughter has a duty to reproduce the form of the family, which means taking up the cause of parental happiness as her own.

In this case, Sophy “happily” does what her parents want her to do. We might imagine that she wishes to be made happy by the same things and receives some comfort by the realization of a happiness wish. Of course, we do not “really” know if Sophy gets what she wants. The book can give us a happy ending by not giving us an account of Sophie’s desires beyond the articulation of a wish to make her parents happy. The narrator declares triumphantly: “At last I see the happy day approaching, the happiest day of Émile’s life and my own; I see the crown of my labours, I begin to appreciate their results. The noble pair are united till death do part; heart and lips confirm no empty vows; they are man and wife” (526–27). The happy ending involves not simply the alignment of desire but the willingness of the daughter to align her desire with the parental desire for happiness.

Happiness is how the given becomes given. In Émile happiness is linked to nature: as being what follows naturally from how things are, or how things are if they are allowed to flourish. As Rousseau explains: “I kept to the path of nature, until she should show me the path of happiness. And lo! their paths were the same, and without knowing it this was the path I trod” (487). Happiness becomes what follows nature’s paths. Deviations from nature become deviations from the common good. For women to be educated to be anything other than wives for men would hence take them away from nature, and from what can promise happiness.

It should be no surprise that Rousseau’s treatment of Sophy was a crucial object of feminist critique. Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* spoke out against Rousseau’s vision of what makes women happy. She comments wryly about his treatment of Sophy: “I have probably had an opportunity of observing more girls in their infancy than J. J. Rousseau” (1792, 70).

1975: 43). The political plea of *Vindication* is against the right of men to decide what happiness means for women. As Wollstonecraft argues: “Consider, I address you as a legislator, whether, when men contend for their freedom, and to be allowed to judge for themselves respecting their own happiness, it be not inconsistent and unjust to subjugate women, even though you firmly believe that you are acting in the manner best calculated to promote their happiness?” (5). The struggle over happiness forms the political horizon in which feminist claims are made. My argument is simple: we inherit this horizon.

**Troublemakers**

We learn from this history how happiness is used as a technology or instrument, which allows the reorientation of individual desire toward a common good. We also learn from rereading books like Émile how happiness is not simply used to secure social relations instrumentally but works as an idea or aspiration within everyday life, shaping the very terms through which individuals share their world with others, creating “scripts” for how to live well.

We can think of gendered scripts as “happiness scripts” providing a set of instructions for what women and men must do in order to be happy, whereby happiness is what follows being natural or good. Going along with happiness scripts is how we get along: to get along is to be willing and able to express happiness in proximity to the right things. The child thus has a happiness duty. A duty can function as a debt, a way of returning what is owed. In the previous chapter, I spoke of happiness as involving the logic of deferral: the parents defer their hope for happiness to the next generation in order to avoid giving up on the idea of happiness as a response to disappointment (you can keep your belief in happiness while being disappointed as long as you can place your hopes for happiness in another). The obligation of the child to be happy is a repaying of what the child owes, of what is due to the parents given what they have given up. The duty of the child is to make the parents happy and to perform this duty happily by being happy or by showing signs of being happy in the right way.

Going along with this duty can mean simply approximating the signs of being happy—passing as happy—in order to keep things in the right place. Feminist genealogies can be described as genealogies of women who not only
do not place their hopes for happiness in the right things but who speak out about their unhappiness with the very obligation to be made happy by such things. The history of feminism is thus a history of making trouble, a history of women who refuse to become Sophs, by refusing to follow other people’s goods, or by refusing to make others happy.

The female troublemaker might be trouble because she gets in the way of the happiness of others. Judith Butler shows how the figure of the troublemaker exposes the intimacy of rebellion and punishment within the law. As she argues in her preface to Gender Trouble: “To make trouble was, within the reigning discourse of my childhood, something one should never do precisely because that would get one in trouble. The rebellion and its reprimand seemed to be caught up in the same terms, a phenomenon that gave rise to my first critical insight into the subtle use of power: The prevailing law threatened one with trouble, even put one in trouble, all to keep one out of trouble” (1990: vii). Happiness might be what keeps you out of trouble only by evoking the unhappiness of getting into trouble. We can consider how nineteenth century bildungsroman novels by women writers offered a rebellion against Émile in the narrativization of the limitations of moral education for girls and its narrow precepts of happiness. Such novels are all about the intimacy of trouble and happiness.

Take, for example, George Eliot’s The Mill on the Floss, which is told from the point of view of Maggie Tulliver. The early stages of the novel depict Maggie’s childhood, the difficulty of her relationship with her brother Tom, and her perpetual fear of disappointing her parents. The novel contrasts Tom and Maggie in terms of how they are judged by their parents: “Tom never did the same sort of foolish things as Maggie, having a wonderful instinctive discernment of what would turn to his advantage or disadvantage; and so it happened that though he was much more willful and inflexible than Maggie, his mother hardly ever called him naughty” ([1860] 1965: 73). Various incidents occur that contribute to Maggie’s reputation as a troublemaker: when she lets Tom’s dog die (37); when she cuts her dark hair (73); when she knocks over Tom’s building blocks (96); and when she pushes their cousin Lucy into the water (111-112).

The novel shows us how trouble does not simply reside within individuals but involves ways of reading situations of conflict and struggle. Reading such situations involves locating the cause of trouble, which is another way of talking about conversion points: the troublemaker is the one who violates the

fragile conditions of peace. If in all these instances Maggie is attributed as the cause of trouble, then what does not get noticed is the violence that makes her act in the way that she does, as the violence of provocation that hovers in the background. Even when Tom is told off, it is Maggie who is the reference point in situations of trouble. Mrs. Tulliver says to Tom: “Then go and fetch her in this minute, you naughty boy. And how could you think of going to pond and taking your sister where there was dirt. You know she’ll do mischief if there’s mischief to be done.” It was Mrs. Tulliver’s way, if she blamed Tom, to refer his misdemeanor, somehow or other, to Maggie” (114). Maggie gets into trouble because she is already read as being trouble before anything happens.

Maggie gets into trouble for speaking: to speak is already a form of defiance if you are supposed to recede into the background. She speaks out when something happens that she perceives to be wrong. The crisis of the novel is when her father loses the mill, threatening his ability to look after his family. Maggie is shocked by the lack of sympathy and care they receive from their extended family. Maggie speaks back out of a sense of care for her parents: “Maggie, having hurled her defiance at aunts and uncles in this way, stood still, with her large dark eyes glaring at them as if she was ready to await all consequences... You haven’t seen the end o’ your trouble wi’ that child, Besy,” said Mrs Pullet; ’she’s beyond everything for boldness and unthankfulness. Its dreadful. I might ha’ let alone paying for her schooling, for she’s worse nor ever’” (229). Girls who speak out are bold and thankless. It is important that Maggie is compelled to speak from a sense of injustice. Already we can witness the relationship between consciousness of injustice and being attributed as the cause of unhappiness.

The novel relates Maggie’s tendency to get into trouble with her desire, will, and imagination, with her love of new words that bring with them the promise of unfamiliar worlds. For instance, she loves Latin because “she delighted in new words” (159). For Maggie “these mysterious sentences, snatched from an unknown context — like strange horns of beasts and leaves of unknown plants, brought from some far-off region — gave boundless scope to her imagination and were all the more fascinating because they were in a peculiar tongue of their own, which she could learn to interpret” (159–60). The association between imagination and trouble is powerful. It teaches us how the happiness duty for women is about the narrowing of horizons, about giving up an interest in what lies beyond the familiar.
Returning to Émile, it is interesting that the danger of unhappiness is associated precisely with women having too much curiosity. At one point in the narrative, Sophy gets misdirected. Her imagination and desires are activated by reading too many books, leading her to becoming an "unhappy girl, overwhelmed with her secret grief" (439–40). If Sophy were to become too imaginative, we would not get our happy ending, premised on Sophy being given to Émile. The narrator says in response to the threat of such an unhappy ending, "Let us give Émile his Sophy; let us restore this sweet girl to life and provide her with a less vivid imagination and a happier fate" (441). Being restored to life is here being returned to the straight and narrow. Imagination is what makes women look beyond the script of happiness to a different fate. Having made Sophy sweet and unimaginative, the book can end happily.

Feminist readers might want to challenge this association between unhappiness and female imagination, which in the moral economy of happiness, makes female imagination a bad thing. But if we do not operate in this economy—that is, if we do not assume that happiness is what is good—then we can read the link between female imagination and unhappiness differently. We might explore how imagination is what allows women to be liberated from happiness and the narrowness of its horizons. We might want the girls to read the books that enable them to be overwhelmed with grief.

It is Sophy’s imagination that threatens to get in the way of her happiness, and thus of the happiness of all. Imagination is what allows girls to question the wisdom they have received and to ask whether what is good for all is necessarily good for them. We could describe one episode of The Mill on the Floss as Maggie becoming Sophy (or becoming the Sophy that Sophy must be in order to fulfil her narrative function). Maggie has an epiphany: the answer to her troubles is to become happy and good: "it flashed through her like the suddenly apprehended solution of a problem, that all the miseries of her young life had come from fixing her heart on her own pleasure as if that were the central necessity of the universe" (306). 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). To be good as a girl is to give up having a will of one’s own. The mother can thus love the daughter who is becoming like furniture, who can support the family by staying in the background: "The mother was getting fond of her tall, brown girl, the only bit of furniture now in which she could bestow her anxiety and pride" (309).

It is as if Maggie has chosen between happiness and life, by giving up life for happiness: "I’ve been a great deal happier," she said at last timidly, "since I have given up thinking about what is easy and pleasant, and being discontented because I couldn’t have my own will. Our life is determined for us—and it makes the mind very free when we give up wishing and only think of bearing what is laid upon us and doing what is given us to do" (317). Happiness is associated here with the renunciation of desire. It is her friend Philip whom Maggie is addressing at this point. It is Philip who refuses to allow Maggie to give up her life for happiness in this way. He says impatiently: "But I can’t give up wishing . . . It seems to me that we can never give up longing and wishing while we are thoroughly alive" (317).

It is Philip who loves Maggie for her aliveness, who gives her books that rekindle her sense of interest and curiosity about the world. He gives her one book that she cannot finish as she reads in this book the injustice of happiness, which is given to some and not others, those deemed worthy of love. "I didn’t finish the book," said Maggie. 'As soon as I came to the blond-haired young girl reading in the park, I shut it up and determined to read no further. I foresaw that that light-complexioned girl would win away all the love from Corinne and make her miserable. I’m determined to read no more books where the blond-haired women carry away all the happiness. I should begin to have a prejudice against them. If you could give me some story, now, where the dark woman triumphs, it would restore the balance. I want to avenge Rebecca, and Flora Madison, and Minna, and all the rest of the dark unhappy ones" (348–49).
Exercising a racialized vocabulary, Maggie exposes how darkness becomes a form of unhappiness, as lacking the qualities deemed necessary for being given a happy ending.23 Maggie gives up on giving up her life for happiness by speaking out against the injustice of happiness and how it is given to some and not others.

The novel relies on contrasting the cousins Lucy and Maggie in terms of their capacity to be happy and dutiful. Maggie admits her unhappiness to Lucy: "One gets a bad habit of being unhappy" (389). For Lucy, being happy is a way
of not being trouble; she cannot live with the reality of getting into trouble; as she says, "I've always been happy. I don't know whether I could bear much trouble" (389). Happiness involves a way of avoiding what one cannot bear.

The climactic moment of the novel comes when Stephen, who is betrothed to Lucy, announces his desire for Maggie, who is swept away by it. She almost goes along with him but realizes that she cannot: "Many things are difficult and dark to me, but I see one thing quite clearly: that I must not, cannot, seek my own happiness by sacrificing others" (471). Maggie chooses duty as if without duty there would be only the inclination of the moment. As a good Kantian subject, she says: "If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie? We should have no law but the inclination of the moment" (499), to which Stephen replies, "But it weighs nothing with you that you are robbing me of my happiness" (500–501). By choosing duty, Maggie does not avoid causing unhappiness. She must pay for her moment of transgression. Having deviated from the path of happiness, she has fulfilled her destiny as trouble. As she says in one letter: "Oh God, is there any happiness in love that could make me forget their pain" (528). Death as a result of a natural disaster (a flood) thus liberates Maggie from the unhappy consequences of causing trouble, of deviating from the paths of happiness. The injustice of her loss of life is how the novel speaks against happiness, which itself is narrated as the renunciation of life, imagination, and desire.

Even if books like The Mill on the Floss seem to punish their heroines for their transgressions, they also evoke the injustice of happiness, showing what and whom happiness gives up. In giving up on those who seem to give up on happiness, happiness acquires its coherence. We could describe happiness quite simply as a convention, such that to deviate from the paths of happiness is to challenge convention. What is a convention? The word convention comes from the verb "to convene." To convene is to gather, to assemble, or to meet up. A convention is a point around which we gather. To follow a convention is to gather in the right way, to be assembled. Feminism gives time and space to women's desires that are not assembled around the reproduction of the family form. Feminists must thus be willing to cause disturbance. Feminists might even have to be willful. A subject would be described as willful at the point that her will does not coincide with that of others, those whose will is reified as the general or social will.

The figure of the female troublemaker thus shares the same horizon with the figure of the feminist killjoy. Both figures are intelligible if they are read through the lens of the history of happiness. Feminists might kill joy simply by not finding the objects that promise happiness to be quite so promising. The word feminism is thus saturated with unhappiness. Feminists by declaring themselves as feminists are already read as destroying something that is thought of by others not only as being good but as the cause of happiness. The feminist killjoy "spoils" the happiness of others; she is a spoilsport because she refuses to convene, to assemble, or to meet up over happiness.

In the thick sociality of everyday spaces, feminists are thus attributed as the origin of bad feeling, as the ones who ruin the atmosphere, which is how the atmosphere might be imagined (retrospectively) as shared. In order to get along, you have to participate in certain forms of solidarity: you have to laugh at the right points. Feminists are typically represented as grumpy and humorless, often as a way of protecting the right to certain forms of social bonding or of holding onto whatever is perceived to be under threat. Feminists don't even have to say anything to be read as killing joy. A feminist colleague says to me that 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 has taught me much about rolling eyes. This is why when people say the bad feeling is coming from this person or that person, I am never convinced. My skepticism comes from childhood experiences of being a feminist daughter in a relatively conventional family, always at odds with the performance of good feeling in the family, always assumed to be bringing others down, for example, by pointing out sexism in other people's talk. 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 that 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 wounding you up. The violence of what was said or the violence of provocation goes unnoticed. However she speaks, the feminist is usually the one who is viewed as "causing the argument," who is disturbing the fragility of peace.

Let's take this figure of the feminist killjoy seriously. Does the feminist kill other people's joy by pointing out moments of sexism? Or does she expose the bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or negated under public signs of joy?
Does bad feeling enter the room when somebody expresses anger about things, or could anger be the moment when the bad feelings that circulate through objects get brought to the surface in a certain way? Feminist subjects might bring others down not only by talking about unhappy topics such as sexism but by exposing how happiness is sustained by erasing the very signs of not getting along. Feminists do kill joy in a certain sense: they disturb the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places. To kill a fantasy can still kill a feeling. It is not just that feminists might not be happily affected by the objects that are supposed to cause happiness but that their failure to be happy is read as sabotaging the happiness of others.

We can consider the relationship between the negativity of the figure of the feminist killjoy and how certain bodies are "encountered" as being negative. Marilyn Frye argues that oppression involves the requirement that you show signs of being happy with the situation in which you find yourself. As she puts it, "It is often a requirement upon oppressed people that we smile and be cheerful. If we comply, we signify our docility and our acquiescence in our situation" (1983: 2). To be oppressed requires you to show signs of happiness, as signs of being or having been adjusted. As a result, for Frye, "anything but the sunniest countenance exposes us to being perceived as mean, bitter, angry or dangerous" (2). If an oppressed person does not smile or show signs of being happy, then he or she is read as being negative: as angry, hostile, unhappy, and so on. Happiness becomes the expected "default position" for those who are oppressed, such that it comes to define the sphere of neutrality. You are either happy: or you are not.

To be recognized as a feminist is to be assigned to a difficult category and a category of difficulty. You are "already read" as "not easy to get along with" when you name yourself as a feminist. You have to show that you are not difficult through displaying signs of good will and happiness. Frye alludes to such experiences when she observes that "this means, at the very least, that we may be found to be 'difficult' or unpleasant to work with, which is enough to cost one's livelihood" (2–3). We can also witness an investment in feminist unhappiness (the myth that feminists kill joy because they are joyless). There is a desire to believe that women become feminists because they are unhappy, perhaps as a displacement of their envy for those who have achieved the happiness they have failed to achieve. This desire functions as a defense of happiness against feminist critique. This is not to say that feminists might not be unhappy; we might be unhappy after all with this representation of feminism as caused by unhappiness. My point here would be that feminists are read as being unhappy, such that situations of conflict, violence, and power are read as about the unhappiness of feminists, rather than being what feminists are unhappy about.

Of course, within feminism, some bodies more than others can be attributed as the cause of unhappiness. We can place the figure of the feminist killjoy alongside the figure of the angry black woman, explored so well by writers such as Audre Lorde (1984) and bell hooks (2000). The angry black woman can be described as a killjoy; she may even kill feminist joy, for example, by pointing out forms of racism within feminist politics. She might not even have to make any such point to kill joy. You can be affectively alien because you are affected in the wrong way by the right things. Or you can be affectively alien because you affect others in the wrong way: your proximity gets in the way of other people's enjoyment of the right things, functioning as an unwanted reminder of histories that are disturbing, that disturb an atmosphere. Listen to the following description from bell hooks: "A group of white feminist activists who do not know one another may be present at a meeting to discuss feminist theory. They may feel they are bonded on the basis of shared womanhood, but the atmosphere will noticeably change when a woman of color enters the room. The white women will become tense, no longer relaxed, no longer celebratory" (56).

It is not just that feelings are "in tension" but that the tension is located somewhere: in being felt by some bodies, it is attributed as caused by another body, who thus comes to be felt as apart from the group, as getting in the way of its organic enjoyment and solidarity. The body of color is attributed as the cause of becoming tense, which is also the loss of a shared atmosphere (or we could say that sharing the experience of loss is how the atmosphere is shared). As a feminist of color you do not even have to say anything to cause tension. The mere proximity of some bodies involves an affective conversion. To get along you have to go along with things which might mean for some not even being able to enter the room. We learn from this example how histories are condensed in the very intangibility of an atmosphere, or in the tangibility of the bodies that seem to get in the way. Perhaps atmospheres are shared if there is an agreement in where we locate the points of tension.

To speak out of anger as a woman of color is to confirm your position as the
cause of tension; your anger is what threatens the social bond. As Audre Lorde describes: "When women of Color speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with white women, we are often told that we are ‘creating a mood of helplessness,’ preventing white women from getting past guilt, or ‘standing in the way of trusting communication and action’" (1984: 132). The exposure of violence becomes the origin of violence. The woman of color must let go of her anger for the white woman to move on.

The figure of the angry black woman is also a fantasy figure that produces its own effects. Reasonable thoughtful arguments are dismissed as anger (which of course empties anger of its own reason), which makes you angry, such that your response becomes read as the confirmation of evidence that you are not only angry but also unreasonable! To make this point in another way, the anger of feminists of color is attributed. So you might be angry about how racism and sexism diminish life choices for women of color. Your anger is a judgment that something is wrong. But in being heard as angry, your speech is read as motivated by anger. Your anger is read as unattributed, as if you are against x because you are angry rather than being angry because you are against x. You become angry at the injustice of being heard as motivated by anger, which makes it harder to separate yourself from the object of your anger. You become entangled with what you are angry about because you are angry about how they have entangled you in your anger. In becoming angry about that entanglement, you confirm their commitment to your anger as the truth "behind" your speech, which is what blocks your anger, stops it from getting through. You are blocked by not getting through.

Some bodies become blockage points, points where smooth communication stops. Consider Ama Ata Aidoo’s wonderful prose poem Our Sister Killjoy, where the narrator Sissie, as a black woman, has to work to sustain the comfort of others. On a plane, a white hostess invites her to sit at the back with “her friends,” two black people she does not know. She is about to say that she does not know them, and hesitates: “But to have refused to join them would have created an awkward situation, wouldn’t it? Considering too that apart from the air hostess’s obviously civilized upbringing, she had been trained to see to the comfort of all her passengers” (1977: 10).

Power speaks here in this moment of hesitation. Do you go along with it? What does it mean not to go along with it? To create awkwardness is to be read as being awkward. Maintaining public comfort requires that certain bodies “go along with it.” To refuse to go along with it, to refuse the place in which you are placed, is to be seen as trouble, as causing discomfort for others. There is a political struggle about how we attribute good and bad feelings, which habituates around the apparently simple question of who introduces what feelings to whom. Feelings can get stuck to certain bodies in the very way we describe spaces, situations, dramas. And bodies can get stuck depending on what feelings they get associated with.

Consciousness and Unhappiness

To be against forms of power and violence that are concealed under signs of happiness does not necessarily mean becoming unhappy, even if it does mean refusing to go along with things by showing signs of getting along. It is striking that Shulamith Firestone’s “dream action” for the women’s liberation movement is “a smile boycott, at which declaration, all women would instantly abandon their ‘pleasing’ smiles, henceforth only smiling when something pleased them” (1970: 90). To refuse the promise of happiness is to refuse the demand that you show signs of happiness. For Firestone, this means a shift of orientation; it means changing one’s bodily habits. “In my own case, I had to train myself out of the phony smile, which is like a nervous tic on every teenage girl. And this meant that I smiled rarely, for in truth, when it came down to real smiling, I had less to smile about” (90). To refuse to keep smiling for Firestone is not a refusal of joy or any of those good feelings that are not distributed along accepted paths of happiness. If anything, the false smile sustains the very psychic and political condition of unhappiness. The feminist who does not smile when she is not happy wants a more exciting life. Indeed, as Firestone argues: “Eroticism is exciting. No-one wants to get rid of it. Life would be a drab and routine affair without at least that spark. That’s just the point. Why has all joy and excitement been concentrated, driven into one narrow difficult-to-find alley of human experience, and all the rest laid waste?” (155; second emphasis added).

Feminism involves challenging the very “pressure” of happiness, the way it restricts the possibilities for finding excitement, of being excited.

This is not to say that feminism makes women happy. It is simply that feminism by refusing to go along with public displays of happiness can participate in the widening of horizons in which it is possible to find things. Feminism
does not guarantee what we will find through this expansion of bodily horizons. It simply opens up the places where we can look. The fact that any such opening is read as a sign of hostility, or of killing other people’s joy, tells us something. The public investment in happiness is an investment in a very particular and narrow model of the good; being happy requires a commitment to finding what Firestone brilliantly describes as a “narrow difficult-to-find alley” of human experience.

I have explored how feminism is represented as causing unhappiness and as caused by unhappiness. Rather than disregarding the possibility of a link between feminism and unhappiness, I want to consider another way of thinking about it. We could describe consciousness raising as raising consciousness of unhappiness. As Gayle Greene argues, “For though education raised women’s expectations, it also made many of them unhappy, creating ambitions that were frustrated by the rigid domestic ideology that urged them back into the home” (1991: 9; emphasis added). Indeed, you have to experience limitations as limitations; the act of noticing limitations can actually make life seem more rather than less limited. If the world does not allow you to embrace the possibilities that are opened up by education, then you become even more aware of the injustice of such limitations. Opening up the world, or expanding one’s horizons, can thus mean becoming more conscious of just how much there is to be unhappy about. Unhappiness might also provide an affective way of sustaining our attention on the cause of unhappiness. You would be unhappy with the causes of unhappiness. Consciousness-raising does not turn unhappy housewives into happy feminists, even though sometimes we might wish that this were the case!

Feminism involves political consciousness of what women are asked to give up for happiness. Indeed, in even becoming conscious of happiness as loss, feminists have already refused to give up desire, imagination, and curiosity for happiness. There can be sadness simply in the realization of what one has given up. Feminist archives are thus full of housewives becoming conscious of unhappiness as a mood that seems to surround them: think of Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway. The feeling is certainly around, almost as a thickness in the air. We sense the unhappiness seeping through the tasks of the everyday. There she is, about to get flowers, enjoying her walk in London. During that walk, she disappears: “But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing—nothing at all. She

had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (1925: 14).

Becoming Mrs. Dalloway is itself a form of disappearance: to follow the paths of life (marriage, reproduction) is to feel that what is before you is a kind of solemn progress, as if you are living somebody else’s life, simply going the same way others are going. It is as if you have left the point of life behind you, as if your life is going through motions that were already in motion before you even arrived. As I argued in Queer Phenomenology (2006), for a life to count as a good life, it must take on the direction promised as a social good, which means imagining one’s futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course. If happiness is what allows us to reach certain points, it is not necessarily how you feel when you get there. For Mrs. Dalloway, to reach these points is to disappear. The point of reaching these points seems to be a certain disappearance, a loss of possibility, a certain failure to make use of the body’s capacities, to find out what it is that her body can do. To become conscious of possibility can involve mourning for its loss.

For Clarissa this rather uncanny sensation of becoming Mrs. Dalloway as a loss of possibility, as an unbecoming, or becoming “nothing at all” does not enter her consciousness in the form of sadness about something. The sadness of the book—and it is a sad book—is not one expressed as a point of view. Instead, each sentence of the book takes thoughts and feelings as if they are objects in a shared world: the streets of London, the very oddness of the occasion of passing others by, a feeling of that oddness. Sometimes it can feel like a coincidence, how one coincides with others. To say “it is just a coincidence” can create the impression that the absence of a causal relation between events is the absence of any connection. But feeling a coincidence might mean recognizing that to fall in the same time and place as others, to happen with others or to happen upon others, is a kind of connection. As Clarissa goes out with her task in mind (she has to buy her flowers for her party), she walks into a world with others. You might be in your world (with your own tasks, your own recollections) and yet you share the world of the street, if only for a moment, a fleeting moment, a moment that flies. Things appear as modes of attention: the plane above that writes letters in the sky, the plane that is seen by those
who pass each other by. Questions unfold as shared questions: What letter is that? What word is that? "What are they looking at?" said Clarissa Dalloway" (42). It is as if the mere direction of a glance is enough to create a shared world. Although each brings to the street a certain kind of moodiness, a preoccupation with this or with that, the street itself can become moody, when an object grabs attention, like the plane that creates words in the sky above, although for each person who looks up, what is seen might be quite different.

If unhappiness becomes a collective impression, then it too is made up of fragments that only loosely attach to points of view. In particular, the proximity between Mrs. Dalloway and the character Septimus is what allows unhappiness to be shared even if it is not passed between them. Two characters who do not know each other, though they pass each other, whose worlds are connected by the very jolt of unhappiness. We have the immanence of the shock of how one person’s suffering can have an effect on the life world of another. Septimus suffers from shell shock; and we feel his feelings with him, the panic and sadness as the horror of war intrudes as memory. His suffering bring the past into the time of the present, the long time of war, its persistence on the skin as aftermath, its refusal of an after. To those who observe him from a distance, those who share the street on this day, he appears as a madman, at the edge of respectable sociality, a spectacle. To encounter him on the street, you would not know the story behind his suffering. To be near to suffering does not necessarily bring suffering near.

Clarissa and Septimus, as characters who do not meet, thus achieve an odd intimacy: the not-just-private suffering of the housewife and the not-just-public suffering of the returned soldier are intertwined. Importantly, their sadness is proximate but not contagious. They do not catch sadness from each other; their sadness is what keeps alive histories that are not shared, that cannot be shared, as they pass by on the street. And yet something is shared, perhaps those very things that cannot simply be revealed. Clarissa, thinking of her “odd affinities” with strangers “she had never spoken to,” sits on the bus and wonders whether the “unseen part of us” might provide a point of attachment to others and might even be how we survive through others, “perhaps—perhaps” (231–32).

It is Septimus’s wife, Rezia, whose musings reflect most directly on the difficulty of experiencing emotions that are simply revealed to proximate others. Rezia is so anxious to reveal her own unhappiness that she “almost felt some-
times that she must stop people in the street, if they looked like good, kind, kind people just to say to them ‘I am unhappy’” (125). She is conscious of how her feelings and Septimus’s feelings cannot simply be revealed to passers by: “was there, after all, anything to draw attention to them, anything to make a passer-by suspect here is a young man who carries in him the greatest message in the world, and is, moreover, the happiest man in the world, and the most miserable?” (126). To inhabit a feeling world does not create a world out of feeling.

Much of the novel is about an event that will happen. For Mrs. Dalloway is planning a party. To some feminist readers, the preoccupation with the party makes the book disappointing. Simone de Beauvoir reads Mrs. Dalloway’s enjoyment of parties as a sign that she is trying to turn her “prison into glory,” as if as a hostess she can be “the bestower of happiness and gaiety” ([1949] 1997: 554). For de Beauvoir, the gift of the party turns quickly into duty; such that Mrs. Dalloway, “who loved these triumphs, these semblances,” still “felt their hollowness” (555). For Kate Millett, Mrs. Dalloway is a rather disappointing figure; she exposes Woolf’s failure to turn her own unhappiness into a politics: “Virginia glorified two housewives, Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsey, recorded the suicidal misery of Rhoda in The Waves without ever explaining its causes” (1970: 37). We might say that it is because Mrs. Dalloway is planning a party that we do not have much revealed about her unhappiness, other than the sadness of recalling lost intimacies with Peter and with Sally, who both turn up, unexpectedly during her day. In a way, it is implied, that does not just happen but bears some relation to Mrs. Dalloway’s own thoughts: “all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally” (280). Such lost intimacies become lost possibilities, hints of a life she might have lived, if things had not turned out the way they did.

If Mrs. Dalloway is distracted from the causes of unhappiness by the party (and we can have some sympathy with the necessity of distractions), the party is also the event in which unhappiness comes to life. For Mrs. Dalloway, her party is life; it is how she can make things happen; it is a gift, a happening (185). What happens? That this question is a question is a preservation of the gift. And something does happen. For it is in the party that Septimus’s life “touche[s]” Mrs. Dalloway most directly. It touches her through death. Lady Bradshaw says to her: “Just as we were starting, my husband was called up on the telephone, a very sad case. A young man (that is what Sir William is telling Mr. Dallow-
way) had killed himself. He had been in the army. Oh! Thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought” (279). In the middle of the party, words accumulate as a narrative, telling the story of a death. A young man kills himself, and the death itself (and not just the narrating of the death) takes place in the middle of the party, in the middle of the life of the party. The soul of the party is death. The reader has already read about this death; we have witnessed it. Now, we witness the ripples of this death; how it acquires a life of its own, how it takes place somewhere in the middle. For Mrs. Dalloway, this death becomes something to imagine, to bring to life by thought:

“What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party? A young man had killed himself. And they talked of it at her party—the Bradshaws, talked of death. He had killed himself—but how? Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. But why had he done it? And the Bradshaws talked of it at her party!”

She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away. They went on living (she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming). They (all day she has been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wrought about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved.

Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death.

(280–81)

Septimus’s death becomes a question that takes Mrs. Dalloway away from the party; she attends to his death, wonders about it; she becomes a retrospective witness even though she was not and could not have been there. The shudder: the sounds of it; the thud, thud, thud of it; the ground that flashes; the rusty spikes. His death becomes material, becomes fleshy through her thoughts. His death announces not only that sadness can be unbearable but that we don’t have to bear it, that you can fling it away. And in this moment, when death intervenes in the life of the party, life becomes chatter, becomes what goes on,

“they went on living,” what comes and goes, “people kept on coming.” Death comes to embody the suffering that persists when life becomes chatter.

What is striking about Mrs. Dalloway is how suffering has to enter her consciousness from the edges, through the arrival of another, another who is an intruder, who has not been invited to the party. It is the suffering of an intruder that exposes the emptiness of life’s chatter. Suffering enters not as self-consciousness—as a consciousness of one’s own suffering—but as a heightening of consciousness, a world-consciousness in which the suffering of those who do not belong is allowed to disturb an atmosphere. Even when unhappiness is a familiar feeling, it can arrive like a stranger, to disturb the familiar or to reveal what is disturbing in the familiar.

The arrival of suffering from the edges of social consciousness might teach us about the difficulty of becoming conscious of suffering or teach us about our own resistances to recognizing those seemingly “little” uneasy feelings of loss or dissatisfaction as unhappiness with one’s life. The party might expose the need to keep busy, to keep going in the face of one’s disappearance. So much sadness revealed in the very need to be busy. So much grief expressed in the need not to be overwhelmed by grief. It is hard labor just to recognize sadness and disappointment, when you are living a life that is meant to be happy but just isn’t, which is meant to be full, but feels empty. It is difficult to give up an idea of one’s life, when one has lived a life according to that idea. To recognize loss can mean to be willing to experience an intensification of the sadness that hopefully postpones.¹¹

To inherit feminism can mean to inherit sadness. There is sadness in becoming conscious not only of gender as the restriction of possibility, but also of how this restriction is not necessary. After all, we have inherited the book Mrs. Dalloway; we have passed the book around, and the book itself has passed into other cultural forms.¹² Take the film The Hours (2002, dir. Stephen Daldry), based on Michael’s Cunningham’s novel The Hours (1998), which takes its title from Woolf’s original title for Mrs. Dalloway. The Hours places three generations of women alongside each other and follows their life on a single day: we have a fictionalized account of a day in the life of Virginia Woolf (Nicole Kidman); of Laura Brown (Julianne Moore), an unhappy housewife living in the 1950s as she bakes a cake and reads Mrs. Dalloway; and of Clarissa Vaughan (Meryl Streep), who is organizing a party like Mrs. Dalloway, this time for her former lover and friend Richard (Ed Harris), who is dying of AIDS.
Mrs. Dalloway the novel is inherited by The Hours in multiple ways; we inherit the lost name of the book, the book itself. The Hours also mimics the book: following its orientation, its directionality in time, by depicting a whole life in a single day. The film attends closely to gestures which bind each generation to the figure of Mrs. Dalloway: Clarissa, for instance, begins her day by saying she will get the flowers for the party. The gestures or tasks of the everyday become forms of inheritance.

I want to focus in particular on Laura Brown, the unhappy 1950s housewife. She is reading Mrs. Dalloway, and we hear the voice of Virginia Woolf as she has been evoked by the film, and the voice travels over time, as a trace of a history that is not gone, of a past that lingers. Laura longs to read the book. She cares for the book; she wants to stay in bed with it; she wants to keep reading, to read more and more. Her desire for the book is also her desire not to be in her life, to be suspended from its time and rhythms: she wants to spend time with the book to avoid spending time with her husband and child.

It is a day, one day. It is her husband’s birthday; but Laura wants to say in bed with the book; we imagine that she wants to be in bed with Virginia. Later, when her husband has gone, her friend Kitty arrives and asks her about the book. Laura talks of Mrs. Dalloway, as if she was co-present, as if she shares the same space, the same world. She says of Mrs. Dalloway, “Because she is confident everyone thinks she is fine. But she isn’t.” To be confident is to convince the world of a happiness that does exist; it is to pass as happy with what does exist. You work to support the belief that everything is fine — when it isn’t. The story of Mrs. Dalloway becomes Laura’s description of her own present, what surrounds her, her life world. She identifies with Mrs. Dalloway through suffering, by sharing her grief, as a grief that is not revealed, as if to say: like you, I am not fine, like you, my life is about maintaining the appearance of being fine, an appearance which is also a disappearance.

What happens when domestic bliss does not create bliss? Laura tries to bake a cake. She cracks an egg. The cracking of the egg becomes a thematic gesture throughout the film, connecting the domestic labor of women over time. To bake a cake ought to be a happy endeavor, a labor of love. Instead, the film reveals a sense of oppression that lingers in the very act of breaking the eggs. If, as I suggested in the last chapter, happiness creates its own horizon, as a horizon of likes, then it is possible to be surrounded by likes that are not your own, and by promises that haunt you in their emptiness. Not only do such objects not cause your happiness but they may remind you of your failure to be made happy; they embody a feeling of disappointment. The bowl in which you crack the eggs waits for you. You can feel the pressure of its wait. The empty bowl feels like an accusation. Feminist archives are full of scenes of domesticity in which domestic objects, happy objects, become alien, even menacing.

In one very poignant scene in The Hours, when Laura’s family gathers around the table, having their own party with the cake she has finally baked, the promise of happiness is evoked. Her husband is telling their child the story of how they met. He says: “I used to think about bringing her to this house. To a life, pretty much like this. And it was the thought of the happiness, the thought of this woman, the thought of this life, that’s what kept me going. I had an idea about our happiness.” As he speaks, tears well in Laura’s eyes. Her sadness is with his idea of happiness, with what keeps him going, and the world it creates for her. Laura explains to Clarissa at the end of the film how she came to leave her husband and child: “It would be wonderful to say that you regretted it; it would be easy. But what does it mean? What does it mean to regret when you had no choice? It is what you can bear. There it is. No one is going to forgive me. It was death. I choose life.” A life premised on “an idea about our happiness,” for Laura, would be unbearable. Such happiness would be death. She does not leave this life for happiness. She leaves this happiness for life.

We might say, why not leave his happiness for another kind of happiness, a happiness that could be called her own? Couldn’t we understand the creativity of feminism, its potentiality for generating new horizons, as giving us alternative ideas of happiness? Perhaps what is revealed in Laura’s sadness is how happiness is saturated by its own history becoming too hard to separate from an idea, from an idea her husband has for her. For Laura, to leave happiness is to leave everything behind her; it is to cause unhappiness for those who are left behind, an unhappiness which is inherited by her child, who, we learn by the end of the film, is Richard. And it is Clarissa who in The Hours cares for Richard and attends to his unhappiness, who has to pick up the pieces of the happiness that Laura has shattered. Clarissa: who ends up (like Mrs. Dalloway) organizing a party for her friend, worrying (like Mrs. Dalloway) that her parties are trivial. Clarissa (like Mrs. Dalloway) tries desperately not to be sad; to use the happy occasion of the party, its celebration of Richard’s award of the Carrouthers Prize for poetry, to stop herself thinking about the sadness of his imminent death; to avoid being overwhelmed by grief.
The film might in its dramatization of the unhappiness caused by Laura, the woman who cannot bear the idea of happiness, withdraw its sympathy from her plight. I think it does. Perhaps we can learn from this withdrawal of sympathy. If the one who leaves unhappiness must cause unhappiness to those who are left behind, then she must refuse to be sympathetic; she must not return feeling with like feeling (happiness with happiness, love with love) if she is to escape from the very obligation to return. In other words, to give up happiness is to become unsympathetic. That Laura's act is only narratable as extreme, even as violence, as the cause of suffering that cannot be repaired, shows us just how hard it can be to give up on the idea of happiness because that idea is also bound up with the impulse to care for the happiness of others. There are, I think we know, many who stay in situations of unhappiness out of fear of causing unhappiness, out of fear of losing sympathy, of becoming unsympathetic.

It is hard to leave happiness for life. There is always a gap between becoming conscious of what is lost by living according to an idea of happiness and being able to leave happiness for life, a gap where things happen, where lives are lived and lives are lost. Not only is there sadness in recognizing gender as the loss of possibility but there is also the sadness of realizing that recognizing such loss does not necessarily make things possible.23 After all, Clarissa in The Hours spends her time, as does Clarissa in Mrs. Dalloway, caring for the happiness of Richard; it is her relationship with Sally that suffers, which does not have her attention.24 Perhaps the film teaches us that Clarissa's unhappiness is both her inheritance from Mrs. Dalloway and her failure to inherit from Laura, from Laura's act of rebellion, rather than being what she catches from Richard, as the child Laura left behind.25 In the end it is Clarissa's daughter who is sympathetic toward Laura. We learn from this intergenerational sympathy: perhaps it takes more than one generation to reproduce a feminist inheritance, where we can acquire sympathy (maybe a sympathy for affect aliens or an alien sympathy) toward those whose acts are publicly remembered without sympathy, as causing unhappiness to others.

To leave happiness for life is to become alive to possibility. The concept of feminism as "becoming alive" was crucial to second wave feminism even in the mode of its critique of the happy housewife, which seems at one level to deposit feminist hope in happiness. In The Feminine Mystique, for instance, Friedan recognizes that some women may be happy as housewives —by saying this, she also implies that making women happy is not the point of feminism,

As she argues, "Surely there are many women in America who are happy at the moment as housewives, and some whose abilities are fully used in the housewife role. But happiness is not the same thing as the aliveness of being fully used" (1965: 223–24). The concept of aliveness is held up as an alternative social value to happiness. Indeed, Friedan argues that women who can fit the image of the happy housewife are the ones who are more likely to adjust to this role and who then give up —without any conscious act of sacrifice —other opportunities for "finding yourself" (310). Behind this argument is a critique of the concept of adjustment, how happiness demands adjusting your body to a world that has already taken shape. If we take the shape of what is given (which depends on being able to take this shape), we experience the comfort of being given the right shape. As Charlotte Perkins Gilman argued, "Comfort and happiness are very likely a matter of prolonged adjustment. We like what we are used to" (1903: 2002: 8; emphasis added). What lies behind this adjustment is the loss of other possible ways of living, a loss that must remain un mourned if you are to stay well-adjusted. To even recognize such loss is to mourn, which is why it can be easier to avoid recognition. Feminist subjects in refusing to be well-adjusted not only mourn the losses but in mourning open up other possibilities for living, as openings that we inherit over generations.

Consciousness and Racism

Our feminist archive teaches us about unhappiness and what it can do. Feminism involves a sociality of unhappiness not only by generating talk about the collective nature of suffering that is concealed and reproduced by the figure of the happy housewife (which is perhaps how we could consider consciousness-raising) but also through passing books around. To inherit unhappiness through the circulation of books is not necessarily to inherit the same thing. It is not simply that feminism coheres around the inheritance of books such as Mrs. Dalloway, which offer alternative forms of consciousness of the world in their narration of gender as loss. After all, if we were to assume feminist consciousness took the form of consciousness of gender as the restriction of possibility, then we would be excluding other kinds of political consciousness from our idea of feminism. Black feminists have had a lot to say, after all, about happiness as a political myth that does things, writing not from the point of
view of those who should be happy because they have what promises happiness but instead of those who are already imagined as being unhappy, as lacking the very qualities and attributes that would make a life good.

Consider Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, which offers us a very different account of unhappiness than that found in the unhappy housewife novels, though it also critiques the idea of the happy family. *The Bluest Eye* begins its critique of the happy family by sentencing it to death: “Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy” (1970) 1979: 1). By taking the punctuation out of the sentence until it becomes “hereisthehouseitis” (2), the picture-book story becomes nonsense, becomes gabbles. To disturb the promise of happiness, which has become literalized, such that happiness is “in house” requires disturbing the very technologies through which we make sense.

The novel tells the story of a family that deviates from the social ideal, that cannot be the “they are very happy” of the picture book. This family is not white, not middle class, where “being not” means being unhappy. Unhappiness becomes a kind of want. In this novel, the family is narrated as wanting, as lacking the qualities or attributes that would make for a good or happy life. Most powerfully, the novel describes the discourses of happiness in terms of the conflation of whiteness with beauty and virtue: the happy ones are blue eyed, the blue-eyed ones are beautiful ones, the beautiful ones are the good ones, the good ones are the happy ones. The “not family,” the Breedloves are the ugly ones, as if their ugliness is a curse: “You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked close and you could not find the source” (28). For some, deviation from the happiness scripts is itself an inheritance; you inherit unhappiness by not being the blue-eyed ones, as if “the master had said, ‘you are Ugly people’” (28). The evocation of the master is the evocation of the history of slavery. Unhappiness becomes an inheritance of the violence of history.

The story of the novel is the story of what happens to the Breedloves, violence, despair, and misery being what follows being not. The novel offers us different narrators, beginning with the sisters Claudia and Frieda, before switching to the Breedloves: the mother Pauline, the father Cholly, and their daughter Pecola. In a way, the novel is the story of the unhappiness inherited by Pecola, who is raped by her father and who loses her child, an unwanted black baby conceived through violence, in a miscarriage. We first witness Pecola’s unhappiness in the opening passage written from the point of view of Claudia: “So deeply concerned were we with the health and the safe delivery of Pecola’s baby we could think of nothing but our own magic: if we planted the seeds, and said the right words over them, they would blossom and everything would be all right. It was a long time before my sister and I admitted to ourselves that no green was going to spring from our seeds. Once we knew, our guilt was relieved only by fights and mutual accusations over who was to blame. For years I thought my sister was right: it was my fault. I had planted them too far down in the earth. It never occurred to either of us that the earth might have been unyielding” (3). I have described happiness as a technology of cultivation; of cultivating subjects “in the right way” so they will flourish. What is so powerful in this description is how much the failure to flourish is not the failure of care or orientation but the failure of the earth to yield. For some, the earth is unyielding, unable to provide the soil in which life can flourish. The unyielding earth provides the grounds of whiteness, as the restriction of life possibility, as giving life to some and not others.

Our first narrator, Claudia, learns to notice that this earth might be unyielding. Claudia expresses rage at the world that asks her to love in a certain way: “It had begun with Christmas and the gift of dolls. The big, the special, the loving gift was always a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll. From the clucking sounds of adults I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish… which were supposed to bring me great pleasure, succeeded in doing quite the opposite… Traced the turned-up nose, poked the glassy-blue eyes, twisted the yellow hair. I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable… I destroyed white baby dolls” (13–15). By not experiencing pleasure in the right way, toward the right things, she must destroy things, transferring her hatred and rage from white baby dolls to white baby girls. To hate what is loved is to recognize your alienation from the beloved.64

In contrast, Pecola, in wanting happiness, wants what is attributed as the cause of happiness: the bluest eyes. For Pecola: “Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike… It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different” (34). In the following paragraph we
return to the picture-book family: "Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes. Run, Jip, run. Jip runs. Alice runs. Alice has blue eyes. Jerry has blue eyes. Jerry runs. Alice runs. They run with their blue eyes. Four blue eyes" (34). The desire for blue eyes is the desire not to be not white; the double negative does not amount to a positive.

This is a bleak novel, bleak as it shows us that the consequences of unhappiness can be more unhappiness. To be conscious of unhappiness is to be conscious of being "not," or of being "un," as lacking the qualities or attributes of happiness. To be not happy is to be not in the eyes of others, in the world of whiteness, which is the world as it coheres around white bodies. Consciousness of "being not" involves self-estrangement: you recognize yourself as the stranger. Note that consciousness is already worldily if you are the one whose arrival disturbs an atmosphere. To recognize yourself as the stranger is to become conscious of the violence directed toward you. Audre Lorde dramatizes how becoming conscious of being a stranger involves a retrospective renaming of apparently random events as racism:

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

(1982: 17–18)

An event happens. And it happens again. The violence is directed from the white body to the black child, who receives that violence by shrinking, shrinking away from its sound. But the mother cannot bear to speak of racism and creates an impression that the violence is random. Racism is a pain that is hard to bear. Consciousness of racism becomes retrospective, and the question of its timing does matter. You learn not to see racism as a way of bearing the pain. To see racism, you have to un-see the world as you learned to see it, the world that covers unhappiness, by covering over its cause. You have to be willing to venture into secret places of pain.

Some forms of "taking cover" from pain—from not naming the causes of pain in the hope that it will go away—are to protect those we love from being hurt, or even to protect ourselves from hurt, or are at least meant as a form of protection. If happiness does provide a way of "taking cover," it is not always offered to protect us from hurt. It can also work to conceal the causes of hurt or to make others the cause of their own hurt. In The Cancer Journals, Audre Lorde offers a powerful critique of the politics of happiness. She writes as a black lesbian feminist who is experiencing breast cancer: Lorde never refuses the power of "writing as" or assumes it can abbreviate an experience. Faced with medical discourse that attributes cancer to unhappiness and survival or coping to being happy or optimistic, she suggests: "Looking on the bright side of things is a euphemism used for obscuring certain realities of life, the open consideration of which might prove threatening or dangerous to the status quo" (1997: 76). To obscure or to take cover by looking on the bright side is to avoid what might threaten the world as it is. Lorde moves from this observation to a wider critique of happiness as an obscurant: "Let us seek ‘joy’ rather than real food and clean air and a saner future on a liveable earth! As if happiness alone can protect us from the results of profit-madness" (76). Lorde suggests that the very idea that our first responsibility is for our own happiness must be resisted by political struggle, which means resisting the idea that our own resistance is a failure to be responsible for happiness: "Was I really fighting the spread of radiation, racism, woman-slaughter, chemical invasion of our food, pollution of our environment, the abuse and psychic destruction of our young, merely to avoid dealing with my first and greatest responsibility to be happy?" (77). I think Audre Lorde has given us to the answer to her question.

We can now see how you can retrieve a model of false consciousness in critiquing claims to happiness. You would not be saying "you are wrong, you are not happy, you just think you are as you have a false belief." Rather you would be saying there is something false about our consciousness of the world; we learn not to be conscious, not to see what happens right in front of us. Happiness provides as it were a cover, a way of covering over what resists or is re-
sistent to a view of the world, or a worldview, as harmonious. It is not that an individual person suffers from false consciousness but that we inherit a certain false consciousness when we learn to see and not to see things in a certain way.  

Becoming conscious—refusing to take cover—is a form of political struggle. I have been thinking about the labor of becoming conscious of racism and what that does to how we inhabit and know the world. It is hard labor, for sure. I am speaking to a black feminist colleague about racism. We are just talking, recognizing each other, as you do, in how we recognize racism in those everyday encounters you have with people who can’t handle it, the idea of it. That’s what they always say, she says to me, that you always reduce everything to racism. Racism becomes your paranoia. Of course, it’s a way of saying that racism doesn’t really exist in the way you say it does. It is as if we had to invent racism to explain our own feeling of exclusion, as if racism provides us with a way of not being responsible for the places we cannot go. It is a form of racism to say that racism does not exist. We know this.

But I am thinking more about paranoia, and the good reasons for bad feelings. I guess the problem is that I do feel paranoid even if I know that this paranoia is reasonable. I do have a kind of paranoid anxiety about things that do and could happen. I am never sure, when x happens, whether x is about racism or is a result of racism. I am never sure. And because I am never sure, then x is lived as possibly about racism, as being what explains how you inhabit the world you do. Racism creates paranoia, that’s what racism does. Whiteness is reproduced both by the fantasy of paranoia (it doesn’t “really” exist) and by the effect of the fantasy of paranoia, which is to make us paranoid. Our feelings become its truth. And when we scream the truth, we are the sore points. Some people describe the struggle against racism as hitting your head against a brick wall. The wall keeps its place, so it is you that gets sore.

One of the best literary descriptions of how consciousness of racism puts you in a different world is offered in Andrea Levy’s Fruit of the Lemon (1999). The novel tells the story of Faith Jackson, a black British girl whose parents migrated to England from Jamaica. She is getting along with her life, doing her own thing. She moves out of home, into a share house with her white friend. Her parents let her go: “Ah Faith, what can we do with you? You just go your own sweet way,” my parents had decided a long time before. "Your own sweet way”” (19). I will return to this idea of the children of immigrant families being allowed to go on their “own sweet way” in chapter 4. What follows here is a powerful description of a girl experiencing blackness, as something that jolts her consciousness and puts her into a different world.

Again, there is an event. Something happens. Faith and her flatmate Simon witness a violent attack on a black woman. He runs after the attackers, and they are caught. Events are what catch you out and catch you up. We witness the event through Faith’s eyes: “A black woman was standing in the doorway of a bookshop. She looked composed, although she had a startled stare—like she’s just won the pools and couldn’t quite believe it. But sliding slowly down one side of her face were several strings of blood—thick, bright, red blood. I stood in front of her and asked, ‘Are you all right?’ and felt stupid when she collapsed onto the ground” (150). They return to tell the story of the event.

The story creates a certain kind of drama, in which Simon becomes not simply witness or participant but also the savior, the hero, and even the victim. The housemates gather around him as if this has happened to him, as if what made the event an event was how it affected him: “Simon’s hands shook as he lifted his cigarette to his mouth—he couldn’t hold it steady. Marion put her hand over his hand to support it. ‘I think you’re in shock.’ Sweet tea is what you need,” she said looking closely into Simon’s face. ‘Mick, put the kettle on!’ (156). Faith watches the black woman disappear as they gather around him. She interrupts the gathering, “I interrupted the story twice. ‘She was a black woman,’ I said. Simon had just called her the woman who worked there. Twice I had to tell them this woman was black like me. And both times Simon and Mick had looked at me and nodded” (156). Faith identifies with the black woman who has been hurt; she says she was black, she says she was black like me. The point of political identification rests on this recognition of another’s hurt.

But they keep going with their story, as if her blackness was just a detail that can be passed over. They fuss over Simon: giggling, full of the drama of an event. And then Faith can’t bear it anymore. She can’t bear the violence of the event, as a violence that acquires its force by being directed against a black woman, to be passed over: “But then I tipped my cup of tea slowly over the table. ‘Will you all just shut up. Just fucking shut up. Its not funny!’ And there was complete silence as they stopped and stared at me I left the house” (158).

To speak of racism, to name racism, to be conscious of racism, puts Faith in a different world, a world where blackness cannot be passed over. The black
woman shouts to be heard. And in shouting, the black woman is the one who becomes the origin of bad feeling. So it is she who must leave. Although she returns, she has been undone. She cannot look at her friends; she cannot bear her own reflection in the mirror, as if what the mirror reflects back to her, her black face, is something she can now see and thus can no longer bear. How can one be disturbed by one's own arrival? The familiar is that which recedes to those who inhabit it. To become estranged from the familiar is thus to have it revealed to you. The familiar is disclosed in the revelation of your estrangement. You learn to see yourself as you are seen by those who can inhabit the familiar, because they can recede into its form as Frantz Fanon demonstrated so powerfully in Black Skin, White Masks (1952) 1966.

What follows is a story of Faith going home, as a home that she has never been to, going back to where her parents are from, back to Jamaica. In a way the plot of this novel is simple, as if going home, discovering your roots, can be the solution. It can be read that way—but that's not how I would read it. Consciousness of racism becomes consciousness of being out of place in a world oriented around whiteness. For Faith, finding her place means learning of her parents' arrival, which means learning about where they are from, her own coming into being, an inheritance of displacement. This is not a story of her becoming happy. But it is a story of becoming black as an act of resistance to being passed over, where becoming black means restoring family connections, of hearing family stories. White feminist consciousness novels tend to involve freedom-from-family and its narrow scripts of duty and obligation. Black feminist consciousness novels may involve freedom-to-family, as family is what is lost through unfolding histories of displacement and dispossession.

Feminist consciousness can thus be thought of as consciousness of the violence and power that are concealed under the languages of civility and love, rather than simply consciousness of gender as a site of restriction of possibility. We learn from this so much, too much. We learn to see what is concealed by signs of happiness. You can cause unhappiness merely by noticing something. And if it can cause unhappiness simply to notice something, you realize that the world you are in is not the world you thought you were in. Feminism becomes a kind of estrangement from the world and thus involves moments of self-estrangement. Our feminist archive is an archive of unhappiness even though the threads of unhappiness do not weave our stories together.

In calling for us to recognize how feminist politics involves killing joy, I am also asking us to turn back, to return to feminist histories, as a history of those who have struggled against unhappiness. I am thus uncertain what it means to call for a more affirmative feminism in our present time. Rosi Braidotti has suggested that the focus on negativity has become a problem within feminism. She offers a rather bleak reading of bleakness: "I actively yearn for a more joyful and empowering concept of desire and for a political economy that foregrounds positivity, not gloom" (2002: 57). The call for affirmation rather than negativity in her work involves an explicit turn to happiness. As she argues: "I consider happiness a political issue, as are well-being, self-confidence and a sense of empowerment. These are fundamentally ethical concerns. ... The feminist movement has played the historical role of placing these items at the centre of the social and political agenda: happiness as a fundamental human right and hence a political question" (2006a: 230). My desire is to revitalize the feminist critique of happiness as a human right and as the appropriate language for politics.

To revitalize the critique of happiness is to be willing to be proximate to unhappiness. I have suggested that feminist consciousness involves consciousness of unhappiness that might even increase our unhappiness, or at least create this impression. Happiness can work to cover over unhappiness, in part by covering over its causes, such that to refuse to take cover can allow unhappiness to emerge. This process of consciousness raising involves not simply becoming conscious of unhappiness but also achieving (with others) better ways of understanding unhappiness. We can recognize that unhappiness is structured, and that what happens to us might be connected in some way to what happens to others. We can recognize not only that we are not the cause of the unhappiness that has been attributed to us but also the effects of being attributed as the cause. We can talk about being angry black women or feminist killjoys; we can claim those figures back; we can talk about those conversations we have had at dinner tables or in seminars or meetings; we can laugh in recognition of the familiarity of inhabiting that place. There is solidarity in recognizing our alienation from happiness, even if we do not inhabit the same place (as we do not). There can even be joy in killing joy. And kill joy, we must and we do.