ugly feelings

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This book presents a series of studies in the aesthetics of negative emotions, examining their politically ambiguous work in a range of cultural artifacts produced in what T. W. Adorno calls the fully "administered world" of late modernity. This is the world already depicted by Herman Melville with startling clarity in "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" (1853)—a fiction in which the interpretive problems posed by an American office worker's affective equivocality seem pointedly directed at the political equivocality of his unnervingly passive form of dissent. What, if anything, is this inexpressive character feeling? Is Bartleby's unyielding passivity, even in the polemical act of withholding his labor ("I prefer not to"), radical or reactionary? Should we read his inertness as part of a volitional strategy that anticipates styles of nonviolent political activism to come, or merely as a sign of what we now call depression? In Melvillian fashion, the following chapters dwell on affective gaps and illegibilities, dysphoric feelings, and other sites of emotional negativity in literature, film, and theoretical writing, to explore similarly ambivalent situations of suspended agency. They
thus draw together two seemingly disparate philosophical definitions—Hannah Arendt's claim that "what makes man a political being is his faculty of action" and Baruch Spinoza's description of emotions as "wavering of the mind" that can either increase or diminish one's power to act—and attend to the aesthetics of the ugly feelings that index these suspensions.²

Recalling the corner of the office in which Melville's scrivener is wedged and cordonned off by a screen, we might think of this book's project as Bartlebyan in a more reflexive sense, in that it privileges the circumscribed standpoint of the literary to examine problems whose greatest import arguably lies beyond the sphere of the aesthetic per se. For Bartleby's powerful powerlessness can also be thought of as exemplified by literature or art itself, as a relatively autonomous, more or less cordonned-off domain in an increasingly specialized and differentiated society. As Adorno's analysis of the historical origins of this aesthetic autonomy suggests, the separateness from "empirical society" which art gains as a consequence of the bourgeois revolution ironically coincides with its growing awareness of its inability to significantly change that society—a powerlessness that then becomes the privileged object of the newly autonomous art's "guilty" self-reflection (AT, 225). Yet one could argue that bourgeois art's reflexive preoccupation with its own "powerlessness and superfluity in the empirical world" is precisely what makes it capable of theorizing social powerlessness in a manner unrivaled by other forms of cultural praxis (104). In this manner, the discussion of aesthetic autonomy in Aesthetic Theory suggests that literature may in fact be the ideal space to investigate ugly feelings that obviously ramify beyond the domain of the aesthetic proper, since the situation of restricted agency from which all of them ensue is one that describes art's own position in a highly differentiated and totally commodified society.

Each of the feelings explored in the following chapters—envy, anxiety, paranoia, irritation, a racialized affect I call "animatedness," and a strange amalgamation of shock and boredom I call "stuplimity"—can thus be thought of as a mediation between the aesthetic and the political in a nontrivial way. As a whole, the book approaches emotions as unusually knotted or condensed "interpretations of predicaments"—that is, signs that not only render visible different registers of problem (formal, ideological, sociohistorical) but conjoin these problems in a distinctive manner.³ My exclusive focus, however, is on the negative affects that read the predicaments posed by a general state of obstructed agency with respect to other human actors or to the social as such—a dilemma I take as charged with political meaning regardless of whether the obstruction is actual or fantasied, or whether the agency obstructed is individual or collective. These situations of passivity, as uniquely disclosed and interpreted by ignoble feelings like envy (of the disempowered for the powerful) or paranoia (about one's perceived status as a small subject in a "total system"), can also be thought of as allegories for an autonomous or bourgeois art's increasingly resigned and pessimistic understanding of its own relationship to political action. At the core of Ugly Feelings, then, is a very old predicament—the question of relevance—that has often haunted the discipline of literary and cultural criticism. The evidence here would suggest that the very effort of thinking the aesthetic and political together—a task whose urgency seems to increase in proportion to its difficulty in a increasingly anti-utopian and functionally differentiated society—is a prime occasion for ugly feelings.

Yet I want immediately to emphasize the deeply equivocal status of the ugly feelings featured in this study. For although dysphoric affects often seem to be the psychic fuel on which capitalist society runs, envy, paranoia, and all the emotional idioms I examine are marked by an ambivalence that will enable them to resist, on the one hand, their reduction to mere expressions of class resentment, and on the other, their counter-valorization as therapeutic "solutions" to the problems they highlight and condense. Admittedly, it is part of this book's agenda to recuperate several of these negative affects for their critical productivity, but no one warns us bet-
ter about the danger of romanticizing them than Paolo Virno, for whom the classic "sentiments of disenchantment" that once marked positions of radical alienation from the system of wage labor—anxiety, distraction, and cynicism—are now perversely integrated, from the factory to the office, into contemporary capitalist production itself: "Fears of particular dangers, if only virtual ones, haunt the workday like a mood that cannot be escaped. This fear, however, is transformed into an operational requirement, a special tool of the trade. Insecurity about one's place during periodic innovation, fear of losing recently gained privileges, and anxiety over being 'left behind' translate into flexibility, adaptability, and a readiness to reconfigure oneself." Here we see how capitalism's classic affects of disaffection (and thus of potential social conflict and political antagonism) are neatly reabsorbed by the wage system and reconfigured into professional ideals. Nothing could be further from Fredric Jameson's more widely known thesis about the "waning" of negative affect in our contemporary moment. Instead, Virno shows how central and perversely functional such affective attitudes and dispositions have become, as the very lubricants of the economic system which they originally came into being to oppose. Yet while irreversibly integrated into the contemporary, post-Fordist organization of labor, these ugly feelings remain, for Virno, "open to radically conflicting developments" ("AD," 26). For example, while there is nothing redeeming about the "eager" disposition of opportunism, its "truth"... what might be called its neutral kernel, resides in the fact that our relation with the world tends to articulate itself primarily through possibilities, opportunities, and chances, instead of according to linear and univocal directions." As Virno points out, "This modality of experience, even if it nourishes opportunism, does not necessarily result in it" (25). For other kinds of behavior, and even kinds diametrically opposed to opportunism, "might also be inscribed within an experience fundamentally structured by these same possibilities and fleeting opportunities. We can discern such radical and transformative behavior, however, only by tracing in the opportunism so widespread today the specific modality of experience to which this behavior might indeed be correlated, even if in a completely different way" (25). Indeed, one could extrapolate from Virno's claims to argue that in the transnational stage of capitalism that defines our contemporary moment, our emotions no longer link up as securely as they once did with the models of social action and transformation theorized by Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, and others under the signs of relatively unambiguous emotions like anger or fear. In other words, the nature of the sociopolitical itself has changed in a manner that both calls forth and calls upon a new set of feelings—ones less powerful than the classical political passions, though perhaps more suited, in their ambient, Bartlebian, but still diagnostic nature, for models of subjectivity, collectivity, and agency not entirely foreseen by past theorists of the commonwealth. This is why, for Virno, even an unattractive feeling like opportunism can provide the "kernel" from which to shape "transformatory behavior." For all its pettiness, the feeling calls attention to a real social experience and a certain kind of historical truth.

While this book makes a similar if more modest claim for the social significance of its own fundamentally ambivalent "sentiments of disenchantment" (an ambivalence demonstrated by the fact that all are mobilized as easily by the political right as by the left, as the histories of disgust and paranoia illustrate so well), it is useful to recall that with notable exceptions like Hobbes or Niccolò Machiavelli, who made fear central to their theories of modern sovereignty and the state, it is the discourse of philosophical aesthetics, rather than that of political philosophy or economy, in which emotions have traditionally played the most pivotal role—from Longinus to Immanuel Kant on the sublime (perhaps the first "ugly" or explicitly nonbeautiful feeling appearing in theories of aesthetic judgment), to the twentieth-century mutation of this affect I describe in my chapter on stuplirmity. Or, to trace another exemplary arc, from the seventeenth-century "Affect Theorists" who tried to systematize the correlation of musical forms and genres to specific emo-
tions, to Susanne Langer’s analysis of music as a “tonal analogue of emotive life” in *Philosophy in a New Key,* to my own attempt to reanimate the concept of literary “tone” by means of the atonal but no less musical concept of noise. The investigation of how new theories of affect might expand the discourse of aesthetics thus continues a long-standing intellectual project, even as it sets this book apart from cultural histories of specific emotions (as, for instance, *American Nervousness, 1903: An Anecdotal History,* by Tom Lutz; *Anatomy of Disgust,* by William Ian Miller; and *Cato’s Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion,* by Julie Ellison), as well as from new philosophies of emotion that inquire into what feeling is (*Parables for the Virtual,* by Brian Massumi; *Feeling in Theory,* by Rei Terada; and *The Vehement Passions,* by Philip Fisher). In a sense, the book’s turn to ugly feelings to reanimate aesthetics is simply the flip side of its privileging of the aesthetic domain as the ideal site to examine the politically ambiguous work of negative emotions.

More specifically, this book turns to ugly feelings to expand and transform the category of “aesthetic emotions,” or feelings unique to our encounters with artworks—a concept whose oldest and best-known example is Aristotle’s discussion of catharsis in *Poetics.* Yet this particular aesthetic emotion, the arousal and eventual purgation of pity and fear made possible by the genre of tragic drama, actually serves as a useful foil for the studies that follow. For in keeping with the spirit of a book in which minor and generally unprestigious feelings are deliberately favored over grander passions like anger and fear (cornerstones of the philosophical discourse of emotions, from Aristotle to the present), as well as over potentially ennobling or morally beatific states like sympathy, melancholia, and shame (the emotions given the most attention in literary criticism’s recent turn to ethics), the feelings I examine here are explicitly amoral and noncathartic, offering no satisfactions of virtue, however oblique, nor any therapeutic or purifying release. In fact, most of these feelings tend to interfere with the outpouring of other emotions. Moods like irritation and anxiety, for instance, are defined by a flatness or ongoingness entirely opposed to the “suddenness” on which Aristotle’s aesthetics of fear depends. And unlike rage, which cannot be sustained indefinitely, less dramatic feelings like envy and paranoia have a remarkable capacity for duration. If *Ugly Feelings* is a bestiary of affects, in other words, it is one filled with rats and possums rather than lions, its categories of feeling generally being, well, weaker and nastier.

This weakness and nastiness notwithstanding, most of the negative affects in this study have managed to endure in a way that other feelings once widely in circulation (like the nineteenth-century feelings of “neurasthenia” and “amatiiveness”) have not, acquiring a colloquial status that broadens the range of sociohistorical dilemmas they can be used to interpret. Each ugly feeling will thus be examined in a cultural context where it seems particularly charged or at stake, ranging from contemporary feminist debates over the perceived problem of aggression between feminists (a context in which the antagonistic as well as pejoratively feminized feeling of “envy” becomes especially problematic) to an American cultural discourse that from the antebellum period forward has found it compelling to imagine the racialized subject as an excessively emotional and expressive subject (a situation in which the affect I call “animatedness” becomes especially problematic). Envy and animatedness could thus be described as affective ideologemes, in the sense of being “historically determinate conceptual or semic complex(es) which can project [themselves] in the form of a ‘value system,’” but also, more simply, as concepts that become the site and stake of various kinds of symbolic struggle. While this book pays close attention to the conditions under which these struggles unfold, and singles out specific contexts in which they become particularly intense, it is not a history of feelings. Its overarching project is rather a theoretical one, calling for a more fluid reading across forms, genres, and periods than is the prevailing norm in academic criticism today. Hence, texts are frequently read in what
may seem like jarring juxtapositions: Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* and Martin Heidegger’s analysis of anxiety in *Being and Time* read with Melville’s *Pierre*, for instance, in my analysis of anxiety’s curious elevation to a place of prominence in Western intellectual life. In the tradition of Barbara Johnson’s book *The Feminist Difference*, this method of disjunctive alignment is intended to allow the texts to become “readable in new ways” and thus generate fresh examinations of historically tenacious problems.²

In this manner, the strength of this book resides not in the historical detail it will supply, but in the theoretical groundwork it will construct. In fact, by not just analyzing but mobilizing affective concepts to investigate a wide range of dilemmas, the book makes arguments that provide motivation for further historical research by explaining why these feelings might be interesting enough to merit attention in the first place. It also demonstrates how feeling can be used to expand the project of criticism and theory. Just as one chapter mobilizes envy to disclose the unusual difficulty feminine aggression has posed for an otherwise versatile and capacious psychoanalytic theory on which feminist film criticism has strongly relied, another invokes the affect I call “stuplimity” to highlight certain limitations in classic theories of the sublime that prevent it from adequately accounting for the experience of boredom increasingly intertwined with contemporary experiences of aesthetic awe. Marshaling its minor affects to investigate impasses in contemporary theory and criticism that might otherwise remain unseen, the book attempts to demonstrate how emotion might be recuperated for critical praxis in general, shedding new light on the intimate relationship between negative affect and “negative thinking,” Herbert Marcuse’s shorthand for ideology critique in the dialectical tradition.¹⁰ In general, like a vaudeville show or revue film (where Max Horkheimer and Adorno find “the negative” to “glimmer for a few moments” in their otherwise unhesitating indictment of the culture industry), this book spotlights a large and transatlantic ensemble of texts by authors across genres and periods.¹¹

Despite an array that may seem idiosyncratic, the selection of texts by these authors—Sigmund Freud, Ralph Ellison, Silvan Tomkins, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Gertrude Stein, Nella Larsen, John Yau, and Melanie Klein, among others—has been determined by the *kinds* of negative feeling I have chosen to emphasize. In this I follow the lead of Hobbes. In his discussion in *Leviathan*, for instance, of the role played by fear in securing the covenants upon which social order in the commonwealth depends, Hobbes argues that the human fear of “invisible spirits” (which, prior to the time of civil society, superseded our fear of the power of other humans) gave rise to a specific form or genre: the oath. Hobbes defines this as “a form of speech, added to a promise, by which he that promiseth, signifieth, that unless he perform, he renounceth the mercy of his God.” “And this,” he adds, “that the fear of breaking faith might be the greater.”¹² Specific kinds of emotion thus could be said to determine specific “literary kinds”—and, in Hobbes’s example, one that will strategically intensify the very emotion at its origin (Fisher, *VP*, 8). In a similar vein, the noncathartic feelings in this book could be said to give rise to a noncathartic aesthetic: art that produces and foregrounds a failure of emotional release (another form of suspended “action”) and does so as a kind of politics. Such a politics is of a Bartlebian sort—very different, say, from the direct activism supposedly incited, according to what has now become American folklore, by Harriet Beecher Stowe’s poetics of sympathy and the genre of sentimental literature as a whole.¹³ Just as one can study fear through the specific forms to which it gives rise, such as the oath, the alibi, or complex genres like the horror film, my book examines the synthesis of boredom and shock I call “stuplimity” through a literature of exhausting repetitions and permutations, paranoia through a transcription-based poetry that continually raises the question of whether writing comes from inside or outside its author, and the racialized affect of animatedness through the screen genre of animated cartoons.

The equivocality of the Bartlebian aesthetic suggests that there
is a special relationship between ugly feelings and irony, a rhetorical attitude with a decidedly affective dimension, if not a “feeling” per se. For the morally degraded and seemingly unjustifiable status of these feelings tends to produce an unpleasurable feeling about the feeling (a reflexive response taking the form of “I feel ashamed about feeling envious” or “I feel anxious about my enviousness”) that significantly parallels the doubleness on which irony, as an evaluative stance hinging on a relationship between the said and the unsaid, fundamentally depends. In their tendency to promote what Susan Feagin calls “meta-responses” (since it is hard to feel envy without feeling that one should not be feeling envy, reinforcing the negativity of the original emotion), there is a sense in which ugly feelings can be described as conducive to producing ironic distance in a way that the grander and more prestigious passions, or even the moral emotions associated with sentimental literature, do not. This is why the aesthetic examples in this book tend not to be drawn from the more recognizably “emotional” genres—such as melodrama, sentimental fiction, tales of supernatural horror, or lyric poetry—to which literary critics interested in such matters have traditionally turned. While the ironic as well as the non-cathartic aspect of ugly feelings drives this book’s preference for “constructivist” rather than “expressivist” forms as ideal sites for examining the social and symbolic productivity of emotion in general, it is another key aspect of these negative feelings—that of being noticeably weaker in intensity than what Philip Fisher calls the “vehement passions” underwriting canonically major forms and genres like Homeric epic and Shakespearean tragedy—which informs its preference for texts that even seem oddly impassive: texts that, like “Bartleby,” foreground the absence of a strong emotion where we are led to expect one, or turn entirely on the interpretive problems posed by an emotional illegibility. The fact that this book reads the tonally ambiguous Confidence-Man rather than the rage-driven epic Moby-Dick, Nella Larsen’s superficially “irritated” Quicksand but not the melodrama of jealousy that is Passing, and Beckett’s exhausting poetry of permutations and combinations as opposed to the Romantic lyric, proceeds directly from its emphasis on the ignoble cousins of the philosophically canonical emotions featured in Fisher’s study. With the turn to the ambiguous affects of the administered world’s many “Sub-Subs”—Melville’s appellation for the minor employee, or “mere painstaking burrower and grub-worm,” who dutifully assembles the cetological “Extracts” that open Moby-Dick—rather than those of more iconic figures such as Ahab, Othello, or Lear, my focus will be on irritation instead of anger, envy rather than jealousy, and “stuplimgly” as opposed to the transcendent feeling of the sublime. It is interesting to note here that while the texts chosen for the way they highlight these feelings are drawn from both high and mass culture, all are canonically minor. Something about the cultural canon itself seems to prefer higher passions and emotions—as if minor or ugly feelings were not only incapable of producing “major” works, but somehow disabled the works they do drive from acquiring canonical distinction.

Still, while partly a response to one philosopher’s call for a study of feeling with a more idiosyncratic focus than those that “concentrate on analyzing the features of a handful of classic emotions,” the “negativity” of the feelings in this book obtains at several levels that the classic emotions share. Like rage and fear, ugly feelings such as envy can be described as dysphoric or experientially negative, in the sense that they evoke pain or displeasure. They can also be described as “semantically” negative, in the sense that they are saturated with socially stigmatizing meanings and values (such as the “pettiness” one traditionally associates with envy); and as “syntactically” negative, in the sense that they are organized by trajectories of repulsion rather than attraction, by phobic strivings “away from” rather than philic strivings “toward.” In the case of these explicitly agonistic emotions, informed by what one psychoanalyst calls the global affect of “against,” the negativity at stake is algorithmic or operational, rather than value- or meaning-based, in-
volving processes of aversion, exclusion, and of course negation. It is these multiple levels of negativit that make the ugly feelings in this study so useful for conjoining predicaments from multiple registers—showing how sociohistorical and ideological dilemmas, in particular, produce formal or representational ones. The affect I call animadedness, for instance, will allow us to take the disturbingly enduring representation of the African-American as at once an excessively “lively” subject and a pliant body unusually susceptible to external control and link this representation to the rhetorical figure of apostrophe (in which a speaker animates or “gives life” to nonhuman objects by addressing them as subjects capable of response), and, further, to connect these to a symptomatic controversy surrounding the televisual aesthetics of dimensional animation, a technique in which clay or foam puppets are similarly brought to “life” as racialized characters by being physically manipulated and ventriloquized.

In this manner, even as the exaggerated expressiveness and hyperactivity associated with animadedness marks an important exception to the Bartlebyan aesthetic fostered by the other feelings in this book, it similarly draws our attention to the politically charged predicament of suspended agency from which all of these ugly feelings ensue. As the translation, into affect, of a state of being “puppeteered” that points to a specific history of systemic political and economic disenfranchisement, racialized animadedness actually calls attention to this predicament in a particularly emphatic way. It is the situation of passivity itself, and the allegorical significance it transmits to the ugly feelings that both originate from and reflect back upon it, to which I now want to turn in closer detail, by examining several moments of narrative inaction from two other American stories of the corporate workplace: the crime melodrama Double Indemnity (Paramount, 1944; directed by Billy Wilder, based on the novel by James M. Cain) and the conspiracy film The Conversation (Paramount, 1974; directed by Francis Ford Coppola). Like Melville’s “Story of Wall Street,” both films depict a worker’s increasingly alienated relationship to the corporation that employs him, as well as to the institutions of the state. Both are also examples of film noir, a postwar genre commonly understood (even to the point of cliché) as being aesthetically and ideologically driven by an entire spectrum of dysphoric feelings: paranoia, alienation, greed, jealousy, and so forth.

The inertial moments from the two films I want to examine could not be more different from the films’ more highly memorable moments of intense emotion, which (unsurprisingly) correlate with significant actions propelling the plot forward: such as, in the case of Double Indemnity, the kiss that seals the protagonist’s decision to help his lover kill her husband, the murder itself, his final confrontation with the femme fatale, and so forth. In contrast to the “mere recital” of events, which Aristotle finds superior to visual spectacle for the maximization of catharsis (“mere recital” entailing a summary in which the duration of events narrated greatly exceeds that of their actual narration, such that “even without seeing the things take place, he who simply hears the account of them shall be filled with horror and pity”), the moments from the noir films that concern us involve a narrative expansion or stretch, in which “discourse time” becomes considerably longer than “story time.” While it has been noted that cinema in general “has trouble with summary,” often resorting to devices ranging from montage sequences to “cruder solutions . . . like peeling calendars,” the preference for the narrative stretch over a compression that “forces us to take in the entire story almost instantaneously” might also be said to reflect the difference between the paranoia that suffuses the postwar film noir and the fear that drives classical tragedy; as a feeling without a clearly defined object, paranoia would logically promote a more ambient aesthetic, one founded on a temporality very different from the “suddenness” central to Aristotle’s aesthetics of fear. The anticathartic device of dilating the time in which any particular incident takes place thus accentuates the manner in which these uneventful moments mirror the general situation of
obstructed agency that gives rise to all the ugly feelings I examine, allowing them to function as political allegories in Arendt’s sense above. But despite their obvious difference from scenes of high drama keyed to emotional tonalities which we are intended to recognize instantly, and even as their own affective quality remains comparatively undefined, these moments of conspicuous inactivity remain affectively charged. What seems indeterminate here, however, is actually highly determined. In fact, I would suggest that what each moment produces is the inherently ambiguous affect of affective disorientation in general—what we might think of as a state of feeling vaguely “unsettled” or “confused,” or, more precisely, a meta-feeling in which one feels confused about what one is feeling. This is “confusion” in the affective sense of bewilderment, rather than the epistemological sense of indeterminacy. Despite its marginality to the philosophical canon of emotions, isn’t this feeling of confusion about what one is feeling an affective state in its own right? And in fact a rather familiar feeling that often heralds the basic affect of “interest” underwriting all acts of intellectual inquiry? Turning to our two films, we may find it useful to refer to this very specific state of affective indeterminacy as the negative feeling of “disconcertedness”—the feeling of not being “focused” or “gathered.” Such an ugly feeling is intimately tied (as we shall see) to the “loss of control” explicitly thematized in each moment of stalled or suspended action. Most important, in both films the dysphoric affect of affective disorientation—of being lost on one’s own “cognitive map” of available affects—is concretely rendered through a spatial confusion made possible by a notoriously unstable narrative technique that film scholars have credited the genre of film noir with most fully instrumentalizing; subjective or first-person camera.

My first example involves a tracking shot from *Double Indemnity* that eventually captures the wounded protagonist, Pacific All-Risk Insurance agent Walter Neff (Fred McMurray), as he speaks into a dictaphone and concludes his narration of the events that have led up to his present condition (Figures 1a–c). Throughout the film, Neff’s self-recorded narration, which eventually discloses his participation in two murders, is directly addressed to his avuncular boss and mentor at the insurance company, Barton Keyes (Edward G. Robinson), who has also been a major character in the story which Neff has been recounting and which the film presents to us through a series of voiceover-flashbacks. The shot that returns us to the scene of narration for the last time seems, initially, unambiguously objective—as would be thematically appropriate, given the symbolic import of the “impartial” recording instrument into which Neff speaks his story, and the fact that the depiction of a narrator in the actual act of telling or narrating (in this case, a technologically mediated, quasi-documentary act) will always have a stronger claim to objectivity than his subjectively filtered tale. As the camera comes to rest on the actor’s profile, however, in a view so uncomfortably close that we can see the beads of sweat on his averted face, Neff slowly turns his head from the dictaphone toward the camera, as if to signal a realism-breaking awareness of its presence, or, more simply, a growing consciousness of being watched (Figures 1d–g). Our sense of the emotional tension that comes to inflect the shot is subsequently confirmed as Neff says, “Hello Keyes.”

The cut to the compositionally contrasting shot that follows (Figure 1h), a long view revealing Keyes standing in the opened office door, unsettlingly reveals that the point of view of the preceding shot has in fact been that of Keyes, and that Keyes—in keeping with his general role as Neff’s intellectual superior as well as the film’s one representative of law and order—has been watching and listening to Neff’s confession, unbeknownst to both Neff and the film’s audience, for an indefinite time, if not all along. “How long have you been standing there?” asks Neff. “Long enough,” is Keyes’s response. The implications of the objective shot’s curiously stealthy and belated subjectivization are as serious as its affective intensity is strong. Just as Keyes “sneaks up” on Neff at the level of
discourse as well as at the level of story, and visually as well as narratively, as his point of view steals into and claims authorship over a gaze initially owned by no subject in the diegesis, Neff is in a double sense “caught,” since it is understood that his capture in the visual field surreptitiously overtaken by Keyes will entail his capture by the law. In fact, in the original, bleaker version of the film which did not survive its studio censors, the arresting shot leads not only to Neff’s imprisonment, but to his execution by the state in a gas chamber. In this manner, the moment when Keyes steps out of the subjectively filtered world of the story told by Neff and enters the more objective world in which Neff’s act of telling takes place is not only a moment designed to reaffirm his character’s power and authority (only Keyes, among all the other characters contained in the flashback sequences, is able to cross over from the past into the present), but one that produces an affective disorientation and qualitative change in the relationship between the two men.

Variations of this alternation between subjective and objective framing, and its use for the purpose of producing the highly specific feeling of feeling uncertain about what one is feeling—the “disconcertedness” which, in this case, heralds and morphs into the more articulated pathos of feeling “busted”—abound in film noir and its generic descendants. In Francis Ford Coppola’s Watergate-era conspiracy film The Conversation (1974), we find the emotional effects of the technique maximized when it is used to produce the paranoia of a surveillance professional apprehended in the very gaze one would expect him to command. Like Cain’s Pacific All-Risk Insurance agent and Melville’s Wall Street scrivener, Harry Caul (Gene Hackman) is a white-collar worker who becomes increasingly alienated from and, eventually, overtly antagonistic toward the organization that employs him. Though we have already seen this opposition take the form of a work slowdown culminating in a full-blown stoppage (in “Bartleby”), as well as what Neff describes as an attempt to “crook the house,” in The Conversation it appears as an effort to thwart a corporate conspiracy, revealed by a protagonist with much greater autonomy and libidinal investment in his work than his fictional predecessors had. Yet here the link between the moment of suspended action in the film’s story and the frustrated agency of the film’s male protagonist is much more structurally and thematically explicit as well as politically charged. For while Harry’s stunted “faculty of action” appears in the guise of an individual problem, the film immediately reveals it as a synecdoche for a much larger social and in fact national ill, as exemplified by the collective apathy the eponymous conversationalists in the crucial opening scene discuss, as they observe sleeping homeless men (who may or may not be Vietnam war veterans) in a crowded public park—a setting that itself suggests a miniaturized
representation of the social whole. Moreover, what we have elsewhere examined as a passivity with political resonance or implications is presented here as a passivity with respect to the domain of politics proper. For we learn that in an earlier phase of his surveillance career, while employed by a state prosecutor, Harry has refused, in the name of the “objectivity” conveniently idealized by his profession, to concern himself with the content of the surveillance cases assigned to him, regardless of the violent ends (including the murder of a local union official) which he suspects his government work may have furthered. Indexed here by the specific feelings of paranoia and guilt, rather than an affective absence or illegibility, Harry’s political passivity, and correlative obsessions with maintaining his privacy and solitude, will become most evident in his inability to prevent a murder engineered by the private corporation for which (in a trajectory that neatly reverses Bartleby’s move from the postal service’s Dead Letter Office to a lawyer’s firm on Wall Street) he has left the Attorney General’s office to work—an inability he cannot overcome despite the technical expertise that has given him advance knowledge of the plot and thus his chance to redeem his past detachment. The allegorically charged moment of narrative stasis that concerns us occurs in the hotel room in which this murder (a sign as well as a direct consequence of Harry’s political impotence) has taken place.

Dramatized, again, by a high ratio of discourse time to story time (and tellingly silent in the context of a film about conversations), the scene opens as Harry reenters this room after the traumatic experience of overhearing, from an adjacent room, the actual sounds of the crime. The take that concerns us begins with a view of Harry cautiously peering through the half-open door (Figure 2a). Moving in the direction of his gaze, the camera drops him from its visual field as it very slowly and methodically, much like a highly skilled surveillance professional, pans across the enigmatically unoccupied and immaculate room (Figures 2b–h). Because Harry has abruptly disappeared from the visual field, as the pan continues we are made to understand that we are seeing what he sees. Without any break in its continuity or flow, the shot has thus already undergone a transition from objective to subjective. The relatively long duration of the pan seems intended, in fact, to secure the shot’s surreptitious change in valence, to give the viewer time, as it were, to get used to its subjectivization. But as the camera completes its near 180-degree turn around the room, we are surprised by Harry’s sudden reappearance at the far right edge of the visual field (Figure 2i). Here the shot undergoes its second transition, from subjective back to objective—for how else could Harry appear in a shot designed to represent his own gaze? In this case, the uncertainty over the authorship of the visual field highlights the pathos of the surveillance professional’s increasing impotence and self-entanglement in the corporate conspiracy (a ghostly afterimage, if we follow Fredric Jameson’s lead, of the social totality of late capitalism itself) in which he hopes to intervene.21 In this otherwise uneventful and unemotional scene (one in which the enunciated content, or what we are shown, is that there is precisely “nothing to see”), Harry loses control of his own gaze—through a desubjectifying discourse that anticipates his own eventual transformation into an object of surveillance by the very corporation that has hired him, as the film’s final scene depicting his failed effort to debug his own apartment ominously makes clear. In fact, the shot’s cunning re-objectivization suggests just how uncertain this surveillance expert’s grasp of the visual field has perhaps been all along.

Though Double Indemnity has already shown us how this alternation between subjective and objective enunciation can be used to produce irony as well as the uncanny affect of disconcertedness, the technique is used in The Conversation to produce another highly determinate feeling—paranoia—that not coincidentally replicates the subjective/objective oscillation in its basic structure: Is the enemy out there or in me? Confusion about feeling’s objective or subjective status becomes inherent to the feeling. Our readings of the
Bartlebian moments of inaction highlighted above have thus prepared us for a crucial reversal of the familiar idea that vehement emotions—in particular, the strongly intentional or object-directed emotions in the philosophical canon, such as jealousy, anger, and fear—destabilize our sense of the boundary between the psyche and the world, or between subjective and objective reality. In contrast, my argument is that a systematic problematization of the distinction between subjective and objective enunciation lies at the heart of the Bartlebian feelings in this book—minor affects that are far less intentional or object-directed, and thus more likely to produce political and aesthetic ambiguities, than the passions in the philosophical canon. For just as the question of whether one's paranoia is subjective or objective is internal to paranoia, the historically feminized and proletarianized emotion of envy has another version of this problematic at its core. While envy describes a subject's polemical response to a perceived inequality in the external world, it has been reduced to signifying a static subjective trait: the "lack" or "deficiency" of the person who envies. Hence, after a person's envy enters a public domain of signification, it will always seem unjustified and critically effete—regardless of whether the relation of inequality it points to (say, unequal ownership of a means of production) has a real and objective existence. In this manner, although envy begins with a clearly defined object—and it is the only negative emotion defined specifically by the fact that it addresses forms of inequality—it denies the very objectivity of this object. In doing so, it oddly bears a much closer resemblance to feelings lacking clearly defined objects, such as anxiety, than it does to an intentional emotion like jealousy. Envy is, in a sense, an intentional feeling that paradoxically undermines its own intentionality.

Marked by this conversion of a polemical engagement with the objective world into a reflection of a subjective characteristic, the confusion over a feeling's subjective or objective status that we have seen become internal to paranoia also seems internal to envy. Both are feelings that contain, as it were, models of the problem that defines them. Even an ostensibly degree-zero affect like animatedness has a version of this subjective/objective problematic at its core—namely, the question of whether "animation" designates high-spiritedness, or a puppet-like state analogous to the assembly-line mechanization of the human body famously dramatized by Charlie Chaplin in Modern Times. In the form of a dialectic of inside/outside, the subjective/objective problematic will likewise haunt Heidegger's and Hitchcock's strikingly similar conceptions of "anxiety," and will motivate the spatial fantasy of "thrownness" that sustains the affect's intellectual aura and prestige. In the form of a tension between psychological interiors and bodily exteriors, the subjective/objective problematic will become similarly integral to
the affect of irritation—defined, as Nella Larsen will show us, by its very liminality as an affective concept (weak or mild anger), given its unusual proximity to a bodily or epidermal one (soreness, rawness, inflammation, or chafing).

The striking persistence with which the feelings in this book reflexively “theorize” or internalize the confusion between the subjective status and objective status of feeling in general can be taken as following from their relatively weak intentionality—their indistinctness if not absence of object. Indeed, while it is widely agreed that “emotions play roles in forms of action,” the feelings in this study tend to be diagnostic rather than strategic, and to be diagnostically concerned with states of inaction in particular. Even the objects of envy and disgust, the most strongly intentional and dynamic feelings among my set of seven, and the only two that can be classified as emotions proper, are imbued with negativity. While envy, as we have seen, aggressively casts doubt on the objectivity of the very object that distinguishes it from other agonistic emotions (the social relation of inequality), disgust is constituted by the vehement rejection or exclusion of its object. Hence while disgust is always disgust toward, in the same way that envy is envy of—whereas it makes no sense to speak of stupefication or ananxiousness toward—its grammar brings it closer to the intransitive feelings in this study than to the other emotions with which it is traditionally classified. For while envy and disgust are clearly object-directed, their trajectories are directed toward the negation of these objects, either by denying them or by subjecting them to epistemological skepticism.

Not surprisingly, the boundary confusions built into the structure of these feelings, whether in the form of inside/outside, self/world, or psyche/body, reappear in the aesthetic forms and genres they determine. They will therefore return in the series of representational predicaments I will mobilize these ugly feelings to read: ranging from controversies about the use of the “ugly” cinematic technique of claymation (dimensional screen animation) as a for-
values like “precious,” “stilted,” “monotonous,” or “imperious,” created from, or based upon, the feeling of pleasure or displeasure that accompanies our initial perception of the aesthetic object (AR, 90). Genette in fact describes these objectifying predicates, which bear a close resemblance to what I. A. Richards called “aesthetic or ‘projectile’ adjectives,” as descriptive terms that “sneak in” evaluations of the object based on feelings about the object. There is thus a sense in which the “aesthetic relation,” which for Genette is more or less synonymous with “objectification,” can be understood as an oblique effort to justify the presence of feeling in every aesthetic encounter.

The subjective-objective problematic, magnified by the relativism of aesthetic judgment and other classic problems in the discourse of aesthetics (including the contested notion of special “aesthetic feelings”), is central, as we have seen, to the ugly feelings in this book, as well as to the artistic forms and genres they generate. It will be a particular concern in my discussion of “tone” (Chapter 1), the affective-aesthetic concept that will implicitly inform all the analyses of the aesthetics of specific feelings that follow. Yet the subjective/objective problematic so central to the philosophy of aesthetics can also be traced back to the philosophy of emotion in general. It has become the über-question of recent theoretical writing on feeling in particular, as evinced in the analysis of emotion after “the death of the subject” (Rei Terada) or attempts to differentiate “emotion” and “affect” on the grounds that the former requires a subject while the latter does not (Lawrence Grossberg, Brian Massumi). These questions reflect the extent to which the subjective dimension of feeling, in particular, in seeming to undercut its validity as an object of materialist inquiry, has posed a difficulty for contemporary theorists. The present spotlight on emotion in literary criticism can be understood partly as an attempt to redress its earlier exclusion on such “subjectivist” grounds, including its failure to be grasped by the more positivistic kinds of cultural-historical analysis and the more dryly technical kinds of semiotic analysis

that dominated literary studies in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as by poststructuralist theories of literary language prevailing in the 1980s and early 1990s. In the former case, feeling’s marginalization stemmed from its perceived incompatibility with “concrete” social experiences; in the latter (as Terada most fully examines), from its perceived incompatibility with poststructuralism’s skeptical interrogation of the category of experience itself. Though emotion once posed an embarrassment to these very different critics for very different reasons, most critics today accept that far from being merely private or idiosyncratic phenomena, or reflecting a “romantically raw domain of primitive experiential richness” that materialist analysis will be unable to grasp (Massumi, IV, 29), feelings are as fundamentally “social” as the institutions and collective practices that have been the more traditional objects of historicist criticism (as Raymond Williams was perhaps the earliest to argue, in his analyses of “structures of feeling”), and as “material” as the linguistic signs and significations that have been the more traditional objects of literary formalism. Although feeling is not reducible to these institutions, collective practices, or discursive significations, it is nonetheless as socially real and “infrastructural” in its effects “as a factory” (Massumi, IV, 45).

The affect/emotion split originated in psychoanalysis for the practical purpose of distinguishing third-person from first-person representations of feeling, with “affect” designating feeling described from an observer’s (analyst’s) perspective, and “emotion” designating feeling that “belongs” to the speaker or analysand’s “I.” Yet Massumi and Grossberg have made claims for a stronger distinction, arguing not just that emotion requires a subject while affect does not, but that the former designates feeling given “function and meaning” while the latter remains “unformed and unstructured” (Massumi, IV, 260, note 3). As Grossberg puts it, “Unlike emotions, affective states are neither structured narratively nor organized in response to our interpretations of situations.” Similarly, Massumi argues that while emotion is “a subjective content, the
sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal,” affect is feeling or “intensity” disconnected from “meaningful sequencing, from narration” (PV, 28). The difficulty affective “intensity” poses for analysis is thus strikingly analogous to the analytical difficulty which Williams coined his term “structures of feeling” to address—that is, the kind posed by social experiences which “do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and action.” In escaping qualification much like Williams’ structures of feeling, which as “social experiences in solution” lie “at the very edge of semantic availability” (ML, 132), affective intensity clearly creates difficulties for more positivistic kinds of materialist analysis, even as it always remains highly analyzable in or as effect (Massumi, PV, 260, note 3).

While strong arguments have thus been made—primarily on the basis of a subjective/objective divide, but also in terms of oppositions like narrative/nonnarrative or semiotic/assignifying—for the idea that emotion and affect “follow different logics and pertain to different orders,” some aspects of this taxonomic division will be more useful and important to this book than others (Massumi, PV, 27). Certainly less narratively structured, in the sense of being less object- or goal-directed, the intentionally weak and therefore often politically ambiguous feelings in this book are in fact much more like affects, in accordance with the definitions above, than emotions—which, for Martha Nussbaum, are “closely connected with action; few facts about them are more obvious.” Tied intimately, in contrast, with situations of what Dewey calls “being withheld from doing,” the feelings in this book are obviously not as strategic as the emotions classically associated with political action; with their indeterminate or undifferentiated objects, in particular, they are less than ideally suited for setting and realizing clearly defined goals. Whereas Hobbes and Aristotle have shown how the principle of mutual fear actively binds men into the contracts that sup-

port the political commonwealth, and how anger advances the redressing of perceived injustices through retaliation, it is difficult to imagine how either of these actions might be advanced by an affective state like, say, irritation. While one can be irritated without realizing it, or knowing exactly what one is irritated about, there can be nothing ambiguous about one’s rage or terror, or about what one is terrified of or enraged about. Yet the unsuitability of these weakly intentional feelings for forceful or unambiguous action is precisely what amplifies their power to diagnose situations, and situations marked by blocked or thwarted action in particular.

While the distinction between affect and emotion is thus helpful here in a number of ways, I will not be theoretically leaning on it to the extent that others have—as may be apparent from the way in which I use the two terms more or less interchangeably. In the chapters that follow, the difference between affect and emotion is taken as a modal difference of intensity or degree, rather than a formal difference of quality or kind. My assumption is that affects are less formed and structured than emotions, but not lacking form or structure altogether; less “sociolinguistically fixed,” but by no means code-free or meaningless; less “organized in response to our interpretations of situations,” but by no means entirely devoid of organization or diagnostic powers. As suggested above, ambient affects may in fact be better suited to interpreting ongoing states of affairs. What the switch from formal to modal difference enables is an analysis of the transitions from one pole to the other: the passages whereby affects acquire the semantic density and narrative complexity of emotions, and emotions conversely denature into affects. At the end of the day, the difference between emotion and affect is still intended to solve the same basic and fundamentally descriptive problem it was coined in psychoanalytic practice to solve: that of distinguishing first-person from third-person feeling, and, by extension, feeling that is contained by an identity from feeling that is not. Rather than also trying to dissolve this subjective/objective problematic by creating two distinct categories of feeling, this study
aims to preserve it for its aesthetic productivity. We see this not just in the meaningful ironies or specific feelings generated by film noir's oscillations between first-person and third-person point of view, but also in the concept of cinematic or literary tone. For as anticipated by film noir's demonstration that certain kinds of ugly feeling (paranoia, disconcertedness) become maximized when we are most uncertain if the "field" of their emergence is subjective or objective, the tone of an artwork—which obviously cannot be reduced to representations of feeling within the artwork, or to the emotional responses the artwork solicits from its viewers—is a concept dependent upon and even constructed around the very problematic that the emotion/affect distinction was intended to dissolve.

By "tone" I mean a literary or cultural artifact's feeling tone: its global or organizing affect, its general disposition or orientation toward its audience and the world. Hence, while the concept I refer to includes the connotations of "attitude" brought to the term by I. A. Richards and other New Critics, I am not referring to the same "tone" they narrow down to "a known way of speaking" or a dramatic style of address. Instead, I mean the formal aspect of a literary work that makes it possible for critics to describe a text as, say, "euphoric" or "melancholic," and, what is much more important, the category that makes these affective values meaningful with regard to how one understands the text as a totality within an equally holistic matrix of social relations. It is worth noting here that literary criticism's increased attention to matters of emotion has predominantly centered on the emotional effects of texts on their readers, and, in the predominantly historicist field of nineteenth-century American studies, where the surge in the discussion of emotion has seemed particularly intense, on the expressivist aesthetics of sympathy and sentimentality in particular. But what gets left out in this prevailing emphasis on a reader's sympathetic identification with the feelings of characters in a text is the simple but powerful question of "objectified emotion," or unfelt but perceived feeling, that presents itself most forcefully in the aesthetic concept of tone. The absence of attention to this way of talking about feelings and literature not only is specific to recent literary scholarship on emotion (though it becomes particularly glaring in such a context), but points to a long-standing problem in philosophical aesthetics that we have already had a glimpse of above, in which an overemphasis on feelings in terms of purely subjective or personal experience turns artworks into "containers for the psychology of the spectator" (Adorno, AT, 275). Tone's original association with the New Critics, who not only de-emotionalized the concept but showed how easily it could be conscripted into a gentlemanly discourse of nuance and implication designed to produce and sharpen social distinctions (as the irony of T. S. Eliot demonstrates so well), may be partly responsible for the dearth of attention paid to tone in their wake, even in later literary structuralisms that provided reinvigorated analyses of other formal categories like plot, setting, and character. But while there has been a conspicuous absence of attention to tone itself, critics have continued to rely heavily on the notion of a text's global affect for the construction of substantive arguments about literature and ideology or society as a whole. The "euphoria" Jameson ascribes to a cluster of late twentieth-century artworks, for instance, is designed to do nothing less than advance his critique of postmodernism as the logic of late capitalism, in the same way that Walter Benjamin's isolation of "a curious variety of despair" in the Weimar poetry of Erich Kästner enabled him to diagnose a much broader "left-wing melancholy" that, as Wendy Brown notes, extends just as problematically into our contemporary political discourses. Tone does a great deal of diagnostic and critical work for these writers and many others. Yet compared to other formal categories relied on for the analysis of literature in society, "tone" in my explicitly feeling-related sense, as a cultural object's affective bearing, orientation, or "set toward" the world, remains notoriously difficult to define. In fact, because tone is never entirely reducible to a reader's emotional response to a text or reducible to the text's internal representations of feeling (though it
can amplify and be amplified by both), the problem it poses for analysis is strikingly similar to the problem posed by uncertainties concerning a feeling’s subjective or objective status. For we can speak of a literary text whose global or organizing affect is disgust, without this necessarily implying that the work represents or signifies disgust, or that it will disgust the reader (though in certain cases it may also do so). Exactly “where,” then, is the disgust? Similarly, the “joyous intensity” Jameson ascribes to the work of Duane Hanson in his aforementioned essay on postmodernity does not imply that Hanson’s hyperrealistic sculptures of tired, elderly museum guards and sagging, overweight tourists represent or express joy, or that they make the viewer feel joyous—as opposed to, say, mildly amused or unsettled. Who is the subject, then, of the euphoria to which Jameson refers? Should this feeling belong to a subject? How is it even produced by the object from which it ostensibly emanates?

I ask these questions not to dispute the tone Jameson attributes to these postmodern artifacts—the exhilaration he is speaking of is clearly of the capitalist “special effect”: flawless verisimilitude as a spectacular display of technological skill and power—but to underscore how central the subjective/objective problematic is to the concept of tone itself, such that to resolve or eliminate the problem would be to nullify the concept or render it useless for theoretical work. Tone is the dialectic of objective and subjective feeling that our aesthetic encounters inevitably produce, much in the same way we have seen paranoia, the global affect of the noir films above, materially constituted by the systematic alternation of first- and third-person enunciations within a single shot. The fact that tone will always pose special difficulties as an object of analysis, particularly in the case of the frequently “atonal” texts foregrounded in this study of Bataile’s feelings, does not imply that one must make its definition more positivistic: the concept’s power resides precisely in its amorphousness. Accordingly, the goal of my first chapter is not to make the concept of tone less abstract or less “noisy” but to develop a more precise vocabulary for the “noise” that tone is. My primary guide in this venture will be Melville’s last published novel, The Confidence-Man (1857), a notably “talky” text that offers a useful allegory of the very problem enabling tone to do its aesthetic work. It demonstrates how feeling slips in and out of subjective boundaries in a series of transactions involving the exchange of writing and money for affective goods.

This book thus begins with what might be called a pre-affective question, by addressing one of the most important though under-examined aesthetic functions of feeling in general. After that, we will examine one of the most “basic” ways in which affect becomes publicly visible in an age of mechanical reproducibility: as a kind of innervated “agitation” or “animatedness.” On one hand, the state of being “animated” implies the most general of all affective conditions (that of being “moved” in one way or another), but also a feeling that implies being “moved” by a particular feeling, as when one is said to be animated by happiness or anger. Animatedness thus seems to have both an unintentional and intentional form. In a strange way, it seems at once a zero-degree feeling and a complex meta-feeling, which not only takes other feelings as its object, but takes only other intentional feelings as its object. For we can speak of someone’s being “animated” by a passion like anger, but not by an objectless mood like nostalgia or depression, which tend to have a de-animating effect on those affected by them.

In its associations with movement and activity, animatedness bears a semantic proximity to “agitation,” a term which is likewise used in the philosophical discourse of emotions to designate feeling prior to its articulation into a more complex passion, but that also underlies the contemporary meaning of the political agitator or activist. Yet while animatedness is bound up with questions of action—and even political action—in this general way, my primary focus will be on the social powerlessness foregrounded by its
racialized version. It is precisely this racialization that turns the neutral and even potentially positive affect of animatedness “ugly,” pointing to the more self-evidently problematic feelings in the chapters that follow. For as an exaggerated responsiveness to the language of others that turns the subject into a spasmatic puppet, in its racialized form animatedness loses its generally positive associations with human spiritedness or vitality and comes to resemble a kind of mechanization. At the same time, the minimal affect is turned into a form of emotional excess, and similarly stripped of its intentionalty. Hence, in Uncle Tom’s Cabin it no longer matters what emotion, negative or positive, moves or animates the African-American slave; rather, his or her animated state itself becomes the primary object of the narrator’s quasi-ethnographic fascination. In this manner, the racialization of animatedness converts a way of moving others to political action (“agitation”) into the passive state of being moved or vocalized by others for their amusement. The disturbing consequences of this conversion are most forcefully demonstrated in Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, which draws on a “primal scene” of racial puppeteering to dramatize the death of a rising political leader, in a particularly violent account of the African-American “agitator” turned “animator” (or entertainer). Animatedness thus brings us back to the politically charged problem of obstructed agency that all the categories of feeling in this book will be used to interpret. It facilitates the transition from the general question of feeling in literature to the aesthetics of complex and highly particularized feelings such as envy, irritation, anxiety, stultimity, paranoia, and disgust.

Given the predominant attention that critical work on emotion has devoted to the aesthetics of sympathy in recent years, we should note that it is precisely the obstruction of this “moral feeling” that “Bartleby” pointedly stages, as if Melville’s intent were to create a character so emotionally illegible as to foreclose the possibility of sympathetic identification altogether (and also, in an interesting way I will elaborate later, charity and pity). As the following chapter pursues the Bartlebyan question of suspended agency beyond its nineteenth-century context through the twentieth century and into the present—where the figure of the Sub-Sub incarnated in the corporate employees in this introduction will morph, in a fashion that echoes the structure of The Confidence-Man, into an overly innervated factory worker, an envious temp, an irritated secretary, an anxious detective for hire, an exhausted would-be novelist, and a transcriber of responses to psychological questionnaires for a state-run psychiatric institute—they similarly highlight the limits of both expressiveness and identification, as my chapter on envy will draw out in particular. Here the work of emotion is taken up in another register of social difference—femininity—where it has seemed particularly overdetermined. Though both feminism and the patriarchal culture that is its constitutive outside have played roles in strengthening the association between emotion and women, the weight placed on this association also creates nervousness, with “women’s feelings” imagined as always easily prone to turning ugly. Envy is one of the most conventionally imagined of these feelings, I argue, though in a manner that reveals the moral constraints imposed on female aggression within feminism as well as by its adversarial outside. Through readings of recent feminist debates as well as classic writings on envy and group psychology by Klein and Freud, I show how the agonistic feeling can be used to explore the fraught issue of antagonism’s political value for feminism, and to disclose the limitations of sympathetic identification as our culture’s dominant way of understanding the making of female homosociality and the formation of political groups.

Harnessed into the constellation of multiple negative affects that make up Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of resentment (as defined in On the Genealogy of Morals), envy is perhaps this book’s most exemplary example of a politically equivocal feeling. For resentment is Nietzsche’s account of how a kind of moral authority, one that transforms social weakness from an undesirable situation one must struggle to overcome into a “blessedness” or virtue (GM, 34),
“emerges from the powerless to avenge their incapacity for action, 
... enact[ing] their resentment of strengths that they cannot match 
or overthrow.” It is an account, in other words, of how a problematic valorization of powerlessness as “good” can easily emerge from the same situation of “withheld doing” that produces the ugly feelings foregrounded throughout this book. Here, then, is a rejection of the sentimental politics of Stowe that parallels the antisentimental aesthetic of “Bartleby,” though made much more aggressively and from a very different place. There can be something useful, as Wendy Brown and other political theorists have stressed, about Nietzsche’s assault on the idea that there is something morally beatific about being poor, weak, or disenfranchised, even though Nietzsche is not interested in how one might actually eliminate the conditions that produce this “slave morality” from the viewpoint of the slave. But despite its superficial resemblance to the “vengefulness of the impotent” that is Nietzsche’s resentment, the ugly feeling of envy actually demonstrates that the two cannot be confused (GM, 37). For envy makes no claim whatsoever about the moral superiority of the envier, or about the “goodness” of his or her state of lacking something that the envied other is perceived to have. Envy is in many ways a naked will to have. In fact, it is through envy that a subject asserts the goodness and desirability of precisely that which he or she does not have, and explicitly at the cost of surrendering any claim to moral high-mindedness or superiority. Indeed, if envy and resentment have something in common, it is their shared status as targets of the very moral disapprobation (driven often by hate and fear) that Nietzsche summons the theory of resentment to attack. This correlates with what Jameson describes as resentment’s “unavoidable autoreferential structure,” where the manager resents his employee, and what he resents most about him is the employee’s resentment. Hence, while the theory of resentment becomes productive for Brown’s critique of contemporary feminism’s “preference for moral reasoning over open po-

litical contest,” it is ultimately on the side of Jameson’s much blunter assessment of the nineteenth-century ideologeme that my own book comes down: “That this ostensible ‘theory’ is itself little more than an expression of annoyance at seemingly gratuitous lower-class agitation, at the apparently quite unnecessary rocking of the social boat.” As an affective matrix devised as a “psychological explanation” for revolutionary or political impulses, which reduces social antagonisms to deficiencies of individual character or “private dissatisfactions,” Jameson notes, “the theory of resentment, wherever it appears, will always itself be the expression and the production of resentment.” Even if envy is not exactly the same feeling, then, as this moralizing pathos (though resentment is a matrix of a number of affects that can include envy), it is an antagonistic response to a perceived inequality easily discredited for similar reasons—especially, I argue, when the envious subject is a woman.

The political and aesthetic problems posed by the gendered and racialized feelings I examine in the chapters titled “Envy” and “Animatedness” converge in my discussion of Nella Larsen’s Quicksand. The oft-noted psychological illegibility of the novel’s biracial heroine has led to critical perplexities rivaling those generated by Bartleby. Though thinkers from Aristotle to Audre Lorde have highlighted anger’s centrality to the pursuit of social justice, Larsen’s novel prefers the “superficial” affect of irritation—a conspicuously weak or inadequate form of anger, as well an affect that bears an unusually close relationship to the body’s surfaces or skin. Hyperbolized in Larsen’s image of her protagonist as “an obscene sore,” the novel’s irritated aesthetic enables us to continue the exploration of the ideologically fraught relationship between emotion, race, and aesthetics as it comes to a head in the context of the Harlem Renaissance. The Bartlebyan predicament of suspended agency persists in the following chapters, as I explore how the intellectual prestige of “anxiety” is oddly secured by a male analyst’s
fantasy of himself as a “thrown projection,” or passive body hurled into space, and as I also examine the paradoxical convergence of excessive excitation (shock) and the lack of excitation (boredom) in twentieth-century artforms ranging from Gertrude Stein’s *Making of Americans* to the late modernism of Samuel Beckett’s novels. While Kant’s sublime involves a confrontation with the natural and infinite, the unusual synthesis of excitation and fatigue I call “stuplimity” is a response to encounters with vast but bounded artificial systems, resulting in repetitive and often mechanical acts of enumeration, permutation and combination, and taxonomic classification. Though both encounters give rise to negative affect, “stuplimity” involves comic exhaustion rather than terror. The affective dimensions of the small subject’s encounter with a “total system” are further examined in the chapter titled “Paranoia,” where Melville’s scrivener reappears in the more contemporary guise of the poet-as-transcriber. He will return in person—but also as a figure for art itself, or rather the “harmlessness” that Adorno describes as the “shadow” of art’s “autarchic radicalism” in a fully commodified society—in my afterword, which discusses the ugliest of all ugly feelings: disgust. As the allegorical personification not just of art but art’s social inefficaciousness in a market society marked by the “pluralism of peacefully coexisting spheres”—the situation of limited agency from which all the ugly feelings and their attendant aesthetics ensue—Bartleby will preside over our final examination of the challenge that disgust’s aesthetic of the intolerable poses to what Marcuse describes as the friendly or “repressive tolerance” that makes the scrivener seem “safely ignorable,” for all his intransigent negativity and ability to make his social invisibility as obtrusively visible as Quicksand’s “obscene sore.” Art thus comes to interrogate the problematically limited agency of art foregrounded in the aesthetics generated by ugly feelings, and in a fashion, I will argue, unparalleled by other cultural practices. Whether in a direct or indirect manner, this Bartlebian problem is one to which all of the following chapters will repeatedly return, even as animatedness, envy, irritation, anxiety, stuplimity, paranoia, and disgust are mobilized to investigate a multiplicity of other representational and theoretical dilemmas.
Envy

Though once at the center of feminist debates, the notion of “penis envy” now seems just an old saw, more deserving of obsolescence than sustained analysis or critique. Yet this theoretical concept, formulated by Freud in 1914 as a structuring principle of gender differentiation and quickly diffused into popular culture, remains something of a shibboleth to be reckoned with in the domain of feminist psychoanalytic theory. The standard objection to penis envy in this discourse has been that the idea entails a “characterization of feminine sexuality as deficiency.” While it usefully identifies a persistent stereotype of femininity subtending the concept of penis envy, such a critique relies on an equally commonplace approach to “envy” itself—one which treats it as a term describing a subject who lacks, rather than the subject’s affective response to a perceived inequality. In other words, the traditional feminist critique of penis envy regards envy as saying something about the subject’s internal state of affairs (“deficiency”) as opposed to a statement by or from the subject concerning a relation in the external world.

Rey Chow’s comment on Gayatri Spivak’s invocation of the affect provides a useful example of this traditional approach. Responding to Spivak’s own criticism of Julia Kristeva’s “ethnocentric sense of ‘alienation’ at the sight of some Chinese women in Huxian Square” (a moment Kristeva describes in About Chinese Women), Chow writes:

Spivak charges Kristeva with being primarily interested in her own identity rather than these other women’s. While I agree with this observation, I find Spivak’s formulation of these other women’s identity in terms of “envy” troubling: “Who is speaking here? An effort to answer that question might have revealed more about the mute women of Huxian Square, looking with qualified envy at the ‘incursion of the West.’” Doesn’t the word “envy” here remind us of that condition ascribed to women by Freud, against which feminists revolt—namely “penis envy”? “Envy” is the other side of the “violence” of which Fanon speaks as the fundamental part of the native’s formation. But both affects—the one of wanting to have what the other has; the other, of destroying the other so that one can be in his place—are affects produced by a patriarchal ideology that assumes that the other at the low side of the hierarchy of self/other is “lacking” (in the pejorative, undesirable sense). . . . The fate of the native is then like that of Freud’s woman: Even though she will never have a penis, she will for the rest of her life be trapped within the longing for it and its substitutes.

Chow’s discomfort with the presence of “envy” in this feminist exchange—an exchange about differences between women—seems based on an assumption that Spivak is invoking the term in the same way it is usually invoked in psychoanalysis as well as a culture which has enthusiastically assimilated it: as a static sign of deficiency rather than a motivated affective stance. Yet the parenthetical qualification of this deficiency, as lack “in the pejorative, undesirable sense,” reveals Chow’s awareness that there are indeed ways of lacking signaled by envy that are not necessarily pejorative or morally coded, but in fact the consequences of economic inequality.
By perhaps overhastily aligning the envy Spivak attributes to the peasant women with penis envy, a particular situation of “not having” produced by a complex network of social relations, inclusive of but not limited to patriarchal ideology, becomes reduced to an illusion wholly contained within a highly specialized Western discourse of sexual difference. Moreover, by describing envy as the “other side” of the hostility or violence evinced by Fanon’s colonized subject, thus replacing an aggressive stance toward owners of property with a more passive longing for property, Chow seems to pass over what Spivak finds most significant in the Huxian peasants’ gaze at the European intellectual on tour—namely, antagonism.

Given what Helmut Schoeck describes as envy’s potential “to draw envious people into class conflict” and other forms of social struggle—“Who does not envy with us is against us!”—why is a subject’s enviousness automatically assumed to be unwarranted or petty? Or dismissed as an overreaction, as delusional or even hysterical—a reflection of the ego’s inner workings rather than a polemical mode of engagement with the world? Unlike anger, another affective support of oppositional consciousness with the capacity to become “a legitimate weapon in social reform” (Schoeck, E, 172), envy lacks cultural recognition as a valid mode of publicly recognizing or responding to social disparities, even though it remains the only agonistic emotion defined as having a perceived inequality as its object. This invalidation is most powerfully exemplified by envy’s integration into the nineteenth-century ideologue of resentment: the “diseased passion” which, as Fredric Jameson notes, enabled the discrediting of genuine political impulses by ascribing them to “private dissatisfaction” or psychological flaws. Hence, once it enters a public domain of signification, a person’s envy will always seem unjustified, frustrated, and effete—regardless of whether the relation it points to is imaginary or not.

If emotions are fundamentally strategic and “play roles in forms of action,” as Rom Harré suggests, the fact that we tend to perceive envy as designating a passive condition of the subject rather than the means by which the subject recognizes and responds to an objective relation suggests that the dominant cultural attitude toward this affect converts its fundamentally other-regarding orientation into an egocentric one, stripping it of its polemicism and rendering it merely a reflection of deficient and possibly histrionic selfhood. Moralized and uglified to such an extent that it becomes shameful to the subject who experiences it, envy also becomes stripped of its potential critical agency—as an ability to recognize, and antagonistically respond to, potentially real and institutionalized forms of inequality.

It is impossible to divorce the pervasive ignobility of this feeling from its class associations or from its feminization, which might explain why the envious subject is so frequently suspected of being hysterical. As historian Peter Stearns has argued, whereas envy and jealousy were “dramatically transformed” into female characteristics in the nineteenth century, in the twentieth century this feminization was accompanied by intensified social prohibition against their expression. These emotions thus doubly “dispositioned” female subjects, since they confronted women with paradoxical injunctions with respect to a gender ideal: femininity entails being naturally or inevitably prone to envy or jealousy, but also never prone to envy or jealousy. If by the twentieth century women were viewed as “more susceptible” to envy and jealousy than men, according to American psychologist George Stanley Hall (1904), the same passions were increasingly viewed as, “on several counts, more inexcusable in a woman than a man,” according to E. B. Duffy’s 1873 bestseller *What Every Woman Should Know.* In this sense, the feminine subject, when speaking of herself, would be forced to speak, as Søren Kierkegaard suggests in *The Sickness unto Death* (1849), a “different language.” As Kierkegaard notes, “Envy is concealed admiration. An admirer who senses that devotion cannot make him happy will choose to become envious of that which
he admires. He will speak a different language, and in this language he will now declare that that which he really admires is a thing of no consequence, something foolish, illusory, perverse and high-flown. Admiration is happy self-abandon; envy, unhappy self-assertion." Focusing on the emotion that places female subjects in such a disjunctive position, this chapter examines how envy’s modes of negative or “unhappy self-assertion,” including a negative relationship to property we might call “unhappy possessiveness,” contribute to—but also enable a critical interrogation of—existing gender norms.

The fact that the feminization and moralization of envy have operated in collusion to suppress its potential as a means of recognizing and polemically responding to social inequalities, casting suspicion on the possible validity of such a response and converting it into a reflection of petty or “diseased” selfhood, should alert us to the fact that forms of negative affect are more likely to be stripped of their critical implications when the impassioned subject is female. Envy’s concomitant feminization and moral devaluation thus points to a larger cultural anxiety over antagonistic responses to inequality that are made specifically by women. As we shall see in the next section, this anxiety about female antagonism in general comes to a particular head in academic feminism, especially when it involves representations of antagonistic relations between women.

"Who Killed Feminist Criticism?"

It may seem like poor taste and timing to use a reading of a lurid thriller like Single White Female (Barbet Schroeder, 1992) as a way of addressing conflicts in academic feminism today—not only because it involves hanging a large coat on a small peg (however one might prefer this to hanging small coats on large pegs), but because the film has already been the object of a vogue in critical attention that has long since passed. In its blunt contrasting of an idealized femininity (white, middle-class, cosmopolitan, and heterosexual) marked “benevolent,” with a bad or threatening femininity (working-class, provincial, and putatively lesbian) marked “envious,” embodied respectively in the figures of Allison Jones (Bridget Fonda) and Hedra Carlson (Jennifer Jason Leigh), Single White Female inspired numerous feminist critiques almost immediately after its release, all of which “justly attack the film for its potent misogyny and homophobia,” and several for its attitudes toward class and race. More recently, Karen Hollinger contextualizes Schroeder’s film, which is based on John Lutz’s novel S.W.F. Seeks Same (1990), as part of a “major backlash” in response to the political conservatism of the 1980s and 1990s, a conservatism she finds particularly visible in the popular reemergence of the “manipulative female friendship film.” Grouping Single White Female with other, contemporaneous Hollywood thrillers about the violent aggression unleashed by envious working-class women, films such as The Hand That Rocks the Cradle (Curtis Hanson, 1992) and Poison Ivy (Kat Shea Ruben, 1992), Hollinger argues:

These films often rejuvenate antiquated stereotypical representations of female relationships from woman’s films of the 1930s and 1940s. They represent women’s friendships as plagued by jealousy, envy, and competition for men, and they teach women to beware of and fear one another. By focusing so strongly on conflicts between women, they obscure other issues related to women’s position in society, relieve men of any responsibility for women’s problems, and suggest, instead, that women should grant men primary importance in their lives because they are the only ones upon whom women can rely. ("B," 207)

Given that Single White Female features an initially happy domestic alliance between Allie and Hedy and chronicles the way in which it becomes increasingly “conflicted”—to the point that Hedy ends up bludgeoning Allie’s best friend and neighbor and leaving him for dead, stabbing Allie’s boyfriend through the eye with the heel of a
stiletto pump, murderously chasing Allie with a grappling hook, and finally being killed by Allie with a screwdriver in the back—it is hard not to agree with the assessment above.

But should we not focus strongly on “conflicts between women,” as Hollinger’s statement also seems to imply? Even if attention is shifted to vexed, antagonistic, or unhappy female relationships at the exclusion of other issues (as any act of “focusing” will entail), the emphasis in itself does not seem to be an obvious sign of an antifeminist agenda. In the wariness it reflects, however, Hollinger’s statement points to the fact that the representation of female conflicts remains a particularly loaded issue for feminists, particularly when these antagonistic relationships often gain greatest cultural visibility through hyperbolic, violent narratives fitting the paradigm above. There is legitimate cause for the fear that female conflicts may be subject to representational manipulation by feminism’s external enemies—a fear reflected in Susan Gubar’s reference to “a culture all too willing to exploit disagreements among women in a backlash against all or some of us.”

But how are polemical “conflicts between women” within feminism figured by feminists themselves? For an example, we can turn to a controversial debate between Gubar and Robyn Wiegman in Critical Inquiry (1998–1999) concerning the very topic of polemical antagonism’s role in academic feminism. In this exchange, murder is invoked not just once but twice, and both times at the very beginning of each critic’s essay. In both cases, the reference to violence is both immediate and strategic, as if to provocatively induce the same “thrill” associated with the thriller genre. Originally called “Who Killed Feminist Criticism?” Gubar’s “What Ails Feminist Criticism?” starts with an explanation of why she decided not to use the more graphic and accusatory title; Wiegman begins her critical response to Gubar by invoking Amanda Cross’s Murder Without a Text, a mystery novel featuring “a seasoned feminist scholar bludgeoning a student to death.” Since both essays characterize the nature of the feminist disputes they discuss as fundamentally generational, it is difficult not to read Wiegman’s invocation of the Cross story (older feminist kills younger feminist) as a canny way of reversing the roles of murderer and victim assigned in Gubar’s essay (younger feminists kill older feminism), as well as a way of foregrounding the murderous scene of “feminist betrayal” that Gubar calls forth but then quickly disavows by substituting the metaphor of illness (“What Ails?”) for the original image of killing (“SO,” 363). The culturally familiar narrative of generational injury and rivalry between women invoked by both Gubar and Wiegman (though in a much more ironic and self-conscious way by the latter) also bears a striking resemblance to the narrative of Single White Female’s 1990 predecessor, All about Eve (directed by Joseph Mankiewicz). For in using thriller imagery to dramatize
generational disputes or "betrayals," and in being framed by subsequent commentators as a conflict between an older feminist and a younger feminist previously the student of the former, the Gubar-Wiegman debate not only recalls the Amanda Cross story cited by Wiegman, but the Mankiewicz film's depiction of the antagonistic rivalry that develops between an older theater star (Bette Davis) and the younger woman (Anne Baxter) who begins as her admirer and pupil. If the themes of envy and ingratitude in this film may remind readers of Melanie Klein's eponymous 1957 essay, the Kleinian implications of the Gubar-Wiegman exchange are reinforced in a letter by "Amanda Cross" herself (a.k.a. Carolyn Heilbrun), describing the debate as a mother-daughter dispute—"another battle in the war of generations" ultimately explicable in terms of infantile aggression.\(^{16}\) As Cross/Heilbrun writes:

My initial astonishment at finding my story quoted in Critical Inquiry soon dwindled to dismay as I understood the rudeness offered to my character, Beatrice Sterling [the seasoned feminist scholar], was not far from the tone Professor Wiegman chose as appropriate for addressing Professor Gubar, who had fought early feminist academic battles when Professor Wiegman was at her mother's knee. ... Why Professor Wiegman agreed to answer Professor Gubar in such a mode is explicable ... chiefly upon maternal principles. ("L," 397–398)

In the Gubar and Wiegman essays, then, we have an accusation of symbolic murder by a seasoned feminist scholar and an allegory in which a seasoned feminist scholar murders her accuser. In Heilbrun's response, these violent motifs are compounded by the introduction of two related themes: infantile rage and aggression toward a maternal figure, and envy and ingratitude. It thus becomes as difficult to avoid seeing parallels between the Gubar-Wiegman debate and a film like All About Eve as it is to avoid finding this association distasteful. For such a comparison seems to do exactly what Hollinger says Single White Female does: "rejuvenate antiquated stereotypical representations of female relationships from woman's films of the 1930s and 1940s" ("B," 207). The fact that a contemporary intellectual debate about the role of antagonism in feminism could be so readily aligned with a mid-century Hollywood narrative about female aggression does seem quite troubling.

But aside from the fact that both key players in this feminist debate use violence themselves as a way of framing their arguments, is there something inherently untenable about women's use of metaphorical violence, even "murderous desire," as a way of critically discussing conflicts between women? While images of "murderous desire" can obviously be used to distort and exploit disagreements between feminists from feminism's outside, does the Gubar-Wiegman debate not also demonstrate that such images can be imaginatively and provocatively used to address such disagreements from within? Yet while Gubar suggestively invokes the image of murderous aggression to frame and advance her argument, in addition to mobilizing the polemical discourse of accusation and blame, she pinpoints this aggressivity in other feminists as the cause of feminism's demise. Thus, she finds bell hooks's "curiously condemnationary vocabulary," "[Hazel] Carby's hostility," and "the aggression . . . surfac[ing] in Spivak's competing for perceptual supremacy over First World feminist critics" equally culpable.\(^{16}\) Ironically, this criticism of "condemnatary vocabulary" would seem to confirm its centrality to the enterprise of feminist scholarship, insofar as Gubar's own critical intervention clearly relies on it. Instead of simply reformulating Gubar's question to address the undeniably important issue of how collective enterprises are constituted and sustained—"Who or what is responsible for conflicts within feminism?"—we might consider posing another question addressing the same issue in a different way: "To what extent do homosocial group formations like feminism rely on antagonism and its associated images, metaphors, and paradigms of aggression?" Single White Female, surprisingly, has much to offer in this regard, since the hyperbolic
violence that characterizes female conflicts in this film becomes most concentrated in its main narrative event: the production of a de-singled femaleness. In fact, the transition from single to compound female identity is not only motivated and facilitated by aggression, but the ultimate goal of the female-female struggle on which the film’s story depends.

Though it is precisely the transition from singular to compound subjects that initiates group formation and therefore politics, it is the rhetorical enactment of this transition that Gubar finds politically suspect (in a metaphorical fashion) in the prose style of Judith Butler. Described as leading to “mistakes in agreement,” Butler’s grammatical error is, according to Gubar, symptomatic of a fundamental incompatibility between feminism and poststructuralism—a discourse Gubar finds complicit with race theory in “sidelining” the “first three stages” of feminist criticism and “marginalizing” the aesthetic. Here the problem is not with the feminist subject’s emotional mindset, as is the case in Gubar’s critique of Spivak’s “aggression” and Carby’s “hostility,” but with the linguistic subject’s discursive status as compounded. Gubar writes:

One especially revealing feature of Butler’s style is the preponderance of subject-verb disagreements. I want to speculate that this penchant, by reflecting the difficulty of sustaining a Foucauldian critique of the singular self and the biological body, reveals the tensions continually at play in efforts to combine poststructuralism with feminism. Since my argument depends on a pattern of mistakes in agreement, I will cite . . . examples here from Gender Trouble . . . :

“The totality and closure of language is both presumed and contested within structuralism.”

“The division and exchange between this ‘being’ and ‘having’ the Phallus is established by the Symbolic, the paternal law.” . . .

Interestingly, while the critique aimed at feminists of color is psychological, the critique aimed at the feminist poststructuralist is grammatical: the problem here is not with emotional qualities like hostility or aggression but with a situation in which dual or compound subjects are combined “into a single force that therefore requires the singular verb.” According to Gubar, this misuse of compound subjects “bespeaks a quandary, for it demonstrates how often the most vigilantly antitotalizing theorist of poststructuralism relies on stubborn patterns of totalization (two treated as one)” (“WAPC,” 898).

In a reversal of her critique of Spivak, Carby, and hooks, which pits universality against particularization, Gubar here plays the particular against what she construes as a false universal. But aside from the fact that the statement above drastically elides the substantial difference between “totalization” and the treatment of two abstract qualities as one (as seems appropriate when the qualities engender effects or are acted upon in tandem), isn’t the combining of dual or multiple subjects into a single force or agency precisely the way in which group alliances (even fraught or uneasy ones such as feminism) are formed? If such a transition “bespeaks a quandary,” Gubar’s discomfort with Butler’s grammatical enactment of it might be said to bespeak uneasiness about the “compound subject” in general. Since Gubar’s argument links poststructuralism and race studies or ethnic studies as complicit in causing the demise of feminist criticism, thus “creating a confederacy among knowledge formations that are not often seen as collaborative cul-
prits" (Wiegman, “SO,” 368), one might also ask how the discursive threat of the paradoxically doubled-yet-single subject associated with poststructuralist feminists relates to the psychological threat of aggression associated with feminists of color. In other words, what is the relationship between female aggression and the grammar of de-singed subjects? Or between the subject of emotion and the subject of language? Oddly enough, these questions are ones that Single White Female directly addresses. But to see how requires some working-through of the terms in which the female relationships in this film have been traditionally conceived.

**Emulation and Antagonism**

Single White Female is perhaps best summarized as a story about the violent production, if ultimately also the destruction, of non-singular female subjectivity, in both cases by means of antagonism between women. In other words, the film narrativizes the making of a compound female subject while depicting the process as both dangerous and unstable. Because this central aspect of the movie turns on Hedy’s emulation of Allie in manner and appearance, as well as on Hedy’s intensely emotional attachment to her (with the two attitudes closely linked and similarly pathologized) readings of the film have continued a line of psychoanalytically informed inquiry into the complex relationship between identification and desire. This identification/desire dialectic, and its role in the construction of gendered and sexual spectatorship, was feminist film theory’s main object of focus in its almost exclusively psychoanalytic phase in the 1970s and 1980s, from Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” to Mary Ann Doane’s equally classic response to it in “Film and the Masquerade.” Thus, like popular “woman’s films” that foreground extremely close but troubled female attachments—films ranging from Rebecca (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940) to The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (Ronald Neame, 1968)—Single White Female has made its way into longstanding but still ongoing debates concerning the relationship between “wanting to be” and “wanting to have” as primary in constituting sexual and gender norms. Although tracing the history of these detailed arguments about desire and identification lies beyond the agenda of this chapter, I want to highlight two issues raised particularly in commentaries on cinematic representations of close but uneasy female relationships: first, the danger of conflating the two dynamics, as Teresa de Lauretis warns in her reading of All about Eve and Desperately Seeking Susan (directed by Susan Seidelman, 1985), since the conflation leads to mistaking “homonuclear, i.e. woman-identified bonding” for lesbian sexuality; and, second, the danger of too-rigidly separating them, as Jackie Stacey argues in a reading of this same pair of films. Thus, Scott Paulin suggests:

Perhaps identification and desire are “not to be confused” in that they cannot occupy the same moment in time, but surely an oscillation between the terms is possible, just as a film spectator can be encouraged to oscillate between identification and desire for a character, regardless of gender. At the very least, whether this situation has a counterpart in “reality,” films like All about Eve and Single White Female fantasize a space in which such oscillation can and does occur.

In what follows, my intention is not to ignore questions related to the desire/identification dialectic (indeed, Freud’s essay on identification will play a key role in the analysis), but rather to suggest that its dominance in the critical discourse surrounding “films like All about Eve and Single White Female”—that is, films that foreground the subject of unhappy or negative bonds between women—often limits the other feminist and psychoanalytic ways in which they might be read. For an almost exclusive focus on these poles tends to produce a reading that overlooks or underestimates the importance of antagonism in these alliances. As a dynamic that is reducible to neither desire nor identification (though desire and identification often inform it), aggressive conflict is em-
phased as the relation of primary narrative significance between women in these films. Though psychoanalytic theory facilitates our understanding of how one might simultaneously desire and bear aggression toward an other, identify with one's aggressor, or form an antagonistic relation with someone with whom one identifies (this being the easiest of all to imagine from a classic Oedipal perspective), in the last analysis the terms are not conflatable: antagonism is not identification, nor is it a subspecies or variant of desire. Freud himself would come to insist on these separations in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), where aggressivity is clearly established as the manifestation of an independent drive, parallel rather than secondary to sexual instincts. In Freud's postwar writings, in fact, the dynamic is viewed as being on equal standing with the sexual in the process of subject formation, thus preparing the way for Klein's insistently negative theories of constitutional aggression and infantile envy. Moreover, his crucial reformulation of aggression as a separate phenomenon irreducible to sexuality enables Freud to introduce one of his few accounts of subject formation in which the subject is neither necessarily marked by nor entirely produced in gender difference. Wariness, then, of a critical tendency to reduce antagonism to a mere side effect of desire or identification (as already anticipated by the shift in the later works of Freud), is one of my motivations for shifting the analysis of the vexed female relationships foregrounded in films like *All about Eve* and *Single White Female* away from these conceptual poles. Instead of focusing on desire and identification as the primary psychic functions informing the uneasy attachments between women featured in this subgenre of the "woman's film," I will examine how these processes work when they are inscribed within the logics of *envy* and *emulation*. Though it is neither useful nor possible to understand envy and emulation apart from questions of identification and desire, I will focus on the latter feelings primarily insofar as they relate to the former.

My second motivation for making some form of break from the identification/desire paradigm relates to another tendency common to readings focused solely on these two poles: the conflation of emulation with identification. For example, what Ellen Brinks accurately describes as Hedy's "mimetic performance"—in which Hedy imitates Allie's appearance and manner to such a degree that the viewer has difficulty telling the two women apart—is referred to as "mimetic identification" in the title of Brinks's essay. As Brinks writes: "For Hedy, 'to look like' is a way 'to become.' . . . Instead of the purely acquisitive desire to have the clothing or the man that Allie possess or enjoys (something which would assume an already constituted subject who desires some thing or object), Hedy 'does the double' in order to create a subjective identity for herself. She desires to be, to be like, or to become Allie" ("MI," 4; original italics). Here the attempt to copy or double Y is explicitly equated with the wish to be Y, with the agency of these attempts attributed to some unfinished or not "already constituted" subject X. Similarly, Scott Paulin uses the fact of Hedy's actively copying Allie's "look" as a basis for claiming, "It is clear that Hedy identifies with Allie as an ideal, that she envies her and 'wants to be her.'" As a mode of admiration that takes the form of striving toward an ideal or idealized object, emulation in *Single White Female* is depicted as this striving gone horribly awry, displaced or rerouted, as it were, from object to subject. Female emulation in particular—one woman's emulation of another woman—is represented in the film as an unstable mode of admiration that easily slides into aggression, or, more specifically, as a mimetic behavior that initiates a trajectory: from the reverence of an ideal to full-blown antagonism toward the subject embodying that ideal. We can thus see the logic underlying the popular psychological view which takes emulation to be a process that naturally subends envy, a cultural idiom *Single White Female* uses in order to feminize and pathologize both behaviors. Hence, the film's greatest ideological contradiction involves positioning Allie as the embodiment of a feminine ideal whose admiration by Hedy or other women is to be expected, even
mandated, while depicting any act of striving toward that ideal as troubling or problematic. Hedy’s attempts to emulate Allie are thus perceived by Allie as a threat, and presented as a kind of warning sign of the beginnings of a trajectory from reverent fascination to aggression. In All about Eve, such a trajectory is ironically foreshadowed in the two sides of Margot’s response to Eve’s emulation. When Margot’s maid, Birdie (Thelma Ritter), points out, “She’s studying you—like you was a book, or a play, or a set of blueprints—how you walk, talk, eat, think, sleep,” Margot replies, “I’m sure that’s very flattering, Birdie [i.e., deferential, an act of homage] and I’m sure there’s nothing wrong with it [i.e., hostile, aggressive].” Since in Single White Female emulation is explicitly posited as the act that inaugurates this transition from admiration to enmity, Allie’s disturbance by Hedy begins when she discovers the signs of Hedy’s imitative behavior, all of which involve acts of appropriation or progressively forceful claims to property: Hedy’s unasked borrowing of her clothes, the discovery of duplicates of these clothes in Hedy’s closet, Hedy’s change of hair color and style to match her own, her own letters hoarded in Hedy’s shoebox of personal mementos.

According to the film’s narrative logic, then, Hedy’s emulation of Allie is an accurate indication that she envies her. But is it synonymous, as Brinks and Paulin claim, with a form of identification? For it seems obvious that emulating someone does not necessarily entail wishing to be that someone, or even that one desires to take over the social or symbolic position he or she occupies in order to enjoy its privileges. In fact, we can easily imagine antagonistic situations in which emulation is motivated by reasons antithetical to a wish or fantasy to be the other, situations in which one emulates in order to overtake or eclipse the other, even “dispossess” her by claiming exclusive recognition for the attributes that define her. Instead of being a means of altering one’s self in deference to another, emulation can be a form of aggressive self-assertion: performed with the purpose of causing the other anxiety or distress, or, to use a Kleinian expression, with the intent of “spoiling” her by rendering her own identity unstable. In Hitchcock’s Vertigo (1958), Judy’s second, extremely reluctant and even painful assumption of the role of “Madeleine” under pressure from Scottie (James Stewart) provides an example of how emulation can also be performed without unconscious or conscious desire to transform one’s own identity after the fashion of the other. Thus, emulation in more aggressive forms of parody, including political satire and cultural mimicry, often works as a sort of prophylactic against or antidote to identification: it makes manifest an incongruity or disjunction, enables one to forcefully assert one’s difference from the other whom one emulates. Similarly, by foregrounding the antagonism between Hedy and Allie (which hyperbolically escalates into murderous violence), Single White Female calls attention to the fact that Hedy’s acts of emulation actually work against “phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, [and] cohabitation,” as Judith Butler describes identifications. Moreover, these acts of copying give rise to the very distinction between emulation and identification, since they transform Hedy’s attitude from philic “striving-toward” to a phobic “striving-against.” Surely the film insists on uncoupling emulation from identification. Why, then, the critical tendency to equate them? Or to treat the former as evidence of the latter?

“Group Psychology” and Freud’s Exemplary Females

If the Gubar-Wiegman exchange and Single White Female both highlight, in very different ways, the question of how aggression relates to the production of “compound subjects” necessary for group formation, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1921), Freud’s attempt to “contribute toward the explanation of the libidinal structure of groups” and theorize the emergence of what he calls “group feeling,” becomes a crucial text in addressing the same issue. And as Diana Fuss notes, “Identification,” the seventh chapter of Group Psychology, is where Freud “first begins to
systematize the complicated dialectical relation between identification and object-choice in the formation of the sexed subject," formalizing the concepts on which major debates in feminist film theory have been based.26 The tendency in psychoanalytically informed film criticism to conflate copying and identification makes sense to a degree if one takes a closer look at the slipperiness in Freud's original account of identification in *Group Psychology*—a slipperiness that in fact encourages the confusion of these two dynamics when they pertain to female subjects.

If one's identification with an other is, as Freud initially argues based on his example of a boy's pre-Oedipal relation to his father, a *fantasy or wish* to be like him, or replace him in his role with respect to another, emulation would seem to be the means by which identifications are pursued rather than established—since identification, as Butler reminds us, is a phantasmatic trajectory, not an actual *event* said to taken place.27 Copying or imitating is not equivalent to wishing. The first is a form of behavior through which a fantasy might be enacted; the second refers to the psychic act of fantasizing. But a slipperiness between the two dynamics enters Freud's account of identification once he turns from the example of the relationship between a boy and his father, and attempts to develop his initial thesis by analyzing identification "as it occurs in the structure of a neurotic symptom" in girls and women. We can locate the moment of transition in the last sentence of the following, frequently cited paragraph:

> It is easy to state in a formula the distinction between an identification with the father and the choice of the father as an object. In the first case one's father is what one would like to *be*, and in the second he is what one would like to *have*. The distinction, that is, depends upon whether the tie attaches to the subject or to the object of the ego. The former kind of tie is therefore already possible before any sexual object-choice can be made. It is much more difficult to give a clear metapsycho-

logical representation of the distinction. We can only see that identification endeavors to *mold a person's own ego after the fashion of the one that has been taken as a model.* (GP, 47; last italics added)

Molding one's own ego "after the fashion" of another person taken as a model, which might be described as an act of transforming the self by example, sounds very much like an act of emulation. Here it becomes easy to understand why critics tend to conflate the purely imaginary act of "wishing to be"—which, as Butler reminds us, "does not belong to the world of events"28—with the realizable event of self-transformation through imitation. In the sentence above, Freud seems to conflate the two himself. Yet even in this expanded concept of identification as having "ego-molding" as its aim or goal, imitative behavior is still not reducible to the original fantasy of being the idealized other, though it now comes extremely close, construed as both the fantasy's objective (what it directly seeks or "endeavors") and the means by which it might be achieved.

The slippage between mimetic self-transformation (event) and identification (fantasy) that Freud's sentence introduces has much to do with the fact that it works less as a logical extension of the remarks preceding it, and more as a proleptic introduction to the topic of the paragraph that follows. Whereas the first paragraph discusses identification in the purely phantasmatic terms of a boy *wishing* to be his father (no mention of actual mimetic behavior yet), the second introduces the case of a girl imitating her mother's cough, visibly behaving "after the fashion" of her mother as model. Thus, the proposition in Freud's last sentence, insofar as it implies an actual inducement to imitation by example, "belongs" more to the second paragraph than the first, which it concludes. Here is the previously quoted passage in its larger context:

> It is easy to state in a formula the distinction between an identification with the father and the choice of the father as an ob-
ject. In the first case the father is what one would like to be, and in the second he is what one would like to have. The distinction, that is, depends upon whether the tie attaches to the subject or to the object of the ego. The former kind of tie is therefore already possible before any sexual object-choice can be made. It is much more difficult to give a clear metapsychological representation of the distinction. We can only see that identification endeavors to mold a person's own ego after the fashion of the one that has been taken as a model.

Let us now disentangle identification as it occurs in the structure of a neurotic symptom from its rather complicated connections. Supposing that a little girl (and we will keep to her for the present) develops the same painful symptom as her mother—for instance, the same tormenting cough. (GP, 47–48, italics added)

Rather than directly addressing the questions raised in the first paragraph (concerning the distinction between object-choice and identification), the rhetorical function of “We can only see ...” is to prepare us for the subsequent paragraph, which deliberately diverts focus from fantasies of being and having that are generated in a male psyche to the observable, empirical behavior of female subjects. The sentence also marks the termination of the male homosocial relation as a paradigmatic basis for Freud's theory of identification; from this point on, all of his “theoretical sources” consist of relations involving women—including not just the hypothetical little girl's replication of her mother's cough, but (in order of appearance) Dora's mimicry of her father's cough, a contagious outbreak of jealousy at an all-girls boarding school, and a “genesis of male homosexuality” based on maternal fixation. In this manner, what is most significant about Freud's first mention of mimetic behavior in his discussion of identification is its location within his series of examples, or its relationship to the way his examples are ordered. The pivotal sentence—"We can only see that identification endeavors to mold a person's own ego after the fashion of the one that has been taken as a model"—marks a crucial transition in Freud's argumentative strategy, a transition in which he relocates the basis of his definition from a generalized account of normative human development (the production of male heterosocial subjectivity) to particular instances of neurosis in girls, women, and homosexual men (the production of hysterical “feminine” subjectivity). The shift from imaginary fantasies of being to observable acts of copying in Freud's example-driven theory of identification thus coincides with a shift from boys and fathers to girls and mothers, normative to neurotic, general to particular, definition to example, and "typically masculine" to "feminizing" relations (GP, 46)—an alignment of terms suggesting that there is a markedly hierarchical logic at work in the essay.

Once Freud resituates his theory in a specifically feminine register, identification and emulation immediately become interchangeable. Starting with the example of the little girl's imitation of her mother's cough, Freud uses one as a synonym for the other throughout Group Psychology. When he speaks of "the identification" in the case of the little girl who copies her mother's cough, the phenomenon he refers to is precisely that of the replicated symptom—not, as one might expect from his previous discussion of the boy's identification with his father, her ontologically distinct act of fantasizing. Fantasy and behavior are further collapsed in Freud's third female "source" (GP, 49) which comes from his failed analysis of Dora. In an infamous account of how sexual object-choice "regresses" to identification based on Dora's imitation of her father's cough, Freud uses her mimetic behavior as evidence of this regression: "Where there is repression and where the mechanisms of the unconscious are dominant, object-choice is turned back into identification—the ego assumes the characteristics of the object" (GP, 48, italics added).

As identification becomes increasingly theorized within a world of feminine subjects and feminizing relationships, it becomes increasingly depicted as a fantasy that not only strives toward but as-
sumes the characteristics of a nonphantasmatic event—one that can be said to happen. And as Freud moves through his examples—(1) the boy and his father; (2) the hypothetical girl imitating her mother’s cough; (3) Dora imitating her father’s cough; (4) the jealousy outbreak at the all-girls boarding school; (5) the young man with the maternal fixation—the ontological distinction between wishing and acting which seemed fairly obvious in the case of the boy-father relationship is ever more reduced. In other words, the further Freud locates his theory away from the original paradigm of male heterosexuality, the easier it becomes to equate identification with emulation. Thus, by the time we reach Freud’s fifth example (concerning “the genesis of male homosexuality”), things have become “transformed” indeed. “Things take a sudden turn: the young man does not abandon his mother [at the onset of adult sexuality], but identifies with her; he transforms himself into her, and now looks about for objects which can replace his ego for him, and on which he can bestow such love and care as he has experienced from his mother” (GP, 50, italics added). Initially a phantasmatic trajectory directed toward the other, identification is now redefined as a trajectory whose destination is the actual transformation of the self: “identification...remolds the ego” (GP, 51).

Thus, the increased proximity between identification and mimetic acts of self-transformation that coincides with a shift in the gender of Freud’s examples also strategically coincides with an increase in the “exemplarity” of these examples—if we understand the example not just in the logical sense of a particular instance of a general principle, but in the social sense of an inducement to imitation (Fuss, IP, 41). Once Freud shifts to examples involving female subjects to illustrate his theory of identification, the proximity between identification and mimesis increases because the “examples” within these examples—the models providing the fashion after which subjects “remold” themselves—increase in their capacity to encourage or induce emulation. The more feminine the example, the more exemplary the example. As if femininity itself were a hyper-bolic mode of exemplarity? Or, to turn a famous phrase of Lacan’s, structured “like” an example?

The logic underlying Freud’s use of examples thus suggests not only that identification is bound up with emulation more closely in social relationships involving women than in male-male configurations, but that female subjects have a closer relationship to exemplarity in general. An extension of this logic implies that to be feminine is to be an unusually exemplary example—an entity inducing imitation in others while at the same time appearing “after the fashion” of a previously established model. Thus, the virtuous Clarissa (from Samuel Richardson’s novel of the same name; 1747–1748), a character repeatedly compelled to serve as “an example to her sex,” became most of all an example of exemplarity, when thousands of eighteenth-century parents named their daughters after her. It could be said that in “Identification,” Freud’s exemplification of femininity—which emerges in this essay as precisely the kind of subjectivity produced by identifications where phantasmat alignments with the other become indistinguishable from events of mimetic self-transformation—induces the feminization of exemplarity.

This correlation between femininity and exemplarity is reinforced through a shared principle of transmissibility, which Freud figures as “infection.” The metaphor is introduced in the fourth of his progressively or increasingly female-centered examples of identification—which significantly turns on a hypothetical anecdote about jealousy. Concerning the contagious outbreak of this emotion among “girls in a boarding school,” Freud’s example invokes the image of infection in order to reinforce the already implicit linkage of femininity with imitation and iterability.  

There is [another] particularly frequent and important case of symptom formation, in which the identification leaves entirely out of account any object-relation to the person who is being copied. Supposing, for instance, that one of the girls in a
boarding school has had a letter from someone with whom she is secretly in love which arouses her jealousy, and that she reacts to it with a fit of hystericis; then some of her friends who know about it will catch the fit, as we say, by mental infection. The mechanism is that of identification based on the possibility or desire of putting oneself in the same situation. The other girls would like to have a secret love affair too, and under the influence of a sense of guilt they also accept the suffering involved in it. It would be wrong to suppose that they take on the symptom out of sympathy. On the contrary, the symptom only arises out of the identification, and this is proved by the fact that infection or imitation of this kind takes place in circumstances where even less pre-existing sympathy is to be assumed than usually exists between friends in a girls’ school. One ego has perceived a significant analogy with another upon one point—in our example upon openness to a similar emotion; an identification is thereupon constructed on this point, and, under the influence of the pathogenic situation, is displaced on to the symptom which the one ego has produced. The identification by means of the symptom has thus become the mark of a point of coincidence between the two egos which has to be kept repressed. (GP, 48–49, italics added)

Here, as Freud moves from individual acts of feminine identification to feminine identifications en masse, note how identification’s equivalence with imitation slides into a further equivalence with infection. Since the logic of exemplarity in Freud’s essay has already suggested that feminine identifications, unlike their masculine counterparts, cannot easily be detached from acts of imitation, or from the example’s social function of compelling imitation, it comes as no surprise that feminine identifications are viewed here as contagious, since, as Freud notes in his earlier work Totem and Taboo (1912), “examples are contagious” (Fuss, IP, 42, italics added). Whereas identification and emulation remained ontologically dis-

tinct phenomena in the case of the boy-father relation, we have seen how difficult it becomes to separate them in examples involving women. Not all identifications, then, but feminine identifications in particular—that is, phantasmatic alignments with women—become coeval with mimetic acts of self-transformation “after the fashion” of another as model. Leading to the production of female selfhood, feminine identifications are more “contagious” than masculine ones since they work like examples. Hence, while all genders may be performative or mimetic in structure, involving “the stylized repetition of acts in time,” Group Psychology suggests that some genders are more mimetic than others, and that its own rhetoric of exemplarity is anything but neutral to the logic of gender difference.31

If femininity is structured like an inducement to imitation or example, and envy or jealousy intensify this relation, how might Hedy’s envious attitude toward Allie in Single White Female constitute a way—a strategic and perhaps even feminist way—of negotiating her relationship to gender itself?

Bad Examples

Reinforcing Stearns’s historical observations, the implicit equation of femininity and exemplarity in “Identification” runs parallel with, and is in fact strengthened by, Freud’s feminization of envy. For unlike his other “theoretical sources,” the boarding school anecdote enables Freud not only to posit that identifications can “leave entirely out of account any object-relating to the person who is being copied,” but also to demonstrate that infectious identifications can be partial rather than whole—“borrow[ing] a single trait from the person who is its object,” hence becoming even easier to establish and transmit (Freud, GP, 48). It is important to note that the shared trait in this example is the female subject’s unquestioned predilection for envy and jealousy: “One ego has perceived a significant analogy with another upon one point—in our example
upon openness to a similar emotion; an identification is thereupon constructed on this point, and, under the influence of the pathogenic situation, is displaced on to the symptom which the one ego has produced" (GP. 49, italics added).

According to Freud's account, identification leads to or implies imitation particularly where feminine subjects are concerned, and even more so where jealous females are concerned; in fact, we have seen how in this emotional arena, under the aegis of an “infection” metaphor, the two processes become virtually synonymous. Given that a fictitious envying scenario provides an ideal setting for this linkage of terms to become visible as such, the gendered logic at work in “Identification” seems to support Paulin’s assertion concerning what is most obvious about the central relationship in Single White Female: “It is clear that Hedy identifies with Allie as an ideal, that she envies her and ‘wants to be her’” (“SSG,” 51). Here again, a fictional account of envy between women seems to provide a way of demonstrating emulation's coextensiveness with identification. As noted earlier, Single White Female does make obvious Hedy's attempt to appropriate for her own use—literally borrowing, as in the case of “partial,” nonsexual identifications—the markers of Allie's identity. Hedy wears Allie’s clothes with, and then without, her permission, and eventually she buys duplicates of the clothes themselves. She pays to have her hair cut in the same style and dyed the same color as Allie's, which brings their resemblance close enough to the point that when dressed in clothes like Allie's, she effectively passes for Allie to others who know her.

Yet insofar as emulation turns the thing emulated (whether this be a single characteristic or a whole person) into a thing that can be copied, and in doing so transforms that thing into something slightly other than what it was, it is possible to interpret Hedy's mimeticism not as the enactment of a wish to be Allie, or an effort to transform herself into Allie and occupy her place, but rather as an attempt to transform Allie. As the film's plot reveals, it is the emulated subject's life and not the emulator's that most radically changes as result of the latter's actions. Defined throughout by an ability to shapeshift, Hedy maintains a comparatively consistent identity. In contrast, by being “copied,” the single Allie is transformed by Hedy's mimetic behavior into something she previously was not: a duplicate. If Freudian identification is a process where the subject makes himself one with the other person, Hedy's emulation of Allie could be described not as an endeavor to achieve oneness, but as a process of making twoness. In their semiotic study of rivalry, which presents envy and emulation as indissociably linked, Greimas and Fontanille describe emulation as implying “an unfinished process, St's process, in relation to another subject, S2, whose process is treated as finished.” But paradoxically, in Single White Female the “unfinished” subjectivization is less that of the emulating person than that of the person she emulates, since it is Allie's sense of selfhood and her relationships with others which are ultimately altered. In one of their final encounters, Allie herself acknowledges this outcome. As she says to Hedy, “I'm like you now.”

Thus, in spite of the overcloseness between the two dynamics that emerges in Group Psychology, Hedy's mimetic behavior seems to have surprisingly little to do with Freud's notion of identification, in the sense of either a fantasy about her own transformation (the desire to be or be like Allie) or a fantasy of replacing Allie in her relationships with other people. The film makes the latter particularly clear: though Hedy deceptively seduces Allie's boyfriend Sam, she does so to force him to vanish from both Allie's life and her own, using the seduction as blackmail. Nor does Hedy express any interest in Allie's other few relationships: her platonic friendship with gay upstairs neighbor Graham, or her disastrous business alliance with the unattractive and rapacious Mitch. Far from attempting to usurp Allie's place within these relationships with men, Hedy's aggressive acts of emulation actually aim at dissolving them. Moreover, Allie's bitter comment, “I'm like you now,” makes it clear that Hedy's mimetic behavior has not been aimed at mold-
ing herself, qua “unfinished” ego, after the fashion of the “finished” model supplied by Allie. In fact, insofar as the comment suggests that what Hedy’s mimeticism has striven toward is the alteration of Allie (implying a trajectory whose destination is the other, rather than the self), its underlying fantasy bears more of a resemblance to what Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis call “centrifugal” identification, in which the subject identifies the other with herself, than to Freud’s centripetal model, in which the subject identifies herself with the other (Laplanche and Pontalis, LP, 206).

Yet insofar as centrifugal identification simply reverses the direction of Freudian identification, Hedy’s emulation of Allie evades this categorization as well. While her mimetic behavior does appear aimed toward Allie’s transformation, the transformation does not take place after the fashion of Hedy’s own self, as a positive entity that can be taken as model. Hedy’s emulation of Allie “molds” Allie, in other words, but not based on the model of who Hedy is or could be said to be. For in a crucial and innovative departure from John Lutz’s novel, the film dramatically reveals who and what Hedy really is: an identical twin who lost her sister when she drowned at the age of eleven, and hence a person deprived of not just her “double” but her sense of herself as a nonsingular or compound female subject. Significantly, Hedy retells the story to Allie to make the loss of nonsingular identity more “original” and even constitutive, situating the moment at birth rather than at the actual childhood accident: “I was supposed to be a twin but she was stillborn. I grew up feeling a part of me was missing.” In conjunction with its many visual motifs of female doubleness—ranging from an opening shot featuring twin girls applying makeup to each other, to the numerous two-shots depicting Hedy and Allie staring at their own mirrored reflections—the film extravagantly foregrounds this disclosure to suggest that what Hedy ultimately desires is the recovery of this no longer existent identity. Hedy’s efforts to mold or transform Allie are thus paradoxically based on the model of what Hedy defines herself as lacking. Allie is refashioned not after the example of who Hedy is but who Hedy is not: a female twoness, a nonsingular or compound female subject.

In this sense, Hedy’s attitude toward Allie does not conform to Freud’s notion of identification, involving the transformation of self after the model of the other; yet neither does it conform to Laplanche and Pontalis’ notion of centrifugal identification, involving the transformation of the other after the model of the self. For in this case, neither subject provides the model for what the emulation produces. Female twoness or nonsingularity, the idealized trait or attribute whereby a partial identification might be established, is indeed the “point of coincidence” between Hedy and Allie, but is a trait that is conspicuously missing. It emerges, paradoxically, only through the process of imitation itself. Prior to Hedy’s transformation of Allie by assuming her characteristics, twoness is precisely what both single white females self-consciously lack. This seems
particularly true for Hedy, whose identity the film takes pains to define as the negation of twoness.

Where is the exemplary attribute located, then? If mimetic transformation, as it occurs in partial modes of identification, requires the “borrowing” of an attribute from one subject by the other, how can this attribute be “lent” when initially possessed by neither party? Hedy’s emulation of Allie does in fact successfully mold Allie after the model of female twoness, yet unlike the “openness to a similar emotion” in Freud’s scenario, twoness is not a quality that Hedy possesses, and thus does not provide the “significant analogy” by which a partial identification might be established. Rather, the “property” of female twoness becomes a product of the emulation, rather than an existent preceding and informing it. Thus, while Hedy’s imitation of Allie depends wholly on literal acts of borrowing (involving jewelry, perfume, skirts, stiletto-heeled pumps, and other explicitly gendered commodities), the transformation of Allie toward which her mimetic behavior aims is paradoxically facilitated through the transfer of a property neither subject owns. If there is a “borrowing” at stake in Hedy’s behavior toward Allie, then, it is not the kind of borrowing that for Freud makes partial identifications possible. When he uses the term “borrowing,” Freud means “taking,” the appropriation of an element belonging to the other for the self’s own use. Yet borrowing can also be thought of as a form of receiving, “with the implied or expressed intention of returning the same or an equivalent.” This secondary definition, which involves the dual actions of receiving and returning rather than the single act of appropriating, suggests that in the case of Hedy and Allie’s relationship, the attribute borrowed (twoness) has no existence prior to being returned. To be more specific, the attribute borrowed has no existence prior to being returned as identical to something that the self has already received from the other. If, as suggested earlier, envy involves forms of “unhappy self-assertion” subtended by a negative relationship to property, Hedy’s aggressive emulation of Allie ensures that for both subjects, property will be redefined as something constantly transferred and circulated rather than something actually possessed, in the sense of being traceable back to an original owner.

Given the strange and paradoxical relationship between self-definition and property that Hedy’s emulation produces, it makes sense that the exchange of material possessions between the two women becomes a significant source of discomfort for Allie. This uncanniness about borrowed property is inextricably linked to Allie’s intellectual uncertainty about her status as feminine oneness or twoness: Am I a single white female, or a nonsingular one? Is my nonsingular feminality a property I can actually own? Or is it something I only receive back from the other as an entity previously lent? Different attitudes toward borrowing become a crucial
site of difference between the film's central characters. In the Freudianism-overloaded scene depicting the purchase of the fetishistic stiletto pumps Hedy will eventually use to pose as Allie, trick Sam into sex, and stab him through the eye afterward, we hear the voices of Hedy and Allie over a close-up of their legs, both wearing identical shoes.

Hedy: Hey, what do you think?
Allie: I think YOU should get them.
Hedy: Oh god, do YOU like them?
Allie: Well, I think they go with that dress.
Hedy: You take them.
Allie: Well . . .
Hedy: I'll just borrow them when I want to.

The initial conflict over who will end up owning the shoes is dispelled by Hedy's encouragement that Allie should take them, while confidently asserting her own right to receiving and returning them. This claim is met with no objection. In the very next scene, however, when Allie is awkwardly caught rifling through Hedy's possessions in Hedy's room and Hedy attempts to ease the tension by saying, "Anything of mine you want is yours, go ahead: share and share alike," Allie's response is notably hesitant. She explains or attempts to legitimize this hesitation by reasserting her status as a female oneness: "But I don't really know about that. I'm an only child." It is at this point that Hedy reveals her own undesired female oneness—but by defining it solely in terms of the loss of a female twoness, she implicitly links her propensity for borrowing and lending property to the very attribute or property she defines herself as lacking. Compound femaleness is a property Hedy does not herself possess and thus cannot lend, but that she nonetheless endeavors to "return" to Allie—retroactively constituting Allie as the owner or original possessor of a property that subsequently can be "lent." A radically negative relationship to property thus subtends the forms of negative yet forceful self-assertion enabled through Hedy's mimetic behavior.

Thus, if a fantasy is being expressed through Hedy's mimeticism, it cannot be described as Hedy's identification with Allie, as Brinks and Paulin suggest: "She desires to be, to be like, or to become Allie"; "It is clear that Hedy identifies with Allie as an ideal, that she . . . 'wants to be her.'" Nor, according to Freud's criteria, can it even be described as a partial or limited identification, since this depends on a notion of "borrowed attributes" presupposing prior ownership of the property transferred. In fact, if identification is a fantasy that constitutes who one is, Hedy's mimetic and envious behavior seems motivated by the undoing of identification, since the event her emulation strives toward, imagines, or phantasmatically stages is the other's transformation after the fashion of what the self is not. In its goal of escaping or undoing female singularity, Hedy's fantasy might be described as a fantasy of female compoundedness. As such, it bespeaks a desire to redefine "femaleness" as what Freud calls "group feeling." Throughout Group Psychology, Freud says group feeling derives from a social organization that begins with and can be limited to two members, a point enabling him to use twosomes throughout his book as allegorical representations of group formations as a whole.

Though Freud's essay and Schroeder's film both create fictional accounts of female homosociality that emphasize its negative emotional dimensions, they use the affective configurations they establish to offer very different arguments about the relationship between identification and emulation, as well as about how this relationship consolidates gender roles and produces "group feeling." In Freud's schoolgirls scenario, envy or jealousy-motivated imitation is depicted as highly conducive to the formation of feminine identifications. In Single White Female, however, envious imitation results in the reversal of these identifications—that is, in fantasies about a female other that take that other, or an attribute she possesses, as a model or example to be imitated—insofar as the imita-
tion is shown to paradoxically undo that other's exemplarity. Hedy's copying of Allie ensures that Allie will become replicable, much like the mass-produced clothes she wears and the fashion software programs she designs. Yet unlike these items, what Allie becomes cannot be described as a copy of or after some previously established or positively existing model. We could say that Hedy's envious emulation of Allie transforms Allie into an imitation without an original, but it is perhaps more interesting to formulate this another way: in enveying and imitating Allie, Hedy is able to transform Allie into an example—something that appears "after the fashion" of a category already defined—voided of its exemplarity. Allie becomes an example that does not exemplify—a particular instance or manifestation of X (female twoness or compoundedness) that does not refer "back" to X as a value already in place. In other words, in being emulated, Allie comes to embody and exemplify a standard that cannot be positively defined or located—that has no ontological coherence or consistency—prior to its exemplification. Hedy's behavior turns Allie into a compound subject precisely by making her into a bad example.

Yet the compound subjectivity Allie comes to embody by means of Hedy's emulation is revealed to be unstable, and (the ending of the movie proves) impermanent. As Paulin notes, "What the film's title reflects is an endpoint, and the fundamental work of the film is to produce the 'single white female' we are promised" ("SSG," 33). The conclusion thus reinstates the situation with which the film begins. Hedy, self-defined as a subject painfully lacking or missing compound subjectivity, dies through her paradoxical efforts to "borrow" it. And Allie, also initially and painfully singular, but temporarily transformed into an example of female twoness or compoundedness through Hedy's mimetic behavior, ultimately kills the borrower who has been "returning" the attribute to her. In doing so, Allie ends the cycle of receiving and returning that has paradoxically generated the attribute, and reverts back to her original singularity.

Yet despite this endpoint, in which female singleness regains precedence over compoundedness by means of an emulator's violent elimination ("screwed" and "stabbed in the back" with a screwdriver, as it were), Single White Female's story about female homosociality and ugly feelings raises important questions about aggression, gender, and group formation that fully pertain to the conflicts—and the conflicts about the political value of conflict—in feminism today. At the very least, the film's violence demonstrates what seems like an almost obvious point: while identifications and female identifications in particular may be mimetic, imitation does not require or presuppose identification; in fact, it can actively strive to reverse and undo identifications, ensuring their failure or even preempting their formation. By insisting on the difference between identification and emulation in the context of a complex female-female relationship, Single White Female enables us to see how not identifying might be the enabling condition for female homosociality, rather than an obstruction to it. If aggressive acts of not identifying can play as active a role as identification in facilitating the transition from single to group femaleness, this usefully highlights the primary and (as Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau and others have argued) even constitutive importance of antagonism to collective political formations such as that of feminism.

Since the film depicts envy in terms of a transition from admiration to antagonism, we could also argue that envy enables a strategic way of not identifying which, in facilitating and ensuring this very transition, preserves a critical agency whose loss is threatened by full-blown idealization of the attribute admired. In this sense, it could be said that a subject might envy and emulate not just as a safeguard against fully identifying herself with the quality emulated—say, "femininity"—but precisely in order to convert her admiration into polemicism, qua critical force or agency. Envy's critical potential thus resides in its ability to highlight a refusal to idealize quality X, even an ability to attack its potential for idealization by transforming X into something nonsingular and rep-
licable, while at the same time enabling acknowledgment of its culturally imposed desirability.

In Melanie Klein's "Envy and Gratitude" (1957), it is precisely the idealized object that gives rise to envy and is attacked and spoiled. Klein also describes primal envy as a form of depri- pectorization or theft, in which the envious robs the object of what it possesses: "In both male and female, envy plays a part in the desire to take away the attributes of the other sex, as well as to . . . spoil those of the parent of the same sex" ("EG," 201). Significantly, envy is further viewed as underlying all forms of "destructive criticism," including in particular any distrust, skepticism, or contestation of the analyst's interpretations on the part of the analysand ("EG," 184). In this theory of envious aggression as critical aggression, or as a refusal to assimilate without contesting an authority figure's interpretations ("EG," 184), the ideal or good object envious and phantasmatically attacked is attacked precisely because it is idealized and good—as if the real source of antagonism is less the object than idealization itself. It is important to note here that in envying the good object, the Kleinian infant ultimately seeks to transform it by phantasmatically disfiguring or spoiling it, hence rendering it something no longer desirable, as well as something that can no longer be possessed. Significantly, Klein also suggests that such envious attacks are both accompanied and intensified by the subject's belief that the idealized object is a source of persecution; hence, the envied breast becomes a "devouring" breast. But if envy thus enables the subject to formulate the assertion, "This idealized object persecutes me," might we not interpret Hedy's aggression toward the idealized, singular white femininity Allie initially em-bodies, or her envious effort to transform it into some form of compoundedness, as an attempt to forcefully put forth a similar proposition? That is, an attempt to identify that particular feminine ideal, one functioning as property whose possession can be claimed, as a persecutory, devouring, or brutally assimilating one?

This approach to envy—which Freud suggests, toward the end of Group Psychology, is an inevitable factor in group formation—bears some interesting applications with respect to aspects of being feminist that are "actively lived and felt" and thus run the risk of "not [being] recognized as social, but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating." Let's say there is a certain model of femininity that I recognize as culturally desirable and invested with a certain degree of power. If from a feminist standpoint what I struggle with most is my having been acculturated into admiring and desiring that femininity, envy would seem to enable me to criti-cally negotiate rather than simply disavow or repudiate this desire, which would entail positing myself as immune to acculturation. Moreover, envy would facilitate a transition from desire to antagonism that might enable me to articulate what I have been trained to admire as something possibly threatening or harmful to me. As Klein notes, it is only once the ideal object is envied that it becomes viewed as persecutory—a view that in turn mobilizes the subject's efforts to criticize and transform it, and transform its value or status as property in particular, spoiling it and "rob[bing] it of what it possesses" ("EG," 188).

While Freud's dramatization of jealousy in "Identification" reinforces the suggestion that femaleness—the concept that is feminism's inaugurative yet most contentious point of reference—may be structured like an example, in Single White Female envying becomes a way of stripping this "example" of its exemplarity, demonstrat- ing that one's status as a particular embodiment of a general principle can take place without the principle's being determined in advance. This obstinate paradox, I would argue, offers a viable and compelling way of approaching feminist "group feeling." For if the concept enabling our sense of ourselves as a collective is actively produced by its various bad and good embodiments, rather than preestablished as a quality for us to passively mold ourselves after or secondarily reflect, the concept becomes more plastic and viable for transformation—though indeed more unstable, as Schroeder's film demonstrates. Yet what the film fails to demonstrate is that
this instability can actually constitute the concept's political agency and force. For while it guarantees that the unifying principle $X$, or membership condition of group $X$, will always be in flux, this flux is more likely to be determined by the members themselves—produced by group $X$'s bad or exemplary examples, rather than fostered or imposed by its outside. Hence, if (as Wiegman argues) there is to be a productive “transition from the critique of patriarchal masculinity to internal struggle within feminism,” a transition in which we shift from a mode of critique “embroiled, indeed embattled, in a heterosexual paradigm in which women's relationships to men are centrally interrogated” to one that is “fundamentally a homosocial circuit in which feminism signifies from the conflicted terrain of relations among women” (“SO,” 363), the affective dimension of feminism, including all its ugly feelings, needs be to taken far more seriously than it has been so far.

It is crucial to note that near the conclusion of Group Psychology, in “The Herd Instinct” (chapter 11), Freud says envy in fact precedes the establishment of identifications that enable group formation, suggesting that ultimately “social feeling is based upon the reversal of what was first a hostile feeling into a positively-toned tie” (GP, 67, italics added). If Hedy's aggressive emulation of Allie suggests that envy produces compound or nonsingular subjects by reversing or undoing identifications, Freud's thesis here is that the identifications on which group formations depend are only secondarily established through a reversal of envy. Thus, envy oddly emerges as primary in the production of “group feeling,” which results only after the subject, in the face of cultural disapproval, comes to recognize “the impossibility of his maintaining his hostile attitude without damaging himself” and is subsequently forced (the verb is Freud's) “into identifying himself with [others].” The subject's identification-based sense of collective belonging emerges only after he is forced to give up his ugly feeling: “What appears later on in society in the shape of Gemeingest, esprit de corps, group spirit, etc., does not belie its derivation from what was originally

envy” (GP, 67; italics added). The example Freud chooses to support this argument once again involves a group of women and girls—this time in terms of their too close, too mimetic, and hence too “feminine” relation to popular culture:

This transformation—the replacing of jealousy by a group feeling in the nursery and classroom—might be considered improbable, if the same process could not later on be observed again in other circumstances. We only have to think of the troop of women and girls, all of them in love in an enthusiastically sentimental way, who crowd around a singer or pianist after his performance. It would certainly be easy for each of them to be jealous of the rest; but, in the face of their numbers and the consequent impossibility of their reaching the aim of their love, they renounce it, and, instead of pulling out one another's hair, they act as a united group, do homage to the hero of the occasion with their common actions, and would probably be glad to have a share of his flowing locks. Originally rivals, they have succeeded in identifying themselves with one another by means of a similar love for the same object. (GP, 66)

The language of the passage suggests that Freud’s initial, gender-neutral examples of primal envy—sibling rivalry and dynamics in “the nursery and classroom”—may have struck him as lending inadequate support to his theory. It is as if in order to make the thesis of envy’s primary role in the production of “social feeling” truly convincing, Freud needs to introduce the image of a female throng or multitude, the quasi-militaristic “troop of women and girls.” The best or most effective example again seems to be a feminine example—which brings us back to how Hedy’s envious emulation of Allie provides a way of critically negotiating her relation to femininity as exemplarity.

If a bad example is an example that destabilizes the argument it is supposed to bolster, or constitutes the idea it is merely supposed to reflect, it could be argued that all examples are potentially bad
examples, “harbor[ing] terrible powers of deviation and digression.” In Richardson’s novel, we can see a certain logic behind the fact that the myriad descriptions of Clarissa as an “example to her sex” are equalled in number only by references to her as a “perverse girl,” as if to suggest that what is most perverse about Clarissa is her exemplarity itself. As Hillis Miller writes, “The choice of examples and their ordering, is never innocent. Does not my choice of examples load the dice, predetermine the conclusions I can reach and, like all examples, in fact form the essence of the argument it is apparently only meant to exemplify?” Similarly, Andrzej Warminski shows how G. W. F. Hegel’s attempt to explain the difference between an idea and its example—as the difference between a primary and active, and a secondary and passive mode of representation—actually rests on the use of a example, reversing the roles he initially assigns them. Hedy’s aggressive emulation of Allie produces a similar reversal, turning Allie into an example of a general principle or property (female nonsingularity or compoundedness) that has no existence prior to its exemplification, and thus cannot be said to be reflected secondarily. In this sense, Hedy’s mimetic behavior suggests that when the production of nonsingular or compound identity is at stake, the best kind of examples are always the bad ones. This in turn suggests that bad examples of X might be good for group X, since they compel its members to constantly question, reevaluate, and even redefine what it is that they supposedly exemplify.

While we have seen Miller’s observation that a theorist’s choice of examples “is never innocent” borne out in Freud’s “Identification,” exemplarity may not always be a choice. Once a group has fought for and attained a certain degree of political recognition, the demand that its members be “good examples” can easily turn repressive, especially when the demand emanates from outside rather than from within. This imperative often takes the following form: “You, having declared yourself an example of X—perhaps in the initial struggle to secure social recognition and visibility for X—must now exemplify X as a fixed concept which you merely refer back to or reflect.” A corollary of this logic would be the following: “In your failure to adequately exemplify X, you threaten the validity and legitimacy of X, as well as any group formation or collective identity based on X.” To use Gubar’s metaphor, the implication is that a group becomes “sick” when its members become examples that do not properly exemplify. This assumption that collective strength depends on good exemplarity bears a close resemblance to the concept of the ego ideal that Freud develops in Group Psychology, as well as the common assumption that one must identify with whatever one emulates or strives toward. All suppose that collectives are formed on the basis of models established in advance for the purpose of being imitated, and that it is a shared relation to an established model that secures the identification of individuals with one another—which in turn leads to the formation of groups. Yet while having to exemplify can be a demand imposed, even violently imposed, on members of a group from those seeking to define and control its parameters from without, being an example can be a site of change from within. One acknowledges or declares oneself an example of X, a “real particular case” among numerous other cases, precisely in order to make and shape what X is.

As a political as well as theoretical discourse, feminism necessarily implies a compound subject, or at the very least a nonsingular one. Indeed, as Wendy Brown suggests, there is an etymological sense in which the making of compound subjects is politics, insofar as the ancient Greek term politeia designates “the singularly human practice of constituting a particular mode of collective life.” The political act of feminist group formation thus entails producing “group feelings,” though not necessarily the antagonism-free, identification-based “group feeling” nostalgically mourned in “What Ails Feminist Criticism?” It would be ludicrous to suggest, of course, that feminist collectivity should be literally modeled on the affective relations depicted in Single White Female, or any other film depicting “women’s friendships as plagued by jealousy [and]
Single White Female is clearly a bad example of female homosociality, since its final reaffirmation of oneness depicts the desingularized female subject as threatening, destructive, and ultimately untenable. But however and in whatever way bad, the film’s unusual account of how compound subjects might be formed provides an interesting alternative to Freud’s more popular model of social and political organization in Group Psychology, where group formation ultimately depends on identifications of individuals with one another based on a mutually shared model already established and in place. In contrast, the film mobilizes envy to demonstrate the capacity of female subjects to form coalitions based on something other than “similar love for the same object,” to emulate attributes without identifying with them, and to function as examples that do not properly exemplify, actively defining and redefining the category they would seem only to passively reflect (Freud, GP, 66). What is most surprising and interesting about Single White Female with respect to how we approach conflict within feminism today is how it depicts female compoundness as actively strengthened through these disidentificatory and antiproprietary practices, if not directly by the ugly feeling that inspires them.

Indeed, since here the compound subject is produced not by making two into one (as in the case of what Gubar takes to be Butler’s symptomatically bad grammar), but rather by making one into two, Single White Female could be said to allegorize the state of contemporary feminism as internally divided or split, yet held together by this very split. We have seen how the transformation of one into two, exacerbating the confusion between identification and mimesis already perpetuated by Freud’s “feminine” examples, is presented by the film in terms of the paradox of exemplarity itself. In an essay that examines the work of exemplarity in the concept of genre, Derrida describes this paradox as follows: “The trait which marks membership inevitably divides, the boundary of the set comes to form, by invagination, an internal pocket larger than the whole; and the outcome of this division and of this abounding remains as singular as it is limitless.” With this strikingly anatomical word choice on the part of a philosopher scrupulously attentive to language, the logic of exemplarity that subsumes the “law of genre” once again seems strangely susceptible to feminization. But in a much more surprising fashion, Single White Female seems not only to understand the division and doubling that produces compound subjects in terms of “bad exemplarity,” but also to present it in terms of the racial divide we have seen Gubar discuss, with respect to contemporary feminism, at the beginning of this chapter.

Here we are finally confronted with one of the most puzzling aspects of Single White Female. Why is the detail of whiteness foregrounded in the film’s title, when the issue of race seems so conspicuously not taken up by the film as whole? Indeed, why
does Allie oddly describe herself as white—"SWF seeks female to share apartment in west 70's"—in an advertisement not for a sexual or romantic partner (where the specification of race has become a convention), but for a roommate? Allie's specification of her own race seems all the more gratuitous, given that in a yet another telling departure from Lutz's SWF Seeks Same, Single White Female is careful to present Allie as "color-blind," indifferent to the race (if not the gender) of the roommate she seeks. The reference to race thus comes across as irritating, an unessential element inexplicably highlighted, but then just as inexplicably dropped from the story once Allie chooses Hedy over the other candidates she interviews (one of whom is in fact a woman of color) and the film becomes exclusively focused on the relationship between the two women played by white actresses. This is, of course, a homosocial relationship most visibly marked by class difference—as is the case in Patricia Highsmith's more widely known novel about male envy and emulation, The Talented Mr. Ripley. Yet in striking contrast to the vast class difference between the envious male protagonist and the man he aggressively emulates in The Talented Mr. Ripley, a text to which Lutz's suspense novel explicitly invites comparison by invoking the "Highsmith tradition" on its jacket, the social distance here is the relatively minor one between a middle-class computer programmer and a lower middle-class clerk employed at a bookstore—both of whom live in the same apartment, pay the same amount of rent, and can more or less afford the same shoes. In both the novel and the film, these relatively minor class differences are presented as disturbingly easy to mask simply by the acquisition of the right female commodities, which exemplify undifferentiation itself: "Everyone's basic black dress was like someone else's" (Lutz, SWF, 158). The self-solicited comparison to Mr. Ripley—the male version of Single White Female's story of female envy and emulation—is especially revealing here, since it suggests that among women, even slight and supposedly easy-to-disguise differences in socioeconomic status lead almost immediately to hyperbolic conflict and violence, whereas they need to be enormous to culminate in violence between men. The difference between the scale of the class differences that set off the aggressive mimetic behavior in Single White Female and Mr. Ripley, not only exaggerates the pettiness of female envy in contrast to male envy (reinforcing the feminization of the emotion in general), but contributes to the stereotype of women as unusually prone to envious hatred of other women in particular. This is precisely the stereotype which Gubar rightly worries that feminism's hostile outside might exploit, and which her critique of internal feminist conflict drawn along racial lines is pitted against.

Though female conflict is obviously Single White Female's central preoccupation, we have seen how its reference to race irritatingly persists, like the whine of a mosquito, even as the film draws attention to the supposed ease with which class differences between white women can be socially masked simply by the acquisition of the right commodities: a better haircut, better shoes. But what if we take Hedy, the female character of unspecified race sought by a woman who oddly calls attention to her own whiteness, as performing a kind of "darkface" in reverse? That is, if we see Hedy as a woman of color in whiteface, an "other" appearing to Allie under the cover of the "same"? This reading not only accounts for the disconcerting way in which racial difference seems simultaneously extraneous and central to Single White Female, but reveals another motivation for the film's insistence that Hedy's mimetic behavior cannot be confused with an identification or desire for adequation with the woman she emulates (in this case, a woman who describes herself as white). Instead, as we have noted, Hedy's emulation of Allie is presented as a form of aggressive self-assertion. It is thus interesting to speculate how Single White Female might or might not have been a very different movie if the actress playing Hedy had been a woman of color—say, the contemporary performance artist
antagonism—that is, irreconcilable class antagonism—in terms of race rather than class. If “class” is the term in the series of struggles defined by categories of social difference (race, class, gender, sexuality) that is “simultaneously one of the terms in the series and a structuring principle of the entire series,”57 “race” names the struggle in which it is most taken for granted that no degree of acquiring what the envied other has—money, education, phallus, or, in the case of *Single White Female’s* story of female-female struggle, the right hairstyle and shoes—will ever culminate in the other and one becoming indistinguishable. The peculiar irritation which race might be said to produce in this film about ugly feelings is the explicit focus of the next chapter.

Nikki Lee, whose work on the aesthetics of “imperfect doubles” has focused precisely on the question of how race complicates the politics of group affiliation.

But let me suggest, in a final turn of the screw (or, in the spirit of the film, the screwdriver), that “race” in *Single White Female*, already visible only by means of its conspicuous nonpresence in the story, is itself a signifier for a struggle based on a distinction in social class—and what is more, a signifier for a class envy or antagonism that cannot be entirely dissipated through economic mobility, or that remains resistant to being reconciled through the mere acquisition of property. Here *Single White Female* simply follows the lead of American popular culture, in its longstanding preference and well-demonstrated facility for imagining this kind of class
notes

introduction


6. In fact, according to Virno, nothing currently unites "the software technician, the autoworker, and the illegal laborer" more than a process of socialization that, in teaching "habitual mobility," the ability to keep pace with extremely rapid conversions, adaptability in every enterprise, and flexibility in moving from one group of rules to another" ("Ambivalence of Disenchantment," 14), effectively runs on the affects of fear (which prompts mobility in the form of flight), opportunism (which relies on flexibility and adaptability), and cynicism (which arises from a particular intimacy with rules).


8. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 115. Jameson also refers to the ideologeme as the "world-view" or "spirit" of a text, and as the "minimal 'unit'" of ideological analysis. Ideological analysis is in turn defined as a task in which individual cultural products are read as "complex work[s] of transformation on that ultimate raw material which is the ideologeme in question" (87).


13. While Lincoln's oft-cited description of Stowe as a cause of the American Civil War has promulgated the idea of a direct connection between sentimental aesthetics and political action, Philip Fisher, in his book *Hard Facts*, argues that emotions in the sentimental novel are more intense at moments "where the capacity to act has been suspended." Yet what Fisher discloses as the hidden lie of the sentimental novel's strongest claim to political efficacy (the case of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) can hardly be scandalous in the case of ugly feelings, which are explicitly and openly "about" suspended agency from the start. The myth about the direct link between high emotion and political effects that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has come to stand for may or may not be true in the case of that particular novel, but such a myth is simply not available in the case of the affects I discuss here. See Fisher, *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 22, cited in Michael Szalay, *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 167.


27. Grossberg, we gotta get out of this place, 81.

28. Raymond Williams, "Structures of Feeling," in idem, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128. Hereafter designated ML. It should be clarified that in "Structures of Feeling" Williams is not really talking about emotions or even affects. For while "structures of feeling" do designate "affective elements of consciousness and relationships" or "social content . . . of [a] present and affective kind" (13a, 133), Williams defines them more broadly (and at the same time much more precisely) as "structured formation[s] . . . at the very edge of semantic availability" (152). His term thus represents a "cultural hypothesis" derived from efforts to un-
derstand "a social experience which is still in process" (132), and thus has
"many of the characteristics of a pre-formation, until specific articula-
tions—new semantic figures—are discovered in material practice" (134).
Hence, Williams's "structures of feeling" cannot be equated with what we
ordinarily think of as emotional qualities, since the former are defined as
formations that are still in process and barely semanticized, while the latter
have distinct histories and are heavily saturated with cultural meanings
and value. It is easy to understand the impulse to conflate these two terms,
for Williams presents us not only with a concept which is strikingly broad
and inclusive ("structures of feeling") designating nothing less than "all the
known complexities, the experienced tensions, shifts, and uncertainties,
[i]ntricate forms of unevenness and confusion" which "do not have to
await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable
pressures and set effective limits on experience and action"), but also with a
concept adduced primarily in negative fashion. A "structure of feeling" is
precisely that which "escapes . . . from the fixed and the explicit and the
known"; it is a social experience which is not fully semanticized, yet does not
require this semanticization in order to exert palpable pressures and gener-
ate concrete effects. Yet Williams is not analyzing emotion or affect, but,
rather, strategically mobilizing an entire register of felt phenomena in or-
der to expand the existing domain and methods of social critique. This is
a subtle yet crucial distinction which Williams foregrounds in his own writing.
Having spoken of changes in "qualities of social relationship" traditionally
misperceived as "personal experience" or as the merely superficial or incidental 'small change' of society" (131), and then defining these changes as "structures of feeling," Williams acknowledges: "The term is
difficult, but 'feeling' is chosen to emphasize a distinction from more formal
conscepts of 'realist-view' or 'ideology'" (132). While a structure of feeling
thus cannot be reduced to "personal experience," it comes to represent
something equally irreducible to ideology. Once again using a negative
definition, Williams writes that the term designates social content "which cannot
without loss be reduced to belief-systems, institutions, or explicit
relationships" (133, italics added). It is clear, however, that structures of feeling
remains inextricably intertwined with belief systems, institutions, and
explicit social relationships; in fact, Williams describes all of the latter as
encompassed by the former, though in a "lived and experienced" manner.
Yet when he clearly states his methodological reasons for introducing his
concept—to find a way of grasping social formations distinct from "more formal"
concepts of ideology—it becomes clear that his primary aim is to
mobilize an entire affective register, in its entirety, and to a register, in order
to enlarge the scope and definition of materialist analysis. This is something
quite different from the goal of offering "a materialist analysis" of affect it-
self.

29. Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*
stone et al., ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith
(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 423–427, 425. See also
Wendy Brown, "Resisting Left Melancholy," *boundary 2* 26, no. 3 (Fall
32. Steve Evans, "The Dynamics of Literary Change," *Imperceptible Lecture
34. I owe these formulations to Mark McGurl.
35. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kauf-
mann and R. J. Hollingdale, in idem, *On the Genealogy of Morals* and
designated GM.
36. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*
37. As Adorno puts it while writing on the guilty intellectual's moral beati-
fication of the "simple folk": "In the end, the glorification of splendid under-
dogs is nothing other than glorification of the splendid system that makes
38. Indeed, given Nietzsche's unambiguous fear and hatred of the "mob," it is
something of an understatement when Brown notes his "remove" from the
"transformative possibilities of collective political action" (*States of Injury,
74*).
of Gissing's *Dems* ("Gissing resents Richard, and what he resents most is the
latter's resentment") with a more generic scenario.

1. tone

1. All quotations are from Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Mas-
quierele*, foreword by Toby Tanner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989),
Hereafter designated CM.
3. Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: A Biography, Volume 2: 1851–1891* (Balti-
more: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 603.
raised by The PJ's and its critical reception, it is interesting to note that when Eddie Murphy first conceived the idea for the show, his original intention was to use puppets rather than stop-motion cinematography to represent the characters (Sue Conklin [Will Vinton Studios], email to the author, 9 December 1999). The difference between characters animated in the form of marionettes pulled on strings, like Clifton's dancing doll, and characters animated by stop-motion photography seems to be a difference in their capacity to create an illusion of independence or autonomy. At a purely visual level, stop-motion characters seem less manipulated than puppets. As Sue Conklin informed me, convincing Murphy to use stop-motion in lieu of marionettes thus entailed persuading him that "it would be better than puppetry for making the characters one step closer to 'real.'" It may also be of interest here to note that one of the roles that contributed to Murphy's popularity in the early 1980s was his Saturday Night Live character "Grown-up Gumby"—a perverse live-action reproduction of television's most famous dimensional stop-motion character. In conjunction with this interest in puppets, Murphy's shift from playing "realistic," street-talking characters in his strictly live-action films from the 1980s (Trading Places, Beverly Hills Cop, Beverly Hills Cop II and III, 48 Hours, Another 48 Hours) to emphatically cartoonish characters in the late 1990s and in films that incorporated digital animation and numerous special effects to forefront the body's "plastimaticity" (The Nutty Professor [a remake of the Jerry Lewis original], The Nutty Professor II, and of course The PJ's) is a career turn worth thinking about in light of the issues this essay raises.

41. Bergson's essay on laughter is notorious for including, as part of its analysis, the question, "And why does one laugh at the Negro?" Bergson, Laughter, in Wylie Sypher, ed., Comedy (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), 86.

42. Sue Conklin (Will Vinton Studios), email to the author, 9 December 1999.

43. Peter Boyd (Will Vinton Studios), email to the author, 10 December 1999.

44. On this strategy of excessive submission, which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5, see Gilles Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 5.

45. As Cavell notes, "It can be internal to a character that he threatens his own limit" (The World Viewed, 159, emphasis added).


3. envy


2. Rey Chow, "Where Have All the Natives Gone?" in Writing Diaspora: Tac-


17. The examples of Judith Butler's prose cited by Gubar are taken from Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), 40-45. See Gubar, "What Ails Feminist Criticism?" 896-897, original italics.


21. Though critics have often argued that Freud's notion of innate drives (Trieben) is essentialist, for a persuasive argument that his understanding of drives actually undermines the opposition between constructionism and essentialism, see Teresa de Lauretis, "The Stubborn Drive," Critical Inquiry, 24, no. 4 (Summer 1998): 851-877.


23. Paulin, "Sex and the Single Girl," 51. It is clear, though, that Hedy perceives Allie's "look" as a generic and mass-produced one: "Where did you guys learn to dress like that? I mean, it's just so 'New York.'"


Significantly, it is in this chapter that Freud also advances his notorious theory of homosexuality as narcissistic identification, defining the former as object-choice having "regressed" to the latter (Group Psychology, 48). This theory is inadvertently replicated by some antihomophobic critics in their readings of Single White Female, who use what seems to be Hedy's mimetic "love of the same" as evidence of her homosexual orientation. Thus Hart's characterization of Hedy as seeking the same, indeed she is seeking the self-identical" occurs in tandem with her characterization of Hedy as a "pathological 'lesbian'" who "effects a disruption of Allie's heterosexuality" (Hart, "Race and Reproduction," 115, 114, 117). The tendency to confute...
copying and identification seems often to subend this equation ("seeking same" = "lesbian"), which is one of my other motivations for questioning it. For a detailed discussion of the troubling implications of reducing homosexuality to love of the same, see Michael Warner, "Homo-Narcissism; or, Heterosexuality," in Joseph A. Boone and Michael Cadden, eds., Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism (New York: Routledge, 1990), 190–206.

28. Ibid.
29. The change in the gender of Freud’s exempla also occurs in tandem with a move away from the use of ingestion as a dominant metaphor for identification, and toward the metaphor of infection—a turn which, as Fuss notes in an excellent close reading of the same chapter, involves switching from "an active subject’s conservation of the object of its idealization" to "a passive subject’s infiltration by an object not of its choosing" (Identification Papers, 41, italics added).
30. The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (a film based on the novel by Muriel Spark) also establishes this link, in order to associate homophilic idealization with political leader-worship (and by extension with fascism). When her prize student, Sandy (Pamela Franklin), "puts a stop" to the ability of Jean (Maggie Smith) to transmit or reproduce her theories of ideal femininity (puts a stop to her ability to copy as well as be copied), Jean equates this with "as-sensation"—hence linking the end of transmissibility with the death of a feminine ideal, but also with the death of the fascist political leaders Jean admires. The relation between the mimetic production of "compound" female subjectivity in this "woman’s film" and Freud’s postwar analysis of the "libidinal organization of groups" in Group Psychology is a worthy topic for an essay on its own.
32. Brinks makes a similar point; see "Who’s Been in My Closet?" 4–5.
35. In contrast, in Lutz’s novel, the lack of "self-worth or identity" that drives Hedra’s pathological impersonation of Allie is revealed as stemming from the fact that Hedra’s father abused her when she was a child. There is a sense in which the novel relies on a much more stereotypical, more "Holly-
wood" explanation for Hedra’s psychosis than the film does. See John Lutz, SWF Seeky Some (New York: St. Martin’s, 1990), 250. Hereafter designated SWF.
37. This is again a significant departure from Lutz’s novel, where Allie explicitly encourages Hedra to borrow whatever she wants from her closet (SWF Seeky Some, 128).
38. This scene illustrates a pattern of relentlessly negative self-assertion in the film as a whole, a pattern in which both subjects interpret propositions puts forward by the other concerning the other as actually being propositions about the subject, and vice versa. For instance, when Hedra makes a statement concerning Allie’s appearance ("Where did you learn to dress like that?"); Allie immediately reads this as Hedra making a statement about Hedra’s appearance, and responds accordingly ("I think you look very comfortable"). Hedra similarly reads Allie’s comment "I think you should get them," a statement about Hedra’s desire for the shoes, as a statement about Allie’s desire for the shoes.
39. The significant difference between the relationships Hedra and Allie have to feminine property is reflected in the contrast between Hedra’s remark here ("Anything of mine you want is yours"), and what Allie says to a cab driver while in pursuit of Hedra dressed as Allie’s double: "Don’t lose her. She has something of mine."
40. Laplanche and Pontalis: "In Freud’s work the concept of identification comes little by little to have the central importance which makes it not simply one psychical mechanism among others, but the operation itself whereby the human subject is constituted" (The Language of Psychoanalysis, 206).
41. Citing Lauren Berlant, "The Female Complaint" (Social Text, 19–20 [Fall 1988]), Gubar partly conceives this point in her response to Wiegman. See Gubar, "Notations in Medias Res," 394.
42. Though envy bears much resemblance to sadism in its destructive aims, Judith Hughes reminds us that "what distinguished [Kleinian] envy from sadism was that envy constituted an attack upon the good because it was good." See Hughes, Reshaping the Psychoanalytic Domain (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 88.
43. Rather than seeking to "preserve and spare" the object, "envy is the angry feeling that another person possesses and enjoys something desirable—the envious impulse being to take it away or to spoil it" (Klein, "Envy and Gratitude," 181). In other words, envy is the impulse to change the status of the object with respect to its ownability, and thus alter one's relation to the thing originally admired and desired.Envying interferes with the subject's ability to accept, assimilate, possess, or internalize the "good object" (which it subsequently transforms by challenging its value), as well as with its ability to distinguish between objects "good" and "bad" (ibid., 185, 192).
female shapeshifter and emulator. In contrast to these multiple jobs, Allie has only one—yet the novel similarly challenges her singularity on this front as well: “Work was scarce for computer programmers; colleges were churning them out by the thousands” (SWF Seeks Same, 129).


4. irritation


4. I am grateful to Mark McGurl for suggesting this to me.

5. Beverly Haviland, “Passing from Paranoia to Plagiarism: The Abject Authorship of Nella Larsen,” Modern Fiction Studies, 43, no. 2 (1997): 295–318, 296. Noting that “abjection is a kind of failure to represent ourselves to the world as authors of our own being,” Haviland’s thought-provoking essay suggests that “there is a psychological profile that sustains the construction of legitimate authorship—a profile that was impossible for Larsen to maintain.” In the short story “Sanctuary,” the only work in which Larsen makes use of black vernacular, Larsen appears to have taken a short story by a British writer (Sheila Kaye-Smith’s “Mrs. Adis”) and to have “made it black” by replacing Kaye-Smith’s characters with African-Americans. Haviland links this act of plagiarism, which effectively ended Larsen’s publishing career only months after she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1930, to “an instability in the recognition and respect for boundaries between self and other” which similarly defines “paranoia” (as embodied by Irene in Passing). Ironically, both paranoia and plagiarism, as instances of this “disorder of the boundaries of subject/object relations,” can be understood “as attempts by Larsen to imagine a more intimate relationship with her origins, familial and social” (ibid., 310, 296). As Haviland notes, it is precisely “a desire to identify herself as an African-American writer that self-destructs when Larsen takes an English story and recasts it with American blacks” (296)—a point which resonates in interesting ways with Quicksand’s treatment of the matter of identification in African-American artforms in general. Drawing on Larsen’s biography, Haviland suggests that Larsen’s plagiarism of “Mrs. Adis” can be read as both a phantasmatic identification with as well as an act of aggression toward the white mother who rejected