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## Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness

**Darrin M. McMahon's** *Happiness: A History* begins with the question: "How to write a history of something so elusive, so intangible—of this 'thing' that is not a thing, this hope, this yearning, this dream?" (2005, xi). This is a good question with which to begin. We can also ask: What does it mean to think of happiness as having a history? How or why would we write such a history? Who or what would belong in this history? McMahon's history of happiness is premised on the belief that thinking about happiness means thinking about how different ideas of happiness have been conceptualized over time. He describes his history of happiness as an "intellectual history" (xiv).

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

I have no wish to supplement McMahon's history with a history told from a specific viewing point, as a particular history within a general history. I want to explore instead how the general viewing point is itself rather particular. Just note how women appear or do not appear in McMahon's intellectual history. In the index, we have one reference to women, which

This article is drawn from my book *The Promise of Happiness*, which is forthcoming from Duke University Press. Thanks to Duke for permission to include this article in *Signs.* In particular, this article is taken from the second chapter of this book, "Feminist Killjoys," which draws on a much wider archive of feminist materials than I can represent here. The examples I have chosen certainly reflect my own reading trajectories as a feminist: other readers, I hope, will be able to supplement my choices with their own materials. With thanks to Miranda Outman-Kramer and Karen Alexander for their generous help with editing this article.

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turns out to be a reference to John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women*. Even the category of women refers us back to a male genealogy, to philosophy as white male European inheritance. Treating happiness as an intellectual history amounts to becoming blind to how differences matter within that history as differences that trouble the very form of its coherence.

If we take up happiness as an intellectual history, it is striking how consistent this history is on one point: happiness is what gives meaning, purpose, and order to human existence. Bruno S. Frey and Alois Stutzer argue: "Everybody wants to be happy. There is probably no other goal in life that commands such a high degree of consensus" (2002, vii). Even a philosopher such as Immanuel Kant, who places the individual's own happiness outside the domain of ethics, shares this consensus, arguing that "to be happy is necessarily the wish of every finite and rational being, and this, therefore, is inevitably a determining principle of its faculty of desire" ([1788] 2004, 24). And yet Kant himself suggests, rather mournfully: "Unfortunately, the notion of happiness is so indeterminate that although every human being wishes to attain it, yet he can never say definitely and consistently what it is that he really wishes and wills" ([1785] 2005, 78). If happiness is what we wish for, if happiness is necessarily our wish, it does not mean we know what we wish for in wishing for happiness.

Happiness: a wish, a will, a want. What would it mean to suspend belief that happiness is what we wish, want, or will, or even that happiness is a good thing? We do not have to speculate on what an answer to this question might look like: feminist histories offer us an alternative history of happiness by suspending belief that happiness is a good thing. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* ([1949] 1997) offers an example of this suspension. She argues: "It is not too clear just what the word *happy* really means and still less what true values it may mask. There is no possibility of measuring the happiness of others, and it is always easy to describe as happy the situation in which one wishes to place them" (28). Beauvoir shows us how description can become a defense: you describe as happy a situation that you wish to defend. Happiness translates its wish into a politics, a wishful politics, a politics that demands that others live according to a wish.

When a happiness wish is deposited, a social norm becomes a social good. Feminists have shown how the happiness wish is deposited in certain places. Take feminist critiques of the figure of the happy housewife. Betty Friedan, in *The Feminine Mystique*, argues: "In 1960, the problem that has no name burst like a boil through the image of the happy American housewife. In the television commercials the pretty housewives still beamed over their foaming dishpans. . . . But the actual unhappiness of the American housewife was suddenly being reported" (1965, 19–20). The happy housewife

is a fantasy figure that erases the signs of labor under the sign of happiness. The claim that women are happy and that this happiness is behind the work they do functions to justify gendered forms of labor not as products of nature, law, or duty, but as expressions of a collective wish and desire.

Feminist histories thus offer a different angle on the history of happiness. Or perhaps feminist history teaches us that we need to give a history to unhappiness. The history of the word *unhappy* might teach us about the unhappiness of the history of happiness. In its earliest uses, *unhappy* meant "causing misfortunate or trouble."[1] Only later did it come to mean "miserable in lot or circumstances" or "wretched in mind." We can learn from the swiftness of translation between causing unhappiness and being described as unhappy. We must learn.

The word *wretched* also has a suggestive genealogy, coming from *wretch*, referring to a stranger, exile, or banished person. The wretch is not only the one driven out of his or her native country but is also defined as one who is "sunk in deep distress, sorrow, misfortune, or poverty," "a miserable, unhappy, or unfortunate person," "a poor or hapless being," and even "a vile, sorry, or despicable person." Can we rewrite the history of happiness from the point of view of the wretch? If we listen to those who are cast as wretched, then perhaps their wretchedness would no longer belong to them. The sorrow of the stranger might give us a different angle on happiness, not because it teaches us what it is like or must be like to be a stranger but because it might estrange us from the very happiness of the familiar.

I thus offer a different reading of happiness, not simply by offering different readings of its intellectual history but by considering those who are banished from it or who enter this history only as troublemakers, wretches, strangers, dissenters, killers of joy. I call the archives that I draw on "unhappy archives." It is not simply a question of finding unhappiness in such archives. Rather, these archives take shape through the circulation of cultural objects that articulate unhappiness with the history of happiness. An unhappy archive is one assembled around the struggle against happiness. We can follow different weaves of unhappiness as a kind of unraveling of happiness and the threads of its appeal.

## Happy objects

I do not begin by assuming there is something called happiness that stands apart or has autonomy, as if it corresponds to an object in the world. I

[1] These definitions and all subsequent definitions are taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd online edition.

begin instead with the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and with what I called in *Queer Phenomenology* "the drama of contingency," how we are touched by what comes near (Ahmed 2006, 124). It is useful to note that the etymology of happiness relates precisely to the question of contingency: it is from the Middle English word *hap*, suggesting chance. The word *happy* originally meant having "good 'hap' or fortune," to be lucky or fortunate. This meaning may now seem archaic: we may be used to thinking of happiness as an effect of what you do, as a reward for hard work, rather than being "simply" what happens to you. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi argues: "Happiness is not something that happens. It is not the result of good fortune or random chance. It is not something that money can buy or power command. It does not depend on outside events, but, rather on how we interpret them. Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person" (1992, 2). In such a definition, happiness not only loses its hap but is defined against it.

I want to consider what follows the removal of the hap from happiness by focusing on the role or status of objects.[2] What is the relationship between "the what" in "what happens" and "the what" in "what makes us happy"? Empiricism provides us with a useful way of addressing this question, given its concern with "what's what." Take the work of seventeenth-century empiricist philosopher John Locke. He argues that what is good is what is "apt to cause or increase pleasure, or diminish pain in us" ([1690] 1997, 216). We judge something to be good or bad according to how it affects us, whether it gives us a pleasure or pain. Locke uses the example of a man who loves grapes. He suggests that "when a man declares in autumn, when he is eating them, or in spring, when there are none, that he *loves* grapes, it is no more, but that the taste of grapes delights him" (216). Happy objects could be described simply as those objects that affect us in the best way. Note the doubling of positive affect

[2] I am focusing on objects for two related reasons. First, I want to consider how happiness as a feeling is attributed to objects. In making such an argument, I do not want to reduce happiness to feeling. As McMahon's (2005) own history of happiness makes clear, the association between happiness and feeling is a modern one, in circulation from the eighteenth century onward. It is now hard to think about happiness without thinking about feeling. My task is thus to consider the relation between feeling good and other kinds of social goods, or to consider how feelings participate in making some things good or into goods. Second, in focusing on objects of feeling, my aim is also to offer a model of feeling that is not subject-centered, that does not assume that feelings begin with subjects and then move out to others (see also Ahmed 2004). For other feminist non-subject-centered models of feeling, see Sedgwick (2003) and Brennan (2004).

in Locke's example: we love what tastes delightful. To be affected in a good way involves an orientation toward something as being good. Happiness can thus be described as *intentional* in the phenomenological sense (it is directed toward objects) as well as being *affective* (it involves contact with objects). To bring these arguments together, we might say that happiness is an orientation toward the objects we come into contact with.

This does not mean that there is always a correspondence between objects and feelings. We have all probably experienced what I would call unattributed happiness; you feel happy, not quite knowing why, and the feeling can be catchy, a kind of brimming over that exceeds what you encounter. The feeling can lift or elevate any proximate object, which is not to say that the feeling will survive an encounter with anything. It has always interested me that, when we become conscious of feeling happy feeling (when the feeling becomes an object of thought), happiness can often recede or become anxious. Happiness can arrive in a moment and be lost by virtue of its recognition. Happiness as a feeling appears very precarious, easily displaced not only by other feelings, but even by happiness itself, by the how of its arrival.

I would suggest that happiness involves a specific kind of intentionality that I would describe as end-oriented. It is not just that we can be happy *about* something, as a feeling in the present, but some things become happy *for us* if we imagine they will bring happiness *to us*. Happiness is often described as what we aim for, as an end-point or even an end in itself. Classically, happiness has been considered an end rather than a means. In *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle describes happiness as the Chief Good, as "that which all things aim at" ([340 BC] 1998, 1). Happiness is what we "choose always for its own sake" (8).[3]

We do not have to agree with the argument that happiness is the perfect end to understand the implications of what it means for happiness to be thought of in these terms. If happiness is the end of all ends, then other things (including other goods) become means to happiness. As Aristotle

[3] I am aware that Aristotle is not defining happiness or *eudaimonia* (which is sometimes and more accurately translated as "flourishing") in terms of feeling but rather in terms of doing or living well. I draw on this model here because I am interested in what it means for happiness to be considered as a telos, or end, and how this might make other things (including other values) into means. Having said this, feeling does play a role in Aristotle's ethics via his model of habituation: the good man is one who learns to be affected in the right way by the right things; "a man is not a good man at all who feels no pleasure in noble actions; just as no one would call that man just who does not feel pleasure in acting justly" ([340 BC] 1998, 11–12). Julia Annas describes how the virtuous agent "will act rightly and will have the right amount of appropriate feeling where this will be a moderate amount" (1993, 61).

describes, we choose other things "with a view to happiness, conceiving that through their instrumentality we shall be happy" ([340 BC] 1998, 8). Aristotle is not referring here to material things or physical objects; he is differentiating between different kinds of goods, between instrumental goods and independent goods. So we choose honor, pleasure, or intellect "with a view to happiness," as being instrumental to happiness and to the realization of the possibility of living a good or virtuous life.

If we think of instrumental goods as objects of happiness, then important consequences follow. Some things become good, or acquire their value as goods, insofar as they point toward happiness. They become happiness pointers, as if to follow their point would be to find happiness. Or we could say that objects become "happiness means." If objects provide a means for making us happy, then in directing ourselves toward this or that object, we are aiming somewhere else: toward a happiness that is presumed to follow. The temporality of this following does matter. Happiness is what would come after. Happiness does not reside in objects; it is promised through proximity to certain objects. The promise of happiness takes this form: if you do this or if you have that, then happiness is what follows.

The very possibility of being pointed toward happiness suggests that objects can be associated with affects before they are even encountered. An object can point toward happiness without necessarily having affected us in a good way. Happy objects thus need to be rethought beyond a sequential logic of causality. In *The Will to Power*, Friedrich Nietzsche suggests that the attribution of causality is retrospective ([1901] 1968, 294–95). We might assume, then, that the experience of pain is caused by the nail near our foot. But we only notice the nail given we experience an affect. The object of feeling lags behind the feeling. The lag is not simply temporal but involves active forms of mediation. We search for the object, or as Nietzsche puts it, "a reason is sought in persons, experiences, etc. for why one feels this way or that" (354). The object is understood retrospectively as the cause of the feeling. Having understood it in this way, I can just apprehend the nail and I will experience a pain affect. Once an object is a feeling-cause, it can cause feeling, so that when we feel the feeling we expect to feel, we are affirmed. The retrospective causality of affect that Nietzsche describes quickly converts into what we can call an *anticipatory causality*. We can even anticipate an affect without being retrospective, insofar as objects might acquire the value of proximities that are not derived from our own experience. For example, with fear-causes, a child might be told not to go near an object in advance of its arrival. Some things more than others are encountered as to be feared in the

event of proximity, which is exactly how we can understand the anticipatory logic of the discourse of stranger danger (see Ahmed 2000).

We can also anticipate that an object will cause happiness in advance of its arrival; the object might enter our near sphere with a positive affective value already in place. Objects can become happiness-causes without causing happiness. This argument is different from Locke's account of loving grapes because they taste delightful, as I am suggesting that the judgment that some things are happy is already made before we encounter them. Such judgments not only precede our encounter with things; they might also direct us toward certain things. For example, the child might be asked to imagine happiness by imagining happy events in the future, such as the wedding day, the "happiest day of your life." The very expectation of happiness might be what gives us a specific image of the future.

We are directed by the promise of happiness. The promise of happiness is what makes some things promising. Consider that the word *promise* derives from the Latin verb *promittere*, suggesting "to let go or send forth, to put forth" as well as "to promise, guarantee, or predict." When objects are promising, they are sent forth; to promise can mean to pass around a promise. Happy objects are thus passed around. It is not necessarily the feeling that passes. To share such objects (or have a share in such objects) would simply mean you would share an orientation toward those objects as being good. The family, for instance, might be happy not because it causes happiness, or even because it affects us in a good way, but because of a shared orientation toward the family as being good, as being "what" would promise happiness. The promise of happiness comes with certain conditions: to place your hope for happiness in the family might require that you approximate its form. We have to make and to keep the family, which directs how we spend our time, our energy, and our resources.

If sharing happy objects does not necessarily mean sharing feelings, then what are we sharing? To answer this question, I will take as an example Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile*, first published in 1762, which was crucial for how it redefined education and for the role it gave to happiness. *Émile* is narrated in the first person by a narrator whose duty is to instruct a young orphan named Emile in order that he can take up his place in the world. Education for Emile is about becoming a good man. Within this book, happiness plays a crucial role: the good man does not seek happiness but achieves happiness as a consequence of virtue. This book had considerable influence on European thought and became a key reference point within feminist debates. Rousseau offers a model of what a good education would do not only for his Emile but also for Emile's would-be wife Sophy, whom he introduces in the fifth book. Rousseau's argument was that

women and men should be educated in different ways that enable them to fulfill their specific duties as gendered beings.

In this book, education for Sophy is about what she must become in order to be a good wife for Emile. Happiness provides a script for her becoming. Rousseau argues:

> She loves virtue because there is nothing fairer in itself. She loves it because it is a woman's glory and because a virtuous woman is little lower than the angels; she loves virtue as the only road to real happiness, because she sees nothing but poverty, neglect, unhappiness, shame and disgrace in the life of the bad woman; she loves virtue because it is dear to her revered father, and to her tender and worthy mother; they are not content to be happy in their own virtue, they desire hers; and she finds her chief happiness in the hope of just making them happy! ([1762] 1993, 359)

The complexity of this statement should not be underestimated. She loves virtue because it is the road to happiness; unhappiness and disgrace are what follow from being bad. The good woman loves what is good because this is what is loved by her parents. The parents desire not only what is good; they desire their daughter to be good. So for the daughter to be happy, she must be good, since being good is what makes them happy and she can only be happy if they are happy.

It might seem that what we can call "conditional happiness" involves a relationship of care and reciprocity, as if to say, I will not have a share in a happiness that cannot be shared. And yet the terms of conditionality are unequal. If certain people come first, we might say those who are already in place (such as parents, hosts, or citizens), then their happiness comes first.[4] For those who are positioned as coming after, happiness means following somebody else's goods.

The concept of conditional happiness allows me to be more precise in thinking about what we share when we share happy objects. If my happiness is made conditional on your happiness, such that your happiness comes first, then your happiness becomes a shared object. Max Scheler's differentiation between communities of feeling and fellow-feeling might help explain the significance of this argument. In communities of feeling,

[4] In chap. 4 of *The Promise of Happiness* (Ahmed, forthcoming), "Melancholic Migrants," I describe citizenship as a technology for deciding whose happiness comes first. This determination of citizenship through happiness draws on a longer history in which the imperial mission itself is justified through the utilitarian injunction of maximizing happiness. The migrant who refuses the conditions of happiness thus becomes a threat to the nation-state.

we share feelings because we share the same object of feeling (so we might feel sorrow at the loss of someone whom we both loved; our sorrow would be directed toward an object that is shared). Fellow-feeling would be when I feel sorrow about your sorrow although I do not share your object of sorrow: "All fellow-feeling involves *intentional reference* of the feeling to the other person's experience" (Scheler [1913] 2008, 12). I would speculate that in everyday life these different forms of shared feeling can be confused because the object of feeling is sometimes but not always exterior to the feeling that is shared.

Say I am happy about your happiness, and your happiness is with x. If I share x, then your happiness and my happiness are not only shared but can accumulate through being returned. Or I can simply disregard x: if my happiness is directed just toward your happiness, and you are happy about x, the exteriority of x can disappear or cease to matter (although it can reappear). In cases where I am also affected by x and I do not share your happiness with x, I might become uneasy and ambivalent, since I am made happy by your happiness but I am not made happy by what makes you happy. The exteriority of x would then announce itself as a point of crisis: I want your happiness to be what makes me happy, but I am reminded that even if my happiness is conditional on yours, your happiness is conditional on x and I am not happy with x. In order to preserve the happiness of all, we might even conceal from ourselves our unhappiness with x or try to persuade ourselves that x matters less than the happiness of the other who is made happy by x.

We have a hint of the rather uneasy dynamics of conditional happiness in *Émile*. For Sophy, wanting to make her parents happy commits her in a certain direction. If she can only be happy if they are happy, then she must do what makes them happy. In one episode the father speaks to the daughter about becoming a woman. He says: "You are a big girl now, Sophy, you will soon be a woman. We want you to be happy, for our sakes as well as yours, for our happiness depends on yours. A good girl finds her own happiness in the happiness of a good man" (434). For the daughter not to go along with the parent's desire for marriage would not only cause her parents unhappiness, it would also threaten the very reproduction of social form. The daughter has a duty to reproduce the form of the family, which means taking up the cause of parental happiness as her own.

It should be no surprise that Rousseau's treatment of Sophy was a crucial object of feminist critique. Mary Wollstonecraft, in her *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, spoke out against Rousseau's vision of what makes women happy. She comments wryly about his treatment of Sophy: "I have probably

had an opportunity of observing more girls in their infancy than J. J. Rousseau" ([1798] 1975, 43). Earlier in the text she directly relates her appeal for women's rights to the question of happiness: "Consider, I address you as a legislator, whether, when men contend for their freedom, and to be allowed to judge for themselves respecting their own happiness, it be not inconsistent and unjust to subjugate women, even though you firmly believe that you are acting in the manner best calculated to promote their happiness" (5). In challenging ideas about gender, feminists have already offered challenges to how happiness is defined, and by whom. This struggle over happiness forms the political horizon in which feminist claims are made. My argument is simple: we inherit this horizon.

## Affect aliens, alien affects

We also learn from rereading books like *Émile* how happiness can be used instrumentally, allowing the reorientation of desire toward a common good. We learn from reading such books how happiness is not simply used to secure social relations instrumentally but works as an idea or aspiration within everyday life, shaping the very terms through which individuals share their world with others. Happiness involves both reciprocal forms of aspiration (I am happy for you, I want you to be happy, I am happy if you are happy) and forms of coercion that are exercised and concealed by the very language of reciprocity, such that one person's happiness is not only made conditional on another person's happiness but on the willingness to be made happy by the same things. Happiness can involve an immanent coercion, a demand for agreement. Coercion is usually thought of as an external force that requires the obedience of subjects through the use of threats, intimidation, or pressure. When we think of being coerced, we might think of being forced to do something "against our will." But coercion can shape the very direction of the will, as the will to will in the right way. Coercion can involve the affirmation or encouragement of a "yes": "Yes, do that"; "Yes, that's a good thing"; "Yes, that's a good way to be"; "Yes, that will make you happy." You are affirmed because you find the right things pleasing.

When we feel pleasure from objects that are supposed to cause happiness, we are thus aligned. We are facing the right way. We become alienated when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are attributed as being good. The gap between the affective value of an object and how we experience an object can involve a range of affects, which are directed by the modes of explanation we offer to fill this gap. We can return to the example of the wedding day, imagined as the "hap-

piest day of your life" before it actually happens. We might even happen upon that which is anticipated as causing happiness. Indeed, the "might" can hide a "must": in order to preserve the happiness of all, you must happen upon the right things in the right way. This is how the promissory logics of happiness do more than make promises: to follow the paths of happiness is to inherit the elimination of the hap.

What happens when what "must happen" does happen? Do happy objects live up to their promise? As Arlie Russell Hochschild explores in *The Managed Heart*, if the bride is not happy on the wedding day and even feels "depressed and upset," then she is experiencing an "inappropriate affect" (2003, 59) or is being affected inappropriately. You have to save the day by feeling right: "Sensing a gap between the ideal feeling and the actual feeling she tolerated, the bride prompts herself to be happy" (61). The capacity to save the day depends on the bride being able to make herself be affected in the right way or at least being able to persuade others that she is being affected in the right way. To correct our feelings is to become disaffected from a former affectation: the bride makes herself happy by stopping herself from being miserable. Of course we learn from this example that it is possible not to inhabit fully one's own happiness, or even to be alienated from one's happiness, if the former affection remains lively, or if one is made uneasy by the labor of making oneself feel a certain way. Uneasiness might persist in the very feeling of being happy, as a feeling of unease with the happiness one is in.

We cannot always close the gap between how we feel and how we think we should feel. To feel the gap might be to feel a sense of disappointment. Such disappointment can also involve an anxious narrative of self-doubt (Why am I not made happy by this? What is wrong with me?) or a narrative of rage, where the object that is "supposed" to make us happy is attributed as the cause of disappointment. Your rage might be directed against the object that fails to deliver its promise or it may spill out toward those who promised you happiness through the elevation of some things as good. We become strangers, or affect aliens, in such moments.

The feminist is an affect alien, estranged by happiness. We can understand the negativity of the figure of the feminist killjoy much better if we read her through the lens of the history of happiness, which is at once the history of associations. Feminists, by declaring themselves feminists, are already read as destroying something that is thought of by others not only as being good but as the cause of happiness. The feminist killjoy spoils the happiness of others; she is a spoilsport because she refuses to convene, to assemble, or to meet up over happiness. In the thick sociality of everyday spaces, feminists are thus attributed as the origin of bad feeling,

as the ones who ruin the atmosphere, which is how the atmosphere might be imagined (retrospectively) as shared. A feminist colleague says to me she just has to open her mouth in meetings to witness eyes rolling as if to say, "Oh here she goes!"

My experience of being the feminist daughter in a conventional family taught me much about rolling eyes. I recall feeling at odds with the performance of good feeling. Say we are seated at the dinner table. Around this table, the family gathers, having polite conversations, where only certain things can be brought up. Someone says something you consider problematic. You respond, carefully perhaps. You might be speaking quietly, or you might be getting "wound up," recognizing with frustration that you are being wound up by someone who is winding you up. The violence of what was said, the violence of provocation, goes unnoticed.

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

We can consider the relationship between the negativity of the figure of the feminist killjoy and how certain bodies are encountered as being negative. Marilyn Frye argues that oppression involves the requirement that you show signs of being happy with the situation in which you find yourself: "It is often a requirement upon oppressed people that we smile and be cheerful. If we comply, we signify our docility and our acquiescence in our situation" (1983, 2). To be oppressed requires that you show signs of happiness, signs of being or having been adjusted. As a result, for Frye, "anything but the sunniest countenance exposes us to being perceived as mean, bitter, angry or dangerous" (2). To be recognized as a feminist is to be assigned to a difficult category and a category of difficulty. You are already read as not easy to get along with when you name yourself a feminist. You have to show that you are not difficult through displaying

signs of good will and happiness. Frye alludes to such experiences when she describes how "this means, at the very least, that we may be found to be 'difficult' or unpleasant to work with, which is enough to cost one's livelihood" (2–3). We can also witness an investment in feminist unhappiness (the myth that feminists kill joy because they are joyless). There is a desire to believe that women become feminists because they are unhappy, perhaps as a displacement of their envy for those who have achieved the happiness they have failed to achieve.[5] This desire functions as a defense of happiness against feminist critique. This is not to say that feminists are not unhappy (they might be or they might not be). My point here would be that feminists are read as being unhappy, such that situations of conflict, violence, and power are read as about the unhappiness of feminists rather than about what feminists are unhappy about.

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

It is not just that feelings are in tension but that the tension is located somewhere: in being felt by some bodies, it is attributed as caused by another body, who thus comes to be felt as apart from the group, as getting in the way of its organic enjoyment and solidarity. The black body is attributed as the cause of becoming tense, which is also the loss of a shared atmosphere. Atmospheres might become shared if there is an agreement as to where we locate the points of tension. As a feminist of color,

[5] Feminists are regularly diagnosed within popular culture as sublimating their disappointment through politics. This is why there is a kinship between the feminist and other figures, such as the spinster or the lesbian, who likewise embody the risk of disappointment (which is presumed to be the proper affective consequence of the failure to achieve heterosexual happiness). It is absolutely necessary that we continue to discuss the sexism and homophobia of such figurations.

you do not even have to say anything to cause tension. The mere proximity of some bodies involves an affective conversion. We learn from this example how histories are condensed in the very intangibility of an atmosphere, or in the tangibility of the bodies that seem to get in the way. You can be affectively alien because you affect others in the wrong way: your proximity gets in the way of other people's enjoyment of the right things, functioning as unwanted reminder of histories that are disturbing, that disturb an atmosphere.

To speak out of anger as woman of color is to confirm your position as the cause of tension. Lorde points out: "When women of Color speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with white women, we are often told that we are 'creating a mood of helplessness,' 'preventing white women from getting past guilt,' or 'standing in the way of trusting communication and action'" (1984b, 131). The woman of color must let go of her anger in order for the white woman to move on. Some bodies become blockage points, points where smooth communication stops; they disturb the promise of happiness, which I would redescribe as the social pressure to maintain signs of getting along. When the exposure of violence becomes the origin of violence, then the violence that is exposed is not revealed.

## Consciousness and unhappiness

We could describe consciousness-raising as raising consciousness of unhappiness. Gayle Greene argues: "For though education raised women's expectations, it also made many of them unhappy, creating ambitions that were frustrated by the rigid domestic ideology that urged them back into the home" (1991, 9). Indeed, the act of noticing limitations can actually make life seem more rather than less limited. If the world does not allow you to embrace the possibilities that are opened up by education, then you become even more aware of the injustice of such limitations. Opening up the world, or expanding one's horizons, can thus mean becoming more conscious of just how much there is to be unhappy about. Consciousness-raising does not turn unhappy housewives into happy feminists, even though sometimes we might wish that this were the case!

Returning to *Émile*, it is interesting that the danger of unhappiness is associated with women having too much curiosity. At one point in the narrative—we might call this a rather queer point—Sophy is misdirected. Her imagination and desires are activated by reading too many books, leading to her becoming an "unhappy girl, overwhelmed with her secret grief" (439–40). If Sophy were to become too imaginative, we would not

get our happy ending, premised on Sophy being given to Emile. The narrator says, in response to the threat of such an unhappy ending: "Let us give Emile his Sophy; let us restore this sweet girl to life and provide her with a less vivid imagination and a happier fate" (441). Being restored to life is here being returned to the straight and narrow. Imagination is what makes women look beyond the script of happiness to a different fate. Having made Sophy sweet and unimaginative, the book can end happily.

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

Feminism involves political consciousness of what women are asked to give up for happiness. Indeed, in even becoming conscious of happiness as loss, feminists have already refused to give up desire, imagination, and curiosity for happiness. There can be sadness simply in the realization of what one has given up. Feminist archives are thus full of housewives becoming conscious of unhappiness as a mood that seems to surround them: think of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. In the world of the novel, the feeling is certainly around, almost like a thickness in the air. We sense the unhappiness seeping through the tasks of the everyday. There she is, about to get flowers, enjoying her walk in London. During that walk, she disappears: "But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing—nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway" ([1925] 1953, 14).

Becoming Mrs. Dalloway is itself a form of disappearance, following the paths of life (marriage, reproduction) so that you feel that what is before you is a kind of solemn progress, as if you are living somebody else's life, simply going the same way others are going. If happiness is what allows us to reach certain points, it is not necessarily how we feel when we get there. For Mrs. Dalloway, to reach these points is to disappear. The point of reaching these points seems to be a certain disappearance, a loss of possibility, a certain failure to make use of the body's capacities, to find out what it is

that her body can do. To become conscious of possibility can involve mourning for its loss.

For Clarissa this rather uncanny sensation of becoming Mrs. Dalloway as a loss of possibility, as an unbecoming or becoming "nothing at all," does not enter her consciousness in the form of sadness *about* something.[6] The sadness of the book—and it is a sad book—is not one expressed from Clarissa's point of view. Instead, each sentence of the book takes thoughts and feelings as if they are objects in a shared world: the streets of London, the very oddness of the occasion of passing others by, a feeling of that oddness. To coincide can involve a feeling of coincidence, a sense that to fall in the same time and place as others is a connection to others. As Clarissa goes out with her task in mind (she has to buy her flowers for her party), she walks into a world with others. They all might be in their own world (with their own tasks, their own recollections), and yet they share the world of the street, if only for a moment, a fleeting moment, a moment that flees.

If unhappiness creates a collective impression, then it too is made up of fragments that only loosely attach to points of view. In particular, the proximity between Mrs. Dalloway and the character of Septimus allows unhappiness to be shared, even if they do not share their feelings. These are two characters who do not know each other, though they pass each other, and yet their worlds are connected by the very jolt of unhappiness. We have the imminence of the shock of how one person's suffering can have ripple effects on the lifeworlds of others. Septimus suffers from shell shock, and we feel his feelings with him, the panic and sadness as the horror of war intrudes as memory. His suffering brings the past into the time of the present, the long time of war, its persistence on the skin as aftermath, its refusal of an after. And then we observe him from a distance, where he appears to be a madman, at the edge of respectable sociality, a spectacle. To encounter him on the street, you would not know the story behind his suffering. To be near to suffering does not necessarily bring suffering near.

Clarissa and Septimus, as characters who do not meet, thus achieve an odd intimacy: the not-just-private suffering of the housewife and the not-

[6] Mrs. Dalloway's stream of consciousness offers itself as a consciousness of death: "Did it matter, then, she asked herself, as she walked towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended?" (12). I am offering my own slant by associating consciousness of death with consciousness of gender: so Clarissa in becoming Mrs. Dalloway and in becoming Mrs. Richard Dalloway "must inevitably cease completely." Feminist histories show us how following the paths of happiness for women requires a cessation.

quite-public suffering of the returned soldier are interwoven. Importantly, their sadness is proximate but not contagious. They do not catch sadness from each other; their sadness is what keeps alive histories that are not shared, that cannot be shared, even as they pass by on the street. And yet something is shared, perhaps what is shared is what cannot simply be revealed. It is Clarissa, thinking of her "odd infinities" with strangers "she had never spoken to" as she sits on the bus, who wonders whether the "unseen part of us" might provide a point of attachment to others, and might even be how we survive through others or, as she muses, "perhaps, perhaps" (Woolf 1953, 231–32).

Much of the book is about an event that will happen. For Mrs. Dalloway is planning a party. To some feminist readers, it is the preoccupation with the party that makes the book disappointing. For Simone de Beauvoir, Mrs. Dalloway's enjoyment of parties is read as a sign that she is trying to turn her "prison into glory," as if as a hostess she can be "the bestower of happiness and gaiety" ([1949] 1997, 554). For Beauvoir, the gift of the party turns quickly into duty, such that Mrs. Dalloway, "who loved these triumphs, these semblances," still "felt their hollowness" (554). For Kate Millett, Mrs. Dalloway is a rather disappointing figure; she exposes Woolf's failure to turn her own unhappiness into a politics: "Virginia glorified two housewives, Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsey, recorded the suicidal misery of Rhoda in *The Waves* without ever explaining its causes" (1970, 37).

If Mrs. Dalloway is distracted from the causes of unhappiness by the party (and we can have some sympathy with the necessity of distractions), the party is also the event in which unhappiness comes to life. For Mrs. Dalloway, her party is life; it is how she can make things happen; it is a gift, a happening (Woolf 1953, 185). What happens? That this question is a question is a preservation of the gift. And something does happen. For it is at the party that Septimus's life touches Mrs. Dalloway most directly. It touches her through death:

> What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party? A young man had killed himself. . . . He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with the thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. But why had he done it? And the Bradshaws talked of it at her party!
>
> She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away. They went on living (she

> would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming). They (all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop everyday in corruption, lies, chatter. (280–81)

Septimus's death becomes a question that takes Mrs. Dalloway away from the party; she attends to his death, wonders about it; she becomes a retrospective witness even though she was not and could not have been there. His death becomes material, becomes fleshy through her thought. His death announces not only that sadness can be unbearable but that we do not have to bear it, that you can fling it away. And in this moment, when death intervenes in the life of the party, life becomes chatter, becomes what goes on—"they went on living"—what comes and goes: "people kept on coming." It is at this moment, the moment of wondering about what has happened to a stranger, to someone whom she does not and will not know, that Mrs. Dalloway becomes conscious of a loss, of having lost something. The loss is not necessarily her loss but what is lost when life has become chatter.

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

The arrival of suffering from the edges of social consciousness might teach us about the difficulty of becoming conscious of suffering or teach us about our own resistances to gathering together those seemingly little uneasy feelings of loss or dissatisfaction into recognition of unhappiness. The party might expose the need to keep busy, to keep going in the face of one's disappearance. So much sadness revealed in the very need to be busy! So much grief expressed in the need not to be overwhelmed by grief! It is hard labor just to recognize sadness and disappointment when you are living a life that is meant to be happy but simply is not, which is meant to be full but feels empty. It is difficult to give up an idea of one's life when one lives a life according to that idea.

We might say that feminism is an inheritance of the sadness of becoming conscious not only of gender as the restriction of possibility but also of how

this restriction was not necessary. Feminism involves a sociality of unhappiness not only by generating talk about the collective nature of suffering that is concealed and reproduced by the figure of the happy housewife (which is perhaps how we can describe consciousness-raising) but also by passing books around. It is not simply that feminism coheres around the inheritance of books such as *Mrs Dalloway*, which offer new forms of consciousness of the world in their exploration of gender as loss. After all, if we were to assume that feminist consciousness took the form of consciousness of gender as the restriction of possibility, then we would be excluding other kinds of political consciousness from our idea of feminism.

I want to think of consciousness of the *un* in *unhappy* as consciousness of being not. Consciousness of being *not* or *un* can be consciousness of being already estranged from happiness, of lacking the qualities or attributes required for a happy state of existence. To be not happy is to be not in the eyes of others, in the world of whiteness, which is the world as it coheres around right bodies, or the white bodies. Consciousness of being not involves self-consciousness; you recognize yourself as the stranger. Note here that self-consciousness is already worldly if you are the one whose arrival disturbs an atmosphere. Lorde dramatizes how becoming conscious of being a stranger involves a retrospective renaming of apparently random events as racism:

> Tensions on the street were high, as they always are in racially mixed zones of transition. As a very little girl, I remember shrinking from a particular sound, a hoarsely sharp, guttural rasp, because it often meant a nasty glob of grey spittle upon my coat or shoe an instant later. My mother wiped it off with the little pieces of newspaper she always carried in her purse. Sometimes she fussed about low-class people who had no better sense nor manners than to spit into the wind no matter where they went, impressing upon me that this humiliation was totally random. It never occurred to me to doubt her. It was not until years later once in conversation I said to her: "Have you noticed people don't spit into the wind so much the way they used to?" And the look on my mother's face told me that I had blundered into one of those secret places of pain that must never be spoken of again. But it was so typical of my mother when I was young that if she couldn't stop white people spitting on her children because they were Black, she would insist it was something else. (Lorde 1984a, 17–18)

An event happens. And it happens again. The violence is directed from the white body to the black child, who receives that violence by shrinking,

shrinking away from its sound. But the mother cannot bear to speak of racism and creates an impression that the humiliation is random. Racism is a pain that is hard to bear. Consciousness of racism becomes retrospective, and the question of its timing does matter. You learn not to see racism as a way of bearing the pain. To see racism, you have to unsee the world as you learned to see it, the world that covers unhappiness by covering over its cause. You have to be willing to venture into secret places of pain.

Some forms of taking cover from pain, of not naming the causes of pain in the hope that it will go away, are to protect those we love from being hurt, or even to protect ourselves from hurt, or at least might be meant as a form of protection. Happiness can also work to conceal the causes of hurt—or even to make people the cause of their own hurt. In *The Cancer Journals*, Lorde offers a powerful critique of the politics of happiness. She writes as a black lesbian feminist who is experiencing breast cancer. Lorde never refuses the power of "writing as," nor does she assume that it can abbreviate an experience. Faced with a medical discourse that attributes cancer to unhappiness and survival or coping to being happy or optimistic, she suggests that "looking on the bright side of things is a euphemism used for obscuring certain realities of life, the open consideration of which might prove threatening to the status quo" (1997, 76). The freedom to be happy can be translated into a freedom to avoid proximity to whatever compromises one's happiness. The very idea that our first responsibility is to our own happiness is what allows us to look away: "Was I really fighting the spread of radiation, racism, woman-slaughter, chemical invasion of our food, pollution of our environment, and the abuse and psychic destruction of your young, merely to avoid dealing with my first and greatest responsibility to be happy?" (76). I think Lorde has given us the answer to her question.

We can retrieve a model of false consciousness in critiquing claims to happiness. You would not be saying "You are wrong; you are not happy; you just think you are because you have a false belief." Rather, you would be saying that there is something false about our consciousness of the world: we learn not to be conscious; we learn not to see what happens right in front of us. It is not that an individual person suffers from false consciousness but that we inherit a certain false consciousness when we learn to see and not to see things in a certain way.

Diversity might offer a happy form of false consciousness. One of the reasons I decided to write about happiness was as a result of the project I completed on diversity in which I interviewed diversity workers in twenty universities in Australia and the United Kingdom, asking them about how

they worked with the languages of diversity. Many practitioners were skeptical about the appeal of this term, as we can see in the following quotation: "So now we'll talk about diversity, and that means everybody's different but equal and its all nice and cuddly and we can feel good about it and feel like we've solved it when actually we're nowhere near solving it, and I think that diversity as a concept fits in much better with the university's idea of what it's doing about being the great benefactor."[7] Diversity pride becomes a form of organizational pride. Saying "we are diverse" allows the concealment of racism and inequalities within organizations. Another practitioner describes it like this: "Diversity obscures the issues. . . . It is like a big shiny red apple, right, and it all looks wonderful . . . [but] if you actually cut into that apple there's a rotten core in there and you know that it's actually all rotting away and it's not actually being addressed. It all looks wonderful, but the inequalities aren't being addressed."

The arrival of people of color into organizations of whiteness thus involves a happiness duty: we have to embody their commitment to diversity by smiling in their brochures. The happiness duty is also a negative duty not to speak about racism in the present. I learned from this project how diversity-proud organizations are often the ones that defend hardest against hearing about racism. It is as if speaking about racism is to introduce bad feelings into organizations; it is as if you hurt or bruise the ego ideal of the organization as being diverse.

You cause unhappiness by revealing the causes of unhappiness. And you can become the cause of the unhappiness you reveal. In becoming an unhappiness-cause, one can certainly be affected unhappily. People often say that the struggle against racism is like banging your head against a brick wall. The wall keeps its place, so it is you who gets sore. Struggling against racism means being willing to labor over sore points. Not only do we need to labor our points, as a laboring over sore points, but we also might even need to stay as sore as our points. Of course that is not all we say or we do. We can recognize not only that we are not the cause of the unhappiness that has been attributed to us but also the effects of being attributed *as* the cause. We can talk about being angry black women or feminist killjoys; we can claim those figures back; we can talk about those

[7] The interviews took place between 2003 and 2005 in Australian and British universities and were part of a wider project assessing the turn to diversity within the learning and skills sector (including adult and community learning and further education), as well as higher education. Interviewees gave their consent on condition of anonymity; thus, their names have not been included here. I was codirector of this project with Elaine Swan, and the team of researchers included Shona Hunter, Sevgi Kilic, and Lewis Turner. For a paper detailing findings, see Ahmed (2007).

conversations we have had at dinner tables or in seminars or meetings; we can laugh in recognition of the familiarity of inhabiting that place. There is solidarity in recognizing our alienation from happiness, even if we do not inhabit the same place (and we do not). There can be joy in killing joy. And kill joy we must, and we do.

In sharing our alienation from happiness, we might also claim the freedom to be unhappy. We might even claim a certain wretchedness. I do not mean that feminists must feel wretched or should feel wretched. It is important to avoid creating a duty out of feelings that can be unbearable. We might claim the freedom to be unhappy, perhaps even retrospectively, as the freedom to deviate from the paths of happiness, from what Shulamith Firestone brilliantly describes in *The Dialectic of Sex* as the "narrow, difficult-to-find alleyway of human experience" (1970, 155). We might claim the freedom to be unhappy in the sense of the freedom to cause unhappiness by acts of deviation. Firestone's own "dream action" for the women's liberation movement was a smile embargo (20): she wanted us to stop smiling in the hope of generalizing the possibility of living a life that would be worth smiling about. She, like many second-wave feminists, refused to be well adjusted, to adjust to the world for the sake of comfort. We might have inherited some of the possibilities they gave up.

I am not suggesting that our unhappiness is necessary. I would say that unhappiness is always possible, which makes the necessity of happiness an exclusion not just of unhappiness but of possibility. If we rethink happiness as possibility, if we lighten the load of happiness, then we can open things up. As Clarissa, who has inherited the sadness of Mrs. Dalloway as well as taking her name, describes in the film *The Hours* (2002): "I remember one morning. Getting up at dawn. There was such a sense of possibility. You know that feeling. So this is the beginning of happiness. This is where it starts, and of course there will always be more. It never occurred to me that it wasn't the beginning. It was happiness. It was a moment right then." Happiness is offered here as a sense of possibility. To turn happiness into an expectation is to annul that sense of possibility. When happiness is not something we promise to another, is not something we imagine is due to us or which we have a duty toward, is not something that we anticipate will accumulate from the right points, then others things can happen. Hap can happen.

I now think of political movements as hap movements rather than happiness movements. It is not about the unhappy ones becoming the happy ones. As I have suggested, revolutionary forms of political consciousness involve heightening our awareness of what there is to be unhappy about. Yet this does not mean that unhappiness becomes our po-

litical cause. In refusing to be constrained by happiness, we can open up other ways of being, of being perhaps. The word *perhaps* shares its *hap* with happiness. We can get from the *perhaps* to the *wretch* if we deviate at a certain point. One definition of *wretch* is a "poor and hapless being." I would say that those who enter the history of happiness as wretches might be hapful rather than hapless. To deviate from the paths of happiness is to refuse to inherit the elimination of the hap. Affect aliens, those who are alienated by happiness, are creative: not only do we want the wrong things, not only do we embrace possibilities that we are asked to give up, but we can create lifeworlds around these wants. While we might insist on the freedom to be unhappy, we would not leave happiness behind us. We would aim to put the hap back into happiness.

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