

In 1960, the problem that has no name burst like a boil through the image of the happy American housewife. In the television commercials the pretty housewives still beamed over their foaming dishpans . . . But the actual unhappiness of the American housewife was suddenly being reported . . . , although almost everybody who talked about it found some superficial reason to dismiss it. BETTY FRIEDAN



CHAPTER TWO

Feminist Killjoys

BETTY FRIEDAN IN *The Feminine Mystique* identifies a problem that has no name by evoking what lies behind the image of the happy American housewife (1965: 19–20). What lies behind this image bursts through, like a boil, exposing an infection underneath her beaming smile. Friedan proceeds by exposing the limits of this public fantasy of happiness. The happy housewife is a fantasy figure that erases the signs of labor under the sign of happiness. The claim that women are happy and that this happiness is behind the work they do functions to justify gendered forms of labor, not as a product of nature, law, or duty, but as an expression of a collective wish and desire. How better to justify an unequal distribution of labor than to say that such labor makes people happy? How better to secure consent to unpaid or poorly paid labor than to describe such consent as the origin of good feeling?

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

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

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

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

her happy. Explanations of relative unhappiness can function to restore the power of an image of the good life in the form of nostalgia or regret for what has been lost.

The happy housewife retains its force as a place holder for women's desires and could even be said to be making a return. Take the following passage from Darla Shine's *Happy Housewives*: "Being home in a warm, comfy house floating around in your pajamas and furry slippers while sipping coffee as your babies play on the floor and your hubby works hard to pay for it all is not desperation. Grow up! Shut up! Count your blessings!" (2005: 15). Shine conjures for the reader a very specific image of what makes housewives happy. In conjuring this image — of leisure, comfort, and ease — she calls for us to return to a certain kind of life, as if this was the kind of life that women gave up in embracing feminism: her fantasy of the happy housewife is as much a white bourgeois fantasy of the past, a nostalgia for a past that was never possible as a present for most women, let alone being available in the present. Shine argues that women have become invested in "being desperate" and have been betrayed by the feminist movement that has "dropped the ball for women at home" (19). Alluding to the program *Desperate Housewives* as an example of what women do *not* want, Shine encourages us to adopt a new image: "I want mothers everywhere to dismiss this horrible image of desperation and come together to promote the image of the happy housewife" (6). This new image comes with a commitment to specific values: "respect; pride; confidence; passion; friendship; a clean beautiful home; and, most importantly, a close relationship with your children" (2). While mothering is a crucial element here in this manual for happiness, so too is marriage, as an institution described in terms of heterosexual intimacy: Shine suggests that "you will never be a happy housewife if you're not intimate with your husband" (53).

Shine's book is unexceptional. On the Internet, we witness a new generation of bloggers who take on this identity of "the happy housewife." These bloggers use the opportunity of the public space generated by new technologies to make public their claim of happiness. This claim is also an insistence on the error of feminism and on the importance of instructing women on how to be happy; happiness is being good at being a housewife, as well as what follows being good. Such blogs typically include recipes, tips on doing housework, thoughts on mothering, as well as belief statements that register the happy housewife as

an important social role and duty that must be defended, as if the speech act (“I am a happy housewife”) is itself a rebellion against a social orthodoxy. The image of the happy housewife is repeated and accumulates affective power in the very narration of her as a minority subject who has to reclaim something that has been taken from her. This affective power not only presses against feminist claims that behind the image of the happy housewife was an unspoken collective unhappiness but also involves a counterclaim that happiness is not so much what the housewife has but what she does: *her duty is to generate happiness by the very act of embracing this image.*

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

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

Happiness, Education, and Women

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

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

Since classical times, the role of education as a form of orientation has been explicit. In *Republic* education is described as “the art of orientation” (1998: 245). Education should “devise the simplest and most effective methods of *turning minds around*. It shouldn’t be the art of implanting sight in the organ, but should proceed on the understanding that the organ already has the capacity, but is improperly aligned and isn’t facing the right way” (245–46; emphasis added). Education provides a way of getting the would-be subject to face the right way such that they can receive the right impressions. Education involves being directed not only by being turned around but by being turned “the right way” round. To turn minds around is an educational imperative only given the presumption that the would-be subject is improperly aligned.

The promise of happiness involves being “turned around.” We can see how happiness involves turning in Rousseau’s *Émile* ([1762] 1993), a book which has been described as “haunted” by Plato: Rousseau himself considered *Republic* “the most beautiful book on education that had yet been written” (Strong

2002: 135).² *Émile* is told in the first person, by a narrator whose duty is to instruct a young orphan named *Émile*, in order that he can take up his place in the world. Education for *Émile* is about becoming a good man. Within this book, happiness plays a crucial role: the good man does not seek happiness but achieves happiness as a consequence of virtue. This book had considerable influence on European thought and became a key reference point within feminist debates.³ Rousseau offers a model of what a good education would do for his *Émile*, but also for *Émile*'s would-be wife *Sophy*, whom he introduces in the fifth book. Rousseau's argument was that women and men should be educated in different ways that enabled them to fulfill their specific duties as gendered beings.

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

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

The good woman is good in part because of what she judges to be good, and hence how she aligns her happiness with the happiness of others. The good woman is made happy by what is good. As Rousseau describes: "She loves virtue because there is nothing fairer in itself, she loves it because it is a woman's glory and because a virtuous woman is little lower than the angels;

she loves virtue as the only road to real happiness, because she sees nothing but poverty, neglect, unhappiness, shame, and disgrace in the life of a bad woman; she loves virtue because it is dear to her revered father, and to her tender and worthy mother; they are not content to be happy in their own virtue, they desire hers; and she finds her chief happiness in the hope of just making them happy” (431). The complexity of this statement should not be underestimated. She loves virtue as it is the road to happiness; unhappiness and disgrace follow from being bad. The good woman wants to be happy and hence wants what is good. The good woman also loves what is good because this is what is loved by her parents. The parents desire not only what is good; they desire their daughter to be good. The daughter is good to give them what they desire. For her to be happy, she must be good, as being good is what makes them happy, and she can only be happy if they are happy.

Statements on the conditionality of happiness—how one person’s happiness is made conditional upon another’s—ensure that happiness is directive: happiness becomes what is given by being given as a shared orientation toward what is good. It might seem that what I am calling “conditional happiness” involves a relationship of care and reciprocity: as if to say, I will not have a share in a happiness that cannot be shared. And yet, the terms of conditionality are unequal.⁴ If certain people come first—we might say those who are already in place (such as parents, hosts, or citizens)—then their happiness comes first. For those who are positioned as coming after, *happiness means following somebody else’s goods*.

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

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

Say I am happy about your happiness. Your happiness is with *x*. If I share *x*, then your happiness and my happiness is not only shared but can accumulate through being returned. Or I can simply disregard *x*: if my happiness is directed "just" toward your happiness, and you are happy about *x*, the exteriority of *x* can disappear or cease to matter (although it can reappear). Alternatively, because I experience happiness in your happiness, I could wish that our feeling of fellowship in happiness amounts to being happy about the same things (a community of happiness), such that *x* becomes shared as a happiness wish. Of course, if the object that makes you happy is my happiness wish, then this would be precarious basis for sharing something (as wishing to be happy about *x* can also be an admission that one is not simply happy about *x*). In cases where I am also affected by *x*, and I do not share your happiness with *x*, I might become uneasy and ambivalent, as I am made happy by your happiness but I am not made happy by what makes you happy. The exteriority of *x* would then announce itself as a point of crisis: I want your happiness to be what makes me happy, but I am reminded that even if my happiness is conditional on yours, your happiness is conditional on *x* and I am not happy with *x*. In such occasions, conditional happiness would require that I take up what makes you happy as what makes me happy, which may involve compromising my own idea of happiness (so I will go along with *x* in order to make you happy even if *x* does not "really" make me happy).⁵ 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*.⁶

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, regardless of what she might or might not want. If she can only be happy if they are happy, then she must do what makes them happy. In one episode, the father speaks to the daughter about becoming a woman: "You are a big girl now, Sophy, you will soon be a woman. We want you to be happy, for our sakes as well as yours, for our happiness depends on yours. A good girl

finds her own happiness in the happiness of a good man" (434). Sophy's father offers a happiness commandment: it is for the sake of her own happiness and the happiness of her parents that she *must* find happiness in the right place, which is in the happiness of a good man. So it is not simply that groups cohere by taking up the same objects as the causes of happiness; some subjects are required to take up the happiness causes of others. In this case, for the daughter not to go along with the parents' desire for her marriage would not only cause her parents unhappiness but would threaten the very reproduction of social form. The daughter has a duty to reproduce the form of the family, which means *taking up the cause of parental happiness as her own*.

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

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

It should be no surprise that Rousseau's treatment of Sophy was a crucial object of feminist critique. Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* spoke out against Rousseau's vision of what makes women happy.⁷ She comments wryly about his treatment of Sophy: "I have probably had an opportunity of observing more girls in their infancy than J. J. Rousseau" ([1792]

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

Troublemakers

We learn from this history how happiness is used as a technology or instrument, which allows the reorientation of individual desire toward a common good.⁸ We also learn from rereading books like *Émile* how happiness is not simply used to secure social relations instrumentally but works as an idea or aspiration within everyday life, shaping the very terms through which individuals share their world with others, creating “scripts” for how to live well.

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

Going along with this duty can mean simply approximating the signs of being happy—passing as happy—in order to keep things in the right place. Feminist genealogies can be described as genealogies of women who not only

do not place their hopes for happiness in the right things but who speak out about their unhappiness with the very obligation to be made happy by such things. The history of feminism is thus a history of making trouble,⁹ a history of women who refuse to become Sophy, by refusing to follow other people's goods, or by refusing to make others happy.

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

Take, for example, George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, which is told from the point of view of Maggie Tulliver.¹⁰ The early stages of the novel depict Maggie's childhood, the difficulty of her relationship with her brother Tom, and her perpetual fear of disappointing her parents. The novel contrasts Tom and Maggie in terms of how they are judged by their parents: "Tom never did the same sort of foolish things as Maggie, having a wonderful instinctive discernment of what would turn to his advantage or disadvantage; and so it happened that though he was much more wilful and inflexible than Maggie, his mother hardly ever called him naughty" ([1860] 1965: 73). Various incidents occur that contribute to Maggie's reputation as a troublemaker: when she lets Tom's dogs die (37); when she cuts her dark hair (73); when she knocks over Tom's building blocks (96); and when she pushes their cousin Lucy into the water (111–12).

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

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

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

The novel relates Maggie’s tendency to get into trouble with her desire, will, and imagination, with her love of new words that bring with them the promise of unfamiliar worlds. For instance, she loves Latin because “she delighted in new words” (159). For Maggie “these mysterious sentences, snatched from an unknown context—like strange horns of beasts and leaves of unknown plants, brought from some far-off region—gave boundless scope to her imagination and were all the more fascinating because they were in a peculiar tongue of their own, which she could learn to interpret” (159–60). The association between imagination and trouble is powerful. It teaches us how the happiness duty for women is about the narrowing of horizons, about giving up an interest in what lies beyond the familiar.

Returning to *Émile*, it is interesting that the danger of unhappiness is associated precisely with women having too much curiosity. At one point in the narrative, Sophy gets misdirected. Her imagination and desires are activated by reading too many books, leading 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 *Émile*. The narrator says in response to the threat of such an unhappy ending, “Let us give *Émile* his Sophy; let us restore this sweet girl to life and provide her with a less vivid imagination and a happier fate” (441).¹¹ Being restored to life is here being returned to the straight and narrow. Imagination is what makes women look beyond the script of happiness to a different fate. Having made Sophy sweet and unimaginative, the book can end happily.

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

It is Sophy’s imagination that threatens to get in the way of her happiness, and thus of the happiness of all. Imagination is what allows girls to question the wisdom they have received and to ask whether what is good for all is necessarily good for them. We could describe one episode of *The Mill on the Floss* as Maggie becoming Sophy (or becoming the Sophy that Sophy must be in order to fulfil her narrative function). Maggie has an epiphany: the answer to her troubles is to become happy and good: “it flashed through her like the suddenly apprehended solution of a problem, that all the miseries of her young life had come from fixing her heart on her own pleasure as if that were the central necessity of the universe” (306). From the point of view of the parents, their daughter has become good because she has submitted to their will: “Her mother felt the change in her with a sort of puzzled wonder that Maggie should be ‘growing up so good’; it was amazing that this once ‘contrairy’ child was becoming so submissive, so backward to assert her own will” (309). To be good as a girl is to give up having a will of one’s own. The mother can thus

love the daughter who is becoming like furniture, who can support the family by staying in the background: “The mother was getting fond of her tall, brown girl, the only bit of furniture now in which she could bestow her anxiety and pride” (309).

It is as if Maggie has chosen between happiness and life, by giving up life for happiness: “‘I’ve been a great deal happier,’ she said at last timidly, ‘since I have given up thinking about what is easy and pleasant, and being discontented because I couldn’t have my own will. Our life is determined for us—and it makes the mind very free when we give up wishing and only think of bearing what is laid upon us and doing what is given us to do’” (317). Happiness is associated here with the renunciation of desire.¹² It is her friend Philip whom Maggie is addressing at this point. It is Philip who refuses to allow Maggie to give up her life for happiness in this way. He says impatiently: “‘But I can’t give up wishing . . . It seems to me that we can never give up longing and wishing while we are thoroughly alive’” (317).

It is Philip who loves Maggie for her aliveness, who gives her books that rekindle her sense of interest and curiosity about the world. He gives her one book that she cannot finish as she reads in this book the injustice of happiness, which is given to some and not others, those deemed worthy of love. “‘I didn’t finish the book,’ said Maggie. ‘As soon as I came to the blond-haired young girl reading in the park, I shut it up and determined to read no further. I foresaw that that light-complexioned girl would win away all the love from Corinne and make her miserable. I’m determined to read no more books where the blond-haired women carry away all the happiness. I should begin to have a prejudice against them. If you could give me some story, now, where the dark woman triumphs, it would restore the balance. I want to avenge Rebecca, and Flora MacIvor, and Minna, and all the rest of the dark unhappy ones’” (348–49). Exercising a racialized vocabulary, Maggie exposes how darkness becomes a form of unhappiness, as lacking the qualities deemed necessary for being given a happy ending.¹³ Maggie gives up on giving up her life for happiness by speaking out against the injustice of happiness and how it is given to some and not others.

The novel relies on contrasting the cousins Lucy and Maggie in terms of their capacity to be happy and dutiful. Maggie admits her unhappiness to Lucy: “One gets a bad habit of being unhappy” (389). For Lucy, being happy is a way

of not being trouble; she cannot live with the reality of getting into trouble: as she says, "I've always been happy. I don't know whether I could bear much trouble" (389). Happiness involves a way of avoiding what one cannot bear.

The climactic moment of the novel comes when Stephen, who is betrothed to Lucy, announces his desire for Maggie, who is swept away by it. She almost goes along with him but realizes that she cannot: "Many things are difficult and dark to me, but I see one thing quite clearly: that I must not, cannot, seek my own happiness by sacrificing others" (471). Maggie chooses duty as if without duty there would be only the inclination of the moment. As a good Kantian subject, she says: "If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie? We should have no law but the inclination of the moment" (499), to which Stephen replies, "But it weighs nothing with you that you are robbing me of *my* happiness" (500–501).¹⁴ By choosing duty, Maggie does not avoid causing unhappiness. She must pay for her moment of transgression. Having deviated from the path of happiness, she has fulfilled her destiny as trouble. As she says in one letter: "Oh God, is there any happiness in love that could make me forget *their* pain" (528). Death as a result of a natural disaster (a flood) thus liberates Maggie from the unhappy consequences of causing trouble, of deviating from the paths of happiness. The injustice of her loss of life is how the novel speaks against happiness, which itself is narrated as the renunciation of life, imagination, and desire.

Even if books like *The Mill on the Floss* seem to punish their heroines for their transgressions, they also evoke the injustice of happiness, showing what and whom happiness gives up. In giving up on those who seem to give up on happiness, happiness acquires its coherence. We could describe happiness quite simply as a convention, such that to deviate from the paths of happiness is to challenge convention. What is a convention? The word *convention* comes from the verb "to convene." To convene is to gather, to assemble, or to meet up. A convention is a point around which we gather. To follow a convention is to gather in the right way, to be assembled. Feminism gives time and space to women's desires that are not assembled around the reproduction of the family form. Feminists must thus be willing to cause disturbance. Feminists might even have to be willful. A subject would be described as willful at the point that her will does not coincide with that of others, those whose will is reified as the general or social will.¹⁵

The figure of the female troublemaker thus shares the same horizon with

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

In the thick sociality of everyday spaces, feminists are thus attributed as the origin of bad feeling, as the ones who ruin the atmosphere, which is how the atmosphere might be imagined (retrospectively) as shared. In order to get along, you have to participate in certain forms of solidarity: you have to laugh at the right points. Feminists are typically represented as grumpy and humorless, often as a way of protecting the right to certain forms of social bonding or of holding onto whatever is perceived to be under threat.¹⁶ Feminists don't even have to say anything to be read as killing joy. A feminist colleague says to me that she just has to open her mouth in meetings to witness eyes rolling as if to say “oh here she goes.”

My experience of being a feminist has taught me much about rolling eyes. This is why when people say the bad feeling is coming from this person or that person, I am never convinced. My skepticism comes from childhood experiences of being a feminist daughter in a relatively conventional family, always at odds with the performance of good feeling in the family, always assumed to be bringing others down, for example, by pointing out sexism in other people's talk. Say we are seated at the dinner table. Around this table, the family gathers, having polite conversations, where only certain things can be brought up. Someone says something that you consider problematic. You respond, carefully, perhaps. You might be speaking quietly; or you might be getting “wound up,” recognizing with frustration that you are being wound up by someone who is winding you up. The violence of what was said or the violence of provocation goes unnoticed. However she speaks, the feminist is usually the one who is viewed as “causing the argument,” who is disturbing the fragility of peace.

Let's take this figure of the feminist killjoy seriously. Does the feminist kill other people's joy by pointing out moments of sexism? Or does she expose the bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or negated under public signs of joy?

Does bad feeling enter the room when somebody expresses anger about things, or could anger be the moment when the bad feelings that circulate through objects get brought to the surface in a certain way? Feminist subjects might bring others down not only by talking about unhappy topics such as sexism but by exposing how happiness is sustained by erasing the very signs of not getting along. Feminists do kill joy in a certain sense: they disturb the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places. To kill a fantasy can still kill a feeling. It is not just that feminists might not be happily affected by the objects that are supposed to cause happiness but that their failure to be happy is read as sabotaging the happiness of others.

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

To be recognized as a feminist is to be assigned to a difficult category and a category of difficulty. You are “already read” as “not easy to get along with” when you name yourself as a feminist. You have to show that you are not difficult through displaying signs of good will and happiness. Frye alludes to such experiences when she observes that “this means, at the very least, that we may be found to be ‘difficult’ or unpleasant to work with, which is enough to cost one 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.¹⁷ This desire functions as a defense of happiness against feminist critique. This is not to say that feminists might not be

unhappy; we might be unhappy after all with this representation of feminism as caused by unhappiness. My point here would be that feminists are read as being unhappy, such that situations of conflict, violence, and power are read as *about* the unhappiness of feminists, rather than being what feminists are unhappy *about*.

Of course, within feminism, some bodies more than others can be attributed as the cause of unhappiness. We can place the figure of the feminist killjoy alongside the figure of the angry black woman,¹⁸ explored so well by writers such as Audre Lorde (1984) and bell hooks (2000). The angry black woman can be described as a killjoy; she may even kill feminist joy, for example, by pointing out forms of racism within feminist politics. She might not even have to make any such point to kill joy. You can be affectively alien because you are affected in the wrong way by the right things. Or you can be affectively alien because you affect others in the wrong way: your proximity gets in the way of other people's enjoyment of the right things, functioning as an unwanted reminder of histories that are disturbing, that disturb an atmosphere. Listen to the following description from bell hooks: "A group of white feminist activists who do not know one another may be present at a meeting to discuss feminist theory. They may feel they are bonded on the basis of shared womanhood, but the atmosphere will noticeably change when a woman of color enters the room. The white women will become tense, no longer relaxed, no longer celebratory" (56).

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

To speak out of anger as a woman of color is to confirm your position as the

cause of tension; your anger is what threatens the social bond. As Audre Lorde describes: “When women of Color speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with white women, we are often told that we are ‘creating a mood of helplessness,’ ‘preventing white women from getting past guilt,’ or ‘standing in the way of trusting communication and action’” (1984: 131). The exposure of violence becomes the origin of violence. The woman of color must let go of her anger for the white woman to move on.

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

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

Power speaks here in this moment of hesitation. Do you go along with it? What does it mean not to go along with it? To create awkwardness is to be read as being awkward. Maintaining public comfort requires that certain bodies “go

along with it.” To refuse to go along with it, to refuse the place in which you are placed, is to be seen as trouble, as causing discomfort for others. There is a political struggle about how we attribute good and bad feelings, which hesitates around the apparently simple question of who introduces what feelings to whom. Feelings can get stuck to certain bodies in the very way we describe spaces, situations, dramas. And bodies can get stuck depending on what feelings they get associated with.

Consciousness and Unhappiness

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

This is not to say that feminism makes women happy. It is simply that feminism by refusing to go along with public displays of happiness can participate in the widening of horizons in which it is possible to find things. Feminism

does not guarantee what we will find through this expansion of bodily horizons. It simply opens up the places where we can look. The fact that any such opening is read as a sign of hostility, or of killing other people's joy, tells us something. The public investment in happiness is an investment in a very particular and narrow model of the good; being happy requires a commitment to find what Firestone brilliantly describes as a "narrow difficult-to-find alley" of human experience.

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

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

had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” ([1925] 1953: 14).

Becoming Mrs. Dalloway is itself a form of disappearance: to follow the paths of life (marriage, reproduction) is to feel that what is before you is a kind of solemn progress, as if you are living somebody else’s life, simply going the same way others are going. It is as if you have left the point of life behind you, as if your life is going through motions that were already in motion before you even arrived. As I argued in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), for a life to count as a good life, it must take on the direction promised as a social good, which means imagining one’s futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course. If happiness is what allows us to reach certain points, it is not necessarily how you feel when you get there. For Mrs. Dalloway, to reach these points is to disappear. The point of reaching these points seems to be a certain disappearance, a loss of possibility, a certain failure to make use of the body’s capacities, to find out what it is that her body can do.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ The sadness of the book—and it is a sad book—is not one expressed as a point of view. Instead, each sentence of the book takes thoughts and feelings as if they are objects in a shared world: the streets of London, the very oddness of the occasion of passing others by, a feeling of that oddness. Sometimes it can feel like a coincidence, how one coincides with others. To say “it is just a coincidence” can create the impression that the absence of a causal relation between events is the absence of any connection. But feeling a coincidence might mean recognizing that to fall in the same time and place as others, to happen with others or to happen upon others, is a kind of connection. As Clarissa goes out with her task in mind (she has to buy her flowers for her party), she walks into a world with others. You might be in your world (with your own tasks, your own recollections) and yet you share the world of the street, if only for a moment, a fleeting moment, a moment that flees. Things appear as modes of attention: the plane above that writes letters in the sky, the plane that is seen by those

who pass each other by. Questions unfold as shared questions: What letter is that? What word is that? “What are they looking at?” said Clarissa Dalloway” (42). It is as if the mere direction of a glance is enough to create a shared world. Although each brings to the street a certain kind of moodiness, a preoccupation with this or with that, the street itself can become moody, when an object grabs attention, like the plane that creates words in the sky above, although for each person who looks up, what is seen might be quite different.

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

Clarissa and Septimus, as characters who do not meet, thus achieve an odd intimacy: the not-just-private suffering of the housewife and the not-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, as they pass by on the street. And yet something is shared, perhaps those very things that cannot simply be revealed. Clarissa, thinking of her “odd affinities” with strangers “she had never spoken to,” sits on the bus and wonders whether the “unseen part of us” might provide a point of attachment to others and might even be how we survive through others, “perhaps—perhaps” (231–32).

It is Septimus’s wife, Rezia, whose musings reflect most directly on the difficulty of experiencing emotions that are simply revealed to proximate others. Rezia is so anxious to reveal her own unhappiness that she “almost felt some-

times that she must stop people in the street, if they looked like good, kind, kind people just to say to them ‘I am unhappy’” (125). She is conscious of how her feelings and Septimus’s feelings cannot simply be revealed to passers by: “was there, after all, anything to draw attention to them, anything to make a passer-by suspect here is a young man who carries in him the greatest message in the world, and is, moreover, the happiest man in the world, and the most miserable?” (126). To inhabit a feeling world does not create a world out of feeling.

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

If Mrs. Dalloway is distracted from the causes of unhappiness by the party (and we can have some sympathy with the necessity of distractions), the party is also the event in which unhappiness comes to life. For Mrs. Dalloway, her party is life; it is how she can make things happen; it a gift, a happening (185). What happens? That this question is a question is a preservation of the gift. And something does happen. For it is in the party that Septimus’s life “touches” Mrs. Dalloway most directly. It touches her through death. Lady Bradshaw says to her: “‘Just as we were starting, my husband was called up on the telephone, a very sad case. A young man (that is what Sir William is telling Mr. Dallo-

way) had killed himself. He had been in the army.' Oh! Thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought" (279). In the middle of the party, words accumulate as a narrative, telling the story of a death. A young man kills himself, and the death itself (and not just the narrating of the death) takes place in the middle of the party, in the middle of the life of the party. The soul of the party is death. The reader has already read about this death; we have witnessed it. Now, we witness the ripples of this death; how it acquires a life of its own, how it takes place somewhere in the middle. For Mrs. Dalloway, this death becomes something to imagine, to bring to life by thought:

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

She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away. They went on living (she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming). They (all day she has been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (280–81)

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

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

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

The arrival of suffering from the edges of social consciousness might teach us about the difficulty of becoming conscious of suffering or teach us about our own resistances to recognizing those seemingly “little” uneasy feelings of loss or dissatisfaction as unhappiness with one’s life. The party might expose the need to keep busy, to keep going in the face of one’s disappearance. So much sadness revealed in the very need to be busy. So much grief expressed in the need not to be overwhelmed by grief. It is hard labor just to recognize sadness and disappointment, when you are living a life that is meant to be happy but just isn’t, which is meant to be full, but feels empty. It is difficult to give up an idea of one’s life, when one has lived a life according to that idea. To recognize loss can mean to be willing to experience an intensification of the sadness that hopefulness postpones.²¹

To inherit feminism can mean to inherit sadness. There is sadness in becoming conscious not only of gender as the restriction of possibility, but also of how this restriction is not necessary. After all, we have inherited the book *Mrs. Dalloway*; we have passed the book around, and the book itself has passed into other cultural forms.²² Take the film *The Hours* (2002, dir. Stephen Daldry), based on Michael Cunningham’s novel *The Hours* (1998), which takes its title from Woolf’s original title for *Mrs. Dalloway*. *The Hours* places three generations of women alongside each other and follows their life on a single day: we have a fictionalized account of a day in the life of Virginia Woolf (Nicole Kidman); of Laura Brown (Julianne Moore), an unhappy housewife living in the 1950s as she bakes a cake and reads *Mrs. Dalloway*; and of Clarissa Vaughan (Meryl Streep), who is organizing a party like Mrs. Dalloway, this time for her former lover and friend Richard (Ed Harris), who is dying of AIDS.

Mrs. Dalloway the novel is inherited by *The Hours* in multiple ways; we inherit the lost name of the book, the book itself. *The Hours* also mimics the book: following its orientation, its directionality in time, by depicting a whole life in a single day. The film attends closely to gestures which bind each generation to the figure of Mrs. Dalloway: Clarissa, for instance, begins her day by saying she will get the flowers for the party. The gestures or tasks of the everyday become forms of inheritance.

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

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

What happens when domestic bliss does not create bliss? Laura tries to bake a cake. She cracks an egg. The cracking of the egg becomes a thematic gesture throughout the film, connecting the domestic labor of women over time. To bake a cake ought to be a happy endeavor, a labor of love. Instead, the film reveals a sense of oppression that lingers in the very act of breaking the eggs. If, as I suggested in the last chapter, happiness creates its own horizon, as a horizon of likes, then it is possible to be surrounded by likes that are not your own, and by promises that haunt you in their emptiness. Not only do such objects

not cause your happiness but they may remind you of your failure to be made happy; they embody a feeling of disappointment. The bowl in which you crack the eggs waits for you. You can feel the pressure of its wait. The empty bowl feels like an accusation. Feminist archives are full of scenes of domesticity in which domestic objects, happy objects, become alien, even menacing.

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

We might say, why not leave his happiness for another kind of happiness, a happiness that could be called her own? Couldn't we understand the creativity of feminism, its potentiality for generating new horizons, as giving us alternative ideas of happiness? Perhaps what is revealed in Laura's sadness is how happiness is saturated by its own history becoming too hard to separate from an idea, from an idea her husband has for her. For Laura, to leave happiness is to leave everything behind her; it is to cause unhappiness for those who are left behind, an unhappiness which is inherited by her child, who, we learn by the end of the film, is Richard. And it is Clarissa who in *The Hours* cares for Richard and attends to his unhappiness, who has to pick up the pieces of the happiness that Laura has shattered. Clarissa: who ends up (like Mrs. Dalloway) organizing a party for her friend, worrying (like Mrs. Dalloway) that her parties are trivial. Clarissa (like Mrs. Dalloway) tries desperately not to be sad; to use the happy occasion of the party, its celebration of Richard's award of the Carrouthers Prize for poetry, to stop herself thinking about the sadness of his imminent death; to avoid being overwhelmed by grief.

The film might in its dramatization of the unhappiness caused by Laura, the woman who cannot bear the idea of happiness, withdraw its sympathy from her plight. I think it does. Perhaps we can learn from this withdrawal of sympathy. If the one who leaves happiness must cause unhappiness to those who are left behind, then she must refuse to be sympathetic: she must not return feeling with like feeling (happiness with happiness, love with love) if she is to escape from the very obligation to return. In other words, to give up happiness is to become unsympathetic. That Laura's act is only narratable as extreme, even as violence, as the cause of suffering that cannot be repaired, shows us just how hard it can be to give up on the idea of happiness because that idea is also bound up with the impulse to care for the happiness of others. There are, I think we know, many who stay in situations of unhappiness out of fear of causing unhappiness, out of fear of losing sympathy, of becoming unsympathetic.

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

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

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

Consciousness and Racism

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

view of those who should be happy because they have what promises happiness but instead of those who are already imagined as being unhappy, as lacking the very qualities and attributes that would make a life good.

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

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

The story of the novel is the story of what happens to the Breedloves, violence, despair, and misery being what follows being not. The novel offers us different narrators, beginning with the sisters Claudia and Frieda, before switching to the Breedloves: the mother Pauline, the father Cholly, and their daughter Pecola. In a way, the novel is the story of the unhappiness inherited by Pecola, who is raped by her father and who loses her child, an unwanted black

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

Our first narrator, Claudia, learns to notice that this earth might be unyielding. Claudia expresses rage at the world that asks her to love in a certain way: "It had begun with Christmas and the gift of dolls. The big, the special, the loving gift was always a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll. From the clucking sounds of adults I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish. . . . which were supposed to bring me great pleasure, succeeded in doing quite the opposite. . . . Traced the turned-up nose, poked the glassy-blue eyes, twisted the yellow hair. I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable. . . . I destroyed white baby dolls" (13–15). By not experiencing pleasure in the right way, toward the right things, she must destroy things, transferring her hatred and rage from white baby dolls to white baby girls. To hate what is loved is to recognize your alienation from the beloved.²⁶

In contrast, Pecola, in wanting happiness, wants what is attributed as the cause of happiness: the bluest eyes. For Pecola: "Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. . . . It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different" (34). In the following paragraph we

return to the picture-book family: “*Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes. Run, Jip, run. Jip runs. Alice runs. Alice has blue eyes. Jerry has blue eyes. Jerry runs. Alice runs. They run with their blue eyes. Four blue eyes*” (34). The desire for blue eyes is the desire not to be not white; the double negative does not amount to a positive.

This is a bleak novel, bleak as it shows us that the consequences of unhappiness can be more unhappiness.²⁷ To be conscious of unhappiness is to be conscious of being “not,” or of being “un,” as lacking the qualities or attributes of happiness. To be not happy is to be not in the eyes of others, in the world of whiteness, which is the world as it coheres around white bodies. Consciousness of “being not” involves self-estrangement: you recognize yourself as the stranger. Note that consciousness is already worldly if you are the one whose arrival disturbs an atmosphere. To recognize yourself as the stranger is to become conscious of the violence directed toward you. Audre Lorde dramatizes how becoming conscious of being a stranger involves a retrospective renaming of apparently random events as racism:

Tensions on the street were high, as they always are in racially mixed zones of transition. As a very little girl, I remember shrinking from a particular sound, a hoarsely sharp, guttural rasp, because it often meant a nasty glob of grey spittle upon my coat or shoe an instant later. My mother wiped it off with the little pieces of newspaper she always carried in her purse. Sometimes she 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. (1982: 17–18)

An event happens. And it happens again. The violence is directed from the white body to the black child, who receives that violence by shrinking, shrinking away from its sound. But the mother cannot bear to speak of racism and creates an impression that the violence is random. Racism is a pain that is hard

to bear. Consciousness of racism becomes retrospective, and the question of its timing does matter. You learn not to see racism as a way of bearing the pain. To see racism, you have to un-see the world as you learned to see it, the world that covers unhappiness, by covering over its cause. You have to be willing to venture into secret places of pain.

Some forms of “taking cover” from pain—from not naming the causes of pain in the hope that it will go away—are to protect those we love from being hurt, or even to protect ourselves from hurt, or are at least meant as a form of protection. If happiness does provide a way of “taking cover,” it is not always offered to protect us from hurt. It can also work to conceal the causes of hurt or to make others *the cause of their own hurt*. In *The Cancer Journals*, Audre Lorde offers a powerful critique of the politics of happiness. She writes as a black lesbian feminist who is experiencing breast cancer: Lorde never refuses the power of “writing as” nor assumes it can abbreviate an experience. Faced with medical discourse that attributes cancer to unhappiness and survival or coping to being happy or optimistic, she suggests: “Looking on the bright side of things is a euphemism used for obscuring certain realities of life, the open consideration of which might prove threatening or dangerous to the status quo” (1997: 76). To obscure or to take cover by looking on the bright side is to avoid what might threaten the world as it is. Lorde moves from this observation to a wider critique of happiness as an obscurant: “Let us seek ‘joy’ rather than real food and clean air and a saner future on a liveable earth! As if happiness alone can protect us from the results of profit-madness” (76). Lorde suggests that the very idea that our first responsibility is for our own happiness must be resisted by political struggle, which means resisting the idea that our own resistance is a failure to be responsible for happiness: “Was I really fighting the spread of radiation, racism, woman-slaughter, chemical invasion of our food, pollution of our environment, the abuse and psychic destruction of our young, merely to avoid dealing with my first and greatest responsibility to be happy?” (77).²⁸ I think Audre Lorde has given us the answer to her question.

We can now see how you can retrieve a model of false consciousness in critiquing claims to happiness. You would not be saying “you are wrong, you are not happy, you just think you are as you have a false belief.” Rather you would be saying there is something false about our consciousness of the world; we learn not to be conscious, not to see what happens right in front of us. Happiness provides as it were a cover, a way of covering over what resists or is re-

sistant to a view of the world, or a worldview, as harmonious. It is not that an individual person suffers from false consciousness but that we inherit a certain false consciousness when we learn to see and not to see things in a certain way.²⁹

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

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

One of the best literary descriptions of how consciousness of racism puts you in a different world is offered in Andrea Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999). The novel tells the story of Faith Jackson, a black British girl whose parents migrated to England from Jamaica. She is getting along with her life, doing her own thing. She moves out of home, into a share house with her white friends. Her parents let her go: "Ah Faith, what can we do with you? You just go your own sweet way,' my parents had decided a long time before. 'Your own sweet way'" (19). I will return to this idea of the children of immigrant families being

allowed to go on their “own sweet way” in chapter 4. What follows here is a powerful description of a girl experiencing blackness, as something that jolts her consciousness and puts her into a different world.

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

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

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

woman shouts to be heard. And in shouting, the black woman is the one who becomes the origin of bad feeling. So it is she who must leave. Although she returns, she has been undone. She cannot look at her friends; she cannot bear her own reflection in the mirror, as if what the mirror reflects back to her, her black face, is something she can now see and thus can no longer bear. How can one be disturbed by one's own arrival? The familiar is that which recedes to those who inhabit it. To become estranged from the familiar is thus to have it revealed to you. The familiar is disclosed in the revelation of your estrangement. You learn to see yourself as you are seen by those who can inhabit the familiar, because they can recede into its form as Frantz Fanon demonstrated so powerfully in *Black Skin, White Masks* ([1952] 1986).

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

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

In calling for us to recognize how feminist politics involves killing joy, I am

also asking us to turn back, to return to feminist histories, as a history of those who have struggled against happiness. I am thus uncertain what it means to call for a more affirmative feminism in our present time.³⁰ Rosi Braidotti has suggested that the focus on negativity has become a problem within feminism. She offers a rather bleak reading of bleakness: “I actively yearn for a more joyful and empowering concept of desire and for a political economy that foregrounds positivity, not gloom” (2002: 57). The call for affirmation *rather* than negativity in her work involves an explicit turn to happiness. As she argues: “I consider happiness a political issue, as are well-being, self-confidence and a sense of empowerment. These are fundamentally ethical concerns. . . . The feminist movement has played the historical role of placing these items at the centre of the social and political agenda: happiness as a fundamental human right and hence a political question” (2006a: 230). My desire is to revitalize the feminist critique of happiness as a human right and as the appropriate language for politics.

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