

The wise man, knowing how to enjoy achieved results without having constantly to replace them with others, finds in them an attachment to life in the hour of difficulty. But the man who has always pinned all his hopes on the future and lived with his eyes fixed upon it, has nothing in the past as a comfort against the present's afflictions, for the past was nothing to him but a series of hastily experienced stages. What blinded him to himself was his expectation always to find further on the happiness he had so far missed. Now he is stopped in his tracks; from now on nothing remains behind or ahead of him to fix his gaze upon. ÉMILE DURKHEIM



CHAPTER FIVE

Happy Futures

TO PIN HOPES ON THE FUTURE is to imagine happiness as what lies ahead of us. For Durkheim an attachment to the future would mean to be missing something, unable to experience the past or the present as something other than hasty, as something we have to get through, rush through, in order to be somewhere else. When happiness is before us, we might even be stopped on our tracks. I have also focused throughout this book on the futurity of happiness, how happiness offers us a promise, which we glimpse in the unfolding of the present. The desire for happiness sends happy objects forth, creating lines and pathways in their trail, as if we might find happiness by following these paths.

It does not follow that we can simply collapse happiness with the future or into the future. The future after all can be imagined in ways that are far from happy: if we feel we have lost the possibility of happiness, if we feel we have lost hope that we might find happiness somewhere along the way, then the future will embody that loss of possibility. So too happiness can be imagined as past, as being what we once had, as being what we have lost in arriving somewhere, or even what we have given up so others can get somewhere. Nostalgic and promissory forms of happiness belong under the same horizon, insofar as

they imagine happiness as being somewhere other than where we are in the present. And when happiness is present, it can recede, becoming anxious, becoming the thing that we could lose in the unfolding of time. When happiness is present, we can become defensive, such that we retreat with fear from anything or anyone that threatens to take our happiness away.

But can we simply give up our attachment to thinking about happier futures or the future of happiness? Queer theorists have been the most vocal in refusing to affirm the future, refusing to embrace the future in a politics of affirmation. Lee Edelman, in his provocatively titled *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, writes: “Rather than rejecting, with liberal discourse, this ascription of negativity to queer, we might, as I argue, do better to consider accepting and even embracing it. Not in the hope of forging thereby some more perfect social order—such a hope, after all, would only reproduce the constraining mandate of futurism, just as any order would equally occasion the negativity of the queer—but rather to refuse the insistence of hope itself as affirmation, which is always an affirmation of an order whose refusal will register as unthinkable, irresponsible, inhumane” (2004: 4). For Edelman, queer theory must be hopeless, must have “no future,” which means saying no to the future.¹ To affirm an order might be to define and regulate what is thinkable in advance of thought.

In response to Edelman’s polemic, I want to take seriously the question of whether all forms of political hope, all forms of optimism as well as utopianism, all dreams of “some more perfect order,” can be described as performing the logic of futurism, which in turn would require negativity to be located in those who cannot inherit this future. And yet Edelman is still affirming something in the act of refusing affirmation. I find something rather optimistic and hopeful about Edelman’s polemic, where hope rests on the possibility opened up by inhabiting the negative. Michael D. Snediker has suggested that the queer embrace of negativity might be “optimistically motivated” (2009: 15). Snediker argues for a “queer optimism,” which would not be an optimism of an ordinary sort. For Snediker, “Queer optimism cannot guarantee what such a happiness would look like, how such happiness would feel. And while it does not promise a road to an Emerald City, *Queer Optimism* avails a new terrain of critical enquiry, which seems a felicity in its own right” (30). Happiness becomes interesting for queer optimists. Snediker argues that rather than presuming the normativity of happiness, we could imagine happiness as “theoretically

mobilizable, as conceptually difficult.” He asks, “What if happiness weren’t merely, self-reflexively happy, but interesting?” (30).

I agree: happiness is interesting. The more I follow the word *happiness* around, the more it captures my interest. We can still recognize the significance of queer pessimism as an alien affect: a queer politics which refuses to organize its hope for happiness around the figure of the child or other tropes for reproductivity and survival is already alienated from the present. Queer pessimism matters as a pessimism *about* a certain kind of optimism, as a refusal to be optimistic about “the right things” in the right kind of way.² Certain forms of political negativity are read as stubbornness or as a way of being stuck. We learned about this dynamic from the figure of the melancholic migrant who is read as holding on to something that has already gone in the very act of noticing racism as going on and ongoing. Indeed the very act of recognizing injustice in the present is read as a theft of optimism, a killing of joy, a failure to move on or to put certain histories behind us. Queer pessimism becomes interesting as an alien affect, although to become pessimistic as a matter of principle is to risk being optimistic about pessimism itself.

Snediker is right to point out that queer affirmations of negativity are not simply negative. To embrace the negative or to say yes to a no cannot be described as a purely negative gesture. To affirm negation is still an affirmation, which could reinstitute a certain yes as the proper signifier of queer politics, even as a yes to what’s not (see Ahmed 2006: 175). I am tempted to call this move “being for being against.” My response to the affirmation of negation would not be to affirm or negate affirmation in return but to ask for a different orientation to what is being or not being affirmed. Rather than affirming positive or negative affects, my task throughout this book has been to read how positive and negative affects are distributed and how this distribution is pedagogic—we learn about affect by reading about the how of its distribution. In this chapter, I want to think about the redistribution of affect that is possible in the achievement of what we can call “revolutionary consciousnesses” and how this redistribution takes time and animates our relationship to time. Forms of political consciousness must be achieved, as György Lukács taught us in *History and Class Consciousness* (1971). It is important not to individuate such an achievement but to recognize the role of collective labor in the process of becoming conscious of class, race, and gendered forms of oppression, which involves a necessary estrangement from the present.

We can explore the strange and perverse mixtures of hope and despair, optimism and pessimism within forms of politics that take as a starting point a critique of the world as it is, and a belief that the world can be different. I will do so by offering a consideration of dystopian forms, including what I call happiness dystopias. Why dystopia? Why not utopia, which seems to rest as a form more explicitly on visions of happy futures? Of course, utopias cannot be reduced to happy futures. As Jean Baudrillard argues, “Utopia does not write itself into the future. It is always, from right now, what the order of the day is missing” ([2001] 2006: 62). Fredric Jameson agrees, suggesting that utopias do not present us with happy images of an after-this-life: “This is why it is a mistake to approach Utopias with positive expectations, as though they offered visions of happy worlds” (2005: 12). The utopian form is a testimony to the possibility of an alternative and involves hope in the very mode of its negative critique. Indeed, Jameson argues that “the Utopian form itself is the answer to the universal ideological conviction that no alternative is possible” (232). The utopian form might not make the alternative possible, but it aims to make impossible the belief that there is no alternative.

Jameson’s most powerful argument is about the need to reorientate our affective relation to the future. He argues that “we need to develop an anxiety about losing the future” (233). In this chapter, I offer readings of dystopian forms insofar as they take as a starting point the possibility that the future might be something we have already lost—this is not a vision only of an unhappy future but the possibility of no future at all, where no future is not conceived as unhappiness (which would be predicated on the survival of a subject) but no hap, no chance, no possibility. I want to think about what it means for happiness to depend on there being a future, as a dependence that enables a certain anxiety about the possibility of its loss. I offer a rereading of some classic expressions of pessimism and optimism in philosophy (Schopenhauer and Leibniz), alongside an analysis of affective orientations toward the future in the film *Children of Men* (2006, dir. Alfonso Cuarón), based on the novel by P. D. James (1993). The film is premised on the belief that we are not anxious enough about losing the future, showing us not only that a future can be lost but also that we will lose the future if we don’t think of the future as something that can be lost. I want to think with this film, in order to think more about how political struggle might struggle with the future, as a struggle over happiness, in the recognition that the future might be a time of loss.

The film's dystopic vision is of global infertility: no future means no children. It seems to rest, as does James's novel, which Lee Edelman rightly critiques, on reproductive futurism, by placing its hope for redemption in the remarkability of the birth of a child.³ I want to suggest that if we read the film purely in these terms we will be missing something about its rather awkward temporalities. This film is certainly an event in which the future unfolds as a question in the present. When released on DVD, it included a number of interviews with prominent academics, including Slavoj Žižek and Saskia Sassen, who focus in their commentaries on the contemporary politics of despair, hope, utopia, and fear, with specific reference to the politics of immigration, security, and environmental catastrophe. In the film, the hero, a habitual pessimist, is Theo (Clive Owen); his life is awful and he does not care about anything, embodying the very affective situation of a world without a future. But Theo gets drawn into caring for something; he is the subject of an appeal by his former wife Julian (Julianne Moore), a member of the revolutionary group the Fishes. They have discovered that a refugee girl named Kee (Clare-Hope Ashitey) is pregnant, and Theo has to get her to a boat called *Tomorrow*, so that she can join a utopian project, the Human Project. The story of the film is the story of their journey. The nightmare in the film is predicated on an explicitly political vision of an unjust present: a world where foreigners and refugees are considered and treated as aliens, and where the pollution of the environment involves the treatment of others as pollutants. I want to offer a reading of the film in order to explore the role of despair and hope in the struggle for a "tomorrow," and what it means to be fighting for the future when "today" seems so hopeless.

Alienation and Revolutionary Consciousness

I have written in this book about "affect aliens": affect aliens are those who are alienated by virtue of how they are affected by the world or how they affect others in the world. How does alienation relate to the possibility of revolutionary consciousness? Can we even speak of revolutionary consciousness today? Of course, it is a much-repeated assertion that history itself has made the very concept of a political revolution impossible: the failure of communism to deliver its promise of an alternative future has been read as evidence of the impossibility of any other future but global capitalism. But that's too easy: there is

too much evidence of the failure of global capitalism to deliver its own promise of the good life to the populations of the world for it to become evidence of the impossibility of alternatives. We learn much from how the very idea of alternatives to global capitalism comes across as silliness.⁴ David Graeber argues in his phenomenological anthropology of anarchism that “faced with anything that remotely resembles creative, nonalienated experience, it tends to look as ridiculous as a deodorant commercial during a time of national disaster” (2007: 410). The silly or ridiculous nature of alternatives teaches us not about the nature of those alternatives but about just how threatening it can be to imagine alternatives to a system that survives by grounding itself in inevitability.

It is important to say here that consciousness does not simply turn people into revolutionaries—such a statement would constitute a form of idealism, refuting the urgency of a Marxist inheritance. What I want to describe is how a failure of consciousness, a false consciousness about the world, is what blocks other possible worlds, as a blockage that makes possibles impossible, such that possibles are lost before they can be lived, experienced, or imagined. It is important to note here that false consciousness was not a term used by Marx. As Joseph McCarney points out, the first written reference to “false consciousness” appears in a letter from Engels: “Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process. Hence he imagines false or seeming motive forces” (cited in McCarney 2005: n.p.). In this reference, false consciousness is used to describe the impossibility of the bourgeoisie knowing their own motives, knowing the coincidence between their beliefs and their interests. Conscious beliefs are ideology; they support interests through the withdrawal of the interested nature of such beliefs from consciousness. We might assume that the idea of “false consciousness” depends upon false/true dichotomies that are no longer viable—such an assumption is so pervasive that the very phrase “false consciousness” seems at best dated. But as I suggested in chapter 2, there are grounds for revitalizing this concept given that we do not have to assume that consciousness is what belongs to an individual subject. Consciousness might be about how the social is arranged through the sharing of deceptions that precede the arrival of subjects. As Lukács describes so well, “The veil drawn over the nature of bourgeois society is indispensable to the

bourgeois itself” (1971: 66). The veil may participate in the reproduction of the social order by covering over the reproduction of the order.

The key might not be so much the distinction between truth and falsity but the role of falsity in the reproduction of the truth. In other words, consciousness is false because it fails to coincide with itself, which is what allows a certain order to be reproduced, defining the horizon of intelligibility or truth. Reproduction might depend then on the failure to recognize the failure of coincidence. To become conscious of the order is not to coincide with oneself in the sense of acquiring true consciousness or consciousness of the truth. The revolutionary might simply witness the failure of coincidence; the veil is not unveiled to reveal the truth; the veil is revealed, which is a revelation that must be partial and flawed.⁵

The recognition of the failure of coincidence is another way of talking about becoming conscious of the falsity of consciousness, and of the interested nature of social belief. How are such forms of recognition linked to alienation? Let’s turn to Marx’s early work on alienation. Marx following Hegel makes labor key to an understanding of human practice. Dirk J. Struik describes in his introduction to *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* how the labor process is that “process of concrete, living man in creating his existence in daily practice, where he breathes and eats and loves and suffers” (1964: 41). The human being is sensuous and worldly; human needs require interaction with the environment, such that the environment provides more than a dwelling space (food to eat, air to breathe) as well as interaction with others, with whom we can create an existence. Man as an “objective, sensuous being is therefore a *suffering* being—and because he feels what he suffers, a *passionate* being. Passion is the essential force of man energetically bent on its object” (Marx [1844] 1964: 182).

Workers are estranged from what they make, giving their energy to the object of labor, which is then taken away, becoming commodity: “the worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him, but to the object” (106). For Marx, this process of alienation, where workers become alienated from themselves, is described as simultaneously “the loss of an object” and a “bondage to it” (106). In other words, the worker is bound to a lost object: capitalism as such might rest on melancholia. The worker “does not feel content but unhappy” (110). Marx describes the worker as a form of “*living capital*” and therefore “a capital *with needs*” (120). To be living capital is

described as a form of “misfortune” (120). The appropriation of labor makes the worker suffer; the more the worker works, the more the worker produces, the more the worker suffers. Alienation is both an alienation from the products of one’s labor—a kind of self-estrangement—and a feeling-structure, a form of suffering that shapes how the worker inhabits the world. Workers suffer from the loss of connection to themselves given that the world they have created is an extension of themselves, an extension that is appropriated.

Consciousness of alienation involves both recognition of suffering and recognition of what produces that suffering. To become conscious of alienation is to become conscious of how one’s being has been stolen. It is not simply to become alienated from the world but to become conscious of how alienation is already, as it were, in the world. One becomes alienated from one’s alienation. We can describe this “double alienation” by considering anticolonial forms of revolutionary consciousness. Let’s turn to Frantz Fanon’s classic *The Wretched of the Earth* ([1961] 2001). Fanon describes how it is that natives take up their arms and revolt against the colonizer, which means revolting against the colonizer’s world. How is such action possible? For Fanon, natives can only revolt through consciousness: natives must first become conscious of the colonizer’s world as an alien world before they can take arms. But this does not mean becoming conscious of the colonizers as alien beings, or as foreigners or impostors. Rather it means “seeing through” the native’s own alienation, which has been managed as a perception into an unrecognizable truth: “Thus the native discovers that his life, his breath, his beating heart and the same as those of the settler. He finds out that the settler’s skin is not of any more value than a native’s skin; and it must be said this discovery *shakes the world in a very necessary manner*” (35; emphasis added). The native’s alienation is an alienation from the alienation that guaranteed acceptance of a subordinate place. The world “shakes.” The native recognizes in this second alienation that he is not the alien he thought he was, and this consciousness returns him to the very recognition of his living body as no more or no less alive than the body of the colonizer. He recognizes that his life has been stolen, and he recognizes the theft of life by turning to life. The body that breathes refuses to be made alien; this, as a result, demands and requires action against those who stole his life.

If, as I discussed in the last chapter, colonial occupation is justified through a utilitarian discourse of happiness, then the native is alienated not only from

life but from the good life. The violence of the native *responds to this very appeal to the good*: “But it so happens that when the native hears a speech about Western culture he pulls out his knife—or at least he makes sure it is within reach” (33). The native hears the violence of the words “Western culture” as a form of violence that is softened under the veil of kindness and responds to this violence *in kind*. The violence of revolution requires violence against not only those who occupy but also the very values and manners that domesticated otherness as relative proximity. To undo the violence of such a history the native must expose the violence and channel himself against it: “But let us return to that atmosphere of violence, that violence which is just under the skin. We have seen that in its process towards maturity many leads are attached to it, to control it and show it the way out. Yet in spite of the metamorphoses which the colonial regime imposes upon it in the way or tribal of regional quarrels, that violence makes its way forward, and the native identifies his enemy and *recognizes all his misfortunes*, throwing all the exacerbated might of his hate and anger into this new channel” (55–56; emphasis added). The wretched of the earth expose the wretchedness of the earth. The wretches direct their anger and hatred toward the world that deems them wretched. The recognition of the wretched is revolutionary. It involves recognition that wretchedness is not an inevitable consequence of being in a certain way but is an effect of the occupation and violence of the colonizer. Misfortune and unhappiness are caused. To recognize suffering—to recognize that one has been *made an alien*, which also means recognizing that one is not that which one has been made—is here to recognize its cause. To recognize suffering by recognizing the cause of suffering is thus part of the revolutionary cause. False consciousness is that which sustains an affective situation (the workers and the natives suffer) but misrecognizes the cause, such that the misrecognition allows the cause to “cause” suffering.

It is no accident that revolutionary consciousness means feeling at odds with the world, or feeling that the world is odd. You become estranged from the world as it has been given: the world of good habits and manners, which promises your comfort in return for obedience and good will. As a structure of feeling, alienation is an intense burning presence; it is a feeling that takes place before others, from whom one is alienated, and can feel like a weight that both holds you down and keeps you apart. You shift, drop your head, sweat, feel edgy and uncertain. Everything presses against you; you feel against the

world and the world feels against you. You are no longer well adjusted: you cannot adjust to the world. The revolutionary is an affect alien in this specific sense. You do not flow; you are stressed; you experience the world as a form of resistance in coming to resist a world.

As I discussed in the introduction to this book, in positive psychology, the flow experience is the optimum positive psychic reality. For the stressed subject, your being is “out” as you are out of time. As Charlotte Bloch describes, “Common features of the descriptions of stress experiences were the contesting of our being in time, an expression of reality as resistance, an experience of other people as barriers, contesting of the taken-for-granted experience of the embodied self” (2002: 107). So while “flow connotes qualities of effortlessness and fluidity,” Bloch suggests that “stress connotes qualities as strain and resistance” (101). If we think of revolution and affect, we might notice that flow and stress are distributed and redistributable: you can be stressed by a world in which you flowed, which you experienced as compliant and easy, by the very act of noticing that world as a world. Indeed, revolutionary consciousness might be possible only as a willingness to be stressed, to let the present get under your skin. To revolt is an “out-of-skin” experience.

If revolutionary action requires a will to be stressed, then it also entails a refusal of what Herbert Marcuse calls “a *happy consciousness* which facilitates acceptance of the misdeeds of this society” ([1964] 2002: 79). Of course, it is important that we do not produce a heroic model of the unhappy revolutionary whose suffering is a gift to the world. You can be unhappy as a way of doing nothing; unhappiness as a belief can be a way of holding on to the present by roaming across objects with a certain indifference (you are unhappy with everything, which anticipates any one thing, so that are unhappy with something before anything happens).⁶ I want to turn here to the film *Children of Men*, which does offer us an image of revolutionaries, the Fishes, who are presented as irrational subjects “fixated” on a certain truth. In the film, the revolutionaries whose motto is “The Fishes are at war with the government until they recognize equal rights for every immigrant in Britain” are shown as committing acts of “senseless violence,” even though their cause seems just. It is as if what they are fighting for has become the fight itself, which means the fight makes them against what they are for.

There is a lot to say about this. On the one hand, we might question the stereotype of the activist as a terrorist: as the one who has fixed on violence,

where violence has become its own cause. And yet, on the other hand, we can recognize in the depiction of the violence of revolution a certain truth: the violence of revolting “repeats” the violence which is its cause. The conservatism of this film might be the extent to which this repetition is assumed necessarily to be the loss of a cause.

The figure of the raging revolutionary or angry activist teaches us something: those who fight for alternative futures are seen as committing acts of senseless violence, *which stops any hearing of the ways in which revolution makes sense*. Indeed, we might consider the very politics of who or what gets seen as the origin of violence: the revolutionaries expose violence, but the violence they expose is not recognized as violence: structural violence is violence that is veiled. As Raymond Williams argues in *Modern Tragedy*, “The essential point is that violence and disorder are institutions as well as acts. When a revolutionary change has been lived through we can usually see this quite clearly. The old institutions, now dead, take on their real quality as systematic violence and disorder; in that quality, the source of the revolutionary action is seen” (2006: 91; see also Arendt [1961] 1973: 35).⁷ If the exposure of violence is read as the origin of violence, then the violence that is exposed is not revealed.

The film does offer us an alternative model of a revolutionary, who is described as having a “lost cause” or as having lost his cause. The revolutionary who has lost his cause is not really a revolutionary.⁸ This is our hero, Theo, who is presented as a “has-been activist” and who is disaffected, cynical, sad, depressed, and numb. That bad feeling becomes a kind of non- or no-feeling or even not-feeling tells us something: bad feeling hovers, holds, weighs, until what is felt is a kind of nothing at all.

We could describe Theo as the affect alien in the film. The first sound we hear in the opening sequence is the generic voice of the BBC presenter, giving us the news of the day. The stories could almost be today’s stories: “The Muslim community demands an end to the army’s occupation of mosques.” “The Homeland Treaty is ratified. After eight years, British borders will remain closed. The deportation of illegal immigrants will continue.” And then, the lead story: “Good morning, our lead story. The world was stunned today by the death of baby Diago, the youngest person on the planet.” The death of an individual person is the lead story, individual grief taking precedence over collective grievance. In the opening sequence, we are in a cafe. A group of people are all staring mournfully upward toward a video screen, and we hear the crying and gasping

sounds of grief. The group coheres through sharing a direction: their grief at a lost object, the loss of the world's youngest person, symbolizing the loss of the future as a shared loss. Theo comes through the crowd and does not look up to watch the screen. He orders a coffee and walks out.

Theo is alienated from the group, refusing to share in the grief toward the lost object, as an object that also functions as a symptom and reminder of lost fertility, the real cause of human grief. Later he goes to work. We see an open-plan office: each worker sits in front of a screen. We recall Marx at this point: the alienation of the worker is so well expressed in the antisociality of the open-plan office, where each worker is a cut off from other workers, a violence that is sustained by the illusion of sharing space. They are watching the story of Diago's death unfold on their individual screens, as if what is being shared is the same thing. The news report intones how "throughout his life, Diago was a tragic reminder of the infertility that humanity has endured and its effects upon the world we now live in." Theo gets up at this point and goes to his boss, saying, "I seem to be more affected by baby Diago's death than I realize," as a way of getting out, using affection as a form of self-narration. He leaves and goes to visit his friend Jasper. Theo is alienated from the shared expression of grief. As he says to Jasper, "That was even worse. Everyone crying. Baby Diago — come on, the guy was a wanker."

To be an affect alien does not mean you necessarily respond to the same events with a different affect (to be made unhappy by other people's happiness). Rather an affect alien might experience the same affect but in relation to different objects, which are judged by others as "the wrong objects." Theo shares the bad feeling that hovers around the film in the harsh edges of its dystopic vision. But Theo's unhappiness is not directed in the right way, toward Diago and the failure of the human race to reproduce. He just feels like shit. As he says to Jasper (Michael Caine): "Same as every other day. Woke up. Felt like shit. Went to work. Felt like shit." Theo has an unattributed grief, a grief about anything and everything, a general sense of despair about the possibility of living a life other than the life that just goes on. The film looks for the cause of his despair, which in turn is what causes the action to unfold.

In this conversation, Theo and Jasper are speaking of the "Human Project." The Human Project begins as a rumor of some alternative future, a community that will sustain the human race. Theo is a disbeliever. Jasper is making a joke. Theo responds: "The Human Project. Why do people believe this crap . . . even

if they discovered the cure for infertility. Doesn't matter. Too late. The world went to shit. You know what. It was too late before the infertility thing happened, for fuck's sake." Not only is it "too late," but it "was too late" before it even happened. For Theo, this means there was nothing that could have been done, as well as there being nothing to do. There was nothing to do when it is too late. The "too late" provides both a critique of hopefulness and a retrospective disbelief that anything could have been done, a suggestion that there was never any hope to hope.

Theo is an affect alien, even at this point. For Jasper is making a joke: "I was just trying to tell a joke, mate." Theo responds: "All right, sorry, go on." The scene shows the affective knot of the outburst: that moment when negative affect spills out, directed toward who or what is proximate. You direct that which has hovered around; you snap. Just the words "Human Project" incite this reaction, this anger and outrage disturb the flow of a conversation. For the unhappy subject, the very promise of something other than the cause of unhappiness is outrageous. For those in despair, the possibility of an alternative is not only outrageous but hurtful: it hurts by threatening to take away the hurt, or it trivializes hurt as a feeling that could simply "go away."

The energy of the film is about redirecting Theo's misery into a purpose, which does not necessarily make Theo suffer less but turns him toward other possible worlds. In the following sections, I want to explore how optimism and hope participate in this turning. I do not want to argue that optimism and hope are always good things or necessary tools for revolutionaries. To be turned is not always about being turned *into* action but can be about how one is turned *by* the actions of others.

Optimism and Pessimism

To become revolutionary would seem to require a belief in the possibility of revolution. To become revolutionary would also seem to require a belief that a revolution is necessary. In other words, you would agree that what exists is something against which we should revolt. The revolutionary might have pessimism about the present but optimism about the future. This does not mean that revolutionary action depends upon subjects acquiring the right kind of orientations toward the present or the future.

It is commonplace to think of optimism and pessimism as forms of psychological disposition, as involving different outlooks or perspectives on the same thing. You can have optimistic or pessimistic tendencies. You can tend or not tend to look at things from “the bright side.” The classic expression of optimism/pessimism as a question of sides is posited in the question “Is the glass half full or half empty?” This is a question of perception, of how we perceive the glass in terms of its emptiness and fullness. We could say of course that *a priori* the glass is both half full and half empty (being half full makes it half empty and being half empty makes it half full — this statement would be true by virtue of the meaning of the word *half*). Optimists and pessimists see the glass as being one way or the other: the optimist sees the glass as half full (“Look, I have more to drink!”) and the pessimist as half empty (“Look, I have already drunk that much!”). Optimism and pessimism are not so much relationships to truth (the glass is half empty if it is half full, and half full if it is half empty) but ways of perceiving things, in terms of how they may affect us, as well as an orientation toward things, in terms of what they can provide.

But of course the story is not so simple. Say you really didn’t like what was in the glass but were being told you must drink it. You look at the glass differently. You might say the glass is half empty as an optimistic orientation toward the object (“Look, I have already drunk that much!” or “Look, I have less to drink!”). In the case of an unwanted drink, the pessimist would be the one who would see the glass as half full (“Look, I haven’t drunk that much!” or “Look, I have more to drink!”).

Pessimism and optimism are not, then, simply two ways of looking at the same thing: our orientation to the thing itself, whether we take the thing as the cause of happiness or unhappiness, shapes how we apprehend the thing in terms of what it might or might not give us at some future point. Optimism and pessimism are thus evaluations of what we encounter in the present (whether something is good or bad, or causes happiness or unhappiness) and future oriented. On the one hand, optimism and pessimism are ways of apprehending the object’s fullness or emptiness, as signs of an occupation (one must have already been occupied with the object for its halfness to be measured as value). On the other hand, they apprehend the object as pointed, where the point of the object is toward a future potential or possibility (how much or how little I have left to drink). Such orientations are both evaluative and anticipatory; they are orientations toward the future as being empty or full, where emptiness

and fullness have already been given affective value (it is always emptiness or fullness of something). Given this, both optimism and pessimism involve the temporality of the promise: they see the future in terms of what it promises to deliver or not to deliver, in terms of what there is or is not left to drink from the glass of the present.

Let's turn to a classic philosopher of pessimism from the twentieth century: Alfred Schopenhauer. One of the most interesting aspects of his work is his tendency to read human desire as lack, as a kind of emptiness that cannot be filled (we can see how much psychoanalysis inherits its model of desire from Schopenhauer). For Schopenhauer it is the human being who is empty, which means the promise of happiness is empty. As he argues: "No possible satisfaction in the world can suffice to still its longings, set a goal to its infinite cravings, and fill the bottomless abyss of its heart" ([1818] 1883: 382). The promise of happiness is what does *not keep its word*: "If it has promised [happiness], it does not keep its word, unless to show how little worth desiring were the things desired" (382–83). As soon as one has the object that one anticipates will cause happiness, one is dissatisfied. Happiness for Schopenhauer necessarily does not exist in the present: "The enchantment of distance shows us paradises which vanish like optical illusions when we have allowed ourselves to be mocked by them. Happiness accordingly always lies in the future, or else in the past, and the present may be compared to a small dark cloud which the wind drives over the sunny plain; before and behind it all is bright, only it itself always casts a shadow" (383).

We can certainly see here that Schopenhauer's pessimism anticipates happiness as an unhappiness-cause. The emptiness of happiness is linked explicitly to the negativity of pleasure. As he argues: "We feel pain, but not painlessness, we feel care but not the absence of care, fear, but not security" (384), such that "only pain and want can be felt positively" (384).⁹ We might question whether pleasure is simply the absence of feeling. In my previous work, I considered comfort as a nonfeeling: you don't tend to notice comfort until you lose it, until you become uncomfortable (Ahmed 2004: 147–48; Ahmed 2006: 134–35). To become comfortable, which means becoming not uncomfortable, you might notice the feeling of comfort, though such comfort might over time become less noticeable. But perhaps what is in view or not in view is not simply a matter of good or bad feeling. You can have background discomfort too, which comes to your attention only after you get to a certain point (you are concen-

trating really hard on something, and you realize that you have a pain in your foot, where the feeling of suddenness suspends the very signs of its arrival). In other words, the intensification of affect is what is noticeable: certain affects can hover in the background, as your affective situation, your “around” or surround, which comes to your attention through the accumulation of intensity. A good example is irritation: you might be walking around, and for sure everything irritates you, and then something happens, and you are aware of being irritable and attribute it to something (you search for the cause of the feeling as an effect of being aware of feeling *that way*). Attributing the feeling can direct or “point” the feeling. You might become irritated with x as if x is the cause of the irritation even though x has nothing to do with it but is just who or what you come into contact with at the moment of recognizing your irritation. This background irritation that becomes attributed and directed is close to the affective landscape provided by *Children of Men*.

Another example would be cheerfulness: you could be brimming with it, humming to yourself, and something happens, and you realize your cheerfulness and attribute it to something (this can often involve memory, *oh yes that happened*). In recognizing your cheerfulness you might direct the feeling in the present; you might smile at people who pass by, as if they were the cause of the pleasure, and they might look at you blankly in return. I would not argue that bad feeling is feeling and the good feeling is nonfeeling but rather that good and bad feelings only come into consciousness through processes of intensification, where intensity itself is an object of feeling that is attributed and directed. The very recognition of feeling can generate feeling, which means that once you recognize a feeling, you give that feeling an object, which changes its form.

Happiness gives form to the feeling it recognizes. Schopenhauer’s work offers a critique of this form, as a critique of optimism *in its form*. As he suggests rather dryly: “Imagine this race transported to a Utopia where everything grows of its own accord and turkeys fly around ready-roasted, where lovers find one another without any delay, and keep one another without any difficulty: in such a place some men would die of boredom or hang themselves, some would fight and kill one another and thus they would create for themselves more suffering than nature inflicts on them” ([1850] 2004: 5–6). The very expectation of happiness as an overcoming of bad feeling is how happiness can cause unhappiness. Christopher Janaway writes, in his account of Schopenhauer’s

pessimism, “Part of the wickedness of optimism is that it causes unhappiness by inculcating these false beliefs about happiness, beliefs whose consequences are pain and disillusionment” (1999: 324).

Pessimism might then offer a critique of the optimism we have inherited in the modern world, of how optimism has been confused with neutrality. As Joshua Foa Dienstag argues: “In a relentlessly optimistic world, it is enough to give up on the *promise* of happiness to be considered a pessimist” (2006: xi). The tendency to see the glass as being half full of what has caused pleasure is how we are encouraged to see the glass. It is assumed that a better way of seeing is to see what is better.

Let us suppose the world is our glass. The optimist might constitute the field of political neutrality insofar as politics has a tendency to see the world’s resources in terms of fullness rather than emptiness, delighting in what we have left to consume rather than in recognizing what has been depleted. To point to the emptying of the world by overdevelopment is to be a killjoy, getting in the way of a future enjoyment. The pessimist refuses to believe in the promise of the half full. However, this does not mean that we always must see the glass as being half empty. As I will argue later, the point might be that emptiness and fullness are not the point. Or we could see that both optimism and pessimism are directed; there are right and wrong ways of being optimistic as well as pessimistic, where rightness and wrongness are determined as evaluations of objects in terms of their readiness or potential.

We do not have to choose between optimism and pessimism as forms of orientation to the causes of happiness and unhappiness. Indeed, if we turn to the classic optimist, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, we can see that optimism does not necessarily mean focusing only on what’s better. Leibniz’s optimism involves his belief in the perfection of God, who makes what is possible “possible.” There is freedom because many worlds are possible. But only some things come to exist. What comes to exist must be the best, because God is perfect: “divine perfection can never fail to select the most perfect” ([1714] 1965: 128).

But as he shows us, such an argument runs counter to experience: “For the best people often have the worst lives” (91). What exists would appear not as the best but as a “confused chaos.” For Leibniz, this chaos is only a false impression, an effect of getting too close to particular goods and bads. By stepping back we can see the order in the chaos: “But on closer inspection, the contrary must be stated. It is certain a priori, by the very reasons we have adduced, that

all things, and especially minds, obtain the greatest possible perfection” (91). Leibniz argues that bad feelings—pain, anxiety, and so on—work to increase or even enable the intensity of pleasure: “The auditor, who becomes anxious about what is going to happen; when after a short time all returns to order again, his pleasure will be so more intense” (92). Bad feeling for Leibniz *causes the intensification of pleasure*, such that pleasure without pain is not pleasing: “Who has not tasted bitter food does not deserve sweets and will not even appreciate them. This is the very law of pleasure, that uniformity does not allow it to continue with the same intensity, but produces satiety and dullness instead of enjoyment” (92). Extending from the laws of pleasure, he argues that good people will turn bad things to their “greater advantage,” just as “in general, it may be affirmed that afflictions are temporary evils leading to good effects, since they are shortcuts to greater perfection” (93). The point of bad things for Leibniz is certainly to make things better. Optimism involves a way of reading bad feeling, which takes its point as progress. The cause of pain, or the pain that is caused, becomes the cause of a higher pleasure.

Reading between Schopenhauer and Leibniz is possible and necessary: both speak about the conversion of feeling but read the conversion as going in opposite directions: for the former, the promise of good feeling converts to bad feeling (disappointment, emptiness); for the latter, the existence of bad feeling (pain, misfortune) converts to good feeling (progress, a higher pleasure). Both read the conversion between positive and negative affect as pointed, or oriented toward fullness or emptiness. To be pessimistic would involve a commitment to unhappiness as the endpoint of human action, as being what all promises of happiness lead us toward. To be optimistic would involve commitment to happiness as the endpoint of human action, as what all experiences of bad feeling enable us to reach. Optimism and pessimism are ways of attending to things, which take good or bad feelings as the point, as being the point of human action or what human action points toward, even when they recognize ambivalence and contradiction.¹⁰ Perhaps a more perverse reading would be to refuse to see the ambivalence of affect as pointed: maybe the point is that there is no point that points to some future horizon. Feelings may be perverse because they don’t always have a point.

How then can we read the switch between pessimism and optimism in *Children of Men*? Are these conversion points also points of perversion? As I have suggested, we begin with Theo, who expresses bad feeling: his pessimism is

about the possibility that a future exists, about the possibility of possibility. We can interrogate the belief in alternatives as a fantasy that defends against the horrors of the present. In other words, the belief that things “will only get better” at some point that is always just “over the horizon” can be a way of avoiding the impact of suffering in the world that exists before us. But we can also interrogate disbelief in the possibility of a different world as a psychic defense against suffering. Perhaps we know this too well: to believe something is possible is to risk being wrong and being disappointed. How better to avoid disappointment than to refuse to believe in the possibility of anything happening at all? Most of us have probably experienced pessimism as a survival tactic: those moments when you prepare for disappointment by avoiding being hopeful, by deciding in advance that there is no hope in achieving the thing one wants even as one “goes for it.”¹¹

Pessimism becomes here a way of preparing for disappointment, as a kind of habit that accrues its force through repetition. Pessimism can offer a way of inhabiting the world through shielding oneself from possibility. In other words, acts of preparation for disappointment can function as modes of subject formation. The perpetual cynic may be the one who defends hardest against the very possibility of disappointment, enjoying the experience of disappointment before anything bad happens, or enjoying other people’s disappointment as a sign of their failure to be prepared. We can examine the cynicism of disbelief as both a defense against contingency, the possibilities kept open by the “hap” of what happens, and as a reasonable response to situations that seem hopeless.

And yet, although Theo’s world is shit, there are forms of suffering that exceed the signifiers “too late” uttered in the spirit of pessimism. There is only one point where he is undone by grief: when Julian is killed. His body shows it; he sinks to the ground. He is undone by grief. Throughout the rest of the film his bad feeling is a doing, a way of being in the world in a certain way, rather than an undoing. In fact, we hear about the cause of his grief through the testimony of others: the loss of his child Dylan. This lost cause is telling. Pessimism can be a defense against suffering as well as an expression of suffering: as if to say, “that hurts” or “it hurts” as a way of making the hurt beside oneself, the world is shit, even my life is shit, can be a way of covering over the cause of suffering: in this case, the loss of a child. I will return to the significance of the child as the object of an unspoken grief in due course. What interests me is how pessimism as a mode of subject formation can use suffering to avoid

suffering. Oliver Bennett in his reflection on “cultural pessimism” makes this point. He reads pessimism as “a defence against depression and anxiety itself, a projection onto the external world of a negativity which would otherwise be directed towards the self” (2001: 183). Pessimism, by anticipating that what follows is nothing, conceals the something that is at stake in this desire for there to be nothing. While cheerful optimists can overlook suffering by looking on the bright side, seeing fullness instead of emptiness wherever they look, so too pessimists can empty this emptiness of harmful content by seeing emptiness as already there, before anything can happen, before shit happens.

Of course, the film does not allow Theo to remain attached to his own despair, his own “too lateness” that enables his inaction to be self-narrated as wisdom. Theo acts. Well, sort of. In the film, Theo is not the agent with a sense of moral purpose and vision; the film does not show him taking charge. Instead, things happen to him. It is Julian who interpellates Theo as a fellow activist, asking if he can get the papers to help them help a fugi girl to escape the country. He goes along with it, even though he refuses the subject of the address. Julian says, “You should have seen him in the old days where he was a real activist,” to which he replies, “You were the activist. I just wanted to get laid.” He refuses the identity of activism. And yet he does go along with things. He gets caught up. And things happen. Julian gets killed, and Theo finds out that the fugi girl is pregnant: as his friend Jasper later says, it is “the miracle the whole world has been waiting for.”

The pregnancy too just happens; there is no explanation. It is a miracle, and the religiosity of this language has its own affective reality. Pessimism is not an adequate defense against things happening. Or we could say pessimism can defend against the possibility of miracles until they happen. Given this, we cannot defend properly against possibility; we cannot even prepare for it, even if we wait for things to happen. Yes, something happens. The hap that happens involves a certain yes in the becoming actual of what was not possible. It is not that Theo converts from pessimism to optimism in embracing this yes at the level of belief or attitude. Instead he has a very practical task, something he must do: he has to get the pregnant girl to the boat, the *Tomorrow*, so she can join the Human Project. We already know that he does not believe in the Human Project as a symbol of the possibility of a future (before, as it were, the utopianism of an alternative future) and in fact that the possibility of such a project causes for him an intensification of his anger and despair (it’s too late,

the world was already shit before this happened). And yet he must get her there, *whether or not* he believes in its existence.

The film is not about the availability of belief as a form of optimism (“They do exist!”); nor does it idealize pessimism as a form of wisdom (“They only exist to make you feel better about suffering!”). Something beyond the technology of belief is expressed here. Theo finds out that the Fishes have never spoken to the Human Project; they know where to find the boat on the whim of a whisper: Miriam (Pam Ferris), one of the Fishes, says, “Luke has no way of contacting the Human Project. Nor does anyone else. . . . Contact with the human project is done by mirrors. Julian was our mirror.” Theo responds, “What do you mean, mirrors?” And Miriam explains: “Mirrors . . . they contact one of our people and that person contacts someone else, and so on till word gets to Julian.” Theo expresses outrage that they can be willing to believe something that might not exist, on the whim of a rumor: “Don’t fucking tell me you never actually talked to them.” And yet he goes along with the whim. A whim is typically defined as a “capricious idea” or “odd fancy.” It is not that you come to believe in something odd but you are willing to keep its oddness going. You act not because you come to believe something is possible that you once disbelieved. You move along as something is asked of you, because you are asked to do something, even if doing something does not correspond to your expectations or beliefs. You do not wait for correspondence.

The pregnancy does not, then, create the future; nor is pregnancy the cause of the future. Rather, the future is what happens through the work required to get close enough to hear the whisper, which is always a whisper that somebody else must have heard. You become the subject of an address that you do not hear. Their arrival at the boat, does not offer an image of a happy future; if anything the arrival is the conversion point or creates the possibility of a future conversion. The arrival is also what takes time. If time is what passes, then the time it takes for something to happen is the time of perversion. We might say that time is what makes the future perverse. In chapter 1, I referred to the game Chinese Whispers, which we can describe as being about the pleasurable perversity of transmission. We laugh at how the whispering words deviate, so that the words we end up with are not recognizable as the words that were sent out. Deviation is the point and pleasure of the game.

Hope and Anxiety

Optimism and pessimism are not usually described as feelings, although we can certainly feel optimistic and pessimistic. I want to turn to the question of hope as a way of reconsidering the temporality of feeling, how feelings are directed toward objects in the present; how they keep the past alive; and how they involve forms of expectancy or anticipation of what follows (the future is always “the what” that follows, never arriving, always or only tomorrow, even when we have past futures behind us). I have suggested that the promise of happiness is what makes things promising; the promise is always “ahead” of itself. Anticipation is affective as an orientation toward the future, as that which is ahead of us, as that which is to come.

Classically, hope is described as a future-oriented emotion. John Locke, for example, describes hope as an emotion that perceives something that is not yet present as being good, imagining a future enjoyment: “*Hope* is that pleasure in the mind, which everyone finds in himself, upon the thought of a profitable future enjoyment of a thing, which is apt to delight him” ([1690] 1997: 218). Hope is a feeling that is present (a pleasure in the mind) but is directed toward an object that is not yet present. Although of course to place one’s hope in something might depend on past experiences: you estimate that something would or will be delightful. I have suggested that happiness is future-oriented even if we experience happiness in the present; you are promised happiness through proximity to objects, which makes happiness “expectant.” We could describe happiness as a “hope technology,” to borrow Sarah Franklin’s term (1997: 203): in hoping for this or that, we attribute this or that as the cause of happiness, which would be a happiness that you would reach at some future point.¹² Or as Zygmunt Bauman describes, we might have happiness as long as we have hope: “*We are happy as long as we haven’t lost the hope of becoming happy*” (2008: 15). If we hope for happiness, then we might be happy as long as we can retain this hope (a happiness that paradoxically allows us to be happy with unhappiness).

Hope anticipates a happiness to come. Ernst Bloch described hope as an “anticipatory consciousness”; we are aware of the “not yet” in the unfolding of the present ([1938–47] 2000: 12–13). For Bloch, hope is a “*directing act of a cognitive kind*” (12). Hope, we might say, is a thoughtful way of being directed

toward the future, or a way of creating the very thought of the future as going some way. If happiness is what we hope for, when we hope for this or that thing, it does not mean we think we *will be* happy but that we imagine we *could be* happy if things go the right way. We have a certain confidence in outcome premised on the possibility that what comes out might be *just that*. If the future is that which does not exist, what is always before us, in the whisper of the “just ahead,” then hope also involves imagination, a wishfulness that teaches us about what we strive for in the present. Hope is a wish and expectation that a desired possibility is “becoming actual.”

This is why, for Durkheim, hope’s anticipatory logic means that it is a kind of orientation that is past or about the past. In my introduction to this book, I referred to Durkheim’s critique of optimism in utilitarian discourse. Durkheim was also a critic of pessimism. As he explores in his classic text on the division of labor, pessimists explain hope as an illusion that sustains the will to “keep going.” He argues, “According to them [the pessimists], if, in spite of the deceptions of experience, we hold on to life, it is because we are wrongly hoping that the future will make up for the past” ([1893] 1960: 245). Durkheim refuses to believe that optimism involves this deception of belief or by belief. He suggests that we have hope because of what is in the past, making a calculation about what he calls the average life: in such a life “happiness must prevail over unhappiness. If the relations were reversed, neither the attachment of men to life, nor its continuance jostled by the facts at each moment, could be understood” (245). In other words, he sees the existence of hope as evidence of what he describes as “relative bounty.” But we all know that hopeful people can be more and less fortunate. Durkheim suggests that the idea that you can be more and less fortunate can only be meaningful if we have experienced “moments of fortune” as well as “the blow of misfortune.”

We do not need to argue that the lessons of history are that of the relativity of good fortune to learn from Durkheim’s work.¹³ What he shows us is that our history, our arrival, involves moments of fortune and misfortune, and that hope is an orientation toward such past moments as the relativity of fortune. We are hopeful—we can feel fortunate—given that we have experienced moments of fortune, even if we are not fortunate in our life situation at present. Hopefulness in life’s persistence might involve a tendency to give affective value to such moments of fortune as fortunate.

In the introduction to this chapter, I explained my interest in dystopian

forms by reference to Jameson's argument that we need to become anxious about the future. We might assume you would be anxious *rather than* hopeful. To be hopeful as an orientation toward past moments could be a way of avoiding anxiety about the future as what could be lost. I want to suggest an intimacy between anxiety and hope. In having hope we *become* anxious, because hope involves wanting something that might or might not happen. Hope is about desiring the "might," which is only "might" if it keeps open the possibility of the "might not."

I want us to think about dystopian films such as *Children of Men* as object lessons in hopeful anxiety and its translation into a rather anxious hope. *Children of Men* is premised on the belief that we not anxious enough about losing the future, not only showing us that a future can be lost (the world has "gone to ruins") but also suggesting that we will lose the future if we don't think of the future as something that can be lost. The loss of capacity to reproduce becomes a symptom of the loss of the capacity for a future. There will be no humans to witness the past, which means that the past will have no future. Theo asks his cousin why he bothers to preserve the world's treasures: "One hundred years from now there won't be any sad fuck to look at any of this. What keeps you going?" His cousin answers: "You know what it is, Theo. I just don't think about it." The preservation of the past becomes unthinking without the thought of the future. It is what "keeps you going."

Given that all of us face no future as finite beings, the thought of the future might be the thought of the human, or the thought of what Marx calls "species being." Without there being a species, individual being, by implication, becomes pointless, so you "just don't think about it" in doing what you do. Of course, we can question this humanist logic of the next generation being the only point, which returns us to the "reproductive futurism" described by Lee Edelman. Or we can consider how it is the interruption of rather ordinary logics of deferral that are at stake here. As I explored in chapter 1, we have a tendency to endure our struggles in the present by deferring our hope for happiness to some future point. It is not that "no children" simply means "no future" but that "no children" signifies the loss of a fantasy of the future as that which can compensate me for my suffering; it is the very fantasy that there is something or somebody who I suffer for that is threatened. If what it is for is what comes after, in this survival logic of deferral, then the loss of "the after" is experienced as the loss of "the for."

The absence of children is one signifier of the absence of somebody to whom I can defer my hope, for whom I can justify my present suffering. Children, in other words, bear the weight of this fantasy. This is not to say that the idea that lives are pointless without children should not be challenged: many of us who live our lives without having “children of our own” are tired not only of being told we are pointless but also of making the point that lives do not have to involve having children to have a point. However we read this idea of a pointless existence without children, the anxiety expressed is that the future as an idea has been lost, and that we need to retrieve the idea to have a future by becoming anxious about that loss.

How does the conversion from despair to the anxiety of hope take place? What are the conversion points in the narrative? Perhaps the character Kee provides the key. Kee is pregnant, we know this. The project of the film—which becomes Theo’s project—is to get her to the boat called *Tomorrow*. I will come back to the significance of the boat shortly. In the film, “getting to the boat” stands for “making the future possible,” or “making it possible that there will be a future.”

We could describe how Theo’s project, his being “caught up” by events, involves a sense of hope. It is not that Theo himself becomes hopeful. If anything, he acts without hope. As Jean-Paul Sartre describes in his defense of existentialism against the charge of quietism, rehearsing what he calls “a time-honoured formula”: “One need not hope in order to undertake one’s work” ([1946] 1989: 40). In working without hope, you are worked upon. Recall that the Human Project communicates through mirrors: messages are passed between proximate bodies, whereby to keep passing something along requires that each proximity recedes. The recession of a given proximity is the condition of possibility for the creation of another. Perhaps there is hope in the recession of passing. The whispers that pass words create a line from one to another. A line of hope is the hope of a line. You extend the line that passes between bodies, even when you do not know what’s what, even if you do not know what you are passing, or whether there is an end to the line. Indeed, the end of the line is not the point of the line: it is no accident that when we say we have reached the end of the line, it means we have lost hope.

There can be hope in passing something on, where the project or task is to keep passing. The film shows us that having a project—something to do for or with others that takes you from the ordinary routines of your life—can ener-

gize one and that energy can acquire its own force: if we lack a project, a sense of a purpose, our purpose can be to find one. But having a project can make some things come into view by making other things less visible. Žižek, in his interview, suggests that the film's power inheres in how much the suffering takes place in the background; it is too intense to look at it directly, so we can see it only obliquely, behind the action of the film. We could argue that this is the film's limitation. The very forward direction of the narrative, Theo's "becoming active," which is at once the becoming actual of the possible, is what keeps the suffering in the background. Theo does not see this suffering as he struggles to get Kee to the *Tomorrow*; indeed, if we adopt his gaze, then our "becoming active" also allows us not to see the suffering. In gaining focus, we can lose focus on suffering. At the same time, to lose focus on suffering does not mean that suffering is not there, or that it cannot be behind our action, in the sense of giving us an aim, direction, or purpose. A good question is whether focusing on suffering is always what allows us to do something about suffering—action might require the capacity to lose and gain focus.¹⁴ If it is the case that losing focus makes gaining focus possible at the level of the task, then we can ask what doing something actually does.

Having a task or "something to do" in this film takes a rather conventional gendered and racial form. The white male citizen has to save the black refugee woman, who will bear the burden of giving birth not only to new life but also to humanity as species being. In one scene, Kee calls Theo to the barn (the biblical theme is explicit) and reveals her pregnant body to him. First he is speechless, and then he says, "She's pregnant." He repeats the utterance as if words are needed to confirm the truth. The black woman becomes a means in the film through which he is given words, as a sign of hope, as a kind of reason for doing something, where hope involves an embodied project. In other words, through her, he acquires a sense of purpose. Theo, even as an unwilling hero, helps her, saves her, guides her, and directs her toward the end of the line, which is happy insofar as she gets to the boat, which gives us the possibility of a tomorrow. She is the object of our hope: we hope that she will bear a child. Her hope is to bear a child. Our hope in her hope depends on the white man, who must get her to the boat *Tomorrow*.

I read the film as being about Theo's conversion. He is not so much the conversion point, as Joe was in *Bend It Like Beckham*, the one who promises to convert bad feelings into good feelings. Rather, Theo is the one who is converted,

who is converted from despair to hope, and from nonfeeling (the numbness that we can experience as everyday irritability “it is too late, the world is shit”) to an intensification of feeling. He converts from indifference—the apparent glibness of the “whatever”—to caring, which means caring for someone, having someone to care for, and thus caring for what happens, caring about whether there is a future or not. Such caring is not constrained as caring for happiness, which is what gives care certain forms, wanting the recipient of care to be a certain way, as I suggested in the previous chapter. It might be a hap care rather than a happiness care: to care for someone is to care about what happens to them. A hap care would not seek to eliminate anxiety from care; it could even be described as care for the hap. There is nothing more vulnerable than caring for someone; it means not only giving your energy to that which is not you but also caring for that which is beyond or outside your control. Caring is anxious—to be full of care, to be careful, is to take care of things by becoming anxious about their future, where the future is embodied in the fragility of an object whose persistence matters. Becoming caring is not about becoming good or nice: people who have “being caring” as their ego ideal often act in quite uncaring ways in order to protect their good image of themselves. To care is not about letting an object go but holding on to an object by letting oneself go, giving oneself over to something that is not one’s own.

If the film is the story of Theo’s conversion, it becomes more troubling. The film would then be read as being about paternity (unsurprisingly, given its title, but it is easy not to be surprised by the title). It is Theo’s lost child that is evoked as the true cause of his pessimism. The first encounter we have with the lost child is through the photographs on the wall in Jasper’s house, including a photograph of Theo with a woman and child, as well as happy images of past activism. The woman and child are not named; but the sadness around this happy image, where happiness is reducible to an image of something that is no longer, that has been lost, lingers. Grief here is unnamed but involves a relation to the loss of the possibility of the happiness contained in the image. The loss of the family becomes the cause of unhappiness, which is then redirected into indifference or apathy: better not to be affected than to be unhappy.

We first hear about this loss through Julian, when she says, “It’s hard for me to look at you. He had your eyes.” His sees with his sadness. Paternity is here evoked as the sadness of an inheritance; the child inherits the father’s eyes, such that to look at the father is to bear witness to the loss of the child. The

film can be read as about Theo overcoming his sadness by becoming a father. So, at the very point where he gets Kee to the boat, she turns and says to him: “Dylan. I will call my baby Dylan. It’s a girl’s name too.” The film rewards Theo with paternity. These are the last words he hears before he dies.

So the narrative converts Theo from indifference to caring and rewards him with the gift of paternity. Not much difference: except this time he has a girl, although she bears the same name. As a utopic moment, this is far from ambitious. Reading Theo’s conversion shows us how much the conventions of hope are predicated on the becoming father of the white man, where he will “father” not only a new being but a new species being. It is Theo’s conversion that gives us a new chance at becoming human. Although Theo dies, the child becomes his child, replacing the dead child through the gift of a name. If the film suggests that it is better to care than not to care, because it allows our anxiety for the future to keep alternatives possible, it leaves us with the question of how caring, even if we care *just or justly* about what happens, can turn us toward the social forms in which hopes for happiness have already been deposited. This failure to offer an alternative that would rescript our narrative of the good life might be telling, not because it suggests that we must disbelieve in alternatives but because it shows how alternatives cannot simply transcend what has already emerged or taken form. The failure of transcendence constitutes the necessity of a political struggle.¹⁵

I want to conclude this section by contrasting *Children of Men* with another dystopian film, *The Island* (2005, dir. Michael Bay). The nightmare of this film is again predicated on its lack of remoteness. The film is told from the point of view of clones, who do not know they are clones but have been “led to believe” that they are the only humans who have survived an environmental catastrophe. This is the truth they must believe in; their belief becomes the truth, allowing them to persist in the world in which they live. The clones have been created as spare parts, as organ donors for humans who want to buy longevity, and as wombs for women who want to secure their reproductive future.

The nightmare of the film is not so much about cloning or advancements in genetics as about the transformation of human beings into instruments, or even the instrumentalization of species being, as such. Cloning matters as a symptom rather than cause of the instrumentalization of life. The clones come to embody the alienated workers, as well as the slaves, as the others who must be liberated, who must become conscious of their alienation in order to revolt.

The living conditions of the clones are not far from the living conditions of many people under global capitalism: they work but do not know what they are creating or for whom they are creating. It turns out that their work is what sustains their alienation: the liquids they put into tubes is the liquid required to make new clones. The clones are called “products”; they are made to be bought and sold; they are, to use Marx’s powerful term, “living capital.” Their lives are technologized, scrutinized, monitored by the big Other, whom they encounter in the face of the physician as well as the multiples screens that shape what they can see and do.

The clones, perhaps, are us. Or, the clones are the other, the other who suffers and works in order that we can have “the good life.” Their lack of hope is converted into our hope for the future: “The whole reason you exist is that everyone wants to live for ever. It’s the new American dream.” We have a political economy of hope, as Ghassan Hage (2003) might describe, where hope itself is unevenly distributed, where some not only have more hope than others but acquire their hope by taking hope away from others, which is, at the same time, about making others “be” in order that some can “have” what they hoped for.¹⁶

Importantly, the clones do not suffer: injustice works here *in the absence of suffering or even by making suffering absent*. The film shows us how optimism, hope, and happiness can be technologies of control. The clones are certainly kept in place through fear, which operates as false memory. As Dr. Merrick (Sean Bean), the psychologist in charge of making the clones, puts it, “We control them with the memory of a shared event, the global contamination that keeps them fearful about going outside.” The other mechanism of control is hope: “The Island is the one thing that gives them hope, gives them purpose.” The Island is what they hope for; the Island is anticipated as the cause of future happiness. Working as a daily lottery, the Island is presented as a utopic world on the outside, which “chosen ones” will populate. But those who are chosen are really being selected for death; rather than going to the Island, they will have their organs taken, being reduced to parts without a sum. The object of hope participates in suffering and death: not only are the clones hoping for what causes suffering and death (the ticket to the Island) but hope covers over that suffering and death as happiness (the bliss of the Island is the horror of the surgeon’s table).

Indeed, the clones are made happy by hope; their environment creates hap-

piness. “Our job is to make you happy,” says Dr Merrick to the hero, Lincoln Six Echo (Ewan McGregor), so “that things are okay with you.” The film provides us with an object lesson on how the promise of happiness keeps things in place; happy and hopeful subjects are well adjusted because they have adjusted to a demand they do not know has been made. Hope is usually considered a transformative emotion, as key to any project that aims to make the world a better place in which to live. In some psychoanalytic literature, hope has been described as a conservative emotion: Anna Potamianou, for example, considers hope “to be stubborn in the extreme” (1997: 4), as a defensive shield against life, with its changes, losses, uncertainties. Hope could be described as a stubborn attachment to a lost object, which stops the subject from “moving on.” Hope can even function as a form of melancholia, as a way of holding on to something that has gone, even if hope feels quite different as a relationship to that something. How do we know whether we are holding on to something that has gone, or letting go of something that is present? In a way, all objects of emotion are fantasies of what objects can give us. Hope is a good fantasy of what an object will give us. The Island is just this kind of object; we wish for something that is not present, which is what makes the object present as a wish.

This film is also about rebellion; we could even say the narrative is scripted as the revolution of the clones. One clone, Six Echo, is the hero, of course, the one who leads the revolution. Six Echo is an affect alien; he is alienated by his failure to be happy. He is not well adjusted and refuses to adjust to the world. “What’s troubling you?” he is asked by Dr. Merrick, to which he replies, “Tuesday night is tofu night. And I ask myself, who decided everyone likes tofu. And what is tofu anyway. And why can’t I have bacon. I like bacon. And I’m not allowed to have bacon for breakfast. And let’s talk about white. Why do we have to wear white all the time? It’s impossible to keep clean. I never get any color. I want to know answers and I want more . . . more than just waiting to go to the Island.” Rebellion begins by seeing what is present as not enough, by being anxious about how what is given is given, and by wanting more than what is given.

To question is to be affectively an alien. Six Echo’s anxiety is sticky; he is anxious about anything and everything, with the energetic force of the question “but why?” unsettling the blanket warmth of good feeling. Dr. Merrick says of him, “He was the first one to question his environment, his whole existence here,” and later says, “We have predicated our entire system on predictability . . . Six Echo has displayed the one trait that undermines it, human curiosity.”

It is common to consider wonder and curiosity as positive emotions. In this film, wonder and curiosity, while presented as good things (as the condition of possibility for freedom), are linked to bad feeling. It is the subject who feels bad who is curious, who wonders.

Six Echo acquires knowledge of what exists outside the horizon of hope, as the purpose of their collective existence. Thrown outside, he does not simply become a revolutionary. He does not just acquire a political will to save the other clones from their happiness. He first searches for the human from whom he was cloned, assuming that his human would care what happens to him: only to find that the human does not care but only wants to protect his investment, which means protecting himself from being faced by the clone, from the evidence that the clone has feelings. In coming to face himself as human, Six Echo witnesses the injustice of what lies behind his existence, or even the injustice of his existence. He acquires the will to revolt through facing his own bodily implication in injustice.

It is also through love that Six Echo acquires this sense of purpose. When his beloved Jordan Two Delta (Scarlett Johansson) wins a place on the Island, he knows she will be going to a certain death. He escapes with her, giving her hope by exposing that the Island is empty of promise. The contrast between the two films is very interesting at this point. Both films involve a man saving a woman, although in *The Island*, this is organized as the romance of the heterosexual couple. In *Children of Men*, Theo acquires his purpose by losing Julian; in effect, he takes her place, by taking up her project of getting Kee to the boat *Tomorrow*. In *The Island*, it is the fact of loving Two Delta that makes Six Echo take charge; liberation begins with his desire to save his beloved. Their love is scripted as rebellion: any proximity is forbidden for clones; their feelings for each other take them “off the program.” The heterosexual couple whose love is prohibited are often the agents of social transformation. Heterosexuality becomes the basis for narratives of reconciliation, as if such love can heal the wounds of the past, as I discussed in chapter 4. After they have sex, Two Delta whispers, “The Island is real; it is us.”

Six Echo and Two Delta come to embody an alternative hope. They escape and return to free the other clones. It is not that the film embraces hopelessness; if anything it is predicted *on a conversion which sustains an affect*. In other words, the affect is sustained by swapping the object: false hope (the Island) is converted into true hope (love, liberation). It is the white man, clone or no

clone, who is the conversion point, who gives the clones true hope by liberating them from the false hope secured by their happiness. At one point, Albert Laurent (Djimou Hounsou) a black man who was appointed to kill the escapee clones, turns around and takes his place alongside Six Echo and Two Delta as liberator. He watches Jordan touch her own brand, with tears falling down her cheeks, and is moved. He recognizes in their struggle for freedom his own history, saying, "My brother and I were branded so that we would know that we were less than human." The brand is a sticky sign; it makes the struggle of the clones adhere to the liberation struggles of black people and all those others declared as less than human by being marked on the skin. I would argue that rather than making the black body a converter, this film, rather like *Children of Men*, uses the black body as the receiver of the gift. Revolution becomes the white man's gift.

We could say that in *Children of Men* and *The Island* the narrative works to contain the revolution that might happen, insofar as revolutionary hope remains predicated on the becoming father or becoming agentic of the white man. And yet in the dystopian form we might witness a potential for other things happening that might not simply be contained by narrative. We witness the creation of solidarity in the face of what happens, a sense of what becomes possible when people are thrown together to overthrow a situation. What happens when the normal rules of engagement are suspended? What do we do with those moments before a new world has begun when the old order is revealed as violence? These moments of suspension are not moments of transcendence, and yet we can still suspend those moments. The moment of suspension creates what Slavoj Žižek calls a "short-circuit between the present and the future" (2005: 247), in which we can act as if the "not yet" is already here rather than being a promise of what might come. In *Children of Men* it is the refugee camp at Bexhill on Sea, where most dread to go, the place where the most wretched reside, that is both the most dangerous and most promising; and it is where an uprising or rebellion is already happening. Žižek describes it as "a kind of liberated territory outside the all-pervasive and suffocating oppression" (2008b: 25). In such places the rules that govern social life are suspended, which means that, at least in the moment, what it means to inhabit specific forms has not been decided. We would no longer be sure what it means to say: a family is *this*, a friend does *this*, a lover means *this*, and a life has *this*. We would not be sure even what it means to admit to being human,

or to being alive. If we don't know what it means to be or to have *this*, then we have to work out and work through what it means. A revolution would not simply require that subjects be revolting; it would demand a revolution of the predicate, of what gets attached to the subjects of the sentence. The subjects would be plural, as the "we" is not only called on to make a decision about *this* but is created as an effect of *this* decision. Hap communities take shape in such moments of suspension, where a "we" is assembled by being thrown together, acquiring a sense of purpose in throwing the meanings of *this* into question.

The Freedom to Be Unhappy

To hold on to the moments of suspension we might have to suspend happiness. We might revolt by revolting against the demand for happiness. The dystopian form unsurprisingly then presents us with visions of happiness as a nightmare. We could even name a subgenre of dystopian fiction as "happiness dystopias," from Aldous Huxley's classic *Brave New World* to James Gunn's *The Joy Makers*, or Ursula Le Guin's evocative short story "The People Who Walked Away from Omelas."¹⁷ What can we learn from the nightmares of these books?

Huxley's preface to *Brave New World* gives us a powerful reading of what scientists call "the problem of happiness." He describes the problem of happiness as the problem "of making people love their servitude" ([1932] 1969: xii). The world that is brave and new is the world of happiness, where people "get what they want and they never want what they can't get" (149). Happiness is what holds things together by getting what you desire, and desiring what you get. You must give up desiring what you have not got, and cannot get. "And that', put in the Director sententiously, 'that is the secret of happiness and virtue—liking what you've got to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their inescapable social destiny'" (10). To be conditioned by happiness is to like your condition. The happy world is drugged up; the feel-good soma makes people feel good; consensus is produced through sharing happy objects, creating a blanket whose warmth covers over the potential of the body to be affected otherwise.

As with the film *The Island*, which I would describe as a "hope dystopia," the revolutionary is the one who refuses happiness, which means not only failing to be happy but not wanting to be happy. Bernard, who is a psychologist and

an outcast, offers the reader the first signs of revolt, of being revolting. "I'd rather be myself. . . . Myself and nasty. Not someone else, however jolly" (59). If "being myself" operates as a challenge to social orthodoxy, it also seems to locate unhappiness with the body of an individual. Bernard doesn't want to be "just a cell in a social body." I am reminded of two animated films about insects, *Antz* (1998, dir. Darnell and Johnson) and *The Bee Movie* (2007, dir. Hickner and Smith). Both of these films are organized around the figure of a revolutionary insect who revolts by not being happy with what he has been given. Indeed, in these films an individual insect is radicalized through unhappiness.¹⁸ The ant or bee that doesn't go along with things is unhappy, curious, and desirous; he wants more than he gets. In turn, these individual heroic insects come to save their hive or colony through their dissent. Their unhappiness becomes an alternative social gift. The imagining of unhappy revolutionaries is limited in its investment of revolutionary hope in the body of an individual.

In *Brave New World* the alternative to happiness is certainly premised on individual freedom. At one level, this freedom is expressed as freedom to be happy in your own way. Bernard's reply to Lenina's expressed desire for happiness is to affirm what she says: "Yes, 'everybody's happy nowadays.' We begin giving the children that at five. But wouldn't you like to be free to be happy in some other way, Lenina?" (61). The book challenges even this idea of freedom to be happy in *some other way* via the figure of the Savage, who comes to this happy world without being conditioned by it. The Savage is the one who articulates the wisdom of the book. "All right then," said the Savage defiantly, "I'm claiming the right to be unhappy" (163). Unhappiness becomes a right in a world that makes happiness compulsory. In James Gunn's later happiness dystopia, *The Joy Makers*, the revolting subject also claims a right to be unhappy: "This is a free country, ain't it," Berns demanded. "A man can be unhappy if he wants to be, can't he?" The Hedonist responds: "No . . . That myth was exploded fifty years ago. The basic freedom is the freedom to be happy" (1961: 63).

The freedom to be happy restricts human freedom if you are not free to be not happy.¹⁹ Perhaps unhappiness becomes a freedom when the necessity of happiness is masked as freedom.

Both *Brave New World* and *The Joy Makers* could be read as critiques of the utilitarian approach to happiness, what is called the science of happiness, with its belief that maximizing happiness is the measure of the social good. The first part of *The Joy Makers* gives us an account of the emergence of the sci-

ence of hedonics from the point of view of Josh, who is a skeptic: “The right the Declaration of Independence was concerned about . . . was the *pursuit* of happiness. That was when happiness was an art. Now it is a science. We have pursued it long enough. It’s time we caught up with it” (1961: 22). Hedonics translates the happiness contagion into a happiness duty: “their happiness must lie in making others happy” (37). The horror of hedonics in Gunn’s novel is the horror of happiness becoming an endpoint; the story ends with people being turned into embryos, a story of life as womb-to-womb, of the happiest life being the suspension of the distinction between birth and death. It is suggested that the science of happiness is a withdrawal from life: the human being has “built himself a last refuge against life and retreated within it for the slow, happy death” (172).

In contrast, Ursula Le Guin’s story “The People Who Walked Away from Omelas” critiques a more robust classical model of happiness as the good and virtuous life. The people of Omelas live happy lives in a meaningful sense: “They were not naïve and happy children—though their children were in fact happy. They were mature, intelligent, passionate adults whose lives were not wretched” ([1973] 1987: 278). Their happiness, you might say, is a good happiness, becoming a sign of worth, of a life and community that is flourishing. They deserve to be happy, we might say. But their happiness has a dark secret. It depends on the misery of one child, a child who is kept in the basement: “The child used to scream for help at night, and cry a good deal, but now it only makes a kind of whining, ‘eh-haa, eh-haa’ and it speaks less and less often. It is so thin there are no calves to its legs; its belly protrudes; it lives on a half-bowl of corn meal and grease a day. It is naked. Its buttocks and thighs are a mass of festered sores, as it sits in its own excrement continually. They all know it is there, all the people of Omelas. Some of them come to see it, others are content merely to know it is there. They all know that it has to be there. Some of them understand why, and some do not, but they all understand that their happiness, the beauty of their city, the tenderness of their friendships, the health of their children, the wisdom of their scholars, the skill of their makers, even the abundance of their harvest and the kindly weathers of their skies, depend wholly on this child’s abominable misery” (281–82).

The story is about the injustice of such a deal: the perversion of a collective happiness that rests on the misery of a single child. If the happiness of the many is caused by the unhappiness of one, then such happiness will always

be wrong. We could, following Alan Badiou, describe happiness as a form of nihilism, predicated on the right of some to have protection from misery, and from the causes of misery, or the right to decide just how much misery one can bear ([1993] 2001: 37).²⁰ In Omelas, the happiness of the world is premised on a necessary indifference to the child's unhappiness. The child's unhappiness provides the moral compass.²¹ Like all good dystopias, Omelas asks its readers to recognize our world in the apparently nonexistent world of the story, to recognize the possibility of what seems impossible.

We recognize too much in Omelas. We recognize how much the promise of happiness depends upon the localization of suffering; others suffer so that a certain "we" can hold on to the good life. Returning to the evocative language of *The Well of Loneliness*, the happiness of "everybody" is what keeps misery within walls. The wrong of happiness is that it participates in the localization and containment of misery, the misery of those who cannot inhabit the apparently empty sign of happiness, who cannot populate its form. To walk away from such happiness is to be touched by suffering. To be touched by another would not be premised on feeling the other's suffering. The sympathy of fellow feeling, which returns feeling with like feeling, is a way of touching that touches little, almost nothing. To walk away from happiness would be simply a refusal of indifference, a willingness to stay proximate to unhappiness, *however* we will be affected.²²

The political will to be affected by unhappiness could be rewritten as a political freedom. We would radicalize freedom as the freedom to be unhappy. The freedom to be unhappy is not about being wretched or sad, although it might involve freedom to express such feelings. The freedom to be unhappy would be the freedom to be affected by what is unhappy, and to live a life that might affect others unhappily. The freedom to be unhappy would be the freedom to live a life that deviates from the paths of happiness, wherever that deviation takes us. It would thus mean the freedom to cause unhappiness by acts of deviation.

I am not suggesting here that our aim is to cause unhappiness. It is not that unhappiness becomes our telos:²³ rather, if we no longer presume happiness is our telos, unhappiness would register as more than what gets in the way. When we are no longer sure of what gets in the way, then "the way" itself becomes a question. The freedom to be unhappy might provide the basis for a new political ontology, which, in not taking happiness as an agreed endpoint for human

action, would be able to ask about the point of action. We might act politically because we do not agree about the ends of action.

To recognize the causes of unhappiness is thus a part of our political cause. This is why any politics of justice will involve causing unhappiness even if that is not the point of our action. So much happiness is premised on, and promised by, the concealment of suffering, the freedom to look away from what compromises one's happiness. To revolt can hurt not only because you are proximate to hurt but also because you cause unhappiness by revealing the causes of unhappiness. *You become the cause of the unhappiness you reveal.* It is hard labor to live and work under the sign of unhappiness. The unhappy archives that I have discussed throughout this book thus reflect on the collectivity of unhappiness. They resist the individualism that posits the unhappiness of one against the happiness of many. It is not simply that we recognize that unhappiness is collective or shared; it is also that we realize that challenging happiness can only be a shared project. It is too hard to cause unhappiness of the many as a one.

This is why feminist, queer, and antiracist archives are collective weaves of unhappiness even when we struggle for something, even in the moment of aspiration, even when we dance in the gap between inheritance and reproduction. If to challenge the right to happiness is to deviate from the straight path, then political movements involve sharing deviation with others. There is joy, wonder, hope, and love in sharing deviation. If to share deviation is to share what causes unhappiness, even joy, wonder, hope, and love are ways of *living with* rather than *living without* unhappiness.

To share what deviates from happiness is to open up possibility, to be alive to possibility. Political movements are also about opening up possibilities for those who are imagined as unhappiness-causes, as the origin of negation, if, as I have suggested, to be not happy is to be not. To open up possibility for the not happy or the not is not about becoming human—or becoming happy. Political movements are about becoming “not not” becoming something other than not. We work in what we could call an immanent utopia; we live in the present understood, in Lauren Berlant's phrase, as “sensually lived potentiality” (2008b: 272). Political movements imagine what is possible when possibility seems to have been negated or lost before it can be recognized. Political movements involve “freedom dreams,” to use Robin D .G. Kelley's powerful language.²⁴ For Kelley, black politics is utopian because people dreamed of freedom, because they did not allow the restriction of possibility to be the re-

striction of imagination. Black politics is utopian because it is premised on the idea that “we could possibly go somewhere that exists only in our imagination” (2002: 2). In imagining what is possible, in imagining what does not yet exist, we say yes to the future. In this yes, the future is not given content: it is not that the future is imagined as the overcoming of misery; nor is the future imagined as being happy. The future is what is kept open as the possibility of things not staying as they are, or being as they stay. Revolutionaries must dream; if their imaginations dwell *on* the injustice of how things stay, they do not simply dwell *in* what stays.

To revolt is to be undone—it is not to reproduce an inheritance. And yet, a revolution does not empty the world of significance; it does not create blank pages. The writing might be on the wall, even when the walls come down. Returning to the dystopian films I have discussed in this chapter, it is good to think of how they do and do not imagine revolutions to come. In *Children of Men* we do not have a revolution in quite the same way as *The Island*: the implication of the film is that the world that is left behind—our world—is destroyed (the rebellion is being crushed by the force of greater force as the boat arrives) and that a new world might be created somewhere, out of the ruins of what has been left behind. The task of our hero is not to liberate a people but to save a pregnant girl.

In *Children of Men*, we end with the arrival of the boat *Tomorrow*. The last words are spoken by Key, after Theo has died. She says: “Theo, the boat! Theo, the boat. Its okay, we are safe now. We’re safe.” The boat signifies the possibility of tomorrow, of a tomorrow whose arrival might save us from today. If the film is hopeful, we could say it is hopeful about possibility, about what is possible if we don’t give the future away. For Žižek, the boat provides the film’s most convincing political solution. In his interview, he says of the boat: “It doesn’t have roots, its rootless, it floats around,” from which he concludes: “You cut your roots, that’s the solution.” However, I contend that such a reading prematurely fills the boat with a meaning, as a kind of optimism (the boat as the cause of pleasure becomes full of potential).²⁵

It is noticeable that *The Island* also uses the metaphor of the boat. The boat is in Six Echo’s dream. He draws the boat of his dreams for the psychologist. The boat has a Latin word on its side, but no Latin words have been implanted into his consciousness. The boat is a sign of subversion because it is not only a dream but a memory. Six Echo remembers the boat, which means as a clone

he remembers what the client has experienced, a sign of the clone becoming human. If the clone is becoming human, then he is becoming other than human or showing the possibility of the human becoming other. Later, when Six Echo has taken the place of the human from whom he was cloned, he acquires the boat. The boat becomes a revolutionary hope for clones, taking the place of the Island as the cause of future happiness, signifying the possibility of becoming other. If the boat is the memory trace, and matters as memory, the boat suggests that hope in the future rests with the objects that are behind us.

We can consider how we are affected by the arrival of something in which we have placed our hopes. The boat that arrives might be empty, or it might be full. We do not know in advance of its arrival whether it is empty or full. So the point might be that we do not point our emotions toward the objects of our cause. Let's think of the happy boat, like the boat *Tomorrow* or the boat with a Latin name: the boat that arrives is the one we expect will cause our happiness in the future. Rather than pointing our happiness toward the boat, by seeing it as full of potential, we would instead accept the happiness as pointless, as a way of responding to the possibility of its arrival. The boat might arrive or not. We have to work hard to get to the point of the boat's arrival, whether or not the arrival happens. If it arrives, we won't know whether the boat will give us what we hope for. The boat will no longer be held in place as a happy object; the prospect of its fullness will not be the point of our journey.

Pointless emotions are not meaningless or futile; they are just not directed toward the objects that are assumed to cause them. Perhaps a revolutionary happiness is possible if we allow our boats to flee.²⁶ Such a happiness would be alive to chance, to chance arrivals, to the perhaps of a happening. We would not wait for things to happen. To wait is to eliminate the hap by accepting the inheritance of its elimination. To refuse this inheritance is to make things happen. When you make things happen, you make happen as well as make things. A happening is an encounter, the chance of an encounter, or even a chance encounter. Such encounters recreate the ground on which things do happen. To recreate a ground is to deviate from a past that has not been given up. When things go astray, other things can happen. We have a future, perhaps. As Jacques Derrida muses: "What is going to come, perhaps, is not only this or that; it is at last the thought of the *perhaps*, the *perhaps* itself" ([1997] 2005: 29). We might remind ourselves that the "perhaps" shares its "hap" with "happiness." The happy future is the future of the perhaps.