

# Where is Tyche? Bringing the ‘hap’ back into Happiness

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## Abstract

*In this paper, I seek to revitalize the concept of happiness by conceptualizing it as a relational and instantaneous phenomenon with both existential, ethical and political dimensions. Happiness happens – in and through encounters, and it does so when we least expect it. Drawing on Bachelard’s writings on ‘the instant’, as well as Gumbrecht’s and Rosa’s much related concepts of ‘presence’ and ‘resonance’, I attempt to formulate a more relational and nonvolitional counter-concept of happiness that blurs the border between eudemonic happiness and subjective well-being on the one hand and positive affect on the other. Safe-guarding opportunities for these moments to happen is to be seen as vital in a contemporary society governed by individualization, rationalization and hedonistic principles. Even though one cannot choose to be happy, one can indeed lead a good life; colored by an openness towards the other and what might come.*

Keywords: happiness, tyche, instant, relationality, presence

## Introduction

Taken its quite impressive journey throughout the last millenniums into consideration, the fact that the word ‘happiness’ often comes with a slight sense of outwornness to it, seems highly understandable. “Happiness is what we want, whatever that is,” Sara Ahmed (2011, p. 16) writes, hereby making it into the *sine qua non* of all our strivings. The fact that we tend to disagree on the content of this cupholder of human desire, only proves that we’re all Aristotelians in the end, understanding happiness as *the supreme good* – which everything else finally aims at.

According to several critics (Ahmed, 2011; Davies, 2006; Bruckner, 2014), the problem with our late-modern understanding of happiness is manifold. On the one hand, it has been

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instrumentalized and reduced to a mean to an end—a way of reaching some other good. Happy people are said to be not only “better” partners and parents, but likewise more effective workers and in many ways, less burdensome for their societies. Being happy is therefore seen as the key to achieving success within a broad range of areas, aside for being happy in itself, providing it with an instrumental status. On the other hand, happiness is sought in and for itself. Historically, happiness might have been the end-goal, but achieving it necessarily went through something else. It was via the struggle for truth, justice or love that happiness became possible (McMahon, 2006). Today, with a sympathetic aim of not demanding too much of our children, we tell them that “we just want them to be happy.” Furthermore, positive psychology and the growing field of happiness studies promotes happiness as something that is indeed worth seeking out in its own right. In this way, happiness becomes all-consuming, and the struggle for it has in many ways become tautological: we *should* be happy in order to be happy.

The many scientific problems surrounding the measuring and maximizing happiness has been criticized extensively (Ehrenreich, 2011; Davies, 2006, Meyer, 2016). Furthermore, how the contemporary understanding of happiness is deeply intertwined with late capitalism have not gone unnoticed (Cederström & Spicer, 2015; 2018; Bruckner, 2014; Segal, 2017). It seems largely uncontroversial to suggest that imperatives of hedonistic enjoyment are omnipresent. Spending just a couple of minutes watching commercials we learn to “Just do it”, that we “deserve it” or with a Latin twist: *Carpe diem*. The implicit morality seems to be to forget whatever long-term ambitions or duties one might have and do whatever one feels like at the given moment. The world of happiness has become a world of need-satisfaction governed by an “eternal now”. Several authors have observed the radical transformation to earlier moralizing super-ego structures, that prohibited excessive enjoyment, to today’s “duties” to do whatever one feels like, and just be happy (Zizek, 2006; Cederström & Spicer, 2015).

Another position—seemingly pointing in a fundamentally different direction, is the branch of happiness studies focusing on the average evaluations of peoples mental state of mind for a longer period of time. In the self-evaluations that are the primary empirical material for these studies, people are expected to give an account of their “general well-being” which is seen as the most poignant aspect of their happiness. With the aim of measuring *whatever it might be*, happiness is reduced to a number between one and ten, and with the development of positive psychology and growth of the therapeutic market, the goal is no longer to reduce pain and suffering, but likewise to increase happiness and well-being. As Martin Seligman canonically puts it in *Authentic Happiness* (2002): “When you lie awake at night, I’m certain that you wonder how to get from +2 to +7, and not just from -5 to -3” (p. xi).

Even though these two tendencies seem to point in different directions, I will argue that they share numerous premises that are not only highly contestable but likewise precludes the existential, ethical and political potential that happiness does carry. First of all, I agree with the general critique of totalizing “the happiness culture” mentioned above, where it functions as both mean and goal which hollows out the concept. Second, it is presupposed that happiness can be achieved through voluntary and goal-directed action – without any form of mediation. Third, happiness tends to be reduced to “feeling good.” Even though there most likely is an affective dimension to most forms of happiness, I will argue that it is not reducible to this. Lastly, it is assumed that happiness is a through and through individual

affair. Others might be important for my state of happiness, but are reduced to instruments in this endeavor.

In this article, I will formulate a critique of both the widespread “happiness culture” and the way happiness is treated within psychology and related scientific branches. I will then suggest a more relational and nonvoluntary conceptualization of happiness that goes beyond the three-way of life satisfaction, positive affect and eudemonic well-being with the clear aim of overcoming some of their difficulties. Inspired primarily by Gaston Bachelard’s (2013) writings on the instant, I will read the longing for *presence* and *resonance* that we find in cultural critics such as Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2004; 2014) and Hartmut Rosa (2017) as a longing for *instants of relationality*. A revitalized concept of happiness needs to consider, first of all, its sudden and nonvoluntary character. Happiness springs from our being immersed in the world<sup>1</sup>, it comes about *through* the actions which intensifies this embedded character of human existence. Happiness “hap-ens”, in a moment that withdraws immediately.<sup>2</sup> In this way, one cannot meaningfully ask whether one is happy without already having lost it (Agamben, 2007, p. 20). Furthermore, I will argue that these instants take place within a relational sphere. Without excluding that happiness might be achievable without a present other, I suggest that it is a deeply relational phenomenon. In this way, happiness has a de-subjectivizing aspect by which I am torn out of the closed and encapsulated ego, and given over to, or in the words of Judith Butler (2004), “become undone” (p. 136) by the world and the other. Approaching the phenomenon from the point of view of a distributed subjectivity, one could argue that we become ourselves in these moments of shared and sudden intense happiness.

## Happiness in Contemporary Culture

Contemporary understandings of happiness are not only deeply intertwined with ideological struggles in the political domain, but likewise with the “new spirit of capitalism” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). The struggle for happiness, Carl Cederström and Andrew Spicer (2018) argues, functions as both moral and cultural justification for capitalism—and the never-ending journey of enjoyment as a way of life that is being promoted as the only one possible. The relationship between happiness and consumption is intricate. On the one hand, the suggestion is that happy people spend more money. According to Barbara Ehrenreich (2010), the problem with depression is not so much mental suffering *per se*, but the inability to actively seeking excessive enjoyment and happiness. With Melville’s *Bartleby*, depression can be seen as a tedious “I’d prefer not to”, in a culture that promotes wanting everything and more. And so, while happiness is “good business” because it increases consumption, it likewise functions as the final goal of desire. In this way, “happiness becomes a means to an end, as well as the end of the means” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 10).<sup>3</sup> Taking any given commercial, one does not have to be a marketing strategist to acknowledge that happiness is the final reason, for buying whatever it is. The message that is being communicated at least has something to do with the underlying belief that we will be

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<sup>1</sup> To use the Heideggerian phrase: *Being-in-the-world*. See Gumbrecht (2014, p. 2-9), for a Heideggerian reading of presence.

<sup>2</sup> *Tyche* was the antique tutelary deity of luck and fortune. In Aristoteles *Physics* (192b), *tyche* refers to an event that falls outside of the traditional causal categories: *causa efficiens*, *causa formalis*, *causa materialis* and *causa finalis*. The Roman equivalent *fortuna* is etymologically related to ‘hap’ in *happiness*.

<sup>3</sup> See also McMahon (2006), p. 137.

*happier* by spending our money on the given product. That happiness accordingly functions as both the mean and the goal of life has led several critics to argue that we live in a “happiness culture” (Cerderström & Spencer, 2015, 2018; Davies, 2006) governed by “imperatives” to be happy (Bruckner, 2014). Whereas early capitalism was governed by a strict protestant working ethic (Weber, 2009), the market of today is driven by an unlimited need for and “right to” enjoyment, pleasure and happiness.

Understanding “homo economicus” and finding the key to what drives people’s consummation behavior (the infamous “buy button”) was and has been an urgent task for both behaviorism, neuropsychology and positive psychology (Davies, 2006; Ehrenreich, 2010). To understand how happiness is conceived here, quantifying and maximizing are important features. If we move away from Bentham’s monistic pleasure-pain distinction, a number of methodological issues become actualized. The question *why* to measure happiness has been partly answered above. For political and economical reasons, governments and cooperations have a large interest in the happiness of people. The question *how* to measure happiness has therefore been taken rather seriously by scientists from different fields.

## Measuring Happiness

In OCED’s *Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Wellbeing* (2013), a distinction is made between life evaluation, affect and eudemonic happiness. These dimensions make up the conceptual framework of the overarching term subjective well-being (SWB) which is defined as “good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives, and the affective responses of people to their experiences” (OECD, 2013, p. 29). Whereas life evaluation refers to the global judgment of the quality of “life as a whole,” affect is placed on the hedonistic scale between positive and negative feelings. Eudemonic happiness is taken to denote “the functioning” element of well-being comprising autonomy, social engagement and altruism (OECD, 2013). Since the art of measuring these dimensions does not rely on brain-scanning’s and behavioral measurements, they put their trust on self-reports. Economist and happiness researcher Christian Bjørnskov (2015) write accordingly: “If we are to learn anything about happiness, the road is actually rather straightforward: We do not ask people about what makes them happy. Instead we ask how *happy* they are” (p. 16). One of the early pioneers in the field, Michael Argyle (2013) agrees: “We shall rely to a large extent on subjective reports of how people feel: if people say they are happy then they are happy” (p. 2). This form of “radical inductivism” suggests not only that each person has a privileged access to his or her “happiness,” but also that he or she is capable of giving a meaningful account of this state of mind, ready for quantification.

The assumption seems to be that as long as we are using a proper method (in this case a quantifiable scale combined with self-reports), *what* we are measuring is less interesting. Happiness Studies seem to be explicitly uninterested in what they are measuring, as long as it *is* measured. Since different things obviously make people happy one can understand part of the motivation of not operationalizing beforehand. On the other hand, there arises inevitable methodological problems when seeking to quantifying phenomena as complex and multifaceted as happiness. The problem with the acclaimed ontological innocence underlying the field of Happiness Studies is therefore not only that the door is left open for ideological conceptions. The result is furthermore that they overlook that what is being sought measured is most likely not measurable at all. The very project of quantifying

happiness can be seen as self-defeating: “There can be no single measure of happiness and wellbeing, for the good philosophical reason that there is not actually any single quantity of such things in the first place” (Davis, 2006, p. 241).

In her critique of the assumptions underlying this branch of research, Ahmed (2011) not only points to the hidden ideological agenda, but likewise to the presupposed self-transparency of the subject. Happiness Studies presupposes that the informant “knows” how happy he or she is. A model of subjectivity that is centered on an all-knowing and transparent subject that sees and know herself is, seen in both a psychoanalytical and sociological light, is highly problematic. My answer to the question “How happy are you” will inevitably be guided by contextual factors as well as by psychological and structural inhibitions. These general problems appear differently with regard to the three dimensions of SWB mentioned and before moving on the revitalized concept of happiness, these will be considered separately.

With regard to capturing the first dimension of SWB, “life evaluation,” Bjørnskov (2015) emphasizes the qualities of “simple questions” such as “How happy are you, all in all, with your life nowadays?” People are accordingly expected to be giving an account of their state of happiness during the last couple of weeks, months or the like. Positive psychology has from the beginning assumed that the individual is him- or herself responsible for seeking out and finding happiness. In his book on *flow*, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1992), writes that happiness “is not something that happens. It is not the result of good fortune or random choice [...] Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated and defended privately by each person” (s. 2). Since happiness in this way is grasped as an almost exclusively personal business, who would be in a better position when it comes to giving an account of the actual state of mind than the person himself? And in the case the score end up on the lower end of the scale, who is to blame apart from the person himself? We should recall that it is *how* happy the person is that is in focus here, not *what* makes them happy (or unhappy)—which, needless to say, undermines the influence of other life circumstances.

The affective scale it is formulated on a unidimensional hedonistic scale. The golden standard for measuring positive and negative affect are the experiencing sampling method (ESM) and day reconstruction method (DRM) (Diener, 2009). In this attempt to get as close as possible to the in vivo experience of the various events countering one’s day, problems of recall bias are acclaimed surmounted. In the same way as with life evaluation, issues of quantification arise here. How does one judge the hedonistic value of a kiss from a beloved, seeing one’s child taking his or her first steps or experiencing runners high during the last kilometers of a marathon. It feels good – very good indeed, but it is a question worth posing the question whether the subsequent judgment has anything to do with the moment that this occurred.

Taking feelings as guidelines to what happiness is might seem intuitively plausible, but is highly reductive taking the immense history the concepts of happiness has traveled. Reducing happiness to “feeling good” risk deflecting millennia of discussions on the nature of happiness and what the good and meaningful life consists in (McMahon, 2006). Confronting the already mentioned problems with measuring happiness through general life evaluations and affective scales, the Aristotelian concept of eudemonic happiness has been brought to the fore. Unfortunately, the way that eudemonic happiness is being utilized is rather far from Aristoteles’s ethical meaning, that referred to the good and virtuous life. The

definition of eudemonic happiness we find in OECD's guidelines is functionalistic, and in the final end based on individual need satisfaction (Meyer, 2016, p. 51-55). It refers to what is called "psychological flourishing" which is comprised by factors such as "autonomy, competence, interest in learning, goal orientation, sense of purpose, resilience social engagement, caring and altruism." (OECD, 2013, p. 32). The problem with this description is not only its vagueness, but rather its implicit assumption that facets such as autonomy and social engagement have one and the same goal—individual happiness. In this light, the other is never more than a means to my ends, and the infinitely demanding character of its original meaning has been reduced to fulfilling one's function within an accelerated capitalist economy. In this way, the scientific measurement of happiness is deeply intertwined with a contemporary paradigm viewing happiness as the means and goals of life. In the remaining part of this article, I will seek a more elaborated concept of happiness that blurs the borders between the mentioned scales and hopefully offers an opportunity to rethink the potential that happiness still carries.

## In Defence of Lost Moments

No matter which aspect of happiness that is being measured, Happiness Studies relies on a transparent subject that "knows" and reports his or her state of mind in an attempt to capture how "it is most of the time", "how you feel" as well as one's "psychological functioning". What is clearly missing from all of these, is a sense of humbleness with regard to the fact that life seldom comes about as one likes to, but in significant ways "just happens." TO begin with, we're thrown into a world that we have not chosen (Heidegger, 2010). Life plays out in the shape of a gift and gifts can only be received (Marion, 2011). Neither do we choose the people that make up our social world; parents are always already there and children come and grow as they do. There are never sufficient *reasons* why our lovers and friends become as important as they do. This "thrownness" of existence does not necessarily imply a form of fatalism, where action is superfluous and life given over to its destiny. But it does call for a certain humbleness with regard to accepting a sense of givenness and limits with regard to that which doesn't entirely lies within one's realm of agency.

Accordingly, living a good and happy life is not merely an individual question governed by rational and calculated choices. There is a sense of "letting be" that I will argue is just as important. Further, positive affect is not reducible to hedonistic parameters. The moments that we often refer to as "happy" have less to do with maximal enjoyment than with being "in tune" with or "resonant" with the world or the other. The argument is therefore still to be seen as Aristotelian in the sense that happiness is the outcome of our enactment with the world and others. It cannot be sought in and of itself, and does certainly not spring from self-actualization. On the other hand – which goes well beyond Aristoteles understanding, I will argue that there is a suddenness to happiness that is existentially primary. Happiness has more to do with a momentous eruption or opening of the self than with any of the three more or less self-sufficient dimensions of SWB. One aspect of leading a "good life" should be seen as not overshadowing these possibilities and embrace them as they come about. Receiving is in this case not merely a passive stance but requires a form of devotion to what hap-ens. Before outlining the phenomenological structure of this more clearly, I will pave the ground by introducing the theoretical apparatus for giving a more privileged position to moments of instantaneous happiness that is not necessarily hedonistic. Starting out from Bachelard's thinking on *the instant* as the existentially most predominant temporal mode, I will be moving on to Gumbrecht's *presence* and Rosa's *resonance*. The question that we

will grapple with in the following is: How can we conceive of this momentous aspect of our lives, and how is it related to happiness?

## Given Time

In sharp contrast to the privilege given to the durational aspect of time that we encounter in Husserl's phenomenology of inner time consciousness and Bergson's *durée*, Bachelard (2013) presents a vivid defense for the instant. The instant is, Bachelard argues, the existentially primary temporal dimension. Feeling alive is an experience of the present instant that is distinguishable from the past and the future. "Time has but one reality, that of the instant," as the first sentence of *Intuition of the Instant* (2013, p. 1) reads. According to Bachelard, duration is always a second-hand phenomenon. What we experience is first and foremost discontinuity and rupture, each instant being separated from the other, and if "our hearts were large enough to love life in all its details, we would see that every instant is at once a giver and a plunderer, and that a young or tragic novelty—always sudden—never ceases to illustrate the essential discontinuity of time" (p. 8). Our sense of continuity and duration is in this light a less primordial experience. "Only nothingness is truly continuous," (p. 22) which means that duration is related to anticipating and postponing, a form of preparation for something to come. Pure duration only has one magnitude, that is potentiality. In this light, happiness has nothing to do with "how it is most of the time." On the level evaluated as "general well-being," we find nothing but existential boredom. And still, time carries a promise, an inherent potentiality that the realm of possibilities is never entirely foreclosed, and that something new might happen.

Gumbrecht's distinction between meaning and presence-effects can be read as pointing in a similar direction, and carries an even more explicit existential significance (2014, p. x). Gumbrecht argues that the pre-occupation with meaning that has been paramount since the enlightenment has resulted in an inability to experience and acknowledge the significance of "the present." Without referring explicitly to Bachelard's writings, Gumbrecht seem to follow the same major lines of thought. Meaning, Gumbrecht says, presupposes distancing oneself from life, with the explicit aim of interpreting it—assuming that it does carry hidden layers that need to be uncovered. The contemporary "loss of the world" is the result of a culture that has lost the ability to experience immediacy. According to Gumbrecht, it is time to "develop concepts that can at least begin to grasp the phenomena of presence, instead of just having to bypass this dimension" (p. 78): "concepts that would allow us to point to what is irreversibly nonconceptual in our lives" (p. 133). This does not imply that the interpretative stance is made superfluous, but rather an insistence that human life should encapsulate a movement between domains guided by meaning and presence respectively. This somberness is necessary when reading happiness in this light; there is little to do but embrace this sense of possibility and accede that moments of lightness and grace will and do show themselves, but paradoxically only once we forget all about them and commit ourselves to something other.

In his attempt to describe presence experiences phenomenologically, Gumbrecht's examples often includes sports, music and literature. It is through inherently meaningful activities and experiences that we experience "presence." These are "moments of intensity," (p. 97) that invalidate demands for a "meaning" beyond themselves. Referring to Heidegger's use of *Gelassenheit*, Gumbrecht describes these moments as "being in sync with the things in the world" (p. 117). Being spellbound by a novel, a song, or a game, we give ourselves over to the world and "lose ourselves" for a moment. Experiencing (*Erleben*)

presupposes a giving up of the self-reflective attitude, that sees my critical attitude as a necessary filter for all experience. These moments, Gumbrecht points out, are not edifying: “there is nothing we could really learn from them,” but intrinsically valuable. Before I will continue and outline this line of thought with specific regard to happiness in the last section of the article, I will suggest that Rosa’s concept of *resonance* offers a more apt relational ontology for these instant moments that has been introduced via Bachelard and Gumbrecht.

## Seeking Resonance

According to Rosa (2013), the primary reason for contemporary psychological and social suffering and the general sense of alienation is a “time regime” that have accelerated almost all spheres of human life in absurdum. For Rosa, a relevant critical theory of today should work towards finding “moments of non-alienated” experiences, and his conceptualization of resonance can be read as a response to this call. Accelerated time plays a cornerstone in Rosa’s thinking, and in this way, he places himself in a slightly different category than Bachelard and Gumbrecht that promote the instant as a way of overcoming existential boredom and alienation. The prime reason for introducing Rosa at this point is to point out how the relational aspect of resonance contributes to my broader line of argument.

In *Social Acceleration – A New Theory of Modernity* (2013) Rosa distinguishes between three types of acceleration, taking place through transformations within the technological, social and life-rhythm spheres respectively. I will focus on the last feature which carries most relevance with regard to this paper. Whereas technological and social acceleration is driven by a competitive capitalistic virtue, the changes in life rhythm carries more straightforward existential aspects. Acceleration of the life rhythm, Rosa argues, is the contemporary equivalent to eternal life. The promises of positive psychology, that is an intense, rich and happy life is seen as a way to secular salvation; the most effective and available “life strategy” (Bauman, 1992) that we employ in the face of death. “Busy living” is the safest way of avoiding being confronted with existential issues as well as others that might call for response, attention and care. Standing outside this area of constant activity is, according to Rosa, what creates guilt, suffering and abjection of the unwanted.

Pursuing an overcoming, not only of the social pathologies of depression and stress that Rosa identify as consequences hereof, but likewise the more general sense of alienation in contemporary society, resonance becomes a key concept. Echoing Gumbrecht’s *presence*, *resonance* can be seen as a way of re-connecting with the disenchanted world. “Alienation’s other is a mode of relating to the world in which the subject feels touched, moved or addressed by the people, places, objects, etc. he or she encounters” (Rosa, 2017, p. 449). Apart from this existential openness that allows the subject to become affected from the outside, an affirmative stance on the side of the subject is likewise required. Resonance is hereby conceptualized as this dual movement of being affected, and responding affirmatively. While this affirmative stance presupposes a form of self-efficacy in a Bandurian sense, “the transformative effects of resonance are beyond the control of the subject” (Rosa, 2017, p. 450). Establishing a resonant relationship with the world hereby leaves the subject vulnerable but likewise opens up a space for meetings and encounters that will serve us as the guiding thread in the final section.



## A Revitalized Concept of Happiness

In this final section of the article I will seek to formulate a re-vitalized understanding of happiness. This understanding rests on two fundamental features. First, that happiness is at least partly out of our control, as it happens when we enact and interact with the world. That is, when we let go of a view of life that is through and through rationalized, individualized and governed by hedonistic principles. Second, happiness is inherently relational. It is through encounters and meetings that we experience this opening most intensely. The strategy is therefore *neither* to define what happiness is, nor prescribe an absolute route to somehow reach it. Doing either, will most likely “annul its very possibility” (Ahmed, 2011, p. 220). The prospect is rather, merely to safeguard opportunities for a natal newness that grants these possibilities in the first place. Even though something certainly happens in solitude and happiness is far from incompatible with this, my focus here will be on the certain forms of happiness that arises in relation to the other.

This endeavour is by no means original but can be found in slightly different versions in the writings of Segal (2017), Badiou (2019), Cederström, & Spicer (2018) and Ahmed (2011). With the explicit aim of avoiding the unfortunate connotations that “happiness” carries, these writers often refer to “joy” as a useful “counter-concept”. Joy, it is argued, carries the playfulness, elusiveness and openness that are necessary to re-establish a resonant relationship with the world and others. Joy is likewise related to laughter and shared impressions; “Joy breaks down the boundaries that separate self from other, humanity and nature. It bestows a glorious we-mode upon earth” (Segal, 2017, p. 24). Even though there are certainly good reasons for this alteration in terminology, I will hold on to happiness, because the etymological roots give every reason for doing so, and because vital connotations would otherwise be lost.

The moment or the instant that we find in the writings of Bachelard and which served as a background for our reading of Gumbrecht and Rosa, doesn’t just happen. Rosas emphasis on the dialectic relationship between passivity and affirmation is important in this context. Even though happiness in the *tychean* sense carries a degree of unconditionality or “comes from the outside,” it’s not other-worldly and totally non-connected to our way of living. Few of us think of ourselves as bricks in the world of Homeric Gods; we do have a saying and are accountable for leading a life that opens up a space for things to happen. McMahan (2006) argues that the history of happiness is the history of humans taking a greater control over their destinies, and even though this process might have gone too far, there are important aspects of this struggle that are worth preserving. Just as one cannot *choose* to fall in love, but to a certain extent can choose *not* to fall in love by excluding the possibilities that the other carries from the sphere of my lifeworld, one cannot choose to be happy, but indeed choose not to make *any* room for moments of happiness in one’s life. How one leads or conducts one’s life is hereby not seen as irrelevant to momentarily happiness.

The most severe problems with contemporary cultural and scientific paradigms of happiness is that they exclude this very possibility. Rather than quantifying, measuring and explicitly aiming for achieving happiness, focusing on what Gumbrecht (2004) calls the “irreversibly nonconceptual in our lives,” (p. 34) can be a way of safeguarding opportunities for re-establishing a resonant relationship with the world. Happiness, in and of itself, is not worth struggling for. Instead, it is achievable and experienced through acting and interacting with the world. In Alain Badiou’s (2019) writings on happiness, the phenomenon is related to the *event* and the accompanied truth experience. In a move affiliated with Gumbrecht, he

bypasses the horizon of meaning and focus on the ruptures and moments where something radically unexpected is allowed to happen. In Badiou's reading, these moments of truth are what is truly subjectivizing: "I believe," Badiou writes, "that there is one affect that is necessarily connected to a true life: happiness [...] This affect is the affirmative feeling of an expansion of the individual from the moment, it becomes part of the subjectivity of truth" (p. 69). Even without following Badiou's metaphysical pathway, it's conceivable that we become ourselves—not by turning inwards and finding happiness through an *art* of authentic self-realizing, self-actualizing or self-compassion, nor through maximizing enjoyment, but through an affirmative response to what is genuinely *other*.

Parallel with this line of thought that relates happiness to a broader sense of possibility, Sara Ahmed writes that:

"Moments of happiness create texture, shared impressions: a sense of lightness in possibility. Just think of those moments where you are brought to life by the absurdity of being reminded of something, where a sideways glance can be enough to create a feeling that ripples through you." (Ahmed, 2011, p. 219)

"The sideways glance" is all it takes for us to be—in one move, thrown out of our self, into the world and *brought to life*. Happiness has less to do with fulfilment and satisfaction than maintaining desire, prospects and possibility. In this way, it remains and probably should remain an unfulfilled dream; the platonic sun that we shouldn't approach too closely.

In this way, the way we relate to happiness can still be seen as a valid existential, ethical and political issue. While depression is often understood as a lack of future, or even "a future without future" (Frantzen, 2019), happiness is an insistence on the fact that this future carries an opening towards something new, or perhaps simply that there *is* a future. Existentially, happiness is paramount to a "radical hope" (Lear, 2006) that one might experience a different world tomorrow, while excluding the possibility that this world will be characterized by durational "state of happiness". Ethically, it most certainly means that happiness and ethical life is not mutually excluding (Klausen, 2018). Devoting oneself to the other does not exclude happiness, but will most likely be one of those moments that pull oneself out of oneself and creates resonance. Finally, and even though this has not been the main focus of this article, there is a political aspect of happiness that should not be overlooked. "No one can be called happy or free without participating and having a share, in public power," Hannah Arendt writes in *On Revolution* (1999, p. 255). Happiness understood as relational possibility might also be understood as the opening up a hope for another future for all.

## Concluding Remarks

In the first paragraph of this article, I mentioned that happiness often comes with a sense of outwornness to it. My explicit aim has been to overcome this and revitalize a concept we shouldn't throw out with the bathwater. By pinpointing how happiness comes with a suddenness to it and springs out from encounters with others, I have shown how it carries not only existential dimensions overshadowed in today's happiness culture, but ethical and political as well. I have argued that the field of Happiness Studies fails to capture vital aspects of happiness, that is moments of grace and love and that our contemporary happiness industry stands in the way for a life that welcomes and embraces this. Seeking happiness is

a self-defeating endeavor but leading a life that is colored by an openness to the unexpected and posits the other not only as an instrument for need fulfillment, can be seen as conditions of possibilities for it to occur.

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### About the author

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