

Feeling (World) Pride: Cruel Optimism, Affect, and the Emerging Event
Tyler Carson

Most critical analyses of pride festivals and parades use ‘strong’ theories of the social to link the harmful structural effects of these events (gentrification, depoliticization, and corporatization) to various systems and processes of oppression (neoliberalism, settler colonialism, cosmopolitanism). This paper takes a different approach to World Pride (WP) than those currently offered in critical theory. Turning to ‘weak’ theories of the social this paper aims at mapping the affective topographies of WP. The concepts of the scene, affect, and the emerging event, are mobilized in order to shift the theoretical register and to consider other planes and scales, which it argues, allows us to think more complexly about WP. This emerging event is more than structure; it is the place where the circulation of public affects produces complicated relationships that involve multiplicities, contradiction, and ambivalence. The paper considers whether Lauren Berlant’s relation of cruel optimism best captures queer people’s investment in the promise of WP to be something otherwise, or perhaps to be a truly queer event. The paper ultimately argues that ambivalence is not only a coping mechanism for critical queers to deal with the pressing forces of the past and emerging present, but is also a potentially valuable tool for identifying some of the limits of critical theory. Its goal is to reposition pleasure, desire, and hope as properly political concepts—concepts that critical theorists who are seeking to understand the dynamics and uneven workings of the social must continually grapple with in their striving towards a more ethical and humane world.