

Cruel Optimism Chapter Summaries + Quotes + Notes

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Acknowledgements.

"Optimism as the thing that keeps the event open, for better or ill". (p. vii)

Introduction - "Affect in the Present" (pp. 1-22)

Initial definition of cruel optimism - "A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing." (p.1)

Operant definition of optimism: "the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying *something* that you cannot generate on your own but sense in the wake of a person, a way of life, and object, project, concept, or scene." (pp. 2-3)

"Whatever the *experience* of optimism is in particular, then, the *affective structure* of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of a fantasy that enables you to expect that *this* time, nearness to *this* thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way." (p.2)

Rearrangements of attachment
↳ from what is figured as the passive reception of aid to the active "participation," "involvement" etc.

Cruel optimism is then, when the scene you return to actively does the opposite - either nothing changes or it changes in the wrong way.

Central to the book is "The good Life" fantasy and what happens when it, or the different fantasies which make it up, start/s to fray.

Usual suspects in terms of the fantasies fraying

What are the fantasies at play in Non-Profits?

↳ "making a difference"
"giving back"
"meaningful work"

Core outline: "The book is about what happens to fantasies of the good life when the ordinary becomes a landfill for overwhelming and impending crises of life-building and expectation whose sheer volume so threatens what it has meant to "have a life" that adjustment seems like an accomplishment." (p. 3)

→ thinking about the Charity Jobs advert last year.

Central claim 1. "The present is perceived, first, affectively" (p.4)

- What we think of as "the present" is felt in "those visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing that can serve to drive us toward movement, thought, and ever-changing forms of relation" (p.1)

From <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/affect-theory>>

[The Affect Theory Reader](#), ed. Gregg, M. and Spixworth, G. 2010 (Duke University Press)

Conceptualizing the "now" as
- post-pandemic (the pandemic is ongoing)
- post-BLM (the work is incomplete)

? How does this connect with *Dark Matter of the Mind* - e.g. is dark matter just affect by another name - iirc the author doesn't really reference affect?

"we understand nothing about impasses of the political without having an account of the"

"an account of the production of the present"

(p.4)

"Genres of historical duration" of interest:

Exploration of "impasse" - "the impasse is a stretch of time in

which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present

and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering

absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help

clarify things, maintain one's sea legs, and coordinate the standard melodramatic

crises with those processes that have not yet found their genre of event." p.4

- In a time of "polycrisis" then, is the impasse less a temporary stretch of time and more the abundant structure of daily life?
- As Berlant points out, tolerability of impasse, experience is influenced by race, class etc. - "gestural economies of self-management that differ according to what kinds of confidence people have enjoyed about the entitlements of their social location." p.5

Also looks at "situation" as a genre - "a state of things in which *something* that will perhaps matter is unfolding amid the usual activity of life" p.5

"The situation is therefore a genre of social time and practice in which a relation of persons and worlds is sensed to be changing but the rules for habitation and the genres of storytelling about it are unstable, in chaos." p.6

- ch 5 will look at situation comedy/ tragedy

Interest in how the different genres becomes transform - "This set of processes - the becoming historical of the affective event and the improvisation of genre amid pervasive uncertainty - organises *Cruel Optimism*." p.6

Tracking the "waning of genre" - how the destabilization/ dissolution of conventional (realist) genres that transition the present into the past opens new possibilities for escaping the impasse.

Crisis as genre - polycrisis

Moving away from everyday life theory as no longer representing most peoples lives p.8

— elite capture as a process by which the transformative potentiality of the "situation" becomes foreclosed?

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— The present as a "body" in the posthuman sense?