# Cruel Optimism K

#### The aff is a manifestation of the magnetic attraction to cruel optimism: The object of optimism (the advocacy of the 1AC) promises to guarantee the endurance of something, the survival of something, the flourishing of something, and above all the protection of the desire that made this object or scene powerful enough to have magnetized an attachment to it.

Berlant 11, Lauren Gail. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011. KJ

All attachments are optimistic. When we talk about an object of desire, we are really talking about a cluster of promises we want someone or something to make to us and make possible for us. This cluster of promises could seem embedded in a person, a thing, an institution, a text, a norm, a bunch of cells, smells, a good idea—whatever. To phrase “the object of desire” as a cluster of promises is to allow us to encounter what’s incoherent or enigmatic in our attachments, not as confirmation of our irrationality but as an explanation of our sense of our endurance in the object, insofar as proximity to the object means proximity to the cluster of things that the object promises, some of which may be clear to us and good for us while others, not so much. Thus attachments do not all feel optimistic: one might dread, for example, returning to a scene of hunger, or longing, or the slapstick reiteration of a lover’s or parent’s predictable distortions. But being drawn to return to the scene where the object hovers in its potentialities is the operation of optimism as an affective form. In optimism, the subject leans toward promises contained within the present moment of the encounter with her object.1 In the introduction I described “cruel optimism” as a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic. What’s cruel about these attachments, and not merely inconvenient or tragic, is that the subjects who have x in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object/scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well- being, because whatever the content of the attachment is, the continuity of its form provides something of the continuity of the subject’s sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world. This phrase points to a condition different from that of melancholia, which is enacted in the subject’s desire to temporize an experience of the loss of an object/ scene with which she has invested her ego continuity. **Cruel optimism is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object**. One more thing: sometimes, the cruelty of an optimistic attachment is more easily perceived by an analyst who observes the cost of someone’s or some group’s attachment to x, since often persons and communities focus on some aspects of their relation to an object/world while disregarding others.2 But if the cruelty of an attachment is experienced by someone/some group, even in a subtle fashion, the fear is that the loss of the promising object/scene itself will defeat the capacity to have any hope about anything. Often this fear of loss of a scene of optimism as such is unstated and only experienced in a sudden incapacity to manage startling situations, as we will see throughout this book. One might point out that all objects/scenes of desire are problematic, in that investments in them and projections onto them are less about them than about what cluster of desires and affects we can manage to keep magnetized to them. I have indeed wondered whether all optimism is cruel, because the experience of loss of the conditions of its reproduction can be so breathtakingly bad, just as the threat of the loss of x in the scope of one’s attachment drives can feel like a threat to living on itself. But some scenes of optimism are clearly crueler than others: where cruel optimism operates, the very vitalizing or animating potency of an object/scene of desire contributes to the attrition of the very thriving that is supposed to be made possible in the work of attachment in the first place. This might point to something as banal as a scouring love, but it also opens out to obsessive appetites, working for a living, patriotism, all kinds of things. One makes affective bargains about the costliness of one’s attachments, usually unconscious ones, most of which keep one in proximity to the scene of desire/attrition. This means that a poetics of attachment always involves some splitting off of the story I can tell about wanting to be near x (as though x has autonomous qualities) from the activity of the emotional habitus I have constructed, as a function of having x in my life, in order to be able to project out my endurance in proximity to the complex of what x seems to offer and proffer. To understand cruel optimism, therefore, one must embark on an analysis of indirection, which provides a way to think about the strange temporalities of projection into an enabling object that is also disabling. I learned how to do this from reading Barbara Johnson’s work on apostrophe and free indirect discourse. In her poetics of indirection, each of these two rhetorical modes is shaped by the ways a writing subjectivity conjures other ones so that, in a performance of fantasmatic intersubjectivity, the writer gains superhuman observational authority, enabling a performance of being that is made possible by the proximity of the object. Because this aesthetic process is something like what I am describing in the optimism of attachment, I’ll describe a bit the shape of my transference with her thought.

#### The Aff cruelly tricks the people into thinking that liberation has occurred with their plan; the discourse of hope and optimistic attachment to the resolution is a trick of time that masks the violence paining marginalized communities.

**Warren 15** (Calvin L. Warren, Assistant Professor of American Studies at Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, “Black Nihilism and the Politics of Hope” p. 4-5)

The American dream, then, is realized through black suffering. It is the humiliated, incarcerated, mutilated, and terrorized black body that serves as the vestibule for the Democracy that is to come. In fact, it almost becomes impossible to think the Political without black suffering. According to this logic, corporeal fracture engenders ontological coherence, in a political arithmetic saturated with violence. Thus, nonviolence is a misnomer, or somewhat of a ruse. Black-sacrifice is necessary to achieve the American dream and its promise of coherence, progress, and equality. We find similar logic in the contemporary moment. Renisha McBride, Jordon Davis, Kody Ingham, Amadou Diallo, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Frederick Jermain Carter, Chavis Carter, Timothy Stansbury, Hadiya Pendleton, Oscar Grant, Sean Bell, Kendrec McDade,Trayvon Martin, and Mike Brown, among others, constitute a fatal rupture of the Political; these signifiers, stained in blood, refuse the closure that the Political promises. They haunt political discourses of progress, betterment, equality, citizenship, and justice—the metaphysical organization of social existence. We are witnessing a shocking accumulation of injured and mutilated black bodies, particularly young black bodies, which place what seems to be an unanswerable question mark in the political field: if we are truly progressing toward this “society-that-is-to-come (maybe),” why is black suffering increasing at such alarming rates? In response to this inquiry, we are told to keep struggling, keep “hope” alive, and keep the faith. After George Zimmerman was acquitted for murdering Trayvon Martin, President Obama addressed the nation and importuned us to keep fighting for change because “each successive generation seems to be making progress in changing attitudes toward race” and, if we work hard enough, we will move closer to “becoming a more perfect union.” Despite Martin’s corpse lingering in the minds of young people and Zimmerman’s smile of relief after the verdict, we are told that things are actually getting better. Supposedly, the generation that murdered Trayvon Martin and Renisha McBride is much better than the generation that murdered Emmett Till. Black suffering, here, is instrumentalized to accomplish pedagogical, cathartic, and redemptive objectives and, somehow, the growing number of dead black bodies in the twenty-first century is an indication of our progress toward “perfection.” Is perfection predicated on black death? How many more black bodies must be lynched, mutilated, burned, castrated, raped, dismembered, shot, and disabled before we achieve this “more perfect union”? In many ways, black suffering and death become the premiere vehicles of political perfection and social maturation. This essay argues that the logic of the Political—linear temporality, biopolitical futurity, perfection, betterment, and redress—sustains black suffering. Progress and perfection are worked through the pained black body and any recourse to the Political and its discourse of hope will ultimately reproduce the very metaphysical structures of violence that pulverize black being.

**The impact is a chokehold of American society. We must not trust within a system of reformist measures but we must do it ourselves.** Paul **Butler** is an American lawyer, former prosecutor, and current law professor of Georgetown University Law Center., 8-1-20**17**, "US justice is built to humiliate and oppress black men. It starts with the chokehold...," Guardian, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/11/chokehold-police-black-men-paul-butler-race-america

The chokehold means that what happens in places like [Ferguson, Missouri](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/mar/04/ferguson-police-racial-persecution-federal-report), and [Baltimore, Maryland](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/aug/09/baltimore-police-department-justice-department-investigation-findings) – where the police routinely harass and discriminate against African American – is not a flaw in the criminal justice system. Ferguson and Baltimore are examples of how the system is supposed to work. The problem is not bad-apple cops. The problem is police work itself. American cops are the enforcers of a criminal justice regime that targets black men and sets them up to fail. The chokehold is how the police get away with shooting unarmed black people. Cops are rarely prosecuted because they are, literally, doing their jobs. This is why efforts to fix “problems” such as excessive force and racial profiling are doomed to fail. If it’s not broke, you can’t fix it. Police violence and selective enforcement are not so much flaws in American criminal justice as they are integral features of it. The chokehold is why, legally speaking, other lives don’t matter as much as heteronormative white lives. The whole world knows that the United States faces a crisis in racial justice, but the focus on police and mass incarceration is too narrow. We might be able to fix those problems the way that we “ fixed” slavery and segregation, but the chokehold’s genius is its mutability. Throughout the existence of America, there have always been legal ways to keep black people down. Slavery bled into the old Jim Crow; the old Jim Crew bled into the new Jim Crow. In order to halt this wretched cycle we must not think of reform – we must think of transformation. The United States of America must be disrupted, and made anew. This book uses the experience of African American men to explain why. One of the consequences of the chokehold is mass incarceration, famously described by Michelle Alexander as “the new Jim Crow”. The chokehold also brings us police tactics such as stop and frisk, which are designed to humiliate African American males – to bring them into submission. The chokehold demands a certain kind of performance from a black man every time he leaves his home. He must affirmatively demonstrate – to the police and the public at large –that he is not a threat. Most African American men follow the script. Black men who are noncompliant suffer the consequences. The chokehold is perfectly legal. Like all law, it promotes the interests of the rich and powerful. In any system marked by inequality, there are winners and losers. Because the chokehold imposes racial order, who wins and who loses is based on race. White people are the winners. What they win is not only material, like the cash money that arresting African Americans brings to cities all over the country in fines and court costs. The criminalizing of blackness also brings psychic rewards. American criminal justice enhances the property value of whiteness. As the chokehold subordinates black men, it improves the status of white people. It works as an enforcement mechanism for keeping the black man in his place literally as well as figuratively. Oh the places African American men don’t go because of the chokehold. It frees up urban space for coffeehouses and beer gardens.

#### The interest in the politics of hope will only result in an overwhelmingly negative force, the AC traps traumatic effects.

Berlant 2, Lauren Gail. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011. KJ

Even amid the racial mediations entrenched in capitalist inequalities in the United States, optimism involves thinking that in exchange one can achieve recognition. But, one must always ask, recognition of what? One’s selfidealization, one’s style of ambivalence, one’s tender bits, or one’s longing for the event of recognition itself ? For Ashbery, recognition’s exchange value takes him out of personality, that cluster of familiar repetitions. It is pure potentiality in the good sense and provides a lovely experience of realizing that the flurry of activity that stood in for making a life was an impasse now passed by and replaced by another, slower one, where he experiences hanging around, letting something or someone come in the way a sound comes, without being defensive. For the men who still feel like boys at the close of “Exchange Value” the affect attached to optimism is either panic or numbness, not humming. While, as defenses, these modes of vibrating near- paralysis are cognate to the modes of getting by that preceded Miss Bailey’s death, those earlier styles of floating beneath value while having fantasies of it seem utopian compared to the crypt of shattered being that pecuniary optimism cruelly engenders. It is striking that these moments of optimism, which mark a possibility that the habits of a history might not be reproduced, release an overwhelmingly negative force. One predicts such effects in traumatic scenes, but it is not usual to think about an optimistic event as having the same potential consequences. The conventional fantasy that a revolutionary lifting of being might happen in proximity to the new object/scene of promise would predict otherwise than that a person or a group might prefer, after all, to surf from episode to episode while leaning toward a cluster of vaguely phrased prospects. And yet: at a certain degree of abstraction both from trauma and optimism the sensual experience of self- dissolution, radically reshaped consciousness, new sensoria, and narrative rupture can look similar; the subject’s grasping toward stabilizing form, too, in the face of dissolution, looks like classic compensation, in which the production of habits that signify predictability defends against losing emotional shape entirely.

#### This turns the entirety of the 1AC case, we are critiquing the very foundation of thought the 1AC attempts to work on top of. It’s an independent solvency takeout, and serves as a trauma DA—their frame posits revolutionary hope that debate and society might change but ultimately reinstitutes the same system that solidifies and naturalizes divisions within the world.

Berlant 06 Lauren, professor of Literature at the University of Chicago. “Cruel Optimism” in Differences, 17.3. 2006

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#### The alternative is a rejection of the affirmative’s cluster of cruel promises in favor of moving away from the discourse of trauma. This is not to say that the affirmative’s advocacy is necessarily wrong, but rather discussions of affect must come first because they frame the produced reality.

#### Negating allows us to understand a broad range of physical and aesthetic genres that pressure the subject’s sensorium, recognizing and moving away from the fantasy life reproduced with discourse of desire.

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The key here is not to see what happens to aesthetically mediated characters as equivalent to what happens to people but to see that in the affective scenarios of these works and discourses we can discern claims about the situation of contemporary life.15 At times I use terms like “neoliberal” or “transnational” as heuristics for pointing to a set of delocalized processes that have played a huge role in transforming postwar political and economic norms of reciprocity and meritocracy since the 1970s. But I am not claiming that they constitute a world- homogenizing system whose forces are played out to the same effect, or affect, everywhere. The differences matter, as do the continuities. My method is to read patterns of adjustment in specific aesthetic and social contexts to derive what’s collective about specific modes of sensual activity toward and beyond survival. Each chapter focuses on dynamic relations of hypervigilance, unreliable agency, and dissipated subjectivity under contemporary capitalism; but what “capitalism” means varies a lot, as each case makes its own singular claim for staging the general forces that dominate the production of the historical sensorium that’s busy making sense of and staying attached to whatever there is to work with, for life. This leads me to the book’s final conceptual aim. I have described its departure from modernist models of cognitive overload in the urban everyday, in order to engage a broader range of physical and aesthetic genres that mediate pressures of the present moment on the subject’s sensorium. Cruel Optimism argues, therefore, for moving away from the discourse of trauma— from Caruth to Agamben—when describing what happens to persons and populations as an effect of catastrophic impacts.16 Why does that follow? Given trauma’s primary location in describing severe transformations of physical health and life, it might be surprising to think about trauma as a genre for viewing the historical present. But in critical theory and mass society generally, “trauma” has become the primary genre of the last eighty years for describing the historical present as the scene of an exception that has just shattered some ongoing, uneventful ordinary life that was supposed just to keep going on and with respect to which people felt solid and confident. This book thinks about the ordinary as a zone of convergence of many histories, where people manage the incoherence of lives that proceed in the face of threats to the good life they imagine. Catastrophic forces take shape in this zone and become events within history as it is lived. But trauma theory conventionally focuses on exceptional shock and data loss in the memory and experience of catastrophe, implicitly suggesting that subjects ordinarily archive the intensities neatly and efficiently with an eye toward easy access. A traumatic event is simply an event that has the capacity to induce trauma. My claim is that most such happenings that force people to adapt to an unfolding change are better described by a notion of systemic crisis or “crisis ordinariness” and followed out with an eye to seeing how the affective impact takes form, becomes mediated. Crisis is not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what’s overwhelming. Each chapter narrates why a logic of adjustment within the historical scene makes more sense than a claim that merges the intense with the exceptional and the extraordinary. The extraordinary always turns out to be an amplification of something in the works, a labile boundary at best, not a slammed-door departure. In the impasse induced by crisis, being treads water; mainly, it does not drown. Even those whom you would think of as defeated are living beings figuring out how to stay attached to life from within it, and to protect what optimism they have for that, at least. Marcuse’s prophetic description of postwar U.S. society charts it out: while people comfort themselves with stories about beating the system or being defeated by it, they “continue the struggle for existence in painful, costly and obsolete forms.”17 I believe that these conceptual distinctions matter to how we view the ongoing activity of precariousness in the present, and each case points to how that mattering might open up the scenes we have delegated to the logic of trauma, with its fundamentally ahistoricizing logic. But some readers might respond to the questions I ask above by thinking that I’m overcomplicating things. They would call the fragilities and unpredictability of living the good- life fantasy and its systemic failures “bad luck” amid the general pattern of upward mobility, reliable intimacy, and political satisfaction that has graced liberal political/economic worlds since the end of the Second World War. They might see collectively experienced disasters as a convergence of accidents in an imperfect system, and they wouldn’t be wrong about that, either; there’s a lot of contingency involved in localizing any process in a life, a scene, or an event. They might take the sense of trauma as equal to its claim to exceptionality. They might think that precarity is existential; they might argue that the focus on structural induction oversystematizes the world. To this set of objections I would say that the current recession congeals decades of class bifurcation, downward mobility, and environmental, political, and social brittleness that have increased progressively since the Reagan era. The intensification of these processes, which reshapes conventions of racial, gendered, sexual, economic, and nation- based subordination, has also increased the probability that structural contingency will create manifest crisis situations in ordinary existence for more kinds of people. One might also point out critically that this book’s archive, which spans conventionally empirical and aesthetic kinds of knowledge, makes big claims on the backs of small objects about how people live now: claims derived from a variety of materials but from neither its own ethnography nor data from diaries, letters, or other primary materials of social history and autobiography. True enough! This book is not offering sociologically empirical cases about who beats the system and who succumbs to its systemic stresses, although it draws widely from an interdisciplinary body of secondary material on these matters. It is a book about the attrition of a fantasy, a collectively invested form of life, the good life. As that fantasy has become more fantasmatic, with less and less relation to how people can live— as the blueprint has faded—its attrition manifests itself in an emerging set of aesthetic conventions that make a claim to affective realism derived from embodied, affective rhythms of survival. I generate exemplary cases of adjustment to the loss of this fantasy of sustenance through the engaged construction of an archive of the impasse or transitional moment, and inquire into what thriving might entail amid a mounting sense of contingency. I don’t, however, claim to be being comprehensive about all of the ways that an adjustment between life and fantasy can or has occurred amid the spreading anxiety about what’s happened, happening, and potentially next in the relation of singular lives and translocal capitalist worlds. Cruel Optimism gives a name to a personal and collective kind of relation and sets its elaboration in a historical moment that is as transnational as the circulation of capital, state liberalism, and the heterofamilial, upwardly mobile good- life fantasy have become. As my previous work on the case study makes explicit, I am extremely interested in generalization: how the singular becomes delaminated from its location in someone’s story or some locale’s irreducibly local history and circulated as evidence of something shared. This is part of my method, to track the becoming general of singular things, and to give those things materiality by tracking their resonances across many scenes, including the ones made by nonverbal but still linguistic activities, like gestures. Aesthetics is not only the place where we rehabituate our sensorium by taking in new material and becoming more refined in relation to it. But it provides metrics for understanding how we pace and space our encounters with things, how we manage the too closeness of the world and also the desire to have an impact on it that has some relation to its impact on us.