

5 TINTED VISIONS

PERFORMING EQUALITIES THROUGH FESTIVE DECORATIONS IN LGBT-THEMED EVENTS IN HULL (UK CITY OF CULTURE 2017)

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Introduction

In 2017, Hull celebrated its status as UK City of Culture. Central to the city's event-based, culture-led regeneration scheme was the programming of '365 days of transformative culture' (Hull 2017 Ltd 2015, 14). Structured across four programming seasons entitled Made in Hull, Roots and Routes, Freedom, and Tell the World, the programme included the week-long commemorative celebration of LGBT50 as one of the flagship events of the year. From July 22 to July 29, 2017, the LGBT50 event series conjoined activities in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales. The commemoration referred to the legislative change of the Sexual Offences Act 1967, in which the UK Parliament agreed to decriminalise same-sex intercourse between two male adults in private spaces (Hull 2017 Ltd 2017). In acknowledgement of this important date for the national Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) movement, local organisations including Pride in Hull and Hull 2017 Ltd curated the week-long series of events and exhibitions to celebrate gender and sexual diversity and equality.¹ Inaugurating the week, the first ever UK Pride Parade and Party took place in the city on July 22, 2017. With over 40,000 participants, the outdoor event was of unprecedented scale for an LGBT-themed event in Hull. On the following days, audiences were invited to smaller, more intimate encounters concerning LGBT politics and experiences. A series of talks at the University of Hull ran alongside the Pride in Hull Film Festival. The exhibition *House of Kings and Queens* by Lee Price, the theatre performance *Lads and Lasses* by ApposArt, and the community zine *Lost Property* engaged the LGBT community and allies, fostering an atmosphere of LGBT visibility, awareness, and empowerment in the city. On the following Saturday, the event series ended with the Summer Tea Party by the queer arts collective Duckie as well as the *I Feel Love* concert organised by BBC Radio 2.

As Coyle and Platt (2015, 275) declare: 'Using festivity to champion a particular political viewpoint . . . is nothing new'. Within the literature

canons on gender and event studies, LGBT Pride events dominate scholarly discussions. Interested in the histories, narratives, and structures of these events, scholars refer to various examples in order to discuss their potential in shaping societal meanings. Leading the debate, Kates (2003) and Browne (2007) point to the potential of LGBT events in terms of their ability to de- and re-construct individual and collective identities. In his analysis of the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in Sydney, Kates (2003) argues that the liminal characteristics of such events allow for—or even invite—re-negotiations of conventional meanings of gender and sexualities. Examining LGBT Pride events in Dublin and Brighton, Browne (2007) suggests that genders and sexualities are (de)constructed through the conditions that the festive event creates and argues that the festive mood invites critical questioning of the gendered and sexualised codes of these structures. As such, these studies of LGBT events highlight the sociocultural significance of events for the negotiation and production of gender and sexual equality. As Browne (2007) argues, rather than being interpreted as a mere party, the politics of the party requires further attention. In order to consider events not only in their binary between ‘party’ or ‘politics’, I agree with Browne’s suggestion to analytically discuss events such as LGBT50 as ‘parties with politics’ (2007).

Consequently, this chapter aims to investigate the ‘party’ and ‘politics’ (Browne 2007, 63) of the LGBT50 celebrations. My attention lies in the performance of equality through the material cultures of events. On the basis of my ethnographic investigation involving the producers and artists of and visitors to the LGBT50 event series, I interrogate in what way equality is negotiated in the decorative materials marking festive spaces. Contrasting the rainbow presence with the artistically informed search for counter-visualities, I argue for plural interpretations of equalities in the celebration of LGBT50. I outline that the celebration of equality does not unify the understanding of the concept; rather, the event series highlights differing, diverging, and even contradicting interpretations of equality. This chapter therefore demonstrates how celebrations and their decorative patterns give insight into the performative processes of festive settings with reference to the notion of equality.

In the following chapter, I address equality as the political ambition of anti-discriminatory movements, including feminist and queer activism. I embrace equality as an intersectional notion. As such, I understand equality as intrinsically linked to various defining categories, including gender, ethnicity, class, and age. In the context of this particular research field, the intersections between gender and sexuality are of explicit relevance as the LGBT50 event series references such imbrications frequently in their programme outline (Hull 2017 Ltd 2017). Furthermore, my analytical focus on the material culture of events centres on the decorations of event spaces. My interest is guided by the importance of visual displays in festivals. However, I address decorations in general terms: rather than materially defining what decorations are, the overarching visibility of the festivity

determines my investigative attention. Therefore, while I consider bunting, banners, and signs, I expand the consideration of decorative materials to include paraphernalia such as face paint, costumes, and accessories as decorative-visual-markers of the LGBT50 celebration.

This introduction is followed by a conceptual discussion of events and their sociocultural significance. With reference to liminality, I outline how meanings are produced in celebrations and discuss the performative and material aspects of these meaning-making processes. Through empirical resources, I discuss the visual spectrum of the LGBT50 event series. Paying particular attention to the rainbow- and counter-visualities, I argue for the plural notion of equality in the context of the event. I close the chapter with a discussion emphasising the performative relevance of events and their materiality in relation to the production of cultures of equality.

Events, Performances, and Liminality

In order to understand the celebratory settings of LGBT50 as a productive site for cultures of equality, considerations of the sociocultural significance of events are crucial. Referring to debates in Critical Event Studies and Anthropology of the Festive, I depart from the assumption that celebrations hold the potential to engage, distort, and express the zeitgeist of their location. As Falassi (1987, 2–3) elucidates:

Both the social function and the symbolic meaning of the festival are closely related to a series of overt values that the community recognises as essential to its ideology and worldview, to its social identity, its historical continuity and to its physical survival, which is ultimately what the festival celebrates.

Following Falassi's (1987) observation, Finkel (2015) points out that events do not take place in a vacuum, arguing that celebrations are embedded in and expressive of their contemporary situatedness. Based on this interpretation, I understand events as techniques for the promotion of political ideologies, communal values, cultural assets, and social dynamics that become meaningful through the concentrated temporality and spatiality of celebrations. Therefore, events need to be addressed as practices of meaning-making with the potential to capture sociocultural significance.

Celebrations are frequently discussed as transformative environments which invite subversions of the status quo (Taylor 2014). As a folklorist studying the cultural histories of the Americas, Abrahams explains:

Festivals manufacture their own energies by upsetting things, creating a disturbance for the fun of it . . . Festivals work (at least in their inception) by apparently tearing the fabric to pieces, by displaying it upside-down, inside-out, wearing it as motley rags and tatters. (1987, 178)

With respect to their sociocultural significance and meaning-making practice, the transgressive potential of events is traditionally investigated in relation to Turner's (1969, 1974, 1982a, 1982b, 1987a, 1987b) notion of liminality (Lamond and Moss 2020).² The concept of liminality is grounded in the anthropologist's discussions of rituals and their procedural compilation of change. Turner (1969) describes liminal experiences as a momentary discontinuity of social structures, norms, and relationships: eventual rights and obligations are suspended; boundaries are redefined; and often the social order appears to be turned upside down. The concept's analytical relevance becomes clear in relation to Abrahams' interpretation of events as 'disturbance for the fun of it' (1987, 178).

Even though subversive atmospheres are temporal, Turner (1969, 1974, 1982a, 1982b, 1987a, 1987b) argues for the necessity of such breaking points in strictly stratified societies. He even goes as far as to claim that society's desires and imaginations become visible within the liminal expressions of festive encounters. The celebratory experience allows for the imagination of alternative models of living and leaves its traces within the normative conditions of society. Event-based subversions of norms supply societies with goals, aspirations, and structural models that would otherwise not be imaginable—capturing the transformative ambitions that celebrations entail. In this moment and experience of disruption and destruction, power dynamics are re-evaluated. Hence, liminal experiences are of crucial political potential for the negotiation and production of cultures of equality.

Performing Events

In his book, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, Turner (1982a) links his notion of liminality to the consideration of performance. In reference to the concept of 'social drama', he establishes the grounds for interpretations of liminal experiences in relation to their dramaturgy.³ Imbricating experience, performance, and social drama through the concept of liminality, he elucidates the sociocultural significance of performances as follows: 'Every type of cultural performance, including ritual, ceremony, carnival, theatre and poetry is explanation and explication of life itself. . . . A performance then is the proper finale of an experience' (1982a, 13).

Turner's (1969, 1974, 1982a, 1982b, 1987a, 1987b) concept of liminality strongly influenced Schechner's (2002) approach to performances and their study. Schechner (2002, 20) argues that 'cultures are most fully expressed in and made conscious of themselves in their ritual and theatrical performances' and he regards performances as 'declarative of our shared humanity, yet it utters the uniqueness of particular cultures'. Moreover, for Schechner, 'any event, action, or behaviour can be examined "as" performance' (48). Though famously debated, his consideration of studying sociocultural realities 'as' performance also invites the study of events and their sociocultural significance in relation to their liminal features.

In line with McKenzie (2004), Boyd regards these imbrications between Turner's and Schechner's accounts as a construct of performative liminality. She points out that Turner uses 'industrial leisure art forms' to create 'a temporal space which, because of the element of play, has the potential to radically critique and subvert' (Boyd 2006, 26). Linking events, performances, and liminality, Boyd highlights that:

Such theories conceive embodied performances (such as ritual or theatre) as potentially subversive in that they create liminal spaces, in-between temporal places, where social norms are played with and, at times, inverted. (25)

In reference to Turner (1969, 1974, 1982a, 1982b, 1987a, 1987b) and Schechner (2002), McKenzie's (2004) and Boyd's (2006) interpretation of the conceptual features of performance match the descriptions of events by Falassi (1987), Abrahams (1987), and Finkel (2015) mentioned earlier. While Boyd (2006) regards performative liminality through examples of the English and Brazilian carnival, for the purposes of this chapter, I use Platt's (2011, 2015) considerations of the Liverpool European Capital of Culture 2008 as my point of reference. The already discussed imbrications between event, performance, and liminality crystallise in her performative reading of Liverpool's year-long celebration. Studying the creative and reflexive enactments of local identity during the event, she also highlights that the event was a liminal moment that was performative in character. While attentive to the existing power structures, Platt (2011, 2015) embraces the performative liminality of Liverpool European Capital of Culture 2008 as an invitation for reflexivity and experimentation through the consistent 'What if?' question. Due to spatial restrictions, I am not able to extend Platt's reading further; however, her study of the performative context of events and its liminal characteristics pinpoints my understanding of the conceptual imbrications for the investigation of the LGBT50 celebrations.

While performative liminality creates fruitful ground for the study of events as performances through their liminal features, the limitations of this proposed reading require explicit attention. Discussing these restrictions, I primarily draw on Boyd's (2006) and McKenzie's (2004) perspectives on 'normative performativity'. Furthermore, I extend these considerations through recent debates on the concept of liminality in the context of Critical Events Studies.

McKenzie (2004, 24) explains the restrictions of performative liminality as follows: 'Performances can also reinforce or re-produce cultural hegemony'. Butler's (1993) discussion of gendered performances informs McKenzie's proposal of normative performativity. Arguing against the idea that gender is 'rooted in a fixity of being-ness or essence of the self' (Boyd 2006, 24), Butler (1993) outlines that gender is continuously performed and

therefore should be addressed as performative. While Schechner's (2002) theatrical performance and Butler's (1993) discursive performativity are distinct conceptual discussions, their relationship informs the central critique of performative liminality as relevant to the consideration of events.⁴ Boyd points out that, in her book *Bodies That Matter*, Butler (1993) considers that 'although gender is performative, it is not simply a performance and should not be reduced as such; a predetermined limited range of "scripts" dictates the performance of gender. In other words, people are not free to simply decide which gender they will enact' (2006, 25). Just as in the case of gender, the assumed liminality of performances and their subversive and transgressive characteristics in events need to be read through these restrictive scripts.

Similar to the critique of liminality in performance studies, recent publications in the field of Critical Event Studies challenge assumptions concerning liminality in events. Lamond and Moss's (2020) as well as Platt and Finkel's (2020) publications problematise liminal experiences in events and interrogate the boundaries of liminality. Going beyond the fairly broad scope of critique in Lamond and Moss's (2020) edited volume, Platt and Finkel's (2020) work focuses on gendered violence at festivals. The contributing authors recount the harm done by the analytical disregard of social structures and highlight that vulnerabilities are constructed and enforced due to the false assumption of liberty in liminality.⁵ In my work I also support these debates as I argue that the re-evaluation of power structures is the privilege of those individuals and communities who can explore the subverted structures with the knowledge and security of returning to a non-discriminatory routine (Grabher 2020). Rather than promoting freeing transgressions of all normative boundaries, performative liminality—especially in events—requires an awareness of its inherent limitations.

Following on from the discussion of the imbrications of events and performances through the concept of liminality, this section concentrates on the spatial—and further material—understandings of celebrations. While acknowledging the already discussed restrictions of liminal experiences, I seek to explore the event's sociocultural significance beyond the experiential reflections predominantly addressed in the literature. Therefore, I interrogate the process of meaning-making in events through the material conditions of celebrations.

While liminality is often regarded as a time-based concept due to the attention that is given to procedural experiences, Turner also highlights spatial conceptions of the liminal experience. As one of many examples, this description of carnival illustrates the relevance of spatiality in liminal conceptions:

Truly [a festival] is the denizen of a place that is no place, and a time that is no time, even where that place is a city's main plaza and that time can be found on an ecclesiastical calendar. For the squares, avenues

and streets of the city become, [during the festive occasion], the reverse of their daily selves.

(Turner 1987b, 76)

Beyond its temporality, the claiming of space and the production of place through festivities is also crucial to the interpretation of liminality and its materialisation. In Turner's example, the intervention in public space materialises the event and its sociocultural significance. This spatial perspective of liminal event experiences influences the observations of LGBT Pride events by Browne (2007), Ammaturo (2016), and Taylor (2014). All three scholars pay crucial attention to the spatiality of events and discuss not only the temporal but especially the spatial visibility of the celebration as 'queer appropriation'. Browne summarises by saying that the festival allows a 'presence of sexual otherness in otherwise heterosexualised urbanities' (2007, 66).

Expanding upon the spatial discussions of Turner's (1987b) liminality, I engage in further considerations of the material culture of events. Bennett and Woodward refer to the conceptual relevance of the materialities of events, contending that: 'Festivals . . . produce a temporal, yet highly visible and in some cases inherently spectacular, display of commonly shared lifestyle preferences' (2014, 14). While material features of events are often addressed descriptively, the study of material cultures as a practice of meaning-making in events is scarce. Bennett and Woodward contribute an important reflection as they acknowledge the materiality of so-called 'nostalgia festivals' and describe these events as 'transcending the conventional blend of music, food and merchandise' (14). In their study of the Wintersun festival in New South Wales, Australia, they recognise 'classical cars, period fashion and various retro or reproduction consumer accessories as essential contributors to the festival experience' (14). Christian Derbaix, Alain Decrop, and Olivier Cabossart similarly investigate the experience of football fans and their relationship with merchandise, pointing out that: 'football fans conspicuously show a lot of support to their teams by such overt behaviour as singing, shouting and cheering but also through a lot of material merchandise: scarves, hats, shirts' (2002, 517). While interpreting this merchandise in relation to its significance as a form of 'identification, integration, expression and sacralization process', Derbaix and Decrop acknowledge it as a crucial contribution to the 'increasing theatricality of the game' (2011, 272). In the case of LGBT Pride celebrations, material culture becomes a crucial symbol in the claiming of spaces. Similar to Derbaix and Decrop's consideration of 'the "true" football fan and its characterisation by their colours' (276), Cooper declares that 'distinct and diverse colours are often important components of queer signification, ranging from the tradition of coloured handkerchief codes for cruising to the reclaimed pink triangle and rainbow flags as symbols of gay liberation' (2014, 10). While I will return to the 'symbols of gay liberation' in the later

analysis, the cited literature confirms events and the liminal experience materialise not only in terms of spatial features but also through paraphernalia including decorations, clothing, and flags. Therefore, as highlighted by Doyle (2012), the materiality of events influences—sometimes even enhances—event experiences and requires analytical attention, as decorations, merchandise, and other accessories contribute to the performative liminality and further the sociocultural significance of celebrations.

Committing to Colours: Mainstream Visuality

The conceptual framework for my further analysis of the LGBT50 celebration is made up of the practices of meaning-making of events and the related sociocultural significance, their interpretations as performative liminality, and the inherent limitations of such interpretations. Turner's (1987b) spatial attention and my further considerations of material manifestations of performative liminality in events guide me in the empirical analysis of the material production of cultures of equality in the LGBT50 celebration. Due to the vast amount of visual input in the LGBT50 event series, my focus below is concentrated on the opening and closing events of the week-long celebration. This attention to specific events in the series allows me to identify two dominant stylistic choices. I firstly address the mainstream decorative patterns of the rainbow, which aesthetically dominated the UK Pride Parade and Party. Secondly, I focus on alternative visual practices spearheaded by Duckie's Summer Tea Party. With an emphasis on the colour patterns of each event, I argue that the material culture of events tints the visions of equality celebrated in the festival, as each decorative style associates with particular interpretations of equality.

As a symbol strongly associated with the LGBT movement, rainbows were a crucial feature in the UK Pride Parade and Party, the opening event of the LGBT50 celebrations. Baker (2019) explains that the Pride flag was created in 1978 by Gilbert Baker, a San Francisco-based artist. By the mid-1990s, the horizontal stripes in rainbow colours replaced the reclaimed symbol of the pink triangle, which was used in Nazi concentration camps in order to visually stigmatise homosexual prisoners. Baker elucidates:

the very idea of the pride flag [is] North American, but since the 1990s [it has] circulated transnationally through digital queer cultures, which have often borrowed language and iconography from Anglophone movements, making . . . the rainbow flag increasingly common sight at European Prides (and elsewhere). (2019, 178)

Therefore, the rainbow flag has become an 'international symbol of the LGBTQ rights movement' (179) as celebrated internationally as well as in the context of Hull's UK Pride Parade and Party in 2017.

Hull-based resident and visitor to various events in the LGBT50 series, Sophia, highlights the presence of the rainbow flag and outlines its socio-cultural significance in relation to the event: '[The city was] trying to visibly show that [they] had moved on and that they were much more inclusive and LGBT aware'. Sophia explains that the visibility of rainbow colours was a crucial contribution to these ambitions as it served as an expression of related intentions:

BARBARA: [How does Hull commit to the values of LGBT50?]

SOPHIA: Well, I guess by sticking all the rainbow things. By the police having rainbow beards and by the rainbow lashes on the uniform and the rainbow steps and all the rainbowyness everywhere. That sort of tells other people that this is LGBT. . . . Stick a rainbow flag on it and that makes you LGBT friendly.

While I return to Sophia's comment in the next section, her awareness of the connotation of the colour palette as a visible clue for commitment and ambition strongly frames the usage of the rainbow flag during UK Pride Parade and Party.

Sophia's reference to the omnipresence of rainbow flags in Hull is framed by Hull 2017 Ltd's social media campaign Challenge Hull in the run up to the LGBT50 celebrations. The campaign encouraged citizens and local organisations to 'Make a Rainbow' in reference to the colourful palette associated with the LGBT movement. Max, a member of a charity involved in the production of LGBT50, explains:

As far as I am aware from Hull 2017 [Ltd] and also from others, Challenge Hull was one of the best campaigns . . . for reaching out to many people. . . . So many organisations even the presenting partners of [Hull UK] City of Culture [2017] have changed their logos. . . . How amazing! They put it on the branding of vehicles [etc.] and it was just a great opportunity for [the LGBT community].

The relevance of the rainbow colours and their supporting vision of equality crystallises further, when considering Max's enthusiasm for a company's commitment to rainbow colours in their slogan, logos, or general branding. He explains:

One of the biggest bucket lists achievements for me this year was getting Smith and Nephew.⁶ On their building, they have lights. On the A63 coming into the city centre . . . you see their lights on their building. For years, they have been random. They are now in rainbow order That was their choice and at their expense. But that is sending out a message that says: we acknowledge this event. We in doing this say that it is ok. We support!

According to Max, the presence of the rainbow becomes a symbolic manifestation of the event of UK Pride Parade and Party. However, as did Sophia, Max understands the rainbow not only as a symbol linked to the liminal momentum of the UK Pride celebrations. Beyond the immediate event, the colour combination inherits an interpretation of celebrated equality struggles and demands. He elucidates:

It is so heart-warming! [Smith and Nephew] kept them up for so much longer than necessary. . . . It means Pride is coming back to Hull and seeing those flags [is saying] actually LGBT rights are human rights. That is not just for [the LGBT community]. It is for everybody and that is the key.

As previously alluded to by Sophia, Max concretises the idea that the colours of the rainbow are an expression not only of support for the event but also of the cause that the event celebrates. Clearly, Max identifies the colour palette through his involvement with the LGBT50 celebrations. However, and more importantly, Max articulates that the colourful mix serves as a statement and commitment: the rainbow flag signals acceptance, tolerance, and support for identities and their diversity, which becomes the key interpretation of equality according to Max's description.

In her study of the Eurovision Song Contest, Baker contextualises Max's enthusiasm for the rainbow flag in relation to its symbolic relevance for international politics. She explains:

Pride flags, especially the rainbow flag, have . . . become significant symbols in international politics. . . . Activist movements have used them to demand equal rights from states and to protest against police repression, using massed flags' visual spectacle to stake a symbolic claim for visibility. (2019, 180)

Max's cheerful interpretations are clarified through Baker's explanation of the relevance of the colourful decorations. Similarly, as addressed in the previous section, rather than being a design for the particular event, the rainbow flag as a decorative pattern for UK Pride Parade and Party needs to be read in relation to the symbolic value the colour palette holds for the international campaign for LGBT equality.

While the colour palette receives international recognition and therefore carries great significance in the production of cultures of equality, Sophia critically reacts in her observations of the omnipresence of the flag. In the previous quotation, she acknowledged the symbol's strong presence and its potential to create meaning in respect to LGBT equality. However, she is suspicious of the kind of commitment and support decorations can entail. In this vein, she continues: '[The rainbow colours] make you as much LGBT-friendly as a nodding dog. . . . People are supposed to think you own

then that message. Even though, you are not. You are just using the symbol for a day'. Rather than a mechanism of commitment and support, Sophia suggests that rainbow aesthetics may become a brand-like mechanism. In this way, she introduces a crucial question into the discussion of mainstream aesthetics of equality-themed events: is a rainbow flag a sign for the LGBT community and their right to equality, or has the symbol become generally associated with celebrations beyond an immediate political interest?

Similar to Sophia's considerations, the LGBT50 celebrations include several producers and artists who critically question the rainbow visuality of LGBT Pride events. Henry, one of the producers of the Summer Tea Party, vocalises his observations of trends of rainbow decorations as follows:

Did you go to the gay pride thing? They put a show on the stage, and you know what those shows are going to be. This is a popstar from 10 years ago singing a song. . . . This is like being a doll on the stage singing a pop song, because it is popular.

In opposition to the UK Pride Parade and Party, Henry argues that not only the content of the event but also the decorations do not necessarily correlate with an ambition or intention for equality; rather, Henry suggests that the recognition and visibility of the rainbow colours have become a branding tool linked to commercialised interests in the event and the celebratory cause.

In contrast to Max, Sophia and Henry imply that the omnipresence and uniformity of rainbow decorations in Hull's UK Pride Parade and Party lacks space for nuances. In opposition to the commodification of the celebrated value of equality, Henry responds to my question concerning the visuality of the Summer Tea Party with the exclamation: 'No rainbow flags! No. Read my lips: No rainbow flags!'

Somewhere over the Rainbow: Counter-Visualities

In order to oppose the tendencies of brand-like strategies of rainbow decorations, Henry questions the essence of the celebrations and outlines the relevance of the notions of equality in his creative and conceptual work. His strict opposition to mainstream aesthetics is grounded in the intellectual and conceptual differences between his work and mainstream LGBT celebrations. Henry explains:

[LGBT activism] comes from an artistic tradition of being oppositional, being against society. [For me] to be queer means that we should be asking other kind[s] of questions apart from just consuming the mainstream. . . . We are interested in asking more questions about: What does it mean to be a human being? What is happening in the world?

You know, who we are. All questions that aren't asked. We want to ask those questions. We open it up.

As outlined in the quote, Henry's personal convictions regarding queer politics result in a search for alternative aesthetics marking the Summer Tea Party. These lie beyond the rainbow and the homonormative branding strategies. Hence, he embraces artistically informed, experimental visualities that allow for further discussion and considerations of the relations between humans, their conceptions of equality, and their claiming of their human rights.

Alongside Henry's account, my data collection reveals elaborate practices of counter-visualities in opposition to the commodifying tendencies of rainbow aesthetics. In the context of the final event of the Summer Tea Party, affiliated artists actively sought a decorative pattern beyond the rainbow-mainstream. Collaborations with performing and visual artists are a particularly fruitful approach for the search for counter-visualities. Through creative interrogations of the event and its values, new colour schemes and decorative designs are explored. Due to the spatial restrictions of this chapter, I am only able to discuss one example of these various alternatives regarding decorative visualities.

As the lead artist of a community dance project, Thomas introduces me to his aesthetic standpoint in regard to his artistic devotion, stating that:

People are already doing [the rainbow thing]. It is already being done a lot. . . . What is the point of repeating [it] again? . . . [In my creative work] I ask: Where is Thomas in that? How do I want to interrogate that as an artist? So this is my take. Where is my work on this? Where is my aesthetic? For me, this is a piece of work so it is about trying to get my point of view across visually and in the style of movement. . . . So, it is trying to get all of that—without relying too much on what is already [being done].

Thomas explains his opposition in terms of the mainstream aesthetics not suiting his artistic vision. Rather than repeating 'what is already being done', he searches for his own artistic expression in relation to the celebration of equality. As a result, he refrains from rainbow colours in the final performance of his community dance project. Instead, the 50 participating performers are dressed in an androgynous look from the 1950s. Grey, white, and brown dominate the scene, interrupted by shimmers of gold. Rather than attracting through bright colours, the pieces of clothing draw attention through tags attached to them with terms such as 'lesbian', 'homosexual', 'trans', or 'Section 28', among others written on them. Referring either to historical facts or identity labels, their random placement on the jackets, ties, or trousers of performers is independent of the performers' own identifications or experiences. Embracing such visual clues, Thomas

elucidates that the visuality of the performance is continuously driven by an understanding of the uniformity of lack of representation. Therefore, the individual dancers blend into one moving mass. However, when considered close-up, the uniqueness of each label, costume, and individual story becomes clear. His artistic vision and opposition to rainbow palettes crystallise when the use of flags becomes relevant to the performance. In an informal conversation, Thomas explains to me that the rainbow flag in the performance is an important reference to the formation of the political movement for LGBT equality. While wanting to incorporate the reference in the performance, Thomas is conscious to avoid mainstream visuals of the horizontal stripes of multiple colours. Rather, he chooses to represent the political movement through individual uni-coloured flags being waved in synchronous movements by different individuals. As stated above, his aesthetic and intellectual approach demanded more nuances than a mainstream rainbow aesthetic would allow. Therefore, in refusing to restrict himself to the limitations of the conventional colour palette, Thomas' artistic vision enables him to explore beyond the already existing strategies for visualising the struggle for equality.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have interrogated the LGBT50 event series as part of Hull's celebration of the UK City of Culture title in respect to its visual negotiations of equality in the form of decorative materials. With reference to Turner's (1969, 1974, 1982a, 1982b, 1987a, 1987b) and Schechner's (2002) combined discussions of performative liminality and its material characteristics, I have argued for the sociocultural significance of festivals, celebrations, and events. I explained that in liminal moments, society is challenged to explore, negotiate, and imagine its potential and possibilities. Even though bound by its limitations, the performative liminality of celebrations creates fruitful circumstances for the study of the production of cultures of equality. To this end, I foregrounded the potential to investigate these productions of cultures of equality through the material cultures of events as I argued that materialities such as decorations constitute part of the meaning-making practice of events.

On the basis of these conceptual discussions, I focused my analysis on the decorative materials used in the context of the opening and closing events of the LGBT50 celebration. By examining the UK Pride Parade and Party and the outdoor Summer Tea Party, I have observed two distinct stylistic patterns of decorations in the event series. UK Pride Parade and Party emphasised their visuality through a 'rainbowyness', as described by visitor Sophia. On the other hand, producers and artists affiliated with the Summer Tea Party distanced themselves and even rejected the rainbow symbol for their event. Their aesthetics were dominated by artistic explorations of alternative styles, which went beyond the already expected

rainbow visualities. I demonstrated that the visualities of both events are not bound to the mere preferences of producers, artists, or visitors but are related to conceptual and intellectual considerations of what values of equality are being celebrated. As key representatives of the two events, Max and Henry both gave insight into their understanding of equality as a reclaiming of human rights. Nevertheless, while Max saw the rainbow flag as constituting the symbol of this struggle, Henry was reluctant to claim any pre-scripted symbol for the fight. In reference to Sophia and Henry, I understood his oppositional stand to the rainbow colour combination as a rejection of the branding mechanism that the rainbow flag has become associated with. In further explanation, Henry elucidated that the event's vision and decorative design encouraged the continuous questioning of what humans, their rights, and their being can be. As such, Henry's approach to the event's visuality was particularly informed by his collaboration with performing and visual artists. In my outline, I concentrated in detail on Thomas, who rather than employing a mainstream aesthetic in his community dance project, embraced his personal vision of a different representational spectrum by highlighting the individuality in uniformity through the dancers' appearance.

This discussion of visualities of equality emphasises multiple interpretations, which influence the negotiation of cultures of equality in celebratory contexts. Rather than a singular perspective of equality, which the celebrations of LGBT50 might embrace, my analysis of decorative materials introduced a multiplicity of considerations of equality. Mainstream and oppositional decorative styles painted not only the festival spaces, but also gave further insight into the differing, diverting, and even contradicting interpretations that underlie these celebrations of equality. In summary, I argue for attention to be given to the plurality of the promoted and produced cultures of equality as expressed in the decorative materials of mainstream and alternative LGBT Pride celebrations.

Notes

1. Hull 2017 Ltd was founded by Hull City Council to execute the event of Hull 2017. The company was led by Martin Green as CEO and artistic director and supported by a board chaired by journalist and cultural commentator Rosie Millard.
2. Alongside liminality, Bakhtin's (1968) consideration of the carnivalesque is a frequently used conceptual framework and can be linked to and understood in relation to the concept of liminality. Due to the spatial restrictions of this chapter, I draw merely on Turner's (1969, 1974, 1982a, 1982b, 1987a, 1987b) notion of liminality and exclude further in-depth discussions of carnivalesque considerations.
3. Schechner (2002, 25) describes the notion of 'social drama' as one of Turner's 'most fruitful yet problematic ideas'. He summarises that 'social dramas are units of aharmonic processes, arising in conflict situations' (Schechner 2002, 25) of any scale. From personal disputes to large-scale international

- conflicts, each social drama is executed in four periods: breach-crisis-redressive action-reintegration or schism. Due to the focus of this chapter, I am not going to address this notion in further detail but mention its existence in regard to the notion of performance.
4. While the two notions inform each other, performance and performativity essentially derive from different scholarly traditions and discuss distinct phenomena. Boyd (2006) cites Sara Salih in order to clarify that ‘whereas performance presupposes a pre-existing subject, performativity contests the very notion of the subject’ (in Boyd 2006, 25).
 5. See Aborisade (2020); Bows, King, and Measham (2020); Fileborn, Wadds, and Tomsen (2020); Mlotshwa (2020); Morero Beltrán and Camps Calvet (2020); and Silvestre, Royo, and Linares (2020).
 6. Smith and Nephew is a multi-national medical equipment company, which originates from Hull and still has a factory in the city.

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