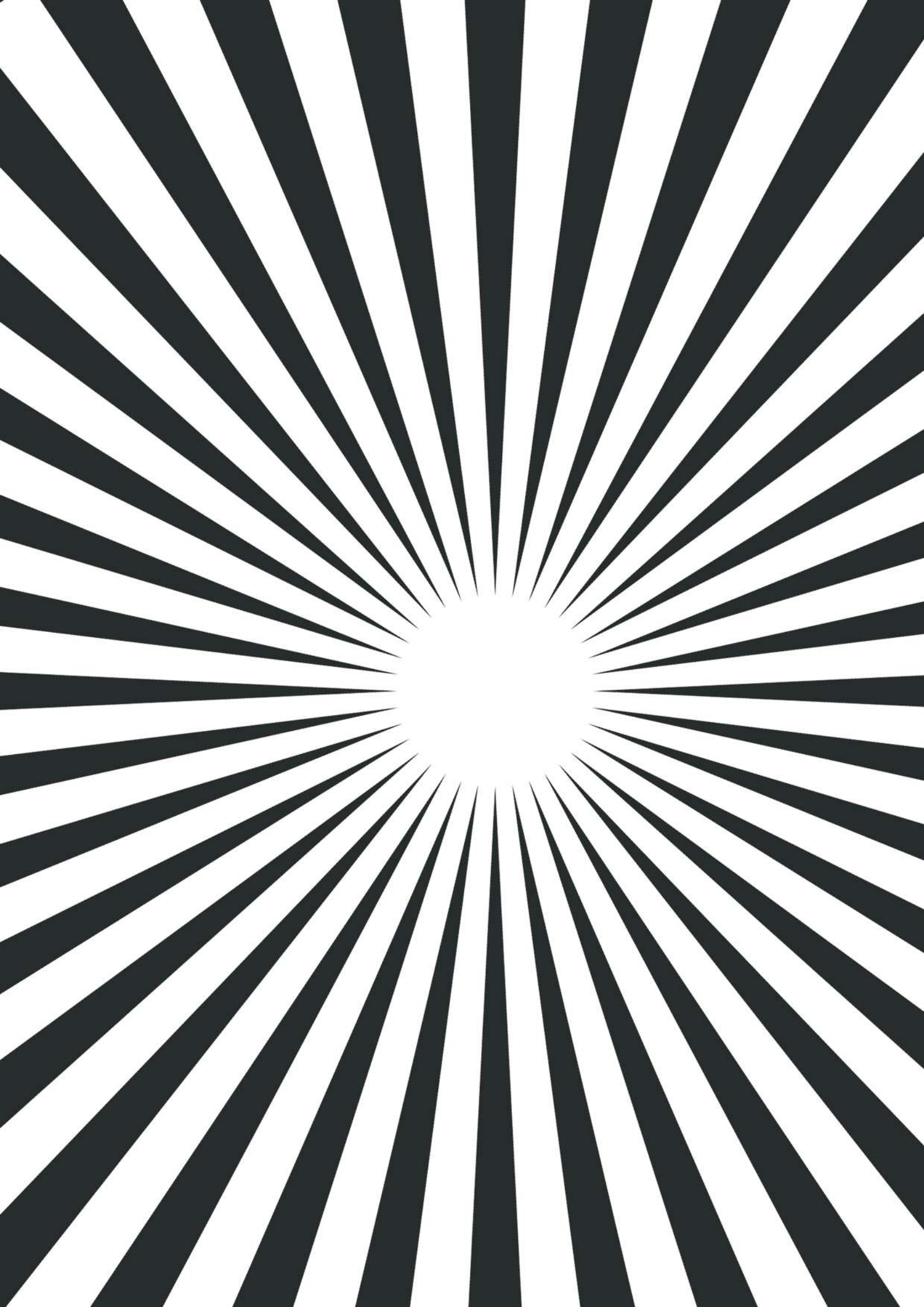


BCMCR

**Birmingham Centre
for Media and
Cultural Research**

**NEW
THINKING
#1
2019/20**



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CAN YOUR PHONE WRITE A HIT YET?

Simon Barber

In recent years, technologies designed to assist songwriters in the writing and production process have proliferated, resulting in a steady increase in the amount of music generated through algorithmic or computational methods. Beyond the traditional recording studio facility, and even the home studio, applications such as Amadeus Code have brought the possibilities of assisted music production to the smartphone (French, 2018, Murphy 2019). These companies join a substantial history of technology firms working with artists to produce apps and platforms based on deep learning networks to enhance music creation (Deahl 2019). However, questions remain about the ability of AI platforms like Amadeus Code or Amper to write innovative or engaging pop songs (Garza 2018, Deahl 2019).

AI music solutions, much like human songwriters, base their ability to produce new songs on learning the structures, words and melodic patterns present in existing catalogues of material, and so can be asked to regurgitate generic country songs or mimic the music of The Beatles if

required (Heaven 2019). However, while AI can master the symbolic rules of a culture and may even bring novelty to the domain, it remains to be seen whether music produced by AI will be recognised and validated by a field of experts (Csikszentmihalyi 2015, Knight 2016, Dredge 2019, Weiner 2019). Furthermore, songs written with the assistance of AI are subject to debates about validity of copyright (Carlisle 2019).

There can be little doubt that music will, for the time being, continue to be a complex product of the interacting forces of humans and technology. However, with the AI sector estimated to be worth £232bn to the UK economy by 2030 (PwC 2017), automation, assistance and augmentation may soon give way to ideas of autonomous control (Davis 2019). This situation engenders post-modern fears for some about the future redundancy of songwriters and composers in the production process (Spezzatti 2019, Reilly 2019). For the time being though, the hits keep coming.

REVISITING THE SECRET MUSEUM

Oliver Carter

66 Holloway Road, London. I've spoken to the owner, Dave, on the phone. He is from a family of Soho bookstore owners. His Uncle Tony ran one of the biggest shops on Walker's Court from the mid 1960s. "You're 5 years too late" he tells me, apparently, all of the people I want to speak to are dead; a common occurrence in my line of research. I step off the tube and make my way to Rambooks...the home of Dave's business "We Buy any Porn". If a family member dies, and you discover that they have a significant porn stash, Dave is the man you call. He arrives in his car, and sympathetically purchases the collection from you. Rambooks has become a museum of pornography, the materials that have been excluded from formal archives. Dave gives me a tour, and takes me to the basement of the shop where the Soho Bibles are kept. I'd never heard of these amateur produced books that were sold in Soho Bookstores from the 50s onwards...and I thought I knew everything about British pornography.

Rambooks is not the only vintage erotica shop in existence. I've found shops in Seattle, Amsterdam, Brussels and

Hamburg. Artefacts that have been excluded from a formal archival discourse are preserved in these spaces, at costly prices, until they are purchased and locked away in secret museums...never to be seen again. I want to find out more about these spaces, and explore the politics of this practice, building on the work of Walter Kendrick, speaking to the owners of these shops, but also the customers; the private collectors, who preserve the material history of pornography.

THE INVITATION

Gemma Commane

FROM: Gemma Commane

SUBJECT: The Professional Dominatrix as Entrepreneur


DATE: 10th July 2019

TO: [REDACTED]


Dear [REDACTED]

I hope this email finds you well. [REDACTED] recommended that I contact you. She also mentioned me in Tweet yesterday, which you were included in. I am a lecturer in media and communications at Birmingham City University, but I am also an active researcher too. My research specialisms and interests explore alternative constructions of femininity, queer identity and BDSM. My PhD explored the significance of femininities in burlesque, fetish and BDSM clubs.

[REDACTED] and have close friends who are active on the scene including friends who used to run Scarlet in Birmingham many years ago before the night closed.



Most of the initial stages of research have been exploring literature on entrepreneurship and the creative industries. I really want to include voices of experts. Would you be interested in participating in an interview to discuss your expertise as a Professional Dominatrix? I would be really interested in hearing if you consider yourself an entrepreneur. This could be face to face or via email. The interview would inform the research paper for the conferences and a future publication. However, I am going to be writing a small-scale bid which would seek to include and be in collaboration with Pro-Dommes. I am happy to explain more if you wanted to hear further



There are ways and means around this, but I have been advised to scale things back and to firstly publish a research paper exploring Pro-Domme entrepreneurship and then start applying for small scale funding.

I am aware that you are very busy, so I understand if you decline this invitation.

Thank you for your time.

Best wishes, Gemma

RESEARCHING MEDIA ARCHIVES

Pedro Cravinho

Over the past months, I have been working on my first book proposal, JAZZ, TELEVISION, AND POLITICS: Encounters with Sound and Image in Portugal in the Cold War Era (1954-1974), which explores the relationship between jazz and television in the twentieth century by investigating the experience of performers and producers in one particular country during a period of profound change. It draws on and is an extension of my PhD research, and It is deeply linked with my main expertise research areas: jazz, media and archives.

This approach offers a new model of systematic analysis revealing a paradoxical interrelationship between state control and international media industries, as well as space in which these forces collide. It represents the first long-form study of jazz on television in one of the last European colonial states. Examining the cultural politics of jazz on Portuguese public television (Radiotelevisão Portuguesa, RTP) under the corporatist far-right Estado Novo (New State) regime, it looks at the musicians and repertoires, the production processes and broadcasts, and the policies and strategies of the time. It examines the launch of the Portuguese public television service and investigates two

distinct phases of its jazz production. It explores connections between RTP's productions, both the national and international jazz scenes, other Western television corporations, and the US Embassy in Lisbon as well that country's propaganda organisation, the USIA (United States Information Agency). Source material includes those archival records of television programmes that have been preserved, official institutional documentation, press archives, complemented by interviews with key figures in television jazz. By focusing on those aspects of Portuguese jazz culture, this book analyses also the way jazz was used as subversive opposition to dominant colonial ideology.

Additionally, this methodological approach offers opportunities for an in-depth comparison of the Portuguese experience with that of other countries, situating Cold War-era Portuguese television jazz broadcasting as part of a bigger, still unwritten story. My next step will be working on a Fellowship Application focus on a comparative study between three social, cultural and geographic distinct European countries using my PhD as a model.

CRITICAL NOSTALGIA

Kirsten Forkert

In “Reasons for Corbyn” (what might seem too optimistic and generous to Corbyn in retrospect), Will Davies makes this observation:

"Speak to my undergraduate students (many of them born during Blair's first term) about the 1970s and early 1980s, and you'll see the wistful look on their faces as they imagine a society in which artists, writers and recent graduates could live independently in Central London, unharassed by student loan companies, workfare contractors or debt collectors. This may be a partial historical view, but it responds to what younger generations are currently cheated of: the opportunity to grow into adulthood without having their entire future mapped out as a financial strategy."

I'd argue that Will Davies' students could be seen as engaging in what Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering have called critical nostalgia. There is a wistful longing and a romanticising tendency that we would conventionally associate with nostalgia, but what is striking is the intergenerational dynamics: members of generations who did not experience the 1970s and 1980s perceive that

period in a more positive light than how it's conventionally narrated, because for them it represents something completely different from their own experience of neoliberalism: precarity, debt and the extreme quantification and financialisation everyday life. There is a sense that the old has become new, and that the past can become a resource for the future.

For those who did not experience this time period and know no other reality than neoliberalism, the act of imagining what the 1970s and 1980s is also a way of imagining the future – maybe not the 1970s and 1980s of the National Front, Thatcher, Mary Whitehouse, or Section 28, the 70s' of '70s jokes, but both a past and a possible future free of debt, precarity and financialisation. As Emily Keightley and Pickering say, 'critical nostalgia function to [keep] 'alive certain counter-narratives that rub against the grain of established social orthodoxies and political pieties' (such in this case the orthodoxies and political pieties of neoliberalism).

AT A GLANCE

Nick Gebhardt

1776, The Forgotten World

Imagine the mangrove-fringed coast, mudflats and silty brown waters. The relentless Equatorial sun beats down. They are far from home, at the edges of Empire. Bodies doubled over and beaten by days of tropical storms and heat and the Atlantic winds. Giant rubber leaves and frangipani and jasmine mixed up with clouds of mosquitos, cockroaches, spiders and flies. Hard to stay focused, alive even. Overseers leave nothing to chance, pushing the bodies as far and fast as they can, shackled pasts held down by the whip and the hunger and the fear of tomorrow.

1786, mid-Atlantic

She was the first to die. A songstress, unnamed as usual. Referred to by a young sailor as an oracle of literature. "In order to render more easily the hours of her sisters' exile," he reported, the woman would "...sing slow airs, of pathetic nature, and recite such pieces as moved the passions, exiting joy or grief, pleasure or pain, as fancy or inclination led" (William Butterworth cited in Brown, 2009). Adrift and afloat, fighting currents of past and future, plagued by the threat of insurrection, the ship's Captain paused, just for a

moment, and allowed the slaves to bury their dead. This was not usual.

1803, City Edge

Names unknown, places unseen, so many thousands gone. Snatches of memory, fragments of another life, talked about in quieter moments perhaps, or simply forgotten. But there's no way of knowing any of this, other than to try to imagine how it might have been for us, similarly placed. A danced existence: coming and going, moving in and out of time, unfolding somewhere between a meter and a rhythm. A rate of motion that gives that motion a life of its own. "There is no one," it is said amongst the Ewe (Friedson, 2009). Glanced from the side, a crowd of people gathers together, caught in the being-there of their festivities, old timers and newcomers, drummers and singers, onlookers and outliers. On the periphery they remain, out of focus, more mirage than actuality.

1986, The Music Lesson

It was a long bus ride, two hours at least. To the right, traversing outwards and on endlessly towards the horizon was the Pacific; to the left, nothing but storefronts and motels and fast food restaurants and surf shops and gas stations and supermarkets. Early morning humidity, 100%. Blue moving through blue moving across stretches of sand; a slight breeze wrapped around rows of palm trees and curling between sea and sky and shoreline, catching the murmur of the board riders and their friends in pursuit of the perfect break. It was a long way to go for a music lesson, and it was hot.

JOURNALISM IS BORING

Dave Harte

‘Pensioner livid after Asda runs out of his favourite 34p Smart Price sardines’ – *Chronicle Live*, 7th July 2019.

A local shop runs out of a product. A pensioner is upset about a local shop running out of a product. Is this news? Discuss.

In my research into local community journalism I come across the question, “is it news?” quite a lot. It’s usually academics who ask it, shortly after politely listening to me present on the topic or asking me about my research interests. “Yeah Dave, but is it news?”

I’ve read a lot of boring, trivial and banal local community journalism in my time and I’ve also talked to the people who write it. These people, often not trained as professional journalists, look around where they live and put what they see onto their local websites or social media pages. It’s often completely unfiltered. I can’t immediately recall a story about a local shop running out of sardines, but it’s at that level. It’s the journalism of lost cats, found cats, dead cats. The journalism of small acts of community

kindness, modest achievements, broken street lights, parks with overflowing bins and streets strewn with dog shit. This is the journalism of what the US journalist Charles Eisendrath called the ‘mom-and-pop’ press. Eisendrath looked at small town USA community newspapers in the 1970s and saw them flourishing on the back of local stories about the banal everyday: “they avoid rigid politics, support the idea of small, workable communities, and pour everything they have into intensely local, rather than personal coverage.” The aim of these US local journalists, as with the UK community journalists I have researched, is to bring their community together around the minutiae of everyday life.

So when Reach Plc., a very large news publisher who run hundreds of local newspapers, as well as some national ones, employ well-trained professional journalists to write a story about a local shop running out of sardines, I’m bound to ask: ‘yeah, but is it news?’

I’m bound to ask other questions as well:

- What’s in it for Reach Plc to be running this story (except for ridicule from industry commentators and other journalists)?
- How much did it cost to produce (it has photographs and a video to accompany it) and how much will it earn (through eyeballs and clicks on the advertisements on the website that hosts it)?
- Is there more and more of this journalism (yes, I think there is)?
- Is all as laughable and trivial as this (no, some of it seems to be exploitative, cynical, nasty)?

- Why aren't we researching this kind of journalism (because journalism scholars feel they have bigger fish to fry in examining 'real' journalism)?

Having sweated the small stuff in looking at community journalism and finding it told me something interesting about the potential for media about the everyday to be more than the sum of its parts, it's now time to turn to the mainstream and ask more critical questions. The industry drift towards the banal may be an inevitability of the need to write anything in order to get a click. But there's something else happening here. Something stinks and it's not just the sardines.

MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Paul Long

"They are far from household names but perhaps should be: Fritz Busch, Carl Ebert and Rudolf Bing in the field of opera, the photographer Gerty Simon, and Hans Schleger, the graphic designer behind the London bus stop sign. All fled the Nazis as refugees, and each played an important part in shaping different aspects of British culture." **Guardian, 30 December 2018.**

Is creative expression a necessity, born of expediency, opportunity or perhaps simply the division of labour? On the last, and as Marx puts it, 'each man (sic) has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood'. Given that so many positions associated with creative expression are hardly ever advertised at the local Job Centre, one wonders whether to be an artist, writer,

composer might also be to do with the comfort and leisure afforded by economic status. As Virginia Woolf puts it: 'One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.' Woolf expands the query too by attaching social identity to economic issues, asserting that 'A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.'

Who is 'creative', when, where, in what manner, with what kind of recognition and reward are perennial issues in my thinking me. These are prompted in part by having taught in a vocationally oriented School of Media (albeit partitioned from those deemed to instruct in 'creativity'), to cohorts of students largely recruited from 'non-traditional' backgrounds. Likewise, I've been interested in creative work and routes into *being* creative and how expression is related to representation, in all of its senses.

My current thinking *about* is focussed on developing these concerns as a means of bringing together my general interest in creative work, cultural justice and research I've produced on the refugee archive with Dima Saber. The last concerns the ways in which those fleeing from the Syrian conflict recorded their experiences – in the hope that their films and testimonies might inform global media and empathies. In exile, they have taken with them a digital collection that one day may provide materials for a histories and an enduring physical archive. At the moment, the archive is, like those creators, in flight, without authority and the base in a State that qualifies its status and which², in turn is something which underwrites the nation.

Alongside this example is a range of cultural enterprises online

that seek to enlist Syrian voices in memorialising in creative fashion (in prose, poetry etc), the culture and experience of everyday life. Such instances have caused me to think on the nature of the refugee (and also the migrant, albeit with qualifications about parameters cultural, economic etc) and their role in cultural projects and indeed in the wider creative industries in the places in which they find themselves, often so far from home.

As a field increasingly conceived as one offering competitive advantage (economic and cultural), creative production as symbolic expression is invested in the relationship of product, people and place: the 'Britain is Great!' campaign stands out as an example. I am thinking through the ways in which refugees and migrants might find routes into this field and creative work (one's skills and professions from 'back home', are not necessarily those in which the host nation is interested). Of how cultural projects make subjects of and enlist refugees and migrants to speak about themselves, in sometimes limiting ways. In what manner do their ideas and innovations test boundaries of creative practice, of production and circulation?

Contemporary issues connect with historical investigation here – of the nature of Hollywood in the 30s or as represented in 'Insiders/Outsiders', a nationwide arts festival in 2019-20 celebrating refugees from Nazi Europe and their contribution to British culture. Whether dealing in current cultural policy, digital circulation across diasporic communities, questions about migrants, refugees and creativity poses fundamental questions about the politics of representation: what is said and by whom.

I WANT AN INTERRAIL TICKET

Annette Naudin

The story of where I am going with my research in less than 2 minutes...

I would like to go to different places with my research...

I want an Interail ticket, to hop on and off trains and explore different ideas, theories, and work with a wider range of academics.

I have joined the newly established Cultural Theory (train) cluster to expand my theoretical knowledge.

I am interested in pursuing my French connections and some emerging relationship with French Canadian colleagues to develop research bids about place, location and cultural entrepreneurship.

With French colleagues, and following my research about location, imagined borders and cultural work, I want to explore theories of liminality. Spaces which are removed

from the everyday or less socially restricted spaces, as locations for cultural activities, experimentation and where different identities might emerge.

My work on craft entrepreneurship, with Karen, has revived an interest in feminist theories, scholars such as Judith Butler and Nancy Fraser. I'd like to draw on their work, and others, to explore the relationship between emotional labour, cultural entrepreneurship and domestic spaces as places where women work.

So, next year, as a researcher, I want to travel... to broaden my horizons, experiment and take a few more risks.

TAYYEB A AND TEHREEM

Karen Patel

This is a story about two women - Tayyeba and Tehreem. Tayyeba is the mother of Tehreem, and they moved over here from Pakistan in 2012. When they got here they spoke very little English, they had no confidence to leave the house and were completely reliant on Tayyeba's husband. Tehreem told me how she would spend all day in the house, isolated and frustrated. Until they came across Go-Woman! Alliance. Earlier this year Tayyeba attended a free jewellery-making course run by Craftspace at Go-Woman! Alliance and learned craft skills. She loved it so much she went back to the second cohort and brought her daughter with her. As a result they got more involved with Go-Woman! Alliance. Tehreem is now employed there as an admin assistant; she has made friends and gained some independence. Tayyeba is working towards starting up a jewellery making business, initially planning to sell to her friends and family. They have both developed their English, developed their confidence and feel more a part of their community.

The type of craft going on at Go-Woman! Alliance is not widely considered expert. This is because participants are likely to have not had any formal training, the scheme is

considered more of an amateur, arts participation activity. So for the next year I am focusing on how expertise operates across crafts by women. Not just women who are making as a career and are professionally trained, but within communities and organisations such as Go-Woman! Alliance. Craft expertise involves skill and knowledge, and I am looking to highlight where and how craft expertise is developed and manifest in these various contexts.

MY T-SHIRT

Nick Pillai

The story of where I'm going starts with the t-shirt I'm wearing today. In May of this year, I was employed as research consultant for BBC4's Jazz 625 Live. It was an entirely unexpected outcome from my AHRC fellowship ending in November. But perhaps even more unexpected was when someone told me that a seller on Etsy had made some Jazz 625 t-shirts. Obviously I immediately went online and bought one before the BBC sent out a cease and desist.

This was completely remarkable to me: someone had designed this tribute to a 1960s jazz programme. They wouldn't have done that if the BBC4 programme hadn't been made. Which wouldn't have been made if I hadn't reconstructed a 1960s jazz TV programme here at BCU. Which wouldn't have been attempted without my research project.

One of the reasons I found this so affecting, I suppose, is that the last two years have been the most difficult of my life: my dad's decline in health had a catastrophic effect on my own mental health. When I came back from an extended period of sick leave, changing the way that I

dressed helped me to redefine my relationship to family and work.

Making this t-shirt was someone's creativity. And creativity has been another thing that's saved me, going beyond my previous academic writing with experiments in television production and comic strip scripting. This is my hope for the coming year: that I can continue to find ways to entangle research and creativity, to learn from my colleagues and to embrace the unexpected.

FRIS & THE RADIATOR

Sarah Raine &
Craig Hamilton

When the radiator fell from the wall at 11.01pm it did so quickly and unapologetically.

Water spread quickly across the floor of the rented apartment, gushing from a bent and broken pipe. A vicious rip in the fabric of an otherwise affable evening; a full stop where a comma should have been.

We took turns holding the heavy radiator in place, using our bodies to push a sodden sofa against it – a vain attempt to limit the watery disaster. A statement uttered in jest earlier that day, on the train journey north – “there are no emergencies in popular music studies” – now hung palpably in the air as we contemplated a potentially longnight ahead.

As we waited for assistance from the contact supplied by the online letting company, we began to notice that the whole rented apartment lacked rigidity. The heavy, 6ft radiator had been fixed by a flimsy bracket to plasterboard

barely an inch thick. Elsewhere we saw that the power sockets, too, were worryingly loose; that the furniture was cheap and hurriedly put together. Everything was a façade.

We are requesting,

This proposal aims...

Supported by relevant publications,

To build on a key strength...

To maximise impact,

To ensure sustainability,

Developing an international reputation...

As innovators within the field.

We were in a strange town for three days, attending an academic conference with three hundred other popular music scholars from across the UK and Ireland. Having pitched the idea to the organizers, we were to solicit original writing from the delegates and then edit, design and print a 'fanzine' edition of our fledgling journal, all during the brief window of the conference.

2

Like the apartment, this had seemed like a solid proposition at the time. An opportunity to achieve much with a meagre budget

A bonding moment of three days together, of making and getting things done. Of production and material 'stuff' that never quite made it into our scholarly everyday. Who wouldn't, we reasoned, want the opportunity to think outside the box and see their thoughts in zine-quick print the very next day? Pressed into the hands of voracious popular music scholars from across the nation: dissemination sorted.

To position the research team,

Placing us at the forefront,

To engage with our new faculty structure...

And our impact can be tracked.

The hours will be split equally between two applicants,

And delivered by the end of the semester,

It can be installed on a secure cloud-based server,

This work is intended to start...

The radiator, indeed the whole apartment, now began to look like a worrying metaphor. The whole, heavy enterprise hung by a flimsy bracket on a less-than-solid foundation. We did not know if anyone would turn up to do the work, and what to do if they didn't. No one was picking up, even when we called. We were out on a limb, facing the prospect of an experiment failing in

public, in front of our peers; a disciplinary disaster. Was this the price to pay for experimenting with the traditional form of hotel rooms, conference papers and book chapters?

It will contribute.

It will benefit.

It will support.

It will develop.

It has potential.

SO PALMYRA.

Dima Saber

An ancient archaeological site in Homs Governorate, really ancient – as in the first known mention of the city goes back to the early second millennium BC. A UNESCO World Heritage. It was taken over by ISIS, and was partly destroyed.

Desecration. Devastation. The entire world wept at the destruction of this ‘once beautiful oasis in the Syrian desert’.

Then someone posted on Twitter a long thread about how this reaction made no sense because that is what we – humans, civilisations – do; things get destroyed over the years, and other things get rebuilt on their ruins. It is how it’s always worked, and that should be totally fine.

This got me thinking about archives, and our ‘obsession’ as Pierre Nora calls it, with archival memory. About this urge to preserve everything, to build platforms, secure servers and physical and digital spaces to make sure records and collections are preserved and made available.

I myself have spent the last 5 years working with archives of the Arab uprisings. I’m working on a film which would, in its own way, become a record of the Syrian war and have

been fighting endless battles with YouTube because of their new algorithmic policies which threaten the preservation of video records of the Syria uprising.

But what if archives – like monuments and people - should just be allowed to disappear. What if their value is actually ephemeral, connected to a specific period of time after which they should be left to die. What if we're obsessed with archiving because it gives us academics, activists, journalists, etc. something to work with, and fight for. A 'raison-d'être' of our own making...

I'd like to write on the **death** of the archives; maybe celebrate it, praise it, push for a narrative where it would be alright for archives to be left to die. I'd like to put on hold this constant urge for preservation with the people and groups I work with in conflict zones, and see what happens.

THINKING WITH VIDEOTAPE

Charlotte Stevens

Starting with archives, thinking about videotape

Knowing the current world of fans, wondering about the complexities that secondary resources might've glossed over.

Which leads to:

Reading letters in fanzines, looking for how fans have watched stuff.

Starting with knowing some documents exist, and a curiosity about what they contain.

There is no research question, no focused and efficient move through piles of fading paper, just making starry-eyed lists from the hand-written card catalogue that this public library may never type up.

And then: *reading*

The pure thrill of taking the time to paw through artefacts

and see *what's there*, driven by interest rather than a plan or a deadline.

No real sense, at the start, of the ecosystem that created these objects, produced just before their world became my world, and before digital communications made these conversations materially intangible. Just the discovery of similarities and differences, the call of 'Gather round the trashfire, O my Sisters...' from a letter 37 years ago that might well have been tweeted yesterday, and a lament that 'decisions are difficult' when you have to choose which 6 hours of video to tape and keep for yourself (1983).

And now:

A hint of a research question, wondering what story I might be able to tell from these documents that communicates their richness. There is one book chapter to write this summer (ha) on videotape, marathon viewing, and precedents for binge-watching. In the paper zines I see affection for plastic boxes - 'poor quality video taped episodes which we guard with our lives' (as one fan writes in 1982). It might turn into something, it might not, but I'm looking forward to having this simmer away while I work through more digital things.

THE THING ABOUT THINGS

Iain Taylor

The object of my research is to better understand peoples' relationships with things. That is to say, that the things which I research tend to be objects, and the objective of my research is to interrogate the subjectivity of objects as things.

This can become confusing quickly.

Because the thing about things is that they can never be fully understood objectively, even if some of those things are objects. Such problems are compounded by the fact that the objects in question are not necessarily things. So maybe it's more accurate to say that the subject of my research is how objects *become* things.

Or how things become objects.

It's all a question of *meaning*.

I'll give you an example.

This zine, which you're holding – it exists objectively. It can be considered an object by virtue of its objective material existence. The fact that you're holding it, decoding the symbols which I've inscribed upon it, and presumably frowning at my obtuse explanation, makes it a *thing* to you in this particular moment – a momentary overlap of your subjective experience of its objective material existence. That isn't to say that the operative component here is your attention. The zine would have been here whether you looked at it or not, and the fact that you're now pondering over the meanings inscribed upon it means that this inanimate object is exerting its own influence over your subjective experience.

People, objects, things, and the momentary overlaps where they make meaning for each other. It's the spaces between which I find interesting.

Over the past year, my hope is bring some of these thoughts into objective reality in the form of books, papers, and gatherings of people.

Hopefully, some of those objects will become things.

HYPERLOCAL TV

Jerome Turner

The object I start with here is the smartphone, as it is one of the starting points and something I hope will feature in some work I hope to be doing in 2020. My funding application is currently with AHRC, and I should hear back at the end of the year.

The work will be extending on my PhD exploring hyperlocal community media audiences, asking whether video work is applicable to that context, when it hasn't yet really happened. We will be setting up hyperlocal video teams at three locations to operate as part of existing local alternative news services there, with a view to ensuring sustainability post-project.

Or at least, I hope it will happen. As a lot of the planning has been about the practical aspects of delivering this in terms of workshops, staff and resources, I can't help imagining all of this taking place.

The exciting thing is that it builds on the PhD and aspects of some of the journalism training we've been doing on Check, and would involve fieldwork for me again, working with new collaborators.

SPACE FEUDALISM!

Nick Webber

During the last year, I've been working increasingly on projects which cross over from my work on games into medieval history. In the last few months, I've been looking at constructions of feudalism in a particular online sci-fi game: so 'Space Feudalism', as it has been called.

In pursuit of that, I've been very taken with recent literature which sees the idea of the Middle Ages as part of a broader construction of modernity's 'other', alongside the colonised, and the urban poor. This is captured brilliantly in a quote from Kathleen Davis:

"Histories of the medieval and the colonial are fully intertwined in the specific sense that the historiographical becoming medieval of the centuries apportioned to the Middle Ages was a regulative colonial practice: there is no 'Middle Ages' outside of this process" (Davis 2015:72).

Here, the Renaissance-as-break becomes artificial; a bulwark between modernity and feudalism, 'irrationality'

and ‘backwardness’; value judgements both of the Western past and of colonial subjects; and, of course, those who feel marginalised by contemporary politics. Modern vs. medieval becomes, to an extent, Remain vs. Leave – characterised as rationality vs. ideology, future vs. past. It is perhaps instructive that my sci-fi gamers, given an open choice about how to structure their political and economic relations, chose to create feudalism – I guess because knights and swordfights sound great – but complete with its associated inequality, protection racket, and powerlessness, decided that it is terrible, and so it’s disavowed by the very people who created it; becoming, as outside the game, an anchor for the emergence of more ‘modern’ states, a problem to which modernity is the solution. I don’t know where this idea goes yet – I’m still working with it – but Brexit is apparently a problem to which modernity has not been the solution. We seem to have lost our sense of future.

Oh, and there might be an edited collection in the Space Feudalism idea somewhere.

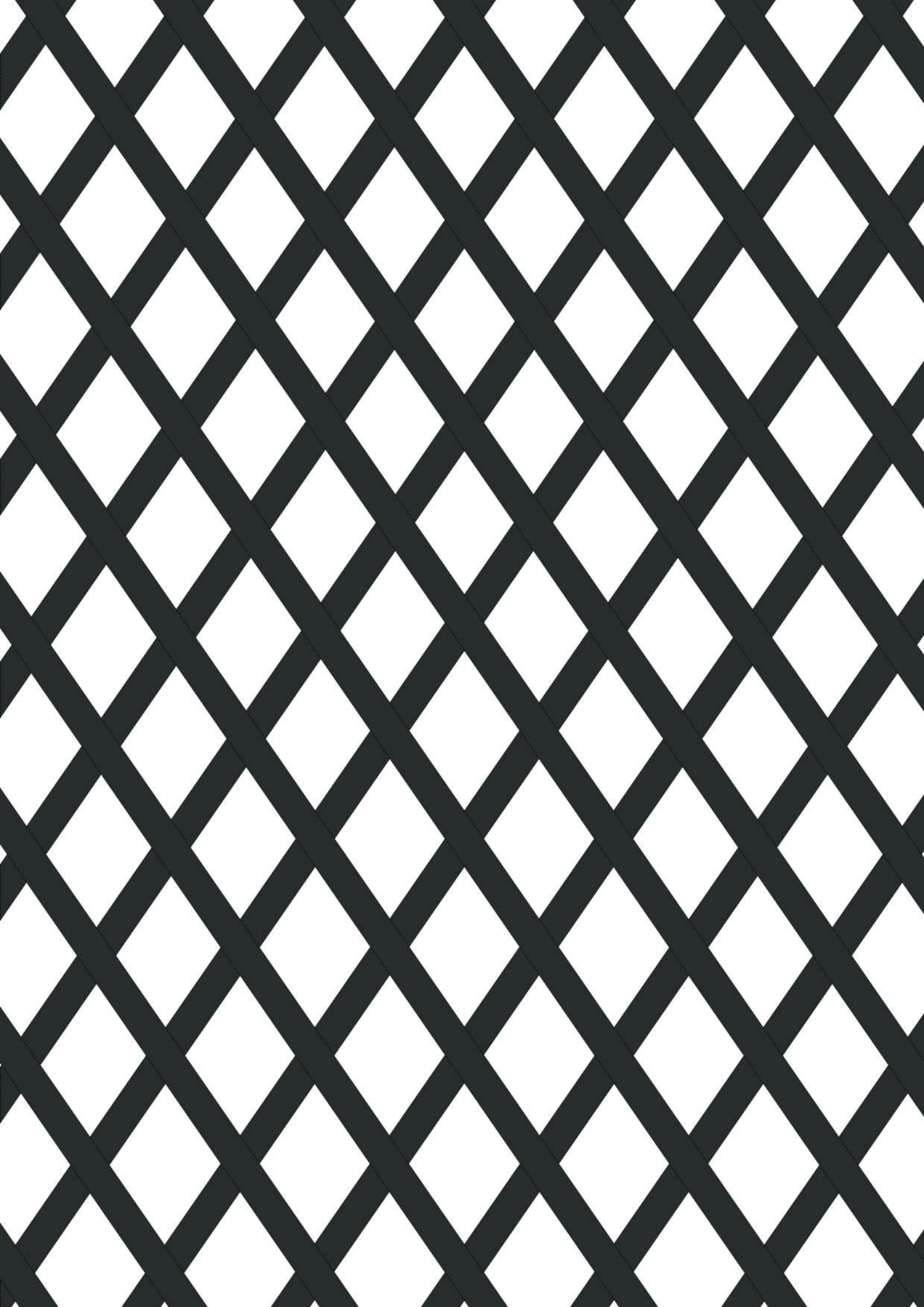
ABOUT BCMCR

The Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research (BCMCR) was established in 2009 to develop excellent research as a core activity within the Birmingham School of Media. Currently, BCMCR has over 30 research-active staff and 30 research degree students. The director of the centre is Nick Gebhardt and the Associate Directors are Kirsten Forkert and Dima Saber.

BCMCR aims to produce distinctive, collaborative work within the field of media and cultural research. In the previous Research Excellence Framework process for assessing the UK HE sector, the majority of BCMCR research environment and activities were judged as of a quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour.

We welcome visiting researchers from across the world and hold regular research seminars which mix presentations from staff, students and speakers from a range of our collaborative partnerships. Please feel free to contact us if you have a research enquiry.

www.bcmcr.org



In the BCMCR strategy meeting on 10th July 2019 each of the research active staff present delivered a 2-minute talk around their research. They were asked to frame that presentation as a response to the following prompt:

"Start with an object, event, theory, problem, technological innovation, inspiration, etc., tell a story of where you're going with your work, and feel free to experiment with the form/content. The emphasis is on lucid writing, imagination, and brevity!"

The resulting presentations were unique and engaging, and together they provided a new perspective on the work being developed across the centre. This 'zine-style publication is a collection of those pieces, presented as a snapshot manifesto of BCMCR at this point in time.

Our hope is that you will enjoy reading this publication, and that it will provide you with a route in to the exciting and innovative research we have in development.

You can find out more about our work by visiting our website: **www.bcmcr.org**