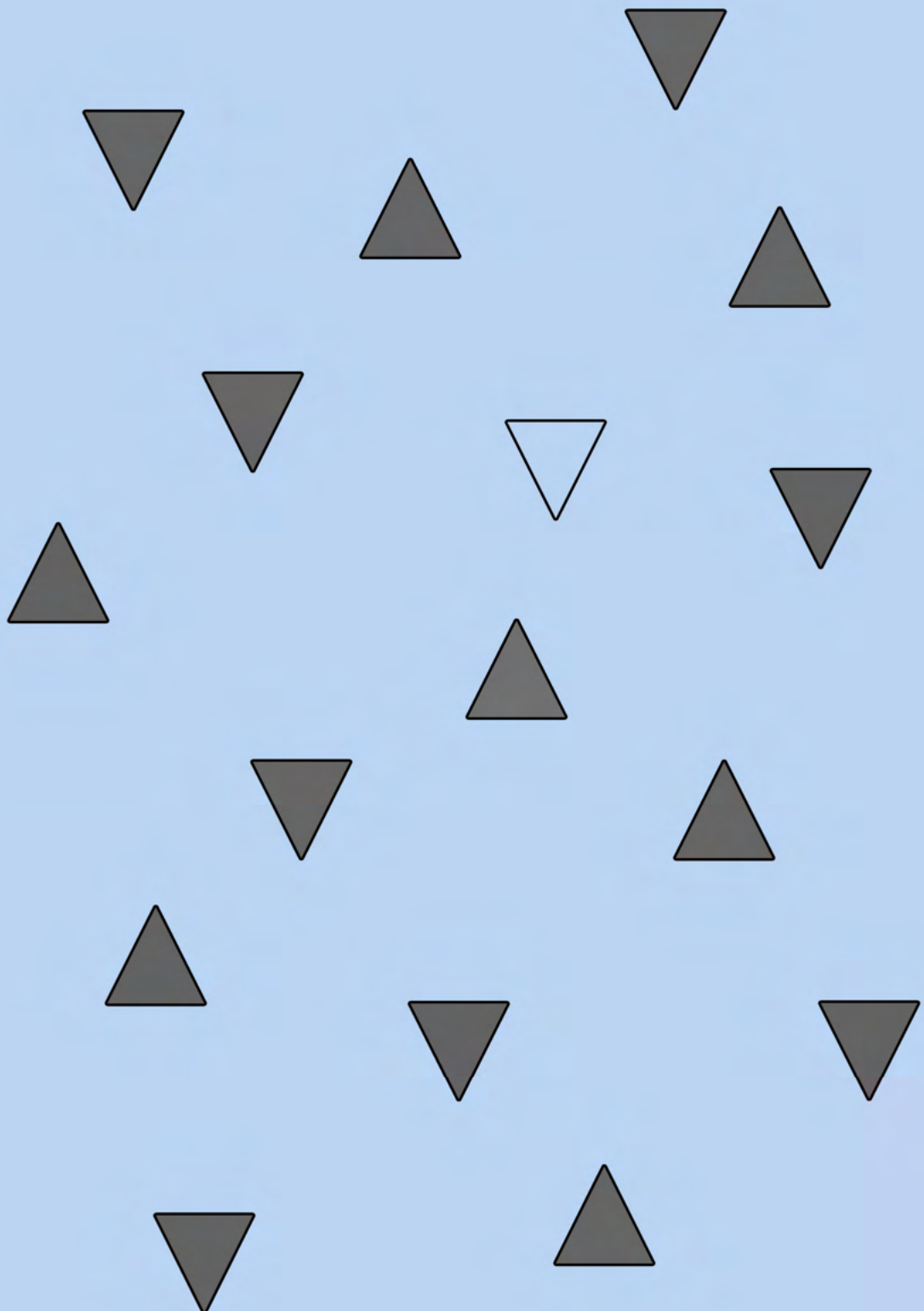


SHORT TAKES ON
ALTERNATI▽ITY

BCMCR
New Thinking #1
2020/21

BCMCR

Birmingham Centre
for Media and
Cultural Research



ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

“Alternativity” is a research theme co-ordinated by Asya Draganova and Charlotte Stevens within the Birmingham Centre for Media and Media and Cultural Research (BCMCR) at Birmingham City University.

As part of this ongoing project, in December 2020 we invited short written pieces that engage with the interpretation and application of the concept of alternativity in relation to a variety of media and cultural fields, experiences, research and creative practices. Involving perspectives from academics, current and former students, and media practitioners, this initiative develops and articulates the richness, breadth and critical potential of the concept of alternativity in relation to resistance, innovation, and transformation.

This edition of the BCMCR *New Thinking* pamphlet series presents a diverse range of topics presented through the critical yet flexible lens of alternativity. These short texts act as provocations for further exploration, capturing the work and ideas that emerge from the project.

For more details about the “Alternativity” BCMCR theme, to read related blog posts, to find out how to get involved, and to get further information about the BCMCR, please visit www.BCMCR.org.



ABOUT THE BCMCR

The 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.

The 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.



CONTENTS

Dislike as Alternativity - Malgorzata Urbaniec	4
Alternative Sources for Audience Research (and Flexibility During the Pandemic) - E. Charlotte Stevens	6
Our Dreams Won't Fit In Ballot Boxes - Matt Grimes	8
Film 'Piracy' in a Non-Western Context: Alternative or Mainstream? - Kateryna Sivak	10
The #EndSARS Movement - Vincent Obia	12
YTM/TANRETLA - Asya Draganova	14
Connected to what? Jazz collectives as alternative practice - Tony Dudley-Evans & Nicholas Gebhardt	16
My name is . . . Thank you very much, goodnight! - John Hillman	18
"For a Free Portugal", Charlie Haden, and the construction of an alternative sonic time-space - Pedro Cravinho	20
Furries at Play: A Brief Examination of the Predominance of Sexual Furry Video Games - Reuben Mount	22
Brave New Alternative World? Playing Dystopian Cold War Scenarios - Regina Seiwald	24



Dislike as Alternativity

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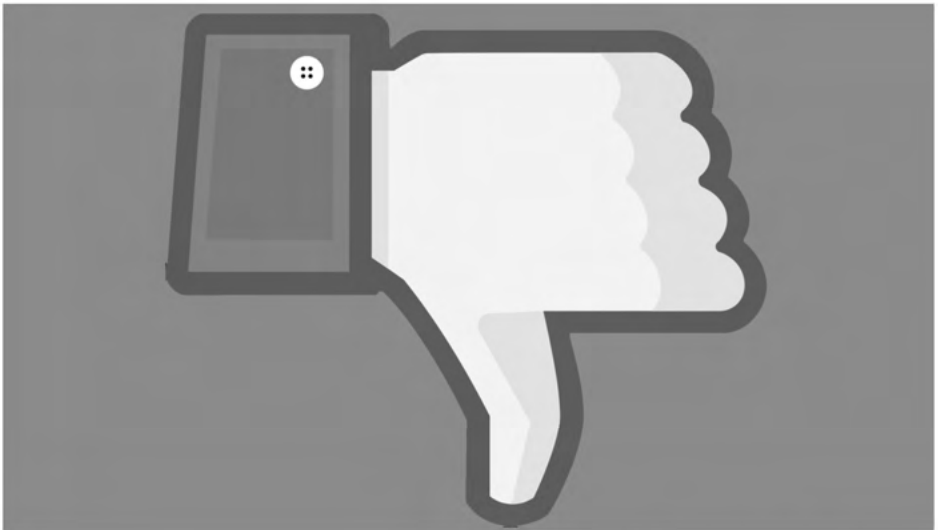


Image: Giorgi Balakhadze (CC BY-SA 3.0)





For years, all that many Facebook users wanted was a dislike button alongside the platform's trademark "Like". To be able to show opposition, without going through the effort of typing words into a box. Facebook always disagreed, warning that the introduction of the button could lead to increased bullying. While here I want to discuss dislike in its productive form, the line where dislike turns into abuse needs to always be in the back of the mind of those studying it.

Dislike of the mainstream may be alternativity in one of its purest forms. Describing music you like, you may start off by saying what you do not like first, to quicker establish your boundaries. And you may say that you really, really, really do not like Ed Sheeran – which may mean gaining points on the imaginary alternativity scale. Some scholars put the enjoyment of one thing directly in opposition with the 'other' – may it be opposition of football clubs, or music. This dislike can be learned – going from liking a text to later recognising its flaws and criticising it. But dislike just as dislike is possible too – without comparisons to the 'other'. It may become even an event in of itself, a little five minutes of hate. Like every year, around May, it is for those who reject the representations of joy, competitions and celebrations of Eurovision. Creating their own, usually collective, viewings – waiting in excitement for flaws or 'bad music'.

My research interest into dislike started as a form of alternativity too. Having done fandom research myself, and with the greatest respect to the achievements of fandom studies – I still was looking for an alternative. I might have not even known I did, until I found it. Gray (2003) "New Audiences, New Textualities: Anti-Fans and Non-Fans", which I must have been reciting in my sleep at some point, made me reconsider – why not look at the other side?

Dislike might also influence one's work – it most certainly did with mine. But cultural workers, especially in those in 'gatekeeping' roles, must figure out how to negotiate their personal dislikes. Or whether their dislikes influence the culture they create. Is a gallery curator exhibiting work led by personal likes or ones of the audience? In my work on music programmers I found that these issues concern the workers a lot – but the negotiations remain very personal. The consensus between audience and expert tastes becomes a thin line, which is often in the audience's favour. Dislike, as I learned, is much more complex than just a binary, it is a spectrum. So while dislike studies may always be an alternative viewpoint, the feeling itself stays deeply rooted in the mainstream. Disliking Donald Trump, for example, has a wide-spread appeal. Unsurprisingly. Even as little as just pressing a dislike button on that guy. But that is a wholly different topic ...

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Alternative Sources for Audience Research (and Flexibility During the Pandemic)

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Name TREK LETTER No. Copies 5.7. Expires 5.7.

YEAR	JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG.	SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.
1986												
1987				5		6		1			2	3
1988								7				
1989	4.1	✓	4.3	4.4	4.5		4.7	4.8	4.9	4.10	4.11	4.12
1990		5.2	5.3	5.4	5.5			5.8	5.9	5.10		
1991	6.1				6.5							

Source FANZINE Price 167 L. Penney 86-89. ALEX Mc QUEEN 1989-

✓ = no number on issue.
06D/6/FILE IN STAR TREK DRAW

Image: 'One of the many zine index cards
at the Merrill Collection, Toronto Public Library.'





For the last couple of years, I have been working with media fanzines housed in North American library collections. I've mentioned on the BCMCR blog about visiting one of the collections and about some preliminary findings that came out of that work. My starting point with this material was simply curiosity: I knew there were fanzines at one branch of the Toronto Public Library, where I was due to visit, therefore I would make time to explore. There is a wonderful freedom that comes from diving into an archive without knowing what it holds, and from encountering a set of documents before having research questions in mind. I found general conversation about television and television watching. This was not just discussion of programmes that were the subject of the zine (science fiction series, cop shows) but information around context for viewing; not only interpretation of characters and story, but also discussion of how and where fans watched television.

This relates to the Alternativity theme in a few ways:

- This kind of fan writing is primary source evidence for spectatorship practices as the spread of videotape changed how fans watched television in the 70s and 80s, documenting the uptake of an alternative to traditional broadcast television viewing
- This kind of fan writing has not been used as a source for scholarship in the last 20 years, its accounts provide an alternative set of accounts to existing ethnographies from the period
- This kind of fan writing contains descriptions written between friends of how they watched television and understood their viewing practices, these discussions presume an alternative audience to interviews (or other audience research methods) conducted by academics

To explore these ideas further, I have a piece in *Alphaville* (issue 20) that starts wondering at how to use fanzines for (television) research in a way that recognises their difference to other forms of audience accounts. They are not letters to a researcher, they are not (semi-)structured interviews guided by a research question, and neither are they pseudonymous comments on a web forum. As I read through comments made between friends that were never intended to be seen outside of a community, the zines feel like past conversations that I'm eavesdropping on from the present day.

The *Alphaville* article was meant to be a conference paper; however, the special issue of the journal has become the primary outlet for new work that might have been shared in person. This highlights an unexpected way that my work with media fanzines intersects with our Alternativity theme this year. Since the usual way of disseminating research at a conference was unsafe due to the pandemic, open access journals take on a new meaning alongside the flourishing of online conferences and dissemination events with a wider public in (virtual) attendance. I am excited to finally be sharing work through an open access format, and particularly work that is focused on looking at new ways to access past television audiences.



Our Dreams Won't Fit In Ballot Boxes

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Image: Our dreams won't fit in ballot boxes (A) (Occupy via Facebook, 2018).

(NB: (A) = Unicode: U+24B6, UTF-8: E2 92 B6)





As an adherent of British anarcho-punk in my youth, its influence on my adolescent life was huge, and it set out a template for the way I have lived my life ever since, and has remained a touchstone for many of the decisions I have made and continue to make in my life. My PhD, which focusses on British anarcho-punk, identity, ageing, memory and nostalgia (Grimes, 2019), came about from my own identarian journey in, through and out of anarcho-punk, and I was interested to see what, if any, lasting influence it had on other ex-adherents of anarcho-punk, 40 years later. For my PhD I interviewed 18 50+-year-olds who were also adherents of anarcho-punk in their youth. One of the lines of questioning was around their perceptions of what constituted anarchism for them as an adolescent anarcho-punk, and how they now perceived anarchism 40 years later. Like me, for many of my research respondents their understanding of anarchism and their development of anarchist thoughts, principles and values, had come about from engaging with anarchist texts and/or from the political and ideological standpoints laid out in the lyrics and practices of the anarcho-punk bands they had been exposed to. As a 14-year-old anarcho-punk I perceived anarchism as an end to capitalism, state and institutional control and exploitation, and an alternative society built on equality, mutual aid, kindness, respect and love. I truly believed that there was the potential to organise and work towards a new alternative political system and society and attending demonstrations such as Stop The City really highlighted that. My research participants' memories of what anarchism meant to them, as adolescent anarcho-punks, were quite similar. For some, anarchism was "a life and a self-governing society without rules" (Liz); "a society without privilege and where everybody had equal opportunities" (Adam); "autonomy and self-determination but with mutual respect for others" (Kate).

Fast forward 40 years and it seems that from the majority of my respondents' narratives, their interpretation of anarchism has remained consistent over time. As adolescent anarcho-punks and now as adults their narratives still point towards the possibilities of creating an alternative societal structure based on anarchist principles and values.

Basically, I'm an anarchist and I'm not someone who calls himself an anarchist, I am an anarchist and I do believe in these things [] If anything, I am more committed to the idea than I was then. (Pete)

Yes, I do (consider myself an anarchist). [...] I still think it's workable. I think it's doable in a practical way, which I've tried to do in my jobs and through other things I've done in my life. (Guy)

At the time, yes, we thought anarchism was a big, big possibility. Like every 18 and 19- year-old, you wanted to smash the system and change the world for the better. I still believe in anarchism. I still believe it's the right way to go though it's a long, long, long term ideal (Adam)

And me? I believed then and I still believe now the potential that anarchism has in developing an alternative society without centralised governance. Surely, we all want fairness, equality, freedom, autonomy and mutualism? Sadly, in a neo-liberal capitalist society those dreams don't fit in their ballot boxes.

References:

Grimes, M. (2019) *"Life We Make": Identity, Memory and British Anarcho-Punk*. PhD thesis, Birmingham City University.



Film 'Piracy' in a Non-Western Context: Alternative or Mainstream?

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Image: Photo by Felix Mooneeram,
(Unsplash.com)





Within my current research project, I am exploring a variety of practices aimed at making mainstream feature films and TV shows accessible to Ukrainian audiences but that have a questionable legal, 'formal' status, e.g., free movie streaming websites containing unlicensed films. In the existing literature, such informal practices are commonly generalised under the term 'piracy' and are often framed as marginal and harmful to the arguably mainstream distribution channels, largely controlled by major content industries, especially Hollywood (e.g. Ma et al., 2014). There is, however, another way to approach 'piracy' – that is as an alternative way to access desired content. Indeed, putting aside the aspects of illegality and immorality, which are used to justify the marginality of such informal practices, the latter may be seen simply as another option for films to reach their audience. It is particularly the case in the context of developing, non-Western countries, where 'pirate', or informal, sources are in fact the only place where many creative works can be found (e.g. Mattelart, 2012; Mueller, 2019).

This approach to 'piracy' as to an *alternative* media distribution channel is effectively contrasted with the marginalising perspective on informal media. In other words, the latter is often criticised as disregarding of the crucial role these non-mainstream channels play in allowing people in these countries to become part of the global audience. It is this alternative perspective that arguably brings a more comprehensive, less Western-centric understanding of the 'piracy' phenomenon. From my own experience, to watch numerous US TV shows or Hollywood films no longer available in Ukrainian cinemas, the only choice I had was either to download them from a file-sharing site or stream from a website certainly without a license to these films; DVD as a format has gone out of formal sales years ago, and streaming services such as Netflix have become available only recently, providing significant yet far from all-inclusive content libraries. It is then indeed valid to recognise such informal practices as a way to distribute and access content. Yet, I suggest that a question that should be asked here is whether it is valid to define this way as *alternative*?

'Alternative' is a relative term, meaning it implies that there is something to be *alternative* to. In the context of major Western countries, it is clear why 'piracy' is seen as such; with an abundance of legal options, commonly referred to as mainstream, informal media become, at the very least, just one of the many channels. Yet, in developing economies, where unlicensed content providers are the only option, what is 'piracy' actually *alternative* to? Is this allegedly less Western perspective on 'piracy' ultimately uses Western understanding of mainstream and *alternative* to explain informality in a non-Western context? Can informal media, often popular and completely normalised in these countries, be conceptualised as mainstream? What does 'alternative' and 'mainstream' truly mean in non-Western media economies?

References:

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- Mueller, G. (2019) *Media Piracy in the Cultural Economy: Intellectual Property and Labor under Neoliberal Restructuring*. New York; Oxon: Routledge.



The #EndSARS Movement

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Image: '#EndSARS protestors at the Lekki Toll Gate, in Lagos, Nigeria
- Nora Awolowo'





I had my PhD research all planned out as I started the process of gathering and considering my data. Then in early October 2020, a protest against police brutality started back home in Nigeria, beginning only as a spark. The protest, aimed at the scrapping of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigerian Police, had been a recurring theme since 2016. But this time, the protest picked up unusual steam and became a movement, creating panic in official circles.

After weeks of youth-led demonstrations online and offline, things came to head. On October 20, 2020, soldiers were captured in smartphone footages shooting at unarmed protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos, a location that had become ground zero for the movement.

Things went downhill from there as widespread violence broke out on the streets of Lagos. Others shut themselves indoors, heartbroken at what the military had done. And I was here, helplessly watching as things were unfolding.

But I was just as affected. Like many back home, I found myself in a dark place, mourning those who had been killed (Amnesty International puts the number of the dead at least 12 with hundreds severely injured). Given the right circumstances, I thought, I could have been at the protest ground that day.

For the first time since I started my PhD, I took some days off, opted out of the meetings I had, and got into a state of reflection. Afterwards, I channelled my focus into random writing and journaling on my blog was key for me.

The fruit of all these was my recognition of the serendipity of it all. The #EndSARS movement was essentially a major case study for my research. It had shown how influential Twitter in Nigeria is in co-ordinating activist discourse and why questions remain regarding whether the wider attempted regulation of social media in Nigeria is targeted at combating online harms or quelling dissent.

Similarly, broadcasting in Nigeria has come under tightening regulation, the latest being the hate speech code which, among other things, bars content deemed to be offensive or repugnant. But this only drove people to alternative spaces like Twitter where they were able to amplify the #EndSARS movement in a way never before seen in Nigeria. This further led to heightened rhetoric on the part of government and legal action by others who held the view that the use of platforms like Twitter should be regulated, or in some cases, banned.

After days and weeks of reflection, I was finally able to frame my understanding of what had played out before me.

I documented my initial observation in a piece that was published on the Media@LSE blog. Now, I am all about theorising Twitter NG as a unique platform for activist and other discourses in Nigeria, and what the implications of its regulation could mean for countries in the Global South.



YTIVITANRET LA

Asya Draganova

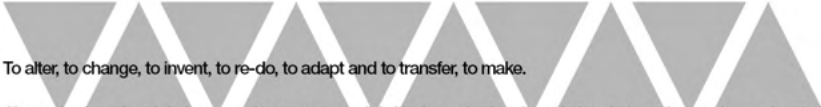
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Image: Draganova, A. (2020) *A pataphysical self portrait*





To alter, to change, to invent, to re-do, to adapt and to transfer, to make.

Alternative is... the alphabet sung in a song, possibly backwards, the absurd, the obvious that we ignore lost in invisible rules, the obsolete, non-existent, a tide with irregular rhythm – a storm. To remix, to cover, to remake, to splice and provoke – pataphysics of everyday life. Winter holiday by the sea.

Alternative is... to dare to stop making sense 'til a new language comes forth; to write 500-words (or some more) that may seem unstructured to some. And who cares? Well, don't we all? Even what's trivial was once a novelty thing, an alternative grows to a canon itself, a status quo in its right, in the process of finding its place - under the sun. An act of resistance, a forward momentum perhaps, alternativivity is a tool in the power play of life.

Alternative, yes, and is there a structure to that? A hidden manual of 'how to achieve...'? A guide? Isn't it ironic we classify what is alternative, too? Definitions, limitations, contradictions at the very heart of what should be a utopian freedom, an infinite space. It's in our nature, we may say. A world of meaning operates through borders, and they are imagined themselves – we use them again and again, even when it is to say that something does not belong to them, that it resides beyond.

How alternative is alternativivity then? Another concept – a riddle of conflicts. An attempt to imagine a different world through the lens of the old. A crossroad of thoughts which we try to unite, an umbrella for homeless ideas.

And for me...? It's the protests, big and small, of youth that shaped my life. The 'hidden' stories, the innate curiosity that I have for them. And why isn't this text about research? Because research is part of my established life, it is what I do in my career. To write here, then, is a chance – to write differently; to make what does not 'fit' in the format present itself raw and direct. No references, no subheadings, but then why have I written a title at all, and signed with my 'real' name? Is this some innate conformism or... an attempt to converse? Even the 'radical' has its own limitations, it adheres to some expectation to communicate its own essence.

Alternativity, then, is a self-designation of sorts; an aesthetic of distinction; profound. It is free will within a bunch of limitations. Maybe a 'personal style'? A pattern not entirely and never eternally to be replicated onto the canvas of ready-made things. Abstraction. This is a demanding choice, and not always a comfort; it is to draw a portrait of a face non-existent, sing a song not written yet, a journey without predicted destination... but maybe the vision of one. An individual non-linear truth.

So, what does it take? The confidence to take risks, to question, to be disliked, to forget the given instructions in sight.



Connected to what? Jazz collectives as alternative practice

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Image: 'F-IRE Collective, London'





In this paper we will discuss the role of ‘Jazz Connectives’ by drawing on discussions with the British trumpeter and bandleader **Laura Jurd** and French saxophonist and bandleader **Robin Fincker** and with a particular focus on collectives in Britain and France.

The term ‘jazz connective’ refers to a group of jazz and improvising musicians who come together to develop their own projects, run their own gigs, set up their own venues, recording labels and publishing outlets (Wall and Barber, 127).

The need for collectives in many European countries has arisen because of major changes in the jazz infrastructure and the means whereby jazz musicians receive recognition, get their work known and, ultimately, are able to maintain a viable career through gigging, touring and recording. In the past jazz musicians could follow various routes to further their careers; one was to apply to two main agencies for touring support, Jazz Services and the Contemporary Music Network (CMN), neither of which now exist. Another route was through being recorded for a major record label; this often involved touring support, which now rarely happens. The dominant route for career development has become through contact with promoters and venues who have become the main gate keepers. The main aim of jazz collectives is for musicians to take control of their own careers and reduce their dependence on promoters, thus opening up new creative possibilities.

Various jazz collectives were established in Britain in the period from 1995 to early 2000s. In London the F-Ire Collective (1995) and the Loop Collective (2005) were active in setting up gigs and small festivals; in Birmingham the Cobweb Collective (2003) created weekly gigs in various venues, in Leeds the LIMA Collective also ran a weekly gig, in Manchester the EFPI group ran a record label and in Scotland Caber Music recorded various innovative Scottish groups. Jurd described how she set up the Chaos Collective in 2011 while studying at Trinity Laban; it was a group of like-minded musicians many of whom were studying together who wanted greater opportunities to play. While none of these collectives operate now, they have left a legacy of regular playing opportunities and career development for many of the prominent musicians on today’s UK jazz scene.

In France jazz collectives have been much more stable. Fincker spoke of the different kinds of collective in France he has participated in, including Sumatural Orchestra which is run as a cooperative organisation and Freddy Morezon Collectif in Toulouse. These organisations are funded from both national and regional bodies, enabling them to employ staff, develop new projects and commissions for members, and run gigs and festivals. Jazz Connectives in France have created an effective alternative path for musicians which encourages creativity amongst its members and regularity of work opportunities. This system runs in parallel and in cooperation with the network of promoters, clubs and festivals, and thus quality control is ensured through this interaction.

References:

Wall, T. and Barber, S. (2015) Collective Cultures and Live Jazz in Birmingham. In: N. Gebhardt and T. Whyton, eds. *The Cultural Politics of Jazz Collectives: This is Our Music*. London: Routledge, pp. 117-131.



**My name is . . .
Thank you very much,
goodnight!**



John Hillman

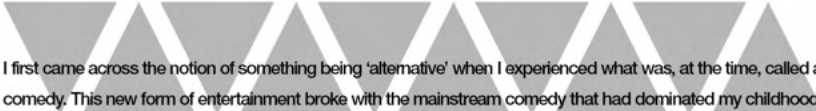
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Image: Hillman, J. (2020) *A photograph of a corded microphone, out of focus on the right side.*





I first came across the notion of something being 'alternative' when I experienced what was, at the time, called alternative comedy. This new form of entertainment broke with the mainstream comedy that had dominated my childhood. If humour tends to offer an alternative view of the world, what defined the movement of alternative comedy was how it reflected not only a different view but what felt like a more authentic view. In essence, the things comedians wrote about more closely represented the world I was living in. This then highlighted how out of touch and disconnected the comedy I had been expected to laugh at before was. What had previously passed for comedy rested on a false universalism, often describing a world through a thinly veiled form of misogyny, racism and sexism. Through its universal position, the implication was that our laughter indicated how we all shared similar world view. Alternative comedy signalled a cultural shift in expectations. Its humour operated against the universality of what had gone before, by being available only to those who knew about it. Inevitably, alternative comedy itself became mainstream; its particularity ceding to a weak universalism. Remaining different, distinctive, and on the outside of any field eventually becomes impossible. What then, might be an alternative to alterativity?

Put succinctly, alternatives are offered when a problem requires resolving in an entirely different way. Today, conspiracy theorists have positioned themselves as the alternative to facts and evidence. Their motivation is to find a unifying answer, even if it does not make sense, to complex and incomprehensible situations. Against a backdrop of confusion and uncertainty, conspiracy theorists are some of the main proponents of alterativity. Despite reactions against neoliberalism such as the Arab Spring, the Occupy Movement, civil unrest, or the BLM movement, there is never any following emancipatory move. In short, alternative positions appear but as quickly disappear. It seems, in most circumstances, there is no viable alternative. Not because one does not exist but because to construct one has become too difficult. Which is why conspiracy theorists have resorted to inventing their own fantasy solutions.

Perhaps, acquiescing to austerity measures, the rise in populist politics, the Brexit vote or the election of Trump in 2016 can be read as an indication of an overwhelming resignation of there being no alternative to neoliberal capitalism. While populations are clearly unhappy, they are not unhappy enough to actually change things. Instead, they choose a kind of semi-rebellious forbearance, like teenagers slamming their bedroom door. Perhaps, the reason we see inconsistent signs of discontent is because nothing can be imagined as a workable alternative. It is, then, a failing of our imagination that means alternatives are never really realised. Any alternative solution needs to understand how our own fear of change can be mapped onto the impossibilities of our situation. As Freud never said: "Did you hear the one about my mother-in-law?"



“For a Free Portugal”, Charlie Haden, and the construction of an alternative sonic time-space

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Image: Alfredo Cunha (April 1974) *The New State regime political police headquarters after its surrender.*

In the photo, a marine and an official portrait of Portuguese dictator, Marcelo Caetano. Fundação Mário Soares / Alfredo Cunha, Available HTTP: http://hdl.handle.net/11002/fms_dc_151025 (2021-2-9)





This essay pays attention to North American double bass player, Charlie Haden (1937–2014), composition “For a Free Portugal”. Following previous experimental explorations of free jazz and political music “For a Free Portugal” was written out from Haden’s concern to free Portugal and its former African colonies from its right-wing colonialist regime. It draws on Haden personal experience and uses ‘sonic memory material’ (Voeglein 2006) to evoke transgenerational experiences of a traumatic colonial/independence war resulting in an ‘aural historical’ event (Hersch 2020).

“For a Free Portugal” was recorded in March 1976 at the Generation Sound Studios as part of his duets album, *Closeness* (1976), featuring Haden on bass and Paul Motion on drums, and comprising collages of studio sessions and superimposed sonic materials. The recording took place almost two years after the Portuguese New State regime’s overthrow by a military *coup d’état* on April 25, 1974. As mentioned elsewhere on November 20, 1971, at the International Cascais Jazz Festival during the Ornette Coleman Quartet set, Haden bent towards his bass microphone to dedicate his composition “Song For Che” to the black liberation movements of the Portuguese African colonies (Cravinho 2017). This action was greeted with an enthusiastic response from the audience. Subsequently, the Portuguese Political Police agents arrested Haden the day after at Lisbon International Airport. He was taken to its headquarters and interrogated. On the following day, he returns to the airport where he boarded a plane to London. From there Haden returns to the US, not returning to Portugal while the New State regime was in power.

“For a Free Portugal” superimposed sonic materials comprise a cassette mono recording of Haden’s dedication at the festival; samples from recordings made in Angola by Liberation Support Movement; portions of the MPLA (People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola) National Anthem; sounds of an attack led by MPLA on the Portuguese military troops stationed in Kari pande; and the voice of José Mendes de Carvalho (1941–1968), head of MPLA Military Commission, also known by his *nom de guerre* Hoji-ya-Henda, killed during the attack. Through jazz’s concept as ‘music of rebellion’, Haden took the mission to challenge the world through his artistic vision (Connor 2000). In “For a Free Portugal,” he evokes power-relations, affect, and memory by generating an alternative sonic space – for himself and most importantly, to its listeners.

According to Bergson, memory is the intersection of mind and matter, challenging both the idealist and realist idea of ‘present perception’ by placing its trigger on past experiences (Bergeson 1991). “For a Free Portugal” cultural voices – both studio recordings and sonic war fragments – resonate fractured ‘realms of memory’ (Nora 1996). However, space construction will always involve a specific time and recalling a specific time will always involve a space (Lefebvre, 1991). With “For a Free Portugal” Haden sets up an alternative sonic time-space relationship by exploring the role of sound in its listener experience, which “can be described according to different perspectival dimensions” (Zeman 2020). Haden’s sonic narrative is socio-political, personal and autobiographical, and emphasises a symbiosis between art and social conscience built of presences and absent voices (Connor 2000).

“For a Free Portugal” Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEPw9FHo_ZI

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See Page 26.



Furries at Play: A Brief Examination of the Predominance of Sexual Furry Video Games

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Image: Snkl Studio (2020) Anthropomorphised character, female. *Seasons With Furry*.





Furries are often portrayed as sexual deviants, with mainstream media coverage often focusing on the fandom through the lens of perceived 'deviant' sexual acts such as plushophilia, or the sexual attraction to stuffed animals, among others (Gurley, 2007). However, those within the fandom and those that study it state that these views simply do not represent the reality of the community, which is instead a safe and welcoming space and one of inherent tolerance (Wall, 2016). The larger proportion of furries do not perceive the fandom as inherently fetishistic, or at the very least do not perceive it as a fetish for themselves (International Anthropomorphic Research Program, 2019), with less than 10% of furries seeing the fandom as their fetish.

However, on the PC gaming platform Steam, we can see a different representation of the fandom. If we take the top 30 results for items with the 'furry' tag listed in order of relevancy to the search term, filtered to show only full video games, 50% of these items contain not safe for work (NSFW) content such as nudity or explicit sexual acts. It should be noted that the filter was added to remove downloadable content (DLC) or solely musical soundtracks, which alter the percentages if left in the search.

So, if we were to look at the representation of furries in the video gaming space brought by this study, it predominantly appears to focus on the fetishisation of the fandom with sexual themes or nudity being the primary aspects. There are several possibilities as to why this could be, but I posit that this predominance is likely tied to the allowance within these games for what Crandall (2007: 599) stated as the exploration of "sexual and anthropomorphic fantasies in virtual space".

This tension between the reality of the furry community and their representation in video games and other media is an important subject of study, as this could potentially be applied to other marginalised groups and similar tensions that exist within them. There is a sexual aspect to the fandom, as with most groups, however the nuances of this group aren't represented as readily or openly by the immediately visible video games around it. Furthermore, it should be noted that the criteria of what makes a 'furry game' are somewhat nebulous as well, given that the unifying aspect of the fandom is the appreciation or adoration of anthropomorphised animals (Crandall, 2007: 598), which is a wide-reaching criterion.

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Brave New Alternative World? Playing Dystopian Cold War Scenarios

Regina Seiwald

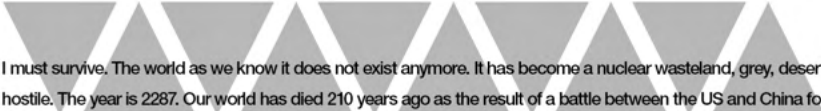
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Image: Thielenhaus (2016) Entrance to the ruins of the Nuka-World Amusement Park. From *Fallout 4*.





I must survive. The world as we know it does not exist anymore. It has become a nuclear wasteland, grey, deserted, and hostile. The year is 2287. Our world has died 210 years ago as the result of a battle between the US and China for the scarce resources left on this planet. Almost everything is dead now. Nothing this world has to offer is inviting and nothing I encounter appears to be worth living for.

Still, I voluntarily enter this world from the comfort of my living room in a house somewhere in the green suburbs of Birmingham. It is 10pm and I have decided to go on a journey to visit an alternative, dystopian world. I am playing *Fallout 4* (2015), a video game that relies on a weird mix between 1950s nostalgia, characterised by stream-lined cars and art deco furniture, and the effects of a nuclear wipe-out. I, the Sole Survivor, have left Vault 111, in which I just awoke from my cryogenic stasis. I need to find my son.

Dystopian, post-apocalyptic scenarios relying on the premise that a conflict resembling the Cold War and referencing its propagandistic sentiments feature prominently in video games. But why are we drawn to something that works with ideas of danger, discomfort, and probable death? One potential answer is that we are drawn to digital 'what-if'-scenarios because they allow us to explore alternatives without direct consequences for us. If we die, we can simply restart the game and try out different ways to handle the situation that just killed us. Danger means excitement, particularly if we can be sure that the danger we experience does not really harm us. Kendall L. Walton famously spoke of "quasi-feelings" (1990: 245), which are experienced in any fictional situation that is approached as if it were real.

Another explanation why dystopian worlds are alluring to us is that they often portray a simplified worldview, which structures our perception of the complex global political landscape in a very straightforward bi-polar concept. Cold War video games, particularly those played from an American perspective, heavily rely on an opposition between the evil Soviets and the righteous Americans. This idea of a world order portraying the moral superiority of the West has arisen from popular media content produced since the 1950s, which propagates "American Exceptionalism" (Voorhees, 2014) in order to justify the paths taken by the US during the Cold War. The images we have of this era are thus not shaped by historical accounts but by content crafted by the "virtual military-industrial complex" (Sterling, 1993). This has the effect that the Cold War conflict is still very much in our collective memory because it continues to play a central role in popular media until this day.

I happily enjoy this world annihilated in a nuclear holocaust, maybe because of its simple opposition between good and bad, maybe because its danger is alluring.

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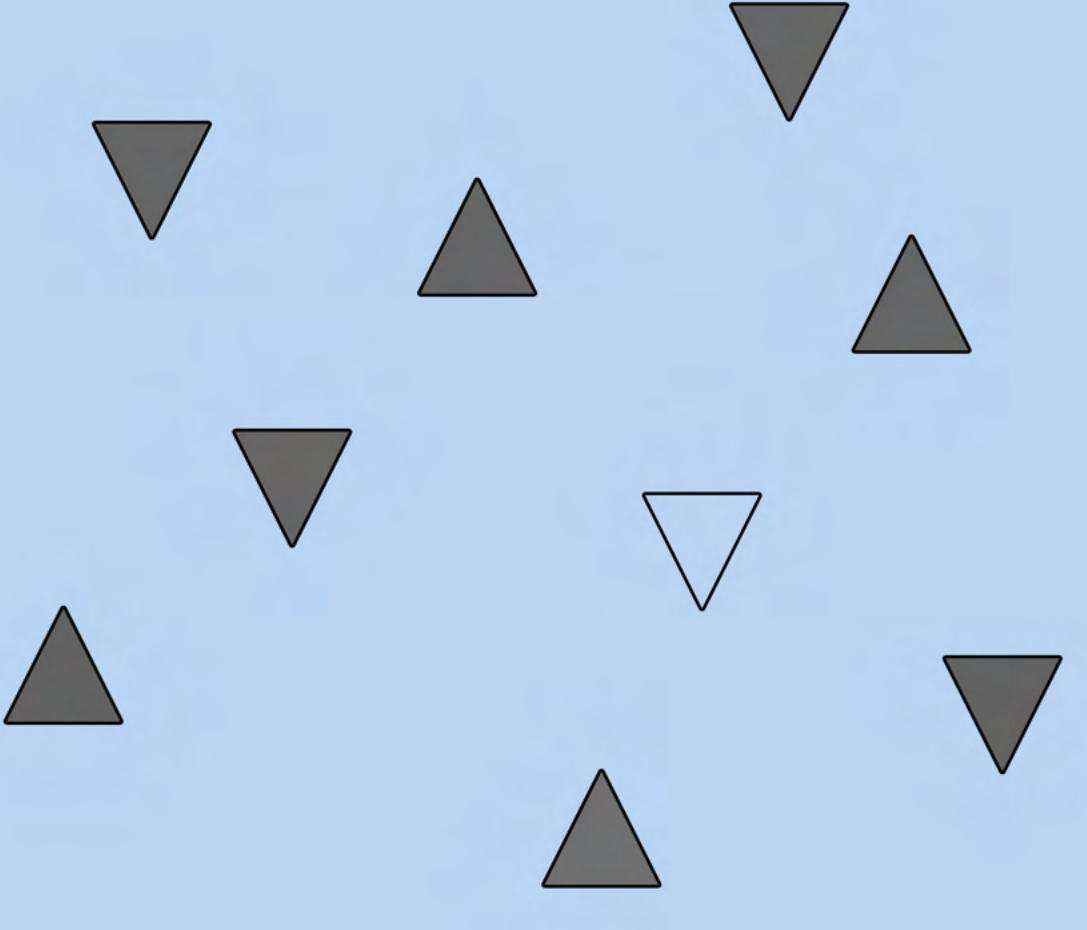
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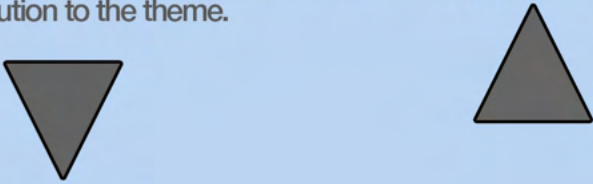
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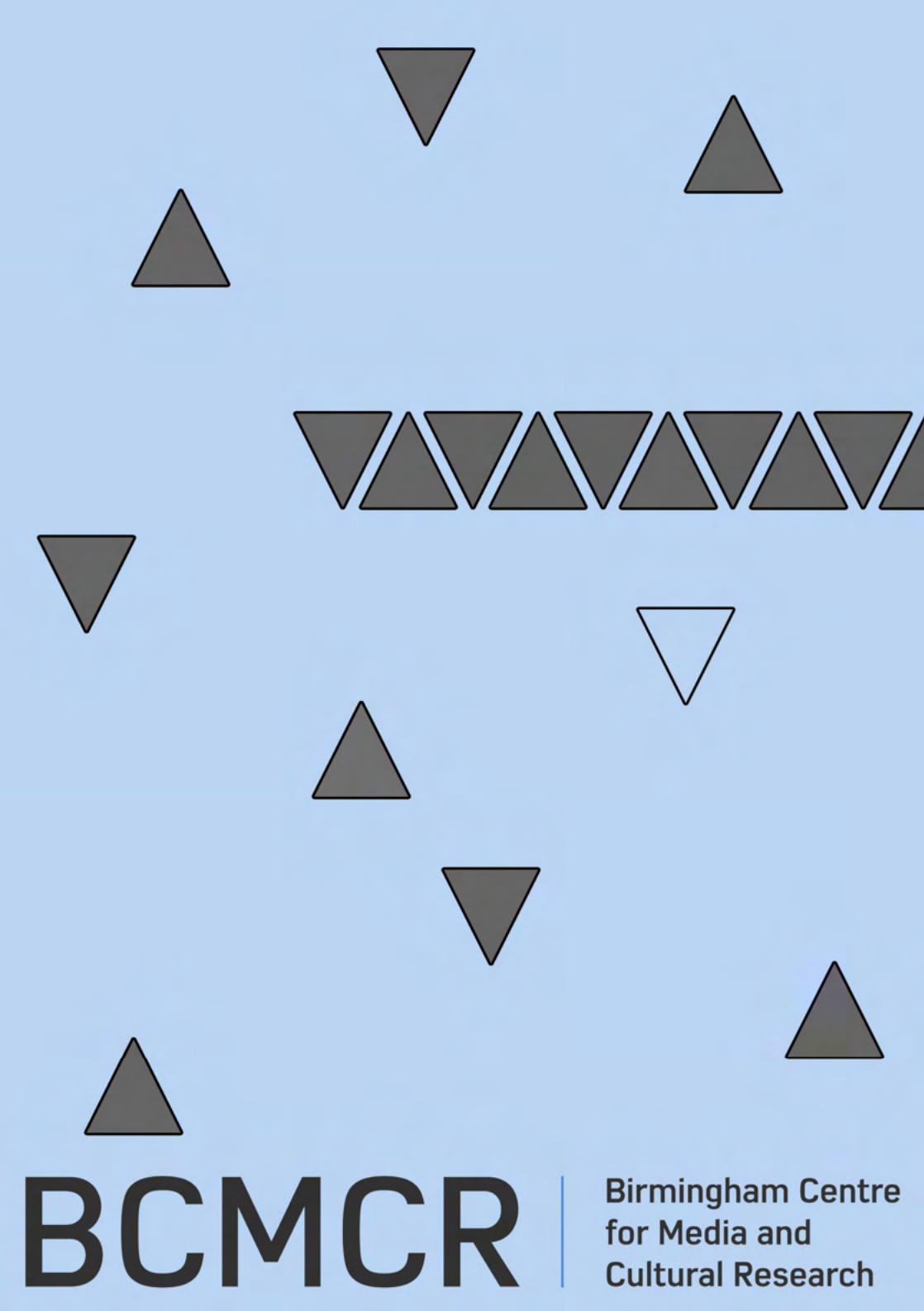
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We hope you have enjoyed this edition of the *New Thinking* series.

For more information on the BCMCR Alternativity theme and how to get involved, please visit our website www.BCMCR.org or get in touch with co-ordinators Asya Draganova (asya.draganova@bcu.ac.uk) and Charlotte Stevens (charlotte.stevens@bcu.ac.uk)

Special thanks to Reuben Mount for his design work and significant contribution to the theme.

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