Postface
The Plurality of Worlds and the Responsibility of Imagination

When closing a volume such as this, the temptation is strong to search for closure, to offer neat conclusions that tie together the diverse strands of research, reflection, and artistic exploration gathered under the rubric of "alternative realities". Yet, if this special issue of *Alma Mater – Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies* has demonstrated anything, it is that the very notion of "closure" is illusory. Alternative realities do not lend themselves to containment. They are porous, generative, unruly, and constantly in the process of becoming. To summarize them would be to betray their nature. Instead, what can be done here is to reflect on the trajectory this collection has traced and to outline some of the responsibilities it leaves with us, its readers.

The editors' preface rightly stressed the need to think of "alternative realities" not as escapist flights of fancy, nor as pathological distortions of truth, but as critical paradigms for understanding the layered, complex, and unstable conditions of contemporary life. Across the contributions, we have witnessed how alternative realities manifest – in language and memory, in music and narrative, in digital skinning and cinematic worldbuilding, in identity politics and feminist interventions, in folkloric imagination and cybernetic sublime. Each contribution did not simply analyze "alternatives" from a safe critical distance; rather, they enacted them, making us see how worlds are always more than one.

In this postface, we would like to weave a conversation among three dimensions which emerged repeatedly across the studies: (1) the politics of imagination, (2) the ethics of memory, and (3) the aesthetics of world-making. These dimensions do not stand apart but are entangled, shaping the field of "alternative realities" as both an object of study and a lived practice.

1. The Politics of Imagination

Imagination has often been trivialized in modern rationalist discourse: it was considered childish, unscientific, or merely decorative. Yet the studies collected here argue that imagination is central to social and political life. It is not a frivolous add-on to reality but a constitutive force. To imagine is to anticipate, to reframe, to refuse the inevitability of the present.

We saw this powerfully in **John Bessai**'s discussion of algorithmic storytelling projects. Here, imagination is not simply the content of narratives but the very mode of engaging with data. By appropriating tools of surveillance and transforming them into engines of empathy, such works show the ways in which imagination can destabilize regimes of governance and capitalism. The politics of imagination is thus insurgent: it carves spaces where alternative relations to technology and ecology become thinkable.

Similarly, the work of **Eve Wong** on Khoisan fabulation reveals imagination as an ontological necessity. In a context in which official histories deny or erase existence,

fabulation becomes survival. It is a recursive performance of identity, a speculative insistence that "we are here". To imagine, in this sense, is a political act of worldaffirmation in the face of non-recognition.

At the same time, imagination is not free-floating. As **Maxim Braun**'s study of Enlightenment fairy tales demonstrates, imaginative narratives always bear the traces of their social milieus. Whether reformist, transformative, or diagnostic, imagination is a political tool: it can uphold, critique, or reconfigure social orders. This insight cautions us against romanticizing alternative realities. Not all alternatives are emancipatory; some may reinforce hierarchies or exclusions. Thus, the politics of imagination is inseparable from the question of responsibility.

The research co-authored by **Monica-Alina Toma, Antonia Cristiana Enache, and Alina Maria Seica** likewise highlights the political stakes of aesthetic environments. Their analysis of *Equilibrium* (2002) shows how spatial design and authoritarian ideology converge to regulate emotion, illustrating the cost of engineered harmony in dystopian cinema. By mapping how physical and symbolic spaces constrain affect, their study argues that alternative realities are not abstract speculations but concrete re-imaginings of how bodies move, feel, and resist within architecture and power structures.

2. The Ethics of Memory

Alternative realities often emerge not only in projection towards the future but also in reencountering the past. Memory, whether personal or collective, is never neutral – it is a contested site on which identities are negotiated, traumas revisited, and possibilities reopened.

Charlotte Bhar's ethnographic work on Tibetan migrants in Paris illustrates this well. Code-switching is not merely a linguistic strategy; it is an embodied negotiation of past and present, homeland and host society. The emotional charge of language use reveals how memory flows through speech, shaping integration and identity. The alternative realities generated here are fragile but vital: they allow migrants to inhabit multiple belonging without collapsing into assimilation or alienation.

Equally compelling is the study by **Israel Holas Allimant** and **Julio Uribe Ugalde** on Mon Laferte. Her music activates memory not as nostalgia but as a critical force. By blending retro and futuristic elements, she opens a sonic space in which personal trauma intersects with collective histories of gender oppression and political violence. In doing so, she demonstrates memory's position as an instrument of both feminist critique and social healing.

Memory equally plays a central role in cinematic and literary studies throughout the volume. From Murakami's dreamscapes to dystopian movie architectures, as **Veronica De Pieri** points out, from historical utopias in Brukenthal's library to the cybernetic sublime of musical events as **Alexandru-Ilie Munteanu** sensibly discloses, the negotiation of past and present recurs. The lesson is clear: memory is not a passive archive but a dynamic site of re-imagination. The ethics of memory lies in how we narrate, what we choose to recall, and which silences we dare to break. Eventually, **Aljaž Mesner**'s contribution reminds us that alternative realities are not always speculative projections of the future; they can also be inherited cosmologies that persist as living frameworks of meaning, for instance in the

ways Buddhist mandalas mediate between earthly and transcendent realms thus structuring as spatial and temporal thresholds human experiences of the sacred.

3. The Aesthetics of World-Making

Finally, the contributions repeatedly remind us that alternative realities are not only political or ethical phenomena but also aesthetic ones. They require forms, genres, and media through which they become sensible. Aesthetics here is not about decoration but about the very conditions of possibility for alternative experience.

The aesthetic and experiential dimensions of collective uncertainty also come to the fore in **Max Kaari**'s exploration of the *cybernetic sublime*. By tracing how music and transformative events in urban environments destabilize hierarchies, Kaari demonstrates that alternative realities are not only narrated but also *felt*. Ambivalence, uncertainty, and ecstatic subjectivity generate moments of rupture in which new social configurations become imaginable. His work underscores that alternative realities often emerge through embodied experience, revealing aesthetics as a catalyst for collective transformation.

Maria Mihaela Grajdian's dual analyses of Takarazuka Revue and Hollywood science fiction blockbusters foreground this beautifully. In both cases, we see how performance and cinema are not mere reflections of existing social realities but laboratories for new configurations of selfhood, nationhood, and humanity. By staging Hollywood cult movies within a Japanese context, Takarazuka Revue negotiates between tradition and globality, masculinity and femininity, conservatism and cooperation. Likewise, science fiction releases like *Oblivion* and *Edge of Tomorrow* dramatize the fragility of the human species while offering blueprints for resilience. These media projects do not simply represent reality; they *produce* alternative realities, shaping the ways in which audiences imagine themselves and their worlds.

A similar dynamic is evident in **Alicia Corts**' exploration of "skinning": what appears at first to be a technical detail of virtual reality design is revealed to be a profound aesthetic and ideological decision. By determining how bodies move and appear in digital environments, skinning encodes assumptions about identity, agency, and knowledge. The aesthetics of world-making here is inseparable from pedagogy: it teaches users how to inhabit digital realities, which roles they can perform, and which remain foreclosed.

The link between music and fantasy in **Thales Reis Alecrim**'s study further reinforces this point. The fantastical narratives of metal are not mere escapism; they construct immersive worlds that address anxieties and aspirations. Aesthetics here is world-making: it crafts experiences through which listeners rehearse alternative modes of being.

Towards a Shared Horizon

Taken together, the papers in this volume do not converge into a single theory of alternative realities. Nor should they. Their strength lies precisely in their plurality. By juxtaposing Tibetan migrants and Chilean pop icons, Enlightenment fairy tales and metal albums, South African fabulations and Japanese musicals, interactive documentaries and dystopian movies, the volume insists that alternative realities are everywhere. They inhabit our speech, our songs, our screens, our stories. They constitute the everyday textures of life as much as its exceptional ruptures.

Yet amid this plurality, a shared horizon emerges: the recognition that alternative realities matter because they shape our common lives and quotidian togetherness. They challenge the hegemony of a single, totalizing "reality" and instead affirm multiplicity, contingency,

and imagination. They remind us that what seems inevitable today may appear otherwise tomorrow. They ask us to cultivate sensitivity to the unseen, the suppressed, the not-yet.

Such a horizon demands both critical vigilance and creative openness. We must remain attentive to how alternative realities can be co-opted – by nationalist ideologies, capitalist spectacles, or authoritarian fantasies. But we must also nurture their emancipatory potential, their capacity to engender empathy, courage, and solidarity.

Responsibilities for the Future

Closing this volume does not mean ending the conversation. On the contrary, it calls for its expansion. Scholars, artists, and citizens alike carry responsibilities towards alternative realities. These include:

1. **Documenting** – Recording and analyzing practices of alternative worldmaking, especially those marginalized by dominant discourses.
2. **Critiquing** – Exposing the exclusions and biases that underlie certain "alternatives", and refusing to romanticize them.
3. **Creating** – Actively participating in the crafting of alternative realities through art, pedagogy, activism, and everyday practices.
4. **Connecting** – Building transdisciplinary and transnational dialogues, as this volume has done, to learn from diverse forms of imagination and memory.

Ultimately, the challenge is to live responsibly amid multiplicity: to inhabit alternative realities not as private escapes but as collective experiments in freedom.

Coda: Living in the In-Between

Perhaps the most profound lesson of this collection is that we have always already been living between worlds. Reality is never singular. Migration, memory, music, cinema, literature, and digital technologies all attest to the porousness of our lived environments. The task is not to choose between "the real" and "the alternative", but to navigate their constant interplay.

In this sense, the "alternative" is not elsewhere – it is here, in the cracks of the everyday, in the shifts of language, in the resonances of a song, in the flicker of a screen, in the collective thrill of a performance. To recognize this is to embrace the multiplicity of existence and to assume the responsibility it entails.

The journey this collection invites us on is therefore unfinished. Its papers do not close doors but open them, offering tools, concepts, and stories for future explorations. May the readers of this volume take up the invitation – not to finalize the meaning of "alternative realities", but to continue dwelling in their plurality, cultivating their promise, and living their questions.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Raluca Nicolae

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Mihaela Grajdian