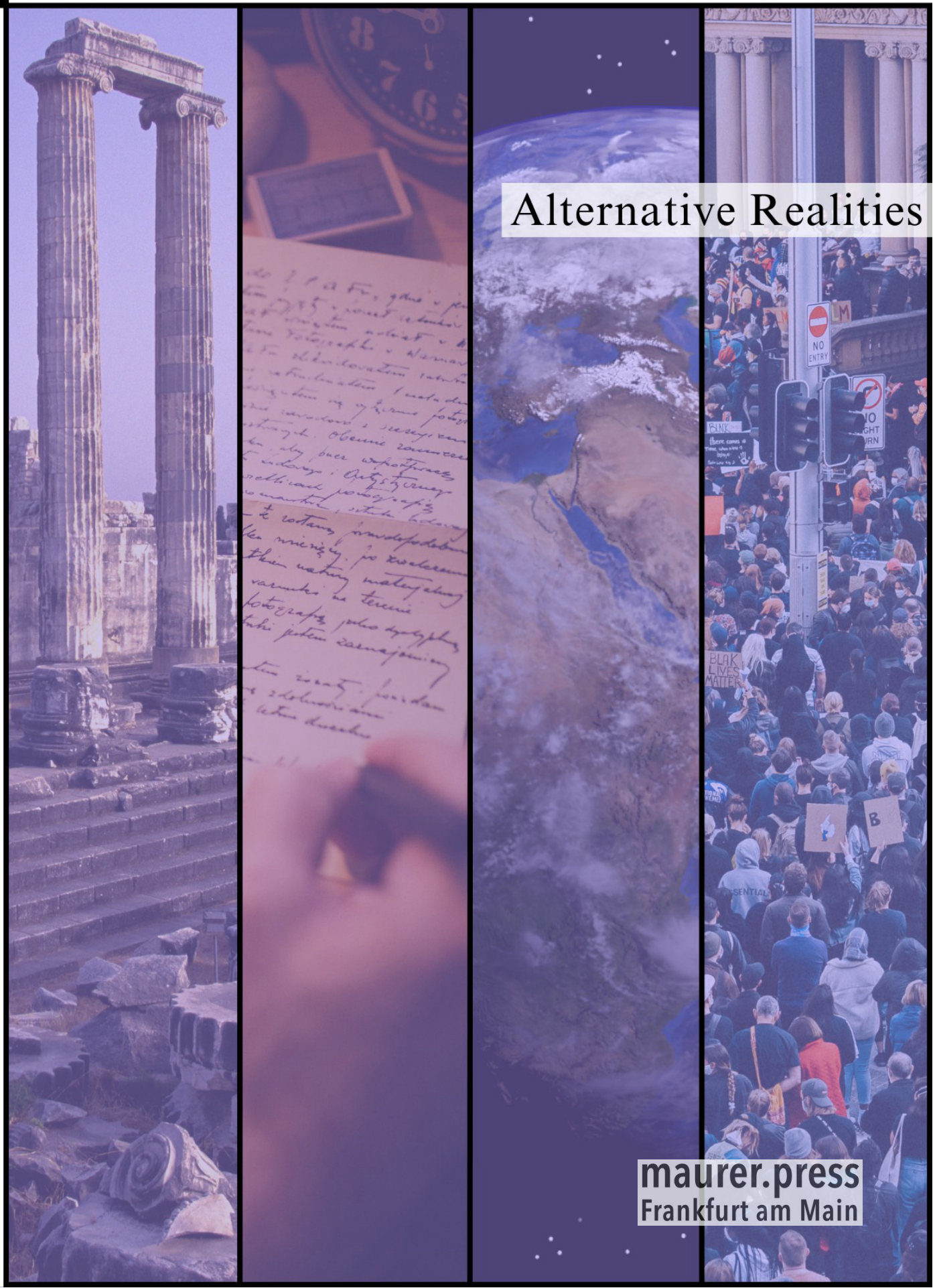
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Editors' Note

In the age of fractured truths and boundless creations, the concept of reality is giving way to numberless possibilities which lie at the crossroads of 'alternative' and the 'real'. The volume posits the lens of 'alternative realities' as a critical paradigm for interrogating the complexities of our contemporary life, transcending its association with speculative fiction and psychological abnormalities. The term 'alternative' denotes parallel modes of being, while 'reality' is approached as both a concrete existence anchored in here and now and a mutable construct shaped by perception and interpretation.

The central aim of this scholarship is to dismantle the reductive categorization and instead illuminate the agency of alternative realities within the mundane, the theoretical and the aesthetic. Comprising insightful studies from different research fields (sociolinguistic anthropology, media studies, cybernetics, folklore, music, ethnography, history, literature, cinema), the volume seeks to weave a conversation across disciplines, examining how other possible worlds incessantly brush against our own.

After highlighting the complexity, variety and importance of multilingual narratives in the wider context of migration policy-making, **Charlotte Bhar** (École Pratique des Hautes Études) explores how Tibetan migrants in Paris navigate integration through language. By analyzing multilingual practices, particularly code-switching, she argues that language learning is an emotional process of embodying new social values. In such a framework, language – particularly the spontaneous production of informal conversation – can never be detached from its context, and it allows for glimpses into events occurring in the speaker's life, particularly those which carry emotional charge.

John Bessai, an independent researcher from Canada, demonstrates how code-based interfaces encourage participants to co-produce knowledge that challenges settler governance, data capitalism, and extractive ecological logics. His analysis blends media studies, public-sphere theory, and the aporetic framework to trace connections among wildlife surveillance, urban futurism, testimonial memory, and personalized data dashboards. Through the strategic deployment of algorithmic processes, spatial audio, and responsive video, the viewers play a hybrid role – simultaneously witnesses, analysts, and participants. Interactive projects, such as *Bear 71, Biidaaban: First Light, The Space We Hold*, and *Do Not Track*, demonstrate that algorithmic storytelling provides a platform for social critique and civic imagination. They engage algorithmic culture from within and turn surveillance tools into engines of empathy, land-based futurity, accountable witnessing, and data literacy.

Drawing on the anthropologists Michael Taussig, Ernesto de Martino and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, the researcher **Max Kaari** explores the relationship between music, events, and transformative experiences in urban environments. His study makes use of the concept of the cybernetic sublime, explored as a moment of collective uncertainty where hierarchies are disrupted, and ambivalence, uncertainty, and ecstatic subjectivity give rise to a transformative, collective experience.

Maxim Braun (Friedrich Schiller University Jena) conducts a study which negotiates the boundaries between imagination and social reality in the German fairy tales authored by Christoph Martin Wieland (1733-1813) and Christiane Benedikte Naubert, demonstrating that their marvelous elements serve as vehicles for philosophical and social reflection. He also pinpoints three modes of social imagining – reformist, transformative, and diagnostic –, revealing how the Enlightenment fairy tales developed a sophisticated repertoire of critical strategies that anticipate later debates about literature's capacity to envision social change.

Aljaž Mesner (University of Ljubljana) explores Japanese Buddhist cosmologies and sacred spaces, tracing how pre-Buddhist perceptions of landscapes were transformed through the employment of mandalas as symbolic bridges between the earthly realm and the Other World. The paper highlights the ways in which such cosmologies remain deeply embedded in contemporary Japanese society – visible in urban planning, ritual practices, and even popular culture – where the "Other World" continues to be felt as proximate to everyday life.

Israel Holas Allimant and **Julio Uribe Ugalde**, both from the University of Melbourne, bring into focus the career of Mon Laferte, a famous Chilian singer covering a wide range of genres. Her musical style is characterized by the interplay between the retro-nostalgic and the futuristic sounds of Latin America's musical past and present, while her artistic voice creates an intimate, feminine space that counters dominant patriarchal attitudes and narratives by foregrounding personal and social traumas through emotionally charged music and visuals. Her introspective feminist vision demonstrates music's capacity to bridge personal and political realms, enabling emotional and social transformation as well as healing.

Eve Wong (University of Cape Town, South Africa) uses the imaginal possibilities of Deleuzian "fabulation" and John L. Jackson Jr.'s notion of "sincerity" to reconceptualize identity and to explain the circulation and the anchoring of emotions within collective memory. Her study centers on Khoisan people of South Africa and the Khoisan revivalism movement, which creates "alternative realities" that do not reconstruct a literal past, but affirm Khoisan existence amid ontological non-recognition. Fabulation is conceptualized as a recursive process, a speculative technique where identities become through iterative actions, affective relationalities, and cultural improvisation.

In her research, **Maria Mihaela Grajdian** (Hiroshima University) examines how Takarazuka Revue negotiates and reshapes the cultural identity in late-modern Japan by reconfiguring the relationship between producers and consumers of popular culture. She choses as case studies three high-profile productions derived from Hollywood cult movies: *Ocean's Eleven* (staged in 2011-2012, 2013, and 2019), *Once Upon a Time in America* (performed in 2020), and *Casino Royale* (staged in 2023). During the 2010s, these performances projected conservative messages of masculinity, national pride, and hierarchical order, while post-2020 stagings reveal a subtle, but significant re-orientation towards envisioning a pluricentric world, characterized by cooperation, compassion, and courage. The author points out that Takarazuka Revue's strategies are simultaneously preserving, contesting, and re-imagining the cultural scripts which define national identity and collective belonging.

Alexandru-Ilie Munteanu (Brukenthal National Museum) explores the political imagery as reflected in six fictional writings from the 17th and 18th centuries, found in the library of Samuel von Brukenthal (1721-1803), the governor of the Principality of Transylvania. The narratives are grouped in three sets, each highlighting a different historical perspective. The first literary duet, *Isle des Hermaphrodites* and *Voyages de Cyrus,* illustrates the concept of anti-utopia and the need for social and political change, the second pair, *L´Espion Turc* and *Voyage de Nicolas Klimius,* brings forward the establishment of an internal and international equitable jurisprudence and the birth of a new, non-Eurocentric, perspective on the world, whereas the last literary group, *Lettres d'une peruvienne* and *L'An 2440,* emphasizes women's emancipation, and the idea of a perfect society.

Thales Reis Alecrim (Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Lisbon) investigates the articulations between metal music and fantasy fiction as a form of cultural cross-fertilization. His study focuses on the album *Saberlight Chronicles* (2022) by Fellowship, which exemplifies how metal bands craft concept albums by narrating original fantasy stories. Metal music and fantasy are shown not merely as escapism, but as active tools for reimagining cultural processes, illustrating the influence of alternative realities in music expression. The study attempts to fill a gap in the literature by analyzing how metal's fantastical narratives address both contemporary anxieties and historical continuities, offering a lens to speculate on alternative realities.

Alicia Corts (Jacksonville State University) provides a robust framework for the concept of skinning in virtual realities. Skinning could be a technical process of binding images to 3D models so that they move believably within a coded environment, but also an act of world-making, an aesthetic and ideological choice that encodes the assumptions and the biases of its creator into the visual experience of the users. Coding constraints remain largely invisible, giving users the sense that they have control and freedom in the virtual space while masking the boundaries developers put in place. The paper argues that skinning invites critical analysis of who learners/participants in the virtual realities of *The World of Hugo Simberg* (developed by the Finnish National Gallery) and *C!ao: Piazza Navona Experience* (developed by the Italian Ministry of Culture and Vection Technologies) are allowed to be and what ways of knowing they are offered. It also positions skinning as a vital design principle for crafting immersive educational futures where learners not only consume content, but perform new ways of understanding.

Monica-Alina Toma, **Antonia Cristiana Enache**, and **Alina Maria Seica** (Bucharest University of Economic Studies) co-authored the study which tackles the complex interplay between spatiality, emotional suppression and authoritarian ideology in Wimmer's 2002 science fiction film Equilibrium, a key example of early 21st-century dystopian cinema. Through an interdisciplinary framework based on spatial theory and dystopian critique, the current research illuminates how these contrasting environments not only structure the narrative, but also articulate a broader sociopolitical commentary on the cost of engineered harmony.

In her paper, **Veronica De Pieri** (University of Bologna) draws on Murakami Haruki's literary production and juxtaposes "this world" (*kono sekai*) and the other world (*ano sekai*), thus contrasting between truth and fiction, facts and dreamlike visions. This impairment in reality testing can be interpreted as a multifaceted psychotic disorder, in which the protagonists' delusions, hallucinations and mnestic dysfunctions find manifestation in the "double world". *The City and Its Uncertain Walls* (2024) explores the sense of loss, regret,

and social withdrawal provoked by urban barriers in the claustrophobic context that compels the search for a dreamscape in which to take refuge.

In a mixed methodological approach (ethnographic description, media discourse analysis, hermeneutic interpretation), **Maria Mihaela Grajdian** (Hiroshima University) examines two live action SF blockbusters, *Oblivion* (2013) and *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014). Both movies engage with themes of individual self-awareness, historical consciousness, and the protagonist's role in his own transformation as a necessary precondition to saving the world. In addition, the films also expose our vulnerability as species, and warn us of the humanity's painful fragility. The study aims at revealing the ways in which science fiction action movies can serve as blueprints for resilient, liberated individuals – capable of courage, dedication, and compassion as they strive to lead meaningful lives.

We have purposefully gathered diverse voices – academics, artists, independent researchers, and professors – to interrogate the theme of alternative realities from every angle. This volume would not exist without their bold creativity and intellectual courage. We would like to thank all the contributors from so many different countries (France, Canada, Germany, Australia, South Africa, Japan, Romania, Portugal, USA, Italy), a diverse community of thinkers and creators whose scholarship and practice have explored the unconventional intersections of alternative realities. We hope that this collection serves as a valuable resource for ongoing discourse in this evolving field.

Editors-in-Chief (Special Issue)

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Mihaela Grajdian

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Raluca Nicolae

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