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Citation:

Spracklen, K (2018) Making Sense of Alternativity in Leisure and Culture: Back to Sub-Culture. In: Subcultures, Bodies and Spaces: Essays on Alternativity and Maginalization. Emerald. ISBN 9781787565128

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

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Document Version:

Book Section (Accepted Version)

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## **Making Sense of Alternativity in Leisure and Culture: Back to Sub-Culture?**

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### **Introduction**

What does it mean to be alternative? What is alternativity, and how does it relate to other attempts to make sense of those on the margins? The contents of this edited collection show that academics are beginning to grapple with these questions. Our contributors are already tackling the problem and building a picture of alternativity today – from the wonderful fashions of mediated sea-punk and heavy metal to gender fluidity and radical politics. The contents of the book so far show the *seriousness* of the research programme, and the complexity of the theoretical frameworks put into place: feminist, Marxist, post-Marxist, post-structuralist, postmodern, liquid. But there is still much work to be done to turn this work into a working theory and empirical programme about the alternative.

This chapter is informed by the diversity and depth of the chapters that have come before it, as well as my own interest in leisure studies and what might be called the sociology of leisure and culture. In the first part of this chapter, I will undertake a history and philosophy of alternativity, from deviance through sub-cultures to neo-tribes. This will focus on four related conceptual frames: the deep history of alternativity; notions of alternativity in classical Greece and Rome and in the Abrahamic religions; popular notions of alternativity in what might be called the age of modernity; and academic attempts to understand it in various disciplines and subject fields. In the second part of the chapter, I will focus on how alternativity has been explored in two specific subject fields – leisure studies and popular cultural studies – to make the claim that both subject fields have failed, for different reasons, to get to grips with the idea of the alternative: leisure studies has failed through a lack of theory; and cultural studies has failed through a lack of empirical research. In the final part of the chapter, I will attempt to reconcile leisure and culture, and I will sketch out a new theory and empirical programme of alternative leisure that returns to the idea of sub-culture as counter culture.

### **A History and Philosophy of Alternativity**

#### *A Deep History of Alternativity*

Modern humans have evolved from earlier mammal species, and have retained the social hierarchies and social behaviour of those ancestors, which we can see at work in our evolutionary cousins: chimpanzees, gorillas, monkeys and so on (Smail, 2007). These animals develop closely-related groups in which dominance hierarchies operate as a social norm.

Individuals know their place in the pecking order, and the social norms of acceptable behaviour are learned through imitation, learning and experience. In the long, deep history of human evolution, humans acquired language, culture and self-consciousness, but retained much of the social order of our ancestors. Being alternative, thinking differently to the norm, must have emerged in this unknowable period.<sup>1</sup> In the thousands of years of pre-history in which we retained a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, the small communities in which we lived did not generally allow for individual rejection of the norms and values of the group: this is the period in which families, customs and ultimately religion are constructed through culture to maintain the social order. The norms of the community could be used to reject those who did not contribute to the community, and those who rejected the values of the community. Behaviour, then, was strictly controlled, as can be evidenced in similar cultures explored by anthropologists (Britt & Cuffel, 2007; Turner, 1969). Although some individuals presumably rejected the norms and values of their communities because they wanted to live in an alternative fashion according to different rules, it is difficult to know for certain what happened to them in the tens of thousands of years of pre-history. We can speculate that some individuals may have chosen to leave their communities to try to live alone or with others, and some individuals were certainly ostracized or killed for rejecting the norms and values. In many other cases, those individuals were probably the original exemplars of the liminal types who lived on the margins of pre-modern cultures: the magicians, the wise women, and others co-opted by the community and its social order to serve variously as scapegoats and interlocutors between the gods and humans (Turner, 1969). This liminal function served the hegemonic order of the ruling powers of the community: alternativity was a way of marking out those who were to be blamed for any problem such as famine or plague; it was also a way of showing the rest of the community what happened when people transgressed.

With the development of agriculture, new social norms and values emerged in human communities (Scott, 2017). Surplus resources led to more humans, which led to the rise of villages, towns and cities. Formal religions established complicated rituals of prayers and sacrifice. Political and economic power was concentrated in the hands of fewer people, who constructed for themselves myths of divine favour and purity of blood. In the rural spaces that underpinned these cultures, the social order was essentially constructed as it had been before agriculture, but conformity was also policed through the power of the ruling elites: farm-

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<sup>1</sup> One could argue that thinking differently conferred an evolutionary advantage in a world that changed dramatically over the time humans evolved. But there is no way to test this.

workers became bonded serfs, or slaves, brutalized and kept in their place (Britt & Cuffel, 2007). Thinking or behaving alternative must have continued as always, but there was no tolerance of dissent in such conditions. However, the towns and cities that emerged in this period of history were spaces that provided the opportunity to be alternative. Firstly, the new towns and cities enabled individual citizens to build their own wealth and find time to be at leisure. Secondly, the new towns and cities developed new forms of culture and leisure that questioned the old order's norms and values. And finally, the new towns and cities helped the dissemination of ideas through the invention of writing and the rise of literacy.

### *The Alternative in the Classical Period and in the Abrahamic Religions*

We can see evidence of alternativity in the literature that has survived from this period, which has shaped and defined much of Western society: the secular literature of Classical Rome and Greece; and the sacred literature of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Both these literatures have been used to define belonging and exclusion through the last few thousand years, but that belonging and exclusion has been re-shaped through the years of transmission and reception.

In the culture and society of Classical Greece, there was some freedom to be alternative and to disagree with the norms and values of mainstream society – providing one was a free (male) citizen of the city in which you lived, or one had the protection of a city's ruling elites. In the city-states of Greece, free men with wealth could debate matters of state and matters of philosophy: asking questions about how to live the good life could mean rejecting the social order, the norms and values, and the stories. It was possible to be a philosopher who challenged myths and struggled with the gods; it was possible to be an atheist, to be a cynic about morals, or a sceptic about true knowledge (Whitmarsh, 2016, 2017). Similarly, it was possible to write plays for the theatre that played with this theme of struggling with and rejecting the norms of the mainstream (Walton, 2015). And beyond philosophy and the arts, alternativity – or rather, liminality - was tolerated in the diversity of religious practices that took place in the Greek world, and the hybrid nature of cults that originated in Greek city-states in the East and in Africa and Egypt. All these ideas – rejecting norms and values in philosophy and theatre, embracing hybridity and liminality in the adoption of Othered cults – were adopted by the Romans, who adopted Greek culture whole-heartedly, especially following the invasion and conquest of Greece. With the spread of Roman cities and Roman society came an elite culture that valued – or at least allowed – alternative, counter-hegemonic ideas to be discussed. Alongside that was an urban popular culture in which the liminal, transgressive could be celebrated through festivals and sacred rites (Teixidor, 2015). Both forms of alternative culture

suffered attacks and legislation from moralists among the ruling elites, and the Stoicism that dominated Roman philosophy is a school that embraces conformity for the good of the soul – but these spaces and modes of transmission for alternativity survived hundreds of years (Whitmarsh, 2016).

The decline of these classical forms of alternativity was a direct result of the Christianization of the Roman Empire. Under successive Christian Roman emperors, polytheism and variants of Christianity not acknowledged as orthodox were banned. Secular philosophy was constrained and Christianized, and secular culture was limited or banned altogether (Cameron, 2010; Whitmarsh, 2016). Christianity took its idea of exclusive divine truth from Judaism: both of these religions had lists of things banned and things allowed, and both of these religions saw their believers as the only people with the moral guide to immortality.<sup>2</sup> It was Catholic Christianity, though, which became the most important force in shaping Western society, as that society developed out of the Roman Empire into Medieval Christendom. In this society, the Pope controlled orthodox belief, and the Church justified the divine right of kings to rule and make laws (Southern, 2016). Christian Europe in this period believed that any deviation from - or transgression of – the norms and values of society was the work of the Devil, or the work of individual sinners inspired by the Devil (Stanford, 2010). Being alternative was severely limited and subject to punishments, whether it was being Jewish outside the spaces allowed to Jews, or wearing clothes not allowed for one's social class, or reading a text banned from the university curriculum. When Luther rejected Papal authority and Christendom was torn between Catholicism and Protestantism, both halves of western Europe believed in Good and Evil culture and behaviour, and the work and influence of the Devil in everyday life (ibid.). Indeed, the more extreme forms of Protestantism believed firmly in moral rectitude in a way that reflects the behavior of conservatives in Islam: rejecting music, dancing and alcohol as ways of temptation in the profane space, and rejecting idolatry in the scared (Acheson, 2014). In this long Christian millennium, alternativity was not allowed, or it was identified the work of the Devil and subject to the fires of purification.<sup>3</sup>

### *Popular Notions of Alternativity*

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<sup>2</sup> The exact same moral certainty about belonging through following the rules in the book can be found in other religions, and Islam is a close relation of Judaism and Christianity not just in terms of geography and history, but in moral philosophy too.

<sup>3</sup> Liminal spaces and transgressive practices and identities continued, for example harvest festivals, taverns and carnivals. The intrinsic need by some humans to be alternative, the need to transgress, had to be met somehow. Medieval states and Popes did not have the structures or resources to successfully police transgression, so people could evade censure and punishment – but as Elias (1978, 1982) shows, the controls got tighter and more effective the nearer Europe came to modernity.

Being alternative was made possible by the Enlightenment. As Habermas (1989) shows, the Enlightenment was a result of the rise of capitalism, the rise of mercantile classes and the free exchange of ideas possible in the coffee shops and urban spaces of Europe. In this period, philosophers, poets and other writers started to explore the possibility of challenging the norms and values of Church and Palace. Young people growing into adulthood could read books that argued that all the assumptions about the truth and timelessness of polite society were a nonsense (Israel, 2009). Young people started to wear fashions and do things in their leisure that marked them as alternative. In Rousseau, these people found alternative ways to live away from the evils of society (O'Dea, 2016); in Voltaire, they found alternative political spaces that rejected received wisdom (Pearson, 2005); in Goethe's young Werther, they found the idea of the doomed romantic, someone who rejects the awfulness and fakeness of modernity with his own life (Jack, 2014).

As the radical ideology of the Enlightenment was defeated by the combination of the reactionary traditional conservative elites and the new industrialists, alternativism as anti-modernity was expressed through the nineteenth-century (McFarland, 2014). Following Rousseau and Goethe, this counter-hegemonic movement retreated from the cities to find meaning and purpose in utopian communities, farms and anarcho-syndicalist organisations (Guarneri, 1994). At the same time, modern capitalism started to commodify the young Romantics in Europe and the West, with books, plays and magazines and newspapers sold that explored the idea of rejecting the mainstream and finding one's true self through being alternative. These ideas of alternativism were consumed by young people searching for meaning in the brutal reality of Empire and Industry: these searchers at the end of the nineteenth-century found atheism and science, socialism and communism, vegetarianism and feminism, but also nationalism and anti-Semitism (Miller, 2013).

The two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century were a consequence of this break with tradition and the search for something alternative, authentic, new. The wars did not disrupt the commodification of alternativism, though entire generations of consumers were lost in the horror. The brutality did not stop the development of the culture industries, and the rise of popular culture as mass culture. The brutality did encourage many young people to reject the nationalism and mainstream values that had shaped it, and these people continued to shape their alternative lifestyles and values. The invention of cinema, radio, music records and television focused the energy of marketing divisions on targeting those consumers still able to consume: young people in the West, factory workers with disposable income, the growing number of white-collar workers. All these were sold products that made them feel good, and

made them feel that they belonged to the West (Briggs & Burke, 2009). But part of that capitalist market was designed to appeal to people who did not feel they belonged, and wanted something to buy that allowed them to feel they rejected the mainstream. So, as individuals experimented with alternative lifestyles and politics in the second-half of the last century, trying to reject capitalism and the mainstream, they found capitalists trying to sell them the alternative lifestyle through material culture and leisure.

Today, then, alternativity has a specific place in popular culture. It is a form of disobedience exemplified by the bikers in *The Wild One*, something that is transgressive and dangerous *but only up to a point*. It is tolerated, and tolerable. The fashions and nihilism attract young people to them as a phase of teenage rebellion – but most grow up and grow out of it. If this stereotype from popular culture is true, what does it mean for those who stay alternative? I will answer that later in the chapter.

#### *Academic Theories of Alternativity*

Most of the research about alternativity comes from social scientific attempts to make sense about the problem of deviancy. This research has been funded by governments trying to keep order in the period of late modernity (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2010). Individuals who are alternative are deemed to be abnormal, deviant and lacking some psycho-social that nurtures conformity and respect for the social order (Akers, 2011). This academic literature on deviancy has increased as the problems of rationalization and modernity have led to entire generations of young people left with uncertain futures. These young people have been identified as potential sources of social unrest, and what is euphemistically called anti-social behavior. Policy-makers trying to tackle this deviancy look for easy solutions, such as predicting the likelihood of anti-social behavior from other forms of abnormal behaviour (having a tattoo, listening to heavy metal music – that is all the things we might call alternative); or asking if there is a genetic cause of deviancy. Academics working on deviancy often provide easy answers that give the policy-makers the link between alternative culture and deviancy: heavy metal, in particular, has been claimed to be the source of a multitude of sins against decent Western society by hundreds of social psychologists (Brown, 2011).

The more interesting sustained academic lens on alternativity has come from radical sociology, feminist sociology and radical youth studies. All this work takes a structuralist epistemology to the notion of the alternative, and it is all inspired by the work of Stuart Hall, and his colleagues at the CCCS. For Hall (2016), youth cultures have the possibility of being counter cultural when they provide Gramscian counter-hegemonic agency to the youth who are in those cultural spaces (Gramsci, 1971). Drawing on ideas about emergent, dominant and

residual culture sketched out by Raymond Williams (1977), Hall finds the counter-cultural status of any given youth culture is contingent on the circumstances of its formation, and on the stage in Williams' model at which it sits. For Hall, then, to be an alternative culture is to be genuinely counter-cultural, running against the dominant popular culture's hegemony, and challenging that hegemonic status. Historically, in the second half of the twentieth century and into the current century, few if any alternative youth cultures have been genuinely transformative of the mainstream in the way Hall hoped.<sup>4</sup> Most counter-cultural movements have either been co-opted by capitalism and commodification into the mainstream (such as soap operas having token goths dressed a bit spookily as main characters, as *Coronation Street* in the United Kingdom did with Sophie Webster), or they have faded away as residual cultures like the Teddy Boys.

In response to Hall, others have posited that alternative youth cultures might be better understood as sub-cultures. Hebdige (1979) suggests that alternative cultures are spaces where individuals can do identity work, adapting and changing previous fashions and tastes to make novel sub-cultures. Hebdige agrees with Hall that most alternative youth culture is a product of capitalism and the mainstream culture, and essentially dismisses the sub-culture around him at the time (punk and skinhead) as failing to be counter-cultural and counter-hegemonic. Despite that, Hebdige's notion of sub-culture has been adopted by most academics over the years who have studied alternativism, and has been taken to indicate individual agency and autonomy in people choosing to be alternative. More recently, Bennett (1999, 2005) and others have argued that sub-culture is a term fixed in the Gramscian world-view of Hall and Hebdige, and the world has changed since they were mapping the struggle between capitalism and the working classes. In this new world of fluid identities, postmodern power relationships and globalization, it is better to see alternative cultures as being neo-tribes. These neo-tribes are identities, fashions and tastes individuals can choose to inhabit and belong to as they wish – we all, says Maffesoli (1996), have multiple neo-tribes we choose to belong to, crossing from one to the other as easy as switching web-sites.

## **Alternativity in Leisure Studies and Popular Cultural Studies**

### *Alternativity in Leisure Studies*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hall had hopes for Rastafarianism, but it has (so far) failed to effect change.

<sup>5</sup> I base much of this analysis of Stebbins and Rojek on a paper I published critiquing their theories of dark leisure (Spracklen, 2017).



In leisure studies, there is a glaring absence of theories on alternativism. There is a small but significant portfolio of research on alternativism, sub-cultures, neo-tribes, transgression, music and lifestyles. There is a clear interest in the leisure lives of the marginal, but that interest comes with a belief in social justice and the emancipatory potential of good forms of leisure (Spracklen, 2009, 2011).

The most salient theories on alternativism in leisure studies come from debates about dark leisure – or, rather, from arguments about deviant leisure and abnormal leisure. The first and most significant theory of deviant leisure appears in the work of Robert Stebbins (1996, 1997, 2001), as another category of leisure alongside the categories of serious leisure and casual leisure previously defined and explored by Stebbins (1982), and what he later called project-based leisure (Stebbins, 2005). Deviant leisure can be casual or serious, with casual deviant leisure being the tolerable kind undertaken for pleasure, and serious deviant leisure being more pre-planned and intolerable (such as murdering someone). Stebbins (1997) is working here with a traditional, psychological model of what is considered to be deviance. Deviance is un-problematically accepted as unacceptable behaviour, the actions of those considered by priests, law-makers and elites as beyond the pale of ‘normal’ society. But what is intolerable, what is tolerable, and what is not deviant at all in leisure according to Stebbins is defined by societal norms and values that frame his worldview. The consequences for Stebbins (2001) is that hedonist leisure behaviour brings dangers to health and to society.

The most important contribution to dark leisure in leisure theory comes in the work of Chris Rojek (1995, 1999, 2000, 2010). In Rojek (1999) he defines and discusses what he calls abnormal leisure, a synonym for deviant leisure or dark leisure. Rojek argues that there are three specific forms of abnormal leisure: invasive; mephitic; and wild. All these three forms can be combined to account for and explain the need for all kinds of abnormal leisure. Rojek believes that abnormal leisure is a product of the crisis of the self in late modernity: a consequence of the rise of alienation, post-industrialization and liquidity (a theme he returns to in Rojek, 2010). Each of the three forms are particular responses to this existential condition. In describing the three forms Rojek comes closest the idea of alternativism emerging in my brief history and philosophy. Mephitic leisure is a long-term and carefully planned response to alienation. It is a rational turn for individuals. But mephitic leisure is related to the third, most transgressive form of abnormal leisure, wild leisure. Wild leisure is an intermittent and truly liminal response to contemporary conditions, although Rojek is drawing on older ideas of the carnivalesque and transgression in the work of Bakhtin (1984). Historically, societies have always experienced mephitic and wild leisure, with individuals and groups profaning laws and

morals, and with organised mephitic leisure being transformed into wild leisure by those actors who take it too far. Rojek seems to believe that wild leisure is more likely to occur than mephitic leisure these days, because the rules that govern and control mephitic leisure are so harsh in late modernity that individuals feel they have no choice than to be wild.

So far, Stebbins and Rojek are the only theorists in leisure studies who have contemplated alternativity, but only through the lens of dark leisure. In Stebbins' social psychological modelling, being alternative becomes morally questionable deviant leisure. For Rojek, being alternative is a way of resisting capitalism and the alienation of modernity. He sees alternativity as mephitic leisure when it is mimetic and a response to alienation, or wild leisure when it is truly transgressive. The problem with Rojek's abnormal leisure is the circularity of its argument: abnormal leisure is leisure that is abnormal. This leaves little room to provide a critical analysis of the abnormal in culture and leisure, what is the alternative culture. Can a way forward be found in cultural sociology, cultural studies, and media and communication studies – what might collectively be called popular cultural studies?

#### *Alternativity in Popular Cultural Studies*

An analysis of the sprawling range of popular cultural studies shows that although there are many academic writing on alternativity (witness the contributors to this collection), there is no consistent critical approach to the problem of the alternative. I contend there are four related reasons what this is the case.

The first reason for the lack of consistency is the problem of aesthetics and assumptions about the importance of particular cultural or sub-cultural forms. We can see this at work in popular music studies. This subject field has been dominated by researchers and theorists who have established a canon of artists and genres, which is aesthetically and politically acceptable as the subject of criticism. So, for instance, Bob Dylan and Bob Marley and punk are considered to be worthy of special issues, edited collections and conferences. The taste-makers in the subject field like these artists and genres and think the music is worthy, and people who write about these artists and genres and the others in the canon find it easier to have their work accepted. Punk is seen as truly alternative so that is in the canon, but until recently heavy metal was dismissed as unauthentic and hence not alternative and not worthy of being considered for serious critical analysis. This is tied up with a related problem of the fetishization of formal aesthetic theory and material practice over sociological critique. Again, in popular music studies, this can be seen in the favouring of work that provides musicological analysis over ethnographic analysis in the writing of Tagg (2011) and others like him.

The second reason for the lack of consistency in the critical analysis of alternativity is the continued adherence to some form of postmodernism, post-structuralism, and/or some other form of postmodern epistemology and ontology. There are too many authors claiming there is no truth, just one narrative or discourse among many others, with every truth and no truth being equally true. The slide towards neo-tribes is a perfect example of this post-something fallacy: essentially all choice and all agency is identified as having equal value, and we are left with the idea that the poor of the world just need to change the music they are streaming (through their non-existent phones? – Spracklen, 2015) to find meaning and purpose and equality. There is some value in the work of post-modernists and post-structuralists, but much of it is complete nonsense. If we deny social reality and the ability to identify it, we deny doing any sociology and making any difference to the world. We want to be able to say people with power are egregious, and we want to be able to say that they maintain that power through the manipulation of popular culture and the repression of the lower classes, women, minorities and others.

The third reason for the lack of consistency is the geographical or methodological turn. Following Thrift (2007), many academics in popular cultural studies have abandoned thinking in terms of culture as culture is representational. Instead these academics try to capture snapshots of people and objects interacting in spaces. This produces some marvellous narratives, and some outstanding description. But if we as academics fail to try to explain what we are trying to research, then it becomes a form of voyeurism and Othering: we just go to the space and point at the people in it.

The final reason is the relational turn in cultural sociology: too many academics in this subject field have been mesmerised by Bourdieu (1986), and want either to defend him and his methods strongly, or to argue about the weaknesses of his work and his methods. There is much that is useful in Bourdieu's work, and I have used him myself to make sense of cultural capital, fields and habitus. But he has become over-referenced in cultural sociology. Just as Derrida and Foucault were fashionable in the 1990s among academics, Bourdieu is the latest French philosopher-sociologist who has become the star around which sociologists shape their own ideas. His networked approach to data analysis has allowed cultural sociologists to indulge in positivism and scientism, making grand inferences from pretty models (Bottero & Crossley, 2011; Crossley, 2015). And while this social-network analysis work is useful it is limited in what it can tell us about the thoughts and lived experiences of actors as constrained agents. The dominance of Bourdieu in cultural sociology is replicated by the dominance of other post-modern theorists in cultural studies. What this means is an over-theorization of culture and alternativity, and an absence of qualitative, empirical research.

### *Summary*

Both subject fields have failed through different means to get to groups with the idea of the alternative and the marginal: leisure studies has failed through a lack of theory, and cultural studies has failed through a lack of empirical research. In the final part of the chapter, I will attempt to reconcile leisure and culture, and I will sketch out a new theory and empirical programme of alternative leisure that returns to the idea of sub-culture as counter culture.

### **Towards a New Theory and Empirical Programme**

Leisure and culture actually represent the same human desire, the same human need for expression and freedom. What we want is meaning and purpose: we want to prosper, we want to be liked, we want to belong; and we want to believe that our culture and our leisure are our own choices that allow us to express that meaning and purpose (Spracklen, 2009, 2011). If we believe in some sort of deity or afterlife we may feel this meaning and purpose is directed towards the goal of getting satisfaction beyond this world. If we accept the wisdom of modern science we reject such extrinsically motivated behaviours and are forced to find meaning and purpose on this world: in the moral framework we set in our own heads for what we believe to be right or wrong; in the ethical behaviour that shapes our interactions with others; and in the people and the work we leave behind when our living cells decay into the atoms and molecules from which we are formed.

The problem we humans face is the inhuman nature of the world in modernity. We live in a cruel world where the powerful have increased their grip on us. With the rise of the modern nation-state we became citizens in the callous hands of bureaucracies and systems that monitor our every move, and our every request for support or information (Habermas, 1984, 1987). The modern nation-state measures our health, decides what food and drink we can consume, and regulates the sports and leisure activities it thinks are morally bad for us. Our children's education is shaped by politicians seeking re-election and support from right-wing newspapers. Universities are judged not by their ability to make fully mature humans but by the proportion of graduates in employment. Nation-states inculcate in their citizens discipline and obedience, designing nationalist ceremonies and practices, from saluting the flag to allowing the obscene notion of hereditary monarchy (the divine right to rule) to continue. Modern nation-states do have some things in their favour, where they have them: equality before the law, universal franchises, human rights and democratic policy-making. But especially in this new century, these rights and freedoms have been challenged and reversed. It is no longer clear that governments work in our best interests. In the West, people have become dis-enfranchised and

alienated from the political systems dominated by corporate lobbyists: politicians and civil servants are reviled by citizens across the political spectrum for their self-interest, their cultivation of connections with bankers and industrialists, their appointment of friends and family to well-paid jobs in the system. Beyond the West, the practices and words of democracy are used by evil people to establish ugly dictatorships with ideology (socialism, nationalism, Islamism) a patina for self-enrichment.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, politicians and policy-makers seemed to be determined to build a better world, where there was social welfare, education for all, universal human rights, and more equality. The public sphere was dominated by people working to the goal of making other people's lives better, at the level of nation-states and in trans-national organization such as the European Union and the United Nations. There was an awareness about the huge structural inequalities that dominated modernity as they dominated pre-modern cultures. On structural inequalities associated with race and gender, legislation was passed in many countries that outlawed racial and gender discrimination. Racial inequality in the West was a deeply problematic product of early modernity, specifically the American use of slaves and the imperialist expansion of European countries into countries beyond Europe. As neither of these historical circumstances has been fully addressed, the problems of inequality continue. Gender inequality, while legislated against and fought against in the cultural space of the public sphere, also continues to shape the modern world and make women less free and less powerful than men. And the victories earned by radical feminists in the late twentieth century – from autonomy to abortion rights – are being questioned by two kinds of gender traditionalists: by religious fundamentalists in Christianity and Islam, who insist on women being subservient, modest and secondary to men in the family because their god says so; and by the men's movement in the alt-right, who believe women to be biologically inferior and therefore unable to have the same rights in the public sphere as men.

The inequality and injustice in the modern world is caused by the gross acceptance of the instrumental rationality of capitalism. The neo-liberal form of global capitalism argues that any given society or nation-state will be better off if markets are allowed to operate freely (Habermas, 1989). The theory goes that people can make better deals as buyers and sellers at the market rate. Better deals mean more profits, and more wealth, which is used by the rich to spend on goods, which returns the money to the economy. There is no doubt that capitalism has increased the overall wealth of the world, and some of that wealth transfers to the poor through rich people buying the services and goods of the poor – and some of the wealth created can be taken by nation-states in the form of taxes, which can be and has been directed at the

welfare of citizens. Capitalism has historically been the driver behind the Industrial Revolution, the development of modern science, and more recently the digital revolution (Briggs & Burke, 2009; Spracklen, 2011, 2015). But there are huge problems with the theory of capitalism, and the neo-liberal ideology in which it operates today. In the West at the height of modernity, capitalism needed well-trained and relatively contented working classes. Workers were of course cheated out of the worth of their labour in the mills and the factories, and capitalists stamped down on trade-union activity as much as they could, but the capitalists knew they needed the workers: from the utopian settlements of Saltaire and Port Sunlight to legislation on working hours and unemployment benefits, capitalists recognized the value of their workers and the working-classes more generally. With the rise of global capitalism and neo-liberalism, there has been a shattering of the symbiotic relationship between the classes in the West: the traditional working-classes have lost their well-paid jobs because global capitalism has re-located mining and industry to cheaper countries, and are now reduced to social welfare or temporary, part-time labour in the 'precariat'; at the same time, the ruling classes have become a global elite making their billions, while the middle-classes feel increasingly squeezed by the austerity enforced by governments too scared to tax the global rich who are taking all the money being made and keeping it.

It is no surprise that in these strange, uncertain times, people turn to religion for solace. There is much alienation, despair, anger and unhappiness. In the period of high modernity, it was easier to find belonging and meaning and purpose in the workplace, or in radical politics. In this world dominated by neo-liberalism and global capitalism, where work is precarious and monotonous, where the public sphere has been co-opted by corporate interests, leisure and culture offer the only spaces where meaning can be found. Becoming alternative is one of the few freedoms we have to express what Habermas (1984, 1987) calls communicative rationality. Becoming alternative is, as it always was, a way to express dissent with the norms and values of the ruling elites. Being alternative, one enlists in the maintenance of communicative leisure, of communicative culture, resisting the hegemony of the instrumentality of the corporate mainstream (Spracklen, 2009). Communicative leisure is the form of leisure we freely choose as human agents, agreeing with each other about what we would like to do with our free time, finding our own space to pursue happiness, wellbeing and pleasure. Communicative culture is the form of culture we construct in a free exchange of ideas about what constitutes good culture. Being alternative, then, is truly counter-hegemonic, and an expression of our humanity and our rejection of the betrayal of the lifeworld. So if being alternative ceases to be counter-hegemonic, if counter culture becomes merely sub-culture or trend or neo-tribe, it stops being

true to its original purpose. In that instance, the alternative is no longer marginal because it is part of the cultural industries, part of the discourse of production and consumption, part of the discourse of hegemony and legitimation.

A new theory of alternativity, then, sees it as an expression of communicative leisure and culture and a rejection of instrumental leisure and culture. This new theory sees alternativity's only moral value in being a counter-hegemonic, counter-cultural space – which is only what Stuart Hall recognized many years ago. But this new theory uses the insight of Habermas to map the hegemonic power onto the logic of instrumentality: we can see how genuine alternativity, by definition marginal, is commodified and made non-alternative where ever instrumentality works unquestioned and unopposed. But how can we oppose instrumentality? Habermas is not entirely clear we can. But I think it should be possible to resist through alternativity, because alternativity has such a deep history in human cultures. There is always a feeling of dis-satisfaction with the things we are told are right and true. So we need an empirical research programme to explore precisely how a different alternative spaces and activities may be counter-hegemonic, or lost to instrumentality, so we can help humans continue to make sense of their place in the world as free-thinking humans.

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