



# Happy Birthday to Us + Stuff We Want To Do

Allegra  
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There is something beautiful that lies within repetitive actions; something inventive and creative that emerges through doing things again and again. The way musicians or dancers learn step-by-step pieces from past masters and imbue them with degrees of flair and originality. But that doesn't describe the paint-by-numbers world of journal publishing for most academics, because of matrices, mean reviewers, and conservatism.



There is also something beautiful that lies within the intensiveness of doing something every day. The moment when routine slips into skilled action and we become, in some small ways, masters of what we do whether it's changing nappies, teaching classes, or chopping vegetables. But that doesn't describe the relentless workload of the 'creator economy' (the world of 'creators' who produce digital content across multiple platforms as their job), because platforms are extractive and exploitative, because the market is flooded, and there's a race for clicks that can leave dignity behind.

So when we ask ourselves, why do we do Allegra - something that sits at the crossroads of digital content creation and academic publishing - we must be aware of the structures that constrain the production in both these spheres. In spite of our desire to [take things slow](#), we sometimes find ourselves caught up in these very power structures and fail to resist the digital matrix's full speed. This is when we fail to care... But in spite of these failures, we remain convinced of the potential that lies within them if we go with our eyes open and bellies full of joy and radical optimism. The joy and radical optimism of a ten year-old.

## **Blow out the Candles and Make a Wish**

Because, yes, Allegra turns 10 this year. This doesn't (just) mean celebrating making it this far (happy birthday to us!), but also thinking through what lies ahead of us (stuff we want to do!). Allegra has known some ups and downs, of course, like any initiative which primarily relies on (free) labour and love, but the fact that it has survived for so long is an achievement in itself.

Perhaps the first thing we should say is that even though often people refer to us as 'a blog' we have not been a blog for quite some time (a very noughties thing when there weren't that many yet who tried to enliven the interstitial space between journals and social media). Rather, we've become a multi-modal publication platform for anthropology! That sounds grand, but what does this mean?



Well, it means exciting experiments in, for example, [nonlinear collective writing](#), [audio diaries](#), [photo essays](#), [ethnographic fiction](#) and [methodologies](#) categorised, along with all the rest of Allegra's ever expanding content, as ONESHOTS: [essays](#), [fieldnotes](#), [conversations](#), [notes](#), [ethnographic films](#), [fiction](#), or [happenings](#); [THREADS](#) of pieces on a theme by guest editors; [ALLIANCES](#): [editorials](#), [resonancecasts](#), [gatherings](#), [petitions](#), or [calls](#); and [REVIEWS](#): [book reviews](#), [film theatre and exhibition reviews](#), or [symposiums](#).

And yet, in today's increasingly narrow academic environment, such experiments are often seen as less valuable or serious than 'real' journal article publications. There has been, over this past decade, an explosion of alternative publication formats (the amazing [Otherwise](#) or [entanglements](#) for example), and while [some debates](#) seem to indicate the tide is turning, our status is still ambivalent and—financially, and institutionally—[precarious](#).

But that doesn't mean we can stop. We believe that the prevalent neoliberal academic model is not only responsible for poisoning our work environments, but that it also produces 'scholarship' in very specifically constrained ways that rewards a certain kind of theory-building and promotes a problematic citational economy. So we could ask you to cite Allegra content more<sup>[1]</sup>, and we could 'celebrate' being 10 years old by becoming more like a 'standard journal', however that would make us miserable teenagers. And we have other ideas about stuff we'd like to do.

## **The Stuff**

What makes Allegra Allegra, we hope, is that it actively seeks to foster a community and create links of solidarity against a neoliberal academia that promotes the model of the lone academic competitive superstar.

There is something about experimentation within and through repetition as it meets the disruptive potential of the intensiveness of digital content creation that



can allow anthropology to be done differently - not just published differently, but done differently. In fact, the process itself of reviewing, editing, and producing digital content can be as satisfactory as the end result or final outcome. What we strive for with Allegra is the chance to find joy and meaning in the *process*: that those who submit their anthropology to us, by freeing their hand from the strictures (and slowness) of the established journal format and double-blind peer review process may also free their mind, and find new meaning and inspiration in their material, in their interactions with their reviewers, and in presenting stuff in a different way. We hope our [authors](#) can build new alliances, reinvigorate intellectual energies, and reimagine research and writing as an exciting collective endeavour that's not just about the next REF cycle or grant application. Joyful radical processes can enable the emergence of a community of peers, lead to the finding of allies, and to find one another in amongst collective wildness that pulls us in different directions but is animated by a shared desire to rethink our ways of doing academia and anthropology.

More concretely, for us, this means thinking through events, our community and interventions in ways that we have not done before. If we were multimillionaire financial speculators with cash to burn (or a reputation to burnish) we would establish our own university founded on the principles of radical optimism. But (happily?) we are not. However, that doesn't mean we can't start making steps in that direction - to start to build places of co-learning and co-creation that sit askew to 'mainstream' academia. In the coming months we will start doing more of these, and we invite you to [propose them too](#). Here's what we have planned:

- Regular [gatherings](#) such as book launches, film screenings, seminars...
- More collectively written [editorials](#)
- The Quintuple A (Anthropological Alliance Against Academic Assholery) newsletter (re)launch
- Writing retreats / treats
- Parties
- A summer school for the ages and all ages (an Allegra festival?)
- The establishing of Allegra University so we can all go work there and



create radically optimistic anthropology (one day, one day)

You have other ideas and/or want to participate, drop us an [email](#)!

<sup>[1]</sup> Actually do cite Allegra content because the content is great (but we are unranked and unrankable).

Featured [image](#) (cropped) by [Deva Williamson](#) (courtesy of [unsplash.com](#))