



Alternatives to mainstream publishing within and beyond academia

ephemera, ACME, Chto Delat, degrowth.info, Ecologia Politica Network, Journal of Peer Production, Radical Housing Journal, Undisciplined Environments and Uneven Earth

Introduction

Since 2001 the open access model of *ephemera* has been operating in opposition to corporate academic publishing, and we are not alone in this struggle. While for-profit publishers have been finding new ways to appropriate and capitalise on academic knowledge and the very idea of open access (*ephemera* collective, this issue), a colourful multiplicity of alternatives has emerged. This contribution aims to make these alternatives visible, showing a whole variety of ways in which they challenge the status quo within and beyond publishing and academia.

Alternatives to mainstream publishing have different organisational forms and formats, but what unites them is being not-for-profit, not guided by quantity, and caring for thorough knowledge creation. These alternatives can be connected to universities or run by independent collectives, based in particular geographical locations or internationally, producing journals, books, blogs, translations or artistic work. Multiple journals already operate within the model of ‘diamond open access’, i.e. immediate open access with no payment for publication by authors or readers (see Fuchs and Sandoval, 2013). A large-scale study of collaborative community-driven publishing has

identified up to 29 000 such journals across the world, with about a third of them registered in the Directory of Open Access Journals (Bosman et al., 2021). While 45% of these journals are based in Europe, more than half of them are specifically in Eastern Europe (*ibid.*). Apart from journals, there are models of open access book publishing (see Deville et al., 2019), like *MayFly*, a long-term sister publication to *ephemera*, *Minor Compositions* and *Mattering Press*. They make books available to everyone from the start, rather than charging the authors thousands of euros to make it possible, as conventional book publishers do today. Beyond books and journals, there are many new media initiatives transcending the borders of academia and publishing, celebrating different ways and modes of knowledge creation. These initiatives show how open access is not just about making academic knowledge available, but about appreciating different ways of knowing, and the different formats in which they can be communicated.

To highlight the already existing multiplicity of alternatives, we have invited eight collectives engaged in what we thought can be framed as alternatives to mainstream publishing to tell us about the initiatives they are part of. These are *ACME*, *Chto Delat [What is to be Done]*, *degrowth.info*, *Ecologia Politica Network*, *Journal of Peer Production*, *Radical Housing Journal*, *Undisciplined Environments* and *Uneven Earth*. These are all run as independent collectives and are close in spirit to what we do in *ephemera*, driven by ethico-political commitments (see *ephemera* collective, this issue; Loacker, this issue), which was the key reason for reaching out to them. With non-hierarchical organising practices at the core, they embody values of autonomous knowledge creation, critical thinking and radical open access, pushing the boundaries of publishing and academia. While there are various connections in the spirit and politics of these initiatives, there is also a diversity of organising practices and formats they are engaged in, which is something we would like to highlight and learn from.

We asked each collective to answer the following questions, on roughly one page:

- What is your initiative about?

- How does it challenge mainstream publishing/academia?
- How are you organised?
- What challenges do you face?
- How to transform publishing/academia/society?

The task of *ephemera*, in turn, has been to bring them together, interconnecting these multiple voices. In what follows, the collectives introduce what they do, articulating their political commitments and organising principles, whilst not shying away from the challenges and limitations of their work¹. Together, they illuminate the politics and organisation of alternatives to mainstream publishing, giving a rich picture of what alternatives can look like. They also help us rethink what it means to be open (access), as reflected in the introduction to each of the following sections.

Publishing independent journals

ACME, the *Journal of Peer Production* and the *Radical Housing Journal* publish independent academic journals. Being open access is a key stance for all of them, but their aspirations and practices further extend our understanding of what it means to be open. For example, acknowledging the imperial and colonial roots of the discipline of geography, *ACME* seeks to publish work written from multiple critical perspectives in or related to geography, and in solidarity with global and local struggles. This includes actively encouraging submissions from beyond the Anglo-Americas, and in different languages, which echoes the effort of the *Radical Housing Journal* to connect to housing struggles in the Global South and East. The *Radical Housing Journal*, further, involves activists in the peer review process, drawing on the knowledge from those engaged in the struggles addressed in the journal, and allowing to scrutinise academic knowledge in the very process of its creation. *Journal of*

¹ Please note that *ephemera* has kept intact the writing style adopted by each collective, in line with the diversity of writing and publishing that is celebrated in this contribution.

Peer Production, in turn, engages in open peer review, which makes the process of publication more transparent, publishing the original submission, reviews and subsequent versions. This challenges the fetish of many journals that a high rate of rejections is inherently good, and encourages a more collegial review process, that involves reviewing and editing contributions with care (Butler and Spoelstra, 2014; Josephs, 2016).

ACME

ACME: An International Journal of Critical Geographies is an international journal for critical, interdisciplinary analyses of the social, the spatial, the ecological, and the political. We work to make radical scholarship accessible for free as a manifestation of our commitment to collective labor and mutual aid.

The journal provides a multilingual forum in English, Spanish, French, and Italian for the publication of critical work about space and place in the social sciences and humanities. *ACME* welcomes work that seeks to build and advance critical frameworks, including, but not limited to, those aligned with anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, anti-authoritarian, Black, Indigenous, feminist, crip, trans, queer, and multi-species perspectives. In the same vein, *ACME* publishes work that not only articulates critical perspectives on space and place, but also makes clear the political, social, and ecological commitments that animate authors' contributions to and engagements with a more expansive set of critical geographies. As a journal of geography, we acknowledge the imperial and colonial roots of the discipline, and we seek to publish scholarship in solidarity with global and localized struggles.

We challenge mainstream publications in the academy as a fully open access (OA) journal and are the only such OA journal in geography. In this unique position, *ACME* publishes conceptually bold, theoretically robust, empirically rich, methodologically rigorous, cutting-edge work that spans disciplines and disrupts orthodoxies of all kinds. By fully OA, we mean that we set no subscription fees or article processing charges, we do not publish for profit, and *ACME* editors do not receive compensation for their labor.

Each field needs one – and many more! – free publication venues that afford a space for emerging scholars to publish without huge fees and for the public to access academic work without paywalls. Further, we are the only geography journal to refuse to share our download numbers with the public or for-profit impact factor engines, and therefore we refuse to have an impact factor, a measurement that reproduces unjust publishing hierarchies.

We are organized as an autonomous editorial collective of around 25 board members at any given time. The managing editor sets the possible vision and priorities for the journal based on feedback from the collective, and through a series of committees, four (online) meetings per year, and an often-used listserv, we define and enact our work. We are funded solely through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, with the majority of our funding devoted to the support of our coordinating editor who handles many of the administrative tasks for the journal and publishes the issues. Most of the board members serve as individual editors for the research and interventions we publish every other month, and others bring their expertise to support the committee work of the journal; we especially seek to adjust workloads according to workloads our collective members face as BIPOC, trans, and/or other marginalized scholars, family caregivers, and/or other responsibilities.

We face a few challenges in our unique position. Similar journals with for-profit publisher backing receive significantly more submissions, and while many critical geographers are keen to get a paper in *ACME*, we are not always their first choice. The editors especially encourage rigorous creative, academic, and activist submissions from outside the Anglo-Americas, including those presented in formats that go beyond standard academic writing. However, our refusal to publish an impact factor often eliminates us as a publishing option for emerging scholars at institutions or in countries that tie professional advancement and professionalism to these metrics. Finally, we are dependent on the free and open-source Open Journal System (OJS) software which allows affordable, public, online publishing but has technical limits.

ACME seeks to transform publishing in the academy on behalf of society. We understand critical analyses to be part of a praxis of social and political change aimed at identifying and challenging systems of domination, oppression, and exploitation, and dismantling the relations of power that sustain them. *ACME*'s mission is to challenge and expand what 'critical' means to interdisciplinary thinking around space and place. To that end, we will soon announce that we will publish new formats such as letters, roundtables, and review essays. These formats will allow quicker turnaround times for publishing and reading – a much-needed change for academic publications in the COVID-19 era and beyond – all the while supporting a readership that allows for increased dialogue with the public.

Journal of Peer Production

The *Journal of Peer Production* published its first issue in 2011. It proposed to explore the relationship between peer production and social change. We understand peer production as a mode of commons-based and -oriented production in which participation is voluntary and predicated on the self-selection of tasks. Notable examples are the collaborative development of free and open source software, of the Wikipedia online encyclopedia, and of open hardware projects. We have published fifteen themed issues on topics including value and currency, shared machine shops, law, work, feminism, urban planning, and policy, amongst others. These issues included contributions from researchers, activists, and artists.

The journal has also developed alternative practices in academic publishing. Our approach to peer reviewing was informed by Whitworth and Friedman's (2009) criticism of academic publishing as a form of competitive economics in which 'scarcity reflects demand, so high journal rejection rates become quality indicators'. This self-reinforcing system where journals that reject more attract more results in a situation where

[A]voiding faults becomes more important than new ideas. Wrongly accepting a paper with a fault gives reputation consequences, while wrongly rejecting a useful paper leaves no evidence. (*ibid.*)

All the articles in the *Journal of Peer Production* are in the public domain. For peer reviewed articles, we publish the reviews – which can remain anonymous or not – as well as the original submission of the article. We have created a range of ‘signals’ indicating the article’s quality so that we can publish imperfect articles more quickly, whilst protecting the journal’s reputation. The journal also circumvents prohibitions on sharing copyrighted or embargoed content, such as preprints of chapters from the recently released *Handbook of peer production*.

We have an editorial team, a scientific board and a wider community. All governance decisions are debated on our publicly accessible and archived mailing list (peerproduction.net/about/participate). Open access independent publishing is not without challenges, however. Lack of resources and infrastructure, as well as burnouts are some of those faced by our journal.

There are of course many ways to achieve social change. From a scientific journal perspective, at the local workplace level, the value of autonomous editorial work should be better recognised by research institutions; open access and open data should become the norm; and dependence on the costly ‘bundles’ of publishing conglomerates which gather access to researcher-produced scientific journals as well as services such as impact metrics (allowing institutions to climb up the rankings) should be likewise challenged.

Societally, the work of the P2PFoundation, P2PLab and Commons Transition show the way. More organisations and initiatives that can facilitate connections between peer production and traditional institutions are necessary. In the context of widespread automation leading to increasing rates of unemployment in many sectors, there is a need to develop the means to gain more space and recognition for volunteer work and the commons sector from states and firms. To this end, in 2021 some of us are planning to launch a new ‘think tank’: the Digital Commons Policy Council.

Radical Housing Journal

The *Radical Housing Journal (RHJ)* is an open access, free online publication and collective that seeks to push the boundaries of how we think about housing, understanding it as a practice in the making, a space of contestation, and as a politics in and of itself. We emerged in 2016 amidst growing struggles for housing and urban justice globally. We have sought to foster a radical approach to housing – inseparable from everyday practices of inhabiting space and challenging the forces that make the world unhomey and uninhabitable – beyond academic limitations, to debate ideas and advance knowledge, theory and praxis.

We try to challenge mainstream publishing and academia at multiple levels. We challenge the few but solidly established mainstream academic housing journals through focusing on housing justice struggles, rather than policy solutions, and using an Open Access and Creative Commons licence. In terms of content, we actively strive to work with both academic and non-academic contributors to unpack and make accessible the interfaces of theory, practice and struggle. Our peer-review process also involves both scholars and self-defining housing-activists; reviews from both positions ensure theoretical rigour and clarity of argument without the jargon and self-referentiality of academic writing, in a push for writing aimed at mobilising for knowledge-sharing and action, locally and transnationally. Our ideal is to financially compensate authors, in order to recognise that radical housing knowledge is often produced by individuals and collectives at the margins of paid research and to value the time, energy and care that writing takes, especially for authors who do not hold a stable (or any) academic position. We have so far been unable to raise the funds to do so; we do, however, strive to embrace active care with/for collaborators. Finally, we enable different formats – conversations, updates and multimedia options – in attempts to dialogue with radical housing movements, collectives and organisations.

In our day-to-day, all *RHJ* collective members – around 15 in total – are involved in working groups coordinating issue production, website and social media, copyediting and financing, to name a few. We also have a

smaller editorial collective made up of six people who have a more intensive role ensuring that issues are delivered, infrastructures are maintained and long-term strategies are forged. As we strive for more horizontality, we are collectively questioning our governance of this multi-sited, translocal project. To facilitate our collective work and its organisation, we use a combination of Slack, Zoom and Gmail/Gdrive, although we are phasing out the latter and moving to NextCloud, an open-source cloud platform used by organisers worldwide.

Practicing horizontality is always challenging. Our organisational structure is in the making through trial and error, and continuing conversations about the politics of organising. While the *RHJ* is a space of refuge from the constraints and challenges of ‘traditional’ structures in academia and activism, the invisible and emotional labour of collective work and care – essential for maintaining the *RHJ* – is sometimes hard in our overworked lives. Creating an ethical finance model has been difficult. When we first launched the collective, members contributed their own income to maintain the journal’s basic infrastructure; only recently we have managed to fundraise money to cover some of this. The dominance of English in academia and international organising is another ongoing challenge. We would love to be able to publish and organise in multiple languages but lack the capacity to do so. Finally, since we tend to receive more contributions from Global North and West geographies, we are committed to building alliances with scholars, activists and peer reviewers from the Global South and East. We do this in the firm belief that true housing justice requires the leadership of Black, Indigenous and Southern scholars and organisers, as well as new international solidarities and intersectionalities.

In response to how to transform publishing/academia/society, we would like to respond with our own question. Can we envisage a transformation that is not ‘a question’ to which an ‘answer’ is provided, but is rather a matter of continuous praxis attained through struggle, community and collective learning? In this sense, transformation would mean putting into question the micro-everyday practices that define frameworks of action, and crafting pathways around and against the violence undergirding housing, property and knowledge production. We believe it is critical to learn from ongoing

transformative justice and abolitionist struggles that seek to undo private property and corollary carceral and colonial landscapes to create more just housing futures. For us, the *RHJ* plays a role in this process in both the content we seek to highlight, and by continually questioning and seeking to improve our internal ways of working together. Such a circularity is of course driven by a sense of direction as expressed in our [Manifesto](#), but *is not* exhausted or ‘achieved’ there. The epistemic privilege and structural violence of the academy was born from its strategic interruption of this circularity. With the *RHJ*, we aim to defend our collective ability to inhabit a space that does not just pretend to transform something ‘out there’ but rather embraces a transformational relationality.

Publishing beyond academia

degrowth.info, *Undisciplined Environments* and *Uneven Earth* take publishing, and writing, beyond the boundaries of academia. All of them, on the one hand, transfer the knowledge that would often be locked behind a paywall to a platform that is openly accessible, and on the other, seek to amplify diverse voices of activists, communities and organisers. The content they publish helps to ‘translate’ academic research into a language that can be understood by non-specialists. *Uneven Earth* collective, for example, explains how they try to avoid academic jargon and introduce complex terms in a clear language that is accessible to all readers. Their ‘[Resources for a better future](#)’ section is a great example of this approach. At the same time, these initiatives certainly go beyond ‘communication’ of academic knowledge. These are vibrant spaces that themselves spark discussions and put emerging political issues into the spotlight. The *Undisciplined Environments* collective, in collaboration with others, has fostered discussion of politically urgent topics, like the political ecologies of authoritarianism and the far right, as these have been emerging in academia. *degrowth.info*, in turn, has given space for raising the issue of how to publish work on degrowth in a way compatible with its principles, which initiated discussion on an open access degrowth journal.

degrowth.info

degrowth.info is the primary web platform of the international degrowth community, which brings together activists, researchers, and practitioners striving for just and sustainable futures beyond growth and capitalism. We aim to build interest in and understandings of degrowth amongst the wider public whilst also acting as a key node of the international degrowth community, where important communications can be published. The core functions of the web platform are our highly-visited [what is degrowth?](#) page, our ongoing [blog](#) of contemporary degrowth writing, our [library](#), which acts as a major repository of degrowth resources in various media formats, and our information on degrowth [conferences](#), and other projects.

We run the web platform as a small international group of volunteers. In our organisational structures, we seek to reflect the politics and ethics of degrowth. This means we take a minimally hierarchical structure, based around decentralised working groups, who send delegates to a coordination team, all of which are nested within the wider webteam. We make decisions within our working groups and as a whole webteam through consensus-based decision-making processes, meaning we work through issues via dialogue rather than taking votes, following the path with the least resistance. We operate mostly autonomously, benefiting from small amounts of funding from like-minded foundations, but deciding ourselves how to distribute this money and relying primarily on volunteer work. While we have no obligations to our donors, we greatly value their input, feedback, and guidance, as well as that of the wider degrowth community that we are part of and whom we serve.

From academics detailing their research in more accessible terms to organisers celebrating wins in their communities, our blog provides a space for degrowthers from all walks of life to communicate to broader audiences. While we don't explicitly claim to directly challenge mainstream publishing and academia, our blog offers an alternative platform where anyone with an interest in degrowth can express their voice. A noteworthy example here is a blog post we published concerning the need and desire for an academic journal centred around degrowth. This post sparked the ongoing discussion

and organising of a degrowth journal, one that is envisioned to be independent and open-access, in support of the knowledge commons.

As we continue our work as a collective, our main challenges revolve around balancing our limited capacity (as a group consisting primarily of volunteers) with the increasing inflow of compelling projects to take part in (like this one!). Additionally, since our team members are located all over the globe, group meetings can only be held within limited time frames. Even so, we continue to deepen our organisational and personal relations with one another by giving a central place to notions of care and community.

Our approach toward societal transformation is to think and act prefiguratively. Clear strategies are not only desirable but required to tackle patterns such as hierarchies, and patriarchal and colonial practices, hidden in our discourses and structures. We believe a better society will only be possible with a pluriverse of alternatives to the development paradigm, built on diverse and not-only-western cultures. This is also true for academia and science-based knowledge; organisations need to include marginalised actors, philosophies and worldviews, e.g. from the Global South, to broaden the current Eurocentric perspective of academic publications. This also applies to the degrowth movement itself. As degrowth has so far been a Eurocentric concept, within degrowth.info we work to create a more diverse team with volunteers from both the Global North and South. Although still a primarily Europe-based team, we endeavour to remain reflexive about our social positions within our local and global communities. By striving to provide a platform for a diversity of topics and authors (in terms of social markers like race, gender, and geographic location), we seek to avoid the echo chamber of only the 'top' (male) voices on degrowth. Finally, our blog also aims to communicate in a more accessible manner, proving that rigorous discourse does not need to be confined to the academy, empowering multiple voices to speak up and uplifting alternatives to traditional scholarship.

Undisciplined Environments

Undisciplined Environments is a blog about political ecology, edited by a collective of researchers from around the world. It was started in 2014 by fellows of the European Network of Political Ecology (ENTITLE). With our platform, we aim to animate a space to share, debate and critically reflect on research, methodologies, activist experiences, events, publications, art, and other issues related to political ecology, in an accessible format. By political ecology we understand the ways that the ‘environment’, as a material and ideological category, is shaped by, and shapes, political-economic structures and power relations in our world, from the local to the global.

Our main purpose is to contribute to socio-ecological struggles, primarily by rendering rigorous and critically engaged research available to non-academic audiences, including socio-environmental movements. We seek to inspire and contribute to radical thought and practice, towards more egalitarian and ecologically sound futures, and to encourage the growth of political ecology networks at a transnational level.

As a collective, we strive to visibilise research and action that works with and for those whose voice is marginalised, sidelined or quashed by the dominant capitalist, colonial and patriarchal order. We also seek to contribute to a shift in the kind of approaches that dominate in academia, pushing towards greater integration of disciplines, and involving knowledge and insights from everyday experiences of oppression and resistance. We see our blog as a space that transcends the confines of universities and academic publishing houses and languages, in the spirit of improving accessibility to this knowledge. We place emphasis on writing in accessible language and formats, with standard essays of 1000-1500 words. We also give space to topics that usually escape academic publications in political ecology, including stories and reflections of what happens *during* research, and reflections on diverse media (movies, novels, exhibitions, etc.). Finally, we seek to communicate issues in a more timely fashion and to a wider public than the academic publishing process would allow.

As an editorial collective, we share the labour of editing and calendarising, with each member assuming tasks according to their (avail)abilities. When we receive submissions, we have a ‘first come first serve’ system where an editor who has interest in taking on the post will assume responsibility for reviewing it and coordinating with the author(s); usually, we also have a second editor doing a final revision of the uploaded post. We also plan publications ourselves or invite guest posts based on ideas that we discuss internally or on matters of political urgency.

We have developed collaborations with other blogs, journals and centers where we co-edit and jointly publish pieces on a given theme, including the Barcelona Lab on Urban Environmental Justice (for the series ‘[Green inequalities in the city](#)’), the IHE-Delft Institute on Water Governance’s *FLOWs* blog (for the series ‘[Reimagining, remembering and reclaiming water](#)’), Lund University’s Human Ecology Division (for the series ‘[Political ecologies of the far right](#)’), the University of Sussex’s STEPS Centre and the Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (for the series ‘[Authoritarianism, populism and political ecology](#)’), and the journal *Capitalism Nature Socialism* (for the series ‘[Ecology after capitalism](#)’). We also have an ongoing partnership with the WEGO (Well being, Ecologies, Gender, and Community) European Training Network, which allowed us to redevelop the blog, and through which we regularly share publications and training. We are also collaborating with a group of Indonesian scholars-activists who are translating and re-publishing some of the blog pieces on the Indonesian blog *Pejuang Tanah Air*; and have an agreement in place with the Spanish language journal *Ecología Política*, for translating and reposting some of their material.

As a group of academics, we are inherently challenged in our aim of offering ‘non-academic’ content. In relation to this, it has been particularly hard to gather artistic and other non-written contributions. Most of us work under precarious conditions in universities, under funding programmes and employers that do not value an ongoing engagement with research communication through the labour of maintaining an open access platform with frequent and widely accessible material. As a result, we have to

navigate our daily responsibilities and expectations as paid employees, alongside our voluntary work for the blog.

Most of us being situated in Europe and with English as our language in common, we find it hard to reach and build a sustained engagement with communities in different geographical contexts and speaking different languages. Apart from the practicality of being able to edit texts in other languages, there is also the challenge of dedicating more (voluntary) time to this expansion of reach and involvement. Our recent collaboration with Indonesian researchers, and our long-term networks in Latin America, have allowed us to publish multilingual pieces, but this is something we are still working on and do not have much capacity to expand.

We do not expect the work of our blog to be transformative *per se*, however, each one of us situated in different localities and at different degrees during our lives is dedicated to dismantling systems of oppression. We are far from having the solution to the neoliberal academic system and its ‘publish or perish’ (increasingly: ‘publish *and* perish’) dogma. We recognise the work done in slowing academia and publishing, although these strategies may be more available to privileged academic groups such as professors with tenure rather than young scholars who juggle precarious working conditions while also dedicating themselves to political work. Some of us dedicate energies and time to address power and gender relations in the academic sphere, others are involved with grassroots movements for environmental and climate justice. While facing the many challenges discussed, we all have multiple communities and collectives where we hone our knowledge and sustain action towards less exploitative futures.

Uneven Earth

Uneven Earth is a collectively-run web platform, focusing on ecological politics. Started in 2015, we have sought to publish accessible narratives on today’s struggles, and have pushed forward public conversations and an advanced understanding in political ecology, environmental justice, and much more. Our core values are political storytelling, slow media, and accessibility. We recognize that stories about environmental issues cannot

possibly be 'objective', and if they claim to be, they usually reflect the dominant narrative and the interests of the powerful — so we take a clear political stance and center justice for people and communities. 'Slow media' means that we value quality over quantity. Our goal is to follow a system where writers and editors do not burn out, readers are not flooded with information, and the articles we publish are considered, thought-out, and accessible.

Unlike mainstream publishing and much of academic knowledge, *Uneven Earth* focuses on accessibility. We seek to offer clear analyses of complex issues that otherwise tend to stay confined to academic conferences and peer-reviewed journals, behind a paywall. We try to avoid academic jargon and, when possible, explain complex internal debates in terms that a broader audience can understand. We try not to assume that the reader knows or understands terms like 'capitalism', so we try to use them sparingly, and, when using them, define them clearly in simple language. We also encourage citizen journalism, personal narratives, and local stories, to work against notions of which, and whose, knowledge counts. We seek to amplify diverse voices in order to publish stories that often remain unheard, and aim to make our articles available in many languages.

Uneven Earth has a core editorial collective of four editors, who focus on the daily tasks of updating and maintaining the website, and deciding the direction of the project. We also currently have 20 contributing editors who advise on the direction of the website, help edit and write articles. If they wish, they can get involved in any other capacity, e.g. posting articles, collecting stories for the monthly newsletter, managing social media, or organizing accounting. They may also be asked for advice on major directions for the website, or for feedback on publishing certain articles. Currently, all work for *Uneven Earth* is unpaid voluntary work. There is no minimum expectation for editing work required of editors, in keeping with our values of slow media.

The challenges we face are mostly related to our lack of resources and funding. Due to the fact that we editors are all unpaid volunteers, there are serious limits in terms of energy and capacity. Our current lack of resources

also prevents us from developing other kinds of media and paying our authors, which in turn makes it hard to reach a broader audience.

To transform publishing, accessibility needs to be front and center. Currently, researchers are expected to do a lot of work in publishing (editing and peer review) for free, on top of our normal extensive full-time workload, while companies like Elsevier make money on putting our free work behind a paywall. We need to build a system where knowledge is open access and does not cost anything for individual people to read. Those doing and publishing research should be paid for their work. Libraries could be an important part of a funding model to make knowledge accessible, as they can channel collective resources into funding published material. We also need to end the trend in academia where publishing volume has become more important than the actual research behind it, leading to the publication of a lot of low quality, cliché writing. This also chips away at the mental health of researchers, often resulting in burnout over time. Also, the work of translation and editing is fundamentally important and should be valued as it is often ignored and unpaid, just like care work. Especially with the supremacy of English, institutions need to support and provide resources for, and hire, ESL (English as a second language) scholars who may otherwise struggle to get their work published.

Beyond publishing

Chto Delat and *Ecologia Politica Network* take the processes of knowledge creation beyond publishing, into art and activism. One critical self-reflection of collectives embedded into the academic context is that even when willing to transcend it and engage with activist and community voices, this is not always easy, due to the formats and the networks our initiatives operate in. Another such reflection is the challenge to go beyond textual modes of communication, as well as to bring more experimental and artistic formats into alternatives to mainstream publishing. The two collectives that feature in this section address both issues. They take knowledge creation beyond academic spaces, whether via the School of Engaged Art of *Chto Delat* or the translations of the *Ecologia Politica Network*. For *Chto Delat* art is an inherent

part of practice, entangled with writing, and not just complementing it. For the *Ecologia Politica Network*, being within and against academia simultaneously makes it possible to push academic practices towards openness and criticality.

Chto Delat [What is to be Done]

Chto Delat enjoys a collective longevity that is not very typical. The collective emerged in 2003-2004 as a workgroup of artists, critics, philosophers, and writers from St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Nizhny Novgorod who produced a bilingual Russian-English [newspaper](#) that covered the urgent issues of critical theory, art and activism, in dialogue with the international context. The intense process of producing texts, dialogues and art projects for the newspaper became a medium of consolidation for the members of *Chto Delat* who were engaged with diverse intellectual, creative and political areas and disciplines. In 2013, *Chto Delat* expanded into an educational and research platform – [School of Engaged Art](#) in St. Petersburg and provides resources for a space called [Rosa's House of Culture](#). The artistic, educational and research activities of the collective address the post-socialist condition and at the same time aim at actualization of abandoned or repressed potentialities of the Soviet past. This is, roughly, what *Chto Delat* is about.

The *Chto Delat* collective published the newspaper of the same title from 2003 to recent years. It can be seen as an apt example of tactical media that drew on and responded to a multiplicity of specific situations and conjunctures, such as exhibition projects, political events, and theoretical problems. The local academia in Russia in the 2000s was not mainstream in the contemporary Anglo-American sense of the neoliberal 'educational factory', driven by income generation and run as a business enterprise. The academic context then consisted of the ruins of the old Soviet 'ideological apparatus', mixed with the new, neoliberal or nationalistic, ideologies and managerial practices. Post-Soviet academia was isolated, debased financially and institutionally, due to the previous decade of the neoliberal 'shock therapy', and the defeat of the earlier Perestroika's attempt to make the critical intelligentsia and the cultural workers significant for the whole

society. The academic job, even permanent, would mean a form of precarity for the majority of the universities' staff under these conditions. The Left were almost non-existent in academia, after the 'ideological bankruptcy' of the Soviet project. The publications of *Chto Delat*, though being a collection of short statements, essays, interviews, conversations and fictional dialogues, have been a small-scale but energetic alternative to this very reactionary and depressing context, also by introducing an international critical perspective to the local debates, and by presenting a local voice in international exchange. These publications and activities were also aligned with the efforts of similar collectives that have been emerging in many parts of the world, being indignant with ongoing marketisation and neoliberalisation of education, art, knowledge and research. These forms of dissent had different local expressions but also a lot of similarities.

During the 'early' and 'middle' periods the group's membership was distributed between St. Petersburg and Moscow. Meetings, email conversations, debates and sharing bed and bread were main tools of generating new publications, interventions and projects. Now the artistic part of the group is more organised around production of specific artworks and educational activities, also drawing on collaborations with academics and writers.

Given that most members of the group are now based in St. Petersburg (with two members living in Amsterdam and London), the challenges we face emerge from the specific conditions of the post-Soviet society, now predicated on a form of authoritarian capitalism that has gradually consolidated since the 2000s and has currently become even more toxic and destructive. The challenges are potential censorship, lack of institutional support in Russia, and the general marginalisation of the Left and critical culture in postsocialist conditions, as well as the recent waves of repressions that targeted many activists. In addition to these direct local challenges, the situation of growing structural inequality during the pandemic also revealed the ongoing 'nationalisation' of resources to support cultural work, which becomes more and more oriented towards the support of national culture in the western countries. This tendency leaves many scenes and communities

from the non-western world completely cut off from international participation.

When it comes to the question of transformation, in current conditions – probably, one of the most reactionary since the early 20th century – the hope emerges from what we already do as educators, artists and researchers and from the energies of the new generations that are being formed in the conditions we have already been actively shaping over the years. In our practices – artistic, theoretical and educational – we never fail to claim our fidelity to both tragic and breathtaking sides of the legacies of the Russian and international radical Left. This past is so enormous and meaningful that it cannot be easily erased by the contemporary – vulgar and moronic – agents of neoliberalism or nationalism. Thus, our activities have always been aimed at ‘unfreezing’ the radical communist legacies, maybe as small-scale experiments (with publishing, collective practices, ways of co-living), but they are always expandable.

Whilst being squared into ‘small’ experiments by our reactionary time, the *Chto Delat* collective has the ambition to think about and imagine ‘big’ things. We believe that the radical legacies of the 19th and 20th centuries are destined to be reinvented – in yet unknown forms, perhaps – under the emergent conditions of the ecological disaster and the looming technological, social and political crises. The early episodes of the ongoing global pandemic provide a glimpse of that possible reinvention. It is enough to look at the ‘anti-market’ measures that were undertaken by some European governments, such as temporary transfer of transport and elements of the healthcare system into public domain. This period was very short, and just absent in many countries like Russia. But the very moment of the first shock and the consequent exceptional measures should not be forgotten. Although these forced measures were not conducted by the Left, they show how the radical legacies could re-functioned as a tool of collective survival.

Ecologia Politica Network

The *Ecologia Politica Network* is made of autonomous collectives that deal with climate justice with an intersectional approach: we try to consider the *ensemble* of inequalities involved in our society. This approach not only serves to re-read the ontology of social struggles in a new light, but it is also functional to political strategy since it simplifies the tactical convergence between struggles that apparently start from different semantic fields, but which in reality indicate the exact same causes and analogous alternative models to the current society. The *Ecologia Politica Network* was born in Italy in 2019 and developed over time as the world got shaken by millions of people who mobilized to form global movements such as Fridays for Future, Ni Una Menos and Black Lives Matter; it is therefore not surprising that these antagonistic experiences strongly influence all the political research we have produced.

Our relationship with academia is ambivalent – using the Workerist idiom, we are ‘within and against’. In our organization there is a research group composed of different subjectivities. Some of them are part of the academic context (since 2019 there are also academic courses on political ecology in Italy). However, our organization's objective is to intervene in the academic sphere by drawing on the heritage of social struggles – avoiding, though, the frequent mistake of not returning anything to people involved in environmental justice struggles. Precisely for this reason, we work hard to organize open and accessible discussion, trying to use an inclusive language even for those who have not had the opportunity to access higher education courses at universities. In the last two years, we have organized about a hundred meetings throughout Italy, both face to face and online. Our contents are always available for free through our social channels. To give a very concrete example, we were the first in Italy to import innovative contents, translating various articles by Rob Wallace and colleagues, to give a positive stimulus to the debate developing during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The contents were disseminated through our social pages and subsequently through independent publications in online magazines such as *Infoaut.org* or *Globalproject.info*, which belong to the Italian scene of autonomous movements.

Our main objective is to create a space for intellectual production that supports movements, ordinary people, and those who often do not have the opportunity to access institutional training spaces. Precisely for this reason, our main interlocutors are political movements, trade unions, and territorial committees who face the challenge of rethinking the theoretical tools and methods of struggle for intervening in the climate crisis. We also aim at contrasting solutions that do not take into proper consideration the population that we define as MAPA (most affected people and areas), that is, those most vulnerable to the consequences of the climate and environmental crises.

We do not have an actual recipe to transform academia/publishing/society. But if we look back, something has already happened in these two years of existence of our network, and we can draw on this experience to understand how to face future challenges. The existence of our network was fundamental to create unseen connections amongst very different political realities in Italy. As suggested, the aim is to create connections and convergences and therefore increase our awareness that the struggles against climate change, for social justice, against gender violence and colonialism are part of a single, larger front fighting for a society whose fundamental principle is to give everyone the same chances and to ensure that everyone lives well.

Conclusion

The collectives brought together in this contribution, as well as *ephemera*, are part of a struggle to challenge mainstream publishing, academia and, ultimately, the politics of knowledge creation and dissemination. We are a multiplicity, with various differences in formats, purposes and modes of organising. The aspiration for radical open access is something that is shared by us all, in a whole variety of ways.

Independent journals give open access to academic knowledge to anyone interested, and charge neither the readers nor the authors. Some practice openness in the review process, too, aiming to make it more transparent, collegial, or evaluated by voices beyond academia. The latter is part of a

larger aspiration shared by all the collectives that have contributed to this forum – to create spaces for different voices and ways of knowing, making unheard voices more visible. Those engaged in blog and media publishing are well-positioned to make this happen, publishing shorter texts, not constrained by the long processes of academic peer review and being able to engage swiftly with emerging debates. This mode of publishing fosters openness by trying to take away the academic jargon that surrounds so much of academic work, whilst keeping the substance of what is told. Art and activism take this openness further, opening up radically new ways of knowledge creation, also beyond writing and publishing. When operating outside established institutions, like for the collectives that have contributed to this text, such initiatives can be a force that pushes academia and universities to engage with the issues most pressing to those involved in socio-ecological transformation from below.

While critical and open knowledge created by the collectives presented here immensely contributes to academic, activist and public discussions, much of this work remains unrecognised within the politics of academic publishing, where for-profit corporate actors dominate and largely act as rule-setters. Within this system, a clear priority is given to publications in academic journals, rather than all other modes of academic engagement. Furthermore, it is based on problematic metrics obsessed with quantification – rankings, citations, impact factor, quartiles – rather than the quality of knowledge creation and collegiality, unsurprisingly prioritising those journals that belong to corporate publishers. As a result, within many academic systems engagement or publishing in alternative spaces is hugely undervalued or simply does not count. Huge budgets of public institutions are spent every year to keep funding and subsidising the current system, via subscriptions, budgets to make publications with corporate publishers open access etc, whilst there is very limited funding and support of alternatives to academic publishing. When putting forward requests for funding, a paradox emerges: libraries or universities do not see why such initiatives should be financially supported or subscribed to if these are open access already, or cannot justify this within the institutional frameworks they operate in. The already

existing alternatives, thus, operate on very low budgets and face significant financial constraints that hinder their continuity.

Shifting publishing towards the goals of open access and knowledge creation for the public good certainly requires going away from supporting the for-profit corporate publishing system, and making alternatives like those presented in this forum recognised, visible, and supported. There is definitely a role for established universities and libraries to play here. This would include cherishing the whole multiplicity of work happening within and beyond publishing and academia, which has been so crucial in showing what it means to be open (access). This contribution has highlighted some of the already existing alternatives, pointing to how academia and knowledge creation can look like. Those of us involved in alternatives to mainstream publishing, in turn, need to think of ways to join forces and act collectively so that initiatives like ours could flourish and multiply.

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ACME is an international journal for critical, interdisciplinary analyses of the social, the spatial, the ecological, and the political, published since 2002.

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Chto Delat [*What is to be Done*] is an artistic, educational and research collective that addresses the post-socialist condition. Since 2003-2004, it brings together artists, critics and philosophers from St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Nizhny Novgorod. The entry was written by Dmitry Vilensky and Alexei Penzin.

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degrowth.info is a key web platform of the international degrowth community, which brings together activists, researchers, and practitioners striving for just and sustainable futures beyond growth and capitalism. The platform originated as a German-based website, emerging out of the 2014 international degrowth conference in Leipzig, before transitioning to an international focus and editorial team in 2018.

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Ecologia Politica Network consists of autonomous collectives from Italy and has been active since 2019. It deals with climate justice from an intersectional approach, trying to consider the ensemble of inequalities involved in our society. The entry was written by Giulia Arrighetti and Federico Scirchio.

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ephemera is an independent open access journal focused on theory and politics in organisation, published since 2001. It provides its content free of charge, and charges its readers only with free thought. The entry was curated by Ekaterina Chertkovskaya, who then received helpful feedback from Bernadette Locker and Santiago Gorostiza.

Website: ephemerajournal.org

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Journal of Peer Production explores the relationship between peer production and social change, and has been published since 2011.

Website: peerproduction.net

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Radical Housing Journal is an open access, free online publication and collective that seeks to push the boundaries of how we think about housing, understanding it as a practice in the making, a space of contestation, and as a politics in and of itself, published since 2016.

Website: radicalhousingjournal.org

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Undisciplined Environments is a blog about political ecology created in 2014, aimed to contribute to socio-ecological struggles, primarily by rendering rigorous and critically engaged research available to non-academic audiences, including socio-environmental movements.

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Uneven Earth is a collectively-run web platform, focusing on ecological politics. Started in 2015, it has sought to publish accessible narratives on today's struggles, and has pushed forward public conversations and an advanced understanding in political ecology, environmental justice, and much more.

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