What is *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*?

ephemera is an independent journal, founded in 2001. *ephemera* provides its content free of charge, and charges its readers only with free thought.

theory

ephemera encourages contributions that explicitly engage with theoretical and conceptual understandings of organizational issues, organizational processes and organizational life. This does not preclude empirical studies or commentaries on contemporary issues, but such contributions consider how theory and practice intersect in these cases. We especially publish articles that apply or develop theoretical insights that are not part of the established canon of organization studies. *ephemera* counters the current hegemonization of social theory and operates at the borders of organization studies in that it continuously seeks to question what organization studies is and what it can become.

politics

ephemera encourages the amplification of the political problematics of organization within academic debate, which today is being actively de-politized by the current organization of thought within and without universities and business schools. We welcome papers that engage the political in a variety of ways as required by the organizational forms being interrogated in a given instance.

organization

Articles published in *ephemera* are concerned with theoretical and political aspects of organizations, organization and organizing. We refrain from imposing a narrow definition of organization, which would unnecessarily halt debate. Eager to avoid the charge of 'anything goes' however, we do invite our authors to state how their contributions connect to questions of organization and organizing, both theoretical and practical.

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Past, presents and futures of critical publishing

The *ephemera* collective

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Pasts, presents and futures of critical publishing

The *ephemera* collective

Dear readers,

Thank you for being a part of *ephemera: theory & politics in organization.* You are what makes *ephemera* a unique journal: a meeting point of scholarly disciplines, a home for emerging ideas that push forward and transform these disciplines, and a community in which past, present and future political questions can be addressed and acted upon. In a time characterized by distraction and productivity, choosing to spend your time reading this journal is the most precious gift we could ever hope to receive.

In December 2020, as we approached our twenty-year anniversary, we asked readers and contributors to the journal to send us their thoughts on what *ephemera* means to them. In the replies that we received, a common thread was 'hope'. People described how the journal gave them hope about the future of the university, hope that alternative forms of scholarship are possible, and hope that academia can be a place of curiosity, passion, and dedication. In other words, *ephemera* provides hope that there is an intellectual life beyond regimes of auditing and evaluation in higher education.

Hope is a positive or optimistic orientation towards the future that allows us to imagine that present conditions can be changed. The idea of hope

resonates with how we, the *ephemera* collective, see this anniversary issue, which marks the twentieth year of the journal. In this issue, we want to reflect on the two decades that have gone. But we also want to reflect on the future of critical open-access publishing. The fact that *ephemera* is one of the few independent journals in its field means that we feel a great responsibility to create and maintain a space for discussing theory and politics in organization in a pluralist and heterodox way.

Today, most academic journals are owned by commercial publishing houses and organized according to journal rankings and impact factors, yet *ephemera* remains stubbornly independent of these global capitalist forces. In this anniversary issue, we want to raise questions about independence: independent thinking, independent publication, independent organizing. We want to explore how these practices – micro and macro, ideational and quotidian – make possible other forms of thinking, writing and publishing. How can we create spaces where marginalized or excluded voices are heard? How might we venture into lesser-known territory or view our everyday world with fresh eyes? What are the promises and challenges of self-organizing for critical academics and fellow travellers?

This anniversary issue celebrates the fact that *ephemera* has existed for twenty years. However, with this issue, we do not want to glorify the past, present or future of *ephemera*. Instead, we want to interrogate some of our own assumptions, habits and perspectives and learn from other independent journals and editorial collectives. We want to interrogate the ways we are entangled with not-so-independent practices in academia. And we want to raise questions about how some forms of scholarship remain silenced or suppressed, even in *ephemera*.

In what follows, we discuss independent publishing by situating it in a changing academic landscape – one scarred by despair but also leavened by hope. Twenty years ago, the goal of publishing an open access peer-reviewed journal was a radical political gesture in itself. Today, the model of open access publishing has been appropriated, hollowed out, and commodified. This requires *ephemera* to reassess what it means to be an open access journal. We then discuss how theory is central to *ephemera*, raising questions

about what theory is, how it is done, and by whom. This is followed by a reflection on how the journal is run and administered by the editorial collective – a topic that speaks directly to the theme of 'theory and politics in organization'. Finally, we consider the relationships and boundaries between independent publishing and political activism.

Ephemeral hopes

As Ben Anderson (2006) reminds us, hope has a complex affective structure. As he puts it, hope's 'taking-place, its mode of operation, remains an aporia' (*ibid.*: 733). To hope is to be moved and animated by a belief that the future will be better. It is also a practice that in most cases is only meaningful because we find ourselves in a present ridden with anxiety, uncertainty and a condition where possibilities seem diminished. Hopeful practices are also prefigurative; they create alternative futures. It is telling that hope was such a prominent feature in the descriptions of *ephemera* that we received from our readers and contributors. It speaks to the many threats to independent thinking and scholarship that characterize academia today. Being hopeful may be what allows people to go on thinking, teaching and writing – despite cut-backs, job losses, and increasingly levels of uncertainty and precarity.

Taking our lead from the statements we received from readers and contributors to the journal, we aim for this issue to serve as a space for hope. 'Hope' in a paradoxical sense: hoping is animating, energetic and optimistic yet it emerges, inevitably, from diminishing possibilities. Against a linear type of nostalgic romanticism in which the past is always perceived as better, hope – for us – is a non-linear practice that brings past, present and future together in different ways. As Walter Benjamin (1969) reminds us, an electrifying spark of hope can draw the past and the present together in the explosive disruption of a now-time. In this issue, we strive to evoke half-forgotten ideas as well as to rediscover futures that might not yet be lost.

The emergence of hope is a practice that imagines the future differently. But it is also a practice that enables the here and now to become open to difference. To hope is to remind ourselves that the present is 'uncentered, dispersed, plural and partial' (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 259, cited in Anderson,

2006: 734). Acknowledging that to hope is not only an imaginative but also laborious practice, we want to consider the different registers – ideological, practical, relational, discursive, affective, and technical – through which practices of hoping unfold.

It might seem like there is little or no hope for alternative futures in the current landscape of corporate publishing. However, as Alexandra Bristow (this issue) argues, based on her historic examination of the meaning of critique in academic publishing, now is the time for a more radical reimagining of journals. Reimagined critical publishing could leave behind critique-as-censure and develop new modes of mattering for the ongoing development of scholarship. In this remaking, the idea of 'being critical' needs to be negotiated through an open and reflexive politics of critique directed towards social, political and organisational action, and infused and tempered with a politics of care and marginalism. *ephemera* explore these hopeful alternatives through dialogues with other alternative publishers and critical examination of our own past.

There is also a lot to learn from decolonial perspectives and activist movements when it comes to the 'art of organising hope' (Dinerstein, 2015). To hope includes stories, voices and visions that emerge from indigenous realities and subaltern knowledges, which remain largely silenced in the totalizing agenda of the modern academy. In this issue, Felipe Fróes Couto, Bruno Eduardo de Freitas Honorato and Alexandre de Pádua Carrieri's contribution invites us to deconstruct the epistemic coloniality of academia and acknowledge the potential contributions of the decolonial activist movement to organization studies. Drawing on the concepts of imperiality and heterarchical thinking, Couto, Honorato and Carrieri show 'how the decolonial alternative… seeks to rescue hope by recognizing the validity of other perspectives on the present and the future'. It is a kind of hope that ought to infuse our practice as critical scholars in the ruins of the contemporary university.

Open access

In their recollection of how *ephemera* was founded, Steffen Böhm, Campbell Jones and Chris Land remind us that, from the very beginning, the journal has followed 'the principle of radical open access, in which no one was charged for access to the work published and the publication itself was collectively managed by the community of those writing for the journal, and who the journal was written for' (Böhm et al., this issue). Twenty years ago, the biggest problem with academic publishing was that publicly funded research was locked behind paywalls and within university libraries. Academic knowledge was open only to those who were affiliated with institutions who could afford to subscribe to journal databases owned by large publishing companies. This lack of access motivated Alexandra Elbakyan, a researcher and computer programmer from Kazakhstan, to start Sci-Hub – a platform that circumvents paywalls and provides free access to millions of academic books and articles. In 2015, the US court granted the publisher Elsevier a $15 million injunction against Elbakyan, forcing her into hiding. The case is emblematic of the power of for-profit publishers, a power that needs to be challenged for a more open and just academic knowledge creation.

Corporate capture of the open access model

The meaning of open access publishing has changed since its inception. Over the last two decades, corporate publishers have found new ways to commodify academia and to profit from public funding and free labour (Harvie et al., 2012). The problem of paywalled knowledge has led many research funding bodies to require publicly funded research to be made publicly accessible. This increases the accessibility for many, but it has also become a commercial opportunity for corporate publishers. In response to the open access requirement, corporate publishers have developed the category of 'gold open access'. Under this arrangement, authors (or their institutions) pay a fee to make their work publicly available – a model that could not even be imagined by *ephemera*'s founding members (see Böhm et al., this issue). As a result, fees for gold open access publication are now budgeted in grant applications. In other words, the gold open access option

has become another way for corporate publishers to channel public funding into private accumulation of capital (see Fuchs and Sandoval, 2013).

Alongside the established big publishers (e.g. Elsevier, Springer, Wiley-Blackwell, Sage), new publishing giants have also emerged in recent years, most notably MDPI. The journals that MDPI host are all gold open access and require a publication fee from authors. There seems to be no limits to how much such journals can publish. For example, in 2020, the MDPI-journal *Sustainability* published more than 400 special issues in addition to its 24 regular issues. According to the journal's website, the processing fee per article is 1,900 Swiss Francs (approx. 1,800 Euros). Such publishing processes follow an industrial factory model, churning out thousands of articles in the interest of commercial gain while neglecting conventional standards of knowledge creation (Böhm et al., this issue).

These trends have given open access a bad reputation – both in terms of predatory publishing by disreputable outlets and in terms of profit-scraping by big corporate publishers. It is a reputation that *ephemera* seeks to counteract with its own critical publishing practices.

Towards radical open access

A multiplicity of alternatives to big publishing already exists. There are currently up to 29,000 journals across the world that follow a more collaborative and community-driven approach to open access publishing (Bosman et al., 2021). Notably, open access publishing is not just about academic journals, but also includes books. Consider the examples of independent open access presses such as like *ephemera*'s sister publication *MayFly*, *Minor Compositions*, *Mattering Press* and others (see e.g. Deville et al., 2019). Beyond these traditional publishing formats, there is a myriad of other open access formats within and beyond academia – blogs, artistic work, translations, activist-academic networks, podcasts, and so on. Open access outlets allow us to experiment with both the form and content of knowledge. But ultimately, what matters is the ethics and politics that drive this process of knowledge production.

ephemera is one alternative to mainstream publishing with a particular ethico-political stance. The journal is independent, collectively run, not-for-profit and committed to making academic knowledge accessible to everyone. There are no fees for anyone and its production costs are met solely by donations from individual or institutional supporters. In the forum of this issue, we bring together eight initiatives that are similar in spirit to *ephemera*. These are three open access journals (*ACME*, the *Journal of Peer Production* and the *Radical Housing Journal*); three publishing initiatives beyond academia (*degrowth.info*, *Undisciplined Environments* and *Uneven Earth*); and two initiatives that transcend publishing and academia via art and activism (*Chto Delat* and *Ecologia Politica Network*).

Taken together, these initiatives point to different ways of creating and spreading knowledge. Operating outside established institutions and working in the margins, the initiatives act as a force that compels academia and society to engage with urgent social, political, economic, and ecological issues. Beyond open access, they show what it means to be open. Independent open access journals share their practices of openness in the review process, which aim to make publishing more collegial and transparent (the *Journal of Peer Production*) or activist-oriented (the *Radical Housing Journal*). Likewise, platforms and blogs foster openness by writing for wider audiences. They do this by stripping out the academic jargon that props up so much academic work (*Uneven Earth*) and raising topics that academia often neglects (*degrowth.info*, *Undisciplined Environments*). Art and activism take this openness further by opening up radically new ways of creating knowledge beyond writing and publishing (*Chto Delat*, *Ecologia Politica Network*).

New manners of spreading knowledge are intimately connected to rapid transformations of digital media. While the web allows *ephemera* to exist and being available to individual and communities all over the world with relatively low financial expenses, transformations of digital media also pose new threats to *ephemera* and other alternative publishing organizations. As Sperber (this issue) discusses in his note, social media have given rise to left-stars that seem to embody a strange contradiction between their critiques

and their own use of platform media to feed their business models. It is a pathway that we need to keep pushing against.

Radical open access exists on the fringes. This comes with challenges of recognition, visibility and funding. But it can also be a powerful position from which to speak. The margins allow for a position that does not claim the fame (or shame) of metrics and standardization. The margins provide the opportunity to work with other quality criteria such as critical scholarship, activist engagement, and thought-provoking research that dares to question the order of the day. Working on the fringes allows collectives to escape from the terms and conditions imposed by corporate publishing houses and avoid the pitfalls of academic metrification. It is a position that is less privileged in terms of funding and technical support. But it provides an opportunity to enrich ourselves and our communities by developing forms of knowledge that are unbound by commercial constraints or institutional limitations.

The theory and practice of being open

For *ephemera*, open access publishing is a deep-seated ethical commitment. But it is not the only way in which the journal is open. From the beginning, *ephemera* has been a space of openness: the journal emerged from organization studies, but it is open to other disciplines and traditions of thought; the journal advances theoretical knowledge, but it is open to other formats and modes of argumentation; the journal is political in nature and open to different types of practical engagement and activist organizing. This openness is evident in how we describe *ephemera*'s guiding philosophy on our website:

ephemera is an independent open access journal founded in 2001. *ephemera* provides its content free of charge, and charges its readers only with free thought. (ephemerajournal.org/what-ephemera)

Providing its content 'free of charge' and charging its readers only with 'free thought' points to two ways in which openness has been inherent to *ephemera* over its twenty-year journey. Openness is not only about active

participation regardless of status, income and discipline. It is about openness of thought, too.

On free thought and its closures

Free thought is associated with the process of theorizing, a form of travelling along a path towards the unknown or unfamiliar (Spoelstra, this issue). Over the years, theory has fallen into disrepute and a false dichotomy between theory and practice has emerged. Drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Sverre Spoelstra (this issue) argues for 'weak' theory as a non-dogmatic mode of theorizing, an approach that encourages the theorizer to change their mind and drift away from the familiar. Such an engagement with theory helps us to see and think differently – which is about as practical as it gets.

Echoing this argument, Bernadette Loacker (this issue) unpacks the meaning of 'challenging thought' in *ephemera*. Inspired by Foucault's notion of 'heterotopia', she positions the journal as a 'site of otherness', a place that challenges conventional modes of thinking in organization studies and beyond. Creative experimentation and exploration are key to this process, which also exposes us to the other and the unknown.

Theory is key for understanding and addressing some of the most pressing problems of our times, from climate change to global injustices. But to remain open, *ephemera* must continuously reflect on the possible closures and privileges that theory involves. For example, in the early days of *ephemera*, the journal was sometimes seen as an intellectual environment for 'boys with books' – that is, an all-male and all-white group who used theory like a sledge-hammer. This context is vividly described in Böhm et al.'s note (this issue), in which the three founding members of *ephemera* reflect on the febrile academic atmosphere in the late 1990s and early 2000s that led to the journal's inception. Their wistful description is a portrait of how these three people, their peers, and institutions passionately forged a new path in the academic landscape, and it also shows some of the privileges that gave birth to *ephemera*: time, confidence, funding, access to networks and office space.

The editorial collective of *ephemera* has become more diverse over time, especially in terms of gender balance. But it still represents only a segment of academia. Most members of the collective, for example, are affiliated with universities or business schools located in the 'Global North'. Moreover, theoretical diversity may in fact be a mirage. *ephemera* celebrates being on the margins, yet the theories we engage with mostly derive from major traditions of European thought. For all its openness, *ephemera* sometimes – inadvertently – neglects theoretical perspectives and empirical studies that fall outside of the concerns of the Global North. This begs the question: whose theory is this? Whose worldview does it represent? Whose voices does theory exclude? *ephemera* has a lot to learn from feminist, post-colonial, and decolonial traditions, which point to a myriad of other voices and offer different ways to theorize, think and write. It is crucial to include these voices in the journal and encourage 'theorizing without parachutes' (Dinerstein, 2016) – a hazardous yet exhilarating proposition. One place to begin is our own academic practices. We need to reflect on how we – as individual researchers, as an editorial collective –unwittingly close down rather than open up avenues for thought and action through our theorizing. The task for us is to open up even further and to make our openness more radical and more inclusive.

How to open up theory and practice

In this issue, several contributions examine what it means to think and write in new, open-minded ways. In his note, Stevphen Shukaitis (this issue) describes publication as a territory we can inhabit and explore, a zone where we can take risks with ideas – with and among others. Jenny Helin, Nina Kivinen and Alison Pullen map out this territory in their contribution, 'Until the dust settles' (this issue). Here, the authors propose a collective form of resistance to the neoliberal academy, a rebel practice that involves writing with patience and opening ourselves to the world, each other, feelings, and ideas. Helin, Kivinen and Pullen invite us to consider the potentiality of patient writing – that is, writing without instrumental objectives, writing without strict boundaries, writing without publication deadlines. Patiently, the authors remind us about the classic academic virtues of thinking, reading, listening and writing slowly and carefully. They urge us to be

touched by what we write; to produce knowledge that matters to the reader; to theorize with an open mind and a vulnerable body. On the shoulders of feminist thinkers like Virginia Wolf, Carol Gilligan and Julia Kristeva, Helin et al. ask us to wait – and wait a bit longer – until the dust settles on research. In so doing, they reconfigure the politics of writing in the academy, in line with a feminist ethics of care. Let us write patiently, with and for each other, rather than in (quick and dirty) competition to 'get it out first'.

Theorizing is not only a matter of temporality – or pacing. Theorizing also happens in languages that feel natural to some and awkward, difficult and alienating to others. In her note, Martyna Śliwa (this issue) explores the implications of living and working in a language different from your own, using her own personal life and work trajectory as rich source material. She unpacks the ways in which speaking in a foreign tongue seep into one's identity as well as the strategies one needs to develop to master the new language and fit in. The note also speaks to us about communities – in her case, the *ephemera* collective – and the safe space they offer for learning and experimenting in a non-native language.

The 'Unfinished lexicon for autonomous publishing' by Julia Udall, Becky Shaw, Tom Payne, Joe Gilmore and Zamira Bushaj (this issue) performs an open-ended, evolving library and reminds us that publishing is a collective accomplishment. The text weaves together democratic ideals and participatory organization in its exploration of politically engaged art performances, architectural forms of publishing, and publishing through listening. Their ongoing project shows how publishing can make publics rather than just making pieces of text 'visible' to certain publics, which raises questions about where publishing begins and ends.

In our conversation with eight like-minded collectives (*ephemera* et al., this issue), we reflect on what it means to be open to others – other traditions, other experiences, other voices. The collectives we engaged with are aware of their situatedness in Europe and the Global North, yet they strive to overcome this limitation and expand their horizons. For example, some journals encourage submissions in different languages and from scholarly groups in the Global South and East (e.g. *ACME*; the *Radical Housing Journal*,

Undisciplined Environments), which enables them to counteract 'the echo chamber of only the "top" (male) voices' (*degrowth.info* in *ephemera* collective et al., this issue).

Other strategies of openness include acknowledging the colonial roots of our disciplines. For example, *ACME* aims to foster critical frameworks 'aligned with anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, anti-authoritarian, Black, Indigenous, feminist, crip, trans, queer, and multi-species perspectives' (*ibid.*) in or related to the field of geography. There are lessons here for *ephemera*, too. In organization studies, knowledge is produced in and spread by business schools – institutions that often devalue the contribution and experiences of scholars of colour (Dar et al., 2021). Historically, business schools are complicit in colonial practices, encouraging the expansion of capitalist enterprise in new and emerging markets and neglecting the violence and dispossession that arise as a consequence. To some extent, *ephemera* has explored some of these topics – for example, the journal published two issues on Latin America (Misoczky, 2006; Misoczky et al., 2020) and one on 'emergence', which opened the space for contributions from multiple contexts and ways of knowing (Chertkovskaya et al., 2017). But there is more work to be done, so that these post-colonial and decolonial voices become an integral part of our theoretical fabric.

Openness also implies being open to those outside the university, particularly as part of 'engaged scholarship'. A renewed interest in engaged scholarship has opened up a space for different forms of activist interventions, which is changing the landscape of academic knowledge production and dissemination in organization studies – including activist sections in journals (e.g. 'Acting up' in *Organization* and 'Feminist frontiers' in *Gender, Work and Organization*), book series (e.g. 'Organizations and activism' by Bristol University Press) and conference workshops (e.g. the *Academy of Management's* Professional Development Workshop on activism). In addition, there are calls for academics to develop a critical praxis that engages with socio-political struggles and advocates for progressive social change (Cann and DeMeulenaere, 2020; Contu, 2020; Prichard and Alakavuklar, 2019). While critical scholarship is driven by a political commitment to everyday struggles, academic activism extends our work

beyond peer-reviewed publication and outside the confines of the university (e.g. public debates, protest action, community organizing, etc.).

Academic activism seeks to overcome the opposition between thinking/reflecting on the one hand and doing/acting on the other. To this extent, academic activism dissolves boundaries between the 'inside' of academia and its 'outside', a process that might be enjoyable yet also uncomfortable. Drawing on her own experiences, Kate Kenny (this issue) reflects on the pleasures and challenges of bringing her research about whistleblowing to audiences outside the university. For Kenny, academic-activist interventions infuse research with meaning and usefulness, which helps to overcome the internalized belief in the separation between theory and practice. To this extent, her contribution reminds us about how the ideas and concepts we take for granted are often forged outside of the university, often incrementally, informally, and dialectically (Choudry, 2020).

The different modes of openness stimulate us to reflect on the theory and practice of openness in *ephemera*, to make our 'free thought' more free and more thoughtful. But as Loacker's note (this issue) highlights, 'thinking differently' in *ephemera* is not just about theorizing – it is irreducibly entangled with organizing and producing differently, a topic to which we now turn.

Organization: The labour and dilemmas of independence

As a collective, *ephemera* prides itself on being both independent and non-hierarchical. Independent in the sense of not relying on large corporations for financial or administrative support, and non-hierarchical in the sense of running the journal as an editorial collective (currently consisting of twenty people). Both principles count among the collective's core strengths (e.g. Beverungen, this issue; Böhm et al., this issue; Loacker, this issue; Shukaitis, this issue; Śliwa, this issue). But collectivism is not always unproblematic. In the following, we share some quotidian details of how we run *ephemera* in order to consider the contradictory nature of our independence and non-hierarchical character.

Independence for *ephemera* means that the journal is run and produced by a collective and not associated with any institution or publishing company. Our commitment to independence has a number of implications. Being part of the *ephemera* collective entails time-intensive and often wearisome tasks: contacting authors and reviewers, proofreading and formatting contributions, doing issue layout, uploading content to the website, and maintaining the social and technical infrastructures that enable these processes. This type of work – performed solely by the collective – does not always involve independent thinking, yet it enables us to maintain total independence from external institutions.

In 2019, a British university press contacted *ephemera* and offered to support the journal. The press proposed to take over the production process, while allowing the collective to retain full editorial control. The only condition was that the logo of the publishing house would appear on the website's landing page. To some members, it seemed like a no-brainer. With this collaboration, the collective would be liberated from much of the tedious work associated with running an independent journal, while retaining the most important scholarly responsibilities. For others, however, the offer was unacceptable – not because they viewed the press as an enemy, but because they could not imagine relinquishing *ephemera*'s independence.[1] For these members of the collective, the repetitive and time-consuming nature of issue production is the practice through which independent publishing can be achieved. In other words, being capable of actually doing the technical work of production is just as important as coming up with ideas and writing editorials. After some discussion, the offer from the university press was eventually rejected.

This incident is illustrative of the dilemmas of independence. Being autonomous is of great value to the editorial collective. However,

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[1] Over the years, *ephemera* has received financial and/or administrative support from academic institutions such as University of Leicester, Queen Mary University, Leuphana University Lüneburg, Copenhagen Business School, and University Library Bern. This support has always been unconditional – no strings attached. *ephemera* also receives small private donations from readers, affiliates and contributors.

independence raises all sorts of tricky questions. Who performs the tedious and time-consuming labour of running a journal? Who bears the costs of investing time in work that is often not recognized as 'work' by academic institutions? In a non-hierarchical structure, is the labour distributed fairly and equally? Who is bearing most of the costs and risks associated with investing time in work that neither directly pays nor counts within the system that guarantees the survival of some (though not others). These questions touch on power relations within a non-hierarchical collective. In an organizational context in which there are no clearly defined lines of authority, other dynamics of influence may emerge. For example, in a non-hierarchical structure, decision-making power may shift to those who can think and act fast, who are confident and outspoken, or who already enjoy recognition based on their institutional affiliations or previous experience (Ashcraft, 2012; Fotaki and Foroughi, 2021; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). Put more frankly, the issues of power dynamics within the collective and the inherent challenges of marginal/dominant voices and in/equality of members is a sore spot within the collective – one that we try not to sweep under the carpet but seek to actively address during editorial meetings. Fairness and equality are important because most people in academia today are overworked – and editing a journal becomes yet another demand on our time and energy. The time, effort and care devoted to communities such as *ephemera* is work on top of the sometimes overwhelming day-to-day struggles at our own workplaces – as one of our affiliates Armin Beverungen (this issue) writes, burning the midnight oil as we oscillate between institutionalization of tasks and reliance on the goodwill of collective members, the way *ephemera* operates may ask for sacrifices out of responsibility, trust and love.

The decision to turn down the offer from the university press also created a renewed collective awareness in *ephemera* of the value of craft of producing a journal. Beyond its function of staying independent, we also reconsidered how boring, annoying and time consuming tasks, such as repetitive layout processes and countless emails exchanged to fix a technical glitch are more than just task fulfilment and technical maintenance. Besides being boring and eating valuable time, practicing these tasks also create small moments

of accomplishment, solidarity, collaboration and islands of relief from the demands of everyday working life (e.g. Johnson, Olaison and Sørensen, this issue) – that so often seem to be characterised by the expectation of being visible, recognised, efficient and strategic.

Overwork, burnout, and suffering are seldom far from the surface. Yet *ephemera* is not all hard graft. It also inspires joy and togetherness. Being a part of an alternative to the dominant publication regime is an energizing experience, especially when we work as a true collective – as colleagues, comrades, and friends. *ephemera* has not yet solved the issue how to nourish our intellectual communities by insistent work to force new agendas and conversations, while also caring for each individual. But we look forward to continuing this conversation with you, dear readers and members of other collectives.

Another question we have reflected upon recently is how politically engaged *ephemera* as a collective should be. What is the meaning of the word 'politics' in the journal's title? Sometimes *ephemera* has spoken up immediately against injustice and in solidarity with colleagues. For example, when the news of redundancies amongst critical management and political economy scholars at the University of Leicester School of Business spread, some members of the collective very quickly voiced interest in openly challenging this university management decision and the collective decided to issue a statement that supported the scholars at risk while also questioning the neoliberal politics at play within such an act. Like some other journals and academic associations, *ephemera* published this statement in an open letter, while sadly following the disrespectful treatment of the critical scholars made redundant.

Not long after this, a wave of Israeli attacks against occupied Palestinian territory gained international media attention. As global academic communities took steps to condemn the attacks, a new *ephemera* member wrote an email to the editorial collective about the possibility of condemning colonial violence and supporting Palestinian resistance. The email was met by silence in the collective. Although many emails are often not quickly responded to, the silence felt awkward and potentially

repressive. At the next editorial meeting, we discussed the meaning of this silence – what it said, what it did not say and what it did. This provided an occasion to reflect not only on how *ephemera* envisions politically engaged scholarship, but also about how the collective might incorporate diverse opinions on how and when to engage with urgent political questions.

This incident speaks to us about the importance of a collective's ability to have 'uncomfortable' conversations. The conversations that followed from it have taught us critical lessons about the importance of practicing collectivity in ways that allow all voices to be heard and responded to. We continue to carefully build the *ephemera* collective as a place where we can meet each other with openness, curiosity and respect and where slow and nuanced conversations can unfold despite the fact that we live in an accelerated and often polarized world.

Attending to the sore spots in *ephemera* is crucial for the health of the collective and the well-being of its individual members. Such an ethics of care (Ahmed, 2017; Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016) involves daring to contend with the journal's own geo-political privileges. In particular, this ethics of care demands that we remain vigilant to the power dynamics that we embody, and are embedded in, within the neoliberal financialized university (Beverungen et al., 2009), even – or especially – when it makes us feel uncomfortable.

An oasis in the desert

As a journal, *ephemera* stands for an alternative politics that seeks to challenge the status quo of academia. In this editorial, we hope to have shown how *ephemera* tests the limits and potentials of critical scholarship in the very way it organizes its day-to-day practices of journal publishing.

This anniversary issue is composed of texts that reflect on *ephemera* in many different ways. There are contributions about the mundane and often tedious practices of organizing and producing a journal. There are contributions about the journal's place within the landscape of open access publishing. There are contributions about the early days of the journal, and

there are contributions about the journal's political commitments and intellectual tributaries. This proliferation of texts about *ephemera* – and about critical open access publishing more generally – provides an intimate portrait of the journal's pasts, presents, and futures on the margins of organization studies.

Yet this issue is also no more than a snapshot of a given moment in time, a Polaroid that will soon fade as *ephemera* continues to change and evolve. The editorial collective is characterized by its ephemeral nature: the members of the collective are not fixed but constantly in flux – entering, leaving, stepping back, stepping up, and joined by the many guest editors who contribute to the journal. Indeed, some of the best special issues over the years have been produced by people outside the editorial collective. Our hope is that it is precisely the ephemeral and marginal nature of *ephemera* that allows the journal to remain open and reflective about what critical publishing means.

This editorial provides a sneak-peak into the way that *ephemera* translates its values – independence, criticality, and openness – into practice. It was collectively written by the twenty individuals that currently constitute the *ephemera* collective, mediated by technology that allows us to write in a single electronic document across countries and time zones. The editorial was written, re-written, edited, re-edited, and revised many times, undermining the distinctions between individual authors and creating a more distributed version of 'authorship'. Writing like this was an experiment, a way to find new modes of community and commonality, a way to probe different kinds of collaboration, a way to re-evaluate conventional forms of academic knowledge production.

At the same time, there are limits to *ephemera*'s ability to experiment. For example, Beverungen (this issue) calls out *ephemera* for its reluctance to experiment with non-conventional publishing formats and different kinds of open access publishing. So let this be a *mea culpa*: the editorial collective is slow to update *ephemera*'s key infrastructure (the website), we pay too little attention to innovations in critical open access publishing, and we shy away from implementing open peer-review. Most of our energies are directed

towards keeping the show on the road: publishing four issues of *ephemera* per year with little or no institutional support.

Yet *ephemera* continues to experiment in other, no less important ways. Christian Garmann Johnsen, Lena Olaison and Bent Meier Sørensen (this issue) remind us that *ephemera* helps 'shape a "world in-between"' the theory and politics of organization studies and beyond. And that for many, publishing in and working with this journal means evading, circumventing, defying and transgressing established academic norms – for example, the expectation that we publish in order to be more productive for the sake of our careers and our universities. This and several other contributions offer descriptions of *ephemera* as an 'oasis in the desert' (Johnsen et al., this issue), a 'sanity saver' (Śliwa, this issue), and a 'safe space' (this editorial). We cling to the hope that the journal will continue to be a 'community unmediated by instrumentalism' (Johnsen et al., this issue), a community that is shielded from some of the most pernicious aspects of academic publishing.

As an editorial collective, we seek to maintain *ephemera* as a place that operates just below the surface in the contemporary university. If you put your ear to the floor and listen closely, you might just hear us and other like-minded collectives burrowing underground – and we invite you, dear readers, to join us in this network of subterranean tunnels we've been constructing for the last twenty years. Bring a shovel, roll up your sleeves, and get digging.

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What was, is and will be critical about journal publishing?

Alexandra Bristow

abstract

Responding to the call of this special issue, I consider the past, present and future of criticality in journal publishing. In particular, I ask what 'being critical' has meant over the ages in journal publishing and play with two senses of the word 'critical' – that of critique and that of being essential. I consider how these two aspects of criticality have evolved in relation to each other, interweaving and intertwining, through past into the present, and in what directions they might evolve in the future. I conclude that academic journal publishing has always been critical in both senses of the word, but that what matters for the future of critical publishing is the nuance of criticality. I argue that the current context is an opportune moment for a more radical reimagining of journals, and for their remaking as simultaneously more and less critical by moving beyond critique-as-censure and towards new modes of being essential. In this remaking, the nuance of 'being critical' needs to be negotiated through an open and reflexive politics of critique directed towards social, political and organisational action, and infused and tempered with a politics of care and marginalism.

Introduction

Critique has a history, or to be more precise, many histories (Foucault, 1996), and so does journal publishing. In Foucault's reading, critique emerged as one of the key constructs of the Enlightenment, and in particular as resistance to

the 'veritable explosion' of the will to govern and the art of governing from the 15th century onwards (Foucault, 1996: 383). From the appearance of first scholarly periodicals in the 17th century, academic journal publishing developed a reliance on critique as evaluative discourse and as a technology of intervention (Broman, 2000a), which remained central but evolved a more inward focus over the course of the centuries. Furthermore, the use of critique became entwined with the critical role of journal publishing in the production and consumption of academic knowledge.

In this paper, I respond to the call of this special issue and consider the past, present and future of criticality in journal publishing. In particular, I ask what 'being critical' has meant over the ages in journal publishing and play with two senses of the word 'critical' – that of critique and that of being essential. I consider how these two aspects of criticality have evolved in relation to each other, interweaving and intertwining, through past into the present, and in what directions they might evolve in the future. I conclude that academic journal publishing has always been critical in both senses of the word, but that what matters for the future of critical publishing is the nuance of criticality. When such nuance is considered, what comes to the fore is the historical development of journal criticality as, ironically, an instrument of stasis[1] rather than of questioning power relations and of societal action and transformation. This has increasingly given rise to a journal publishing system which, rather than channelling and amplifying the kind of critique that embodies and precipitates a transformative crisis (Deslandes, 2017) and conveys the meaning of the experiences of the oppressed to stimulate social change (Horkheimer, 2002), instead reduces critique to internally-oriented censure and policing of the scholarly community. In this configuration of criticality, journals are notably a) critical *to* academic careers in which they play a conformist role in the context of neoliberal, managerialist, consumerist, and increasingly precarious Higher Education (HE), and b)

[1] With thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers (Reviewer 2) of this paper for this apt phrase. In general, I am indebted to both reviewers of this paper for helping me sharpen and develop it.

critical *of* deviations from established conventions both in terms *what* is written and published and *how* it is written and published.

I argue that the current context is an opportune moment for a more radical reimagining of journals, and for their remaking as simultaneously more and less critical by moving beyond critique-as-censure and towards new modes of being essential. In this remaking, the nuance of 'being critical' needs to be negotiated through an open and reflexive politics of critique directed towards social, political and organisational action, and infused and tempered with a politics of care and marginalism.

The paper is structured chronologically – I start with a history of 'being critical' from the first appearance of scholarly periodicals onwards, then proceed to contemporary journal publishing, and finally conclude with proposals for what 'being critical' in journal publishing might look like in the future.

What was critical about the emergence and development of academic journals?

There are two aspects of the early history of scholarly journal publishing that are important for the purposes of this paper: 1) the critical role scholarly periodicals played in scientific communities from their first appearance, and 2) the development of their use of critique as a technology of intervention – both in society at large and in scholarly knowledge production. I discuss each of these two aspects in turn, showing how they intertwined and reinforced each other, leading eventually to what is typically thought of as contemporary academic journal publishing.

Critical to the development of science

Right from their inception, scholarly journals have been critical to the development of science. Histories of scientific periodicals (e.g. Broman, 2000a; Goldgar, 1995; Houghton, 1975; Kronick, 1976; Lindsey, 1978; Manten, 1980) emphasise their essential role, which had to do with the dual purpose of scholarly publishing as communication and control of scholarly knowledge

(Cummings and Frost, 1995; Lindsey, 1978). To put it in Foucauldian terms, right from the outset scholarly periodicals grew into what can be understood as capillaries and conduits of power-knowledge (Foucault, 1980; 1991) constitutive of the Enlightenment and then post-Enlightenment science.

The journal publishing system that dominates global academia today has its roots in the invention and spread of printing. Blockprinting was invented in China during the Tang dynasty in the 8th century AD, and movable type a few centuries later in the Sung period; in Japan, blockprinting was used as early as 770 AD, and in Egypt in 950 (Manten, 1980: 1-2). The invention of printing enabled China to develop one of the earliest scholarly publishing systems, which was soon introduced to neighbouring East and Southeast Asian countries, where it was critical to spreading the influence and prestige of Chinese science and education. For a long time, this system developed independently in the region until the Western contemporary scholarly publishing started to dominate and replace it about a century ago (Xia, 2006).

In Europe, prior to the use of printing, 'new scientific information was spread initially almost exclusively by scholars wandering from one university to another' (Manten, 1980: 2). This restricted exchange of news and thus collective science making to major centres of learning that benefited from the busiest traffic of scholars. As printing became more commonplace after the introduction of the Gutenberg movable press in the 15th century, '[m]any learned authors – university professors, for instance – became their own printers and booksellers, or controlled a small printing establishment', and some universities founded their own printing houses (such as the Oxford University Press that dates back to 1478). Scholars were now travelling 'far and wide' to try to sell their books. Yet despite the improvements brought about by printing, 'the growing trade of books and manuscripts in the later Middle Ages was unable really to remedy the rather slow and selective dissemination of new knowledge' due to the delays associated with book production and distribution (Manten, 1980: 2).

A new stage of scholarly correspondence began with the establishment of a network of regular postal routes in the territories of the Holy Roman Empire during the political and religious upheavals that followed the Reformation of

1517 (Manten, 1980). The post was originally used mainly for the purposes of conveying diplomatic correspondence but quickly diversified into handling other correspondence too, giving rise to networks of correspondents maintaining contact with each other. News of political developments and commercial undertakings could then be exchanged, and rulers employed 'correspondents in different parts of Europe to send them reports on current events' (Broman, 2000a: 227). Soon the production of newsletters developed into a major undertaking. Those situated at nodal points of the new correspondence networks played an important role – this included prominent persons of letters, powerful banking and merchant houses and, especially, postmasters, who were particularly well-placed for copying and passing on newsletters. These early handwritten newsletters did not circulate widely or openly, but the development of printed newspapers – from the sporadic broadsides of the 16th century to the regular newspapers that began to appear in the early 17th century started to address a broader audience (Broman, 2000a).[2]

The development of European correspondence networks also supported the development of scholarly communication. Relying on established postal routes, letters containing news of research work undertaken, requesting, or bestowing patronage, requesting specific information and communicating news of recent books began to be written regularly by individuals or groups of scholars to other individuals or groups of scholars (Goldgar, 1995; Manten, 1980). This led to the development of 'hidden' or 'invisible colleges' – informal networks of scholars remaining in ongoing contact with each other (Manten, 1980). Just as with the general correspondence, those well-placed at the nodal points of these networks 'became, like postmasters, virtual clearinghouses of information for their contacts in diverse corners of Europe' (Broman, 2000a: 228).[3]

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[2] Postmasters still played an important role in this, which is reflected in some of the newspaper titles (containing 'Post' or 'Courier') (Broman, 2000a).

[3] Manten gives the salon of Father Martin Mersenne in Paris and the office of Henry Oldenburg in London as two examples of such scholarly clearing houses (Manten 1980: 4).

The first scholarly periodicals appeared in the late 17th century in France, England, Italy and Germany[4] (Broman, 2000a; Kronick, 1976; Manten, 1980). In the 18th century, other journals followed, including in Spain, US, Hungary, and Russia, and France led the scholarly publishing sphere with over 50 scientific and popular science journals (Garrison, 1934; Rykov and Polyakov, 2014). The journal numbers soon started to grow rapidly, 'from two in 1665 to about 30 in 1700, to about 750 in 1800 and to a few thousands as early as 1850' (Manten, 1980: 1). The first scholarly journals and journal editors emerged from the nodal positions in the circuits of knowledge and power constituting the invisible colleges. One notorious example is that of Henry Oldenburg – a well-connected and highly influential secretary of the Royal Society, whose office had served as one of the major clearinghouses of scholarly correspondence before Oldenburg inaugurated *Philosophical transactions* in 1665 (Manten, 1980). The journal acted as a means of formalising Oldenburg's correspondence network, and at the same time the journal's 'standing in the scholarly world was secured by the prestige of the early Royal Society, and by the extensive network of contacts maintained by Oldenburg' (Broman, 2000a: 228-229). Oldenburg exercised considerable discretion over the *Philosophical Transactions* as its direction, composition and publication remained his personal responsibility up until the journal's seventh volume, when it became the official publication of the Royal Society (Houghton, 1975; Manten, 1980).

Critique as a technology of intervention

Although early editors like Oldenburg acted as nodal points in the scholarly circuits of power, they were still missing the consistent use of one of the major journal and knowledge shaping technologies used by editors today – namely criticism as evaluative discourse (Broman, 2000a). Embryonic critique in the first journals can be seen in isolated examples, such as the free-wheeling criticism of the founding editor of *Journal des Sçavans* De Sallo, which led to the withdrawal of the journal's licence after only thirteen weeks for the first

[4] The French *Journal des Sçavans* was first, appearing in January 1665, with the English *Philosophical transactions* that is still ongoing today a close second, starting a few months later. These were followed by the Italian *Giornale de'Letterati* in 1682 and the German *Acta Eruditorium* and *Monatsgespräche* in 1688.

year of its publication (Broman, 2000a: 229),[5] and in the case of the physician and anatomist Thomas Bertholm, whose journal[6] effectively served as a forum for disseminating his ideas, and who 'can be considered as a precursor of the critical editors of the nineteenth century in that he often embellished the communications he published in the Acta with his own comments and notes' (Houghton, 1975: 17).

At the same time, as can already be glimpsed from the example of De Sallo, journals and editors were themselves subject to critical intervention in the form of external censure and, specifically, initially ecclesiastical and royal control and later government and state control (Hall, 2017). Publishing was a licensed privilege, which could be easily revoked. In the 17th century England, for example, 'the Crown, the Star Chamber and Parliament took turns deciding what might be published' (Rembar, 1969: 17), and in the 18th century Russia it was not uncommon for the Tsar himself to act as an editor before a periodical issue could go to print (Rykov and Polyakov, 2014). According to Hall (2017), external censorship persisted mostly unchallenged until mid- to late-20th century when publishers and editors began first to contest it a lot more persistently and successfully and then consistently internalise it into forms of self-censorship.

Meanwhile, journals developed and honed their own uses of critique. A more consistent use first began with the introduction of the critical book review, which was a stepping-stone towards the scholarly journals becoming 'conduits of criticism' into the public sphere (Broman, 2001a). The two senses of 'critical' intertwined here – according to Broman, contemporary science would not be 'the journal-based entity we know it as' (i.e. journals would not be as critical to contemporary science and academia more broadly) if scholarly periodicals had not taken on that function of critique. In becoming 'conduits of criticism', scholarly journals developed into disciplinary instruments that made full use of two important constructs of the Enlightenment – the 'public'

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5 After that the journal was re-licensed and returned with a new, less combative editor (Broman, 2000: 229).

6 The Acta Medica et Pholosophia Hafniensia, published in Copenhagen between 1673 and 1680 and strongly medical in character (Houghton, 1975: 17).

as a justification provider and criticism as an associated technology of public and social intervention (Broman, 2002a).

Much has been written about the invention of the 'public' in conjunction with critique for legitimation of intervention (see, for example, La Vopa (1992) for a critical review of Koselleck (1988) and Habermas (1989) on this topic, and Goodman (1992) for a broader analysis of Koselleck's, Habermas', Ariès' and Chartier's contributions to this). The 'public' was a key, characteristic and powerful construct of the Enlightenment, and its invention and eventually widespread acceptance transformed the meaning of 'opinion' from something fickle and narrowly prejudiced as it was generally understood as late as mid-18th century to something that, when paired with 'public' as 'public opinion', began to be seen as 'the authoritative judgement of a collective conscience, the ruling of a tribunal to which even the state was subject' by the end of the 18th century (La Vopa, 1992: 7925). This conceptualisation and the growing authority of the 'public' eventually made it possible to give new weight to critical judgements in journal *public*ations. When scholarly journals, as prime vehicles of published scientific communication, began to use criticism as an instrument of intervention in social and public lives by incorporating evaluative judgements, it was,

> significant both for the cultural role of periodicals and for the public authority of scientific knowledge [...] For judgements published in journals had a public character that did not pertain to opinions and judgements contained in unpublished letters. This is not to say that private letters never had public consequences [...] But judgements made in print became not just one person whispering in a correspondent's ear, but instead a new kind of public and authoritative voice. (Broman, 2000a: 229-230)

The power of published critique was further enhanced with the addition of anonymity. The latter first started to feature as a way of maximising the authority of early critical book reviews incorporated into journals. Anonymity allowed authors to position their published voices as proxies for the public – as speaking for the public whilst simultaneously instructing the public (Broman, 2000a, 2000b). With the onset of professionalisation and institutionalisation of science in the 19th century, the use of anonymous critique became increasingly embedded in the formalising peer-based

manuscript review process until the latter eventually acquired its contemporary double-blind form as standard academic journal publishing practice in the 20th century (Lindsey, 1978). This paved the way and provided a mechanism for the growing inward focus of critique-as-intervention as publishers and editors began to internalise censorship into forms of self-policing (Hall, 2017).

What is critical about contemporary journal publishing?

The above discussion brings us to the contemporary era of journal publishing, and to debates over the skewed nature of editorial and reviewer critique that tends to reinforce orthodoxies and keep out approaches critical of the mainstream, especially in the 'publish or perish' context of journal performance metrics that have exacerbated the already critical role of journals. What is at stake here is the capacity of academic journals to act as conduits of more radical forms of critique-as-intervention, in other words, more transformative forms of political, social and economic critique that can speak truth to power, challenge oppression and stimulate progressive, emancipatory change (Horkheimer, 2002). In a journal publishing system in which criticality is predominantly inward-focused and conformative of established conventions and power relations, such capacity is curtailed. In this section I discuss these aspects of 'being critical' first in relation to contemporary journal publishing in general, then in relation to Management and Organization Studies (MOS) journals, and finally drawing out some implications specifically for journals that position themselves as 'critical'.

Skewed critique and publish or perish

Editorial and reviewer censorship of papers and authors is one of the key distinguishing characteristics of contemporary journal publishing. This has been subject of much critique revolving around the notion of journal editors as 'gatekeepers of science' (a term popularised by Crane (1967)) – whereby editorial critique-as-censure (of papers and authors) is seen as pervasive, excessive, biased and skewed, in that the exercise of its power keeps what editors consider undesirable approaches out of the public domain and, vice versa, includes their preferred approaches. Over many decades now journal

publishing critics (Crane, 1967; De Grazia, 1963; Lindsey, 1978 as early examples) have argued that this skewed nature (sometimes labelled 'confirmatory bias') of editorial and reviewer critique sustains and reproduces orthodoxies and established power relations in academia and beyond. As Lindsey (1978: 98) writes about gatekeeping, it results in

> restricting admission to the public forum only to those who are sympathetic to the dominant paradigm, theoretical perspective, or currently accepted line of enquiry. Critics of the major approaches, or individuals developing new lines of analysis, may be thwarted by eminent scientists who have built their reputations on the traditional approaches.

In other words, skewed gatekeeping is a kind of critique that keeps out critique of the orthodox. It implies that journal editors and reviewers tend to be overly critical in relation to non-mainstream approaches and insufficiently critical in relation to orthodox ones, contributing to the reproduction of what in Kuhnian terms (Kuhn, 1996) can be understood as normal science (De Rond and Miller, 2005) through a guardianship of both scientific and disciplinary conventions. Both 'scientific' and 'disciplinary' aspects are important here. As the gatekeeping debates developed, critics of the journal publishing process contesting the necessity for social sciences to imitate the natural sciences began to note that the reproduction of orthodoxies through the exercise of editorial and reviewer critique tends to translate into the guardianship of scientific methods and conventions (themselves constituting orthodoxies). This has disciplining effects for what counts as knowledge acceptable for publication:

> [The publication system] assumes that there is a measure by which papers may be clearly separated into good or bad, useful or useless. This measure is 'scientific' method. Papers not conforming to this yardstick are 'poorly written' or exhibit 'sloppy methodology' and cannot conceivably contribute to pure knowledge. (Van Wyk, 1998: 251)

This is particularly significant as over the centuries since the first appearance of scholarly periodicals their critical role in the production of academic knowledge has anything but waned. Once again, the entanglement of 'critical' as critique and as being essential is notable here. With the onset and development of neoliberal, new-managerialist 'New Higher Education' (Jary

and Parker, 1998) with its accompanying audit culture (Strathern, 2000), increasingly incessant and pervasive mechanisms of academic performance measurement and management developed from late-20th century onwards (Amit, 2000; Shore and Roberts, 1995; Shore and Wright, 2000a; Willmott, 1995). These mechanisms have effectively prioritised and privileged journal publishing (Willmott, 2003) so that its role for academic careers and for the survival and development of academic departments and universities has become so critical in many academic fields as to truly warrant the moniker 'publish or perish' (Darnhill, 1996; Van Wyk, 1998; De Rond and Miller, 2005). Moreover, in an ironic neoliberal reincarnation of external censure, these mechanisms of academic performance measurement have also subjected the journals themselves to assessment and critique, as reflected in the now ubiquitous journal guides, rankings, citation indices and impact factors. One of the well-recognised effects of this has been the further skewing of critique towards the mainstream in the scrabble for publication in what are seen as 'top' or 'high-ranking' journals (Barry et al, 2001; Harley and Lee, 1997).

Critique and criticality in and around MOS journal publishing

MOS journal publishing embodies all the elements of critique and being critical discussed so far. MOS is very much dominated by journal publications as the privileged form of performance-managed academic 'output' and is becoming increasingly so. For example, 80% of Business and Management publication submissions to the 2001 UK national Research Assessment Exercise[7] were journal articles (Geary et al., 2004), which rose to 92% in the 2008 exercise (Mingers et al., 2012). This makes MOS journal publishing a career-critical activity, in the 'publish or perish' sense. As Beverungen et al. (2012: 929), who call journals 'the *sine qua non* of early 21st century academic life' in business schools, put it:

> Whilst other disciplines have retained the book length research monograph as the apogee of academic achievement, in management and organization studies, as in many of the social sciences, it is the publication of articles in highly ranked journals that will make or break an academic career.

[7] The prime mechanism for allocating research funding to universities in the UK, now renamed 'Research Excellence Framework'.

MOS critics have spoken out persistently about problems with the current journal publishing system. Their critique has included the publish or perish effects of journal publications being career-critical (De Rond and Miller, 2005; Miller et al., 2011), which is combined with excessive editorial and peer review criticality. This manifests as unnecessary tampering with papers and leads to the erosion of the autonomy of authors who can be subject to reviewers' whimsy (Bedeian, 2004; Brewis, 2018) and are pressured to make changes with which they do not agree (Bedeian, 2003; Gabriel, 2010). Given also the gatekeeping 'confirmation bias' in favour of the orthodox (Miller, 2006), this often results in bland, 'vanilla pudding' publications (Ashforth, 2005). MOS critics thus have also pointed to disciplining and skewing effects of journal gatekeeping on MOS knowledge (Aguinis et al., 2020; Butler and Spoelstra, 2014; Macdonald, 2015; Macdonald and Kam, 2011; Tourish and Willmott, 2015), exacerbated through journal rankings and guides producing homogenisation and convergence towards the mainstream (positivist functionalist) orthodoxy (Grey, 2010) and a 'one best way' 'research monoculture' (Mingers and Willmott, 2013: 1051) whereby fields of practice can become marginalised (Anderson et al., 2021) and critical MOS authors have to emulate mainstream theories and methodologies to get published (Özkazanç-Pan, 2012). Moreover, such skewing critical practices around MOS journal publishing also marginalise and exclude contributions and contributors from non-Western and non-Anglophone locations and perspectives (Boussebaa and Brown, 2017; Boussebaa and Tienari, 2021; Meriläinen et al., 2008; Murphy and Zhu, 2012; Tietze and Dick, 2013) and non-white, anti-racist and anti-patriarchal theories and thinkers (Dar et al., 2020).

It is important to emphasise the geopolitical and historical aspects of these wide-ranging issues and problems. Üsdiken (2010) notes that MOS has always been dominated by the US positivist/functionalist core, but within this, the US influence and thus the pressure of convergence and homogenisation on the field have waxed and waned. The first wave of US influence happened in the 1950s-1970s and was linked to the post-WW2 aid and anti-communist efforts. This was followed by a UK-led interlude in the 1980s and 1990s, when more non-mainstream and alternative approaches briefly had more relative

freedom to flourish (it is notable that this 'freedom' was still largely on Western and Anglophone terms). Yet from the turn of the millennium onwards, a second US wave arrived, this time driven by the new regime of academic performance measurement and global rankings, which placed universities, business schools, journals, and academics around the world in direct competition with each other. (I will return to MOS geopolitics in more detail in the next section.)

The growing emphasis on academic 'excellence'[8] (Ashcraft, 2017; Bristow et al., 2017; Butler and Spoelstra, 2012; 2014; 2017), narrowly defined as hitting increasingly elusive and precarious performance targets in which publications in top-ranking journals feature prominently, has produced a context in which academic success can never be permanently secured (Knights and Clarke, 2014). Arguably then, the culture of academic 'excellence' has effectively institutionalised, and perhaps should be more appropriately known as, *a culture of censure* – the dark side of the 'excellence' discourses and practices that pervade all aspects of academic lives. In other words, the emphasis on 'excellence' implies ongoing judgement, a critique of anything that does not fit its definition, with the consequence that anything or anyone not counting as 'excellent' is simply not good enough. Journal publishing and its metrics are at the core of this culture of censure and implicated in it inextricably, as at once a key means of and an object of critique-as-censure. Much has been said in MOS, as elsewhere, about the damaging effects of this pervasive academic censure as mediated by journal publishing on the health and wellbeing of academics (e.g. Bristow et al., 2019; Gabriel, 2010; Morrish, 2019; Smith and Ulus, 2020), and in particular of those in more vulnerable positions such as in the early stages of their academic careers (Bristow, 2012; Bristow et

[8] As one of the anonymous reviewers of this paper pointed out, the etymology of the word 'excellence' is telling. 'Excellence' derives from Latin *excellentia* (superiority), from -ex + -cellere – to rise high, to tower. Etymology of other related words similarly (ab)used in neoliberal academia is equally interesting: for example, 'prestige' derives from Latin *praestigium* (illusion) and *praestigiae* (juggler's tricks), a derivative of *praestringere* (to blunt sight or mind, or literally to tie up so as to constrict). With thanks to Reviewer 1.

al., 2017; Malsch and Tessier, 2015; Prasad, 2015, 2012; Ratle et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2017).

Moreover, the political economy of journal publishing contributes to the culture of academic overwork and exploitation (Beverungen et al., 2012). Most MOS journal publishing (and thus most MOS publishing) is in the hands of commercial publishers (*ephemera*, of course, being a notable exception). Publishers take advantage of the indispensable (and mostly paid for by universities and taxpayers) academic labour of authors, editors and reviewers as knowledge producers. The labour of reviewers in particular, essential to the contemporary publishing process, is typically unrecognised and unrewarded financially, reputationally or even in terms of university workload models and so depends on increasingly unsustainable academic citizenship practices (Dean and Forray, 2018). Commercial publishers make free use of this labour, marketize it, and then sell it back to academics at inflated prices (Beverungen et al., 2012) resulting in 'extraordinarily high' profits (Harvie et al., 2013: 235).

This setup also contributes to the skewing effects of critique as gatekeeping, whereby publishers can be seen (along with editors and reviewers) as gatekeepers too. Moreover, they are gatekeepers that are typically for-profit businesses, meaning that it is in their interests to ensure that it is marketable, sellable work that gets published. In other words, marketability, knowledge commodification, and knowledge commodities consumption are critical to the current prevailing model of commercial journal publishing. This means that journal and article performance against consumption metrics (citation indices, impact factors, and more recently altmetrics that measure media engagement) are very much in publishers' interests. As Harvie et al. (2013: 230) explain,

> widely-cited journals are perceived to be higher quality, which allows for-profit publishers to charge higher prices for such journals; if widely-cited and more highly-priced journals also enjoy higher circulation (because they are widely-cited), then publishers also benefit through lower average production costs.

Publishers therefore both make use of and are implicated in the consumerisation, commodification and marketisation of HE, in tandem with the rankings industry and in the context of growing precarity and insecurity

of academic labour. They are part and parcel of the academic publication game through which critique and knowledge become skewed towards the orthodox in pursuit of performance targets and metrics (Butler and Spoelstra, 2017; 2020; Macdonald and Kam, 2011, 2007; Prasad, 2012). Publishers are also gatekeepers in the sense that they control access to what is published – either at the point of sale through subscription chargers or at the point of production through author processing charges (Beverungen et al., 2013, 2012; Harvie et al., 2013). This, again, subjects gatekeeping critique to market forces that skew it in accordance with the field's specific geopolitics of knowledge, more on which below.

Critique, criticality, and critical journals

The issues around the political economy of journal publishing lead to the point that within the contemporary journal publishing system critique itself is a marketable commodity, but some forms of critique are more marketable than others. This variable marketability reflects and co-constructs the geopolitics of MOS knowledge according to both the relative sizes of the markets and what they are seen as able and willing to produce and consume. Production and consumption are particularly entangled here due to the 'double appropriation' model of journal publishing (Beverungen et al., 2012) as academics and universities are both producers (as authors, editors and reviewers) and consumers (as subscribers and readers) of what is published. The largest, richest MOS journal publishing market is the US, which is also the field's centre that is historically dominated by the positivist-functionalist mainstream, towards which other MOS geographies gravitate – the pull that has been exacerbated by the advent of journal rankings and international league tables (Grey, 2010; Üsdiken, 2010). This pull, described by Murphy and Zhu (2012: 219) as a 'confection of a "world championship" of scholarship', puts pressure on erasing the historic differences between MOS journals originating in different geographies and traditionally favouring different approaches to both what they publish and how they publish it. Proliferating journal metrics create global performance scales, which effectively subordinate non-US journals to US ones in journal lists, rankings, indices and league tables, in which mainstream US journals tend to do better (Grey, 2010). This leads to pressures of homogenisation as it is in publishers', editors' and

authors' interests to play to the dominant and 'best performing' market. By contrast, poorer parts of the world can end up being priced out of the market altogether through practices such as grossly excessive access fees or author processing charges (Harvie et al., 2013).

It is within these challenging conditions and against these gravitational forces that journals positioning themselves as 'critical' in the 'oppositional' sense of not being like the conservative core of their fields (Parker and Thomas, 2011) operate. MOS has a number of journals clearly within this category, including *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, *Culture and Organization*, *ephemera*, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, and *Organization*. As Parker and Thomas (2011) observe, the appearance of critical MOS journals is part of the broader development of critical journals across social sciences since 1960s, and this phenomenon implies that the editors and the publishers of these journals must assume that there is some market for this sense of critical ideas. This assumption seems to be supported by an uptake of 'critical' work in some of the highest-ranked MOS journals, and not only those historically more open to non-mainstream perspectives such as European journals like *Human Relations* and *Organization Studies*, but also some of the most traditionally mainstream US journals like those of the Academy of Management (more recently especially the *Academy of Management Learning and Education*). The boundaries of 'criticality' around particular journals can be rather blurry and vary over the course of their histories, so it is arguably a fallacy to separate journals into a binary of 'mainstream' and 'critical'. Rather, oppositional criticality should more accurately be seen as a matter of extent, a spectrum in journals at a particular point in time.

Nevertheless, there are several specific concerns added into the mix for explicitly oppositionally critical journals. The first concern is the understanding that, on the one hand, the critical communities, such as notably Critical Management Studies (CMS), with which such journals co-construct the legitimacy of critical knowledge, have their own orthodoxies, conventions and historical power asymmetries (Tatli, 2012). If journals positioning themselves as critical embrace publishing processes that largely mirror those of mainstream journals (as many critical MOS journals currently

do), they risk simply reproducing and institutionalising such critical orthodoxies within their fields (Parker and Thomas, 2011). Maintaining ongoing radical criticality and openness to the unorthodox therefore requires departing more radically from the beaten track of conventional publishing. *ephemera* has done this in electing a democratic, open-access, not-for-profit publishing process run fully by an academic editorial collective, and even, somewhat paradoxically, disassociating from institutionalized versions of oppositional criticality to the point of 'removing the label ['critical'] in order to learn the thing itself' (Böhm and Spoelstra, 2004: 100). On the other hand, going too radical off the beaten track risks further marginalising critical journals in what is already a niche (relatively to the mainstream) 'market' of critique. It is perhaps not surprising that *Organization,* owned by Sage and whose publishing processes are almost indistinguishable 'from most other elite academic journals' (Parker and Thomas, 2011: 423) performs much better in terms of journal metrics than *ephemera*, even though both journals explicitly eschew such metrics.

Of course, marginality can actually be taken as a measure of success for oppositionally critical journals, demonstrating that they have been true to their mission (Li and Parker, 2013). This raises interesting questions over their criticality in the sense of being essential (to what extent oppositionally critical journals are and should be essential and to whom; and whether editing themselves out of existence would count as their ultimate success). More pragmatically, it points to a fine balancing act for explicitly critical journals in steering a course between falling into the institutionalization trap (Parker and Thomas, 2011) and becoming so niche as to increasingly separate themselves from the broader communities whom they might otherwise engage and perhaps even transform.

Uncharted futures – what will be critical?

In some ways, it is remarkable how little academic journal publishing has actually changed, in the grand scheme of things, over the long centuries of its existence in terms of 'being critical'. Like their early predecessors, contemporary academic journals still play a critical, disciplinary role in the

communication and control of academic knowledge, and still make daily use of critique as a technology of intervention. It is notable that the changes that *have* occurred over the course of the centuries – the formalization of the review process accompanied by the institutionalisation of anonymity, the advent of journal performance metrics in the context of the culture of censure (a.k.a. 'excellence'), the neoliberal commodification and marketization of published knowledge and the domination of the political economy of journal publishing (at least in MOS) by commercial publishers – have all served to intensify and strengthen these two elements of 'being critical', despite the long-standing and ongoing criticisms levied against them. They have also channelled both vectors of 'being critical' increasingly inwards, towards the regulation and management of academic careers and towards critique-as-censure of academic knowledge production. Combined together in these ways, these two elements create a matrix of tensions and dilemmas for journals that go against the disciplinary grain in positioning themselves as critical of orthodoxies and conventions in terms of what and how they publish.

However, there are multiple points of pressure operating on the current system that could be leveraged to initiate more radical changes in journal publishing, and now could be the time to consider them. The Covid-19 pandemic is a moment of great crisis but also of great possibilities, as established practices, norms and conventions are questioned in all spheres of life around the world, and as development and spread of new technologies and new ways of working are accelerated. These possibilities could be grasped to bring into being as yet uncharted futures for journal publishing as part of broader reshaping of societies and the role of academia within them.

To usher in such uncharted futures, we should consider anew the two aspects of 'being critical' in academic journal publishing, as well as alternative, old and new meanings and methods of critique. Starting with being critical in the sense of being essential, this is an opportune time to ask to whom and for what we want our journals to be critical, and if, indeed, we want them to be essential at all. There are possibilities here for explicitly oppositionally critical journals to break their way out of the corner into which academic market dynamics and journal performance metrics have backed them. These

opportunities come as potential for new kinds of engagement with publics and communities beyond the spheres in which journal performance metrics matter, and which can perhaps even help challenge their dominance in academia. I am suggesting here a reframing of the questions of 'relevance' and 'impact' and thus 'being essential' in more activist terms (Alakavuklar, 2020; Contu, 2020, 2018; Rhodes et al., 2018), where the focus is on being integral to social action, on being critical to progressive and emancipatory social change and transformation (Horkheimer, 2002). This would require re-emphasising critique-as-intervention in public and social life not just within but also beyond academia, where critique-as-censure at a distance does not do much to effect change but where more engaged and constructive modes of critique-as-intervention as expressed, for example, in critical participative approaches (e.g. Bristow et al., 2021; Cunliffe and Scaratti, 2017; King and Land, 2018) are required. In this regard, *Organization* has set an important precedent with its Acting Up section (Prichard and Benschop, 2018), but the very containment of activism to a section points to the current limitations of its reach. Further opportunities remain for activism to more radically transform journal publishing so that social, political and organizational action drives the very logic and purpose of journals.

As part of such more radical transformation there is an opportunity to consider the shape and fluidity of journals in light of new technologies. Academic journals have already significantly changed their shape. When I first began researching MOS journals shortly after the turn of the Millennium I observed a monthly editorial meeting, in which journal editors sat around a box of hard-copy manuscripts, which had been sent in by 'snail-mail' and were passed around the room in order for editorial decisions to be made. Twenty years later, MOS journals have almost entirely left behind all forms of hard copy. In 2020 I took part in the first online editorial board meeting of the journal in my above example (a development due to the pandemic). It was striking that significantly more people from more diverse locations were able to join the online meeting than its face-to-face equivalent at the AOM conference the previous year. In the context in which academic conference time and funding are the preserve of the privileged elite, and the environmental and health impacts of travel are increasingly problematic,

there are new possibilities for more democratic, inclusive, and sustainable ways for journals to connect and foster their communities. This, in turn, could help to open up and 'un-skew' publishing processes. However, these possibilities also come with pitfalls, such as the potential for new forms of exclusion and marginalisation to be produced through different manifestations of the digital divide, sometimes embodied in practices as mundane as the choice of time zones for online meetings.

Another notable recent development that can be seen as a source of both opportunity and caution is the appearance of social media editors on editorial teams in response to the rise of new technologies that are reshaping public communications. Up till now, journals have been mainly using social media to promote their published contents, but as with activism, possibilities remain for a more radical rethinking of academic publishing as a result of these and other online technologies (Tomkins, 2020). The importance of scholarly and scholarly/public online interaction outside the traditional journal space is growing both in spread and in scope, providing new possibilities for collaboration and knowledge co-production as well as communication (Hendler, 2008). In reimagining knowledge production through time and space, is it time for academic journals to burst the banks of regular issues that have defined but also constrained them for centuries in order to develop different kinds of relationships between scholars and broader communities? New ways of being essential can open up if journals act as multifaceted, multi-located, continuous, polyvocal and multi-way conversations, through which we can learn from each other and from others who are both critical *of* the institutions and practices we want to challenge and critical *to* the causes and communities we want to support. And to turn journals into such spaces we can learn from others too – from activists reshaping societies but also from journalists engaging in different kinds of critical research and writing (Bridgman, forthcoming). Whilst this may sound utopian, some new, hybrid forms of such conversations are already developing. One example is *CMS InTouch*, a global digital platform born during the pandemic out of a collaboration between the journal *Organization* and the Academy of Management CMS Division. A hybrid between a conference and a spoken journal, *CMS InTouch* brings together critical scholars, practitioners, and

activists through free and open online events, aiming to support and nurture critical communities around the world, regardless of career stage and any membership or affiliation.

There are, of course, manifold ethical and political issues to consider with opportunities offered by new technologies, especially relating to the controversies around major social media companies such as Facebook. Any optimism with regards to a radical transformation of academic publishing through new technologies must be tempered with ethical deliberation and critique-as-reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2003; Letiche, 2017) to channel knowledge production towards de-corporatisation and empowerment rather than new technologies becoming a new means of commercial entrapment. This leads back to the point about commercial publishers, that the political economy underpinning mainstream corporate journal publishing cannot be ignored by journals aspiring to be critical, as if the published content were all that mattered and the means through which that content is delivered were unimportant. Much insight can be gained here from the old adage that the medium is the message. The mutual criticality of academic journals and corporate publishers, where each is essential to the other needs to continue to be challenged as *ephemera* has done over the years.

Turning to 'being critical' as a technology of intervention and particularly as critique-as-censure, it is high time to consider how to make journals less critical. Publishing is all too often experienced by authors as immensely and destructively critical, which happens along the full mainstream-critical spectrum of journals. Critique in this sense is, in Bourdieu's (1976) terms, a form of symbolic violence routinely perpetrated as part of wider processes of 'micro-terror' in academia (Ratle et al., 2020). This is (hopefully) not the sort of criticality that 'critical' journals in particular are aiming for. A possible way to address this would be to move towards more dialogical forms of peer review (Dobusch and Heimstadt, 2019; Ross-Hellauer, 2017) that could at least partially rebalance the asymmetrical power relations in the journal publication process towards more open and democratic power dynamics, where the co-production of articles by authors, reviewers and editors is rendered visible, acknowledged, and operationalised in a transparent and reflexive manner (see also Brewis, 2018). This could help partially address the

issue of high emotional costs of going through the manuscript review process, fetter some of the excessive or skewed editorial and reviewer critique, and also, as an added bonus, help protect the unwary from predatory publishing (Dobusch and Heimstadt, 2019).

More radically perhaps, we should consider what post-critical publishing could look like, and search for alternatives to critique-as-censure as the default modus operandi. Looping back to activism, the move from critique towards social, political and organisational action (Murphy et al., 2013) could be an opportunity to infuse journals with a politics of care. It is now more than 10 years since Gabriel (2010) challenged journal editors to counterbalance the ethic of criticism implicit in the publishing process with an ethic of care, but there seems to be little evidence that such a rebalancing has happened so far in a substantive way. It is time to reissue and reinforce this call for care with new urgency.

Within such new arrangements, there would still be space for critique as evaluative discourse if we treat it as an instrument of social and intellectual change, not a Kafkaesque master of processes; if we operationalise it in open and reflexive ways as subordinate to ethics of care driving social, political, and organisational action, be that action a conceptual or practical engagement with oppressive realities. There would also be scope for the banner of oppositional criticality to differentiate projects from those that use critique for merely upholding the status quo, as in Burrell and Morgan's (1979) sociology of regulation, instead reaffirming critique as a sociology of radical change. This will require acknowledging academic publishing, like any other kinds of publishing, as an inescapably political activity.

There would thus also still be scope for the political role of critique in defending the unorthodox, fostering intellectual pluralism and upholding marginalism (Bristow and Robinson, 2018). For as long as there is a will to govern scholarly knowledge there would be space for critique in Foucauldian sense of questioning and challenging the extent, the means and the ways of governing, for critique as 'the art of not being governed so much' (Foucault, 1996: 384). As I write these words, the University of Leicester in the UK is busy purging anything and anyone associated with CMS from its business school.

This includes targeting anyone who has published in what are perceived to be critical journals or on a topic or using an approach deemed to be critical, regardless of the journals' rankings or reputation. This is a stark reminder that the possibility for oppositional critique can never be taken for granted but also that it is still needed as much as ever.

However, in reimagining journals we should also acknowledge the need for a critique of the kind of critique that itself becomes a form of oppressive governmentality, of critique that abuses, terrorises, marginalises and excludes. At the very least we should acknowledge once again that critique is not a panacea that can miraculously address all that is wrong in the world, that not all critique is progressive, emancipatory, liberating and empowering, and that figuring out what counts as good and desirable critique is a matter of political and ethical struggle and contestation. Acknowledging that critique has its morally ambiguous politics, even within critical fields such as CMS, could allow for more transparent, open and purposeful engagement in the politics of critique, including in journal publishing.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored what 'being critical' has meant over the ages in journal publishing, focusing in particular on two senses of the word 'critical' – that of critique and that of being essential. I am aware that the historical narrative I have thus painted is broad-brushed and linear, with the corresponding limitations in terms of nuance and dissonance between the argument and the historiographical approach. Yet I hope that the narrative still serves its main purpose, which is to outline some of the key continuities, ruptures, and entanglements in how 'being critical' has developed over time in journal publishing, and that in doing so it performs as a history of the present in a Foucauldian sense (Garland, 2014).

This history of the present indicates that academic publishing has always been critical, both in the sense of being essential and in the sense of critique as an evaluative discourse and technology of intervention. The changes to journal publishing over the centuries have only intensified, formalised, and strengthened these two aspects of 'being critical', directing their vectors

increasingly inwards towards the management of academic careers and censure of academic knowledge production. So, looking to the future of academic journals, it is not so much a matter of whether we want them to be critical as how, why, of what and for whom we want them to be critical. We need to be *care*-ful and nuanced about what we want from our critiques and criticalities. For these purposes, there are many ways of being critical that we can draw on for inspiration, from the histories of journals, philosophies of critique (e.g. Foucault, 1996; Horkheimer, 2002; Kelly, 1994), to critical MOS strands such as CMS (e.g. Adler, 2001; Ashcraft, 2017; Bell and De Gama, 2018; Deslandes, 2017), and critical-reflexive research and education methodologies (e.g. Cunliffe, 2003; Letiche, 2017). The current context is an opportune moment to more radically reimagine journal publishing, and in so doing make journals simultaneously more and less critical by moving beyond critique-as-censure and towards new modes of being essential. In such a reimagining the nuance of 'being critical' needs to be negotiated through an open and reflexive politics of critique directed towards social, political and organisational action, and infused and tempered with a politics of care and marginalism.

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The decolonizing future of organization studies

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abstract

In this paper, we propose that organizational studies researchers must pay attention to the contributions of decolonial epistemology, which has been developing counter-hegemonic, marginal, and subaltern organizational theories, embedded in the radicality of broken silence. The decolonizing future of research in organization studies opens up possibilities for new organizational modes of existence — from the perspective of indigenous societies and different knowledge from that of modernity. We explore main concepts related to the decolonizing movement, seeking to elucidate its main ideas and transposing them to organizational studies. We have found four main heterarchical reinterpretations provided by decolonial scholars on the field of organization studies: (a) the organization concept, (b) the history of economic development in colonized nations and management organizational knowledge, (c) consumption, technology and changes in the natural environment and (d) intersectional studies about gender, race, and social class. It is possible to anticipate that the future of organization studies may be marked either by segregation, or heterarchical thinking integration within a global agenda. The first scenario is featured by the flourishing of alternative thinking outside academia environments and valuing the great diversity of languages worldwide; the second scenario must be featured by the openness to provide a more organic and structured presence for groups of emerging countries in international science arenas. We stand that the heterarchical thinking can contribute to overcoming an increasingly polarized world, allowing the rise of several knowledge production competing arenas of, making possible a more democratic development for organizational studies.

Introduction

To study 'coloniality' means acknowledging contemporary ways in which indirect colonial domination is perpetuated, even after the independence of colonizing countries direct administration — mainly through the cultural and economic structures imposed by global transnational organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and World Trade Organization (WTO), among others (Arango, 2015; Bhambra, 2014; Grosfoguel, 2011).

'Colonialism', on the other hand, are macro level colonial situations imposed by the presence of direct colonial administration intervening over a country, as in cases of military invasions, seizures of power or coups d'état financed by exogenous interests — in disagreement to those of the people who compose a particular nation. Colonial situations can also occur at micro level, when they concern oppression or cultural, political, sexual and economic exploitation of racial groups subalternized by other racial/ethnic groups who consider themselves to be dominant (Grosfoguel, 2011).

Coloniality does not solely refer to classical or to internal colonialism, nor can it be reduced to colonial administration presence; coloniality is a power pattern that operates through the naturalization of racial hierarchies that enable the reproduction of territorial and epistemic domination relationships. That pattern does not only subordinate one man to the other through capitalist reproductions, but also marginalize knowledge, experiences and life forms of those who are exploited and placed in precarious conditions of existence (Quijano, 2007; Soler, 2009).

The 'decoloniality' category is useful for bringing new forms of resistance to secular denials (even extinction attempts) of local and traditional knowledge, in order to deconstruct epistemic colonialism from a hierarchical thought, based on the epistemic superiority of Western countries, and replace it with heterarchical thinking, based on the coexistence of distinct lines of thought that do not overlap each other as universal truth (Silva, Maciel and Coutinho, 2018).

Decolonizing studies can be subdivided between postcolonial and decolonial types. Postcolonial studies are part of the economic analyses proposed by the World-System analysis (Bhambra, 2014; Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007) and provide a critique with emphasis on 'colonial discourse', emphasizing the cultural agency of individuals in the subject/structure binomial (Grosfoguel, 2011). This theoretical current is historically placed after the processes of decolonization and emancipation of the Third World, from the second half of the twentieth century. Postcolonialism can also be characterized as a set of theoretical contributions of literary and cultural studies of the 1980s in the United States and England (Ballestrin, 2013), supported by European critical authors such as Foucault, Gramsci, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida (Ballestrin, 2013; Grosfoguel, 2007; Mignolo, 2007a). The movement seeks to deconstruct essentialisms, to propose a critical epistemology to modernity (Bhambra, 2014) and has a strong connection with revolutionary anticolonialism, with struggles of national liberation and with African and Asian independence movements (Ballestrin, 2017). According to Bhambra (2014), postcolonial studies have been an exercise of opening and questioning the implicit assumptions of dominant discourses.

Decolonial studies, on the other hand, have emerged from the theoretical perspective developed by Modernity-Coloniality-Decoloniality Group and brings the notion that culture is always intertwined with political economy processes. In this sense, political economy is seen as a cultural control device, imposing discursive structures in relation to the individual (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007). Decolonial thinking is also not attached to the modern category 'time' as a theoretical framework and, therefore, escapes postmodernity and postcoloniality (Mignolo, 2007a).

Decolonial studies are supported by indigenous experiences and memories, as they oppose modern beliefs (Mignolo, 2007a). For MCD group, a 'post-colonial world' is a myth because, to this day, there is no effective liberation from the structures of contemporary coloniality (Grosfoguel, 2007). Decolonialism retrieves contributions from authors such as Mahatma Gandhi, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Fausto Reinaga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Mignolo, 2007b). It also provides new meaning to the *Movimento Sem Terra* (MST) in

Brazil, the *Zapatistas* in Chiapas, the indigenous movements in Latin America and the Social Forums of the Americas and the World (Ballestrin, 2013).

As stated earlier, decolonial episteme is open to the coexistence of distinct thoughts, without hierarchies among themselves, constituting an heterarchical pluriverse (Reyes and Beltrán, 2014; Soler, 2009). Decoloniality preaches altruism insofar as it seeks to give others time and space to be heard, affirming the 'other' position — refraining from condemning and prejudging, and trying to understand circumstances and experiences in different points of view (Vélez, Grisales, Gil and Botero, 2017). Decoloniality goes beyond, because it seeks not only to overcome colonial episteme, but to propose new parallel and alternative views (Ballestrin, 2017).

As Brazilian authors, we have witnessed in recent years the development of a growing set of decolonial approaches in organizational studies. Several lines of interest have been explored by researchers, regarding (a) the conceptual bases of decoloniality and the disruption with hegemonic thoughts inherited from Western nations (Abdalla and Faria, 2017; Carrieri and Correia, 2020; Szlechter, et al., 2020); (b) the reinterpretation of organizational phenomena from decolonial philosophers bias (Couto and Carrieri, 2018; Couto, Palhares, and Carrieri, 2020; Misoczky and Camara, 2015); and (c) the challenges of transposing theoretical and methodological foundations from decolonial movement into empirical research (Couto, Honorato, and Silva, 2019; Misoczky and Camara, 2020; Wanderley and Bauer, 2020).

The challenge for decolonial researchers is to rescue knowledge produced by hidden voices and epistemologies born from alternative realities, contraposing them to the hegemonic Westernism that was constituted in Europe and in North America. Rewriting this history based on silenced thinkers and recovering South theories is an urgent task. In this scenario, we position the central argument of this article: Latin American organizational studies must pay attention to the contributions of decolonial epistemology to develop other, counter-hegemonic, marginal and subaltern organizational theories, embedded in the radicality of broken silence; only this way, we can create an inclusive future for research in organization studies, considering for

new organizational modes of existence from the perspective of indigenous peoples and different knowledge from that of the modernity.

In this paper, therefore, we explore the main concepts related to the decolonial movement, seeking to elucidate its main ideas and transposing them to organizational studies. In addition to exploring the categories 'coloniality' and 'colonialism', we approach historical origins of its constitution in Modernity-Coloniality-Decoloniality Group (MCD), as well as other categories that permeate this increasingly popular field among Latin-American scholars. Throughout this work, we establish, in a didactic and non-exhaustive way, distinctive milestones between the concepts, facilitating the operationalization of future research that adopt, as an epistemic basis for guidance, the critical orientation towards modernity.

This paper is organized as follows. First, this introduction, which posits the theme and explores some initial definitions regarding decolonial epistemology. Second, we analyze the construction of modernity and the *hybris del punto cero*, which constitutes contemporary 'hierarchical thought'. Third, we advance in two fundamental concepts to understand the possible decolonial concepts transposition to organizational studies: *Imperiality* and *Heterarchical Thinking*. We will analyze the ways in which heterarchical thinking has manifested itself in the field of organizational studies in recent years. Finally, the final remarks, in which we consolidate the knowledge obtained throughout this paper to reflect on the decolonizing future of organizational studies.

Modernity and the hybris del punto cero

For Mignolo (Mignolo, 2007b; 2007a; 2011) and Dunford (2017), the values of enlightenment that inform cosmopolitan thinking and the 'modern' institutions that protect these values emerged endogenously in Europe and were expanded to the rest of humanity as a form of global knowledge. Modernity and enlightenment, therefore, constitute what is called the *hybris del punto cero*, or the emergence of rational thought, in which science and method have become the ontology of legitimate knowledge, that is, the only way to effective discovery of the real (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007).

In this line of thought, God is replaced by a concept of 'rational self', a knowing subject capable of bringing the answers to man's most fundamental questions.

The construction of the notion of *hybris del punto cero* of knowledge starts from the critique of 'rational' and 'scientific' methods from Western historiography to rescue the voices of societies that, over the years, had their stories erased and silenced. This challenge arises through the contemporary need to 'retell the stories', resuming records of traditional knowledge and oral histories — documenting what was not previously recorded — in order to allow the democratization of ideologies, knowledge and ways of interpreting human existence before nature, society and the supernatural (Chakrabarty, 2011). The 'conflict of histories' is something desirable by the decolonial movement, since it constitutes criticism about the interpretation of human actions and, consequently, political disputes that can balance power asymmetries in the discussions that are currently sedimented by Western thought.

Dominated peoples are the victims of a rational science that produces a myth of a man 'free from natural limitations'. The decolonial movement aims to release us from the 'progress discourse', which had been strategically used to impose a single way of life and a single system of world thought (Mignolo, 2007b; Dussel, 1977). Here, the term 'emancipation' is no longer used, for its European connotation, but rather 'liberation', which would be the notion of getting rid of imposed forms of thought that constitute the universality of European values — and of the thought hierarchies among peoples, thus, eliminating the diversity of ideas (Pinto and Mignolo, 2015).

From a decolonial perspective, no one has access to a final truth, and consequently, no person can offer one solution for the entire population of the planet. For this reason, abstract universals such as Christianity, liberalism, Marxism and Islam are left without logic when they lose their temporal and spatial character. In this sense, decolonial task is to denounce the processes of universalization and all hierarchization of thought, valuing intellectual production beyond modernity, considering the particularities of each context (Quijano, 1992; Mignolo, 2011).

According to Grosfoguel (2011), many paradigmatic hierarchies constituted through coloniality still exist (Table 1) and need to be broken. This implies a change in the geopolitics of knowledge, which provincializes values and beliefs produced in the center. The challenge of decolonial scholars is to overcome each of the divisions proposed in the complex chain of paradigms naturalized in the sciences through the intersections between political, economic, cultural, racial, gender, among others. Hierarchies, in this sense, are the darker side of modernity, which has eliminated distinct cosmovisions (ways of seeing existence) in various parts of the world. The decolonial movement isolates such cosmopolitan Eurocentric hierarchies as strictly localized visions, incomplete and limited (Dunford, 2017).

Reference Paradigm	**Description**
Class Division	Hierarchy between classes that constitutes diversity of oppressive forms of work, such as slavery, servitude, wage labor and the production of small products. Relationships governed by Capital Gains in general.
International Labor Division	Hierarchy between nations that concentrates extractivism in the South and aggregate production in the North.
Political-Military Organization	Hierarchy of governments and political-military structures controlled/financed by European men or from European origin/matrix to intervene in countries characterized by 'fragile' democracies.
Division of Races	Global racial/ethnic hierarchy that favors Europeans over non-Europeans.
Gender Division	Gender hierarchy that privileges men over women/feminism, making predominant the European Jewish-Christian patriarchy over other forms of gender relations.
Sexual Division	Sexual hierarchy that privileges heterosexuals over homosexuals, bisexuals and lesbians — in this sense, it is important to consider that the majority of indigenous peoples in the Americas did not consider sexuality among men a pathological behavior.
Spiritual Division	Hierarchy that privileges Christians over non-Christian or non-Western spiritualities.

Epistemic Division	Epistemic hierarchy that privileges Western (scientific) knowledge and cosmology over non-Western (traditional) knowledge and cosmologies.
Linguistic Division	Linguistic hierarchy between European and non-European languages that subordinate local languages and cultures as folklore products, but not knowledge/communication.
Aesthetic Division	Aesthetic hierarchy of 'high art' versus 'naïve or primitive art'. Diminishing of the local forms of artistic production originating.
Pedagogical Division	Pedagogical hierarchy that privileges Cartesian Western forms of pedagogy considered superior.
Media Division	Hierarchy of media and information — to which the West holds control over the means of global media production, information technology and discourse production.
Age Division	Age hierarchy in which the Western conception of productive living makes people disposable over 65 years.
Ecological Division	Hierarchy that constitutes superiority of western conceptions of nature as a means of production, and not as a living entity that constitutes a bilateral relationship of synergy with the human species.
Space Division	Hierarchy that constitutes the superiority of the urban over the rural, with the consequent destruction of rural communities.

Table 1: Hierarchical paradigms of modernity. Source: Grosfoguel (2011: 8-10)

Taking distance from Western knowledge is the initial assumption for the decolonial alternative, which does not tolerate the waste of experiences and seeks to rescue hope by recognizing the validity of other perspectives on the present and the future. It is about the 'rescue of voices silenced and oppressed by the Eurocentric narrative of history and knowledge, affirming their place of equality in the dialogue with Western scientific knowledge in an ecology of knowledge and in an intense work of intercultural translation' (Ribeiro, 2018: 1067). In this sense, the decolonial turn is a proposal that does not aim to eliminate the uncertainties of contemporaneity, but to fully assume and use them, transforming into opportunities, freeing societies and peoples from the domination of unique, hierarchical and racialized thought, aiming at a fairer society project.

Such constructions so far bring an important premise to this work: that there is no correct nor last formula on a particular concept, but rather multiple

formulas and systems of thoughts, cultures and contingent values for different groups. Each nation can and must decide on its own, which value systems and paradigms govern that form of social (co)existence. In this sense, establishing a hierarchy of concepts or committing epistemic racisms, which are the delegitimization of alternative thought systems to modern science, are completely unreasonable actions for decolonial endeavors (Pinto and Mignolo, 2015; Vélez, Grisales, Gil and Botero, 2017). Therefore, we seek distinct visions and alternative theories for different realities — without supremacy of one over the other. Comparison, denunciation, criticism and liberation are latent objectives for decolonial research.

Modernity-Coloniality-Decoloniality Group

In the 20th century, since the end of the 1960s, the socioeconomic, environmental and cultural Latin America realities have been undergoing important changes (Soler, 2009). In the socioeconomic sense, initiatives have been taken to reorganize, restructure and reconfigure the world standard of power and capitalism. The post-war period, as signaled by Abdalla and Faria (2017), driven by the trauma of atomic bombs and followed by American benevolences in helping countries in need, contributed to the shift of the hegemonic axis of capitalism from Europe to the USA.

This hegemonic transition instituted dynamics in which the colonies would become the Third World, as well as the emerging powers would be contained. This restraint of powers would occur by means of developmental projects that would transfer technology and knowledge through a system financed by 'modern' countries themselves, in order to prevent the emergence of divergent systems (Abdalla and Faria, 2017). With the collapse of the truly existing socialisms and with the implementation of neoliberal system, the deepening of market relations was allowed on a wider socio territorial extension, as well as the reconfiguration of the contemporary capitalist system — which now not only concerns exchange relations, but also the capitalization of nature, people and cultures — increasingly marked by ecological crises, exploitation and massive exclusion (Soler, 2009).

In this context, a group of scholars emerged, in the late 1980s, who would be responsible for expanding the 'decoloniality' category. In 1998, important authors of the decolonial movement organized independent meetings and workshops to debate issues related to contemporary colonialism, and their findings pointed in similar directions (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007). With the support of *Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales* (CLACSO), that year, a meeting held at the Central University of Venezuela, in Caracas, brought together, for the first time, Edgardo Lander, Arturo Escobar, Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, Aníbal Quijano and Fernando Coronil. In the United States, Ramón Grosfoguel and Agustín Lao-Montes reunited authors such as Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein for an international conference at the University of Binghamton, in New York.

These events, seminars, parallel dialogues and publications (joint or not) constituted a milestone that would start the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality Group (MCD), which would be responsible for the theoretical development, in the following years, of decolonial studies (Ballestrin 2013; 2017; Soler, 2009). The Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality Group, therefore, was constituted in the late 1990s and was formed by Latin American intellectuals. Some of them were already recognized, such as the case of Dussel, Quijano and Wallerstein for their role in the development of relevant works such as the Philosophy of Liberation, Theory of Dependency and World-System Theory. Researchers of the MCD Group were located in different institutions around the world and carried out a fundamental epistemological movement for the renewal of criticism in the social sciences of Latin America in the 21st century (Abdalla and Faria, 2017; Ballestrin, 2013; 2017; Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007).

The group's proposal was to address the epistemic, theoretical, methodological and practical problems associated with modernity/coloniality. The group sought to rescue, problematize and update Latin American theories and challenge social science mainstream with the argument that globalization means global neoimperialism (Abdalla and Faria, 2017). Assuming a wide variety of theoretical influences, the group was responsible for critical reinterpretations of traditional theories, challenging the persisten global coloniality, both at an individual and collective level. In

this sense, the group defended the 'decolonial option' as a critical Latin bias. In the 2000s, seven group events took place (Ballestrin, 2013). According to Soler (2009), the decolonial perspective, still under construction, is a Latin American epistemic, theoretical and methodological proposal to understand power relations and domain over identity, knowledge, space, time, race, sexuality, among other forms of production of subjectivities; its final goal is to overcome the historical-colonial matrix of power, liberating subjects from this matrix. Mignolo (2007a), in this sense, affirms that decolonial thinking emerged based on modernity/coloniality as its counterpart.

The decolonial movement defies the foundations of knowledge production and the ways of reproducing coloniality of knowledge through modern methods and categories — which, in replicating Western European traditions, ignore, make invisible and subordinate other epistemes, meanings and modes of knowledge (Silva, Maciel and Coutinho, 2018; Soler, 2009). For the past 20 years, the decolonial perspective has promoted its own genealogy. According to Ballestrin (2013), among the MCD Group's consistent contributions are attempts to resume: (a) the original narrative that rescues and inserts Latin America as the founding continent of colonialism and modernity; (b) the importance of Latin America as a testing laboratory for racism in the service of colonialism; (c) the recognition of colonial difference, since it predates other differences and underlies it (e.g., the relationship of racism and the colonization of sexual practices); (d) the verification of the oppressive structure of the coloniality of power, knowledge and being as a way to denounce the continuity of the colonizing processes; and, finally, (e) the decolonial perspective, which provides original background for independent thinking.

Decolonial studies go beyond the economicism and dependentist view of the Southern Countries to enlighten issues related to culture and to the symbolic role of social relations that constitute hierarchies (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007). With this, the decolonial movement manages to overcome the Marxist reductionism that focuses on economic relations and the exploitation of work to pay attention to the symbolic/ideological structures that constituted the production of knowledge in the 19th and 20th centuries. The goal is to remove opacities of the developmental discourses to which

Latin American countries were submitted. Thus, decolonial researchers (a) suggest that economic structures are intertwined with cultural structures to subvert the conceptions of center and periphery, and (b) affirm the bases of the periphery as central elements, thus provincializing other cultures (Soler, 2009).

In the field of organizational studies, as noted by Abdalla and Faria (2017), a growing number of authors have been criticizing the colonial character of Administration. The basis of the criticism stems from the great American effort to export and impose its management and administration models to the rest of the world as the only and legitimate way of organizing social structures, which has not only expanded the financial management agenda, but has also increased the number of neoliberalism victms on a global scale (Abdalla and Faria, 2017; Dussel, 2013; Ibarra-Colado, 2006). Resistance movements or manifestations of the effects of an increasingly exclusionary economy have been treated as barbaric and irrational, which has ultimately fueled the conservative movement and its universal solution discourse.

Management organizational knowledge (MOK) field, in this sense, is complicit in a colonial system when producing developmentalist discourses to organizations that, uncritically, reproduce neoliberal ideological foundations on local cultures and create a unipolar and totalizing scenario — in which divergence becomes a threat in several senses (Abdalla and Faria, 2017). It is noticeable that, in recent years, pro-market movements have been associated with Christian matrices that tout Western sexual practices, as well as legitimate the weakening of historical compensation policies to certain racial/ethnic groups under the motto that there is no character of truth in the differentiation between agents — in this perspective, everything happens according to the market, and the historical views diverging from those who have suffered the negative effects of the colonial process over the decades are completely forgotten.

For Asher (2013), Latin America has long been a poster child of resistance and revolution against the hegemonic neoliberal models advocated in Northern countries. In this sense, the studies of alternative experiences (indigenous communities, alternative experiences to traditional social and organizational

models) as well as openness to cultural diversity leads to decolonial politics. In other words, this means giving voice, through otherness, to the community of victims, enabling the production of previously ignored knowledge, overcoming the massified, unified and standardized reality of individuals and worldviews (Asher, 2013; Silva, Maciel and Coutinho, 2018).

Specifically, in the Brazilian case, the conversion of the underdeveloped country from Third World to the status of emerging economy/power helped to marginalize its Latin American identity and weakened its identification with continental agendas due to its modernization and to the mitigation of its relationship with colonizing countries (Abdalla and Faria, 2017). Only recently, some researchers within the field of Brazilian organization studies have awakened to the possibility of conducting research from decolonial bias. It is still necessary for scholars to be aware of the potential in the country for producing relevant knowledge to the field (Ibarra-Colado, 2012).

For Harding (2019), the decolonial movement can shed light on discussions about critical realism, opening a gap to an 'ontological turn' of the sciences. From the decolonial movement, it is not only possible to think about 'doing' management, but also to reflect on what management is, what are its different interpretations, purposes, as well as rethinking organizations (what they are, what their purposes are) in a wide range of virtual possibilities — thus, allowing plurality of mental models about the world. It is possible, according to this view, to conceive another management theory (indigenous, feminist, community-driven, among many other existing options).

Hence, there is a need for openness to other ways of thinking, to conceive socio-political models of society based on the valorization of interculturality, which means highlighting the most distinct realities and seeking the ideal of unity in diversity, in order to recognize each one of the characteristics of each community, valuing the various dimensions existing in each cosmology (Silva, Maciel and Coutinho, 2018). As Abdalla and Faria (2017) argue, the decolonial perspective is not an imposed truth, but, on the contrary, it is an option that can become universal through the engagement for victims of colonial systems, allowing other ways to build a political economy located and directed towards Latin America.

Throughout history, many non-Western countries have produced reliable knowledge without modernity. However, the positivist label of 'scientific' has attributed a certain elitism and oppression to the ontology of knowledge, making valid and legitimate only the knowledge produced under the aegis of the Eurocentric and Western method. This ideological device was the cause of losses for humanity over the centuries. Overcoming it has been one of the challenges of contemporaneity (Mignolo 2007b; Pinto and Mignolo 2015). It is on this historical challenge that decolonial research must focus, especially in organizational studies, overcoming epistemic imperialism and making room for heterarchical thinking.

Imperiality and heterarchical thinking

Once we have understood historical domination carried out by Europe and the United States over the colonies, it remains to be understood what the future of decolonialism over Latin American organization studies is. This is because Latin America is historically labeled as periphery, as a premodern and underdeveloped society (Quijano, 2007). Resisting the advances of a globalizing and totalizing agenda on the modern academy is an ethical researcher option, who now has the challenge of incorporating subaltern knowledge into the processes of academic production (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007).

To understand this movement within the Academy, we will use Ballestrin's (2017) concept of imperiality. According to the author, the notion of imperiality resembles Dussel's *ego conquiro* (Dussel, 1977; 2012), insofar as it refers to a right, privilege and feeling of being superior (imperial) or the defense of a way of life in which the geopolitical invasion of Western power is not only legitimized, but desirable. In other words, it means that the act of 'modernizing' is a desirable action of 'bringing progress and democracy' to other societies with some gratitude or consent (Ballestrin, 2017).

Such actions are carried out, nowadays, by the control of scientific, economic and political organizational means around the world. The control of the means for scientific publication, the existing Manichaeism in the mass media and social networks, the opening of dependent economies and the forced free

market for the countries of the South, as well as military interventions, the penetration of capital and the creation of military bases, are some of the imperial policies that differ from traditional colonial forms and perpetuate the exercise of colonial power (Ballestrin, 2017; Maldonado-Torres, 2007b).

Contemporary imperiality was due to the architecture of the post-1989 international system, after the fall of the Soviet Union and its resistance to the hegemonic Eurocentric capitalist model (Quijano, 2007). it is built on the profound deregulation of markets with the complicity of States of Third World countries to neoliberalism and to the untying between productive and financial capital (Ballestrin, 2017).

Operating for what Quijano (2007) called coloniality of power, Western modes of foreign relations continue to function, imposing 'civilized conditions' on countries to perform government and trade. The contemporary power network has become a space and a tangle of social relations of exploitation, domination and conflicts articulated due to international treaties, restrictions on trade, trade blockades, media control and cultural production (Quijano, 2007). Contemporary neoliberal discourse imposes the hegemony of individualism and the loss of identity in favor of Westernism and the supremacy of economic relations in society (Mignolo, 2007b).

In this sense, it is important to remember that Western capitalism has arranged the worldwide distribution of labor around the coloniality of power, since 'original' capitalist countries finance and charge interest, while pre-capitalist countries work to produce commodities that serve economies and technologies of 'more advanced' capitalist countries (Ballestrin, 2013; Quijano, 2007). Likewise, the coloniality of power is present in the distribution of wages according to race and gender criteria, in which ethnicities other than white as well as women would have their jobs undervalued (Fonseca and Jerrems, 2012). For Soler (2009) and Ballestrin (2017), the coloniality of power can be seen as an overlap, or intersectionality of global, multiple and heterogeneous hierarchies in order to privilege the European in different fronts of action (Figure 1):

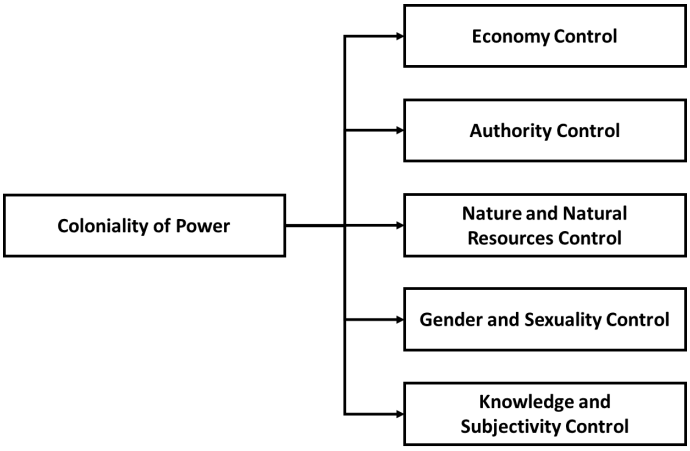

Figure 1: The imperialist hierarchies articulated by coloniality of Power. Source: Ballestrin (2017).

In academia, the imperialist movement takes shape by defining the most appropriate forms of scientific production (publish or perish), as well as delimiting a supremacy of neopositivist and quantitative studies supported by financial logics that naturalize capitalism as the only possible system, in a clear movement of hypermodernization of organizational studies and other areas of social sciences (Abdalla and Faria, 2017).

Subaltern groups and intellectuals felt the need for a movement of resistance to imperiality as the imposition of '*civilizing*' values as mechanisms for one nation to overcome another (Ballestrin, 2017; Mignolo, 2007b). The verb '*to decolonize*' (in Portuguese: *descolonizar*)[1] was attributed to anti-imperiality (Ballestrin, 2017; Bhambra, 2014). The term '*decolonizing*' (verb) is a term that has different meanings, being commonly used as a synonym of the term '*decolonial*' (Asher, 2013; Ballestrin, 2013). However, '*decolonizing*' is usually portrayed as a genre referring to an attitude or ethical posture of the researcher in the sense of untying western colonialism, while postcolonialism

[1] In Portuguese, there is a difference between the terms '*descolonial*' and '*decolonial*'. The first one refers to '*decolonizing*' as verb, such as '*descolonizar*', and means a genre. The latter refers to a species of decolonizing studies (decolonialism). At last, '*decoloniality*' is a category that refers to a property/feature of decolonial studies.

and decolonialism (noun) appear to be species or theoretical currents effectively distinct from each other (Ballestrin, 2017; Soler, 2009).

In this sense, 'to decolonize gains a sense of detachment from modernity and its rationality, rescuing the subjectivity of the misaligned Third-Worldism of capitalism and communism, of the right and the left, while not being able to escape a pre-colonial nostalgia' (Ballestrin, 2017: 519-520). Decolonizing means, therefore, demonstrating the relations of power and conceptions of knowledge, thus creating discourses that oppose hegemonies, recognizing new ways of understanding the world — in the search for the transformation of naturalized and invisible structures (Ballestrin, 2017).

Heterarchical thinking (as opposed to hierarchical thinking) is an attempt to conceptualize social structures with a new language that still needs to be developed to account for the complex processes of the world without resorting to liberal language (Castro-Gómez, 2007). This means assuming that, in global capitalism, there are no autonomous logics, nor a single determinant logic that governs all others, since there are complex, heterogeneous and multiple processes, with different temporalities (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007).

In the field of organizational studies, we have witnessed manifestations of heterarchical thinking in at least four lines of heterarchical interest. The four lines ahead are derived from 'Semantic Scholar' search in which the term 'decolonial' was inserted with filters to show only papers from social sciences and administration. The full papers were read and analyzed, being categorized in the research lines mentioned below.

The first is composed of the *reinterpretation of the organization concept*. Bringing contributions from the decolonial movement, the concept of 'organizations others' contributes to assign meaning to organizations as organic instances of social mediation (rather than static entities governed by principles of efficiency and strategy) (Couto, Honorato and Silva, 2019). This concept understands that organizations do not follow generic, neutral, and universal models, but manifest themselves in different ways, following their own logic, considering local cultural and historical particularities (Couto and

Carrieri, 2018; Palhares, Couto and Carrieri, 2018). The power exercised over the individual in these organizations is delegated and derives directly from the legitimacy voluntarily conceived by the persons who compose the collectivity (Couto, Palhares and Carrieri, 2020).

Understanding this new frame of organizational phenomenon demands capturing them in their place of events, through their ordinary, everyday, habitual and improvised movement. 'Organizations Others' (such as urban resistance movements or indigenous set of practices in a given community), follow their own local logic, customs, habits and praxis (Couto, Honorato and Silva, 2019). Organizations are a legitimate locus for the exercise of recognition of the other, a space of proximity and human contact. In these contexts, the researcher's job will never be to speak for the other (victim), but to the other; their job is to listen to the victims' community and produce research programs that allow them to understand the causes and rationales for the exclusion/oppression of vulnerable groups. Next, their job is to universalize this knowledge so that the victim community can develop their critical thinking. Only the colonized can ponder their own happiness and liberation (Couto and Carrieri, 2018).

The second line of heterarchical interest concerns *the reinterpretation of the history of economic development in colonized nations and management organizational knowledge (MOK)*. Studies of this nature have focused on the historical turn and the reinterpretation of facts through another geopolitics of knowledge (Wanderley and Barros, 2018). The intention is to demonstrate that the Third World can appropriate Northern concepts and transform them to their own realities, without being catechized or becoming a mimicry copy of the colonizer. In Brazil, concepts from important local thinkers such as Oswald de Andrade's Anthropophagy and Guerreiro Ramos' Sociological Reduction acquire centrality in local studies regarding concepts related to MOK (Wanderley and Bauer, 2020).

With this exercise, Brazilian organizational studies have opposed key ideas of neoliberal thought. National studies of the Cold War and its implications for the ideological struggle for control of the world have demonstrated how capitalism was introduced directly through financing military dictatorships in

Latin America and Africa; or indirectly through the political intervention of large multinational corporations over the years (Wanderley, 2015). Scholars have retrieved dependency studies carried out by Celso Furtado and Raúl Prebisch at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (eCLAC), which aimed to analyze the center-periphery movement, and constituted a base of rebellious thinking that recentralizes the role of the State and State Enterprises in the construction of industrial structures and development Latin economy (Wanderley and Faria, 2013).

The third line of heterarchical interest concerns the *reinterpretation of consumption, technology, and changes in the natural environment*. Decolonial studies have questioned the sustainability of production relations both in terms of balance with the natural environment and in relation to its capacity to absorb and include all workers, especially given the context of wealth and technology accumulation in colonizing nations (Faria and Hemais, 2020). The reinterpretation of the man-nature relationship is at the heart of these studies, which seek to overcome the idea of 'nature as a factor of production/accumulation' in order to build a political ecology that substantively consider the natural environment as essential to life (Magalhães, Rabelo and Teixeira, 2019; Zanotti et al., 2020).

Some studies with this orientation analyzed: (a) buycotts practices for companies and conscientious consumption of products offered only by firms that demonstrate corporate citizenship (Hemais and Santos, 2021); (b) food production through regenerative systems (Dahlberg, 1994); (c) organizing indigenous knowledge about solidary production (Diniz, Fernandes and Monte-Mór, 2020); and (d) sustainable consumption (Myers, 2015). Recently, in *ephemera*, an article was published analyzing the relationship between big techs (such as Google and Apple) and the possibility of decolonizing production systems, making possible a movement to reverse climate change (Hogan, 2018).

The fourth (and most prominent) line of heterarchical interest is the *intersectional reinterpretations about gender, race, and social class*. Decolonial feminist literature has suggested the rewriting of the history of the organizational field, considering voices historically silenced by the racist and

sexist Western pattern — based on the premises of Christian patriarchy. Historically, women from Southern countries are portrayed as rural, sexualized and servile (Paludi, Mills and Mills, 2019). The modern binary pattern constitutes social representations of female and male and establishes gender roles that translate into the unfair sexual division of labor (Gomes, 2018).

Decolonial feminism expands the experience of the feminine into an Intersectionality that advances not only in terms of gender and race, but also cultures, religions (mystique), among other categories (Figueiredo, 2020; Oyhantcabal, 2021). The category 'third world woman' builds a representation of gender and race of women that covers many geographies, understanding the situational character of each one of them. Based especially on the works of Gayatri Spivak and María Lugones, decolonial feminists seek to break with the modern and binary conception of gender roles to reestablish the forgotten voices of women historically excluded from the 'modern civilizing process' (Paludi, Mills and Mills, 2019).

Important to notice that a quick survey on the Academy of Management archives (the largest world event on management sciences) indicates that the occurrence of research adopting decoloniality as an epistemological option has been more frequent since 2017 and concerns a multiplicity of themes (Table 2).

Topic	**Research**
The dependency theory and reinterpretations on the History of Management and MOK	(Doucette, Gladstone and Carter, 2021; Wanderley, Alcadipani and Barros, 2021; Wanderley and Faria, 2018)
Teaching Administration from indigenous pedagogical experiences (or inspired by local authors)	(Cavalcanti, 2020; Faria, Filho and Ipiranga, 2017; Nkomo, 2015; Sauerbronn and Sauerbronn, 2018; Woods, Dell and Carroll, 2021; Zoogah, 2021)
Critical analysis of modern diversity management in organizations	(Faria and Guedes, 2017)
Feminist studies that analyze the various decolonial experiences of femininity	(Manning, 2018; 2019; 2020; Mathur, 2019)

Analysis of the meaning regarding the term 'organization' and the critical decolonial praxis in organizational spaces	(Cadete, Faria, Jack, Jammulamadaka and Ruggunan, 2020; Celano, Irigaray and Fontoura, 2019; Jammulamadaka, 2020)
The emergence of multinationals in former colonized countries	(Wanderley, Faria and Guedes, 2018)
The construction of deliberative democracies, economic development and sustainability in consumption considering the different realities of Third World Countries	(Banerjee, 2020; Banerjee et al., 2018; Faria, Hemais and Cooke, 2017; Faria and Hemais, 2018)

Table 2: Decolonial production in Academy of Management. Source: Academy of Management Archives.

The possibilities of heterarchical thinking are varied and are gradually being inserted in the context of academic discussion. The four lines of heterarchical interest that we have mentioned explore important research opportunities in the field, although further studies are needed to point out the authors' ability to overcome liberal language in the ways of understanding realities and conceptualizing social structures.

When analyzing Academy of Management archives, it was possible to notice short insertion of decolonial research in international context. If we consider the global and universal character of the event, such papers express the initial insertion of heterarchical thinking in the main scientific event of Administration field, although, as can be seen in table 2, it is also clear that heterarchical thinking has only been gaining attention from Third-World researchers recently. That is, more intensely in the last five years. We believe that there is potential to deepen heterarchical discussions from beyond critical management studies (CMS), transposing decolonial findings to mainstream theories, counterposing actual meanings regarding the organization phenomena, as well as management practices.

Final remarks: The decolonizing future of organization studies

Our aim in this article was to think about possible futures for decolonial thinking in the field of organizational studies. The historical resumption of

the processes of economic, social, cultural and, above all, epistemic domination in Europe and the United States and the relegation of Latin American countries to pre-modernity and the cultural periphery poses the challenge of breaking the ties that bind us to worldviews that do not understand society in a real condition of equity. We look not only to the challenges of academic insertion from originally Latin perspectives, but also, above all, to the challenges of self-determination of peoples, cultures and subaltern practices. The complexity of decisions must respect the multiple visions and voices that echo from each world. It is about looking for a democracy of knowledge and values present in the most diverse forms of organizing. Thus, the more voices that enter the debate, the better for escaping simplification and reduction of the various peripheral interests that can and should contribute to the formation of a common world — not common in the sense of unison, but possible for all its members.

Resistance derives from epistemic decolonizing action, in which roads are opened for intercultural communication (or exchange of experiences and meanings). Decoloniality seeks to overcome Eurocentric mechanisms of dichotomization and segregation by academic, educational and social revolutions, which would take part through: (a) promoting political identities in research-teaching, and (b) rescuing, co-constructing, legitimizing and disseminating knowledge connected to multiple local realities. The decolonizing wider efforts seek to generate alternatives to modernity and build knowledge engaged with the solution of colonial problems that have been faced by academy (Abdalla and Faria, 2017).

Building a decolonial agenda demands, therefore, three actions: (a) being more concerned with reality than with theory, because reality is the source of theory production; (b) seeking daily knowledge of the latest academic literature, to the same extent that the problems of peoples, communities and nations are known; and, finally, (c) focusing more on analyzing the field work, to understand the problems where they occur — in order to facilitate possible solutions (Ibarra-Colado, 2006; 2012).

It is possible to anticipate that the future of organization studies may be marked by two possibilities: either segregation, or the integration of

heterarchical thinking within a global agenda for the knowledge production. Nowadays, decolonial production is still attached to journals from emerging countries, as well as meetings based in the same locations, as there is an invisibility (or lack of interest) on the part of the mainstream academia in relation to this type of transnational production (Ibarra-Colado, 2012). If the segregation trend is perpetuated over time, it is possible that decolonial scientific production will flourish outside the traditional circuit of scientific productions, abandoning the modern rules of science and being produced within the existing diversity of languages in the world, without the concern of necessarily be published and popularized in English language.

To build an integrative agenda for decolonial studies, it is necessary to: (a) clarify contemporary agenda of world problems, considering the complex hybridization processes that we have been experiencing for the past 500 years — the four lines of research interest presented on this paper may be helpful in this sense; (b) foster the growth of the decolonial community in each of the countries of Latin America to combat the fragmentation and isolation that makes it difficult to recognize each other; (c) encourage the use of various means of articulation that facilitate the circulation of knowledge generated in each country; (d) provide a more organic and structured presence for groups of emerging countries in international disciplinary forums; (e) put into debate the rules and forms of academic work so that they can go beyond the walls of the university, reviewing how the processes have been done in a 'publish or perish' way; and, finally, (f) provide a free space for ideas to flow, opening access to publications for Latin America's dissident contributions (Ibarra-Colado, 2012).

Considering the four lines of interest in decolonial studies, future works should seek to document the stories of silenced subaltern realities, as well as to register the different currents of thought, customs, traditions and localized knowledge (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006). Specifically in relation to organizational studies, it is important to deconstruct some hegemonic ideas, such as: (a) that modern ways of organizing were invented as an indispensable device that makes different realities homogeneous; (b) modern societies are governed by the imposition of instrumental rationality, which overlap with the substantive and identity logics of the groups; (c) a rebellious behavior is

needed to provincialize Europe and USA, in order to understand the advances presented by them as spatially applied solutions (Ibarra-Colado, 2006).

At last, we can affirm that decolonial studies can bring possibilities of disruption and the emergence of heterarchical thinking that allows the denouncement of contemporary mechanisms of epistemic coloniality, especially in relation to the ways in which we interpret organizational, political and social phenomena. Its critical potency also lies in the resumption of consciousness (culturalist and valorative) of a society in relation to its own condition, allowing self-reflection about reality. We stand that heterarchical thinking can contribute to overcoming an increasingly polarized world, allowing the flourishing of several competing arenas of knowledge production, making possible an inclusive advance of science and a more democratic development for organizational studies.

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Until the dust settles

Jenny Helin, Nina Kivinen and Alison Pullen

abstract

Impatience rules the systems in which we operate. Since the inauguration of *ephemera* in 2001, we have witnessed increasing haste which continues until this day. There are endless possibilities for us to work smarter and harder, thereby delivering more in less time and writing to comply with sector and university publishing norms. In this situation, writing in academia becomes normalized to publishing in 'top' tiered journals, especially those that find themselves on some world ranking list. In contrast, we put patience at the heart of the academic profession. Proposing writing with patience, we envision writing without intent to complete a specific project, writing without clear boundaries, beginnings and endings. Such non-event writing holds potential for meeting the world as a verb, and for enduring a collective capacity to care.

Waiting

For years, Emily Dickinson had been sitting alone in her room, watching the world outside through the window. Taking notes, writing beautiful lines. Words about trees and flowers, rain and the wind, death and living. Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was an American poet who spent most of her adult life confined to her house and it seems also for long periods staying in her bedroom. All but four of her over 1800 poems were published posthumously when they had been found by her relatives among her belongings. Who was

she writing to? Why did she write? What did this practice of writing mean to her?

Writing poetry seems the most difficult genre of all writing. Using the multiplicity of meanings of words, conveying layer upon layer of meanings. Like an abundant box of treasures, always more to be discovered if you dig a bit deeper. A poem draws you into a miniature world created by a few words and sentences, creating an affective atmosphere where we as readers can dwell and linger. A world in-between.

Is the writing of poetry a practice of patience? Of thinking about words, meanings, rhythms? Saying words out loud to hear them in the room, see them bounce off the walls. Or perhaps the words are silently murmured so no one can hear them.

Did Emily Dickinson write in secret? Emily Dickinson wrote in a time when not many women wrote at all. Not all women were literate and only the affluent would have time to write. Women wrote letters though. Careful depictions of everyday events, stories of the lives of family and friends. Letters that could take a long time to reach the recipient. Read and cherished, kept, saved. Tied with a blue ribbon. So, were these poems in fact letters to someone long gone? Letters to herself? Letters to something divine?

The image of a woman sitting alone by the window, writing. Writing for years. Words that would be read by someone else only decades later.

Her hand moving over paper, her thoughts hovering in the air. Someone must have provided her with paper. Lots of paper perhaps. Crumpled, discarded pages on the floor, hidden under the bed, burnt in the fireplace. Did she have a favourite type of paper, a pen she favoured?

She could observe the changing of seasons through the window. This window seems important. She can see the world through the window, but the cold surface of the window separates her, and her illness, from the world. Did she like being an observer, did the world scare her? Perhaps she wanted to engage with the world in a way that was not suitable, acceptable, appropriate. Did she choose a life by the window or was this life forced upon her?

Nina: Emily Dickinson's poetry can be found in a song cycle by Aaron Copland. I have sung a few of these songs, badly I must admit. But I remember the excitement I felt in interpreting her words through music. Her words were sung in a room more than 150 years later. Would she have liked the music? Would she have approved of how her words had been shaped to music, performed in this room? I imagine the rhythm of the music would not have been exactly the same as the rhythm she imagined. Once her poems left her room, they were no longer hers. They became ours.

Why - do they shut me out of Heaven?

Did I sing too loud?

But I can say little 'Minor'.

Timid as a bird!

(First lines of Emily Dickinson's poem

'Why do they shut me out of Heaven?')

***

Waiting, to be called

'Be patient, it will come',

'Be patient, your turn will come',

We are taught from a young age to be patient,

Inferring a ladylike quality.

'Wait your turn',

'Don't speak out of turn',

This is a life for some women,

Academic women.

Wait patiently, backstage,

Invisible, overlooked,

The call comes,

Time to serve,

Go forth,

Speak their language,

Be patient,

After all, patience is a virtue.

***

Suspending

> *Jenny:* 'I would like us to start by sharing some of our favourite readings and how that inspires our writing....'
>
> That's me, starting off the second day in the PhD course entitled: *When writing matters: Exploring writing as inquiry.* The day before, we had explored writing as inquiry in different ways, and this second day was devoted to the theme of reading and the relationships between reading and writing.
>
> However, as I uttered these words, at the same time as the 15 participants got ready for the day by setting up their laptops, coffee cups, notebooks and printed articles, it got entirely quiet. All the small organizing of people's things just stopped.
>
> I waited for a short while and thought that maybe they needed some more time to settle, before I kind of repeatedly said: 'So, what have you read lately...?'
>
> 'It's very difficult to talk this way because I don't read like that', one of the doctoral students responded.
>
> Yes, she is from the science department, I thought for myself, as I left some time for someone else to go next.
>
> 'You know, I am not expecting to 'waste' time on reading, even though I would have loved that, and, also, the texts that I work with are not written to be read...'

In a nutshell, what these students are witnessing, one after the other, across the sciences, social sciences, and humanities, is validating Michelle Boulous Walker's (2017) critique in her book *Slow philosophy: Reading against the institution*. In this book, she draws our attention to how our reading in

academia is forced to engage with otherness in haste, leaving us largely untouched and with little trace of what we are encountering. To cope we develop reading practices that install a false feeling of certainty and security through containment. She calls this a 'desire to know'. A knowing that builds upon that which we already knew.

> *Jenny*: I have noticed how my own reading habits have changed over time too. I find it more and more difficult to read, in particular books. I start somewhere, flip the pages, without letting myself sink into the world that the text invites. I am reading with a particular aim in mind, reading in relation to some project. Always quick to get to the next book if the current doesn't 'deliver'.

Impatience.

A term not so often spoken about in academic circles. The definition of 'impatience' according to Cambridge Dictionary, is 'the feeling of being annoyed by someone's mistakes or because you have to wait.' The listed synonyms included words like anger, annoyance, frustration, fury and rage.

In contrast to the annoyed and hurried reading, Boulous Walker (2017) envisions a 'love of wisdom' in academia; a reading that cherishes suspension by pausing, meandering and bypassing the demands of calculative thought. This form of reading, furthermore, holds the possibility to transform 'the everyday world of nearness into the strange and the surprising, thus permitting us both an ethical and aesthetic opening to the other' (Boulous Walker, 2017: 185).

The 'love of wisdom' that Boulous Walker articulates started in her reading of Levinas, on the ethical act of patience. From reading Levinas deeply, she noted how we, in order to not reduce the world to our pre-existing categories and understandings, need an encounter with the other (or strangeness of the other) that does not rush to reduce the other back to what I already know or can understand. This is an ethical relation where '[p]atience involves exposing and subjecting myself to the other; coming near, in order that a relation be established and the work of ethics done' (Boulous Walker, 2017: 57).

What does an ethical act of patience have to do with *ephemera*? In the inaugural editorial introduction to *ephemera*, the editors envisioned the new

journal to be 'a space for the articulation of alternative models of change, with the aim of imagining 'possibilities of something radically different to the present' (Böhm, Jones and Land, 2001: 4). Importantly, they continued, this 'will only become possible if we remain attuned to the need for a sympathetic engagement, one which is not just dismissive or oppositional, but which seeks to enter into *dialogue*' (Böhm, Jones and Land, 2001: 4, emphasis in original).

The dialogic intentions of *ephemera* comes through in a multitude of ways that makes a difference for how the journal is set-up and governed, even if that could be seen as time-consuming. Since *ephemera's* inaugural issue contributors and readers of the journal have witnessed its sustained commitment to open access publishing, allowing the papers to be read outside of narrowly defined scientific communities. The journal is governed and edited as a collective. And, as Martyna Sliwa stated in her review of the paper, *ephemera* has a tradition of contesting 'journal rankings and the formulaic way of writing that so called 'top' journals promote.' This way *ephemera*'s scope includes writing that contests phallocentric ways of writing (see for example, Just, Muhr and Risberg: 2018) and it aims for a democratic and friendship-based ethos. A collective approach to patience makes a difference to scholarship and publishing.

***

Enduring

Such critical, engaged dialogue that the founders of *ephemera* wanted to make room for starts with listening, in receiving the words from others. This form of listening, through reading, is evident in Virginia Woolf's (1932) essay, 'How should one read a book?' Here, she is emphasizing the need to meet a new text with openness. In response to the difficulty of setting us free from our preconceptions of that which we read, we need to engage slowly, and with care. Otherwise, she warns us, if 'you hang back, and reserve and criticize at first, you are preventing yourself from getting the fullest possible value from what you read' (*ibid*: 9). And she continues, we have to teach ourselves how to engage with texts in such a way that we can:

> wait for the dust of reading to settle; for the conflict and questioning to die down; walk, talk, pull the dead petals from a rose, or fall asleep. (Woolf, 1932: 22)

To even fall asleep. This is far from the academia that we are familiar with where we are juggling a multitude of roles and projects, projects to start and projects to end. Can we even allow ourselves a moment of writing without a project to fulfil? In this setting, patience is not part of the vocabulary.

> *Jenny*: In the Swedish language (the native language of Nina and I), the word for patience is 'tålamod'. It is a word that contains two parts: 'tåla' + 'mod'.
>
> 'Tåla', translated with 'endurance', to put up with, over time.
>
> 'Mod' means 'courage'.
>
> Tålamod = to have the courage to endure over time.

***

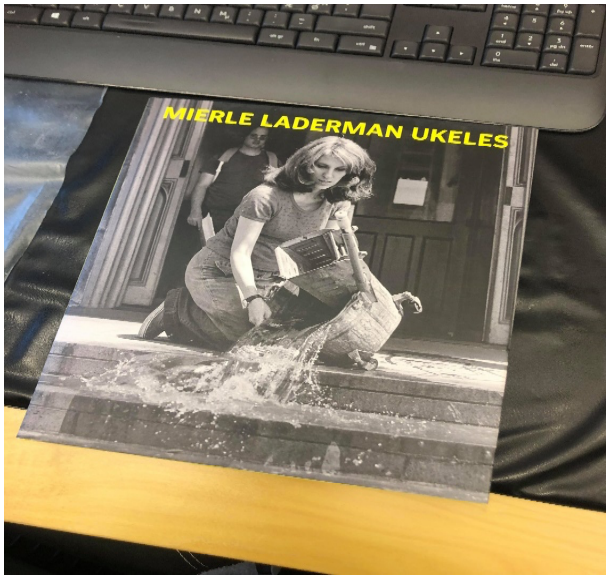

Image 1: Photo author's own.

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Maintaining

Maintenance art is a movement founded by the artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles in the late 1960s. After childbirth, Ukeles recognized she could no longer be the avant-garde artist she wanted, given all the maintenance she had to carry out. In rage, in one sitting, she wrote the three-and-a-half-page typewritten *MANIFESTO FOR MAINTENANCE ART 1969! Proposal for an exhibition 'CARE'*. The manifesto is divided into two parts. In the first part, she elaborated on what she calls 'two basic systems', where she puts 'development' and 'maintenance' up against each other. In the questioning of why art has been solely connected to the creation of the new, of the individuals (the artists) development of the object of art, she wrote:

> Two basic systems: Development and Maintenance. The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?
>
> Development: pure individual creation; the new; change; progress; advance; excitement; flight or fleeing.
>
> Maintenance: keep the dust off the pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain the change; protect progress; defend and prolong the advance; renew the excitement; repeat the flight.

The problem Ukeles had identified is that society values development, while maintenance 'takes all the fucking time'. This manifesto is not only a call to clash with the patriarchal structures that kept women, just as all maintenance work, hidden, but also a critique of how we understand change.

In her critique of what art and creation is and can be, Ukeles ends her manifesto with a description of her upcoming exhibition – entitled *Care* – where she in different ways would make the maintenance work present and visible. For years to come, she worked with maintenance art, in an institutional critique, where she shows the creative act in maintaining over time and the care that involves towards family, city and the Earth. Maintain, derived from the Latin root *manu tenere*, which means to 'hold in the hand', conveys more tenderness than we usually think of. Ukeles shows that through her many artworks, often carried out outside formal art institutions. This way she bridges feminism, environmentalism, and participatory art practice. In

one of her projects, *Touch sanitation*, she shook hands and thanked each of the 8,500 sanitary workers that through their invisible work make sure New York City is clean and alive, day after day. A work task without a beginning and end. Work without a project?

> As an artist, I tried to burn an image into the public eye, by shaking shaking shaking hands, that this is human system that keep New York City alive, that when you throw something out, there's no 'out. Rather there's a human being who has to lift it, haul it, get injured because of it (highest injury rate of any US occupation), dispose it, 20,000 tons every day. Our garbage, not theirs. (Mierle Laderman Ukeles, in Philips, 2016: 216)

The *Touch sanitation* handshake project showed the 'hand-energy', by literally shaking hands with those that handle the waste of the city (Baraitser, 2017). This way, patience involves a complex and ambiguous act of permitting, but also the holding back of force, energy, movement. If nothing else, patience requires attention; an attentive intimacy towards those, and that, which we care about.

***

Image 2: Photo author's own

***

Standing, still

Branches follow clouds,

trunks follow branches.

Fragile, brittle leaves overhead

suspended, gently hanging,

waiting patiently for them to drop

from grey solid branches.

Gusty wind circulates between woody connections,

fluttering of leaves.

Inhale, exhale, repeat.

Back pressed on the bark of the trunk,

Hard, rough torso exfoliating skin,

Neck stretched.

Cheeks rosy, skin dry, lips cracking red.

Look up.

Blue and white pierce through empty branches,

leaves fall cascading,

zigzagging their way through the air.

Gliding like seagulls on a sunny day.

Close to the unfamiliar,

far from the familiar,

Together, yet apart.

Moving. Still.

Inhale, exhale, repeat.

***

> ...the wonderment we may feel as human beings when standing under trees that have witnessed their surroundings for hundreds and, in some cases thousands of years. (Hobbs and West, 2020: 7)

Arches overhead, roofs shelter,

Familiar intimacy within the arms of the trees,

A home for wood of and for many,

Slow passing of time,

Connecting, relating,

Taken away from never-ending demands,

Call-centre lives, locked-in, locked-down,

Technological chains trapping bodies,

Connection, care, meaning,

Living, as if we had all the time in the world.

***

Tasmanian Blue, Gum Eucalyptus globulus – an ability to adapt to fire

> Eucalyptus oil is flammable, so the shed bark and fallen leaves of the tree serve as ideal fuel for a forest fire. Once the fire has burnt itself out, however, with most competition eliminated, the tree is reborn from dormant buds beneath its charred bark. The seed capsules open in the heat, and the ash-rich soil is perfect for germination. (Hobbs and West, 2020: 20)

***

Image 3: Photo author's own.

***

Silver Birch, Betula pendula: 'lady of the woods'

> Birch rarely lives to a great age, but where it is happy it grows and spreads quickly, its smooth, thin, dark-purplish-brown twigs have what look like small warts. The buds open in April, revealing long-stalked serrated-edged leaves with pointed tips. These leaves mature from pale to dark green, turning yellow in early autumn. (Hobbs and West, 2020: 200)

***

Remembering

Writing now and writing together builds on the legacies of those who came before us, including those who are no longer with us. When we write we have no knowledge of who will read the text, or whether and how it will be engaged with, an engagement that requires patience, duty or service to their writing. Women who paved the way for many other women to write. Writing against the tide, unaware of the impact that their work would have on those women who would come along behind them. They created texts that acknowledged women's place in thought and writing and they set a path to walk on, if we chose to. Heather Höpfl, drawing on Julia Kristeva (2000: 100) reminds us

> … when a writer, male or female, confronts the text not only is there the anxiety of coming to wield the pen but also the more vertiginous confrontation of primal repression which Kristeva characterizes as 'the ability of the speaking being, always already haunted by the Other, to divide, reject, repeat … because of maternal anguish, unable to be satiated within the encompassing symbolic. (Kristeva 1982: 12)

And yet, having to constitute oneself in language, to achieve the separation from the Other by the abjection of the maternal. In other words, to achieve a semblance of autonomy in language, the Other, as Mother and as Feminine, must be rejected, separated, thrown off. In writing, this means conforming to the authority of the patriarchal discourse. Hence, it is salutary to consider what it means to speak of a 'submission to a journal'. It seems one can only submit to under such circumstances as a 'man''.

The violence towards the feminine is palpable. Höpfl (2003: 26) wrote of the danger for women of male membership, becoming a virile member:

> The idea that one must become a man in order to demonstrate discipline and commitment, at least to conform to the appearance of a male conception of order, is an important matter. To become a 'member' a woman must render herself homomorphic. To be rendered first androgynous is, hence, to be set apart from, or in other words, abjected from, the capacity for bodily reproduction as a condition for male membership. The reward of membership is given for being more fully conformed to the symbolic order, for homologation. This is a bizarre transgression by which the appropriation is by what is conferred rather than by what is taken. She is given a metaphorical member in order to become a member. By rendering real women, physical bodies into mere representations, the disruptive power of the female body is neutralized and made safe (cf. Irigaray, 1985; Warner, 1976). If the feminine threatens to subvert male order, then the move to confer the honorary penis, the metaphorical phallus, marks the reversal of the potential for transgression. The feminine is, thus, incorporated, and given membership by being made to conform with the phallogocentric order. It is ironic that the acquisition of the phallus as conferred in this way is represented as a triumph of feminism. Clearly, it is entirely the opposite of that. It is regulation via homologation and arises from the fact that men can only reproduce themselves hyper-abstractly.

The 'normalization of the masculine-rational ideal' (Rhodes and Pullen, 2018: 8) in academic standards and metrics is increasingly present and powerful, affecting the ways in which writing can be pursued in the context of academic work. Despite the best intentions of many who resist, these abstract gendered

systems assimilate and make virile 'outputs' that produce 'impact'. Höpfl teaches us that we need to learn to transgress the masculine order and refute submission to patriarchal discourse and authority. How can we reimagine writing beyond, as Genevieve Lloyd (1984: 1) writes, in Western cultures,

> rational knowledge has been constructed as a transcending, transformation or control of natural forces; and the feminine has been associated with what rational knowledge transcends, dominates or simply leaves behind.

What would a future where the feminine is no longer assigned to the margins in this masculine-rational realm look like?

estrangement

abjection from

the symbolic order

refusal

to be left

behind

patriarchy thrives on

disconnection from women

women's writing

determination

relational

enduring

commitment to move forward over time

re-learning to live liveable lives

empathy and compassion

collaborative relations which rupture

letters wait in the wings

writing connections.

Who will be remembered when we enter this un-familiar terrain? In reviewing this text, Mie Plotnikof asked us: 'I become curious to know a bit more as to how writing differently might enable other effects and affects as "research impact"? Without instrumentalizing it, how may we become touched by challenging academic writing with patience? And who/what can become a patient writer?'

***

Walking

Under foot,

greener than usual,

thick plush carpet underfoot.

More rain than usual,

feet sink,

into this velvety cushion.

Leaves fall…

slow motion,

cascading through thin rain.

Falling leaves,

changed colour,

New season, time sped up.

Birds louder.

Yellow crested cockatoos gleeful,

flying together gathering speed,

groups combine,

an impressive assembly of white stars against the blue sky.

Black crystals arrive, a quaking mass of black and white cockatoos.

Hurried movement,

migration,

Freedom across borders,

enviable.

Fragile, intimate, connections,

permeating ego-centric individuals,

humans and non-human intercorporeality.

Slowly,

Gently,

Caring.

***

Caring

The act of writing gifts a traversing of time and space, intimate solace to enduring life and whilst not ignoring obstacles to write. When writing becomes an affective intimacy with others, especially when there is no project or submission in mind; it defies instrumental masculine rationality. Labouring in a climate that features haste and inherent carelessness requires us to deliberate on what we care about and what we care with. Care is a central feature of the slow scholarship movement which

> is thoughtful, reflective, and the product of rumination – a kind of field testing against other ideas. It is carefully prepared, with fresh ideas, local when possible, and is best enjoyed leisurely, on one's own or as part of a dialogue around a table with friends, family and colleagues. (Slow Scholarship, 2021: np.)

Deliberation asks us to be open, preventing closure, asking questions that may or may not be part of the writing task. Has women's writing changed? Have women been patient for long enough? What could be the radical potential of patience for women's transgression from the status of submitting – to patriarchy and the journal? How does patience give rise to ethics? It seems

that patience disrupts the order of things; enduring time whilst writing and reading and carefully and often painstakingly passing through time until the words arrive – often very slowly.

Reflecting on how knowledge is produced and written, being patient enables relational work (Fletcher, 2001) based on trust and care between us, and with the community in mind. This is writing, which is often written repeatedly, not to get 'right' for the reader, but to ensure that the writers are connected to the text. Writing patiently encourages reflection with words, intimacy, and care beyond transactional economies. The potential of writing beyond rigid hierarchies that divide. Being patient prevents impulsive relationships, quick judgements, and the inevitable violence that pursues whether through collectively writing with others or through the review and editorial processes. Critical engaged dialogue in *ephemera* offers a space for patient reading and writing, and as Lena Olaison reminded us in her editorial letter *ephemera* helps 'shape a "world in-between"' the theory and politics of organization studies, where writing can evade norms between classification, hierarchy and conformity to standards.

Writing patiently, or indeed learning to write with patience, prevents the epistemic violence between the knower and the known, the rational and emotional, the disembodied and embodied. In this way, patience ruptures systems that lack patience, it teaches us to breathe, and it teaches us of the importance of writing which breaths. Waiting to write, and when the time comes writing with patience in mind, embodies a care ethics that is relational, contextualized, embodied, and realized through practices. Such care ethics is political and destabilises intersecting hierarchies of power and privilege. Gilligan (1995: 122) makes the important distinction between a feminine ethic of care and a feminist ethic of care:

> Care as a feminine ethic is an ethic of special obligations and interpersonal relationships. Selflessness or self-sacrifice is built into the very definition of care when caring is premised on an opposition between relationships and self-development. A feminine ethic of care is an ethic of the relational world as that world appears within a patriarchal social order: that is, as a world apart, separated politically and psychologically from a realm of individual autonomy and freedom which is the realm of justice and contractual obligation. A feminist ethic of care begins with connection, theorized as primary and seen as

> fundamental in human life. People live in connection with one another; human lives are interwoven in a myriad of subtle and not so subtle ways. A feminist ethic of care reveals the disconnections in a feminine ethic of care as problems of relationship.

What if academic writing and reading would be an expression of friendship rather than competition? In an ideal world, academic work is directed to advancing knowledge. To do good in the world – through grassroots activism, challenging dogma and promoting alternative ways of developing scholarly communities, as *ephemera* have shown since inception. The risks are that emerging norms are reproduced which mimic the norms that the journal stands against. Writing is controlled by the institutions of which we are a part, from universities to publishing houses. Editors and reviewers control the processes of writing; often ensuring compliance to journal norms and academic standards. How can we inhabit scholarly spaces without control of what is read and written? A feminist ethic of care provides inspiration for alternative ways of inhabiting spaces, the responsibility of collective organizing practices beyond individuals. However patient writing may be a privilege afforded to those not in precarious positions, doctoral students and non-tenured faculty (see Mendick, 2014) for a discussion on the gendered and classed relations of slow scholarship). Writing as a friend, reading as a friend, reviewing as a friend. Practices drawing upon empathy and care. Feminist ethics of care draws on corporeal generosity (Diprose, 2002). The intimacy of embodied writing, writing that touches, writing that leaves traces on our bodies, reading that marks our bodies. Words written in blood.

Friendship directs us to openness in writing, writing without fear of rejection. Our friends will still be there once the text has been written, once the text has been read. The words we write are our gifts to the world, but the act of giving and receiving creates friendships. For Jane Bennett (2001), enchantment is a way to understand our affective and embodied attachment to the world. To be enchanted is to experience a moment in the flux of everyday life, when something stirs, disturbs or moves you. This moment of enchantment in Jane Bennett's ethics holds great potential. This is the moment when we are vulnerable and open for change. In this enchanted moment, we can allow others in. 'Affect can join narcissism, beauty can serve violence, and enchantment can foster cruelty' (Bennett, 2001: 148). And yet the potentiality

in this moment, this brief encounter with the world, nature, a text, a friend, is worth pursuing. With friendship as a starting point, words are written with love. Words are read with love.

***

Breathing

There is nothing more natural than breathing. It just happens, without thought or purpose. And yet, we can take control of our breathing, we can learn to breathe better. Deep, slow breaths lower our blood pressure, calm the nervous system, relieve anxiety. Standing on a cliff overlooking the ocean, breathing becomes a profound experience – opening the lungs to the world. Walking in the woods when the trees are in autumn foliage, the bright colours, fresh air, the faint smell of winter lingering. The sound of crunching snow under your feet. The cold air tickling your nose. The changing of seasons, the paces of breaths, the rhythm of life.

We can learn to breathe together.

***

Noticing

> Jenny: In a messenger conversation with a friend, she wrote: 'There is something endlessly fascinating about timescales and events that unfold at such slow paces that we don't register them. … Like the crisis of Covid-19, the climate crisis, etc. We register them, officially, sometimes, but we don't know what to do with them.' She draws attention to the point that our current tools and methods are out of order, in terms of noticing these slower patterns. How can we go on, when the big-plan-way-of-working doesn't hold any longer?

In *The care manifesto (*2020: 97), the authors notice that

> …in our current moment of rupture, where neoliberal norms are crumbling, we have a rare opportunity. Awareness of our systemic carelessness across all social hierarchies has begun to appear everywhere.

The time has come. And they continue, there is a need for us to be 'building more enduring and participatory caring outlooks, contexts and infrastructures, wherever we can' (*ibid.*: 97). In this creation, we would argue, patience has a vital role to play '"to stir up", "to make cloudy", "to disturb"' (Haraway, 2016: 1). Caring to be more patient, or after Mountz et al. (2015), to make the feminist case for collectively slowing down as an act of resistance in neoliberal academia.

This form of patience, which enables us to be noticing otherwise, has also been acknowledged in a recent special issue in *ephemera*, on the notion of 'standby' (Kemmer et al., 2021: 1):

> If we mobilize the concept as a lens through which to observe social phenomena, standby can be understood as a state of 'in|activity' that indicates readiness without immediate engagement, but that nevertheless requires and generates energy, resources, and relations. As such, we explore the notion of standby as a mode of organizing that integrates new materialist, affect-theoretical and time-space-focused approaches to denote a field of tension between the contingent and persistent, between the exceptional and ordinary, between the human and nonhuman.

To be noticing otherwise, in particular ourselves, was exactly the point in Mierle Laderman Ukeles art initiative *The social mirror*, in which she covered a New York City Department of Sanitation truck entirely in mirrored glass. How do we react, when we, at least, have to face ourselves in relation to our own trash, something we have outsourced to invisible others in our modern society?

***

Staying

Being patient offers opportunities for 'learning to be truly present' (Haraway, 2016: 1) and to 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016), especially in the context of 'learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying together on a damaged earth will prove more conducive to the kind of thinking that would provide the means to building more liveable futures' (*ibid.:* 2). Feminist technoscience studies scholar Haraway who defines herself as a multi-species

feminist writing, drawing on Marylyn Strathern's commitment to the 'relentless contingency' of relations with relations (Haraway, 2016: 34), proposes that in thinking about the:

> world is a verb … worlding is the dynamics of intra-action' (Karen Barad's word from *Meeting the universe halfway*) where 'partners' [such as books, trees, flying foxes] do not precede the relating. This is interesting for thinking about the ways in which writing unfolds in the entanglements and intra-actions that we become part of as we go about our daily lives.

Haraway introduces readers to the idea of intra-patience, something that we have experienced in being together writing this text, that there is a 'giving and receiving of patterning, all the way down, with consequences for who lives and who dies and how' (Haraway, 2013: np.).

For writing patiently words written down are co-created by us, through the intra-actions we have had over many years. We talk but we do not talk about writing. We write from the patterns emerging from relations, and the trees, books, people, animals, objects that are part of our worlding. Nina drinking coffee and eating freshly baked bread in Stockholm, Jenny taking the ferry home after a short break with friends, Alison curled up sick with her dogs. As two of us go to bed, the other one rises, and the reverse. Our mornings and bedtimes have become part of our intra-actions, an illustration of intra-patience as we work across time-zones. What would writing look like if we fully considered intra-patience? We would write less for sure, and the nature of written outcomes would be considered to not think about their impact but rather the ways in which such writing was produced. How would theoretical development look? Would we only be able to announce theory-building after years of careful consideration rather than at the end of a NVivo analysis on data that had been collected quickly? What methods would enable us to work intra-actively both in the classroom and in the field? In our own attempts, Jenny, together with colleagues, bought a countryside caravan for their fieldwork, which turned out to enable them an enduring capacity to reconnect to the moment of inquiry, the place, each other, and themselves (Helin et al., 2019). Alison, together with Anu Valtonen (2021), in their engagement with rocks remind us of the importance to be continually curious. Nina, writing about grief, shows how our past forms us (Kivinen, 2021).

Writing would stay with and reflect curiosity with the world, the books, trees and leaves. Writing about Hannah Arendt and Virginia Woolf, Haraway notes that

> both understood the high stakes of training the mind and imagination to go visiting, to venture off the beaten path to meet unexpected, non-natal kin, and to strike up conversations, to pose and respond to interesting questions to pose something unanticipated, to take up the unasked-for-obligations of having met. (Haraway, 2016: 130)

This, for Haraway, is 'cultivating response-ability'. She continues writing by engaging with the mundane:

> Visiting is not a heroic practice; making a fuss is not the Revolution; thinking with each other is not Thought. Opening up versions so stories can be ongoing is so mundane, so earth-bound. That is precisely the point. (*ibid*.: 130)

This is patience that needs to be endured and to keep saying and writing the same message over and over again; until change comes. In this way, an intra-patience is an ethical and political commitment to being in the world. It requires perseverance, as we have been taught during the pandemic.

Opening up to the world theoretically and methodologically after Haraway is an urgent necessity. Practically, after two years of being unable to transcend the immediate local, the world is about to re-open to us. There seems to be the same haste met with this challenge, and yet we ask how we can learn from the staying with the trouble to think anew, to develop new meanings, but it appears that many are ready to return to pre-pandemic life. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we are required to overcome the tendency to be immediate, impatient. To learn to live, work, write differently will require nurturing patience.

***

> To us, trees seemed to offer another kind of saeculum, a longer timescale and deeper continuity, giving shelter from our ephemerality the way that a tree might offer literal shelter under its boughs. (Solnit, 2021: np.)

Beginning

In writing without a project, there is no conclusion as we know it, other than to start where we end. This is the beginning of our writing, a commitment to developing new ways of being patient and writing patiently. Throughout this text, we first noticed Emily Dickinson's writing of poetry, which has something timely to say about the personal in relation to patience. We then turned to Boulous Walker's work on reading, addressing the (im)patience we face today, in our academic community/our profession/the public. Moving on, through walking we met the trees, and moved to another world - to the world as a verb - which introduced us to patience in the world. Writing with patience is played out across these different spheres in ways that was not known to us before we wrote it but has shown itself in the discursive construction of our material experiences such as breathing, trusting relations of care and the ability to write without haste. Thus, intra-patience teaches us about acknowledging and caring about the relations which inform us that cast relations through writing, the tensions, and struggles, and with a focus on being in the world. This will be a recuperation project as much as a political project. Murphy's (2015) feminist health practice research calls for 'staying with the trouble' and 'unsettle care' as a positive affect and which moves, 'Beyond a simple politics of dismantling, unsettling is a politics of reckoning with a world already violated: it is a commitment to desedimenting relationships that set the political, economic, and geopolitical conditions of knowledge-making, world-making, forgetting, and world destruction' (Murphy, 2015: 732). This is the 'work of stirring up and putting into motion what is sedimented, of decentering and cracking open the smooth into accounts of the messy and the partial' (*ibid*.: 732), and we would add writing. Patience therefore is enduring 'the unhappy affects of staying in the trouble' (*ibid*.: 732).

Is the capacity to stay with, in particularly during troubling times, paving the way for a particular form of intimacy? Mierle Laderman Ukeles (in Philips 2016: 216), talked about this special kind of patience and intimacy that she noticed when she worked with her project *Touch sanitation*, the project where she shook hands with all the 8500 sanitary workers in the New York City:

> … where you get called back to work with no choice after only eight hours off, for several days running, until your eyeballs turn inside out and you don't know what time it is. I ate with sanmen, often on curbsides when restaurants wouldn't serve them. I talked with them on audiotape and shot video throughout. Mostly I stayed behind the hopper, as they do – where you can't escape the scare of the wind, sheets of rain, beating sun, stumbling in the snow, when you get soaked form sweat inside your rain-gear and drenched outside anyhow, facing the stink and the ultimate jungle of juxtapositions that is garbage.
>
> … I got enlightened about the expertise of balance, 20- to 30- year spans of strength, about camaraderie and life-death teamwork under such stress your hair could stand upon end, mostly about spirit even when there's zero moral and supreme endurance, dedication, keeping going no matter what comes at you.

Patience tends to be understood as a restriction upon oneself, but in the temporal breaking free from current writing norms and standards, writing with patience offers un-acknowledged pockets of freedom, for the writer, as well as the reader. Furthermore, writing with patience, without a conclusion as we know it, builds an expectation of an enduring reader. This is the invitation patience holds.

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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 work[1]. 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 unhomely 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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the authors

ACME is an international journal for critical, interdisciplinary analyses of the social, the spatial, the ecological, and the political, published since 2002.
Website: acme-journal.org
Email: acmegeography@gmail.com

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.
Website: chtodelat.org
Email: info@chtodelat.org

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.
Website: degrowth.info
Email: contact@degrowth.info

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 Loacker and Santiago Gorostiza.
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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
Email: jopp-editorial@lists.ourproject.org

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
Email: collective@radicalhousingjournal.org

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.
Website: undisciplinedenvironments.org
Email: undisciplinedenvironments@gmail.com

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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Challenging thought at *ephemera*: Attempting to think and organize differently

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abstract

Inspired by Foucault's (1967/1986) notion of 'heterotopia', this note reflects on *ephemera* as a 'site of otherness' that challenges modes of thinking and organizing, predominating within the field of organization studies. It thereby illustrates how members of the editorial collective seek to integrate the idea of an affirmative 'critique from within' in their various activities and practices. The note suggests that, at *ephemera*, critical, challenging thought cannot be separated from the practices of its production. Thinking differently is for *ephemera* and its members irreducibly entangled with organizing and producing differently.

Introduction

As a long-standing member of the *ephemera* collective, I have been invited to write a note on 'challenging thought' in light of the past, present, and future of the journal. While it is a pleasure to share some of my reflections on critical, challenging thought and thinking, I would like to open this note with our readers' thoughts on *ephemera*. Recently, we asked our readers to tell us what they associate with the journal. We were moved by the responses that we received. These included accounts such as *ephemera* is

'open', 'experimental', 'reflexive', 'critical', 'different', 'unconventional', 'independent', and 'non-judgmental'. Our readers, further, perceive *ephemera* as 'collaborative', 'community-oriented', as well as 'idea-driven', 'interdisciplinary and contemporary', and 'inspirational'. Moreover, they consider the journal as 'engaged', 'intellectually curious', 'passionate', 'transformative', and 'evermore important for the field'. Eventually, one of our contributors ponders: '*ephemera* is to me a little sailboat of hope, cooperation, and playfulness, among the containerships of counting, positioning, and competition'.

It is this portrayal that inspired me to think further about *ephemera* as a sailing boat, which is, according to Foucault (1967/1986: 27), the 'space of otherness' or 'heterotopia par excellence'. More specifically, Foucault argues that:

> [T]he boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is self-enclosed and at the same time given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from bank to bank, from brothel to brothel, goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens. (Foucault, 1986: 27)

Foucault (1986: 27), furthermore, notes that 'the boat has been for our civilisation… also the greatest reservoir of imagination', which turns it into the exemplary heterotopia. As such, it plays an important part in our society – following Foucault, 'in civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage replaces adventure, and the police the pirates' (*ibid*.). In light hereof, I want to share in this note my thoughts on *ephemera* as an exemplar of a 'space of other thinking and organizing'.

The note begins with some theoretical reflections on 'spaces of otherness', whereby particular attention is paid to the question of how such spaces operate as sites of challenging thought and, overall, sites of challenging taken for granted knowledge and practice. Referring to *ephemera*, I then suggest that the practice of critique is an important component of 'other spaces'. Following this, with reference to the experiences of the collective and *ephemera*'s broader community, it is exemplified in what ways precisely the journal questions existing thinking and practices in our field,

management and organization studies (MOS). The note finally concludes with some reflections on *ephemera*'s ethos and its past, present, and future.

'Sites of otherness', or what is critical, challenging thought?

Appreciating the 'ephemeral' and 'nomadic' outlook and qualities of *ephemera*, it is not the aim to define and pin down in the following what *ephemera* 'is', or what its ethos exactly involves. But I dare to argue that challenging, critical thought has always been a principal concern for the journal, playing out across all its activities. For *ephemera* and its members, such kind of thinking is essentially an *attitude*, an attitude that resembles an understanding of critique as being about challenging and problematising what is taken for granted (Foucault, 1997). To enact this attitude, the editorial collective of *ephemera* attempted from its early days to support the creation of conditions that allow a space of thinking, organizing and ordering differently to emerge. This space can be considered an other or 'heteropian' space, in Foucault's (1986) words. And indeed, the above-mentioned accounts of our readers and affiliates suggest that *ephemera* is understood as such a space or 'vessel' – and not a 'container'. But before we further unpack the latter, let us first clarify what exactly heterotopias are and what they involve.

Of heterotopian spaces

Following Foucault (1986), heterotopias present 'spaces of difference' or 'spaces of alternate ordering', which connect different orders, norms and practices, and thereby challenge seemingly given and coherent landmarks (Topinka, 2010). As such, heterotopias can be understood as sites that 'organize a bit of the social world in a way different to that which surrounds them' (Hetherington, 1997: 41). In other words, heterotopian spaces seem to have the capacity to order established conventions and knowledge in other, not taken for granted ways. On these grounds, heterotopias are often associated with an irritating and 'disturbing nature' (Foucault, 1970: xvi) that undermines and reverses dominant social and organizational 'grammars' (*ibid*.: xvii). By this means, heterotopias also remind us of the contingent and contested nature of extant social, cultural, and discursive

classifications and 'truths'. As spaces of other organizing, heterotopias indeed intrude 'an alternate reality on a dominant one' (Westwood and Rhodes, 2007: 6), and thereby contribute to the emergence of new ways of seeing, speaking, and knowing (Loacker and Peters, 2015).

Foucault (1986), further, notes that there are a variety of different other spaces. These include, e.g., brothels, theatres, carnivals and, as already suggested, boats. Despite their diversity, these sites share some common characteristics. Alongside heterotopias' quality to challenge and disrupt dominant patterns and modes of ordering, there are, according to Foucault (*ibid.*: 24ff.), six principles that can be ascribed to them. First of all, spaces of other ordering exist in every culture. They are 'designed into the very institution of society' (Hjorth, 2005: 393) and are, thus, universal (Topinka, 2010). Second of all, heterotopias are dynamic spatial sites; hence, their function and use can change over time. Third, heterotopias are multiple spaces that juxtapose heterogeneous orders and practices in one site. Theatres exemplarily reflect such multiplicity, by bringing 'onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another' (Foucault, 1986: 25) and still combined in one site. Fourth, heterotopias are connected with time. In other spaces, time can be interrupted, compressed, or fleeting (Davis, 2010). In fact, many heterotopias, like carnivals or ships, present temporal passages, which 'are not oriented toward the eternal, but are rather absolutely temporal' (Foucault, 1986: 26). Fifth, heterotopias are different from all other sites that they might reflect; and yet, they are not completely separate or disconnected from them (Dumm, 2002). This implies, eventually, that heterotopias do not exist on their own; they are relational and have a function with regard to all 'the space that remains' (Foucault, 1986: 27). Following Foucault, their function commonly 'unfolds between two extreme poles' (*ibid.*), referred to as 'illusion' and 'compensation'. In a few instances though – thinking, for example, of brothels – one of them can also dominate.

That said, heterotopias are not to be confused with abstract types of utopias. Rather, heterotopias are real sites that reflect upon the conditions of the present (Davis, 2010). According to Foucault (1986: 24) heterotopias are, in fact, places which exist as 'something like counter-sites in which… all the

other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted'. Among other things, this implies that heterotopias are not outside or external to established powers and norms, but are informed by them (Topinka, 2010). Though, recalling that 'resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (Foucault, 1982: 221), it seems that the 'different-yet-related' position of other spaces, principally, allows them to operate as sites from where critical, challenging ideas and practice can emerge.

In light of the above, one may argue that heterotopian thinking and organizing means, first and foremost, to challenge, subvert and redefine seemingly ordered surfaces, taxonomies and 'familiar landmarks of… thought' (Foucault, 1970: xv). Reflecting on *ephemera*'s past, present and future, it now seems opportune to ascribe to the journal such a quality of 'other' thinking and organizing. In what follows, I want to further elaborate on this quality.

On ephemera's heterotopian qualities: Practicing critique from within

Many members and contributors to *ephemera* consider the journal, in analogy to the floating vessel, as a 'reserve of imagination' (Foucault, 1986). As such, *ephemera* seeks to interfere in and transgress the common ground and landmarks that appear given and natural within the discipline. While doing so, however, the journal does not stand outside of institutional power and conventions. Struggles over power and control are rather part of the attempt to challenge the established 'architecture of the everyday' and familiar orders within the field of MOS, and to (re)evoke their contingent and disputed nature. As a site with heterotopian qualities, *ephemera* also presents a manifold space that juxtaposes and connects various practices, norms, and ideals. It is thus not simply 'freed' from the field and its dependencies and constraints, but rather linked to and embedded within them. Being different and at the same time connected comes along with an interesting strategic position though, a position at the border of MOS and related disciplines. This liminal position, particularly, offers scopes for a *critique from within* (see also Böhm and Spoelstra, 2004). But what does this mean?

The idea of a critique from within essentially differs from traditional notions of critique, which tend to assess and judge from outside. Traditional critique commonly subscribes to an emancipatory agenda (Habermas, 1986), and positions itself in opposition to the 'object' it critically evaluates and defines. Attempting to practice (scholarly) critique from within, however, means that the problematisation of common assumptions and conventions does not come from an outside or superior position. It rather involves a critical-reflexive, ethico-political, and *affirmative engagement* with the specific field and discipline (Böhm and Spoelstra, 2004). This idea of a critique from within has been fostered by members and contributors to *ephemera* for a long time as, for instance, the special issue on 'no critique' illustrates, which was published in 2004. The issue substantially engaged with the question whether and how '*ephemera* can contribute to a productive ethos of critique within organization and management studies' (*ibid.*: 98).

As indicated, a productive ethos or productive attitude of critique asks for a non-judgmental, critical dialogue and 'truth-telling' (Foucault, 2001), with regard to seemingly given assumptions and modes of thinking and practicing that prevail within our field, MOS. The very concrete practice of critique is thereby meant to be local, provisional and partial, rather than global, distal and general. Such practice further involves creative thought, imagination and 'local political creativity' (Barratt, 2008: 527; Foucault, 1997) to effectively challenge established knowledge and canons, and to encourage modes of thinking and organizing differently. That said, critique or truth-telling also includes elements of creative experimentation and exploration – which, again, asks for a courageous exposure to the other or unknown, as well as an acknowledgement that critique is often played out from a subordinate position (Bardon and Josserand, 2010).

For *ephemera*, a subordinate position is however not obscure. Whereas some may consider *ephemera* as a meanwhile well-established journal within the field of (critical) MOS, its members feel that the journal still operates on the margins of the discipline. As suggested elsewhere, for *ephemera* and its contributors, a standing at the margins may be quite suitable though to engage critically and affirmatively with pervasive rationales, knowledge, and practices in MOS and academia, more generally. While seeking to

productively critique, inform and incrementally transform the 'mainstream', members of the collective are, more specifically, guided by an attempt to become 'critical of norms under which we are asked to act' (Butler, 2005: 24). Within our institutions, these norms often imply structural power asymmetries, hierarchies, and various measures and counting practices that shape modes of working, organizing, and relating – to self and others. In view of this, it is also part of *ephemera's* commitment to challenging, critical thought to actively problematise the often taken for granted conditions within the field and, hence, to get involved in the extant 'politics of truth' (Foucault, 1997). While doing so, many members of the collective are directed by an understanding of critique as the attitude and 'art of not being governed or… not being governed *like that* and at that cost' (*ibid*.: 29). 20 years of *ephemera* and the above-mentioned accounts of our readers, indeed, suggest that attempts of not being governed like that leave some marks in the field. The increasing interest in open access publishing and the concomitant critique of commercial publishing houses is only one example that hints at them.

In view hereof, the following section aims to illustrate what challenging thought and, thus, challenging what is considered appropriate and 'true' in MOS can look like. It will explicate that challenging thought plays out on different levels and involves various aspects. This is not only reflected in the ideas and formats that *ephemera* promotes; challenging thought is also enacted in how we organize as a collective, and how we work and produce ideas and knowledge.

Heterotopian thinking and organizing: *ephemera* at work

Members of the *ephemera* collective hold the firm belief that challenging, critical thought cannot be separated from the specific practices of its production. At *ephemera*, challenging thought is hence considered entangled with challenging the organization and production modes that prevail within the field. Acknowledging that the entanglement of critical scholarship and critical publishing is best conveyed by specific examples, let us now further

delve into some of *ephemera*'s practices of heterotopian thinking and organizing.

Thinking and writing differently

As previously mentioned, the past and present (and future?) work published in *ephemera* does not approach critique as an end it itself, but aims to reflexively and creatively engage with the established canon of organization studies. *ephemera*'s creativity is, for instance, manifested in contributions that draw on various research traditions, perspectives, and disciplines. By undermining narrow disciplinary and theoretical boundaries and genuinely furthering multi-perspectivity and interdisciplinarity, the contributions to the journal, indeed, strive to go beyond the familiar, accurate or 'right' knowing in MOS – *ephemera* precisely welcomes alternative and new ways of exploring, thinking, and writing about organization and organizational phenomena.

Over the years, *ephemera* engaged with a plethora of themes from critical, transdisciplinary perspectives. Alongside organizational studies, contributors to the journal draw in their analyses on fields such as philosophy, history, human geography, sociology, cultural studies, and political economy. In 20 years, *ephemera* has thereby never positioned itself outside MOS, but sought to productively challenge and relate to the ever-changing field and overall academic landscape. Retrospectively it now seems that, with its aspiration to recurrently explore timely and pressing organizational and societal concerns, *ephemera* 'set the scene' with respect to different themes and debates. Some of these themes were later seized upon by other journals within the field. However, *ephemera* did not have the intention to become some kind of thematic 'model' or precursor within the discipline. Rather, *ephemera* and the members of the collective were inspired by the Deleuzian and Guattarian idea of 'nomadic science' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2000). This science is characterised by a curiosity towards the new, singular and potentially unknown and, as such, seeks to explore and 'shadow' in a playful manner what is *not yet* addressed or made visible – rather than to reproduce and determine what is already there or known (this is the focus of so-called 'royal sciences').

Testament of this nomadic approach to the 'theory and politics in organization' is, for instance, *ephemera*'s critical engagement with themes such as the rise of neoliberal policies and institutions (Birch and Springer, 2019), including e.g. the entrepreneurial-financialised university (Beverungen et al., 2008; Butler et al., 2017); the (re)configuration and modification of capitalism and its different facets (Beverungen et al., 2013a; Bradshaw et al., 2013); the concomitant deregulation and precarisation of work (Beverungen et al., 2013b; Bialski et al., 2015), and the subsumption of life to work (Butler et al., 2011; Chertkovskaya et al., 2016). Further themes explored in *ephemera*, e.g., include the increasing role of immaterial, creative, and affective forms of work (Dowling et al., 2007; Karppi et al., 2016), and the diffusion of digital labour and cultures across society's different spheres (Burston et al., 2010, Bachmann et al., 2017). A manifestation of *ephemera*'s concern to stimulate critical-affirmative 'truth-telling' within the field is, furthermore, its longstanding interest in themes such as the commons and alternative forms of work and organization (Hoedemaekers et al., 2012, Phillips and Jeanes, 2018; Stoborod and Swann, 2014), and, more recently, in questions relating to organizing for repair and a post-growth society (Böhm et al., 2012; Graziano and Trogal, 2019; Johnsen et al., 2017).

The journal's publication formats can also be read and understood as an expression of challenging thought and thinking. Alongside standard academic articles, these formats include notes and essays, interviews and roundtables, and artistic and more experimental modes of representation (like comics and collages). From the collective's point of view, *ephemera*'s formats do not only represent ideas differently, but also create different ideas, by means of 'writing differently' (Just et al., 2018). To cultivate such writing, *ephemera* has explored and worked with various formats for many years now, and the issues published in the journal give an account of the conviction that thinking and writing differently are entangled practices. To ensure that the engagement with special issue themes is polyvocal, multi-faceted, and experiential, *ephemera* issues never, in fact, include traditional academic articles only. While thorough, in-depth theoretical analysis is and has always been important to the journal, it is equally important to *ephemera*

to offer scope for other thinking and expression. This allows the contributors to *ephemera* to communicate a style of thinking and imagining that could not otherwise be expressed in the abstract discursive language, often characterising the field of MOS and the social sciences more generally (Harrington, 2002).

As indicated above, the attempt to challenge taken for granted thoughts, practices, and truths (e.g. about 'good' journals or rankings) is also reflected in how we organize as a collective, open-access journal and 'other site'. Unlike most organizations and institutions within higher education (including publishing houses), *ephemera* does not work and organize on the ground of principles such as impersonal rules or hierarchical orders. As an independent open-access journal, *ephemera* further 'provides its content free of charge, and charges its readers only with free thought' (*ephemera* collective, n.d.), which illustrates, among other things, that the journal undermines economic, commercial rationales. The collective's practices of working and relating are, more specifically, directed by certain ideals that form part of the ethos of *ephemera*. Alongside independence these ideals include, for instance, openness, involvement, curiosity, (self-)reflexivity, mutual support and collaboration, and scholarly integrity. The overall aspiration of the journal is thereby to practice so-called 'fröhliche Wissenschaft' or 'joyful science' (Nietzsche, 1882/2000); and this joy also shapes the modes of how the members of *ephemera* relate to each other and organize as a collective. That said, organization and organizing is for us not a technique, it is rather a practice of forming and developing meaningful connections and social relations at work (Weiskopf, 2002).

What is more, the attempt to challenge extant thought and practice in the field cannot be reduced to the world of (intellectual) ideas only. As suggested, at *ephemera*, challenging the taken for granted and seemingly given also involves a critical engagement with the specific modes of production, i.e., the modes of producing and distributing knowledge that dominate within MOS and academia in general. For this reason, the following sub-section discusses in more detail how challenging thought is also manifested in the very concrete production practices of the journal. This hopefully allows to reveal that *ephemera*'s ethos and, specifically, values

such as shared responsibility, scholarly care, and independence are also reflected in the material production work of the collective; a work that is often hidden, yet significant. Without its production process, *ephemera* would not be *ephemera*, i.e., a critical open-access journal that affirms the mutual conditioning of (challenging) ideas and forms of production.

Organizing and producing differently

Contributors to *ephemera* are occasionally surprised when they learn about the thorough outlook of the journal's production process, opposing 'anything goes' premises. For members of the collective, this outlook is however part of the specific attitude to scholarly work. In contrast to traditional journals, *ephemera*, in fact, carries responsibility for the whole production process. This process includes, alongside the formulation of issue proposals and assistance in the development of single contributions, areas such as proofing and formatting of final paper versions, layout, cover creation, issue upload, and the announcing of new issues, once they have been materialised. Overall, this prompts that the production of *ephemera* issues implies a rather intricate and systematic process of organization; a process that is now further exemplified.

For the collective, the production of the journal is not simply an abstract, technical process that can be 'outsourced' to external production managers. The production of an *ephemera* issue rather involves elements of craft work and presents, as such, an antidote to mechanical, 'industrial' production. Craft work is about forming aesthetic, embodied, and informed relationships to the 'object' that is created (Bell et al., 2019). In the context of *ephemera* this means that members of the collective seek to develop aesthetic and considered relations to the ideas and texts that are produced. Texts published in *ephemera* are thus not approached as distal, given 'things'; what bears a meaning is rather the relation and work *with* them. By engaging with single texts, e.g. in the context of final editing or formatting, members of the journal, furthermore, foster and intensify their understanding of forthcoming contributions. For the collective, it is hence not only the intellectual, idea-driven engagement with *ephemera* contributors that counts; the very concrete labour that goes into the production of an

individual piece or issue equally 'matters'. Together, these components allow the collective to develop a 'proximal' view and approach to the work produced and published; rather than a distal approach (Cooper and Law, 1995), which tends to prevail within the current academic journal landscape. Put differently, it is part of *ephemera*'s scholarly attitude to work with its authors and the texts they develop, also manually, and to thereby challenge and oppose the simple provision of mechanical, standardised 'services to authors' (via online proofing systems or 'publisher tracking systems'). As indicated, *ephemera* seeks to support its authors from idea development, paper submission and revisions, to publication. While doing so, members of the collective do not self-identify as passing 'service providers'. The assistance the collective offers rather intends to be continuous and includes both scholarly as well as practical elements, which are each grounded in an *understanding* of the matter.

Admittedly, publishing one's own journal demands various individual and collective organizational efforts. The *ephemera* collective, however, takes these efforts, given that its members are convinced, and have repeatedly experienced, that it makes a difference whether (critical) scholars are responsible for the production of academic contributions, or whether this work is done by so-called global production editors, who commonly have to deal (at short notice) with various contributions from across different disciplines. For example, when we prepare authors' final manuscript versions for publication, we still notice minor issues due to our close and long-lasting engagement with single texts; issues that production editors, engaged by corporate publishers, may not discern. What is more, and this is quite important, assuming responsibility for the production of issues also informs the collective's internal communication, knowledge sharing, and overall organizing practices.

To be more specific, on the basis of a rotating principle, members of the collective are recurrently involved in different steps of *ephemera*'s production process. One of these steps is, for instance, the so-called double-checking process that involves a review of the formatting and layout of final paper versions. For each issue, this process is performed by two members of the collective, who are not part of the editorial team of the respective issue.

By this means, we are able to spot potential flaws with individual contributions. More importantly, still, the process of double-checking allows the members of the collective to maintain an awareness and knowledge of the ideas that *ephemera* produces and to, further, 'follow' the research endeavours of its authors, forming a crucial part of the journal's vivid and diverse community. In view of this, the process of double-checking accepted author manuscripts seems to be a good example of how, at *ephemera*, critical-challenging thought and scholarship and critical-alternate publishing mutually shape each other. Such processes promote continuous exchange and relatedness among the members of the collective and, thereby, form and refine their scholarly and personal relationships. Moreover, the fact that all members of the collective are involved in the production process and its organization allows the journal to develop some kind of organizational knowledge and memory. Hence, form and content of scholarly work and practice unfold jointly at *ephemera*.

The editorial meetings, taking place quarterly, likewise illustrate the significance that the collective ascribes to *ephemera*'s production process and, specifically, principles such as scholarly care and quality, diligence, and integrity. It may be unexpected for some (especially those who tend to consider *ephemera* as a 'gathering' of abstract, intellectual thinkers), but, in these meetings, members of the collective often speak more about issues such as formatting or layout, than about *ephemera*'s scholarly ideas and prospects. During the editorial meetings, the collective further makes decisions on seemingly minor issues (e.g., whether acknowledgments should be included in a footnote on page one or be moved to the end of the manuscript), as well as bigger issues, including, e.g., decisions on whether to introduce a new software for handling submissions, or whether to keep print versions of issues or not. Related discussions allow the collective to regularly reflect on its work, organizing and production processes and make amendments where they are considered necessary. As suggested, production-related discussions and activities are sometimes challenging and tedious and yet, for members of the collective they are important, especially if *ephemera* wants to maintain a proximal approach to the work it produces and the people who are involved in this production. Caring for *ephemera*

includes various components. It involves how we think, speak, and write, how we relate to each other and ourselves, and how we operate, organize, and produce collectively.

Against that background, it is eventually worth highlighting that *ephemera* is one of the very few journals that is published and 'owned' by an independent academic collective. This re-invokes, among other things, its heterotopian qualities and position at the margins of the field. Some, however, may wish to transform this position. In recent years, *ephemera* has, indeed, received several requests from established publishers, specifically university presses, regarding a potential 'acquisition' of the journal and its production process. Considering our commitment to collective organization and production and a non-commercial attribution, it has been always clear though that this is not an option. The work in *ephemera* is, besides, published under a creative commons license (with authors being the owners of the copyright of their contributions), and the collective does not intend to change this – not transferring ownership, control and copyright to an external (commercial) publishing house is a considered and politically informed decision that we have made. This decision is in line with our concern to challenge extant modes of thinking, working and producing (knowledge) within MOS and the overall academic landscape. It is further in line with the core values and ideals that form *ephemera*'s ethos, including independence, openness, collectivity, and care for what, how, and whom we produce.

As explicated, ownership also comes with responsibility and 'at a cost', in that it asks for dedication and a good deal of work. Though, past and current members of the collective have been prepared to take on this responsibility and the different efforts accompanying autonomous publishing. This readiness matters so that *ephemera* can continue to operate as a journal 'from the community for the community' that provides its ideas free of charge. In light hereof, let us conclude.

Lines of flight: Being and becoming *ephemera*

Reflecting back on 20 years of *ephemera*, it seems there are certain principles and ideals that guide the, irreducibly intertwined, thinking, work and

organizing practices at *ephemera*. Without intending to fully capture *ephemera*'s ethos and ethico-political attitude, these ideals include, as suggested in this note, a commitment to other thinking and practice and to a reflexive-affirmative form of critique; further, a commitment to disciplinary openness, scholarly adventurousness and courage; a commitment to engagement, dialogue and participation; and, concomitantly, a commitment to collegiality and the idea of 'sister- and brotherhood'. In his essay, 'Science as a vocation', Max Weber (1946) has addressed similar idea(l)s, including curiosity, inspiration, and passion. In the current academic climate, such ideas and principles are challenged though, as they run counter to aspirations for counting, comparing, assessing, and normalising. Yet, for *ephemera* and the people who are or were part it, they have always mattered, as these reflections tried to illustrate. All the same, it is not argued that *ephemera* and its ethos is in any way static or fixed; to the contrary, after 20 years, the journal still aims to be ephemeral and nomadic. In other words, and in analogy to the metaphor of the sailing vessel explicated in the note's introduction, *ephemera seeks* to remain 'a floating piece of space', an open, non-illusory but real 'reservoir of imagination' (Foucault, 1986: 27).

Among other things, this implies and requires that *ephemera* will continue to change and transform. And indeed, in the years to come, new ideas and ventures will be explored and further developed – including, e.g., ventures on 'intellectual activism' (Contu, 2018), degrowth, and the contemporary commons – and new people will get 'on board' of the vessel, while others will leave. However, despite these shifts, which are necessary for *ephemera* to *be(come) ephemera*, the collective is convinced that its members, readers, and broader community will maintain their dedication, maybe vocation, to question what is considered true, given and taken for granted, and to think, organize and produce differently *within* the field. Creating and sustaining a space for the latter was, in my view, always at the heart of *ephemera*, and it will most likely continue to be so. As discussed, preserving a purposeful in-between position or position at the border of MOS may be a good point of departure for challenging, critiquing, and modifying the field. Admittedly, this is an ongoing endeavour, involving mostly small and incremental changes. It is also all but a straightforward, linear process, but one that

involves various struggles and contingencies. Though, the members and affiliates of *ephemera* seem to have an awareness of these struggles and may even appreciate them. *ephemera* is, after all, the journal of 'theory and politics in organization'. That said, an engagement with the politics in organization and the 'politics of truth' (Foucault, 1997), more generally, is not only part of the journal's intellectual project; developing and cultivating a sensitivity to the ethico-politics inscribed in organization and organizing is also an important facet of the ethos underpinning and directing *ephemera*, its members, and their *practices*.

As illustrated, in the past two decades *ephemera* has aimed to engage from the margins with the field of MOS. While striving not to 'be governed like that and that cost' (Foucault, 1997: 29), and refusing to accept as true 'what an authority (in the field) tells you is true' (*ibid.*: 46), the journal and its contributors always *intended* to practice critical, challenging thought from a non-judgmental, non-oppositional, and non-superior position. *ephemera* has rather sought to interfere and 'disturb' (Foucault, 1970) from a position that enables an open, critical-creative and situated engagement with those field-specific common-sense assumptions and conventions that are, from an ethico-political and scholarly point of view, considered problematic and potentially perilous (Böhm and Spoelstra, 2004). Looking, e.g., at the attention that critical, open access publishing attracts in recent years, it seems that the attitude and concern of *ephemera* to practice heterotopian, alternate thinking and organizing does indeed make a difference. The work of the vessel *ephemera* is always in progress though. In the spirit of *challenging thought*, it asks us – and the present and future community of *ephemera* – for recurrent critical-affirmative reflections on the question, 'what are we willing to accept in our worlds… willing to refuse, and to change, both in ourselves and in our circumstances' (Foucault, 1993: 223).

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Theory's best practice

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abstract

Why is theorizing important? What does it do? This note reflects on the broad question of what we do when we theorize, taking its starting point from the Greek notion of *theoria*. The argument is that theorizing as an uncertain journey, i.e. as a form of travelling along a path towards the unknown or unfamiliar, has unjustly fallen into disrepute. The notion of 'theory' is today primarily associated with methodology and the ideas of a fixed path or a stable position. But this is not the only type of theory that critical organization studies needs. In this paper I consider how the notions of 'strong' and 'weak' theory can help us understand the role of theorizing in organization. Theory's best practice involves making us see and think differently, and this, in a sense, is as practical as it gets.

Introduction

In 2004, the *ephemera* collective replaced its original subtitle, 'critical dialogues on organization', with a new version: 'theory and politics in organization'. The first had survived for just three years, while the second has remained with us ever since. This should not be surprising, given that *ephemera* has always had a dual focus on theory, with a special interest in philosophy, on the one hand, and in politics, and the movements that challenge the hegemony of transnational corporations in particular, on the other.

When I joined *ephemera*, around the same time as the change in subtitle, the collective was fairly evenly split between those who were mainly interested in philosophy of organization in its own right and those who were interested in philosophy of organization to the extent that it provides the tools to resist contemporary capitalism. One might say that the split was roughly between those who were in it for the practice of theorizing and those who saw theorizing as a vehicle for practice. The difference between the two, to the extent that it can be maintained (in theory and/or practice), is interesting in and of itself.

My aim in this note is to undertake a similar project to that pursued by Steffen Böhm in his 2002 *ephemera* note, 'Movements of theory and practice', that is, to explore the relation between theory and practice in our contemporary context. This context is most fundamentally defined by the pull towards action that has become part of our zeitgeist. Climate change and biodiversity loss are challenges that demand action, as do the problems raised by the 'Me Too' movement, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the advance of post-truth politics. Whether on a conscious or a subconscious level, today's age is underpinned by a feeling that something *must* be done, sooner rather than later, and ideally years ago. In this climate, it seems natural to value practice over theory.

The second contextual factor that is important to consider is the assault on theory that has its origins in the culture wars currently being waged across the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as elsewhere in Europe. This full-blown attack is primarily directed at the intellectual traditions out of which critical organization studies has grown (including critical theory, poststructuralism, feminism, and postcolonialism). Such theoretical traditions, in some extreme articulations, are collectively dismissed as involving a 'postmodernist' dismissal of facts and truth (e.g. Kakutani, 2018; Pluckrose and Lindsay, 2020).

The practical turn

It seems to me that in the 20 years since *ephemera* was founded, theory and theorizing have fallen into disrepute, even in critical organization studies.

The tide has gradually turned from an infatuation with the latest translations of French philosophers to a concern with how to make an impact on the world. In critical organization studies, we have, for example, witnessed calls for 'critical consulting' (Voronov, 2008) and 'critical performativity' (Spicer et al., 2009). Both are expressions of the idea that critical academics should descend from their 'ivory towers' to make a real-life impact on organizations. Such work refers implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) to the notion of 'the end of philosophy' that was first popularized in the 1970s and 1980s. Proponents of this view draw inspiration from Marx's (1998/1888) famous 11th thesis on Feuerbach ('Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it'), which they interpret as a call for action, an action that would have no time for the useless speculations of philosophy.

Such changes are not limited to organization studies. Across the humanities and social sciences, academics increasingly feel the pressure to make their work more 'relevant' (without any agreement on what such relevance would amount to). This renewed orientation towards practice is also reflected in research assessment exercises that seek to measure the impact of research, and is particularly fitting for the age of Facebook and Twitter, in which impact, at least in terms of clicks, can easily be measured.

When I moved to Lund University in 2006 from The University of Leicester, where I had written my PhD on the rather high-theory question 'What is organization?', I experienced this gradual shift as an abrupt event. In Leicester, the overall culture at the time could be summarized neatly with a single question: 'What books did you read last week?' (which *really was* a normal question to ask at the time; I have fond memories of the many reading groups in which I participated while I was there). When I arrived at Lund, I found that theory had already lost much of the respect it had once had. The overall sentiment was that, as a rule of thumb, it is better to do another interview than to read another book. This feeling is now widespread. Indeed, during the writing process for this paper, the University of Leicester, once host to the world's most critically oriented management school, has cut critical management studies and political economy from the curriculum through a series of forced redundancies – in order to make space for

specifically 'practical' specializations, such as quantitative data analytics, leadership, and entrepreneurship.

To some readers, the idea that theorizing has fallen into disrepute will no doubt sound rather strange, as the dominant scholarly narrative at present claims exactly the opposite. Most papers contemplating the state of theory and theorizing in organization studies warn about an increasing 'theory-fetishism' (Avison and Malaurent, 2014; Hambrick, 2007). The argument is that organizational journals increasingly publish formulaic papers with minute 'theoretical contributions' that have little to do with the data upon which they are supposedly based, and do equally little to address the concerns of practitioners. In this context, Avison and Malaurent (2014: 329) point towards the danger of 'acceptance by stealth', referring to those 'theoretical' papers that are accepted for publication because they tick all the necessary boxes, despite being 'dull', making a 'minimal real contribution', and having 'very little, if any, impact on the community'. Their proposed solution is the promotion of 'theory light' papers, which are 'those papers where theory plays no significant part in the paper and the contribution lies elsewhere' (*ibid.:* 330). Others explicitly argue that qualitative and critical research should become more empirical, that is, that it should be based on interviews, observations, or other forms of data collection (e.g. Silverman, 2014). The idea is that when one comes closer to the empirical world, the research one produces will also be of more value for that empirical world.

To put it another way, the dominant perspective holds that research needs to become *less theoretical* if it is to be useful, a view based on the assumption that there is some essential tradeoff between the theoretical-conceptual and the practical-empirical. Embracing this apparent dichotomy, it seems that many critics have taken to heart Dennis Gioia's (1999: 230) call to 'Get off the veranda!' ('which means that armchair theorizing only goes so far and too easily ends up in the clouds, whereas a dose of data just might help ground us in practical reality'). Gioia's suggestion was that rather than 'working from concept to concept', we should instead work 'from data to workable concept' (*ibid.*).

As I will explain later in the note, I do not disagree with the premise that many 'theoretical contributions' figured prominently in the 'best' journals in our field are really quite worthless; what I *do* disagree with is the supposition that these papers are actually theoretical in any meaningful sense, and that the solution ought to be sought in making organization studies *less* theoretical. Tellingly, Avison and Malaurent (2014: 327) do not consider papers that communicate 'new and exciting ideas' to be theoretical. Rather, such contributions are classified under the desirable category of 'theory light'. But what has happened to our notion of theory and theorizing when papers that make us think differently are no longer associated with theory simply by virtue of having this desirable outcome?

The issue boils down to whether moving 'from concept to concept', in Gioia's terms, is really as fruitless as is commonly assumed. To interrogate this question, we can ask what happens *in the practice of* moving from concept to concept, and whether, even if such movement does not directly solve particular practical problems, or add to the stock of evidence-based knowledge, it might perhaps generate benefits of other kinds.

While the current iteration of our question about the nature of theory may seem distinctively modern, it is, in fact, an age-old issue, and one that the classical Greeks were already struggling with more than two millennia ago. Indeed, the language we use now to discuss this question is itself rooted in Greek thought and terminology. As we shall see, these Greek underpinnings continue to frame our own thoughts on the subject, for better and for worse. In exploring these issues, it will therefore be useful to consider the Greek understanding of the notion of 'theory', which was laden with connotations relating to 'sight' and 'seeing' when it was originally drawn into philosophical discourse.

The two-world notion of theory

In *The life of the mind*, Hannah Arendt (1981) suggests that the distinction between theory and practice that we, implicitly or explicitly, tend to cling to is itself a theory, which she calls 'the two-world theory'. It is, furthermore, a theory with significant implications for practice.

This two-world theory is most famously articulated by Plato in the *Republic*, in which he distinguishes between the divine and unchanging world of Ideas (or Forms) and the ever-fluctuating world of appearances. The famous allegory of the cave that stands at the centre of the dialogue tells the story of the philosopher who leaves the world of appearance and ascends to the higher world of truth. Having seen the truth, he then returns to the cave to share what he has learned. However, when he tells those still living among the shadows what he has seen, he is met not with admiration but with skepticism and even violent rage.

According to Plato, the theorist can see the true nature of things because of his familiarity with the Forms, but the people, if they are without proper education, cannot recognize this truth for what it is. Instead, they are more inclined to follow imposters who are good at selling imitations of truth. For Plato, these masters of deception include the rhetoricians, sophists, and demagogues who vied for political control of the state through the use of the crafty lie and the well-turned phrase: they are essentially misleaders while the philosopher-king is the true leader precisely because he, by contrast, has access to, and is concerned with, the truth.

The two-world theory distinguishes between a world of stable being, where truth is to be found, and a world of everchanging becoming, in which there is only appearance. We are born into the world of appearance, but we are not trapped in it: we can try to find a way out by looking beyond appearances to the higher truth of the other world. To the extent that we manage to do so, we become part of that other world. Humans, therefore, Plato's Socrates says, 'should make all haste to escape from earth to heaven' by means of 'becoming as like God as possible' (*Theaetetus*, 176b). Yet, this other world, because it is higher, is also, in a sense, truly practical, in that it forms the basis for the transformation of the here and now: we are capable of creating better – truer – imitations in the world of appearances thanks to the philosopher.

As Andrea Nightingale (2004) shows, Plato's account of the philosopher king is deeply rooted in the Greek notion of *theoria*. Before Plato associated the term with philosophy, *theoria* referred to the cultural practice of witnessing

religious festivals outside the city or, more broadly, of learning from foreign contexts. The *theoros* who has journeyed out to see returns home as a transformed being, but this transformation can happen only if the *theoros* manages to fully detach herself from her own cultural bonds during the journey. The journey of the *theoros* has three stages – leaving the city, witnessing an event, and returning home – a tripartite division which also neatly maps onto Plato's allegory of the cave. As in the cultural practice of *theoria*, Plato's theoretical philosopher returns to the city (or the cave) as a transformed being. Like the *theoros* sent out by the city, Plato's theoretical philosopher must be fully dedicated to seeing the world of Forms in its own right without being held back by where he has come from. It is through this radical detachment from the practical sphere that the philosopher is transformed, and it is this transformation itself that can be beneficial for the city (provided that its people are capable of recognizing the true value that the *theoros* brings).

The distinction between two worlds – one physical and the other accessible only to the intellect – that underpins Plato's version of *theoria* is still with us in various forms. Both critics and adherents of theory still base their views on Plato's opposition between theory and practice. In Plato's paradoxical version of this opposition, theory can be practical only when it is not pursued for the sake of practice.

While Plato may have been the first to set out on this journey, it is only with his pupil, Aristotle, that we find the first proper articulation of the idea of 'theory for its own sake'. In Aristotle, the *theoros* goes on a journey to find the truth, but never returns home (Nightingale, 2004). Theory, for Aristotle, is supremely useless, but in a positive rather than negative sense: theorizing consists of the highest form of human activity, defined by freedom (from ends) and leisure.

In what follows, I suggest that there is something both troubling and enlightening about the Greek notion of *theoria*. The troubling element consists in the assertion that the theorist goes on a journey to a higher realm – the assumption underlying what Arendt aptly labelled the two-world notion of theory – and can therefore assume a higher status than that

attainable by 'ordinary' people. But it is simultaneously enlightening to reflect on the Greek conception of theory as a transformative activity, as something that shows its worth in itself; in a transformation of seeing.

Theory/practice today

When we speak today about the theory/practice distinction, we may not think first of a 'religious' scheme of division into a higher and lower sphere. In organization studies, the word 'theory' has become primarily associated with the so-called 'theory building' and 'theory-testing' traditions (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Sutton and Staw, 1995). These traditions are modelled on the success of the natural sciences, in the context of which the first can be characterized as inductive (moving from empirical data to the formulation of a theory that offers an explanation of these data) and the second as deductive (formulating a theory and hypotheses that are subsequently tested empirically). The discussion about the lack of 'relevance' of the resulting theories – the 'rigour-relevance gap' – is based on the concern that the theories resulting from these traditions do not provide the practical guidance that managers and other organizational actors are seeking (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006). In other words, the mainstream in management studies tends to associate the notions of 'theory' and 'practice' with the theories of management science and the doings of so-called 'practitioners'.

Scientific 'theory', in these traditions, aims at an objective representation of reality that is not influenced by the subjective experiences of that reality. This is what methodology, in the realist tradition, tries to achieve: it separates theories from practical interests by imposing a number of rules on the scientist that would ensure things like value-neutrality, falsifiability, testability, reliability, validity, and the like. The resulting practice of science, as Popper (1992: 32) has remarked, is game-like, and the main feature of games (or of play in general) is adherence to a set of rules that are distinct from the normal rules one follows in life.

In comparison with Plato's version of the two-world theory, modern science has been democratized: access to the truth has, in a sense, become open to

all. The pursuit still attempts to get beyond appearance, but it no longer needs a philosopher to get there. To be a theorist, or a scientist, is to reside in a parallel world, with its own temporal and spatial dimensions, in which the goal is to represent or explain the world of appearance as adequately as possible. Theory is supposed to mirror reality, while not itself partaking in that reality. What it needs instead is method, i.e. clarity about the path to knowledge, about causes, laws, or other mechanisms that explain or predict surface phenomena. Once the path to knowledge is paved, any scientist should be able to walk the route for themselves simply by following the methodological rules of the discipline. The possibility of reaching the same destination by following the same path is known as 'replicability', which is generally considered to be a key condition for scientific progress.

Science may still need creative people to formulate theories, but to decide whether or not these theories indeed belong to the realm of representational truth is a matter of more or less mechanical testing, a matter of practice that all trained practitioners of science are capable of. The metaphor of the unpredictable and even dangerous journey of the *theoros* that informed Plato's thinking is changed into a quite different image of travelling: the scientist merely follows the path (*method*) that is already laid out for him or her, and the uncontroversial destiny of evidence-based knowledge is pregiven.

Strong and weak theories

In the theory-building and theory-testing traditions, theory is seen as the goal of the research process (e.g. Sutton and Staw, 1995). The practice that leads to theory is oriented towards the development of models and concepts that would explain or predict a particular phenomenon. The theory itself is understood as some kind of bounded entity, which is deemed 'strong' when it remains unaltered in the face of the flux of the empirical world, in contrast to a 'weak' theory that constantly finds it necessary to change its shape to fit the changing world. A strong theory rarely needs to change shape because it explains the phenomenon that it theorizes in all its possible manifestations. The world of appearances, to which we belong as 'practitioners' of living, is

volatile. Nevertheless, the changes that dramatically affect us do not affect strong theory. Like a lazy dog, a strong theory hardly lifts its eyelid when something happens; there is little that it considers worthy of interrupting its sleep. According to this conception of theory, there is not much scope for the idea of theory itself as some kind of fragile 'thing' that is constantly at play in relation to that which we encounter in our practices, be it the practices of fieldwork, of reading books, or any other activity. There is also little scope for a notion of theorizing that actively works upon the implicit theories that are always already part of the way in which we look at things.

As Thomas Kuhn (1970) has observed, in practice, strong theories come with strong faith. Kuhn even goes so far as to suggest that 'Normal science' *requires* a pseudo-religious dogmatism; a strong unwillingness to question the theory that defines the paradigm when confronted with empirical facts that do not fit easily with the theory's predictions. For Kuhn, such dogmatic faith is a good thing, because without this faith science would lose the determinism needed for scientific progress. However, while such an idea may hold descriptively in certain cases, it is a grave mistake to generalize this into an imperative that would hold for all knowledge domains.

This can be seen quite clearly in the case of organization studies, in which strong theories are much harder to sustain in the face of a frustratingly intransigent empirical reality. In contrast to most of the objects of the natural sciences, organizations and their inhabitants rarely behave in reliably predictable ways. As a consequence, the methods that are borrowed from the natural sciences have a much narrower range of applicability. While some scholars, notably Karl Weick (1995), have argued that organizational theories are only ever approximations of a strong theory, their assumptions remain locked into the notion that a strong theory is the ideal for which one should aim.

As I see it, the widespread disillusion with 'theory' in organization studies bears testimony to the limitations of the methodologies of the theory-testing and theory-building traditions. The implicit pretense of these traditions to strong theorizing easily becomes counter-productive: instead of offering genuinely strong explanations for organizational phenomena,

they rather strengthen a faith that all too often stands in the way of organizational inquiry. In such cases, the faith that is a prerequisite for strong theory starts to lead a life of its own. While this faith may serve a wide range of personal and institutional ends, it does not make the contribution to knowledge that one would expect of a genuinely strong theory.

What are labelled 'theories' in our field, e.g. 'institutional theory' or 'transformational leadership theory', do not amount to strong theories that stand tall against the flux of life in and of organizations. Rather, they offer a perspective on or image of organizational life that may be helpful in making sense of what is happening, or that inspires us to take certain actions, but that may also blind us to other ways of understanding a situation or phenomenon.

Let us take transformational leadership theory as an example. The content of this self-declared 'strong theory', on my interpretation at least, amounts to the idea that leaders who stand above their organizations are more desirable than leaders who operate within the organization (Spoelstra, 2018). Because of their high status, they are deemed capable of changing the direction of organizations while also lifting their employees up to higher ground. Such an image of leadership may inspire us to take the initiative, to be self-sacrificial, and to pursue other traits that we may deem worthy and beneficial in relation to this ideal image. But a paradigm of this sort can also give rise to hubris, lack of collaboration, and even to moral transgressions. In other words, a 'theory' such as that from which the notion of transformational leadership springs, actively participates in practice, for better and worse. It certainly does not reside in the kind of parallel world in which the strong theories of the natural sciences enjoy their uninterrupted sleep. 'Theory' becomes a way of pursuing certain practical ends, but it does so without taking a real interest in practice itself.

In contrast to a strong theory, the typical understanding of a weak theory is a theory that is of limited explanatory value, in the sense that it does little more than offer a description of an empirical object or situation. 'Weak' is then understood as deficient in relation to 'strong', as the absence of

strength (e.g. Sutton and Staw, 1995). But as the critics of theory fetishism rightly point out, not pretending to the building of a strong theory can also be a strength in that it creates spaces for alternative, equally valuable, research contributions. Such an understanding satisfies Avison and Malaurent's (2014) demand for approaches that are 'theory light', in the sense that the relative absence of strong theories creates space for rich empirical descriptions or papers that make one think.

Alternatively, instead of thinking of weak theories in terms of the absence of strengths, one may also think of 'weak theorizing' as a strength in itself. Loosely following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1997) suggestion, we might focus on the state of mind of the theorizer, seeing weak theory as a mode of theorizing that is weak in terms of its dogmatic faith. The theorizer of weak theory is strong in their willingness to change their mind, to change the shape of the theory, or, as Paul K. Saint-Amour (2018: 443) puts it, 'weak thought *weakens* the peremptoriness of what passes for the inarguable'. The Greek notion of *theoria*, and the accompanying character of the *theoros*, is helpful here: the *theoros* travels to other cities so that she may change her mind; so that she is transformed. The entire ambition of the *theoros* is to drift away from the familiar. To practice weak theorizing is to look for the most beneficial conditions under which to change one's mind.

It should, perhaps, not come as a surprise that one can find this (positive) notion of weak theory in ethnography (Stewart, 2008) and archaeology Pétursdóttir and Olsen, 2018). Here, the 'weakness' of the theory refers to the openness to foreign things that the researcher encounters. In Kathleen Stewart's (2008: 105) words, '[b]y following things, a weak theory allows us to wonder where they might take us'. Indeed, the Greek practice of *theoria* can be understood as being rather close to what some critics understand as taking place when one engages in ethnographic fieldwork: the ethnographer is ready to let go of their preunderstanding; by 'going native', they may eventually resurface as a changed person.

But the same notion also holds for how we choose to engage with theorizing in the philosophical tradition. The moment one starts to theorize, one also begins to drift. This is a drifting away from something one sees, or

something one reads. It is a drifting away from the practice we engage with. But this does not, of course, necessarily imply a drifting *towards* something unworldly, like Plato's Forms or the divine. Theorizing can remain close to practice, in the sense that it reflects on the practices that we observe or engage in at times when we are not theorizing. These can be, and often are, the very same practices that we have drifted away from when we start to theorize. But in theorizing, at least in the philosophical tradition, the theorist does not engage directly with the object or phenomenon from which we have drifted away. Rather, he or she starts to work on the concepts that are already present in the direct experience of practice. This work on the concepts through which one sees and experiences then leads to further drifting, a movement from concept to concept to concept, that only ends as a result of external impositions (having to do 'real work', doing the laundry, falling asleep, etc.). The drifting itself is initiated not by the researcher but, rather, in the encounter between the researcher and the concept, and what that encounter produces is more drifting, more movement that leads us to other concepts.

This may sound abstract, but it is really quite concrete, and part of the daily life we all experience, not just that of the professional philosopher. For instance, we may be engaged in something practical, like planning a holiday, but while doing so our mind wanders. We begin to ask why we need to get away from our regular life to begin with, which may lead us to question the value of our work and the society within which it is embedded, and thus to other concepts, and so on. Do we end up in the clouds by drifting away like that? Far from it. It seems to me that we are rather actively working on how we come to see and experience our practical life.

Jacques Derrida (2019), in a recently published lecture series from 1976-1977, insists that the most common interpretation of Marx is incorrect: Marx was not, in fact, calling for the end of philosophy. On the contrary, he was calling for an operation that would rescue philosophy from mysticism through practice. The less famous 8th thesis provided Derrida with the clues he needed. It reads:

> Social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which mislead theory into mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice. (Marx, 1998: 574)

In other words, on Derrida's interpretation Marx says that philosophy, a good thing, has degenerated into mysticism, a bad thing, and now practice is needed to turn philosophy into a good thing again. The assumed trade-off between the theoretical and the practical is false: theory does not imply a flight from the practical; far from it, theory needs to stay close to the practical in order to remain theoretical.

Theorizing, one might say, is something that comes out of a practice; it comes out of it by drifting away from it. It drifts away from practice through a concept, and then the drifting continues: one drifts from concept to concept to concept in a movement that cannot be fully controlled, but that can be followed through. There is neither management nor leadership in theorizing, but there is followership. Theorizing is therefore itself a practice, even if this practice, by its own nature, draws our attention away from the purposive relations that make up the practical sphere.

Conclusion

Theory works on the way that we see things; it is the work of thought upon itself so that we see and experience practice differently. Through it, we acquire a vision not of truth, of God, or the Forms, but of practice. Theory is not elevated, but rather a 'besides', a way to temporarily stand beside ourselves, beside our culture, and beside the fixed paths we are on that stem from the academic disciplines in which we partake. Theory shows its value in itself, independent of practical evaluations, which is to say that its value is not determined by purposive relations. In this sense, theorizing really is, as Aristotle maintained, supremely useless, which is another way of saying that theorizing drifts away from practical valuations in order to maintain its own distinctive character. But it need not turn to the clouds or heavens to get there.

But one could still ask, why are we in need of theorizing now? After all, one might think that it is pretty clear that climate change is the most urgent

problem of our times and that it is equally clear what needs to be done about it (mitigate carbon emissions, decrease production and consumption, etc.). Instead of losing oneself in questions of a philosophical nature, one may argue that today is the time to think about practical solutions to well-defined problems.

The objection is understandable given the urgency of tackling climate change, but the underlying logic that time used on theorizing is time lost for finding practical solutions is flawed. There is no fundamental trade-off between theorizing and finding practice-oriented solutions. While it might seem straightforward that a response to climate change requires reducing consumption, it is also clear that practical efforts to accomplish this are bound up with larger questions, such as the role that organizations and technology can and should play in mitigating climate change, or the relationship between nature and humankind. Indeed, it is hard to think of questions that are less straightforward than these. It is impossible to grapple with them without theorizing, without drifting away from a narrow focus on the matters urgently at hand.

Universities are far from the only places where theory happens. Theorizing is far too ordinary for that. But when it is excluded from such educational establishments, they are much impoverished. Indeed, a department or business school that does not allow its staff and its students to drift is interested in neither study nor education. This is not the time to downsize theory, and least of all in the university.

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Theory and politics in organization

Steffen Böhm, Campbell Jones and Chris Land

Spectres

Scanned from a faded old analogue print and bearing no date, this photo was taken at the first meeting of the recently formed *ephemera* editorial board in Chris' living room. Someone had suggested we should capture the moment for twenty years hence, when people asked us about it. Weird.

Image 1: Image provided by the authors

Given the rather shabby looking Christmas tree sitting on the TV, the image was probably burned onto a gelatine and silver halide film at some point in late 2000. The idea started when Steffen and Chris were the PhD student representatives at Warwick Business School, editing a PhD newsletter they called the *International journal of ephemera*. The title intended to cock a snook at academic pretensions to world-leading excellence, while simultaneously indulging some of our postmodernist pretensions by delighting in the fleeting ephemerality of life and meaning, accepting that this too shall pass, and dancing, rather than despairing, in the colossal wreckage of Professor Ozymandias' mighty Work. The *International journal* included a 'Mayfly of the month', encouraging a celebration of the sheer diversity and beauty of Ephemeratopera. The name was, fittingly, not only reflective of a more abstract passing away, but of the insect of the genus ephemera, known for being born, living and dying, in Europe at least, in the course of a day each May.

Image 2: Image provided by the authors

This all might have ended there, had Campbell not moved to the UK to join the Warwick doctoral programme in the European autumn of 1999. Our combination, and the context and gathering place of Warwick, which we knew then simply as 'the machine', produced a misfiring, Belbin-like logic of functionalist team-role composition. Steffen's background in banking and consultancy had given him practical skills, an understanding of technology, and a deep, reflective mind. Chris brought an infectious energy and enthusiasm from a background in vegan anarchist wholefood cooperatives and punk-rock, including the DIY 'zine' scene and a youth spent playing with Letraset, typewriters and photocopiers. And Campbell had an austere commitment to reading at a time when others seemed to think that reading the original was optional and postmodern and poststructuralist theory were box-of-convenience positions rather than specific intellectual arguments.

As with all work, this project was made possible by collective efforts well in excess of the three of us. We noted in our first editorial the importance of reading groups in preparing for launching our own journal, even if we didn't mention the specific importance of our reading of Volume One of Marx's *Capital* through the European summer of 2000. Iain Munro, then a lecturer in operations management and now Professor of Leadership and Organisational Change at Newcastle Business School, was a part of this group, and stood out as an awe-inspiring, progressive presence at Warwick in those days. We saw that Iain was already in, but not of, 'the machine', and his encouragement and support of our efforts was priceless. We were also supported by comrades on the doctoral programme, such as the wonderful Torkild Thanem, now Professor of Management and Organization at Stockholm University. We were also supported from within 'the machine' by Keith Hoskin, the great scholar of accounting and the examination, who was Professor of Accounting at Warwick at that time. We even bid for, and were granted, £2,000 by Warwick Business School to establish and run the journal for two years, on the condition that we subtitle the journal 'critical dialogues on organization' rather than anything more radical. We complied, even though we found 'dialogue' to be a hopelessly liberal notion, and critique to be only one moment of the politics of organization.

Why, though, did the ivory towers need storming? While perhaps interesting, or even entertaining for some, anecdotes such as these are not enough to understand the conditions in and from which *ephemera* was born. To understand these requires, as C. Wright Mills so elegantly put it, paying attention to 'the economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals' (Mills, 1959: 9). There are four key aspects we think are important to understand, both for the sake of historical understanding and for the theory and politics of organization today: first, the intellectual context from which *ephemera* was established and took root; second, the importance of institutions that provided the medium and nutrients for the journal's early fermentation; third, the political-economic context of universities, and specifically business schools, in the UK at the turn of the millennium, as well as their sometimes parasitic symbiote, the publishing industry; and fourth, the very idea of organization, as verb and noun, which *ephemera* has always intended to displace and disorganize, in the hope to reach the shores of a radical new organization of life. A lot has happened over the last twenty years. As the world has changed – and, of course, we have also changed – we thought it would be worth recalling what was, and what we hoped to achieve at the time, before we move on to consider what has changed and, crucially, where *ephemera* and other related ventures might be going.

Intellectual context

Steffen and Chris had joined the MA in Organisation Studies programme at Warwick in 1997, in the department where Gibson Burrell held the Chair in Organizational Behaviour. It was the same year that Burrell published *Pandemonium: Towards a retro-organization theory* (1997). Most PhD students then, and even now, knew *Sociological paradigms and organizational analysis,* which had been published by Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan in 1979, or the popularizing version *Images of organization,* which was published by Morgan in 1986. By contrast with *Sociological paradigms*, *Pandemonium* was a completely different kind of book. Physically, it adopted the conceit of a bi-directional text, provisionally separated by a central reservation that the reader was actively encouraged to traverse by constructing humuments

cutting across and through sections. As well as exemplifying the best and the worst of the postmodern moment in organization theory, *Pandemonium* teetered on a threshold: tempting, taunting, inviting us to cross over, beyond mere *organization*. As readers, we could not mistake the interdisciplinarity, the erudition and the vertiginous scope of the book. If there is a parallel to this today, then it is in works such as Harney and Moten's profound ethico-ontological treatise *All incomplete* (Harney and Moten, 2021), or indeed, in the recent pages of *ephemera* itself. Putting aside all pleasantries and seeking to please none, Burrell turned effortlessly from pain and torture, to careers, witchcraft, genocide, labyrinths, Cabalism, Kafka, Sade, the peasantry, McDonald's, and Michael Jackson's penis. The text was a radical opening to difference, to the topics that were pushed out of or buried beneath the veneer of rationality reflected in the glass-and-steel frontages of business school brochures. *Beneath the atrium, the abattoir*. It featured a family tree and a 'scratch and sniff card'. In terms of the intellectual context in which *ephemera* arose, this radically open encounter with the breadth of what could count as meaningfully within the remit of 'organization', and of 'organization theory', was essential. The book threw open the windows of perception and issued at least one invitation to jump. *Sociological paradigms* had created a two-by-two matrix upon which self-conscious scholars could nail themselves and their thinking, adopting a position from which to fight the ensuing 'paradigm wars'. *Pandemonium* offered a radical opening of organization theory to its constitutive yet endlessly silenced outside, its repressed others, and opened to a creative practice of reading and writing that not only tweaked the nose but punched the face of the positivist reactionaries holed up in the business school.

Pandemonium was not only revolutionary in its content but also as a physical text. The leitmotif 'linearity kills' is repeated and reworked throughout the book, which in its form simultaneously seeks to escape linearity, doubling back on itself in the bottom half of each page, inviting transversal readings across the 'central reservation', and constructing linkages that might escape the author's narrative. Such a device was only possible at a moment at which the Gutenberg era was drawing to a close. The World Wide Web was becoming well established and the rise of new forms of hypertext – which itself dates

back at least as far as the earliest Talmudic commentaries – constituted a condition of possibility for both a text like *Pandemonium* and for our choices in distribution for *ephemera*.

Image 3: Image provided by the authors

The first issues of *ephemera* were printed and bound in paper at the University's print services, with funding that had been provided by Warwick Business School. The decision to print physical copies reflected a continued commitment on our part to a hierarchy of the printed text over the digital. Even then, the very ephemerality of the internet aroused suspicion and seemed inadequately substantial to count as legitimate knowledge. Some of us today still retain this faith in the durability of the physical, which is at least in part a hangover of the cultures and religions of The Book. For us, printing copies with an ISSN number meant that we could submit them to the British Library in London for archiving in the edifice of the Euston Road atheneum. This was important for us as academic neophytes. Our induction to the scholarly community of organization studies was through the written text, as much as it was through conferences. This was a time at which we would each spend hours every week in the university library browsing the most recent

editions of journals. While printing on paper was perhaps not 'efficient', this meant we viewed a journal issue as a coherent whole, an agora where the public of our discipline gathered to share their ideas. Many of those ideas would not be relevant to our own research, but this practice of reading a journal *as* a journal, as one can attend to the time of listening to a musical recording *as* an album, informed how we thought of a journal. Each issue should have a certain consistency: a not entirely contrived theme and an editorial introduction which did not merely summarize or repeat the articles but took a position. This stands in stark contrast to the most common practice of academic reading today, which, more often than not, is so time-constrained that meandering through stacks of books and journals has been by and large replaced by searches using algorithms responding to a pre-given research question. This enables a more efficient use of time but places this imperative of 'search and cite' over belonging to a community of scholars. It also allows members of a field to plead blind ignorance of developments elsewhere, or even in their own discipline. This has also shifted the control over research data from journal editors to the publishers in charge of the citation indexes and databases.

We will return to both of these points – the changing nature of the university itself, and the political economy of publishing – below, but first it is worth returning to the specifically institutional medium that enabled *ephemera* to materialize. The University of Warwick had porous disciplinary boundaries, with students and staff organizing joint seminars and reading groups with peers in philosophy and sociology. In addition to this open, curious, and interdisciplinary – if not downright undisciplined – environment, and despite Warwick's not unfounded reputation of being run like a corporation (Thompson, 1970), the university, at that time, was still governed and managed in significant ways by academics, rather than by the managerial cadres running universities today who come from another quite different world than that of the scholar.

Institutions

In the case of *ephemera,* we benefited enormously from the generosity of established academics in writing for us and sharing contacts through their networks. This allowed us, from the very beginning, to publish contributions by established luminaries including John Armitage, David Boje, Robert Cooper, Catherine Casey, Gary Gemmill, Silvia Gherardi, Ruud Kaulingfreks, David Knights, Rolland Munro, Martin Parker and Hugh Willmott. In the summer of 2001, we therefore organized and hosted a roundtable at the European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) conference in Lyon, which was subsequently published in our third issue (Boje et al., 2001). We also had the good fortune of working with younger and then-emerging scholars including Alessia Contu, Peter Fleming, Saoirse O'Shea, Alf Rehn, André Spicer, Samantha Warren, Ed Wray-Bliss, Ann Rippin, Tadzio Mueller and Bent Meier Sørensen, who have since gone on to profoundly reshape the research agenda in critical management and organization studies and beyond. While many supported us, and the depth of this support should not be underestimated, support was far from universal. We were all taken aside at one time or another and told to stop wasting our time on *ephemera*. 'It has done all it can do for you,' we were told with a patronizing sneer: 'Now you need to start publishing in real journals.' We tried to resist playing the game by those rules and did so because of deep moral and political commitments. We saw then, and we see today, careers built on incremental 'insights' repeated, every time with a minor twist, so that one paper became ten. We saw the moral and intellectual degeneracy to which this practice of 'salami slicing' led. We had long discussions as to whether we should aim for ABS (Association of Business School) list ranking, which is often used in the UK business school context to determine the quality of research output. On the one hand, it was clear to us that supposedly 'low quality' journals published great work, whilst the top-ranked journals repeatedly published tedious dross. The Research Assessment Exercise in the UK, which later morphed into the Research Excellence Framework, was also complicit in a model of privatization of knowledge. 'I have my four 4s,' was becoming a marker of job security and academic success in UK academia at the time. This was the antithesis to the collective and open practices of scholarly, intellectual

endeavour that so excited us when we read, wrote, taught, and discussed ideas and research findings. While the journal was originally based at Warwick, it included work by thinkers based mainly, but not exclusively, across Europe. Upon finishing their PhDs, Chris and Steffen took up lecturing positions at Essex, while Campbell moved to Keele to finish his PhD before moving to Leicester, where Gibson Burrell was setting up the School of Management as an alternative to the slick, corporate servitude that WBS was pursuing. As Leicester quickly became the powerhouse of critical management studies, Campbell started working with a new generation of brilliant young academics, several of whom would contribute and ultimately take on leadership of the project, including Armin Beverungen, Nick Butler, Stephen Dunne, Stevphen Shukaitis, Sverre Spoelstra, and others.

While the funding of the journal was tiny in relation to business school operating budgets, perhaps the most important aspect of the support of Warwick, Leicester and Essex was symbolic. The personal commitment and support of Keith Hoskin at Warwick was invaluable but also afforded a degree of institutional legitimacy. As universities become ever more risk-averse and define excellence according to narrow, individualized and predetermined criteria, such activities are increasingly threatened. In a context in which most senior academics today are cowed by their institution and brutally suppressed or victimized when they speak out against the revolting practices of their institutions, support for such a venture today requires a courage that is in increasingly short supply. This journal was only made possible by those willing to take a risk, and with enough good fortune and privilege to be able to bear the costs of taking those risks.

In significant ways, *ephemera* was clearly connected with the project to develop and institutionalize 'Critical Management Studies', even if the journal was generally seen from both within and outside as being well to the left of not only most of organization studies but also of critical management studies. In many ways, the journal moved with the changing fortunes of different institutions experimenting with critical management education. Hence, the original connection with Warwick, which had been important in the rise of critical management studies in the late 1990s, and then with Leicester and Essex. Keele had also been another key location for critical

management studies in the late 1990s, before financial and managerial ineptitude ultimately spurred a mass exodus to Leicester. Through the 2000s, Essex recruited heavily in CMS, with both Chris and Steffen working there for a number of years before moving to Leicester and Exeter respectively. By the late 2000s, Queen Mary rose as a centre for Critical Management Studies, with the arrival there of Gerry Hanlon, Stefano Harney and Cliff Oswick from Leicester. Through the 2010s, centres of critical management education rose at Bayes Business School (formerly Cass Business School), the Open University and Bristol. Both critical management studies and the *ephemera* project found significant support in the slower and potentially more stable build-up of critical management scholarship at Lancaster and Manchester, where critical management studies has been fostered since the 1980s, and is now alive and well at Cardiff, Copenhagen, Glasgow, Grenoble, Lund, Macquarie, Massachusetts, Newcastle, Northumbria, Oxford Brookes, Rio Grande do Sul, St Andrews, Sydney, York and many other places around the world. Even as senior management at Leicester are seeking to burn critical management studies and political economy to the ground in an autocratic and thoughtless attack on the very principles that justify the university, these acts of institutional vandalism must be resisted with all of our efforts, while recognizing that the rolling counter-insurgency will always return and, at the same time, that critique will always find new forms and locations.

Open access

In this account of the peregrinations of *ephemera*, and of CMS, it is clear that the journal has been embedded, ever since its inception, in the contradictory space of the neoliberal university. On the one hand, this space is characterized by a seeming friendliness to openness, multiculturalism, innovation, difference and critique. On the other hand, though, this openness, which is central to capitalist organizing (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988), is immediately territorialized into the pursuit of commodified knowledge and identity production, which has been called 'the new treason of the intellectuals' in higher-education (Docherty, 2018). This treason has been driven by an ideology of privatization that is directly in opposition to everything *ephemera* stands for. *ephemera* has always been about not just openness but

understanding the contradictions of openness in capitalist regimes of organization; understanding that openness requires difference, free access to knowledge, radical thought and democratic participation, but also realizing that the neoliberal university is dedicated to enclosure. The neoliberal university erects walls around knowledge in precisely the same moment as it promises 'widening participation'; it promises open access policies while restricting access to those who can afford to pay for 'gold open access'; and it promises to democratize the benefits of research to all while privatizing such knowledge through new IP regimes.

Widening participation is particularly telling in relation to the fate of the business school, as this is the discipline that has perhaps benefited the most from such policies in the UK. Approximately 50% of the population between 17 and 30 years of age now participates in higher education. This raises the question, what are these participants actually accessing? Here the answer is educational 'products' driven by consumer demand and a pseudo-interactive model of gamified 'engagement', monitored by dashboards, satisfaction scores, and continuous assessment. This has pushed out the difficult, obdurate work of thinking, reading, listening, and writing, in favour of entertainment and employability. Worse still, this 'access' has to be paid for: mortgaged as a debt against the student's own future in the hope that this future will be more prosperous. As Docherty (2018) notes, this limits the benefits of a university education to those who directly participate. This benefit is itself coded in terms of increased graduate earnings: the promise of a slightly higher position on the income distribution curve for those prepared to gamble. In practice, this debt cancels the future, offering only an infinite horizon of 'more of the same': a continuation of wage labour under capitalism to pay the debt that gave you access to the work in the first place (Lazzarato, 2012; cf. Fisher, 2008). Increased student intake at the business school does nothing to challenge the conditions that gave rise to socio-economic inequality in the first place, but just plasters over these social fractures with a thin veneer labelled 'meritocracy'.

This bait-and-switch around openness has also driven the move to open access in publishing. We cannot claim to have been pioneers of open access, which has a much longer history. But *ephemera* was, from the start, committed

to a principle of radical open access: no one was charged for access to the work published and the publication itself was collectively managed by the community of those writing for the journal. We could not have even imagined at the time that authors might be required to pay to have their work published in an open access forum. This stands in stark contrast to the 'open access' that now dominates the university landscape. Research funders, directors, librarians, and even the Research Excellence Framework in the UK insist that work is published open-access. The rationale here is a good one. Most of the research undertaken globally, and most of the innovation for that matter (Mazzucato, 2013), is publicly funded, whether directly or via student debt underwritten by the public. As such, the public should have access to this knowledge, so that its benefits are not restricted. There are two flaws with this idea, however. First, knowledge is always restricted in some ways. At the most basic, membership of a linguistic community is required to read and participate, but in most cases this is a specialist community, with participation being based on prior understanding, cultural references, and even in-jokes. Knowledge thus requires socialization into a discursive community, so mere availability does not constitute openness. Second, the openness of contemporary open access (OA) publishing is strictly one-way: academics publish, and the (educated) public reads. Although some articles (OA Green) are published on university repositories, the common standard (OA Gold) are most commonly pay-to-publish, so that having a voice in this open-field is limited to those with institutional OA budgets, or the money to pay-to-play (Beverungen et al., 2012).

The perverse incentives this gives rise to are manifold, but we will give just one example. The journal *Sustainability* is published by MDPI, a commercial publisher, based in low-tax Switzerland, as many publishers are. MDPI has a stable of over 300 journals that are published open-access. The journal itself deals with a hugely important topic, as sustainability concerns everyone on this planet, and is under threat from a wide range of sources from unstable political and financial regimes to global warming and climate chaos. The journal itself, however, published 10,691 articles in 2020: more than any academic working in this area could possibly read. In contrast, a journal like *Organization Studies* publishes in the region of 5-6 articles in each of its 12

editions: 60-70 articles a year. The logic for MDPI should be quite clear, however. Their Articles Processing Charges (APCs) for Sustainability are 1,900 CHF (approximately £1500 at the time of writing, or €1,700, or US$2,000). The journal waives 25-27% of these fees, but even so, on the basis of 2020 this would mean that just this one journal brought in revenues of around £11.7 million to MDPI. That money, like access fees through library subscriptions, was mostly funded through public monies (whether grant or student-debt funded), channelled through OA funds in universities. This enclosure comes on top of the capture of the inevitable free labour that is gifted to all journals: the unpaid work of editors, reviewers and authors, working beyond academic contracts, or on weekends, with no direct recompense to themselves or their institutions (Beverungen et al., 2012).

Such unpaid work, of course, is an essential part of *ephemera* too. The journal was only made possible through the unpaid and largely unrecognized work of its wider community. Here we want to give tribute and credit to all of those who have done that work either for nothing or at a direct cost to themselves. We have all been discouraged in certain ways. We should perhaps not be surprised when we are told by university functionaries that edited volumes 'do not count' as research outputs, or when we are told by unthinking para-academics 'I am not saying that you should regret all of that editing work, it's just that…'. But at least with *ephemera* the benefit was for the community we all belong to, rather than to further augment the millions flowing into Swiss bank accounts on the back of our hard work. Free and open access, not enclosure. Common goods, for collective benefit. The publishing industry is central to all academic and intellectual work, and yet so often it is outside of academic control and parasitic upon the work of academics and students. We wanted the journal to be free and accessible to all, not via a rent-extorting paywall, and publishing to be without financial cost to the author. We are glad that this ethos remains a core principle of the journal today.

The open access publishing model of *ephemera* has always opened itself to readers and authors from outside privileged institutions in the Global North. While diversity was one of our key goals from the beginning, the radicalism of the early years was clearly limited in its attention to gender, sexuality, race, colonization and imperialism, while the theoretical terms of reference were

in the early years by and large centred on Europe. Through his involvement with, and research on, social movements, particularly the World Social Forum, in the first decade of the new millennium, Steffen developed deep and meaningful relationships with academics and activists in South America and other parts of the Global South, particularly friends and colleagues at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil. This led to special issues, such as 'The organisation and politics of social forums' (2005) and 'América Latina / Latin America' (Misoczky, 2006), which provided radical new vistas of 'organization' beyond the institutions that are normally analysed by organization and management scholars, even those of the 'critical' kind. With this political move, the journal developed a deep affinity and solidarity with emancipatory struggles around the world well before the irreversible demand for decolonization came to centre stage.

We are glad to say that over the past twenty years, *ephemera* has become increasingly diverse. Rather than becoming institutionalized in, and dominated by, one particular context, the journal has continuously questioned the boundaries of organization studies. It has practiced a radical interdisciplinarity that has yet to find an equivalent in the field. We are always astonished and pleased to see the wide and diverse readership and authorship of *ephemera*. It attracts attention by geographers, sociologists, historians, anthropologists, political theorists, psychologists and many others – not to mention the various business and management disciplines. What is unique here is that the journal's readers and authors have a lust for a radical interdisciplinarity that goes well beyond the usual calls by the academy for interdisciplinary methods. In 'The atmosphere business' (2012), for example, in an all too rare exploration of the relationship between business organizations and climate change, the journal presented contributions from a wide variety of academic backgrounds and disciplinary approaches. The form here again mattered, constituting a politics in itself, acknowledging that the climate crisis should be approached through an ethos of radical inclusivity and diversity, providing a critique of the commodification approaches that climate capitalism offers in the form of 'net-zero' and 'carbon market' solutions. The journal continues to engage with topics that no other organization and management studies journal would touch, as with the recent

issue 'América Latina / Latin America: Again (and again)' (Misoczky et al. 2020), which renews its interest in social movement struggles of the Global South.

Yet, there are limits, of course, to what *ephemera* has been able to achieve. There are always possibilities of radical critiques of one's own organization and organizing. When we were directly involved in the day-to-day running of the journal, it was all too clear that editing a journal is a political process in itself. Openness does not just happen and cannot just be yearned for. It needs to be worked on, and forever renewed. We hope that the current editorial collective will continue in this struggle of diversity, continuously questioning identities and politico-economic structures of organization, including that of academia itself. The political work of critique should continue and intensify, involving topics that are not yet fully central enough in the journal, including racism, white supremacy, ongoing colonialism, the lives of animals other than humans, the planetary ecological crisis, along with indigenous organizing, new forms of political organization, new and unforeseen struggles, and the return of the idea of communism. The journal, we hope, will continue to push the boundaries of the field of organization studies, including its own boundaries. Journals, more than ever, have to think beyond their own form, thinking about their audiences and the limits of their form. In an age of shorter and shorter attention spans, how do we communicate complex concepts and conceptual insights? How do we take 'theory' seriously when there is a growing distrust of 'experts'? How, indeed, do we organize the publishing industry in an age where a new, radical enlightenment is needed? This requires ever new lines of flight, questioning taken-for-granted assumptions of what 'organization' is, how it is to be done, and to what ends it is put.

Organization

To start anything anew requires using an old language but at the same time causing it to stutter, break-down, and forge new associations. It was clear from the beginning that we were proposing to use the word 'organization' in a quite different sense from its dominant meaning. This was not an effort to

simply make 'organization' an indiscriminate shibboleth that could mean anything to anyone. We used and continue to use the idea of 'organization' in a specific way. When we started *ephemera*, one of the key reformulations that we and our associates were concerned with involved questioning the static, fixed and seemingly completed result that was called 'the organization' and instead drawing attention to the practices that establish and reproduce those apparently durable forms. This was put in a number of ways, whether as a movement from thing to process or from organization as a noun to organizing as a verb. In this we were consciously twisting the word 'organization', and key to this expression was that certain key aspects of organizational life are and remain 'in organization'. This requires a recognition that social forms do not arise 'spontaneously' through the interaction, in whichever form, of individuals. Rather, social and organizational forms are put in place (*gestellt*) in an always determinate way. This both draws attention to the fact of organization that lies behind much that appears to others to be merely natural or spontaneous, but moreover it opens the space for contestation and organizing things differently. To say that things are 'in organization' means both that they are organized by concrete processes that can be understood, and, at the same time, that this fact of continuous organization indexes the fact that they are not (yet) completely closed and their possibilities for transformation are not completely dead.

We found the key intellectual touchstone for this kind of thinking in the work of Robert Cooper. The generation which came before us had been inspired by the writing, teaching and thought of Cooper, both those who had worked with him at Lancaster in the 1970s and in the encampments in Manchester and Keele from the 1980s and 1990s. In 1976, Cooper published his remarkable essay 'The Open Field', and through the 1980s pressed, with others such as Gibson Burrell, for an opening towards deep engagement with philosophy and theory (Cooper and Burrell, 1988; Cooper, 1989). This wave would break at the end of the 1980s with the self-assured arrival of 'the theory and philosophy of organizations' (Hassard and Pym, 1990).

We always wanted to link this rise of open and deep theoretical reflection with equal urgency for politics and social change, thus 'theory *and* politics in organization'. We could clearly see that both theory and politics are never

done by individuals in isolation from social processes, but that they are always, for better or worse, organized in a particular way, with their own inclusions and exclusions. The goal then was to organize theory, to provide it a platform and a place to live, to foster new pathways and support creative minds. This involves taking on the editorial apparatus and finding ways to organize differently. Likewise, politics is also always organized, in one way or another. By openly linking to fields of politics and political experimentation, which organization theory had so often claimed to be outside its purview, even if we all know that some of the most important changes historically in how organizations are structured arose directly from state and extra-parliamentary politics, we wanted to bring politics back in, to contest the depoliticization of organization theory, and thus to bring about something of an 'undepoliticization' of the theory of organization.

Clearly, 'theory' and 'politics' are not just things that happen to 'organizations', but rather are also organized in particular ways. They are contested terrains; they are open to being organized in other ways, and our efforts to change them cannot eschew being involved 'in organization'. We have written at length about these challenges, in for example Steffen's demand for the repositioning of organization theory (Böhm, 2006), Campbell's call that political organization always maintain the dialectic of politics and organization (Jones and Walsh, 2018), and of Chris's relentless search for alternative forms of organization (Parker et al., 2014).

A fear of achieving perfection is immobilizing when it holds us back from doing anything. While we would hesitate to claim any full or final victories, at the same time we are immensely proud of what *ephemera* has been able to achieve, from our own initial efforts to the massive and ongoing efforts by those who have led the journal since. Minor victories have been won. Today, the international field of organization studies is certainly more diverse and more critical in its approach and outlook. More voices are being heard, although of course the market knows how to package and sell once-radical ideas to its customers. Clearly, a sense of defeat is invited by the massive and overwhelming counterrevolution that has been waged against progressive thought and politics over the past fifty years. While many today name the neoliberal onslaught effected through government policies from the 1980s, in

terms of the recent history of the West, this reflects one crucial but not isolated aspect of a fifty year war that has sought to repudiate and go back on everything that was hopeful in the 1960s, whether this arose in the form of the insurrections of 1968, the success and vision of Black Panther Party, the Womens' Liberation Movement, the refusals of war and police brutality, the demand for equal rights or the radical critique of the limits to economic growth expressed by the environmental movements.

Almost every element of this vision, other than what can be superficially entertained or turned into market segments, has been the subject to a relentless refusal over the past fifty years, in a sequence of which the most recent atrophy of the United States political system is merely the most recent symptom. This counterrevolution has been waged on economic and political terrain, to be sure. It has also been fought on ideological and scientific terrains, even if this resulted in something quite different from the triumph of the best ideas. Rather, the fifty-year war of reaction against critique and difference has sought instead to immobilize and apparently 'question' progressive ideas, such that the force of reaction does not even claim that they are on the right side, but, rather, seek to foster doubt in their opponents. Here, the ideological offensive has again learned from and fostered the worst corporate manipulations in order to doubt the hope or prospect of anything that might look like progress (Oreskes and Conway, 2010).

We know this world is broken. There are so many crises that surround us: the climate crisis, the pandemic, the ecological crisis, the social crisis, the crisis of dignity and ethics. Sheer greed seems to dominate most organizational affairs these days. Some say: don't just focus on the negatives. Correct. We must see the positives; the love and the humane; the sheer resilience of those against whom war has been waged for so long. Yet, we maintain that critical theory has taught us of the need to transit through a moment of utter despair. To not do this would be to be less than human. To despair is to come face to face with reality. To generalize a sense of failure is to become political in the hope to make things better, or at least 'fail better'. *Worstward Ho!* The point of going through negativity is to arrive at a more positive, more inclusive and progressive world, or at least to keep trying for it.

Despite many defeats, we retain the same utopian optimism that motivated us when we started *ephemera* at the turn of the millennium. The question of course is what can be done today. If we allow the current state of the world to be the end of the matter, then we have abdicated responsibility, we have reneged on the promises that the present also contains. As the new youth put it today, 'Everything is fucked…but the point is to move beyond that' (Jaques et al., 2018). This moving beyond has always been our project, and, in this sense, if things have been moved even a little bit, then *ephemera* has been worth all of our efforts. Indeed, everywhere today we are surrounded by those working incredibly hard to make the world, at least for some of its participants, a little less fucked than it currently is. For some this means working within their organization, whether this be 'public' or 'private', to move beyond the impasses of today, even when knowing that so little can be done without confronting the economic and political system directly. Others constantly feel the need to step outside their organization, to speak loudly and clearly for the new world and to take to the streets to demand it. For many young people today, there is literally nothing to lose. And for us it remains that the new world will not simply be rationally legislated into being by however well-intentioned elites who would speak for and on behalf of others. No, society changes in the direction of the many precisely because of the rising up of the voices of those who until then had been counted as nothing. So small that they seem to count as nothing, it is these tiny creatures which promise to spring to life each May, on which we must wager our every hope.

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Academic activism

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From my limited perspective, I have found that academic activism can be a source of delight offering a sense of connectedness that is rare in academic work. It is also daunting. Activism can be as frustrating as it is satisfying. Making peace with this ambivalence early on is probably a good idea.

Academic work – the day job – mainly involves some mix of research, publishing, teaching, and helping to run the university. On top of this, some academics get involved in 'activism'. The activity has multiple definitions but when people speak about activism they are generally describing interventions, outside the day job, aimed at bringing about social change of some sort. This can involve working with civil society organizations, or one's trade union, leading and participating in rallies, street marches, and strikes. At a workshop recently, one senior academic well-known for his activism was asked how he decided between the myriad of possible pursuits. 'I do the talking and the writing parts', he explained. 'I'm no good at the other stuff'. The talking and the writing parts include appearing on the radio, the TV, writing opinion pieces, getting involved in policy debates, presenting to politicians, and speaking publicly. These are the kinds of interventions outside the university in which, through my research on whistleblowing in organizations, I have some understanding. I thus write from this position. Just to be clear: others are much better at these things. But having been asked, I am happy to reflect on the experience and particularly the critical question: given that the day job is incredibly busy: why do it?

Universities tend to like academic activism, most of the time. Activities can be presented to onlookers as evidence of 'relevance', particularly desirable in an era in which academic institutions are increasingly accused of the opposite. Universities can package accounts of academic staff being relevant in short stories for inclusion in newsletters and websites, and tweet the stories with a picture attached. Of course, the extent of university approval likely depends on what the activity involves. Being on the evening current affairs TV show is good and to be encouraged. Organizing in direct opposition to the university itself is probably not so favoured. Taking legal challenges against gender discrimination in academic promotions, protesting the mass redundancies of influential scholars because they do critical work: these are recent examples of the kind of activism less likely to appear in the newsletter. If the aim is to struggle toward a better world, we clearly need a broader understanding of what activism entails than that offered by the university. Where to begin?

Being useful

Being useful is perhaps an obvious place to start if activism involves attempting to work towards social change. This is not something we academics are always great at. But sometimes, if we are lucky, invitations to be useful arrive. For the past seven years, a group of trade union activists, civil society organization members and campaigners from different countries have been working hard to bring about significant legal change across the European Union. It will offer much stronger protection for workers who speak out about abuses of power in their organizations. I followed this activity with interest albeit at a distance. First, this group had to agree upon a set of common goals; this was not easy given the mix of ideologies and beliefs inevitably present. They had to do this agreeing despite language differences and geographic dislocation. They each had to compromise their positions, to work with difficult people: to agree to disagree. And then the work began: writing to politicians, writing again, travelling to where the politicians would be, waiting, more waiting, rescheduling, travelling again, getting promises to vote a certain way, and hoping they would be kept. But the group succeeded:

a promising new law across all EU Member States is due for December 2021[1]. Of course, it will not be perfect, there will be the inevitable flaws in the statutes and flaws in the implementation. But it is a significant start. Other countries including the UK and US are talking about following suit.

This achievement is impressive to say the least. It appeared doubly-so from my perspective as an academic with a permanent job, aware that some of these activists and advocates have had to do their travelling and their waiting, in-between raising funds for their organization's survival next year. So when I am asked, here and there, to be useful to the process, I try to say yes. A talking-head slot on the national radio, a commentator on a TV documentary, providing a quote for the newspaper, or writing up a policy brief: various attempts at usefulness. It all felt uncomfortable at the outset, but I learned two things quite quickly. First, most of this activity requires your usefulness to be demonstrated right now, at once, today. The radio request in the morning is for the evening drive-time show, a mere four hours later. The TV researcher needs information immediately. The article is going to press tomorrow. Any other plans you might have need to be shelved. Someone else must pick up the kids. A critical management academic, who seems to do this kind of thing with ease, shared a tip with me. She pitches to an open publishing forum like *The Conversation* on a Monday. If the piece comes out by Wednesday, it is far more likely to be picked up and run by a mainstream broadsheet newspaper seeking content for the weekend edition. I learned this by accident – chatting as we queued for a conference coffee urn.

The second thing you learn is that, in order to be any use, you must have full command of all the facts you need and know exactly what you want to say. You will need to be sharp. No notes allowed on the TV. No room to waffle on about ambiguities and complexities on the thirty-second radio slot. The

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[1] The EU Whistleblower Directive 2021 establishes for the first time a comprehensive legal framework for whistleblower protection across the bloc, aimed at safeguarding the public interest. Changes will include easily-accessible reporting channels, obliging organizations receiving whistleblower disclosures to maintain confidentiality and to act on disclosures, and strengthening protections for whistleblowers against retaliation. There are omissions in the law but it represents a significant step forward in protecting free speech rights for workers.

journalist does not want a citation to support your controversial point, thank you very much. But you get used to the flutter of anxiety that comes with the request to which you reluctantly feel compelled to say yes. You learn to memorize your talking points and not to be swayed by a presenter looking for controversy – although radio and TV presenters have told me that they normally give academics an easier time than other guests, because we are famous for being such poor interviewees. And you learn to be ok with the fact that it never works out exactly as you would like. You stuttered a little, you fluffed the curve-ball question. But mostly there is a vague feeling that you have been somewhat useful, and that is not unpleasant.

Useful research?

Our research itself can be useful. I recently spoke to a whistleblower in Ireland whose story was in the news. He had made a protected disclosure – a whistleblower statement – about dangerous breaches of safety at a well-known organization. But now he was being punished and excluded by management, driven to publicize his story in the news media. As often happens, he was finding it difficult to conceive of a career outside this industry, even though his claims had been fully vindicated by an independent inquiry. 'Your articles and books were very helpful', he told me. I thanked him and asked which bits particularly. 'Oh, I didn't read them, it was my wife. But she told me what they said'. It turns out that this man's wife, who herself had studied social sciences in her youth, found the parts that attempted to explain what happens when organizations use their resources to retaliate against individuals useful. The theories had been helpful for this couple making sense of what they were going through. They normalized – or at least explained – something about this bizarre and painful situation in which, having done the right thing, in the public interest, they were suffering along with their children. The articles and books helped to understand how, contrary to appearance, organizations do not always act rationally, and that the legal system can be inherently unfair. Academics often downplay this aspect but it is worth remembering that our work can, now and then, make a difference to people in difficult situations; it can help show these things in a new light. Theory is not the preserve of academics, it's just that we go on about it more.

Chatting to others who have spoken out, it is clear that stories of the many other people who have been through similar situations, across the world, are a source of comfort. Other whistleblowers have kids too, have mortgages, experience financial struggles. Others have found themselves pretty much on their own, suffering from stress. The research can offer a sense of connection.

The numbers we produce can also be useful. While theory can help whistleblowers to some degree, there are often more immediate, pressing problems to deal with. Money is one, especially when one has lost the capacity to earn any, through the common practice of whistleblower blacklisting. I feel somewhat sheepish recalling a series of interviews ten years ago, for a research project on 'whistleblower identity'. More than once, when the tape recorder was shut off at the end of the discussion, my interlocutor would ask softly whether I had come across examples of others who had spoken out, lost their job and managed to create a new career. 'How had they managed it?' they wanted to know. These moments rendered my investigation into subjectivities in a different light. Frankly it felt a bit obtuse. This spurred colleagues and I to carry out survey research into the financial and material costs of speaking up, which attracted funding in 2016. We get news sometimes of how the resulting report is being used. We heard from the lawyers of Dawn Wooten, a US immigration services nurse and whistleblower who spoke up about detained immigrants' repeated exposure to COVID-19, the carrying out of hysterectomies and other procedures without consent, and other abuses. Dawn's supporters have used the report in drawing support for her ongoing case, and we learn about other instances too. The research in question is based on relatively rudimentary quants: descriptive statistics. The simple points we are making – whistleblowers suffer financially, and here is the price tag – do not, I am now learning, always sit well with academic journal reviewers, possibly because of this very simplicity. But the work has been found to be useful. I do not mention these examples to promote the study but rather to highlight another example where the activism bit does not always sit so well with the doing of the day job - in this case, publishing in highly-ranked journals.

So, activism seems to be about being useful. But let's be honest here. The content is important, but the source perhaps even more so. What you say on

the radio, what you share with people struggling against organizations, what you calculate from your survey results – a large part of the usefulness of these efforts is the fact that the message arrives to its recipient with the stamp of the university on the letterhead. In practical terms, it is the marshalling of the influence and authority held by the university that offers a valuable scaffold to the points you make. It is easy to forget, in the day-to-day ambivalences and challenges we encounter within the walls of these places, how to those outside, universities still represent – more or less – solidity, longevity and trustworthiness. People tend to trust authorities, and academic experts appear near the top of the list when people are asked which professions are the most credible: significantly higher than journalists, government representatives and CEOs. Controversies and ambivalences notwithstanding, credibility is a currency in which academia remains rich. The academic is - not only – but in a large part, a conduit of this credibility. Her activities and artefacts can enable symbolic support to flow from an institution in which these are in plentiful supply, to individuals and small groups who struggle alone and who could use the help. Working with colleagues in my area, we try where possible to share the platform, inviting whistleblowers as guest lecturers (paid), as honorary academics, co-authors and researchers, offering a forum to speak where possible. More needs doing, of course, but it is something.

Dissolve the boundaries

So if activism involves drawing on one's fortunate position to provide bits of usefulness, what exactly is it that makes the work compelling enough to want to do, on top of an already overloaded schedule? It appears to draw people, but why?

The question of why we get involved in this kind of thing has been explored at length. Ideas of mutual obligation are put forward, often accompanied by philosophical exhortations that we must depart from a narrow individualistic worldview. We must instead fulfil our responsibilities to other people in a reciprocal manner: 'I will help you because I know I will need you later'. But there is a mealy-mouthedness to this idea, an aura of the transactional. More

compelling for me is a psychosocial understanding that foregrounds the mutual constitution of subjects who come into being as inseparable from the other. Such approaches highlight our intertwining even before birth through matrixial connection inspired by Bracha Ettinger and many others, and through language as highlighted by poststructural feminist theorists from Judith Butler to Jessica Benjamin. Drawing on these ideas, organization scholars problematize – at a fundamental level – the self-other boundary and the elevation of individualism that marks today's academic work. As academics we are human, that is, we are embodied, intersubjective beings despite the fact that we often pretend we are not. Our embodied academic selves are thus 'infinitely extended' through relations with those others that read what we write and by extension those others we encounter in our work. The extending exists because, simply put, without those others, we cannot be. The academic writes 'within a relational, ethical, matrixial space where we connect to the other… And so we get hurt when the other is hurt'; we should therefore write – and act – from this position (Fotaki and Harding, 2018: 174).

This helps to make sense of academic activism, at least my limited experience of it. It seems that the joy – partial and temporary as it most certainly is – comes from a little bit of relinquishing the self. It comes from a sense of boundaries dissolving: boundaries learned and internalized over years of academic practice. Activism is so very different to the rest of what we do, at least in much of the social sciences. The publishing side tends to be all about the individual; the academic authors the paper. The professor gets the grant, and if others are involved in bidding she is asked to quantify the specific value of her contribution. The lecturer holds forth in the theatre, a singular focus of attention. Academia can seem so totally set up for individual attainment, for competition, for self-aggrandizement. Its structures and cultures shape the subjectivities and not in a very nice way. Even critical management studies, an area focused on resistance that is often collective, often feels contentious and aggressive, despite that it would surely make sense to stick together given the role of capitalism in driving us to global catastrophe, and all that. The pleasure of activism work is partly to do with how cold the day job can feel sometimes. Sometimes the solidarity shown in activism, by those EU partners campaigning for legal change for instance, leaves me in awe. There is a desire

to be part of this. Academic activism – the joyous parts – removes the actor from the spotlight, and the subject from the sentence. The author fades into a blur of activity. Her value now stands in direct proportion to the extent to which the artefact she has made can be used by others.

Of course, as anyone familiar with a psychosocial approach will note, it is not all sweetness, light and celebration of connection. Somewhat awkwardly, academics are always engaged in the everyday narcissism that accompanies human existence. We go around upholding, buttressing and defending the self, same as everyone else. What we may tell ourselves is commendable altruism is simply part of this ongoing project. We are often drawn to research topics that – somehow – do something for us, that give us something we don't have. Personally, I sometimes struggle to find my own voice, finding it easier to stay silent. I am not proud of displays of cowardice in situations where speaking up is clearly the thing to do. I am in awe of those who actually display a backbone, who always act on their principles. Is it desirable for me to be around people like this, I wonder? Does it, and I can feel how pathetic this sounds as I write, do something for me; to hang on the margins - looking on, writing, talking and not doing? Probably. Is throwing out an op-ed or two a fantasy that I am making a difference? Likely. Can I live with that? I guess it might be this question that keeps me going back. If we are honest, it is not wholly unlikely that a smattering of guilt, a desire for elusive solidarity, a glow of second-hand bravery, all colour this kind of endeavor. But if it gets a job done, perhaps that is ok.

Bring back the boundaries, please

All this said, sometimes I feel nostalgic for my boundaries. They offered protection from what can be a chaotic new world. Writing opinion pieces, and especially going on the radio or television, are activities that put your name 'out there', even a little. They effectively signal – in public – that you exist and that you work in this area. Most people don't pay any attention whatsoever. Many others are supportive, creating connections on social media, sharing useful information and generally emanating goodwill. And there are always some people who find what you are doing and saying highly

offensive, and feel that your sharing of your views simply cannot be tolerated. Even benign articles on new laws can yield interesting responses. One message on Twitter informed me that my recent book was less useful than a sadomasochism website, to which he (I presumed it was he) helpfully provided a link. It was quite difficult to figure out whether in fact this was 'trolling' because as an act of online violence it was rather incoherent. But I like to think it was trolling. If you haven't been trolled, you are not working hard enough. I have been asked to explain my 'profiting from research into whistleblowers', presumably by someone unfamiliar with the mass exploitation in the service of arms industries that is academic publishing. And defending oneself on Twitter sometimes feels like shouting in a crowded bar, in which everyone is drunk and also shouting. Others experience this kind of thing to a much greater degree, but any amount of online escalation can feel overwhelming. When criticism is shared on Twitter it can multiply exponentially – each click causing notification numbers to rise and the atmosphere to sharpen. It is worth learning about Twitter's block function. I think it would feel less overwhelming if I knew of others in this situation.

Because I write about corruption and have hosted speakers at my university who talk about corruption, it is often necessary to mention who is doing the corruption. To do this without losing multiple nights' sleep worrying about the consequences, you need to swot up on the libel laws. These can be complicated. Did you know that in the UK you can be sued for defamation one year to the day after your book has been published, but not after that? Even if it is an e-book. Except, that is, in Northern Ireland. Here the law deems an e-book to be published anew every time someone opens the file, which, I am told, means you can be sued into infinity or however long your e-book remains in existence. That's just the technical side of the law, which has some relation to – but is quite different from – the actual practice of the law. The latter involves estimating the likelihood of being sued, a mystical formula depending upon people's tolerance for risk, the potential claimant's own career plans, and the news cycle. There are other requirements; you become on first-name terms with the university's lawyer. You learn how to distance yourself from statements: when to smile and say 'XX's views are not the views of the university!'. You wake up at 2am to print out the 1997 Academic

Freedom in the Universities Act, just to remind yourself of what it says. It cheerfully advises that Irish academics are safe to 'question and test received wisdom, to put forward new ideas and to state controversial or unpopular opinions', without detriment, although again the practice is likely a little different. None of this lends itself to peaceful existence. Nostalgia for the boundaries grows.

Another radio interview. The presenter wants you to explain, briefly, why retaliation against whistleblowers occurs, when they have clearly done the right thing. You pause. 'Well, it's complex', you begin to say, 'there are lots of different factors at play'. She pushes you to get off the fence and make an unambiguous, single-sentence statement. This goes against everything you have ever done in academia. Bring back my boundaries please.

As is probably clear by now, the desire to bring back the boundary, to concentrate only on the day job, relates to how isolating it can sometimes feel as you learn each of these lessons by yourself. Maybe others have had different experiences, but I have yet to work at a university that prioritizes the things that seem to be needed. On the contrary much of what makes an academic useful in the activism space is not taught, rather is sometimes in direct contradiction to what you learn in the day job. To be useful in moments like this, it is necessary that you formulate specific and unambiguous claims with which you can live, that you know how to look after yourself on social media, and – if your work involves critique – that you have some skills in negotiating that fine line between what can and cannot be said in public, in order to prevent dreaded Friday-afternoon solicitor letters arriving to you or your colleagues. These are the things you will need: standard media training only goes so far. Perhaps the reasons for this are obvious, but in this era where other sources of critique fall away, maybe we should indeed be taught how to approach the line, to learn how far the 1997 Academic Freedom in the Universities Act can be pushed in the service of the public good. I am not always courageous and often afraid to take chances. But I believe that I might be better at it, if there were more people around doing it too.

Concluding thoughts

In conclusion, I have not found a simple way to make sense of this kind of activity. In the best-case scenario, you will be rendered useful. And that is fine, it feels nice to surrender the self a little bit. You will also at times regret that you ever bothered. If you are honest you will acknowledge your own ego in all of this, and that is also fine because that is the way we are. Hopefully something good will come out of it all.

Academic activism is both enjoyable and uncomfortable. Making peace with this ambivalence is a useful thing to do. Because it is important to keep trying. As readers of *ephemera* know well, organizations are marvelous entities that can get things done, and they can also cause horrific pain and suffering to many. In disputes the balance of power is often with large organizations; what experts call 'equality of arms' in such legal cases is a fantasy. Organizations with deeper pockets can out-spend most challengers. The traditional sources of support for those who expose abuses of power – independent investigative journalism and well-funded unions among others – are in rapid decline. Without deluding ourselves about the extent to which we can effect change, perhaps making it a little more difficult for organizations to wield this power is a reasonable aim. When we find ourselves pinned to a statement on the radio, what we can do is speak from a position that is based on some knowledge and understanding of a topic that we have done our best to examine in some depth. This understanding is always partial but it is what we can offer. And in some cases, it can help.

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author note

I am very grateful to two reviewers and two activist-academic friends, who commented on an earlier draft of this piece. They offered critical additions and counterpoints to some of the issues raised. I include them here:

- I recognized much of what you said. I found techniques for managing stress when doing live tv/radio around being pre-prepared (3 mins of tv can be/should be a few hours of gamed-out practices on the 1st outing), working out zinger lines (it is cognitively hard to think on live radio), and de-risking (clothes, voice warming, knowing the format, arriving early etc).
- I think working out what type of academic activist are you is important – should I shut up about things outside my expertise (unlike others on the media scene)? Am I speaking as a researcher about my expertise, or, am I speaking as a smarty-pants from the university who knows a lot about stuff (knowing it can be hard to change register from expert to rent-an-opinion, and that experts are more than media content-providers)?
- I empathize with your sentiments on the limits of our impact at the end, but also disagree with them. I feel people need to be warned as to how serious activism can become. Sometimes, and often in unpredictable and unusual ways things happen because of academic activism - we need to own the implications of what interventions we make… This is the counterbalance to the vanity endorphins that come with media-work. It is so important to have thought through strategically what you would like to happen, and what might happen from activism.
- I would say that universities are rather ambivalent about academic activism – not only when it concerns union activism – e.g. EP Thompson's account in 'Warwick University Ltd', but also issues such as Occupy, anti-war activism (Chomsky vs MIT), and many forms of political activism, e.g. Yale vs D. Graeber, Harvard vs Cornel West.
- My impressions are that most activists work in solidarity as anonymous collectives engaged in many mundane support activities and that except in a few cases academics (e.g. De Beauvoir, Greer, Chomsky, Said, Graeber), they are relatively marginal to activist movements - in some sense there may be parallels with lawyers as professional advocates, e.g. Hollander, Tibbo, Donziger, Melzer.
- In the introduction, you provide a definition of activism as a set of practices by differentiating between 'the talking & writing parts' and the 'participating in rallies, marches, strikes'. While you define your own activist activities as belonging to the first, I read this differentiation between 'discursive' vs. more 'embodied' forms of interventions as something you seem to want to overcome in favor of interrogating the very usefulness of our research for those concerned by it. In this sense, academic activism can be appreciated not only by 'what we do' (either speaking/writing or marching/sitting-in) but rather 'what we do and what our research does to/for/with others'. As such,

your account provides various examples of not only what you did but most importantly, the performative effects of your activist activities. The above comment connects in a way with the psychosocial perspective you develop in the section 'Dissolve the boundaries' around ideas of relationality, reciprocity and mutual constitution. But the second point I want to make here is that it brings in, albeit implicitly, the question of ethics or of ethical responsibility we hold toward each other.

the author

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An unfinished lexicon for autonomous publishing

Julia Udall, Becky Shaw, Tom Payne, Joe Gilmore and Zamira Bushaj

abstract

The unfinished lexicon for autonomous publishing explores the spaces, relations, and interdependencies that can be produced by recognising publishing as a precarious, collective and distributed activity. Our web-based lexicon brings together practitioners and theorists across disciplines who are engaging with publishing as an emancipatory practice, to share verbs and contributions to an evolving library that delineate their approach. Through this experimental assemblage we seek to map out a constellation that enables open-ended stories, and operates to 'hold together with others,' across different scales and temporalities (Kelleher, 2015). The lexicon does not offer fixed or final definitions; in hosting these in a virtual space, we seek to enable non-linear readings and multiple adjacencies. This article introduces the lexicon, and three initial entries, from the fields of architecture, performance, and fine art. We invite guest contributions to our emerging web project, autonomouspublishing.org, which we will launch later this year.

AN UNFINISHED LEXICON FOR AUTONOMOUS PUBLISHING

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OUTLINE OF AN OPENING

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Publishing is such a simple notion: making information available for a public. Yet concertinaed into every one of these words lies a multitude of complications, propositions, uncertainties, and questions: what is information and what process designates it so, and what degree of informing must information perform? What contexts produce and prevent availability, and what forms of public and publicness, and its shadow 'private' is being 'made' when publishing happens? Publishing is not just about the circulation of discourse, or the communication of knowledge. Rather what is being published, how particular cultural, experimental and marginal text relate to broader social processes contributes to the organisation of people and space across different contexts and locations (Bell & O'Hare, 2019). The unfolding of publishing over time takes place across space; collectively gathering, designing, making, editing, communicating, printing, disseminating, reading, remaking. Here the social forms create the convergence of political democratic and participatory aesthetics, where initiating such a process within the context of a social struggle is to seek to establish conditions that enable the coproduction of meaning, and animate social, cultural, and material relationships. By paying attention to the technologies, labour, material, and knowledge-making practices is to open-up moments of negotiation, reconfiguration and distributed agency (Holert, 2011).

A B C D E F G H I J K L N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Drawing on the work of Stevphen Shukaitis, and Joanna Figiel, we are energised by the notion of 'publishing to find comrades' (Shukaitis & Figiel, 2019). Our lexicon will bring together spatial practitioners and theorists engaging with publishing across disciplines to share terms that delineate the processes, tactics, actions, acts that shape their thinking and work. Through this experimental assemblage we seek to map out a constellation that enables us to tell open-ended stories, and operate to 'hold together with others,' across different scales and temporalities (Kelleher, 2015). The lexicon does not offer fixed or final definitions; in hosting these in a virtual space, we enable non-linear readings and multiple adjacencies. To borrow from historian Tina Campt, 'It is a shifting relation where each term takes a turn at occupying the foreground of our focus and attention, while sustaining a dialogue with those in the background to improvise a multitude of provisional answers' (Campt, 2019). This article introduces the lexicon, and we welcome guest contributions to our emerging web project, which we will launch later this year.

Whilst any discipline or field might be said to be publishing according to their accepted methods, the process all might share is 'making available for'. This common verb, 'making' is perhaps the most lively we have: it corrals movement, gesture, materials, ordering, combining and space. The act of publishing as making contains the possibility that the 'public' being evoked is also made too. Crucially, this relation involves being bound to that information at the moment of it being made public – of becoming a publisher. All major social media platforms deny their status as publisher, describing themselves as platforms to side-step the ethical and legal obligations that this status confers. This claim is controversial, given their use of algorithms, blocking and censoring of content (Zilles, 2020) and their reach and dominance in shaping discourses. Whilst there is a proliferation of subscription web publishing fora, any claim for publishing autonomy through web platforms is compromised by corporations such as Amazon (who utilize digital rights management or DRM to lock content), Facebook or Google, who are providing web architecture such as React or AngularJS.

The *Unfinished lexicon for autonomous publishing* seeks to consider the spaces, relations, and interdependencies that autonomous publishing might permit or activate, as well as those forms of enclosure or exclusion that (de) limit. In working with the notion of autonomy, we are seeking to signal what may be considered its opposite – publishing's interdependence, and precarity. This framing acknowledges that certain forms of commercial or institutional publishing claim independence, and sole authorship of that is always the work of many. Instead, we strive to have autonomy from those practices of enclosure or claims of ownership that deny or obscure what is below the line, what is adjacent, how, and why a publication has emerged (through labour, cares, desires, needs), and where it may travel, or have affordances. We are interested in publishing that draws attention to and enables the struggle

against oppressive material conditions, and strengthens those moments of joy, freedom or resistance. Where individual voices and perspectives that speak about themselves in a critical way are listened to and do not need to be spoken for. With this in mind, the lexicon is composed of intransitive verbs. Verbs have a kind of sensorial register that evokes degrees of force, scale, qualities of movement and speed: consider the materialised squeezing downward force in the verb 'pressing' or the incessant eroding of 'dripping'. Verbs are important because they do not indicate outputs or ends, but potentials.

We do not claim to hold the centre ground of 'expertise' around publishing but see the margins that we each occupy allowing us the space to experiment in our coming together, rather than defend terrain. The instances of publishing that we present in greater depth here, and which will be some of the first on the web platform, are engaging in social and cultural organising; trying to shift norms, find openings or challenge existing hierarchies. Following the work of Jane Rendell, we understand this as a critical spatial practice that is restless, provocative and questioning, (Rendell, 2003). Space here is about the opening of possibilities, in ways that are responsive and situated. In thinking about what spatial practice is, Eyal Weizman asks us to 'see spatial practice as the kinds of practice practiced by (rather than on) spatial things [that slow] into form.' (Weizmann, 2012: 143). In this the processes, tools, and materials of publishing are not passive, waiting for the designer, performer or artist to act upon them, but rather spatial agents in their own right.

In developing this expanded approach to publishing, we consider it in relation to deep listening, publishing as performance, and publishing as landscape. What follows then, are three accounts and three lexicon verbs, drawn from expanded praxis of performance, architecture and fine art. Performance maker, researcher and educator *Tom Payne* explores autonomous and improvisational approaches to the publication of political activist expression in public space. His entry for the lexicon documents a performance by UK/Australian company Doppelgangster at the Paris climate talks (COP21, 2015), which took place under a national State of Emergency following the Islamic State terror attacks across the city four weeks earlier. The imposition of enhanced security measures resulted in the loss of civil liberties, including the right to gather in public space with political intent. This had serious implications for the planned activities of protestors; and placed limitations on how and where political views could be expressed, thereby conditioning, shaping, and curtailing artistic and activist responses to the COP.

Architectural designer, practitioner and educator *Julia Udall* writes about 'sonic acts of noticing'; a pedagogical tool for listening, as care for an entangled world. Her exploration focuses on an interactive audio-textual environment, which emerged from the collective work of architects Studio Polpo, in

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their room design work for the British Architecture Pavilion 'The Garden of Privatised Delights', at the Venice Biennale 2020 (now 2021). This speculative prototype engenders practices of deep listening that lead to the production of a unique digital publication generated by the site's users in response to textual artefacts temporality coded to the audio.

Artist and educator *Becky Shaw* writes about publishing as re-animating and remodelling in relation to the Liverpool Biennial. She writes here as part of Static, an art and architecture organization, interested in using practical experiments to explore the conditions that produce cultural practice. She explores a publishing project, Exit Review, that re-purposes a well-known artists' review publication to materialise concrete striations (Stoner, 2012) of legitimacy, visibility, judgement, taste, and privacy, and remodels them to reframe, disrupt and make public.

Joe Gilmore is a graphic designer and educator, who has worked extensively around the ideas of books and publishing. Through graphical interventions he has responded to the written contributions to this article and explored the architecture of the page as spaces of tension. His design for this piece is in dialogue with the wider task of designing the lexicon as an interactive web platform or 'lexicon-as-artwork'. The short form descriptive contributions to this piece, and those that will populate the wider online lexicon, seek to answer the question 'what is a lexicon?' or 'what can a lexicon be?' Here, the design is divided into two discrete systems: form and content, and these have been explored in various ways that question their relationship. The size, area and sequence of pages, and the layout of this article are considered as what could be called 'book space'. How this space is divided and sequenced, according to rule-based systems, is explored through treating book space as essentially a non-linear topology. The surface of the page, it's edge – and how these relate to other pages is questioned through experimental approaches to layout where printed content is used to suggest other readings. In this piece, and the forthcoming online lexicon, these and other design considerations – including the space in a font, the space between one page and the next, the space moved and sliced by a performer, the space of the overheard that listening assembles, the space carved by a drawing and stacked in a building, and the temporal and digital space of moving image, are considered. We collectively argue that different spatial constructions make social and political space and seek to understand how the spatial forms of publication and social space relate to each other. To do this, we invite others to add to the lexicon (autonomouspublishing.org) with their own verbs to describe the processes of space creation at work.

INFILTRATION: DOPPELGANGSTER'S *OXYGEN SUPPORT*

J K L N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z A B C D E F G H

Creating site-responsive political activist performance in contested public space.

Doppelgangster's *Oxygen support* (2015) occurred at the closing of the COP21 Solutions Exposition at the Grand Palais, Paris (12 December 2015). This thirty-minute performance was devised by Tobias Manderson-Galvin and Tom Payne following the exhibition's contested opening on 4 December. The high-profile Exposition was a public facing corporate event as part of the 21st United Nations Climate Talks (COP21, 30 November-12 December). It was heavily criticised by some as an act of 'corporate greenwashing' (World Tourism Group, 2015) and the Palais hosted a series of protests that were silenced by heavy handed security. Doppelgangster's performative publication *Oxygen support* was part of an unfolding social process (Shukaitis and Figiel, 2019) occurring in the Palais during the climate talks. It sought to interrogate how performance making strategies and tactics might operate to make dissent permissible within this specific contested space, and in doing so, lend support to comrades (Weinmayr, 2018) in the fight against climate change.

Figure 1. *Oxygen Support* by Doppelgangster. Performed at the Maskbook exhibition by Art of Change 21, at the Grand Palais, Paris. Left, Tobias Manderson-Galvin. Right, Tom Payne (photo by Alice Audouin, December 2015)

A B C D E F G H I J K L N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Any artist and activist plans for the COP were met by an aggressive zero tolerance policy following the imposition of a national State of Emergency, (France24, 2015; Global Times, 2015). In response to the 13 November Islamic State Terror attacks, The Senate gave the French police enhanced powers of detention and arrest (Severson, 2015), at the expense of certain liberties, including a ban on public gatherings and intrusions on public life, leading to concerns about the infringement of human rights (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Key instigators behind plans for large-scale acts of civil disobedience were placed under house arrest (Nelson, 2015a) and major public demonstrations, which some had predicted would be the largest on record (Nelson, 2015b), were disrupted with force (Chan, 2015).

What could and could not be expressed became a matter of police/state discretion. One could percolate through the crowds around the market stalls on the Champs-Élysées but could not gather in groups of three or more with a placard decrying the climate crisis. Canadian journalist and activist Naomi Klein highlighted concern that the banning of marches signalled the relegation of climate change to a 'minor issue, a cause without real casualties' unlike 'centre stage' concerns like 'war and terrorism' (Klein, 2015). The implication was that the full 'violence' of climate change (Solnit, 2015) was not recognised by the authorities, and public shock at the terror attacks was used by the state as a distraction to undermine protest and quash dissent: an insidious manifestation of the 'shock doctrine' (Klein, 2007: 9). This was in high contrast to the state sanctioned heavily guarded corporate exposition at the Grand Palais that provided a platform for organisations, including Renault Nissan, Engie, Coca-Cola, and Avril Sofiproteol, to propose climate solutions. Emblematic of this event was Evian's proposed solution to the global hydrological crisis: a less than useful virtual reality headset experience of water.

Performance theorist Shannon Jackson observes that 'Parisians were largely denied the opportunity to use a familiar performance form—the street protest—to share their views' (Jackson, 2015) and large-scale public artworks and actions that signified absence took centre stage. More than ten thousand pairs of shoes were laid out in the Place de Republique, signifying the absence of a mass of shoe wearing protestors (*The Guardian*, 2015); and object-based artworks, such as Nordic environmental artist Olafur Eliason's *Ice watch* (2015) – featuring a clock like assemblage of giant blocks of ice sourced from the melting fjords of Greenland - became absent as the ice melted in front of the Paris Pantheon: a chilling metaphor for icecap melt.

Oxygen support was conceived as an itinerant performance in which the agitants/actors – Manderson-Galvin and Payne – don black rubber gas masks and walk the streets of Paris selling air filled balloons. However, in lieu of the right to gather and protest in public space, and conscious of the provocative nature of the performance given the recent terror attacks, this action was

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reconceived, and an alternative work was performed at the closing of the Exposition on 12 December 2015, courtesy of an invitation by Art for Change 21 and *MaskBook*: one of very few artist-led exhibits in Exposition.

On 4 December, potential protesters were singled out and denied entry to the Palais, while many, primarily white activists, entered the exhibition hall and one-by-one attempted to voice dissent by capturing media attention. This action was repeated at regular intervals. Each time, a different protester was at the centre of what became a media scrum that would be permeated by stocky men with short, clipped hair, hands grasping and lifting, dragging the disruptor from the building. Variations on this performance were later broadcast internationally across mainstream and online news media.

While many activists and protestors were ejected for voicing views about the exhibits, I infiltrated the security detail of a leading French government minister, Stephan Le Foll, as he was defending the Exposition to the media (Pashley, 2015).

This chance encounter – made possible because I was wearing an identical grey suit to Le Foll and his bodyguard – led Manderson-Galvin and I to consider how to create a performative response to events in a way that would give voice to dissent and not result in our expulsion. This led us to negotiate the use of the *MaskBook* exhibition space for a thirty-minute performance at the closing of the Exposition on 12 December.

Figure 2. COP21 Solutions exposition. Left, Stephan Le Foll. Centre, Tom Payne (photo courtesy of *Climate Home News*)

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We reviewed audio from the protests, trawled news media for political and activist sound bites, and collated found texts and lyrics, which we crafted into a 30-minute two-handed performance. Our script combined protest songs, with views of protesters, as well as classical texts, the faking of the moon landing, and the story of the Trojan horse and the taking of the city of Troy by the Greeks following a fruitless siege. Using a recorded-delivery technique synonymous with Doppelgangster, we listened to our pre-recorded lines through earpieces, and exclaimed the words in our ears. As crowds gathered, we grew louder, climbing on furniture, yelling protest songs, pushing at the limits of what felt permissible, while giving voice to the views of those who we had seen ejected the week before.

At the end, while the crowd applauded, we turned, breathless, to see the Palais security had gathered, become one with the audience, and had begun to clap at a work of performance produced through the social relationships embedded within it (Shukaitis and Figiel, 2019). Those relations were, in part, produced through the action of their own hands as they had suppressed dissent. The pressing of their hands on arms and legs was critical to the publication of that earlier protest, fuelling adrenaline, triggering raised voices, and producing striking images for dissemination across the media. The irony of watching as they pressed hands together in applause was a critical part of meaning making for us in the publication of our contribution to the wider performance of protest at the Palais, and more broadly across Paris in December 2015. This action tied the performance to other moments in time and

Figure 3. *Oxygen Support* by Doppelgangster. Performed at the Maskbook exhibition by Art of Change 21, at the Grand Palais, Paris. Left, Tobias Manderson-Galvin. Right, Tom Payne (photo by Alice Audouin, December 2015)

space, both within and outside of the exhibition hall, revealing ways in which suppression might act as a productive and contributory factor in the social publication of performance that seeks to run counter to it.

LISTENING: SONIC ACTS OF NOTICING

Exploring the pedagogical potential of the sonic in shifting subjectivities and creating emancipatory space.

The development team for *Sonic Acts of Noticing* is composed of two architectural designers and educators, Julia Udall and Jon Orlek, a sound artist and researcher, Alex De Little, and two web design-researchers Joe Gilmore and Richard Cook, operating at the intersection of practice, teaching and research; the material, the sonic and the virtual, to find modes and sites of intervention that will support collective and transformative learning.

Figure 4. sonicactsofnoticing.org (screenshot by Julia Udall)

In this interactive audio-textual environment, sound compositions drawn from field recordings from three high street locations in Sheffield UK, collide with textual artefacts that are temporally coded to the audio. Provocations, quotations, and critical and journalistic writing, augment, subvert, and dissonate listening, in relation to your navigation of the site and spaces of the

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street, opening new possibilities and configurations. Through this process of navigation artefacts, you select are saved to the library, and these are then re-composed into a unique publication in relation to the journey the listener took through the high street audio, which can be downloaded as you exit the site.

Figure 5. *Best Barbers* (photo by Matthew Drummond)

Each artefact is logged by its location in space and time in relation to the composition and the listener's journey through the website.

Publishing happens through listening. In the production of the website, our collective writing, thinking with, editing, composing, are carried out through practices of careful listening to the sonic compositions, which spanned across the course of a year.

This approach was informed by Pauline Oliveros 'sonic meditations' which seek to develop practises of listening that can heighten sensitivity and awareness to one-another (Oliveros, 2005). The artefacts consist of transcriptions of the audio recordings, collective responsive journaling carried out through shared listening and re-listening, episodic essays that respond to concerns generated through personal listening, and provocations that seek to interrupt or challenge. Artefacts produced through multiple practices of listening appear on-screen, coinciding with the audio, and through this virtual publication they act into the space of listening. Rather than representing the listening, it is co-constitutive; engagement with the site creates the space of the publication, and the publication creates the engagement with the site.

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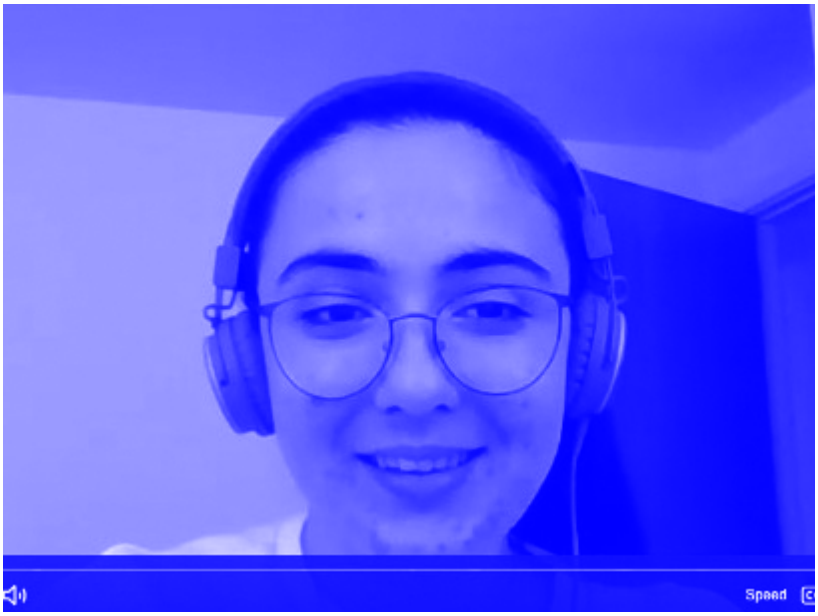

Figure 6. Sonic meditations and collective journaling (screenshot by Julia Udall)

The source of the sound is not visually represented, and this prompts a deep listening in which the listener seeks to orientate themselves but can also fly off into dreamlike spaces of the imagination. Sonic theorist and practitioner Brandon La Belle offers this description of its possibilities of such a mode:

> There is no particular body or space to which the acousmatic sonic object is contextually bound; rather, it circulates to incite a sonic imaginary – a form of listening which accentuates sound's capacity to extend away from bodies and things, and to request from us another view onto the world, one imbued with ambiguity. (LaBelle, 2018: 33)

Rather than space being extensive, fixed and bounded, listening produces space-through-publishing as intensity, and as open-ended assemblage, with porosity. The political, social and ecological are entangled, and the hard boundaries between the human and non-human that predominate visual representations, disintegrate. Jane Bennet tells us, 'through sound, through the various refrains we invent, repeat, and catch from nonhumans, [that] we receive news of the cosmic energies to which we humans are always in close, molecular proximity' (Bennet, 2016: 155).

Each listening produces space anew; the arrival of the artefacts (and the process of their production), the affordances of the website, the contingent navigation of the visitor and their personal response, the sonic compositions, are all part of the production of the space. In their recent work, *To tend for, to care with: Three pieces on listening as method*, AM Kanngieser suggests:

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> Because we are never just one thing and no encounter is ever just one thing, listening is a practice composed by and through difference. Listening tells us that there are infinite ways that encounters happen and infinite interpretations. What listening does is offer a pause for these variations to be tended to. It creates an opening for suspension (being-with), it gives no answers and offers no absolution – there is no end or conclusion to be drawn. (Kanngieser, 2020)

The forms of noticing that we seek to engender, ask us to pay close attention to the possibilities of the social without assuming how it is composed. Useful here is the sonic theorist Brandon LaBelle's notion of the 'unlikely publics' which are assembled through sound. He considers sonic agencies to be that of '[...] the invisible, the overheard, the itinerant, and the weak' (La Belle, 2018:17). In doing so he suggests that ethical and agentive positions are offered that may be emancipatory.

Sonic acts of noticing is a tool for listening that deploys publishing spatially and assembles a public otherwise. The website is a prototype that allows for other sonic compositions, and other textual responses to be added, enabling new publications and navigations and practices to be produced. It allows things to emerge. Eva Weinmayr asks us to 'look at publishing more to initiate a social process, a social space, where meaning is collectively established in the collaborative creation of a publication...Publishing is not a document of pre-defined cognitions. Publishing becomes a tool to make discoveries' (Weinmayr, 2018: 54). Such discoveries happen in the practise of listening and reading (or choosing not to), and in the production of your library. The library, and the publication you leave with reveals the infrastructure of the website- the way it connects, classifies and presents text leaves traces through the code and footnote that accompanies each artefact (Mattern, 2019). In selecting items for the library, and choosing to download them as a personal document, it shows what the various authors (us, you) have attended to.

REMODELLING: STATIC

Making the forms of hierarchy, visibility and judgement embedded in art and academic organisations malleable.

From 2003 the UK art and architecture space Static repurposed existing forms of publishing, to make the structures, platforms and aesthetic decisions embedded in art and academic organisations visible and transformable. While these projects involve writing, they were conceived as forms of architecture where existing social boundaries were visualised or materialised

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through actions. These tangible boundaries were then disrupted, reversed or remodelled though practice- but never dissolved. In the following the process of making the work is recounted, with attention to the points where spatial forms are at work in the practice of publishing.

Static in the 2000s was led by architect Paul Sullivan, and artist Becky Shaw, and devised artistic projects focused on conditions that shape practice. In the early years of the Liverpool Biennial artist-led organisations and artists were wary of the 'show coming to town', questioning the value for the city, and for artists, especially young artists and precarious smaller organisations. A Biennial offers the tantalising promise of increased visibility, visitors and funds for independent artists and organisations, and speaks to the desire to be part of a cultural centre that draws others and reflects kudos on those who practice there. However, as articulated in a series of discussions at the time, artists' organisations were suspicious that benefits would not be so evenly distributed and that they would always be considered marginal (Ramsden and Shaw, 2005). The leaders of large Liverpool arts organisations had gained new stewardship and visibility as they were tasked to take on curatorial roles to ensure the international programme engaged with the city in a way that they considered appropriate. This generated a predictable level of tension as small organisations saw the affirmation of entrenched positions of authority. Hierarchical relationships between organisations were being re-stated, rather than the event generating a dynamism where different voices could speak for their city.

At the same time, the art schools in Liverpool seemed disconnected from what was happening in the city and cultural leaders implied that a lack of local artists in the biennial (beyond the fringe) was an indication of the poor quality of the art school. The suspicions and positions seemed tangible and solidified. It is important to note that these relationships have changed significantly, with Universities and the Biennial working together, as one of the genuine benefits of the long presence of the Biennial in Liverpool.

At Static, we were reading *100 reviews* by Matthew Arnatt et al. (2002), a collected book of reviews written by artists, of shows by other artists – it is a funny, acerbic, and deeply revealing of the social and political materiality of the artworld. It is described by reviewers as disposing 'of the myths of critical distance and objectivity, to surprising and challenging effect. The resulting documentation places the artists firmly at the centre of their own small world, while simultaneously forcing the observer to expand their horizons.

The reviews are not only insightful about artworks, and galleries, they communicate the existing networks, friendships, and tensions within artworlds that shape critical perspectives. Static decided to apply this model to their context, using it for different ends.

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Static commissioned eight of Liverpool's gallery leaders or senior cultural figures (director of Tate, deputy and director and curator of Biennial, director and curator of Bluecoat, and a theory writer from the University) to write a review of every graduating student coming from the three Fine art courses in Liverpool. Reversing Static's usual role as 'employee' of commissioners, Static became the commissioner, paying reviewers ten pounds per review. Some reviewers sought to refuse the payment, wanting to give their time freely to a worthwhile project, but Static insisted on the payment terms of the commission to maintain this altered status. Every student would have two reviews so they could compare them. The reviews were published in a little book with a similar format as *100 reviews* by Arnatt et al. but using black and white. Paul Sullivan, describes this design decision as architectural, drawing on Giambattista Nolli's 1748 ground plan of Rome where he uses black and white to make the distinction between private and public space visible (Sullivan, 2012).

Despite Static's potentially arch and exposing framing of the reviewers (which could have set up a simplistic binary relationship between subject and critic), the reviewers undertook their task with sincerity and care, wanting to use the opportunity to commit to the practice of new artists, and were sometimes daunted by the responsibility they felt. The artists found themselves with unexpected reviews- a gift but also a burden and source of anxiety. The art school was defensive about the project, seeing the entry of the reviewers to the art school, without consent, as a violation of their space. However, the yearly annual show is a promoted public event. It is interesting to consider the spatial production then, of this act of publication- perhaps it might be considered as a deliberate occupation of space, or a reminder of the art school's public value (when open for shows, etc.).

The reviews and book were launched at a discussion event and the quality of works and reviews – as literary forms – were debated. The notion of stewardship, responsibility, criticism and taste were also explored. The uniform form made tangible the tone and grammar of different reviewers, materialising different critical histories and conventions of review, and also disaggregating writers from their institutions.

As well as publishing in the book, the reviews were printed large and pasted on the walls of the gallery, amplifying the exposure of both artist and reviewer. Both reviewers and artists jostled to see 'their' bit; something akin to getting exam results but where the exam markers and examining organisations are also seen, exposed, and compared. Paul Sullivan (2012) reflects on the 'architecture of the event' and the closing of space between reviewers and students. A vibrant and good-humoured discussion ensued and a recognition grew that our relationships were different to how we imagined them. The remodelling of the 'scene' allowed reviewers to be understood as

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involved in uncertain and constructive activities, like artists (albeit usually with more resources and visibility). There was a shared sense that relationships and critical activities were speculative and that they could be materially moulded and re-imagined. There was also greater awareness of how all involved create the 'structure of feeling' of the artistic community in the city.

Figure 7. *Exit review* at Static Liverpool (photo by Paul Sullivan, 2003)

In 2005 Static took part in Cork Caucus, an international event to explore Cork's European City of Culture status. Unlike a Biennial model Cork Caucus eroded hierarchical boundaries between highly visible organisations and smaller ones, and between curators and artists, producing a three-week experience of discussion, artworks and other forms of publishing. Static proposed to apply its 'Exit Review' model to Cork, commissioning curators and writers to write a review of the graduating fine art students from Cork Institute. This time, with the support of Cork Caucus the reviews were published in an insert in the Cork free newspaper. This form of publishing allowed Static to move an assumed 'interior' space of an artworld and make it of general public concern, again, a little like making exam results public. Artistic quality was communicated as an issue of public concern, with practice described as being for and in the City, rather than only of concern in the art community or institution.

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Figure 8. *Exit Cork* (photo by Paul Sullivan)

In the above, types of space-making practices generated by *'Exit review'* and *'Exit Cork'* are considered. The reviewers enter space and make its publicness tangible, contrasting with how the institution sees their perimeters: the reviews on the page order and bring together different critical histories. The contact between artists and reviewers, both in the event and through the reviewing, closes a perceived space between them. The final publishing mechanisms, including in the free newspaper either re-models or articulates afresh the shared enterprise of making visual arts culture public.

Figure 9. *Exit Cork*, supplement for *Cork Evening Echo* (photo by Paul Sullivan, 2006)

VIVACIOUS LEXICON FOR AUTONOMOUS PUBLISHING: OUTLINE OF A TEMPORARY CLOSING

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This is a modest beginning to a longer process to define terms that describe processes of socio-spatial production. In these three offerings from performance, architecture, and art, we hope to find generative differences and resonances, prompting further published responses. In *Exit review*, the oldest project, the edges of spaces, *the social meniscus* are explored and even theatricalised, in a way more akin to Mouffe's agonism. Sonic Acts of Noticing senses and calls into life space as murmuration, making mosaics of vibrant assemblages but not edges. In *Oxygen support* a chink of space is literally wedged open in the suffocating and authoritarian event; both its evolution, as Tom presses open a space between the minister and his guard, and its presentation, as a sanctioned performance. Across these practices publishing situates us within material and social processes.

The lexicon will be an assembly of verbs, situated within short texts, audio or visual contributions. Our intention is that through the publication of these initial texts, we open to other (ways of) publishing spatially, that allow for other voices and disciplines to take part. To extend this invitation, we close with some questions that have emerged through our shared processes of writing, editing, and publishing, that will inform our future lines of inquiry:

- How can publishing make publics rather than just 'making visible' to the public? And as caveat to the above, might publishing also be employed to produce purposeful privacy or to block the ways that private interests take public space?
- How is time present in the spatial processes of publishing? Can time be made as well as space?
- Where does the act of publishing begin and end?
- How does publishing organise space? What are the opportunities/ points of intervention for ethics and politics within these processes?

Through writing and publishing here, we find affinities, and shared struggle. In continuing this work of public-ation, we hope to find further solidarities that allow for difference, and which are rich and thick and full of potential. Their capacities, or 'power to' (van de Sande, 2017), being produced through their specificity and situatedness. We want to continue to explore what such a situated process of publishing consists of, what it might become composed of, and what are the practices, and desires that drive it forward.

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Ephemeral design notes

Stevphen Shukaitis

Usually when it is time to reflect upon or commemorate the importance and meaning of a journal or publishing series we find ourselves falling into a discussion of important issues, or key debates, or maybe something about the impact of the journal, these days maybe even its audience size or metrics. For me this kind of misses the point, and especially gets wrong what I've long felt are the most important aspects of *ephemera* as a project.

Rather than through the usual framings I rather like to think about publications as strange places, as territories we can inhabit and explore. At their best they take you somewhere new that you can explore. Somewhere that you might indeed feel uncomfortable and unsettled by at first, but then as you acclimate you then find yourself making new friends, developing feelings of comradely with those you find there as well. Andre Breton declared that we publish to find comrades; I've found this to very much be the case with *ephemera* as I have with other publishing and media projects that I've been involved in (Shukaitis, 2019) or conducted research with. Such floating affects and relationships might indeed be ephemeral, for but for me they just as important as all the regular measurements and indications of what counts as a 'high quality journal', maybe even more so. I fully realize this is dangerously close to going full cheese and saying something like 'the real treasure was the friends we made along the way' – but the level of cringe contained in a statement is not an argument against the truth the claim.

The approach to philosophy, politics, and organization that I have developed comes from always looking for such strange places and those that reside within their undercommon time and spaces. I can honestly say that I've learned more from moments like that more so than in any classroom. And this holds true whether it's one of countless late nights reading and talking about books at a twenty-four-hour diner, or conversations around global war and the general intellect taking place on a train going across Mongolia while eating ice cream (a la the 2005 *ephemera* conference 'Capturing the moving mind').

These are precisely the kind of moments and spaces that are increasingly hard to keep open within the constraints of the existing academic world where everything has to be known in advance, every outcome and project needs to have realistic and measurable goals, etc… Saying that you want to come up with a crazy interesting experiment without definite and measurable outcomes is more likely to get tossed out of the university. But for me this is what has been the most important thing about *ephemera*, its ability to exist as a space, both in terms of publishing and events, where you can take those risks with ideas and discussions, without having to worry that you've failed to live up to the existing and required metric. This ability to make and do things together, working through them together, is precisely what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) described as study – and it's also precisely the thing you're not longer able to do in the university.

Given that my main role at *ephemera* for a number of years (aside from editing an occasionally issue or two) has been working on cover design. Thus I thought it would be appropriate to include in my reflections a few of the back stories and strange places that led to the images that have been used on some of the covers. These are the aspects, the back stories of the images, that don't usually get included in the journal, but perhaps they will still be of interest. If not, you're always free to turn the page. But personally I'm still very glad the a publication as *ephemera* still exists precisely as a space for taking those risks with thinking, publishing, and working together that are simply not possible in the vast majority of other journals.

Before doing that I've been asked to provide a few thoughts on my working methods. To be honest I'm not sure I have anything as developed that could be described as a methodology. When I was in high school I studied art and photography, and thus found myself doing bits of design work with various projects I was involved in from bands to record labels, political organizing, and eventually publishing (Shukaitis, 2010). If I have anything like a method its simply that I often find myself working through and playing with an idea in visual form, whether through collage, painting, or photography before I'm able to articulate it in words. Perhaps this is something like the space that Deleuze and Guattari (1994) describe as the pre-philosophical moment which underpins and makes conceptual thinking possible. And that means when it comes time to design something specific, I often have a reservoir of half worked out ideas and sketches that I draw from for what's needed.

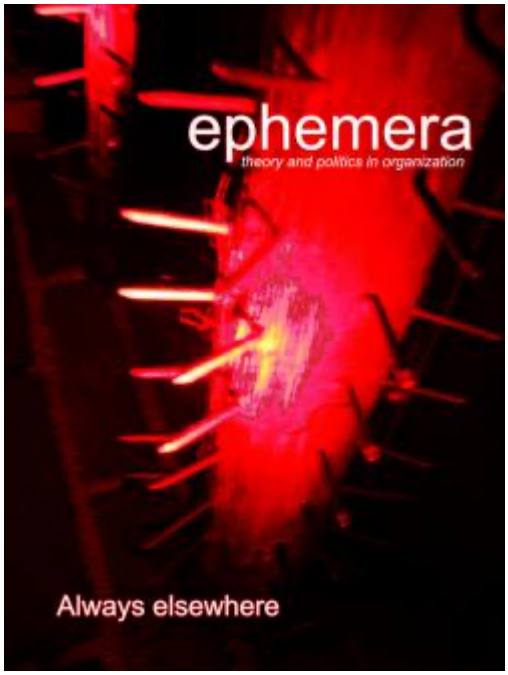

Image 1: Volume 7, number 4

This image was taken at the Torture Museum in Amsterdam. Honestly I wasn't quite sure what to do with a theme like 'Always elsewhere', but I figured if there was one experience that would lead to a strong desire always to be elsewhere from one's current position, then being tortured would be a

compelling candidate. The lighting in the museum is quite low, dark, and reddish, which rendered the torture instruments to look interesting but also mysterious enough that it was immediately obvious what they are.

Image 2: Volume 13, number 3

'The communism of capital' has always struck me as a quite strange sounding concept despite knowing how and why it's used within Marxist terminology (particularly when discussing the socialization of capital, and how such concepts were taken by in Italian operaismo). This image was taken at a games and gambling hall in Clacton-on-Sea. Why is there a rubber ducky wearing a cow mask sitting on a layer of coins? Why not? If you want a further explanation please reference the Third Italian Edition of Marx's 1845 Grocery Lists.

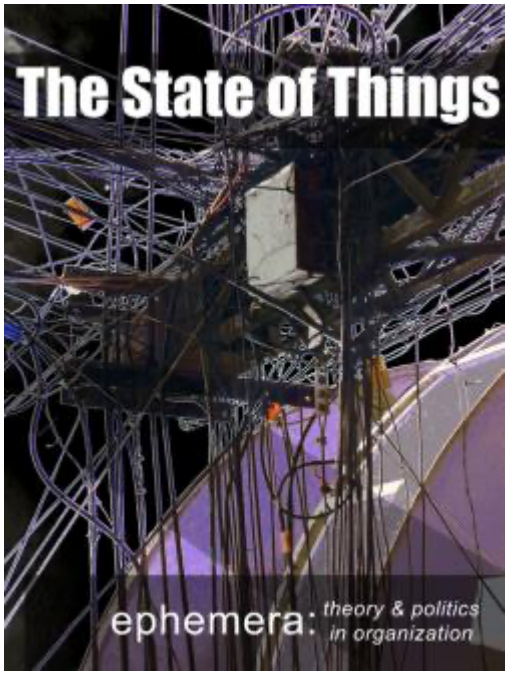

Image 3: Volume 10, number 2

'This State of things' comes out of a conference held at the University of Leicester, which was an attempt to bring together ideas from Actor Network Theory and Science and Technology Studies with concepts from post-autonomism. Thus I wanted to find an image that conveyed how technological decisions and developments are shaped around quite complicated, messy, and multilayered histories and conflicts. Admittedly I have no how or why this particular network of power exchanges in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, came to be quite this complicated, but I was willing to wager there's an interesting back story here, and that would make it a fitting image for embodying that set of ideas.

Image 4: Volume 11, number 3

Given that affect is non-representational it always ends up being quite tricky for that matter thinking up an interesting and compelling image to… uhm… not represent it? Come to think of it, many of the areas and concepts *ephemera* covers regularly are not exactly to represent easily. Thus the approach ends up being more trying to think of an image would get people interested and is at least somewhat conceptually related to the topic, even if it's not exact. I hope the covers and conference images that I've worked on have managed to do that, because if they've managed to get some people interested in engaging with some ideas, readings, and concepts they would have not otherwise than it's definitely been a success. But back to affect. This image was taken in the tunnel going underneath the S.E.A. Aquarium in Singapore. It was a blistering hot day out when I decided to go there with my son Gustav, who was two at the time. And he wasn't really interested in most of the aquarium. But then we walked through this tunnel it just felt totally immersive. It wasn't just looking at some sea life, it felt almost like being another fish for a moment looking at the other fish. I don't know how quite to put it in words (the affect is non-representational, remember?) – but I do remember standing there for almost an hour with my son just looking at

things, immersed in that affect. As the old saying goes, the fish cannot see the water. But for the moment you find yourself immersed in the sensation of the water, you can't go wrong with following Bruce Lee's advice to 'be as water, my friend'.

So is that where we end up, becoming water? Or maybe trying to constantly patch up our little boats of independent thinking as we're increasingly cast on a sea of precarious academic work and the storm of disciplinary neoliberalism, ecological crisis, and various other catastrophes? Can we find ways to build our houses of thought on the sea, or does that risk ending up turning into a Costner-esque *Waterworld* style farce? Hopefully not. A journal, any journal, is not able to solve all those problems regardless of how quality it is or what appears in its pages. But if run well it does have a hope of opening a space where comrades can find each other, huddle together in thinking and being like floating otters, and maybe if lucky come up with an idea or two. And at the end of the day, maybe that's the best thing a journal can do, set up a space and possibility to take risks, experiment with ideas, and to actually sit with and be with the thoughts, and those whom we think together with. And I don't know about you, whoever is reading this, but I'm definitely up for another twenty years of that.

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The political economy of the podcast and the rise of the left entrepreneur

Joshua Sperber

It may seem like another world, but it was only a little over a decade ago that scholars were engaged in an energetic debate over the liberatory nature of the internet. Today, as millions of people spend hours a day on Zoom meetings, navigate their children through 'online learning', and write work emails late into the night, the notion that the internet was ever going to liberate us from capitalism seems naïve if not farcical. On the contrary, it has been the internet that has allowed, in the most troublesome sense, the world to go on amid ecological, epidemiological, economic, social, and political crises as we are told to wait out a pandemic by eradicating any remaining distance between work and home or public and private while wrecking our backs, necks, eyes, and sense of peace, autonomy, self-knowledge, and control.

There has been no shortage of leftist analyses of our ongoing transformations, but there has been less consideration of the ways in which these transformations have affected leftist analysis itself. Indeed, through the hegemonic expansion of the internet, leftist communication and more specifically critical publishing, which increasingly – and at times exclusively – occurs online, has significantly changed not only in its form but also in its content. Surveying key developments over the past 20 years and their effects on left (i.e. self-described anti-capitalist) online communication can allow

us to think about where much critical publishing has recently been, where it is now, and where it is going. This paper specifically addresses left media developments within the United States, although it argues that due to the global structural economic forces underlying these changes it is as likely as not that comparable developments will also emerge elsewhere.

The internet, of course, was never a so-called neutral technology, if only because, whether we are examining paintings, stained glass windows, books, radio, film, or television, form shapes content. The internet is distinct for its instantaneity, the propinquity involved in its use, and its intrinsic interactivity. Specifically, the internet reduces geographic space while its use is characterized by close physical proximity between users and machines, enabling postindustrial production based on the physical atomization of individuals who actively and intimately engage the medium via a distinctive 'mechanism of reply' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002 [1944]: 96; Zwick et al., 2008).

In addition to its elimination of delay and this transformative 'mechanism of reply', the internet can foster a distinctive tunnel vision, as it eliminates users' 'lateral vision' (2012: 36) and helps militate against users' capacity for visual (and arguably intellectual) perspective. Virilio observed:

> The faster we go, the more we look ahead in anticipation and lose our lateral vision. Screens are like windshields in a car: with increased speed, we lose the sense of lateralization, which is an infirmity in our being in the world, its richness, its relief, its depth of field. (2012: 36-37)

It was not an accident that numerous commenters who believed that they were posting the first response to an aughts-era Yahoo news article frequently confined themselves to submitting the single word 'First!'. The speed of the encounter – along with the knowledge that one's chances of having one's comment read exponentially decline as other comments accumulate – led form to overwhelm content, as all that matters is one's ability to beat others in a race to, if not be heard, post one's screen name and writing, regardless of content, in a highly visible location. Posting 'First!' was an ironic joke within the still-early internet that acknowledged that,

within a context of exponentially expanding information, content was becoming increasingly irrelevant.

Irrespective of questions concerning the internet's form, the advent of collectively run websites, political listservs, and blogs – with their apparent ability to exponentially expand opportunities for communication, connection, and organization – was accompanied by much progressive optimism during the days of the early internet (Benkler, 2006; Tapscott and Williams, 2008; Rosen, 2009; Earl and Kimport, 2011). To be sure, the internet has been and in some cases is still beneficial. Perhaps most prominently, Wikipedia draws on volunteer contributors who, operating through consensus, work collectively to provide a free and valuable resource. Nevertheless, Wikipedia has proven to be not a harbinger of a free, dynamic, and collective internet but an exception, occupying a niche of its own making, proving the rule (Benkler, 2006; Tapscott and Williams, 2008). Indeed, by the teens it had become increasingly apparent that the internet's mediation of communication was doing as much harm as good, as breakneck monetization and the dominance of oligopolies had effectively made invisible or walled off the free and open internet promised by 'good internet' advocates and instead funneled users into a shrinking number of sites devoted above all to data extraction and personalized advertising while circumscribing and exploiting users' behavior in a number of ways (Terranova, 2000; Zwick, et al., 2008; Fuchs, 2012; McChesney, 2013; Scholz ed., 2013; Srnicek, 2017; Sperber, 2019). Aware of these sites' tremendous potential for surveillance as well as their obnoxious corporate personalities, many of us disconcertedly watched as a critical mass of our friends and acquaintances inexorably migrated to them.

In retrospect, however, it has become only clearer that the 'good internet' of the aughts was never as promising as its boosters asserted, and that the more transparent problems of today's internet reflect less a deviation from than an evolution of what had always been implicit (Terranova, 2000; Galloway, 2004; Hindman, 2009; Comor, 2010; Fuchs, 2010; Fuchs, 2012; Fuchs, 2013). The notion that social media corrupted the left politics practiced in, say, aught-era listservs badly understates the shortcomings of the latter, which were in some cases elitist operations dominated by self-

serving and boorish personalities. It is more accurate to say that social media such as Facebook and Twitter compelled and exacerbated existing online left practices, enabling left entrepreneurs to expand and ultimately export audiences to external sites where continued access could be ultimately privatized and exchanged for rents via, for example, patron-only content. The emblematic site of this evolution toward left individualization and privatization, this article argues, is the podcast.

If the internet is primarily used to facilitate business, social media such as Facebook represent, well before Facebook's 2012 initial public offering, business itself. Facebook is designed to draw and keep users on its site, where it collects and sells users' data to advertisers who, in turn, target users via personalized ads (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010; Fuchs, 2012; Srnicek, 2017). Echoing casinos' use of mirrors and alcohol, Facebook engineers formulate ways to discourage users from exiting the site. The red notification alert in the upper righthand corner has specifically been likened to the functioning of a slot machine, as the suspense accompanying a notification – which can indicate anything from a banal birthday notice to the more thrilling announcement that an admired friend 'loved' your comment – stimulates a dopamine rush like that experienced by compulsive gamblers (Lewis, 2017). Such pressure is reinforced externally by family, friends, and prospective employers who coerce individuals—lest they appear 'suspicious' – to maintain Facebook accounts (White, 2012).

Left writing on Facebook – or, presupposing a primacy of content over form, the self-flattering 'Leftbook' – exists in a substantially altered arena from that of the left listservs and blogs of the earlier internet. A massive and impersonal corporation, Facebook engages in not only surveillance but also censorship, recently issuing warnings to users who may have encountered 'extremist' political content. Such warnings additionally encourage users to report on 'friends' who may be engaged in political 'extremism'. Notably, the algorithm Facebook uses to determine what constitutes extremism is opaque and could pertain to content ranging from the QAnon movement to gender critical left feminism to anti-capitalism. It goes without saying that for Facebook, no less than for Twitter, non-extremist politics largely correspond to the conventional politics of the day. In this regard, left users of Facebook

forfeit to an immensely powerful corporation the capacity to make political judgments determining the boundaries of acceptable speech and are accordingly required to engage in self-censorship so that they do not get reported and suspended themselves.

Rather than appearing on the moderator-regulated and nominally neutral turf of the listserv, left writing on Facebook additionally occurs on the pages of specific users as posts and comments directed to 'friends' or 'followers'. These pages are often treated as virtual fiefdoms that users meticulously adorn with, under the banner of their name, autobiographies and other personal descriptions, photos, memes, and other images, as well as itemized accomplishments and lists of favored commodities. Indeed, when dealing with unruly guests or 'trolls', users frequently refer to and invoke the ostensible rights and privileges of 'my page' or 'my wall', likening rude guests to loutish visitors in one's home who have raided the refrigerator. In a domestication of left tendencies' historically fractious – sometimes ferocious – internal debates and self-consciously anti-bourgeois comportments, Facebook 'guests' must be wary of too aggressively challenging a page's host lest they embarrass a host and are then – often performatively – banished. These rituals encourage some users to wait in anticipation for irascible hosts to humiliate and block visitors, some unsuspecting, who had provoked their ire. Alternatively, some hosts more discreetly simply omit comments they disapprove of. And, in some cases, hosts remove entire posts in which the comments thread did not develop to their liking, disappearing productive political debates and unduly shaping semi-public left discourse about topics of shared concern. Considering that Facebook owns the space and content that appear on its site, this invocation of 'my wall' expresses a seemingly uncritical embrace of the privileges of a corporate-allocated virtual micro-plot, which is only proffered insofar as Facebook can reasonably expect that its users will provide financial returns – specifically through generating personal data for themselves and their guests – on its investment.

While some ambitious and ego-driven personalities assuredly dominated some of the earlier listservs, the format did not to the same extent as social media encourage such individuals to formally accumulate discrete followers

or 'entourages' (Goldhaber, 1997) or to expand 'their' space in relation to and at the ultimate expense of that of others. Relatedly, users more rarely – certainly in the era of the pre- and early-aughts listservs – exploited the listservs to promote their so-called 'brands' or professional ambitions over and beyond the discussions of articles or other matters at hand. Professional left activists and writers over the past decade have, however, migrated to the corporate arenas of social media, primarily Facebook and Twitter, sites where the individual self – and its ongoing 'projects' – is visually and conceptually centered and promoted as such and in which 'followers' or 'entourages' can be collected and ultimately channeled to external sites – e.g., Substack, Patreon, GoFundMe, and Twitch – where revenue can be extracted via donations and subscriber or patron fees.

The critical point here is not that a number of popular and sometimes astute left political observers have 'sold out' or behaved unethically by operating in effect as private entrepreneurs. Instead, it is to emphasize the fact that, within an environment in which existing digital infrastructure is integrated into a work-or-starve economy, previously voluntary political analysis and agitation have become increasingly marketized and incorporated into the reproduction of capital. Indeed, this is less an indictment of these writers than of the unending penetration of the market system. Just the same, it is instructive to observe the specific manner in which such market coercion rewards and punishes writers and thereby affects critical publishing in general and left political discourse in particular.

The left-star

In their ultimate form, social media left entrepreneurs, or left-stars, become commodities unto themselves, even as maintaining and expanding market-share paradoxically entail the periodic repackaging required to sustain interest or 'stay relevant' amid shifting political terrains. If the left project historically included the use of debate over history, principles, and strategies, left-stars are structurally discouraged from forming consensus with competitors lest they endanger the uniqueness of their brand – a concern that notably does not undermine the comparatively anonymous

contributors doing consensus-based work on, say, Wikipedia. Resembling academia's prioritization of originality for originality's sake irrespective of political relevance, such uniqueness is generated through the formation of mutually exclusive political arguments – and a corresponding discouragement of nuance and subtlety – as well as unending self-personalization and promotion. This can be seen in the rise of prominent unaffiliated or independent left political writers whose political arguments are in fact, when viewed over the long-term, incoherent and inconsistent. Salient among these writers is their continuous attention to their own personalities, which function as stand-ins for and become inseparable from their political projects.

Concerned with maintaining and ideally expanding their position in the hypercompetitive and hyper-ephemeral attention economy's space, left-stars personalize themselves to their followers through a formulaic set of techniques: periodically disclosing intimate and frequently nostalgic personal histories or suspenseful and surprising real-time accounts; self-appropriated personal histories and 'mood's such as ennui, excitement, and melancholy; and personal developments including career accomplishments (and less frequently setbacks notwithstanding those now overcome, which are examples of the left-star's teleological success), breakdowns, epiphanies, hardships such as the loss of pets, break-ups, and politically correct crushes. In this regard, left-stars are remarkably obedient in answering Facebook's ever-present question: 'What's on your mind?'. Instructed by book agents and other professional promoters that they need to 'tell a story about themselves' in order to be successful, left-stars present an individualized 'package' including a (ideally challenging) personal history, a contemporary mission, and an accessible, vulnerable, and intriguing persona that says without saying that their success is the success of a – and ideally and ultimately *the* – cause. Confessional writing in particular reinforces the emotional connection between left-stars and their followers and is complemented by selfies or glamour shots conveying the complexities and intellectual or physical beauty of the stars. Reflecting existing sexist stereotypes, male left-stars typically post a wide array of pictures of themselves, while female left-stars are far likelier to share photos, whether

on Facebook or Instagram, showcasing/constructing the stars' mystery, beauty, or sexiness via 'mommy porn' and other activities enabling tasteful or 'accidental sexiness'.

Of course, leftism has always had its icons, and one only needs to see a Che T-shirt to understand that such icons have long been commodified. Today, however, we are seeing not simply the commodification of icons but the strategically marketized iconification of self-produced left entrepreneurs. One prominent left journalist recently demonstrated a particularly overt version of this process when, after repeatedly warning his 180,000 Twitter followers about the dire threat of big-tech political censorship (which at the time was targeting then-president Donald Trump), he announced that those concerned about such dangers can fight back by donating to his Patreon, PayPal, Bitcoin, Cashapp, or Venmo accounts. Although it is tempting to celebrate left commentators' ability to earn a living through their politics, doing politics for money is a double-edged sword. Those who rely on supporters' donations – in effect, charity – invariably tend to the proclivities and desires of their audience lest they alienate them. Whereas left stars seek attention through provoking outraged reactions and shares, they would not continue to stay in business without also maintaining a foundation of 'likes' among their loyal supporters. In this regard, left stars will test new ideas, which they will then reiterate, revise, or withdraw depending on their core supporters' responses. The market and the career, not a – or *the* – truth, become the imperatives of the left star's political development and thereby the development of dominant left discourse.

Critically, left-stars reinforce followers' loyalty and expand market share through conducting rivalries in which followers are deployed to support their stars or 'knights' (Rao, 2020) against hostile outsiders. Here one's collection of followers signifies more than the quantitative competition vis-à-vis other left-stars. Rather, one's number of followers demonstrates the *capacity* to secure and expand one's power within what Rao has called 'an unflattened Hobbesian honor-society conflict with a feudal structure, at the heart of which is an involuntarily anonymous, fungible, angry figure desperate to be seen as significant: the mook' (Rao, 2020). Left-stars can at times be seen as writing and performing *for* their followers and not – unless

conspicuously unfriendly – for those outside of their entourage. Lavished with this intimate, if ultimately anonymous, attention, the entourage understand that the latest selfie, confession, or special subscriber-only promotion code is a gift *to them* and that the left-star's successes – including and especially the expansion of his or her platform – are their own. Indeed, followers are not merely engaged in vicarious existence but in some instances strive to become left-stars themselves, competing in an intense struggle in which there will always be more followers than left-stars. The career trajectory of Virgil Texas, former co-host of the *Chapo Trap House* podcast and current co-host of the *Bad Faith* podcast, helps illustrate the dialectic between follower and left-star. Texas was at one time a largely unknown commenter on Twitter but attracted attention in part through fervently defending left-stars such as Glenn Greenwald. Now a left-star himself, Texas has recently faced accusations of inappropriate sexual conduct toward a minor and has benefited from the fervent defenses of his own followers, some of whom surely aspire through such displays of fealty to one day become left-stars themselves.

The political-economy of the podcast

While the task of the aspiring left-star is to attract attention and fill as much digital space as possible, there are inevitably obstacles to doing so. On logocentric blogs and websites, excessive length is an intrusive demand on the time and patience of the site visitor. Even the most prolific political observers can struggle to continually update their blogs without resorting to transparent filler, facile content shared not for its originality or relevance but for the mere propinquity of its composition. Websites have notably become unapologetic in raking the dregs of analysis – in which an article's substantiveness often negatively correlates to the click-baiting provocations of its title – in order to sustain newness for newness's sake and to not miss out on opining on recent fads, which is one reason why *Jacobin* feels compelled to comment on subjects including the popularity of Popeye's new chicken sandwich (Kampf-Lassin, 2019).

Online media have struggled with reconciling the contradiction between their reliance on filler and their need to maintain not only reader awareness of their product in general – i.e. their space in the media universe – but also reader receptivity to advertisers. This contradiction is particularly apparent in online corporate news sites' increasing substitution of videos for articles. Videos enable companies to extend user engagement with a page and thereby charge higher advertising rates. Yet, the use of videos that deliberately slow the conveyance of information simultaneously frustrates and repels impatient site visitors who prefer their previous autonomy over the pace of their online news consumption.

The podcast has resolved the contradiction of filler as podcasts are less based on utilitarian data conveyance than on cultivating a satisfying feeling based on the development of emotional relationships between listeners and hosts. The distinction between substantive content and filler disappears in a medium in which enjoyment is based on the sounds as much as the meaning of the words uttered by the host. It is misleading, then, to attribute the popularity of podcasts primarily to the convenience with which they can be listened to in the shower, the car, or the kitchen. Rather, mic checks, throat clearing, and mumbling convey an 'in my room with me' intimacy that can be nurturing in itself. Commiserating on the night of the 2016 US presidential election, in which Donald Trump stunningly defeated Hillary Clinton, the hosts of *Chapo Trap House* (one of the most popular – and profitable – left US podcasts) combined their analysis of the election with exchanges including:

> I'm proud of all the boys for holding it together on stage even as we ate shit.
>
> I had diarrhea; I was just feeling so so, I gotta go…
>
> Virgil's a diarrhea boy. I know it from working with him. He will always be a diarrhea boy. That's what I like about him.
>
> I promise you that for these next four years I will have IBS. (*Chapo Trap House*, Episode #58).

In an experience that Yasha Levine has described as 'virtual friendship',[1] we do not impatiently wait for the hosts to get to the point because 'being together' among 'friends' is the point. Although speaking in jest, it is telling that *Chapo Trap House* producer Brendan James accounted for why listeners spent the night of the 2016 presidential election listening to his show instead of being with loved ones, noting.

> We are their loved ones now. They are spending it with their loved ones, because they've grown to develop personal relationships with us, and they will do whatever we tell them to do. (Borenstein and Honor, 2017)

Accordingly, podcasters banter, deploy quips and inside jokes, and engage in all manner of, often confessional and self-deprecating, personal anecdotes to lengthen their time with listeners irrespective of content, a process that has reached it apotheosis with some podcasters encouraging listeners to follow them to Twitch, where podcasters can make an attraction of and monetize their mundane routines and very being.

Left-star podcasters' cultivation of intimate virtual friendships with listeners ideally forms an emotional dependence that can be leveraged by the podcaster in order to exploit listeners' 'fear of missing out'. This is done through offering premium subscriber-only episodes including 'Ask me anything' shows, which enable hosts to share their uncertainty, vulnerability, and continuing search for truth and meaning – or to merely playfully interact – with their followers. 'Ask me anything' shows simultaneously provide listeners with a sense of control over podcasters, resembling broader trends which can be seen, for example, on the NewNew 'Control my life' app, in which stars seek to maintain attention by allowing viewers to control stars' very behavior (Jennings, 2021). Podcasts' amelioration of listeners' alienation is, notably, highly contingent given the fact that the star-follower basis of the 'virtual friendship' is unequal and podcasts can potentially be discontinued (Sperber, 2019). Listeners' corresponding anxiety concerning the possibility of losing their 'friends' can then be leveraged to secure further donations in the name of political activism and solidarity. The left podcast *Dead Pundits Society*, for instance,

[1] Email to author.

offers listeners a 'Working class hero' subscription package in exchange for monthly donations of one hour's worth of the subscriber's wages.

'Virtual friendship' provides the podcaster with a level and form of credibility that advertisers have sought for nearly a century to develop and exploit. While Howard Stern's radio program, for instance, charged its highest rates for ads that Stern himself would narrate and provide testimony for, fans saw Stern – or, in prior eras, TV show hosts – as trusted icons but not accessible confidants on equal footing. Podcasts, by contrast, establish a shared space in which listeners' 'mechanism of reply' consists of direct messages and on-screen chats where listeners 'talk back to' and about their hosts: 'Will sounds sick, drunk, or on a relaxer – anyone else hear it?' (*Chapo Trap House*, Episode #478). Such 'talking back' transforms the listener from a recipient of unilaterally disseminated information to an active if unequal partner who, through his or her own expression, is likelier to further internalize the ultimately asymmetrical emotional and ideological content of favored programs, connecting listener to star in an ever-tighter bond. Comments in chat can also, among other things, be provided to advertisers to demonstrate listener engagement and proclivity, illustrating the manner in which listeners' relationships with shows are inseparable from active participation in their own objectification as sources of revenue. Indeed, notwithstanding these podcasts' anti-capitalist language, hosts engage in product plugging through, among other things, issuing 'shout outs' to supportive businesses that listeners ought to patronize as matters of political activism and solidarity. Beyond this encouragement of 'left' consumption, the *Red Scare* podcast recently devoted half an episode to discussing the Disney film *Cruella*, calling into question (even as one of the hosts criticized the movie) whether the Disney corporation paid the show for such sustained attention. In either event, the podcast, which has approximately 8,000 paying subscribers on Patreon, powerfully instructed their 'virtual friends', if not what to think, what to think about (*Red Scare*, 2 June 2021).

As noted above, the point of this discussion has not been to condemn individual left-stars, which would be ill-considered. First, left-stars are not monolithic and some of them undoubtedly perform valuable functions,

publicizing critiques of institutional power and the works of important thinkers whom many listeners would be otherwise unfamiliar with. Second, our current problems do not result from the opportunism or narcissism of ambitious media personalities. Even if every left-star were magically sent away, new ones would quickly take their places. Similarly, even if every left-star were conscientious and altruistic, as some surely are, we would still be witnessing the same shifts in political communication. The current media universe is such that anyone who seeks to affect political discourse will struggle to find an audience without conforming to processes designed by state and market forces for state and market interests.

Nevertheless, the rise of the left-star suggests several dubious developments within left culture and practice in general and left online critical publishing in particular. Those who are interested in left politics find themselves in the position of the fan, rooting for a series of competing micro-celebrities who are structurally discouraged from both building consensus among likeminded thinkers and offending the sensibilities of their own followers by pursuing the 'ruthless criticism of all that exists' in the tradition of Marx. It is fair to assume that numerous people who might otherwise concern themselves with left causes are being repulsed by left stars' self-serving conduct and intellectual compromises. It is indeed unsurprising that many rightwing podcasters, who do not confront the same contradictions between their political content and its expression within the current media structure, increasingly attract massive and growing audiences. By contrast, left political discourse – which within prominent historic tendencies is in its ideal form ontologically and epistemologically collective – is a priori compromised in this hyper-competitive and marketized arena, reflecting and reinforcing the very social and economic relations that are ostensibly being challenged.

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Being in another tongue

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abstract

In this anniversary note, I reflect on the importance – in both personal and professional terms – of being, for many years, a member and then an affiliate of the ephemera collective. In these reflections I highlight how, to me, ephemera's story has been interwoven with my own professional trajectory, and how belonging to ephemera has helped me navigate life and work as a foreign-born academic in the UK. I place a particular emphasis on my experience of living and working 'in another tongue', i.e. functioning in a language which, as is the case with many international academics, differs from the language of my upbringing.

Prelude

We live in a world of confounded languages, differing cultures and polarised worldviews; a world where we find it very hard to understand each other, not least because of the language differences between us and the language-related prejudices we sometimes are not even aware of. Whilst accepting this and navigating life in this world has not come easily to me, there has been one space in which I always felt that we shared the same 'language', the same universe of values and the same affective responses to what was happening around us. As cheesy as it sounds, to me *ephemera* – a collective valuing diversity and multiplicity, united around the common aim of curating, in a democratic way, an open-access journal dedicated to theory and politics in

organization – was that space. In this anniversary essay, let me take the opportunity to explain why.

The first misunderstanding

I will never forget that cold, January night in 1999. It was my first time in the United Kingdom. I arrived in Newcastle after a long journey: 26 hours by coach from Kraków to Victoria Coach Station in London, followed by seven hours of waiting, then nearly another seven hours on a National Express coach from Victoria to Newcastle. By the time we reached Newcastle, it was after 1am. Luckily, taxis were waiting at the bus station; the drivers knew that there would be a few arrivals from London, in need of a late-night ride. I was tired and could not wait to get myself – and my heavy green suitcase – into the student hall of residence which was to become my home for the next six months. Once I was sitting in the taxi, I told the driver the address we were going to: 'Stoddart Street, Stevenson Building'. He had no idea what I was saying. He said something in response and I did not understand a word. After many years of learning English back in Kraków, I now had to make myself understood by showing the Geordie taxi driver a piece of paper with the address. My new life, also a life in a different tongue, had begun.

It has been more than 22 years since that first misunderstanding – a first-hand experience of a 'language barrier' (Harzing and Feely, 2008) that unexpectedly grew between me and my interlocutor and that gave me a real shock: how am I supposed to study in this country if I cannot communicate in English, even at a basic level? Little did I know that I would stay in the UK for much longer than the initial period of the student exchange – courtesy of student mobility arrangements enabled by the European Union – I was part of. Neither did I realise how much, over time, the experience of living and working 'in another tongue' would shape me. I did not expect the extent to which that experience of functioning in a different language, using syntax differently and speaking with an accent seen as 'different', would accompany the various spheres of my life, both literally and metaphorically. What I could not and did not know back then, either, was how important *ephemera* would

turn out to be to my academic becoming and to finding my place in the culturally and linguistically challenging world of anglophone academia.

Academic becoming in 'another tongue'

Academia is a highly internationalised sector. Regardless of the changes in staff composition brought about by Brexit and notwithstanding the decrease in international mobility in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic, the professional world I inhabit, that of UK business schools, employs many people who were not born in the UK. For many among these, English is not their first language. What is it like to live and work in 'another tongue'? I was curious about what it is like for other non-native English speaking academics to work in English and more broadly, about issues related to language use in organizational contexts. Back in 1999, I had no idea that a body of scholarly work exploring these issues would emerge under the umbrella term of 'language-sensitive IB research', and that my own research, drawing on the experiences of UK business school academics, would contribute it. Neither did I know that *ephemera* – an open-access journal organized by a collective of volunteers was to be formed before long, and that a few years later, *ephemera*'s story would become, and remain, integral to my personal story.

Following the undergraduate student exchange programme I was part of in 1999, I enrolled on a master's degree. Upon its completion, I began part-time PhD studies and secured my first UK academic position at Newcastle Business School. This was a period of intense linguistic immersion, filled with learning, making mistakes and a lot of hesitancy. I recall how everything that involved English language use would take a long time and how tiring it was. I used to over-prepare for lectures and assemble long PowerPoint presentations with numerous bullet points on each slide, to make sure that I would not run out of things to say. I used to spend a lot of time carefully familiarising myself with all the reading materials assigned to the students, in case any of them would ask me to explain the meaning of a specific word or expression. I also recall how slow the process of getting through the ever-lengthening bibliography of my PhD was. There were daily frustrations, such as those accompanying work-related meetings with colleagues during which I was not

able to contribute much because by the time I had worked out how to say what I wanted to say, the discussion had moved on to a different topic. Finally, I vividly remember trying to write in English and discovering, to my dismay, that I was no longer a person for whom writing used to come easily and was a satisfying endeavour, but someone who struggled to formulate sentences and was often uncertain or embarrassed about the outcome. Years earlier, a school teacher in Kraków once teased me: 'it seems that for you, the process of writing is like opening a tap: the water flows out of the tap, the words come out of your pen'. But now I was trying to open my 'words tap' in vain, as hardly any word-drops were coming out. It felt sad and scary, and I was ashamed of myself.

Studies reporting on the effects of the introduction of a corporate language policy – whereby employees find themselves in a situation of having to carry out their daily work tasks in a different language to their native language and the language they have always worked in – tell us about the 'status loss' (e.g. Neeley, 2013) experienced by people who suddenly have to function professionally in a language in which they are not fluent. By choosing to become an academic in a country and an education system whose language I was not very competent in, inadvertently, I put myself in the position of someone with a lower status compared to native English-speaking academics. Not being able to express myself as fluently in spoken and written English as I would have wished also undermined my newly forming and still fragile self-esteem as an academic.

We know from the language-sensitive international business literature that members of organizations adopt various strategies in relation to any 'shortcomings' in their competence in the official language of the organization. Some embrace the opportunity to improve their language competence, some resist the demand to use it, and many apply their agency to come up with individual, ad hoc solutions, depending on what is required of them and their own circumstances and ambitions (Lønsmann, 2017; Sanden and Lønsmann, 2018). My personal 'strategy' mainly involved spending time and effort on making friends with the English language. To get to know my not-yet-friend better, I was reading a lot in English: academic texts, newspapers, magazines, short stories and novels. My attempts at

writing continued in the hope that one day, the new 'friend' would approve of me as an author of texts in English. Obviously, with all these efforts, I was trying to compensate for what I perceived as a deficiency on my part, and I wanted very much to be accepted and to belong, and not to feel alien and foreign. I cannot overestimate how much of that finally achieved sense of belonging came from becoming part of the *ephemera* collective which I joined in 2006. On a practical, language-related level, there were co-authors and co-editors from whom I was able to learn, and who did not mind correcting my mistakes and smoothing out clumsy expressions. Importantly, the *ephemera* collective was very international, even if predominantly European and white. Others were in a similar situation to me, working in a non-native language and encountering the same challenges. They did not judge me. Somewhere in between self-frustration and determination to find my own, anglophone, voice, progress was being made and my feeling of deficiency, thanks to *ephemera*, was dissipating. It was ok to be 'from elsewhere'; indeed, I was learning, through the first Special Issue of *ephemera* I co-edited, that marginality – *ephemera's* 'core business' (Śliwa et al., 2007: 499) – was a value to be nurtured.

Speaking with a different accent

The experience of arriving in the UK and not being able to communicate was the prelude to other unexpected situations connected to anglophone working and living. Throughout all those years of learning English in Poland, I was unaware of the importance of the accent with which a person speaks, the information it carries about the speaker, and its implications for how the speaker is perceived by others. The initial realisation that there was something significant about accent came in 2002. I was teaching a group of around 25 third year undergraduate students at Newcastle Business School. It was an interactive session, with the discussion of a case study illustrating certain strategic management concepts. As the session took place well into the teaching term, the students and I had already developed a friendly rapport with each other. Yet, they knew very little about me. At some point – perhaps weary of the strategic management rhetoric we were practising – one student, Ben, asked: 'Where are you from?'. In the spirit of the 'Socratic method' I

usually applied in my classes, I asked back: 'Where do you think I am from?'. Taking up the hypothesis elimination challenge, Ben replied: 'We can hear from your accent that you aren't from here. We think you must be from Germany, Gateshead or Sunderland'.

This was a joyful and friendly exchange, but it made me very aware of being an outsider in that classroom, and of the fact that the way I spoke signalled this outsider status to others. It seemed significant and I wanted to know more about it, and therefore developed an interest in language attitudes research, an interdisciplinary study – with roots in social psychology – of the social meanings we attribute to language and its users (Dragojevic et al., 2021). It turns out that researchers have known since the 1930s that listeners make judgements about speakers based on their voice and accent, both with regard to the latter's social category (e.g. sex and social class) and personality, and that personality-related judgements are largely inaccurate and yet consistent with the prevailing social stereotypes (Allport and Cantril, 1934; Pear, 1931). Language attitude research also tells us that speaking with a foreign accent activates stereotypes associated with specific nationalities and that the socioeconomic status assigned to a nationality becomes transposed onto a speaker (e.g. Lindemann, 2003). I learned that some accents carry a 'low prestige' and others a 'high prestige', and that speakers with different accents are treated accordingly. I was worried about what treatment I was likely to receive as a woman speaking English with a Polish accent. I was certainly concerned when I found out that students tend to evaluate the teaching quality and effectiveness of non-native accented educators less favourably than that of native-accented educators (e.g. Subtirelu, 2015), even if the students themselves are non-native speakers of the language which is the medium of their education (Hendriks et al., 2018).

Over the years of my living and working in English there have been, of course, many instances where my accent drew someone's attention. Some were amusing, others less so. On reflection, most of the time I did not consider, and still do not consider, it as a positive thing when someone pays attention to my accent. On the contrary, it tends to make me uncomfortable and I'd rather they did not mention it. When I have to ring a call centre to find solutions to mundane problems, such as a home insurance policy renewal, I wonder about

the judgements people will make about me and the service I am going to receive as a result of the accent I speak with. At the same time, I am aware that the call centre worker who answers my call might be having similar concerns: after all, we know that call centre workers are a group of service workers who tend to suffer because of the prejudiced and discriminatory reactions of customers to their accents (Taylor and Bain, 2005). In my everyday working life, I remain conscious that as soon as I open my mouth, assumptions about me will be activated in my students, colleagues, the conferences audiences I am presenting to, or members of an interview panel I am attending. This awareness, in many instances, has made me over-cautious in interactions in the professional context. In this regard, as in many others, being part of the *ephemera* community has been a blessing as it helped me greatly in realising the kindness of people who listen to what one says and not the accent with which one says it.

The sheltering tower of *ephemera*

In a metaphorical sense, the past two decades of my professional and, to an extent, personal life have been spent dealing with my private version of the aftermath of the punishment that the human race supposedly had to face following the construction of the *Tower of Babel* on the land of Shinar. The relocation to the UK made me experience for myself the implications of the fact that people, scattered around the world, speak different languages and they find it difficult to understand each other when they finally meet in one place. I have been striving for that state of unity with others through learning to live and work in English and through researching what individual and organizational-level consequences result from functioning in a non-native language, and what can be done about them for the benefit of the individual, organization and society. I am still searching for answers – an endeavour that is at once satisfying and frustrating, but always close to the heart – and taking any opportunities that present themselves to me to tell others about it.

Becoming part of the editorial collective of *ephemera* back in 2006 was like arriving home. Soon after I joined, it occurred to me that I never thought it possible to meet so many like-minded people in one place. It was a space

where I belonged, where no one asked 'where are you from?' as soon as I spoke – an often well-intended question that strangers tend to ask and that I came to dread – where we shared a particular mindset even though we were brought up in different countries and families. Central to that mindset has always been an understanding that we are a multitude, that we are different in many ways but all committed to the *ephemera* project. Unsurprisingly, I stayed in *ephemera* for a long time, perhaps even for too long, since the project of *ephemera* was supposed to be about change and, well, ephemerality. Paradoxically though, over all those years, *ephemera* has been a constant in my life, and I am still an affiliate. Whatever else happened: turbulences in the workplace and socio-political turbulences, *ephemera* was there, with people who I knew would understand, with friends who could be trusted, with scholars interested not in fashions but in ideas and in what these ideas might do towards creating a more just, more sustainable and happier world of organization.

ephemera was to me our alternative to the *Tower of Babel*. It did not aspire to a 'top in the heavens' and never competed for attention in journal ranking positions (Butler, 2018; Butler et al., 2017; Butler and Spoelstra, 2012). By contrast, it felt safe and certain in its desire to pursue original scholarship, addressing issues that genuinely matter to society and organization; to support the development or early career academics, not in a patronising 'look at me and follow me' manner, but through providing a forum for generating and debating ideas; and in bringing together people who accepted, liked and cared for each other. No matter how busy and stressful my daily working life might have been, an *ephemera* conference was never too far away, and it was guaranteed to be a thought-provoking academic event and a heart-warming meeting with old friends and a chance to make new ones: a much-needed reminder of why I became an academic. I used to see the annual *ephemera* conferences as obligatory for recharging my internal batteries: for intellectual inspiration, for engaging conversations, for opening up, trusting, listening and laughing in the company of others. These 'others' would come from different national and linguistic backgrounds, speak with different accents, and bring a multiplicity of ideas to the table.

More than once, *ephemera* was a sanity saver to me. I recall how on the date of the Brexit referendum in June 2016, I was spending the evening with an *ephemera* friend and a fellow European working in UK academia, and then staying over at her place before returning to my London home in the morning. We spoke until late at night – no language or other 'barriers' and obstacles to communication, just a pure joy of connection and dialogue, being together and sharing a meal. The next morning brought a shock. It felt like there was nothing that could possibly be said. This time, we had silence between us – the most intimate common language at that moment – and in that silence, we had each other's compassion and grief. Because she was there, hope had not been lost, regardless of all the other losses and destruction that Brexit was threatening us with.

Accentuate the positive

I was honoured to be invited to contribute to the 20th anniversary issue of *ephemera* through sharing these reflections on what it has been like to work and live 'in another tongue', set in the context of being part of the *ephemera* community: a community characterised by diversity and multiplicity. This community has greatly influenced my scholarship and my academic career, and has given me the opportunity to build friendships with wonderful people. *ephemera* has been a space of mutual encouragement and support, respect and trust, and learning and growth. It has been delightful to be able to express how lucky I feel to belong to this community.

Am I romanticising it? For sure. Was it always perfect? No. Could we have found ways to include more, or better, those who were outside *ephemera*? Quite possibly. Constructive criticisms are welcome and justified, and reflexivity is needed because without it we rigidify, regress and cannot flourish. Personally, being part of the *ephemera* community has helped me enormously in the lifelong project of 'being in another tongue'. No wonder I continue to speak with the *ephemera* accent.

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Water in the desert: *ephemera* as an Arendtian oasis

Christian Garmann Johnsen, Lena Olaison and Bent Meier Sørensen

> … we, who are not of the desert though we live in it, are able to transform it into a human world… precisely because we suffer under the desert conditions we are still human and still intact; the danger lies in becoming true inhabitants of the desert and feeling at home in it…
> Hannah Arendt, *The promise of politics*, 1955: 201

To join the *ephemera* collective, whether 10 or 20 years back, was to be invited into an oasis whilst wandering in the desert. In this oasis we found a community of scholars, created by the social relations between its members. To believe in *ephemera*, for us, is to insist that the possibility of community unmediated by instrumentalism always exists. To believe in *ephemera* is to be reminded of who and where you are, to be convinced that the desert can be transformed, that a human world can be created. Indeed, *ephemera* reminds us that the world can be different, for like Michel de Certeaus's concept of tactics, the journal holds the promise that 'however bad things get, they are not *necessarily* so' (2000: 89). Such a promise, however, can easily lead to disappointment.

For Arendt, the desert is a metaphor for the modern condition – a condition marked by the spread of worldlessness. To be in the possession of a 'world' can refer to two aspects of such world: at one level, the world can be seen as comprised by created artifacts, but at another as being constituted by unmediated social relations (Gomez, 2016). Arendt refers to the former as

the human condition of work, which in Arendt's view entails the creation of durable objects and is thus always a means towards a given end. Arendt refers to the latter as the human condition of action, something that happens between humans insofar as they are able to do and say things that others can respond to, such as taking initiative and creating a new beginning. It is this condition of social relations – the ability to be together – that Arendt sees as being threatened by desertification. The desert is nothing but a worldless place devoid of unmediated social relations. Thus, 'the modern growth of worldlessness, the withering away of everything *between* us, can be described as the spread of the desert' (Arendt, 1955: 201). The experience of losing the world, in Arendt's optics, is to lose the ability to be together.

The experience of finding an oasis in the desert – somewhere to feel at home – exists, however much a mere potential, a virtual or utopian mirage. The *ephemera* community represents just such an experience for us. In all its plurality of writers and readers, theorists and activists, reformists and revolutionaries, this community and the sense of belonging it bestows cannot be subsumed under a single, unitary concept like 'home'. Indeed, Freud was unlikely to fully enjoy such an experience of home as he strode into his Biedermeier-style boudoir in mid-19th-century Vienna, this being where he developed his idea of the *unheimlich*, the 'unhomely' or uncanny, that place where not even the home could be understood as homely. Humans remain in search for a home, but Arendt maintains that a home is not restricted to a physical location, but is rather the experience of feeling home as one *stays in the desert*, of refusing to project the desert into one's own soul, and of rejecting the desert's totalitarian sandstorms as part of its coming redemption. So, how do we find that oasis in the desert?

Arendt's struggle to find an oasis in the desert

For Arendt, modernity puts belonging to the world at stake – not the world defined by a subject-object relation, as we have neither lost ourselves nor the objects that surround us, but instead the world we share with others. It is, as Arendt writes, 'everything between us' (Arendt, 1955: 201). As such,

the problem of worldliness cannot be reduced to a psychological problem, and the formula 'fix the subject, and all will be fine' therefore cannot solve problem. In fact, the real danger of modernity, Arendt insists, is that we have become too comfortable in the worldliness we inhabit. Once we become isolated subjects in a worldless world not shared with others, other perils arise, most notably desert sandstorms – Arendt's metaphor for totalitarian movements. Although having become desert dwellers, we are not *of* the desert, as our suffering in it makes only too clear. Therefore, the real 'danger lies in becoming true inhabitants of the desert and feeling at home in it' (Arendt, 1955: 201). Benjamin sees the full consequences of this desertification in the necessary apotheosis he and Arendt endured in their own, war-torn lives as refugees: humankind's 'self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order' (Benjamin, 2015: 235). How do we end up becoming true desert dwellers?

One way of sheltering in the desert is to retreat into the inner self and seek comfort in our inner experiences, feelings and thinking, but then another danger lies in wait. Once obsessed with ourselves, we interpret external problems from our surroundings as internal problems springing from within our beings. This mindset leads us to believe that we are at once the disease and the cure, and so the self ultimately becomes a 'pharmakon' (Derrida, 1981). The truth is that the desert is not 'in ourselves'. Indeed, to Arendt, Nietzsche made his 'decisive mistake' in thinking that the desert is within us (Arendt, 1955: 201). Modern psychology proceeded to fall into the same trap, and has been trying to 'help' us 'adapt' to our desert nature ever since (the inverted commas are from Arendt, 1955: 201). Becoming a true desert dweller requires subscribing to coping strategies that make our surrounding worldliness endurable. Both totalitarianism and modern psychology want us to suffer less. Yet, this loss of suffering and endurance comes at a price, as it is only through suffering and endurance that we can make room for the passion and action 'that patiently enable us to transform the desert rather than ourselves' (Arendt, 1955: 202).

However, Arendt's pessimistic reading of modernity is not without hope. In fact, Arendt insists that an oasis always has the potential to occur in the

desert when 'one heart reaches out directly to the other, as in friendship' (Arendt, 1955: 202). For Arendt, an oasis is thus not a place out there, bound to a physical and geographical location, but the space wherein humans can meet and show each other who they are. Arendt uses the concept of 'action' to describe this phenomenon, defining it as the ability of humans to express themselves to each other. Against this backdrop, an oasis becomes what Arendt calls a 'space of appearance', that is, a space that 'comes into being whenever men are together in the manner of speech and action' (Arendt, 1958: 199).

Still, Arendt stresses, we cannot escape the desert and simply enter the oasis but must constantly struggle to transform the desert into an oasis – hardly a simple task with all of modernity's inherently conflictual tendencies. Modernity has led us to become obsessed with either the things around us (objects) or ourselves (subjects). Another danger Arendt saw in modernity was how instrumentality has infiltrated social relations, so people no longer meet for the sake of showing who they are (action), but to exchange services (work). By understanding a community in merely instrumental terms, we fail to acknowledge that the desert is not our natural habitat. For this reason, Arendt believes that we must remind ourselves who we are. And this is precisely what *ephemera* allows us to do: to remind ourselves of the intellectual thinking, contemplating, theorizing, and writing in which we engage – not to garner academic prestige, but to develop new ideas that let us see the world differently.

To Arendt, transforming arid land into a verdant oasis requires the miracles of philosophy, art, friendship, love and, we may add, engaged scholarship, none of which we could survive without in the desert. What is more, we as writers, thinkers, organization scholars or, to copy Arendt's own example, 'political scientists' must know how to make the most of the oases in our thinking, or they themselves will dry up (1955: 203). The transformation depends on an *Amor Mundi*, which is to say a love of the world impossible to realize in isolation, even if the isolation entails a necessary component of this love – solitude, which we would like to take some license to translate as engaged scholarship.

In solitude, we read the sacred texts at the heart of the university and, in dialogue, speak about them. In the academic community, we enact the truths of past writings and realize plurality. Of course, all these activities occur in atmospheres of controversy: Which texts may we talk about? Where exactly is this alleged heart of the university? How is an inclusive dialogue even possible in a metaphorical desert with its totalitarian storms? How would action connect to truth, and how long until plurality, democracy and freedom are inscribed in a durable world for all? And who are 'we' anyway? Certainly, we have witnessed 'the withering away of everything *between* us' (Arendt, 1955: 201) and our common world attacked by tech giants and monstrous concentrations of wealth. Such totalitarian sandstorms have succeeded in purging love from the concept of friendship, thinking from the concept of speaking, and courage from the concept of action. Nevertheless, we insist that the experience of *ephemera* is the experience of believing in the oasis.

Believing in the oasis of *ephemera*

If Arendt conceptually connects thinking and doing, the *ephemera* collective has continuously sought to connect them directly in practice. Any intervention, then, would necessarily have both aspects. A so-called 'Critical Mass cycling intervention' performed by the collective in London about twenty years ago illustrates this connection of thinking and doing, as well as the challenges such connections bring about. The critical mass aspect of the intervention pivoted on the notion that if enough bikers swarmed the capital's streets, they would be seen as legitimate road users. In other words, the demonstration was calculated to disrupt the city's reigning traffic regime and thereby make space for cyclists in a city designed only for motorized vehicles.

To reinforce this aim, on the day of the event the *ephemera* collective placed Steffen Böhm and Chris Land, safely equipped with bikes, helmets and whistles as part of the group of active cyclists. With the activism aspect having now been attended to, the collective also designated two of its members, Campbell Jones and the Sørensen of this publication, to observe

and, in the words of intervention organizers, ultimately 'theorize the event' as it unfolded. The observers had been placed at the event's slated final destination, the square in front of the National Gallery. As a resident of Copenhagen, Sørensen could just picture the Scandinavian-scale droves of bikes arriving at a nice pace, perhaps even cheered by bystanders and liberals in cruiser cabriolets.

Reality had something else in mind. After some hours of rather uneventful observation, Sørensen heard sudden whistling and shouting, growing louder as it apparently approached the square. Two lone cyclists, the aforementioned Böhm and Land, were pedalling towards the square with an enormous phalanx of London Metropolitan Police in heavy vehicles surrounding them. The police immediately apprehended the cyclists as they arrived on the square. However, with only a critical mass of two activists to throw in the massive police wagon, law enforcement turned their sights on the two 'theorists', the status of which the police found somewhat more dubious, for unlike classic activists, the observers wore dark suits and were standing still. To the detriment of annual arrest rates, the police were compelled to assess that these two individuals represented no *immediate* threat to law and order in the greater metropolitan area. So with the drama over, the police left, and the two theorists quietly walked into the art museum.

In all its glorious inconclusiveness, the Critical Mass event played out in a way that brought the schism that has always lain at the heart of *ephemera*: activism versus theorizing, the politics versus theory in the journal's title. The same members of the critical mass in the London event eventually edited a book, *Against automobility* (2006), that elucidated the distinction between activism and theory. The book states that as 'undoubtedly important as the *automobile* is, however, the aim of this book is to look beyond the car itself to consider the concept of *automobility* that underlies it' (Böhm, Jones, Land and Paterson, 2006: 1). This short quote already reveals the schism. Even, as in this book, when the adversary is palpably manifested in an armour of steel and wheels, it is nonetheless assumed to cunningly conceal its true force, the *concept* that underlies it. This inclination not only demonstrates the need for theory, but also points to theory's superior

strength at lifting the veil concealing the regime of forces actually functioning in the world.

The *ephemera* collective has always debated this schism between the visible action and its invisible causes, swaying between the tangible activism connected to and often directed against organizations and the high-end theory capable of uncovering the workings of such organizations. The activists have seemed to feel the theorists are trying to escape the burden of action, to see it as something only to watch and speculate about rather than partake in. The theorists, on the other hand, have distrusted activism's ability to grasp and thus change the configuration of the world's true forces, which hover above us, beyond the reach of our influence. Arendt, however, considers the movements into either action or theory to be forms of escapism:

> to escape from the world of the desert, from politics into… whatever it may be, is a less dangerous and more subtle form of ruining the oases than the sandstorms that menace their existence, as it were, from without. (1955: 203)

In both cases we 'carry the sand of the desert into the oases', since to Arendt (1955: 203) the distinction between thinking and acting is false. Plurality, the human condition of action, exists only where thinking, speaking, and acting remain intimately connected. Many actions consist solely of speaking, and no meaningful action was ever taken without being born of thinking and talking, a fact to which the very duration of many editorial meeting at *ephemera* attests. Whether facing the sheer force of the London Metropolitan Police or the soul-shattering art of the National Gallery, thinking, speaking, and action demand a belief in the courage of human action.

Where do we go with our courage from here?

The actions of *ephemera* have often been courageous, if only infinitesimal in the great scheme of things. Whether such actions are schematically ephemeral or not, the sheer existence of the journal is a Herculean accomplishment in its own right, and one achieved by the entire *ephemera* collective as it seeks to correct the dark sides of the publishing business. Although this darkness deepens, we are tempted to cite Arendt once again:

'the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization' (1968: 206).

This issue of decay and crystallization takes us directly to our present day and the University of Leicester School of Business. Founded at the University of Warwick in 1999/2000, *ephemera* moved to Leicester School of Business in 2002. Someone looking at the university now would think this move must have been to another planet. Leicester School of Business still harbours strong, independent researchers, but the university management's new policy is clear: no more Arendtian oases are to be sprouting at this school. In 2021, the university management decided that 16 academics, all treasured colleagues and friends of *ephemera*, were redundant and forced them to leave. Indeed, *ephemera* has been engaged in this struggle to maintain critical research alongside and together with more mainstream business studies, sending Professor Nishan Canagarajah, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leicester, a letter that said the journal 'stands in solidarity with our colleagues who face compulsory redundancy because of their commitment to critical organizational scholarship'. The letter goes straight to the core of the matter: 'The research excellence of critical organizational scholars at the School of Business is beyond question.'

The storm blowing through Leicester School of Business knows nothing of excellence and does not confine itself to any one campus. Even as we write this note for *ephemera*'s anniversary issue, our own business school, like so many others, is undergoing a reform that includes fewer admissions. So-called 'soft' programmes in the social sciences and humanities are being singled out for reductions and closure. We all have formal roles in this process, so we have had to cancel our plans, even our precious writing time, to devote ourselves and days to this situation. One such day, early in the process, as the pressure and exposure grew unbearable, the Olaison of this note, found herself closing down everything – her email, phone, all documents – and shutting the office door. She then opened her computer folder containing the *ephemera* contributions for this very anniversary issue and began formatting, proofreading, and laying-out. She turned to *ephemera* and engaged with someone else's reference list, experiencing this as meaningful work. This may all sound like a deliberate act, but it was not.

Indeed, it was only sometime after this seclusion that she realized what she had done, and how meaningfully this act expresses what we are writing about and trying to share in this anniversary issue. In truth it simply happened, like a habitual act of self-preservation: it was a way to endure the sandstorm in the desert.

Within such courageous acts of self-preservation, of sheltering and saving and of waiting lies human excellence as the most profound and hermetic secret of the oasis – a secret predicated on the constant struggle of transforming the desert into that oasis. The journal has been itself a fruit of such acts of excellence and would not have come about without it. When the oldest of this note's authors joined the *ephemera* collective almost 20 years back, he walked into a room full of scholars at Leicester University. This was the editorial collective. The scholars were creating an intense intellectual and social environment strong enough to leave a lasting, physical impression. The room was light, not because of the grey concrete cityscape outside its windows, but rather in the Heidegger sense of *Lichtung*, namely as the 'clearing' or 'lighting' in the woods, a place not only where light more easily streams down, but also where things are more clearly put forward as Dasein engages authentically and resolutely with the world.

To Heidegger, however, the clearing is not a merciless enlightening that slams the hard facts on the table, but rather an opening that brings forth *and* shelters and through this sheltering allows being to reveal itself. Only when an area in the forest has been opened and its vegetation cut down can its open space, *das Offene*, offer both protection against dark forces and the disclosure of being. This opening brings being 'to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *alêtheia*, truth, happens' (Heidegger, 1993: 319). Indeed, the room on the university campus appeared beset with a particular intellectual energy that, unbounded by the participants' diverse situations in their home woodlands/concrete jungles, deserts/business schools, could flow more freely. Both the stakes and the drama were high, and one's courage came to be demanded as well as recognized, as it is today at the University of Leicester. At these early meetings, things took off in the belief that change was possible; some beliefs

were crushed. It too was a manner of 'critical mass' events, and many such were to follow.

An oasis can often materialize as a place of rest, ease, and leisure, but this is not what Arendt teaches us. An oasis is created and maintained in action, and takes courage, passion, and an individual as well as collective investment to come into being. Indeed, an oasis in a desert is an improbable miracle, which brings us effortlessly to Olaison's first editorial meeting. A founding member of the collective contributed to the first item on the agenda, the election of a new editorial manager. However, in his opening statement he said: 'I don't think we should elect a new editorial manager, I think we should go for the nuclear option.' He then continued by explaining that *ephemera* may have lost its role, if it ever had had one, that he could not see how it would be able to live on. Nor was he sure it should live on. Did *ephemera* matter? Did we really push any boundaries anymore? Or had we just been co-opted by the publishing machinery? Were we just another journal?

Silence. After a few trembling moments a collective member started to speak, more voices chimed in, and slowly we began to regain faith in each other and in *ephemera*. After electing a new editorial manager, we moved on to discuss the matters at hand – the issue pipeline, website maintenance and layout. Having dealt with 'the nuclear option', we could concentrate on what appeared to be the journal's most pressing issue: should *all* the words in reference book titles be capitalized or only the first? The heated debate extended into the next meeting, and, as for the issue, it became an *ephemera* classic.

Our aim with this example is to expose the fragile and dangerous relation between the desert and the oasis. Arendt warns us about feeling at home in the desert, and the same must be said about the oasis. True desert dwellers feel no need for an oasis, but then anyone seeking to escape rather than endure the desert brings sand into the oasis, instead of water into the desert. In this way we 'ruin the life-giving oases when we go to them for the purpose of escaping, it sometimes seems as though everything conspired mutually to generalize the conditions of the desert' (Arendt, 1955: 203).

Becoming a true inhabitant of the oasis is also dangerous, for we risk internalizing the oasis, thinking that changing ourselves into oasis inhabitants will resolve the problems of living in the desert. However, in inhabiting the miraculous oasis, we will find it hard to separate ourselves from such an ephemeral community, and impossible to imagine the oasis without ourselves as its necessary centre. In actual fact, though, *ephemera* was always meant to be ephemeral, despite its collective endurance as an oasis in the desert. That's the point of its name, and although it is now turning 20, collective members will continue to come and go; people will leave and others will join. With these people and their actions, with the community's very plurality, *ephemera* changes but is also maintained.

As such, *ephemera* has been an oasis in which one could train one's courage among friends. Some were activists, some theorists, some friends of the revolution, some friends of Plato, some all of the above, but every action has always taken place in a certain atmosphere of hope and belief. It has taken place, we suggest, within the strange glory of what Benjamin terms 'a *weak* messianic' power:

> For we have been expected upon this earth. For it has been given us to know, just like every generation before us, a *weak* messianic power, on which the past has a claim. This claim is not to be settled lightly. (Benjamin, 2003: 390)

This claim has not been settled lightly in the history of *ephemera*. For that matter, it has not to this day been settled at all. The question remains how, in the context of our ephemeral oasis, this *weak yet collective* power of mind and heart, of thinking and action, of *ephemera: theory and politics in organization* may be brought to bear on the desert.

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The wonderfully organized and mediated endurance of *ephemera*

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Introduction

There used to be a time, in the late noughties and early teens, when at *ephemera* editorial collective meetings an item would sneak onto the agenda: the closure of *ephemera*. I joined *ephemera* as a member of the editorial collective in 2007, and left 10 years later. Especially during the early years of my time with *ephemera,* there was a sense in which the name of the journal was taken quite seriously: if the journal is to be *ephemeral,* when has our time come? When is the time to call it a day? Loosely inspired by Jacques Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence, Karl Marx's '*ruthless criticism* of all that exists' ([1843], in 1992: 207), and perhaps also Friedrich Engels' 'gnawing criticism of the mice' ([1888], in 1996: 7), the question was whether *ephemera* had already fulfilled its purpose ('self-clarification' it was for Marx and Engels as they elaborated their materialist conception of history, ibid.), particularly since it was felt that other journals in the field, such as *Organization*, were catching up in terms of content and style with *ephemera.* There was also always a general discussion on the project of critique – the subtitle of the journal until 2004 was 'critical dialogues on organization' – and a reverberation of discussions elsewhere, for example the self-criticism of critical projects such as *Critical Inquiry* (Daston, 2004). Lorraine Daston's worry for *Critical Inquiry* and the humanities could equally have been voiced

with regards to *ephemera* and critical management studies: 'It seems to me that the greatest risk for *Critical Inquiry* is becoming predictable and uniform, just as the greatest risk for the humanities is becoming hermetic' (Daston, 2004: 361).

And then there were Bruno Latour's reflections on critique having run out of steam (2004). Predictability and uniformity, Dalston's fears, perhaps weren't such a problem in organization studies: even though *ephemera* more or less explicitly set out in a rebellious spirit against these, perhaps they were part of 'growing up', or more gratuitously of developing a certain 'style' or 'approach' that could characterize the journal? Hermeticism could equally be dealt with: in 'repositioning organization theory' (Böhm, 2006) one could turn towards social movements and other kinds of alternative organization (*ephemera* 8-2) to find some purpose and orientation to organizational practice. Yet Latour's reflections, which seem timely today considering he warned against the way critique would be used to undermine (climate) science and to promote conspiracies, seemed more hurtful, nagging the self-reflective critical scholar often in conflict if not at war with her institution, the business school: 'Should we be at war, too, we, the scholars, the intellectuals? Is it really our duty to add fresh ruins to fields of ruins? Is it really the task of the humanities to add deconstruction to destruction? More iconoclasm to iconoclasm? What has become of the critical spirit?' (Latour, 2004: 225). *ephemera* partly pre-empted this discussion by re-engaging the history of critique and the enlightenment with Immanuel Kant via Michel Foucault (1996; 1997), and by removing 'critique' from its byline, announcing: 'We are removing the label in order to learn the thing itself' (Böhm and Spoelstra 2004: 100). Yet the learning continues, as does the self-criticism.

This brief anecdote demonstrates how *ephemera* and its editorial collective worked on itself to keep going, to confirm the critical project of the journal and to justify its existence both to itself and to its readers. As may be obvious, however, discursive closures, positionings or situatings can only temporarily suspend the continuous questioning of an ongoing concern. The putting into question of *ephemera*'s existence at editorial collective meetings always resulted in a collective pulling-together and a bout of enthusiasm which, if not necessarily leading to new energetic impulses, would at least keep

everyone involved and working until the next meeting. Even if this brief contribution to *ephemera*'s anniversary issue can't quite perform a re-staging of these moments of self-doubt leading to self-affirmation, I want to offer a few reflections on the endurance of *ephemera*, which isn't only down to self-criticism and collective enthusiasm – although these are key elements – but also to media and organization. *ephemera*'s is, after all, a wonderful story of success – and of endurance.

Media

ephemera's history is intimately intertwined with media of publishing and organization. While the 'gnawing criticism of the mice' (Engels [1888], in 1996: 7) already suggests that permanence is difficult to achieve even for paper-based publications, the conundrum explored above is exacerbated at a technical level by digital media. Digital memory comes with 'constant degeneration', as Wendy Chun writes:

> Digital media complicates this relationship [between the transitory and the permanent, the passing and the stable] by making the permanent into an enduring ephemeral, creating unforeseen degenerative links between humans and machines. (2008: 148)

Digital memory is fickle, too. What applies to digital memory also applies to *ephemera,* not only because of its name, but because of the way digital media are inscribed in its project. *ephemera* is a digital native, we could say, set up on the World Wide Web, making use of what the Web and the Internet offered at the time. It is the 'enduring ephemeral' of these technologies that perhaps seemed so appealing: not so much 'the enlightenment ideal that better information leads to better knowledge, which in turn leads to better decisions' (Chun, 2008: 155) – this promise of these technologies was left to 'mainstream' scholars – but rather the hope that the time of thinking and writing in media could change, that thought could catch up with the speed of events (Chun, 2008: 151-152). Scholarship could be cheap and cheerful, fast and responsive, yet more than pulp fiction.

Out of curiosity, when working on this piece, I checked what the earliest saved versions of the *ephemera* website on the Internet Archive are. 'These pages are

not quite dead, but not quite alive either; the proper commemoration requires greater effort', Chun writes of what we find there (2008: 169). It turns out the first one is dated 17 February 2001, so not long after the launch of the first issue (see Figure 1).

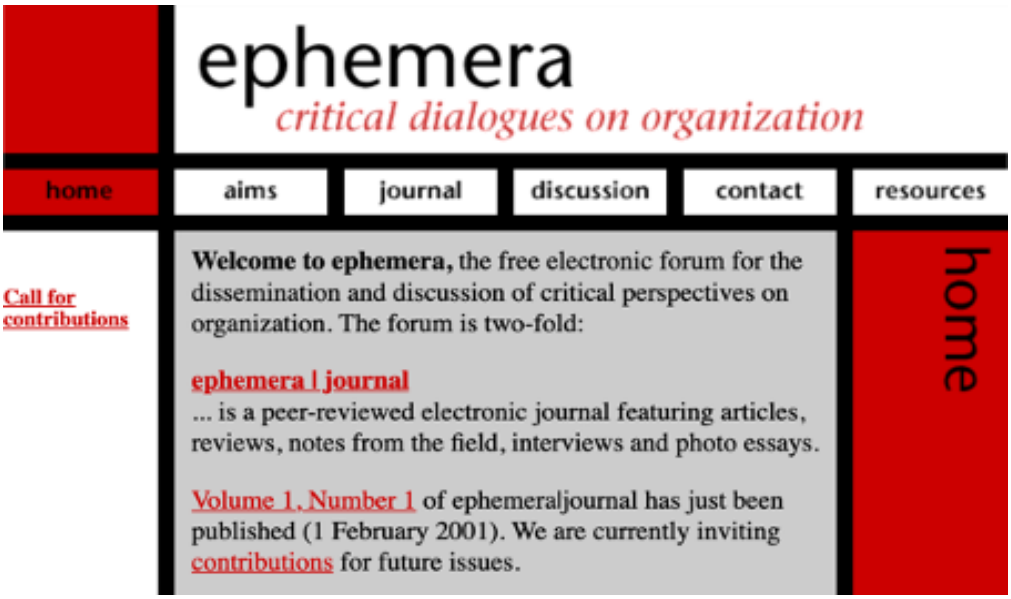

Figure 1. Screenshot of *ephemera*'s homepage at ephemeraweb.org as recorded on the Internet Archive[1]

The Mondrianesque design, the old subtitle, the static HTML pages, the emphasis on 'free', the invitation to join a discussion mailing list, and more broadly the faith in what the Web has to offer – all of this reminds us of an age in which the World Wide Web was still a novelty for most, and independent, scholar-run journals were popping up everywhere (*Tamara: Journal for Critical Organization Inquiry* also launched in 2001), as scholars were hoping to liberate themselves from publishers. While Tiziana Terranova had already written about 'free labour' (2000), here were a few PhD students eager to work for free to challenge their field and to establish a new outlet for their work and that of their friends and colleagues. And their vehicle was going to be a website, which, not just a journal but 'an electronic forum for

[1] https://web.archive.org/web/20010217163726/http://www.ephemeraweb.org/.

developing and extending discussions of critical perspectives on organization', as the aims read at that time, reproduced key features of journals, including editorial governance, peer review and the (for the Web) anachronistic insistence on scheduled 'issues'.

Notwithstanding working papers and other kinds of 'grey literature' (Striphas and Hayward, 2013), this kind of independent publishing would have largely been unthinkable without the Web, and a few other material conditions, like the ability to engage in free labour. Key were also media formats such as the PDF, which gives these documents 'the look of printedness' (Gitelman, 2014: 115), and allowed them to enter into competition with many other traditional print journals, even the already 7-year-old *Organization*, which at the time were being made available online (we could say, with Lisa Gitelman, 'remediated') in that very format, much as they are today. In fact, the website contained very little text formatted in HTML, and largely served as a container for said PDFs, either of the entire issue – promising a kind of boundedness and binding reminiscent of a heavy and heady book (Hall, 2016: 145-159) – or individual contributions, allowing for speedier and more directed circulation. Most importantly, these PDFs could and can be printed, and while it is exactly these same PDFs of the first issues you find on the newer website today (I don't think they have even been updated to a new PDF version?), I wonder how many yellowed, scribbled-upon and earmarked print-outs of these PDFs still occupy stacks of print materials or file drawers of stuffy academic offices today – if the mice haven't had a go (or someone's toddlers, cf. the cover of *ephemera* 8-4). After all, this journal was to be printed, as publishing only slowly became properly digital.

The endurance of *ephemera* on the Web was fragile and at times amusing. Soon enough the HTML page wasn't timely but pleasantly vintage, and there were at times only a few members of the collective who knew how to update the website through FTP, and with little knowledge of HTML 'uploading new issues' (as I think it is still called) involved a lot of copy and paste of HTML code. At a certain moment the collective didn't even know where the website was hosted; soon the URL was found to be directed at a server operated by Alf Rehn, who had volunteered space some time earlier and was also working on open access publishing (e.g. Jones and O'Doherty, 2005). The website was

hardly seen to be key to *ephemera*, perhaps because it was the content and the printable PDFs which were seen to make up the journal's output – the website was hardly more than a vehicle for distribution, an interface for access. It was only in the mid-2010s that *ephemera* moved to a content management system, namely Drupal, on the recommendation of friends at *Mute Magazine*. At the time Drupal could be considered an open platform providing 'alternative, and non-commercial means of producing the web'; it offered more modularity than WordPress and a trendy programmability: a kind of 'selective programming – connecting amateur web developer with the mature code of open source programmers' (McKelvey, 2011: 48, 42). While Drupal turned out to be rather needy of maintenance, something a journal with hardly any institutional funding could ill afford, it ensured *ephemera*'s Web presence for another decade.

While we can consider *ephemera* to be born digital, its tendency towards bookishness and printedness, and its rather traditional journal formatting, mean that it hardly embraced the intertextuality the Web had and has to offer. While on Drupal more recent contributions were made available to read in HTML, and a comment function was integrated through a Disqus plugin but hardly used, there was little consideration of the promises and perils of hypertextuality. Consider for example the way in which Miller describes hypertext as 'multimedia assemblies of signs', turning 'a linear verbal text into a vast indeterminate assemblage, mixing sounds and pictures with words that you can navigate in innumerable different ways…' (1995: 35), and all kinds of literary experiments related to this. Or consider the way Katherine Hayles considers hypertext enabling different kinds of close, hyper and machine reading (2012), which may inform how a journal is written.[2] Having said that, *ephemera* did early on consider itself to be in the business of 'writing differently' (Grey and Sinclair, 2006; Gilmore et al., 2019), with for example an early issue on 'silent sounds' experimenting with textual form and offering a 'playlist' of contributions (*ephemera* 3-4). Ironically, the only issue that

[2] See for example book projects such as Open Humanities Press' *Liquid/living books* (http://www.openhumanitiespress.org/books/series/liquid-books/), or the *Scalar* platform for semantic web authoring and journals such as *Vectors* which run on them (https://scalar.me/anvc/scalar/ and http://vectors.usc.edu/).

every really tried to play with the issue format, volume 5 number X resulting from the first *ephemera* conference *Capturing the moving mind* (on the Trans-Siberian Express), which included image works as well as flash animations, and withs its heavy imagery challenged the PDF format, was in its presentation a victim of the introduction of Drupal, with the issue being reduced to its PDFs once again.

With Drupal also came issue covers, and a few years of *ephemera* issues being available in print. Where this was partly a confirmation of *ephemera*'s bookishness, it was also an attempt to fund the open access journal, of which more below. While print-on-demand in some ways promised to be quite radical, with technologies like the Espresso Book Machine coupled with open access content promising journals like *ephemera* to be available for 'post-digital print' in any library with such a machine (Ludovico, 2012: 70-78), the solution ultimately put *ephemera* in touch with the platform capitalism of the print-on-demand (LightningSource/Ingram) and book distribution (Amazon) industry, in that sense having *ephemera* come to grips with this new era of the Web (Srnicek, 2017). Printing stopped after a few years, as very few readers and supporters subscribed or bought issues, which is not unusual for a Web-based journal freely available to read online – and perhaps a blessing in disguise for *ephemera*, as energies could now be spent again on content rather than yet another layer of formatting for print. So, despite some early experiments in format, and some attempts to play with what the Web and later platform capitalism had to offer, *ephemera* was in this regard a quite conservative force. Where it turned out to be perhaps more radical than may have initially seemed was in in its organization, with its radical commitment to open access and to institutional independence.

Organization

In terms of organization, the key feature of *ephemera* is that it is a self-organized collective. In that sense it is an experiment in organizing, one which has so far escaped both the 'poverty of journal publishing' (Beverungen et al., 2012) and the 'tragedy of the commons' (Hardin, 1968). We could read this brief contribution like a case study of *ephemera* as an institution of the

common, with particular ways of governing itself (see also *ephemera* 12-4). Membership is by invitation, and has expanded throughout the years to currently 20 members, with quite a bit of turnover and a lot of former members now 'affiliates'. One of the achievements of *ephemera* was – also in response to it being perceived as a 'boys club' – to become one of the first editorial boards of any business or management journal to become majority female in the mid-2010s. Production processes, governance structures and the distribution of labour are regularly renegotiated, and although the kinds of free labour required for publishing a journal means collective members are far from able to do 'one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner' (Marx and Engels, 1998: 53), the free labour is distributed among members so that each one takes part in different parts of the editorial and publishing process.

This is not unusual for independent publishing (e.g. Dean et al., 2013), which resists the business models of especially 'feral' publishers (Harvie et al., 2012) and with it how professionalism is defined there (and often constituted by outsourced labour). It also resembles other free labour in the cultural industries more broadly, where amateurism has received appreciation and professional cultures are being renegotiated (Reichert, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 2010). Even though in a sense *ephemera* refuses a certain professionalism, it hasn't stopped working as a spring board for a lot of former members to become editors at more 'established' journals published by institutional publishers mostly in the field of organization studies. This may be of concern as it positions *ephemera* at the lower end of the journal pecking order in the field, on which more below, but it also attests to the way *ephemera* has drawn in PhD students and 'early career' scholars, contributing to their success as scholars. *ephemera* has often seen itself as 'marginal' to the field of organization studies (Spoelstra et al., 2007), yet it is the disciplinary landscape surrounding this 'undisciplined discipline' (Czarniawska, 2003) that the journal is oriented towards and which it has shaped.

ephemera's somewhat rogue status – 'The key problem of positioning a critical journal in this way, is this need to take an oppositional stance', write the editors of the first issue (Böhm et al., 2001: 2) – also include the institution of

the business school. As the discussion of its format as a journal has made clear, there *ephemera* was rather traditional, meaning it qualified for various journal lists, such as the Chartered Association of Business Schools Journal Guide, where it was rated rather poorly. Because of contributions of *ephemera* being cited in established journals, other platform businesses in the publishing sector (such as Informa or ThomsonReuters) sought to list it and its free content. *ephemera* has always been rather indifferent to these listings, if opposed to their logics, e.g. those of journal rankings which 'stifle diversity and constrict scholarly innovation' (Willmott, 2011: 429). What also characterizes *ephemera* in this regard is its regular reflection on the modes of governance associated with its institutional environment. For example, Peter Svensson et al. note how the discourse of 'excellence' is a self-referential game and one that 'too often produces stuff that just isn't good enough' (2010: 5), thereby also challenging what counts as good scholarship.

More broadly, *ephemera*'s reflections have thoroughly shaped its relationship to the institution were most of its collective members have traditionally been employed, namely the university-based business school. *ephemera* would not have gotten off the ground nor sustained itself without institutional support. Its production and maintenance were initially supported by Warwick Business School, as the website acknowledged in 2001. During the years, it also received financial and administrative support (e.g. via the funding of graduate research assistants) from the School of Management at the University of Leicester, the School of Business and Management at Queen Mary, University of London, from the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy at Copenhagen Business School, the University Library Bern and the Centre for Digital Cultures at Leuphana University of Lüneburg. Pretty much all of these places based in the UK in particular have witnessed serious challenges to the ways they have embraced what is known as critical management studies, a project *ephemera* has long identified and grappled with (Böhm and Spoelstra, 2004). Warwick came under attack in the early 2010s (Burrell, 2001; Parker, 2014), Queen Mary around the same time (cf. Rowlinson and Hassard, 2011), and Leicester as I write (Parker 2020). This attests to the contested and precarious nature of these endeavours, with Parker (2020: 1) for example lamenting the lack of 'an understanding of the politics of the institution and its

environment' leading to a 'defensive isolation' which puts critical scholars at risk.

Curiously, Rowlinson and Hassard write of a 'third wave' of critical management studies, which 'may eschew formal organization, but its adherents are associated with the journal, *ephemera*, and a conference circuit, hosted by UK business schools' (2011: 676). *ephemera* never really was that central to critical management studies nor these business schools, although at times there were a lot of personal overlaps and solidarities. That *ephemera* has managed to survive all of these onslaughts is also due to the careful distance it has kept to the business school as an institution. *ephemera* has broadly embraced notions of the common and the commons, has often understood itself as producing a commons, and has embraced what David Harvie (one of those formidable scholars purged from Leicester) has expressed so clearly with regards to communities in the university whose forms of collective knowledge production require protection from enclosure: 'the community can only be sustained by commons!' (2004: 3). This insight requires a certain distance to the university as an institution which has become so thoroughly financialized (*ephemera* 9-4), for example rejecting forms of participatory management and instead managing in common (Kamola and Meyerhoff, 2009), or, more radically, considering one's position as part of the 'undercommons' of the university, as Fred Moten and Stefano Harney have so forcefully put it:

> it cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. (2004: 101)

If anything, *ephemera* gave more to the universities it was affiliated to in terms of edginess and output than it took in terms of free labour (often performed burning the midnight oil anyway) or photocopy paper. After all, there aren't that many journals in organization studies or business and management more broadly, that have so consistently brought contemporary debates in social sciences and cultural studies to the field, such as debates around the multitude (*ephemera* 4-3) and immaterial and affective labour (7-1), or opened up debates on urgent topics such as the atmosphere business (12-1/2) or post-

growth (17-1). During the mid-2000s *ephemera* was also arguably a part of what Dean has called the 'new left communicative common' (in Dean et al., 2013: 161-162), which included magazines such as *Mute* and blogs such as those by Jodi Dean or Mark Fisher (aka k-punk). Certainly, as a still rather traditional scholarly journal *ephemera* wasn't central to this, but with its proximity to debates in cultural politics and social movements it was read widely beyond organization studies. In particular, issues focused on social forums (*ephemera* 5-2), new political forms (6-4) or social movements in Latin America (6-3) brought it worldwide readership. Even before alt-metrics for scholarly publications became popular, or research 'impact' became imperative, *ephemera* managed to gather a readership that many journals in organization studies would presumably be envious of: more than three and half million hits and more than half a million visitors (not quite readers) on *ephemera*'s website between February 2004 and September 2007.

Ephemeraweb.org – Access Stats Feb 2004 – Sept 2007

Time range: 10/02/2004 09:19:22 - 30/09/2007 23:05:27 Generated on Mon Nov 12, 2007 - 09:51:56

Summary

Hits	
Total Hits	3,694,146
Average Hits per Day	2,779
Average Hits per Visitor	7.02
Cached Requests	884,304
Failed Requests	225,513
Page Views	
Total Page Views	692,146
Average Page Views per Day	520
Average Page Views per Visitor	1.32
Visitors	
Total Visitors	526,129
Average Visitors per Day	395
Total Unique IPs	138,116
Bandwidth	
Total Bandwidth	138.11 GB
Average Bandwidth per Day	106.42 MB
Average Bandwidth per Hit	39.20 KB
Average Bandwidth per Visitor	275.26 KB

Figure 2. Access Statistics for the *ephemera* website, February 2004 to September 2007. (Source: *ephemera* internal document)

The popularity of *ephemera* at the time was both a blessing and a curse. Many collective members felt the journal was moving away too far from organization as an object of study and organization studies as a discipline to be able to keep a concise profile and a committed readership. This was also a contest over how to constitute organization studies as a field, a debate that is ongoing (e.g. du Gay, 2020). *ephemera*, perhaps without much actual strategy, managed to deal with this minor crisis born out of its own success quite well. In addition to a changing constitution of the editorial collective, which still meant it was broadly business-school based but perhaps embodied more diverse interests, *ephemera* also adopted a new organizational principle, recommended by friends at *Social Text*, which was to solve two problems at once. For most future issues, *ephemera* was to invite outsiders as guest editors, joined usually by one member of *ephemera*; in that way it could both draw in the labour of colleagues who were willing to provide it in return for editing an issue of *ephemera*, and at the same time *ephemera* could engage more assuredly in debates beyond organization studies, for example in cultural studies or urban studies. Broekman describes a similar kind of editorial process at *Mute* as a 'connection-engine', which 'draws people in, propels people out, in a continual, dynamic process, which, due to its intensity, very effectively blurs the lines of "professionalism", friendship, editorial, social, political praxis' (in Dean et al., 2013: 165).

As far as I am aware, this principle broadly is still in operation, and while it has meant that *ephemera* has remained a journal with a strong editorial (or curatorial) line – and concomitantly rather few unsolicited, open theme submissions – it has resulted in a remarkable set of issues engaging scholars and knowledges from other fields, such as those on digital labour broadly situated in media studies (*ephemera* 10-3/4), the politics of consumption broadly related to (critical) marketing (13-2), organizing in the post-austerity city engaging with urban studies (15-1), affective capitalism emanating from media studies and affect theory (16-4), or repair matters exploring science and technology studies (19-2). The productivity of these engagements is, I would suggest, unparalleled, certainly in organization studies if not in many other fields where at least established journals hardly dare to venture out so widely

in terms of themes and approaches, and hardly managed to establish such diverse networks, affiliations and solidarities.

Ephemeral futures

ephemera's endurance, despite or because of its regular self-criticism and its marginal status in organization studies, is therefore quite remarkable and presumably more of a success than its initiators might have hoped for 20 years ago. What is perhaps most important for *ephemera*, which still today 'provides its content free of charge, and charges its readers only with free thought', is that it gets *read*. There are still around 100,000 users which visit its website annually according to Google Analytics, and many of the contributions have several thousand reads and downloads. Nonetheless, if the spirit of the early days of *ephemera* is to be sustained, there are a few things one could suggest to the current editorial collective. For example, why not engage more fervently in radical open access politics? *ephemera* is a member of the Radical Open Access Collective,[3] yet its policies around open access have hardly changed. It still, for example, sticks to a rather conservative Creative Commons licence, which allows neither commercial use nor derivative works. While the book publisher *MayFlyBooks*[4] emerged out of *ephemera*, it seems the collective is currently not involved in pushing open access forward, while in the meantime most commercial journal publishers have embraced new open access models. Certainly, *ephemera*'s model of not charging article processing charges is preferable to these models' 'double-dipping' into funders' pockets (cf. Harvie et al., 2012), but could there be a way in which *ephemera*'s model could be developed, also to make *ephemera* itself sustainable? This is a challenge for many scholar-led journals, not just *ephemera*.

In terms of formats, *ephemera* has often rather by default chosen to stick to scheduled issues, standard text variants with little variations (such as 'notes' like these), and rather established writing styles, not to mention double-blind peer review. Why not think of some other formats? Why not, for example,

[3] See http://radicaloa.disruptivemedia.org.uk/.

[4] See http://www.mayflybooks.org/.

break up the issue logic, engage in more timely publications, reform the peer-review process (cf. Prug, 2010)? Even if *ephemera* wants to remain a by now established scholarly, academic journal, why not use the scope of what is possible within those bounds to experiment with some new formats and styles? Furthermore, *ephemera* could also embrace its position as a journal read beyond organization studies to rediscover the role it fulfilled in the mid-2000s. As Antonio Negri put it: 'A good journal is like an octopus, continually reaching out and pulling in the theoretical and historical happenings in the environment in which it lives' (cited in Thoburn, 2010: 12). A lot of the recent crises, in particular the financial crisis of 2007-8, brought forth a new set of public intellectuals and a bout of new political magazines such as *Dissent, The New Inquiry* or *n+1* (Goldstein, 2016). Couldn't this be a new communicative common to which *ephemera* could contribute, strengthening and expanding its affiliations and solidarities beyond the academy?

Finally, I often thought of *ephemera* being in the business of making anti-commodities, of what Nicholas Thoburn (2010) calls 'communist objects'. For Thoburn this perspective 'emphasizes the capacities of objects to have transformative effects on human sociality and thought that are not predetermined by the form of the human subject', and is 'attentive to the way human and object association can undo the capitalist patterns of subjectivity that institute that dichotomy in the first place' (2010: 2). So it's a matter of thinking of objects as comrades (cf. Shukaitis, 2013), and to think about how in our case a journal could have affective and transformative, potentially anticapitalist effects, beyond the forms of capitalization journal publication itself is subject to. What could that entail today beyond printable PDFs with linear textuality of cultural theory and radical politics, beyond buying a copy of *Capital* during crisis (cf. *ephemera* 9-4)? What kind of critique could this precipitate, so urgently needed in the business school today?

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Shiny new archives? On the politics, history, and ethics of archives under the condition of big data

Mathias Denecke

review of

Thylstrup, N.B., D. Agostinho, A. Ring, C. D'Ignazio and K. Veel (2021) *Uncertain archives: Critical keywords for big data.* Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press. (PB, pp 640, $55.00, ISBN 9780262539883)

With some vigour, American artist and information studies scholar Johanna Drucker clarifies: 'the notion of data as "given" and thus self-evident is patently false – all data are constructed' [*Visualization*, 563]. Since data are not just given, the questions then are who produces data, who decides what data are stored, maintained, and deleted, who profits and who is discriminated in and through data sets? The glossary *Uncertain archives: Critical keywords for big data* (2021) sets out to tackle these questions. What becomes clear right from the start is the book's high ambitions. In line with other book projects making use of keywords, the editors promise 'a glossary of central concepts in contemporary data regimes' [12] which seeks 'to problematize, stake out, and contribute new knowledges and perspectives, as well as to develop new forms of knowledge production' [13]. These aspirations crystallize in the image of the centrifuge. 'We regard this book', the authors

claim, in terms of a 'centrifugal force, spinning out and thereby performing a diversification of thinking about datafication by circling the multiplicity of ways in which the uncertainty of big data archives can be identified and conceptualized' [13].

This book does what it promises. In order to grasp this 'diversification of thinking' [13] and try to convey the specific scholarly momentum of this edited volume, at first, I lay out in length how the editors' introduction intermingles the history, theorization, and politics of archives with big data research. Then, as this book is a glossary, it's apparent to exemplarily focus on a single entry. I discuss the keyword *Algorithmic Racism* and indicate that the relation of racism and technology is a central theme throughout the glossary. The same applies to the term labor, which is no keyword entry but runs like a thread in the book. At last, I sketch a fruitful friction between the entries on *Ethics, Justice,* and *Care*. What I hereby want to show is that this glossary certainly has a new academic ring to it.

History, politics, and ethics of the archive

By putting the question of uncertainty on centre stage, Thylstrup et al. set out to counter idealizing assumptions of data collections. Data are far from being neutral, precise, and valid, and they don't allow people and things to be traced and predicted flawlessly. But the prominence of such notions signals the need for reconsidering big data archives from 'ethically and human-oriented perspectives' [2]. This is the central claim and means to map the relations of humans as well as their (non)appearance in data archives. The introduction therefore takes into account the politics of producing and storing data by relating big data research with archival studies. 'Big data archives', the introduction argues, 'represent a long negotiation between techniques for organizing knowledge and archival subjects, between control and uncertainty, order and chaos, and ultimately between power and knowledge' [4-5]. Since the seemingly 'new, shiny, and automated methods' are related to former archival knowledge practices, data sets reiterate 'the epistemologies, injustices, and anxieties' which branded 'previous archival orders' [4]. This especially pertains to operations of inclusion and exclusion. Archives were

always characterized by excluding persons and groups, like women, minorities, 'and those living under colonial rule', while at the same time 'certain parts of the population, including Black, immigrant, and refugee populations, were also subject to surveillance – and archiving – to a disproportionate degree, with devastating implications for the individuals concerned' [4].

For a systemic account of such mechanisms and effects, the introduction links to a broader theoretical formation concerned with the politics of archival practices. Before the backdrop of poststructuralist theories of the archive as well as 'feminist, queer, postcolonial, and critical race theories and critical archival studies up to the present day', [5] the authors follow the critique of 'archives as reliable repositories' which 'produce truth, offer evidence, and categorize human identities' [5]. The editors particularly stress 'modes of permitting (or denying) access' [5], challenge ideas of the archive as 'static, stable institutions invulnerable to transformation' [6], and concentrate on those who were both forcefully included or deliberately excluded from being archived. In consequence, the authors call for 'a feminist praxis [...] that fully challenges and uproots the oppressive systems that underpin archival reason and archival practices in general' [8]. Such praxis builds on 'the historical roots of current practices of data gathering, hoarding, storing, leaking, and wasting', and contemporary's 'seemingly streamlined interaction' of machines and humans which in fact 'is every bit as messy, porous, and generative as archival encounters have always been' [8]. Through this historical contextualization of today's big data archives and their framing within critical archival studies, Thylstrup and her co-authors rigorously dismantle notions of apolitical and always already well-structured operations of big data archiving.

Large collections of digital data sets, however, do not strictly follow the logic of the archive. The authors therefore actualize the field of archival studies under the condition of big data. Concerning the genuine archival procedures of 'selection and interpretation', the authors trace their 'new epistemological and political implications' which are most evident regarding 'the failure of archives to integrate embodied experience', whereas 'big data archives increasingly record and sort such embodiments for the purposes of

surveillance and profit' [9]. To unfold these new implications – and here we already find the glossary's convincing entanglement of theory and praxis – demands an interdisciplinary approach. For scholars in the humanities, relating 'critical archival perspectives [...] with fields such as critical data studies' [10] seems to be exceptionally promising. The task is to pay 'attention to affective responsibilities in archival practice, the often invisible and gendered labor of archivists, the materiality of digital archives, the ethical challenges of archiving sensitive material, the need to advocate for and with marginalized and vulnerable communities, and the relevance of archives for human rights and social justice' [10]. The field of archival studies affords two important things. First, it provides the theoretical point of departure. Crucially, data production and gathering 'is not a neutral pursuit', 'capture and exclusion' do have 'ethical consequences', and in 'the age of the digital', archives are 'contested sites of power, knowledge, risk, and possibility' [10]. Second, archival studies underscore the need for collaborative research.

With this historical, methodological and political equipment, the introduction comes full circle and returns to the question of uncertainty today. While one might challenge ideals of big data archives as providers of evidence by asking for uncertainties in the creation, maintenance, and operation of data sets, such uncertainties could at the same time be what a company might capitalize on. The 'globalized economies', the authors diagnose, 'demand a future that is open to risk-taking and not entirely calculable yet still somehow subject to a degree of control and predictability' [11]. Hence, although 'private corporations and governments across the globe promote big data as effective solution to deal with informational uncertainty, risks, and unknowns' [11], 'the very same companies and governments also exploit big data as drivers of creativity and high-gain opportunity. Uncertainty and control are therefore embraced by technocapitalism on an equal basis' [12]. As this turn to capitalism makes clear, Thylstrup et al. regard big data archives only in respect with their corresponding economic surround and depict them 'not simply as rational apparatuses'. Such archives thus serve 'also as reflections of a political and social reality in which uncertainty is profoundly feared and yet simultaneously embraced as potentially disruptive and even desirable' [12]. The authors present a highly differentiated,

historically situated, and theoretically well-founded approach to data archives. And this is mirrored in the glossary's keyword entries.

Algorithmic racism

One often-recurring theme in the book is the relationship of racism and digital technology. Alana Lentin's keyword entry [57-64], as just one exemplary case among others, decidedly argues against the neutral character of technology. Drawing on YouTube's recommender system, she illustrates how the platform profits from search rankings. Based on suggesting content similar to previously watched videos, 'one video with content that concerns race often leads viewers directly to videos about subjects such as "black on white crime" and "anti-white racism"' [60]. Although the platform does not recommend 'racist content at random based on algorithms that purportedly cater to individual interests', YouTube aims 'to further drive up profit by encouraging more clicks on already wildly popular videos' [60]. But the popularity of racist content does not just occur naturally. Rather, Lentin argues, it is based on 'the spread of white supremacist propaganda' [61] and 'far-right ideas' which became part of the 'mainstream' [60]. Furthermore, the assumption of neutral algorithms 'combines with the notion that all ideas deserve an airing and can be assessed by free-thinking individuals to create the current predicament wherein we are served up a near-constant stream of racist, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic ideas presented as mere opinions in the marketplace of ideas' [60]. The Internet is obviously neither an apolitical space unfettered by the discourses in the public sphere, nor free from economic interest. Lentin makes the crucial point: 'because algorithms are essentially shaped by commercial interests and operationalized within racist societies, racism is in fact integral to how the Internet works' [58]. In a similar vein David Lyon in *Sorting* emphasizes that '[d]ata sets are far from neutral', instead they are 'built on years of racist, misogynist, and other prejudiced ideas' [479]. On Internet platforms, such ideas are not just reset and magically vanish.

The pressing question is: what are the alternatives? Lentin contends that in general we have to recognize 'that racism and sexism in networked

communications are not a question of unconscious bias but are built into the system' [61]. Accordingly, 'more diversity within the tech industry' won't make any difference. Following an argument by Wendy Chun, Lentin sees the 'need to understand the extent to which networked communications are predicated on network science' [61], where data correlations are handled as 'naturally occurring rather than produced to facilitate the working of the algorithm across a variety of sectors (commercial, judicial, welfare, health, education, and so on)' [62]. But there is no such thing as a 'supposed objectivity of representation', underscores Amelia Acker [*Metadata*, 326], and 'representations' in general – stresses Catherine D'Ignazio – 'do not innocently reflect reality but also have a role in producing it.' [*Outlier*, 380] There is no alternative without taking the production of data into account. However, since we cannot expect all computer engineers in the near future to be trained as 'race critical theorists', the 'history of computing' itself must undergo a 'decolonial reading' [62]. Alana Lentin follows computer scientist Syed Mustafa Ali, who regards 'computing [...] itself [as] a "colonial phenomenon"', i.e. that '[c]omputing has been shown to mirror colonialism in that it is expansionist, being "ubiquitous and pervasive"' [62]. Lentin concludes that an 'assumed neutrality of the algorithm serves to obscure the underside of modernity, its colonized others, and racialized subjects' [63; see also *Intersectionality,* 305-312]. Questioning '"who is doing computing"' and '"where they are doing it"', the task lies in 'exposing this, redressing it, recreating workable systems, and, as Ali remarks, paying reparations to those whose lives have been sacrificed' [63].

Besides the demand for 'decolonizing technology' and 'incorporat[ing] alternative epistemologies' [*Intersectionality*, 308], the call for an *Ethics 'of* algorithm' [203; original emphasis] or 'data justice' [*Complicity*, 95], the glossary's entries articulate several alternatives to the un/certainties of big data regimes which are based on questions of rhetoric, narratives and imaginaries. A widely shared assumption is that data visualizations are also 'a rhetorical argument' instead of a 'declarative statement of quantitative expression' [*Visualization*, 565]. This goes hand in hand with the 'rhetorics of quantification' [*Pornography*, 401] and the 'rhetorical presentation of precision' related to *Quantification* [428] that is – contrary to 'truth-telling' –

better understood as 'remediation and storytelling' [429]. Some authors build on 'powerful counternarratives' [*Intersectionality*, 309] and different 'powerful narratives' [*Remains*, 434], a 'reparative reading as a critical method for the big data "times we're in"' [*Reparative*, 443] or make use of 'the figural logic of literature' in terms of 'a relevant methodological point of departure when we try to understand the role and function of information today' [*Figura*, 239]. An illustrative example of such an alternative reading is the entry on the *File* which focuses on gendered labor in the history of computing.

Gendered labor

Craig Robertson focuses on the paper file 'through the early twentieth-century business imagination' which is regarded 'as a response to heightened uncertainty' [241]. In the face of large quantities of information on paper and the need for '"small information"' [243], capitalism's imperative of 'efficiency' [242] and 'faith in rationalization' [243] materialize in the filing cabinet. Whereas the 'retrieval' of files was characterized as 'mechanized work', compared 'to the idealization of machines, people introduced uncertainty.' Handling files 'depended on labor – gendered labor – of people' [244]. This becomes clear in the construction design of filing cabinets. Here, normative assumptions about the female body 'partly determined these measurements'. For example, 'the length of the drawer factored in the length of a clerk's arms'. If the drawer would be too deep, then operating the filing cabinet would afford 'a "walking operation"' instead of more efficient '"arm operation"'. Companies also saw a danger in the weight of a filled cabinet and the problem to '"operate"' it, thus they were 'emphasizing the construction of drawer slides' [244]. Such an 'infantilizing' of work, Robertson summarizes, amplifies 'the devaluing of secretarial work'. Precisely, the 'filing cabinet was promoted on the premise that it was so easy to use that it required no strength or thought' [244]. On top of prevailing imaginaries of mechanized work, advertisement of the cabinets did not include female workers. Instead, 'close-up[s] of the interior of a drawer' only showed 'hands that represented the relationship of [...] labor and technology'. Advertising underlined 'the claim that a filing cabinet was "automatic": a hand separated from body and mind emphasized that the person who used this office equipment did not have to

think while using it' [246]. In addition to misogynist and normalizing assumptions, such office work is regarded and advertised as mere mechanical work, thus dehumanizing female clerks who handled information.

While hands detached from the body here relate to ideas of automated work in the early 20th century, Olga Goriunova provides a contemporary example of working persons made to disappear. 'Humans', she describes in her keyword entry on *Stand-In*, 'are turned into hands' [490]. Drawing on the art piece *ScanOps* by Andrew Norman Wilson, she notes that 'a tip of a finger scanned by mistake, or a scrambled page, stands in for the immense and underpaid human effort behind book digitization for Google Books' [490]. Hands indicate manual labor that is supposed to be invisible and give Google users the illusion that this service does not require any labor – and accordingly that there is no one who is underpaid. Relating to these questions, Miriam E. Sweeney offers a complementary counterpart to automated labor and interrogates the anthropomorphization of *Digital Assistants* like Amazon's Alexa or Jeeves, the early assistant on Ask.com. She observes that there are 'two representations' in digital assistants which 'convey two different sorts of gendered labor: the feminized call center worker and the male domestic worker. Both are linked to distinct service work industries that have unique cultural histories as they intersect with class and gender roles.' Sweeney summarizes that 'these representations also convey different formations of the user role: as a customer or as master of a great house, respectively' [153]. The role of users is also central for Patrick Keilty's keyword article *Pornography*. Keilty focuses on *PornHub insights*, a blog which provides 'statistical and data trends compiled by PornHub's research and analysis team' [398] about their users. 'For PornHub', he points out, 'a viewer's sexual desire is human labor, and the libido parallels labor power because they are both natural energies that a capitalist economy demands should be treated in an entrepreneurial spirit' [399].

Throughout the book, further examples include 'sociotechnical work' in archives that goes 'into producing and maintaining collections, categories, classification systems, documents, and standards' [*Database*, 127], the 'human, technical, material, and immaterial' labor necessary to bring data 'back into circulation' [*Hauntology*, 283], or 'Black women's labors' that

'remains marginal, neglected, and mostly unacknowledged in the grander narratives of revolution, general strike, fugitivity, and refusal' [*Care*, 82-83]. These brief examples illustrate the glossary's investigation into the relationships of labor with big data archives and its backing service industries. The ongoing task is to disclose such relations and to inscribe them into the histories of our digital cultures. Working with archival material and paying attention to specific imaginaries prevailing in history, Robertson's text concludes with a reflection on academic work: 'A file, placed in a cabinet drawer, makes information accessible through historically specific ideas of efficiency and gender' [247]. Archival work allows Robertson to connect a certain understanding 'of information as an object' and its technical implementation to a 'highly gendered understanding of information work' [247].

In Thylstrup et al.'s *Uncertain archives*, such findings through archival research are complemented by keywords concerning our collective efforts to criticize and resist big data regimes as well as continuously imagine and practice robust alternatives. There is a particularly productive friction between the keywords *Ethics* (Amoore) on the one hand, and *Flesh* (Morrison) and *Intersectionality* (Gipson/Corry/Noble) on the other hand, for which Daniela Agostinho's *Care* might provide a link.

Ethics, justice, care: Alternatives in conflict

Louise Amoore suggests 'a different way of thinking about the relations between ethics and algorithms.' Her keyword essay on *Ethics* asks 'How are algorithmic arrangements generating ideas of goodness and what society ought to be?' [203]. The concept of 'an ethics *of* algorithm' thus 'begins from the ethics in formation of the algorithm and its cloud data landscape'. It is already here that the 'algorithm contains, within its mathematical and spatial arrangement, multiple potentials for arbitrary cruelties, surprises, violences, joys, distillations of racism and prejudice, injustices, probabilities, and chance' [203-204; original emphasis]. Amoore therefore argues that an 'ethics of algorithms involves how they learn to recognize and to act, how they extract assumptions from data relations, and how they learn what ought to be

from relations with other humans and algorithms' [204]. The central claim concerns the *accountability* of algorithms. The author contends that 'the mathematical propositions of algorithms [...] can be held to account for the conditions of their emergence' [205]. More precisely, such 'conditions include some relations of algorithms that are identifiably between humans and algorithms', for example 'the selection of training data or the setting of target outputs'. Besides these human-machine relations, there are 'relations of algorithms to other algorithms', including 'the recognition of clusters or the extraction of features' [205]. To repeat the keyword's central argument, 'the conditions of an algorithm's emergence – a composite of human and nonhuman relations – are venues for ethical responsibility' [205].

For Brooklyne Gipson, Frances Corry, and Safiya Umoja Noble, however, an ethics does not go far enough. In *Intersectionality* the authors emphasize 'data justice', which in general means 'the right to choose how and to whom one is knowable and the means to understand how knowability is deployed' [309]. The collective of authors claim: 'data justice framed through intersectionality is a far more potent and powerful lens than that of data *ethics*, which foregrounds the individual responsibility of users and designers of technical systems' [309; original emphasis]. And in *Flesh*, Romi Ron Morrison similarly note: 'appeals to ethics- and rights-based discourses misread the harm caused by algorithmic violence, providing ill-fitting avenues for reproach' [249]. In part, Daniela Agostinho's keyword text on *Care* offers an approach that may combine these positions.

Agostinho connects to 'debates in critical archival science as well as decolonial and Black feminist theories of care' [77]. She argues that 'care ethics can be imagined as a radical mode of engagement in times of big data', but, and this is crucial: 'one that is firmly aligned with, rather than antithetical to, claims to social justice and collective liberation' [77-78]. The crux is that 'care ethics needs to be conceived as a reconstructive, dismantling, and imaginative ethos and praxis' [82]. First, it has to be 'reconstructive' in order to provide for '"critical reparative" interventions', i.e. to take into account those persons in archives who are still unaccounted. Then, care ethics has to be understood as 'dismantling because these reparative interventions need to be grounded in an ethics focused not only on

repairing a broken world'. Importantly, quoting Romi Ron Morrison in this glossary, it must 'ai[m] at "the end of the world as we know it"'. At last, concerning 'existing structures of social coexistence', Agostinho clarifies that 'an imaginative ethos needs to be nurtured, because new worlds and modes of coexistence need to be imagined and brought into being' [82]. The essential part is the question of practice. Agostinho makes the strong case that 'an ethics of care for digital times will only be meaningful if care labor is recognized as a structuring social force. Staying with care as a framework invites us to attune to – and take seriously – the different political possibilities that such labors can instantiate' [83]. Such a 'care practice' is not only in need of 'quotidian gestures of sustenance that cultivate life and livability' [83], but also of ongoing organizational work. This includes continuous discussions about the self-conception of those who are involved as a group, the permanent reassuring what is meant with 'a better world', the ongoing search and inclusion of further companions, the recognition of all those who do not receive recognition, and eventually both the scholarly work and the translation of 'quotidian gestures' into a political praxis.

Conclusion

The glossary's diverse topics range from the *Throbber*, the all too familiar graphic animation on screens which seems 'to make the progress of time appear orderly' [Ørum, 519], to *Glitch* as an 'error [...] inviting critical thought' [Schneider, 261], 'targeted advertising based on' *Metadata* [Acker, 324], *Flesh* 'as a particular figuring of blackness' [Morrison, 250] and 'the uncertain nature of our digital' *Remains* [Sutherland, 433]. The wealth of central contemporary key terms gathered and discussed in this anthology makes it a highly relevant glossary for translating our present big data condition into palpable terms. This volume of keywords surely does provide a bandwidth of enriching 'new theoretical vocabularies' [2] and 'new concepts to make sense of the epistemological, political, and ethical dimensions of big data' [14]. Aside from using this book as a glossary and focus on a single entry when needed, the book's architecture invites us to browse through the entries, weaving together specific keywords and to take the editors' reading proposition serious: to find both 'connections' as well as 'clashes' [14]. In

addition to relationships between the keywords themselves, the editors and contributors clearly demonstrate, from a broader perspective, the conditions for today's scholarly research on data archives. The glossary's editors formulate the pressing tasks 'to expose, counter, harness, resist, or evade the forces of today's political and technological regimes of uncertainty' [2]. Besides the respective 'methods' [2] proposed and practiced in the entries to do so, the introduction 'insists on the importance of building communities, beginning with scholars working across the humanities, social sciences, critical data studies, and beyond' [2], This is not a plea for so-called digital literacy, quite on the contrary: 'alliances are needed' [2]. In order to make solid arguments about digital cultures, we inevitably need to collaborate and combine our respective expertise.

The *Uncertain archives* glossary, to cut it short, simultaneously introduces and materializes a new *sound* in academia. Of course, there are keyword entries that work better than others – but that does not diminish the overall purpose of the volume and the majority of insightful contributions. Accordingly, the volume figures as an essential reading for a broad range of scholars. The volume is written for those who do ethnographic and theoretical research on big data, interrogate translation processes through the digitization of archival materials, or update theories of the archive. And the book addresses scholars who work in such different fields as STS and history of computing, media, organization or performance studies and the arts. Thylstrup et al.'s glossary allows to get familiar with diverse, yet equally important and contemporary features of our digital cultures. The keywords can be read as an introduction to a respective scholarly subject, and the literature provided at the keyword entries allows for an in-depth study. Therefore, this book figures as a perfect fit for students, too, as they get introduced to central concepts, their history, as well as with the tasks ahead. This volume shows that studying the impact of computation on our everyday lives or the effects of algorithms, we don't necessarily have to dig deep into technical specifications. This is particularly the case because this book 'offers valuable counterweights to the centripetal forces of data informatics as they aim to integrate, tame, and optimize everything' [14]. This book should be read by scholars who think that contemporary digital cultures can be sufficiently historicized merely through

narratives of technical inventions, and by those who are fascinated by the processing capacities of computing equipment.

Uncertain archives fits well with critical analyzes in the history of computing, such as Janet Abbate's *Recoding gender: Women's changing participation in computing* (2012), Thomas S. Mullaney et al.'s recently published *Your computer is on fire* (2021) (with some contributors also being part of this glossary), Joy Lisi Rankin's *A people's history of computing in the United States* (2018), or Nathan Ensmenger's *The computer boys take over* (2010). The volume is in line with new publications in the field of critical data studies, for example Catherine D'Ignazio (also one of the editors of this book) and Lauren F. Klein's *Data feminism* (2020) and decidedly political analyses of big data, such as Cathy O'Neil's landmark *Weapons of math destruction* (2016) and the works by Wendy Chun, both being frequently quoted in the glossary's keywords.[1] Eventually, *Uncertain Archives* works also as a complement to the edited volume *Digital keywords: A vocabulary of information society and culture* (Peters 2016). *Digital keywords* is an important companion to the question, 'What does the language of the information age do?' (Peters 2016, xiii). Nevertheless, it is in the difference to *Uncertain archives* that the new academic sound becomes noticeable, which is expressed in the consequent consideration of race, gender and labor in relation to our present digital cultures.

I end by repeating the introduction's 'hope' articulated in the acknowledgments that 'this book will inspire others to think, write, and organize collectively' [xii]. As inspiring as this book is, and this cannot be stressed enough, it also demands us to work *collectively*: this means to continuously put an effort into collaborations with scholars outside the familiar fields we feel most comfortable in and to be aware of the actual work such endeavors require – as well as sometimes the burdens they bring. Researching data archives doesn't necessarily mean that we have to learn programming. But we could work with those with the necessary technical expertise; we could form alliances in other disciplines working on similar matters; and we could embrace the tacit knowledge of persons outside

[1] Thank you to Randi Heinrichs for this remark.

academia. In the words of the editors, in times of pervasive big data regimes, this is what gives our research its diversifying momentum.

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Re-thinking the datafied society through the anonymity kaleidoscope

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review of

Anon Collective (ed.) (2020). *Book of anonymity*. Earth: punctum books. (Pp. 486, $27 in PB and free e-book, ISBN: 13: 978-1-953035-30-1, DOI: 10.21983/P3.0315.1.00)

Anonymity is a crucial issue in debates concerning technology, politics, and data justice. A new anthology offers fundamental insights into what anonymity is and why it matters. *The book of anonymity* focuses on the possibilities connected to and created by anonymity, how it is produced, its outcomes, and its potentials. The book looks at anonymity as a 'mode of being and knowing' [23], moving beyond a purely technical definition. The editors frame anonymity as a concept that includes issues related to equality, freedom, collectivity, and their 'entanglements with power, exclusion, privilege, and aggression' [19]. Thus, the book considers anonymity as a broad societal issue, one that connects with geopolitics, cybersecurity, media, and policy-making. Anonymity, as defined in the book, is an 'active absence' [26] that produces a range of possibilities and opens up potentials for what would otherwise be unthinkable. With anonymity being so strongly under attack today, especially in terms of its political dimensions, which possibilities for a fairer and less surveilled digital realm are being neglected?

The book is explicitly and theoretically intended to be a 'kaleidoscope', in which 'disciplines encounter one another in shifting relations while remaining distinct, yet establishing common patterns at certain points in time,' as the authors state in the book's introduction [20]. Thus, the book follows a multidisciplinary and collaborative approach, bringing different disciplines together in the analysis of anonymity. However, while keeping the disciplines distinct in principle, this approach, at the same time, also allows the creation of common thematic patterns. *The book of anonymity* is composed of 28 chapters that consider anonymity in terms of how it is being conceptualized in a variety of areas, how it is under threat, how it can become a political tool for subversion, and how it can provide forms of delight by offering certain gratifications. As a further experiment with anonymity potentials, all book chapters are authored partially anonymously – with authors' identities withheld in the single chapters, but still indicated in the book overview of contributors – and the book is published by the Anon Collective, a group of over 40 writers, academics, and artists. With this attitude, *The book of anonymity* aims to untangle the concept of anonymity and relate it to a range of areas: policing, 4Chan, the arts, offshore economies, Bitcoin, and genetics. In particular, the book deals with the politicization of anonymity and the consequences of the profiling of real data names in the context of digital services and commercial platforms, and it offers important inputs regarding the fundamental role of anonymity in a 'datafied society' (Schäfer and van Es, 2017), and the strategies needed to reposition anonymity at the core of contemporary societies and their principles and values. By engaging with the chapters most focused on these themes, this review will attempt to position the book in the broader debates around surveillance and the attacks that anonymity faces in the context of the pandemic, which has certainly inspired even more occasions for surveillance normalization.

One of the clearest outcomes of the extended ubiquity of surveillance in contemporary social and economic paradigms of today's life is the *de facto* erosion of anonymity from most human activities on the Internet and, increasingly, in the physical world, especially due to the dominance of digital services and platforms provided by for-profit entities well positioned in what Shoshana Zuboff defines as 'surveillance capitalism' (2019). This progressive

elimination of anonymity, however, is not only to be found in economic and technical dynamics. Rather, it also affects how the most powerful actors have allocated their surveillance powers, mostly by normalizing them. Issues related to privacy and data justice have also gained more prominence in the public sphere. For instance, anonymity-related issues are still frequently contested in public debates and are at the core of fundamental contemporary discourses around the politics of technology and its impacts on rights and freedoms (Monsees, 2020). In light of this, it is possible to argue that, while anonymity appears to be increasingly questioned in various areas by the very assumptions of a 'datafied society', its technologies, and its most powerful actors, anonymity is a foundational concept in today's discourses around technology and its role in society. However, the fact that the conceptual centrality of anonymity implies a need to 'defend' it, 'protect' it, or fight for its survival is also a reminder of anonymity's fragile nature.

The chapter 'Anonymity: The politicisation of a concept' connects anonymity with some of the most pressing issues in the relationships between technology, politics, and power(s). This chapter also focuses on how anonymity and anonymization techniques are frequently delegitimized in public discourses in the technical, economic, legal, and sociopolitical domains. As the chapter describes, anonymity has frequently been critiqued in all these domains or framed mostly as an 'obstacle' to achieving certain supposed positive goals, such as security. These are the core reasons why there is a pressing need to discuss (and defend) the concept of anonymity, especially when considered in its 'vertical' dimension, the one along which anonymity is conceptualized *vis-à-vis* powerful institutions, such as state entities or Big Tech, those with the broadest capacities to conduct surveillance at scale, as well as retrospectively, as the chapter author argues. This dimension is usually dominant in public debates around surveillance, privacy, and intrusive technologies and has re-emerged with a strengthened visibility in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in debates around the technological solutions proposed by governments in order to curb the spread of COVID-19, starting with contact-tracing apps (Couch, Robinson and Komesaroff, 2020). The pandemic has contributed to the acceleration and reinforcement of various surveillance practices, putting the aforementioned

'vertical' dimension of anonymity under even more stress. In Italy, for instance, arguments in favour of anonymized solutions (e.g. Bluetooth-based rather than GPS) for contact-tracing apps have frequently been dismissed as 'whims' by various public voices, as if fundamental rights, such as the right to privacy, should be lightly dismissed from such crucial social debates (Di Salvo, 2021). This is obviously not a novelty of the pandemic world, and similar discussion points have also emerged on previous occasions. The voices driving these visions of 'anonymity-as-an-obstacle' have usually been those of powerful political actors pushing for 'surveillance normalization' (Wahl-Jorgensen, Bennett and Taylor, 2017). Particularly since the Snowden revelations in 2013, these instances of normalization have emerged in various parts of the world, and in most cases, they have framed anonymity as problematic in relation to the use of cryptography and strong encryption tools. For these purposes, various governments have also attempted to advance bills and legal proposals attempting to ban strong encryption, frequently pointing at these technologies' use by criminals and terrorists to communicate anonymously.

Thus, the politicization of anonymity discussed in *The book of anonymity* has become a battleground on which the futures of technology are debated, advanced, or expressed in all their possibilities. In this regard, *The book of anonymity* is a reminder that, in order to 'ensure that anonymous communication has a secured place in digitized societies,' radical changes in how a 'datafied society' is governed will be needed [107]. Moreover, the power dynamics of surveillance capitalism, largely centralized around a few US-based commercial platforms, has changed the meaning of 'being online,' an issue discussed in the 'Where do the data live?' chapter. As the constant mining and extraction of personal data has become the hegemonic mode of being online, the idea of 'community' has 'shifted from the nineties cyberutopian vision of fluid anonymous *online beings* to an imperative of an *authentic*, consistent social media profile' [229]. Inevitably, this ends in replicating existing and strongly rooted social and political issues and imbalances, such as 'gender and racial biases as well as reinforcing social and economic inequalities embedded within societies' [247]. In the face of these imbalances, anonymity could increase the possibilities for a radical re-

thinking of the contemporary controversial and potentially dangerous logics of surveillance. These possibilities are debated in a variety of chapters in the book, including in the 'Collective pleasures of anonymity' chapter more in detail.

Here, anonymity becomes a way of 'radically inhabiting and accelerating the logic of mass-mediated publicness that social media platforms themselves rely on and exploit' [359]. This may become the grounding argument for a radical re-discussion of how anything digital functions today, starting with the capitalist obsession over the 'personalized self,' which is actually a goldmine for companies and commercial entities. As author and activist Cory Doctorow notes (2020), to be constantly surveilled while conducting personal activities, such as looking for locations, asking questions to search engines, or building a social network of relationships, 'is to lose the sanctuary of your authentic self'. Surveillance modifies human behaviour and makes us all vulnerable and naked in the face of power. This is true with regard to law enforcement agencies conducting monitoring in public spaces, as well as for companies monopolizing the Internet and thus eroding the quality and equity of social life online. However, it would be naive to pursue purely technological solutions in order to modify the current state of things. As *The book of anonymity* argues, 'anonymity can no longer be achieved by switching off our computers or other devices' [100], because the demarcation lines between the offline and online worlds are now completely obsolete and it would be naive to fight powers created through techno-solutionism with other techno-solutionist arguments.

Here, the 'kaleidoscope' metaphor and approach at the core of *The book of anonymity* may also be useful in the search for viable solutions to the structural de-anonymization taking place in surveillance capitalism, as well as in the 'datafied society' overall. The book is a powerful reminder that kaleidoscopic efforts are needed in order to ensure that the possibilities created by anonymity still have a future. These efforts will inevitably have to be legal, institutional, and robust enough to 'keep capitalist dynamics and governmental overreach in check' [106]. Cory Doctorow's argument against the dangers of surveillance capitalism, for instance, is kaleidoscopic in nature and examines technological monopolies as one of the strongest elements in

the contemporary dominance of surveillance (2021). The way forward, Doctorow argues, is to build an 'ecology' around the many battles for a different Internet, aiming at dismantling the dynamics – beginning with monopolies – that brought us to the current situation. One of the major strengths of The book of anonymity is examining anonymity itself outside of purely technological frames. It is only with a new kaleidoscopic-ecological attitude that anonymity can be again placed at the core of modernity. The book offers precise and diverse indications of how and where this kind of anonymity is still visible, as well as where and how it can be produced and pushed forward. In sum, the book is a solid, needed, and engaging read that encourages a more 'kaleidoscopic' and multidisciplinary understanding of how the commodification of human identities, bodies, fears, and desires has dramatically changed the way in which we inhabit, make sense of, and create social life and its spaces. Otherwise, 'the freedom to be another – to enter and disappear into a fold' will be at stake [372].

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