

## Pasts, Presents and Futures of Critical Publishing

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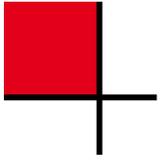
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## **Pasts, presents and futures of critical publishing**

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 imperialism 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](http://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, Stephen 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.<sup>1</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> 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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