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

Bernadette Loacker

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 *ephemer*a'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).

acknowledgements

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the author

Bernadette Loacker is a member of the editorial collective of *ephemera*.
Email: b.loacker@lancaster.ac.uk