

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE JOURNAL OF PEER PRODUCTION BY ITS FOUNDER

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In 2009, in Manchester, at the Fourth (and as it turned out, final) [Oekonux](#) conference, jointly organised with the [P2P Foundation](#), I proposed during the closing plenary to create and maintain a journal that would document research into peer production. Oekonux was a German conflation of 'Linux' and 'economy,' and Oekonux conferences were lively affairs which brought together activists and academics interested in the emancipatory potential of peer production. This was my first interaction with this community, and I was inspired by the intellectual effervescence and camaraderie which permeated the proceedings. In particular, I felt that the creative ideas which were being discussed deserved a broader audience.

In the [Handbook of Peer Production](#) chapter on 'prophets and advocates,' George Dafermos writes that my proposal was 'supported by Athina Karatzogianni, Michel Bauwens, George Dafermos, Stefan Merten, Christian Siefkes, and Johan Söderberg (later joined by Nathaniel Tkacz and Maurizio Teli). This group of people had met each other through Oekonux and were, to various degrees, attuned to its theories' (Dafermos, 2021). Founding members of Oekonux such as Stefan Meretz and Stefan Merten saw in commons-based and oriented peer production the 'germ form' of a post-capitalist society. Though sympathetic to these views, the new journal embraced a wider diversity of perspectives in its exploration of the relationship between peer production and social change. However, it opposed corporate academic publishing by being completely open access.

SETTING UP THE JOPP

I collaborated with Stefan Merten of Oekonux to set up a website using the Plone CMS. Via a mailing-list which anyone could join and participate in, I also coordinated the establishment of the journal's governance. As anyone who has worked in this capacity knows, encouraging and constructively orienting voluntary contributors requires a specific set of attributes. I think important qualities are responsiveness, friendliness and the ability to synthesise debates accurately. This happened a while ago, but I remember there was a feeling of crackling energy in the first years of the journal's existence as we collectively defined its purpose and rules, and particularly our peer review system. During this early period I edited the first two issues, 'Mass peer activism' ([#0](#), 2011) and 'Productive negation' ([#1](#), 2012).

At some point in between these two releases I came to the conclusion that it was necessary to separate the journal from the Oekonux project. A key sticking point was that the complete transparency which core Oekonux members deemed mandatory at all times, and for all interactions, was incompatible with the exigencies of anonymous peer review. The journal's name was changed from *Critical Studies in Peer Production* to the *Journal of Peer Production*. Michel Bauwens agreed to host the journal on the P2P Foundation's servers, and I re-created a new website, using WordPress this time, with the help of the P2P Foundation. As George Dafermos documents in his *Handbook* chapter, Oekonux ceased operating in 2013. I then recruited a core group of editors to help steer the journal, with Johan Söderberg, Nathaniel Tkacz and Maurizio Teli playing a key role in editing issues and bringing in new contributors. Finding and enrolling the 'best' people to edit new issues on relevant topics was one of our most important functions. A steady influx of people connected with the journal; most seemed to appreciate its openness and the opportunities for autonomous self-expression it afforded them. I kept on moderating the email list (not an onerous task) and did my best to make sure the infrastructure was secure.

Over the next decade a diverse group of researchers and activists thus curated *Journal of Peer Production* themed issues on topics such as bio/hardware hacking (Delfanti & Söderberg [#2](#), 2012), free software (Teli & D'Andrea [#3](#), 2013), value and currency (Tkacz, Mendoza & Musiani [#4](#), 2014), shared machine shops (Maxigas & Troxler [#5](#), 2014), disruption and the law (Daly & Collins [#6](#), 2015), policies for the commons (Dafermos & Kostakis [#7](#), 2015), feminism and (un)hacking (Nguyen, Toupin & Bardzell [#8](#), 2016), alternative Internets (Tréguer, Antoniadis & Söderberg [#9](#), 2016), peer production and work (O'Neil & Zacchiroli [#10](#), 2017), urban planning (Travlou, Antoniadis & Anastasopoulos [#11](#), 2018), makerspaces and institutions (Braybrooke & Smith [#12](#), 2018), open access (O'Neil & Collins [#13](#), 2019) and infrastructure and STS (Sciannamblo, Teli, Lyle & Csíkszentmihályi [#14](#), 2020).

It was always interesting to discover how each group of editors approached their topic, and thrilling when they innovated and changed the issue format, as happened on several occasions. Many issues included contributions from researchers, activists, and artists. They combined academic rigour with a great deal of freedom in the choice of topics and design options. One of the nicest aspects of the jopp was that it attracted contributions from young, emerging academics who – rather than being rejected because they lacked polish – were supported and given invaluable feedback by our reviewers.

JOPP IN THE WORLD

After the Oekonux conference in 2009 most of the original group met in person in Hull in 2010, at a conference organised by Athina Karatzogianni. A few core members also met in Uppsala in 2012 at the Fourth ICTs in Society conference. In 2013 I relocated to Australia and Johan Söderberg then organised several events and projects: in 2014, with support from the Free Society Conference and Nordic Summit (FSCONS), Johan edited and released with Maxigas a print *Book of Peer Production* featuring selected jopp articles. In 2016 Panayotis Antoniadis, Félix Tréguer and Johan created an abridged version of jopp #9 on Alternative Internets. This was printed as a [24-page booklet](#) and freely distributed during the 4S/E4ASST conference held in Barcelona. In addition to jopp #9, Panayotis also co-edited jopp #11 City and jopp #15 TRANSITION. In these later years other notable editors included Peter Troxler, who managed the journal's web infrastructure since 2015 (and hosted it since 2016), as well as Kit Braybrooke who created in 2018 the jopp Twitter account ([@Peer_Production](#)).

The Journal also inspired external contributions and connections. These included [translations](#) of jopp articles into French (by Pratiques collaboratives) and Spanish (by Guerilla Translation and En Defensa del Software Libre). In 2019, for jopp #13 I invited the editors of open-access publications such as the *Journal of Open Source Software*, *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, and *Culture Unbound* to re-publish an article representing their journal in the jopp, as well as to respond to a questionnaire addressing their experience of, and reflections around, independent publishing. This in turn inspired the editors of *ephemera: theory & politics in organization* to celebrate their 20th anniversary in 2021 by reaching out to independent journals and collectives such as jopp to explore 'Alternatives to mainstream publishing within and beyond academia.' The [ephemera editors' introduction](#) to these contributions is particularly apt, so I quote from it here:

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 [eight projects] 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.'

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE JOPP

And now, since we have reached the final issue of the *Journal of Peer Production*, it is worth spending a few moments to summarise what it achieved.

Aside from exploring and extending a new field of research, as can be seen by reviewing the range of topics covered in our fifteen issues, the journal developed original 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.). [1]

For peer reviewed articles, we publish the reviews – which can remain anonymous or not – as well as the original submission of the article. We created a range of 'signals' indicating the article's quality so that we could publish articles more quickly, whilst protecting the journal's reputation (after a few years, it became clear that not everyone agreed that this was an excellent idea: some wished that we adopted a more conservative approach and rejected more papers, but the practice remained).

As mentioned previously, the journal's rules and policies were debated on our publicly accessible and archived [mailing list](#). Debates were lively and respectful. It was clear that participants cared deeply about the journal's goals, integrity and legacy.

In sum, the *Journal of Peer Production* not only researched and documented peer production: it also enacted it. In doing so it exemplified the qualities and defects of DIY projects which rely on volunteer labour and goodwill (with the possible exception of the above-mentioned printed book and booklet, it existed entirely without money, or contracts). To all the people who joined our editorial team, our scientific board and our wider community: you should be proud of your contribution. I know I am!

[1] Karine Nyborg et al. (2019) argue that the journal hierarchy derives from the information deficit caused by an over-abundance of literature: 'Given the extremely large amount of research that exists, users cannot browse everything. They are left to rely on indicators of others' assessments when deciding which papers to read: citations, journal quality, personal knowledge of the author, information from colleagues, and so on. One cannot, of course, simply rely on authors' claims about the excellence of their own research: while the author knows the content of the paper, he or she is not impartial. Similarly, since no-one is an expert in all fields, readers also need to rely on others' assessments concerning the quality of the research. For these reasons, there is a strong demand for quality indicators in research – which would prevail even if one decided, as postulated in the [DORA](#) declaration, to disregard the role such indicators play in hiring or funding decisions. The (informal) journal hierarchy can be regarded as a response to this.' [and further:] 'In the absence of journal hierarchies, other and more malign responses may easily arise, including discrimination along dimensions such as gender, age, personal networks, and the prestige of institutional affiliations.' See Karine Nyborg, Bård Harstad, Steinar Holden, Tore Nilssen, and Kjetil Storesletten (2019), [Plan S and the economics of scientific journal publishing](#), *Journal of Peer Production* #13 OPEN. The solution is to start including open access as a core prestige indicator for journals, alongside citations and other traditional metrics.

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