



Call for papers for an *ephemera* special issue on:

## Repair matters

**Issue editors:** Valeria Graziano and Kim Trogal

This special issue of *ephemera* aims to investigate contemporary practices of repair as an emergent focus of recent organizing at the intersection of politics, ecology and economy (e.g. Bialski et al., 2015; Perey and Benn 2015; Wiens, 2013). We wish to explore notions of repair and maintenance as crucial components for redefining socio-political imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1987), away from the neoliberal capitalist dogma of throw-away culture and planned obsolescence.

While the political aspects of repair have recently become an issue of interest in the realms of design (Rosner and Ames, 2014), new media (Jackson, 2014), urban geography (Graham and Thrift, 2007) and, in a broader sense, legal studies (Verdeja, 2008), their implications for critical organization studies are still under-explored. Pinning down the significance of repair processes within organization and organizing therefore remains an open task.

Under conditions of austerity, the depression of wages, the escalation of material exploitation and climate collapse, repair is an activity that is growing in significance among local initiatives that seek alternative forms of 'economizing' on production and consumption. Within conventional enterprises, the complexities of repair and maintenance

operations are impacting choices around workflows, logistics and product design as well as asset management and overhaul across different sectors (cf. EFNMS, the European Federation of National Maintenance Societies).

As ethnographic studies in urban geography show, repair and maintenance are also crucial elements of contention in the persistent struggle between private actors, public authorities and citizens over the establishment of rights of access and duties of care across the 'city fabric' and its infrastructures (Chelcea and Pulay, 2015). On a broader scale of global relations, the spatialization of repair is configured alongside habitual disparities between North and South or so-called developed and under-developed areas. This is demonstrated, for instance, by the dumping of broken, used products in specific parts of the world, whose locations are host to industries such as ship stripping, second-hand clothes or second-hand motor and electronic goods (Brooks, 2013; Demaria 2010; Simone, 2014).

In response to such inequalities, the last ten years have seen a rapid proliferation of collective mobilizations around repair and maintenance, aimed at challenging the patterns of production and consumption within neoliberal capitalism (Chertkovskaya and Loacker, 2016). In the global North, recent initiatives such as Repair Cafés and Restarter Parties, among many others, draw together local constituencies and volunteers to share mending and fixing skills. Online communities for the exchange of tutorials like iFixit.com and tool libraries are rapidly multiplying, to the point where all these initiatives taken together begin to form a new 'Do it together' lifestyle-movement (Haenfler et al., 2012; Ratto and Boler, 2014). These initiatives tend to share some of the concerns first collectivized by hackerspaces and bike-repair workshops within squatting movements, and also echo feminist arguments regarding the widespread undervaluing of reproductive labour, even within alternative cultures (Ukeles, 1969).

Following feminist works on care and reproduction, Jackson (2014) argues that predominant neoliberal values consistently draw attention to the moments of birth and triumph of human creations, whereas the care at the end of life 'drops out' of the imagination. An examination of repair and maintenance then can help us expose these tensions and contradictions and the ways they shape the realms of alternative consumption (Littler, 2008; Podkalicka and Potkańska, 2015) and production (Gibson-Graham, 2008). As Huws (2015) explains, products

are key moments in capitalist processes and the emergence of new products for repair points to the growing commercial interest in an expanding market. There are now products that are ‘designed for repairability’, i.e., designed to be easily taken apart or cared for with the assistance of manufacturers. Other new products are designed to help people repair their own belongings. Such items signal the transition of repair from vernacular, informal and independent practices towards more industrialised, yet ‘user-oriented’, practices.

Design’s interest in product repairability is paralleled by manufacturers’ recent expansions into the ‘aftermarket’, which is seen as a new site of profitability. In the context of the so-called fourth industrial revolution, corporations are developing a variety of strategies that make it no longer possible to repair goods independently (cf. the Repair Association). Against this encroachment of property, we witness the articulation of a new ‘right to repair’, not only as a consumer right, but also the right of autonomous repair workers to access an independent livelihood. Practices of repair and maintenance become interesting sites from which to study claims of different regimes of ownership and the common (see also Beverungen et al., 2013).

Finally, as an intersectional preoccupation, repair and maintenance articulate responses to environmental collapse and environmental justice, supply chains and the distribution of wealth alongside them, the division of labour and particularly its gendered dimensions, and to pedagogical questions around expertise and power. If repair brings its own (heterogeneous) ethos and logic, it could also do more than simply shift the focus of specific areas of expertise, such as design. It could become a significant component of alternative processes of organizing for socially and ecologically just cycles of production and consumption (Graham and Thrift, 2007; Spelman, 2002; Wright et al., 2013). In this context, this issue aims to surface questions around specific reproductive activities and collective undertakings: Can repair and maintenance become effective means for examining and challenging the productivist bias that still dominates both mainstream and ‘alternative’ approaches to social and ecological organization, and how do we make sense of the contested narrative of empowerment and mobilization that accompanies repair and maintenance?

We would like to invite a wide range of contributions to embrace this multi-disciplinary concern and phenomenon. Possible topics include, but are by no means limited to the following:

- Traditions of repair

- Geographies of repair and possible transnational solidarities
- Repair pedagogies
- Divisions and hierarchies of labour within maintenance and repair sectors
- Repair as domestic activity
- The role of maintenance and care in commoning
- Design, planned obsolescence and reparability
- Property, copyright and the right to repair
- Neighbourhood organizing and urban practices of repair and maintenance
- Struggles over power and control in repair/maintenance and its organization

### **Deadline for submissions: 30 April 2017**

All contributions should be submitted to the issue editors: Valeria Graziano (v.graziano@mdx.ac.uk) and Kim Trogal (KTrogal@ucreative.ac.uk). *ephemera* encourages contributions in a variety of formats including articles, notes, interviews, book reviews, photo essays and other experimental modes of representation. Information about some of these types of contributions can be found at: <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/how-submit>. The submissions will undergo a double-blind review process. All submissions should follow *ephemera*'s submission guidelines, which are available at: <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/how-submit> (see the 'Abc of formatting' guide in particular). For further information, please contact one of the special issue editors.

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