Postscript: Revisiting the Concept of the Edited Collection



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1 Introduction

The edited collection is a standard publishing vehicle that stands alone among other collections as an academic form of writing that since its beginnings in the nine-teenth century has been taken for granted and has remained unchanged in terms of its conventions. The edited collection is a collection of original scholarly chapters written by different authors and arranged or organized by the editors of the collection to reflect different perspectives on a theme, generally chosen by the editors and developed in a 'call for chapters' that summarizes the main ideas and indicates the subthemes. It is different from anthologies which republish important articles, normally chronologically, or the edited collection rests with the editor or editors who craft the volume's purpose and structure and generally provide an introduction to the major themes of the work and mention each chapter and its contribution to the work as a whole.

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© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022 M. A. Peters et al. (eds.), *Bioinformational Philosophy and Postdigital Knowledge Ecologies*, Postdigital Science and Education, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-95006-4_17 319

Michael Peters and Petar Jandrić have published many edited collections including *Education and Technological Unemployment* (Peters et al. 2019) and *Knowledge Socialism: The Rise of Peer Production: Collegiality, Collaboration, and Collective Intelligence* (Peters et al. 2020a). In this edited collection, *Bioinformational Philosophy and Postdigital Knowledge Ecologies,* edited with Sarah Hayes, we have decided to theorize and experiment with this form of scholarly communication in the humanities and social sciences.

Historically, the edited collection has had much value. In order to stretch its limits, we decided to explore the way in which we might encourage greater reflection on a major category of academic publishing whose form and standard conventions are often taken for granted. In our paper, 'Revisiting the Concept of the "Edited Collection": *Bioinformation Philosophy and Postdigital Knowledge Ecologies*' (Peters et al. 2021a) – which is partially reproduced in the first part of this Postscript – we provided a brief overview of history, philosophy, and the practice of the edited collection. We designed a new approach to collaboration in this edited collection, and we invited authors to join us in this exciting journey into the unknown. In this paper, we first present our invitation sent to all authors and conclude with a brief analysis.

2 The Edited Collection – Openness, Collaboration, Trust

We recently discovered Peter Webster's *The Edited Collection: Pasts, Present and Futures* (2020a), focused on church history that at the same time begins the process of rehabilitating the notion of the edited collection as a 'lesser work', where he writes:

Edited collections are widely supposed to contain lesser work than scholarly journals; to be incoherent as volumes, no more than the sum of their parts; and to be less visible to potential readers once published. It is also often taken as axiomatic that those who make decisions in relation to hiring, promotion, tenure, and funding do so agree. To publish in or edit an essay collection is thought to risk being penalised for the format before even a word is read. After examining the origins of this critique, this Element explores the modern history of the edited collection and the particular roles it has played. It examines each component part of the critique, showing that they are either largely unfounded or susceptible of solution. It proposes the edited collection as a model of one possible idea of scholarly community: collaboration, trust, and mutual obligation in pursuit of a wider good. (Webster 2020a)

Webster proposes a defence of the format of the edited collection, examining the elements of the critique to show that they are unfounded 'or (if they are of real substance) that they may be resolved' (Webster 2020b).

Webster's defence and proposal that the edited collection is a scholarly model of community based on 'collaboration, trust, and mutual obligation in pursuit of a wider good' (Webster 2020a) is a theme and philosophy that reverberates with us. We would argue that there is a need to retheorize the construction of the edited collection, as a scholarly format of academic publishing in the age of peer production, where collegiality, collaboration, and collective intelligence take on new value. This

enables us to use it more constructively to explore themes of the collection. We can do this by writing papers that act as a springboard, reference point, and theoretical position, which contributors can use to spur their own thinking either in use, modification or criticism of the ideas proposed. This additional material in this case is generated by the editors (in three separate but related papers) (Peters et al. 2021b, c, d) together with this reflection on the publication format of the edited collection. When taken together, these materials may provide additional resources, research directions and perhaps greater research coherence, extending and broadening the concept of the edited collection.

During this global pandemic, the principles of free online scientific articles has been an urgent priority, especially where the speed of exchange and new scientific findings are required. These, in a sense, are able to compete and even outrun the speed of infection, mutation and development of new strains of Covid-19 (Peters et al. 2020b, c). At the same time, the concept of 'community' must be distinguished in terms of scientific and scholarly communities exchanging academic work on the basis of argument and evidence, from media sites and cultures where there is no emphasis on science, evidence, testing and rigorous analysis. Bioinformational and biodigital philosophy has the job not only of observing and analysing the evolving forms of science and knowledge, its production under different modes, its publication forms, but also of understanding and explaining the differences between the social epidemiology and epistemology of conspiracy thinking. This includes differentiating between viral forms of disinformation (infodemics) (Peters et al. 2020c), those forms of public science that are open and available free to all - socalled open science - but also with regard to the mode of open knowledge production and its associated forms of open education.

The value of openness here is part of an emerging economy of knowledge ecologies that has a range of applications in open access, open data, open methodologies, open peer review, and open educational resources. These emergent social forms tend to focus on collaborations and distributed computing and cognition, and both open submissions systems and open public access. This kind of open science knowledge, distributed for free by publishers suspending the paywall or publications in open science, advanced the speed and development of the vaccines in the international community, hopefully to save millions of people from dying from Covid-19 globally. The United Nations Web site (2020a) indicates that '[t]he UN is calling for authoritative scientific information and research to be made freely available, to accelerate research into an effective vaccine against the Covid-19 virus, help counter misinformation, and "unlock the full potential of science". The United Nations news story (2020a) indicates that '115,000 publications have released information related to the virus and the pandemic, and more than 80 per cent of them can be viewed, for free, by the general public'.

Another United Nations news story (2020b) records, '[t]he heads of three UN agencies joined forces on Tuesday to appeal for a global push towards "open science", citing the value of cooperation in the response to Covid-19 and the dangers of treating evidence-based knowledge as an exclusive asset, or simple matter of opinion'. The story indicates how 'UNESCO is taking the lead in building a global

consensus on values and principles for Open Science' and contains reference to the first draft of the UNESCO (2020) Recommendation on Open Science that declares six aims and objectives including:

- 1. Universal access to scientific knowledge [as]... an essential prerequisite for human development and progress towards planetary sustainability.
- 2. ...Open Science sets a new paradigm for the scientific enterprise based on transparency, sharing and collaboration...
- 3. As Open Science turns into a global movement, robust institutional and national Open Science policies and legal frameworks need to be developed by all nations to ensure that scientific knowledge, data and expertise are universally and openly accessible and their benefits universally and equitably shared. (UNESCO 2020)

The first draft is to promote 'a common understanding of Open Science', to develop 'an enabling policy environment' and encourage investment in Open Science capacity and infrastructures that will 'transform scientific culture' and 'promote international cooperation on Open Science' (UNESCO 2020).

Michael Peters has examined and advocated the virtues of openness (Peters and Roberts 2011) and tried to develop the philosophy of openness in relation to building knowledge cultures (Peters and Besley 2006) and understanding the concept of open science and open education (Peters 2006; Peters and Britez 2008; Peters et al. 2011, 2012). Peters uses the concept of radical openness as a new logic for public organizations, economy and management and as a means of fostering large group creative collaboration and co-creative labour based on being open, peering, sharing, interdependence and acting globally. He argues that openness should be considered as the basis of the global knowledge commons as an emerging mode of social production for education and science (Peters 2012, 2013a, b, c). In this context, his argument and concept is that 'co(labor)ation' refers to the wisdom of the crowd (so-called crowdsourcing), and a systematic mode of collective learning processes that offers the prospect of encouraging 'creative labour' (Peters 2013a, b, c).

This same value of openness can be applied to the notion of the edited collection as a basis for promoting coherence or consistency in research focus and aims. It promotes a creative flexibility especially in the area of the postdigital-biodigital convergence (Peters et al. 2021b), where past philosophy and digital studies are still scattered in silo-ed disciplines and have been slow to address this new convergence that is determining of the global knowledge ecosystem as a whole.

3 The Edited Collection in the Age of the Postdigital-Biodigital Convergence

The edited collection, as we have come to know it, has been shaped as something of a standardised production, within our neoliberal political economy. Critiqued from a scientific point of view as a lesser publishing vehicle to a journal article, particularly in research measurement exercises (Webster 2020a, b), the writing of book

chapters has almost become something that many of us do (and perhaps actually enjoy) 'behind closed doors'. Whilst aiming for acceptance in a high impact journal to meet institutional demands, we might simultaneously write a chapter because collaborating on an edited collection involves a creative process, dialogue, topic of interest and being a part of a writing community. Within a neoliberal political economy however, the direct individual 'impact' from such communal aspects of the writing and editing process is hard to measure, and so is less valued. Metrics applied to journals mean that a particular place of publication is deemed more important than the actual written content (Jandrić and Hayes 2019: 381). However, 'measuring research excellence brings a particular concept of research excellence into being' (Jandrić 2021: 19). It is a concept that sits within, and is dialectically related with the neoliberal process of academic publishing, which 'is a form of "social production" that takes place across the economy, politics and culture, all of which are in turn accommodating both old and new technology in our postdigital age' (Jandrić and Hayes 2019: 381).

It is this 'digitalisation' in our postdigital age which (whilst it may currently serve neoliberal goals) now offers a fundamental disruption to humanity. This is because 'biodigital technologies, or the biologization of digital processes, are a reflection of a very different kind of political economy' to our current one (Peters et al. 2021b). Alongside a technological and biological shift, where 'biology as digital information, and digital information as biology, are now dialectically interconnected' (Peters et al. 2021b: 370) we can also appreciate a philosophical shift. This is a shift based on environmental self-renewal and synthetic enhancement (Peters et al. 2020b, c) and a philosophy of biodigitalism, as opposed to endless market-led growth within neoliberalism.

This in turn impacts on our understanding of human labour and indeed the academic labour processes relating to the production of an edited collection. If the bioeconomy concerns using for example renewable feedstocks to produce everyday goods and services, this now encompasses a wide range of sectors and activities, such as food, agriculture and forestry. The bioeconomy is a new means of production that will gradually replace fossil-based production and be consistent with the concept of a circular economy (Philp and Winickoff 2018). As such, this combination of digital and biological transformation has significant implications for companies, as it changes the design and handling of production processes and their products. It has significant implications too, for academic labour and publishing processes as these are reimagined in a new philosophy of biodigitalism.

Through 'exploring a philosophy of biodigitalism, as a new paradigm closely linked to bioinformationalism' we can therefore appreciate that 'both involve the mutual interaction and integration of information and biology, which leads into discussion of a biodigital convergence' (Peters et al. 2021b: 370). Within this unified ecosystem, we now have opportunities to resolve problems that isolated disciplinary capabilities cannot. This has been demonstrated during the Covid-19 crisis, as a new significance of relationships between the biological and the technological has been revealed, along with 'new knowledge ecologies within a constellation of technoscience' (Peters et al. 2021b: 370). Thus, against a background of scientific crises and

challenges to resolve, we perceive many sites of promise for social change, including new ecologies in publishing.

Through a postdigital-biodigital convergence, we have an opportunity to disrupt the existing set of socially constructed standard conventions that misleads us into thinking that there is only one possible rationality for edited collections. As authors in an edited collection, it is the current norm to be provided with a (usually strict) set of guidelines. Thus, we might play with more ecological and self-renewable models. In this new philosophical configuration, we no longer need to accept that the edited collection is somehow less worthwhile than other publishing formats because we can change this discourse. However, to experiment with the edited collection as a concept, and across a community of writers and editors, requires a certain amount of unlearning for each of us. It requires resistance to the digital obedience we have adopted where Big Tech 'platform ontologies' know us better than we know ourselves (Peters 2020). We have become used to strictly following a set of prescribed conventions that lack an ongoing dialogic element and the more open philosophical values of sustainability. It is important then that the few initial new possibilities suggested below are expanded in what we perceive to be an ongoing postdigital-biodigital convergence dialogue, related to the labour and production of edited collections. For this experiment to work, the list below needs to be extended, contended, and further shaped.

We identify some new possibilities for edited collections in general:

- 1. In the light of the postdigital-biodigital convergence explored in the trilogy of papers we are now seeking to collaboratively establish a research direction and sustainable and creative research practices for the edited collection in the humanities.
- 2. This means extending the 'editing' side of the edited collection through a range of collaboratively developed processes that channel our research and thinking.
- 3. This means rethinking the 'collection' part of the edited collection by recognizing that there are different forms of the genre, including anthologies, encyclopaedias, and others. We might consider how editing could vary with, and across, genres. We might think further about the ideological nature of genres and question whether they normalise certain values in our current political economy, when other understandings and forms of agency might emerge underpinned by a new bioeconomic political economy.
- 4. This is related also to an ongoing working with, and shaping of, values of 'radical openness' (Peters 2014), taking into account how these might be enacted across different regions and cultures. It may involve developing new 'pledges' too, like the Open Covid Pledge for Education (Association for Learning Technology 2020), for example.
- 5. If technological development has taken the lead in scientific inquiry, we might explore the philosophical and social implications of this convergence.
- 6. A new imaginary could emerge where we may be confident that, if biology can no longer be thought about without technology, then scientific and other disciplinary categories can no longer act as hard borders in edited collections.

- 7. These ideas could aid our processes of thinking, acting, writing and editing more fluidly and reflexively across existing and new disciplines.
- 8. As we develop the craft of authoring and collaborating simultaneously, we need creative ways to document the rich interplay that develops, for others to work with.
- 9. We might give more space to each author's postdigital positionality (Hayes 2021) as part of the new philosophy of openness outlined above. This may involve a deeper exploration of the fluid identities, spaces and power relations that surround each contributor. Such details emerged freely, for example, when a large collective group of authors responded to a call to provide personal Covid-19 testimonies and workspace images (Jandrić et al. 2020).
- 10. Exploring new alternatives to our current political economic discourse through a political bioeconomic discourse in our institutions and organisations, businesses and community groups could take the form of live debates (Hayes et al. 2020) that shape edited collections verbally, as well as textually.
- 11. New diverse collaborators might participate in different ways, or through contributing to establishing different and new genres. The role of genre to assist during the writing process, rather than simply as categorisation, might be explored. Perhaps genres are more fluid in a bioeconomic political economy; therefore, this gives us more scope to negotiate their boundaries 'in social interaction between writers and readers through texts, shifting to reflect changing social contexts. Through the decision to conform to or subvert genre conventions in their writing, writers contribute to these changing genre boundaries.' (Grimmer 2017).
- 12. Where once we might have discussed a 'literary style' and forms of 'literacy', we may now need to question more deeply what we mean by literary, and literacy, at the intersections where humanities, biology, technology, economy and politics meet.

The above are just a few possibilities raised to provoke discussion, for development and for further elaboration, to break down the 'established' conventions for the edited collection that a neoliberal political economy has structured. Inspired by a postdigital-biodigital convergence, we look forward to collectively redefining the edited collection through a new dynamic bioeconomic political economic discourse.

4 What Is Next?

In order to address this question against the background of the call for chapters, we invited each author to:

1. Consider Webster's (2020a) proposal that the edited collection is a scholarly model of community based on 'collaboration, trust, and mutual obligation in pursuit of a wider good'.

- 2. Think about the role of openness, as an essential aspect of an emerging global knowledge commons that fosters open science and open education (Peters 2013a, b, c). Think too about how radical openness and collective learning might encourage creativity and coherence in our edited collection.
- 3. Read the additional material generated by the editors of this volume. This is the three separate but related papers about bioinformation philosophy and postdigital knowledge ecologies (Peters et al. 2021b, c, d) and the paper on revisiting the edited collection (Peters et al. 2021a).
- 4. Use this material to explore the themes of the collection and to provoke their own thinking concerning how they might modify, extend, or critique the ideas proposed.
- 5. This additional material, together with this reflection on the publication format of the edited collection, are intended to provide additional resources, research directions and hopefully a greater research coherence, that will extend and broaden the concept of this edited collection.

Finally, we wrote: We do hope that prospective authors for *Bioinformation Philosophy and Postdigital Knowledge Ecologies* will share our belief in the value of this experiment. The edited collection is a collective enterprise, and this experiment is fully in the hands of its contributors. We look forward to reading and editing your contributions!

5 Revisiting the Concept of the Edited Collection

Looking at suggested general new possibilities for edited collections, we can conclude that turning our theories into practice has achieved varied success. In terms of access, for instance, our pledge to radical openness does not meet the basic criterion of Open Access – this book, or more precisely its digital version, is paywalled by the publisher. In terms of content, however, we are really pleased that we managed to place arguments developed by biologists, philosophers, priests and their many positionalities (Hayes 2021), shoulder to shoulder.

Authors developed their chapters fairly independently of each other. Taken together, however, the richness and diversity of their works creates a postdigital dialogue which reaches beyond direct communication (Jandrić et al. 2019). Individual contributions neatly follow academic standards for the genre of book chapters in the humanities, yet chapters written by authors working in different fields, such as philosophers and medical doctors, bear many traces of disciplinary differences. Even book's structure, in which each part is an explicit or implicit response to themes identified in our preparatory papers, is far from common. It would be presumptuous to claim that all authors in this book have engaged with our experiment to the same or even similar extent. Yet these differences also indicate different positionalities. Authors' understanding of the importance of this

experiment – and the level of their engagement within the experiment – reflect their epistemic values and practical willingness to engage with this type of experimentation.

While we have not managed to practically explore all new possibilities for edited collections identified in our theoretical work, this book does scratch their surface and shows that experiments in academic publishing are much easier to imagine than to put into practice. This work also opens new possibilities, and new directions, for further experimentation with academic publishing. What would have happened, if we involved a more diverse group of authors in our invitations? What would have happened, if we invited four or five co-editors, where each editor would 'represent' one discipline (such as medicine or biotech)? What would have happened, if we did a similar experiment in a radically different field such as engineering?

With such variations in mind, a new edited collection is being developed with diverse cross-sector authors contributing chapters that bring together voices from charities, small businesses, cross-disciplinary academics, councils and combined authorities. *Human Data Interaction, Disadvantage and Skills in the Community: Enabling Cross-Sector Environments For Postdigital Inclusion* (Hayes et al. forthcoming 2022)¹ is experimental too, in that the draft chapters have been developed further, through two strongly dialogic virtual events. These meetings introduced the authors to each other and have provided forums for the cross-sector dialogue to flourish. Furthermore, such an approach towards an edited collection with such a multitude of positionalities and contexts represented, demonstrates a vibrant approach towards knowledge exchange that challenges more static conceptions of a Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) (Research England 2021) and reporting mechanisms.

It is our belief therefore that there are close links to be made between these varied, experimental approaches towards extending how we understand edited collections in the humanities and what we describe as 'enabling cross-sector environments for Postdigital Knowledge Exchange (PKE)' (Hayes et al. 2021). We suggest that:

Rather than heading into the community with a ready-made policy model or knowledge exchange framework to work to, postdigital knowledge exchange disrupts and inverts this approach. Based on both cross-sector postdigital dialogue *and* interdisciplinary academic debate together, these co-inform more dynamic theoretical and policy frameworks. (Hayes et al. 2021) (emphasis from the original)

Such an approach offers a more dynamic and ecological route towards exchanging knowledge and contributing to edited collections that are inclusive of multiple diverse stakeholders in communities.

In this book we pursued two parallel strands of inquiry: research into bioinformational philosophy and postdigital knowledge ecologies, and (theoretical and practical) investigation of the concept the edited collection in the age of the

¹This book, Hayes, S., Connor, S., Johnson, M., & Jopling, M. (forthcoming 2022). *Human Data Interaction, Disadvantage and Skills in the Community: Enabling Cross-Sector Environments for Postdigital Inclusion.* Cham: Springer, is scheduled for publication in the Postdigital Science and Education book series.

postdigital-biodigital convergence. For practical reasons, including traditional expectations from edited collections and the limits of our own cognition, we decided to present conclusions arriving from our two research strands separately. However, these two strands of inquiry are dialectically related, as our ways of arriving to knowledge strongly impact its quality and structure (Jandrić 2021). Should we try and be even more radical in merging these different yet interconnected strands of inquiry into one?

So many questions, so little answers. Our only consolation is that Rome was not built in a day. Facing a mountain of things we don't understand, we humbly decide to take one step at a time. After this book is published, and after we receive feedback from our readers and reviewers, we will try to push our theory of the edited collection a bit further. Then, we guess, the time for another experiment will arrive...

Acknowledgement This Postscript reproduces a part of our invitation paper for authors in this collection, Peters, M. A., Jandrić, P., & Hayes, S. (2021). Revisiting the Concept of the 'Edited Collection': *Bioinformation Philosophy and Postdigital Knowledge Ecologies. Postdigital Science and Education*, *3*(2), 283–293. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-021-00216-w. The paper ends with a brief analysis of how these ideas have been applied in practice.

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