Editor's Gloss. Publishing and Climate Justice: Dialogue and Action

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This special issue of the *Journal of Electronic Publishing* (*JEP*) is the outcome of a professed need felt by *JEP*'s editors for more research, discussion, and—crucially—action on the relationship between knowledge production and climate justice. Over the last two decades, publications, journals, and book series that are focused on climate research and the environmental humanities, and on topics ranging from the Anthropocene to ecocriticism, have seen a surge in popularity in academic publishing. This mirrors the growth in research on the current climate emergency and on policy efforts such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (Haunschild et al. 2016; Jørgensen and Ginn 2020; Santos and Bakhshoodeh 2021). Academic publishers have played a crucial role in ensuring trusted climate research reaches the widest possible audiences and can contribute to future policy development. The related importance of open access publishing is increasingly recognized, as rapid distribution of and frictionless access to climate research can be seen as an important contribution to climate justice.

This same argument is made by Simon Worthington, Gitanjali Yadav, Peter Murray-Rust, Renu Kumari, Shweata Hegde, and Parijat Bhadra (members of the #semanticClimate open research group) in their contribution to this issue, "Climate Justice in Electronic Publishing: Supporting Global South Participation in Climate Science Through Semantic Publishing." The authors make a plea for a new publishing model based on semantic publishing principles to open up academic publishing beyond the constraints of PDF-oriented system architectures. As they state, the deficiencies in digital publishing infrastructures to support open research render knowledge hard to navigate. These publishing infrastructures are controlled by large publishing companies from the Global North, which are accountable for the enduring fee and language barriers that hinder scholars from the Global South to fully participate in fast-moving knowledge domains such as the climate science discourse. Worthington et al. present a new model that illustrates the functionalities and possibilities of semantic publishing, which they apply to the IPCC climate reports to demonstrate how such reports could be made more accessible. They present an indicative scoping exercise and

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conceptual modeling of the open-source tools that will be used to create the Climate Knowledge Graph, which aims to make the IPCC reports globally accessible by providing improved syntactical and semantic structuring and indexing. This, they argue, will contribute both to social epistemic justice (improved access to climate literature for the Global South) and to making this research more accessible in general for translations and multi-format outputs.

Worthington et al. provide just one example of how, despite its interest in publishing research on climate justice, the publishing industry as a whole has not really reflected on its own complicity in the climate emergency and on the long-term sustainability of its knowledge production and distribution practices. What is and has been the role of publishers and other institutions of knowledge production in reproducing the global climate crisis? This also relates to the literature on knowledge production that is critical of academic capitalism and neoliberalism, which tends to foreground issues of justice, equity, and academic labor but "rarely engages directly with climate justice or the value or the exploitation of non-humans" (Bacevic 2021, 2).

In this context, Lynne Bowker looks at AI translation tools, which sit at the intersection of questions about social and climate justice. In her article, "Multilingual Scholarly Publishing and Artificial Intelligence Translation Tools: Weighing Social Justice and Climate Justice," she explores the potential of AI translation tools for supporting linguistic diversity in academic publishing while also considering the harmful environmental effects and (non)human costs associated with these AI tools. One the one hand, the benefits of multilingual scholarly publishing include the opportunities it provides to incorporate relevant non-Western and Indigenous knowledge to help address the climate crisis. Yet at the same time, as Bowker points out, AI translation tools do not accommodate those language communities that suffer the most environmental harm from the extractivist supply chains that support these tools.

The publishing industry has only started to address the negative environmental impact or footprint of both print (paper waste, polluting ink, and transport emissions from shipping copies of books and journals over the world are examples of unsustainable environmental practices connected to print publishing) and digital publishing and archiving (Baillot 2023). Maddalena Fragnito reviews Anne Baillot's book *From Handwriting to Footprinting: Text and Heritage in the Age of Climate Crisis* (2023) for this special issue, which is an important attempt at starting to calculate the academic book publishing industry's environmental footprint. Fragnito outlines in her review how Baillot, drawing on the making of the book itself as a case study (published open access by Open Book Publishers), unpacks the environmental impact of textual production and dissemination through a balanced consideration of issues of access (which tends to be access for the rich) versus environmental burdens (which tend to fall disproportionally

on already marginalized communities). Hence discussions on sustainability in relation to unchecked "digital access for all" urgently need to be had.

This argument is further picked up from an archival perspective, and by looking specifically at the discourse on economic, social, and environmental sustainability in the library and information science (LIS) field, in Kaitlyn Rich's article, "Sustainability and Resilience: A Critical Review of Sustainability Literature and Implications to Resilience of US Academic Libraries, Archives, and Information Systems." Rich argues that there is a gap in critical research on the ways in which academic information systems contribute to the climate crisis. Her LIS sustainability review offers a new perspective on sustainability in academic libraries, based on an acknowledgment of the colonial capitalist forces that underlie knowledge production and academic libraries and how these are accelerating the climate crisis. Instead of a reliance on profit and economic value, Rich imagines more resilient paths forward based on, among others, community-engaged and decentralized academic-archival collaborations.

The theme of 2022's Open Access Week was "Open for Climate Justice," and we have seen many climate pledges from publishers "going green," commitments to climate action, and/or organizational adoptions of environmental policies, from carbon accounting and reducing carbon or greenhouse gas emissions to a completely carbon-neutral production system. Yet, at the same time, we have seen various accusations of greenwashing within the industry—especially by commercial publishers and large publishing conglomerates—with publishers such as Elsevier, Wiley, and Taylor & Francis heavily entangled with fossil fuel companies and hence seen as responsible for "perpetuating and enabling a fossil fuel economy" (Dahl 2022; Westervelt 2022).

These practices are also the focus of Angus Lyall, Mark Ortiz, and Emily Billo's article, "Greenwashing at Elsevier: A Political Ecology of Corporate Publishing," which has been republished from the *Journal of Political Ecology* (volume 32, issue 1 [2025]). In this article, the authors detail the intimate relationship between the fossil fuel industry and the publishing firms that distribute climate change research. They focus specifically on the proliferation of marketing and management practices, which they frame as internal "greenwashing rituals," to manage and immobilize potential worker dissent and activism within "delimited, company-sponsored spaces." They provide a case study of these forms of corporate governance of labor at Elsevier, the largest science publisher in the world. Lyall et al. argue that by means of these performative rituals, Elsevier contributes to producing the invisibility of corporate publishers' connections to fossil fuels that obscures or conceals the roles of publishing firms in the climate crisis.

Moving away from performative greenwashing rituals and organizational pledges, Lyall et al.'s article prompts the question whether climate justice in academic publishing does not demand that we ask bigger questions about the industry as a whole (and about the way knowledge production in academia is set up). This includes looking at issues of

overproduction in research and publishing, which is directly connected to profit targets in the industry and academia's reliance on quantitative performance metrics, following the adage "to publish or perish." This has led to calls for slow science (Stengers 2017), digital sobriety (being frugal of one's use of digital technologies), and less resource-intensive approaches to (digital) text and publishing (Baillot 2023), among others.

Chelsea Miya and Geoffrey Martin Rockwell, in a similar vein, critique the ideology of platform capitalism and interrogate the environmental consequences of higher education's dependence on (proprietary) platforms (e.g., for digital project websites) to share and distribute scholarly research. In their article, "Platitudes: The Carbon Weight of the Post-Platform Scholarly Web," they argue for a minimal computing–inspired, back-to-basics approach to web design as a strategy to push back against the hegemony of big tech and adopt more reflexive, slow, and eco-conscious forms of knowledge production. In doing so, they consider the trade-offs that come with deplatforming a scholarly project, using their own experience and the challenges they faced creating the University of Alberta SpokenWeb website as a case study. They ask, how can online publishing be more sustainable, both in terms of energy consumption and labor?

Going back to the publishing industry, this question might also need to involve considerations on how corporate consolidation and ongoing competition in academic publishing could be standing in the way of concerted action. What is the role and responsibility of the publishing industry in tackling climate change? Publishing organizations and collectives are signing up for initiatives, pledges, and manifestoes such as the UN SDG Publishers Compact—a joint initiative of the United Nations and the International Publishers Association (IPA)—Publishing Declares, or the Climate Change Knowledge Cooperative. Although these kinds of green values and practices are commendable and can reflect an organization's commitment to decarbonization, it could be argued that this is not sufficient for a transition to a low-carbon economy if it is not accompanied by a pledge that "academic knowledge production becomes detached from the commitment to profit that ensures carbon emissions continue to rise" (Bacevic 2021, 3).

This is what my own contribution to this special issue departs from, where I argue in "Strategies for Climate Justice in the Academic Publishing Industry: From Pledges to Direct Action" that the publishing industry needs stronger commitments and stronger climate and environmental governance (including legislation and penalties) that go beyond self-regulatory frameworks to tackle the climate emergency. I take inspiration from the tactics and climate activism used within literary publishing by the campaign group Fossil Free Books and make a plea for scholars to similarly position themselves more clearly as workers within the academic publishing industry. I further make connections to recent research on ecological governance and knowledge production and put forward the crucial connection between climate, labor, and social justice in developing speculative strategies for climate activism in the publishing industry, and to highlight

the power scholars have as workers in this industry to leverage their labor and support alternative, more ethical publishing models.

The contributions to this special issue all share a desire to further the dialogue about climate (in)justice in scholarly publishing, highlighting the paucity of research on this topic. But they also offer, or start to outline, real examples of ways in which scholars, publishers, libraries, universities, and infrastructure providers can start to make meaningful change in this context. At the same time, there is a strong awareness of the often-complicated trade-offs that exist between movements and activism for social, economic, climate, labor, and epistemic justice. Yet these entanglements and the ways scholars and stakeholders in knowledge production have agency across these contexts also offer various opportunities for climate activism and for rethinking the dominant profit-based publishing model. Let us continue both this dialogue and the search for alternative knowledge systems. We hope this special issue contributes to this.

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