

Editorial Freedom in Academic Publishing: On the First Decade of the Open Library of Humanities

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This editorial commemorates the tenth anniversary of diamond open access journal publisher the Open Library of Humanities (OLH) and its flagship journal, the *Open Library of Humanities journal* (OLHJ). Launched in 2015, the OLH serves as an innovative model for sustainable and equitably-funded scholarly publishing that now supports over 30 peer-reviewed humanities and social sciences journals. Discussing the OLHJ's rolling publication format as a key factor in its success, this article draws on the experiences of academic editors to emphasise the importance of retaining editorial agency throughout the journal publication process. Recognising increasing corporate pressure on editors to compromise their academic integrity in favour of increasing profits, the article reveals the growing trend of mass resignations of journal editors in recent years, highlighting the fundamental importance of editors' ethical decisions in extending the global scholarly ecosystem for the common good. Building on the 2002 Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) and its 20th anniversary recommendations, this article calls for a renewed commitment to its open access principles, urging the academic community to 'think globally, act locally'. Applying Jonathan Lear's concept of 'radical hope' as a powerful catalyst for the open access movement, the editorial frames collective action as a vital response to global crises in academic communities. It details vital practical steps that researchers, editors and educators can take to help advance the BOAI's goals, concluding that such individual ethical choices and collective actions are crucial for the future of the open access movement.



On 28th September 2015, the *Open Library of Humanities* journal (OLHJ) published its first article, an editorial outlining a bold new venture in academic publishing. Written by the founders of the Open Library of Humanities (OLH), this article launched a fledgling diamond open access megajournal, adapting the format to showcase peer-reviewed scholarship across the humanities (Eve and Edwards, 2015). However, the article also introduced a broader venture: the journal would serve as the flagship title in an innovative new open access publishing model. This venture would set out to prove that scholarly journal publishing in the humanities could operate sustainably, without charging authors to publish their works, and without charging readers to access the articles—making knowledge freely available to all.

The premise was simple: to fund a humanities publishing enterprise by sharing the costs fairly, using small voluntary contributions from academic libraries, and in doing so, demonstrate that critical thought could find an accessible safe haven in a sustainable, equitably-funded new platform. Responding to the pervasive and ongoing scarcity of funding for humanities research, the platform launched amidst increasing financial pressures throughout higher education. The founders' words could just as easily apply today: amidst a wider climate of 'budget cuts and continually resorting to liberal humanist defences of critical thought in a democracy, our times remain unripe and feel precarious' (Eve and Edwards, 2015: 1). And yet, their announcement dared to hope for change in a primarily closed-access research landscape in which academic publishing costs were frequently passed on to the reader via paywalls, or to the author via Article Processing Charges: 'What we have so far is the seed of a scalable model for journal transition to open access in the humanities that does not rely on payment from authors or readers' (2).

Ten years after the publication of the OLH journal's first article, it gives me great pleasure to write this editorial celebrating the joint successes of the OLH and its flagship journal across its first decade. Since its launch, the OLH has published over 13,000 open access scholarly articles, which have been downloaded over 8 million times worldwide. It now has 12 members of staff, and actively develops a dedicated publishing platform, Janeway, whose code is proudly open source. The six journals that originally launched with the OLH in 2015—19: *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long-Nineteenth Century*; *The Comics Grid*; *Orbit*; *ASIANetwork Exchange*; *Studies in the Maternal*; and *The Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*—have continued to flourish, whilst some 30 more peer-reviewed academic journals have since found their diamond open access home with the OLH.

This growing portfolio of academic journals covers a wealth of subjects including architecture, linguistics, literature, digital humanities, philosophy, labour, film, comics, environmental humanities, economics, archaeology, sociology, and religion—with more titles from across the humanities and social sciences preparing to migrate to the OLH at the time of writing. While the achievements from each of their editorial teams are too numerous to mention here, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to the latest journals to join us, and their teams: *Political Philosophy*; *Free & Equal: A Journal of Ethics and Public Affairs*; *Review of the History of Economic Thought and Methodology*; *Syntactic Theory and Research*; *Theory and Social Inquiry*; *[in]Transition: Journal of Videographic Film & Moving Image Studies*; *Regeneration: Environment, Art, Culture*; *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*; and the *International Labour Review*, established in 1921 by the International Labour Organization. We are privileged to be a part of your journey.

In the decade since its inaugural issue, the *OLHJ* has published over 400 articles across more than 50 special collections, curated by experts from the disciplines of literature, history, politics, law, cultural heritage, film, theatre studies, music, the media and many more. Its collections are interdisciplinary and adventurous, with topics as varied as ‘Postcolonial Perspectives in Game Studies’, ‘The Medieval Brain’, ‘Representing Classical Music in the Twenty-First Century’, ‘Humour as a Human Right’, ‘The Politics and History of Menstruation’, and ‘Cultural Representations of Machine Vision’. The *OLHJ*’s rolling publication format allows the journal’s workflow to be faster and more reactive than traditional print-based publishing models, moving articles swiftly through the production process and progressing to publication as soon as the corrected proofs are ready. By eliminating the need to wait for all the other articles in an issue to be ready before going to press, this approach prevents publishing delays, allowing the latest research to be released as soon as it is ready, contributing to the flourishing of a vibrant scholarly ecosystem and a growing critical conversation across the humanities.

So far in 2025, according to the latest statistics available at the time of writing, the journal’s average time from submission to publication is just under 187.5 days, or an average of just over six months for articles to move through the publishing workflow from start to finish.¹ Within this six month period, articles have spent approximately four and a half months progressing from submission to acceptance (including initial

¹ Statistics taken from Janeway’s ‘Displays time to publication information for articles including averages’ publishing workflow times report, last accessed 22 September 2025.

article triage, manuscript anonymisation, sourcing reviewers, collating peer reviews and providing author feedback, and allowing time for any corrections required), with the remaining one and a half months spent progressing accepted articles to publication (including two rounds of copyediting, professional typesetting, proofreading and correcting galleys, and final publication). Although articles may of course take longer or shorter periods to pass through any of these stages, it is worth mentioning these average statistics here to show that such workflow times are indeed possible in academic publishing, particularly for edited collections. Traditional publishing workflows for such collections can take many years before the articles go to press, delaying the availability of new research and frustrating authors in the process. It is particularly gratifying for our team to see academics returning to *OLHJ* to publish their second or third special collection with us, having experienced how a flexible diamond open access publishing workflow can increase the speed and ease of knowledge dissemination across their projects.

At *OLHJ*, we are particularly fortunate in the amount of agency that we have throughout the publishing process. However, other academics and editorial teams working amidst heavily monetised publishing systems often do not have access to this amount of editorial freedom. There are no commercial pressures driving the *OLHJ*'s metrics, no negative repercussions if some articles need to take longer, and no mandatory publication quotas to fill. We do not actively 'cascade' articles on to less scrupulous journals for publication, as is the case at several large commercial publishers.² We have no pressure to target certain monetised buzzwords or lucrative subject areas, and no fiscal requirement to accept articles that aren't up to scratch. Sadly, this is not always the case elsewhere. Following *Theory and Social Inquiry*'s inception as a diamond open access journal with the OLH, Editors Professor Greta Krippner and Professor Monica Prasad (2025) observe, 'we are not required to meet publication quotas determining how many articles appear in each issue. We are also one of only a handful of social science journals unconstrained by page limits. Authors can take the space they need to make complicated arguments and offer rich empirical evidence without having to adhere to arbitrary restrictions on word length' (1). Amidst ongoing global threats to scholarly independence, editorial agency in the publishing process has itself become a precious commodity. As the editors rightly note, 'the times call for a journal of this kind' (Krippner and Prasad, 2025: 2).

² See 'Cascading peer review for open-access publishing' (2013) by Edward F. Barroga, which notes that 'Cascading peer review is a model that avoids final rejection by redirecting peer-reviewed papers, which are rejected by one journal, to another more suitable publication' (90). Barroga notes that this approach can 'create unethical shortcuts for those opting for rapid publication of flawed and redundant papers', concluding 'Predatory publishers may especially benefit from the new system which will allow them to accept and publish rapidly papers rejected elsewhere' (91).

Such academic freedom is by no means universal in commercial scholarly publishing. *Free & Equal: A Journal of Ethics and Public Affairs* also joined the OLH in 2024. Its Editor-in-Chief, Professor Anna Stilz, speaks out about the ‘escalating unreasonable demands’ experienced under a large commercial academic publisher, ‘including a demand that we massively increase the number of articles per year that we publish, essentially abandoning our editorial judgment and our control over the quality of our content’ (Stilz, 2023: 14). Stilz also describes having experienced the publisher’s stipulation that a journal that ‘historically published 12–16 articles per year’ was told to ‘accept 35 articles within 60 days’, in an attempt to force the small journal to increase the publication rate more than tenfold—an ‘absolutely unreasonable demand’ (Stilz, 2023: 28).

Amidst increasing corporate pressure on editors to compromise academic integrity in favour of increasing profit margins, there are signs that a tipping point has been reached in recent years. Entire editorial teams are increasingly resigning en masse from global mega-publishers in protest at the untenable conditions imposed on their journals by their publishers. At the time of writing, *Retraction Watch* lists 45 journals on its list of mass resignations of editors from scholarly journals in the last decade; 64% of these—29 journals—have resigned from their publishers since 2023.³ In Dr Katherine Parker-Hay’s interview with Professor Johan Rooryck, Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics*, Rooryck—who led a mass resignation to flip the journal *Lingua* to open access as *Glossa* with the OLH in 2015—remarks that ‘at one point, editors get sick and tired of being bossed around by a commercial publisher, especially when you know full well that it is not in the best interest of the intellectual content of the journal’ (Parker-Hay, 2023).

I would like to take a moment here to recognise the tremendous courage that it can take for editors to move their journals, their editorial teams, and their labour, away from a closed-access, pay-to-read or pay-to-publish format to a diamond open access endeavour, whether with the OLH or elsewhere. Many editors walk away from sizable honoraria that are given in return for their obedience and complicity, paid out by powerful corporations which continue to siphon their enormous profits from the academic institutions whose accumulated labour and knowledge they secure behind paywalls and sell back to their university libraries, many of whom can scarcely afford them.⁴ The editors who dare to speak out are experts in their fields with careers, academic reputations, and families to consider, without the benefit of dedicated legal

³ See ‘The Retraction Watch Mass Resignations List’ on the *Retraction Watch* website at <https://retractionwatch.com/the-retraction-watch-mass-resignations-list/>, last accessed 14 October 2025.

⁴ For more on the prohibitive cost of commercial publisher journal packages for university libraries, see ‘Academic libraries cannot afford to carry on with transformative agreements’ (Edwards, 2025).

departments whose labyrinthine contracts and non-compete clauses are designed to prevent any easy escape from such a system. Such acts of quiet bravery, carried out in fidelity to their own ethical principles, serve the entire academic community. By allowing research in scholarly journals to be shared and read by the communities that it is intended to serve, each move to open access contributes to broadening the global scholarly ecosystem for the common good.

The Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) of 2002 remains one of the foundational declarations of the open access movement. In just a few pages, its clear and concise statement of principles and possibilities helped to launch a global effort to make peer-reviewed research freely available to all. Extending this effort, the BOAI 20th anniversary recommendations remind us: ‘When we spend money to publish OA research, remember the goals to which OA is the means’ (Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2022). To build on this sentiment: if we are to extend the benefits of open access to knowledge for future generations, we must find ways to ‘think globally, act locally’ in our communities and act in accordance with the broader goals of the open access movement in mind. It is not just government mandates and journal flips that make change happen—these are crucial, but they are also not possible to action in the everyday lives of most individuals. And so I urge you to look also to the smaller decisions and collective efforts that can make vital contributions to the wider goals of the open access movement, wherever we are able to make them.

To the original founders’ seeds for this open access enterprise, then, I wish to add a further sapling – the promise of radical hope. Developed by Jonathan Lear in his 2006 text *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, the concept of radical hope refers to an ethical commitment to regeneration amidst total cultural devastation, a courageous reorientation towards a better future whilst fully acknowledging the grim realities of the present. While the concept has been reimaged and applied to a range of different disciplines, including in the museum sector, pedagogy, and public administration,⁵ in the face of existential threats to knowledge production and dissemination across entire nations, its commitment to collective action amidst crisis becomes particularly relevant to academic research communities currently in peril. While I have elsewhere written about the urgency of compassion in dystopian times,⁶

⁵ For examples, see *Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto*, which applies the concept to pedagogy in higher education (Gannon: 2020); ‘Radical Hope as a Transformative Praxis in the Face of Hate and Intolerance’, which applies the concept to public administration (Nickels and Tinnin, 2025); and ‘Radical Hope: An Introduction’ which applies the concept to help make sense of the museum sector’s colonial past (Van Broekhoven, n.d.), among others.

⁶ See ‘The urgency of individual compassionate action’: ‘Imagining the near-inevitable final death rattle of our species is now all too easy. A much harder task is to dare to imagine how a broken civilization might, over many generations, begin to adapt and rebuild against improbable odds – a task that will require a post-secular leap of faith and a revaluing of the essential function of compassion in human survival’ (Harris-Birtill, 2019: 152–158).

when facing unspeakable oppression, radical hope becomes a powerful catalyst. In the words of Rebecca Solnit: ‘hope is not like a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky’; it is ‘an ax you break down doors with in an emergency’ (2016: 4).

In the face of such overwhelming global crises that threaten universal access to knowledge, the anxious question, ‘but what can *I* do?’ will arise again and again. The answer is simple: *Do*. Do whatever you can, wherever you can. To academic researchers: vote with your feet. Choose openly accessible publication venues for your articles whenever and wherever you are able. To editors, and those of us privileged enough to have a voice: use it wisely and unrelentingly. Speak up with your own radical hope and courage, whatever these may mean to you. You are the custodians of knowledge; organise and plan your routes to bring it back to the communities that it serves. To educators: ensure that your students understand the basic economic mechanisms behind the closed-access article paywalls that they will encounter in their search for knowledge, and help them find and share freely open alternatives wherever possible. Ensure your postgraduates are aware that their own academic publishing choices also have an ethical dimension.⁷ In the words of the Budapest Open Access Initiative, ‘The more who join the effort to advance this cause, the sooner we will all enjoy the benefits of open access’ (2002).

I am proud to work alongside the brilliant OLH team, and all of our dedicated journal and special collection editors, on this great enterprise of sharing knowledge in the humanities. In our own small ways, we make the choice to use our labour for the benefit of all now and to come, and to open up as much intellectual research on the critical interpretation and preservation of human culture, heritage and experience as we are able, using the tools that we have as best as we can. The OLH mission—to support and extend open access to scholarship in the humanities for free, for everyone, for ever—remains an enormous undertaking. Yet despite all that we have achieved in the last decade, both in the OLH and in the open access movement more broadly, I choose to believe that the best is still yet to come. In the words of the OLH’s founders, then: ‘What is before you today is not, of course, the end product; it is just the start’ (Eve and Edwards, 2015: 3).

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⁷ For free open access advocacy resources to help, see the OLH Resources page at <https://www.openlibhums.org/site/resources/>, as well as SPARC’s ‘HowOpenIsIt? A Guide for Evaluating the Openness of Journals’ at <https://sparcopen.org/our-work/howopenisit/>, and Think Check Submit to help authors to assess potential publication outlets at <https://thinkchecksubmit.org/> (all last accessed on 17 September 2025). The original Budapest Open Access Initiative (2002) statement and the latest recommendations in its 2022 update give useful broad overviews of the open access movement’s journey and aims to date and can be found at <https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read/> (BOAI, 2002) and <https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/boai20/> (BOAI, 2020), both last accessed 26 September 2025.

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Competing Interests

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