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Editorial

Welcome to the 'Slop-verse'. AI and Writing about Law and Technology

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Abstract

This editorial is written by angry editors. We are angry because Big Tech has made available with large language models (LLMs) something that is killing a form of knowledge that we value. We are angry because rather than opening the academy to diverse voices and perspectives it is causing the exact opposite. We are angry because it highlights how generic academic writing had become to allow LLMs to imitate scholarly work. Ultimately, we are angry because we do not want to hear what the robots have to say, nor the boorish, repetitive, empty ways that they talk. We need the creative, imperfect, paradigm-changing writing by humans about law and technology.

Drowning in Slop!

Slop is a wonderful word.[1] Like many invocative and eminently useful words in English it has four letters. It is onomatopoeic. The concluding '/p/ - voiceless bilabial plosive' pops from the lips when spoken. It has become a favourite word for besieged editors and others tasked with ensuring the basic integrity of academic publishing.

The usual use of the word is in a sentence to the effect of 'we are drowning in [often inserted here is a derivative of another invocative and eminently useful four-letter word] slop!'[2]

The academic publishing model was under incredible stress even before the zeitgeist caught up with what OpenAI was producing in 2022.[3] The real work of academic editing is done pro bono by the academy[4] while there is spectacular rent-seeking by commercial publishers.[5] Increasingly the differences in practices between 'predatory presses' and the 'Big 5' commercial publishers seems scant.[6] Researchers are frantically under pressure to write and publish and do the endless administrative load that has been delegated to them by the neoliberal university, so much so that they are too busy to undertake reviews.[7] Also new

[1] We would like to thank Tegan Cohen, David Gurnham and Felicity Dean for comments on earlier drafts of this editorial.
[2] See the cases discussed by COPE, "Cope Focus on Artificial Intelligence."
[3] Kovanovic, "A Key Science Publishing Platform is Cracking Down on AI Slop."
[4] Jamali, "Roles, Challenges, and Sustainability of Australian Journals."
[5] Alonso-Álvarez, "The Cost of Open Access."; van Bellen, "Scholarly Publishing's Hidden Diversity."; Montgomery, "Academic Publishing is a Multibillion-Dollar Industry."
[6] Butler, "The Oligopoly's Shift to Open Access."
[7] Tranter, "Benchmarks for Australian Law Researchers' H-Index and Citation Count Bibliometrics."

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and exciting impact measures and datasets are being unleashed, ranking journals and researchers according to diverse and often unknown criteria.[8]

Nonetheless, the impact of large language models (LLMs) on academic writing as the AI boom/hype/crisis floats over the middle years of the 2020s is visceral (as suggested by the word slop and other four-letter words).[9]

LLMs are explicitly built to deceive. Indeed, the lodestar of the digital has been deception. The aim of the 'universal machine' was to trick a human into thinking they were engaging with another human.[10] Turing's 'game' although expressed less as a goal and more a thought-experiment, is nevertheless so entrenched in the digital that it was almost inevitable that LLMs would be developed whose purpose was to imitate human outputs to fool humans. This did not need to be so. Isaac Asimov's robot stories from the 1940-1950s – especially the lessor known 'Galley Slave' (1957)[11] about a robot that was manipulated to poorly copyedit a history professor's manuscript to discredit robotic labour – presents AI as *sui generis*, as distinctly different, as not inherently there to deceive humans that it is human.

Yet Anthropocentric Big Tech could not think of it otherwise, and has been feeding its hungry models prodigious amounts of human produced content with the express aim of commercialising a product that can fake human outputs. Generally quality control of the material being digested has been woeful, because LLMs treat the entire scraped internet as a raw, neutral 'ground truth,' relying on massive scale and low-paid human labour to clean up the chaotic output rather than applying rigorous, contextual data curation.[12] The idea of AI hallucination mislabels what is going on. The entire output is a hallucination; it is a statistical regression based on patterns identified from the material it has digested. The distinctions between real and imagined and correspondence accounts of truth exist beyond the sealed hermeneutic comprised of the LLM, its data, user prompts and output. This process has about as much meaning and relationship to the world as ghosts chasing Pac-Man projected onto a cathode ray tube in a video arcade in the 1980s.

What has emerged are readily available LLMs that can produce text in response to prompts. They can edit text to make it more 'readable.' They promise productivity for knowledge workers in helping with the hard task of creating and proofing text. This alleged productivity gain is what we are experiencing as editors of *Law, Technology and Humans*. For the first six months of 2026 we have experienced a 75% increase in submissions compared to all of 2025. Most of these are clearly and evidently the product of overzealous LLM use, often with the telltale hallucinated references. This is leading to a current desk rejection rate of 96%. We have received reviews where we have strong suspicions that the reviewer used AI to generate it and therefore could not use the review. We have had reviewers decline to review manuscripts because they felt there was too much AI constructed text. We have had to reject manuscripts after review when the amount of AI constructed text became evident in the copyediting phase. We are having to undertake more checks on manuscripts before we decide to expend further resources to send to review. Editorial workload is an issue for all involved in the lifecycle of each new submission, editorial screening, peer review, copyediting, production and publication. And the downstream consequence of the introduction of AI constructed text is creating significant disruption into the scholarly ecosystem. The 'productivity' of AI is abundantly clear. It is the sort of double-speak that seems rife in the Trump-era of wars for peace and 'dear friends' that are enemies. The productivity of AI has substantially decreased our productivity. In short, we are drowning in slop!

However, beyond the calculus that we are having to invest much more time and resources to publish the same number of articles, there is a sense of death. The academic article, where a researcher offers to the world their contribution to knowledge, that has been anonymously checked by peers in a double-blind review process and published in a forum that is respected for maintaining academic standards, has been the vehicle that has changed the world.[13] The collective endeavour of safeguarding and growing knowledge is a privilege to participate in. Essential to knowledge sharing, especially in the HASS (Humanities and Social Sciences) disciplines, of which law belongs, is *how* ideas, concepts, data, reasoning are expressed. The words chosen matter. Words are not receptacles of known meaning, much to the frustration of computational lawyers whose projects repeatedly become wrecked on the rocks of semantic instability. Academic work, especially in law, that has impact, always has a genius of expression. Robert Cover's seminal 'Violence and the Word' would not have changed how we see the interpretative games of lawyers if it did not begin with invocative 'Legal interpretation takes place on the field of pain and death.'[14] HLA

[8] Serenko, "Dancing with the Devil."; Caunes, "Some Triple Q Reflections."; Teymourifar, "Understanding the ABS Journal Ranking System."
[9] Linnenluecke, "The 5 Stages of the 'Enshittification' of Academic Publishing."
[10] Turnig, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence."
[11] Asimov, "Galley Slave."
[12] Crawford, "Excavating 'Ground Truth' in AI."
[13] Sabal, "Reformation of Science Publishing."
[14] Cover, "Violence and the Word," 1601.

Hart's *Concept of Law* would not have had the impact without his relaxed prose and clear and careful introduction of core terms: 'gunman analogy', 'Law as rules,' 'Rule of recognition.'[15] As lawyers trained in the modern tradition of text, interpretation, and written statutes and judgements, we know intrinsically that words matter; the right word, placed in the right context, can work magic, can unlock understanding, create empathy, convince a decision maker to exercise judgement in our favour.

LLM produced and edited text diminishes this. While it might be 'grammatically correct' – according one of the many conventions – it distances author and reader and meaning. It inserts itself into the very process of meaning making. If a human is more than biochemical blob engaged in material exchanges with the planetary system, it is as the being whose being is aware of being (to mutilate another provocative word that has changed knowledge, Martin Heidegger's *Dasein*/being). To put a machine too much into this zone, a machine built by Big Tech to make profits by faking meaning, kills our calling as scholars and diminishes our humanity. While our humanity is diminished, and affirmed and changes consistently in the everyday,[16] the challenge to what it means to be scholars, to strive for new meaning, new insights and new understandings, is fundamental. Letting LLMs try to take thoughts as prompts and then produce smooth shiny bloodless text cannot produce new knowledge and meaning. It blends up and reproduces what has already been said. It is a future killer. It is a machine composed of the past that stamps a regurgitated past onto the present. In this LLMs are structurally antithetical to what it means to be scholar engaged in research to advance knowledge. Us drowning in slop is emblematic of the slopification knowledge.

The 'Honey Trap' of LLMs

We understand why scholars, particularly emerging scholars and scholars from non-English speaking backgrounds, use LLMs in the production of manuscripts. They are a honey-trap – extremely attractive and enticing. They can seemingly translate between languages, 'fix' imperfect English, and instantaneously produce perfectly sounding cover letters that pesky editors require when a manuscript is submitted. LLMs suggest an opening up, of the 'Universal Translation Machine' that will allow a world of equal exchange, even for those not born into the privilege of English as a first language. There is a promise of the globalisation of knowledge where scholars regardless of location and cultural heritage can more effectively engage with the old centres of knowledge.

However, we can tell LLM produced text. It is, as defined by Louie Giray and colleagues 'SLOP' (shallow, low-quality, overgeneralised, poorly sourced).[17] There is a pompous monotony in tone and repetition, the same point said slightly differently across sentences. There is a stilted verbosity and a tendency to uniform paragraphing. There is an overuse of negative parallelism and 'rather than/instead' constructions. There is a weird sense of contrived balance between points that are palpably not of equal value, a lack of scale as if all content is commensurable and equal – which ultimately to an LLM it is, but to academics and lawyers, and particularly academic lawyers, can never be. There are tendencies to rigorously and robustly deploy 'rigorous' and 'robust.' And there is the absence of pinpoints in citations. The many small stylistic traits that suggest robotised text are obvious to us as highly experienced writers and editors of English language work on law and technology. Collectively these tells do something devastating. They produce a manuscript that *does not actually say anything*. The nuance, the new, the originality, the meaningful ordering of words, sentences and paragraphs to make convincing arguments about law and technology becomes displaced. Like a cheap mass-produced tool, it might look fit for purpose but soon breaks when used. Yet, for emerging scholars, still developing their knowledge and expression of their field, this is not so obvious. Rather, LLM massaged text seems good, it appears to flow in a way that resembles academic prose. It provides confidence to a writer who is still learning their way through the arcane, irrational labyrinth of the English language.[18]

LLMs are tricksters. Rather than opening knowledge it is forcing us to close it down. By turning prompts, material written in another language and 'first attempt' sentences into what reads as slop, we are desk rejecting work at a prodigious rate. Rather than celebrate that the journal is receiving submissions from scholars at all stages of their academic career from across the globe – one of foundation focuses of *Law, Technology and Humans* – we are suspicious and defensive. We are very aware that there is prejudice at work here. The critical literature on AI text detecting systems highlights that the tells of AI-generated text are often the hallmarks of English as second language writing.[19] This is cruel and is another example of the irony that comes with most things that Big Tech has unleashed into the digital; of attracting users through cornucopian promises that melt into dystopian realities. LLMs promises enhanced communication and access but are causing the closing down of communication and access. We have contemplated the future of *Law, Technology and Humans*. As a Diamond open access publication (no

[15] Hart, The Concept of Law.
[16] Tranter, Living in Technical Legality, 110-32.
[17] Giray, "AI Slop in Academic Publishing."
[18] Warschauer, "The Affordances and Contradictions of AI-Generated Text for Writers of English as a Second or Foreign Language."
[19] Liang, "GPT Detectors are Biased against Non-Native English Writers."

article processing charges [APCs]) with an inclusive ethos and commitment to publishing global research and voices on law and technology, the Herculean task of ensuring academic integrity within the slop-verse feels relentless.

The Academy is Partially to Blame

However, the tendency to slop was already underway prior to LLMs. Academic prose in the twenty-first century was increasingly becoming roboticised. The enhanced roll out of earlier generations of grammar and language checkers banished 'passive voice' and other formal sins of grammar that most celebrated English writers gleefully ignore. The need for search engine recognition saw the decline in clever and witty titles. Journals, even in some of the HASS disciplines, started expecting articles to have a common structure with generic headings 'Literature Review', 'Findings' etc. The emergence of structured literature reviews, systematic/PRISMA or otherwise, as original scholarly work; anticipated and normalised formulaic algorithmic driven scholarship. All these have led to a homogenisation, a predictability, a robotism, in form and substance to published academic work.

The reason for this is the weight of data. The genre of academic writing is absolutely dominated by the STEM disciplines. The technosciences have greater homogeneity in how academic work is structured and more rigid conventions result in tighter lexicons where there is less space for semantic play and interpretative nuance. Words and sentences are media. This contrasts with the scholarly discipline of law where words and sentences are the message. If the sum of academic work is an ocean, then the sum of law work within that total is probably a large bubble. Furthermore, the totality of work on law and technology, and especially to quote our publication manifesto:

> …[m]anuscripts that consider law and technology though the humanities, social sciences, political, social, media and technology theory, economics and empirical studies are particularly encouraged, as are manuscripts that consider law, technology and humans in the context of Asian, southern, postcolonial and First Nation societies.[20]

… is exceedingly small; a surfactant molecule on the bubble's skin.

What this means is that when LLMs are prompted to produce or edit text in an academic context, it is not law research and particularly not 'interdisciplinary and theoretically informed scholarship'[21] that is fuelling the statistical engine. Rather a more significant influence is the proto-robotic forms of expression from STEM. The academy has paved the way for LLMs; through series of decisions that has produced a homogeneity of academic forms and expression, which have become both culturally accepted as 'academic writing' and now have become hardwired into LLMs.

We Need - Creative, Imperfect, Paradigm Changing -Humans

The editorial for the foundational issue of *Law, Technology and Humans* expressed the hope that the journal would be 'a portal to the multiverse of stories and methods through which to understand, dream, critique, build and live well in the technological present as it … moves towards the technological future.'[22] This is not what LLMs can do. The journal is titled *Law, Technology and **Humans,*** not *Law, Technology and **Robots***. We are perfectly capable of prompting LLMs and scanning through the dross outputted. *Law, Technology and Humans* has published on LLMs, legal scholarship and criticism of their privileged Global North 'voice' in 2021.[23] We approach LLMs not with wide-eyed wonder, but also not with a romantic rejection. Rather we see LLMs as sociotechnical assemblages that are causing change. Our concerns are material, measurable and real. The current LLMs and the practices that they are encouraging is manifesting the slop-verse. This journal exists to encourage different thinking, different voices, alternative imaginaries of law and technology. It cannot do this marred in slop.

All academic journals and presses are grappling with the impact of LLMs on the traditions and practices of academic writing and publishing. The Big 5 publishers have released mostly similar guidelines for authors, editors and reviewers.[24] Taking Taylor and Francis' as an example, these specify with disclosures the use of 'Generative AI' for 'idea generation and idea exploration', 'copyediting and language improvements and translations,' 'literature classification' and 'coding assistance.'[25] There are also seemingly bright-line prohibitions such as 'text generation without rigorous revision', 'synthetic data generation to substitute

[20] "About the Journal."
[21] "About the Journal."
[22] Tranter, "Welcome to the Multiverse," 2.
[23] Alarie, "Will Machines Replace Us?"; Tranter, "Introduction and Then 'Friends'."
[24] Lendvai, "Artificial Intelligence in Academic Practices and Policy Discourses across 'Big 5' Publishers."
[25] Taylor and Francis, "AI Policy."

missing data without robust methodology' and 'generation of any types of content which is inaccurate including abstracts or supplemental materials.'[26]

The Big 5 occupy an invested space regarding AI use. They profit from having more journals selling more content; a direct incentive for slopification.[27] As digital platforms they are eagerly deploying AI to shift resource costs to authors, reviewers and editors.[28] They are also engaged directly with selling academic work to Big Tech as training data.[29] It would, therefore, be arrogantly ironic that they produced guidelines that prohibited AI use. Furthermore, these guidelines, reflecting the dominance of STEM, are entirely focused on STEM research and writing. We will leave it to leaders in the STEM disciplines to debate and refine where the lines should be drawn and whether the expressions used to draw those lines are adequate ('robust' – given its status as a weasel word, really?). For HASS, and particularly in law, these guidelines are nonsensical because 'idea generation and idea exploration' is intimately entwnned with the process of writing. Too much LLM involvement with text, especially under the innocuous sounding permission of 'language improvement,' invites slop and with that we read a robot speaking through the text and not a human.

The solution is not really the formalities of AI use declarations, although they have a role in awareness for authors and facilitating author blaming for publishers. The solution is to affirm the need for creative, imperfect, paradigm changing *human* writing on law and technology. Rather than speeding up the production of text, this requires a slowing down. We are at a same moment in time in relation to writing that saw the emergence of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement that reacted to the mass production of consumer goods.[30] Good thinking can only come through good writing, and good writing is an art. It involves practice and cycles of feedback. Feedback from topic experts and also feedback on the mechanics and meaning of the writing. Craft an argument. Scrutinise every word. Read – and not just the latest slop pimped by ResearchGate – but writing that has endured. This includes the well-known writers in law, technology studies and law and technology, but also novelists celebrated for the clarity and inventive evocativeness of their prose; for example, Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, James Baldwin, George Orwell, or more idiosyncratic favourites Jack Kerouac and Douglas Adams.

Our message to scholars wishing to work with *Law, Technology and Humans* is to be a human writing about law and technology. Slow down and craft; specifically:

- Have something to say that is original yet emergent and connected to existing knowledge.
- Work on the manuscript's structure and form to convince us and your peers of the argument.
- Work on the paragraphs, sentences and expression. Every manuscript is a step in developing and refining your voice, your vocabulary, your contribution to knowledge.
- Seek guidance and mentoring. Have drafts read by colleagues and mentors, reflect on comments and meaningfully engage. The best feedback that makes a better manuscript is not feedback that celebrates the perfection of the manuscript or the genius of the author. Rather it challenges to think more, engage with more ideas and content, write more clearly, organising material more precisely. Many a research leader will credit critical feedback early in their career as instrumental in them finding their research agenda.
- Use LLMs if you must. But use them proactively and defensively. Proactively, they can help with proofing, expression and formatting and checking references. But they are impatient unruly creatures. Vigilance and checking are needed to make sure slopification and hallucinations do not sneak into the manuscript. The need to scrutinise and supervise the robots probably means the vaulted productivity gains of LLMs are illusionary. Defensively, be aware of the hallmarks of slop and edit these out. Run manuscripts through AI-text detectors prior to submission and experiment with other ways to communicate meaning.
- Finally, have a passion and belief in what is being said. There is a tragic cynicism within the contemporary academy that quanta of publications in ranked journals are all that matters; an intensification of the publish or perish mentality of previous generations. LLMs arrive, seductively and dangerously, within this milieu. Make every manuscript the best manuscript it can be and the best manuscript that you have done; because the world needs what you are saying.

This is essential. We want to publish work that thinks differently and tries to make a difference. We need to publish work that thinks differently and tries to make a difference; otherwise slop will reign, the future will die, and the past with its violence, exploitation, alienation will cycle endlessly.

[26] Taylor and Francis, "AI Policy."
[27] Linnenluecke, "The 5 Stages of the 'Enshittification' of Academic Publishing."
[28] Ngwenyama, "Platform Capture of Scientific Knowledge Production."
[29] Komljenovic, "Assetizing Academic Content and the Emergence of the 'Assetizen'."
[30] Stansky, Redesigning the World.

AI Declaration

Of course, AI was used in the production of this editorial. We did not write this with pencil and paper in a musty library while physically accessing the stacks for material. It was made in the digital; and interfacing with AI systems in the digital is unavoidable. Windows 11, Microsoft Word and the various online searches all involve systems connected, built on, and incorporating AI. What we can declare is we did not directly use an LLM for 'idea generation and idea exploration' or massaging text.

Although we did feed the opening paragraph into Microsoft's Copilot and asked it to make it more 'intellectual.' See Figure 1 below. Its first response:

Slop is a remarkably useful word. Like many evocative terms in the English language, its force lies in both brevity and sound. The word is distinctly onomatopoeic: the concluding */p/*, a voiceless bilabial plosive, ends with a sharp expulsion of breath that mimics abruptness and disorder. Unsurprisingly, *slop* has become a favoured term among editors and others charged with safeguarding the integrity of academic publishing.

We will defer to you, gentle reader, on which you prefer.

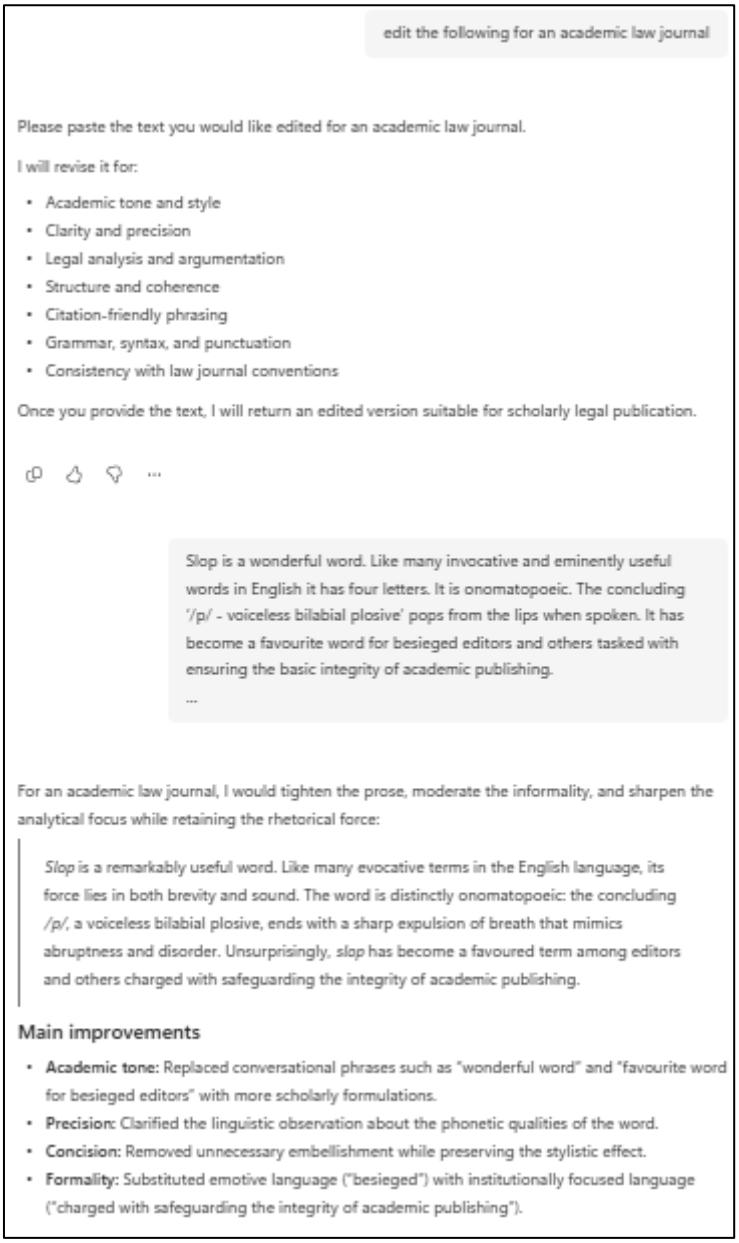

Figure 1. Copilot output on editorial opening paragraph, 7th of August 2026

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