



AN INTERVIEW WITH

Adrienne Russell

Journalism Education in a Time of Climate Crisis

PRESENTATION

Adrienne Russell is the Mary Laird Wood Professor of Communication and co-director of the Center for Journalism, Media, and Democracy at the University of Washington (Seattle). Her research lies at the intersection of journalism, technology, and political communication, with a focus on emerging technologies, social problems, and the conditions for democratic and participatory publics.

She began examining the transformations of journalism in relation to the spread of the web and mobile technologies in *Networked: A Contemporary History of News in Transition* (Polity, 2011), which traces changes in news production and circulation from the early 1990s onward. She subsequently explored the changing boundaries of journalism through the lens of media activism in *Journalism as Activism: Recoding Media Power* (Polity, 2016), showing how activists adept at using and creating new communication tools have taken up journalistic work, expanded the field, and reshaped traditional news stories and genres.

Russell has also contributed to broader debates on media, politics, and public life as co-editor of *International Blogging: Identity, Politics and Networked Publics* (Peter Lang, 2009), *Journalism and the NSA Revelations* (Reuters, 2017), and *Rethinking Media Research for Changing Societies* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Her most recent book, *The Mediated Climate* (Columbia University Press, 2023), examines the overlapping climate and public knowledge crises, focusing on how journalism, activism, and Big Tech compete to shape public understanding. Since 2008, she has been a member of the MediaClimate research team, an international group of scholars conducting comparative research on transnational coverage of the annual United Nations climate summits and the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

In this interview, she reflects on how climate journalism education should be rethought in response to the entanglement of the climate crisis with crises in the public mediation of knowledge, emphasizing verification, situated knowledges, transparency, structural analysis, and the rejection of false balance. Russell argues that journalism should not understand itself simply as a neutral transmitter of information, but as a practice that helps shape publics, visibility, responsibility, and collective responses to climate change.

ENTRETIEN AVEC

Adrienne Russell

Les formations en journalisme face à la crise climatique

PRESENTATION

Adrienne Russell est professeure de communication, titulaire de la chaire Mary Laird Wood et codirectrice du Center for Journalism, Media, and Democracy à l'Université de Washington à Seattle. Ses travaux se situent à l'intersection du journalisme, des technologies et de la communication politique, avec une attention particulière portée aux technologies émergentes, aux problèmes publics et aux conditions de formation de publics démocratiques et participatifs.

Elle a commencé à analyser les transformations du journalisme liées à la diffusion du web et des technologies mobiles dans *Networked: A Contemporary History of News in Transition* (Polity, 2011), qui retrace les évolutions de la production et de la circulation de l'information depuis le début des années 1990. Elle a ensuite exploré les recompositions des frontières du journalisme au prisme de l'activisme médiatique dans *Journalism as Activism: Recoding Media Power* (Polity, 2016), montrant comment des militant·es maîtrisant les nouveaux outils de communication se sont saisi·es d'activités journalistiques, contribuant à élargir le champ du journalisme et à transformer les formats et genres traditionnels.

Adrienne Russell a également contribué aux débats sur les relations entre médias, politique et espace public en codirigeant plusieurs ouvrages collectifs, parmi lesquels *International Blogging: Identity, Politics and Networked Publics* (Peter Lang, 2009), *Journalism and the NSA Revelations* (Reuters, 2017) et *Rethinking Media Research for Changing Societies* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Son ouvrage le plus récent, *The Mediated Climate* (Columbia University Press, 2023), analyse l'imbrication entre crise climatique et crise des savoirs publics, en s'intéressant aux concurrences entre journalisme, activisme et grandes plateformes numériques dans la production des cadres de compréhension du changement climatique. Depuis 2008, elle est également membre de l'équipe de recherche MediaClimate, un collectif international de scientifiques menant des recherches comparatives sur la couverture transnationale des sommets climatiques annuels des Nations unies et des rapports du Groupe d'experts intergouvernemental sur l'évolution du climat (GIEC).

Dans cet entretien, elle revient sur la manière dont la formation au journalisme climatique devrait être repensée face à l'imbrication de la crise climatique avec les crises contemporaines de la médiation publique des savoirs. Elle insiste notamment sur les enjeux de vérification, les savoirs situés, la transparence, l'analyse en termes structurels et le rejet d'un « faux équilibre » dans la couverture médiatique. Adrienne Russell défend ainsi l'idée que le journalisme ne doit jamais être pensé comme un vecteur neutre de transmission de l'information, mais comme une pratique participant à la construction des publics, des régimes de visibilité, des formes de responsabilité et des réponses collectives au changement climatique.

ENTREVISTA COM

Adrienne Russell

Os ensinamentos de jornalismo face à crise climática

APRESENTAÇÃO

Adrienne Russell é professora de comunicação no Mary Laird Wood e co-diretora do Center for Journalism, Media, and Democracy da University of Washington (Seattle). Sua pesquisa se situa na interseção entre jornalismo, tecnologia e comunicação política, com foco nas tecnologias emergentes, nos problemas sociais, e nas condições de formação de públicos democráticos e participativos.

Ela começou sua carreira analisando as transformações do jornalismo com a divisão da web e das tecnologias móveis na obra *Networked: A Contemporary History of News in Transition* (Polity, 2011), na qual identifica as mudanças na produção noticiosa a partir do início dos anos 1990. Na sequência, explorou as fronteiras movediças do jornalismo sob a lente do ativismo midiático em *Journalism as Activism: Recoding Media Power* (Polity, 2016), mostrando como o uso e a criação de novas ferramentas comunicacionais por ativistas incidiram no trabalho jornalístico, ampliando o campo, e reformatando notícias e gêneros tradicionais.

Russell também contribuiu com os debates mais amplos sobre mídia, política e vida pública como co-editora das obras *International Blogging: Identity, Politics and Networked Publics* (Peter Lang, 2009), *Journalism and the NSA Revelations* (Reuters, 2017), and *Rethinking Media Research for Changing Societies* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Seu mais recente livro *The Mediated Climate* (Columbia University Press, 2023) examina a sobreposição entre as crises climática e de conhecimento público, focando-se em como o jornalismo, o ativismo, e as Big Techs competem para moldar a compreensão pública. Desde 2008, integra o MediaClimate, grupo de pesquisa internacional que reúne acadêmicos envolvidos em um estudo comparativo sobre a cobertura transnacional das cúpulas climáticas das Nações Unidas e dos relatórios do Painel Intergovernamental sobre Mudança do Clima.

Nesta entrevista, Russell reflete sobre como a formação em jornalismo climático poderia ser repensada em resposta ao entrelaçamento da crise climática e das crises de mediação pública do conhecimento, enfatizando a verificação, os conhecimentos situados, a transparência, a análise estrutural, e a rejeição de um falso balanço na cobertura. A entrevistada argumenta que o jornalismo não deveria se ver simplesmente como um transmissor neutro de informações, mas como uma prática que ajuda a formatar os públicos, bem como garantir visibilidade, responsabilidade e respostas coletivas às mudanças climáticas.

If journalism schools were redesigning their climate-reporting curriculum tomorrow, what is necessary in that curriculum and what should be cut?

The core skills of journalism still matter: rigorous investigation, careful interviewing, and a deep commitment to verification. But those fundamentals need to be expanded rather than simply preserved. Students should be trained to recognize a broader range of expertise, not just institutional authority, but what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) (and Donna Haraway before her) calls situated knowledge, including lived experience and frontline perspectives, especially in the context of climate injustice. For example, reporting on heatwaves in India or Pakistan, sea-level rise in the Pacific Islands, or wildfire exposure in the Amazon requires integrating Indigenous land knowledge, informal labor conditions, and local adaptation practices, not just meteorological data or government policy statements.

What should be left behind is the idea that journalists stand outside the world as neutral arbiters who simply “find the truth.” That model has never fully held, and in the case of climate reporting it has actively distorted reality. Equally problematic is the assumption that every issue has two equally valid sides—what sociologist Thomas Gieryn (1983) helps us see as a constructed boundary around what counts as legitimate knowledge.

If objectivity has produced faux balance, what should journalists do instead? What does fairness and transparency look like in practice?

Rather than abandoning rigor, journalism needs to rethink what rigor looks like. Drawing on Michael Schudson’s (2011) idea of “reasonable subjectivity,” the goal should be fairness and transparency rather than an impossible neutrality.

In practice, that means clearly signaling how a story is reported, things like who counts as a credible source, what evidence is prioritized, and what values guide editorial decisions. It also means weighting claims according to evidence, not simply presenting opposing voices side by side.

David Weinberger (2011) argues that trust today comes from revealing the “sources and values” behind a story rather than pretending to a “view from nowhere.” In a climate story, that might look like explicitly stating that the overwhelming scientific consensus affirms anthropogenic climate change, while situating dissenting claims as politically or economically motivated rather than equally valid scientific positions. This is particularly important in global climate governance contexts such as COP negotiations, where fossil fuel lobbying groups have at times been given disproportionate visibility compared to small island states advocating for climate survival.

How should journalists distinguish between legitimate pluralism and manufactured controversy?

Journalists need to be trained to evaluate not just claims, but the power structures behind them. Legitimate pluralism involves real differences in interpretation, values, or policy solutions. Manufactured controversy, by contrast, is often strategically produced.

Climate denial is a textbook example. As Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway (2010) have shown, doubt around climate science is actively manufactured by industries with a stake in delaying action. Treating that as just another side of a debate misrepresents reality.

Similar dynamics have appeared globally, for instance in coordinated misinformation campaigns around coal expansion in Australia, or fossil fuel interests shaping climate narratives in parts of Latin America and Africa.

Journalists can also draw on Daniel Hallin's (1986) distinction between the sphere of legitimate controversy and the sphere of consensus. The existence of anthropogenic climate change belongs firmly in the latter; debate should focus on responses, not on whether the problem exists.

What newsroom habits most undermine strong climate reporting today?

This varies across media systems, but a few recurring patterns become visible when climate reporting is understood as part of a broader information infrastructure rather than a standalone journalistic topic.

One persistent issue is dependence on elite sourcing. In many newsrooms, especially in the U.S., journalistic routines continue to privilege institutional authority—government officials, corporate representatives, and credentialed experts. This pattern is also visible globally. For example, climate reporting in major European outlets often centers EU policymakers, while underrepresenting farmers in Southern Europe facing drought or communities in sub-Saharan Africa experiencing agricultural collapse.

Closely related to this is the continued force of what Gaye Tuchman (1972) famously described as the “strategic ritual” of objectivity. Even when journalists are aware of the limitations of strict neutrality, institutional pressures and professional norms still reward practices like “both-sides” framing or excessive balance.

A third dynamic is structural fragmentation of journalism itself. Climate change is still often treated as a discrete beat rather than a transversal condition shaping multiple domains of social life. For instance, flooding in Bangladesh, wildfires in Canada, and hurricanes in the Caribbean are often reported as isolated disasters rather than interconnected climate-system events.

Finally, editorial decision-making is increasingly shaped by platform logics and attention metrics. Here the work of José van Dijck (2018) and Nick Couldry (2012) is particularly relevant. This is visible globally in how climate misinformation spreads rapidly through WhatsApp networks in India and Brazil, or how TikTok climate content is optimized for virality rather than depth.

Taken together, these habits do not operate independently; they reinforce one another.

How does generational concern about climate shape young journalists?

Many students today enter journalism from a different epistemic starting point: the anthropogenic reality of climate change is not experienced as a contested claim but as a structural condition. This is especially true for journalists from regions already experiencing acute climate stress, such as sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Pacific Island nations, where climate disruption is part of everyday life rather than a distant policy issue.

This has consequences for journalistic orientation. Younger journalists are often less invested in the inherited epistemology of balance between competing claims, and more attentive to questions of the asymmetry of power, responsibility, and distributive injustice.

At the same time, this orientation develops under conditions of intensified informational fragmentation. As journalism becomes embedded in platform logics and attention economies, climate competes not only with other policy issues but with war, migration, and economic insecurity. For example, coverage of the 2022 Pakistan floods had to compete with global attention on the Ukraine war, illustrating how climate disasters are often deprioritized in international news cycles.

What does it mean to see journalism as part of the “making of publics”?

To think of journalism as part of the making of publics is to move away from the idea that publics already exist “out there” and journalism simply reports to them. Instead, publics are formed through communication itself, through the ways attention is organized, issues are defined, and visibility is distributed. This is an idea that dates back to some great scholars postwar social and political theory.

For example, Jürgen Habermas’s (1989) idea of the public sphere, underscores the fact that in contemporary societies, journalism helps create a space where shared discussion becomes possible, even if that space is never fully open or equal. Nancy Fraser (1990) more recently pushed this further by showing that there isn’t just one public, but multiple publics—some dominant, some marginalized—that form precisely because not everyone has equal access to being heard. Journalism plays a role in deciding which of these publics are amplified and which remain at the margins.

Benedict Anderson (2013) helps us see another layer. Journalism creates shared worlds of attention. It allows people who will never meet to still feel part of the same collective, because they are reading, seeing, and reacting to similar narratives. That sense of a “we” is not natural—it is produced. And as Hannah Arendt (1958) reminds us, publics are also spaces of appearance: places where people and issues become visible as politically meaningful. Today, though, that space is fragmented across platforms and infrastructures that decide what is seen and what disappears from view.

So in this sense, journalism is not just transmitting information to a public, it is actively involved in producing what the public is, who is included in it, and what counts as a shared problem in the first place. In the case of climate change, that means journalism is part of whether climate becomes something a society can actually recognize and act on collectively, or whether it remains scattered across competing frames and fragmented attention.

Globally, this fragmentation is evident in how climate publics form differently across regions, for example, youth climate movements in Europe (like Fridays for Future) develop through institutional media visibility, while climate activism in Latin America often circulates through community networks and alternative media systems.

What does justice-oriented climate reporting require?

Justice-oriented climate reporting requires shifting from describing unequal impacts to explaining the structures that produce them. As sociologist Robert D. Bullard (2000) demonstrates, climate change is not simply an environmental issue but a distributive one, in which patterns of vulnerability are structured by race, class, and geography rather than occurring randomly.

Practically, recognizing this means the need for two shifts. First, diversifying sources and newsrooms is not just a matter of representation, but

of epistemology. Second, it means situating local experience within wider infrastructures of extraction, policy, and historical responsibility. For example, reporting on oil extraction in the Niger Delta, lithium mining in Chile, or deforestation in Indonesia requires linking local environmental harm to global supply chains and energy transitions.

What framing should journalists question most aggressively?

Frames that individualize responsibility deserve particular scrutiny, because they subtly relocate climate change from the realm of structural power into the domain of personal morality. As Robert Entman (1993) argues, frames are not neutral packaging devices, they define what a problem is, who is responsible, and what kinds of solutions become imaginable. When climate change is primarily framed as a matter of consumer choice or lifestyle adjustment, the underlying systems that produce emissions are effectively rendered invisible.

This is not simply a communicative accident. Michael E. Mann (2021) has shown how the idea of the “carbon footprint” was actively popularized through fossil fuel industry strategies designed to redirect attention away from corporate and infrastructural responsibility and toward individual behavior. The effect is not just to shift blame, but to narrow the horizon of political imagination.

This does not mean individual action is irrelevant. I firmly believe that the ways we live our everyday lives—how we get around, what we eat, what we purchase, and so on—orients our relationship to one another and to nature so it is relevant to how we respond to the climate crisis. But when responsibility is consistently privatized, climate change becomes a moral psychology problem rather than a political and economic one. The result is that collective agency, or the ability to form publics capable of demanding structural change, is weakened, because the problem is constantly reframed at a scale where collective action appears secondary or even unnecessary.

This framing is especially visible in consumer-driven climate campaigns in North America and parts of Europe, where recycling or lifestyle changes are emphasized more than fossil fuel regulation or industrial policy.

Do we need better-trained journalists, or different institutions?

Better training is necessary, but it is not sufficient on its own. Journalism now operates within a broader media environment shaped by concentrated ownership, precarious labor conditions, and platform infrastructures.

So the question is not only how to train better journalists, but how to train journalists who can recognize the structural limits of the systems they are entering. Journalism education, in this sense, is not just professional preparation but a form of institutional literacy: an ability to understand how economic incentives, political pressures, and infrastructural logics shape what can be known and publicly said.

This becomes especially important in a global media environment where press freedom is not evenly distributed, but is instead continuously negotiated within different configurations of power. In some contexts, this involves direct or indirect state influence over news production and regulatory constraints on critical reporting; in others, such as the United States, it is increasingly shaped by commercial imperatives, platform dependency,

and polarized political attacks on journalistic legitimacy. In many European settings, public service media coexist with commercial logics and platform infrastructures, producing hybrid systems in which editorial independence is formally protected but still structurally constrained.

Across these differences, what matters is less a categorical distinction between “free” and “unfree” media systems than the varying ways in which constraint is organized and normalized. Training journalists to see these conditions is therefore also about enabling a more reflexive understanding of journalism itself, not as a neutral space outside power, but as a practice embedded within shifting regimes of visibility, accountability, and control.

To wrap up, rethinking climate journalism is not simply a matter of updating skills or refining professional norms, it requires a deeper shift in how journalism understands its own role in shaping knowledge, publics, and power. Moving beyond faux balance toward transparency, structural analysis, and justice-oriented reporting means recognizing that journalism is always already embedded in the worlds it describes. As Candis Callison (2024) argues, reporting is inseparable from the cultural and political contexts in which it circulates, and different communities interpret and engage with climate narratives in fundamentally different ways. Taking this seriously pushes journalism to expand whose knowledge counts, to situate facts within systems of meaning and inequality, and to see itself not as a neutral observer, but as an active participant in how societies come to understand and respond to the climate crisis.

Thanks so much for asking these great questions!

*Questions from Jayson Harsin , Camila Moreira Cesar,
and Sophie Dubec, 2026*

Pour citer cet article, to quote this article, para citar este artigo :

Jayson Harsin, Camila Moreira Cesar and Sophie Dubec, « Interview with Adrienne Russell. Journalism Education in a Time of Climate Crisis », *Sur le journalisme, About journalism, Sobre jornalismo* [En ligne, online], Vol 15, n°1 - 2026, 15 juin - june 15 - 15 de junho - 15 de junio.

URL : <https://doi.org/10.25200/SLJ.v15.n1.2026.704>

REFERENCES

- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- Anderson, C. W. *Rebuilding the News: Metropolitan Journalism in the Digital Age*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.
- Bullard, Robert D. *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*. 3rd ed. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000.
- Callison, Candis. *How Climate Change Comes to Matter: The Communal Life of Facts*. Duke University Press, 2014.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Couldry, Nick. *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012.
- Entman, Robert M. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm." *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51–58.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 56–80.
- Gieryn, Thomas F. "Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science." *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 6 (1983): 781–795.
- Hallin, Daniel C. *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989 [1962].
- Haraway, Donna. *Situated Knowledges The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*." *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575–599.
- Mann, Michael E. *The New Climate War: The Fight to Take Back Our Planet*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2021.
- Oreskes, Naomi, and Erik M. Conway. *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010.
- Schudson, Michael. *The Sociology of News*. 2nd ed. New York: W. W. Norton, 2011.
- Tuchman, Gaye. "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity." *American Journal of Sociology* 77, no. 4 (1972): 660–679.
- van Dijck, José, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal. *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Weinberger, David. *Too Big to Know: Rethinking Knowledge Now That the Facts Aren't the Facts, Experts Are Everywhere, and the Smartest Person in the Room Is the Room*. New York: Basic Books, 2011.

