

Editorial: Cybernetics and systems theories for the 21st century. Introducing the new aims and scope of *Kybernetes*

4071

For more than five decades, *Kybernetes* has provided a scholarly home for pioneering research in cybernetics and systems thinking. As the newly appointed co-editors-in-chief, we are honoured to contribute to the legacy of this journal and guide it into a new phase of development. In this editorial, we present our renewed vision for *Kybernetes*, clarify its epistemic and thematic orientation, and outline the operational adjustments that will accompany this evolution.

Our aspiration is to position *Kybernetes* as the pre-eminent international journal for the study of second-order cybernetics and systems-theoretical inquiry. Building on a strong institutional foundation and a vibrant international community, we aim to foster conceptual innovation, cross-disciplinary dialogue and self-reflective engagement with the manifold challenges of organised complexity. We write this editorial to encourage submissions that reflect these priorities, and to articulate the criteria and expectations that will guide our editorial decisions.

The evolving mission of *Kybernetes*

The evolving role of *Kybernetes* reflects significant shifts in the contemporary landscape of systems thinking and cybernetics. While the journal has long served as a platform for interdisciplinary engagements with systems, control and communication, its revised mission statement affirms a more focused commitment to second-order cybernetics, systems theories and reflexive methodologies.

In its current form, *Kybernetes* advances a vision of cybernetics as the study of how systems—whether psychic, social, organic or technological—observe, decide and interrelate. This entails a shift from viewing systems as objects of control to engaging them as sites of observation and participation. In line with [von Foerster's \(1984\)](#) ethical imperative “to act always so as to increase the total number of choices,” we are particularly interested in research that explores how choice, contingency and decision-making are structured in conditions of complexity.

The editorial team seeks to move beyond opportunistic treatments of popular themes such as climate change ([Roth et al., 2025a, b](#)), digital transformation ([Roth, 2019](#)) or global governance ([Clausen, 2022](#); [Roth, 2021](#); [Roth and Valentinov, 2023](#); [Žažar, 2022](#)). Instead, *Kybernetes* privileges submissions that offer conceptually rigorous, counter-intuitive, or boundary-reframing approaches to these and other issues. We believe that cybernetics and systems theory are at their most powerful not when they confirm prevailing narratives, but when they challenge them or explore emerging and alternative mainstreams that might turn into the mainstream of the future.

Conceptual priorities and theory-as-method

Kybernetes distinguishes itself by its explicit commitment to conceptual rigour and theoretical originality. In contrast to journals that treat theory as an auxiliary component of empirical research, *Kybernetes* welcomes contributions in which theory plays a central, generative role—both as an object of analysis and as a methodological resource.

We are particularly receptive to manuscripts that approach theory not merely as a lens through which data are interpreted, but as a method in its own right ([Roth et al., 2021](#); [Roth,](#)



2024). Theory-as-method entails a mode of inquiry in which distinctions, codes and paradoxes are systematically explored as structuring elements of both research practice and the phenomena under investigation.

Authors are encouraged to reflect on the implications of their own positionality and observational frameworks. Contributions that demonstrate systematic self-implication—recognising the role of the observer in constructing the observed (Maturana, 1978; Spencer Brown, 1979; von Foerster, 1988)—will be especially valued. Equally welcome are efforts to reframe the guiding distinctions (Roth *et al.*, 2025b) that shape our fields, such as system/environment, true/false, or human/machine, in ways that open new pathways for theoretical development.

Rather than privileging a particular school of systems thought, *Kybernetes* is open to a plurality of cybernetic and systems-approaches. In supporting such work, this journal seeks to provide a venue for research that is not only analytically precise but also conceptually adventurous—capable of articulating new distinctions, challenging orthodoxies and expanding the scope of systemic inquiry.

Contributions and article types

In keeping with its renewed mission, *Kybernetes* invites a broad spectrum of scholarly contributions that reflect the journal's commitment to theoretical innovation, systemic reflexivity and conceptual depth. While the primary focus remains on peer-reviewed research articles, the journal also accommodates alternative formats that support critical dialogue and disciplinary experimentation.

We welcome the following types of submissions.

- (1) *Theoretical and conceptual articles* that engage with foundational or emergent themes in cybernetics, systems theory and related epistemologies. These should foreground rigorous conceptual development and demonstrate relevance to broader scholarly or societal concerns.
- (2) *Discussion papers* that challenge existing paradigms or offer novel perspectives on established debates. These shorter contributions may be speculative, provocative or exploratory in tone, and are designed to stimulate intellectual engagement and reflexive discourse.
- (3) *Theory transfer and impact articles*, which demonstrate how systemic and cybernetic concepts are being applied in specific disciplinary, organisational or societal contexts. Submissions in this category should articulate how theoretical frameworks travel across domains, and what insights or complications emerge in the process.
- (4) *Counter-intuitive perspectives articles* that reverse conventional analytical priorities, destabilise disciplinary assumptions or offer alternative systemic interpretations of well-studied problems.

In all cases, submissions should clearly articulate their theoretical positioning, demonstrate conceptual originality, and reflect the journal's core interest in how systems observe, decide and differentiate themselves from their environments.

While we do not privilege empirical studies *per se*, we are open to empirical research that is guided by systemic reasoning and contributes to the development or testing of cybernetic and systems-theoretical ideas. Such work must demonstrate methodological coherence and engage meaningfully with the conceptual frameworks that underpin the journal's orientation.

Editorial and review processes

To support the journal's evolving scope and uphold the highest standards of scholarly integrity, we have aligned the editorial and review processes of *Kybernetes* with its renewed conceptual

mission. The revised editorial workflow has been designed to ensure that each submission receives rigorous, fair and intellectually engaged evaluation, with particular attention to conceptual clarity, systemic relevance and theoretical contribution.

All submitted manuscripts undergo an initial editorial screening. At this stage, the editors-in-chief assess whether the submission aligns with the journal's aims and scope and whether it meets baseline expectations in terms of clarity, structure and originality. Submissions that fall outside the conceptual remit of the journal or that do not demonstrate adequate levels of scholarly engagement will be returned with developmental feedback where appropriate.

Submissions deemed suitable for review are subject to a double-blind peer review process. Reviewers are selected for their expertise in second-order cybernetics, systems theory or the specific inter-/disciplinary domain addressed by the manuscript. Wherever possible, we aim to match manuscripts with reviewers who are sympathetic to the journal's epistemic commitments and who can engage constructively with the complexity of the work under consideration.

In evaluating submissions, reviewers are asked to attend not only to the internal coherence and academic rigour of the manuscript but also to its capacity to contribute to ongoing conversations in cybernetics and systems thinking, its originality of conceptual intervention, and its reflexive awareness of the implications of its own distinctions.

We are committed to supporting authors through the review process. Where manuscripts show promise but fall short in particular areas, we may invite revisions that clarify or strengthen the conceptual contribution. In such cases, reviewers and editors will provide guidance that is both precise and oriented toward further development.

In addition to standard peer-reviewed articles, *Kybernetes* publishes a limited number of invited contributions and special issues, often in collaboration with partner institutions or learned societies. All invited content is subject to editorial oversight and must conform to the same standards of theoretical relevance and systemic insight.

Expanding the editorial team

The revitalisation of *Kybernetes* is not only conceptual but also institutional. As part of our renewed editorial vision, we have significantly expanded and diversified our editorial team. The new appointments reflect our commitment to global dialogue, epistemic pluralism and transdisciplinary reach.

Associate editors

We are pleased to welcome a distinguished group of Associate Editors, each bringing unique expertise and regional perspectives to the journal. Professor Erik Aal (Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary) contributes deep experience in project management and organisational design, while Professor Philipp Altmann (Central University of Ecuador) and Professor Hugo Cadenas (University of Chile) offer valuable sociological perspectives on systems theory. The intersection of management, engineering and philosophy is represented by Professor Albrecht Fritzsche (IEDC Bled School of Management, Slovenia), whose work exemplifies the journal's commitment to interdisciplinary research.

Further strengthening our editorial foundations, we are joined by Dr Pedro Giardano (University of Buenos Aires, Argentina), a social scientist; Dr Dong-Hyu Kim (University of Glasgow, UK), who brings insight into strategic thinking and organisational theory; and Professor Bettina Maisch (Munich University of Applied Sciences, Germany), known for her scholarship on innovation and entrepreneurship. Additional global voices include Professor Juliana Mansur (Brazilian School of Public and Business Administration, Brazil), Professor Pastora Melgar Manzanilla (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) and Professor Takemitsu Morikawa (Keio University, Japan), whose systems-theoretical work in management, legal studies, health research and general sociology considerably broaden the board's scope.

We are also fortunate to be joined by Professor Ermanno C. Tortia (University of Trento, Italy), a specialist in economics and cooperative studies; Professor Kristof van Assche (University of Alberta, Canada), an authority on planning and governance systems; and Professor Krešimir Žažar (University of Zagreb, Croatia), a sociologist and systems theorist who also serves on the executive committee of the European Sociological Association.

Managing editors

Complementing this group are our newly appointed *Managing Editors*, who will play a vital role in coordinating workflows and supporting conceptual continuity across submissions. Dr Nico Buitendag (University of the Free State, South Africa) brings a synthesis of legal scholarship and systems theory. Dr Bryan Cheang (King's College London, UK), an Austrian economist, expands our engagement with economic systems. From the University of Cambridge, Dr Vincent Lien contributes expertise in special needs education and educational systems. Rounding out this team is Dr Richard Pretorius (Eindhoven University of Technology, The Netherlands), whose interdisciplinary reach spans engineering and management.

Theory transfer and impact

To ensure quality and resonance in our *Theory Transfer and Impact Article* section, we have also appointed two new editors with extensive applied experience: Philipp Belcredi (Co-Creating Professional Development, Austria), an independent systemic consultant working across the public and private sectors, and Lars Clausen (UCL University College, Denmark), a senior advisor and policy expert in education.

Honorary editors

We are particularly honoured to welcome two new Honorary Editors whose scholarly contributions have advanced social systems theory in important linguistic and regional contexts.

Professor Dirk Baecker (Zeppelin University, Germany) continues to inspire generations of Germanophone systems theorists with his rigorous yet imaginative readings of Niklas Luhmann.

Professor Artur Mkrtichyan (Yerevan State University, Armenia) has significantly advanced the development and dissemination of Luhmannian thought across the Russian- and Armenian-speaking scientific communities.

Editorial advisory board

The growth of our editorial structure would not be complete without also acknowledging the outstanding new members who have joined our Editorial Advisory Board. This group of internationally respected scholars brings intellectual depth and disciplinary breadth to *Kybernetes*, and we are honoured to be able to draw on their expertise as we chart new directions for the journal.

Professor Alejandro Agafonow (ESSCA School of Management, France) joins as a management researcher with a keen interest in organisational purpose and pluralist economics. From HEC Paris in Qatar, Professor Wolfgang Amann offers a distinguished background in management education and executive development. Professor Jolanta Bieliauskaitė (Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania) strengthens our legal-theoretical scope with her expertise in jurisprudence and legal systems analysis.

Another important addition is Professor Dariusz Jemielniak (Kozminski University, Poland), a leading scholar at the intersection of management and sociology, who is currently serving as Vice-President of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Professor Michal Kaczmarczyk

(University of Gdansk, Poland) also joins us with a background in political philosophy and the sociology of law, further expanding our transdisciplinary reach.

In the domain of future studies, Professor Jari Kaivo-oja (University of Turku, Finland Futures Research Centre) is one of Finland's leading experts on foresight and systemic scenario planning. Professor Franz Kasper Kroenig (Cologne University of Applied Sciences, Germany) contributes a sociological lens grounded in educational systems and organisational learning. From Denmark, Professor Sören Möller (University of Southern Denmark) brings statistical rigour and a biostatistical perspective that enhances the journal's methodological pluralism.

Professor Mark Pennington (King's College London, UK) is an eminent scholar whose work focuses on Austrian economics and public policy. Dr Julie Ricard's (McGill University, Canada) research is in administrative science and systemic approaches to policy implementation.

Professor Valery Solovyev (Kazan Federal University, Russia) adds unique competencies at the interface of mathematics, big data and digital humanities—a growing area of relevance for cybernetic and systems-theoretical inquiry. Also bridging technical and systemic domains, Professor Tilia Stingl de Vasconcelos Guedes (Vienna University of Applied Sciences for Management and Communication, Austria) specialises in business informatics and systemic consulting, offering expertise in how information infrastructures shape organisational realities.

Finally, Professor Steve Watson (University of Cambridge, UK) joins as a sociologist of education with a strong research profile in artificial intelligence and learning systems. His work at the intersection of social theory, pedagogy and digital transformation aligns closely with the journal's interest in second-order observation and recursive learning environments.

Together, these new Advisory Board members will provide strategic counsel, disciplinary perspective and intellectual guidance as *Kybernetes* continues to evolve as a platform for critical, systemic and forward-looking scholarship.

Institutional affiliations and community support

The renewed editorial direction of *Kybernetes* is grounded not only in the intellectual commitments of its contributors and editors but also in a broader community of institutions, networks and scholarly traditions that sustain systemic inquiry. As the journal deepens its focus on second-order cybernetics, systems theory and reflexive methodologies, we are equally committed to fostering a vibrant and inclusive ecosystem of support.

Our editorial team reflects a diversity of institutional homes, spanning universities, research centres and independent organisations across the continents. This global constellation allows us to remain attentive to the contextual specificities that shape systems thinking in different regions, while also maintaining a shared vocabulary for addressing complexity, contingency and self-reference in an interconnected world.

We continue to benefit from longstanding partnerships with academic societies and research collectives devoted to cybernetics, systems sciences, sociocybernetics, organisational theory and epistemology. These affiliations serve not only as sources of dialogue and peer review but also as sites of methodological experimentation and conceptual exchange. In addition to these established partnerships, *Kybernetes* is proud to be institutionally supported by the *Next Society Institute*, a systems theory start-up and research institute affiliated with *Kazimieras Simonavicius University* in Vilnius and devoted to the further development (e.g. Roth, 2019; [Valentinov and Roth, 2024](#)) as well as practical applications (e.g. [Sales et al., 2022](#); [Sales et al., 2023](#); [Sales et al., 2025](#)) of social systems theory in the tradition of [Luhmann \(1995\)](#).

In addition, *Kybernetes* benefits from its new affiliation with the *Luhmann Conference Community*, an independent network of scholars committed to advancing and pluralising social systems theory. The community's annual meetings and collaborative spirit provide

fertile ground for theoretical experimentation and reflexive dialogue, further enriching the journal's intellectual ecosystem.

In building this transdisciplinary infrastructure, *Kybernetes* actively supports early-career scholars, independent researchers and those working at the margins of established disciplinary fields. We see this as essential to our mission of amplifying diverse voices and cultivating new approaches to systemic problems. Where possible, we aim to connect authors with mentors, host dialogues across paradigms, and provide feedback that is both rigorous and generative.

The journal also recognises the importance of digital infrastructures in contemporary knowledge production. As part of our community strategy, we are developing open-access pathways, exploring hybrid publication formats, and encouraging reflective engagement with the technologies and platforms that increasingly mediate scholarly communication.

In short, *Kybernetes* is not merely a publication outlet, but a platform for community formation and conceptual co-production. We invite readers, authors, and collaborators to join us in advancing a cybernetic and systems-theoretical culture that is both theoretically ambitious and institutionally generative.

Steffen Roth and Augusto Sales

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