

May 9, 2024

Dear Colleagues,

As former members of the editorial board of *Theory and Society*, we wish to announce that we are launching a new journal, *Theory and Social Inquiry*, to continue the mission of Alvin Gouldner's *Theory and Society*.

The immediate catalyst for the constitution of this new journal is an attack on the principle of intellectual autonomy. In 2023 Springer Nature, the publisher of *Theory and Society*, unilaterally decided to change the intellectual direction of the journal. Beyond simply changing editorial personnel for operational reasons, Springer decided that the journal needed to be "less political" and "more scientific," and found two executive editors willing to fulfill that mandate.¹

Springer asked us, the members of the existing editorial board, to resign. This demand for our resignation came after we had asked to provide input into the process of selecting a new executive editor, only to have Springer refuse our request.

For us, the issue is simple. Because academic careers depend on scholarly publications, allowing for-profit publishers to determine the intellectual trajectory of a journal means allowing them to dictate the intellectual trajectory of the discipline. Springer decided the direction of the journal *without any consultation with the community that produces the journal*, neither the senior editors nor the corresponding editors.

In behaving in this way, Springer has set a precedent that for-profit publishers can unilaterally determine the intellectual direction of scholarly journals.

We propose a different model. Our new journal, *Theory and Social Inquiry*, will be published by the Open Library of Humanities (OLH). OLH is a non-profit organization whose mission is to assist journals in breaking free of commercial publishers if their intellectual autonomy comes under attack. Our experience at *Theory and Society* is far from unique, and other editorial teams have also been effectively "fired" when they refused to cede to publishers' demands. Often these demands involve pressure to publish more (typically shorter) articles so that the press can make higher profits from open access fees ("article processing charges"). Publishers may also interfere in the content of a journal, as in Springer's decision to "change the direction" of *Theory and Society* by opting for a more "scientific" and less "political" type of scholarship.

¹ <https://retractionwatch.com/2024/01/22/sociology-journals-entire-editorial-board-resigns-after-springer-nature-appointed-new-leadership/>

In the broader context of growing attacks on sociology and encroaching censorship, we feel it is critically important to take a strong stand by moving our journal to a not-for-profit publisher.

In addition to re-constituting as a non-profit, our new journal will also be open-access. OLH's model of open access ("Diamond Open Access") relies on collective funding from an international network of university and public libraries and does *not* charge article processing fees to authors. This is particularly important for researchers situated in universities with fewer resources, including in low-income countries. Open access also allows readers without university affiliations to access scholarly work, expanding the reach of the scholarship published in our pages to the broader public.

Most importantly for us: we will own the journal. An association of sociologists will be the owners of *Theory and Social Inquiry*, which means that what happened with Springer can never happen again. We hope other journals will follow our lead in exploring models that similarly protect their intellectual autonomy.

Our Vision

Alvin Gouldner founded *Theory and Society* explicitly to advance scholarship devoted to the "critique and renewal" of established traditions of social theory and empirical research, with the aim of attaining a better comparative-historical understanding of the social world and coming to practical terms with its hardened structures and future possibilities. "Critique" and "renewal" also encapsulate the mission of the new journal, although we have given these concepts new meanings, alongside their original connotations.

What "critique" means to us, first and foremost, is a refusal of efforts to draw a bright line between scientific practice and engagement in the world. Alvin Gouldner's *Theory and Society* was dedicated to the view that a critical analysis of existing social structures and social processes is not opposed to, but in fact an important source of, scientific discovery. The modal article asked "big" questions, theorized boldly, and drew on rigorous empirical research to arrive at knowledge that often challenged conventional wisdom. Our new journal will follow these principles, publishing articles that engage the world from the best traditions in social scientific and humanistic research, including ethnography, comparative and historical sociology, and quantitative analyses. Whatever the method, *Theory and Social Inquiry* will publish articles that offer a high level of theoretical argumentation, drawing from an eclectic and interdisciplinary range of sources, as was also the signature of the original *Theory and Society*.

"Critique" is inseparably tied to "renewal," and here again we draw on our own history while seeking to recast it for a new generation. Alvin Gouldner's *Theory and Society* was reflexive from the very start. We believe that some of the most exciting conversations in the discipline today involve serious reflection about the scholar's role in the world, under names such as

public sociology, problem-solving sociology, engaged research, and the like. These conversations offer an opportunity for renewal of our practices as of the world we study. We welcome theoretical meditations on these issues as well as practical empirical applications that result from such thinking.

“Critique” and “renewal” also apply to ourselves. We are very aware that aspects of the operational procedures of the former *Theory and Society* were the source of justified criticisms, particularly concerning long turn-around times for initial reviews. Renewal on this issue means a new model that places the review process directly in the hands of the editors, who will now handle all operational aspects of shepherding manuscripts through. Our pledge to the discipline is a new journal that is not simply a continuation of the old journal, but a better one.

The journal will be open for submissions by July. We plan to celebrate the launch of the journal at the ASA annual meeting and produce its first issue this year.

2024 would have been the 50th anniversary of Alvin Gouldner’s *Theory and Society*. We look forward to reconstituting this exciting intellectual community, now entering its sixth decade, and we invite you to join us at ASA to celebrate the official launch of *Theory and Social Inquiry*.

Sincerely,

Nitsan Chorev, Brown University

Gil Eyal, Columbia University

Neil Gross, Colby College

Greta Krippner, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Charles Camic, Northwestern University

Mara Loveman, University of California, Berkeley

Chandra Mukerji, University of California, San Diego

Monica Prasad, Johns Hopkins University

David Swartz, Boston University

Iván Szelenyi, Yale University (emeritus)