

# Critical Psychology in an Age of Uncertainty

Michael Arfken

Since the beginning of this year, a new virus has claimed the lives of well over half a million people. Spawned in part by the increasing human encroachment on the non-human world and fueled by egregious forms of inequality, this pandemic shows few signs of abating in the foreseeable future. With no vaccine in site, public health care experts have repeatedly called for a temporary cooling down of the engines of capitalism in the hope that physical distancing can significantly reduce the transmission of the virus. And we have witnessed time and again such advice being diluted or ignored all together in support of an economic system that is radically incapable of meeting this monumental challenge.

At the same time and in the wake of state violence and oppression, people from nearly every walk of life are filing the streets in an unparalleled demand for racial justice. In the United States in particular, protesters have increasingly faced a military-state apparatus deploying tactics with undeniable similarities to historically insidious forms of authoritarianism. Labeling this fascism seems less and less hyperbolic by the day.

If psychology as a discipline is to be judged by the role it has played in past crises, there is little doubt for those of us working within the critical psychological tradition<sup>1</sup> that these uncertain times call for something far beyond what orthodox psychological research and practice is capable of providing. It is our hope that *Awry: Journal of Critical Psychology* can come to play an important role in highlighting critical psychological scholarship that is vital for engaging with the full spectrum of injustices and inequalities in this age of uncertainty.

The origin of *Awry* can be traced to a conversation I had with Tod Sloan under a tree in San Francisco at the 2018 American Psychological Association (APA) Annual Convention. A number of us had organized a session on critical psychology and Tod was eager to discuss the future of critical psychology and the importance of building an infrastructure to support this sort of work. As we sat under that tree, colleagues would join us for a bit to share their views and leave to catch the next session. Tod and I spent much of the afternoon debating and strategizing with our colleagues on the best way to sustain interest and direct resources to topics that challenge a range of psychological orthodoxies. During this time, Tod confided in me that he had been diagnosed with cancer and while he was unsure of his future, he wanted to use whatever time remaining to inspire a new generation of critical scholars to carry on this important work.

At that time, we were also preparing for another gathering to take place at the end of the year. In November,

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<sup>1</sup>While there are a number of excellent introductions to critical psychology, Gough (2017), Parker (2015), and Teo (2014, 2015) are particularly helpful as they provide recent comprehensive overviews of this form of inquiry

a handful of international scholars, activists, and students gathered at CUNY Graduate Center for the *Pathologies of Capitalism* conference. Over two intense days we discussed and debated issues that remain central to grasping a range of institutional structures that have come to dominate modern society. This was to be Tod's last academic gathering. His cancer had returned leaving Tod weak and uncomfortable by the end of the conference. With great difficulty, he made it back to his home in Oregon and passed away the next month. Our planned panel at the International Society of Theoretical Psychology (ISTP) in Copenhagen the following year was turned into a celebration of Tod's life and an opportunity for people from around the world to gather and discuss how much he had meant to all of us.

One of the ideas that Tod and I had floated was the establishment of a journal dedicated to critical psychology. Based on discussions with our colleagues at the conference in New York, it was clear that the traditional publication model too often made it difficult for colleagues and students from institutions with modest journal subscription budgets to access peer-reviewed scholarly articles. Moreover, for those unaffiliated with an institution of higher education, it was often extremely difficult to access scholarship in this area.

In addition, we were concerned that the traditional publication model appeared less as an appropriate forum for challenging entrenched ideas and more as a potent reflection of the institutional structures we wished to interrogate. As such, the open-access model of academic publication appeared to be the ideal form to match our critical content.

The articles and review in the inaugural issue of *Awry* engage with a host of ideas and practices that are too often relegated to the margins of psychological research and practice. From interrogating androcentrism, sexism, and neoliberalism to exploring intersubjective recognition and attitudes towards socialism, the selections in this issue make important contribution to a growing body of critical psychological scholarship that is absolutely vital in these uncertain times. And I have no doubt that Tod would be proud to see the exciting directions taken by these emerging and established scholars.

## references

- Gough, B. (ed.) (2017) *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Social Psychology*. London, UK: Palgrave.
- Parker, I. (ed.) (2015) *Handbook of Critical Psychology*. London, UK: Routledge.
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