



Awry²: Making Space for Experimenting with Form

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Could experimenting with form help us to counter – even crack – coloniality? We are hopeful. For us, experimenting with form shimmers with possibilities for (a) decolonising Psychology. Awry² (“Awry-squared”) is a section dedicated to experimenting with form within Critical Psychology and related fields. Aka, where Awry goes awry. In this Introduction, we summarise some shapeshifting possibilities for knowledge, knowing, knowers when experimenting with form. And we overview how, through Awry², we are experimenting with making a space for these possibilities to both breathe and be put to the test.

KEYWORDS

psychology, decolonising, experimenting, form

1 | INTRODUCTION

In August 2020, I (Rachel) was reading Awry’s inaugural issue when their explicit invitation for pieces that experiment with form caught my eye. Having had performative work rejected by Critical Psychology as “not Psychology”, “not scholarly”, “not English”, “not a good fit”, I felt a familiar flicker of joy and caution. I emailed the editor to double-check that I should submit an experimental piece I was working on toward decolonising Psychology. He said yes. Before I knew it, my fingers were asking if Awry might then be open to having a recurring section dedicated to making a welcoming space for these kinds of pieces, given their unique needs and desires. He said yes, although to first experiment also with making this kind of space. Knowing that Ali and Teah were critically-oriented psychologists who also experimented with form as part of their decolonising commitments, I asked if they might be interested in collaborating on both this experimental issue and the ones that will (hopefully) follow. Through the making of our own painted (Teah), poetic (Ali) and performative (me) pieces with shared reflecting, musing,

feeling, questioning, practicing, editing, poetry, pounamu and babysitting in-between, Awry² began to 'show itself'¹ ...

2 | HE AHA TE KAUPAPA: WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

If capitalism depends on the death of the cosmos (Federici, 2014). And coloniality depends on the death of the human (Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Wynter, 2003). And Enlightenment depends on the death of wonder (Daston & Park, 1998), mystery (Mika, 2020), darkness (Lorde, 1984). And decolonisation requires the miraculous return of these five Marvellous things (Césaire, 1955, as cited in Kelley, 1999). And this happens in the cracks, in the spaces in-between (Anzaldúa, 1987), the spaces that shimmer (Sandoval, 2000). And these cracks are typically sealed by a fearful Psychology that seeks to Know to control (Liebert, 2019). Including through academic forms that act as legitimacy devices to systematically grant or deny our participation with the cosmos. That demand con-formity with the colonial episteme, with the colonial order of extraction, exploitation, enslavement. While experimenting demands that we be attentive and responsive to the effects of what we do (Stengers, 2012). To hear and care how the cosmos speaks back. Then could experimenting with form help us to counter – even crack – coloniality?

We are hopeful. For us, experimenting with form shimmers with possibilities for (a) decolonising Psychology. Our individual pieces will show you more about where, how and why we sense these possibilities. We thought we should summarise them here yet are wary of casting a think-net on form, allowing it to be dragged into institutions for display, lifeless. For us, the decolonising potential of experimenting with form comes ultimately in its enactment of shapeshifting. And shapeshifting is an act that welcomes contradiction and surprise, that respects the elusiveness and liveliness of the cosmos, that experiments rather than solves. Our 'summary', then, goes something like this:

If knowledge is reflected in our forms. If our forms are mirrors that tell us back what we see. Mapping the shape, the landscape of our theories. Reterritorialising (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972). And if, while acknowledging this in its departure from positivism, the social constructionist roots of Critical Psychology remain human-centric. And centring the human is violently limiting. For one, because within coloniality human is Man (Wynter, 2003). For two, because Man comes with a rational logic of this or that, with binary-thinking (Wynter, 2003). Exhausting possibility (Fanon, 1952/2008). Stealing possibility (Carlson, 2021). Then to the extent that we stretch, squeeze, break, play with, disrupt form, could we decolonize knowledge (Quijano, 2000), welcoming (back) other(ed) ideas and agencies?

Or:

If knowing – how we observe, collect/analyse, theorise – enacts our relationship with the cosmos. And this enactment cuts borders around our senses, objects, subjects, happenings (Barad, 2014). And is often expected to follow a plan, a killjoy – prescribing this step, then the next, then the next. Founded on an extractive agenda with an entitled notion of the empirical. And on the rational scrutiny of recognizable, cognizable pieces of the cosmos. On a taxonomic pretentiousness. Ignoring poetics of relations (Glissant, 1997). Making enclosures. Capturing. Ordering. Hierarchizing. In short, if these methods destroy the very worlds they seek to occupy (Fanon, 1952/2008). Then to the extent that we stretch, squeeze, break, play with, disrupt form, could we decolonise relations of power (Quijano, 2000), welcoming (back) other(ed) reverberations of reciprocity?

Or:

¹Tawatihitihī o te Rāwhitiroa Carlson-Kingi (personal communication, 5th April, 2021).

If knowers are premised on a Cartesian individual, on mind over matter. And this means denigrating and denying our own feelings, flesh, spirit, ancestors, earth mothers (Trinh, 1989; Wynter, 2003). And is therefore core to not just human but more-than-human genocide. Including killing our dreams (Wa Thiong'o, 1992; Warrior, 1995). And this epistemological, ontological, cosmological violence emerges at least in part from a fear of the other (within) (Césaire, 1955). Training us to think while sitting in a chair and to write pieces that get people to think while sitting in a chair. Making discipline. Making Man (Wynter, 2003). Disembodied heads (Liebert, 2021), beheaded bodies (Lara, 2021). Then to the extent that we stretch, squeeze, break, play with, disrupt form, could we decolonise being (Quijano, 2000), us, welcoming (back) other(ed) modes of being human?

In sum, we wonder if experimenting with form could help us to counter – even crack – colonial theories, methods, bodies. Far from being a passive vehicle, these interwoven possibilities welcome form as an active collaborator for our decolonising commitments – experimenting with form keeps us nimble too.

To make a space for this experimentation, we take inspiration from our intellectual ancestors and (becoming) elders who draw attention to form² – including within Critical Psychology³ and indeed Awry (see Parker, 2020). And we take seriously our role as children in this field. In Te Ao Māori there is a proverb: *Tā te tamariki tāna mahi wāwāhi tahā! It is the job of children to smash the calabash!* The calabash is a gourd that early Polynesian settlers brought to Aotearoa New Zealand from South America. After eating the fruit inside, it was dried and used as container for food or water or music, both holding and shaping its contents. For us, its proverb brings the demi-god Māui-Tikitiki-a-Taranga – the youngest sibling in his whānau, the greatest calabash-smasher of them all, a shape-smasher, a shapeshifter, letting in fresh air. And it brings Hine-pu-te-hue, moving through and as the gourd as music, sound, vibrations – connecting across times, evoking sacred winds, evoking calm, reminding us to breathe, to inhale, exhale and repeat.

We call on Māui and Hine-pu-te-hue as we seek to make a space for the above and other shapeshifting possibilities of form to breathe and to be put to the test. For in a state of breathlessness, of coloniality (Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Gumbs, 2020), where calls and tactics to 'decolonise' are being branded and disciplined (again; see Tuck Yang, 2012), having an ongoing place to practice hopeful and accountable experimentation feels more needed than ever.

3 | HE AHA TE TIKANGA: HOW ARE WE DOING THIS?

Awry² ("Awry-squared") is where Awry goes awry. It is Awry to the power of Awry, where Awry encounters the power of encountering itself, the power of reflexivity. It is a section dedicated to experimenting with form within Critical Psychology⁴ and related fields. As described above, we see this as a decolonising act. Placing ourselves inside a Critical Psychology journal is also a decolonial gesture, rejecting oppositional logic for the possibility of possibility within. However, we also smell the irony that this decision itself rests on a binary (between oppositional logic and the possibility of possibility within...). The result is an example of the spirals that drive our accountability, keeping us experimenting too. Awry² is fundamentally energised by not 'of course' positivism, nor 'even' social constructionism, but a relational, shapeshifting cosmogony. In turn, Awry² itself is an experiment, unfurling in relation to its encounters along the way. Below is how we are currently approaching our process.

²E.g., Gloria Anzaldúa, Karen Barad, Suzanne Césaire, Patricia Clough, Frantz Fanon, Trinh Minh-ha, Audre Lorde, Hirini Moko Mead, Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o

³E.g., Molly Andrews, Sunil Bhatia, Michael Billig, Kerry Chamberlain, Michelle Fine, Ken Gergen, Mary Gergen, Linda Nikora, Corinne Squire

⁴We use 'Critical Psychology' as an umbrella term for all non-positivist psychologies with explicit commitments to social justice (and often a soft spot for more qualitative methods)

3.1 | On Editing & Curation

Our pieces will show you more about who we each are and what brings us each to this work. However, collectively we see ourselves less as editors and more as curators – committed to making space and time to warmly welcome and respectfully host submissions, nourishing their liveliness within what might otherwise be an unwelcoming, disrespecting, exterminating environment: Academia, Psychology and, yes, even Critical Psychology. Providing shelter, we will seek to escape binaries, be attentive and responsive and connect to the cosmos, being (with) more-than-humans – whether elemental, spiritual or otherwise. We aim for a process that generates – rather than drains – energy.

3.2 | On Submissions & Concretes

Awry² is for pieces that experiment with form as a means to critically and creatively engage with Psychology or psychological matters. We welcome submissions from any discipline as well as transdisciplinary collaborations, particularly with artists (although this is not required). We seek pieces that share our decolonising commitments and offer a theoretical, methodological or affective contribution to Critical Psychology, shifting the shape of what this field is or could be. However, we know from experience that it can be heart-breaking to submit a piece that experiments with form. We are therefore committed also to working closely with submitters to hear what kind of space, time and review might best suit their piece.

As well as the standard Abstract to describe the political, theoretical, methodological or affective contributions of pieces, we are also experimenting with a new device: the Concrete. The Concrete is the same size and style as the Abstract, but instead of the beginning it comes at the end, and instead of describing the content it reflects on the *form*. Or, in other words, while the Abstract offers the 'What', the Concrete offers the 'How'. It is a device for accounting for the piece's experimentation.

For now, we are requiring all pieces to have:

- both an **Abstract**
- and **Concrete**
- as well as a **Title**
- and a list of **Keywords**.

If not otherwise specified, it will also be assumed that the formatting is to follow Awry's default style, including with regard to referencing and footnotes. If your piece requires changes in this style that are beyond the scope of the template currently used to typeset articles, we will simply hyperlink to your piece as a separate file. In addition we are committed to disability justice, so will work with submitters to make sure pieces are as accessible to as wide a range of sensory and bodily capacities as possible.

If you are interested in submitting something, please just email us and we can take it from there! We will be excited to hear from you.

3.3 | On Peer-Review & Dialogue

We are determined for pieces within Awry² to be accepted as legitimate scholarship. As such we are committed to peer-review. However, we know from experience that it can be complex to know how to approach peer-review with a piece that experiments with form. We are therefore also experimenting with form in our peer-review process – both how it is done and how it is incorporated.

We aim for a peer-review process that is less about acceptance or rejection and more about bringing pieces into a whānau with shared commitments and as such to offer responses for strengthening submissions, helping them and us to be effective and accountable. We see this as happening through dialogue between us, the submitter(s), the reviewers and the piece itself:

- Could this piece interrupt the coloniality of – or contribute to the Indigenising or Africanising of – Psychology?
- Could this piece shift the shape of our knowledge of psychological matters?
- Could this piece shift the shape of our ways of knowing psychological matters?
- Could this piece shift the shape of us – physically, politically, spiritually, emotionally, energetically? What does this piece do to/for/with Psychology? You?
- Does the form reflect and/or refract the political, theoretical, methodological or affective content in ways that are generative?

While we offer these guiding questions, the exact shape of this dialogue will itself emerge through dialogue between us, the submitter(s), the reviewers and the piece itself. Our vision is for idiosyncratic, peculiar peer-review processes to emerge and be documented alongside the publication of the final pieces.

Each piece will be reviewed by two peers, at least one of whom is a Critical Psychologist, at least one of whom is not and at least one of whom has a creative practice. We are always keen to grow our reviewer whānau – if you are interested in joining us, please be in touch!

4 | PAINTING, POETRY & PERFORMANCE

Let us finish this editorial note with a brief mention of our contributions to *Awry*². I (Teah) paint my soul among the trees and flowing water. I embrace wairua as a core creator to heal me – exploring the fundamental nature of the reality I live in, and the unseen. I (Ali) reflect on the reasons behind the steady forms and the anti-shape-shifting rhythms that psychology encourages for its academic production. While doing that I remembered a different rhythm: Yaocuicatl. War singing. From which I take metrics and rhythms to write, in other writing, a manifesto to mess with forms. And I (Rachel) engage my White sick body to call for decolonising Psychology to engage White bodies-cum-Psychology as sick with a re/fusal of feeling and imagination, asking in turn if embodied, inspired forms may offer to revive the *psykhe* – breath – of our praxis.

We had the honour of having our pieces peer-reviewed by Michelle Fine, Tim McCreanor, Wen Liu, Carl Mika, Akemi Nishida and Amit Rai. We sent each of our pieces out for two reviews – it was not 'blind' and we included a draft of our Tikanga section above. All initially replied in written form – some reflexive, some poetic, some playful, some prose, some connecting, some questioning, some yearning, some deadly serious. All affected all of our pieces, including this Introduction. Tim's, Carl's and Amit's have also been published alongside their respective reviewees. We are hugely grateful for everyone's camaraderie and guidance.

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