

## Editorial

# A spectre is haunting Innsbruck. Documentation of the first International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology

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But the root of history is the working, creating human being who reshapes and overhauls the given facts. Once he has grasped himself and established what is his, without expropriation and alienation, in real democracy, there arises in the world something which shines into the childhood of all and in which no one has yet been: homeland.

Ernst Bloch (1954 / 1986, pp. 1375-1376)<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this special issue is twofold: First and foremost, it documents the first *International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology*, which was held from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 2022 at the University of Innsbruck. As such, it features a conference report describing the event in some detail, distinguished contributions by the keynote speakers, and a vibrant bricolage of the position statements of the participants of the panel discussion convened as part of the closing session. The second and closely related purpose is to honor the person who has during his whole career worked tireless, determined, and courageously to eventually make such an event possible here in Innsbruck. Although his scientific and political activities are by no means ceasing but, in the contrary, vigorously ongoing, Wolfgang G. Weber has officially retired from his Professorship in Applied Psychology at the University of Innsbruck in September 2022. As the members of the Applied Psychology Unit I that he has built up and chaired over a period of more than two decades, we want to use this opportunity to express

our gratitude to Wolfgang and our admiration for him as a person and for his work, which has always been guided by strong radical humanist ethical values and principles, scientific thoroughness and attention to detail, as well as personal integrity, respect, and caring for others. In this context, reviewing some personal information and showcasing selected milestones of his academic biography and research legacy seemed called for and has been attempted in the addendum of this special issue.

Of course, the overview provided there is just a fragmentary and superficial account of Wolfgang's scientific and political activities and much more would deserve to be mentioned. However, even in light of the limited information proved, it should already become clear that the „*spectre*“ in the title of this special issue, borrowed from the famous first sentence in Marx and Engels's historical manifesto, refers to the spirit of social critique and radical humanism that Wolfgang has helped to instill here at the University of Innsbruck. Moreover, the notorious „*spectre*“ also alludes to the collective consciousness and contributions of all who have heeded our call to come to this conference – as well as to all who sympathize with our cause for a more equal, more just, more compassionate and caring, more socially inclusive and ecologically sustainable world. A particularly fitting metaphor, the „*spectre*“ of critical scholarship currently appears to be heavily haunting mainstream work and organizational psychology. This is vividly demonstrated by the „triggered“, angry and defensive knee-jerk reactions, displayed by some of its proponents in response to any insinuation that the field could, in the slightest

<sup>1</sup> Bloch, E. (1986). *The principle of hope, volume III* (N. Plaiice, S. Plaiice & P. Knight, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Original work published 1954)

degree, be influenced by neoliberal ideology and managerialist performativity. Still today, such zealous defendants of the status quo and advocates of allegedly value-neutral science try to weaponize the „branding reproach of communism“ to denounce any conception of fundamentally *Critical* scholarship that transcends their technocratic notions of „critical“ as a form of positivistic scientific rigor. Such polemic skirmishes notwithstanding, the „*spectre*“ of Critical and Radical Work and Organizational Psychology, as we understand it, albeit having strong affinities with undogmatic (neo-)Marxism, has no leanings towards or tolerance, whatsoever, for authoritarian forms of (so-called) Communism and associated totalitarian political regimes (e.g., from Soviet Russia to contemporary China). Rather, it is firmly rooted in humanist ideals of equality, community, and solidarity, as inherent in the genuine (and rarely realized) historical alternatives of Democratic Socialism and Anarcho-syndicalism. Clarifying and emphasizing this distinction between democratic and authoritarian forms of Socialism seems particularly mandated in the context of a „*Zeitgeist*“ that seeks to obscure and collapse these political antipodes in order to reinforce the ideological hegemony of neoliberal capitalism (i.e., cementing the counterfactual dogma that „there is no alternative“). Notably, highlighting the theoretical and practical distinction between democratic and authoritarian Socialism is also an especially important matter of concern to Wolfgang, who is known to passionately identify with the former and vocally speak out against the later – along with radicalized neoliberal capitalism and all other types of de-humanizing and oppressive economic and political systems.

The above digression with regard to the „*spectre of social critique*“ brings us back to the conference. Although it is not possible to fully capture all of the important and substantial presentations, engaging workshops, and insightful discussions in this special issue, we are very thankful and appreciative to all conference participants for all their contributions, which are documented in the abstract proceedings. In this special issue, we will next present the conference vision by the organizing team, which is based on a revised version of the call for participation. After that, a conference report will give an overview of the program and activities during the two and a half days of the event. The subsequent article will be based on the opening speech by Wolfgang G. Weber (Some lineages

and resources of Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology), followed in sequential order by the four keynote speeches by Rainer Funk (Productivity in face of a „pathology of normalcy“, Erich Fromm’s contribution to Critical Psychology), Thomas Theo (Subjectivity and work: Critical-theoretical reflections), Ruth Yeoman (Meaningfulness and organising for sustainable futures), and Martin Parker (Hard lessons: (Critical) Management Studies and (Critical) Work and Organizational Psychology). The final main contribution is a bricolage of position statements of the participants of the panel discussion (Laura F. Röllmann, Johanna L. Degen, Edina Dóci, P. Matthijs Bal, Severin Hornung, Gazi Islam, Thomas Kühn, and Zoe Sanderson). Our special thanks go to all these colleagues and friends who have graciously devoted their time and knowledge to make this special issue the inspiring documentation of eminent critical scholarship and engaged scholarly activism that it is. We hope that it gives the reader a helpful impression of the rich pluralistic theoretical basis and epistemological principles, uncompromising moral values, diverse applications, and multitude of voices characterizing Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology.

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