Cognitive Dispossession: Ecofeminism, Entheogens and Neuroqueering Drug Policy

This article illuminates the central importance of feminist theory in drug policy analysis and in the resurging psychedelic community. Specifically, I will be showing the revelations provided by intersecting ecofeminism (and by extension, feminist disability studies) and psychedelic philosophy, using it to analyse drug policy and hegemonic systems of substance taxonomy. The inclusion of feminist insight is pivotal as it highlights certain key insights and exposes systemic inequalities. It allows for a more open and reflective debate on the content, effectiveness, and direction of drug policies and related histories. What is revealed is that racist and androcentric assumptions are embedded in drug policy and the moral codes which made them are influenced by colonial ideational patterns. Certain ideological undercurrents, specifically canonical history, have bled into contemporary drug policy, casting entheogens and the mental landscapes they provide access to as ‘uncivilised’ and evil. Accumulatively, this results in the current context whereby British drug policy consistently reflects these imperialist views, continues to devalue indigenous knowledge, and disturbs cognitive liberty - a right to explore our own consciousness. Therefore, current drug policy, in effect, represents a severe form of epistemic violence.
Niamh Eastwood, Executive Director, Release

In 2013 Release published 'The Numbers in Black and White: Ethnic Disparities in the Policing and Prosecution of Drug Offences in England and Wales' which demonstrated that the drug laws were unduly focused on black and minority communities. In 2017 we will be updating this research to see what has happened in terms of drug policing. This presentation will discuss some of the initial findings, this is particularly important in light of significant reforms to stop and search powers in recent years. Furthermore, consideration will be given to the notion of drug policing as a form of social control and that such state actions are more aligned with the policing of poverty, increasing the harms for those who live in areas of deprivation.
Danny Kushlick, Founder, Transform Drug Policy Foundation

It's all too easy to describe the global drug war as a failure because of its catastrophic impact on citizens and, in particular, the poor and marginalised. But this view fails to recognise the benefits of the war that accrue to some of the most powerful global actors. Viewing the drug war through the lenses of citizens, state, capital, government and civil society, my presentation will explore why the drug war has maintained such high levels of support, including support from citizens. I will also suggest some reasons why the war is coming to an end, together with some key pressure points to lever a more rapid transition to peace.
Dr Oscar Guardiola-Rivera

The Apotheosis of War in Colombia

This paper will be exploring a mix between memoir, ethnography and re-collection around the meaning of the war in Colombia, with a focus on the link between the impact that the encounter and "invention" of Amerindians by 16th century chroniclers had on the west's self-image and more recent attitudes concerning healing, limpieza and drugs.
Necropolitical Wars and the Spatial Dimensions of Law

Scholarly explanations of drug cartel violence tend to exclude examples of sexual and physical violence against women, dismissing these as problems confined to the private sphere (Sullivan, Bunker). However, New Wars literature considers women’s bodies to be the target of competing political groups who use them as a means of revenge or as “living parchment” for the exchange of deadly and brutal messages (Kaldor, Segato). This paper contends that while the first explanation, which excludes a focus on women, is androcentric, the second fails to grasp the gender continuities of criminal, and specifically drug-related, violence.

This paper develops the idea of necropolitical war as a type of conflict that simultaneously explains criminal and sexual violence as part of a continuum of violence for the securing of criminal markets and the commodification of women’s bodies. Using Mexico as a case study, it offers a typology of necropolitical wars: the war for the necropolitical governmentalization of the State and the war for the dispossession of women’s bodies. While these wars have different aims —co-opting and reconfiguring the state, on the one hand; and dispossessing women of their bodies for commodification, on the other— they share a common feature: a dysfunctional, permanently corrupt and deliberately deadly legal-spatial site that secures the impunity of their power technologies: massacre, feminicide and forced disappearance. These technologies give agents of war the control of drug markets but also of sex trafficking and slavery, while subordinating women to the reproduction of the economy as a whole.

Building on Achille Mbembe’s and Sayak Valencia’s necropolitical framework, Judith Butler’s definition of dispossession, and David Delaney’s idea of the nomosphere, this paper contends that, by analyzing drug and sexual violence through the lens of necropolitical wars, violence against women becomes clearly visible. Furthermore, the necropolitical wars framework reveals how the permanently disrupted legal-spatial functioning of the law administrates death for men and women differently and obscures the fact that gender violence is the continuance of drug related violence.
The biopolitical economy of cannabis legalization in Washington State (a worm’s eye view)

Radical experiments in progressive drug policy reform are few and far between. This paper reports on emergent social policy results from Washington State’s experiment in cannabis legalization, from the perspective of cannabis movement and market subjects whose social relationships have been conscripted as raw material for creating a “Washington model” for post-prohibition modernity (after Scott, 2004). The view from above is generally, perhaps substantively, positive: cannabis market creation and participation are being treated as a social good, delivering fewer arrests and more tax revenue with minimal-to-positive public health effects. The “worm’s eye view” (after Haraway, 1988), situates these results in the context of their social costs to the people without whom this experiment in democracy would be possible, historical cannabis movement and market actors. The grounded theory presented in this paper suggests that progressive social policy outcomes could have been achieved with far less social cost, and possibly more widely distributed and greater social benefits.

The presentation will focus on core ethnographic evidence to describe three emergent outcomes and processes. First, we will examine how a decade of “medical cannabis” movement was captured by an ACLU, “rights-based” legalization initiative, with no implementation architecture. Second, we will examine how the resulting bureaucracy-driven process started from scratch rather than use existing medical market infrastructure, resulting in waves of creative destruction (after Polanyi, 1944). And finally, we will examine the emergence of four stakeholder groups that dominate the policy landscape: local government associations (cities and counties); revenue-driven bureaucratic authoritarianism; private real estate market actors; and highly capitalized interests that are new to the cannabis landscape but fundamental to the legal cannabis economy.
Prof Dave Boothroyd, University of Lincoln

**The online life of drug culture and the ends of prohibition: towards the ‘drugs peace’ to come**

This paper will reflect, in part, on aspects of Thomas Szasz’s ‘Our Right to Drugs’ thesis from the perspective of the emergent globalized online drug culture. One aspect of this culture is its capacity to facilitate the smooth flow of product to consumer exploiting the infrastructure of official postal services, at least for those with access to a computer, an internet connection, a postal address and the necessary funds available, preferably held in a crypto-currency wallet.

Alongside these techno-cultural mechanisms organizing the relationship between supply and demand, there is a burgeoning and varied array user-review mechanisms and a wider culture of of peer-to-peer knowledge and experience exchange around drug use, for instance in dedicated blogs and forums and on social media platforms. Arguably, this contemporary drug cultural condition presages the becoming ineffective or obsolete of drug controls as hitherto conceived and implemented, and signals the failure and futility of the ‘war on drugs’. This is accompanied by a shift in the power-knowledge nexus of drugs and drug use away from form conventional, scientific and professional expertise and toward user-generated and articulated forms ‘practical wisdom’.

Against such an image of the digital ‘drug scene’, and a critical analysis of its limitations, this paper seeks to revisit the question of the ethico-politics of a ‘drugs peace’ that can neither be imagined nor secured on the basis of the commodity relationship to drugs, but calls, rather, for a deeper thinking of ‘drugs’ in relation to life itself in the context of the techno-cultural whole in which it is embedded. The argument presented will draw on ideas developed in work of Derrida (auto-immunity), Stiegler (techno-pharmacology) and Levinas (alterity and peace).
Assumptions of a universalist approach to prohibition – Lessons from the development of organized crime in Colombia

Prohibition is commonly understood to stem from the intention to prevent harm yet in the case of Colombia, illegal drug production has been prohibited as an extended form of warfare. The state prohibits drug production to debilitate the source of funding of organized crime groups that threaten the state, as well as to conform to the international status quo and the interests of primary consuming states. But the universality drug prohibition is based on the premise of the state’s ability to control the monopoly of violence. As the case of Colombia shows, the harm of the illegal drug economy has been exacerbated by prohibition coupled with the state’s inability to control the monopoly of violence. Lessons from Colombia can be drawn for countries where an emerging illegal drug trade has not yet been hijacked by organized crime groups to specialise in protection services in the face of a hard-line approach to prohibition.
The ‘war on drugs’: the utmost expression of prohibitionist logic within the drug control dispositif

The idea that ‘drugs’ needed to be controlled in some form began to evolve in the mid-nineteenth century. As the twentieth century progressed, there was desire to enact stricter controls on drugs which led to the 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. US president Richard Nixon then went a step further, launching the ‘war on drugs’ in 1971 and US President Ronald Reagan took the ‘war’ on drugs to its logical conclusion by militarising drug law enforcement outside of US borders in 1986. These discursive and non-discursive practices have shaped how drug policy is prosecuted across the globe. Using Foucault’s concept of the dispositif, this paper will demonstrate how ‘drugs’ became the subject of a control-orientated dispositif that, from the latter part of the twentieth century onwards, was shaped by a US-driven prohibitionist logic. As the twenty first century progresses, the prohibitionist consensus is beginning to be challenged through discourse and practice. This is exemplified by a wide range of UN bodies including the WHO, UNDP and UNAIDS, who initially supported ‘harm reduction’ measures as a response to HIV/AIDS, have now gone as far as to call for decriminalisation of drugs. The drug control dispositif may be evolving in a different form once again.
Governmentality and phenomenological studies of drug use, especially those regarding the lives of drug users as well as the effects of the war on drugs, have led us to vitally important political insights over the last 50 years (e.g. Becker, Bourgeoise, Garriott). The earliest phenomenological literatures made possible empathic intellectual understandings of drug users’ experiences and the ways in which the power embedded in legal regulation is repeatedly revealed on the bodies, minds, and experiences of the user. Likewise, Foucaultian governmentality scholarship brought us a long way toward understanding micro expressions of power and the impacts of shifting political rationalities, especially in the rise of critical accounts of neoliberal logics of risk management (Moore, 2007; O’Malley, 1999; Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Simon and Feeley, 199*).

Yet drug use studies that situate themselves too heavily in either governmentality or phenomenology can also conceal as much as they reveal. In whose interests, and for what reasons, do we study drug use? As drug scholars, what is our relationship to laws that govern drugs? Is it to know them, or to politicize them? Is it to change them? To abolish them? No matter how rich the tools of description, they run the risk of eliding the work of drug scholars and are unable to offer sufficient frameworks for political and social change. We argue that exploring the logics and legalities of regulating drug use is necessarily linked to political logics, and that both phenomenological and governmentality approaches too often tarry with the apolitical.

The rise and critique of these two ways of seeing the carceral lay out at least three fundamental questions about the state (and politics) of drug use scholarship: 1) How does a political scholarship of drug use assist us in understanding the laws of consumption from a variety of perspectives? 2) What (if any) current political contributions are made from this scholarship? And 3) if the goal is to critically understand the changing landscape of drug regulation, then are phenomenology and governmentality really the only, or most important, tools in the kit—or might we think more expansively about the conversations, convergences and divergences with feminisms, critical race theory, and Indigenous and Queer understandings of drug regulations?
Exploring competing concepts of dignity

Human dignity is a fundamental organising principle within human rights, and is a status described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as one 'inherent' to 'all members of the human family'. Since the 1980s, dignity (or more specifically the protection or restoration of dignity) it is also a concept increasingly found as a justification for punitive drug laws. However, rather than being a universal status based on personhood, within drug control discourse, dignity is a restricted status based upon the presence or absence of drug use. In this context, a person who uses drugs by definition lacks dignity (or has had dignity taken away), a person who does not use has dignity maintained or protected and a person who stops using may have dignity restored or rescued. The protection or restoration of dignity therefore becomes a rationale for repressive drug control measures, measures that often violate the dignity and rights of both people who use drugs, and others caught up in the drug war.

This presentation will offer some thoughts on these competing concepts of dignity, and what this divergence can tell us about the nature of the modern drug control regime.