

CALL FOR PAPERS (CFP)

Thinking with drugs: Interventions in the social

An interdisciplinary workshop

Goldsmiths, University of London

Monday 22 July – Tuesday 23 July 2024

Always already freighted with the dual spectre of remedy and poison, drugs carry mixed, often oppositional valences as sources of moral opprobrium and technologies invested with hope for better futures. Drugs that are illegal in many jurisdictions such as heroin, cocaine and crystal methamphetamine attract legal and political contestation, and are often sites of moral panics. Prescribed drugs are an engine of medicalisation: with the ever-widening ambit of the medical gaze, a range of health and lifestyle concerns have been redefined as ‘problems’ making them amenable to pharmaceutical solutions designed to augment and enhance bodily capacities, rather than simply prevent or treat illness (Dumit 2012)¹. Drugs are also beacons of hope for people with conditions as diverse as cancer, autism and Alzheimer’s disease with patient advocacy groups lobbying for new, better drugs invested with techno-utopian promises of cure or prevention. Conversely, the reliance on antimicrobial drugs to prevent and treat diseases in humans, animals and plants (including in industrial farming) has contributed to a stark rise in drug-resistant diseases and antimicrobial pollution in marine and municipal water systems (WHO 2022)². As these examples highlight, drugs saturate everyday life, and shape human and planetary health in myriad ways.

Far from inanimate objects, drugs are intimately involved in social relations. They shape bodies, lives, relationships, and even our political institutions. Following Lauren Berlant’s (2016)³ work, for example, drugs may be thought of as infrastructures, both connecting and separating us in ‘the movement and patterning of social form’. Caught up in violent struggles of power, the ‘war on drugs’, no less, drugs also resist control and curtailment. They call for modes of thinking that can accommodate this multiplicity and difference. Drugs push us beyond disciplinary divides and focus our attention on the entangled relations and subjectivities that are constantly unfolding in more-than-human worlds.

¹ Dumit, J. (2012). *Drugs for Life*. Durham: Duke University Press.

² World Health Organisation (WHO) (2022). World leaders and experts call for action to protect the environment from antimicrobial pollution. *WHO News*, 2 March, <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-world-leaders-and-experts-call-for-action-to-protect-the-environment-from-antimicrobial-pollution>.

³ Berlant, L. (2016) The commons: Infrastructures for troubling times. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34(3): 393-419.

In this two-day workshop we open up a space for thinking drugs differently and rethinking the social through drugs. We aim to open up discussion of how critical, interdisciplinary research on drugs might sensitise us to new ways of embracing complexity and contingency, thus generating new insights for the social study of health, science, and socio-environmental change. Bringing together scholars from science and technology studies, anthropology, medical sociology, history and philosophy of science, and critical drug studies, this workshop explores how drugged relations might be rethought as a mode of critical inquiry in a time of global change. By posing drugs as analytic objects the workshop aims to provoke discussion and debate on questions such as:

- How might critical, interdisciplinary research on drugs sensitise us to new ways of embracing complexity and contingency?
- What new insights might such research offer for the social study of health, science, and socio-environmental change as we confront a climate emergency, enduring political conflicts, global health crises and other urgent issues of our time?
- What organising logics and founding concepts are at work in dominant epistemes of drugs? What are their political stakes?
- How do drug concepts travel into the governance of other worlds and bodies? What place do gender, sexuality, race, Indigeneity and other foundational social categories hold? As sociopolitical agents, how do drugs (re)shape our founding social institutions?
- What affects, desires and intimacies are produced through drugged relations?
- Under what conditions are certain global health challenges and experiences becoming medicalised through their relationship to drugs?
- Which actors and agents are implicated in these processes? What subjects do they produce?
- What theoretical-methodological innovations can remake drugged relations beyond the confines of existing paradigms?

Participants are asked to circulate ‘thought pieces’ (3-5 pages) prior to the workshop. Each speaker will have 10-15 minutes to speak to their thought piece, followed by a 10-minute commentary by a discussant and an open discussion. This format is designed to generate critical discussion and interdisciplinary exchange, opening up new conversations, collaborations, and the possibility of an edited volume to follow.

Please submit your application as a single PDF to r.fomiatti@deakin.edu.au by **Friday 10th of May 2024**. Your application should include:

- 250-word abstract addressing the CFP
- Your affiliation and a link to your institutional profile

The workshop is organised by Professor Kari Lancaster (Goldsmiths), Dr Kiran Pienaar (Deakin University, Australia), Dr Fay Dennis (Goldsmiths) and Dr Renae Fomiatti (La Trobe University, Australia) and is convened with the support of Goldsmiths’ [Centre for Critical Global Change](#) and Health, Science and Planetary Change program, Deakin’s [Sociology and Social Change Collective](#) and La Trobe University’s [Australian Research Centre for Sex, Health and Society](#) (ARCSHS).