

THE MERCURIAL LIFE OF DRUGS

Psychedelics as models, risk factors, and treatments for mental disorders

a workshop organized by the Neuroscience and Society Network

11 July 2018 | 3-6 pm

Seminar Room 5, IoPPN

16 De Crespigny Park, London SE5 8AF

12 July 2018 | 9 am – 4 pm

Pilowsky 2&3, Ortus Center, IoPPN

82-96 Grove Ln, London SE5 8SN

ABOUT

In this workshop, we seek to explore what makes psychedelic research unique, different and potent, and how do (or how might) researchers manage this?

Recent decades have seen a ‘revival’ of psychedelic research, and the interest seems to already capture the potency and potentiality of these substances—they are not just like any other drug. In this research, psychedelics and related compounds – LSD, psilocybin, cannabis, ketamine – are used in different, sometimes seemingly contradictory, ways. In some cases, they are potential risk factors for psychosis and other mental disorders (Arseneault et al., 2002; Henquet, Murray, Linszen, & van Os, 2005). The effects of psychedelics are also used as models of psychotic states associated with mental disorders (Langlitz, 2017). However, more recently, researchers have been exploring their therapeutic value, suggesting that they open up new possible directions for treatments for mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression (Carhart-Harris et al., 2016; Vollenweider & Kometer, 2010).

How these drugs treat, however, is still an open question: by what means do the drugs “work”? How do the drugs alter experiments, trials, and therapy? How does the therapist (and researcher) work with the psychedelic experience, both phenomenologically and environmentally? How is the therapeutic potential standardized, if at all? What are the ethics of medicalising and potentially normalising psychedelics? These different uses and questions begin to suggest their ‘mercurial’ quality –there is something changeable, ambivalent but also potent and potential, about these substances in combination with humans, their brains and their surrounds.

The workshop will also consider the ‘surrounds’ of research. Psychedelic drugs have complex and potent socio-political and cultural lives, associated with illegality, spirituality, counter- and underground cultures, all of which impact research. As a result, there is interest in their prohibition or regulation, but also in possibly changing these to reflect the drugs’ new potential uses

and shifting social attitudes. How do these social and political histories of management impinge on the contemporary life of these drugs? How are the different drugs categorized, legalized, normalized or medicalized? What policies are in place and how do these recognise the mercurial qualities of these drugs? What various interests might be otherwise involved, such as public, state and policy concerns, as well as private, pharmaceutical or other drug-procuring business? How might these interests collaborate or conflict? What are the possibilities of and limits to change?

This event is part of a wider programme of activity by the Neuroscience and Society Network (NSN) to develop and support collaborative exchanges between the neurosciences and the humanities and social sciences. The NSN is funded by King's Together which offers seed-funding for inter- and multi-disciplinary research projects with the aim of developing these into larger research programmes.

References

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- Langlitz, N. (2017). Opaque models: Using drugs and dreams to explore the neurobiological basis of mental phenomena. In T. Mahfoud, S. McLean, & N. Rose (Eds.), *Progress in Brain Research* (Vol. 233, pp. 53–72). Elsevier. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0079612317300146>
- Vollenweider, F. X., & Komater, M. (2010). The neurobiology of psychedelic drugs: implications for the treatment of mood disorders. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, *11*(9), 642–651. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn2884>

PROGRAMME

Wednesday 11 July | Seminar Room 5, IoPPN

- 3:00 – 3:10 **Introduction + Coffee**
- 3:10 – 3:45 **Neuropsychedelia: The Revival of Hallucinogen Research Since the Decade of the Brain**
Nicolas Langlitz, Associate Professor of Anthropology, New School for Social Research
- 3:45 – 4:15 **Psychiatry and Psychedelic Drugs**
James Rucker, NIHR Clinician Scientist, King’s College London
- 4:15 – 4:45 **Patients’ Accounts After Psilocybin for Treatment-Resistant Depression**
Rosalind Watts, Clinical Psychologist, Psychedelic Research Group, Imperial College London
- 4:45 – 6:00 **Discussion**
- 7:00 - **Dinner**

Thursday 12 July | Pilowsky 2&3, Ortus Center, IoPPN

- 9:00 – 9:10 **Introduction**
Discussion sessions will be divided into 1 hr breakout sessions, and 30 min plenaries.
- 9:10 – 10:40 **Discussion Session 1: Pathways**
- By what means do psychedelics and related compounds “work” as treatment?
 - How is the therapeutic potential standardized, if at all?
 - What are the ethics of medicalising and potentially normalising psychedelics?
- 10:40 – 11:00 **Coffee Break**
- 11:00 – 1:00 **Discussion Session 2: Policy**
- How are psychedelics and related compounds categorized, legalized, normalized or medicalized?
 - What policies are in place and how do these recognise the mercurial qualities of these drugs?

- What various interests might be otherwise involved, such as public, state and policy concerns, as well as private, pharmaceutical or other drug-procuring business? How might these interests collaborate or conflict?

1:00 – 2:00

Lunch Break

2:00 – 3:30

Discussion Session 3: Narratives

- How do psychedelics alter experiments, trials, and therapy?
- How does the therapist (and researcher) work with the psychedelic experience, both phenomenologically and environmentally?

3:30 – 4:00

Conclusion