

A Conversation About Recovery and Political Activism

In this conversation Jarrett Zigon, Porterfield Chair of Bioethics and Professor of Anthropology at the University of Virginia, discusses his research into the drug war, focusing in particular on his recently published book *A War on People: Drug User Politics and A New Ethics of Community* (2019). In his theoretically informed ethnographic exploration of how the anti-drug war movement is creating new worlds and a new ethics of community, Jarrett Zigon argues that his new conception of war as governance urges us to reorient the conversation about the war on drugs to the war on people. Understanding the war on drugs with this singular focus on people has important implications for how we might come to think about the use of currently illegal drugs, and experiences of ‘recovery’ both in and out of treatment settings. In this conversation, Zigon canvasses some of the key findings of his previous ethnographically informed work, and then elaborates on some of the analytical prospects and methodological challenges of this reorientation with a particular focus on the meaning, practice and experience of ‘recovery’.

This conversation took place via email exchange between Zigon and Nicole Vitellone, Cameron Duff and Lena Theodoropoulou over the course of several months in mid 2021. We started with a series of formal questions devised by Vitellone, Duff and Theodoropoulou, which, in the main, invited Zigon to elaborate on the impact of his ethnographic research and conceptual analysis for drug policy and critical drug studies. The questions focus on three broad themes, which we discuss in turn. First, we revisit the utility of a social scientific framework for inventing an alternative methodology for engaging harm reduction and recovery that takes up the task of connecting drugs, community and people. Second, we turn to ethnographically informed theoretical explanations of how the anti-drug war movement serves politically to build new worlds through what Zigon calls an ‘assemblage ethnography’. On this point we explore, in passing, some of the key methodological implications of such an ethnography for critical drug studies. Thirdly, we trace the critical strands of Zigon’s analysis of the anti-drug war movement’s imaginative politics for building futures as a critique of how the drug policy field has delimited its view of politics and policy reform. The conversation includes reflections on how to respond to drug user politics, the new ethics of community and care implicated in recent critical discussions of recovery policy and practice, the global anti-drug war movement and its consequences for drug policy.

Our questions address assumptions that shape debates on drug policy, harm reduction and recovery, with the subsequent discussion ultimately suggesting the need for more critical accounts of the ‘war on drugs’ concept, pushing it in new directions. Notions of recovery emerge as key faultlines in this discussion insofar as a war on drugs conceived in Zigon’s terms as a war on people must undermine the very practice of recovery. To the extent that recovery may be understood by way of an ethics of care within a community of difference, the war on drugs only serves to undermine this community. We discuss some of the implication of this analysis for recovery policy and practice later in the conversation, however we begin by situating the war on people with respect to Zigon’s new conception of governance as that of war, a violent and exclusionary form of governance on drug users lives.

NV: I want to begin the conversation by asking how you think *A War on People* (Zigon, 2019) responds to the central theme of this special section on the Politics and Practices of Recovery? We were delighted that you responded to our invitation to participate in this special section in the *IJDP* and would like to know how you situate your work in relation to debates in critical drug studies and drug policy.

JZ: First, I’d like to begin by thanking you for inviting me to be a part of this special section. This is a really important conversation that you are bringing to light, and I’m glad to be a part of it. In terms of how I would situate my work – and perhaps most especially *A War on People* (Zigon, 2019) – in

relation to this special section and to the critical debates you mention more generally, is that I'm very interested in exploring alternative possibilities beyond the narrow constraints of recovery traditionally conceived in terms of abstinence, and the moralism this aim entails, such as, for example, self-discipline, responsibility, and ultimately a kind of self-denial and asceticism. Note that all of these moralistic entailments begin with the assumption that we are fundamentally individual and ultimately autonomous human beings. What I try to show is precisely the opposite – that we are all fundamentally relational beings. And then I try to articulate what recovery, harm reduction, drug policy, political activism, and ultimately sociality and ethics look like when we begin with this starting assumption of being relational. Most importantly, I must point out that I'm really just the researcher and theorist of this thought. What I try to show in the book is that the potential for this alternative – and sometimes the nascent form of it – is already out there being done by active and former drug users in their political and care activities. I try to show and theorize how what I call the anti-drug war movement is doing this already in some way, and hope that my articulation of it helps to motivate others to take up this work in a more explicit manner.

NV: In reading your ground-breaking ethnography *A War on People* (Zigon, 2019) I was struck by the shift in focus from historicising the making of drug policy by governmental experts, which has been the focus of much critical research on harm reduction and recovery, and one familiar to the readership of *IJDP*, to historicising the global anti-drug war movement as an alternative focus of social inquiry, which you describe in terms of 'the onto-ethical politics of worldbuilding'. I wonder if you could say more about your use of Foucault's methods and why you feel it is necessary for academics and researchers to think beyond biopolitics when addressing drug policy and its effects?

JZ: I think part of the difference you may be pointing to is that I understand the war on drugs as indicative of a broader condition for social existence that is shared by many people beyond drug users. This is what I call a condition of war as governance, by which many peoples' lives – drug users and nondrug users – are more or less enframed by this model of war as a form of governance. This is what I find so compelling about the way in which the activists – I prefer actually to refer to them as agonists – with whom I worked renamed the war on drugs as a war on people. This phrase – a war on people – is not only a perfect description of how the war on drugs is a violent and exclusionary form of governance on drug users, but it also opens the possibility for thinking and realizing that we all live in this condition of war as governance. That all of our lives are conditioned by war.

This being the case, it's important to take up this thinking in a manner that gets us beyond a rather narrow focus on policy so that we can begin to understand precisely how it is that this war on people as a form of governance conditions social existence, that is, makes certain kinds of lives possible and other kinds not. And in this I actually go beyond Foucault and try to articulate what I call critical hermeneutics. This is an approach that is certainly influenced by Foucault's work, no doubt about it. But this is so mostly in that I read Foucault as a post-Heideggerian thinker, by which I mean those who take up a broadly Heideggerian project of understanding human entanglement with the world as always ontologically enframed. The other thinkers I engage with in the book – Arendt, Gadamer, Derrida, Nancy, Esposito, and, of course, Heidegger – are all part of this line of thought. And what I find most compelling about this approach is that unlike theorists who mostly offer us critique – which of course is an important first step, thus the critical part of critical hermeneutics – this Heideggerian tradition of hermeneutics allows us to find potential for an 'otherwise' right there in the middle of whatever it is one might be considering critically. In this case, the war on drugs. And this is precisely what I understand the anti-drug war movement to be doing – not simply trying to change policy, but trying to change our world (our conditioned existence) by finding the potential for another mode of existence right there in the middle of this war on people.

NV: As a sociologist I read your ethnography as both a canonical and provocative piece of empirical research not just in the drugs field, but the social sciences more broadly, in ways that reflect some of the methodological problems and achievements of Howard Becker's empirical research on drugs in the 1950 and 1960s (Vitellone, 2021). On the one hand, the problem of how to ethnographically describe the 'Becoming of an Otherwise' in *A War on People* (Zigon, 2019), like Becker's (1953) sociological description of 'Becoming a Marijuana User' situates the methodological problem of description as a central political problem worth having and pursuing. On the other hand, *A War on People* (Zigon, 2019), like Becker's work on deviance, attempts to mitigate against researcher bias in taking sides through the use of social research methods. Both studies highlight the historical relevance of empirical research with people who use drugs for the development of methodological problems and innovation in the social sciences. But whilst Becker deployed social scientific methods as a political intervention to disrupt the judgement of drug users as deviants by sociologists and other academic and professional experts, your research highlights how attempts to disrupt and challenge the epistemological and disciplinary power of experts in defining the problem of the war on drugs, involves the activists – or rather agonists – themselves. In so doing, *A War on People* (Zigon, 2019) highlights the legacy of Becker's (1967) question 'whose side are we on' not as a provocation for academic experts to reflect on the politics of *our* research methods and research practice in the world, but a disruptive political tactic enacted by agonists in *their* fight back against the war on people. Would you be able to say more about the methodological trouble of describing the **anti-drug war** movement in your research practice, particularly in relation to the use of poems and vignettes as thick descriptions of an alternative vision, and your participation in the deployment of disruptive methods of showing and telling both sides of the story by agonists, especially in their experimental imaginative politics of worldbuilding possible futures.

JZ: Yes, this is what I call a disruptive politics of showing. In the book, I try to show that this showing is a central tactic of the anti-drug war movement. For example, Hannah Arendt writes somewhere that political action is about the most human thing one could do. Now, for the average person on the street, indeed, for the average academic in the halls, the last thing they imagine a so-called drug "addict" doing is political activity. This is something the agonists about whom I write know well, and they use that knowledge for their purposes. So, one example I give is of Henrik, the head of the users' union in Copenhagen, giving a presentation to politicians or medical personnel – you know, really grabbing their attention and impressing them with his expertise of the information and data and whatnot – and then pausing for a moment to tell them something like, "oh and by the way, I'm on heroin right now". Another example is of Martin, a middle aged African-American man in New York City, who will regularly meet with city and state politicians to talk about various policy concerns. When he does he gets dressed up and looks, as he told me, like he's from Wall Street. But then at some point in the conversation he'll tell them that he too uses drugs. These are just a few examples of what I mean by this disruptive politics of showing. The point is not simply to shock those with whom these agonists are speaking but to disrupt their preconceived notions – what Martin and others call their fantasy – of what a drug user is and can do. But I suggest that this tactic goes even further than a disruption of the fantasy. It also shows that people who use drugs are not only capable of doing the most human thing – political activity – but also pretty damn good at it. In other words, this disruptive politics of showing is an everyday enactment of the theoretical approach of critical hermeneutics about which I was just speaking: at one and the same time the tactic critically disrupts and hermeneutically shows or reveals the potentiality that is already there, a potentiality that is already becoming a reality, that is, the new world or new condition of existence.

So, this is also what the book is trying to do. By showing in close detail the various political, as well as the everyday ethical and caring practices done by active drug users, I'm hoping to both disrupt the fantasy of what the so-called "addict" is and to show how an otherwise condition for existence is possible beyond that of war. And, again, this is where the book is more than a book on the anti-drug

war movement but rather a book about all of our social existence and how it could be otherwise. How social existence could be more open, less exclusionary, more caring of the singularity of each of us, and, thus, less violent to difference. It just so happens that active drug users are the ones who are showing us that such a world is possible through their political and ethical practices. We really ought to pay attention.

NV: In describing the politics of harm reduction not in terms of solving problems but creating a new world that makes it possible for communities to emerge, your ethnography draws attention to Safe Consumption Injecting facilities as the most radical political initiative to open situations for an otherwise of being together in a non-judgemental way. In highlighting the transformative possibilities of safe consumption facilities and syringe exchange in these experimental zones to address and move beyond the biopolitical bias of state funded interventions enacted by university educated bureaucrats (Zigon, 2019, p. 27), I wondered if you could say more about harm reduction not as a gift but a disruptive situation connected to regaining humanness and feeling like a person again (Zigon, 2019, p. 23)?

JZ: I think the way you pose the question really gets at the heart of the matter. That is, I don't see harm reduction simply as a public health initiative but perhaps more importantly as the foundation for the emergence of a new modality of sociality. You know, a mantra of harm reduction is "to meet them where they are at." I understand the kind of psychological assumptions that are behind this mantra in terms of where the individual person is regarding their own use. But more fundamentally "where they are at" is in a world. And to meet them in their world – which is also our world – is to recognize the ways in which that world conditions drug use to be done in certain ways and the kinds of violent exclusions this entails. So, for me it is important to think of harm reduction beyond the syringe or the safe use facility or such things, and to begin to think of how to reduce the harm of the world. And this is what I find so powerful about what I've called the Vancouver model. Certainly, what has happened in the Downtown Eastside is not perfect, and recently there has been some real issues related to fentanyl and other things, but the model offered there is, I believe, the right way to go. I write about this quite a bit.

To be brief: this is the model where harm reduction is not limited to the singular clinic but rather is conceived as a network of possibilities that range from the syringe exchange to the safe use facility to housing to various job opportunities to a bank to community-oriented activities. And all of these possibilities are connected – thus, the network – such that showing up at any one of these locations opens the possibilities of all of the others. Some might call this a world. And in this world, one is not violently excluded because of who one is or does with their body, but rather this world itself attunes to the differences and vicissitudes of whoever arrives, that is, to the singularity of each person. This is what I call attuned care, and when it is enacted by a number of people within a network I call it a community of whoever arrives. In this way, a community is not closed and it is not identitarian. Rather, a community in this sense is an open network of non-judgmental and attuned care; it is a way of being-together-with the singularity of the other person whoever and however she may be. This, of course, sounds utopian, and perhaps is in its full realization. But I will continue to argue that this is the potentiality I see emerging – even if only partially – through the political and ethical practices of the anti-drug war movement, and the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver is (or perhaps, once was) the exemplar of this.

CD: We were interested to see you describe your approach in *A War on People* (Zigon, 2019) in terms of an "assemblic ethnography", although when introducing this approach in Chapter 1 you say a bit more about your own research interests than your central theoretical and/or conceptual orientations. On the face of it, your approach seems broadly consonant with recent discussions of the assemblage and/or assemblage theory within anthropology broadly speaking, although you've

not referenced this work directly here, at least in the discussion of an assemblic ethnography. We wonder then if you could say a bit more about this assemblic approach, first in terms of your key conceptual and methodological sources for developing this approach, and second what you might see as its key strengths for empirical studies of drugs, drug use and recovery?

JZ: Hmm, I'm a bit surprised by this question because I tried to differentiate it from some similar approaches such as the ones you mention. I think it's really important to see that what I describe as an assemblic ethnography is not about studying sites, even multiple ones. So, in that I try to differentiate it from what is known as multisited ethnography. Assemblic ethnography, then, is the study of what I call situations. What I mean by a situation is 'a nontotalizable assemblage widely diffused across different global scales that allows us to conceptualize how persons and objects that are geographically, socioeconomically, and "culturally" distributed get caught up in shared conditions that significantly affect their possible ways of being-in-the-world' (Zigon, 2019: 38). I conceive of the war on drugs in this way, and I'll say more about that in a moment. I go on to characterize situations in three ways: first, as a nontotalizable assemblage, as I've just said; second, as not singularly locatable; and third, that sites of potentiality for political activity arise from the interstices of situations. Again, I'll say more in a moment.

In characterizing situations in this way, I differentiate what I mean by assemblages from two of the currently more influential theories that might seem similar. First, a situation is different from the global assemblages described by Ong and Collier (2005) in that they seem to characterize the latter as supplements to already existing 'contexts', whereas I argue that situations *are* the context and supplement *nothing*. Second, a situation differs from the concept of hyperobjects as described by Timothy Morton (2013), which in some ways I find more compelling than global assemblages but yet ultimately find it a politically unhelpful concept. In any case, it probably seems clear that to some extent this concept of situation and the assemblic ethnography I argue is necessary to study it is influenced in part by the expected theorists – Deleuze, Guattari, and DeLanda. And this is certainly true. But ultimately, and more fundamentally for me, this approach comes out of the basic phenomenological methodological-analytic of aspects or *Abschattung* first developed by Husserl and then, in my view, developed and articulated in a much more helpful manner by Merleau-Ponty. And, by the way, I am convinced that much of what is today attributed to thinkers like Deleuze and others of that French generation had its roots in this phenomenological thought, and most particularly that of Merleau-Ponty, who I really think is the unmentioned inspiration (along with Heidegger) of that generation of thinkers. But that is another interview, perhaps.

To get back to your question: I don't understand the war on drugs as a policy issue, for example. Rather, I consider it a situation as I described it already. By this I mean that the war on drugs is, among other things, the temporary manifestation of aspects of such things as global militarism, mass incarceration, aggressive policing, biopolitical therapeutics, international and national surveillance, the normalization of labour regimes, and international and intra-national inequalities. And aspects of these can temporarily manifest anywhere and potentially affect anyone. In my book *Disappointment* (Zigon, 2018) I give a quick and broad sketch of how this concept of situation can be helpful for describing other concerns of our time such as climate change. Anyway, in order to study such situations, I have tried to develop what I call assemblic ethnography, which is really what you asked about. And this is what I describe as 'a method of chasing and tracing a complex phenomenon through its continual process of assembling across different global scales and its temporally differential localization as situations in diverse places' (Zigon, 2019, p. 23). In practice, this means that one does not simply go to sites – this would be multisited ethnography – but rather follows the various assemblic relations of the situation as they emerge across the globe until they unfold into other assemblic relations, and then follow those. For example, I started my research in the mid-2000s on heroin rehabilitation in Russia, and while there learned about drug user unions, and

followed that to New York City, and learned about policing and mass incarceration, and followed that to Indonesia and then Vancouver, where I learned about surveillance and biopolitical therapeutics, and followed that to Copenhagen, and so on.

What becomes clear through this method is that the war on drugs is precisely a situation as I describe it, and that is important because it offers an analytic approach for understanding how drug users all around the world find themselves in shared conditions of existence despite the local differences. And this is important for understanding how the global anti-drug war movement is possible, and why I believe it is one of the most widely dispersed, networked, and collaborative political movements in existence – because they recognize their shared condition despite the differences. A focus simply on policy does not allow for this.

CD: Your book is theoretically eclectic in the best possible way, drawing from key figures in contemporary social theory, Foucault, Agamben, Butler, Heidegger and Negri, among many others, along with key references in literature, poetry and dramaturgy. Could you describe the role of theory in your own writing and thinking? And more broadly, how do you see social theory most effectively contributing to an ethically and politically engaged social science of drugs, drug use and recovery?

JZ: Thank you for saying that. Above all I consider myself a theorist so I take this as a compliment in the highest regard. I think, probably, for a lot of people theory seems very abstract; disconnected from reality and a bunch of jargon and nonsense. And no doubt some attempts at theory can be just that. But the best of it – at least for me – is very clarifying. It helps me have a better sense of the world, or at least those aspects of it that I'm concerned with. And by sense, I mean here a way of seeing, listening, and so on, to the world, as well as understanding it. So, for example, the concept of situation that I just described. For me, at least, this concept really helps clarify what the war on drugs is as a phenomenon in our world, and thus, it helps us not only to understand it but more importantly how to fight against it.

But I'm also an anthropologist, so perhaps unlike a lot of theorists I begin with the world and the experiences of actual people in it. So, the way I describe situations may be a bit fancier and more abstract than the way anti-drug war agonists with whom I worked would describe the war on drugs, but I maintain that this is – more or less – what they mean by it. So, the theoretical concept comes directly from real people doing real (important) things. In this way, doing theory – at least for me – is both a way of seeing and listening to the world, and then articulating it back so that both those who inspired it might be a bit clearer about what they are already doing, which I think is helpful, and those who might want to do further research or thinking along with the world might have a starting point. And this is why I often talk about theory as thinking with the world, and not as an already established conceptual apparatus to be applied. This latter notion of theory, which is perhaps more common, is precisely a way of turning real things and activity into abstractions and categories, for example. Thinking with the world, in contrast, is something like the clarifying articulation or expression of the world as it unfolds.

CD: We'd like to turn more explicitly to questions of politics now. You open your book with a discussion of leftist politics in a global context of struggles for social justice and inclusion, yet you also note that such movements often fail to construct a meaningful strategy for achieving their goals. This critique might also apply, fairly in our view, to recent drug policy initiatives, an argument that seems to run through much of your book. So, our question then is what do you see as the most urgent political priorities for global drug policies today? A follow up question might concern the most effective political models, strategies or practices for achieving change. In other words, can you elaborate a little on the "possible futures" of drug policy addressed in your writing?

JZ: In my view, the most urgent priority for global drug policy should be the legalization of all drugs and, thus, the ending of the drug war. Everything else is essentially putting a Band-Aid on a gunshot wound. I understand all of the potential issues and concerns that arise when someone makes such a statement, but it seems to me that when the war on drugs is considered in terms of how I described it above – a complex situation assembled not simply of drug policy but also global militarism, violent policing and mass incarceration, biopolitical therapeutics, inter- and intra-national inequalities, etc – then the potential knock-on effect of ending this failed war and legalizing everything far outweighs the other concerns.

Importantly, doing so would also – in my view – be a much better strategy for achieving some of the concerns of the left that currently receive much attention. For example, in the United States the calls to defund the police by some activists – a call and mantra that seems designed to immediately turn off at least fifty percent of the population, though likely much more. But this goal of defunding the police would be almost immediately achieved by ending the war on drugs. And this is something that is much more palatable to the average voter, and I assume many more once one takes the time to explain the failure of this war to them. It is also something that already enjoys much more so-called bipartisan support than a simple call to defund the police will ever achieve.

As I try to emphasize throughout the book, I'm also trying to offer a political strategy for changing all of our worlds – not just changing drug policy – and this is what I call worldbuilding. Or, I should be more precise, I try to articulate theoretically what I see the anti-drug war movement already doing. So really, I have learned from them – many of whom are active drug users – how to think about a politics of worldbuilding. And again, this is a politics that recognizes the complexity of any 'issue' (a term I really prefer to never use), addresses it as that situational complexity I already articulated, and does so by playing the long-game. So, this is a politics that is much less spectacular than the weekend protest or occupation, it likely won't get much or any media or Twitter coverage, but it can and does have actual results in the world in terms of affecting peoples' lives for the better and with the hope of making long-term permanent changes that will affect many more if not all of us. In many ways, this is an old-school left political strategy that got lost. The anti-drug war movement (or at least the part of it that I write about) is reviving it. And in doing so, they are slowly but certainly building new worlds of openness, connection, and care. We all really ought to pay more attention to this.

LT: *A War on People* (Zigon, 2019) is a fascinating ethnography, empirically showing how harm reduction can be done otherwise. Following three case studies in different national and policy contexts, you show the attempts of drug users to build collective, caring worlds. These world-building practices are a departure from normalising practices that categorise and regulate people that use drugs. By letting people be and become together, small practices of care and tiny displacements emerge, opening up new ways and possibilities of being together. I found your descriptions fascinating in relation to my own empirical research (Theodoropoulou, 2021b) with services and people in recovery from drugs and alcohol. What I found of particular interest was the emergence of similar practices of care, coming out of approaches that have been described as in conflict. While working and researching with recovery services for example, the attempt to achieve freedom, not in its neoliberal sense of individual choices and responsibilities, but as a collective practice that expands life possibilities, was a desire coming from all service-users and encouraged by recovery workers. The process of preparing food collectively and eating together is one more example of a practice that reflects the desire to build a world, rather than to choose between harm reduction and abstinence. In my reading this painstakingly process of slowly building a world of care with others, goes beyond the dichotomy between recovery and harm reduction. I wonder if there is a way to re-think drug policy as a force that is not primarily concerned with the consumption or absence of substances, but with the emergence of practices of care?

JZ: Yes, I'm not surprised at all by what you say you have found in your research. No doubt I and others have at times overemphasized the neoliberal aspects of harm reduction and recovery. As I've written in a previous book of mine on heroin rehabilitation in Russia – "*HIV is God's Blessing*" (Zigon, 2010) – it's not so much that these programs are neoliberal, though of course some are, but that what gets done there can be too easily translated, as it were, into the neoliberal discourse that has become dominant in society. The result being that neoliberal subjects, or aspects thereof, are created despite everyone's intentions. I still think that this unintended consequence is really important to keep in mind.

But to get to your question, I would probably want to reference my last answer and respond again with the call for legalization and the end of the failed war on drugs. Only when this is done, can we really begin to focus on practices of care that don't always have some other concern of legality involved. Plus, can we imagine how much "easier" (I hesitate to use that word, but still) practices of care could be when we don't have to worry about all of the health damage that comes with things like contaminated drugs, or when abstinence is off the table as a requirement for care?

LT: In the fourth chapter of *A War on People* (Zigon, 2019) you discuss the difference between sovereign freedom and disclosive freedom, through demonstrating how practices of freedom are enacted in the three different field-sites. These practices of disclosive freedom differ from neoliberal understandings of freedom as an individual matter linked to productivity; conversely, disclosive freedom is about opening up new, unexplored possibilities while becoming with others. This understanding and practice of freedom resonates with my findings from doing empirical research with recovery services in Liverpool and Athens (Theodoropoulou, 2021a, 2021b). These services were focused on creating caring spaces where people could become themselves and develop ways of living otherwise. Paid work, for example, was discussed within the services as an option rather than an obligation; an option to be pursued only when it enhances the service-users' becoming-well. What kind of actions are needed in order to reclaim freedom from neoliberal systems of thought? How can we, together with active and recovering drug users, establish disclosive freedom as an accepted way of being, rather than an exception to the 'normal'?

JZ: I'm so glad to hear that you've found this in your research; it's also not surprising, I think. In a way, I'd say you've already answered your own question. Something is achieved, or perhaps a better way of putting it is that a new habit of being and doing-together comes about by being and doing-together regularly. This is another way of describing worldbuilding. So, I suspect that in the places in Liverpool and Athens that you mentioned, practices of disclosive freedom are already established and will continue as long as those there continue to do them. This is the case, I would argue, in the places I've worked as well. The real trick, I'd say, is how to unfold or spread these practices of disclosive freedom beyond the service centers or user unions or other such rather located places we are talking about here. I write a bit about how this has been done in Vancouver in the book, but, as you know, this is where the real difficulty begins. This is where we move from a practice of care and freedom in relation to drug use to a politics of worldbuilding beyond drug use. Well, that's been a hard nut to crack for a very long time. But my bet is that it's something similar to what I write about in the book.

LT: In your previous book "*HIV is God's Blessing*" (Zigon, 2010) you discussed your engagement with a residential recovery service in Russia. You discussed care as a discipline mechanism that restricted rather than opened up life possibilities, while your engagement with harm reduction services has led to the description of 'attuned care' as a practice of becoming together otherwise, rather than an imposition of morality. Rethinking that residential recovery centre now, and following your analysis

of 'attuned care', would there be a potential for worldbuilding in recovery services? Is there space to do things otherwise without drugs, without focusing on the consumption or absence of substances?

JZ: Given the opportunity, I might like to reconsider some of what I wrote in that book and particularly around this restriction that you pointed out. Still, I do see a fundamental issue with recovery programs – and I think this is accurate to say about most of them, if not all – and their emphasis on abstinence. In my research, and I write a bit about this in *A War on People* (Zigon, 2019), many people I've come to know would prefer something like a non-abstinence-based recovery program. Such a program, at least as I'm imagining it right now, would be one of attuned care in that in contrast to the a priori assumption that to be in recovery is to be or aim at abstinence, it would rather attune its practices of care to the singularity of those who are there. For some, it may very well be abstinence; for others, not; and for others, this would likely change with time in either direction. But in terms of your larger question of worldbuilding and an otherwise without the focus on drugs: yes, absolutely! Again, this is the larger point of *A War on People* (Zigon, 2019): that a politics of worldbuilding is a model for any kind of political and ethical change.

LT: The practice of harm reduction in your chosen field-sites is, as you say, significantly different to the structured harm reduction services run by 'professionals', abiding with specific policies and designed to regulate drug use. Harm reduction in the UK was instigated in Liverpool in 1986, when activists trying to contain the spread of HIV set up the first needle exchange scheme. While these initial harm reduction practices were based on solidarity and care for people using drugs and the community, when harm reduction became an official policy and the central government and local councils took over, it quickly turned into a bio-political tool, mobilised to discipline and regulate bodies rather than to open new possibilities of care. One could narrate a similar story about recovery - see for example the history of the Lifeline project in Manchester (Yates, 1992). Why does policy, as it has been and is practised, operate as a force that closes rather than opens possibilities? Is there a way to do policy otherwise? Can a politics of worldbuilding only become outside of policy?

JZ: This is a great question that could probably only be replied to appropriately with a book of its own. The story you tell about Liverpool and Manchester is probably a story that you could tell about a lot of places, and likely well beyond the particular question of drug use. As you already mentioned, so many of these programs around the world began as collectives of drug users who came together to care for one another in ways that, I would say, were attuned to the singularity of those who came by. That doesn't mean there was chaos and anarchy. It meant putting in the ethical work each time to figure out what is best now, here, in this situation, with this person. That is a different model from one based on schedules, budgets, office hours, and best practices.

But the thing is, it seems that ultimately all political projects fail. As I perhaps too often like to say, even the Roman Empire eventually collapsed. So, this, I think, is something that must always be kept in mind with any form of activism, even that of a politics of worldbuilding. Our project may at some point be successful, that world we worked so hard to build may have been realized. But in that very success, in that realization are seeds of its failure and eventual breakdown. Future political agonists will then have to respond to that breakdown and begin to build something else. This is, if you will, the impossibility of justice. Just when we think we have achieved justice, we realize it has simply given way to a new form of injustice, to which we must now respond.

And this might be a way of considering your question on policy. Policy is, ultimately, a practice of bureaucracy and institutions. And too often we believe that we must engage this practice or be recognized by it in order to achieve the goals we aim for. This is the case for a lot of the early drug user collectives like the ones you mentioned – at some level it was considered important to be recognized by these bureaucracies and institutions, if for no other reason than to get some money

to do what it was the collectives wanted and needed to do. And many of them succeeded in this. But this very success entailed the eventual failure of the initial project – the collective practice of attuned care. So here we are, responding to this new form of injustice – this biopolitical injustice – born out of a prior political success. And so it goes.

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