

REVIEW SYMPOSIUM

Travis Linnemann, *Meth Wars: Police, Media, Power*
(New York University Press, 2016)

Fear, Insecurity, and the Economy of Deception

Tammy Ayres*

ON THE SURFACE, *METH WARS: POLICE, MEDIA, POWER* IS AN INTERDISCIPLINARY examination of methamphetamine (meth) in the United States. On closer examination, however, it is much more than this. Drawing on psychoanalysis, cultural criminology, and contemporary philosophy, Travis Linnemann provides a nuanced overview of contemporary society and the political economic context of late capitalism. He examines its cultural forces, inherent inequalities, and insecurities, as well as the failing war on drugs, through the lens of methamphetamine. Linnemann depicts how meth and the subsequent “methamphetamine imaginary” feed into the wider war on drugs—a war fought on the terrain of class relations and one that disavows the wider political economy. Using examples taken from case studies, interviews, and ethnographic research, alongside an analysis of popular culture (e.g., pictures in the media), Linnemann demonstrates how representation has overtaken reality, particularly in relation to illicit drugs and their users. Here, the methamphetamine imaginary exemplifies how “meth mediates the social world” (5). It depicts how the caricatures surrounding meth are created, perpetuated, and legitimized by the state, illustrating how “actors of all kinds engage in its cultural production to do political work and effectively govern through meth, which operates as a conduit of police and state power” (87). The methamphetamine imaginary, as Linnemann argues, is used to justify draconian law enforcement, excessive police powers, and disproportionate controls that provoke insecurities along the lines of race, class, and gender, despite being one of the least popular street drugs in a country rife with legitimate amphetamine-based medications such as Adderall and Ritalin. Throughout the book, Linnemann reveals how the

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reciprocity of the methamphetamine imaginary and governing through meth “swirls from inside to the outside and back again, folding the foreign and domestic, the international and the everyday, into one another” (114) via a process of loops and spirals—a nod to the cultural criminology of Ferrell et al. (2015). Linnemann describes how meth—and drugs, more generally—has been fetishized, while the reality has been disavowed to create a hyper-reality and “simulacrum” of drugs and their use (Baudrillard 1994). Meth is used as a scapegoat, or as Linnemann puts it, “the drug is cause and effect, beginning and end” (102) to an array of issues: crime, squalor, amorality, poverty, sexual promiscuity, environmental harm, terrorism, and/or death. In other words, drugs—in this case, meth—are to blame for society’s ills, or at least some of them, while capitalism’s “instantaneous cruelty; its incomprehensible ferocity; its fundamental immorality” are hidden and disavowed (Baudrillard 1983, 28–29).

Meth Wars analyzes the popular television series *Breaking Bad*, affording Linnemann the opportunity to suggest that meth is “emblematic of the death drive that underpins life in the late modern US” (Wakeman 2017, 2). At the same time, Linnemann examines anti-meth campaigns, such as “Not Even Once” and the “Faces of Meth,” putting forth the argument that they are not only cultural (mis)representations but also political projects, as meth users are “marked with the stigmata of their crimes” (66), in what Phil Carney (2010) has called a public form of branding. Here, the image, as Eammon Carrabine (2015) has suggested elsewhere, is not only a symbolic spectacle but also a dynamic power.

Drawing on his ethnographic research with urban and rural police officers, Linnemann illustrates how meth is perceived as ubiquitous and, for the rural officers in particular, their biggest drug problem (despite official statistics suggesting the opposite), thereby highlighting the importance of aggressive, zero-tolerance policing. In fact, Linnemann sketches a cultural criminology of the rural (see generally Brisman et al. 2015), depicting how power, meaning, and the meth imaginary overlap with and influence everyday understandings of place and space: meth is blamed for physical and corporeal decay and the moral disintegration of rural people into zombies and lepers. In so doing, Linnemann uncovers how meth, alongside other drugs, is attached to grand narratives and tropes (organized crime, terrorism, promiscuity, disease, destruction, and death) that feed into contemporary society’s culture of fear and insecurity, which is often blamed on others (e.g., foreigners and/or outsiders). Alongside these foreigners, poor white rural areas have also become the new front line for the war on drugs, and according to

the author, “we must engage the imaginary in such a way that we may begin to believe that a better world is possible” (224). Unfortunately, Linnemann fails to elaborate as to what or how this world might be achieved, which might leave some readers feeling a bit adrift. In contemporary consumer capitalism, how can we engage the imaginary to believe a better world is possible, particularly in a society where the exigencies of capital and its economic imperatives are prioritized while its harm are disavowed, and where draconian crime control measures and national security are prioritized while civil liberties and human rights are compromised? Linnemann does not say.

In sum, *Meth Wars* offers a “critique of the politics, culture and ideology that underpin and animate both methamphetamine and the war on drugs” (224) to show how the methamphetamine imaginary is used to govern through meth, as well as drugs more generally, in a society where representation has overtaken reality (Baudrillard 1994, Debord 1994) and an economy of deception operates (Bauman 2007). Instead, the mythologies represent and defend the prevailing power structures (Barthes 1973)—or, as Linnemann puts it:

This is precisely the function of the drug war, as the fear and insecurity that structure it disown and disavow the many strange contradictions of the present social order and our shared fates as finite beings. Meanwhile laws are passed, careers are made, race and class divisions are reborn, and bodies pile up. If the drug war can be understood as a death wish, then it manifests as a compulsion to repeat, a surrogate social world chosen and future preferred over others. (224)

Although engaging the imaginary to believe a better world is possible is optimistic and ideal, “capital realism”¹ dominates (see Fisher 2009, 2) and “interlaced with or conditioned by bourgeois ideology, the methamphetamine and drug-war imaginaries help to individualise the most fundamental of social relations” (224) and perpetuate the harmful subjectivities characteristic of consumer capitalism (Hall & Winlow 2015). Essentially, in contemporary society, it is “easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism” (Fisher 2009, 2).

NOTE

1. By “capitalist realism,” Fisher (2009, 2) is referring to “the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it.”

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Meth and Cultural Politics

Eamonn Carrabine[†]

METH WARS IS AN AMBITIOUS, WIDE-RANGING, AND PENETRATING cultural criminology of what Linnemann has termed the “methamphetamine imaginary” and is written in his inimitable style, with well-turned phrases, vivid imagery, and acute criticism adorning every page. He is careful to insist that “invoking the imaginary in no way suggests that the problems associated with drugs are not real and thus without consequence. Rather, *imaginary* describes important yet often-overlooked mediated dimensions of social life” (5, emphasis in original). Much of the book then is taken up with mapping it, and each of the six chapters focuses on a specific, significant site where meaning is constructed, contested, and exchanged. It takes seriously the idea that culture is not so much a set of things, but rather a process, a set of practices. Although he does not put it in these terms, and he may quarrel with them, I think the book offers a way of understanding meth as a representational system, using language, signs, and images that enable us to make sense of the world and the social relations in it.

The book deftly moves from the television screen to public service advertisements, from small-town policing to global narcopolitics, taking the reader on a grand tour around the major sites where the methamphetamine imaginary establishes itself. The book makes many contributions and I want to highlight just three: discourse, whiteness, and place. With respect to discourse, Linnemann innovatively develops Simon Hallsworth’s (2013) distinction between gang talk and gang talkers to describe *meth talk* as the language, grammar, and free-floating discourse of *meth talkers*, who are far removed from the actual lived realities of meth production and consumption but are actively involved in methamphetamine control. Meth talkers are the police, educators, legislators, and researchers, among others, who position themselves as authorities in the business of treating, controlling, and punishing those involved in the meth industry. As such, the cultural work of meth talkers plays a crucial role in shaping the methamphetamine imaginary. The focus on language is important; by seeing meth as a representational system, the rules of communication can be critically exposed, and the book can be understood as a sustained attempt to demystify the mythologies of meth.

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The book's second accomplishment is its sophisticated grasp of the politics of race and class. In particular, it pulls apart the metaphor of "white trash" that is a crucial element in the methamphetamine imaginary, where distinct social hierarchies and subject positions are mobilized in an aesthetics of class distinction. Importantly, he ties the insult "white trash" to contemporary forms of class denigration and racial domination by pointing to certain similarities with the stigmatization of "chavs" in the United Kingdom, as analyzed by Keith Hayward and Majid Yar (2006). As with white trash in the United States, the implication is that the animosity directed at chavs is a form of symbolic violence through which class inequalities are socially reproduced. Of course, the book will be well known for its analysis of public service announcements and anti-meth campaigns devoted to reproducing a distinct sort of racialized subjectivity. It is a fine example of a criminology attuned to visuality and makes innovative use of Julia Kristeva's understanding of abjection in the mug shot pairings that feature in the campaigns.

Thirdly, the book takes criminology to task for its inability to address the rural and its overwhelming concentration on the urban texture of crime. His aim is to demonstrate how the "so-called rural meth epidemic is a distinct cultural production" and the various efforts to police it "animate a particular criminalized and penal subjectivity – carceral habitus – of rural crime" (145). Here, he confronts Steve Hall and Simon Winlow's (2007) critique of cultural criminology, which they charge with romanticizing transgression at the expense of a serious engagement with theorizing the ills of global capitalism. As such, Linnemann attempts to provide both a materialist and idealist understanding of place simultaneously, leading to a closer understanding of the tropes of rural idyll and rural decline. The book also illustrates how methamphetamine and drug-war imaginaries are put to work fabricating national boundaries and a particular sort of global social order. In this he maintains that the border, like the rural, is not simply a line drawn on a map, but an ongoing cultural creation fashioned by efforts to control the flow of bodies and materials, particularly drugs.

The book is not only a cultural criminological tour de force, but a compelling tour de horizon as well, and it is difficult to find fault with it. That said, the book would have been stronger if it had finished with a more extensive conclusion, instead of a brief epilogue that touches on some of the themes running through the text. Instead, I would have liked to see further reflection on the analytical framework deployed in the text. The book works best as a series of interlinked essays, where individual chapters explore the imaginary as a signifying practice in a rich diversity of social contexts. What was

missing was a sense of pleasure and fantasy, that dynamic mix of fascination and repulsion, dread and desire that moral guardians often exhibit toward the objects of their anxiety. In other words, I thought the psychoanalytical insights from the likes of Kristeva and Žižek could have been pushed further. They are certainly in the book, but a comprehensive interrogation of them might have teased them out and brought them into productive tension with some of the other concepts developed under the umbrella of imaginary. None of this should detract from the impressive scholarship on display across the book, which provides a powerful critique of the politics, culture, and ideology underpinning and sustaining contemporary drug wars.

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Death, Dread, Desire

Phil Carney[‡]

AT THE END OF *DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH*, FOUCAULT DISCERNs BEHIND the strategy, tactics, and mechanisms of modern power “the distant roar of battle” (Foucault 1977, 308). If, in turning Clausewitz (1982) upside down, politics is for Foucault war by other means, then power in modernity multiplies in the service of defending society against a host of dangers (Foucault 1977, 2003). Such confrontations also take place at the

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level of subjectivity in which a largely unconscious, though not uncontested, self-subjection takes place in new fields of control. We recall these insights when faced with those social practices recruited to combat the enemies of crime and drugs. Travis Linnemann's compelling and powerful book *Meth Wars* investigates the cultural productions and practices of the great US war on drugs through a well-conducted case study of the methamphetamine problem. We sense not so much the faint echoes of Foucault's "distant roar" but more a noisy and spectacular series of battles with a feared, hated, socially constructed adversary. Like Foucault, he suggests that the methamphetamine war also takes place at the level of subjectivity.

Linnemann takes us on a journey into the world of the "methamphetamine imaginary," a dark fantasy traversing US culture in its images, discourses, and narratives. Agencies of control, treatment, correction, punishment, and government follow in the imaginary's wake, all invested with a heavily moralized, righteous, and endless sense of war. However, his text reminds us that the fight is not about just one drug, one drive, or one battlefield; it is also embedded in wider practices of power and control. His framework of analysis creatively uses the methods and perspectives of cultural criminology, to which are added an explicit critique of capitalism leavened with Slavoj Žižek's psychoanalytic understanding of fetishistic disavowal and ideology. We not only encounter "Merton with energy and Katz with structure" (Young 2003) but also energy and structure understood through an analysis of unconscious desire. In this way, the question is raised: What if we *need* the drug war? This subtle but insistent refrain on desire and subjectivity regularly punctuates the text and in many ways orders its argument too.

Fizzing with wonderful cultural observations, the book takes in, for example, a penetrating critique of the popular TV series *Breaking Bad*, in which Walter White's death drive is revealed to be that of a wider political and cultural formation ignored in the story. Another chapter calls us to witness a disturbing photographic portrayal of bodies on meth. The analysis detects not only desires of penal spectatorship but also the operation of racism. Ravaged faces and abject bodies are deployed in antidrug propaganda and incorporated into a systematic discourse on the specter of derelict white trash. At this point criminology should recognize its origins in Lombroso's gallery of faces, illustrating his application of colonial stereotypes to the European city's heart of darkness.

Another standout cultural analysis is encountered in a reading of the best-selling *Methland* (Reding 2010), in which he finds documentary and fiction conventions crossing over in the construction of fantasy. Hence, meth

cannot be disengaged from the politics evident in the imaginary as a tool of macro- and micropolitical government—governing through meth—from precrime policy based on chemical precursors to the grand security strategies of the Patriot Act and the global war on drugs. Through Linnemann's astute analysis, woven throughout the book, we also discover how meth gives shape to forms of repressive rural politics and policing.

A critical response to a book like this is supposed to pass judgment, weigh up the plusses and minuses, reward or find fault, and evaluate the guilt or innocence of the author, all gestures before which our criminology should at least pause. Such judgment does not accord with how I want to read this book or, more importantly, the way in which this book should be read. Instead, I want to follow certain dynamics suggested by a story of desire and subjectivity.

Implicit in the book is the problem of consumer desire, without which the order of capitalism is inconceivable. To be a bit psychoanalytic, this is a culture of orality driven by deficit. You feel a little unhappy? Comfort eat or, even better, comfort consume in order to fill that gap. Unhappiness becomes a constricted neediness. More insidious, perhaps, is the mimetic desire of emulation in search of lifestyle—equally restless and unfulfillable. Big Pharma's peddling of psychotropic drugs moves between these two imperatives, but in the end—whether through consumer goods, off-the-peg ways of life, or pills to make us happy—we are left with the modern sickness of infinity. This malaise underlying the glister of consumerism is not just a side effect; it provides the engine for more consumption, a cycle which can only be described as addictive. Of course, there are many, varied consumer pleasures, but consumerism is nonetheless haunted by the sometimes narcissistic and always troubled relationship with the commodity. This is an entirely new kind of desire, transforming creative impulses into deficit-based yearnings in the managed sadness of consumer populations. Consumerism creates the problem and presents itself as the solution. However, a psychoanalytic vocabulary of orality is only useful if it is taken out of the psychological and resituated in the social and political registers. Thus, the origins of consumer desire are not found, as Lacanians might have it, in the nostalgia for a universal mirroring relationship between suckling infant and carer that follows the traumatic entry into symbolic society.

Hence, if we want to understand what is disavowed in the methamphetamine imaginary, then we are obliged to consider what is *avowed* over and again in the deadening repetitions of our consumer habits and our all-

too-willing addiction to Big Pharma. Our analytical task is to understand how capitalism has been profitably complicit in the construction of a desire based on deficit, restless orality, and addiction, not so much in the individuals identified by pathologizing discourse but as the condition of a culture.

This is precisely where Žižek, who hovers at the edges of Linnemann's text, may miss the target. Following the Freudo-Lacanian tradition, Žižek (e.g., 1989, 1991) first rests his universal notion of desire on a fundamental *deficit* of the human condition inherent in the symbolic-cultural order we all inhabit. Apparently, after a founding trauma, we act out the script of a universal tragedy. Second, he gives too much priority to ideology and symbolism in social life. It is in this way that the affective dynamics of fetishism are transformed into the unwieldy, cognitive, dialectical apparatus of "fetishistic disavowal" (e.g., Žižek 2000). Third, Žižek fails to contextualize the death drive sufficiently. We are left with the Freudian conception of a universal drive, reducing to mere happenstance the various sociohistorical death drives inserted in our culture by different kinds of power, not least that of exchange found in the nihilistic market mechanism, as well as the violence used by the police, carceral, and military institutions of the modern death state. In short, the delightful, entertaining, provocative Žižek, our "Elvis of cultural theory" (McLemee 2004), with his deficit-based notion of desire and drive and his reduction of culture to the dialectics and semiotics of the symbolic, falls into a trap laid there by the very capitalist order he seeks to critique. It is not that he offers us a theory of consumer desire; it is, rather, that his theory of desire is consumerist.

I have attempted to read desire in another way, but not in order to find a negative in Travis Linnemann's monograph. Rather, my reading is enabled by the book's enormous fertility. The power of the writing allows us to take it in different directions. Perhaps I have tried to do justice to the text, but those are not the right words to use for such a short intervention on a vigorous work that vibrates with many insights and incitements to thought. If Linnemann addresses the question of how and why we have needed the methamphetamine war, then I can only conclude that we all need to read his book *Meth Wars*.

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Rural Criminology, Myth, and Meth

Bill McClanahan[§]

HAS THERE EVER BEEN A RURAL CRIMINOLOGY? NOT A CRIMINOLOGY that applies the well-worn approaches to theory and method that characterize and constitute criminology writ large to rural issues, spaces, and people (see Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy 2013), but a criminology that takes rurality as more than a site of opportunistic analysis? Putting aside the more fundamental questions surrounding the utility or necessity of a rural criminology, prior to Travis Linnemann's *Meth Wars: Police, Media, Power*, I am inclined to say that there has not. I expect that some will disagree, pointing to the robust body of work produced by those raising the

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flag of rural criminology—a body of work that, despite the criticism that will follow, offers significant and necessary insight into the distinct problems and issues faced by rural populations in their collisions and interactions with the tangled phenomena of crime and criminal justice. What has nearly always been missing, though—and what Linnemann corrects—is that prior to *Meth Wars*, rurality has been treated primarily as a site of subjectivity, materiality, and being that is somehow divorced nearly entirely from the forces of culture. This miscalculation has laid the foundations for a rural criminology that has failed to define rurality using a multifactor framework, one that accounts for more than demographics, locations of primary production, and proximity to urban and suburban spaces. Though it may, perhaps, be controversial to assert that rural criminology has yet to offer a compelling analysis of the spaces it purports to privilege, I would guess it is far less controversial to assert something like the following: rurality is a thing, a space, and a feeling that we are only able to know and apprehend when we encounter it in our daily lives. Like Potter Stewart's obscenity, we know the rural when we see and feel the rural. It is more than demography, more than geography, and more than materiality. It is, then, in large part the sensory and affective that we have encountered when we say we have encountered the rural, and so it is *culture* that, in large part, configures rurality. If the cultural rural is a necessary rural, then the bulk of the extant rural criminology is simply criminological analysis of rural issues (which, it is worth noting, might not even be *distinctly* rural). What is needed, and what *Meth Wars* sometimes offers (particularly in chapters four and five), is a contemporary cultural criminology of the rural, making it, by my measure, the first bit of rural criminology to date.¹ When even the best pieces of theory that consider the rural are treated as missives from the edges of irrelevance, *Meth Wars* fires a much-needed shot across the bow of contemporary social theory, giving the issues confronted by the lives immersed in the nonurban front lines of the drug war their due place.

It is little wonder, then, that the bits of *Meth Wars* that follow Keith Hayward's (2012) suggestion for a more spatially attuned cultural criminology are so clearly descended from Raymond Williams, whose fundamental interest in the spaces of society and material geography that we call the rural is intimately entangled with cultural knowing. Linnemann, though, drags that tendency—a tendency to see the spaces so routinely redacted from criminological and popular discourses alike—into the twenty-first century, along the way imbuing it with criminological relevance by considering the role of the continuous drug wars in configuring what we now know as the

rural. Through his sharp analysis of the ways in which the drug war—and meth itself—comes alive as a monster animated by media and cultural production and unleashed by police power, Linnemann makes it clear that the drug war is equal parts Freudian death drive and revanchist, classed, and racialized political police violence, and that both are routinely enacted on the social and material landscapes of rurality. In particular, his interviews with the police that patrol the rural Midwest, a place mythically configured by meth—and here the book is clear: the enemy of police in the drug war is as much myth as it is meth—reveal the racial and class-based violence of police. What is perhaps most refreshing, though, is that *Meth Wars* deftly and forcefully dodges each of the traps set by liberal appeals to reform; there is little ambiguity in Linnemann's critique, and the fundamental violence and injustice of the institutions he takes aim at are never far from the surface of his analysis.

Police power, of course, *is* fundamentally violent, from before the dawn of the first organized patrol and well before the rise of the oft-discussed police militarization, whereas property has always been reserved for capital, protected by the violence of law and police. *Meth Wars* makes the violence inherent in police and capital clear through its presentation of a narrative of recent drug war history that recognizes the fundamental nature of the issues it problematizes; never does the book mistake old phenomena for new, epoch-making, periodizing phenomena, but instead it recognizes the problems it raises for what they are: the mediated power of capital and police, the necessary marriage of the two, and the related “disavowal” of the “embeddedness” (Linnemann 2016, 20) of liberal and conservative politics alike in the structural problems inherent in the drug war. Here, then, Linnemann joins voices like that of Mark Neocleous, warning us of the dangers of mistaking old for new, one for two. *Meth Wars*, moreover, does all of this while also injecting rural criminology with a desperately needed dose of culture. By breaking ground in these various ways, Linnemann does not, to his credit, add to the bloat of stock-standard criminology, but instead contributes to the kind of theoretically promiscuous thinking that gives cultural criminology, even decades on, its urgency, relevance, and purpose.

There are, no doubt, those among us in (or on the margins of) the criminological fold who have gone hoarse calling for theories of criminal justice, police ethnography, rural criminology, and so many more vestigial additions to our common theoretical and methodological canon. There are none, though, that I trust more with the task of developing or rejecting the necessity or possibility of those various additions than Linnemann, who

proves with *Meth Wars* that he has the narrative intuition, theoretical sophistication, and methodological sensitivity to reveal to his audience the human suffering built into the drug war, capital, and police through the media we thoughtlessly consume and encounter. He likewise has the political spine to critique and scrutinize the ways that the violence and power of police and its drug war come alive before our eyes in the oft-immaterial spaces of mediated culture, the material-cultural spaces of rurality, and the all too often bankrupt spaces of criminology.

NOTE

1. Despite the argument presented here in support of the significance of *Meth Wars*, there are many excellent pieces of scholarship under the banner of rural criminology. There are, even, notable moments of rural cultural criminology. My aim here is not to deny or denigrate that work, but instead to note that *Meth Wars* has a place in that canon and that, moreover, its rigor and sensitivity make it a standout contribution to the ways that criminology and contemporary social theory approach and apprehend rurality.

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Apocalypse Now and Forever

Travis Linnemann[¶]

MARCH 2018: SPEAKING TO A CROWD AT A NEW HAMPSHIRE community college, Donald Trump stirred controversy—even for him—with the suggestion that executing drug dealers might be a way out of the country’s rising opioid crisis. With overtures to Philippine strongman Rodrigo Duterte, who openly encourages the extrajudicial executions of drug dealers, Trump raised the tough-on-crime ante, chiding:

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These are terrible people, and we have to get tough on those people... but if we don't get tough on the drug dealers, we're wasting our time. Just remember that. We're wasting our time. And that toughness includes the death penalty. (Trump 2018)

Betraying his utter ignorance of the workings of US criminal justice, Trump drew on the myth of drug dealers who “kill thousands” only to be fined or jailed for “30 days” or a year and of murderers invariably imprisoned “for life.” Continuing his screed, Trump leaned on his now patented brand of crude nationalist, racial politics, holding China and Mexico responsible for the nearly 1,500 pounds of fentanyl seized by US agents in 2017 and the ambiguous group of “criminal aliens with 76,000 charges and convictions for dangerous drug crimes” apparently arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that year. Emboldened by chants of “Build that wall! Build that wall! Build that wall!” from his curated audience, he lambasted Democrats for the insolence of sanctuary cities, the terror of the gang MS-13, and the chaos of the southern border. Amid the bombast, he offered up “very, very bad commercials” as the centerpiece of his administration’s drug control efforts. Despite decades of research findings to contrary, he touted the ability of fear-appeal ads to keep young people from “getting hooked on drugs to begin with,” punctuating his cut-rate response to a problem he had declared a national emergency months earlier (Trump 2018).

As easy as it is, we should resist framing Trump’s response to the opioid crisis as a marked departure from long-established practices of the US drug war. More aptly, we might say that Trump simply doubled down on many of the missteps that I outlined in *Meth Wars*. From the racialized specter of violent street crime ginned up by his fixation on MS-13 and the politics of border and nation reverberating in chants to “build the wall,” to the geopolitical expediency of policing global commodity chains, the drug war provides this president, as well as those preceding and those to follow, the vehicle for a virulent politics of security. Like the lethal, race-making populism marshaled by anti-meth ads, the violent singlemindedness of small-town police, and the global hunt for narcoterrorists featured in *Meth Wars*, Trump’s calls for toughness and quick but ineffectual technocratic fixes follow closely a decades-long history of accepted failures in the US drug war.

On these points, I think it is safe to assume that the critics assembled for this symposium, and I agree. Where they do find fault with my argument, in broadest terms, is my psychosocial explanation for the drug war’s dogged persistence and my suggestions for a way forward, or rather a lack thereof. In response, I’ll begin by revisiting my framing of the drug war.

In short, building on Slavoj Žižek's fetishistic disavowal, I account for US commitment to the drug war and all its failures as a sort of collective death wish, a destructive *jouissance*, displacing for a moment the intractable inequalities of late capitalism and the frailties of human mortality onto a never-ending parade of loathsome scapegoats. Admittedly, such an understanding of methamphetamine, the drug war, and global narcopolitics grimly foregrounds fear and insecurity or, as Phil Carney aptly notes, an understanding of human desire conditioned by *deficit*. In his contribution to this symposium, Carney makes the important point that the drug war is driven as much by an affective and indulgent desire for drugs and the drug war as objects of consumption as it is by the disavowal of its many harms. On this we couldn't agree more, and I will suggest that desire is present, albeit buried, in my argument, particularly as it relates to the contradictory desires and envy directed toward those who pursue the freedoms and hedonistic pleasures of illicit drug use while also seeming to escape the stifling stasis of bourgeois conventionality (Linnemann 2016, 68).

Although the place of desire in the world of drugs cannot be overstated, the drug war as a security project is organized by fear and insecurity. Here, the drug war, whether aligned against a particular substance, person, demographic, gang, or an entire nation, manifests a perpetual state of emergency, necessitating and normalizing the terror of policing's pacification projects, its no-knock raids, stop-and-frisk, asset forfeiture, and mandatory minimums. Desire in this respect can be located in the panicked calls for more police and punishment and, of course, the commodified wares of security itself.

Another point of contention raised by both Tammy Ayres and Eamonn Carrabine concerns the book's epilogue and theoretical conclusion. Like Carney, Carrabine wishes the conclusion had reflected and elaborated upon the book's analytic framework and included a sense of pleasure and fantasy amid the dread and death. Relatedly, Ayres understandably brings Mark Fisher's (2009) *Capitalist Realism* to bear on the conclusion's modest injunction to imagine differently. Fisher clearly haunts the book's conclusion, however, speaking through Steve Hall and Simon Winlow, who are among his greatest champions. Yet both Carrabine and Ayres also detect another kind of ghost, the eerily absent glimmer of hope, the productive critique that fails to emerge from pessimism and resignation. On this, I also couldn't agree more. In fact, the injunction to imagine differently was my attempt to end on a high note, to leave the reader with some way forward following several hundred pages of cynical criticism. As I wrote in the conclusion, I hoped my rejection of reform would not be read as postpolitical apathy, but

rather as the more deliberate strategy of thinking before acting, or rather just learning to think differently. Perhaps I fell short. Writing and then reflecting on the epilogue did force me to further clarify a position that has since emerged in my writing (see Linnemann 2017). Rather than the injunction to imagine differently, the conclusion might now reflect Simon Winlow's *enlightened catastrophism*, which abandons the myth of reform, incremental progress, and easy solutions for the clarity of a grim realism better equipped to imagine the dystopian future, or perhaps diagnose the dystopian present (Winlow 2016). "Once we have imagined this future," Winlow writes, a "shock of recognition and conscious acceptance" must and will compel us to "be brave enough to face the future and look it square in the face, and then join with others to fashion the forms of intervention that can arrest our slow descent into the chaos of the future" (Winlow 2016). As I argued in *Meth Wars*, and as Trump has since reminded us, the drug war emerges again and again as the compulsion to repeat—the fear-drenched desire to destroy and to kill. This is precisely how I read Jameson's famous adage that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. However, in *Meth Wars*, the imagined end of the world is not external to human desire; it is an apocalypse of our own design, engineered again and again, until at last the product is perfected.

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