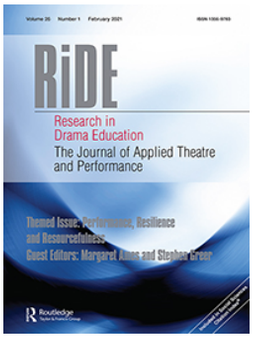

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The 'pop-up' recovery arts café: growing resilience through the staging of recovery community

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ABSTRACT

Reflecting on a prototype event, *A Recovery Arts Café*, this article examines how recovery communities can be staged through collaborative performance events that directly engage with what it means to be *in recovery* from addiction. I theorise recovery and performance practice as particular forms of affective ecology, or processes of relation between the human and nonhuman, and challenge neoliberal ideas of self-care and 'good' citizenship. Drawing on posthumanist concepts of 'life-living' (Manning 2016) and 'making kin' (Haraway 2016), I identify how recovery-engaged performance events can operate as dynamic modes of growing resilience amidst societal contexts that impede capacity for recovery.

KEYWORDS

Addiction; posthumanist; performance; precarity; resilience

On 2 October 2019, I welcomed those in attendance to *A Recovery Arts Café*. The audience were a cross section of members of the host institution's community (staff and students from Royal Central School of Speech and Drama), recovery arts community (performers and practitioners) and external visitors. Situated in a studio performance space that had been temporarily transformed into a cabaret setting, the seated audience joined the assemblage of red cloth covered round tables, flickering imitation candles, curtain-draped walls and dimmed wash of pink lighting that generated an intimate atmosphere. As compère for the proceedings, I invited them to join in with the experimental experience. It was indeed to be an experiment in a number of ways; an experiment in sharing knowledges about the performance practices I was researching, an experiment in gathering different types of people together who might have an interest in these performance practices and an experiment in doing this through the medium of a performance event. It was also an experiment in sharing the ethical and political ethos of my doctoral research that recognises our collective responsibility – in society – for creating social environments that are conducive to increasing capacities for recovery from addiction. I was particularly interested in exploring how to extend the insights from my three-year postgraduate research project beyond the limit of the written thesis and into potential future developments of my work.

This article reflects on the philosophical concepts that underpinned the ethos with which I curated *A Recovery Arts Café* and how these informed what became a

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collaborative, participatory event engaged with recovery from addiction. It positions the concept of resilience as a dynamic practice of recovery through which those involved develop less harming responses to the surrounding world. Recognising Brad Evans and Julien Reid's warning that neoliberal governance obfuscates resilience as risk management against the many perceived dangers to humanity (2014, 18), I offer an interpretation of resilience within the context of the philosophy of recovery I share below. Through this, I frame resilience in a practice of recovery as an acceptance of the impermanence of our human existence and a commitment, shared and demonstrated with others, to being fully reflexively engaged in the present moment. It is not so much a process of resourcefulness, though there are a variety of useful rituals that can be acquired, but rather, it entails the development of a certain philosophical – some might argue spiritual – stance.

Influenced by Isabelle Stengers' 'ecologies of practice' (2005, 185) as a methodological approach, I do not attempt an evaluation of the practices of this event, but, rather, I address the multi-dimensional encounter of the event to highlight its potential for generating new connections and experiences. Stengers proposed that research should emphasise how the localised features of an event operate and are informed by its surroundings. Her discussion of responsibility is also of relevance, here, in that she suggested that the role of the researcher is not to exert control or power, claiming a 'right to act' or a predetermined outcome (188). Responsibility takes a minor role in that it becomes a 'matter of pragmatic ethos' in paying attention and practicing discernment (ibid.) My discussion emphasises, therefore, the contributory ethical and political commitments informing the facilitation of the event as an indication of the potentiality of this and possible future occasions.

First, I share a posthumanist understanding of addiction that appreciates the multifaceted everyday realities of what it means to *be in recovery* and challenges neoliberal ideas of it as predominantly an individual's responsibility. Second, I propose an ethico-political approach to performance-making that adapts Erin Manning's concept of 'life-living' to the cultivation of collaborative performance events. My discussion culminates in proposing that performance events, infused with experiences and understandings of *being in recovery* hold the potential to function as modes of building resilience to the inevitable precarity of recovery and of, currently under-resourced, recovery arts practices. This is achieved in the manner such arts practices stage and, subsequently, connect forms of recovery communities.

Donna Haraway's 'staying with the trouble' (2016, 1) is a useful analogy for my emphasis on the contextual realities of experiences of addiction and recovery. Her concept of the chthulucene offers an appreciation of the present moment as composed of multiple times, including the past and the yet to be, and inhabited by a myriad of earthly beings that perform the earth's processes and, more pertinently, demonstrate consequences (2). This chthulucene is marked as 'disturbing' and 'turbid' times, containing a 'damaged earth' (ibid.). In response to such trouble, Haraway urged that our task is to 'make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present' (1). People *in recovery* are particularly aware of the impact of consequence, having reached a point – often referred to as a 'rock bottom' – where the extreme experiences of active addiction have precipitated a critical moment in which the impact of certain ways of thinking, feeling and doing must be confronted. Recovery, as I discuss in the following section, is not solely the concern of an individual

because it occurs within a broader societal context that can, and does, inhibit capacity for living well. Even the phrase living well invites discussion of what are the presumed values associated with wellness. Attending to performance practices engaged with recovery, however, offers an opportunity to explore what it means to 'make kin' and to address living well in the thickened present.

Growing resilience in the chthulucene

The programme for *A Recovery Café* featured a variety of short performative offerings from a variety of performers and practitioners. These included music from Simon Mason playing acoustic versions of songs produced with his band Hightown Pirates, a conversation with Mark Prest (Director of Portraits of Recovery) sharing insights from his visual arts practice, a theatrical performance by Outside Edge Theatre company from a devised piece entitled *Check in / Check out* which was inspired by experiences from recovery meetings, an interactive activity based on *The Washing Up* which was a performance created in collaboration with Small Performance Adventures and Cascade Creative Recovery Brighton, a reading of 'The Recoverist Manifesto' by Nicola Hollinshead from the Recoverist Theatre Project, a comic song by Anna North from her solo autobiographical show *Hero Win* and a comic interruption by Katie O'Brien inspired by her solo autobiographical show *Catch 22 Years*.

I share this long programme list to reveal the variety of perspectives and art forms at the event. Those involved were artists or practitioners with whom I had met and, most of whom, I had written about in my PhD thesis. This was, therefore, an opportunity to share the arts practices from this research in a manner that ensured that contributors could represent their own work. It was, deliberately, a collaborative enterprise in that I extended an invitation to them to present whatever they wished so long as it would fit within the two hours of the event. I curated the eventual programme from this, although there remained a degree of indeterminacy as I would not know specifically what would be presented until the cabaret was unfolding. What I did expect, however, was that the programme would share a range of recovery-engaged artistry by people who have a nuanced understanding of the lived experience of issues related to addiction. Most involved self-identified as in recovery and those few who did not identify as such had a particular understanding of addiction through personal connections or professional practice with people affected by addiction. Yet, in this experiment of sharing recovery-engaged practices, what knowledges or insights might we presume to share?

The word recovery is, in my view, a misnomer, with its implications of a return to, or recovering of, some normative notion of static wellbeing. It is laden with assumptions of what it means to be well or, as I shall elaborate further below, values attributed to neoliberal concepts of good citizenship. Given the predominant use of the word recovery as a signifier for a state of being (indicated by colloquial phrases such as 'I am in recovery' or 'I am a recovering … ') amongst recovery communities, it seems counterproductive to reject the use of the word completely. In this article I offer, therefore, a theorising of recovery that attempts to intervene in its use by proposing a concept of *being in recovery* that aligns with the varied and contingent lived realities of it. To do so, I build on Erin Manning's philosophical concept of the body as 'an ecology of processes' (2013, 19) which conceives of our experience of life as continually evolving bodily movements that are

influenced by the various affective encounters, or energetic and sensorial interrelations, we have with our surroundings. These include interactions with other people, but also with the non-human that, for people affected by addiction, involve objects (often substances), places and socio-political systems that inform the context of their experience.

Drawing from Manning, I consider the body as a 'relational field' (ibid.) within which the physical, neurological and psychosocial converge to become an individual's lived experience, or, in other words, their particular system of processes in the world. Addiction is one potential tendency of these operations that, if placed on a spectrum, would perhaps be situated at the extreme. It involves a loop of extreme sensations, behavioural and thinking processes, in which a person may find themselves caught within an entropic cycle. By entropic, I do not infer any particular value judgement on chosen forms of existence, but, rather, I suggest that through the perpetual loop of thinking and behaviour manifested in the 'graft-score-use process'[1] of active addiction a person might find themselves unable to cease activity that is increasingly detrimental to their capacity to engage in the world around them, and ultimately a threat to their health and wellbeing.

Considering addiction as a swing towards extreme processes that cause someone to become caught in a cycle of active addiction, I regard recovery as an effort towards (a never fully achieved) equilibrium that enables the maintenance of less damaging processes of being.[2] Recovery, for me, entails practices that foster a balance in how affective relations – energetic and sensorial interactions – are experienced that increase a body's capacity to affect and be affected by avoiding the swing towards extremes that disrupt and divert 'becoming well'. Concurrently, this involves the development of new approaches to relation with the surrounding world that are also resilient to the inevitable painful sensations of life and its associated losses. It includes a process of active and embodied learning of strategies for survival founded upon intra- and inter-personal discoveries of less harmful ways to respond to felt sensations. Yet, given the relational dimension of any process of being in the world, it is pertinent to consider how the surrounding environments may increase or decrease a body's capacity for recovery.

It is productive, therefore, to adopt a posthumanist approach that can also highlight the potential of performance practice that intersects with the human and nonhuman dimensions of experience. A posthumanist understanding of addiction identifies the everyday realities of this condition as constituted by the material surroundings that influence experience. For instance, Fay Dennis and Adrian Farrugia highlighted how the new materialist concepts drawn from 'Deleuze's ontology of 'becoming', Barad's 'agential realism', Latour's 'Actor Network Theory', and Bennett's 'enchanted materialism' all move beyond notions that reality is a stable matter awaiting discovery and instead explore how materiality is relationally made or takes shape' (2017, 88). Their new materialist analysis of addiction attends to ways in which experiences of drug using emerge in relation to contingent material surroundings and so 'radically reconfigures' the traditional subject upon which public health policy has been founded (90). They argued that materialist readings of drug use highlight the need for a revision of current drug policy to adopt an ethics of care in which the material experience of the drug consumer matters (ibid.). I suggest that the radical shift they offer is a re-orientation of addiction research and policy to the vantage point of the body affected by addiction, and its interactions with objects, substances and its surroundings, rather than imposing decisions made from an external diagnosis on an essentialised 'addict'[3] body that inevitably limits agency and marginalises.

A posthumanist approach is of particular relevance when one examines the contemporary socio-political context that impacts on the everyday experiences of those affected by addiction, particularly, to substances. The prohibitionist policy of the 'War on Drugs' and its consequent criminalisation of people addicted to what are deemed to be illicit substances reflects an 'apparatus of control' (Foucault [1977] 1991, 101) through which neoliberal government ascribes deviancy to those not considered to conform to notions of good citizenship. This, in turn, impacts the social context and psychosocial experience of people affected by addiction. Those addicted to prohibited substances are criminalised and controlled via the judicial system of their respective country. In fact, through the laws of prohibition, they are not just positioned as morally deviant, but are caught in a cycle in which they will inevitably continue to contravene the law to both procure and use the substance on which they have a dependency. A report facilitated by UK drugs reform charity Release, entitled *A Quiet Revolution*, highlighted that, despite an annual expenditure of approximately £100 billion on law-enforcement approaches to drug policy, there has been a continued increase in drug use, prison populations and drug-related deaths (Eastwood, Fox, and Rosmarin 2016, 6). It emphasised the disproportionate impact of criminalisation upon ethnic minorities within the UK, which was also further highlighted by the Lammy Review's report that Black people were five times more likely to be subjected to police 'stop and search' than white people pro rata (Shiner et al. 2018, vi).

Isabel Lorey's theorisation of the emergence of the 'dangerous other' (2015, 38) is useful to understanding the biopolitical position of the 'addict'. She extended Foucault's biopolitics to the contemporary context to demonstrate how precaritisation, underpinned by fear, operates as the current 'instrument' of neoliberal government (2015, 1). In particular, she noted that the *affect* of fear is harnessed as an important mechanism to ensure compliance to the neoliberal regime (2). Fear, she argued, is promoted by loss of security which is further intensified by minimal assurances by governments that reinforce the presumption that 'there is no other alternative to the current state of affairs in capitalist democracy' (ibid.). Faced with such uncertainty, people strive to reduce their vulnerability through the modes of self-regulation and compliance encouraged by the neoliberal regime (26–28). This includes understanding how their class, gender, racial, sexual and religious attributes impact on one's position of precarity in relation to a male heterosexual norm (29). Lorey proposed that by marking 'dangerous others' as the precarious ones at the 'margins', the government can obscure the precariousness and subjugation within an inequitable system shared amongst all and so prevent a collective revolt (38 and 39). Danger, the marginalised, or the self-regulated citizen might, therefore, be conceived as a convenient construct of biopolitical governmentality.

Lorey's discussion of the 'dangerous other' is particularly relevant to the position of 'the addict' within societal contexts where government policy is still bound tightly to the politics of prohibition and criminalisation of drug use. The addicted person is positioned within society as 'an embodied deviant' (Ettorre 2015, 6). Should their object of addiction be a legal substance or behaviour, such as alcohol, prescription drugs or gambling, they are still likely to be considered deviant in how they threaten the neoliberal notion of an effective citizen. In *Gendering Addiction*, Nancy Campbell and Elizabeth Ettorre highlighted that women, and also people who experience racism and other marginalised groups, including the LGBTQ+ community and those with disabilities, are further

impacted by the continuance of hegemonic values that impose a limited perspective of what is 'normal' and so are unable to access effective support ([2011] 2014, 1).

Marginalisation and stigmatisation are, therefore, the consequential experiences of bodies labelled as 'affect aliens' (Ahmed 2010, 50) because of their non-compliance upon which is projected the fear and disgust of those aspiring to the ideal norm. This 'alien' biopolitical position, I suggest, can impact upon the possibilities and forms of funding available to arts practices involving people affected by addiction. For example, Faces and Voices of Recovery UK launched a recovery declaration of rights in response to funding restrictions and increased drug-related deaths. The declaration addresses directly the impacts of marginalisation on people affected by addiction in a period of time when access to state-funded treatment has become increasingly difficult due to budget cuts. This is further evidenced by a study conducted by the BBC in May of that year that found that cuts made to treatment budgets across the UK since 2013 had led to a rise in drug-related deaths (Rhodes 2018). Drawn from the Office of National Statistics, the statistics cited demonstrate that in England, in particular, an 18% cut in funding to treatment services corresponded with a 26% rise in drug-related deaths. Whilst there may be other factors involved in the overall increase, cuts to funding will inevitably impact on the level of provision and access to addiction support services. Furthermore, as core treatment services have experienced cuts in funding, there is subsequently less funding available for arts projects that might be considered a value-added option, rather than an essential part of the programme. This precarity is likely to have been exacerbated even more by the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic of 2020.

When faced with cuts to state funding, arts companies in this field can and do apply to private trust funds for financial support. These forms of funding tend to emphasise social impact criteria in their application processes. As Caoimhe McAvinchey has highlighted, this places an onus on the artist to articulate a particular promise in the framing of their practice (2014, 6). Such promises are antithetical to the reality of the artistry involved in applied performance practice which, as James Thompson argued, relies on the less easily communicated, and at times accidental, *affects* of a performance project (2011, 6). This is certainly relevant to art practices with people with recovery experiences that are vulnerable to relapse and that often entail a personal journey that involves renegotiating one's relation to the world. Long-term practices of recovery are not best facilitated through the imposition of social norms of what might be considered an effective citizen, such as whether one is exhibiting appropriate levels of self-esteem or has skills considered requisite for employability. Rather, I suggest that funding models might take more account of the attachments with sustainable recovery communities that recovery-engaged arts projects might generate. These attachments are formed through the lingering *affects* of participation in collaborative performance activities or events that connect people in recovery (and those curious about it) through public expressions of recovery communities. This offers a long-term approach, instead of transient short-term targets that do not effectively embed participants in new lifestyles of recovery.

A posthumanist approach is, therefore, essential for disrupting neoliberal assumptions of addiction that emphasise individual pathology and evade collective accountability. Instead, Cameron Duff proposed a shift from the individual as the focus of analysis towards addressing the connections of that individual body within an assemblage, leading to a more accurate analysis of the varied social and structural aspects in how

they shape experience (2014, 126). Drawing from Delueze and Guattari's concepts of immanence and becoming, he offered an approach to understanding drug use, and subsequently addiction, as a form of drug assemblage stating that each event of consumption 'combines spaces, bodies, affects and relations in the expression of drug effects … ' (127).

Approaching addiction as an assemblage is, I suggest, a more flexible framework with which to consider not only the nuanced ways in which social, economic and political factors contribute to addiction, but also allows for individual variation in how bodies are affected by, and respond in relation to, the assemblage differently. It particularly offers a way to account more adequately for difference in the manner that bodies are also gendered, racialized, or additionally 'othered' in accordance with established notions of a generalised 'norm'. Any arts activity with people affected by addiction should, therefore, consider the ways in which the social and structural aspects of wider society inhibit capacities for recovery. Consequently, while I acknowledge the process of recovery from addiction as partly the development of personal wellbeing, I prefer to emphasise the political nature of practices engaged with recovery. By this, I highlight how performance practices reveal the varied and context-specific features of lived experience that challenge simplistic assumptions that addiction is an individual person's problem and that it is solved by the compliance of that individual to a treatment programme. Instead, I position addiction and recovery as a collective concern. I conceive recovery-engaged arts practice, therefore, as a form of activism and active citizenship that calls on us to take collective responsibility for creating societal conditions that are conducive to supporting less harmful forms of living.

In gathering together to create what became *A Recovery Arts Café*, the performers and practitioners involved demonstrated their understanding of recovery as contingent and enhanced through connection with others, including the nonhuman features of the chthulucene. By this, I suggest that those involved revealed survival from addiction to be comprised of the development of capacities to address 'trouble' – including varied and differing experiences of difficulty and processes of recovery – through attending to the present moment. They did not offer utopic visions of an ideal future world or self. As the title of one of the songs performed by Mason indicated, they shared a common understanding of recovery as 'Just for Today'.[4]

Offering an ethos of 'life- living'

On each table were placed three paper cranes. Their outstretched wings offered one of a selection of three questions as an invitation for conversation; What are your strategies for connecting? What is life-living to you? What is survival? Seated upon oval-shaped pieces of paper of a variety of colours, adjacent to a jar of colouring pens, the cranes gestured, gently, towards participation. In my welcoming comments, I spoke very briefly about the context of the event as sharing practices that I had been researching. I explained that Manning's concept of 'life-living' (2016, 16) had resonated with my approach to thinking about and doing practice engaged with recovery from addiction. In particular, I offered her suggestion that we can learn from perspectives that are not the majority, or neurotypical, view and noted that the process of life is ecological in that it is formed and nurtured through various modes of connection (3–6). By accepting the ecological premise of life as

systems of connections, Manning emphasised interdependency as a strength and how we might value the ways in which all lives, the human and nonhuman, contribute to the event which we register as our lived experience (8).

In-between performances and during the intermission, audience members were invited to respond through conversation or creative expression using the materials on the table. My colleague, Adelina Ong, gathered these responses through joining people in conversation, listening, gathering paper that had been written upon and making chalk markings upon a large graffiti wall mounted on one side of the studio space. By the end of the event, the graffiti wall, wearing the title 'Habits of Survival', contained expressions in chalk, paper and pen from audience members and performers. These lingering traces of conversation, thought or feeling revealed a variety of responses that simultaneously highlighted difference and connection. For instance, one comment, written in a circular form to indicate the intended continuum of the sentences noted, 'connect with others to connect with myself to … '. Another expressed appreciation for 'the courage and honesty of performers and people sitting at my table. It's helped me to connect with, celebrate and move on from all the addicts and addictions in my life.' In contrast, other comments were short and pointed, such as 'Fuck stigma' and 'To experience truth is to experience pain.' Chalked on the wall were segments of conversations documented by Ong, including 'art is my higher power', 'not everything needs to be big', 'open your eyes' and 'I can't but we can.' These revealed different perspectives on experiences of life, however, the reoccurring theme of connection suggested that most in attendance believed that recovery, or living well, was a process involving more than an individual person.

Features of participation in social community, particularly what is referred to as recovery community, have been identified as supporting the development of recovery-orientated identity and lifestyle (Donovan et al. 2013, 312; Leighton 2017, 176–177). Performance practice, which stages representations of recovery-engaged sociability, holds the potential to instigate modes of recovery community and identity through artistic expression. Such performance events might continue to promote environments conducive to recovery after participation in treatment services has ceased. Given the flexibility and multiplicity of artistic forms and varieties of performance, they also offer a pluralist approach to recovery community. Different types of arts event can, therefore, instigate different expressions of identity within and across recovery *communities* and connect those who, as identified in Campbell and Ettorre's research ([2011] 2014, 1), have been historically under-represented and insufficiently supported in conventional treatment provision. Recovery-engaged arts events such as *A Recovery Arts Café* are social environments from which creative approaches to 'make kin' (Haraway 2016, 1) can emerge.

Staging recovery community

The title of *A Recovery Arts Café* was initially inspired by the growing trend for treatment services to facilitate community outreach services in the form of a 'recovery café'. These café services are usually daytime facilities that serve food and refreshments at low prices as well as offer free wellbeing workshops, such as yoga or arts activity. As indicated earlier, the features of what the event became were partly incidental due to its premise as a collaborative programme and so too was the development of it from the initial idea of a café

to that of a cabaret. The transition from café to cabaret aesthetic emerged in response to the range of performances offered by those who wished to participate, the change of venue from a studio room with natural lighting to a black box studio reliant on artificial lighting and the scheduled time of the event.

The discoveries made in this transition highlighted further the potential for experimenting with forms of staging recovery community. The early evening and cabaret-style setting of the eventual event indicated how the concept of a recovery café might be subverted to suggest that recovery spaces need not be anodyne or day-time places. Feedback from one particular audience member on their perception of the high quality of the performances highlighted that recovery arts activity can be presented as professionalised artistry. While I note Zoe Zontou's application of Alice O'Grady's concept of 'risky aesthetics' to discuss the complexity of attributing value to participatory practices that involve co-created performances with and by people with lived experience of addiction (2017, 209), I suggest it is worth appreciating how this artistry can exist amongst other cultural activity in general society, offering a recovery-engaged option.

FK Alexander's article on the Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2019, 'Theatre and Addiction', highlighted the particular risks for people in recovery when working in the theatre industry (2019). She articulated her observations about the pervasiveness of alcohol used within performances at the Fringe Festival as an issue of access in that uncritical practices involving alcohol alienate, and potentially endanger, people in recovery from addiction. For instance, she noted that offering alcoholic drinks to audience members or holding team meetings in bars are problematic scenarios for people who are in early stages of recovery. Occurring the month following Alexander's article, the timing of *A Recovery Arts Café* at the end of the first day of the annual *Collisions* festival of practice research, served as a recovery-orientated intervention in replacing what would conventionally have been a wine reception with a 'sober' event. Influenced by the recent trend for 'sober curious' events (Matei 2019), I explored the potential for performance events by, with and for people in recovery to operate as recovery-friendly options across the social fabric of arts and culture.

Duff proposed that opportunities for 'becoming well' might be better facilitated through the 'staging of atmospheres of recovery' that understand the way in which recovery is supported through an 'attunement' to the way in which affects, spaces and bodies operate to enhance or inhibit individual experiences (2016, 58). Rather than focus on the championing of personal recovery targets, he argued that emphasis should be placed on cultivating spaces of recovery (62). Drawing from geographer Ben Anderson's research on affective atmospheres, he argued for the following approach to recovery support,

> By focusing on the modulations of a body's capacities to affect and be affected in the spaces and times of its encounters, work on affective atmospheres avails a means of tracing some of the mechanisms by which capacities like hope, sociality, meaning and empowerment ebb and flow for bodies in recovery (ibid.).

Many UK treatment services facilitate social activities as part of their programmes. I suggest, however, that there is a need for wider availability of potential recovery support networks beyond the scope of initial treatment programmes. Given, as indicated earlier, that recovery is a perpetual process, it should follow that access to atmospheres of recovery needs to exist within and across the intersections of local communities. Duff also

highlighted the importance of duration, atmospheres that can be sustained in everyday practices and encounters (72). It is insufficient, therefore, to evaluate recovery services on the basis of individualised achievements of recovery targets, such as sobriety, re-housing or re-entering employment. Instead, I suggest that recovery approaches must consider public health as a collective concern in how the patterns and structures of society formulate atmospheres in which all bodies can live well.

Connection and cohabitation

Two members from the collaborative performance project *The Washing Up*, led an activity involving a tea towel. Nou Ra, representing the arts organisation *Small Performance Adventures*, shared the ethos behind the creation of *The Washing Up* that appreciates the seemingly small, everyday things as potentially profound.[5] Members of the audience were asked to speak to someone seated near them and share the following, how many tea towels do you have at home, which is your favourite and why? As an incentive, they were offered the opportunity to win a bespoke tea towel with printed sketches of *The Washing Up* performance. From observing the exchanges that occurred during the activity, it was evident that the exercise facilitated interaction and connection amongst the audience. Not only were some people provided with a premise for speaking to someone unfamiliar, but also the theme of washing dishes seemed to have a ubiquitous relevance to everyone in the room.

In keeping with the organisation's ethos of small as profound, the stories shared by audience members revealed how a tea towel can become more than a banal household object. These included associations with various forms of functionality, assisting in cleaning and food preparation, as well as attachments to memories of places travelled and people who had gifted the item. At one point during the audience feedback, a brief discussion of the proposed lifecycle of a tea towel emerged, describing a journey from pristine, new item to ragged floor cloth to refuse bin. It was a seemingly flippant interaction with one member of the audience, however, that revealed to me the deeper potential of *A Recovery Arts Café* as a recovery-engaged event. The prize tea towel was awarded to an audience member who had shared that he owned only three tea towels, each he had named and treated as friends. This was shared as a humorous anecdote and, subsequently, he was awarded with another 'friend'. Unbeknown to the facilitators of this exercise, the audience member they awarded with a tea towel had recently experienced a long period of ill health during which they were confined to their home. They had been uncertain as to whether they would be well enough to attend and, on speaking with them, I was aware of their anxiety about having sufficient bodily capacity to participate in the event. They left that evening with not only a new tea towel, but feeling the positive sensation of having interacted with others who understood recovery as ongoing, contingent and, at times, complicated with additional difficulties.

Such unexpected interrelation indicates how recovery-engaged performance events hold the potential to instigate encounters that connect people to forms of recovery community beyond treatment or health facilities. I accept, however, that such forms of connection are indeterminate in that it is not possible, or appropriate, to predict what encounters might occur in the moment of experience. Indeed, one comment posted on the graffiti wall indicated a desire to have more time allocated to facilitated

conversation in order to interact with more of the other people present in the room. There is certainly scope for further development of the mechanisms I incorporated into *A Recovery Arts Café* to encourage interaction. Yet, I also appreciate that there might be those who find talking with unfamiliar people or immersive performance environments uncomfortable. For instance, social anxiety has been identified as a barrier to participation in addiction treatment programmes (Book et al. 2009, 474) and can also be a factor contributing to addictive use of substances (McNaughton 2008, 19).

Reflecting on Haraway's proposal to find creative ways in which to 'make kin' with others, it is useful to consider how the social interaction might evoke sensations of anxiety, discomfort, or even shame, for people affected by addiction. I am interested, therefore, in how to use performance-induced interaction to enable sociability in more subtle, gentle ways. The arts materials left on the table, for example, invited participation in response to the performances without insisting on verbal communication with another human. It was, therefore, possible to listen and respond to the collective encounter according to the level of social interaction that an individual felt comfortable with. Two facilitators also circulated the room during the intermission to offer anyone who might be alone an opportunity to converse, should they wish.

Given the deliberate cross-section of people in attendance, those from within and external to the institution, the event offered an opportunity to make kin (if only momentarily) with people who might otherwise be unlikely to meet. Poignantly, practitioners and performers were largely responsible for facilitating, through their presentations and conversational interactions, the atmospheric conditions in which academic staff and students participated. A member of staff commented afterwards that it was refreshing for staff and students to be treated as the guests, as if they were the strangers, while the visitors were the hosts. This resonated with my ongoing inquiry into performance events as a conduit for 'cohabitation' (Butler 2015, 118), drawing from Judith Butler's use of the term to infer a building of alliances with those who might not otherwise consider themselves to have anything in common, may even be suspicious of each other, but join in a common understanding of the precariousness of life (27). In *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Butler proposed a 'politics of alliance' founded on an 'ethics of cohabitation' which appreciates that any struggle for individual identity rights is 'only meaningful within a broader struggle for social justice' (70).

Political representation, the right to stigma-free visibility and active participation in society were themes emerging from some of the performative contributions of *A Recovery Arts Café*. Prest, speaking about his practice with Portraits of Recovery, shared his ethos as a recoverist, a term he uses to denote a form of recovery activism whereby he facilitates visual arts commissions that represent the varied experiences of recovery. One recent project, *Unseen: Simultaneous Realities* (2017–2018) engaged people affected by addiction from LGBTQ+ and also South Asian communities in collaborating with professional artists to create installations and performance events that communicated expressions of their complex experiences of addiction and recovery. Nichola Hollinshead, founder of The Recoverist Theatre Project, chose to read aloud *A Recoverist Manifesto* (Parkinson 2015) which had emerged from an EU arts project with which Prest had been involved. The manifesto, written in poetic stanzas using phrases contributed by the people in recovery who had participated in the arts project, appeals for solidarity, equality, respect and tolerance (ibid.) Such contributions highlight how recovery-engaged performance events can function as

a form of sharing knowledges of recovery, revealing a nuanced understanding of the contingent experiences of addiction. Extending these insights to public audiences contributes to a political act of representation and also, I suggest, emphasises an understanding borne from struggle with personal and social adversity of the shared precariousness of life. The ethos of recovery-engaged events, therefore, resonates with Butler's summation that 'our shared exposure to precarity is but one ground of our potential equality and our reciprocal obligations to produce together conditions of liveable life' (2015, 218).

Potential for connection at *A Recovery Arts Café* was revealed in how performers and practitioners were able to meet, many for the first time, other recovery-engaged artists. Throughout the event, I was particularly attentive to introducing the programme contributors to each other and facilitating connection between the organisations present. While each had their own specific approach to practice, they were gathered in the temporary alliance of the event through their common connection to performance practice engaged with recovery from addiction and, concurrently, to me as researcher and curator. Coincidentally, that evening a former participant of one organisation attended, reuniting their connection with the company. While it is not possible for me to ascertain or predict what developments might emerge from the interactions that occurred between practitioners, performers and audience members, I propose that the event of making connection through an ethos of cohabitation generated potential for future occasions. This further contributed to possibilities for strengthening a movement of recovery arts, using the collaborative event as a conduit for building connection.

Conclusion: the minor gesture

Manning proposed a political approach that attends to the minor register of an event, referring to its unregistered emergent potential as well as what might be overlooked through the majority viewpoint (2016, 7). The minor gesture, and indeed experiment, of *A Recovery Arts Café* was to explore how a participatory performance event might operate as a form of knowledge – or practice – exchange that simultaneously shares the insights of people in recovery while also building further connections amongst artists in this field and with a wider public audience.

By approaching the curation of the 'café' with a posthumanist understanding of addiction, the experience revealed and engaged with the contextual realities of recovery as involving the development of strategies of resilience to both personal and socio-political factors that can impede capacities for recovery. A recovery-engaged ethos was transmitted through the forms of encounter and interaction that occurred, including participation in performance, conversation or nonverbal creative activity with the objects provided. It was clear that reflections on 'habits of survival' and on recovery emphasised the need for connection, thus resonating with the theoretical assertions I make in this article about performance events as generating possibilities for engaging with 'life-living' (Manning 2016, 16), the task to 'make kin' (Haraway 2016, 1) and 'cohabitation' (Butler 2015, 118).

For recovery arts as a field of practice, I propose that the futurity of it lies in the potentials that can emerge from collective encounter and networks of connection that recognise the benefits of embracing interdependency. Resilience to economic and organisational precarity can emerge from finding mutually agreeable modes of collaboration, with recovery communities, with other organisations and even across research

disciplines. As Manning suggested, borrowing from Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013), the political potential lies in the 'undercommons' of an encounter, an emergent collectivity that is 'a tentative holding in place of fragile comings-into-relation, physical and virtual, that create the potential to reorient fields of live-living' (2016, 8).

Notes

1. The phrase 'graft-score-use' is a common idiom of active addiction which refers to the repetitive cycle of activity involved. The word *graft* demotes the means by which someone might acquire the money to purchase their addictive substance of choice. *Score* refers to the purchase of this substance and *use* indicates the action of taking the substance. It is possible to apply this cycle to all forms of addiction, substituting 'substance' for whichever object is the focus of activity.
2. My reference to equilibrium is informed by my interpretation of Gilbert Simondon's concept of individuation (1992 [1964], 302), the process of being as a perpetual process of *becoming* in response to energetic and affective interaction to environmental surroundings. Simondon described this as a process through which a human, or other live form, attempts to resolve the instability caused by a new encounter, however, neither stability or a fixed form of being are ever fully achieved (307).
3. My use of the word 'addict' in this article is deployed when referring to its function as a pejorative label that stigmatises those to whom it is applied. My preference, when referring to those affected by this issue, is to use the phrases 'people affected by addiction' or 'people in recovery'. I do this to resist the cultural stereotypes associated with linguistic terms used about addiction.
4. Just for Today is also a colloquial phrase used in peer recovery groups to suggest that attention to the present moment is more productive to maintain recovery, while also acknowledging that a permanent, fixed, state of being recovered is not guaranteed.
5. This ethos is also shared on the company website which states: 'small … because not everything has to be big, the everyday can be profound and magical' (https://smallperformanceadventures.com/ accessed 9.12.19).

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