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3. Facilitating Recovery-Engaged Milieu

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Abstract

This chapter continues the discussion introduced in chapter two of applied performance activity as creating a space of potentiality. The appreciation of space as constructed through interactions with the human and nonhuman elements is developed further to examine how this creates a liminal milieu; a temporary environment. Analysing the process of devising a performance, entitled *The Antidote*, with people in recovery, it reveals how a distinctively 'recovery-engaged milieu' can be created through bodily attunement that also embraces conflict and difference. This thinking is extended beyond the human to consider how FK Alexander's *Recovery*, a performance conducted largely through the sounds and vibrations of resonating objects, also generated a milieu that reminds us of the more-than-human features of addiction and recovery. It is suggested that the political dimension of recovery-engaged performance practice provides alternative milieus that can support the development of recovery identity and also create an 'aesthetics of critical visibility' (Fisher 2017) that provokes us to examine how we approach practices of wellbeing in society.

Its February 2017 and I'm lying on the floor of the Wickham Theatre in Bristol. The floor is cold, the room is in darkness except for the dim wash of yellow-orange light upon the central area of the room where FK Alexander sits on a tapestry cloth amidst an array of Tibetan singing bowls. A large screen displays digital images of microbial movement. To the right, two noise DJs stand behind a mixing desk. I'm a little confused. I feel the foam surface of the earplugs in my hand that were offered to me from a bowl held by the friendly usher at the entrance of the theatre when I walked in. What will I be needing these for? I close my eyes, as invited to do so, and breathe deeply as I begin to feel the vibrations of sound move through the floor, through the air, through my body.

FK Alexander's performance of *Recovery*, which I experienced during the *In-between Time* international festival of performance art in Bristol 2017, generated a 'sonic milieu' (Gallagher 2016, 44) that was infused with an understanding of lived experience of addiction recovery. In the previous chapter I reflected on how human bodies might generate a temporary, liminal milieu through their interactions within a facilitated space-time. While I will continue the discussion of this and how the creative process of *The Antidote* created a specifically recovery-engaged milieu through interaction with peers in recovery, I also extend this thinking beyond the human to consider how a performance conducted largely through the sounds and vibrations of resonating objects can also generate a milieu that reminds us of the more-than-human features of addiction and recovery.

The milieu, as discussed already in previous chapters, is a constellation of bodies, human and nonhuman, in which these constituents are in perpetual affective interrelation (Manning 2013, 19). Both the collaborative creative process and the resultant staging of performance work generate constellations, some of the features of which might be intentionally primed to stage a story. These performance-based

milieus are inherently unpredictable and cross-temporal. In this chapter, I proffer two features of milieu that relate productively with the experience of recovery-engaged performance. These features incorporate modes of interrelation experienced during recovery that also map onto the examples of performance practice shared in this chapter and throughout the book, namely, *attunement* and *antagonism*.

Manning's reference to the milieu as a constellation conceptualises it as a relational field of 'affective attunement' (2013, 26). Specifically, she emphasised the experience of identity as constructed through relation with one's surroundings, referring to it as the limit, or the 'pinnacle of a relational field tuning to a certain constellation' (17). By conceptualising identity as a body 'tuning in' to the milieu of a particular constellation of other bodies and environmental features, Manning acknowledged the quotidian perception of human experiences of identity as momentarily static, while also recognising that we are in perpetual flux – although this might oftentimes be experienced in human perception as gradual change (2013, 17). This, I propose, aptly encapsulates the paradox of identity whereby lived experience involves strong attachments to a positionality that is often reinforced by one's surroundings, while, coincidentally, our way of being in the world changes as we encounter new experiences.

A constellation approach to understanding identity as constituted by experiences of relation within a particular environment assists with examining the ways in which people in recovery have been impacted, or defined by, certain relations associated with addiction in their lives. This is particularly relevant for acknowledging how an 'addict' identity emerges in relation to the socio-political environment that includes systems of addiction treatment, criminal justice, media and entertainment that convey certain hegemonic values that inform what constitutes an 'addict'. Apply the additional intersections of race, gender, sexuality, disability and class and it becomes clear that there is a wide spectrum of nuanced judgements and discriminations that constitute differing experiences of 'addict' identities.

Ahmed's 'affective economies' highlights how societal norms and social hierarchies are reinforced by the ways in which negative *affects*, such as hate or disgust are projected upon – and stick – to certain bodies (2014, 8 and 12). In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014), Ahmed developed this argument to demonstrate how bodies of Black, Asian or Minority ethnicities, particularly the feminine, become objects of hate or disgust in how their presence disrupts social hierarchies founded on male whiteness (4 and 58). Any discussion of milieu must, consequently, acknowledged the compromised attunements caused by past legacies of human-centred constructs of socio-political order. Perhaps, then, recovery-engaged performance can offer the potentiality of alternative attunements that might support the ongoing development of recovery identity?

Nonetheless, antagonism is an inherent feature of any environment. For Manning 'relation does violence to identity' because, as she stated, coming into contact with other bodies disorients what we think we know of ourselves (2007, 108). She acknowledged that coming into contact with difference is antagonistic to a static perception of our own identity. As discussed in chapter one, individuation is conceived as a process of affective relation with difference, human or non-human, that evokes a 'conflictual' experience and, subsequently, a response to restore a

level of never-quite-achieved equilibrium (Simondon 2009 [1989], 9). Antagonism or conflict, difference and disagreement, are essential features of the learning process. Without encounters with something, or somebody, different to what we already know about the world or ourselves, personal development is unlikely. Collaborative theatre-making is a particularly useful process for embracing difference and conflict. These attributes inform the making of new discoveries during creative performance activity as well as contribute to the generation of work that explores the tensions of 'becoming well' amidst societal contexts that can inhibit bodily capacity for recovery. Theatrical, or other modes of interdisciplinary, performance can disrupt preconceived perceptions and challenge our prior attunements.

Attunement

It is day four. The final workshop has finished and we are sat in a circle, as we have done at the beginning and end of every session, taking a turn each to share our thoughts, feelings or reflections on the experience of the workshop process. We have completed a full run-through of *The Antidote*. Sean begins and highlights a moment shared immediately after the performance. This moment is visibly registered as a shared facial expression, a smile, although the comments shown below reveal what I consider to be a more complex affective relation that instigated it,

Sean: Yeah. I seen that smile on yer face earlier on, just now when you said 'that's it.' You seemed to be reasonably happy with what we've got so far. Which is great...I'm happy with it...'

Me: Thank you

Hannah: I've really enjoyed seeing you, all of you, for four days – and that smile [points to me], I remember that smile [others make sounds of agreement].
(Research Collaborators 2017d)

Hannah's comment, in particular, reveals the significance of the moment for her in how she connects it to previous experience, a time before, and acquired knowledge from past creative collaboration with the group and I. Both comments reveal familiarity and somatic connection. Their chosen words are indicative of pleasure, specifically a sense of satisfaction in having achieved the collective goal of the performance task.

While Thompson (2011, 140) and Nicholson (2014, 337) have already discussed the significance of the 'joyful encounter' in creating applied theatre performance, I suggest here that the emotive expression shared above revealed a form of relation or connection akin to Manning's discussion of 'attunement' (2013, 26). In particular, this moment highlighted, for me, the depth of connection established between myself and the group during the process of the workshops. As a practitioner, I was interested in tracing how this attunement operated during the creative process and how it was facilitated. Specifically, how the bodies-in-process constellated during the short duration of this particular event of practice to constitute a recovery-engaged ethos. Heightened by the embodied knowledges of those in the space, processes of relation with others and societal context operated in uniquely recovery-infused ways.

Tuning into a Reflexive Process

To explain further, I propose that a distinct form of attunement operated through the group's bodily responses to the shared understanding of practices of recovery and the particular orientation towards their surroundings that this generated. Specifically, there was an increased level of self-awareness that also enhanced affinity with the others in the group. This revealed itself particularly during the check-in reflections. For instance, during the check-in on day one, a collaborator shared their thoughts before arriving at the workshop venue,

Sarah: ... my first thought is always alcoholic, it doesn't matter how long I've been in recovery, my first response to anything is alcoholic and I've learnt to get rid of the first thought. It's like pancakes, y'know, the first one goes in the bin. And so, my first thought is, 'Everyone will hate me, I don't fit in and Cathy's asked me because she feels sorry for me, or something, or she's run out of people to ask,' [she and I chuckle] and I just have to say that and I know it's not true. Although I know it, the thought still comes. I think if I just put it out there, that's dumped ... And I'll feel more comfortable in the space (Research Collaborators 2017a).

Sarah's comment revealed her awareness of the sensations she feels and how she experiences them as negative thoughts. She applied her experience of self-reflective practices of recovery to identify what she was feeling, but also acknowledged how this can impact on her perception of the intentions of others which might, in turn, influence her behaviour towards them. In the following comment, another collaborator stated,

Sean: This morning I was leaving my flat ... and I got a little feeling, a little umph, and that umph I also got anytime we were going out to do a performance ... it's just a oooh [*claps hands, shivers shoulders* - others murmur agreement] (Research Collaborators 2017a).

Sean's comment also revealed an awareness of bodily sensation, but, in contrast to Sarah, it was a pleasurable sensation that we might interpret as excitement. Both comments evidence that reflections were founded on a commitment to honesty about, and accountability for, personal bodily sensations.

Recovery practices require a particular ethic of reflexivity that is simultaneously supportive, respectful and challenging. When working with people in recovery, avoidance of the potential discomfort of critical reflection would be counterproductive to a recovery process that often entails a continual 'inventory' of thoughts and actions to encourage recognition of, and accountability for, addiction-orientated behaviour. This may also involve a recognition of thinking patterns or painful sensations of feeling that might inhibit relation with others, and also recovery. Relation in this context involves continual acts of reflexivity that support those involved to be open to relating with others while also practicing personal accountability. Sarah and Sean's comments above indicate some of the self-aware and reflexive practices of recovery. Expressions from collaborators during check-ins throughout the creative process also revealed reflexive thinking about personal

responses to the process and one's capacity to affect others is apparent. For instance, on the first day (a Monday) Adi demonstrated a keen awareness of his own thinking patterns and his commitment to identifying how they link to addictive tendencies,

...being back to work I've got into this thing of 'I hate Mondays', so I'm feeling a bit of lack of energy...But I'm really glad to be back in this kind of environment and it's taking me a bit of a while to get my mind set towards it... And with being off work this week, I'm still thinking about it and it takes me a few days just to get into another one. And I think that that's where a lot of addictions stem from because the mind wants to kind of latch on to something and obsess about it... (Research Collaborators 2017a)

Performance practice, such as *The Antidote*, that uses reflexive practices that inevitably contain the memory of, or ongoing struggle with, personal experiences related to addiction risks the emergence of emotive and painful sensations. As indicated earlier, recovery practices often entail learning how to cope with difficult feelings rather than avoid them through addiction-based responses. During the process of working with my collaborators, I was mindful of my responsibility, as practitioner, to be attuned to them and responsive to bodily and linguistic indications of discomfort also. Zontou has discussed the complex tension between vulnerable lives and risky aesthetics in the work of Fallen Angels Dance Theatre that uses autobiographical experience of addiction in their performances (2017, 211). Her discussion indicated that those involved in practice with people in recovery should 'problematise' the tension between the exposure caused through performing past experience and the potential empowerment of biographical performance (210).

During my previous practice with Outside Edge Theatre Company, we continually negotiated boundaries for respectful and inclusive interrelation, including the level of exposure that participants consented to experience in creative sharing or critical reflection. This was, on some occasions, uncomfortable and challenging. In particular, some participants, especially those in 'early' recovery from addiction, experienced fear and vulnerability more acutely. The first stages of recovery after detox entail learning how to manage unpleasant feelings that can often seem overwhelming and may even trigger relapse (Burgess 2017, 313; Segal 2017, 379-380). A phrase I have heard from people reflecting on their early stage of recovery is, 'I had to learn how to feel my feelings'. This is reflected in some of the comments cited from *The Antidote* workshops later in this section. Often, having used addictive behaviour, especially substances, to avoid painful feelings, processes of recovery involve learning to feel the intensity of emotion arising from past psychosocial experience, possibly including childhood difficulties or traumatic events.

The bodily sensation of shame is a particular affect that may impinge on the capacity for recovery and participation in collaborative arts activity. Although *The Antidote* collaborators were perhaps less hindered by sensations of shame as they might have been in earlier stages of their recovery, Sarah's comment, noted earlier, about her first 'alcoholic thought' indicates how shame is present as an ongoing sensation. Given that, as discussed in chapter one, addiction functions as a codependent relation and codependency is a condition considered to be founded on sensations of shame (or feeling 'less than worthy') it is useful to discuss briefly how performance practice might intervene with this sensation. I suggest intervention here with the view

that shame can inhibit capacity for attunement with others and, consequently, restrict participation in performance and also recovery.

Brené Brown identified shame as a barrier to creativity, in that it fuels a fear of ridicule or the pain of being seen as unworthy which manifests into a reluctance to share creative ideas with others (2012, 185). Brown suggested that the paradox of shame is that it is also, ultimately, a fear of disconnection. Yet it is also a *cause* of disconnection because of the avoidant behaviour patterns a person might use to avoid feeling the pain of shame (2012, 68 and 77). Previously, cultural theorists Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank drew upon Tomkins' theory of affect to also consider shame as a paradoxical push away and pull towards sociability. With reference to queer identity, they demonstrated that the 'exquisite painfulness' felt in the social performance of shame becomes ingrained in self-identity (2003, 37). Considering identity as constructed through relation with one's surroundings, they considered that, for some, such relational encounters are imbued with painful experiences of shame and consequently their identity becomes marked by it (ibid.). Their discussion of shame is useful to the discussion of practice in this chapter in that they proposed that shame should be embraced as part of the formation of certain experiences of identity (63). Through playing with the performativity of identity, they highlighted the possibilities of metamorphosed, reframed, refigured shame.

If shame operates through social performance, then perhaps recovery-engaged theatrical performance can offer people in recovery an opportunity for experimentation with different performances of identity. Consequently, through performance activity, they may renegotiate or re-navigate interrelation with others, to explore a different way of being, one beyond their current painful experience. Applying Manning's concept of constellations to theatre-making, therefore, offers a consideration of performance as an opportunity for generating a different milieu from the hegemonic norm in that it is informed by the bodily relations of collaborators who embody a different, recovery-orientated, world view. This is not only possible through the theatrical performance itself, but also occurs in the way in which relations with others in the group, including the facilitator, are navigated throughout the devising process. Creating a space for potentiality with people in recovery from addiction involves, therefore, an appreciation of vulnerability within the group and the corresponding modulations of shame felt by participants. I suggest that this occurred in *The Antidote* project through a shared attunement to the experiences of each member of the group that was supported by an understanding of recovery practices and perspectives. Such attunement also emanates from a mutual appreciation that vulnerability and perhaps painful, or uncomfortable, sensations are part of the process. Dave's comment at the end of the first workshop illustrates the point that this performance practice occurs alongside pain and discomfort,

Dave: As I was coming down here, I was thinking I'll feel better when I'm here and interacting with other people... Cos I have a lot of fear around getting ill. And doing these sorts of things [the performance workshops] is always a worry. Am I going to be ok? And, of course, I'd a bad night last night because there was a certain amount of preoccupation about that...My worry is always whether physically-wise I can keep the energy (Research Collaborators 2017a).

During the devising of *The Antidote*, all collaborators demonstrated a willingness to share their reflections, enhanced, I suggest, by the relative safety of a space shared with others with similar recovery commitments. There were also responses from members of the group that indicated an affective relation to the reflections shared by others that I consider to reveal a shared understanding, an attunement to each other's recovery-orientated reflections. These reflexive responses occurred throughout the process, including the in-between moments of breaks, lunchtime and even overnight. Often the content of their comments would shift across time and context. For instance, someone would share an idea for the developing performance, then add reflection on their own past experience or literature they had read or a perspective on current events in the UK or world politics. Others would join in, adding their own perspectives on politics, society or past experience. This indicated a cross-temporality to the affective relations that emerged in the creative space in that at any given moment there might be a simultaneity of bodily sensations invoked from memories, present events or musing about future aspirations. Listening to their conversations, I realised that the milieu of the creative activity was neither time-bound or constrained to the theatrical space, the resonances of which lingered with the bodies involved.

As shown, understanding recovery from addiction added a specific dimension to the processes of reflexivity, demonstrated through their awareness of bodily sensations and how these affect thinking, behaving and relation with others. Such self-awareness is not necessarily exclusive to people in recovery, but, in this context, it revealed commitment to attuning oneself to the affective sensations of the body in order to find a sense of equilibrium from which it was possible to be receptive to others and the surrounding environment. I conceive such attunement as a crucial strategy for relapse prevention, whereby maintaining recovery requires an ability to monitor the potentially negative affect of relation with people, places or objects that might trigger former addictive responses. This is why I consider recovery to be an ongoing process of active and embodied learning. Patterns of reflexivity amongst the group revealed an acknowledgement of each other as people engaged in the ongoing process of recovery, as well as involved in a temporary theatre-making activity.

This reinforces the point made earlier that a practice of reflexivity that is simultaneously supportive, respectful and challenging is crucial. I also suggest that to attune to this manner of reflexivity in a theatre-making experience requires the practitioner to commit, and indeed have the personal capacity to engage in honest self-awareness and appraisal of their own behavior and an openness to share some of this self-reflection. This might require a readjustment of personal boundaries for the practitioner, as well as a willingness to be critically reflexive about how one's own relative privilege, unconscious bias or previous experience, might impact on affective attunement with participants or collaborators.

The embodied responses to creative stimuli were distinctive in their connection to a shared understanding of survival, a working through painful lived experience. This was evident in movement montages created on the theme of recovery as well as improvised scenes. For instance, in response to a stimulus of music by an artist in recovery, the group created image and movement sequences together that revealed a nuanced understanding of the conflictual sensations akin to the entrapment,

struggle and hope experienced during phases of recovery from addiction. Indeed, the process of relation with other bodies with similar embodied experiences meant that the resonances of the felt experience of recovery emerged through the piece. Inadvertently, biographical material infused into the performance, although it was morphed into symbolic references or slightly altered narratives. The following reflective comment illustrates the shared bodily knowledge that would resonate during the creative process and, I suggest, emerged into a constellation that became the performance,

Sarah: It's not about your core addiction, your prime physical addiction, it's what that creates and, even when that's taken away, it's what you were either trying to treat or fix with that. And you're left with something – and the messiness of that - ... that never leaves you... So how do you begin to create an existence for yourself with that and where does that take your life story? (Research Collaborators 2017a)

Much of the discussion about the development of characters by each collaborator for the performance coincided with reflections on identity and the perception of being different to, what one collaborator referred to as, the 'norms'. They shared experiences of being marginalised, but also feelings of solidarity in identifying with a recovery identity. For instance, Sean stated,

We're also unique in a way because not everybody tackles their emotions and we have to – at your early stages [of recovery]... Y'know you run away and hide your emotions, but what's unique is we had to put ourselves through that, question your emotions and don't be afraid of the answer... (Research Collaborators 2017c).

This, I consider to reveal an awareness of their identity in contrast to the hegemonic value systems of the society around them. There were many moments of reflection that revealed their sense of exclusion, or frustration with, societal notions of addiction and recovery or the systemic structures of society that reinforce marginalisation. From these comments, I infer that they were particularly aware of their own attunement but also their antagonistic relationship with society. I will return to thoughts on antagonism later in this chapter.

Tuning in with the Feeling of Sound

Given that constellations, as discussed in this chapter, incorporate nonhuman constituents, tuning in with the nonhuman elements of performance seems pertinent. In Alexander's performance of *Recovery*, objects performed as co-actors through their production of a 'sonic milieu' (Gallagher 2016, 44) which generated the narrative content of the piece. They demonstrated the potential for 'posthumanist performativity' (Barad 2008, 121) in theatrical intra-activity between the human performer and sound-emitting objects. In particular, communication through sound rather than words revealed the potential of object-focused performance to convey aspects of experience that might otherwise be 'unspeakable' (Bernstein 2009, 70). In the context of performing experiences related to addiction and recovery, *Recovery* demonstrated that language need not be used to portray aspects of the embodied

sensations of these lived experiences. Instead, the resonating objects moved the human audience to tune in with the vibrational narrative emanating from them.

I attended *Recovery* with a fellow performance researcher with whom I recorded a post-show reflection.¹ Two weeks later, I also recorded a reflective conversation with Alexander about the performance. The analysis that follows utilises observations made during both recorded conversations, as well as my memories of my own embodied experience of the performance in an attempt to convey through written language the affective experience of the performance.

Alexander's website states that she considers herself to be a performance artist 'whose work is concerned with issues of wounds, recovery, aggressive healing, radical wellness, industrialisation and noise music' (Alexander 2015). As the performance began, Alexander stood in the centre of the space, bedecked in glittery costume. The spangled make-up, tousled hair and shiny bindi seemed reminiscent of the forms of attire worn by performers and clubbers at electronic dance festivals or gigs. The conflation of signifiers from the contexts of the western dance club and the theatre, while also utilising objects associated with eastern practices of transcendental meditation, was simultaneously familiar yet strange. This sensation of out-of-jointness (Thrift 2008, 14) evoked a particular bodily engagement that was paradoxically both uncomfortable and comfortable. As the objects began their performance, beginning with the hypnotic ringing of the Tibet bowls which were then joined by the deep tremor of noise from the speaker stacks, these oxymoronic sensations intensified.

Alexander's *Recovery* was a performance communicated mainly without words, except for her introductory instructions to the audience. This was a piece that utilised affect in an innovative way in that the sight, sound, and indeed vibration, of sound-emitting objects generated a deep bodily experience. Interdisciplinary researcher Michael Gallagher defined 'sonic affect' as 'the vibrational movement of bodies of all kinds' to decentre anthropocentric notions of sound (2016, 42). He defused over-emphasis on the materiality of objects and bodies, by focusing on sound as waves of movement *through* and *between* bodies which, consequently, accrue other layers of movement, such as motor responses, feelings, perceptions and memories (43). His discussion usefully equates affect as a force that is not bodily-located, but moves through bodies, objects and space. This correlation of sound with movement is useful in that it relates to Manning's discussion of *being* as a series of tendencies or inclinations of movement (2013, 16). Sound waves might, therefore, be conceived as entities that exist beyond a 'body' in the quotidian sense of the word.

In *Recovery*, the 'vibrant materiality' (Bennett 2010, 13) of the sound-emitting objects operated through their power of sonic vibration that transmitted a force that moved through, and was felt by, the bodies of the audience members lying on the floor in

¹ The post-show conversation with a colleague assisted in translating the traces of the affective sensation of the performance felt through our bodies to a linguistic form of expression for the purpose of analysing the experience for my research. Whilst this might result in us applying our own cultural and disciplinary references to the experience, thus altering it, it was useful to compare our reflection to the subsequent conversation I recorded with Alexander to discover whether her artistic intentions had been received and understood by us through the performance.

the theatre space. Both my companion, Amy², and I shared in our reflection afterwards that the sonic sensations evoked for us memories and associations with the affective experience of the process of recovery, either from addiction, illness or some other difficulty. The Tibetan singing bowls, joined by the sounds played by the 'noise DJs' over the electronic sound system, generated a milieu of sound that provoked a strong relation to the piece as a felt sensation that correlated with our own embodied understanding of what a journey of recovery might feel like. These incorporated sensations of discomfort similar to anxiety, or nausea, a dull ache in our ears and, at one point, the feeling of excess reminiscent of the sensory overload one might feel at the end of a long night of clubbing.

It was apparent from our reflections that the sounds generated by the objects, a combination of solid instruments and electronic devices, resonated in our bodies provoking an affective response. We both felt a spectrum of contradictory sensations. At first the relaxing sound of the Tibetan bowls evoked memories of meditative practices, such as yoga and mindfulness activities. The heavier sounds, however, from the electronic sound system felt intrusive and unsettling. Indeed, at points, the resonance was physically uncomfortable and at one point painful, causing our ears to ache. Presumably, this is why ear plugs were offered to us on entry to the performance. In this way, objects were indeed actants emanating a palpable 'thing-power' (Bennett 2010, 6). There was, to some extent, human intentionality behind how the objects were deployed in the performance space. It was apparent that Alexander had carefully choreographed layers of sound and a juxtaposition of signifiers, including sound effects such as an alarm clock, to create a provocation about recovery. For instance, her choice of costume, the use of the digital image of micro-biotic movement, how she welcomed us into the space and the leaflet given to us before entering, framed the piece within a discourse around recovery. Amy reflected that she found it difficult to relax because 'the experience was already too complex' to engage with just 'one particular set of signifiers'. In her opinion, Alexander had set up multiple layers within the piece, one of recovery, one of addiction and one of a 'post-colonial' critique of how eastern practices are co-opted by western recovery programmes. Gallagher's discussion of making meaning from sound, however, noted that any interpretation of sonic affect is contingent on the bodies it involves and their phenomenological response (2016, 44). Any intentionality in the performance of *Recovery* might, therefore, be considered relative to the myriad of indeterminate encounters occurring as the sound moved through different bodies, with differing embodied knowledges, sensorial responses and hearing capabilities.

According to Gallagher, it is possible to identify 'sonic tendencies' (45) that certain bodies may experience in common within certain contexts, such as dancing to music in a night club. From my reflective conversation with Amy, it was clear that we did share similar bodily responses to the performance. In particular, the combination of sensations of discomfort and relaxation were, for us, a poignant reminder of the conflictual experience of recovery. As I will elaborate on later, people in recovery have an awareness of their own antagonistic relationship with their surrounding milieu. Recovery is an ongoing process of resisting relapse and moving beyond the stigmatising bounds of an 'addict' identity. Practices of recovery support the

² Name changed to preserve anonymity.

navigation of these conflicts and, linking again to the parallel with Simondon's notion of individuation, they assist in the effort to resolve the problems that are encountered in their milieu in so far as it enables continued progress, though always incomplete. Amy's comment below highlights how Alexander's *Recovery* represented this struggle, in that she felt that the convergence of the signifiers of addiction and recovery within the performance were encouraging her to develop an 'ambivalence' to addiction.

...I thought it was probably one of the closest representations to recovery that I'd experienced in performance form, which is that there were all the signifiers there of addiction, in the costume, in the whole set up of the experience ... in the noise, the referencing of clubs etc., the presence of all of those things in different forms and then the suggestion that you can exist in that space without engaging in those things (Amy and xxxxx 2017).

During our conversation, she elaborated by reflecting on how recovery is an uncomfortable feeling and an internal struggle. For her, the positive impact of the performance was that it demonstrated that it is still possible to resist and become 'ambivalent' to addiction. In the performance, this is demonstrated in the persistence of the sounds of recovery, the singing bowls throughout as well as our own persistence to continue a meditative journey.

Yaron Shyldkrot has explored in his performance research the ways in which atmospheric affects might be generated through deliberately constructed scenographic or dramaturgical arrangements (2018, 153). Using 'a constellation or assemblage of natural and aesthetic elements in a particular time', he argued that this theatrically crafted atmosphere generates an encounter that impacts upon what the participant might feel or perceive (149). Similarly, I suggest that Alexander had carefully composed a sonic atmosphere through her intra-actions with musical objects generating the encounter that Amy and I experienced.

In keeping with my discussion of performance in this chapter as a material constellation, I am suggesting that *Recovery* demonstrates that objects might be used to create, what Gallagher referred to as, a 'sonic milieu' (2016, 44). The milieu created during the performance of *Recovery* evoked, at least for Amy and I, an assemblage of the sensorial dimension of lived experiences of addiction and recovery. Without using language, the affective sensation of sound invoked feelings, memory and perceptions of socio-cultural surroundings. Although our encounter with the performance was contingent upon our own embodied knowledges that impacted our perception of it, I suggest that sound and image constellated together to generate a liminal milieu in which each audience member might engage in their own subjective, affective experience. By entitling the piece *Recovery*, we were invited to engage with this theme which simultaneously implied that, according to Alexander, 'we are all in recovery from something' (Alexander 2017).

Antagonism

The performance of *The Antidote* also directly addressed the experience of recovery within hostile circumstances, amidst a prohibitionist environment that criminalises those with dependencies on illicit substances or, as Ettorre argued, renders those

affected by addiction as 'embodied deviants' for failing to conform to normative ideas of social acceptability (2015, 6). During the first few minutes the characters exhibit fear and suspicion towards each other as they endeavour to determine why they are incarcerated together. They gradually discover that what they have in common is that they are all in recovery from addiction. Forced to inhabit this confined space together, the characters demonstrate the struggle to maintain the balance of mindful relation with others as they clash with, or withdraw from, each other. As the characters begin to connect and moderate their interaction to reveal the reflexive efforts of recovery, they reach a respectful truce. Yet, the performance concludes abruptly and with uncertainty as they are summoned to meet an unidentified 'committee'. Recovery, within the context of this performance, was depicted as a collective effort of survival amidst and despite antagonism, navigating the painful and the unjust as inevitable features of life.

As noted above, Manning's (and Simondon's) discussion of milieu highlighted that relation with others is inherently antagonistic in that it provokes us to acknowledge difference (2007, 108). During the collaborative theatre-making process of *The Antidote*, antagonism was embraced as a natural aspect of the ecology of creative activity and also recovery practices. As I discuss this relationship with antagonism below, I propose that our approach to addressing conflict could be conceived as a form of *agonism*. A space of potentiality might, consequently, operate as a site of 'agonistic democracy' (Mouffe 2013, 7).

Mouffe's concept of radical democracy, or agonism, insisted that conflict should not be eradicated, but that confrontation should be engaged within 'common allegiance to the democratic principles of liberty and equality for all' (2013, 7). With this in mind, I do not propose recovery-engaged work as an ideal process of consensus or transformation. Instead, I suggest that commitment to a common frame of relation through a shared understanding of recovery practices that acknowledge difference and encourage reflexivity and accountability to self and others, is a form of localised agonistic politics. The liminal milieu generated during performance activity with people committed to the processes of relation encouraged by recovery practices has the potential to operate as a 'conflictual consensus' in the manner proposed by Mouffe in that antagonism might be modified into moments of collective agreement through pluralist representation and negotiation (9).

Recovery-infused Democracy

Antagonism was palpably present during the creative process of *The Antidote*. There were several challenging moments, instances of disagreement, chaos and uncertainty. An emphasis on improvisation and self-generated characterisation, while encouraging openness to chance, particularly led to some awkward and uncomfortable moments. For instance, one member of the group began to explore how their character might exhibit misogynistic and homophobic behaviour. This led to what Mary Ann Hunter has described as a 'messy negotiation' (2008, 8) as the group collectively discussed the contribution. Care was shown in how the contribution was acknowledged as the sharing of a creative idea, however, disapproval was expressed in a candid and considered manner. In this instance, the shared

commitment to recovery-orientated reflexive practices provided a mechanism for working through conflict and tension.

Group check-in routines were particularly useful in facilitating the expression of uncomfortable sensations, which were received attentively by the group and mirrored in their responses to each other. For instance, there were conflictual responses to the introduction of the written script I had drafted from the improvised material to assist with the dramaturgy of the performance. Individual perspectives were expressed during a check-in that enabled those for whom a script posed a difficulty to express the feelings of anxiety this instigated. One member of the group, a trained hypnotherapist, offered a free hypnotherapy session during the break to alleviate their anxiety and another member expressed that they preferred to have a script as a framework, but stated 'we don't have to stick to it, there's flexibility.' Ultimately this process drew upon recovery practices that encourage honesty and reflexivity about uncomfortable sensations. Agreement was not presumed or necessary. Differing perspectives were acknowledged and could co-exist within the group.

As noted earlier, I have found that navigating emotive responses that might include anger, fear, shame, as well as joy, are a potential feature of the milieu of working with people in recovery. While this particular group did not experience moments of extreme conflict, I have worked in circumstances where heightened friction has emerged. Addiction involves extremes of thinking, feeling and doing. Those attuned to a recovery-orientated way of life acquire the skills to maintain a more balanced and resilient response to engaging with the world around them. Nonetheless, under significant pressure, relapse to extreme experiences of sensation can emerge in the form of highly emotive expressions, particularly those associated with anger and shame. Indeed, the first section of *The Antidote* performance engaged directly with the emergence of former habits of thought, feeling and behaviour under challenging circumstances. Each character portrayed what they would consider as their addiction-orientated trait, such as controlling behaviour, aggressiveness, avoidance or denial.

A practice of reflexivity that is simultaneously supportive, respectful and challenging is crucial. I also suggest that adopting this manner of reflexivity in a theatre-making experience requires the practitioner to also embrace, and possibly even model, such reflexive practices. During *The Antidote* project, both the devising process and the performance revealed patterns of relation that indicated a recovery-engaged attunement that acknowledged difference and conflict as intrinsic to any group interaction. There was a willingness to express and engage with disagreement, and, importantly, to listen and reflect. I consider such aspects of reflexivity as heightened by the concomitant practices of recovery that were embedded in modes of peer support and accountability. These processes also resonated into the performance in how the characters of *The Antidote* revealed patterns of self-reflexivity, accountability and peer support to demonstrate the features of a recovery-engaged way of being. As discussed earlier, enhancing one's capacity for 'becoming well' involves acquiring strategies for navigating conflict and painful sensations. During the devising process and the performance, the group supported each other in reflecting on their collective positionality as 'in recovery' while acknowledging their differing identities within, and outside of, recovery communities.

With regard to wider society, such performance practice has *agonistic* potential in its form of political representation. The processes of affective attunement in the group generated a constellation that revealed modes of communicating with others that shared knowledges of recovery from addiction. *The Antidote* performance emphasised recovery, rather than addiction. It revealed the counter-narratives of representations of people in recovery different to predominant notions of the 'addict' identity. In so doing, I consider it to perform a certain kind of agonistic activism which highlights the nuance of the lived experience of addiction and recovery and invites the audience to challenge what they think they know about the surrounding environment in which we are potentially complicit to systems of addiction.

Yet, it is also important to maintain an understanding of the spatial dimension of this practice, that bodies-in-process are attuned within a facilitated space of theatrical activity. As Massey contended, spatiality is integral to any formation of political subjectivity (2005, 10). By this, she critiqued Mouffe's earlier writing on identity politics to highlight her omission of the fundamental influence of how the embedded practices that constitute any given space also inform the political identities that operate within this context (ibid.). The practice of agonism I propose here requires more than a recognition and expression of difference, but an understanding of how difference itself is constructed by the systems of power that generate hegemonic values. Massey's discussion of space, consequently, resonates further with Manning's notion of the milieu as a constellation, while emphasising that space should be foregrounded in any discussion of identity formation. Indeed, Massey referred to place as a 'constellation of trajectories', a combination of order and chance that emerge in the material conditions of located space (151). The space of potentiality that I offer in performance practice might, thus, be conceived as a site of agonistic practice formed through the event of performance-making which facilitates recovery-engaged modes of relation that understand collectivity, and certainly recovery, as an ongoing negotiation.

Revealing the Obscured

Mouffe's concept of radical democracy proposes that any model of politics that founds its claims of democracy on its capacity for establishing consensus is undermined by the fallacy that a 'universal consensus' can be achieved (2013, 3). It is very evident that the contemporary political climate is constituted by divergent opinions for which no resolution can be found that appeases all factions, be that Brexit, immigration or any other socio-economic policy. This simple observation confirms Mouffe's assertion that the search for universal harmony and agreement must be abandoned as an emancipatory ideal in democratic politics (2013, xi). She advocated embracing antagonism in favour of a framework for 'conflictual consensus' in which adversaries might work together in 'common allegiance' to agreed principles of operation (7). Antagonism, or disagreement, is not erased, but transferred into a system of 'agonism' that supports a more pluralist representation in systems of power that transfers conflict into productive activity (ibid.).

As discussed above, a recovery-engaged approach to collaboration in performance-making can operate as a process of agonism through systems of negotiation and reflexivity that are accountable for the ways in which we may affect,

and be affected by, others. Here, I examine how the public sharing of performances generated from bodily knowledges of addiction and insights from practices of recovery can potentially contribute to an agonistic model of society. Mouffe asserted that artistic practice can contribute to agonistic democracy by 'making visible' what the current hegemonic consensus tends to 'obscure and obliterate' (93). The assumption that 'making visible' is sufficient has been troubled by Tony Fisher's philosophical examination of 'performing agonism' (2017, 7). He argued that the political power of such performances is not what they state at the level of 'discursive statements', but 'what they show regarding the structures that produce those statements' (ibid.). My discussion below, identifies how the nonhuman elements of Alexander's *Recovery* reveal the antagonistic interrelations that occur between the human, nonhuman and societal systems in which experiences of addiction and recovery are enveloped. By revealing these *messy connections*, the sonic performance evokes an 'aesthetics of critical visibility' (20) in how it provokes a bodily dissonance, through its affective capabilities, instigate those experiencing it to view societal values, habits and priorities from a different, felt perspective.

Alexander's *Recovery* particularly engages the audience in critical awareness of the conflictual features of the macro-political systems of society, specifically a post-colonial reading of western appropriation of eastern spiritual practices. As described above, Alexander used a variety of Tibetan singing bowls and a large gong in her performance. These were used to create a continuous undertone of sound throughout the performance, reminiscent of the background music used in some transcendental meditation practices. Whilst, her costume was mainly indicative of club apparel, her forehead was adorned with an exaggerated, jewelled bindi. This was, I suggest, a very deliberate choice, given criticisms at that time of appropriated use of ethnic apparel at festivals.³

These signifiers were performed simultaneously with electronic music and an array of sound effects indicating habitual western lifestyle such as the ringing of an alarm bell and church bells. During our reflective conversation after experiencing the performance, Amy commented that she felt drawn to a critical awareness of how 'we use non-western forms as a means of recovery from our own capitalist experience, our neoliberal experience'. She also indicated that it provoked her to reflect upon 'the western' as the source of addiction. Alexander corroborated this response during our conversation two weeks later, stating,

...capitalism has co-opted a lot of self-help, [a lot] of eastern practice or meditation and mindfulness and yoga and all these things. It's co-opted these things and turned it into this bland *Psychologies* magazine, yoga pant wearing bullshit. And it doesn't acknowledge days where you just want to take a hammer to something... (Alexander 2017).

Alexander was not suggesting that meditative practices should not be used by people in recovery, rather that the commodification of these practices removes them from their original context and imposes a 'bland' westernised version that can be

³ During the summers of 2017 and 2018, there was a particular emphasis in on-line magazines and news media on raising awareness of cultural appropriation in festival attire and encouraging festival-goers to avoid wearing outfits causing offence to ethnic minorities. For example, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/sohanjudge/cultural-appropriation-festival-fashion> (accessed 17.9.18).

sold in the expanding market of the contemporary self-help 'lifestyle' industry. Of course, Alexander is not the first to criticise the distortion of meditative practices in the west. Addiction research by Shonin et al. (2016) argued that the increasing use of a secularised version of 'mindfulness' correlates with an increasing development of addiction to 'self' or 'self-improvement.' By removing the practice of 'mindfulness' away from its original principles, mainly derived from a Buddhist spiritual practice, it becomes isolated from its original ethos of selflessness and distorted into an obsession with the self. Sahanika Ratnayake warned, however, that the 'watering-down' and 'distortion' of these ideas in commodified versions of mindfulness 'oversimplifies the difficult business of understanding oneself' (2019). An emphasis on stepping back from one's emotions encourages a lack of critical engagement, which is not in keeping with ancient Buddhist practice and the critical reflection that is required for deep personal development that supports wellbeing (ibid.).

Mindfulness and meditation can be a useful strategy for people in recovery. Although, as noted by Alexander in conversation with me, these practices are only one aspect of a holistic engagement in spiritual and psychological healing. For Alexander, meditation enables her to 'listen' and, therefore, connect better with her 'higher power' and the world around her (Alexander 2017). Her performance of *Recovery* invites us to critically evaluate the strategies we adopt to support our well-being and how we use them with awareness and appreciation or, problematically, appropriate them. Returning to the political references of *Recovery*, Alexander's work infers that rather than address the systemic causes of addictive behaviours, we are sold sanitised versions of practices with inherently flawed promises of a good life. This resonates with Berlant's concept of cruel optimism (2010, 94), as discussed in chapter two, in that wellbeing is commercialised as an individually achievable package that obscures the everyday realities that are negatively impacted by systemic factors that are beyond the capacity of the individual.

An appreciation of agonism is also evident in Alexander's approach to compassion. She acknowledges that she often encounters 'uncomfortable and challenging behaviour' that she attributes as the 'manifestation of the deep overwhelm of discomfort at being alive' (ibid.). In her view, all behaviour is influenced by someone's experience of relation with the world and, therefore, in her practice of recovery she considers everyone deserving of compassion. This is not a compassion that should be conflated with empathy or sympathy, but simply an acceptance of our shared experiences of vulnerability within the broader system of the 'universe'⁴. Ong's concept of compassionate mobilities is useful here in interpreting compassion as 'thoughtfulness and care that attends to the implications of an interconnected world' (2018, 10-11). Ong suggested a way forward through acceptance of difference, of conflicting 'hopes', and an appreciation of how our actions might impact on others which generates an openness towards negotiating a way of moving forward compassionately (ibid.).

⁴ The term universe is often used in recovery circles to refer to a 'higher power' that is not necessarily a deity, but rather a recognition that humans are part of a bigger ecology of systems of life beyond our control. It is particularly adopted by people who do not practice a particular religion, but need to develop their understanding of spirituality if they are following the Twelve Steps programme of recovery (Ilissa Ducoat (2018) 'A Higher Power for those who don't believe in a Higher Power').

In Alexander's *Recovery*, 'self-help' commodities circulate in an affective economy in which positive value is attributed to the individual that is deemed to conform to the image of the calm, emotionally peaceful and positive expression of a citizen that takes appropriate care of their wellbeing. Alexander argued that there is a sanitising of emotion, and of politics, that inhibits recovery. In particular, she stated that, 'anger is just as much an energy as anything else and lots of addicts have a lot of anger, a huge amount of anger' (Alexander 2017). Her use of 'noise'⁵ music provokes us to acknowledge the *uncomfortable* sensations of being in the world as much as the pleasurable. In his discussion of the politics of the genre of noise music, Paul Hegarty theorised the 'masochistic' effect of such performances (2013, 137). Rather than pain or eroticism, he applied the Deleuzian concept of masochism as 'not about suffering but about dis-organising and reorganising the world through physical activity' (138) to the experience of a noise performance. Drawing from his reading of this music genre, I suggest that Alexander's use of noise in *Recovery* served to unsettle the audience from a comfortable, uncritical position by re-orientating our perspective through the sonic *affects* of the piece.

Conclusion

In summary, both *The Antidote* and *Recovery* generated liminal milieus infused by bodily experiences of practices of recovery. In the case of *The Antidote*, by forming a temporary milieu through collaborative theatre-making, informed by past experiences and contemporary socio-political context, but not bound by them, we were able to re-imagine how to share a certain way of being in the world. We demonstrated our commitment and capacity, as bodies-in-process, to affect and be affected through and beyond the theatrical experience. In sharing the resultant constellation as a public performance, we showed that people in recovery might contribute to a more pluralist representation of society through the sharing of perspectives that are often hidden or obscured.

Alternatively, the nonhuman performers in Alexander's *Recovery* remind us of the nonhuman, or more-than-human, dimension of addiction and recovery. Their sonic affects intermittently soothe and jar us into a critical visibility of how human-centred society inhibits capacities for 'becoming well' (Duff 2016).

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⁵ Noise is a genre of avant-garde music considered to have emerged in 1980s and, according to Hegarty, has a close association with 'very physical performance art' (2013, 135). As an art form, it resists structure and the usual sonic conventions of music and so is associated with transgressive politics (133-134).

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