Making problems: The inventive potential of the arts for alcohol and other drug research

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ABSTRACT

The arts and arts-based methods are rare in critical studies of alcohol and other drugs. This article explores the potential role of the arts for allowing alcohol and other drug problems to develop in more collaborative (with participants, broadly conceived) and thus more generative ways. Following turns in the field toward the performativity of alcohol and other drug realities, this article instead asks: what happens if we take the 'experimentality of social life' (Marres, Guggenheim & Wilkie, 2018) as our starting point for research rather than our object? That is to say, how can we work *with* our already inventive alcohol and other drug worlds to know and intervene with them in closer, more intimate ways? Through ethnographic engagement with a community theatre group for people who identify has having experiences of dependency or addiction, the article looks at how they 'set up' and 'stage' the problem they seek to research and enact through embodied, sensorial and relational modes of knowing that are created speculatively together and with the audience and environment. As we now accept that our methods in critical drug studies are entwined with the realities they make, this article intends to awaken our methodological imagination and attentiveness to the arts as the discipline that has always made things to know things, in order to enable problems to not only be known in new ways but to emerge in new ways.

Keywords

the arts, embodiment, inventive methods, problem-making

Introduction

> 'How fucking dare you!', I yell at the top of my voice at the man in front of me, leaning in and glaring into the depths of his eyes, not knowing quite where this rage has come from and slightly afraid that people are witnessing it. He shouts back. I can see inside his mouth where his gum flies around from corner to corner. His face reddens, temple veins pulsating. The cries get louder and our bodily movements more exaggerated, until … hysterics. I fold over laughing, shocked by my display. But, to my surprise, he copies me. This makes me laugh even more. And again, he bends over laughing. Is he mocking me? What's going on? I realise we're stuck in some kind of diffractive loop. Each time I change my response, he changes too, to mimic it, but slightly differently.

We are playing 'emotion tennis'. I am carrying out ethnographic research at a theatre group for people who identify as having experiences of alcohol and other drug dependency. More and more, I have found myself drawn to the arts for both enlivening and problematising alcohol and other drug research, sometimes unknowingly and often uncomfortably. This interest in the arts started with using a basic drawing method, body mapping, in my doctoral research (Dennis, 2019). The drawing/s offered a way for people who inject drugs (predominantly, heroin and crack cocaine) to express different kinds of injecting experiences. It opened up worlds inaccessible by words alone. By drawing 'the body' in its connection to drugs and their material, political and social flows, its traditional boundaries were broken down and re-drawn together with these processes. This has led me to ask what else methods can *do.* If they can help to un/re-fold bodies in this way, how else might they discomfort our researching sensibilities, put our well-trodden alcohol and other drug knowledges at risk, and breathe new life into neglected and often subjugated ways of *being with* drugs?

Fast forward a few years and I have found myself engaging with the arts once more to think about mattering practices: that is, how people who consume drugs come to matter or not, as an entangled social and material process, in the wake of increasing drug-related deaths. In the UK treatment system, people who consume heroin and crack cocaine cannot *be* in the same way as people who consume other drugs. Funding frames, outcome measures, governmental policies and recovery models all work against such modes of being, actively turning attention away from the many ways that people live with these substances (Dennis, 2019). While highlighting the very material contribution that these knowledge systems and devices make to being (or lack thereof), I have become increasingly aware of the role of our own critical knowledge-making practices in bringing certain ways of being into life that otherwise fail to matter. So, just as I witnessed the systematic failure of these ways of being with heroin and crack cocaine, I saw glimpses into these other drug worlds that my current project seeks to support and maintain – to imagine and bring into being, with more force and relevance, these often marginalised ways of living with drugs. I turn to the arts, and here, in particular, the performing arts, for this purpose, to explore and invigorate these ways of living – of feeling, doing and thinking – with drugs that are otherwise hard to articulate.

This essay traces this journey into the arts as a potential method for knowing and connecting with alcohol and other drug realities differently. I have previously used public engagement 'games', pedagogical mapping tools (Dennis, 2017a) and, as mentioned, a drawing method (Dennis, 2016, 2017b), but here I focus on my current work with a theatre group. And, specifically, the way they approach problems in the devising process, as a collaborative and embodied experiment, not to solve problems but to thicken them out: to enact them into being in new ways that can then be acted with and on, to experiment with them as these affects, thoughts and feelings get enfolded back into the *play*.

Background

Despite thirteen years having passed since Tim Rhodes and John Fitzgerald's (2006) call for more visual and arts-based methods in drug research, little has changed. For Rhodes and Fitzgerald, photography, film, mapping and visual diaries all help to fill in the gaps that a word/text-based analysis leaves behind – the parts of alcohol and other drug experiences and realities that are not so easily spoken. For Rhodes and Fitzgerald, this includes the minutiae of peoples' injecting equipment and setting, the detail of their technique and practice, as well as the policing forces and wider structures that put people at risk. However, while their call is about 'offering scope for more "complete" analyses' (Erickson, 1992, cited in 2006, p. 351), their motive is still clearly political: 'creating the evidence required to bring about a policy change' (2006, p. 360). Hence, for Rhodes and Fitzgerald, visual and arts-based methods are not just about documenting alcohol and other drug worlds but about intervening in them to reduce harm.

Although the widespread adoption of visual methods that Rhodes and Fitzgerald hoped for has not yet been realised, a few exceptions exist. Notably, film and photography has been employed, especially by ethnographers, to challenge the structural violence and inequality embedded and enacted through drug consumption (e.g. Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009; Briggs, 2013; Briggs & Gamero, 2017; Fitzgerald, 2015; Parkin & Coomber, 2009). By exposing the suffering and exploitation of people who use drugs in a visual form, and with them, the capitalist economies and ideologies operating at the expense of people who use drugs, the viewer is made to confront these issues in a more instantaneous and visceral way.

However, at the same time as alcohol and other drug researchers have become more interested in and informed by the power of representation, so too has research emerged to critique representations of alcohol and other drug consumers, including those offered by researchers. For example, Nicole Vitellone raises concerns over the political affectiveness of Philippe Bourgois' photo-ethnography of homeless people who inject drugs in San Francisco:

The risk of Bourgois' methodology is that it produces not contemplation and empathic identification with fellow humans but pornographic pleasure for a voyeuristic public fascinated with seeing the suffering of others. (2011, p. 583)

Rather than building connections, Vitellone argues that these visualisations risk pushing audiences further away from people who use drugs in a process of othering.

Attuning us to the affective work that the visual can do, if not always positively, we are reminded of the capability of our research methodology to not only report on or represent the world we study, but to also act in it. And it is to this methodological performativity that I turn next, and take as the focus of my concern. To unpick how this performativity has taken place in alcohol and other drug research and what is opened up by the arts, I will look at two slightly different emphases in these trends in terms of 'knowing-as-making' and 'making-as-knowing'. The former considers how things are made in knowledge production processes, whilst the latter attempts to intervene in these processes. Interestingly, although the former has received considerable attention in the field, the latter has not. I will then pose some tensions in both approaches, before offering another way of engaging with the inventiveness of methodology opened up through my research with the theatre company.

Knowing-as-making

Alongside recent attention to visual methods for studying alcohol and other drug cultures, there has been increased interest in new approaches to knowledge-making in research on alcohol and other drugs. Drawing on the work of Bruno Latour, John Law and Annemarie Mol in science and technology studies (STS), and on that of Donna Haraway and Karen Barad in feminist science studies, researchers have, for example, examined how addiction-knowledge practices – such as policies (e.g. Fraser, Moore & Keane, 2014; Lancaster, Duke & Ritter, 2015), treatment procedures (e.g. Formiatti, Moore & Fraser, 2017; Garcia (2010); Hart, 2018; Vrecko, 2010), media coverage (Dwyer & Fraser, 2016) and technologies (Dwyer & Fraser, 2017; Rhodes, 2018) – participate in the 'making' of drug worlds. The STS concern with the sociomaterial construction of knowledge has also extended to methodology. For example, in their oft-cited essay, 'Enacting the Social', Law and Urry argue that:

social inquiry and its methods are productive: they (help to) make social realities and social worlds. Second, […] if social investigation makes worlds, then it can, in some measure, think about the worlds it wants to help to make. (2004, p. 390)

Rather than our methods merely exploring, testing, and representing our social worlds, they are actively involved in enacting them, often in restricted and singular ways (Law, 2004). Therefore, drug research has begun to explore previously 'absented' realities (e.g. Dennis & Farrugia, 2017; Dwyer & Moore, 2013; Fraser, 2017; Seear & Moore, 2014), and, in particular,

those 'objects, spaces, bodies and things' that escape human/nonhuman and active/passive divides in consumption practices (Duff, 2012, citing Vitellone, 2011).

Acknowledging the role of method in our knowledge-making practices and in those of science, treatment, media, and policy, has informed a concern in critical drug studies with the ontological effects of these practices. And, of course, the last *Contemporary Drug Problems* conference, which champions such research, was entitled '*Making* alcohol and other drug realities' (see Moore, 2018, my emphasis). In the conference's call for papers, the organisers argued that: 'processes of studying, treating and otherwise responding to entities such as drugs do not simply "map", "reveal" or "deal with" them; they enact or constitute them as realities'. No longer are realities merely investigated but are now understood as brought into being through our method assemblages – propositions, devices, reporting mechanisms, 'data', sensibilities, and so on. Understanding the epistemological as ontological, that is, knowing as making, exposes the importance of our practices for intervening in the worlds we used to merely study.

As a result of this development, the arts – the discipline that has always made things to know things – no longer seem so distant from the (social) sciences, or rather, the sciences no longer seem so immune from the processes that have long defined the arts but which the sciences considered outside their purview. Therefore, taking this a step further, some scholars have turned to actively getting involved in these realities as an ethical and political responsibility (Barad, 2007, 2012).

Making-as-knowing

As the 'making discipline', the arts are still surprisingly underutilised when it comes to exploring the potential of our research methods in enacting better alcohol and other drug realities. Whereas the sciences, including the social sciences, have traditionally sought to find and test things, to then re/present them, the arts have long been led by the presenting or performing. They 'do', 'make' and 'create' to find things out about and intervene in the world. Arts-based research, or research-creation, as it has become known more recently, especially in Canada, has emerged as a situated style of research that is responsive to diverse publics and its ethico-political ramifications. Employing this spirit, feminist new materialisms (e.g. Springgay & Truman, 2018), process and affect theory (e.g. Lury & Wakeford, 2012; Manning & Massumi, 2014), human geography (e.g. McCormack, 2014; Raynor, 2017), and STS (e.g. Salter, 2015; Myers, 2012) have all treated research, or at least thinking, as a creative, experimental and potentially empowering practice. In their recent edited collection, *Inventing the Social*, Nortje Marres, Michael Guggenheim and Alex Wilkie bring together these 'creative' strands in STS 'to move beyond the customary distinctions between knowledge and art, and

[...] to connect the doing, researching and making of social life in potentially new ways' (2018, p. 17).

Marres, Guggenheim and Wilkie (2018) take a vital step from analysing performativity to inventing the social. Taking the 'experimentality of social life' as their starting point, they explore what research makes possible to know. That is, in contrast to understanding an object of inquiry as 'enacting' reality, 'inventive approaches tend to regard the enactment of social phenomena not as a topic to be exposed or described, but as a research task or challenge: can we do it?' (Marres, Guggenheim & Wilkie, 2018, p. 25). Therefore, 'to acknowledge the performativity of social research is but a first step. To rethink social research based on this understanding means to invent the social' (Marres, Guggenheim & Wilkie, 2018, p. 22). There is enormous potential here for alcohol and other drug research to help enact worlds that enable ways of *living* (well) with drugs that are less stigmatising and harmful for those who consume them. These will challenge 'fascist' tendencies that delimit desires and act to punish and pathologize bodies that desire drugs (Malins, 2017). Moving toward 'the worlds [research] wants to help to make' (Law & Urry, 2004), art-based practices can help to enact healthier encounters with drugs and their effects and affects (that often live beyond the drugs themselves). And it is from this 'minoritarian politics' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) – working with people who consume drugs as they are situated in their attachments to others, rather than trying to articulate a centralised truth – that alcohol and other drug researchers may have much to gain in stimulating change.

Although alcohol and other drug researchers have carefully explored knowledge-as-making in the ways that substances, bodies, and space-times come into being through, for example, diagnostics (e.g. Keane, Moore & Fraser, 2011), treatment procedures (e.g. Fraser & valentine, 2008) and policy-making (e.g. Lancaster, Seear & Ritter, 2017), specifically 'making' or curating drugged realities remains rare. One notable exception is the 'fitpack' developed by Suzanne Fraser and colleagues (Fraser, 2013; Fraser, Treloar, Gandera, & Rance, 2017) – an injecting pack given out at needle exchanges – which they developed with the explicit intention to become involved in the worlds that research makes: in this case, prototyping a more caring, dyadic injecting public. Aligned with an object-oriented ontology, they argue that 'technology helps shape the decisions, actions and goals it is ostensibly produced merely to enable' (Fraser et al., 2017, p. 20). For the fitpack, specifically designed to be used by heterosexual couples, this includes affording 'love and care', 'new responsibilities' and 'new conversations' between the couple and with drug service workers.

However, to pose a tension, if we take enacting or inventing the social to its endpoint, are we in danger of overstating the creative potential of our methods? By highlighting the role of method in making reality are we at risk of once again granting too much responsibility and power to researchers and their intentions, practices and technologies (as raised in debates over the crisis of representation [Clifford and Marcus, 1986]), and not enough to the world as it makes itself known (Barad, 2007; Savransky, 2018; Stengers, 1997)? I raise these

concerns not to come down on either side or attempt to answer them in any concrete way, but to extend this critical thinking through attention to the empirical. Therefore, it is through my encounters with the arts and specifically theatre that I turn to next in considering the embodied enactment of 'public health *problems*'.

Making problems? Theatre as a speculative mode of inquiry

For the last ten months, I have been carrying out research at a theatre company for people who identify as having experiences of alcohol and other drug addiction or dependence.[1] The group fluctuates in size from six to ten people, including the artistic director and facilitator. Every week I attend a 2.5 to 3-hour session where the group meets to work on devising a new play on the topic of drug-related deaths. Drug-related deaths in the UK, depicted in the play in particular in relation to opioid consumption, have more than doubled over the last five years (Office for National Statistics, 2017) and the play seeks to tell this story as a mode of social intervention.

Here, I consider how this 'public health problem' is approached and what this language of problems may add to other terms such as 'realities' or 'ontologies', for engaging with the social in more inventive and experimental ways. A problem is at once a phenomenon and puzzle. To make problems is to open something up to more questions than answers: to offer new angles and vantage points, to thicken it out and get involved in its creation, and to think from and within it rather than about it. This comes from a position of seeing method as already part of the problem it invokes (Savransky, 2018). As such, this approach extends how problems have been previously treated in critical drug studies as enactments 'out there'. It takes a concern, for example, with how problems, like alcohol and other drugs (Bacchi, 2015; Fraser & Moore, 2011; Pienaar & Savic, 2016), addiction (Moore & Fraser, 2013), recovery (Lancaster, Duke & Ritter, 2015), or more loosely 'evidence' (Rhodes, Closson, Guise, Paparini, & Strathdee, 2016), have been made in policy (and treatment), towards a more fleshy and playful engagement with the making of problems as something *we* do, like that seen in Kane Race's (2018) experiments with HIV problems or the ontological work of the harm reduction 'Rovers' described by Gonçalves, Kolstee, Ryan, and Race (2016).

In my observations of the theatre group, what is important to its success, against say the social scientific method, is this focus on making problems as an embodied and ongoing process which involves the actors, environment and audience. This speaks to Martin Savransky's assertion that too much attention in sociology has been paid to the illocutionary

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[1] While I acknowledge the macro politics of theatre as recovery-based therapy, I focus here on the micro politics of problem making.

in our methodological performativity – our intentions – thus obscuring the perlocutionary, which he defines as:

> the more modest logic of connection-making: making a difference, introducing a novelty which might be capable of acting as a vector in the transformation and/or sustenance of the becoming of an ongoing process of events. (2016, p. 133)

Rather than 'enacting the social', per se, the theatre group tries to learn new ways of being (thinking, acting, feeling) so that 'the problem', in this case, 'drug-related deaths', can emerge in novel and unpredictable ways. In this sense, theatre operates as a speculative mode of inquiry for drug research. Instead of trying to get to know 'the problem' in an exploratory way, the group enables 'the problem' to develop. I focus here on this 'enabling of problems' (Savransky, 2018) through their setting up and staging.

Setting up

The theatre company works through ensemble-based improvisation, that is, performing drama spontaneously from working with/in a group rather than as an individual. But counter to the idea that improvisation comes from a lack of planning, I observed a rich scaffolding of preparatory work to foster movement, thought, feeling and modes of expression. I will explore the importance of 1) warming up, 2) playing games, and 3) care and rapport-building. By paying attention to this setting-up process for something to happen, notably, often through less-than-conscious, non-cognate, embodied and relational means, our methodological attention is dispersed to the speculative middle-ground (Springgay & Truman, 2017) needed for drug problems to emerge, to be known in new and potentially more valuable ways: a crucial intervention for improving drug realities that are currently at crisis point, if we take drug-related deaths as the tip-of-the-iceberg in how drug consumers are failing to matter in society.

Every session starts with a warm up. We gather in a circle and are invited to yawn, often leading to exaggerated and amusing sounds and stretches. We learn to extend our bodies. Pivoting on the spot with one arm pulled out straight across our body, we are able to twist further each time, pointing to a different part of the room. We imagine a shared enemy to fight against in a boxing exercise, calling out 'one, two, three, four' as we unleash short jabs into the middle, and another 'one, two, three, four' as we deliver larger under-hook punches. In turn, one person runs across the circle, catching someone's eye midway to run toward, and then they jump together with a mid-air clap and a smile. Evenly spread out, we start to walk around in a circle, holding the gap in front of us. We walk at some speed until we begin to whir and it feels like if one of us was to stop, the others would carry them along. We become swarm-like. We are told not to look at each other but use our peripheral vision to move as a group. We quickly progress from being able to stop and start together, to being

able to change the direction of the walk and coordinate a collaborative jump into the air. We are learning ways to move without any one individual initiating it and embodying a sense of group timing and rhythm – a feel for each other as each other – that doesn't require words or direct sight for action. By learning this group movement, new kinds of improvisation can emerge, to know drug-related problems in different, collaborative ways.

Extending this disruption to the individual, games are played to experiment with this newly found group embodiment and comportment and what it can do. They too build responsiveness and relationality to work together and let ideas, movement, and affects flow. In many ways an extension of the warm up, one of my favourites was the 'sweet game'. First, one person is given a sweet to hold onto and when they are walking, everybody else must freeze, and vice versa. Then, when the sweet-person is static, the group must move towards her/him to try to get hold of the sweet. The sweet is released to one person without the others knowing or giving it away. The facilitators then guess who may have it. They are always wrong. Not only do the actors start relaying stories of past encounters with drug dealers and re-living the unequal configurations of power in these situations, but the game builds imagery to be employed in the performance.

Central to the group's ability to engage with these problems creatively is its perceived safety, which required constant maintenance. For example, when a 'check-in' at the beginning of the session is hurried through, or things get too serious, or there isn't enough time allocated to tea breaks, the group can become unsettled. Behind the scenes, the artistic director engages in frequent 'outreach' – she telephones the actors before the session to encourage attendance and after the session to check they are okay. The actors also maintain strong bonds through meeting up outside the group and have frequent communications, via smartphone messaging, sharing information and art forms such as recovery advice, poetry, songs and upcoming events.

However, the care work required for the creativity to flow – to trust the group with personal stories, to be able to make a fool of oneself and laugh at each other, to try out different subject positions, personas and genders, and to practice emotions, physicalities, language and other modes of expressions (to laugh, cry, shout, swear, sweat) – is equally needed for shutting down the creativity, to go back into one's self, even if slightly altered. The 'check out' at the end of the session was very much about this closure or exit. I think this need for care in the opening up and closing down of experimentations with these ways of knowing and relating is testimony to the *problematic* nature of what is getting set up. For instance, the actors describe the relational and embodied ways of feeling, doing and thinking built up over the course of the night as drug-like. It is perhaps no surprise then that these collaborative ways of knowing and being put the actors' individuality at risk and had to be carefully managed.

Staging

Unlike the setting up of problems from *within* the ensemble, staging problems involves a purposeful interaction with the *outside*. Staging is performed with the material environment and audience in mind. In this sense, it is perhaps not only a more honest way of making knowledge that considers its consumption as part of the process, but a way of doing research that celebrates its potential to affect and intervene with what is often seen as external to it. As Maria Puig de la Bellacasa puts it:

> this way of knowing/caring in our *staging* of things relates to a politics of knowledge, in that *it generates possibilities for other ways of relating and living*, it connects things that are not supposed to reach across the bifurcation of consciousness, and transforms the ethico-political and affective perception of things by the way we represent them. (2011, p. 99, my emphasis)

By engaging with the affective capacity of research or an impassioning of knowledge, alcohol and other drug realities become everybody's problem! Thus, according to Vinciane Despret: 'to "de-passion" knowledge does not give us a more objective world, it just gives us a world "without us", and therefore without "them"' (cited in Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011, p. 99). Following this, I want to look briefly at how problems are staged through 1) props, 2) rhythm, 3) comedy, 4) imagery and 5) metaphor to generate new publics or 'ways of relating and living' *with* alcohol and other drugs.

In the rehearsals and play, the group uses props to afford different responses from the actors and audiences to make problems tangible. For example, one actor clutches onto a teddy bear for dear life throughout the play, and gets distressed both on the stage and off when cast members misuse it. This not only brings to life our tight human-nonhuman relationality but our vulnerability when it is interrupted. Another prop – an empty green gin bottle – has such powerful affective affordances for one actor that she feels uncomfortable using it. When her lips touch the rim and she imitates a swig, throwing her head back and taking an ecstatic exhale of relief, she feels unnervingly close to a past self, an affective affinity that she no longer wishes to know.

The actors all read poetry in the play, changing the tempo of the rehearsals and production. These poems, written by one group member, but read out also by others, cut through the narrative flow. In the rehearsals, each time they are read, silence envelops the group and goose pimples involuntarily rise as we let the words resonate and ponder what they might mean for the author and reader. Rhythm is also introduced through music. In the opening scene, the actors are encouraged to move against, not with, the musical accompaniment, to jar and refract audiences' responses, to enhance a collective sense of uncertainty and discomfort with the scene and what is to come.

Comedy is then used to puncture these tense times, and the morose story line, more generally, to enable curiosity. The potential for laughter enabled the cast and play to ask difficult questions and (re)visit otherwise uncomfortable places and themes such as the 'crack den', mental health, homelessness and sexual exploitation. For the audience, however, laughter did not always come easily, and the cast even spoke of planting audience members to permiss this laughter. By laughing, it was felt the play could push taboos and allow new avenues for knowing drug worlds, in ways that were not singularly tragic but also funny and joyful. However, rather productively, each time there was a disconnect between intention and response, the play was diffracted in new and possibly more worthwhile ways *with* the audience.

The audience is invited into the story through the production of imagery. In one scene, a male drug dealer is 'swarmed' by the remaining cast, creating a sense of their amalgamation versus his powerful individuality. This is learnt from the warm up and 'sweet games' (above), as actors' bodies learn to move as one. Affected actors volunteer accounts of scoring drugs which are then fed back into the imagery. In rendering such affects knowable through this imagery, audiences are brought into this crowding and contagion, putting at risk their individuality and therefore what they may already know about drug use, for example, as (immorally) controllable.

In the staging, words are muddled and replaced with analogies, often not making complete sense. The play's title 'Brown Bread', Cockney rhyming slang for 'dead', crops up throughout. Bread is used as a metaphor for drugs. So, when the performers talk about different kinds of bread, or bread purchasing, making, cooking, eating, and selling, they are actually talking about alcohol and other drugs. This allows the actors to talk about their drug practices in a more frank way, both among themselves and to the audience. With the true meaning of the words not always obvious, a curiosity and uncertainty is engendered, which is crucial to the questioning approach that the play attempts to instil.

Importantly, the staging is always evolving and responsive, so although audiences' responses are to some extent pre-empted and curated, they are also elusive and unsolicitable, and indeed, this is the point, to evoke rather than demand. Whilst the arts have opened our social scientific imaginations to making problems, it is in enlivening problems that I think they hold most promise. This marks a 'togetherness' between the method and problem (Lezaun, Marres & Tironi, 2017; Marres, Guggenheim & Wilkie, 2018; Savransky, 2018). Rather than focusing on how our research knows or evidences problems (or, perhaps worse, gives solutions to problems), and thus how to make publics listen, which conceives of the arts as a merely communicative exercise – to 'engage' the public – theatre, here, teaches us the merits of the arts for getting involved in the very problem we are trying to know and intervene in.

Coda

> To engage the social as an open problem is therefore also to imagine a form of inquiry whose task is that of a permanent experimentation with problems themselves. (Savransky, 2018, p. 228)

Whilst increasing numbers of innovative studies have emerged over the last decade to show how policies, technologies, treatments and objects enact alcohol and other drug worlds, fewer studies have engaged directly with this making. In turning this methodological performativity 'out there' toward the potential inventiveness of our own methods, I hope to have shown how theatre can work as a method to enrich drug problems. Problems may provide the necessary language to always problematize rather than know or make realities, and with this, to get involved in this problem-making. A concept of problem-making may better keep alcohol and other drug phenomena, in the ontological turn, bound to a 'problematic' that is never fully explicable and always still emerging, but also 'made' from the phenomenon itself. In this, it also alerts us to the inventive limits of our methods. Therefore, for critical sociology scholars like Savransky (2018), the question is not 'how do methods make problems' but how do methods 'enable them'?

By moving from analyses of performativity to 'inventing the social', and from making realities to enabling problems, there is 'a departure from methodological indifference to the object of inquiry – an affirmation that social research involves active participation in social life' (Marres, Guggenheim & Wilkie, 2018, p. 27). Therefore, rather than looking at what theatre might tell us about drug-related deaths, empirically, I have considered the methodology of how theatre sets up and stages problems as a speculative mode of alcohol and other drug inquiry. That is, rather than the play seeking to know and tell audiences about drug-related deaths, it seeks to engage in the process of inventing the problem with different environments and publics: to pose new questions and vantage points through collaborative, embodied and affective ways of knowing. Whilst speaking to the ontological turn in critical drug studies, where we have known for some time now that realities are not only studied or represented but enacted, considering theatre and the arts, more broadly, as an inventive method pushes this enactment further to think about our methodological participation and experimentation *with* the world as inevitable and thus a *starting point* for intervention.

If we acknowledge all research as participatory, we can take more seriously questions of how to participate. The actors in this play are not merely communicating pre-existing knowledge (e.g. from statistics or past experience), but curating new ways of knowing and relating with each other and wider publics. This is not about us enforcing ways of knowing, but perhaps providing different tools and propositions so that new ways of knowing and relating can emerge. Where representations of drug users so often push people away from them, as Vitellone (2011) points out, how can our methods, in contrast, draw people closer

in harnessing connection and empathy? Dealing with issues of aesthetics, art self-consciously participates in this affective ecology.

Theatre is a way for people with experiences of alcohol and other drug consumption to experiment with ways of thinking, feeling and acting in a 'safe', 'drug-free' environment. As such, it allows new ways of knowing problems to emerge in light of and with publics. It is hardly surprising then that the play often left the audience and cast with more questions about drug-related deaths than answers. I will further interrogate these processes in future research. But, for now, in contributing to this series in 'Contemporary Issues', I hope to have shown some of the ways in which methodological performativity has been taken up in the ontological turn in critical drug studies as a process to be analysed (knowing-as-making) and engaged (making-as-knowing). And it is through a version of the latter that I see a fruitful and yet underexplored role for the arts in research, to intervene with alcohol and other drug problems so they can develop in different and potentially more valuable ways.

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