



Research paper

The place and time of drugs

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ABSTRACT

'Context' is one of the most enduring analytical devices in social science accounts of alcohol and other drug (AOD) use, although its elaboration tends to emphasise macro-structural processes (like economic change, law enforcement, health policy, racism or stigma) at the expense of more finely-grained understandings of the *place and time* of consumption. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's notion of the assemblage, and its reception in recent critical geographies of AOD use, I will characterise context as an assemblage of social, affective and material forces. Such a characterisation is not indifferent to the range of structural forces that are often understood to mediate AOD use. Rather, it is concerned to document how these forces *actually participate* in the modulations of consumption. The assemblage will thus be construed in ways that align context with the 'real conditions' (place and time) of drug use. I will develop this argument by way of a case study drawn from a recent qualitative study of the social contexts of methamphetamine use in Melbourne. My goal is to document the ways 'context' is produced in the activity of drug use, and how 'context' so constructed, comes to modulate this use. By contrasting traditional approaches to the analysis of context with methods borrowed from Deleuze, I aim to transcend structural understandings of context in order to clarify the active, local and contingent role of contexts in the mediation of what bodies do 'on' and 'with' drugs.

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"The minimum real unit is not the word, the idea, the concept, or the signifier, but the assemblage."

Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (51)

Gilles Deleuze's mature philosophy evokes an 'image of thought' contrary to the differentiation of human/nonhuman, agent/structure, subject/object, body/world and self/other that structures so much analysis in the social sciences. In their place, Deleuze proposes a logic of relations, multiplicities or *assemblages*. Assessing the adoption of this logic in the contemporary social sciences, [Marcus and Saka \(2006\)](#) argue that 'assemblage' has generally been mobilised to replace the more traditional notion of 'social structure'. In contrast to the putative rigidities of structure, and the reifications of social context, the assemblage emphasises processes of emergence, heterogeneity, instability and flux. Whereas structure is typically understood to be resistant to change, 'assemblage' foregrounds the ways "heterogeneous elements" are organised in the formation of social, symbolic, economic or political "scaffolding", which "orders" interaction, meaning and practice ([Marcus & Saka, 2006:102](#)). Such an approach suggests that the objects of social science inquiry (such as 'drug', 'consumer' or 'setting') shouldn't be regarded as static phenomena, but must instead

be examined in the context of their contingent formation. "Assemblage thinking" is apparent in much recent innovation in the social sciences (see [Anderson, Kearnes, McFarlane, & Swanton, 2012](#) for a review), availing a novel methodology of great promise for scholars interested in the use of alcohol and other drugs (AOD), and the problems associated with it (see [Fitzgerald, 2009](#); [Malins, 2004](#); [Oksanen, 2013](#)).

Expanding on this promise, the paper advances the figure of the assemblage as a means of rethinking context and its deployment in the analysis of AOD use. Throughout the paper, I will illustrate the heuristic merits of the assemblage by way of a discussion of the *place and time* of drugs. My purpose is to indicate how closer attention to the spatial and temporal aspects of AOD use may suggest novel means of transforming consumption events in order to reduce the harms that may be associated with them. Developing my critique of context, I will argue that the analysis of context in the study of AOD use tends to emphasise macro-structural aspects of social organisation at the expense of more finely-grained understandings of the place and time of consumption. Recent work in social and cultural geography would suggest that these spatial and temporal aspects emerge in an assemblage of bodies, settings, practices, affects and relations by which the event of AOD use unfolds alongside a discrete context ([Wilton & Moreno, 2012:99–106](#)). Contexts are in every instance made in the place and time of consumption. This formulation is not indifferent to the range of structural forces that are often understood to mediate AOD

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use. Rather, it is concerned to document how these forces *actually participate* in the modulations of AOD use in particular places, at particular times. I will develop these arguments by way of a case study drawn from a recent qualitative study of the social contexts of methamphetamine use in Melbourne. My goal is to document the ways context is produced in the activity of drug use, and how context so constructed, comes to modulate this use. By contrasting traditional approaches to the analysis of context with methods borrowed from Deleuze, I aim to transcend structural understandings of context in order to clarify the active, local and contingent role of contexts in the mediation of what bodies do 'on' and 'with' drugs. I will close with a discussion of the implications of this shift for contemporary drug policy debates.

Theorising the assemblage

The assemblage has two primary advantages over conventional understandings of the role of social contexts in mediating AOD use, including those informed by structuralism, neofunctionalism or constructivism (see Rhodes, 2009:194–98). First, 'assemblage' dissolves the antinomies of structure and agency in asserting a relational logic of emergence, association and ordering. Neither structure nor context can be regarded as coherent, distal or remote entities that somehow intervene in the activity of human agents. As such, the assemblage does away with the idea of 'structural factors' in the work of explaining power, mediation or inequality. It challenges in particular, the claim that behaviours like illicit drug use, and the problems associated with it, may be distinguished from their nominal social contexts. There is not, in this sense, behaviours and their contexts, but rather an assemblage of forces in the midst of their associations. Consistent with Michel Foucault's (1977) "micro-physics" of power, the assemblage makes power immanent to practice, rather than external to it in the operations of a distal structure. It follows that power is one force among many responsible for the assemblage's modulations. In privileging the analysis of force, 'assemblage' returns the social sciences to "thick empirical description" of the "practices, actors, atmospheres and representations that generate new interactions" in a social field (McFarlane, 2011:379). What matters is how entities affect one another in the creation of *relatively durable* social, political or economic formations, and how this process creates a context for interaction. Dependent on myriad forces, contexts are not fixed and they do not behave in the same way in all places at all times. This is the principal inference to be drawn from the application of 'assemblage thinking' to the analysis of context in social science inquiry. Assemblage thinking exposes the "conditions under which provisional unities emerge from the *agencement* (arranging, fixing, putting in order) of heterogeneous phenomena" (Anderson et al., 2012:176), thereby dismissing the epistemological disjunction of context from the activity of AOD use. 'Assemblage' emphasises the ways social and political formations (like 'context' or 'consumption') are made durable; the work that goes into maintaining these formations over time; and how they are transformed in routine struggles over power, meaning, resources or identity.

The second advantage to be derived from the mobilisation of 'assemblage' in the study of AOD use is the attention it calls to the activity of *nonhuman forces* in the modulations of consumption. Such attention further emphasises the importance of explaining the means of the assemblage's formation. Just as the displacement of 'structure' by way of the 'assemblage' should generate fresh insights into how social, political or economic forces mediate AOD use, renewed focus on the nonhuman aspects of AOD use should reveal more of the 'real conditions' of consumption. This will require greater attention to the range of spaces, entities, bodies, affects, forces and signs that *actually participate* in events of AOD

use. While I will flesh this argument out below, the point for now is that the entities involved in assemblages of AOD use can each be identified by way of the effects they generate (and the concrete relations they establish) between bodies, human and nonhuman. For example, the work of distal actors, such as policy, law enforcement, income distribution, racism or stigma may be traced via the effects they engender in particular bodies, at particular times, in particular places. If they can't be traced, then such forces cannot be said to mediate (or participate in) AOD use. In advance of a novel "social science of harm reduction" (Rhodes, 2009:196), the properly empirical task is to document the technologies, bodies, affects and spaces involved in assemblages of AOD use, and the work each does to either promote or diminish harm. This suggests that harm should be regarded as a *property of the assemblage* and not of any one discrete body therein. However, before I may develop this argument it is important that I briefly clarify the formal properties of the assemblage.

As a theoretical object, 'assemblage' evokes diverse historical, conceptual and methodological antecedents, although it is arguable that much of the recent surge of interest in "assemblage thinking" across the social sciences may be traced to Deleuze's seminal contribution (see Anderson et al., 2012:176–77; DeLanda, 2006:3). Reflecting the variety of definitions and deployments of 'assemblage' in Deleuze's writing, both alone and in his collaborations with Felix Guattari, the adoption of the term in recent social science research betrays a remarkably heterodox trajectory (see Anderson and McFarlane, 2011:125–26). Given the aims of the present paper, the conceptual summary of the assemblage offered below will concentrate on its implications for thinking about place and place-making, and the relationship between activity, practice, space, force and affect as they may pertain to phenomena like AOD use. Certainly, a key facet of Deleuze's treatment of the assemblage concerns the links between territorialisation (or *place-making*), embodiment (or *subjectivation*) and affect (or *capacity*). Brief review of these links should shed light on the ways assemblage thinking may inform novel empirical analysis of AOD use (Malins, 2004).

Deleuze and Parnet (1987:69–70) characterise the assemblage in terms of a "multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them". As such, "the assemblage's only unity is that of co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy'... defined by its degree of power or 'freedom', its affects, its circulation of affects: what a set of bodies is capable of" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987:69–70). Caroline Williams (2010:249) provides a useful summary of the *relationality* that sustains all assemblages when she notes that the relation is "not simply... a link, connection or association between two or more discrete objects; relation is literally a 'taking in hand', a production of something that did not exist before and which, through the process of relation, *becomes an aspect of that thing's existence* (emphasis added)". Elements or phenomena are not folded into some pre-existent entity, in other words, but rather contribute their affective and relational force to the ongoing modification of the assemblage in the event of their encounter with it. It follows that all things may be defined by their relations, and by the various affects ('degrees of freedom') such relations enable. Elsewhere, Deleuze and Guattari (1987:40–45) emphasise the social, material, affective and semiotic aspects of the assemblage and its characteristic modes of production. With more specific relevance to the aims of this paper, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) assert that assemblages draw together discrete material resources in the deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of place. *All assemblages create a territory*. De/re/territorialisation involves a "double articulation" in which elements combine in "formed matters" subject to a variety of "relative movements" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 70–72).

In the first of these articulations, “raw materials” are selected and combined in the composition of discrete territories. Deleuze and Guattari (1987:40) stress that the “first articulation chooses or deducts, from unstable particle-flows, metastable molecular or quasi-molecular units (substances) upon which it imposes a statistical order of connections and successions (forms)”. As DeLanda (2008:162) helpfully explains, this *process of selection* applies to the various procedures by which “geological, biological and even social strata are formed”. Each may be regarded as material processes insofar as each involves the combination or synthesis of material elements in the expression of discrete geological, biological or social territories. This includes, for example, the processes of selection and sedimentation which transpire over geological time in the formation of physical structures; the combination of material elements, forms and capacities in the evolution of biological life; and the convergence of materials by which social entities are composed and recognised. In each case, the selection, attraction, synthesis or combination of material elements is articulated in the creation of a territorial space unique to each geological, biological or social entity. And so, the sedimentation of materials settles in the space of the mountain; material elements are folded into the biological territory of the human body; just as assemblages of place, bodies, communication, infrastructure and transportation express the social space of the modern city (see McFarlane, 2011).

The second articulation involves a “folding” that establishes “a stable functional structure” for the elements selected in the first articulation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:41). Put another way, the second articulation “establishes functional, compact, stable substances (forms), and constructs the molar compounds in which these structures are simultaneously actualized (substances)” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:41). The point is that each of the processes of selection and combination by which material elements are assembled in the expression of a territory (the first articulation), necessarily entails in the second articulation, the expression of a series of explicit functions, capacities or forms. This second articulation establishes (or seeks to determine) the function, meaning, purpose or form of the territory effected in the first articulation. Such processes limit the possible array of forms that may be attributed to a material territory. An interesting example may well be the human body itself and the way each of the material territories that make up the assembled body, such as the hand, is overcoded in an attempt to delimit its function, form, capacity or purpose. Another example concerns the formation of crowds and the overcoding processes involved in the distinctions drawn between peaceable assemblies, insurrectionary mobs, incipient social movements and so on (see Thrift, 2004:57–59).

It is important to note however, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) stress, that neither the first nor the second articulation is ever completed or fixed. Matter is continuously in motion, such that both the first and the second articulation need to be understood as a *movement towards stabilisation* rather than the final achievement of this state. Just as the “raw materials” that combine in the creation of “actual entities” are forever in motion, so too are the forms and functions that serve as the effective expressions of these processes. For DeLanda (2008:164), this means that all bodies, forms, spaces and territories must be regarded as “objectively changeable: they may undergo destabilising processes affecting their materiality, their expressivity or both”. This is why Deleuze and Guattari emphasise *processes* of territorialisation and deterritorialisation, inasmuch as all material forms, all assemblages, remain fluid and unstable (“objectively changeable”) according to the historical, political, social and/or economic forces applied to, or expressed through, them. I should add that the means of this double articulation provide an insight into the formation of the assemblages of bodies, spaces, signs and affects central to the event (or ‘context’) of AOD use.

Assembling the context of drug use (spaces, bodies, affects)

Consistent with the analysis reviewed above, I would argue that the contexts of AOD use may be regarded as assemblages of human and nonhuman forces by which affects and relations obtain between bodies in particular territories. Another way of making this point is simply to note that all contexts are expressions of an assemblage. Contexts assemble *spaces, bodies and affects* in a “constellation of singularities and traits” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:406), giving to each assemblage a provisional identity such that contexts may be distinguished from one another according to the specificity of their spatial and temporal arrangement. Distinguishing contexts in this fashion is critical if one is to overcome the tendency for contexts to assume a kind of pan-spatial, structural hegemony, seemingly operating at all places at all times with the same relentless mediating power. Yet the specificity of context also requires that one pay heed to the discrete arrangement of spaces, bodies and affects by which the assemblages that comprise context are composed. The active power of contexts lies in the force of these connections and flows. This is why one must conceive of the context of AOD use as *an assemblage of spaces, bodies and affects* rather than as a composite of such forces. It is worth briefly summarising the spatial, corporeal and affective aspects of this ‘drug assemblage’ before considering how their analysis may be advanced in the design of novel studies of AOD use.

With regard first to the *spatial* aspects of assemblages, and their expression in the contextualisation of AOD use, space and matter alike are continuously constructed and reconstructed “through the agency of things encountering each other in more or less organised circulations” (Thrift, 2003:96). Space is not discovered but rather is socially mediated or enacted in the play of events, flows and encounters between bodies, affects, objects and territories. Space is less a natural property of the world, an inert substance, and more a means of making sense of it, of negotiating movement and passage and organising relations and cultural practices. Above all though, matter and space are continuously evolving and becoming, being made and unmade, contested and stabilised. What is crucial for the analysis of AOD use proposed here is the manner in which settings or spaces are crafted in processes of territorialisation and deterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Each event of territorialisation (or place-making) inflects the ways assemblages enact a social context for the activities, interactions or associations expressed in AOD use. The place of consumption must, therefore, be construed in terms of connections and encounters that establish a territory for the ‘drug assemblage’. The assemblage organises and distributes relations, affects and bodies in each event of AOD use.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987:405–06) primarily conceive of the *corporeal* dimensions of the assemblage in terms of affects, habits, practices and expressions, and the manner of their circulation on a plane or territory. Behaviours, actions and practices circulate in relations of embodiment as entities come to affect (and be affected by) one another in an assemblage. Such relations give to each body within the assemblage an “emergent identity” (DeLanda, 2008:163). Yet as I have stressed, assemblage thinking eschews the subject/object binary distinguishing bodies and spaces in arguing that bodies represent “series of flows, energies, movements, strata, segments, organs, intensities; fragments capable of being linked together or severed in potentially infinite ways” (Grosz, 1994:167). What is striking about this position given the purpose of this paper is the affirmation of the spatial character of relations of embodiment in practices like AOD use. The practice of consumption necessarily assembles spaces, affects and bodies in particular points, at particular times, with particular effects. As such, the body can no longer be understood as separate from (or prior to) the spaces around it; rather, the two are mutually constitutive. Spaces and contexts are made coextensive with the body *as they are folded*

into it in relations of movement and rest, practice and reaction (Malins, 2004).

The folds by which spaces and bodies are de/re/territorialised are equally central to the distribution of affects between spaces and bodies, further indicating how the context of AOD use is expressed in an assemblage. Affects are critically important insofar as they denote what bodies ‘actually do’ in a drug assemblage. Nevertheless, what ‘bodies do’ most certainly does not in every instance pertain to what bodies will or desire. The great empirical purchase of Deleuze’s (1988) understanding of affect lies in his suggestion that affects describe what bodies become in their encounters with other bodies, *human and nonhuman*. Encounters modulate affects as they ‘pass through’ bodies, determining in and for the moment of their encounter what each body may be capable of doing, enacting or being. This affective modulation involves a transfer of power, capacities or action-potential between bodies (Deleuze, 1988:123–28). Regardless of a body’s ‘nature’, whether human or nonhuman, all bodies are affected by a panoply of other bodies in any particular encounter. Yet, just as bodies affect one another *in place*, bodies are inevitably affected *by place*, such that “context seems to be a vital element in the constitution of affect” (Thrift, 2004:60). Affects are experienced in bodies but expressed in encounters; encounters between bodies, between bodies and contexts, bodies and places. Each encounter generates unique affective capacities in that no two encounters ever produce the same affective modification in a body’s scope of activity. Bodies are affected by place in each instance anew, with each encounter with place. The experience of place may thus be said to differ affectively with each novel encounter.

All of which suggests that affective engagement with place, and with the “affective atmospheres” (Anderson et al., 2012) this engagement supports, is another of the primary mechanisms by which social contexts are territorialised and deterritorialised in an assemblage. The affects produced in the event of drug use reside neither in individual bodies, places or substances, but rather in the dynamic interaction of places, substance, bodies, contexts and subjects. It follows, therefore, that the affective function of context – the extent to which contexts may transform or mediate the event of AOD use – can never be discerned in advance of empirical analysis of encounters in and with context (Duff, 2012). Refusing to posit context as a *determinant of encounters* in place is critical if the more active, aleatory and affective aspects of context are to be adequately understood. Contexts certainly mediate encounters with drugs, but only insofar as they contribute to the affective valence of events that transpire within a broader ‘drug assemblage’. It is the particular spatial and temporal arrangement of settings, bodies and affects enacted in each event of AOD use that mediates the force of context, not the other way around. Context is as much an event as it is a coherent pattern of spatial, temporal and affective relations.

Conceiving of contexts as an assemblage of spaces, bodies and affects provides a compelling new logic for the interrogation of individual drug use settings, and the broader contextualisation of drug related harm. The effort to reconceptualise context in terms of the assemblage should be understood as an attempt to return context to the focus of empirical research, rather than to retain it as a heuristic shorthand for the vagaries of power or culture. Indeed, the problem with so much of the existing literature on context is that its heuristic value has fallen away sharply as context has congealed into a static, hypostasised synonym for ‘power’, ‘structure’ or ‘society’. In the drugs field, ‘structuralist’ understandings of context mostly frustrate its operationalization as an object of empirical research, given the bewildering array of group norms, economic processes, social traditions and political relations now regarded as properties of context (Fitzgerald, 2009; Rhodes, 2009). Granted such expansive purview, structural

approaches obscure the *specificity of place* and the particular means by which contexts shape local drug use behaviours. In response, I have argued that context should be characterised as an assemblage of spaces, bodies and affects, whereby the grouping together of these elements inevitably mediates the ways contexts shape AOD use and related harms. The challenge now is to articulate how this approach may inform the development of new types of drug policy, research and practice. Such is the goal of the case study offered below.

The drug/work/housing/treatment/crisis assemblage (a case study)

The challenge with context as it is typically deployed in social science accounts of AOD use is arguably one of *connecting* ‘individual’ and ‘society’, ‘practice’ and ‘setting’, ‘behaviour’ and ‘culture’, ‘consumption’ and ‘norms’ in order to explain how cultural, political, economic or social forces mediate AOD use (Fitzgerald, 2009). Or, to pose the problem with recourse to a rival vocabulary, how to explain the social or structural determinants that produce (or mediate) AOD use? Yet what if one were to start with the *connection* rather than the *subject* (or its behaviours) as the basic unit of analysis? What if one were to prioritise analysis of the *event of consumption* rather than the drug user? These are the principal exhortations of an approach to the study of drugs and place modelled on the assemblage. Such an approach should permit novel analyses of what are typically regarded as the social and structural aspects of AOD use, revealing more of the force of context, without at the same time assuming a subject who comes to culture only to affect and be affected by it in the course of behaviours like AOD use. Following Deleuze, I would argue that drug use may be explained not in terms of a subject and its choices mediated in a web of social, economic and political structures, but rather in terms of an *assemblage of forces* that produces both the subject of drug use and the effects of this use. It follows that conventional epistemological distinctions such as structure/agent and object/subject impede, rather than facilitate, the work of producing empirically nuanced accounts of AOD use and the problems associated with it (Wilton & Moreno, 2012:100–102).

A more compelling way of drawing these distinctions may be to contrast conventional understandings of ‘social context’ with that of the ‘assemblage’ in the analysis of qualitative data exploring the use of alcohol and other drugs. If the task occasioned by “assemblage thinking” is to rethink the context (and practice) of AOD use in terms of spaces, bodies and affects, then the focus of analysis must shift too from structures and subjects to events and relations (Anderson et al., 2012; DeLanda, 2006). What I would like to attempt, therefore, is an analysis, modelled on the assemblage, of the transition into AOD treatment drawn from a recent study of the social contexts of methamphetamine (MA) use in Melbourne (see Quinn, Stoovalé, Papanastasiou, & Dietze, 2013 for details). I will primarily detail the difference such analysis may make compared to findings that derive from recourse to more traditional understandings of the context, or social determinants, of MA use. My goal is to provide a coherent picture of the character of “assemblage thinking”, along with a clearer sense of how it may be applied to the study of AOD use. The passage below is taken from an interview with a middle aged male who reported regular MA use. It pertains, more directly, to the circumstances in which Bill (a pseudonym) first entered treatment for his MA use. I have selected this excerpt from among the 31 interviews partially for the richness of its account of the contexts of MA use, but also for its heuristic value, for what it reveals about the array of forces (human and nonhuman) active in AOD use. For these reasons it is worth citing the transcript at length before turning to its analysis.

What was happening in your life at the time that you first got into treatment?

It was about five years ago, I was in a little rental bungalow, quite comfortable. I had a car and a job with a service station where I was basically night manager. I worked like six nights a week. It was a family business and they were a bit disorganised. I had all night to myself so I would do their ordering, the drinks and accessories and stuff like that. I'd leave a list for the rep so I was basically night managing, getting everything ready for the next day. Then Mobil had their computer system installed with the whole computer ordering system and I had all night to myself, speeding off my head, and I know about computers so you know I'd go around with the PDA and barcode everything and then type in the number of stock and then after you put it in, you would know how much had gone and it would tell you how much you needed at the end of the week. So I set that all up for them. I had fun doing it. I was doing it for myself, just to work it all out and that. I had a ball. That was good until, well you know my wages were going into speed so I was just on a fine line you know and what happened, well basically the landlord's husband came over and said "you've got to move, you have to find another place to live" and yeah the same weekend my boss's brother rang me up and sacked me. I was only casual, they were paying me under the table so I could collect the dole as well you know, so there was nothing I could do. There I was, having a good time at work, no one to bother me, just some taxi drivers to talk to every now and then and then bang, he just rang me and goes "don't bother coming in tonight" and I go "why" and he goes "you're sacked" and I go "why" and all he said was "you know". So yeah basically the same weekend my work and my home came crashing down. It doesn't help when you're speeding as well you know so without the work I didn't have the money to go and get another place. But I'd already helped a friend access stuff, mainly housing through the Salvation Army so I knew exactly the people to go to. I had a week's notice to move, so I went and signed up with them (Salvation Army) to see if I could get transitional housing or something because, you know, I'd already helped my friend and she'd gone through the whole process. So I put my name down for transitional and they suggested I go to the Bridge program (AOD treatment) you know if I wanted to straighten out my life. So I started doing the Bridge program. I did go to transitional housing but I had to stay on a friend's couch for a couple of weeks, that's the only reason I had a roof over my head. Then they rung me up and put me over in West Footscray, well supposedly until my housing commission place came up. So for my own sake and to be doing the right thing, I was going to the Bridge program and they were housing me, they were feeding me, so yeah I can't say a bad word about the Salvation Army.

Thinking first of a *structural reading* of the contexts discernible in this excerpt, 'context' would ordinarily be parsed by way of the allusion to varied economic, political and social forces in the data. One obvious example is Bill's description of his employment arrangements ("casual, they were just paying me under the table") with its inferences of insecurity, irregularities in the terms of employment, and the arbitrary character of supervision, management and conditions. Bill's housing was reported to be equally insecure, with the intimation of an irregular tenancy agreement with few, if any, of the usual statutory protections available in Victoria (e.g. only a week's notice of forcible eviction). The characterisation of the support provided by the Salvation Army (transitional housing and AOD treatment) is also striking, in that Bill appears to indicate that his enrolment in treatment was a kind of *quid pro quo* for the Salvation Army's offer of transitional housing. It would be easy enough to discern in this report a form of 'structural violence' in which admission

to treatment is presented as a tacit cost of the provision of housing support. Either way, a structural reading of the contexts of Bill's MA use would arguably emphasise his vulnerability in terms of the tenuousness of his employment, housing and financial arrangements. It follows that Bill may be described as impoverished or socially excluded, such that his MA use may be regarded as a reaction to, or consequence of, this marginalisation.

It is not the case that such a reading is wrong or inaccurate, yet it does depend on a disregard for whole sections of the excerpt. It is likely, for example, that a structural reading of the contexts of MA use described in this excerpt would ignore almost all of Bill's account of his experience at work. His mundane reports of stock-taking and administration (along with Bill's identification as "basically night manager") would likely be glossed in favour of the intimation of vulnerability and insecurity in Bill's employment. The obvious corollary is the identification of structural inequalities in Bill's work arrangements, and the sense that this may (partially) explain his drug use. The same could be said, of course, for the Bill's housing. The point I wish to make is that such a reading of context relies almost entirely on the identification of forces that are not actually described in the data. Indeed, a typical social science analysis would arguably read into Bill's report the trace of structural forces like the deregulation (and/or deunionisation) of labour markets in Australia, declining availability of public housing, unequal access to health care, and the stigmatisation of addiction. Again, it is not the case that such a reading of the contexts of MA use in Melbourne is wrong or misguided. It is just that it relies on a reified understanding of context that seems to serve as an a priori condition for any social science account of AOD use (Duff, 2012). Along with Deleuze (2004:172–74) I would argue that this kind of reading *necessarily abstracts structure* from the vagaries of participants' language, practice or understanding. Moreover, it is by way of this abstraction that structure hardens into a kind of pan-local 'context' that exceeds the locus of activity. And so, for example, labour market deregulation and deunionisation may be presented as structural forces in the contextualisation of Bill's MA use, even though Bill himself failed to describe or identify such forces. Regardless, a structural reading of context inevitably ends up endorsing these kinds of structural forces in ways that reify or enact structure as a real and enduring feature of social organisation. Accordingly, analysis moves from entities, relations or processes as they are described in the data, to structures, power relations or forces which must be inferred. Of course, the work of inference can't help but defer to habit in the characterisation of structures or contexts, and the ways each may be said to organise phenomena like AOD use.

So what difference might recourse to "assemblage thinking" make in the analysis of Bill's MA use? I would argue that the primary consideration for analysis must be the identification of relations between phenomena (human and nonhuman) and the "co-functioning" that such relations enable. If the task is to reveal the contexts of MA use (as discernible in the data), then analysis must focus on how forces *beyond the subject of consumption* come to participate in this use. "Assemblage thinking" would suggest focussing in particular on the establishment of sympathetic relations between heterogeneous terms. So, again, what kinds of 'co-functioning' may be discerned in Bill's description of his MA use? In tracing Bill's drug assemblage, a whole host of spaces, bodies and affects are available for analysis. First, there is the space and time of work; a quiet service station "with no one to bother me, just some taxi drivers to talk to every now and then". A space without supervision availed an opportunity (or context) for Bill's MA use ("all night to myself, speeding off my head"), while a "disorganised" family business created activity, or things to do, while Bill was "speeding" ("getting everything ready for the next day"). The space and time of work thus enter into Bill's MA assemblage, which is

populated in turn by various objects, technologies or actants. Interest in these nonhuman forces evinces the sharpest contrast between Deleuzian and conventional readings of the contexts of AOD use.

Conventional readings of context tend to ignore mundane objects (like a “computer system”, “PDA”, “drinks and accessories”, a “list for the rep”) in favour of more familiar instantiations of power and structure (Fitzgerald, 2009). Yet Bill identified numerous entities in describing his MA use; each of which appeared to support the ‘co-functioning’ of this use. This included human entities (such as taxi-drivers, absent employers, company reps), along with varied material objects, technologies and practices. Indeed, Bill was very clear that his MA use was intimately involved in the completion of his duties at work (stock-taking, ordering, maintaining records, setting up systems). Stock-lists, records, computer systems, software, hardware, shelves and floor-plan must all be understood in the context of Bill’s drug assemblage for each participated in the event of this consumption. Such use is replete with *co-functioning*, with the sympathetic relations of entities, human and nonhuman, that enable the transmission of affects between bodies. Bill clearly enjoyed using MA at work for the ways it transformed his affective relations with the spaces and objects that comprise the work of “night manager”. Bill reported being affected by the “computer system”, the “PDA”, “stock”, “drinks and accessories”. Each entered into a drug assemblage in ways that transformed Bill’s activity ‘with’ MA. As Bill established new relations with these entities (“speeding off my head”), the context of his use shifted to include novel forces (spaces, bodies, affects) within a drug assemblage. As Bill said of this work/drug assemblage, “I had fun doing it. I was doing it for myself, just to work it all out, I had a ball”. Bill’s report thus provides a rich account of one particular context of MA use. Although one should not ignore the distal forces that order this use (like the circumstances that sustained Bill’s employment with few, if any, entitlements), too great a focus on these forces obscures the proximate force of bodies, spaces and affects as they intermingle in the event of Bill’s MA use.

Spaces, bodies and affects: this is the actual context of Bill’s MA use. Even though the force of power may be traced in Bill’s report, it is not the kind of structural force that simply determines conduct. I would argue that power may be traced in those instances in which Bill’s drug assemblage de/re/territorialises, such as occurs in the event of his unexpected loss of employment, but also in his procurement of transitional housing. Clearly Bill’s boss exercised power ‘over him’ as he terminated his employment. Yet even here “assemblage thinking” calls attention to other forces in the data. Rather than regard Bill’s predicament as a function of his powerlessness in the face of structural factors (such as the casualisation of unskilled labour in Melbourne; or disinvestment in public housing), “assemblage thinking” highlights the ways Bill was able to mobilise novel relations and resources in response to the shock of losing his home and his work in quick succession. Indeed, the data reveals much of Bill’s resourcefulness in accessing support through his social networks and the Salvation Army, even as he acknowledges the effects of his drug use and the paucity of his financial resources. Again, this is not to ignore the effects of structure (as it is conventionally understood) in Bill’s account of his drug use. All the same, structure should never be exaggerated at the expense of Bill’s own description of his reaction to hardship. Bill’s description of the circumstances in which he first came to drug treatment may be read as a process of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation within the assemblages that express Bill’s MA use (along with his employment, accommodation and health status). Bill described this process clearly enough, just as he accounted for the various contexts of his MA use. There is simply no need to exceed these reports in the imposition of structural forces that somehow explain Bill’s MA use more clearly than he himself can (see Latour, 2005:21–22).

The place and time of drugs

The shift from Bill’s work/home/drug assemblage to a treatment/support/recovery assemblage may be traced in terms of the interaction of spaces, bodies and affects, and their relative transitions. First, Bill reports using MA at work amid a host of spaces, bodies and objects, and the security afforded in his “comfortable” housing. This is the context of Bill’s ‘drug assemblage’. Bill is then sacked and evicted; the assemblage deterritorialises and reterritorialises suddenly as previously sympathetic relations are broken and the assemblage’s ‘co-functioning’ is transformed. The social context of Bill’s MA use is similarly transformed as some of the spaces, objects and bodies formerly involved in this consumption are removed from the assemblage. Yet the assemblage reterritorialises relatively quickly in a suite of novel relations (a new co-functioning); Bill’s contacts a friend and obtains “a roof over my head”; reflecting on a friend’s experience he contacts the Salvation Army and in “a couple of weeks” is offered transitional housing. Affected by this support, “and to be doing the right thing”, Bill enters into a treatment program offered by the Salvation Army, for whom Bill “can’t say a bad word”. The assemblage shifts as new relations are established between heterogeneous phenomena; a new play of forces in the context of Bill’s life.

I will admit that such a reading of the contexts of Bill’s MA use (and his subsequent admission to drug treatment) has little of the familiarity of conventional analysis. However the goal, as Bruno Latour (2005:22) would have it, is simply to *describe* the array of forces (human and nonhuman) at work in a given assemblage, without automatically discerning “in the cases at hand yet more examples of well-known types [of] social explanation”. Whenever ‘context’ is elided with ‘society’, ‘structure’ or ‘power’, the temptation to eschew description in favour of explanation begins to penetrate one’s analysis. For “explanation” is the course by which the specificity of time and place is erased in the identification of “gigantic forces”, “dramatic patterns” or “dark powers” whereby a “structure” is instantiated in the midst of everyday life (Latour, 2005:22). And so, “well known types” (power, structure, context) are once again reified in defiance of the conditions of “real experience” as they order the time and place of practices like AOD use (see Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:248). This, I would conclude, is the principal advantage of the adoption of “assemblage thinking” in analyses of the context of AOD use and its various social aspects. “Assemblage thinking” returns one’s focus to the place and time of drug use; to the array of social, material and affective forces that actually participate in the event of consumption. I should add that place – construed as an assemblage of human and nonhuman forces – ought to remain the focus of empirical analysis of AOD use, if only to counter the ongoing reification of context, power and structure in such analysis. Too much social science analysis of AOD use discovers in the midst of consumption the trace of social and structural forces, without describing how these forces actually participate in AOD use in particular places, at particular times. Without adequately describing the place and time of drugs, it is rarely clear how power or structure may be resisted, reterritorialised, or ‘ordered otherwise’ in specific consumption events.

As a result, drug policy is thrown back on the antinomies of structure and agency, as if each may be distinguished in practice. The risk for harm reduction policy, for example, is that structural factors come to be regarded as the principal determinants of drug related harms, such that structural interventions are prioritised in the design of harm reduction praxis (see Rhodes, 2009:198–99). Such a course arguably shifts attention from the real conditions (time and place) of drug use to a broader set of structural processes (such as the stratification of labour markets, or local policing activity) that may well mediate consumption in certain circumstances, but can scarcely be modified at the whim of drug policy. It follows

that drug policy begins to focus on social factors that are explicitly removed from the time and place of consumption. Yet it is never quite clear how this concern for structure is supposed to solicit ideas for the modification of events of consumption in the interests of reducing harm. The best research, the best policy advice, and the best harm reduction praxis never ceases to concern itself with the real conditions of consumption; with the specific circumstances in which bodies, spaces and substances interact in the event of AOD use (see Fraser & Moore, 2011). As such, harm reduction ought to focus on the assemblage rather than structure or context in its consideration of a means of intervening in events of AOD use. Only with renewed attention to the place and time of drugs may harm reduction praxis discover the next generation of interventions practices, policies and guidelines for the ongoing mitigation of harmful consumption.

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Conflict of interest

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