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Developing a dialogic practice of storytelling with adolescents: encounter in the space of story

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of PhD (practice-led)

York St John University, School of Performance and Media Production

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ABSTRACT

Oral storytelling has been widely employed with adolescents, often applied to educational, therapeutic or other purposes. The unique contribution of this research is to articulate what storytelling can offer this age group as an open-ended participatory artistic practice, informed by an understanding of the anatomy of narrative knowledge, or 'storyknowing'. Long-term, reflective Practice as Research (PaR) in educational, mental health, youth theatre and youth work settings has provided me with a powerful methodology to shape storytelling practice around adolescents, and simultaneously to theorise and disseminate this practice.

I contend that storytelling practice with adolescents has evolved through different 'chronotopes'. I both identify, and develop further, an emergent dialogic chronotope which enables dialogue between traditional repertoire and reality, enchantment and empowerment, and storyteller and young people. Such dialogue, conducted through narrative, is responsive to adolescents' interests without intruding upon their personal challenges.

Using my practice as both evidence and methodology, this exegesis explores the complex dynamics of the intersubjective space 'between' storyteller and adolescent participants, the demands this makes on the storyteller, and the different roles played by story in facilitating this encounter. In particular I find the sparse and otherworldly nature of myth and folktale to make a strong invitation, or even provocation, to young people to enter into collaborative creative processes. I depart from Bakhtin's (1981) view of epic to describe how adolescents both 'knock down' and 'raise up' these stories, to articulate their own perspectives and dignify their life experiences.

I consider the extent to which my practice has established dialogic fora (Delanty 2007) contributing to the regeneration of youth institutions, and 'resingularising' (Guattari 1995) roles and relationships within them. Given the relatively rigid institutional structures and cultural constructions surrounding contemporary adolescents, I propose that dialogic

storytelling entails a conscious orientation to open-endedness, intersubjective meaning-making and singularity.

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CHAPTER 1

'STORYKNOWING' AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF STORYTELLING PRACTICE WITH ADOLESCENTS

1.1 Introduction and rationale

Listening to and telling stories has almost certainly always played a vital role in adolescents' lives, enabling them to explore their values, learn from the life experiences of others, negotiate their changing social roles and relationships, shape and be shaped by the world around them (see for example Wilson 1997). Conversation conducted through the medium of narrative activates a qualitatively different kind of knowledge. Crucially for young people encountering the contradictions and complexity of adult life, this knowledge, in Bruner's words, is centred not around 'the narrow epistemological question of how to know the truth' but 'the broader and more inclusive question of the meaning of experience' (2006:116). In absorbing the stories and thus the counsel of others, young people are 'joined […] to the possible worlds that provide the landscape for thinking about the human condition' (Bruner 1986:128). In listening to them they add their own, often unforeseeable, layers of meaning and experience to the teller's words. In passing them on they influence the culture around them in turn.

Yet unfettered access to this everyday artform, this simple means of making sense of multiple truths, cannot be taken for granted – at least in relation to storytelling between adults and adolescents. It calls for a certain commonality of life experience between tellers and listeners (Benjamin 1973), as well as fora within the daily lives of young people where stories can be exchanged – conditions that may often be lacking due to social, economic, technological and educational changes influencing the contemporary adolescent experience.

Storytelling with adolescents, therefore, needs to be reinvented within this landscape, or at least articulated anew. There are many adults telling stories to or with this age group in the UK, in educational, therapeutic and community settings. However, much of this work in recent decades has been carried out within paradigms inspired by psychology or critical pedagogy, and too instrumentally directed towards specified learning, behavioural or political ends. Consequently it has been too restricted by unwritten rules governing repertoire and young people's roles.

Thus it becomes necessary to adopt a conscious orientation towards carving out space for open-ended, responsive dialogue through storytelling with young people, and to explore its implications for storytelling practice. I argue that such a dialogic mode of storytelling can be seen emerging in the writings and practice of reflective storytellers such as Mike Wilson (1997,

1997b, 2004, 2006), Petra Kuppers (2007), and Pat Ryan (2008), Lisa Heledd Jones (2014) and Jo Blake Cave (2016). It draws on long-held tenets of storytelling, tempered by a new awareness of how people syncretically construct meanings and identity.

Through the synthesis of theory and practitioner knowledge enabled by long-term, participatory Practice as Research (PaR), I have investigated the potential of this approach in practice with adolescents, and charted the traces this has left on the institutions where I worked with them. The responses and interests of my participants have helped me to shape and articulate a dialogic practice of storytelling with adolescents. I hope that it will offer counsel and interpretive frameworks to those working with young people through story.

1.2 How to read this research

This exegesis is the companion to my online portfolio of practice, www.storyknowingwithadolescents.net ; it is embedded within that website, with the intention that the reader can make easy reference to cited elements of the portfolio by means of hyperlinks. Whereas this exegesis takes a bird's-eye view of the conceptual territory that became visible through extensive PaR, the portfolio starts from singular, earthbound experiences of practice and gestures upwards to the theory which resonated with them. It moreover fulfils the need identified by Robin Nelson (2013) for an 'account of process' in PaR exegeses.

I therefore invite the reader to follow my recommended route through the core of the portfolio (starting at Welcome page) *before* reading the substantive chapters (3-5) of this exegesis, so as to understand the nature of the practice from which their conceptualisations arose. The recommended route traces out the same conceptual areas, by loosely mapping stories of practice onto the dimensions examined in each substantive chapter. The portfolio also gives further details of *Storyknowing*, the festival and symposium on storytelling and theatre with young people held at the International Centre for Arts and Narrative (ICAN) in April 2016, on which my live practice was assessed.

As will be laid out in Chapter 2, writing blog posts and papers is a key method by which I have crystallised and shared theoretical understandings from practice. These writings are frequently cited within this exegesis, with hyperlinks to enable the reader to read them in full if desired; those posts and papers which I draw upon are also provided in the portfolio.

The structure of this exegesis, however, resembles that of a conventional PhD thesis and is intended to be fully comprehensible in its own right. In this chapter I lay out two areas of literature essential to situating my practice (narrative knowledge, and the development of storytelling practice with adolescents). Chapter 2 explains the particular inflection of PaR which I have evolved as my methodology. Three substantive chapters then explore three dimensions of my participatory practice of storytelling: the dynamics of the space 'between' storyteller and adolescent listener (Chapter 3); the ways in which story itself establishes a territory for this encounter (Chapter 4); and the traces left by such storytelling encounters on the settings where they take place (schools, mental health facilities or youth clubs) and beyond (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 concludes by summarising my key contributions to the understanding of storytelling practice with young people, and proposes that dialogic storytelling may be particularly valuable in the context of the rapidly changing adolescent experience.

Before turning to my own PaR, there are two explorations of literature which must be made. The first (section 1.3 below) is a distillation of the theoretical tradition which considers narrative as a distinct track of knowledge. This is an important point of departure both for my methodology, and my understanding of what happens in a storytelling exchange with adolescents. The second (section 1.4) is a structured review of oral storytelling practice with adolescents in the UK and USA, which attempts to contextualise my own practice within a lineage of developing approaches or 'chronotopes' of storytelling.

1.3 'Storyknowing': narrative knowledge in my research

Jerome Bruner distinguishes 'two irreducible modes of cognitive functioning – or more simply, two modes of thought – each meriting the status of a "natural kind"' (2006:116). Firstly, there is the form of knowledge he calls propositional, paradigmatic or logico-scientific, which 'seeks explications that are context free and universal' (116); secondly, there is narrative knowledge, or knowledge in story form, which 'seeks explications that are context sensitive and particular' (116), and whose functioning is often poorly understood in psychology, education and most other disciplines. Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) similarly emphasises the incommensurability between the local authority of 'narrative knowledge' and the verifiable accuracy of 'scientific knowledge'.

Narrative, for Lyotard, is not an underdeveloped attempt to attain propositional knowledge, but a viable way of knowing in its own right, and its denigration limits our understanding of reality to that subset of it which can be understood by the scientific track. It is worth citing, as

an illuminating example of this in relation to young people, Chandler et al's (2003) research into how young people's accounts of their own selfhood develop throughout adolescence. The researchers were compelled to change their research design and conceptual models when they realised that most native American participants were accounting for their identity and 'personal persistence' not through the 'essential track' (I am my name/my soul/my personality) adopted by most young people, but through a 'narrativist track' (I am my story). A failure to understand this was leading to inappropriate support of native young people's mental health.

Writing in 1984, Lyotard is concerned by the overweening dominance of the scientific, particularly in postmodernity, when its technical concerns are relatively unconstrained by 'metanarratives', such as Marxism or Enlightenment, which previously gave it its social purpose. Some decades later, we might be equally concerned by the countervailing trend of 'post-truth', defined by the Oxford Dictionaries as 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief' (Oxford Dictionaries 2016)[1]. Yet the hermeneutic philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (1984-8) and, after him, Richard Kearney (2002), suggests a vital role for narrative knowledge in precisely these rudderless postmodern times. Hermeneutics contends that reality is neither wholly a construct, nor an essential truth, and that there can therefore be no knowledge without interpretation: 'the retelling of the past is an interweaving of past events with present readings of those events in the light of our continuing existential story' (Kearney 2002:46). From a hermeneutic perspective, acknowledging uncertainty and multiplicity should not lead us to conclude that one account of the truth is as good as another. Rather, in our information-rich world, story's ability to 'humanise' time into 'a pattern, a plot, a *mythos*' (Kearney 2002:3-4), and thus to plot 'scattered events into a new paradigm' (12-13), is of great value in helping us weave a path between extremes of scientism and relativism. Narrative may be a key mode, even *the* key mode, of sense-making, knowledge creation and 'knowing how to live' (Lyotard 1984:8) in our times.

Matthew Reason and I (2016) coined the term 'storyknowing' to refer to the irreducible knowledge articulated by groups of people through storytelling in participatory arts work. An understanding of storyknowing is vital both to my methodology, and to my claim that storytelling facilitates different kinds of communication with young people to those available within everyday discourse. In entitling ICAN's symposium and festival *Storyknowing*, we sought to encapsulate our aspiration to enable richer dialogue between young people and adults, practitioners and researchers, by conducting it partially through story.

[1] Indeed 'post-truth' was named as the Oxford Dictionaries' 'Word of the Year' for 2016.

1.3.1 Building an anatomy of storyknowing

I would argue that, from early on in my career as a storyteller, I was tacitly (and sometimes explicitly) inducted into an understanding of at least two aspects of storyknowing which constitute core values for most oral storytellers, namely that

> A) story exists to convey *experience* rather than authoritative *facts*, and
>
> B) its role is usually to extend empathic identification with *different perspectives* rather than to convey a particular *message*.

That is, it was noticeable to me that storytellers at gatherings and conferences, like Ruth Sawyer's storytelling nurse Johanna, 'pointed no moral and drew no application' (1962:18). Rather, their introductory and concluding devices underlined the particularity of the experience recounted. While there exist religious and moral traditions of fable- and parable-telling which do aim to teach lessons, there remains a widely held objection among storytellers to the misuse of storytelling for propaganda purposes. This is clearly articulated, for example, by Anthony Nanson (2005), who trained NGO workers and businesspeople in storytelling, and became frustrated with their tendency to view story simply as a compelling way of disseminating their core – propositional or scientific - messages.

An exploration of the literature on narrative knowledge, however, enables us to go much further in understanding its nature. The close studies of narrative and propositional knowledge by the authors already discussed have been complemented by many others, to create a persuasively consistent picture of the distinctive characteristics of the two forms of knowledge. It becomes possible to compile an anatomy of their characteristics and what Bruner calls their respective 'criteria of well-formedness' (2006:116). To enable a succinct overview of this literature and to draw out the relationships between these characteristics and criteria, I have compiled them into a table (Table 1.1). In addition to Bruner **(JB)**, Lyotard **(JFL)**, Ricoeur **(PR)** and Kearney **(RK)**, important contributions to this task have been made by Walter Benjamin **(WB)** (1973), Lev Vygotsky **(LV)** (1967), Arthur Frank **(AF)** (1995), Donna Haraway **(DH)** (1988), Augusto Boal **(AB)** (1995,2000), Michael de Certeau **(MdC)** (1984), Alisdair McIntyre **(AMcI)** (1981), Italo Calvino **(IC)** (1956) and Peter Reason and Peter Hawkins **(PR/PH)** (1988), among others. While each of these authors has their own emphases, there exists considerable cross-fertilisation and relatively little disagreement between their thinking on the nature of narrative, and it therefore seems a justifiable experiment to consider it as a body of thought, and tabulate it in this economical way. Having extracted many quotations from the above authors' writings to build my understanding of each characteristic of the two forms of

knowledge, in Table 1.1 I cite as an elucidation only the writer who, in my view, has most cogently expressed it.

As my PaR largely underscores this consensus, but occasionally stretches it, I will refer back to this table throughout this exegesis.

Table 1.1 A comparison or 'anatomy' of narrative knowledge and propositional/paradigmatic knowledge

	Storyknowing / narrative knowledge	**Propositional / paradigmatic knowledge**	**Sources**
Conveys…	Experience	Facts / 'reality'	WB, JB
	'[O]ne can…ask oneself whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman's relationship, whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way.' (Benjamin 1973:108)		
	Perspectives	Messages / instruction	WB, PR/PH, RK
	'*A key function of narrative memory is, I would therefore argue, empathy. And empathy is not always escapism. It is […] a way of identifying with as many fellow humans as possible.'* (Kearney 2002:62)		
Vehicle	Embodiment	Transmission	WB, JB, AF
	'People telling illness stories do not simply describe their sick bodies; their bodies give their stories their particular shape and direction.' (Frank 1995:27)		
Primary driving force	Intentionality	Causality	JB
	In narrative, action is largely interpreted *'in terms of the working out of human intentions in a real or possible world*', in paradigmatic *'through the operations of causes, structural requiredness, reasoned correlation.'* (Bruner 2006:121)		
Composition techniques	Presupposition / shared associations	Logic	WB, JB, LV
	'Stories, to achieve the condensation and the tropes that render them something other than the mere recountal of events, […]rest upon what Joseph Campbell many years ago called a "mythologically instructed community" who will know how to assign appropriate presuppositional interpretations to what is being said.' (Bruner 2006:124)		
Criteria for quality	Memorability	Verifiability	WB, JB, RK, JFL
	'It has seldom been realized that the listener's naïve relationship to the storyteller is controlled by his interest in retaining what he is told. The cardinal point for the unaffected listener is to assure himself of the possibility of reproducing the story.' (Benjamin 1973:97)		
	Gives counsel/suggests prescriptions	Reference / is limited to denotative statements	WB, JB, AF, JFL, IC
	'All this points to the nature of every real story. It contains, openly or covertly, something useful.' (Benjamin 1973:86)		
	Cultural 'fit'	Transcultural applicability	JB, RK, AMcI, AF, JFL
	*'[T]he objects to which [*the denotative statements of science*] refer must be*		

	available for repeated access, in other words, they must be accessible in explicit conditions of observation; and it must be possible to decide whether or not a given statement pertains to the language judged relevant by the expert.' (Lyotard 1984:18)		
Knowledge claim	Context-specific	Universal	MdC, WB, JB, JFL
	'[N]arrative knowledge does not give priority to the question of its own legitimation […] it certifies itself in the pragmatics of its own transmission without having recourse to argumentation and proof.' (Lyotard 1984 :27)		
Act of performance and reception	Jointly crafting meaning	Conferring explanation	WB, RK, PR/PH
	Created a story response to a controversial issue which *'tentatively feels the way forward towards a synthesis without artificially creating a compromise, or explaining away the differences.'* (Reason and Hawkins 1998:95)		
	Unstable/performative meaning	Stable/fixed meaning	WB, MdC, JB, PR/PH
	Storytelling *'does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out / of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel. Storytellers tend to begin their story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow […]*' (Benjamin 1973:91-2)		
	Socially embedded	Socially alienated	WB
	'[A] collectivity that takes narrative as its key form of competence […] finds the raw material for its social bond not only in the meaning of the narratives it recounts, but also in the act of reciting them. The narratives' reference may seem to belong to the past, but in reality it is always contemporaneous with the act of recitation.' (Lyotard 1984:22)		
Epistemology	Complexity, multiplicity, irreducibility	Abstraction, conceptualisation	DH, AB, JB, MdC
	'*You ask what they "mean" ("veulent" dire)? I'll tell them to you again. When someone asked him about the meaning of a sonata, it is said, Beethoven merely played it over.*' (De Certeau 1984:80)		
View of knowledge development	Cumulative	Totalising	MdC, JB, DH, IC
	'I do not think that my interest in theatre and literature has made me more abstract. *Instead, it has joined me to the possible worlds that provide the landscape for thinking about the human condition, the human condition as it exists in the culture in which I live.'* (Bruner 1986:128)		
Metaphor of territory	Itinerary/route	Map	MdC, AF
	'The map, a totalizing stage on which elements of diverse origin are brought together to form the tableau of a "state" of geographical knowledge, pushes away into its prehistory or into its posterity, as if into the wings, the operations of which it is the result or the necessary condition.' (De Certeau 1984:121)		

1.3.2 Cleverer within the story

To make the case that an understanding of storyknowing is vital to reflective storytelling practice with young people, and illustrate that young people's narrative knowledge may outstrip their propositional knowledge, it is worth providing a vignette from my practice. At the end of my time with the 'intervention classes' at City School, the teacher and I held a focus group with some of the pupils in order to investigate their views on the role of storytelling in school. Most of them became visibly frustrated at the difficulty of articulating their meaning. Mary tried to explain why she preferred stories to facts but rapidly became embarrassed and trailed off:

> *A story is like, longer, and facts are shorter, and it's like, there's more information in a story…* (18/03/2015)

Her implication, I thought, was that a story embeds knowledge in a storyworld. Sam grasped her intention and was more successful in articulating it, by making his argument through a specific example – a story:

> *Like say we were learning about World War Two, really good storytellers would explain how the planes were flying over, the sound, the terrain…* (18/03/2015)

Yet despite their enthusiasm for the topic, the discussion dried up. It was only when one pupil suggested finishing the focus group (as we often concluded our storytelling sessions) by creating a story 'in the round', that the group became animated again. In the two minutes remaining before the school bell, they created a story that was surreal, witty and well-formed, displaying their understanding of story structure and cosmic justice, concluding:

> *J: And then the two goldfish came back alive to haunt the man.*
>
> *D: The man knew that the fish had returned, so he locked every door in his house.*
>
> *A: He tried to capture them with a hoover.*
>
> *S: He tried to capture them with a hoover and it was actually really difficult because he was running around the house, and these ghosts of the goldfish were flying around all through the air, and he just couldn't get high enough because they were getting really really close to the ceiling…*
>
> *C: At which point, he heard a strange voice, a deep booming voice, saying JEFF, JEFF!*

S: YOU'RE A FISH! (GIGGLES) Then he looked at his hands and realised – he is a fish! (18/03/2015)

This story was silly. Yet it demonstrated that their context-dependent understanding of how story 'works', and their ability to perform this meaning, was far in excess of their capacity to generalise it.[2] To misconstrue young people's narratively expressed knowledge as deficient propositional knowledge is to impoverish our dialogue with them.

The review of practice which follows will provide evidence that the ongoing incomprehension of narrative knowledge can also give rise to an instrumentalisation of storytelling. An understanding of the strengths of storyknowing provides a different lens through which to view storytelling practice with young people, and suggests different aspirations for this practice.

1.4 Practice review

The traditional literature review of a conventional thesis aims to locate one's research in a theoretical lineage, but in PaR, it is of more pressing importance to locate it within a lineage of practice (Nelson 2013). The search for relevant, thoughtful accounts of storytelling practice with adolescents leads to diverse disciplinary corners and reflects my evolution as a storyteller, confirming Nelson's view that 'the field of the conceptual framework of PaR […] is more typically wide and interdisciplinary rather than narrow and specific' (2013:102). Thus, rather than being delineated by strict geographical or disciplinary boundaries as might be expected in a conventional literature review (e.g. the use of storytelling in applied theatre practice in the UK), the key criterion for inclusion in the practice review is whether the practice in question has in some way informed, or influenced the context for, my storytelling practice with young people in York, UK.

As 'storytelling' is a culturally loaded and easily appropriable term, this review is restricted to practice based mainly on oral narration, either of personal true stories or of heritage material such as myth, folktale and local history, and to work which included young people aged 11-19 (although I occasionally refer to the younger adult storytellers as an indication of emergent trends within storytelling). The *Storyknowing* symposium was in part an attempt to render this

[2] This is far from denying the value of philosophising; Julian Stern's (2015) study of young people's articulations of solitude and 'enstasy' garnered eloquent responses, which clearly showed respondents' delight in finding the words to explain their experience. Notably, however, many of their responses, like Sam's, were not abstract conceptualisations, but embedded in the starting-points of specific paintings or personal memories of aloneness, and the richer for it.

review current and comprehensive, by assembling a snapshot of the field as it is configured in the UK (as represented not only by those who made contributions, but by the over thirty others who applied to do so).

Perhaps surprisingly, given the widespread view that storytelling is 'not for adolescents' (see Chapter 3), it has been extensively employed with this age group, perhaps uninterruptedly throughout history, across a range of contexts: formal and informal education, therapy, applied theatre, community and youth work. However, a great deal of this work has viewed storytelling as an instrumental means to another end: learning about a particular topic, raising awareness of an issue, improving their mental health. It has also become pervaded with binary distinctions: between the written and spoken word, between traditional repertoire and personal stories, between therapeutic and socially critical understandings of storytelling. It has rarely (albeit with notable exceptions) been viewed as an artform with intrinsic value, in a way that cuts across disciplinary boundaries.

Despite this apparently fragmented picture, this review traces a trajectory through the approaches taken to storytelling with adolescents, which has sometimes been obscured by the different vocabulary used to discuss storytelling in education, arts practice, mental health and other disciplines. This trajectory will be a highly contestable account of intersecting ideas, a narrative placed around understandings of narrative. It will enable me to identify the basis for an emergent practice with adolescents which does not rest on binaries, or claim specific mechanisms of efficacy, but which puts the richness of the oral storytelling repertoire and tradition at the service of young people's current needs and interests.

I organise this trajectory around Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the 'chronotope'. In his essay 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel', Bakhtin (1981) analyses the nature of time and place in various chronotopes he identifies in literature, such as Greek adventure romance, the chivalric, the carnivalesque or folkloric, the idyllic. Sue Vice summarises chronotope as relating to

> how fictional time, space, and character are constructed in relation to one another […] how texts relate to their social and political contexts. (1997:201)

Bakhtin considers the chronotope of a given genre to limit and condition everything from how characters and their agency are understood, to whether the text is viewed as distant and authoritative, or available for mockery and imaginative exploration. Chronotopes can overlap, co-exist and recur, in different sectors of society. Chronotope is related to ideology, but in relation to storytelling it also calls to mind concepts such as timelessness, authenticity, truth

value, the relationship between the story and the life circumstances of the listeners, and thus their agency over these circumstances. Calling oneself 'a storyteller', as opposed to 'an author' or 'a performer', suggests one has in mind a particular set of relationships with one's chosen texts and one's audience; thus the concept of chronotope seems perfectly suited to explore how storytellers working with young people have envisioned these relationships in different times and contexts. In particular, I draw attention to the interlinkage between storytellers' *aspirations*, and their chosen *repertoire*, in each chronotope.

1.4.1 The 'everyday' chronotope: the librarian and the teacher

Since the 1880s in the English-speaking world there has existed a confident and articulate tradition of storytelling teachers and librarians (Ryan 2008). Despite the professional contexts for their work, I see this group as representing an 'everyday chronotope' of storytelling with young people, because they viewed storytelling as a self-evidently necessary, non-specialist, multi-functional, socially embedded practice. The hugely influential didactic works of storytellers such as Marie Shedlock (1951), Anna Cogswell Tyler (1921), Ruth Sawyer (1962), and Eileen Colwell (1980) take a practical tone, citing their own extensive practice in schools, libraries and community settings, including with age groups we would now define as adolescent. There is an underlying assumption in their work of the value of narrative knowledge, which they often express as an irreducible interdependence between literacy, moral education, development of the imagination, and self-expression. Their recommended repertoire is accordingly broad, often ranging from history, poetry and literature to folktale and mythology. They address a potential teller who may become qualified by 'the building of background' (Sawyer 1942:99): practice, humility, wide reading, thoughtfulness and care of young people, rather than by virtuosity or inheritance of an oral tradition. Marie Shedlock's counsel (1915) is of simplicity, and trust in the young listeners: tellers should learn to avoid the 'dangers' of over-illustration, too much detail, too contrived appeals for audience participation.

Firmly in this tradition is Betty Rosen (1988, 1993), a secondary school English teacher in an inner-city boys' comprehensive, who gave over substantial portions of class time to telling her pupils folk stories. Her agenda is nothing less than to persuade all teachers that they and their pupils have the inner resources to be storytellers. Oral storytelling has, for Rosen, a power that education cannot do without:

> On every occasion – without exception – that I have told a story in someone's classroom I am told of this child or that who has never before sat so still, listening; and

> on every occasion – again, without exception – in written follow-up work, there will be pupils excelling themselves in quantity and in quality where they would normally produce nothing or a reluctant little. (1993:35)

Rosen's instrumentalisation of storytelling goes no further than this observation that it tends to motivate pupils. Despite the considerable social challenges faced by her pupils, she does not choose stories which address particular needs or issues. She rather trusts that each pupil will perform their own transformations or appropriations, drawing on 'the detail of the way he or she lives life and, secondly, the individual's own feelings and attitudes towards this personal experience' (1993:92). In subsequent chapters I will explore how my own practice in some senses represents a return to this trust in the processes of listening and appropriation.

Such confidence in the power of story was particularly apparent around the inception of the National Curriculum in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The National Oracy Project (Howe and Johnson 1992) convened storytellers and educationalists to develop the use of storytelling in both secondary and primary education. Yet the NOP existed at the juncture of two conflicting philosophies of education: a liberal or expressive model was giving way to a more positivistic, assessment-oriented model (Barnes 1990). Just as storytellers were advocating the importance of knowledge expressed in story form, it was becoming increasingly endangered in the wider education system, in favour of the generalizable analytical skills pertinent to propositional forms of knowledge (see Table 1.1). This trend has largely continued: teacher trainer Nicola Toyle confirmed to me the dominance of overt analysis skills in the secondary English curriculum, at the expense of the reading of whole texts, or narrative approaches to interpretation such as 'creative extension' favoured in the 1990s (pers. comm. Jan 2015; see blog post, 25/02/2015). Advocates of the NOP argued that this was making anecdotal knowledge 'unthinkable' (Barnes 1990) and thus impoverishing classroom dialogue, particularly for secondary pupils:

> The further up the school system we go, the less likely is it that spontaneous, pupil-made narrative will be able to insert itself comfortably and naturally into the flow of talk. (Rosen 1985, cited in Howe and Johnson 1992:20)

Ongoing efforts have been made by storytellers and educators to grasp the 'everyday chronotope' before it vanishes, and embed (or re-embed) storytelling in the everyday life of school communities. American storyteller Robin Mello, who taught storytelling to student teachers in a deliberate attempt to reclaim their 'storied voice' in their teaching, highlights how this wove a texture of relationships and knowledge: 'Storytelling, students noted, created relationships between student and text, plot and life experience, as well as the audience and

the teller' (2001:7). Although I will discuss the work of Jack Zipes mostly in relationship to the 'dynamic' chronotope (1.4.3), it is important to mention here his call for *long-term* close relationships between storytellers and schools. Since, he observes, 'not every teacher wants to become a 'storytelling teacher' (1995:8), the storyteller should become almost a '*member* of a community' (15), and a facilitator of everyone else's storytelling within it. The benefits expressed are relational, holistic, systemic, to some extent unfathomable to a system primarily focused on the measurement of specific cognitive outputs.

Reviewing this body of practice in 2008, storyteller-in-education Pat Ryan sees both these models in decline. No longer is storytelling 'practiced as a matter-of-fact by a majority, integrated without much notice' (12); it is rather limited to the occasional visit 'from a visiting professional during Book Week or Arts Week' (11). Similarly, Erin Walcon (2012) argues that in secondary schools, the involvement of storytellers and other artists is now often aimed at achieving predetermined educational, psychological or behavioural outcomes, something that my own experience confirms, as discussed in sections 1.2.4 and 1.2.5. Ryan ascribes the endangerment of storytelling in education to financial cuts, curriculum changes, changes in teacher and librarian training, but also to the professionalization of storytelling as a profession in its own right.

The trend towards professionalization, and the specialization and indeed sub-specialization of storytellers, have, I suggest, contributed to the evolution of the 'magic' and 'dynamic' chronotopes whose profile has grown as 'everyday' storytelling has declined. These will be explored in the next sections.

1.4.2 The 'magic' chronotope: spellbinding performance and healing stories

The post-1968 period saw a rediscovery or revival of storytelling traditions within the counter-culture (Joseph Sobol 1999, 2008; Wilson 2006). Wilson describes this revival as a moment when:

> Numerous storytellers and performers in the UK and US optimistically turned their backs on the social and political institutions to find authentic voices of the past and their own authentic voices through story. (2006:xviii)

Thus, storytellers drew on the folk material of a (possibly imagined) past to express opposition to a technologically advanced but socially atomised or corrupt present. The revival movement,

according to Sobol, is fundamentally concerned with healing the 'brokenness' of present society through communal aesthetic experience; it

> seizes on a practice that seems to do an urgent artistic work: to transport the audience and performer and to connect them in a powerful and significant way. (1999:29)

Central to this idea of transportation is the liminal or 'hypnogogic' state in which the 'listener's heart rate slows down, temperature lowers and breathing slows' (Ryan 2008). This can bring a sense of communion and confluence with others present (Mead 2011) which has a neurological, and for some even a spiritual, basis. This continues to be one of the most widely documented and celebrated aspects of storytelling, often described as feeling 'spellbound'. Listening to a story can be a particularly intense form of what Julian Stern calls 'enstasy' – a healthy, contemplative solitude that is generative and important for well-being, and sometimes difficult to attain in modern schools and societies – while being co-present with others, a chance 'to be alone and together' (Stern 2014:161). My experience as a freelance storyteller and story-listener corroborates both the real value of this state, and its hold on popular (adult) culture. Teachers and parents often have a strong desire for young people to experience its unmediated and low-tech 'magic'; their expectation that adolescents may be less susceptible to it is often given as a reason for considering them too old for storytelling.

These two interconnected elements – the recurring quest for connection and wholeness, and the drawing on traditional material to evoke it – encapsulate what might be called the 'magic' chronotope of storytelling. There are two areas of storytelling practice which I see as the main inheritors of the magic chronotope: performance storytelling, and therapeutic storytelling.

1.4.2.1 Performance storytelling

Sobol emphasises that the new generation of performance storytellers (or in the USA, 'platform storytellers') in the storytelling revival centred their practice on the 'master trope of tradition' (2008:124), claiming a continuity of lineage with storytellers of traditional societies. What they were in fact creating, he claims, was a new artform. Efforts to define the boundaries and aspirations of this artform have remained a priority for its guardians, such as (in the UK) performance agency the Crick Crack Club, which has produced its own set of 'criteria for performance storytellers' (Haggarty 2014). There is considerable disagreement on these matters within the broader community of performing storytellers; many tellers in the Society for Storytelling, including the organisers of the Young Storyteller of the Year (YSOY) competition, consider Crick Crack's performances too orchestrated, virtuosic and theatrical to be defined as storytelling. Yet the focus on the unscripted, unmediated telling of traditional

material is essentially held in common, as is the aspiration to captivate and spellbind the audience. The promotional text for a performance by Sally Pomme Clayton is characteristic: 'This intimate and enchanting performance takes the audience into the secret world of the magician' (A Bit Crack 2016). *The Londonist*'s reviewer felt that this claim, and the audience's expectations, were fulfilled: 'Sally Pomme Clayton has that magic in plenty – she is a dream-weaver, a spell-binder' (A Bit Crack 2016).

Attempts to involve adolescents in this artform - either as performers or as listeners - have been rather limited, both in scale and form. A notable exception and interesting case study is the YSOY competition, organised annually by the Traditional Arts Team (TAT) from 2005 to 2014.[3] TAT suggest two reasons for the invisibility of young people in storytelling:

> The teens and twenties have been unrepresented, ignored or excluded in an art that is held by the sage and the specialist as being theirs by right, and is often judged by young people as only suitable for children. (2010:1)

No longer so susceptible to enchantment, thus unfit as listeners, nor are adolescents considered qualified for initiation as tellers. This encapsulation, however, perhaps says more about what is understood by 'storytelling' within the magic chronotope than about adolescents.

The barrier to *listenership* – that of perceived age inappropriateness – is one that surfaces throughout the literature on storytelling with adolescents as creating a flashpoint between storyteller and listeners. Yet adolescents, in my and others' experience, have little resistance to the liminal state of listening to a story itself. Their objections usually seem to arise where the storyteller makes too concerted an effort to lead them unprepared into what Helen East calls '"the world of make-believe" of folktales and comparable narrative' (cited in Howe and Johnson 1992:51), the core repertoire of most oral storytellers but suspected by some young people to be childish or alien. East found a group of 14-15-year-old students to be 'initially very sceptical about the whole idea of "telling stories"', but happy to tell short personal anecdotes or on the intermediate ground of urban myths (51). Some of the teenage pupils working with Xanthe Gresham on a history-related storytelling project by the International Centre for Arts and Narrative (Reason and Harrison 2013) were similarly resistant to 'weird' folk material they felt to be irrelevant to them and their curriculum.

Those storytellers who have built up extensive performance practices with this age group, such as Gail de Vos (2003) and Kevin Cordi (2003), tend to address these issues head-on and take as

[3] YSOY is now run by the National Organisation of Young Storytellers (NOYS).

their starting-point the affinities and preferred styles of adolescents. This home territory, to generalise, features personal or family anecdote, the subversive or grotesque (e.g. ghost stories), informality, and a lack of concern with genre boundaries (Wilson 1997). De Vos advises tellers to start conversationally with anecdote, ghost and trickster stories, and to facilitate the leap to less familiar, mythological genres by discussing it with the audience in advance:

> This eliminates the need for members of the audience to react negatively at that point in the story in order to demonstrate to their peers that they are too mature to be taken in by such nonsense. (2003:25)

She warns too against expectations of visible audience participation. These measures in place, she finds her large high school audiences receptive and hungry for a broad range of stories:

> More so than when first writing about myths and legends a decade ago, I believe that young adults need a strong background in world mythology in order to better understand and appreciate the world of popular culture that surrounds them. (2003:81)

Indeed a comparative glance towards the US storytelling world suggests that it is not the choice of myth and folktale specifically, but rather any rigidity of repertoire and style, that is likely to exclude younger people. The favoured repertoire in America consists largely of personal and family 'true' stories, yet there too Sobol evidences the crystallisation of 'de facto canonic structures that operate purely by imagery, assumption, and implication' (2008). Hannah Harvey (2008) documents how these marginalise many manifestations of storytelling which grip younger audiences. She discusses the condemnation by the US storytelling community both of the angry, 'broken' (135) autobiographical storytelling of one young teller, and of the genre-crossing work of the KSU Tellers, a 'narrative theatre' company of university students which 'worked the borderland between disciplines to engage storytelling in/as a liminal site' (137), infusing mythic material with personal experience and social comment.

Inevitably, the UK storytelling scene is diversifying in both style and repertoire, with the increasingly high profile of socially engaged 'spoken word' storytellers like Kate Tempest and Holly McNish, and cross-fertilisation with digital storytelling and other artforms. Yet some gatekeepers of storytelling networks still do not recognise these performers as storytellers. Thus a significant barrier to adolescent *tellership* is still posed by the subtle policing of genre boundaries in the storytelling world.

The YSOY competition challenged these barriers in the sense that that its courses and mentorship model demystified and shared the skills of storytelling, as Zipes (1995) urges storytellers to do. Its preparatory programmes achieved 'progressive development from absolute beginners to confident public performers', to the extent that it has launched the careers of many young tellers currently successful in the storytelling 'circuit' (Trad Arts Team 2010:1). However, the competition remains primarily a vehicle for passing on a canonic repertoire and style, rather than for encouraging young people to develop new forms of storytelling. In the 2014 YSOY competition I attended, performers transposing their stories to the first person, or incorporating too much comedy or personal experience, lost to those giving more faithful, mesmeric renditions of myth and folktale in the familiar form of the third person, past tense. Thus the YSOY approach opened up membership of the storytelling community to young people, but limited their right to reshape the artform itself – a distinction I will discuss further in Chapter 2. Past YSOY winners Jo Blake Cave and Tamar Eluned Williams both chose to focus, in their talks at *Storyknowing* (2016), on the unwritten rules of repertoire, style and self-presentation which dogged their individual processes of carving out a professional identity as a storyteller. Blake Cave described sensing these rules as an almost tangible, weighty and sometimes oppressive 'mantle of the storyteller'; Williams spoke of feeling creatively constrained by ideologically laden definitions of 'what storytelling is'.

Meanwhile, another branch of the magic chronotope has been the growth in recent decades of therapeutic storytelling, either in individual therapy or in groups. This work has exercised a profound influence on the development of applied storytelling, whereby storytelling is 'applied' to the wounds of young people's mental ill health, problematic behaviour, disempowerment or exclusion.

1.4.2.2 Therapeutic storytelling

Therapists using storytelling have tended to locate its healing potential in the two facets of the magical chronotope I have already identified – that is, in the therapeutic nature of the act of storymaking or listening (Wilson 2006), and/or the wisdom conveyed by specific stories. On the former side, therapists have found it productive to harness the liminal (or 'spellbound') state of absorption in metaphor and symbolism so as to 'bypass the "left brain" that acts as a logical "watchdog"' (Crawford et al 2004:4) and sometimes a hindrance to personal transformation. On the latter, the influence of Carl Gustav Jung's thinking on the collective unconscious has been extremely significant, and forged a strong bond between storytelling and psychological therapy. The narrative structure of the 'hero's journey', inspired by Jungian archetypes and identified by Joseph Campbell (1949) as universal, has been proposed as a

template for supporting healthy adolescent development, including by Andrew Lines and Graham Gallasch (2009) in their 'Rite Journey' initiative with teenage boys in Australia.

Others working with teenagers in mental health concentrate on the storymaking abilities of young people themselves, and their need to hear certain kinds of stories to guide this process. Dan McAdams (1993) suggests that adolescence coincides with the beginning of the ability to become a self-conscious mythmaker, to story one's own life. An appreciation that limiting or oppressive self-narratives become self-fulfilling has led to the use of stories to provide alternative metaphors, for example G.W. Burns' (2005) compendium of 'healing stories' for young people. Human Givens therapy takes this further, using storymaking, particularly with young people, in a targeted attempt to combat trauma by reprogramming neural pathways (Yates 2011). All such approaches rest on an understanding of obliquity, the way in which 'metaphorical image provides the means for a child to look at his powerful feelings from a "safe distance"' (Sunderland 2000:14). Sunderland finds, however, that adolescents are more reluctant than younger children to enter the imaginative world the therapist seeks to create – precisely because they have become conscious of the mechanisms of the myth-making process and feel exposed even in their fictional storymaking. They may also, I suggest, suspect the therapist's agenda, or the particular messages she is trying to convey.

Eloquent illustrations of the potential, but also the difficulties, of trying to harness the 'magic' of storytelling to therapeutic outcomes, are provided by Alida Gersie's nuanced accounts of her therapeutic storytelling and storymaking practice, much of which is with adolescents (1997; Gersie and King 1990). She emphasises the creation of multiple fluid meanings, rather than simply specific 'lessons' she is trying to teach the participants. She is simultaneously aware of the potential for developing mutuality and collaborative ability, building tolerance for a range of emotions, loosening unhealthy self-narratives, reclaiming agency and a sense of responsibility, and becoming aware of alternative explanations and actions. (In this, she echoes Nelson (2003) who identifies four actions facilitated by oral storytelling which constitute empathy: establishing emotional resonance, engaging in perspective-taking, displaying empathic behaviour, and providing positive regard.) However, Gersie's attempts to use specific stories to heal, untie a knot or hit a particular target occasionally founder when working with adolescents. An honest vignette from her work with a group of inner-city teenage girls provides a hint of the limitations of such an approach with perceptive, suspicious, sensitive young people. In frustration at the girls' boredom and refusal to participate wholeheartedly, she tells them a story of a minister walking out on his recalcitrant flock. One girl immediately perceives her thinly-veiled meaning - "You're fed up of us aren't you?" - leading to a discussion which makes clear their feeling that Gersie preferred her own

interpretations to theirs and treated them like children (1997:12). Even Gersie's acute interpersonal intelligence had not been enough to outweigh or disguise the messages and agenda carried by her stories, and she was made to pay for this.

Therapeutic storytelling is just one element of the wider landscape of participatory or applied storytelling. This work draws on diverse influences beyond the therapeutic, and beyond the storytelling world itself. Perhaps for this reason, it is the battleground on which the magic and dynamic chronotopes meet, as Wilson's (2006) overview of the main strands of practice in applied storytelling helps to clarify.

1.4.3 The 'dynamic' chronotope: applied storytelling and 'telling your own story'

The growth of applied storytelling projects can be understood as the fruit of cross-fertilisation between the worlds of applied theatre (which, as Helen Nicholson (2005) discusses, has roots in Marxist and anarchist thinking as well as the socially ameliorative role of the welfare state) and of community, therapeutic, and schools-based work by storytellers following the countercultural storytelling revival. The two strands of practice have different theoretical reference points, and intersect somewhat haphazardly. This sometimes makes their mutual influence difficult to chart, as the following discussion will indicate.

The most influential, erudite and articulate critic of magical approaches to storytelling has been Jack Zipes. Although he rarely refers by name to the Marxist-inspired work of Augusto Boal, Paulo Freire and Bertolt Brecht which is so foundational to applied theatre (explored in detail by Deborah Mutnick, 2006), his contribution is arguably to extend their critical pedagogy to storytelling, and in so doing to articulate what I call the dynamic chronotope. Like the magical chronotope, this starts from a critique of late-capitalist societal structures, but the relationship between story and contemporary circumstances is direct and critical, encapsulated by the notion of praxis, a move 'from reflective enquiry to social transformation' (Mutnick 2006:37). Within the dynamic chronotope, engagement with a story should not bypass or escape advanced capitalism as in the magical chronotope, but rather facilitate listeners to grapple with and reshape it. While granting the power and magic of the liminal state, Zipes does not wish to linger there. He vehemently rejects a passive role for listeners or any 'cult-like status' or 'mystical overtones' for storytelling, whose function for him is rather

> to provoke thought and curiosity […] Storytelling that is not *engaged* in the everyday struggles of the teachers and children is just another form of commercial amusement. (1995:6)

Zipes wishes storytellers to use the texts of the past as a framework to critique and prepare to change the present. His storytelling practice, emanating from this position, places heavy emphasis on understanding the structure and grammar of story, active story-making and often subversion of cultural myths by young people. In Bakhtinian terms, he wishes to entitle young people to 'knock down' the epic (Bakhtin 1981). In Brechtian terms, he wishes to hand over the means of mythic representation to them. Zipes' influence has rendered community-based storytelling more critically reflective, ambitious, and socially relevant; for example Wilson cites him as the inspiration for the Developing Schools Project Storytelling Residency in six Northern Irish secondary schools, whose aim was that 'the storytelling would not end as soon as the residency finished' (2006:102).

The dynamic chronotope, whether transmitted through the Boalian or the Zipesean route, has had a further consequence for much of the work within applied theatre that might be called applied storytelling. Although Zipes' work builds on his complex analysis of the utopian and subversive potential of folk and mythic material (1994, 1995, 2012), this focus on *equipping young people to be storytellers* has intersected with the cultural democratic ethic in applied theatre, to generate a focus on *telling young people's own stories*. Thus, as with the magical chronotope, declared aspiration and prescribed repertoire are often intertwined.

That is, in applied theatre, the linkage of the term 'storytelling' with 'young people' almost invariably points to efforts to facilitate the retelling of young people's own personal experience in some form. The forms of applied theatre most often linked to oral storytelling, such as forum theatre and other Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) approaches (Boal 2000), playback theatre (Fox and Dauber 1999), and verbatim theatre (for example Anderson 2007) are all explicitly focused on this goal. Of these, forum and verbatim have been very widely used with adolescents. Personal digital storytelling too, often in tandem with applied theatre processes, has been seen by many practitioners as particularly suited to this age group; Megan Alrutz sees its potential to 'invite youth to critically reflect on and (re)imagine metanarratives about their lives' (2013:51), while Prue Wales finds it to allow for 'resistance and authentic self-expression' (2012:548). Accounts of devising processes in applied theatre projects have also emphasised that their starting points were personal storytelling by young people. Christine Hatton, for example, says of her devising with teenage girls that

> In seeking out the personal narratives for exploration in drama, we invite the narrative meaning-making of each individual into the learning process of the group. (2003:151)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, the majority of papers submitted to *Storyknowing* dealt with varying approaches (verbatim theatre, devising, digital storytelling) to the retelling of

teenagers' experiences of suffering or marginalisation (Allum 2016, Davies 2016, Inchley and Baker 2016, King 2016, Shoba 2016, Village Storytelling Centre 2016, Walcon 2016). These projects aimed, variously, to use story to give the young people some distance from these experiences, help them envisage alternative stories of possible futures, build supportive communities to resist or cope with difficulties, or empower them to change current realities. All began with the starting point of the personal story.

Although these papers demonstrated clearly how valuable these projects can be to young participants, the emphasis on personal experience in work with this age group needs some unpicking. It may partly owe to the affinity already identified in this chapter between teenagers, anecdote and personal myth-making. It undoubtedly also arises from TO approaches aiming to foreground young people's own knowledge and perspectives rather than stories brought by facilitators, and thus 'to position even the least powerful individual in the proactive, subject position' (Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman 2006:103). It is rooted too in Boal's concept of 'ascesis', glossed by Seyla Benhabib as the understanding that

> All struggles against oppression in the modern world begin by defining what had previously been considered private, non-public, and non-political as matters of public concern, issues of justice, and sites of power. (Cited in Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman 2006:102)

Yet the emphasis on personal storytelling also confirms James Thompson's characterisation of a dominant 'discursive system' within applied theatre, the 'imperative' to 'tell one's story', particularly one's story of trauma (2011:43). While not denigrating such work, Thompson suggests that it rests on a) an uncritical parallel with psychological understandings of post-traumatic stress disorder, and b) an unsafe assumption that telling one's story will lead to empowerment and solutions to social problems. This way of working may also deny young people's right to choose *not* to tell their story, rather to retain their own complex, private relationship with their own experience – what Thompson calls a 'difficult return' – and good reasons they may have for doing so. For example, Jenny Hughes and Simon Ruding found that for a young woman involved in a project based on individuals' stories of offending behaviour, 'a focus on the offence was damaging efforts to support the development of a positive sense of self and capacity to control events in her life' (2009:220).

Meanwhile an overlapping category of applied storytelling projects using personal storytelling shift the focus away from the political realm, towards individualised behaviour change goals: to reduce adolescent pregnancy rates (Cox 2003); to combat persistent offending behaviour (Village Storytelling Centre 2016); to improve ability to cope with stress (Goodman and

Newman 2014). This is consistent with developments within applied theatre, as Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston observe: 'It is commonplace in the UK today for applied theatre projects to be undertaken directly or indirectly at the behest of the Government's social inclusion policies' (2009:14).

Such projects, in the hands of skilled practitioners, may in fact be far less narrow than they sound, and provide empowering and rewarding experiences for young participants. However, they evidence a complex and often misty grafting-together of therapeutic, socially critical, and sometimes overly mechanistic understandings of storytelling. By seeking to be *about* a particular issue, they may also impose a restricted, *propositional* agenda on a creative *narrative* encounter that has the potential to be much more. Nick Rowe, director of Converge, an arts and education programme for users of the mental health system, points out that 'Just because a group of young women have anorexia, does not mean they will want to tell stories about anorexia' (pers. comm. 2014). I suggest that, just like an overweening belief in the healing power of certain archetypal stories in some therapeutic circles, the assumption that 'telling young people's own stories' is the main purpose of storytelling with this age group still often goes unchallenged within applied theatre.

The magical and dynamic forms of engagement are possible responses to any storytelling situation; I suggest that it is in *preferentially setting out to engender one or the other* that the storyteller declares their (perhaps unconscious) affiliation to a magical or dynamic chronotope. Resisting this choice is perhaps the most notable characteristic of the final chronotope in my trajectory.

1.4.4 The 'dialogic' chronotope

Hughes and Ruding describe the beginnings of a shift within applied theatre in criminal justice settings, away from social realist personal storytelling, 'to a more direct embracing and exploring of the metaphorical or fantastic' (2009:220). This growing appreciation of distant or mythic material, and its often unresolved meanings, seems intertwined with the recent broader recognition within applied theatre practice that artistry and 'affect' may be as important as messages, solutions or 'effect' (Thompson 2011).

Within storytelling performance for – or by - young people, a similar trend of blending the personal or 'real' with the fantastical, and traditional oral storytelling with other genres, can be detected. Jack Dean, a 26-year-old storyteller who 'grew up with' hip hop, describes his latest show *Grandad and the Machine* as 'A brand new steampunk fairytale for grownups, mixing

vivid storytelling with a live original score' (Dean 2016). At *Storyknowing*, theatre student Megan Hardcastle's performance *Her* (2016) fabulised her increasingly problematic relationship with a childhood friend, allowing the friend to disappear in a mysterious flutter of white feathers evoking a Grimm fairytale. Matt Harper's plays for young actors (including *The Holding Place* (2016), also performed at *Storyknowing*) start with issues such as family breakdown or the refugee crisis but use embedded retellings of Greek myths to explore the dramatic emotional landscapes of these situations, rather than suggesting answers to them.

This less anxious relationship of contemporary experience to the traditional heritage – neither slavish nor rebellious, but mutually nourishing – is likewise evident in place-making storytelling projects such as Wilson's *Clay Stories* project in Restormel, Cornwall, in which young people gathered memories and local legends from members of the community of all ages, for performance and publication. Wilson writes that this was not a 'preservation' of a vanishing heritage, but a 'celebration' of an evolving oral culture (1997b:151) in which young people's personal stories were woven together with the more 'hallowed' material of the past.

That young people can readily grasp the syncretism involved in dialogic storytelling was revealed in ICAN's multi-artform storytelling workshops based on traditional stories. As Reason and I (2016) document, a significant proportion of participants spontaneously 'transposed' the stimulus story to incorporate their own personal, political or metaphysical perspectives; my experience as co-facilitator of these workshops was that this was markedly truer of adolescent participants than younger children. Similarly, Christine Garlough's study of the storytelling of both teachers and students in US Indian diasporic schools found that they used traditional Indian stories as 'inventional resources' (2013:143) for 'rhetorical work and critical play' (149) to reflect on current issues, gender roles and changing identities within their communities. Garlough notes that teachers told the old stories not to reinforce the mother culture's authority – indeed they 'actively attempt to disrupt […] a nostalgic, diasporic gaze back to India' (147) – but to be enriched by it.

I suggest that a differently inflected chronotope is becoming evident in such projects and the writing of storyteller-theorists like Blake Cave (2016), Ryan (2008), and Tom Maguire (2015), giving rise to approaches to storytelling which negotiate with both the magical and the dynamic but place a new emphasis on the dialogic. There are many senses in which the word 'dialogic' applies to this work:

- The dialogue between fantasy (or traditional repertoire) and reality: the storyteller's role arises from a conscious desire to put elements of myth, folktale, history or personal experience at the service of listeners as they construct new narratives for

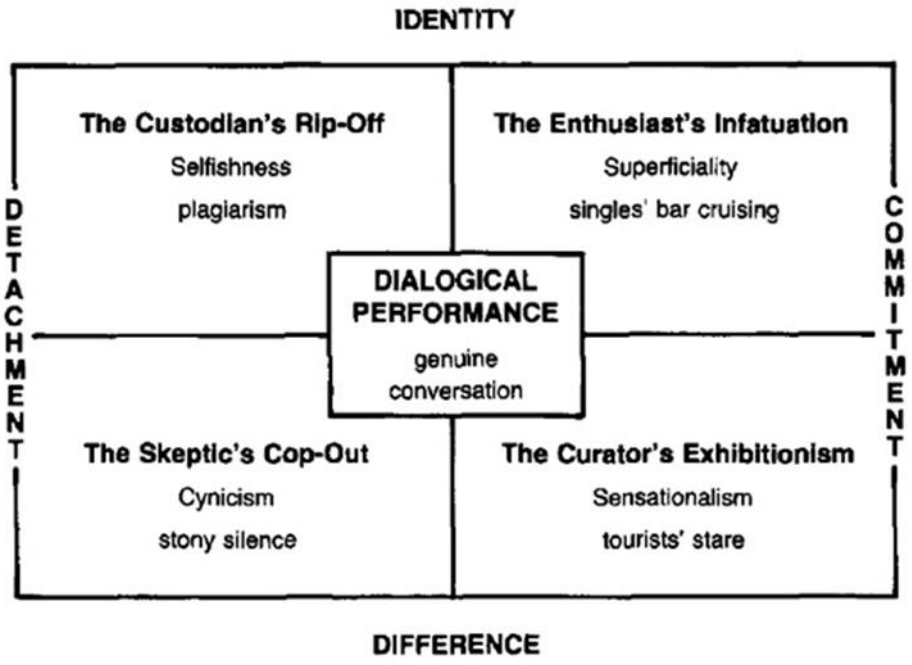
themselves. The central metaphor is not the story as wise text, nor the story as an archetype to be subverted or knocked down, but the story to be jointly (re)constructed in and for the moment.

- The dialogue between enchantment and action: the storyteller has the potential to be both magical transmitter of wisdom and dynamic *agent provocateur*, employing both connecting and distancing devices. However, it sees the impact of the storyteller's words or actions arising not in her own will but in the dialogic space she inhabits with the listeners.
- The dialogue between storyteller and young person: rather than according undue dominance to the authority of the storyteller (as in the magical chronotope), or to the right of the young person or participant to be given voice (as in the dynamic chronotope), dialogic work recognises that they are mutually nourishing. A storyteller with no predetermined agenda of either enchantment or empowerment, but an awareness of both and a sensitivity to the listeners' desires, must necessarily work in this space *between* teller and listener.

This chronotope undoubtedly has many roots. My choice of the term 'dialogic' is made in conscious acknowledgement of both Grant Kester's (2004) conceptualisation of 'dialogical art', and Dwight Conquergood's (1985) of 'dialogical performance', as well as the practice with young people referenced by each. Conquergood's thinking is further discussed in Chapter 2.3.2, Kester's in Chapter 5.1-5.2. The storytellers I reference in this section would doubtless follow Kester in seeing participatory art as a means of facilitating an open and responsive dialogue between individuals or groups whose social roles would normally hinder them from empathising with each others' perspectives. Notably, one of Kester's first examples of such work is Suzanne Lacy's 1994 work *The Roof is On Fire*, which brought together 220 young people and 100 police officers for unprecedented conversations in cars in a rooftop car park (Kester 2004; Lacy 2010).

Dialogical storytellers might also be sensitive, like Conquergood in his work with Hmong refugees and young gang members, to 'the complex ethical tensions, tacit political commitments, and moral ambiguities inextricably caught up' (Conquergood 1985:4) in the work of dialogue with different others. There are balances to be struck between identity and difference (acknowledging participants' difference but not making it exotic), between detachment and commitment (showing solidarity with their difficulties but not claiming them as one's own). Held in the tension between these poles is a stance he calls 'dialogical performance':

Figure 1.1 Conquergood's 'dialogical performance' stance (1985:5)

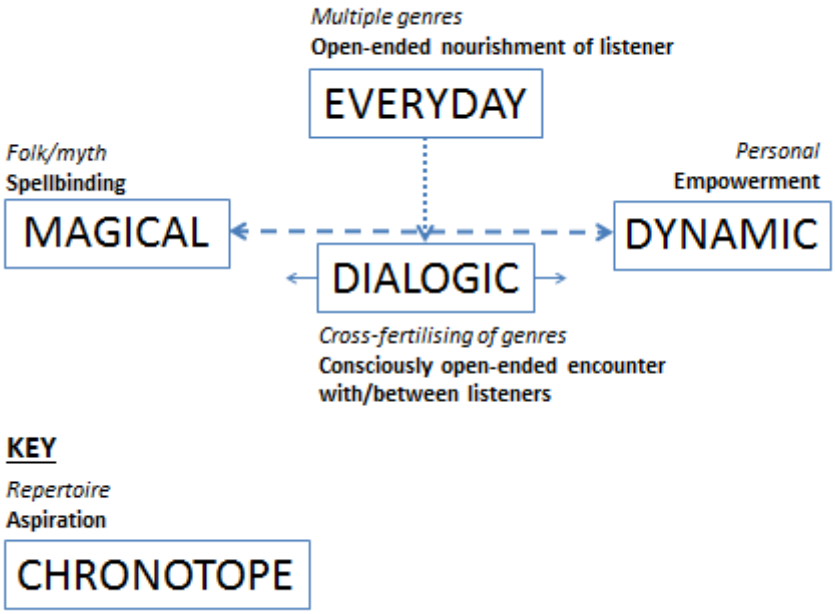


However, while Kester and Conquergood focus on practice which engages propositionally with the issues affecting participants, work within the dialogic chronotope of storytelling conducts dialogue through the narrative track of storyknowing. As such, it is further informed by a line of thinking, provocatively expressed by Jacques Rancière in *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), on the creative meaning-making role of listeners, readers or spectators. Rancière critiques the Marxist idea that audiences must be catalysed into political consciousness and agency either by works *about* the contradictions in society (such as Brechtian theatre), or by works which rely on their overt active involvement (such as participatory theatre). Empowerment, for him, is not orchestrated by the artist but claimed by the audience member, even the apparently passive audience member responding to an apparently apolitical artwork. It is bound up in 'the realization of a capacity that belongs to everyone' (2009:81) and potentially, can be developed in relation to any artwork, any story. While Reason suggests that the concept of the emancipated spectator is 'too easily idealistic' (2015:275), he and Kirsty Sedgman (2015) perceive a need for a shift in focus from artists' *intention* to audience *reception*, to analyse 'the manners in which actual audiences engage with different kinds of audience-performer relationships to produce different kinds of experiences' (275). Dialogic storytelling is aware of this complex co-production, and the fact that a storyteller's choice of story for a participatory artistic process will influence but cannot predetermine the themes or meanings which participants might find in it.

Dialogic storytelling also draws on developing understandings of how story mediates the complex relationship between the past and future, and as such is undoubtedly related to a hermeneutic understanding of truth. That is, to repeat, an account is never either objectively true nor wholly fictional, but the structuring of reality into something that addresses the questions of, the current moment. The mechanisms and strategies by which storytelling achieves this are becoming the subject of interest to authors such as Maguire (2015); he discusses the 'metaxic' devices by which the past event represented in the story is overlaid onto the present of the storytelling event, the meanings of the past with the needs and interests of the listeners or tellers in the present. For example, the footballer-storytellers in Ryan's *Kick Into Reading* project pull listeners in and out of the storyworld with their physical re-enactments of moments in their footballing careers: 'Their actions and styles are not mimetic, but dialogic, used to suggest and involve rather than enact and distance' (2008:8).

My review of recent developments in practice with adolescents indicates that storytellers working within a dialogic chronotope have first become aware of, then sought to cast off, hardened views about what story 'is' or 'does'. In Chapter 6 I will explore further the idea that such storytellers are reclaiming some of the values of the everyday chronotope, albeit in a conscious and knowing way. Their work is fundamentally syncretic and catholic, aware of all the roles and functions story has fulfilled within other chronotopes and seeking to make them all available in the moment, should dialogue between storyteller and young people need to draw on them.

Figure 1.2 Chronotopes of storytelling with young people



The dialogic chronotope is also about bringing to the fore storytelling's potential to provide an additional channel for dialogue between young people and adults, in a time when many of the others available may be congested, over-mediatised or ridden with other goals. It is the particular relationship between this chronotope and work with adolescents which will be further developed throughout this exegesis.

The reader will often have noted throughout this practice review that, concurrent with the practice of storytelling *with* adolescents *by* adults in every chronotope, exist adolescents' own, 'indigenous' storytelling practices. Storytellers' practice takes account of these and interacts with them in different ways in each chronotope. I therefore conclude this review with a necessarily brief overview of the diverse 'grounded aesthetics' (Willis et al 1990) of adolescent storytelling.

1.4.5 Ethnographic research into young people's storytelling practices

Folklorists from the mid-20th century onwards, notably Iona and Peter Opie (1959), have drawn attention both to the richness of rhymes and language games among teenagers and children, and to their many social purposes. Mike Wilson's in-depth study of adolescents' storytelling practices, nearly 40 years later, likewise uncovers a rich tradition incorporating 'a wide variety of techniques and devices to serve the specific functions of the performer' (1997:187) –

ranging from building social cohesion, to asserting personal, family or group identity, to conveying a message, to 'cocking a snook at the adult world' (80), to simply creating entertainment.

Wilson observes that adolescents have a diverse repertoire, but are rarely interested in genre boundaries, or distinctions between personal and folk narratives: 'a teenager who offers to tell a ghost story, may well proceed to tell a contemporary legend, a joke, a personal experience story, a UFO story, a piece of family lore, a local legend etc' (70). Moreover, young people's storytelling practices may pose a particular challenge to notions of oral transmission cherished by many storytellers; Wilson (1997) suggests that they draw syncretically from material drawn from written sources, mass media, personal experience, and the traditional heritage, and finds Linda Degh's (1994:33) term 'variable narrative' more apposite than 'oral narrative' to adolescents' folklore (as is probably also true of adults). Corroborating these observations is the fact that, whereas long-established distinctions between poetry reading and story*telling* persist among older performers, the slam poetry and 'spoken word' scenes favoured by the teens and twenties blur the boundaries between storytelling and poetry, the read and the improvised word (Henry Raby, 'Say Owt' slam organiser, pers. comm. 2016).

Anthropologist Amy Shuman, in her study of teenagers' storytelling in an inner-city US community, highlights the interplay between the written and spoken word:

> Adolescents in this community have acquired the rudimentary mechanical and social skills of both oral and written communication to the extent that they can use these skills for adolescent play. Furthermore, in this inner-city community, adolescents are the assigned managers of most written documents. Reading is considered to be too difficult for younger children and an inappropriate activity for older members of the community. (1986:2)

While the lack of comfort with the written word may be specific to Shuman's research setting, it is interesting that she marks narrative play as the particular property or currency of teenagers. Wilson's study too provides evidence, not only that adolescents enjoy story as much as other age groups, but that mastery of some forms of oral narrative is *especially* important to them.

Wilson notes that storytelling is rarely a very performative event among teenagers; it is rather 'an essential and integral part of the process of social interaction […] absorbed into everyday communicative practices' (185-6). However a broader definition of 'storytelling' leads us to highly developed manifestations of youth culture drawing on diverse cultural influences.

Ethnographer Bronwen Low (2011) documents the diverse and well-established hip-hop and spoken word culture at the inner-city high school where she collaborated with a teacher to develop an English curriculum based on these genres. Arts ethnographer Wendy Luttrell (2003) finds the pregnant teenagers whom she researches to share a compelling, highly physicalised and theatrical style of telling stories of personal experience, expressing thereby their identity, agency and what she called 'bodysmarts'. She sees her role as 'restoring the artist' in them by appreciating these informal performances as art, echoing Wilson's view of the storyteller's role with adolescents as being primarily to help them appreciate and develop their own narrative culture.

Low, Luttrell and Wilson have the last word in this chapter because their work underlines the difficulty of making any clear distinction between young people's 'grounded aesthetics' of storytelling and practice facilitated by adults. Indeed, if my storytelling practice is to be truly dialogic, attending to the dialogue between participants' forms of storytelling and my own is perhaps the overarching challenge to which I am awakened by this review of practice.

Chapter 2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Practice as research

Practice as research (PaR) is now established as a key methodology within arts research (Hann 2015; Nelson 2013). Its central idea, the imbrication of a research enquiry within a creative or professional practice, allows the tapping of forms of knowledge which are only accessible within such an enquiry. It enshrines a process Schoen (1983) calls 'reflection-in-action', by which practitioners refine and come to understand their practice, as a vital source of knowledge. It further catalyses this learning by drawing on theory, which

> can gesture towards possibilities beyond the scope of any one practice and can be used as a fast track to bypass the slow accumulation of learning through experience. (Hall 1999:1)

Making explicit this traffic between tacit, embodied practitioner 'know-how' (Schoen 1983; Nelson 2013), and critical thinking or 'know-that', creates an intersection at which understandings can be unbound (to some degree) from their individual, practical context, and generate research knowledge which can be shared. Crucially, however, PaR often allows for these understandings to be expressed or 'published' through the practice itself, 'performatively and emotively transmitting the truth of the images so that they enter bodies as well as minds' (Allen 2013:17), as well as through verbal articulation which might be insufficient to convey them alone. It has thus been embraced throughout the arts as a means of capturing what artistic practice 'knows'.

While privileging the knowledge gained through the dynamics of practice itself, PaR tends to be, as Nelson (2013) and Morwenna Griffiths (2010) state, a multi-modal enquiry incorporating ethnographic and other social science approaches as well as art-based enquiry. My own enquiry into storytelling with adolescents is no exception. At its core is the method of reflective practice: the hundreds of storytelling workshops I have held with young people (and the stories I have told within them), the documentation of process and outputs of these workshops, and the critical reflection I engaged in both individually and in dialogue with collaborators (participants and practitioners/teachers), which in turn reshaped my practice. Beyond this methodological core of the PaR cycle, however, a review of practice and theory across storytelling, applied theatre, and other intersecting disciplines led me to other methodologies with the potential to lend rigour and enrich the research. I will therefore go on

to discuss lessons drawn and methods borrowed from the ethnographic research approaches of arts ethnography and performance research.

2.1.1 A brief note on research ethics

It will be noted that this chapter contains no free-standing section on research ethics, despite the enormous significance of ethical concerns to work with young people. In accordance with the ethical approval I gained from York St John University, I sought written informed consent from participants (and their guardians where appropriate), and guarded their confidentiality except where they specifically sought recognition for their creative work. The consent form I used (and tailored to each setting) is attached as Appendix A. I also worked with staff at all my research settings to seek to protect young people from distress, bearing in mind the researcher's 'minimal responsibility to protect participants from harm' (Murphy and Dingwall 2001:347).

However, this is a bare and purely institutional skeleton of the ethical structure of extensive research with young people. The ethical obligations of the researcher articulated by Beauchamp et al (1982:18-19) as *non-maleficence, beneficence, autonomy or self-determination,* and *justice,* are complex, intersecting and subject to interpretation. Focused on the principle of non-maleficence, formal ethical compliance procedures cannot guarantee even that; Murphy and Dingwall (2001) argue, for example, that a consent form does more to protect the researcher than the participant. Rather recalling Conquergood's (1985) fluid stance of dialogical performance (see Chapter 1.4), ethical PaR in participatory settings is a continual process of interpersonal negotiation with participants, as individuals with agency and equal rights to oneself, which permeates every aspect of the research. It is also difficult, in PaR, to make a distinction between the aspirations towards ethical *research* practice and dialogic, respectful *storytelling* practice. Thus I feel I can do better justice to my ethical obligations within the conceptual areas within which they can best be fully explored:

- research reciprocity, advocacy and commitment, consent and refusal, and the representation of young people's perspectives to a wide audience within section 2.3;
- the complex dynamics of gift and coercion in section 3.2.3;
- issues around the social value of the research in sections 2.2.4 and 2.4, and throughout Chapter 5.

2.2 Core Methodology: reflective practice - reshaping storytelling in the encounter with adolescents

2.2.1 My body of practice

Over two and a half years, I led (or co-led) over 350 hours of storytelling workshops with adolescent young people in a broad range of settings:

- a secondary school (both in lessons and in informal extracurricular activities),
- an adolescent residential psychiatric unit,
- youth clubs,
- two youth theatres (including one for young people with learning difficulties),
- an Indian dance group,
- informal mentorships of talented young storytellers, and
- holiday storytelling masterclasses.

In total I worked with approximately 400 young people, in some cases for only a few sessions, in other cases over a period of up to two years. Brief narratives of my work in each of these settings can be found in my online curated portfolio along with a filmed performance of a meta-narrative of a typical workshop, including a folktale told by me.

If my fieldnotes and the creative outputs of this practice were to be viewed, as artistic work often has been, as playing 'the role of data used for investigation within more traditional scientific methods' (McNiff, cited in O'Connor and Anderson 2015:22), the research would appear to be highly profligate. That is, inevitably, only a small minority of these storytelling workshops are explicitly referred to in either my online portfolio or in this exegesis. However, in PaR the practice cycle does not simply generate data; it is also the principal means of analysis and the embodiment of its findings. Further, this process leaves its marks on the practitioner-researcher's *self*, and the self thus becomes a research instrument, an 'emphatic resonator with experiences that are familiar to him and which find in himself a resonant chord' (Varela et al 1993, cited in Nelson 2013:67). Thus, in a blog post (18/06/2015) on this apparent profligacy, I note that

> My skin has thickened, my instincts have been tuned, my range and repertoire has been stretched in every direction. I am incorporating this learning, these 'findings', into my own self, whether I choose to or not.

James Daichendt provides a metaphor that justifies such extensive and open-ended travel:

> I think this concept of a continuous understanding and development of knowledge is comparable to driving across the country. The more roads, towns, and states you explore, the better understanding you will have of the country and its residents [….] A new understanding is developed and a new knowledge of the country can be applied after these experiences, and the driver is apt to contribute to such a knowledge pool. (2012:14)

Indeed, I believe that the long-term nature and open-endedness of this practice was crucial in constituting it as research, as I now go on to explore.

2.2.1.1 Cultural democracy as a reference point for PaR in a participatory context

What has distinguished this as PaR, in contrast to my previous, hopefully always reflective and curious, professional practice as a storyteller? As the 2001-2006 Practice as Research in Performance (PARIP) initiative concluded, PaR challenges many received ideas in knowledge production, such as the dominance of text-based modes of knowledge; yet it must still conform to basic criteria for research in comprising a research problem or question, a research context and a research methodology (Piccini 2004). In shaping these, I found a template in the early, long-term, open-ended residencies of the community arts movement (Braden 1978, Kelly 1984), which embodied a spirit of enquiry, even a research-like purpose. The role Braden saw for community artists was not to 'bring their artform to the people', but rather to act as enablers for cultural democracy by allowing their artform to be reshaped by the needs and resources of the context. This depended on their having sufficient time, commitment, relationships and fluidity in a particular community setting to allow them to respond to participants' interests. Braden's articulation of this distinction, and the conditions necessary for it, strike me as a helpful way of encapsulating the difference between reflective professional practice and PaR in the participatory contexts within which I work.

This quest to allow new forms to evolve could not have been pursued within short-term projects with predetermined educational or other objectives. The same is perhaps true of PaR in participatory settings. Nelson's idea that 'one notion of "rigour" in PaR is the worked-through-ness of ideas in process' (2013:75) suggests the need for sufficient time and freedom for the praxis cycle to generate new ways of working. As my AHRC research bursary freed me from the constraints of project funding (e.g. particular desired outcomes or endpoints), and from the requirement to charge for my time, I was able to allow the practice to find its own form in each setting – or indeed to discontinue it where it could not find a sustainable role for

itself. In the aforementioned blog post (18/06/2015) I noted that the work in each practice setting continued until it had 'worked itself out' in the view of all parties concerned, rather than up to a pre-planned moment at which a project had been completed. Importantly, in talking of the practice in the third person, as if it had its own volition, I acknowledge its 'heteronomy' (White 2015, Thompson 2011) – the fact that the nature of each setting and the wishes of participants and collaborators had as much role in creating it as I did myself. Here I follow Griffiths, who underscores that just as 'we make ourselves in *relation to others*' and influenced by '*specificities of time and place*' (2010:168), PaR will be embedded in particular places, moments, and institutional power structures.

Proceeding from this focus on cultural democracy, my research question or problem became to find a genuinely participatory practice of storytelling with adolescents; my research context emerged as my own and others' previous models of storytelling that might be challenged or developed; and my research methodology was that of open-ended, reflective praxis.

My experience is that, within such open-ended residencies, the highly intersubjective nature of the storytelling exchange (explored further in Chapters 3 and 4) provides a powerful framework for a participative artistic research process. This is true even of the apparently singly voiced telling of a story, which can itself function as a process of participative enquiry, as I now go on to explore.

2.2.2 Storytelling as a research method

Telling a story is itself a research method for me (as it was in the ICAN storytelling workshops discussed in Reason and Heinemeyer 2016) because, as Table 1.1 laid out, all narrative shares certain properties which allow an exploration of multiple truths. Rather than instructing listeners what to think, a story provides a concrete situation within which they can exercise their own values and knowledge, both logical and intuitive. In so doing, it encourages exploration of a variety of viewpoints, and according to Wolfgang Iser (cited in Bruner), may allow a 'spectrum of actualizations' (1986:24-5), a variety of interpretations and meanings, to be held simultaneously. For example, Peter Reason and Peter Hawkins (1988) found storytelling to be a valuable way of exploring themes which were difficult and contentious within their collaborative enquiry group, such as gender politics.

I suggest that this feature of stories makes them equally apt to researching complex practice with young people, a group whose life experience differs substantially from my own. This realization has been made in other disciplines than the arts; for example, youth workers

Elizabeth Chambers et al (1999) employ the fairytale 'Hansel and Gretel' as a container in their attempt to make sense of common trends in the millennial experience of Canadian youth, while not losing sight of their interviewees' individual experiences.

Within my practice I find myth and folktale - a subset of narrative which Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) calls 'epic'[4] – to be special cases of these characteristics of narrative and thus particularly suited to collaborative enquiry (thus Chambers et al's choice of a Grimm story is not surprising). Their unfamiliar social worlds and typical lack of 'psychological shading' (Benjamin 1973) require much of listeners, asking them to draw on all their imaginative resources and stretch their empathic imagination at times to the limit. Epic characters are not three-dimensional individuals, but 'figures' who are functions of the plot (Amelie Rorty 1976, cited in Bruner 2006:133); inhabiting them imaginatively makes a particular demand on the audience's facility for 'presuppositional interpretations' (Bruner 2006:124), and tests the extent to which these are shared by all present. Thus, in choosing material from the oral heritage, I not only draw on the interpretative freedom given by common property, the lack of authorial presence to which I would owe some fidelity. I also make the decision to privilege plot over psychology, the concrete over the abstract, the epic over the realistic, the symbolic over the workaday, the alien over the familiar. In Chapter 4 I discuss in depth the affordances of these genres in working with adolescent young people.

In terms of research, telling such stories creates an intersubjective space in which sense can be made (as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3). While telling a story I am aware of the points where it resonates with participants, as well as those where its unfamiliar causality surprises or its anachronism shocks them. As Bruner points out, surprise 'allows us to probe what people take for granted' (1986:46), their presuppositions and when they feel these have been violated; it thus helps us rapidly to depict and understand the models of the world by which other people work. Fundamental to the oral telling of a story is that I must respond accordingly to create, on my feet, a retelling of it for *these* young people on *this* occasion. To the extent that I can capture these tacit observations after the fact, either by making them explicit in writing or by allowing them to modify my future practice, this makes the telling of the myth or folk story itself a research method into the perceptions of adolescents.

It is to the role in my research of this 'reflection-in-action' (and 'on' action), as defined by Schoen (1983), that I next turn.

[4] In fact Bakhtin reserves the term 'epic' for myth, classifying folktale as one of the antecedents of the novel, but I feel his arguments as to the 'distant', otherworldly nature of these stories and the characters' lack of interiority apply equally to folktale. It is also my experience that adolescents often experience both genres as a single category.

2.2.3 Reflection and theory

Critical reflection is key to any intelligent, developing practice. Schoen (1983) examines closely the mechanisms by which 'reflection-in-action' operates within the practitioner's mind. Like Bruner, he draws our attention to the importance of surprise, arguing that

> Much reflection-in-action hinges on the experience of surprise. When […] intuitive performance leads to surprises, pleasing and promising or unwanted, we may respond by reflecting-in-action.' (1983:56)

The practitioner's attempt to make sense of the unexpected then sets in motion a cycle of a conceptualisation, experimentation and modification of subsequent practice. Ryle's criterion for intelligent practice is that 'one performance is modified by its predecessors' (cited in Nelson 2013:61). This in turn, of course, leads to further reflection.

A further element required to raise such reflective practice to the level of practice *as research* is a conscious fertilisation of one's own thinking by the thinking of others, a 'fast track' in Hall's words (1999:1). Indeed, Nelson advocates the term 'praxis' to enable us to talk of all research activities involved in PaR without making false distinctions between theory and practice (29).

Thus my praxis cycle is thoroughly infused with theory, as well as the practice of others. For me, theory has fulfilled three vital roles in particular: it **resonates** with practice, meeting it halfway; it **provokes** me and thus leads me to challenge my unacknowledged assumptions; and it acts as a **device of hope** with the practice itself.

2.2.3.1 Resonance

Whereas in propositional forms of research the researcher must situate her work by establishing the theoretical lineage with which it sits, my experience reflects Nelson's view that PaR is likely to draw on a more eclectic and interdisciplinary network of theoretical influences, 'syncretism' rather than 'depth-mining' (2013:34). I have often been led down paths of reading after I have recognised, in an author's work, a phenomenon that I have encountered in my practice – reflecting Nelson's prediction that 'reading will lead to further reading until resonances emerge between the praxis in process and a conceptual framework' (2013:6). He describes how the contribution of PaR to theory is made in the intermediate zone between the situated and the universal:

> Spontaneous concepts, in working their way 'upward' toward greater abstractness, clear a path for scientific concepts in their 'downward' development towards greater concreteness. (2013:62)

Moreover, as Susan Orr et al contend, such processes of theoretical development are multi-layered and ongoing, with subsequent episodes of reading and reflection triggering off 'reverberation between what is known now and what was not known at the time of writing' (2010:12).

2.2.3.2 Provocation

Such resonances between practice and theory can be harmonious or antagonistic. Frequently it has been theory which, in provoking me to defensiveness, has alerted me to my own unchallenged assumptions or what Schoen calls 'overlearned' approaches (1983:61). A key instance arose when I felt an instinctive opposition to some of the subversive free play with fairytales advocated by Zipes (1995, 2012). This led me to identify his viewpoint as a dynamic mode of storytelling, opposed to a magic mode, which he was criticising and within which I had often worked. Allowing his arguments to critique my practice led me to identify a third mode centred in the 'gaps' in a story, the dialogic mode, which I recognise as sharing intellectual roots with reader response theory, and which I also recognise in some other contemporary storytellers and theatre practitioners (see Chapter 1.4.4). That is, such oppositions often lead to dialectical processes and more nuanced understandings – and these in turn point to fertile zones of practice.

2.2.3.3 A device of hope

The above example illustrates how acknowledging the strengths of alternative understandings of storytelling has had a liberating effect on my practice. The cognitive, theoretical mind has a role to play in the act of facilitation, and can 'show its workings' to participants, loosening the grip of both parties' unstated assumptions and widening the realm of possibility. This suggests why bell hooks (glossed by Helen Nicholson) values theory as 'a "location for healing", a way of looking at the world differently, a focus for asking risky questions' (Nicholson 2004:14). In my applied practice with young people, I often came to share with participants those questions that seemed to generate the most lateral thinking about storytelling, and explore them creatively in storytelling workshops. My reflective dialogues with young collaborator Imogen Godwin are a clear example of theory coming to have an explicit presence within the participatory practice itself, and becoming what hooks (1994) calls a 'device of hope' within it.

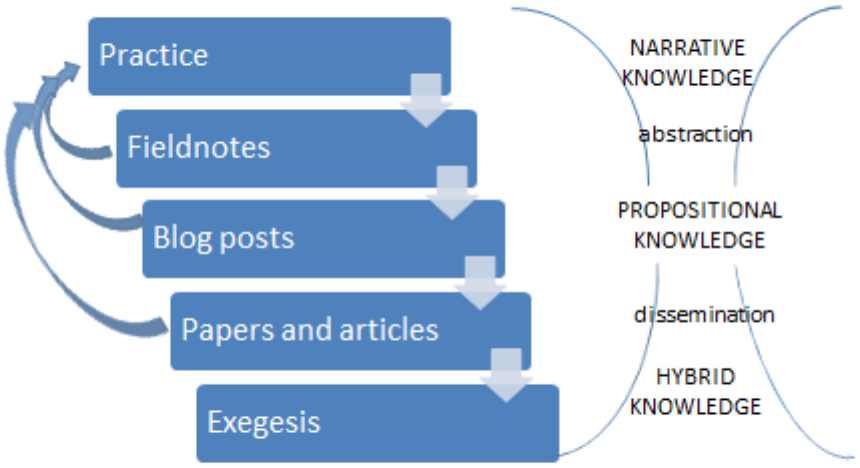
2.2.4 Writing: the two faces of counsel

No less than reading, writing has had a crucial and all-pervasive role as a method within my praxis. A progressive crystallisation of concepts and their interrelationships occurred through the sequence of writing:

A. Extensive fieldnotes;
B. Edited compilations and memoranda comparing observations across different workshops with the same group (or occasionally across groups);
C. Blog posts which sought to articulate, as far as possible, a single point or concept-in-development;
D. Conference papers and articles, which challenged me to articulate my research to diverse audiences;
E. This exegesis, which brings these concepts back together into a conceptual framework around a model of practice.

It is possible to track a funnelling inward and then outward in this schematic trajectory: an abstraction of isolated concepts from multifarious practice in A to C, and then in D and E an experimentation with returning these back to the world of practice as understandings that might be applied. Simultaneously, there is a complex interplay between the narrative and propositional tracks of knowledge (see table 1.1), as concepts arising in concrete experience took on propositional form in blog posts but, as their interrelations with other concepts developed, were often more fully communicable through narratives of practice in papers and articles. This trajectory can therefore be expressed as a helix of praxis:

Figure 2.1 Progressive conceptualisation and reshaping of practice



Blog posts thus represent the 'hinge' between the moments of abstraction and dissemination. They often encapsulate a particular concept just at the moment when it acquired clarity for me, and thus they are quoted throughout this exegesis. The corpus of blog posts, along with memoranda and papers, also served as an *aide memoire* and a rigorous corrective to the shifting moods of practice; to write this exegesis I 'mined' them systematically, to ensure my conceptual framework was indeed addressing the questions and drawing on the ideas which had arisen at all phases of the research. In the interests of transparency, they remain publicly available.

2.2.4.1 The ethics of counsel

The above helix suggests both the main motivations for writing: the intellectual (the fact that, as Orr et al say of reflective arts practice, 'we find things out *through* the act of writing' (2010:4)) and the ethical imperative to disseminate findings, so that the research fulfils the 'standard […] of usefulness to others' proposed by Shaun McNiff (2010:4) as a defining criterion. I would like to explore both these functions of writing in PaR, and tie them together using Walter Benjamin's notion of the 'counsel' provided by the storyteller, from his influential essay 'The Storyteller' (1973).

Benjamin uses 'counsel' to discuss the use value he saw in all storytelling. The experiential knowledge conveyed by storytellers to listeners is, for Benjamin, a form of guidance or wisdom, but crucially it does not purport to be an exhaustive explanation of reality. Indeed, counsel is

'less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding' (1973:86). It resembles Aristotle's *phronesis*, 'a form of practical wisdom capable of respecting the singularity of situations as well as the nascent universality of values aimed at by human actions' (Kearney 2002:143). The claim that is being made by a storyteller to her listeners is something like the following: *I have been this way before, and the experience has brought me to some understandings which may be useful to you in your own onward journey and search for understanding.*

Notably, debates about PaR in the arts have often focused around the need for its findings to be 'abstractable, not simply locked into the experience of performing it' (Piccini 2002:12). Some of the strongest mistrust of artistic methods in research has been 'tied to our inability to appreciate how personal enquiry can serve others and transcend introspection for its own sake' (McNiff, 2013:6). For Daichendt, for example, while reflective arts practice has much in common with research enquiry and may generate new knowledge, the term 'research' and its associated expectations of producing knowledge of public value may be burdensome and even detrimental to it (2012). Perhaps importantly, Daichendt (along with more strident critics of practice research such as James Elkins, 2009) speaks primarily from a visual arts perspective, from which verbal articulation may indeed be a poor medium for artistic thought processes.

Storytelling, however, is a profoundly verbal artform. It is a vessel shaped to convey its learning to others in easily comprehensible words and, ethically, should seek to do so, so as to meet the hunger from practitioners in many fields for artistic languages that might enrich their communication with young people. Here bell hooks' (1994) defence of theory as a public, 'social practice', as legitimate in oral as in written form, is particularly apposite. For hooks, 'creating theory that speaks to the widest audience of people' is an ethical imperative arising from a political choice to use theory to heal individuals and society rather than to reinforce hierarchies (1994:71). We might see resonances between hooks' summons and recent calls for a 'second wave' of practice research, focused on making its findings available and useful to the research community, and leaving behind 'unsustainable or inaccessible documentation strategies' (Hann and Ladron de Guevara 2015:5-6) aimed primarily at gaining acceptance within the administrative structures of the academy (Hann 2015). Indeed, I would argue that heeding hooks might require us to reach beyond research communities to share counsel with practitioners and other audiences.

Moreover, it is this dialogue with other perspectives that helps to constitute and generalise my findings. Giving counsel and receiving responses to it enables the research to aspire, not to

objective 'abstractability', but to the level of 'maximum intersubjectivity' identified by Nelson (2013) as a goal.

2.3 Ethnographic methodologies and ethical balances

In adopting this PaR cycle as my core methodology, I differ from the majority of applied theatre researchers, who have tended to adopt methodologies drawn eclectically from the qualitative social sciences which emphasise the collaborative and community-based dimensions of their work, such as participatory action research or ethnography (Hughes et al 2011).[5] In contrast, I have not chosen to engage participants explicitly as co-researchers, or label my research methodology 'practice as collaborative research' (although some of its most powerful moments of learning occurred when particular participants did move into this role).

However, I have found ethnographic approaches invaluable in navigating the power relations and ethical challenges inherent to research with young participants. These include concerns such as research reciprocity, the instrumentalisation of relationships, and the representation of participants' voices. Such questions cannot be simply resolved through formal ethics clearance procedures; they are balancing acts, bound up in complex and ongoing social interactions. Both arts ethnography and performance ethnography have advanced stances and strategies to help me stand more firmly on the shifting sands of participatory research.

2.3.1 Arts ethnography

The principle of research reciprocity originated in feminist ethnography but has since become widely accepted. As put by O'Connor and Anderson, the research should be a 'symbiotic' rather than a 'parasitic' experience, 'that benefits everybody involved' (2015:60). I would like to suggest that long term PaR has, on the whole, enabled me to honour this principle to an unusual degree.

However, sharing social space with research participants over long periods of time raises the question of how to represent them in the documentation and analysis of research. Complex and multifaceted relationships develop, only parts of which are relevant to the research

[5] This situation may be changing, as evidenced by the March 2016 on practice research held by the Applied and Social Theatre Working Group of TAPRA (Theatre and Performance Research Association) on 'Practice and Research', and the awarding of TAPRA's annual David Bradby Prize for outstanding research to Prof Sally Mackey for her PaR portfolio on applied practice with young people – www.challengingplace.org and www.challengingplacehalfmoon.org .

enquiry. Here the overlap between applied practice research and ethnography is particularly pertinent. I recognise ethnographer Wendy Luttrell's description of feeling 'split at the roots' by the tension between embeddedness in her research setting (an education unit for pregnant teenagers) and the process of extracting data and analysis from it:

> On some days I would try to dust myself off so I could write what I had seen and heard and relate it to theories about social and psychodynamic forces, but this often felt 'hollow at the heart' […] One (way of knowing) is the way of 'dusting off', detachment, and analysis, and the other is the way of being an emotional participant in what one is seeing. I believe ethnographic knowing is about embracing both ways. (2003:162)

To lessen the conflict and avoid instrumentalising her everyday interactions with the young women, she arrived at the strategy of facilitating art workshops with them, and asking their permission to use their artworks as her main data. While the analytic voice remains Luttrell's, the participants were represented in her work by their considered, creative statements of their own identity, rather than solely by her analysis of their throwaway comments and behaviour. Undoubtedly, their artistic contributions can be considered as co-authored texts, defined and framed by Luttrell, like the stories created by young people in my 'Stories of Practice'. Nonetheless, their coherence and completeness allow them to speak more directly to the reader and prevent any monopoly of meanings by the researcher. Simultaneously, the process of facilitating such creative work, which the young women enjoyed and used for their own purposes, became a key form of ethnographic reciprocity.

My own core methodology is to modify my own practice reflexively, rather than to extract data as such from encounters. However, where young people have created 'retellings' (in various artforms) of stories I have told them, or generated their own stories in workshops, and where they have granted me permission to use them, I have taken these artefacts as privileged (because considered) expressions of their perspectives. In a few cases, notably the *Wormwood in the Garden* project and my work with the intervention classes at City School, the collaborative creative process they represent led the way into collaborative analytical processes (e.g. reflective dialogues), in which young people reflected with me on the nature of working together through story. In these cases, their analytic words too are a privileged source for me.

These supplementary methods do not remove the tensions inherent to the asymmetries of research interactions. However I have sought to restore balance to these relationships by returning my learnings to participants in appropriate forms (e.g. in a catalogue document), and availing of opportunities for them to represent their own viewpoints (and artistry) publicly

where possible (e.g. at conferences or through performances, particularly in the case of participants at Maple House).

2.3.2 Performance ethnography

My methodology has been further shaped by rich debates on the role and approach of artists in community settings in the discipline variously called performance research, performance studies, and performance ethnography. In particular, Dwight Conquergood's ethical mapping of a performer's work has helped me understand my positionality and role with respect to young people, the importance of attending to their covert forms of communication, and the value of performative writing, as I now briefly discuss in turn.

Conquergood (1985) urges performers to adopt an ethic of 'being with' individuals and groups in their struggles, yet to retain an awareness that dialogical performance, or 'genuine conversation' (Fig. 1.1), is an elusive stance held in tension between various pitfalls. It 'struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another' (1985:9). Thus I have had to learn the limits to my own ability to empathise with young people, and simultaneously the need to keep trying to do so. One young collaborator seemed to be exhorting those working with mentally unwell young people to just such a delicately balanced position, in a prose poem she included in our performance *Wormwood in the Garden*:

> If you are boasting that your experience is all based on having survived being a teenager yourself – stop. We are 'average teenagers' minus the ability to get it together. We are average teenagers with acute and chronic illness that -were it anywhere else in the body - would lead to hospital tubes and wires. Today the young people are ignoring you, but please don't take it personally. (Godwin 2015b)

Her call not to take rejection personally echoes Conquergood's warning against the 'cynic's cop-out' – it is a call to persist despite the risks and failures of practice, sensing out the zone of dialogic practice rather than seeking clear rules.

Performance research also draws attention to the insufficiency of analytical discourse to give voice to the full range of perspectives in an ethnographic encounter. Conquergood (2002) points out that clear, frank verbal communication is a luxury of the few, perhaps unsafe for subordinated people to indulge in. His call for researchers to be alive to covert forms of communication, such as non-participation, is one I have had to learn and relearn to heed. It

reminds me, for example, that where adolescents choose not to participate in my workshops, they may not simply be 'too cool' for storytelling; they may in fact be communicating specific objections to my story or to my presence (as for example in 'Pushing it too far at Maple House').

Finally, performance research suggests ways to capture my physical and emotional responses to a practice situation in moments of writing and dissemination. Ronald Pelias (2005) defines a form he calls 'performative writing', often narrative or poetic in style, as a vivid and multifaceted way of harnessing insights which resist analysis, and of sharing one's research findings. Monica Prendergast found performance writing invaluable in her performance research as a storyteller and theatre-maker for its 'potential to communicate emotionally charged moments in our professional and personal lives' (2010:82). I have used performative writing both to achieve some emotional distance from intense challenges within practice (as in the poem I wrote during a difficult but enlivening period at Maple House), and to bring audiences rapidly into the matrix of decisions and perceptions I experience within a storytelling workshop.

Performance ethnography thus gives licence and voice to the subjective perception of the researcher. Yet it is important to consider strategies to minimise the risk of bias that is perhaps inherent to such situated research, and to meet the interlinked challenge of ensuring it is convincing in the public domain.

2.4 Rigour and impact

2.4.1 Rigour in my PaR

The nature of PaR is inherently challenging to positivistic research ideals of validity, rigour and abstractability, and it repositions concerns around the researcher's reflexivity in the very centre of the work. Moving on from debates as to the strengths and weaknesses of 'insider' research (outlined in Greene 2014), PaR starts out from a belief in 'the particularity and embodiment of all vision' (Haraway 1988:582) – the understanding that all knowledge is situated. Nonetheless, Greene (2014) reminds 'insider' and practitioner-researchers of the necessity to remain aware of the potential for bias, and develop strategies to mitigate it. A rigorous approach is vitally important if such research is to avoid solipsism, be convincing, and have social value, as explored in my discussion of 'counsel' (section 2.2.4). Nelson offers valuable guides to what such rigour might look like in PaR: it may consist in 'the worked-through-ness of ideas in process' (2013:75), in 'making the tacit more explicit and in

establishing resonances between “know-what” and “know-that”’ (52), and in finding verbal correlates for the knowledge gained. Crucially, however, none of these conceptualisations involve leaving behind one’s own subjectivity; rather, they are about bringing it into dialogue with the external world.

Indeed, my experience is that a practitioner’s embedded, ‘partial perspective’ (Haraway 1988) has its own mechanisms to check any too-neat analyses of practice: each time I have found a mode of storytelling practice that ‘works’ in a particular setting, I have been unsettled again by a change in dynamics which has called this into question (see for example ‘Not about the story at Maple House’). This slow and painful learning of humility and wisdom feels itself to be a kind of rigour. Further, working in a wide variety of settings (educational, therapeutic or artistic) has prevented me from becoming fixated on the conditions pertaining to each, and enabled me to find a broader understanding of storytelling with this age group. Complementing these inherent correctives are the research practices outlined throughout this chapter which I have employed to counterbalance the risk of circling around my own preoccupations – from reflective dialogues with collaborators, to testing my findings in blog posts and papers, to the systematic mining of my processual writings.

Yet clearly, I do not wish to suggest that these devices of rigour are sufficient to remove the risk of bias, even as this may be understood within a PaR orientation. My syncretic approach to literature, seeking resonances and following what felt like productive threads, may have generated its own confirmation bias that a more systematic and discipline-based programme of reading may have prevented. It is also likely that my practice was dictated by the bounds of my own comfort zone as well as by a spirit of enquiry. An obvious example is that all the settings where I have managed to develop a long-term practice have been institutional and of a certain intimate nature – small school classes, a residential unit, an established youth theatre. More informal adolescent settings have proved resistant to long-term involvement in storytelling, or at any rate to my practice of it (further discussed in Chapter 5.3.4). Thus the conceptualisations I have reached of storytelling with adolescents may be heavily rooted in a certain kind of context within which I can work more easily.

The question could be posed as to why I did not introduce some more ‘objective’ measures of the effects on young people of my storytelling practice, such as standardised psychological measurements, in order to test the rigour of my research and perhaps increase its persuasive impact by generating headline figures. I decided against such measures because, as my research progressed, I felt that the potential gains would be outweighed by the reframing they would bring about of the relationship with my participants as ‘I/It’ instead of ‘I/Thou’ (see

Chapter 3): presenting them with questionnaires purporting to monologically assess their 'progress' would undermine the spirit of open-ended, voluntary, artistic collaboration I sought to build with them.

2.4.2 Osmotic impact and the advocacy of the private

This decision requires further defence. As Eleanor Belfiore and Oliver Bennett (2010) have discussed, such disengagement of arts researchers from measurements easily comprehensible to policymakers leaves the field free for those with a narrowly positivist outlook to dominate public discourse. Moreover, my research was perhaps yet another step removed from traditional approaches to achieving impact, because, whereas the learning of PaR projects is often communicated via public performances, the majority of my practice was (typically for applied work) process-based, occurring within 'closed' workshops (Thompson 2011). However I would now like to draw on recent theorists of applied theatre, and on well-established understandings of policy processes, to argue that the impacts of this research have been better realised through what might be called an 'osmotic' understanding of impact and policy. This calls for an amplified understanding of the praxis cycle, beyond the 'private' sphere of my practice.

Both Gareth White (2015) and James Thompson (2011) emphasise that the effective power of applied theatre cannot be understood separately from its aesthetic dimensions, troubling the distinctions between 'process' and 'performance', the 'private' and the 'public'. Thompson argues that, while the 'micro-practices' of applied theatre may not directly bring about strategic change, work conducted within private workshops is thoroughly permeated with the social and cultural discourses of the public world, and influences them complexly and osmotically in return (2011:17). For example, it may result in shifts in self-perception or interpersonal dynamics that may play out in the relationships between participants and the institutions to which they belong.

I follow Thompson, however, in finding this insufficient, given the challenges imposed by society on many of the young people with whom I have worked. He also sees a mechanism by which these micro-practices of applied theatre may enable and motivate practitioners themselves to engage more overtly in advocacy and policy processes. He roots this in Emmanuel Levinas' concept of the 'face' of the Other, and the infinite ethical demand it makes on us to be of service to them. The intimate encounter of the workshop allows practitioners to feel the full force of this demand, by overcoming our learned indifference to others, and the

aesthetic beauty of the art-making process enables us to bear it. By extension, paraphrasing Simon Critchley (2007), Thompson sees the potential for a 'meta-political ethical moment':

> The small act of accepting that another person makes an ethical demand […] extends to a universal […] We might work with some street children in a short-lived project but the experience is *felt* as a demand that all children should have the right to a decent place to live. (Thompson 2011:169)

This, argues Thompson, then confers an 'additional responsibility on applied theatre practitioners' (39): 'an advocacy of the private (a politics of the intimate) and a critical encounter with the public' (34).

I read this as a call to practitioners to enhance the 'natural' processes of osmosis; to incorporate engagement in public discourse into their research praxis itself. Two examples will clarify how I have sought to do this:

a) In the area of young people's mental health provision, opportunities have arisen around the redesigning of regional CAMHS services, responding to national policy from which arts provision is noticeably absent (see Department of Health/NHS England 2015). I have brought the insights of my practice with young people into fora of practitioners and policymakers informing this process. Those projects within my practice which did result in performance or digital outputs enabled me to bring young people's own direct or oblique expression of their views before policymakers – presenting an extract from *Wormwood in the Garden* alongside young collaborator Imogen Godwin at Higher York's 'Everybody's Business' conference on young people's mental health; and co-presenting *The Story of Rob(i/y)n* with two young Maple House residents at a recommissioning consultation event.
b) Incorporating *Storyknowing* into the structure of the research was a further vehicle for facilitating dialogue and sharing practice learning. Indeed, this symposium was itself positioned as a collaborative practice-as-research exercise, bringing into conversation the perspectives of researchers, arts practitioners, mental health and youth workers, teachers, and young people, and synthesising their insights into a short documentary film.

Insights from policy studies suggest that such ongoing interaction with communities of practice, incorporated within the research praxis itself, may have as much influence as generating evidence of impact through standardized measures. Studies reviewed by Carol Weiss suggest that the policy process is much more discursive, rhizomatic and nonlinear than is widely

believed. While decision makers believed that they were influenced by policy-oriented research,

> Often they could not cite the name of any particular study and many of them could not even remember reading a research report. But in circuitous ways research findings came into circulation and ideas from research percolated into the policy arena […] and people had the sense that they had heard generalizations from research and that these ideas had influenced their thinking. (Weiss 1995:141)

Further underlining this is Rebecca Sutton's (1999) contention that policy in the real world is iterative and multi-directional, not separated into moments of policy-making and implementation. The artful ways in which individuals pass the various expressions of policy handed down to them through the filter of their own values and practices, in turn, influence the policy landscape.

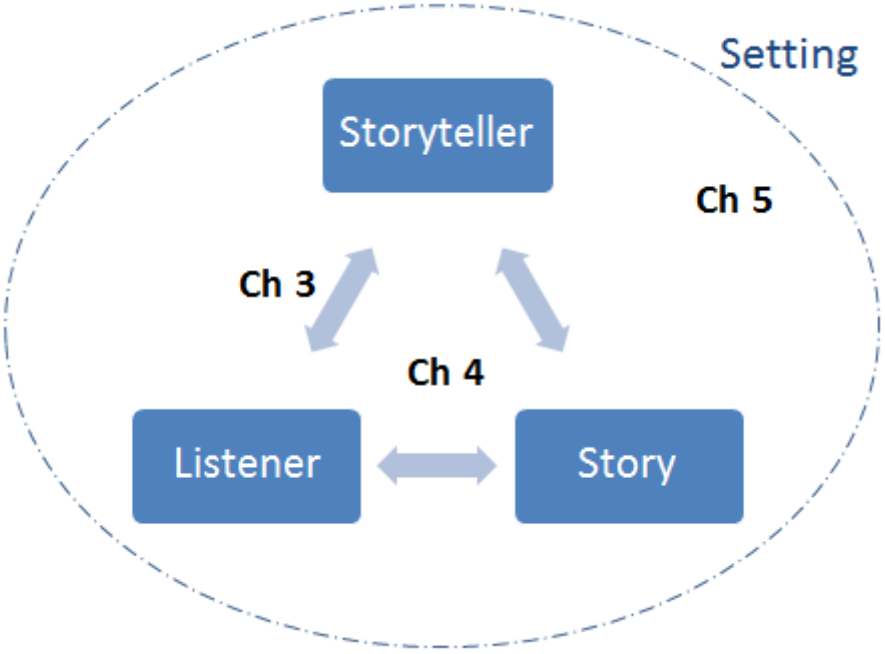
This picture of a complex policy ecosystem leaves little scope for me to claim direct impacts for my research. However, in Chapter 5 I will attempt to draw out the kind of traces I feel my work may have left on individual young people, collaborators, institutions and relationships, or indeed on communities of practitioners. Such traces are not sealed off from 'policy', but nor are they 'effects'. Rather, they are unfathomable marks on the selves of all those involved in the collaborative artistic encounter, and like a story, they may influence their future actions. They are intersections of my PaR cycle with the lives, practices and advocacy of others.

CHAPTER 3

RESHAPING STORYTELLING IN THE SPACE 'BETWEEN' STORYTELLER AND ADOLESCENTS

My research has allowed detailed exploration of the intersubjective space between storyteller, adolescent listeners or participants, and story – a tripartite relationship whose importance is inescapable to many analysts of storytelling (see for example Jackson 2002, Maguire 2015). The phenomenon of intersubjectivity in participatory artistic processes, according to Nancy Gerber et al, can be understood as 'how the experience of human relatedness is experienced, reflected and represented' (2013:40) in these processes. The task of this chapter is to articulate how I have come to understand the dynamics of the storyteller-participant axis of this triangle, and consequently, how these understandings have reshaped my practice with young people. Chapter 4 will then turn to the roles played by the story itself in the triangle; Chapter 5 will examine how the relational dynamics of the whole encounter interact with the surrounding social ecology of the school or setting.

Figure 3.1 Conceptualising the focus of my three substantive chapters in relation to the tripartite relationship of listener, storyteller and story



3.1 The space between storyteller and listener

3.1.1 Buber, Levinas and the 'Between'

My starting point for understanding intersubjectivity in the storytelling encounter with adolescents is the complementary thinking of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, both of whom Andrew Tallon (2004) locates in a lineage of thinkers interested in the meaning created *between* individuals. Every human encounter can, Buber (1958) proposes, be understood as expressing a 'primary word', or fundamental relationship, between Self and Other – either 'I/It' or 'I/Thou'. Our concern can either be technical and monologic – to convey information to, or bring about change in, the Other, thus treating her as 'It' – or open-ended and mutual, meeting her as 'Thou':

> The relation to the Thou is direct. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and fancy intervene between I and Thou […] No aim, no lust, and no anticipation intervene between I and Thou […] Every means is an obstacle. Only when every means has collapsed does the meeting come about. (Buber 1958:9)

In 'relocating the locus or "space" of the event of meaning from inside one's head, to the realm of the between' (Tallon 2004:50) (in Buber's German the *Zwischen*), Buber defines a tangible, pre-cognitive, affective domain where the Self is no longer in charge. While there are important differences between Buber's and Levinas' perspectives, more relevant to my argument in this chapter is their essentially common starting point. Levinas (1969) critiques the lack of economic realism and respect for difference in Buber's conceptualisation of I/Thou relations, yet he too sees our first ethical duty as human beings as meeting the Other in dialogue – a dialogue in which we are vulnerable to her and give fully of ourselves. Although we can never really 'know' another human being, he claims, we must do what we can to transcend our ego and reach out across the divide, by giving a meaningful, generous response to her 'questioning glance' (1969:14). We cannot prepare our answers.

If both Buber's and Levinas' visions seem idealistic to the point of otherworldliness, it may be because of the dominance in our culture of what Levinas calls 'totalistic thinking', which is 'outwardly directed but self-centered' (Wild 1969:17), and concerned with rational systems which suppress the inner life. For Buber, human history, and the history of the individual, involves 'a progressive augmentation of the world of It' (Buber 1958:27). A young person growing up in the 21st century spends much of her time in institutions which have explicit goals for her development, broken down into ever-smaller units of achievement and assessment. A great deal of her contact with the adult world is framed by her consciousness of the

instrumental purpose of its communication with her – to teach her something, to sell her something, to help her market herself to something. She will speak in return (in person, in writing or online) to set into motion her own agendas for this world; that is, she will situate others as 'It' in her turn.

How, then, are we to discern moments of genuine dialogue, in Buber's or Levinas' sense? Essential, for both, is a readiness to be affected by what the other party brings to the exchange. Hence, Stern, writing from a pedagogical perspective, suggests that for dialogue to occur, the possibility of 'surprise' must be embraced. He goes on to quote Buber:

> In a real conversation (that is, not one whose individual parts have been preconcerted, but one which is completely spontaneous, in which each speaks directly to his partner and calls forth his unpredictable reply), a real lesson (that is, neither a routine repetition nor a lesson whose findings the teacher knows before he starts, but one which develops in mutual surprises), a real embrace and not one of mere habit, a real duel and not a mere game – in all these what is essential does not take place in each of the participants or in a neutral world which includes the two and all other things; but it takes place between them in the most precise sense, as it were in a dimension which is accessible only to them both. (Buber 2002:241-242, cited in Stern 2013:45)

Likewise, Matthew Reason and Anja Mølle Lindelof follow Stern and Buber in proposing the presence of surprise as a marker of a 'real encounter' (2016:3) in live performance – one which leaves both performer and audience somehow changed.

3.1.2 The 'between' and the artform of storytelling

If extended to 'a real story', this model of a pure I/Thou dialogue seems to go to the heart of some of the most dearly held and yet keenly contested tenets of oral storytelling, and to resonate with the idea of storyknowing. These are idealised positions, which many performers may rarely attain, but they are important starting points for an understanding of the dynamics of storytelling, in at least two ways.

Firstly, it is important to reprise the characteristics of narrative knowledge which, as I discuss in Chapter 1.3, are anchor points for storytellers such as Sawyer (1962) and Nanson (2008), as well as myself: namely, that we understand story as a counterpoint to the communication of both *facts*, and *lessons*. These interrelated distinctions are most succinctly made by Benjamin (1973), when he contrasts the 'experience' conveyed by a storyteller with 'information', which

for him invariably comes pre-packaged in its own unnegotiable interpretation and with a predetermined purpose in mind. Sawyer's and Nanson's reluctance to preach can both be understood as an aversion to positioning the audience as 'It'. For both authors, the listeners must be given the teller's experience and trusted with it as equals, to interpret and respond to it as they will, in freedom. Joe, a young boy in the focus group at City School, expressed this distinction pithily:

> *Well facts are, for example, you're about to walk into a wall…that's a fact. And a story is where you just – put your head down and listen.* (18/05/2015)

Secondly, the storyteller often does not know, when starting to tell a story, how it will take shape. Storytelling is profoundly reciprocal; the story is not simply made up by the storyteller, nor is it taken word-for-word from a text – rather the story happens in the space 'between' the storyteller and the listeners, in an unspoken dialogue between them. Sawyer describes sensing this for the first time when she told stories in a seamen's mission:

> In the process of the story's leaving my lips and reaching across the hall to the men out in the darkness it had become, by the grace of God and the power of imagination, living substance; it was feeble, limping substance, but life was in it. (1962:88)

The primary use of diegetic (suggestive) rather than mimetic (representative) strategies in storytelling (Maguire 2015; Haggarty 2011), and thus the greater role of the audience in creating the action in their imaginations, sets into motion an intersubjective feedback process which shapes the storyteller's telling. The listeners, in the quality of their attention or inattention, the expressions on their faces and reactions of their bodies, have a power not only over the layers of meaning a story attracts during each particular telling (which might be said of all theatre, as discussed below), but over the very words in which it is clothed, or indeed whether it can be told at all. Even in defining the criteria for virtuosic, rehearsed performance storytelling, Ben Haggarty insists – perhaps more as an article of faith than a statement of fact - that the storyteller's 'deep structural composition' is built on 'a clear understanding that *the story is not the words – it is the plot*,' (2011:12), and thus that storytellers must 'improvise the retelling of the story uniquely and specifically for the listeners' on each occasion (14).

3.1.3 Is storytelling an especially dialogic artform?

How unique this reciprocity and intersubjectivity is to storytelling is a keenly debated point. Erika Fischer-Lichte describes essentially the same phenomenon in relation to theatre: a

'feedback loop […] a self-referential, autopoietic system enabling a fundamentally open, unpredictable process' (2008:39). Yet Tom Maguire points out that debates about storytelling have focused around often oversimplistic binary oppositions - between live storytelling and literature (as in Benjamin 1973) and between storytelling and theatre. An overemphasis on these distinctions is traceable throughout the Western storytelling revival, with its rejection of advanced capitalist modes of communication and spectacle. The descendants of this movement, for example the high-profile storytellers interviewed by Wilson (2006), often see clear blue water between themselves and the world of acting, with its implication of scriptedness, rehearsal and the 'fourth wall'. Wilson (1997) critiques this idea as resting on an essentially Victorian conception of naturalistic theatre, discussing many crossover performances and proposing instead a 'Performance Continuum' operating across theatre, storytelling and indeed everyday life:

Table 3.1 Wilson's 'performance continuum' (1997:28)

Conversation----------cultural performance

Low intensity----------high intensity

Informal----------formal

Subconscious----------conscious

Low risk----------high risk

Low rewards----------high rewards

Wilson's continuum has clear links with Richard Schechner's distinction between framed, conventionalised 'is-performance' and informal, everyday 'as-performance' (2006:38), and Michael Kirby's continuum between 'non-matrixed performance' and 'complex acting' (1972). Kirby observes that while,

> in a performance, we usually know when a person is acting and when he is not, […] there is a scale or continuum of behaviour involved, and the differences between acting and not-acting may be quite small. (1972:3)

Maguire too denies any clear boundaries around storytelling as an artform, citing in particular the recent trend of 'the return of the storytellers' to the Irish theatre stage (2015). Nor is this a new phenomenon; Walter Benjamin (1998) describes the theatrical 'byway' past naturalistic

acting throughout history identified by Bertolt Brecht, in which 'the actors can at any moment stand outside themselves and show themselves to be actors' (xiii):

> That byway led via the medieval mystery play, German baroque drama, certain scenes of Shakespeare, Part II of Goethe's Faust, to Strindberg, and finally Brecht and "epic theatre". (xiv)

Post-dramatic theatre (Lehmann 2006) too may be seen as part of this byway. All of these forms challenge any binary distinction from storytelling in their consciousness of the co-presence of audience and actors.

Nonetheless, genuinely dialogic performance remains relatively rare on the stage. Fischer-Lichte suggests that theatre, during its period of naturalistic acting, has learnt habits of suppressing the audience's influence on the performance which may die hard. Modern directors may 'aim at making the functioning of the feedback loop visible by foregrounding certain factors and variables, whilst minimizing, if not fully eliminating, others' (2008:40).

Perhaps for this reason, Maguire sees a residual particularity in storytelling, demanding his repeated investigation of 'what it is that takes place between such tellers, the people to whom they are performing and the tales they present' (2015:2). He concludes that storytelling is 'a fundamental act of intersubjectivity' and that the story 'is created within and modulated according to the act of telling' (11). In fact he gives 'the immediate reciprocity of the relationship between the teller and the audience' (11) as one of the defining characteristics of the form, which

> makes the relationship between the teller and the spectator far more central to the experience of the storytelling event than the relationship between an actor and the spectator whose presence he has been trained to ignore, or appear to ignore. (18)

In practice, storytellers, just like actors, work within commercial and institutional structures which may often hinder the realisation of such a relationship, and as discussed, theatre, literature and other artforms often offer similar possibilities for dialogue and intersubjectivity. Nonetheless, I would argue that it is this ideal, the overriding *impetus towards* an unmediated, surprising and reciprocal dialogue, that characterises the form of storytelling more than anything else. It is akin to Jacques Derrida's idea of '*the* impossible', an inaccessible but nonetheless defining and guiding principle, as discussed by Lee Higgins (2012) in relation to community music. Simultaneously, the intensity of engagement and degree of responsiveness this requires is perhaps its defining difficulty.

3.2 *The reshaping of my practice in the encounter with adolescents*

The mutuality of the storytelling exchange extends beyond the boundary of the story told, to the framing of it in the wider social event, and even to what Ryan (2003, cited in Maguire 2015:30) calls the storyteller's 'mega-identity'. Therefore the young people involved in my PaR have influenced not only the words of my stories, but the way I embed them in workshops, and the very kind of storyteller I aspire to be. Indeed my central research methodology (Chapter 2.2.1) has been consciously to allow this influence to shape my storytelling practice and document the changes it brings about.

Through reflective practice informed by theory, I have come to trace four interconnected ways in which working consciously in the 'between' with young people has re-shaped the nature of my practice: A) articulating a dialogical approach to the artform of storytelling; B) being alive to the significance of the 'contracting' process before and after telling a story; C) becoming sensitive to dynamics of gift and coercion in storytelling encounters; and D) balancing the storyteller's role as guide with that of partner in dialogue. The following sections explore each of these themes in turn.

3.2.1 A) Towards dialogic storytelling

It may seem strange to claim that storytelling is a highly dialogic artform, and then seek to articulate a particularly dialogical form of it. Yet, as I contend in Chapter 1, the practice of storytellers often operates within particular paradigms or chronotopes, some of which may reduce its dialogic potential, by partially predetermining the terms of the listener's or participant's involvement. Through my recognition of these chronotopes in the work of other storytellers, and simultaneously through my own PaR with adolescents, I have been able to contextualise and challenge my own earlier work, predominantly with primary-aged children and adults. I was first led to define a magical chronotope, and realize that I was often operating within it, when I observed that telling stories to teenagers called for a loosening of the 'web' in which I hold my listeners during performance. In a paper written at the outset of my PhD (Heinemeyer 2013) I documented one of several incidents which made this clear:

> Performing at a small festival this summer, I found myself in a yurt, unexpectedly telling to a group including not only young children and parents, but also four teenage boys. I started to spin my tale of Maori adventurers, inviting the audience to row with me across the ocean, chanting in time with the oars. The boys rowed – and how they rowed. They generated enormous waves that sent them and other audience members

> crashing to the ground. They parodied the fairies' wicked baby-stealing and wailed like abandoned infants; they answered every rhetorical question with a smart riposte. The little children were transfixed by them, my 'web' of entrancement was broken, and my cheeks started turning red. And yet the boys stayed until the end of the performance. Later in the weekend, they asked me to come and see an intricate 'fairy theme park' they had built in the woods, with lookout points for spotting babies to steal.

Such subversive engagement was certainly a response to a 'magical' atmosphere they felt had been set up for younger children. They mocked and undermined the absorbing experience I had sought to give the young families present - clearly exemplifying why adolescents are often perceived as too challenging, too unwilling to be enchanted, for storytelling. If, as I suggest in Chapter 1.4.2, the magic chronotope tends to demand reverence for a certain folk or traditional *repertoire* and a certain spellbinding *mode of performance and reception*, they had wrested both out from my control. However, as their later playful development of the storyworld indicated, what they were rejecting was not the story but the closed terms within which it was offered. Moreover, they wanted me to see *and respond to* their creation.

This and similar experiences led me to question my own assumptions and practices regarding storytelling with young people. Meeting with Zipes' indictment of storytellers who behave as 'stars and initiates of a secret sect, as if only they possess the secret of a good story' (1995:4) seemed to confirm the four boys' implicit critique of my practice. Zipes' own methodology abounds in ways of facilitating young people's subversion of mythic or folk material: juxtaposing contrasting versions of stories, free play with the plot elements of fairytales, games that satirise and modernise stories. Meanwhile, other authors within a dynamic chronotope of storytelling (Chapter 1.4.3) advocate that storytellers draw on young people's own repertoire of stories, rather than importing their own. I went on to incorporate many of these approaches in my work, adapting them to the particular teenagers with whom I was working; for example 'layering' a modern-day true story onto a 'hero's journey' myth to allow the structures, stereotypes and archetypes themselves to become visible.

Yet I felt reluctant to embrace the role of 'rabble-rouser' Zipes proposes for the storyteller (1995:6), suspecting that this was, to some extent, to usurp the role of the young people themselves. In the example above it seemed noteworthy that the boys took joy in up-ending the story and challenging me; a teacher at Maple House similarly observed that one of my most important functions in the setting was allowing the young people to make the empowering choice to reject or subvert my stories. In order for them to choose to strip the dignity or wholeness from the story, it needed to be present in the first place. Equally, there

were many occasions when young people chose to leave its dignity intact, finding in my stance vis-a-vis my story the permission to present their own with equal care. On still further occasions, all my efforts to facilitate any creative response to a story were fruitless; one young woman at Maple House presented me with a letter from her mother asking that she be allowed to be present to listen to stories, but not have to say a word. Her responses, whether respectful or subversive, were hers alone.

It simply was not possible to foresee what a group of young people might want from me on a given day. In a blog post (07/10/2014) I recorded struggling with the demands of this:

> In the course of a week I tell stories to a group of three 14-year-olds who are playing with clay and interrupting me continually to tell me what ought to happen next; to a roomful of silent, wide-eyed, troubled, inscrutable adolescents whose reactions are unpredictable and momentous […] When I say I feel vertiginous from surfing this continuum within storytelling every week, it's because I'm sliding along a scale which has big bumps along it. It demands that I reset my sense of purpose and role.

Thus I have been led by my practice with this age group away from reliance on magical engagement; yet I have also hit against their resistance to too great expectations of dynamic engagement. My journey from that point has led to a recognition of a dialogic chronotope which allows the teller to borrow from the repertoire and performance styles of both the magic and dynamic, as the specific storytelling encounter demands.

As the rest of this exegesis explores the implications and potential of a dialogic practice with adolescents, it may be useful at this point to briefly sketch out what it looks like in practice. It may involve long stories told by me, and tellings or retellings by young people, as in my performative meta-narrative of a 'typical' workshop; yet it may at other times be difficult to distinguish from a normal social gathering. Various practitioners, including Shuman (1986) and Wilson (1997), have reported a preference by adolescent audiences for more informal, conversational or playful performance, at the 'lower performativity' end of Wilson's spectrum. Working with adolescents has indeed pulled me down the spectrum to this informal style, allowed me to explore its affordances, and provoked me to reflect on why they may prefer it.

Lower performativity has become, for me, key to holding a dialogic tension between the poles of magical and dynamic engagement. I have felt that being available for an 'I/Thou' or 'face-to-face' encounter with adolescent young people has required an especially flexible stance, ready to discern the nature of their interest (or disinterest) and what a story can or cannot provide for them in a given moment. Dialogic storytelling is, for me, a way of inhabiting

shifting sands. It is conversation which holds the door open for artistry, or artistry that does not shut down conversation. This may mean being able to break off in mid-performance for a discussion the story provokes (a form of metalepsis, leaving the storyworld in order to comment on it); or sometimes simply listening to a group of teenagers chatting, and knowing when to add a relevant story.

This is not to argue that there is no place for an absorbing, magical performance in practice with this age group, or for a structured, dynamic, workshop which helps a group see through the stereotypes embodied in a myth. Rather, it is to observe that adolescents are often keenly aware of these states, and interested in the nature of switching between them, and this readiness to switch is a key aspect of the dialogic chronotope of storytelling.

It is interesting to consider what the Buberian 'primary word' for the fundamental relationships emphasised in different chronotopes might be. That for the magical chronotope might be 'I/We', expressing a desire for individual connection with the social whole; the dynamic chronotope might correspond to 'I/World' or 'We/World', reflecting the socially critical perspective which seeks to articulate a common vision and intervene in the world to achieve it. Both express moments which might arise during a storytelling workshop with adolescents – however, dialogic storytelling recognises that neither arises from the storyteller's will alone, but from the more fundamental I/Thou interaction between storyteller and listeners. In embracing this unpredictability as a strength, dialogic storytelling arguably inherits a key value of the 'everyday' chronotope (see Fig. 1.2).

3.2.1.2 Adolescent identity, connection and the dialogic chronotope

Dialogic storytelling may be an emergent trend across practice with all age groups, but it is my work with adolescents that has led me to recognise and develop it. For various reasons, there may be a particular need for dialogic encounter in this phase of life. Adolescence is a period in which young people are developing the ideological setting for their 'personal myth' (McAdams 1993), 'questioning the contradictions in their environment' (Vaucelle and Davenport 2004:9), and articulating progressively more sophisticated accounts of their own selfhood (Chandler et al 2003). These are conversations and arguments with the world which require discussion partners.

Henderson et al (2007) and Plante (2010) suggest that the creation of a healthy identity, or self-narrative, is a markedly more demanding task for 21st century adolescents than for previous generations. For Henderson et al, rapid economic, social and technological change quickly renders redundant any templates young people may have for their lives or future

biographies, thus they must devote energy to making conscious choices as to which relationships and areas of life are the most fruitful basis for their identities. Coleman and Hendry's (1990) model of 'lifespan developmental psychology', in which young people 'produce their own development' within a surrounding human ecology, likewise seems to belong to an era of many competing identities. Adolescents are therefore likely to seek opportunities for exploration of alternative roles, stances, and beliefs, and for testing the reactions of others to these.

Essential to forming a healthy identity, says Plante (2010:37), are certain 'self-capacities', including the ability to 'maintain a sense of connection to others'. Achieving connectedness emerges from the literature on adolescent development as both vital and dogged with challenges. Adolescents may subscribe to a 'personal fable' (Elkind 1967): they often suffer from an over-differentiation of feelings, in which they perceive their difficulties and inner lives to be unique and incommunicable. The emotional impact of this 'self-othering' by young people may be exacerbated by a cultural 'othering' by adults of an adolescent world seen as deviant and problematic (Offer et al (1981), cited in Coleman and Hendry 1990).

There is some evidence that the challenge of achieving connectedness acquires an additional layer in the era of social media. The current generation of teenagers is, in the online sphere, more socially connected than any other, yet the consequences of this for the quality of their relationships, as Danah Boyd's (2014) research concludes, are complex. Boyd finds that for many young people, social media interactions are a compensation for reductions in freedom and free time which prevent them from meeting friends in person. While emphasising the opportunities offered to teenagers by participation in 'networked publics', she discusses how 'social media alters and amplifies social situations' (13), creating dynamics many find difficult to navigate. Within my own practice, participants often discussed social media as a sphere where they must maintain a convincing performance at all times, a situation which was often perilous and fragile.

The challenge of connectedness was identified by Kate Collins (2015) during her dialogic artmaking project connecting urban adolescents with student artists. At the broadest level, the collaboration revealed 'the insularity and occasional isolation in *all* our lives' (2015:120). She also perceived a particular lack of genuine listening and dialogue in the students' and teenagers' lives, which was reflected in the slow speed at which skills, trust, empathy and confidence were incrementally developed during the semester-long project.

For these reasons, a storyteller may wish to seek to create within a storytelling session a space for dialogue, within which listening and speaking occur on a more attentive level than is

customary in everyday life, education or the online sphere. The practice I have developed has sought to *make visible and realizable* this possibility of connection with both other young people and adults.

On the simplest level, an ever-expanding series of written and oral games modelled on the chain story have become a key part of most of my storytelling sessions; it is surely no coincidence that similar games are often played by adolescents among themselves. The collaboratively invented story (no matter how trivial) makes tangible to young people the acceptance and development of their ideas by others, momentarily overcoming the 'personal fable' and bridging the gap between the individuals present. Forms of such games have evolved as the property of specific groups: in Maple House the reluctance of some young people to express even innocuous ideas out loud gave rise to a private and lyrical variant. Each young person wrote half a story, stopping mid-sentence at the story's crisis point, and chose someone else to finish it and resolve the crisis. Those that wished passed the resulting stories to me to read out loud. The gratitude young people felt for the sensitive responses made by others to their cautious beginnings rapidly built up a sense of trust and connection.

By extension, some of the most powerful moments in my practice have been when I have 'returned' to a group of young people a story they have themselves created by telling it back to them, showing I have heard their nuances and understood their meanings. In some cases, such as the shared creation of *Mr Imagination* by a group at City School, this returning helped to enshrine the story as a sort of myth in itself.

The lead practitioner at Acting Up!, Kelvin Goodspeed, followed an essentially similar process when he scripted the play *Mythic*, rich with allusions to stories, ideas and characters the group had brought or devised during the preceding term. Both the group's facilitators underlined that achieving a 'meeting of minds' with others is a key developmental challenge for their members. Showing them that their own meanings had been heard, and incorporated in the storyworld, enabled them to move beyond identifying with their own characters to connecting with others:

> *Because they were interwoven, and they could see the threads relating to other people, there was that trail back to someone else in the story.* (Jenna Drury, 09/07/2014)

The example of *Mythic* makes clear that dialogic storytelling is concerned with both interpersonal dialogue, and syncretic dialogue between stories or genres. In creating and sustaining an embodiment of the space between individuals, a storyteller can lay a stepping stone by which adolescents may move towards connection with others.

3.2.2 B) The contracting process

If the magic and the dynamic modes of engagement co-exist in a storytelling session, they correspond loosely to the states of absorption in a story and more outwardly active phases of responding to or challenging it. In my performative talk (Heinemeyer 2014) I described and enacted the conflicting pulls of the dynamic and the magic, and the moment of paralysis that often results in adolescent groups just after a telling:

> Now comes this sort of awful silence. I have tried to keep you ready to spring, but now you are absolutely left hanging, dependent. I was able to lead you in respectfully but you have been silent for a long time now, and coming out again feels very hairy. I don't know what this moment is but it contains demands and discomfort on both sides – from me, the desire to see a response; from you, an awkward sense that something may now be demanded of you, a request for time and quiet.

In a focus group at City School, 13-year-old Mary showed her empathy with this moment of crisis:

> *Don't you feel shy when you, like, stop and everyone just stares at you?* (15/03/2016)

As she recognised, the points of beginning and then ending a story are particularly revealing and difficult moments in a workshop which negotiates both magical and dynamic forms of engagement. Storytellers from many cultures have had access to code-switching devices to signal the transition from normal conversation to storytelling: their 'Once upon a time', or their 'Crick – Crack!' at the commencement, their 'That's another story for another time' at the end. Around these verbal cues might be established social patterns of seguing into story-time, as Ben Haggarty describes in his concept of the 'ladder to the moon' (Haggarty 2014). Where no such accepted vernacular codes exist, where as a visiting storyteller (in a culture or setting ill-at-ease with storytelling) you are seeking ways of negotiating the entry and exit points with an audience, the process is more challenging.

I have come to problematize the entry into a story as a 'contracting' process, a term also used by other storytellers, such as Haggarty (2011) and Mead (2011), as well as within theatre (for example Walser and Etchells 2012). A storyteller needs the audience's consent to begin a story; an implicit agreement must be struck in which the storyteller offers signs of their trustworthiness to carry the audience through the story, and the audience indicates their readiness to listen to the end. Haggarty summarises the audience's considerations in deciding whether to embark on this journey in one of his 'criteria for performance storytellers':

> Is the audience in a safe and appealing pair of hands? Will they be returned from wherever they might be taken to? Will that journey have been worthwhile? (2011:17)

When this end is reached, there is often another hiatus in which storyteller and audience step back into 'normal' conversation, often with a feeling of uncertainty as to their next interactions with each other. As expressed in the performative talk, it is at these points that I feel most conscious of my hopes or even expectations of the listeners, and my desire to connect with them, yearnings which Levinas sees as essential to human encounter. Yet these moments simultaneously impress upon me his assertion that 'we shall never know [the Other]' (1969:18). These moments of contracting and leaving a story, with an adolescent audience, are often charged with significance and tension. They can feel painfully exposing and vulnerable; it is perhaps in them that the storyteller is most at the audience's mercy and genuine I/Thou, or face-to-face, encounter can occur.

3.2.2.1 The storyteller's 'authenticity' or 'identity', and the contracting process

It is in these moments of contracting that I have most strongly experienced a challenge to my 'authenticity' as a storyteller. I recognise the almost shamanic expectations Sobol describes which audiences, absorbing ideas of the magical chronotope, can invest in a storyteller: 'the mediating image of restored wholeness, a prism of heightened presence through which these idylls of past and future can shine' (1999:29). It is tempting for a storyteller, particularly (as in my case) one with an Irish accent performing in a culture which still exoticises the Celtic fringes, to seek to live up to this image and sometimes even believe in one's own myth for the duration of the story. Yet in fact my construction of my identity, repertoire and skill set as a storyteller has been a decade-long process, drawing only on vestiges of inheritance and 'folk art', and consisting in large part of purposeful learning, research and trial and error. While *authenticity* may be a problematic term, invoking essentialist notions of selfhood and culture, another of Haggarty's criteria suggests that presenting one's *identity* honestly remains a vital, ethical, though complex and subtle, task for storytellers:

> Is the storyteller his or her 'self' (albeit an enhanced or 'super' self)? Are they playing an intentional and purposeful role in a consensual game? Or have they adopted a false persona? Where is the truth in all this? Are they deceitful? (2011:18)

This construction of identity is inescapably located within a chronotope – thus Sawyer's (1962) frank description of her own long and sometimes humiliating self-training process is typical of the everyday chronotope. Each chronotope also comprises approved performance styles and repertoire, and characteristic strategies of contracting. For example, in my earlier freelance

work, often within the magical chronotope, I sometimes introduced my stories without revealing my sources for them, particularly if these were written collections of folktales. As Wilson points out, an 'uncritical reverence for *tradition'* (2006:24) in some parts of the storytelling movement (those I call magical) is tied in with belief in the story told as an 'Ur-text' with a fixed meaning, rather than a historically situated, 'ever-changing entity' (28) – a belief I never held. Yet my lack of transparency may have implied that these stories were in some sense my inheritance, feeding the myth of their and my own 'authenticity', and disguising the compositional processes I and others had exerted on the material.

Working regularly with adolescent groups, particularly the intervention classes at City School, has brought me to a different understanding of authenticity, and thus new forms of contracting to tell. In the initial sessions the pupils' most frequent immediate response to stories was to ask if they were true or not, perhaps an expression of their uncertainty as to my authority. However as their familiarity with me and storytelling grew, their emphasis shifted to my research and compositional processes. Danny repeatedly asked me at the end of my stories: 'How do you get to know this stuff?', asking for my sources and trying to discover my process; I developed the habit of bringing in books I had used in research to show him. His classmate Sam was interested, both as a listener and a practitioner, in the craft and sources of storytelling:

> *We get to listen to a good story, that someone's made up, or they've got from someone else, or they've learnt, or they've taken their time to, like, remember that story…* (15/03/2015)

> *I went to the theatre and I told stories to the little kids there…(The sessions) have made me want to be a storyteller when I'm older.* (15/03/2015)

Indeed, discussions about the work involved in bringing a story to readiness for telling, and the wider process of becoming a storyteller, sometimes occupied a significant part of a session at City School.

With the older and more cautious teenagers in Maple House, contracting acquired an additional layer: not only did they question a story's relationship to 'the truth', but I often felt an implicit challenge as to my reasons for choosing a particular story. This was perhaps unsurprising in a setting where, in the words of their teacher, 'they feel they are permanently under the microscope' of mental health professionals (17/07/2015). In order to 'sign' the contract and enter into the story, they needed to be clear as to whether I had an undeclared therapeutic or analytical intent, and what they were signing up for.

This view of authenticity, in which the young people demanded that I 'show my working' and clarify my motives, rather than claim an automatic right to tell a certain story, gave a new cast to the contracting process. Rather than the code-switching phrases so redolent of tradition, my entry point to a story became an explicit discussion of my relationship to it, and why it might be of relevance to my listeners. It became a vital part of modelling the storyteller's role, and starting off the dialogue.

3.2.3 C) Gift and coercion in the 'between'

If listeners are to be granted a share of the power and responsibility, met in a I/Thou or face-to-face relationship not only during the telling of a story but throughout a storytelling session, there are dynamics of reciprocity and vulnerability which can be understood in the light of Buber's and Levinas' thinking. For Buber, 'The *Thou* meets me through grace – it is not found by seeking' (1958:8). For Levinas (glossed by Wild),

> Responsible communication depends on an initial act of generosity, a giving of my world to him with all its dubious assumptions and arbitrary features. They are then exposed to the questions of the other, and an escape from egotism becomes possible. (1969:14)

The storytelling exchange is in fact one of lavish gift-giving on both sides: the storyteller chooses the best words to give of herself; the listener undertakes to listen for an unforeseeable length of time. In this section I consider the storytelling exchange with young people in relation to the problematics of 'the gift'. On the one hand, gift-giving can incur obligations and reinforce status difference, as Marcel Mauss (2002) warns. On the other, it can be a form of 'empathetic dialogue' (Fennell, cited in Nicholson 2005:164) which may disrupt normal economic relations by replacing them with 'the heterogeneity of generosity' (Nicholson 2005:162).

The funding structure of the PhD perhaps made the latter unusually accessible, liberating me from economic constraints and freeing me to engender relationships with young people and settings that were to some extent outside or even transgressive of them – as I discuss in Chapter 5 in relation to the role of 'storyteller-as-friend'. Hierarchical differences between myself and participants have often been disrupted by the long-term mutualism of this 'empathetic dialogue'. In a reflective dialogue, one of the Maple House teachers and I noted that my workshops often relied heavily on the generous and reliable participation of one or two individual young people (such as Luna, whose contribution is discussed in Heinemeyer

2017, and John in Chapter 5.4.1.1). In recognising my dependence on them to co-create a structure within which the reticent majority could participate, these individuals were actively caring for me, as much as for the others in the room.

Nonetheless, during this research, I have negotiated with both faces of the gift. I will now discuss occasions when I have succumbed to the temptation to lessen the power of the audience, and circumvent the intense demands of the 'between', through coercive tactics. It will become evident that these are often the result of my having a conscious or unconscious purpose or agenda, which is not shared by the young people. I will show how these violations of the spirit of face-to-face encounter are often resisted by teenage listeners, bringing me to an understanding that I must make myself vulnerable to their responses - and how the nature of facilitation makes this a guiding, but ever elusive goal.

3.2.3.1 Coercion and its consequences

It is possible on occasion to ensnare a group of young people in a story almost against their will. For example, during the penultimate session at the Global Youth Club, when the young people had become more and more reluctant to give up their free play and socialising to join in with the storytelling and drama led by myself and another practitioner, my fieldnotes record:

> *They drifted in for a drink before drifting off to sport, and I thought, this is the moment for a 'proper' performance if there ever was one, i.e. I consciously decided to grab them by the scruff of the neck. I got out my tin whistle and played a show-off jig, then as the applause died down I started into my highest-impact version of Tir na nOg. Gradually turned down the volume as the story proceeded but kept the telling tight and efficient. And everyone stayed til the end (they didn't have to, the hall door was open behind them) BUT then almost all took their freedom, drifted or even marched off […]*
>
> *Was my telling a breaking of our promise about free choice, a step backwards into coercion, an attack […]?* (08/03/2014)

Indeed, the next session saw almost all the young people refuse point blank to engage with us, their trust of us apparently broken.

Likewise, in the aftermath of a story, the difficulty for young people of leaving a session without seeming impolite has often given me a power advantage in determining what follow-up activities I might set to facilitate their own storytelling based on my story. Yet they may have genuine reasons to prefer to simply listen to the story and leave it at that. By seeking to 'empower' their voices in relation to mine through active storytelling, I may in fact be riding

roughshod over their wishes. In a blog post (17/07/2015) I discuss an in-depth conversation with the teachers at Maple House, after a period in which attendance at the storytelling sessions was tailing off. The teachers pointed out that the young people invariably enjoyed listening to my stories, but feared the performance element of subsequent activities as exposing and risky, as well as mistrusting the play space I was attempting to set up. I called my own motivations into question: was I really concerned to give the young people a voice during the sessions, or was I ignoring the eloquence they were already expressing through their non-engagement? Was my persistence with follow-up activities a demand for something in return for my gift, to satisfy my own desire to see their creative response to my stories?

In both these cases, I was not paying heed to the golden rule of the gift freely given, as expressed by the storyteller Ruth Sawyer:

> Experience…is like fairy gold: make use of it, and it serves you bountifully; hoard it, and it turns to dust. As with fairy gold, you can never trade it directly over the counter. It must be used with indirection; for who will take another's experience in trade for one's own? (1962:81)

3.2.3.2 'Splendid instinct': the balancing act

I was able to seize the young people's attention (at Global Youth Club) or to some extent their participation (at Maple House), but was conscious even in so doing of the violation I was perpetrating on the storytelling exchange, and they responded on the next possible occasion by withdrawing their free consent. However, it would equally deny the possibility of an I/Thou encounter to fail to step confidently into the role of storyteller and facilitator. As Schoen (1983) points out, there is an interplay between structure and freedom; thus I might have a strong feeling a group would enjoy and benefit from creating their own retelling of my story through creative writing or drama, but that they will not be able to see this and judge for themselves until they have entered into it within a structure I provide. With sensitive and often reticent young people, it is difficult to distinguish between initial inertia or shyness, and a genuine preference to incubate the story slowly in their own minds, or indeed to banish it from their minds. These are challenges faced by other arts practitioners – Higgins for example discusses the 'fine line between leading and controlling' (2012:148) in music facilitation - but the switches between the often liminal state of storytelling/listening and 'normal' communication gives a particular intensity to these moments of contracting and negotiating young people's participation.

The difficult balance between these poles of coercion and fearfulness is struck through a perhaps unattainable ideal I have come to think of as 'splendid instinct' – an attuned and responsive playfulness which offers boldly but does not demand; which opens the doors for an open-ended and enabling I/Thou encounter with the young people without having specific expectations of them. Donald Schoen (1983) contends that any practitioner in any discipline depends on developing this kind of 'knowledge-in-action', a tacit 'knowing-how' opposed to propositional 'knowing that'. Working with storytelling in a therapeutic context, Alida Gersie describes something similar to splendid instinct:

> in each group I note members' timing of contributions and their style of withdrawing from interaction as well as evident engagement with particular issues. I clarify patterns in habits of relating and listen carefully to the spoken, the near-spoken and the unsaid […]This process welcomes experience in, integrates uncertainty as uncertainty and facilitates the bonding of informed not-knowing with secure knowing. (1997:4)

In the phrase 'splendid instinct' I am seeking to contain Derrida's 'Impossible', the sense that I feel myself always in deficit of the alertness and repertoire of responses Gersie describes; climbing a glassy mountain with an invisible peak, and seeking to bring others with me.

3.2.3.3 Resisting the search for 'purpose'

This aspiration towards splendid instinct is therefore essential to the giving of the gift, but to work solely through 'empathetic dialogue', resisting any sense of desired outcome or agenda, is deeply challenging. In the notional communities of the slower-changing past described by Benjamin (1973), storytellers largely shared common conditions of life with their listeners, and thus the value of their exchange of experience and wisdom may have been self-evident to all parties. The apparent purposelessness of storytelling ceilidhs recalled by elderly Irish people interviewed by Lawrence Millman (1977) was in fact a multifaceted socially embedded usefulness, tacitly understood by teller and listeners.[6] In contrast, in my peripatetic existence as a storyteller, working with ever-changing groups of unpredictable young people in diverse institutional settings, I have felt at times guided only by negative pointers: *away* from coercion and expectations, *away* from allowing my own voice to drown theirs out, *away* from too-sensitive themes, *away* from too earnest and neat resolutions to stories. The lack of a readily expressible, positive purpose, and the splendid instinct which alone can show the way to what

[6] '"It was not the story that was in it," one old man told me. "Not the story really at all, but the idea you were passing your time with the others. 'Twas like mass, you see, because we went to the chapel for the same reason."' (Millman 1977, pp.78-79)

a particular encounter might be capable of generating, is simultaneously the defining characteristic of storytelling, and a sometimes paralysing ideal.

It is perhaps for this reason that I have noticed a pattern in my long-term work with groups, in which I have sought some shelter in the instrumental goals of the institution, such as education or therapy, and accordingly in structured workshops which limit the open-endedness of the encounter. There have been defensible arguments for this, and whether to do so is by no means a clear ethical choice. Arguments around instrumentalising storytelling and the arts are often repeated, but as both Nicholson (2005) and White (2015) discuss, in relation to applied arts with an aspiration to be 'of use', any distinction between intrinsic value and social purpose is oversimplistic. However, it is vital for me to honestly confront my personal reasons for doing so, as a brief examination of my two longest-term research settings will illustrate.

In my work in City School, I have matched my choice of stories to the pupils' broader humanities curriculum (e.g. the legend of King Charles' escape from Cromwell across the fens while a class was studying the Civil War), and sought to give my workshops at least some similarity to a lesson in which knowledge is created and gained. This strategy accorded with my belief in the unassailable value of storytelling in education, enabling 'lower ability' young people to be knowledge creators through sharing experiential knowledge (see Chapter 5.4.1.1); pragmatically, it also enabled the classes' teacher to justify the time she allocated to the project. However, it was at times an artistic and even ethical compromise. While there remained abundant scope for 'surprise' to shape the sessions (see section 3.1.1), the guiding structure allowed me to avoid relying on splendid instinct. I perhaps aligned myself too closely with the goals of the education system at times, and in moving on from a telling to at least partially planned response activities, I adopted its coercive practices of demanding evidence from pupils of their new knowledge. In our focus group, Joe repeatedly sought to persuade me that the real creative work was in the listening, not anything the group created overtly at my request:

> *It's just – you know when you're telling a story and some of us put our heads down like that – it's only because some of us do it to, like, picture the images in our heads….I would prefer to hear another story* [rather than do response activities]. (15/03/2015)

My insistence on my purpose, however loose, may even have denied the pupils opportunities to hear and engage with (or indeed choose not to overtly engage with) stories that might have been even richer and more meaningful for them.

In Maple House, it has paradoxically been the setting's own staff who have at times needed to remind me not to have therapeutic or instrumental goals, as my fieldnotes record:

> *Every guidance I have had from knowledgeable parties about my work at Maple House has pointed in the same direction. Right at the beginning, a year ago, the occupational therapist told me she liked the flexibility and responsiveness and playfulness of the sessions. She has been cautious about my attempts to do more 'structured' work as this might not respond to the individuals' moods and needs on that particular day….More recently, when I asked the teacher what he wanted from the storytelling sessions – whether he wanted them to have a curriculum link – he said not at all, rather he wanted them to give a chance for the young people to experience some more happiness in their day.* (25/11/2014)

Each time I think I have absorbed this lesson and accepted my own vulnerability, an incident has occurred at Maple House which has revealed that I was still searching for mechanisms, purposes, or guiding structures. For example, following the incident in which I was humbled by the clear indications and written feedback from a particular group of inpatients that they did not wish to deliver cathartic, feminist parables to my door on demand but simply to *'do something creative together',* in subsequent months I focused on collaborative games and musical, creative writing, craft and puppetry projects based on story. Particular sub-groups of enthusiastic participants formed around some of these projects, notably the digital story *The Story of Rob(i/y)n* and the performance *Wormwood in the Garden*, such that by early summer 2015, I felt that artistic collaboration provided me with a sense of direction in my work at Maple House. However, as discussed in section 3.2.3.1 and in my blog post (17/07/2015), collaboration itself became a too-rigid purpose and structure, however dialogic and empowering it might sound. The teachers recalled me to other desires the young people might have, such as to find rest and relief from their difficulties in an absorbing story, or to avoid re-traumatisation. My collaborative agenda in fact enabled me to avoid attending to the covertly expressed wishes of many of the current cohort of young people, such as the young woman who felt the need to ask her mother to convey her wish to remain silent in my sessions. Rather than take my lead from the eloquent non-engagement of most of the young people, I had once more become enamoured of my own sense of purpose. I was offering my gift, but on my own terms.

3.2.3.4 Splendid instinct as an impossible and necessary ideal

In the case of adolescents, avoiding coercion by paying attention to their non-explicit, non-verbal contributions to dialogue (such as their refusal to participate) may be particularly vital.

The often troubled young people I have worked with at Maple House and City School, and to some extent adolescents in general, can be considered a 'subordinate people' in Conquergood's (2002) sense. Their individual crises of development and identity formation intersect with the gendered, class-based, cultural and political ways in which society makes them subordinate. To generalise, the predominantly female, highly sensitive, anxious, self-blaming young people at Maple House, and the predominantly male, poor, 'challenging', 'disengaged' young people in the intervention classes at City School, are both at the sharp end of our culture's disservices to adolescents. Conquergood points out that to enter into dialogue with subordinate people we must attend to the ways in which they are able and willing to communicate:

> The state of emergency under which many people live demands that we pay attention to messages that are coded and encrypted; to indirect, nonverbal, and extralinguistic modes of communication where subversive meanings and utopian yearnings can be sheltered and shielded from surveillance. (2002:148)

This observation underscores the difficulty of engaging in dialogue with fragile young people, but simultaneously suggests the value of seeking to do so. As Conquergood's dialogical stance of performance (1985) suggests, where there is a possibility of entering with young people into territory where their 'subversive meanings and utopian yearnings' can find some expression, a fallible storyteller should certainly seek to do so, even, perhaps, at the risk that splendid instinct will fail and she will find herself to have been coercive.

In all probability, I will never attain full reliance on splendid instinct in the I/Thou encounter. Nor is there any stable ground on which I can pitch my tent as a storyteller, by saying for example that I let my stories speak for themselves, or that I facilitate young people to do their own storytelling, or that I collaborate with them. One of the Maple House teachers pinpointed the fuzziness of goals we needed to accept by observing that, while neither he nor I were trained therapists or had any therapeutic goals,

> *There is nursing in all we do here.* (15/07/2015)

My conclusion to my blog post about Maple House inpatients' non-engagement was perhaps an articulation of yet another structure or purpose, but a more humble one that accepts the shifting sands that are dictated by the gift-giving exchange of storytelling. I needed to make undertakings, explicitly or implicitly, that young people could listen to stories without anything being demanded of them:

> Thus the storyworld and its potential for free-floating will be available to everyone. And (this is a bit Zen) by giving up any hope that we will get into the play space that lies beyond, I will therefore make it possible that just sometimes we will. Some people will drift off and those few who have the will and ability to pass the many barricades will stay. And we will fail and fail again, and see what happens! (17/07/2015)

3.2.4 D) The storyteller as guide

An aspiration towards open-ended, surprising dialogue between me and my adolescent listeners may suggest a goal of democratic equality between us, but as Stern (2015) suggests in an educational context, dialogic interaction between diverse young people and the adults working with them is grounded in a relationship more complex than equality. While a visiting storyteller has none of the institutionally sanctioned authority of a teacher, at least for the duration of the story she is in a guiding role, in some sense responsible for everyone present. Benjamin (1973:86), while always emphasising the agency of the listener, does not shy away from words like 'wisdom' and 'usefulness' in relation to stories; storytellers provide counsel based on their experience. Further, the whole persona of the storyteller may communicate a sense of responsibility for the listener, as has most richly been explored by Arthur Frank in relation to illness narratives.

3.2.4.1 The suffering storyteller

Frank's *The Wounded Storyteller* (1995) has helped shape a narrativist understanding of how illness and recovery are constructed, suggesting that by bearing witness to their own path through illness, sufferers may help others after them chart their route. This witnessing stance, says Frank, makes the storyteller's own body 'communicative', and is thus an ethical position of care and responsibility for others, the choice to 'be a body *for* other bodies' (37). A communicative body is dyadic, embodying a recognition that *'the other has to do with me, as I with it'* (35). Storytelling allows this communication to be healing or helpful to both parties:

> Storytelling is one medium through which the dyadic body both offers its own pain and receives the reassurance that others recognise what afflicts it. Thus storytelling is a privileged medium of the dyadic body. (36)

Thus, for example, countless blogs and online fora which curate sufferers' and survivors' personal stories offer themselves as a valuable resource to other sufferers (although it is

important to note that the counsel of wounded storytellers is as fallible as any; there also exist many pro-anorexia blogs, for example). Adolescent and young adult bloggers are prevalent in these communities – see for example www.upsidedownchronicles.com. In its introduction to the 'best eating disorder blogs of 2015', Healthline writes:

> These 14 blogs are a wonderful place to begin your journey toward recovery if you have an eating disorder, or if you're caring for a loved one who does. Each blog is unique in its own way. You're likely to find at least one that speaks to you. (2015)

Frank suggests that illness may present a particular opening to enter this kind of mutualistic relationship with others. However, the ethical choice he identifies applies to all storytellers, amplifying both Levinas' ideal of 'responsible communication' and Benjamin's of conveying experience. A storyteller may seek to put all of herself, including the suffering she has endured in her life, at the service of her listeners for the duration of the story, making herself vulnerable and co-dependent with them. This may not entail telling true personal stories, but drawing on this experiential knowledge in the construction of imaginative worlds, and thus acting as a 'vulnerable guide to experience', through difficult emotional territory she has traversed before.

Indeed, where the past experience of the storyteller differs widely from the present and likely future experiences of the listeners, resulting in a rupture in the mechanisms of counsel (Benjamin 1973), fantastical stories may have something to offer that personal stories do not. Thus, as the adolescent experience has changed very rapidly in the two decades since my own teenage years (see Chapter 6), my own memories may fail to resonate with my listeners. In contrast, the timeless and archetypal worlds of folktale and myth, with their vocabulary of 'wood and stone, blood and iron and earth, fire and bread' (Tolkien 1966:10), may be an open enough meeting ground for me to offer meaningful counsel.

The salient point here is that surely I must express my own values and beliefs, won through experience, in my storytelling. To do otherwise would be to be a blank slate, not a partner in dialogue. Yet, in this acceptance of the guiding role lies a challenge to the idea of storytelling as dialogue: in both my choice of stories and my manner of telling them, I have a curriculum. I have felt the need at least to clarify this agenda to myself. By studying the themes I gravitate towards and the stories I reject, I was able set this out in a prose poem, 'A Storyteller's Agenda'.

It then becomes necessary to articulate the relationship between being a vulnerable guide to experience, and a storyteller in dialogue with young people.

3.2.4.2 Guiding while in dialogue

The ethical stance here is complex and, once more, dialogic, held in magnetic balance between two poles, with varying degrees of success. On the one hand, I am entering into open-ended dialogue with my adolescent listeners, making myself available to co-create a story with them both in my telling and in subsequent workshop activities. On the other, I am passing on my experience and values, standing as a solid responsible adult, providing counsel. Within the latter role lie both the positive responsibility to offer the listeners something of use and value, and the negative responsibility to lead them into no harm. Herein lies one of the most challenging tensions for me, and perhaps any storyteller working with vulnerable and sometimes distressed young people. There is a danger in underplaying the guiding role, becoming *too* receptive to dialogue. This is particularly the case given the distance discussed above between their world and mental architecture and my own; I have written in fieldnotes on several occasions that, '*There are elephants in the room which I cannot even see.*' Allowing a story to be re-written in the space between myself and my listeners, without premeditation, can lead into dark and dangerous places, as I discovered at Maple House when I told one of my favourite stories, The Twelve Wild Swans:

> This is a story I know in many forms…A young girl's brothers are transformed into swans, and only she can save them by sewing them suits of nettles, keeping silence for seven long years while she does so. Even when she is taken as a bride by a prince, and then narrowly escapes death for witchcraft by her mother-in-law the queen, she remains silent and dedicated to her work to the last. To me, the story centres on the endurance and steadfastness of a young woman, who is interested not in pleasing men but in accomplishing what she feels to be her mission in life. Knowing the group fairly well, I felt this was useful territory for them to explore. Perhaps, on another day, had the young people been in a different frame of mind, it would have been. And yet on this particular morning, as I was telling the story, I was horrified to feel it take shape as a tale of original sin, isolation, and hopelessness. The girl seemed like a victim powerless to resist the iron will of her society – just as some of the young people in the room undoubtedly felt about their own lives. The context had retold the myth, in a place of darkness from which I could not readily pull it out, and I had allowed it to happen. (Heinemeyer 2015:2-3)

Nicholson (2005) describes a similar experience, in which a lighthearted storymaking workshop developed in a UK setting gave rise to explorations of traumatic conflict and loss in a Sri Lankan group. My learning from the above occasion (and others) was that, precisely where a story

appears to be 'useful territory' for a particular group, I need to remain a skilled and yet still responsive guide to it. I must fully explore in advance, and remain aware of in performance, all the possible twists and turns it might take, and the layers of meaning it might attract. This is not to say that I should steer away from dark areas, should they require exploration, or even ensure a happy ending. However, my positive responsibility is to keep hold of the wisdom I have gained from this story, rather than let it be wrested from my hands. As Tallon suggests, Levinas' philosophy of 'being for the other' is needed as a corrective to the danger inherent in Buber's idealising of the encounter in the 'between', namely that we avoid a dominant role 'to such a passive extreme as to be incapable of the ethical responsibility commanded in the face of the other' (Tallon 2004:64).

Even more importantly, in respect of the negative responsibility to do no harm, I need to be ready to guide the listeners to a place of hope or safety – in Haggarty's words, to return them home from where the story takes them. This requires some perception and understanding of the resonances it may have for them. One demand of the encounter in the 'between' is to perceive where one's own experience has the potential to show listeners one way of charting an emotional trajectory through difficulty, and follow their interest through it. This recalls Bruner's celebration of a teacher who passed on not just information, but her relationship with this information: 'She was […] negotiating the world of wonder and possibility […] She was a human event, not a transmission device' (1986:126).

A striking example came for me after telling a story which featured rainforest destruction to one of the intervention classes at City School. In our collective retelling of the story, the pupils experimented with more optimistic endings, but by developing these came to a realisation of the strong likelihood of the indigenous people's defeat. This visibly deflated them. They were overcome with the scale and hopelessness of the problem. No easy reassurance was possible. I responded with another story, Joe Kane's account (1996) of the Huaorani people[7], which had been important to me in my own adolescence; it had helped me express my grief at ecological destruction, but also to understand that, even where victory is impossible, persistence and solidarity can start to build a movement which can shift society's ideas. We discussed the work of Survival International, supporting indigenous peoples worldwide to defend at least parts of their homeland. The 'suffering' I was offering was my own encounter with disillusionment; the counsel was the suggestion that there are always choices as to how to respond to it. I felt a recuperation of some collective sense of possibility in the room, and a sense of a thickening of our knowledge of each other.

[7] *The Huoarani people of Ecuador eventually sold out and lost their land after a lengthy battle with an oil company and its army of anthropologists, marketing people and lawyers.*

3.3 Conclusion: articulating the 'between'

In this chapter I have argued that the teller/listener axis of the storytelling triangle is a 'between' space, which contains the potential to attain the ideal, held up by Buber and Levinas, of I/Thou or face-to-face encounter. The exchange of gifts – a story for the gift of listening – is an apparently simple 'empathetic dialogue' in which each party makes herself vulnerable to the other and the surprise of the exchange. However, for me as a storyteller inhabiting this space with adolescents, coming to it in a spirit of responsible openness is no simple task. There are myriad temptations: to fortify oneself with structures and purposes, to expect more gifts in return, or to abdicate responsibility for what may occur.

Seeking, and often failing, to resist these temptations has brought me closer to an understanding of what adolescents need from a storyteller. Dialogic storytelling entails setting out, as far as possible, without an inflexible purpose or desired endpoint in mind. I have learnt from young people's responses to aspire neither to enchant nor to empower, but to remain alive to both of these potentials in storytelling, and to when each might serve the needs of young people, whether these are expressed overtly, covertly or unconsciously. In the subtle process of contracting to tell stories to adolescent listeners, I have learned that deceptive layers of authority based on appeals to tradition create suspicion rather than confidence, and that real dialogue is rather begun by sharing and modelling the craft of storytelling as authentically and generously as possible. I have become aware of the hidden curriculum of values and experience I repeatedly seek to share with adolescent listeners through my choice of stories, and simultaneously of the difficulties of bridging the gap in our experiences and understandings; this has led me to articulate the difficult balance between guiding young people through sometimes risky territory, and meeting them in open-ended dialogue through story.

The developments of my practice discussed in this chapter foreground the encounter and dialogue between me as storyteller/facilitator, and the young people. Chapter 4 turns to the role – or rather, overlapping roles - of *story* in creating and shaping this triangle of 'between' space in which we meet. In so doing, its focus shifts to a large extent away from my intentions, to the dialogue between the voices of the young people themselves, and the creative outputs they generate.

CHAPTER 4

STORY AS TERRITORY

There was once a girl, who left her home one morning and headed into the forest behind it.

There was the girl, *once,* in that other world, untouchable now. It is up to us to surmise what we can. So: there was *a* girl, a specific girl. She *left, one morning* - that is, we must assume that a moment came when she decided to leave. One morning she left her *home.* A safe place, or a restrictive place; a timeless cottage or a suburban semi; in any case a familiar place that will remain a fixed point in that world. She must have had a reason to take that journey away from it, apparently alone. And she was not just moving away from something but towards something, but which of those provides the motive for the journey? She *headed* – yes, she is certainly intentional – *into* the forest. The forest is a world unto itself, not simply adjacent to her home; it cannot simply be wandered in and out of, it is a stark alternative, one must head *into* it. Indeed it is *behind* her home; out of sight of the well-lit, everyday social environment. And for heaven's sake, it is a *forest*. But what kind of forest? A sharp-smelling pine forest with little undergrowth and trees planted in straight rows? A leafy beechwood carpeted in bluebells? A rich, moist, abandoned wilderness of fallen trunks, moss and creepers?

4.1 Metaphors of territory and storyknowing

This chapter deals with the role of story itself in the triangle also comprising adolescent participants and the storyteller. The story can be imagined as the third element which 'pulls' the bilateral, I/Thou or face-to-face encounter out to create a more complex territory for exploration.

There are many competing senses in which story can be territory. A reading of Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* suggests that an understanding of story depends on appreciating the ways these contradictory senses interlock. In the first place, 'every story is a travel story – a spatial practice' (1984:115). Whether on a literal or metaphorical level, a story is a tour or an itinerary; stories 'organize walks' (116) – say, from home into the forest. De Certeau observes, however, that a story can also 'found' a territory as a 'theatre of actions' (123). It does this by marking out the frontiers of the territory, an act it accomplishes, paradoxically, by transgressing those frontiers. By crossing a river to enter the theatre of actions, the agent in a story turns that river into a bridge. Therefore, the frontier land of the

forest's edge, when crossed by the girl, becomes 'an ambiguous third element […] a "space between", *Zwischenraum'* (127).

De Certeau's analysis also begins to suggest the essential relationships between the nature of story territory and other key aspects of sense-making in narrative: the journey suggests causality and intentionality, partiality and subjectivity; the boundaries both constitute and contain blank areas and ambiguities which are fertile ground for interpretation. Thus exploring the territorial aspects of story goes to the heart of narrative knowledge or storyknowing (see Table 1.1).

In this chapter I will draw on my own praxis to evidence how the exploration of the territory of a story can be heightened by the often sparse and timeless style of narration associated with the repertoire of folktale and mythology (see Chapter 2.2.2) – a style illustrated by the story opening above, lacking in either adjectives or detail. This chapter will explore the affordances of this material, my core repertoire, in creating territories in which to meet with adolescents.

Throughout this exploration it will be crucial to keep in mind H. Porter Abbott's (2008) reminder that in any narrative there are at least two worlds in play, the storyworld and the world of narration. In my practice, these two worlds are physically separate, the former often being 'long ago' or 'far away', and the latter being the space in which the young people and I are gathered to narrate and perhaps play with a story. Always present too is a third world, the world outside the workshop or other storytelling encounter, in that a story might relate to participants' lives in different ways: it may have the potential to guide them, evoke memories, or suggest alternative viewpoints.

What, therefore, should be the relationship between these three worlds (storyworld, workshop space, and outside world)? De Certeau suggests that story organises walks, founds 'theatres of actions', and creates ambiguous frontier zones of 'No-Man's-Land'. This chapter will explore how on different occasions my practice rests on these three different metaphors:

A) The story as a *walk through* an unknown territory of human experience;

B) The story as a *founder* of a territory – a theatre of actions or 'safe space'; and

C) The story as a *half-completed map* of frontier territory or No-Man's-Land.

Each suggests a different relationship between the storyworld, workshop space, and the young people's lives in the world beyond. Each has affinities to different chronotopes and activates storyknowing in different ways. I have found that dialogic storytelling with young people,

responsive to their interests and needs, requires fine-tuned awareness of how the story is defining the territory, and of when, too, it is time to switch metaphor.

4.2 A) Story as walk through unknown territory

Perhaps the simplest model of my practice is that I share, through story, my first- and second-hand life experience with adolescent listeners, aiming to help them understand and navigate a world they are coming to recognise as complex and perplexing. This is the role of the storyteller most celebrated by Benjamin (1973): the gatherer of experience, who shares it as counsel for the listeners (see Chapter 2.2.4). This is, perhaps, the only theoretical understanding required by a storyteller within the everyday chronotope, and which might be recognised by anyone who considers their stories worth passing on to young people.

De Certeau and Bruner agree that story precedes abstract thought in human development and learning (supporting Terry Pratchett's contention that 'In reality, we are Pan narrans, the storytelling chimpanzee' (2002)), and both subscribe to a *cumulative* rather than a *totalizing* view of knowledge (Table 1.1). Bruner contends that scientists often rely on stories or metaphors in the early stages of developing a theory explaining natural phenomena, although they deny this at a later stage: 'their salvation is to wash the stories away when causes can be substituted for them' (1986:13). De Certeau (1984) makes a similar observation regarding maps: the early maps of many cultures made no attempt at completeness, but rather showed itineraries, or documented the events of past journeys, either for the purpose of posterity or to guide future travellers. He cites the Aztec map of the exodus of the Totomihuacas, but one could also consider orally transmitted 'maps' such as the Australian Aboriginal songlines (Chatwin 1987). As more and more journeys were made and ambition to know the world increased, maps then typically evolved from these partial histories into 'a totalizing stage on which elements of diverse origin are brought together to form the tableau of a "state" of geographical knowledge' (de Certeau 1984:121) – eliminating the traces of the received knowledge which had built them up. Both authors make a claim for stories to remain on stage in all their complexity and multiplicity, challenging oversimplifications and rehumanising abstractions.

Like cultures, individual children start developing their knowledge of the world through perception, experience and narrative, and usually only develop the capacity for abstract or 'formal operational thought' during adolescence (Coleman and Hendry 1990), as is arguably evidenced by my City School focus group members in Chapter 1.3.2. Yet in accounting for this

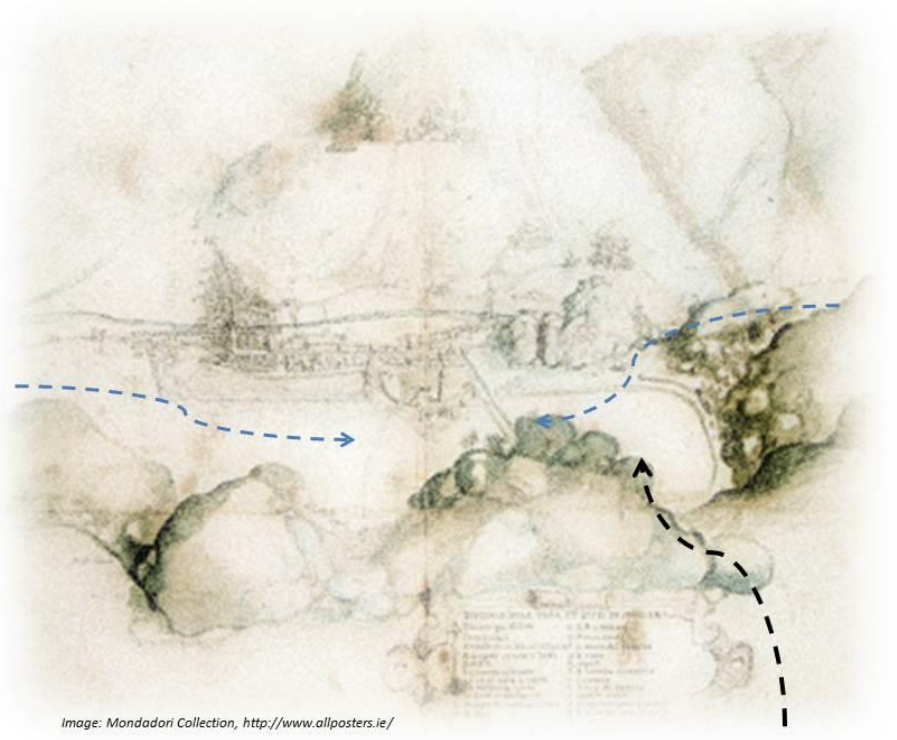
change, Vygotsky (1967) emphasises not the emergence of qualitatively different cognitive skills, but the growing vocabulary of experiences and combinatorial possibilities that a young person of this age has assimilated. We could take from his view that young people cumulatively interpolate the gaps in their experience, and thus formulate their apparently 'abstract' understandings of life, by making more and more unique, irreducible crossings of the intricate territory of human existence.

If we accept Vygotsky's understanding, the role of a storyteller with young people becomes straightforward: to guide them along routes they have not yet traversed. He proposes that the narrations and lessons of others are as valuable as first-hand experience in building this repertoire of crossings, providing both additional images and new ways of combining them.

4.2.1 The corpus of stories: developing a discourse

Within this understanding, a storyteller leading a workshop need simply lead young people through one story, which may elicit others which offer other routes through the same territory. Such story-sharing may support something related to the process Boal calls 'ascesis' – 'the movement from the phenomenon to the law which regulates phenomena of that kind' (Jackson in Boal 1995:xx). However, rather than adducing laws governing life, young people listening to and telling stories are making various forays across an unknown landscape, and thus gradually building up a three-dimensional picture of its complexity, diversity and contours. I express this exploration visually as follows:

Figure 4.1 Story as a walk through unknown territory



The story I contribute (the black arrow) does not need to be a myth or folktale; it simply needs to open up an area of human experience for exploration in order to trigger off further stories and conversation, as Emma Parfitt (2014) found storytelling to do for groups of secondary school pupils. It places trust in the storytelling exchange to take its own turns and run its own course. Of the three metaphors I propose (the walk, the theatre of actions and the No-Man's-Land), this one is perhaps the least interested in genre boundaries.

Wilson (1997) found that a 'primer' story from him was enough to trigger off a fertile process of story-sharing in a secondary school classroom. Such primer stories are like the first crossings across new snow, giving permission and inspiration to others to contribute their own stories, modelling the storyteller's role and a certain tone of significance. A single example from my own practice will suffice to corroborate this. In my work with the intervention classes at City School, some individuals emerged as storytellers with their own repertoires which complemented to my own. In my last session with Louis' class (13-14-year-olds) I told stories of World War Two from perspectives other than the British: the rescue of the Jews by many of the Christian population of occupied Denmark; and my mother-in-law's disrupted and often frightening early childhood in Nazi Germany. When I mentioned the billeting of Allied soldiers in her house in 1944 just after their bombing campaign on her region, Louis looked avid. He took the floor as soon as I was finished, with his great-grandfather's wartime experiences

doing dangerous work, manufacturing the bombs for that very year's bombing campaign. The story had been passed down to his grandfather and in turn to him. As well as sharing his very vivid family experience, he was, I felt, making a subtle point about not embracing the perspective of the 'other side' too fully (although he later contributed a cartoon of a German village being bombed by an English fighter plane). His story triggered off other pupils' stories of their great-grandparents' wartime hardship and endeavour, until the room thrummed with their atmosphere.

We had rapidly created a set of intersecting stories across a complex environment, and there was no need to extract general principles from them (such as that conflicts are many-sided), or indeed to tussle out the differences between our own perspectives. These awarenesses were present amongst us and caused no discomfort. Indeed, in the resonances between individual stories, I felt an excess of meaning that such abstractions could not have contained. The teacher and I came to describe this cross-fertilisation by the pupils as 'stitching knowledge to experience', corroborating my understanding of storyknowing as encompassing the complexity, multiplicity and irreducibility of our human experience (Table 1.1). By making their own experiences each others', they created a unique shared map.

The teaching function of a *body* of stories is surely one of the most time-honoured understandings of the purpose of storytelling, existing in all religions. Its specific relevance to young people on the cusp of adulthood is reflected in the 'curriculum' of most mythological cycles, dealing as they do overwhelmingly with young men or women heading out to face challenges. The Welsh 'Mabinogion' derives its name from 'mabinog', a young apprentice storyteller. Even de Certeau's language of journeys, transgressing boundaries, and liminality strikingly evokes our culture's discourses around adolescence. Italo Calvino passionately defends the value of his corpus of folktales, though so apparently otherworldly, in guiding young people through the difficult process of emotional maturation. He makes no claims of wisdom for any one story. Rather, 'Taken all together,' he says:

> […] they offer, in their oft-repeated and constantly varying examinations of human vicissitudes, a general explanation of life [….] especially for that stage in life where destiny is formed, i.e. youth, beginning with birth, which itself often foreshadows the future; then the departure from home, and finally, through the trials of growing up, the attainment of maturity and the proof of one's humanity. (1956:xviii)

What forms of understanding, then, are being developed by such an exposure to many overlapping, contradictory and idiosyncratically retold stories? Among other things, there is an exploration of the nexus of intentionality, causality and responsibility. Calvino goes on to say

that stories document the inequality that riddles society, and confirm that individual lives are 'predetermined by complex forces':

> This complexity pervades one's entire existence and forces one to struggle to free oneself, to determine one's own fate; at the same time we can liberate ourselves only if we liberate other people (1956:xviii)

Calvino seems to be suggesting that stories generate an understanding of our freedom and responsibilities within social, biological and political constraints. Bruner (1986) finds evidence that young people build their understanding of the many possible chains of causality by first grasping the conflicts between intentions and reality in many narratives. This is echoed by Ryan (2008), who makes the point that stories provide us with a repertoire of 'scripts' or building blocks for metacognition:

> These scripts are not only guiding our physical and social actions and reactions, but our emotional, imaginative and intellectual responses and actions, too. These are what provide our catalogue of building blocks for metaphor, simile and so on in our thinking (narrative and otherwise). (2008:5)

On occasion the route a story describes can project a group well beyond their own life knowledge into the heart of a different territory of human experience, onto higher ground from which their own stories can set out. It becomes possible to explore chains of causality and forms of agency that might not have been accessible within a workshop drawing only on their own personal stories, for example. While any story may fulfil this role, there may be a particular value to the relentless focus of myth and folktale on the dramatic *outward* consequences of inward decisions. Adolescents' developmental tendency to a 'personal fable' of overdifferentiation from others (see Chapter 3.2.1.2) may be intersecting with recent trends towards internalisation of young people's expressions of their frustrations – a gradual shift from outwardly rebellious behaviour to self-harm, eating disorders and other mental health problems (Plante 2010, Press Association 2015, 2016). In this context the dramatic plot-led nature and lack of psychological realism of traditional stories can be very helpful. A group of young women at Maple House were fascinated and delighted by Angela Carter's earthy folktales (1991,1993), with their exposition of the multitude of ways that sexual politics can be played out, if carried to the extremes of conflict. As the teacher in Maple House observed of the setting's inpatients during a reflective dialogue with me:

> *Your stories are often on an epic scale, a bit like their lives, where life, survival and death are genuinely pressing concerns. They recognise themselves. And then as well,*

> *stories name things, in a symbolic language. They allow you to name the taboos and the extreme emotions, if only symbolically.* (17/12/2015)

However such understandings arise, the 'sequential clarity' of cause and effect in folk stories and myths 'may facilitate the development of the ability to assume ever greater responsibility for one's deeds' (Gersie 1997:10). That is, they may help young people develop their own 'discourse', understood even by the apparently relativist Bakhtin as a hallmark of maturity and citizenship: 'An independent, responsible and active discourse is the fundamental indicator of an ethical, legal and political human being' (1981:349-50).

The literature of the everyday chronotope (Chapter 1.4.1) is characterised by a trust in the story to open up a territory for exploration, simply by striking out into it, without the storyteller needing to give undue thought to the matter. Such moments of commonsensical confidence in the storytelling exchange have been frequent in my practice with young people. Yet at other times I have become conscious of the rarefied air of the territory we are occupying, and of a different metaphor in operation: the story as a 'safe space'.

4.3 B) Story as founder of 'theatre of actions' or 'safe space'

De Certeau's suggestion that story 'founds' a territory by creating a boundary around a 'theatre of actions' (1984:123) resonates with the use of story in applied and particularly in therapeutic settings, in two senses. Firstly, writers I would locate within the magical chronotope often emphasise story's role as a 'protective metaphor' (Gersie 1997). It is well attested that people often find it easier to approach the truth, or explore alternative interpretations of a situation, through an oblique lens (Crawford and Crawford 2004). Sunderland (2000) urges fellow therapists working with children and young people to 'stay within the metaphor' of the story, rather than asking them to make links to their own difficulties. Secondly, a workshop itself may constitute what D.W. Winnicott (1971) defined as a 'transitional space' of play, or what Boal (1995) called a 'transitive space', in which the rules of everyday life do not apply and individuals can safely experiment with different ways of being. Within applied theatre the term most often used is 'safe space' (Hunter 2008).

Such safe territories can, therefore, be established without the use of a containing traditional story. Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed techniques (1995; 2000), like playback theatre (Fox and Dauber 1999; Rowe 2007) and much of dramatherapy (Emunah 1994), use participants' personal stories as the raw material for exploration. Their vulnerability in sharing them is limited by the rules and practices of the setting. Ways of creating safe space differ from one

model of practice to another, but generally suggest the sense of carving out a temporary territory from which the outside world is excluded. The imputed relationship to this outside world is that realisations (whether therapeutic, political or other) will be made about it or about oneself, which will be brought to bear when one leaves the workshop.

Yet, a storytelling workshop based on third party material such as myth may comprise a doubly safe space by providing two layers of insulation from everyday life: its content and its practices. In fact, the implication of 'staying within' the story is that the boundaries of the storyworld and the boundaries of the workshop may coincide. In the International Centre for Arts and Narrative (ICAN) workshops I co-delivered to community groups in 2014-15 this is the invitation we made explicitly to participants, to 'spend a day within a storyworld', exploring and retelling a traditional story: 'Crucially, the workshops never asked participants to link the story to their own experience or to use it as an opportunity to tell their own autobiography' (Reason and Heinemeyer 2016:568). I have implicitly made the same undertaking in my framing of most of my workshops at Maple House, by re-introducing myself each week to young people as a student and storyteller come to lead storytelling and arts activities, not a therapist with knowledge of their case histories or recovery goals. The visual representation of this 'double-bubble' way of working might be:

Figure 4.2 Story as founder of a 'theatre of actions' or 'safe space'

Image: Georg Bohle, http://www.tokyo-ws.org/english/creator/b/georg-bohle.shtml

To work within this double bubble is to seek to open up what J.R.R. Tolkien, in his essay on fairy stories (1966), calls a 'secondary world' or 'sub-creation', where the imagination is at least partially untethered from everyday constraints and anxieties about self-exposure.

4.3.1 Obliquity and indeterminacy

As in therapeutic practice, participants may be aware that I hope they may take something away with them from this process (as I will myself), back into the outside world – represented in figure 4.2 by the dotted arrow exiting the double bubble. However, grasping the nature of this 'something' is key to understanding how I have come to make use of this delimiting role of story with young people.

There is an important difference between a therapeutic understanding of obliquity, and an artistic storytelling practice. A therapeutic model of practice like Sunderland's which stays within the *metaphor* implies that the therapist may know or at least discover what the participants need to take away from it – a recognition of their anger, say, or a range of strategies for dealing with it. In contrast, to undertake to remain within the *story* - within the zone of narrative, non-propositional thinking – is to accept that I will probably never know what they have taken. As Geoff Mead says of the triangle between storyteller, listener and story: 'All three are in relationship with each other but the crucial relationship between the audience and the story is beyond the storyteller's grasp' (2011:39-40). In most cases I am only partially aware of what the story is 'about' for the listeners. In particular, it is not possible for me to know how a story may intersect with young people's past and future life experiences and thus influence them over time. Benjamin reminds us too that the audience's transformation of the story may continue long after the event: a story 'preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time' (1973:90).

This acceptance of indeterminacy has a further ethical significance, in that it provides a layer of protection for the young people with whom I work, what one young woman at Maple House called *'the confidentiality we need'* (01/06/2015). It becomes participants' own decision whether or not to link the story openly to their own experience, and on the occasions when they do, this 'surprise' can lead the session into new territory. As I explore in Heinemeyer (2017), such a promise not to intrude into personal experiences and thoughts may extend the freedom and range of narrative knowing which then becomes accessible to participants.

4.3.2 Adolescents and safe space: stories as leaky containers at Maple House

Despite these insulating properties, working with adolescents, and most particularly with the sensitive, troubled Maple House residents, has brought to the fore two particular challenges to the idea of story as a delimitor of safe space.

Firstly, the boundaries of a storyworld undoubtedly offer less protection to adolescents than to young children, precisely *because* they know it has a relationship to reality; recall Gersie's anecdote (Chapter 1.4.2.2) of the perceptive young women who immediately saw through her story to the agenda behind it. In a reflective dialogue, the two teachers at Maple House challenged me to consider why many young people at that point in time (July 2015) were choosing *not* to engage in my workshops. Among other reasons, the teachers sensed that while the young people were keen to listen to a story, many were very reluctant to engage in any creative response to it, or generate their own stories in response, because, as I blogged afterwards:

> While the archetypes of myth and folktale might be an other-worldly common language, of great value in the right 'transitional space', they are just too obviously near to autobiography for some of these young people whose lives and emotions are in turmoil. (17/07/2015)

The story, as a container for their perspectives or difficulties, was 'leaky'. The interpersonal intensity of telling and listening, combined with the resonance of the themes of the stories I introduced, may have brought their personal issues *nearer* rather than further away, and made the space feel *less* safe. I continued my post:

> All of these things call into profound question my belief in the 'other room' of the story, that a meeting of minds is possible in that room separate from the conditions and anxieties prevailing in the world next door. (17/07/2015)

Secondly, the concept of safe space may have what Mary Ann Hunter calls 'limiting protectionist connotations' (2008:7) inappropriate both to the content and the practices of a storytelling workshop with the adolescent age group. Both Robert Boost Rom (1998) and Hunter find the term to be uncritically applied in educational and applied theatre contexts respectively. For Boost Rom, it carries unspoken assumptions that individuals' isolation can only be breached by an unconditional acceptance, excluding critical dialogue or challenge; he prefers the alternative of an 'agora' which encompasses these vital elements of learning too. Hunter values broader conceptions of safe space which allow for risk-taking and 'the creative potential of tension' (2008:5), and whose boundaries are permeable.

It is notable that on occasions where I have felt stories to be successful 'containers' for exploring difficult or sensitive material (such as Project J's *The Holding Place*, discussed in section 4.4, where the myth of Dido and Aeneas became a means of approaching the painful experience of refugees), young people have engaged with them not naively, but in a knowing attempt to facilitate their response to issues in the outside world. They have actively chosen to believe in the boundaries we have put up together, and recognised too when it is time to dismantle them.

Such arguments helped me clarify how I should respond to the Maple House teachers' observation that inpatients often did not experience my workshops as safe space and were choosing to disengage. I could not fully agree with the teachers' suggestion that I should simply tell stories to the young people, the element of the workshops that seemed to give them a genuine rest and distraction from their difficulties. I felt that their desire to guide me away from problematic areas led the teachers to over-emphasise the value of magical, enstatic engagement and restrict what the storytelling exchange had the potential to become. I felt too that, while they were right to urge me to establish conditions in which all the young people felt comfortable, I should defend the creative, adventurous projects (such as song-writing and collaborative performances) that a minority had risked entering into with me, and the interactions these had generated with the world outside Maple House.

These differences went to the heart of the conflicted meanings of safe space. As Hunter points out, in performance contexts, it can be conceptualised as a structure or set of rules that in fact enables or even 'invite[s] a greater degree of aesthetic risk' (2008:8). In this view, the disinclination of some Maple House residents to participate in storytelling workshops may have arisen from their lack of familiarity with the 'rules', and therefore, in such a transient population, I needed to mark out more clearly what these were. For example, I could ensure young people knew they could listen to a story or make crafts in silence if they wished, and leave without causing offence. I could also start with less intense, more relaxing activities (hence the story quilt sessions of that summer).

However, I felt that tension and the potential for dynamic engagement could and should not be excluded. As Gersie aptly puts it, 'the evocation of a tolerable level of anxiety' is one of the vehicles that carries a live and compelling storytelling' (1997:9). The face-to-face or I/Thou encounter is inherently risky to both parties. Unlike the setting's mental health professionals, my role was surely to deal with the young people *as if* they were robust and able to engage in dialogue and creative experimentation within a story, to give them many chances to accept the challenge. The ways that individuals and small groups availed of these opportunities over

the coming months gave both me and the teachers a tentative confidence in the nature of the theatre of actions we created. In a later reflective dialogue, one of the teachers revisited the subject of the tensions and anxieties often circulating during storytelling workshops:

> *The social contract that they are invited into sets a high bar – but it is an appropriate interaction, in that it is spoken not written, keeps them in the realm of language - and if they lose that, they will lose their identity – even if week after week they cannot enter it*. (17/12/2015)

In considering this invitation to language, dialogue and its challenges, this teacher and I reflected back on the aforementioned group of young women (with eating disorders, anxiety and depression) who created a raucous 'peasant version' of 'Sleeping Beauty' inspired by Angela Carter's fairytales. The boundaries of the workshop were not delimited by any one story, but by a nervous, giggling sharing of audacious material, and a sense that our sharing of it was no more risky than that of the women who 'first' told these stories in their own cultures. The girls themselves chose which stories to read out. In response to one particularly 'deviant' Inuit story of an old woman and her lonely daughter-in-law (involving a sealbone dildo), one young girl rejoiced quite earnestly in the language we were licensed to use in the room: *'I am really glad someone took the trouble to write that story down'* (02/12/2014). The space was safe enough for subversion; the stories had made clear their rules that today there would be no penalty for challenging authority.

Thus the safe space a storyteller can create with sensitive adolescents may not feel otherworldly or necessarily be demarcated by a 'magical' story, though moments of absorption may be a precious element of it. Rather, the story may help to define the space by acting as an attractor, an 'interrelation of forces', as Hunter paraphrases Henri Lefebvre's definition of space (1991, cited in Hunter 2008:7). Young people might knowingly choose to enter into this nexus, in full knowledge that it is not a territory hermetically sealed off from the world beyond. At its best, the storytelling workshop space may rather resemble that of Hunter's hip-hop project (2008), where many young people lingered on the margins, the stakes felt high, and the challenges and opportunities of the outside world were always present; where the potential was not always clear, but the invitation was always warmly repeated to come and help shape it.

4.4 C) Story as No-Man's-Land

There is a third possibility: to see story not as a route of exploration through real territory, nor a metaphor of real territory, but a map of contested No-Man's-Land, Unknown Parts that can never belong to anyone or be definitively known. This recalls de Certeau's images of stories defining frontiers by crossing them. Story, in this sense, is a map of border country yet to be made by habitation, just as for poet Antonio Machado, 'the road is made by walking' (1912:XXIX). Story can become what de Certeau calls *Spielraum* – a liberating play area within a domain otherwise colonised by authority – precisely by 'mak[ing] room for a void':

> In that way, it opens up clearings; it 'allows' a certain play within a system of defined places. It 'authorizes' the production of an area of free play (*Spielraum*) on a checkerboard that analyses and classifies identities. It makes places habitable. On these grounds, I call such discourse a 'local authority'. (1984:105-6)

Teenagers, operating within a 'checkerboard' of authority and surveillance that is more tangible and comprehensive than that governing most adults, seek out borderlands where they can establish such 'local authorities': bits of land under bridges, landings outside arts workshops (Hunter 2008), social media platforms (Boyd 2014). A certain kind of story, if offered in a certain way, can serve the same purpose. We might equally call on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's category of 'smooth space' – glossed by Shari Popen as ungoverned, 'aesthetic' and 'deterritorialized' (2006:130) – which although not liberatory in itself, holds the potential for new alignments and creations.

The similarity between these images and the previous image of story as a theatre of actions is only superficial. The story here is not a safe space in which to discover, rehearse or experiment with different approaches to reality, but a gap into which tellers and listeners can jump in order to *make* reality. This is exactly how Petra Kuppers (2007) describes the project she undertook as a member of a group of mentally unwell and physically disabled women: using local legend as an artistic *Spielraum* to inscribe their own marginalised identities and experiences onto the 'master narrative' of a national park.

To offer a *Spielraum*, the story canvas must be partly blank, not carved up by predetermined meanings. It must be, in Barthes' (1974) sense, a 'writerly' text, which allows listeners a share in the composition process. Indeed, more than that, it must 'desire' them (1975:6). The question of whether any text or artwork offers such a role to listeners is answered differently by Barthes, Umberto Eco, Rancière, and other authors who have shaped ideas of the 'open work' (Eco 2006) and influenced debates around participatory practice. To gloss their answers

very briefly, Barthes considers some texts to be distinctly more 'writerly' than others, whereas for Rancière, as discussed in Chapter 1.4.4, the intentions and style of the author (*poiesis*) do not determine its reception by the audience (*aesthesis*). While for Eco, the sense made by an audience member of any work of art 'is always modified by his particular and individual perspective' (2006:22), he suggests that those whose structures are 'deliberately based on suggestiveness' (28) make a more irresistible invitation to the audience.

My practice with adolescents reinforces Eco's perspective, indicating that structure does matter to some extent, and that epic stories such as myth and folktale may make this invitation more clearly than many other genres. When I started a workshop at City School by retelling the story of Barbara Smucker's (1978) *Underground to Canada*, a psychologically realistic historical novel about slavery, the young people did little, at least out loud, to interpret the story from their own perspectives; they listened avidly, then moved on to stories of which it reminded them. The story was an invaluable walk to bring them on, but never a *Spielraum.* There was simply no need or room for further amplitude. In contrast, epic stories, if sparsely told, are full of gaps; they are just enough of a structure to hold open the crack for listeners to jump into. The 'girl' who headed into the 'forest' behind her 'home', at the head of this chapter, is making a fulsome invitation. Benjamin expressed precisely and powerfully the value of this initial sparseness:

> There is nothing that commends a story to memory more effectively than that chaste compactness which precludes psychological analysis. And the more natural the process by which the storyteller forgoes psychological shading, the greater becomes the story's claim to a place in the memory of the listener, the more completely is it integrated into his own experience. (1973:91)

Sparseness in telling a myth or folktale is an implied assertion that I am an 'ignorant facilitator' (Lev-Aladgem 2015, paraphrasing Rancière 1991), without a plan for what 'should' occur in the No-Man's-Land of the story (though I refer the reader back to Chapter 3.2.4.2 for an important caveat, that of guiding while in dialogue).

Epic stories are also literally No-Man's-Land, whereas both true and literary stories appear to belong to their teller or writer. The experience of working with youth theatre group Project J led me to believe that teenagers in particular may have a strong respect for such narrative property, which may inhibit them from feeling entitled to explore and interpret stories. The group was intimidated by the ethical and emotional challenges of devising a play in response to the real stories of refugees. Like the teenagers participating in Helen Nicholson's intergenerational oral history project, 'they were concerned to tell the stories as "authentically"

and “faithfully” as they could’ (2005:89). While this aspiration showed a vital respect for the painful experiences to which they wished to do justice, it made it difficult for them to explore them imaginatively. In a blog post (12/11/2015) I suggested reasons for this anxiety about playing ‘fast and loose’ with personal stories, both developmental:

> Do you simply need to live for a certain length of time to develop an understanding that, while experience is not universal, all our stories draw on everyone else's stories?

And generational:

> the requirement to maintain a sophisticated performance of one's self on social media may make young people burningly aware of the value of retaining ownership of their own stories […] For young carers I once worked with, their stories were a form of 'capital' they curated and built upon […] One's story is one's life, perhaps, to a greater extent than in previous generations.

Project J gradually gained in confidence when my collaborator Matt Harper and I offered them a section of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the story of Dido and Aeneas, as a parallel narrative for the project. I first told them the story – as sparsely as possible. Locating some of our devising sessions in the distant storyworld, composed of figures about whose fates we felt entitled to speculate freely, allowed myriad resonances between the current refugee crisis and details of the myth to circulate between us, without having to come to rest in the true story of any real person. In the child Askanios’ offering of his hand-carved wooden boat to Queen Dido, the young people saw reflections of the resourceful play and gift-giving that help people survive in refugee camps; they then felt able to make wide-ranging dramatic explorations of the dynamics of gift-giving in intercultural encounters between refugees and hosts. Harper reflected on the resulting play, *The Holding Place*:

> *People find it easier to explore, dissect and comment on stories which are firmly fixed within the realm of fiction, because it isn't real, because there is a distance between the conversation and the content, there is also no imminent consequence to real life by having this discourse.* (04/04/2016)

The graphic representation of this way of conceiving story as territory – as *Spielraum* or No-Man’s-Land – might be:

Figure 4.3 Story as No-Man's-Land

Background image source: https://uk.pinterest.com/pin/137289488611362596/

This is the metaphor of territory which I have found most powerful, yet challenging, in guiding my practice with adolescents. It is in relation to this metaphor that I wish to argue most strongly for the particular value of epic narrative, by citing as evidence some of the ways young people have written on it during these sojourns in No-Man's-Land. I will then chart one journey I have observed many young people to make there, taking the epic apart and then carefully restoring its intactness. Firstly, however, I must address the case against epic stories.

4.4.1 Writing on the epic

4.4.1.1 The problems with epic

Mikhail Bakhtin makes a heavy charge against epic, namely that its world is 'inaccessible to personal experience and does not permit an individual personal point of view or explanation' (Morris 1994:183). He finds it an 'utterly finished thing' (Bakhtin 1981:17) which offers no further role to the audience.

Bakhtin's view is extreme, an 'epic view of epic' (Vice 1997:82), and as Vice points out,

> His concern is with genre; with “epicness”, not particular epics, and this makes it difficult to argue against his position, if one feels his points are best dealt with at the level of specific counter-examples. (1997:79)

Nonetheless Bakhtin’s position challenges my choice to centre much of my practice on myth and folktale. Any story, after all, can be told sparsely, or otherwise invite interpretation. If I do not subscribe to a belief in the primal status of an ‘Ur-text’, or the healing wisdom of archetypes, why not choose stories of more direct relevance to young people’s lives? Indeed, why focus on my own choice of stories at all? Older children and teenagers like Louis (section 4.2.1), Wilson points out, have their own repertoire; perhaps the storyteller’s role should be to help them become ‘storytellers of their own lives’ (2004:20). His words echo those of the community arts movement’s 1984 Campaign for Cultural Democracy, in what could be read as a direct critique of the less overtly political storytelling movement that was flourishing simultaneously: the demand that people should be ‘taking part in the telling of the story, not having a story told to them’ (Dickson 1995:24). These are questions to which I will return in Chapter 5.3.4.

My own research aim, to allow my practice with young people to reshape the artform of storytelling to their needs and interests, is indeed derived from the goals of cultural democracy. Yet my discussion of performance storytelling (Chapter 1.4.2.1) suggests how the oral heritage could be seen as one of the very ‘citadels’ of the arts world which Owen Kelly (1984) and other writers of the community arts movement wished to breach. Indeed, in my collaborations with theatre practitioners, inheritors of this movement and sympathisers with the dynamic chronotope, I have at times sensed their anxiety that the perceived high status of a myth might over-determine participants’ responses or drown out their voices.

I recognise these concerns as partially justified and genuinely challenging, given the ever-present pull of the magical chronotope to perform storytelling as an act of homage to hallowed cultural traditions. Many young people clearly do not feel entitled to make syncretic use of their own experiences, favourite films, books and other cultural references in making sense of epic stories. In a paper I noted of workshops involving retelling or reversioning of stories that:

> In shyer, inexperienced groups, where trust is yet to build up between the young people and with me, the renditions may stay extremely tight to my version of the story and its moral arc. (Heinemeyer 2014:3)

This caution may partly result from the specific gravitas they perceive in the epic material, or the fact that its unfamiliarity exacerbates their lack of confidence in a workshop setting whose rules are not yet clear.

4.4.1.2 Signalling openness: the epic as invitation

The cautious response may equally, however, be deeply rooted in Western performance traditions modelled on a performer/audience dichotomy. Helen Nicholson cites Peggy Phelan's observation that 'Redesigning the relationship between self and other, subject and object, sound and image, man and woman, spectator and performer, is enormously difficult' (1993:163, cited in Nicholson 2005:81) – and notes that applied theatre's participatory ethos is not enough to make it immune from this.

The challenge therefore becomes one of creating a genuinely dialogic practice based on traditional story: how to signal clearly to young people the status of a story as *Spielraum*, or in Barthes' words, that my story 'desires' the audience (1975:6)? Reason and I note that 'In a non-oral culture, therefore, storytelling may need to do more than simply hold out the potential of participation' (2016:9). Through my research I have explored artistic approaches which explicitly invite young people to populate the epic. My fieldnotes record that Acting Up's lead practitioner spoke for both of us when he prefaced my work with the group with an assurance that:

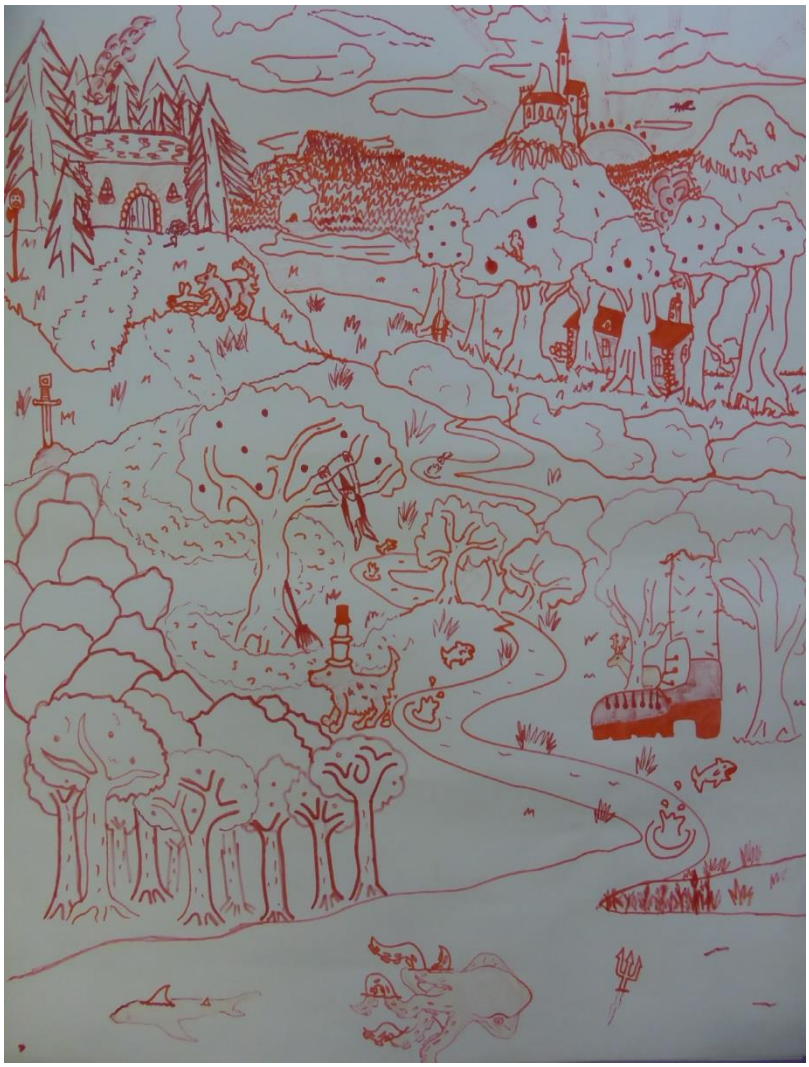
> *We will not be working with this myth 'as it is', 'in a pure form' – it will be mashed and mangled, we will make it contemporary, we will pinch elements of it but create our own myth which may also include elements of Banulah* (our own invented world). (29/01/2014)

On occasion, however, the epic story can make its own invitation. Adolescents I have worked with have made striking and unexpected responses to what Tolkien, writing about fantasy and fairy stories, calls their 'arresting strangeness' (1966:6), and their freedom from the constraints of 'the things that are trite, or (in a bad sense) familiar' (9). That is, these stories often come into a session stripped of their 'cultural fit' (Table 1.1); we need to write this layer onto them. Calvino quotes a Tuscan proverb to make this point: '"The tale is not beautiful if nothing is added to it" – in other words, its value consists in what is woven and rewoven into it' (1956:xxi), while storyteller Shonaleigh Cumbers describes the process as 'rehydrating' a story, something which can be done in infinite ways. As Vygotsky (1967) perceives, we use our existing repertoire of images and experiences to perform this creative task of bricolage. Some stories from practice now illustrate the ways in which this can occur.

4.4.1.3 'Rehydrating the epic' – translating experience

The holiday storytelling activity I led, based on Arthurian legend *The Lady Ragnell* and other myths of forests, was attended by four 11-14-year-old storytelling enthusiasts. Felix and Oliver kept darting out of the 'official' activity to a corner of the room, to work on a drawing. They incorporated elements of all our games and stories into a surreal and fantastical world, which became the setting for our final performance:

Figure 4.4 Felix and Oliver's storyworld



Amongst the obvious fantasy elements drawn from the group's favourite books and films, there were many places in the performance where they were clearly invoking their experiences and opinions of peer group exclusion, stereotypical gender roles and sibling relationships – confirming Bernfeld's finding (cited in Vygotsky 1967:67) that adolescents are particularly prone to infusing their autobiographical experience into their creative fictions. Jenny, for example, developed a riff on the bad table manners and insatiable appetite of the bewitched 'loathly lady' Ragnell, whose moment of liberation could not come until she and

Gawain could defy the gossip and judgement of all the watching ladies at court, and he brought her another wild boar. All these insights were translated into the vocabulary of 'wood and stone', a unifying language of sufficient generality that almost anything could be synthesised and said.

This can be equally true of more charged, purposeful attempts to communicate personal experience and 'write on', or even influence, reality. It is interesting to contrast (as I did in a paper, Heinemeyer 2016) the relative predictability of *The Story of Rob[i/y]n*, a digital story whose raw material was the scarcely fictionalised experiences of Maple House residents of the mental health system, with the richness and amplitude of *Wormwood in the Garden*, a collaborative performance created by some of the same young people. Both were intended to convey their perspectives to adults on public occasions. The latter defamiliarised their perspectives by infusing them into an intricate and peculiar folktale; the arresting images of its complex plot summoned not just their mental health narratives but other areas of their experience and imaginative resources. Rendering these into an otherworldly language liberated us from a fairly two-dimensional plain of familiar narratives already pre-packaged in interpretation, and suggested multiple layers of meaning.

4.4.1.4 The provoking epic

Where the strangeness of an epic story goes beyond unfamiliarity to suggest an utterly different worldview, the invitation becomes more intense: young people may be shocked, provoked or intrigued into wishing to rewrite it. Far from providing counsel, such a story may pose a scenario, an exercise in making sense of perplexity (see blog post, 25/09/2015).

In my second session with a new (and particularly difficult and conflict-ridden) intervention class at City School, I told a version of *Egil's Saga*, the life of a Norse antihero whose fierce temper and awesome strength propelled him around the Viking world and into dreadful trouble. When Egil vengefully killed the child of his enemy King Eric Bloodaxe, there was palpable shock in the room, from which the young people were still reeling after the story ended. It was clear that they were not sure whether to view the saga as history, fiction or something in between; my fieldnotes recorded that they were perplexed by *'the general moral ambiguity of the story, and thus my moral ambiguity as teller'* (08/10/2014). I asked them what they would like to do with the story; they chose to make a poster of it. To try and make sense of Egil's character, one boy represented the moment when the 5-year-old Egil was given a golden bracelet by the king – a rare moment in which he was shown any tenderness – drawing the runes that might have been carved on it. Another drew the *nidstang*, the pole of revenge, which seemed to epitomise the brutality of the culture around Egil. We made Viking

'kennings' in boastful, emphatic tones to express his extreme behaviour, the resentment and life experiences which may have driven him to it, while some pupils remained vehement that these were no excuse.

As in all my practice, the 'benefit' of such work to this small class of mostly troubled 12-year-olds is ultimately indeterminable (see section 4.3.1). However, their teacher's difficulty at this time was in overcoming their individual withdrawal, lack of confidence in their own abilities, lack of interest in their curriculum, and consequent retreat into bickering and mocking each other. While Vygotsky is surely not the most up-to-date analyst of teenage development, his diagnosis of one of the pitfalls of adolescence seemed apt to many in this class:

> a form of stunted or frustrated creativity in which the individual loses the will to complete the cycle of creativity and manifest its products into the external world. (1967:32)

The epic story, with its anachronisms and unfamiliar morality, needed them to resolve, explain, oppose, amplify it; it threw their own discourses into relief and provoked them to action.

4.4.1.5 The epic as grounded aesthetic

In stressing the unfamiliarity of myth and folktale, I am in danger of making inaccurate dichotomies between generations or genres. The popularity of fantasy fiction and film makes myth in particular a form of 'grounded aesthetic' (Willis et al 1990) for some young people; 'epics' such as *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* are founding texts of their own culture, common ground on which they are delighted to meet. As one of the practitioners in the Acting Up youth theatre observed in a reflective dialogue:

> *I think that, for most of the boys, that sort of mythical world is their world, that they inhabit anyway, and that they're very comfortable in it. You wonder how much time they spend in that world, rather than reality.* (09/07/2014)

Indeed, I have encountered young people whose ease with epic material went beyond a familiarity with its content, to a sophisticated command of its artistry. In the holiday storytelling activity above, another young man, Robbie, improvised an introduction to our final performance, featuring silver fish (as in the drawing) 'glinting in the sunlight'. When he repeated this later, leaving out this phrase, the others insisted he reintroduce it: *"Silver fish have to glint in the sunlight!"* This is what Adam Nicolson (2014), in his analysis of Homer and of Balkan epic singers, calls 'composition in telling', improvisation aided by a set of inherited formulas that give fluency and authority to the teller. The group's readiness to call on these

tropes gave them great confidence to weave their own perspectives and subversions into the story of Ragnell.

4.4.2 Meeting the epic – a dialogic journey

The young people's responses highlighted in this section challenge Bakhtin's notion of the closed epic world. Bakhtin perceived epic as immune from the dialogic processes he described as forming all human language, but my experience is that, if offered with open hands to contemporary young people, it is full of the 'openendedness, indecision, indeterminacy' and contextually embedded meaning he found it to lack (Morris 1994:182). Indeed, these responses are classic examples of a process Bakhtin himself identified and called 'novelisation'.

Moreover, Bakhtin's conceptions of 'novelisation' and 'heteroglossia' prove invaluable in articulating one particularly notable way in which I have found teenagers to use the *Spielraum* which I will now go on to discuss: namely, after taking stories apart, they then raise their own experience up towards the epic plane. Bakhtin distinguishes the centrifugal and centripetal forces in language. The following, final section of this chapter moves first 'downwards' and 'outwards' from the epic, as many of my workshops do, before tracing the path many young people have walked back 'inwards' and 'upwards'.

4.4.2.1 Downwards and outwards: novelisation and heteroglossia

Whereas the epic, for Bakhtin, is characterised by an 'absolute epic distance' from everyday life (1981:17), a 'wholeness' and 'poetic harmony' which cannot be breached (5), he argues that the novel introduces 'an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality' (7). It does this by giving voice to multiple 'social languages', discourses belonging to different socioeconomic groups and ideologies, within a single text (Vice 1997), a strategy he calls 'heteroglossia'. A work from another genre, such as epic, can be 'novelised' by introducing multiple voices into it ('dialogising' it), which will satirise and challenge its monologic truth claim:

> The "absolute past" of gods, demigods and heroes is here, in parodies and even more so in travesties, "contemporized": it is brought low, represented on a plane equal with contemporary life, in an everyday environment, in the low language of contemporaneity. (Bakhtin 1981:21)

Novelisation is a form of 'uncrowning' (23). What is more, Bakhtin claims that this has become an inexorable phenomenon: 'In the process of becoming the dominant genre, the novel sparks

the renovation of all other genres, it infects them with its spirit of process and inconclusiveness' (7).

There are clear resonances here with storytelling practice in the dynamic chronotope. Where Calvino sees a cumulative wisdom in the body of folktales available to a storyteller, Zipes (1994, 1995, 2012) rather emphasises the historical baggage of stereotypes, caricatures and oppressive ideologies they often carry. For this reason he proposes a range of strategies to dialogise and uncrown them, such as by presenting canonical and satirical versions alongside each other, or retelling them from the point of view of the 'baddie' (1995). He is effectively introducing heteroglossia, '"aimed sharply and polemically" at official languages' (Bakhtin 1981, cited in Vice 1997:20).

Even if one does not subscribe to Bakhtin's caricatured understanding of the monolithic epic, any storyteller surely needs to heed Zipes' appeal to help young people discern the ideological freight of myth and folktale, which is not dependent on epic distance. Perhaps because of their very sparseness, these cultural texts become loaded anew with cultural (and especially dominant cultural) meanings *in every era;* as Chambers et al express it:

> Fairy tales contain within them the deeply embedded traditional discourses of our culture and play a role in moving these discourses along from generation to generation. (1999:398)

Recent Disney heroines, for example, may not conform to the 'helpless female' stereotype of earlier decades, but may be laden with currently dominant values which young people may need more help to perceive: consumerism, post-feminism or individualism (Kinder 1991).

Thankfully, as Bakhtin himself foresaw, the practice of novelisation has become a reflex, and young people's birthright. As I wrote in a blog post, (25/09/2015), 'both I and my listeners were brought up primarily on the novel, not the story.' Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that they were brought up on the even greater intimacy, intertextuality and rapid appropriation enabled by interactive media, as Kinder observed as early as 1991. So, despite some groups' deference to the apparent authority of the oral heritage (section 4.4.1.1), we have an inbuilt tendency to novelise stories during a workshop, 'giving them psychological interiority and inconclusiveness' (25/09/2015). Young people bring to this process their own cultural references, personal experience and emotional understanding: when Imogen helped create the character of Wormwood in Calvino's folktale**,** what came naturally to her was *'looking to myself, and what I would do or feel*'.

Such starting points are diverse, so novelisation cannot result in unison; it will be heteroglot. Storytelling workshops in the *Spielraum* of a story offer abundant scope for multiple perspectives to meet in dialogue, and for what Bakhtin calls 'the "orchestration" of multiple social voices within an artistic unity' (Morris 1994:19). The disagreements between the 'social languages' of Wormwood and the other characters in the performance – from the authoritarian essentialism of the king, to the social Darwinism of Ali, to the paternalism of the doctors, to Wormwood's own uncompromising and wounded morality - were not ironed out, but brought into closer focus. The resulting dialogue is not a 'democratic' exercise of finding consensus or majority, or simply 'learning to tolerate different views'. As Stern (2015) points out, both those discourses which treat young people as having an undifferentiated collective 'voice', and those which view them as 'separate, floating individuals' (2015:75), deny the value of the 'messy, unpredictable' (2015:87) activity of dialogue between contrasting voices. Whether in facilitating the devising of *Wormwood in the Garden*, or in workshops in City School or Maple House, dialogues in story's *Spielraum* may enable both me and other adults present to resist the temptation to exclude 'unacceptable' views.

Instead, these languages enter into dialogue *with each other*, relativizing each other's contentions, suggesting alternative worldviews or chains of causality; drawing once more on Bakhtinian ideas, 'It is possible to recognise the ideological contours of one social discourse by outlining it against other discourses' (Morris 1994:16). In so doing, young people can gain a degree of 'outsidedness' (Morris 1994) from the social languages they are taught to speak by their experience and culture. That is, a collective retelling of a story can bring these discourses to the surface, allow them all to speak, and hold the tension between them.

4.4.2.2 Upwards and inwards: recrowning the epic

The first generations to topple an idol may be dizzy on parody and polyphony. But what about a generation with few gods left – young people fluent in (or even floundering in) postmodern alternative readings and trained to see themselves as infinitely flexible, syncretising consumers of diverse material, as Kinder (1991) suggests? Such a generation might not need to knock things down to peer closely at them. For them there is less epic distance to cross. They may be capable of a more delicate operation: break the epic open, expose it and rearrange it, and then choose to put it back together, restoring some of its magic.

In a blog post (25/09/2015) I revisited the contrast between the 'novel' as understood by Bakhtin and the 'story' as seen by Benjamin:

> **If,** as Bakhtin rejoices, the **novel** is about polyphony – multiple social languages in wondrous, open-ended, unresolved dialogue ('life's fullness', as Benjamin grants) – the flipside of this, mourned by Benjamin, is that it is about the irredeemably perplexing and ultimately lonely nature of life. […] (25/09/2015)

In contrast, the story, despite all the claims I have made for its potential multiplicity, suggests continuity, unity, the possibility of counsel and mutual comprehensibility. And despite my emphasis on novelisation, an epic story has a sense of dignity, which young people may want to borrow. That is, the story's status can flicker. Confident that it belongs to no-one, young people may be able to work very subtly with this malleability.

Two 16-year-old girls at Maple Lodge, Allie and Jemima, looked delighted when I suggested telling them a version of Andersen's *The Snow Queen*; they both loved the story, and Allie had seen a film of it many times. She offered to tell this version, and her telling gathered a decent-sized group of inpatients to listen. I contributed the Andersen 'original', and a third girl, Ina, told the recent Disney version, *Frozen*. Much discussion ensued as to the feminist qualities of *Frozen* compared to the Andersen tale. All but Allie and Jemima then drifted off and the three of us decided to make a lifesize collage of Gerda using magazines. Elements of all three versions found their way into this, along with new ideas. Allie was very struck by a picture of three roses I had stuck near Gerda's heart, as the film version, unbeknownst to me, had hinged on a brooch of uncannily similar design. We added words to particular images that struck us in the collage and, over the coming weeks, turned these into a song (Jemima being a guitar player) which we performed for other young people and staff. It was drifting and reverent, following Gerda's quest for Kai downriver in the face of cold and hostility.

I had worked with these girls many times and they knew the rules; they felt free to play knowingly in No-Man's-Land, infusing their own perspectives into the story without fearing interpretation or 'therapy'. They were instinctively dialogic storytellers, untroubled by genre boundaries. They took the story carefully apart, then just as carefully recrafted it into a whole folktale again. The collaboration may or may not have been therapeutic but, more importantly, it was a creation that gave dignity to things dear to their hearts.

At a stage of life when they are 'fashioning their own identities' (Hatton 2003:149), young people's crossing of epic distance may be followed by a conscious return. They may be aware that the epic distance is fictitious and breachable, but feel inclined to restore its intactness for their own purposes. My blog post continued that Bakhtin had not foreseen a generation that would reappropriate the gravitas of epic to restore what Milan Kundera (1987) called the '*es muss sein*' (sense of inevitability; "it has to be") of living - although

> At other times, of course, they would restore the multiplicity and perplexity that they know must on some level exist within the most perfectly formed story. They would play with these opposing pulls like a tug of war. (25/09/2015)

To have these options they need to be given the epic with some magic in the first place – not a parody, but something of value and wisdom, a gift, a map of a territory not yet explored. Rather than uncrowning this traditional story, the story can then crown their experience. It achieves this in part because of its pared-down vocabulary; in translation to 'wood and stone', there can be common ground between the longsuffering endurance of Gerda, and the anorexic's or self-harmer's own journey towards self-perfection or recovery – without any insistence that this is the case.

4.5 Conclusion: completing the triangle

This chapter has focused on metaphors - of story as a walk, a theatre of actions, a No-Man's-Land – and in particular on how epic stories may create these kinds of territories for dialogue between storyteller and adolescent listeners. Ultimately, however, no story of any kind has agency of its own, and a metaphor only exists if the parties to it recognise its existence and usefulness. The incidents I have called on as examples therefore show us the practice, often the conscious and knowing practice, of young people using the resource of the stories provided.

The work of the Acting Up! group with just one myth, the 'meaty' story of Llew Llaw Gyffes, underscores that part of this practice is their recognition of the shifting nature of the story-territory. I think it is possible to contend that all three metaphors were in play at different moments during this exploration. The group allowed themselves to be led on a walk to the myth's complex 'higher ground', which for some of them was beyond their cognitive comfort zone. They departed from there in creating their own stories, almost by instinct – such as H's subtle portrayal of betrayal, blame and forgiveness in relationships – rather than retreating to simpler and more habitual territory. When very troubling themes arose in their improvisations, they chose to uphold the metaphor of the story as a safe space, taking the risk of exposing their own emotions and experiences within the container we had erected. Perhaps most significantly, though, the stories the group developed populated the No-Man's-Land of the strange myth. They novelised it by holding the figures of the dependent female Bloedeuedd and the lonely male Llew up for parody (as robots), yet giving them a chance to speak for their desires. There was a quality to all these improvisations that seemed to dignify or 'crown' some

of the humiliating experiences faced by these young people with learning difficulties in education, relationships and family dynamics.

The storyteller's role in this is defined by the dialogic challenges of guiding while in dialogue (section 3.2.4.2) and splendid instinct (section 3.2.3.2): perceiving how a story has come to define the territory, and whether this is its appropriate status. I will suggest in Chapter 6, however, that for storytellers working with contemporary adolescents, an understanding of the dynamics of the story as *Spielraum* (or No-Man's-Land) is particularly vital.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I have examined closely the nature of the 'between' space and what dialogues and creative processes can occur within it. To understand what is *generated* by such creative collaborations requires us to take a step back, to look at the storytelling encounter with adolescents within its institutional and societal context. This is the task of Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DIALOGIC STORYTELLING FORA AND THE TRACES THEY LEAVE

5.1 The need for dialogic fora

According to Deleuze and Guattari, both human subjectivity and social change are less a matter of autonomous, rational decision-making than the product of interactions between individuals and the complex of social and economic forces surrounding them (Lorraine 2011). Consequently, Guattari argues that current global, social and psychological challenges are interdependent, and none can be solved unless we 'enlarge the definition of subjectivity beyond the classical opposition between individual subject and society' (1995:1), allowing each to renew each other symbiotically.

Everyday communication alone seems inadequate to this task. What might be called the 'regenerative needs' of a culture – bridging divides, achieving consensus, reinvigorating social bonds, and enabling transformation in response to changing circumstances - exceed what can be achieved within the narrow bounds of conventional social interchange, where individuals' roles are often quite narrowly defined. They require a different quality and level of communication.

A complementary lens to understand this idea of multiple interrelated levels of communication is found in the political and social theory of Jürgen Habermas. Habermas argues that social groups possess a 'lifeworld', a 'cultural tradition which they use and at the same time renew' (1987:208), which comprises and generates their shared background knowledge, worldviews, social practices and personal identities. In addition, societies institutionalise spaces for more attentive and deliberative public discourse, points 'removed from, but always presupposed in, everyday life' (Delanty 2007:29), within which the hierarchies and roles dividing individuals are, to a limited extent, temporarily 'bracketed' and a diversity of views can come into dialogue (White 1996:160). These fora for deliberative communication exist in a complex relationship to the lifeworld, regenerating and enhancing its justice and health.

The rapidly changing youth experience, and adult difficulties in empathising with it (Press Association 2015, 2016), underline the need for unusually attentive dialogue – not simply to build young people's resilience to the evolving pressures operating on them, but to enable culture to change in response to such conversations. However, the dialogic fora envisaged by Habermas are difficult to create. Kester (2004) critiques both his belief that differences can be bracketed, and his overemphasis on rational argumentation. He draws on feminist

perspectives which have enriched Habermas' model of communicative community with an increased emphasis on empathetic identification. Thus, as a starting-point, we might seek to establish fora within which an unusual level of I/Thou or face-to-face communication between young people and adults is readily achievable.

For Kester, is often artistic practices, with their facility to suspend normal rules, unite a disparate group around an intense experience, and bring individuals' and groups' perceptions to the attention of a culture, which succeed in generating moments of creative confluence of different perspectives. Indeed, in recent decades much art practice has reconfigured itself around this challenge, in what has been called the 'social turn' or the 'relational turn'. Among this work, dialogic artworks overtly addressing social issues, such as Suzanne Lacy's *Oakland Projects* (1991-2001), a series of workshops, debates and media interventions involving urban youth (see Lacy 2010), Kate Collins' encounters between teenagers and students *Don't Talk With Strangers* (2015) (see Collins 2015), or Lorraine Leeson's collaborative public billboard challenging perceptions of Indian culture *West Meets East* (1992) (see Kester 2004), provide platforms from which young people can speak and be heard. Yet their time-limited, orchestrated nature, and their focus on a particular menu of issues to be addressed propositionally, may limit their ability to give expression to the allusions, insights, analogies and realisations arising from young people's everyday lives. Applied theatre projects for disadvantaged young people often suffer, to some extent, from the same constraints.

The possibility I hold out in this chapter is that a participatory practice of storytelling with young people, such as that which I have developed through practice research, can become rooted in a setting and play this deliberative, bracketing role. It can develop its own 'vernacular', an alternative, located language and established practices for free-ranging, creative, narrative dialogue. I will draw on Guattari's thinking to argue that, on the occasions where my practice has generated such a storytelling vernacular, it has demonstrated that this can intervene subtly in the social practices of a setting, creating 'new modalities of subjectivity' (1995:7) within it. However, I will have cause to specify the difficulties of creating deliberative fora within the institutions which condition much of the 21st century youth experience; and further, to argue that my primary affinity, as a storyteller seeking to be of service to adolescents, must be with what *crosses* institutional boundaries. I will also highlight the difference my practice has led me to recognise between Habermas' conception of a dialogic forum available to all, and the *protected* fora available only to defined sub-groups of young people.

As a starting point, it is important to contextualise my work in terms of both 'relational art' and applied practice, and to introduce the overlapping but distinct possibility of a vernacular for storytelling with adolescents.

5.2 Relational, applied and vernacular understandings of the storytelling encounter

Now that participatory art can no longer gesture towards a better future based on political 'grand narratives', argues Nicolas Bourriaud (1998), a 'relational aesthetic' can be discerned which is concerned with human encounter in the present, artistic moment. Bourriaud assembles a body of artists who consider intersubjectivity, conviviality and interaction not as by-products of their art, but as 'a point of departure and as an outcome, in brief, as the main informers of their activity' (44). Works such as Rirkrit Tiravanija's *pad thai* (1990), in which gallery-goers could cook for each other and eat together, constitute 'microtopias', tiny fleeting utopias in which participants repair the social bond between them, by

> learning to inhabit the world in a better way, instead of trying to construct it based on a preconceived idea of historical evolution. Otherwise put, the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real. (Bourriaud 1998:13)

These are perhaps grand claims to make for the relatively banal acts of communal cooking and eating. Yet Reason proposes that

> art offers us access what we might term non-conceptual forms of knowing that go beyond those of the everyday precisely because they are framed, shaped and propelled by an aesthetic quality, which we might describe as a particular way of looking, hearing, feeling or knowing. (2016:7)

The very 'artness' of an artistic experience, says Reason, heightens its affective impact, enabling what John Dewey (1934:19) described as 'active and alert commerce with the world'. Storytelling is – or can be – an artistic experience, often one woven into the fabric of everyday life. Thus the invitation to a face-to-face encounter made by relational artworks, and the regenerative potential Bourriaud claims for them, appeal to me as a way of understanding how the storytelling exchange might leave traces on the lives of participants, in the form of new relationships, realisations and ways of interacting. He seems to be describing, indeed, how art can establish temporary dialogic fora in fluid contemporary society.

5.2.1 The limits of the 'relational moment' and the alternative of vernacular

Yet in Bourriaud's celebration of the fleeting moment, there is a bowing to the inevitable: the increasing impracticability of artistic models based on durability and social embeddedness. The reasons for this relate to the atomisation of advanced-capitalist society, and the institutionalisation of much participatory artmaking. These factors problematise the idea that interchange within a relational artwork can influence or regenerate society. A one-off storytelling session can constitute a 'relational moment' as embraced by Bourriaud; but as a form of community with 'no-strings-attached', it correspondingly promises to leave little behind it. In relation to de Certeau's (1984) visualisation of our lives as constrained within a 'grid of discipline', relieved by the existence of resistant 'local authorities' within the cracks in the system (1984:105-6), a 'relational moment' might flare up and warm people for a while, but can never become a local authority.

It is significant that two other important contributors to recent debates around participatory arts, Kester (2004) and Claire Bishop (2012), have taken issue, in different and opposing ways, with the evanescence of much participatory art. Each suggests mechanisms by which it can still make a significant, enduring mark on the real world, or on public consciousness. For Bishop, its calling is to make work that is provocative enough to be unforgettable, and to document this for those who were not involved in the participatory work itself; for Kester, it is to create situations in which divergent groups can build mutual understanding and negotiate rational solutions to their conflicts.

Both also critique the move from long-term to short-term horizons in the community arts movement, linking this to its loss of political autonomy. Kester laments the shift from socially committed practice situated in particular communities to applied arts projects that

> define their collaborators serially, as socially isolated or disaffected individuals whose collective identification is provided by an ameliorative aesthetic experience administered by the artist. (Kester 2004:150)

I would like to suggest that an aspiration to longevity and autonomy is vital to my practice, if it is to escape this ameliorative, serial mode, and that a model for this aspiration is provided by 'vernaculars' of storytelling associated with traditional storytelling spaces and practices.

The word 'vernacular' is principally defined by the OED as 'a local language of speech', but is often extended to architecture and other locality-specific accretions of artistic practices. A vernacular, then, is an established set of practices that belongs to a community. In relation to storytelling, I use it to define a procedure whereby the usual rules of everyday communication

are altered or suspended to create a shared storytelling space, and the path to this other space is tacitly understood by those present. Ben Haggarty's 'ladder to the moon' (2014) suggests a well-trodden path from anecdote to epic as an archetypal example; another is the habit that developed between some young people and myself for a period at Maple Lodge, of transitioning between the setting's morning meeting and the subsequent storytelling session with the telling of corny jokes. Whatever its specific local form, such a vernacular is a potentially durable resource which a community can draw upon to help meet its 'regenerative needs'.

Vernacular practices, imaginatively located within more stable communities of the past and in some present-day non-Western cultures, have more often been romanticised than described or analysed in detail. Some notably informative exceptions in anthropological and folklore literature (such as Bauman 1986, Millman 1977, van Deusen 2001) build up a picture of storytelling spaces as multi-layered institutions with complex relationships to the societies in which they were embedded. They did not only entertain and transmit knowledge, but provided subtle vehicles for expression of views, experimentation with social roles, and negotiation of interpersonal conflicts, which could not be safely or amply accomplished in everyday communication.

As a storyteller I operate within the same contemporary world of short-term project funding and ephemerality as the artists discussed by Bourriaud. Moreover, the rapid turnover and changing moods of patients at Maple House, in particular, made it unavoidable for me to engage with the potential of the transient relational moment, as I discussed in a blog post (11/03/2015). Yet even at this extreme, I sensed an impulse coded into the artform of storytelling to strive towards the creation of a vernacular; that is, not only stories should be left behind, but the ability to keep telling stories and evolving storytelling practices. Reason and I draw on Zipes (1995) and Wilson (2006) to argue that 'storytelling presents the possibility of the audience becoming the artist, with the listener becoming the teller' (2016:562) and that this invitation may be 'more immediate and more structurally central to the form' (562) than in other artforms. It is probably for this reason that long-term partnerships such as those advocated by Zipes between storytellers and schools remain the ideal for many.

However, precisely in this partnership or visiting role lies the paradox. 'Vernacular', even when stripped of its nostalgic baggage, suggests something belonging to a more-or-less defined community. Yet a storyteller working with young people is often a *guest* in an institution. Regardless of how many sessions I led at Maple House and City School, it was never as a member of staff with a known set of responsibilities, or any explicit entitlement to

influence these settings. Rather, I remained a partially understood figure from outside, corresponding to Benjamin's (1973) itinerant 'sailor' rather than settled 'farmer' type of storyteller – arguably the most common configuration of relationships between storytellers and institutions. How can such an outsider figure hope to intervene by nurturing dialogic fora, or vernaculars within them?

To understand my role and its potential, it becomes necessary to step back and examine the wider landscape of institutions which shape adolescent life.

5.3 The technical, the interpersonal and vernaculars of storytelling

Many teenagers spend significant proportions of their time within relatively rigid institutional structures, where interpersonal relationships with adults are displaced to some extent by frameworks of policies, incentives, sanctions, and technically structured curricula – what Martin Buber (1958) characterised as 'I-It' as opposed to 'I-Thou' interactions (see Chapter 3). To see this clearly, we can look to extreme examples such as the care homes documented by Claire McNeill (in O'Connor and Anderson 2015), where nested paradigms of power masked and justified inhumane, depersonalised and degrading treatment of young people. Rather than love or, indeed, *care* or *home*liness, their development was monitored and policed through bureaucratic systems.

Of course, in most young people's experience of the education, mental health and other systems, technical and authoritarian imperatives are more healthily counterbalanced by caring relationships with teachers, professionals and other adults – and indeed, Buber grants, both elements are essential: 'Without *It* man cannot live' (in Stern 2013:48).

5.3.1 'Golem schools' and protected settings

Discussing the above balance, Stern highlights the consequences of trends within education policy towards greater compliance and control: that where schools overemphasise the technical and knowledge transfer dimensions of learning, they risk squeezing out the possibility of dialogic, surprising knowledge creation in the space between teachers and pupils. Stern applies Buber's spectre of 'golem institutions' ('golem' is translated as 'clods without soul') to schools which go too far in this direction:

> […] golem-schools lack real dialogue and are inhuman: 'he who lives with *It* alone is not a man' (Buber 1958:52). A school that is personal and therefore dialogic does not 'add' the personal to a technical search for truth. The truth, and even more the capitalised Truth, is itself discovered through personal relations. (2013:48)

It is problematic to draw general conclusions as to the changing balance between the interpersonal and the technical in secondary schools, and Stern himself does not do so in the above article; however my long-term practice in City School may be illustrative. Schools like City School, in hard-pressed working-class areas, perhaps feel the sharpest edge of pressures to sideline the interpersonal and dialogic facets of learning, as it is not possible for them to achieve stringent and ever-moving academic and behavioural targets without devoting the vast majority of their energies to them. Such schools are neither pockets of privilege where significant time can be spared for nurturing relationships and developing interests, nor protected settings for those who have proven themselves unable to progress in mainstream settings, and who therefore gain some exemptions from the usual targets. Thus, during the single day of English lessons I observed at City School in January 2015, pupils of all academic levels were continually reminded of their individual target grades, and specific strategies to achieve them in assessments. The necessity to do this was, moreover, a frequent subject of despair in the staffroom, by middle-aged and older teachers in particular.

There appears to be a dramatic contrast between the closely regulated use of time at City School, and Betty Rosen's (1988, 1993) freedom, as an English teacher in an inner-city comprehensive in the 1970s and 80s, to set aside the whole of every Friday afternoon for storytelling sessions. Documenting this is not to argue that City School does not recognise and seek to meet individual special needs, nor to draw any conclusions as to the net effect of changes in the English education system for relatively disadvantaged pupils. It is rather to identify a shrinking of the scope for bracketed, face-to-face dialogue within many schools, and the likelihood that this has consequences for their ability to regenerate a healthy social body.

The same trends, as I argue in a blog post (25/02/2015) and in Chapter 1.4.1, have diminished the role of narrative knowledge and storytelling in mainstream secondary education, as too indirect, capricious and unpredictable a route to demonstrable mastery of the curriculum.

In contrast, in protected educational settings for young people acknowledged to be vulnerable, storytelling and narrative approaches are often readily embraced. It is important to note that such protected settings are increasing in number and significance as a growing minority of young people fail to thrive in mainstream education. By 2015, 20,000 children and young people in the UK were catered for by 'alternative provision' such as pupil referral units (PRUs)

or schools for children with social, emotional and behavioural needs (SEBD schools), and many units have recently seen increases in demand (Quine 2015). In York, for example, the number of pupils attending the Danesgate Community, a pupil referral unit (PRU) for those unable to attend mainstream schools because of emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties or exclusion, has steadily risen from 102 in 2003 to 163 in 2016 (Danesgate Community 2017)[8]. In protected provision, the interdependence of individual young people's learning, development, and wellbeing with the quality of relationships within the setting is not in question (Quine 2015). Perhaps for this reason my practice was seen as part of core learning in Kitchen School and the Maple House school, and to some extent within the small intervention classes at City School (until, in 2015, these were absorbed into mainstream classes, at which point the school no longer felt it could make time for my workshops).

5.3.2 'It' and 'Thou' beyond schooling

Similar tensions exist to some extent within the child and adolescent mental health system (CAMHS) between, on the one hand, protocols and assessment regimes and, on the other, young people's own individual and mutualistic routes to recovery. This was attested by my experience of the everyday life of Maple House, where weight thresholds dictated whether young people with eating disorders could become involved in even sedentary workshops, and rigid medication schedules were allowed to disrupt young people's creative activity in mid-flow. The fact that important exceptions were made (section 5.4.1.1) reflects the setting's protected status and the relative freedom of staff to respond holistically to young people's needs. Yet more broadly, it seems likely that the transfer of CAMHS funds from community-level support to acute medicalised services, as a consequence of budgetary austerity (Barry Wright 2015) is decreasing the opportunities for young people in the early stages of mental ill health to access responsive, person-centred support.

Beyond either the education or mental health systems, we might cite the decline of universal youth clubs (UNISON 2014) in favour of targeted 'interventions' for specific groups (young people in care, young parents, young travellers) as suggesting an overbalancing in favour of institutionalisation, and a hardening of the cultural construction of adolescence and its challenges. Erin Walcon cites a wealth of evidence for a similar trend in participatory arts practice, which she finds increasingly to be 'grounded in problematic deficit models which

[8] During this period the Danesgate Community started to accept a small number of 5-11-year-old pupils; however, as these children were previously considered to be adequately supported by their mainstream primary schools, it seems legitimate to consider the increase as a single figure.

define young people by their degree of "risk" or within particular categories of exclusion, deprivation or need' (2012:59).

Protected provision targeted at certain groups may be internally rich in dialogue. Yet to the extent that it is hermetically sealed off from mainstream education and the wider world, such dialogue cannot contribute to the regeneration of these. Tendencies to place unnecessarily rigid boundaries around the roles of 'pupil', 'patient' or 'at-risk young person', may limit the extent to which adolescents can influence or reshape their institutions, or the broader society beyond. This may also hinder the formation of more fluid coalitions of young people and adults, which might shape more responsive forms of learning, wellbeing, and sociality, such as those I have on occasion glimpsed through my practice and that of others, and will sketch out in subsequent sections. Buber suggests that

> [r]eal education is made possible - but is it also established? - by the realization that youthful spontaneity must not be suppressed but must be allowed to give what it can. (in Stern 2013:53)

In sum, I wish to suggest that at least for some young people, dialogic fora within which they can meet with adults and with each other in open-ended dialogue may be lacking.

5.3.3 The intervening storyteller

Such concerns are, in one sense, beyond the scope of this research, yet they are the water in which it swims. As a visitor in an institution, I must situate my storytelling practice and the conversations it triggers within a conflicted field of institutional goals, defined roles, personal desires and interpersonal relationships. There are choices to make. Where do I align myself, and what do I seek to cut across? Where within an institution can a storytelling practice engender a unique and situated vernacular, a local language for bracketed conversations?

There are two theoretical constructs which suggest a home for such a vernacular within an institution: Habermas' discussion of the lifeworld (1984, 1987), and Bourriaud's use of Marx's conception of the 'interstice', a gap within a system which 'suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within this system' (1998:44). Habermas argues that the impulse of authorities is to take over people's spaces, time and thinking with an 'instrumental rationality', in the name of governance or market forces. This externally imposed rationalisation of the lifeworld has consequences including 'loss of meaning, […] alienation, psychopathologies, breakdowns in tradition, withdrawal of motivation' (McCarthy 1984:xxvii), and the

undermining of fora for deliberative dialogue. Bourriaud too is concerned by the colonisation of social interaction by capitalist and consumerist ideologies and meanings. The two then have divergent ways of conceptualising the locus of resistance to this takeover. For Habermas (1987), the underlying landscape of the 'recalcitrant lifeworld' cuts its own grooves which are not easily ironed out by authority - for example, I suggest, vernaculars of storytelling to which the community can recourse. For Bourriaud, resistant action occurs through the creation of (artistic) microtopias in the small interstices permitted or overlooked by the system, whose significance may grow and radiate outwards. We might picture these as spaces within which a vernacular might be *consciously nurtured*.

I would like to draw on two stories of practice to exemplify these alternative ways of envisaging the locus of a storytelling vernacular, and the role of a visiting storyteller, in adolescent settings. Interestingly, it has been the 'failures' of my practice which have been most revealing of the value of a storytelling vernacular to a given community of young people, and the constraints on establishing one.

5.3.4 A tale of two failures

In two of my practice settings, it proved impossible for me to co-generate a vernacular of participatory storytelling with young people. I contend that in the first, a youth club, there was in fact no failure, but an accurate perception by all concerned that *I was not needed*, because the club was already rich in open-ended, face-to-face communication; the lifeworld was strong. In City School, in contrast, the failure to establish a storytelling club occurred despite a hunger on all sides (young people, teachers, myself) for such a dialogic forum. The lifeworld was suppressed, and even those interstices that opened up within the 'grid of discipline' (de Certeau 1984) were squeezed.

5.3.4.1 Global Youth Club

The youth workers at Global Youth Club made a two-edged invitation to me and a theatre practitioner from York Theatre Royal: they wished to offer the club members opportunities to become involved in storytelling and drama, but past experience had taught them that the young people tended to become 'bored' or resistant when projects monopolised the club nights too often. We had a strong sense that control of the space and time available was shared and negotiated between the youth workers and young people, and that our acceptance would depend on the latter's ongoing interest.

These two resources – space and time – remained subjects of negotiation throughout this short and ultimately abortive project. The 'hum' of activity and chat within the youth centre made clear how valued were the traditional youth club activities of playing pool, football or cards, chatting, making jewellery, hanging out with staff. However, the young people did not reject what we had to offer in itself. Indeed, they were intrigued. They asked me to tell stories and sometimes listened with fascination, participated in 'story dice' games in corners, joined in some of our games with hilarity, and swapped stories of family life in snack breaks. Such creativity and enthusiasm filled us with confidence in the potential of this project; my colleague proposed that they might wish to devise a piece of theatre based on their and our stories, and they showed a cautious interest in this idea.

However, our efforts to mark out a certain area within the centre, a certain time within the session, or a certain sub-group of keen young people, had only fleeting success. Each was an attempt to 'close off' a domain within which we could develop a sense of commitment to the artistic work we were proposing – and therefore an attempt to colonise their fluid social space, however benignly, by introducing internal barriers, rules and goals. Club members expressed their individual identities, interests and relationships, and their shared culture, by charting and improvising their own routes through club nights; the role of 'workshop participant', however carefully negotiated with them, was incompatible with this vital freedom.

Their lifeworld proved indeed to be 'recalcitrant': during our fourth and fifth sessions, the majority of the young people showed their resistance to our agenda through chaotic behaviour or refusal to participate, and so we agreed with them and the youth workers to bring the project to a close.

This project underlined, for me, that storytelling can operate at any position along Wilson's (1997) spectrum from informal conversation to staged performance. Adults were already helpfully available when required at Global Youth Club, as sounding boards, conversation partners and providers of understated wisdom gleaned from experience. The setting clearly possessed, if not a vernacular of storytelling *per se*, established communicative practices which fulfilled a similar function. Had I been content to be absorbed into the shifting hum of young people's own informal narrative practices, as a 'storyteller in the corner', I think they would have welcomed my stories, ideas and listening presence in the long term, as they valued those of their youth workers. However, partnering storytelling with drama calls for a higher bar of commitment; workshops are planned and 'scaffolded', requiring young people to commit to the whole experience. By making my stories a hook to lure them into structured drama workshops, my colleague and I were not strengthening but threatening their lifeworld.

5.3.4.2 Liars' Lunch

In contrast, the origin of the Liars' Lunch club at City School was my growing perception, through long-term practice and many conversations with pupils and teachers, that there was a potential niche in school life which a storytelling club could fill. Supportive teachers corroborated this impression of an unmet need; one wrote that storytelling provided a *'creative spark'* to animate a largely *'methodical'* curriculum, and another saw the opportunity to fulfil pupils' social needs. (The range of social spaces available to pupils in their lunch break was limited to the free-for-all of the playground, and a 'safe' classroom for 'vulnerable' young people at risk of bullying, who were referred there by their teachers.) We had identified a possible interstice within the school. It was my hope that within this gap, I could work with young people and supporting teachers to co-develop, consciously and responsively, a vernacular of storytelling.

Yet there was a divergence between the teachers' visions of the limits on this interstice, and mine, which I would like to discuss in terms of Owen Kelly's distinction between two 'self-directed and internally controlled activities of living communities […]: the *protective* and the *expansive*' (1984:51). Conscious of the deep social divides within the school, the teachers envisaged the club as providing a creative lunchtime alternative for the 'vulnerable' young people, and perhaps enabling them to bond with a small number of other storytelling enthusiasts. Indeed, they made some ongoing efforts to restrict attendance to these groups alone. Establishing the club was, for them, a protective act of community – in Kelly's words, their concern was to

> protect, nourish and maintain those minimum social meanings and resources without which community would be impossible […] (e.g.) the establishment and maintenance of basic communal facilities. (51)

I was not surprised, however, to see a more diverse range of young people seeking to attend the club. It soon became obvious that there were indeed clear lines between different 'tribes' of young people, that each had different desires for the club, and was importing different social practices into it. While I had no desire to close the club to a defined membership, in order for it to function creatively and socially these lines needed to be eroded, if only for the half-hour duration of our club meeting.

We did, indeed, make steps towards establishing our own *shared* vernacular. I recognised and encouraged the areas of overlap between the affinities of the vulnerable 'old guard' and the 'naughty but needy' tribe: for the gothic, for various surreal variations on the chain story, and

for a style of storytelling based on practices of 'interrupting'. I felt that the improving relationships and creative ideas the club members were generating among themselves might even set off small ripples through the social life of the school. In this optimism I echoed Kelly's second category of acts of community:

> Expansive acts, on the other hand, will aim to encourage and expand social meanings wherever they are strong. They will move beyond the determinist fallacy of seeing people *solely* as the products of a given, and pre-existing, culture, and take into account their role as co-authors of that culture. (51)

Kelly's distinction hints at the productive relationship between the small events that can occur within social interstices, and the regeneration of a wider system. He envisages a conscious and sustained effort by a group, facilitated at least initially by an artist, to nurture a nucleus of autonomous shared practices, meanings and resources, which can then circulate and compete with the meanings imposed by authority or the market. It is this role which I believe Liars' Lunch, had it thrived, could have fulfilled in a small way within the social life of the school, by creating a vernacular that had not existed before. This alternative channel for communication might have softened the lines drawn between pupils and staff, 'vulnerable' and 'naughty' young people, the curriculum and the social life of the school.

Yet this glimpse of potentiality proved brief, despite a desire from pupils, teachers and myself for Liars' Lunch to succeed. Ironically, the club's effort to create a vibrant, bullying-free forum for fun, dialogue and creativity within the school fell foul of the very measures the school had put in place to limit bullying: a very short lunchbreak, further shortened by frequent on-the-spot detentions. It was not possible for pupils to become regular attenders, or for us to use the full half-hour. More broadly, within a system in which teachers' overwhelming driver was to improve exam results, there was no spare time or capacity for them to support project ideas generated by the club members, and each in turn fizzled out, discouraging the group. The interstice was simply too small to protect, let alone expand from.

5.3.5 Why should adolescents need a storyteller?

Whether a vernacular of storytelling is located within a pre-existing lifeworld (as at Global Youth Club), or nurtured within an interstice (as with Liars' Lunch), has a bearing on a question already hinted at in Chapter 4.4.1.1: 'Why should adolescents need a storyteller?' Is the widely-perceived incompatibility between teenagers and traditional storytelling not, in fact, an indication that their own narrative practices are sufficient to them? My emphasis on

'vernacular' only underlines the paradox. Do teenagers not, as Shuman (1986) and Wilson (1997, 2004) suggest, have their own established repertoire and modes of telling, and is this oral heritage not a critical part of the texture of their lifeworld? Is it simply a missionary impulse that leads me to impose my practice on them? Wilson recognises this challenge to the storyteller's *raison d'etre* when he asks himself:

> If these pupils were active, and indeed proficient, storytellers in their own right, then what was it I was hoping to achieve by my work, and what could I do to encourage and enable the teenagers I was working with, in the short space of time I had available to me, to become, what Zipes calls, 'storytellers of their own lives'? (2004:20)

Wilson locates his role as one of reinforcing the lifeworld, and its already existing vernacular. While my failure at Global Youth Club corroborated his experience, my other failure established, ironically, the dialogue-impoverished conditions where there *is* a 'need' for a storyteller. The youth club, a protected setting, was rich in dialogic opportunities. It was precisely City School, which did not have the luxury of allowing a vernacular of storytelling to develop and flourish, and much less of allowing the pupils to reshape school life, which would have benefited from the regenerative leaven of a storytelling club or similar forum. In these circumstances, it may be more helpful to envisage the storyteller's role as 'seeding' storytelling practices within an interstice in the regime. An aesthetic or practice arising solely from the lifeworld of a group of young people is not inherently more valuable than one developed among them with the input or facilitation of caring adults. Both are endangered in some settings; both are valuable, and as Wilson's question implies, each may nourish the other.

5.4 Storytelling and resingularisation of institutions

It could, however, be legitimately argued that there are many artistic and other practices which could have created the dialogic forum that seemed necessary at City School, as demonstrated by the fact that everyday youth work practice appeared to supplant it at Global Youth Club. Is it possible to be more specific about what established *storytelling* practices contribute to a setting and the young people within it? This closer examination requires me to call on Guattari's examination of the interlinkages between the individual's psyche and creativity and the health of the social body of which they are part.

5.4.1 Resingularisation: causing institutional walls to flicker?

In Guattari's clinic at La Borde, he was less interested in healing patients' symptoms than in exposing them to new activities, relationships and possibilities. Like Buber, he found self-renewal to originate in the space 'between' people (or between people and environments). He aimed for his patients' 'resingularisation', a word which like most of Guattari's terminology resists straightforward definition, but which refers to an escape from subjectivities imposed by capitalist economic and social relations, or colonised by instrumental objectives. The patient role can be understood as just such a constrained subjectivity. He wished his patients, like artists (and often through the arts), to generate for themselves other roles and ways of interacting with others, which were healthily and creatively their own:

> The important thing here is not only the confrontation with a new material of expression, but the constitution of complexes of subjectivation: multiple exchanges between individual-group-machine. These complexes actually offer people diverse possibilities for recomposing their essential corporeality, to get out of their repetitive impasses and, in a certain way, to resingularise themselves….One creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist creates new forms from the palette. (1995:7)

Stories, with both their otherworldly and their highly personal facets, and with their tendency to initiate unusual conversations (Parfitt 2014), may be naturally suited to facilitate 'complexes of subjectivation'. My fieldnotes during the devising process of *Wormwood in the Garden* circle around the sense of multiple possibilities in the territory created by our exploration of the storyworld:

> *There is a network of relationships between the two young people, me, the story, the garden, the puppets and props, Imogen's poetry, the city, Maple House, the mental health system in general.* (01/06/2015)

In *The Three Ecologies* (2000), Guattari lays out the interdependencies between the ecologies of the natural environment, the social body and the individual psyche. His 'ecosophical' philosophy contends that, if we are to reverse social divisions, inequality and ecological destruction, we need to find ways of resingularizing both individual and collective subjectivities at every level. Thus, for example, the social role and curriculum of the pupils in City School's intervention classes somewhat constrains their subjectivity to that of low achievers in an unequal society who, if they are compliant, may find a place in that society, but may not critique its injustices or help renew it. This subjectivity seemed to stretch during the incident

recounted briefly in Chapter 3.2.4.2, where one of these classes, through storytelling (mine and theirs) and debate, came to a mature understanding of the complex forces entrapping rainforest-dwelling indigenous people, and those seeking to support them. My fieldnotes record that

> *They are full of questions about this […] I feel strangely like a university lecturer, pointing the pupils to further references, not a storyteller in an 'intervention' class. (20/11/2014)*

The pupils' intellectual, critical and emotional engagement in this issue was so far in excess of what the curriculum expected of these particular pupils, that it felt virtually transgressive. Yet any cognitive dissonance this may have created felt like a price worth paying for the sense of a unique exchange among skilled and curious storytellers with a stake in the wider world.

Such incidents in the intervention classes were many, but they remained sealed within the walls of one classroom. Guattari, however, wishes the aesthetic process of resingularisation to influence institutions at every level, abolishing the rigidity of their roles and structures, and making each one and each relationship within it a unique and singular thing:

> Something is detached and starts to work for itself, just as it can work for you if you can 'agglomerate' yourself to such a process. Such requestioning concerns every institutional domain, for example, the school. How do you make a class operate like a work of art? What are the possible paths to its singularisation, the source of a "purchase on existence" for the children who compose it? (1995:132-3)

Guattari's proposal that 'something is detached' (he elsewhere describes this 'something' as a 'mutant nucleus of subjectivation' (131)) strongly suggests to me the semi-autonomous life of a story, or an emergent storytelling vernacular, within a group. Stories told, retold and transformed become unique possessions of individuals and groups, reference points for realisations made or moments when perceptions and relationships collectively shifted (as for example the intervention class for whom the story *Mr Imagination* became totemic of their group identity, or the practice of interrupting which became an asset of the Liars' Lunch group). Importantly, such a process can be speeded by the 'everyday' nature of storytelling, and its ability to move between multiple levels of formality and gravitas. Thus, many groups of young people rapidly grasp the marginal, fluid, potentially influential role of the storyteller, needing only a small amount of facilitation, modelling, and transparency on my part, in order to develop their own vernacular version of it (see Chapter 3.2.2.1).

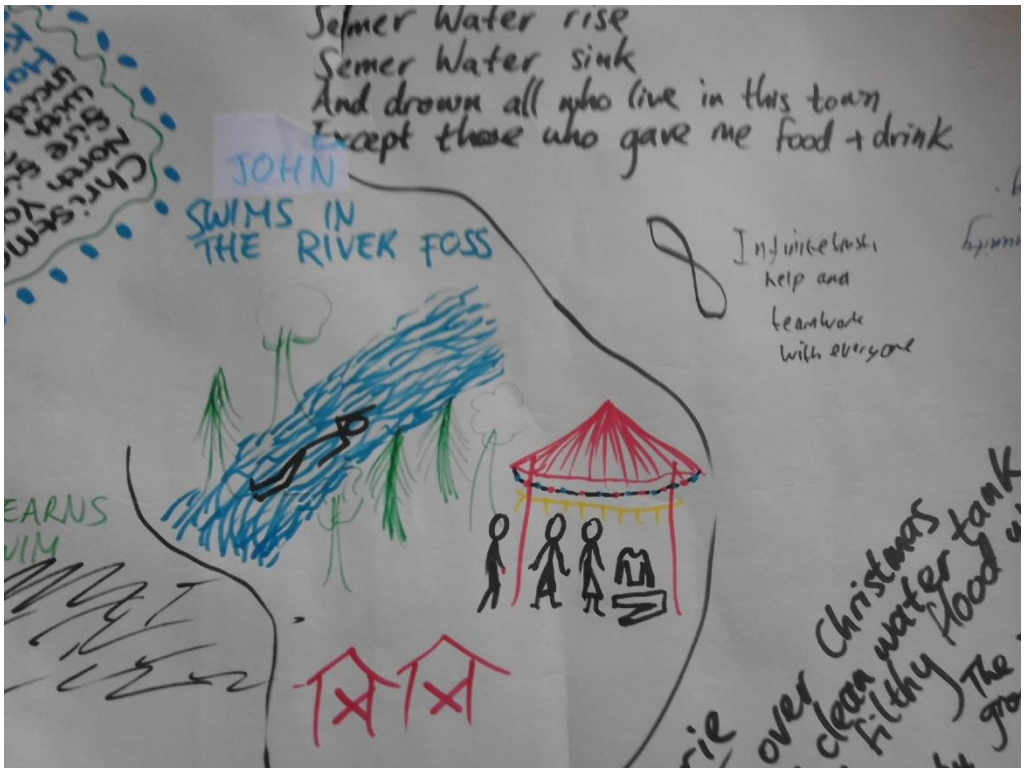
For these reasons, one role of storyteller may be rapidly to catalyse this process of resingularisation such that the metaphorical 'walls' of the institution – its stated purposes and roles - are felt to 'flicker' for a moment, or perhaps even to be regularly called into question. In particular, dialogic storytelling fora may allow for usual roles to be transcended, or for new and unexpected shared meanings to be coined, as the following incident at Maple House exemplifies.

5.4.1.1 Transcending roles and coining meanings: John's 'Legend of Swimming'

I was working with a small group at Maple House on flood legends, incorporating media coverage of the recent Christmas 2015 floods in York into a collage. New inpatient John was particularly struck by the story of one elderly man for whom the flooding had been a boon, enabling him to use the insurance money to carry out the disability adaptations he had been unable to afford otherwise. This echoed, for John, the message of a 'positive newspaper' he had been writing in his free time to convince other inpatients of the silver linings in life (many were opting out of storytelling and other activities at that time; indeed the staff had considered making participation in storytelling compulsory, as it was for group therapy sessions – a move I resisted.)

I asked the group if they had any personal memories of 'water' which they wanted to add to the collage, and John laughed at how apposite the question was. He had absconded in distress from the setting during one of his first nights there and run away through the woods in the rain, swum across a river and ended up, freezing, wounded and bedraggled, in a housing estate, where he had gone from door to door looking for someone to help him. He was eventually invited in by two women who helped him get dry and bandaged and returned him to the setting, and now wished he could meet and thank them. Not only had they helped him practically, the experience had suggested to him the idea of what he called an 'infinite circle of trust': *'The ideal thing would be if everyone trusted each other, a circle of trust, then everything would work brilliantly in life'* (14/01/2016).

Figure 5.1 My sketches and notes on John's Legend of Swimming



A week later, after gazing at the cartoons I had made in response to his and others' stories, he and another boy were keen to perform their own stories to a group of non-participating young people, and we created a 'stage set' for them. John's commanding and vivid retelling incorporated striking parallels with the legend of 'Semerwater' and other stories I had told him, which seemed to 'crown' and mythologise his personal experience (as discussed in Chapter 4.4.2.2). It had become a legend.

The rest of the group was gripped and, when I asked whether he would like to use the story as the starting point for a song, encouraged him. He was, it turned out, a keen lyricist, and another young man in the setting admitted to playing the guitar. John's enthusiasm was infectious and soon almost all the inpatients were involved, playing instruments and singing the repeating chorus in his song, which featured his message of 'the circle of trust'. They performed it as a group for all the staff and discussed sending it in to the local radio station, which was running a series on mutual aid during the post-flooding period.

Maple House staff could easily have objected to such celebration of what was essentially miscreant behaviour, symptomatic of John's illness, a security breach, and an unsettled atmosphere. They could also have prioritised protocols which discouraged young people from

discussing their own clinical history publicly. Instead, they allowed themselves to be surprised. They endorsed John's leadership, as well as what D. Stephenson-Bond (1993) would call his 'personal myth', and the insights it had to offer to the other young people, the setting, and potentially also to local people.

John's 'legend of swimming' suggests how understanding storytelling as playing a resingularising role helps to escape the binary between a 'therapeutic' and an 'artistic' storytelling practice. Neither I nor, I think, John, perceived his telling of his traumatic experience to be cathartic or necessary for him personally. Rather, he and his story brought other young people back into an optimistic and voluntary engagement with what the setting had to offer – something which both the staff's therapeutic goal of increasing participation in groups, and my initial, propositional challenge to 'explore the theme of flooding', had failed to achieve. Something – a unique communal legend – had indeed detached itself and started to work for us all over the coming weeks (although, this being Maple House, turnover of young people meant that as soon as it started to have the texture of a vernacular practice, it dissipated).

An interesting parallel on a larger scale is provided by Rowe (2015), who evidences the beneficial impact on a university and its students of hosting learning programmes for users of the mental health system. Rejecting a therapeutic model of practice, the 'Converge' programme defines learning as a multi-directional process; the university's students often find themselves in an apprentice role to more experienced Converge members. At organisational level, the presence of Converge also suggests an alternative identity for the university, that of the 'healing campus'. From a Guattarian perspective, this alternative identity might be said to renew and resingularise the university, by providing an alternative driver to market-imposed logics of competition, and blurring the boundaries between the roles of community member, staff, and student. So too, a dialogic mode of storytelling, open to surprise and leadership by young people, entails an open-mindedness as to what the exchange is 'for' and who might bring what to it, and a secret hope that it might cause the walls of the institution to flicker.

However, perhaps aiming for such a flickering is still to submit too readily to the limits of working within institutional structures. I have already stated that *outsiderliness* is a vital aspect of the typical storyteller's role. In the final section of this chapter I wish to explore the affinity of this peripatetic existence with the development of collaborative or mentoring relationships with young people, that could exist outside the institutions where I met them.

5.5 Taking the lid off applied practice: mentoring relationships

These collaborative or mentoring interactions in my practice research, though few in number, perhaps represent the logical conclusion, or epitome, of the resingularising role I propose for storytellers working with adolescents. Any collaboration that occurs within a setting must to some extent engage with young people as pupils, patients, or members. A mentorship, in contrast, can escape (to some extent) these roles, and thus be defined by the singular needs, interests or talents of the whole young person (or group of young people) and their particular interaction with an equally singular individual storyteller. In speaking of mentorship I am not referring to the institutionally defined, effect-oriented mentorship structures which can be found in some of the extensive literature on mentoring in youth work and education (see for example Hall 2003, Dubois 2012). Rather I refer to an ongoing interpersonal exchange by which, quite simply, 'the more experienced shall care for and train the less experienced, in a non-judgmental manner' (Gulam and Zulfiqar 1998, cited in Hall 2003:3), as for example in peer support, or in artistic mentoring relationships within the theatre.

Proposing that de-institutionalised collaborations and relationships might be the ultimate aspiration of a storyteller with young people involves, to some extent, a critique of a paradigm which remains somewhat dominant within applied theatre. This is characterised, according to Thompson (2011), by:

- a concern with 'effect' over 'affect' (that is, projects often aim for a particular therapeutic, behavioural or educational impact on participants);
- an emphasis on the 'strategic' over the 'tactical' (projects sometimes make unachievable promises to 'give participants a voice' and address injustices overtly);
- a model, borrowed from psychotherapeutic understandings of post-traumatic stress disorder, of achieving closure through telling one's story.

Many of the initiatives reported at *Storyknowing* (see Chapter 1.4.3) map onto this pattern, some defining themselves as 'applied storytelling projects'. I have occasionally led similar projects myself throughout my career and may do so again. Such work may be an effective way of addressing pressing difficulties their participants themselves wish to tackle. Moreover the community of applied theatre and storytelling practitioners is increasingly aware of the need for a nuanced and critical understanding of 'effect', to the extent that O'Connor and Anderson can speculate:

> Perhaps we have come far enough in applied theatre that we can finally reject the false binary of aesthetic versus instrumentalism, and recognize that both are totally and completely intertwined. (2015:34)

I remain interested, however, in the limits, or more precisely the 'lid', of the applied paradigm. Where projects are time-limited, located within an institution or aimed at a target group, and directed towards particular outputs or outcomes, what possibilities are barred off? What cap does this model place on the role of participant; what alternative 'higher' roles does it prevent participants from trying out? Can anything durable – such as a vernacular - really detach itself and take on an autonomous life as a consequence of these projects? This lid is in place, in both obvious and subtle ways, across much of applied practice, and it is related, as Kester identifies, to practitioners'

> privileged relationship to the various institutions charged with public management of 'communities' such as the homeless and the incarcerated. (2004:148)

The serial relationships Kester observes between practitioners and groups of participants limit the development of ongoing interactions which might lead to the latter becoming performers, authors, critics, researchers, or storytellers in their own right. Interestingly, this lid is relatively absent in the theatre *performance* world, where mentoring relationships which aspire towards mutuality are one of the bedrocks of personal development and career progression. York Theatre Royal for example employs former youth theatre members as volunteers and practitioners, offers work experience and performance opportunities to those who might otherwise struggle to find them, and operates a 'Takeover' scheme for young people to gain experience in all aspects of theatre-making and production. It was when my practice developed in the direction of mentorship that it dovetailed most fully with the theatre's own *raison d'etre* and *modus operandi*, bringing new young talent, perspectives and energy into the theatre, and opening up its opportunities to them.

To lift the lid, it is necessary to at least *remain committed to the possibility* for interested young people to develop their engagement in storytelling beyond institutional boundaries, roles or timescales, and this is where I see the potential of mentorship.

In my own case, as a storyteller mentoring teenagers interested in storytelling, creative collaboration on a performance has replaced institutional roles and priorities as the key container for the relationship. The devising of *Wormwood in the Garden* was one such process which 'took off' from my work within Maple House and evolved its own shape. The young people involved, particularly poet and blogger Imogen Godwin, took on a variety of creative

and critical roles in this process, which did not end at the point of performance, but went on to catalyse joint research and dissemination. It also set the pattern for an ongoing guiding and facilitating role for me in Imogen's career development as a storyteller, artist and spoken word performer. Similar but shorter-term mentoring relationships came to exist between me and two boys from City School, a former youth theatre member, the Indian Dancers of TICO, and another patient at Maple House.

Vital to this process – to my ability to be a useful mentor – was a readiness to be helpfully present *as a storyteller:* an artist, with a concern to co-develop good storytelling performance with the mentee(s), rather than a workshop facilitator. The latter often needs to err on the side of caution, celebrating all offers forthcoming in a tentative group; as Sean Cubitt said of community art, 'we are always reluctant to tear down the fragile unity of the self that is being expressed' (cited in Bishop 2012:189). In contrast, in my mentoring relationships with young people, the growing sense of an artistic common ground and the engagement with individual characters and abilities brought a greater robustness, bravery, and tolerance for dissensus. My fieldnotes during the *Wormwood* devising process question:

> *What am I in this, for example? Fallible, opinionated, convinceable, inexpert, playful, open for questioning, at their service, reliable, responsive, nonjudgmental, erring, caring, but not highly nurturing. Allowing them to discern my own fixations and contrasts as artistic preferences, allowing them to contrast themselves against me.* (03/06/2015)

5.5.1 Storyteller as friend?

The idiosyncrasy of the above description – the fact that I feel I was in some sense *being myself* - suggests that it is worth considering the overlap between mentorship and forms of friendship. This idea was posed by my collaborator Shrikant Subramaniam of Kala Sangam South Asian Arts in relation to my work with his group of young Indian Dancers. At the end of my first discussion with the girls, Shrikant told them he had wanted to introduce me to them '*so they would have a storyteller as a friend.'* I later questioned Shrikant about his choice of words, which seemed to suggest an unusual understanding of friendship. He explained it in terms of the limitation of his own role as their dancing teacher, despite his awareness of the challenges the girls faced in their lives and his desire to be a 'friend' to them:

> *In the traditional pedagogy of Bharatanatyam the teacher is seen as a guru … he keeps a distance from the students as he is seen to be the supreme master who has acquired*

> *all the wisdom of the artform. But I don't believe in that system. I believe in mutual sharing and sustaining a respect of knowledge through that process. I guess, to harness and abstract the best in a student a teacher needs to become a student again.*
>
> *Understandably, the art of storytelling lends itself to that bond of sharing and thereby leading to a marvellous camaraderie. I felt they could have that relationship with you, perhaps teach you some BN* (Indian Dance) *movements and you could teach them some skills of voicing words, wit and wisdom through an imagined and choreographed patterns of movement. In that mutual process of sharing emerges a new bond of friendship…*

Shrikant's emphasis on reciprocity and mutual learning suggested the possibility of a resingularisation of my storytelling practice as much as the girls' dance practice.

Storytellers might feel a resistance to the possibility of friendship with young people, in that it implies lax professional boundaries. Yet Shrikant's articulation suggests a challenge to the dominant understandings of friendship which might rehabilitate it as a model for practice. To understand this dominant model and the possible alternatives, it is helpful to step back to Aristotle's view of friendship, as critiqued by Ray Pahl and Jacques Derrida.

5.5.2 Equality, singularity and 'quoracy'

For Aristotle, the classic form of friendship was a private, fraternal bond of virtue between two men of equal social status and power. Derrida (1997) contends that our ideas of citizenship and democracy are still modelled on this view, limiting our ability to envision other forms of friendships, and to extend hospitality and friendship beyond the defined group of those who share our status. He is, in fact, concerned with how citizenship obligations might transcend the borders of the nation-state, but his proposals might be applied to other societal demarcations of status, such as adulthood.

The relevance to storytelling practice of Derrida's assertion, namely that democratic equality must be balanced with individual singularity, is illuminated by Owen Kelly's discussion of the community arts movement. This movement was weakened, Kelly argues, when it started to internalise the Arts Council's expectation that 'effective' community arts should be sufficiently representative of a large cross-section of specific deprived communities. Consequently, engagement by interested groups and individuals may be vital and original, and nonetheless criticised for developing relationships only between a select few – for never being 'quorate'.

The tension between quoracy (or accessibility), and freedom to participate or resist, is one I have repeatedly grappled with through my practice, particularly at Maple House, as is visible in the story of John (above) and in Chapter 4.3.2. For Kelly, however, 'what proportion of the community is participating?' is the wrong question; we should rather ask

> what community a group is *participating* in bringing into being…The work ceases to be an imagined microcosm of a larger, and always absent, whole, and becomes what it really is: a group of people engaged in a process of collective creativity. (51)

Of course, the storyteller should wish to remain at the service of a broad group of young people, if not of society in general. However, work that is overly constrained by a quest for equality and quoracy – demonstrably including every participant – will likely retain the lid that dictates that they must *remain* participants. In contrast, in my work with John and his friend, our enthusiastic pressing on despite the low participation of other young people gave him the opportunity to emerge as an artist and leader in his own right and, as it happened, help to bring a community temporarily into being.

Therefore, Derrida's questioning of the division between the public domain of rights and needs, and the private domain of singular personal relations, seems likewise to pose mentorship or friendship as a means to lift the lid on the participant role. David Wills, analysing Derrida's thinking, suggests that

> Perhaps, in fact, the very question of friendship is a problematics of the relation between public and private space, that whereas amorous and familial relations are conceived of as private, and economic and political as public, friendship functions across the border separating private from public. (Wills 2005:2)

This possibility seems to be supported by sociologist Ray Pahl's (2000) contention that ever more diverse forms of friendship have become more central to people's wellbeing, development and identity.

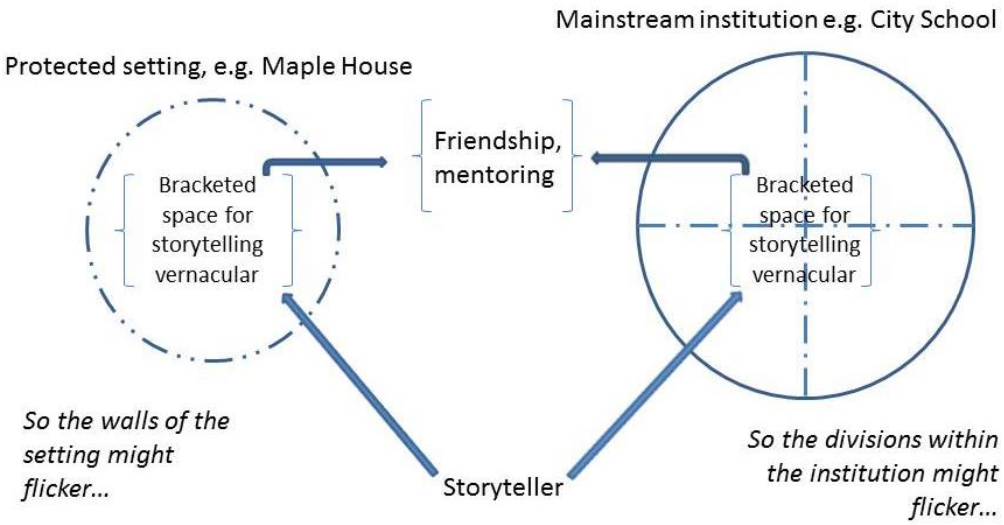
Certainly, an Aristotelian friendship would not be possible between a storyteller and a young person, given the assymetries of their status and responsibilities at the outset. Its implication of intimacy (Lynch 2002) would, indeed, transgress wise ethical boundaries which a storyteller working with young people in any circumstances should uphold. However, the role of 'storyteller-as-friend', enriched by concepts of mentorship, fellowship and 'hospitality' (Higgins 2012) may be apposite. Pahl suggests that we increasingly see our friends, including our mentors, as our 'personal convoy', helping to support and conduct us through life. Not all these friendships need start from a position of equality, though they may develop towards it.

A storyteller-as-friend needs to retain a finely-tuned awareness of professional boundaries, however these are not defined by institutional structures but by the needs of the young person and the opportunities that arise for them to develop and contribute to society. There is an interesting echo here of recent 'ecosystemic' thinking on child and adolescent mental health, seeking to move beyond a reliance on clinical interventions and professional roles to a nurturing of the informal support systems available to an individual young person, from the local priest to the next door neighbour (Wright 2015).

5.6 Conclusion: Navigating the role of sailor-storyteller

Thus I would like to propose, tentatively, that the role of storyteller-as-friend may prove more valuable than that of applied practitioner in guiding a storyteller seeking to make herself available to adolescents. Friendship, vitally, implies the potential for long-term interaction, and thus for the detachment or development of something – a vernacular, a shared endeavour, ongoing obligations - that can endure beyond the relational moment, or the ten-week project. Figure 5.2 attempts a conceptual mapping of the resingularising role I propose for my practice both within settings or institutions, and beyond them.

Figure 5.2 Resingularisation and the sailor-storyteller



Clearly, there are practical limitations on one person's ability to maintain mentoring relationships, and many young people may have no interest in them, just as they may not wish to respond to a particular story – once more, the values of indeterminacy and individual

freedom coded into storytelling dictate the forms practice should take. I am also very conscious that PhD funding has allowed me to operate with longer time horizons and decouple my practice from the need to earn money; such freedom is rare. Yet it has enabled me to recognise that an openness to the *possibility* of friendship with interested groups or individuals may alter my disposition as a facilitator, and thus the quality of everything that takes place in group-based storytelling encounters within institutions. Thus, no friendship went on to develop between John and me – but by choosing to work idiosyncratically with him in response to his surprising ideas, rather than including everyone in the setting as in a compulsory therapeutic group, I was perhaps stating my disposition towards friendship.

Where rigidly defined 'systems' cannot meet a young person in dialogue – see for example Godwin's (2015c) account of a bureaucratic and frustrating transition from children's to adult mental health services – they will have need of responsible others who, as in Sandra Lynch's glossing of Derrida's view of friends, will 'engage purposefully but without purpose and see what happens – much like the artist does in producing a work of art' (2002:105). Friendships can provide a fluid constancy in shifting times and cut across shifting roles; they can themselves constitute portable dialogic fora. A storyteller-as-friend might play a certain creative and responsive role within a young person's life, helping to bridge the gap between different identities (such as patient and artist, adolescent and adult); or in a group's life, helping to nurture their own vernacular forms of storytelling. As a friendship, this would start not in a desire to diagnose or heal problems, but in curiosity, affinity, or mutual enlightenment through the sharing of experiences. This seems a role for which the sailor-storyteller is well suited.

CHAPTER 6

DIALOGIC STORYTELLING AND THE CONTEMPORARY YOUTH EXPERIENCE

They said, 'You have a blue guitar
You do not play things as they are.'

The man replied, 'Things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar.'

And they said then, "But play, you must,
A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,

A tune upon the blue guitar
Of things exactly as they are."

From 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' by Wallace Stevens

6.1 Things as they are: understanding the youth experience

A subterranean theme throughout this thesis – surfacing fleetingly, occasionally, but also inevitably – has been enquiry into the nature of adolescence. It may be audacious to develop a practice in response to the needs of an entire age group, no matter how situated such a claim might be. Still more so is to seek to chart recent generational changes in the youth experience which might condition that practice, or be revealed by it – to attempt to say something about 'things as they are' for young people. Yet not to make some attempt would be to deny how developmental factors intersect with social change in young people's lives. It would also constrain our understanding of how storytelling practice should respond to the challenge of opening up rich and underexplored channels of communication with 21st century young people.

This chapter therefore, in some trepidation, takes on this challenge, arguing that there may exist an 'empathy gap' between adolescents and the adult world, sufficiently wide to disrupt the mechanisms of counsel on which the everyday chronotope of storytelling was based. Drawing on the concepts explored in previous chapters – including those of storyknowing,

chronotope, the encounter in the 'between', metaphors of story territory, and the need for dialogic fora – this short chapter synthesises the key elements of a dialogic storytelling practice seeking to breach this gap. It posits this practice as a conscious reinvention of the everyday chronotope, which puts storyknowing back in centre stage.

6.2 A generational empathy gap

There is evidence that the accelerating pace of social change, and the differentiation of adolescents' and adults' worlds enabled by the internet, are exacerbating the cultural 'othering' of adolescence which may be common to every recent era. Lori Plante feels it necessary, in her study of the recent (and to most adults inexplicable) phenomenon of widespread teenage self-cutting, to 'bring to life the real humanity of these struggling adolescents' (2010:xiv), implying that the nature of adolescent search for identity has become unrecognisable to adults. A recent survey by Girlguiding UK found that 82% of teenage girls believed their parents misunderstood the pressures they were under. This study corroborated the findings of other recent surveys that parents are most concerned about drugs and alcohol abuse, while young people are overwhelmingly more affected by mental ill-health, self-harm, sexual harassment and cyber-bullying (Press Association 2015, Press Association 2016, Green 2015). The phenomena by which social media transmit and heighten mental pressures on adolescents (see for example Godwin 2015) can scarcely be understood by adults whose relationships in youth were conducted in person or by telephone.

Despite (or because of) this incomprehension, there is growing adult anxiety over young people's mental health, and a solidifying sense that interlocking pressures are impacting them in insidious ways. Former UK Children's Mental Health Champion, Natasha Devon, cites the key factors as poverty, academic pressure, lack of family time, cuts to CAMHS budgets, and social media (Aitkenhead 2016). According to the charity Young Minds (2015), there has been a doubling in hospitalisations of young people due to eating disorders during 2012-2015, the approximate lifespan of this research project; over a slightly longer horizon, the charity reports a 68% increase in hospitalisation due to self-harming between 2001 and 2011, and a doubling of the number of 15-16-year-olds with depression between the 1980s and the 2000s (2016). Meanwhile the average age of onset of depression has decreased to 14, from 45 in the 1960s (Aitkenhead 2016).

It is of course impossible to disentangle changes in illness rates from changes in diagnosis rates, and exclude the possibility that this 'crisis' is in fact a moral panic. We might suspect as

much when Henry Giroux (cited in O'Connor and Anderson 2015:17) goes so far as to talk of a 'war on youth'.

However, the desire to avoid hyperbole and over-generalisation should not dissuade us from harking to what CAMHS psychiatrist Rory Conn called 'canaries in the coalmine' (Bradbury 2017). Thus, while achieving a sense of connectedness to others may be a fundamental developmental challenge for adolescents at any time (Chapter 3.2.1.2), researchers in a recent verbatim theatre project interviewing a hundred York teenagers were struck by the degree to which their contributors felt 'divorced from their peers and the world around them' (Upstage Centre Youth Theatre 2015). Within my own practice, the stories young people created, alongside much exuberant and utopian creativity, often threw up the figure of a tough and wounded hero or antihero in retreat to a wild and lonely place (such as *Hamma* at Kitchen School, *Girls Combing Their Hair* at Maple House, or *Mr Imagination* at City School), on the run from technology and unsympathetic eyes. Their moral reversals sometimes seemed like straws, not happy endings but snatched refuges of calm, happiness, trust and control, of fragile bonds being formed between individuals across complex and cold environments. Inevitably these motifs will partially reflect concerns the young people perceive in my consciousness, through my tellings, as well as intertextual references from film or young adult fiction; in any case it is not my methodology to conduct thematic analysis of young people's creative outputs. Nonetheless the common motif of disconnection, from either peers, adults or both, is hard to ignore.

In this context, it is of particular concern that there may be a lack of situations where adults and young people can listen attentively to each other. While the scope of mainstream institutions like City School to provide the dialogic fora envisaged by Habermas has arguably decreased, protected settings for segments of young people identified as vulnerable abound in opportunities for dialogue (Chapter 5.3.1), but such conversations are more or less sealed off from influencing mainstream provision. Thus from the (avowedly situated) perspective of my practice research, there seems evidence of a bifurcation of the systems supporting and educating young people, producing unequal access to responsiveness, flexibility and dialogue, and potentially exacerbating the empathy gap.

6.2.1 Counsel in decline?

Lamenting social disconnection is of course nothing new. Writing in the 1930s, Benjamin contends that in the aftermath of rapid industrialisation and the dramatic social ruptures of

the First World War, '"having counsel" is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring' (1973:86). This observation remains salient to any exploration of how storytelling gives counsel. To counsel other people, one must inhabit the same social sphere as them, at least to the degree that one's own understandings gained from experience might foreshadow their future experiences and needs – for example the success of Pat Ryan's (2008) *Kick Into Reading* project may lie in its facilitation of football coaches to tell stories to young footballers. Bruner draws on Jean-Paul Sartre's observations to amplify this point:

> life stories must mesh, so to speak, within a community of life stories; tellers and listeners must share some 'deep structure' about the nature of a 'life,' for if the rules of life-telling are altogether arbitrary, tellers and listeners will surely be alienated by a failure to grasp what the other is saying or what he thinks the other is hearing. Indeed, such alienation does happen cross-generationally, often with baleful effects. (2006:138)

Storytelling in the everyday chronotope may often have enabled unusually attentive, I/Thou dialogue, through the narrative channel of storyknowing, within young people's everyday lives. I have suggested (in Chapter 4.2) that the everyday chronotope rests primarily on the mechanisms of counsel, and the related metaphor of the story as a walk across unknown territory – that telling any story or sharing any experience is likely to provide something of use, and build up shared understanding by eliciting answering stories exploring similar territory. If so, it is profoundly challenged by any empathy gap. For counsel to be possible, young people must encounter adults who consider their life experience to be of interest and relevance to them. It also requires a confidence in the multifaceted value of narrative knowledge and a readiness to make time for the storytelling exchange, which have prevailed during certain periods in education and the welfare state in the UK, although never unchallenged, and which have been in marked retreat since the early 1990s (Chapter 1.4.1). My observation from working in a variety of settings catering to adolescents is that only in protected settings do adults and young people frequently share experiences and stories. Where stories are told, as Bruner predicts above, the risks of mutual incomprehension are high; in Chapter 3.2.4.2 I described the 'invisible elephants in the room' I have sensed on many occasions.

Thus, neither the spaces and time, nor the shared framework of reference, essential to the everyday chronotope can be taken for granted by a 21st century storyteller working with adolescents. It therefore becomes necessary to articulate a way of working which inherits its intentions and values of open-endedness and exploration, and its ease with the cross-fertilisation of imagination and critical thinking, but adapts itself to current circumstances.

Neither the dynamic nor magical chronotopes (oversimplifications though these may be) fulfil this role, both involving, to some extent, a quest for a predetermined outcome, or an overemphasis of a certain 'moment' within storytelling over others. The dynamic reaches too eagerly towards a propositional expression of knowledge gained through story; the magical seems to limit the potential for critical engagement with reality; both can leave storytelling too open to ready instrumentalisation. It is dialogic storytelling which I have identified as the answer – but to be genuinely dialogic in the 21st century, how should storytellers offer our stories to adolescents, and just as importantly, where shall we do it? The following section brings together my key findings from Chapters 3, 4 and 5 as to the rationale and nature of this practice.

6.3 Dialogic storytelling: the everyday chronotope reinvented

6.3.1 How shall we tell stories dialogically with adolescents?

Of the three metaphors I propose in Chapter 4 – the story as walk, as a theatre of actions, and as No-Man's-Land or *Spielraum* – it is the third that I feel to have taken shape in response to the empathy gap, and the particular needs of contemporary young people. To honour the ethic of open-ended exploration, and to put my stories at the service of the adolescents I have encountered, I have had to develop an awareness of the dynamics and potential of the story as No-Man's-Land, as I will now briefly attempt to justify.

Story has undoubtedly always functioned as a playground for imagination, discourse and the creation of meaning. I have always been aware that the stories I tell are created in the space between myself and the listeners, through the face-to-face or I/Thou encounter between us. In Chapter 4.3.1 I also argued that storytellers invariably embrace a degree of indeterminacy in how their stories are received. However, as my attunement to the differences between my life experiences and those of my adolescent listeners has grown, the gaps in my narratives have grown to encompass much of the landscape. This has underlined my ignorance of the shared story world, and the necessity to work with young people as 'emancipated spectators' (Rancière 1998). Simultaneously, however, being continually surprised by the very different resonances stories may strike for young people has reiterated my guiding role (explored in Chapter 3.2.4.2); even if we are creating something rather than discovering something already existent within a story, I cannot abdicate responsibility for bringing them home safely.

Meanwhile, I have become increasingly aware of the affordances of such a relatively blank canvas. Where my own experience might not offer counsel, stories open, distant and

fantastical enough to provide a common ground for mutual exploration are particularly valuable. Their strangeness and anachronisms may provoke; their complex plots and wide landscapes may show up the boundaries of social languages and bring them into dialogue with each other (Chapter 4.4). Finally, they can be told with great dignity. Young people may choose to satirise these epic stories or bring them down from their pedestals, but just as often they choose to raise up their own experiences to the mythic plane, and use the cachet of storytelling to make a proud statement of their hard-won learning. The generational rupture in understanding between a storyteller and a group of young people no longer applies at this level of universality; these stories are vastly flexible and can dignify or 'crown' almost any adolescent experience (Chapter 4.4.2).

Working dialogically with young people in the territory of story, without an agenda but with an awareness of the many meanings in circulation between oneself and the listeners, bears an affinity to the everyday chronotope, with its lack of desired outcomes. Both chronotopes embrace listeners' complex practice, the constantly shifting dynamics of the tripartite storytelling relationship, and thus what Warren Linds calls '(g)roundlessness, the very condition revealed in common sense' (2006:116) – but the choice to work in this way is made more consciously within the dialogic chronotope.

However, given the increasing impermeability of mainstream secondary schools to the initiatives of artists (Ryan 2008, Walcon 2012), and the difficulty of carving out interstices which might accommodate a storytelling practice (Chapter 5.3.4), on what ground can we work in this 'groundless' way?

6.3.2 Where shall we build a storytelling practice with adolescents?

We might be guided by seeking to enrich the dialogic possibilities of the formal and informal settings that are shared by young people and adults – to regenerate a common lifeworld through storytelling activities. In practice, storytellers working with adolescents may spend much of their time either grappling for a foothold in mainstream institutions, or contained within the more hospitable, but insular, environments of protected settings (Chapter 5.3.1 and Fig. 5.2). However, these very difficulties suggest the purpose of this work.

Once more, we may need to hold a *conscious* orientation towards establishing or expanding fora for storytelling and dialogue, in both kinds of setting. Within the mainstream institution of City School, my greatest asset was the peculiar 'everydayness' and unthreatening accessibility of storytelling, its ability to resist what Guattari calls the 'bifurcation of

subjectivity' (1995:132) between rarefied artistic activity and mainstream culture. The invisible boundary between storytelling and other forms of communication more usual in the school setting (lessons, drama) allowed my practice, for a time, to permeate areas of the institution and briefly propose alternatives to some of the roles, relations and divisions that pertained there. That is, while storytellers may be engaged to work on short-term projects motivated by institutional goals, which we may or may not recognise as worthy, Chapter 5 explored how we can render ourselves of service to adolescents by never letting these goals overcome the pull towards singularity: the singular experience expressed in story rather than the ostensibly desired 'learning outcome'; the singular and capricious practices of a nascent vernacular rather than the defined roles of the institution; the singular relationship of friendship rather than the binary one of facilitator and participant. Singularity may ultimately arise wherever we respect the authority of the I/Thou relation over the I/It. It is likely to be continually in retreat, but nonetheless worth pursuing.

Meanwhile, my work in protected settings has suggested the value of seeking not to seal storytelling activities or groups off, but to enhance the permeability between them and other elements of the society within which they occur (Chapter 5.6). An analogy is offered by Kathleen Gallagher and Anne Wessels' (2013) research into a theatre company who chose to develop their practice with homeless young people 'between the frames' of the formal theatre environment and the homeless shelter, allowing the former to be troubled and reshaped by the latter. Beyond the boundaries of either mainstream or protected settings, the (perhaps often hypothetical) role of storyteller-as-friend stands as a call to remain committed to nourishing the lifeworld of young people, and to continually seek opportunities for them to become storytellers in dialogue with the world around them.

6.4 Last word

My research has given me glimpses of the ways in which epic stories might form part of a common language for mutual understanding, friendship, and advocacy between storytellers and adolescents. It has convinced me that storytellers emphatically do have a role to play in re-seeding story and dialogue in youth settings where these have become endangered species. As artists operating in the spaces between art and simple conversation - and between institutions - storytellers number among the few non-aligned adults who may be able to listen carefully enough to gain a nuanced understanding of the challenges facing adolescents. Such an approach seeks to honour the 'utopian function' Zipes (1995) sees for storytelling, an everyday artform now placed in knowing hands.

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APPENDIX A: Research consent form

My consent form was adapted to the specific project I undertook in each practice setting, and the young people's level of understanding. The below is typical:

Dear (school/group) (student/member),

My name is Cath Heinemeyer and I am a storyteller at York Theatre Royal. I am also a PhD student at York St John University, studying storytelling with teenagers. I will be coming to some of your lessons for two reasons:

1) To help you learn some storytelling skills you can use in school and in life;
2) To observe our sessions so as to learn from you (and your teachers) about the stories you like, those you want to tell and how you want to tell them. This may give me ideas which will be helpful in my research.

For my research, I will take notes about things I have observed during lessons. I might use these notes in my future research, but I will never use your name or any details that will give away your identity. I might also make audio recordings of lessons, and take photocopies of some of your work.

If you have any questions about my research, please talk to me, or your teacher, or write to cath.heinemeyer@yorktheatreroyal.co.uk

Please fill in the form below to let me know whether you give me permission to involve you in the research.

Yours,

Cath Heinemeyer

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM for City School

Name of Researcher(s) *(to be completed by the researcher)*
Cath Heinemeyer
Title of study *(to be completed by the researcher)*
PhD Storytelling with Adolescents

Please read and complete this form carefully, and sign and date it at the end. If you do not understand anything and would like more information, please ask.

- Cath has explained the research to me and I understand it **YES / NO**
- I give Cath permission to write notes about lessons and make photocopies of my work for her research. **YES / NO**
- I understand that I can change my mind about being involved in the research at any time. **YES / NO**
- I understand that Cath will not use my name or give my identity away at any time. **YES / NO**
- I give Cath permission to make audio recordings of lessons I am in. **YES / NO**
- I understand that Cath will discuss her research with her teachers at York St John University **YES / NO**

I freely give my consent to participate in this research study and have been given a copy of this form for my own information.

Signature: ……

Date: ……