"ROVING" AND RECOVERY IN STORYTELLING FOR MENTAL HEALTH: RECLAIMING THE CITY, RESINGULARISING OURSELVES

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Abstract

Storytelling is a multi-faceted activity, but the aspects of it most commonly associated with mental health are the therapeutic potential of the stories told, and the unique interpersonal connections which can be created during a storytelling encounter. These two aspects, encapsulated in the image of a storytelling circle, resonate with two of the characteristics of the CHIME model of mental health recovery, "Meaning" and "Connection" (Leamy et al 2011). In the Storytelling class I ran for adults who use mental health services, I saw abundant evidence of the role of the intimate storytelling circle to build a learning community of mutual support, tolerance, and understanding.

However, in Spring 2018, practical necessities led us out of the "safe space" (Boost Rom 1998) of the classroom and into multiple collaborations and interactions in the city, and revealed the recovery potential of an equally integral characteristic of the storytelling craft, namely its *roving* side. This role, for which Walter Benjamin (1973) coined the term "sailor storyteller", encompasses the often risky and adventurous physical and social journeys storytellers undertake to discover, research, and experiment with new material. Researching and reinterpreting forgotten stories in the city's archives, retelling and recording them in public spaces, cross-cultural exchanges and professional recording studios, enabled us in

small but significant ways to reclaim the narratives of our tourist city, and "resingularise" our own identities (Guattari 1995).

A focus on roving resonates with critical psychological perspectives on recovery, resisting an overemphasis on the unwell individual, and reasserting the primacy of challenging social exclusion, and aiming for a shared creative process enabling the "mutual recovery" (Crawford et al 2013) of all involved as participants or collaborators. It also suggests a future direction for research into the recovery potential of other dimensions of the storyteller's role which are less frequently explored within health settings, for example activist, entertainer or trickster.

The circle or the voyage?

There are many senses in which storytelling can be a healing or therapeutic activity. The two sides of the mirror most often sketched by reflective practitioners and analysts of storytelling are the therapeutic potential of the stories told, and of the unique interpersonal dynamics of a storytelling encounter. There are striking resonances with the CHIME acronym for the characteristics of the mental health "recovery" journey (Leamy et al 2011), particularly with its fourth word, "Meaning", and its first, "Connection". Alida Gersie (1997) documents how storymaking and storytelling facilitate both of these, helping people to make narrative sense of their lives, take responsibility for themselves and their actions, and form empathic bonds with others. For Arthur Frank (1995), there is a circular interdependence between connection and meaning, the wellbeing of the storyteller and that of the story-listener. That is, the teller shapes and shares her experience as a means of caring for the listener, who in turn dignifies this experience by the act of listening and receiving this counsel. Even the high priest of postmodernism, Jean-Francois Lyotard, recognizes the vital

connecting function of the storytelling act, when he says that a community which practises storytelling “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" (1984:22).

These authors imply that this nexus of meaning and connection is a fundamental characteristic of the storytelling exchange, a phenomenon which may be observed to some extent whether the ostensible purpose is therapeutic, educational, or simply to pass an entertaining evening. The image it conjures is of an intimate gathering; a circle of care and reciprocity.

The fuzzy boundaries between learning, artistic and therapeutic goals are evident in the storytelling course I teach for adults who use mental health services. Although it is focused primarily on learning of storytelling skills rather than recovery from mental ill health (a distinction which will shortly be explored in further detail), I see abundant evidence of the power of this two-sided mirror of meaning and connection. When students enter the university classroom where we meet each week, they first see a circle of chairs, a visual manifestation of our aspiration to witness each other’s stories – whether these are humorous and ephemeral, or of deep personal significance - and build a learning community of mutual support, tolerance, and understanding.

However, in Spring 2018, practical necessities led me to adopt a quite different approach – to get us out of the communal intimacy of the classroom and into the wide world. This gradually led me to appreciate the recovery potential of a perhaps less often discussed, but integral, characteristic of the storytelling craft. That is, not its cosy sedentary side, but its *roving* side: the physical and social journeys storytellers undertake to discover, research, and experiment with new material. This is the role for which Walter Benjamin (1973) coined the term “sailor storyteller”; unlike “farmer storytellers” sitting at the hearth of their own

established communities, sailor storytellers bring new stories and ideas from one shore to another, forging momentary connections between disparate people.

In telling the story of the course as it unfolded, I hope to show that a focus on this *roving* side of storytelling leads us to focus on different aspects of recovery, and to make a small contribution to ongoing debates around the role of the arts in the unfathomable process of recovery itself.

Seeking the shape of recovery

The concept of recovery has become increasingly established as a paradigm for mental health services in the UK and many other OECD countries (Crawford et al 2013, Mental Health Taskforce 2016) since the turn of the 21st century. With its emphasis on community-based care, patient voice and supporting people to live meaningful lives despite their diagnosis, it is often posed as a counterpoint to purely biomedical approaches to mental ill health, which stand accused of pathologising individuals and failing to find answers to the most intractable mental illnesses (Crawford et al 2013).

However, perhaps inevitably in relation to a concept so intertwined with our understandings of human flourishing and purpose, recovery is a highly contested notion. Spandler et al point out that "there is no clear consensus within the mental health community about what people are recovering from, what the process of recovery is, or what the outcomes of recovery should be" (2007: 791). Leamy et al's aforementioned CHIME model (2007) has clarified this to some extent, as evidenced by its adoption into mental health policy.

Yet this very mainstreaming has generated a more fundamental critique of the recovery paradigm from critical and community psychology. Despite its origins in patient advocacy groups such as the 1970s antipsychiatry and survivor movements (Crawford et al

2013), who emphasized the impact of social and economic injustice on mental health, recovery has arguably been deployed by neoliberal agendas to neutralize the collective political power of those who are mentally unwell. This paradoxical situation is eloquently explored by Harper and Speed (2012), who highlight the rhetorical complex of ideas of recovery and "resilience" which can place the responsibility for becoming well at the door of the individual, denying (or taking as unalterable) the contextual root causes of mental distress. Indeed, for those whose thinking is informed by critical psychology, the concept of recovery has largely been superceded by the *Power Threat Meaning Framework*, recently published by the British Psychological Society, which posits mental distress as a "meaningful, functional and understandable response to life circumstances" (Johnstone and Boyle 2018:6). This framework gives special attention to the interaction between narrative, meaning and empowerment, suggesting that

> patterns underpinning individual and group experiences of distress will be inseparable from their material, environmental, socio-economic and cultural contexts, and that alternatives to diagnosis need to recognize the centrality of meaning, narrative, agency and subjective experience. (2018:6)

Other researchers argue that the concept of recovery remains useful, to the extent that it remains focused on the wider societal context of people's lives. Particular aspects of recovery which have been neglected, according to Saavedra et al (2018), include the needs of those with serious mental illness to rebuild their identity, to move beyond clinical contexts towards a normal everyday life, and to develop "a sense of control of their own lives not only regarding symptoms and condition management, but also about other aspects of their life such as employment, housing, and interpersonal relations" (2018:905). Such an approach unavoidably engages with questions of social inclusion and impinges on the conditions pertaining to the wider community.

A further valuable proposal to keep practice true to these principles is made by Crawford et al (2013) and Saavedra et al (2018). Their research programmes explore how, rather than setting up a binary opposition between mental health service users in need of recovery, and carers, professionals and other social actors who "recover" them, we might understand recovery as a reciprocal process recognising the needs of all these groups for renewal and development. Crawford et al propose that society should provide spaces for this "mutual recovery", and suggest a particular role for the arts in this:

> creative practice could be a powerful tool for bringing together a range of social actors and communities of practice in the field of mental health, encompassing a diversity of people with mental health needs, informal carers and health, social care and education personnel, to establish and connect communities in a mutual or reciprocal fashion to enhance mental health and wellbeing. (2013:55)

These two proposals – to keep the principle of social inclusion at the forefront of practice, and to aim for a shared creative process enabling the mutual recovery of all involved – may be useful guides for arts practitioners in mental health contexts, so as to ensure that we are facilitating the flourishing of participants, rather than complying with a co-opted version of the recovery paradigm. In particular, this conception of recovery challenges the idea that we should always enclose our practice with vulnerable people within a safe or otherworldly space, at one remove from the outside world. While this may often be valuable and necessary, we might be mindful of Boost Rom (1998)'s critique that "safe spaces" can limit the learning and critical thinking that occurs at the interface between self and world. Our practice might help participants build bridging social capital beyond their peer group of fellow mental health service users, as well as bonding social capital within their group – although only, as Spandler et al (2007) emphasize, where participants themselves desire and feel ready for such forays. This may mean being led by the creative process that evolves within a group, and the explorations and statements participants wish to make in their creative work, rather than by

unchallenged notions we may hold as to the therapeutic value of the intimate storytelling exchange.

There are clear resonances with the debate between 'affect' and 'effect' within applied theatre. James Thompson (2011) argues that participatory arts work is often led by funders' or hosting institutions' stated aims to achieve particular outcomes or "effects", yet artists complying with these agendas risk compromising the "affective", unpredictable, emotional engagement in which lies the true power of art. Effect-focused work, within mental health, may also fix participants in the role of *person in need of recovery*, inhibit them from taking creative risks, or limit the range of their artistic exploration and achievement. Thus, paradoxically, the arts opportunities which are most conducive to people's recovery from mental ill health (in the amplified sense discussed) may not always be those which explicitly aim for it.

It is this understanding of the oblique relationship between learning, artistry and wellbeing that underlies the aims of the organisation in which the storytelling course was located, Converge York, as I shall now briefly outline. This article then continues to tread a similarly oblique line, analysing an educational course through the lens of its recovery potential, and discussing what this might contribute to our understanding of recovery.

The context for the journey

Converge York is akin in many ways to a Recovery College (Oh 213; Cameron et al 2018), in that it provides free educational courses for adults who experience mental ill health, aiming to contribute to their recovery and enrich their lives. Its enduring success in doing so (Converge York 2017) is such that it is jointly funded by the regional health trust, Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Trust, and York St John University. Its emphasis, however, is subtly

but vitally different. Recovery Colleges primarily offer courses overtly aimed at building wellbeing such as Building Resilience, Living with Bipolar or Mindfulness, and

> focus directly on helping people (students) pursue their preferred life goals by focusing on their strengths, encouraging them to develop their own understanding of their difficulties and further develop self-management and other skills and resources (Meddings et al 2015: 212)

In contract, Converge's courses are in arts, sports, or research disciplines, and largely taught in a university setting (York St John University) by specialists in those subjects. Students are treated as university students, actors, or researchers, as appropriate, often remaining part of Converge for many years, and developing their roles within the organisation. Converge evaluates the impact of its courses less by their success as health interventions, than by the artistic or educational progress made by students, and their progression to act as peer mentors, assistant tutors, tutors, performers or ambassadors for the organisation. The organisation itself has grown and evolved to offer more challenging opportunities to these longer-established students, including a semi-professional theatre company (Out Of Character Theatre Company) and paid work opportunities.

There are tensions in this way of working. In some ways, we might not see a university as the ideal setting, or *student* as the ideal role, for a participant who lives with long-term mental ill health. Universities seek to promote independence, challenge, rigor, and developing professionalism. They are not safe and therapeutic environments, although they may offer what pastoral services they can. Converge generally seeks to mitigate these risks and challenges by providing a more nurturing, supported and predictable environment than typical university courses.

Yet in the spring semester of 2018, in the Storytelling course, creating an intimate circle of mutual support and connection proved impossible, and we had to go off piste. Necessity, as my notes record, proved to be the mother of invention:

As we gather for the first session of the new semester, I look around the room. It is immediately apparent that the student group is more diverse than any previous group, ranging from seasoned and talented established students, to uncertain new students with, in some cases, both physical and cognitive impairments. We move into our warm-up games and it quickly becomes apparent that working on storytelling activities together will stretch some beyond their limits, while I can see frustration with the slow pace in the eyes of others. We need to make space for different people's abilities and interests – we need to open the windows and bring in some outside air! I introduce the theme which last semester's student group has chosen for this semester: "An alternative history of York". I find myself giving thanks for this topic. I tentatively suggest that this will require us to get out there into the city, and looking around the room I see many nods.

To make sense of the journey on which we embarked, I will draw on Felix Guattari's (1995) concept of "resingularisation", and Petra Kuppers' (2007) discussion of how storytelling can reclaim spaces for marginalized people and challenge narratives of exclusion. I will argue that it may be in these adventurous moments that people find chances to resingularize their identities – by simultaneously reclaiming the place they live in. I felt the whole group developed a similar understanding of what we were doing, even if they did not feel the need of theory to explain it. For this reason I will follow Kuppers in employing as my chosen pronoun what she calls the "precariously positioned 'we'" (2017:34), even though it is I, like she, who hold the academic singular voice. This will hopefully become evident in some of the words which group members have volunteered to include in this essay, and the vignettes from the course which I include throughout.

Resingularisation and tactics

We arrive in ones and twos at the City Library. We can't go up to the Archives as planned because some of the group cannot climb stairs, and the lift is out of action - the council can no longer afford to maintain the building. So we enter an oak-panelled ground floor room and the archivists bring down box upon box of leather-bound documents, resting them on pillows in front of us. Turning the pages slowly and carefully, we uncover tiny fragments of other people's lives, in court records and Poor Law applications. Perhaps this is the only trace that remains of Mary-Ann Leckenby of Clifton, aged 18, arrested in 1896 for indecency, or Jacob Hoare of Petergate, aged 89, "blind, destitute and helpless", awarded a week's ration of mutton. Was it our imagination, or did the prison chaplain betray a great deal of sympathy for Harry Fellowes, 19-year-old first time thief of "fancy socks" from a city centre laundry, in the scanty few lines he wrote about him? And was the Poor Relief the only avenue for help open to Michael McGlowan, the head of a Walmgate family reduced to foraging for brambles after his work as a navvy ran out? We scribble notes, draw each other's attention to surprises.

Felix Guattari's (1995) concept of resingularisation emerged from his clinical work with psychiatric patients, where rather than seeking to heal their symptoms, he sought to expose them to new relationships, activities, and possibilities. In trying new things, with new people, in new places, using their bodies and their minds in different ways, people constructed

> 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 resingularize themselves. (1995: 7).

This was, he said, an artistic process rather than a medical one: "One creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist creates new forms from the palette"

(1995: 7). Guattari observed that in this way people could develop conceptions of their identity and selfhood that were singular, unique and full of potential, not confined to subjectivities imposed by capitalist economic and social relations, such as *patient*, *failure*, or *unemployed person*. Rowe (2015) refers to something similar when he describes how Converge York students grow beyond the "mental illness identity" towards more positive and generative identities.

Thus, just as important as the buried stories we were seeking out and celebrating was the new story, or complex, of ourselves as a group of researchers in the Archives. Over the coming weeks, several students revisited the Archives independently, and pursued other information sources elsewhere, to follow up on lines of research. One student, who became deeply drawn into archival research into some of the city's lesser-known historical figures, and recorded authoritative versions of these stories for posterity, told the class around this time, "This is making me fall in love with York all over again". Both as a group and individually, we inhabited different spaces in the university and the city, both literally and metaphorically.

Writing on the city

> *We meet at a junction of two pedestrian streets in the city centre. Two lecturers from the university's Music Production staff join us with mics and recording equipment. It is difficult to get the wheelchair across the cobblestones, or find convenient places to sit and rest. We lead each other on a slow, trailing story walk within the city walls, visiting each of the spots where our stories may have taken place, telling and recording their histories. We tell them in loud voices: in this attic lived (and died) the destitute Jacob Hoare, maybe. This is probably where the hen wife manufactured her "miraculous" spiritual eggs and sold them to unsuspecting people at a premium. In*

the gardens of the Minster, recording gossip of Roman York, we are challenged by a frostily polite member of the Minster Police. We should not be recording here unless we are university students, she says. We reply that we are indeed a group of students. One cannot tell what students look like, these days, she replies, and speaks into her radio as she retreats.

York is a tourist city. The stories that are told of it are well-rehearsed, time-honored, neat and confident. Yet the fragmentary stories we uncovered were usually prosaic, occasionally salty and sometimes heartbreaking. We sometimes had a sense that these stories needed us in particular to tell them. One particular entry in the prison chaplain's books documented an elderly man, of no fixed address, arrested for threatening some boys with assault after they teased him in the street. The chaplain noted that the old man was a veteran of the Crimea and "not quite right in the head". We felt that, had he been around today instead of in 1892, he might have joined our group and had some great stories to tell. In between the lines recorded in these documents we hypothesized, imagined and superimposed our own memories until we felt the characters return briefly to life.

Beyond simply voicing the possible stories of these protagonists, we placed each of them in a particular street or building, giving them as much reality as could be afforded to these otherwise forgotten people whose personal tragedies had made so little mark on the city.

In this sense our work resembled that of performer Petra Kuppers (2007) and the group of disabled and mentally unwell women with whom she collaborated in various sites around a National Park. The public images of the pastoral landscapes where they worked rarely include poor, diverse and marginalized communities, except as picturesque relics of a long-gone past:

> Both the fiercely national and the bucolic image rely on segregationist and exclusionary concepts of community, on a single vision that references historical origin and continuity…But how can a community politics that keeps openness, provisionality and respect for difference alive be mobilized? (Kuppers 2007: 37)

Kuppers' group decided to use the celebrated legends of the area as their raw material, rewriting and staging the stories of supernatural creatures to include echoes of themselves. Like Kuppers we wanted to write on the landscape of the city, using our found "legends" to reclaim it for ourselves. As Kuppers points out,

> The absolute rule of 'history' as a monolithic discourse…is put into question by the power of the minor story, the legend…Legends have an important function in this desire to make a space out of a place, making it human-shaped, habitable, weaving it into the practise of the everyday. (2007: 40)

Kuppers links her group's work to Michel de Certeau's (1984) understanding of the city as a "grid of discipline" maintained by authorities, which nevertheless can be undermined by everyday practices of walking, talking and storytelling which "momentarily, locally, impact on power structures…People get away with things" (Kuppers 2007: 40). We too "got away with" recording in the Minster Gardens and temporarily claimed it for ourselves and our minor stories.

Bridging and hosting

A chance conversation with a tutor of English as an Additional Language led me to invite her class of Japanese visiting students to come and visit us for an exchange of stories of our respective home cities – linking to our theme of alternative histories of York. The ESL department, like Converge, has a special status in the university and a somewhat marginalized one. Their tutor informed us that many of these students rarely had the opportunity to speak to a local person other than their tutors. In an article for the Converge newsletter, one student described the exchange as beginning with nerves on both sides:

> *Initially, we were all a bit shy and nervous, but after ten minutes of warm-up activities, we were all smiling and laughing, ready to exchange our stories.*

> *The Japanese group had spent the last six months living with families in suburban York. Our stories offered them a glimpse of other places and people. They heard tales of The Knicker-Thief of Belfast city, of sexual awakening in very old fashioned Irish Dance Halls, where the boys were perfect gentlemen and the bouncer was a Catholic priest (the idea was to keep you IN, not out, and any couple wanting to go out for "air" were slapped and sent back in!)*
>
> *We shared our varied experiences of British childhood: growing up in a forest, or a sweetshop, camping in the woods without any adults.*
>
> *From our point of view, we learnt so much about Japan that we didn't know. We met people with hectic lives in Tokyo, people who lived in the countryside, in villages or towns. One boy's story was of his dream to learn English, of his pride in his achievements and his ambition to go back home and become an English teacher. A girl recalled a normal school day when an earthquake hit. Pupils giggled under desks as the walls rocked and the classroom floor buckled as if they were in a storm at sea. […] All in all, we loved them! It was a fabulous experience and we hope to repeat it in the future. (Durkin 2018)*

This storytelling exchange not only required substantial boldness from the Converge group, but also placed us in the role of hosts. The Japanese students visited our classroom, and the responsibility for putting the group at ease lay primarily with us – in Guattari's sense, creating another configuration, or "complex of subjectivation".

Lifting the lid

It is often tempting in participatory arts practice to construct narratives of redemption, which posit a storytelling or arts project as having had a transformative or healing impact on participants. Doing so risks reinforcing the invisible "lid" which often operates within community arts work. That is, within many targeted arts projects for vulnerable or marginalized groups, the label *participant* can act as a kind of glass ceiling, carrying the implication that those individuals are unlikely to transcend the role of participant to become, say, artists in their own right (Heinemeyer 2017). I have suggested elsewhere (Heinemeyer 2017a) that it is vital to understand those participating in our projects as having their own *practice*, to which they bring multiple prior resources, interests, commitments and agendas.

The role of the facilitator then becomes one of cultivating an atmosphere within which these resources can be harnessed, and providing opportunities for individuals' practices to intersect and collaborate.

Inevitably this means that some will attain much higher levels of performance than others, and some may act in informal or formal support roles:

> *We present ourselves at the Music Production studios for our first recording session, to capture our stories for posterity. We want to make an alternative map of York, where people can click on a place to hear some of its forgotten stories. Each person has planned the background music and sound effects which will enrich their story. Some stand confidently at the mic in the recording studio. One student, acting as teaching assistant, helps another as he records his story using the roving mic. A drama student, who has joined us as a volunteer, is outside the studio helping a shy student to practise telling her story. One student, John Manson, recruits two others to join in a performance of his story-poem, a sequence of haikus in the voice of the destitute navvy, Michael McGlowan. They go upstairs to the editing suite to refine it with the help of some Music Production students.*

John Manson, already a social policist and talented poet, went on to co-facilitate the following semester's course, as have other students in the past. John's description of his research and writing process illustrates his own personal agenda in becoming involved in storytelling, and how it linked into the group's wider project:

> *I worked off the assumption that Michael had come to England to work as a navvy on the canals originally and then working on the railway tracks around Yorkshire to eventually settle in York. I did some research and discovered that York was a destination for many Irish emigrants and they did a lot of the stevedore work around*

the old Ouse dock areas and many settled in the local slums. At the time there was a big push on for "indoor relief" (workhouse) across England but many in the north kept the outdoor relief going because of the risk of riots as whole families didnt want to be in the workhouse! I loved looking into the hidden history - as a social policist I've always had an interest in the 1880s, lots of radical ideas around at the time. Jeremy Corbyn (and me) would have felt at home in those times!

MICHAEL McGLOWAN, by John Manson[i]

Michael Mc Glowan,
A man of this here parish,
I ask for your help.

Kids eating brambles!
I am asking for relief
Before it's too late.

The navvy's lament,
Family living in a tent,
Wife and kids all ill.

'N -
Navvies get by, but
I want better for me kids.
Your coffers – much more.

‘N –

Foraging for food!

I want better for me kids.

Meat on a table.

‘N –

No more poor relief.

I want better for me kids -

Good work and good pay.

‘N –

No more tent living.

I want better for me kids,

A strong, well-built home.

And no more bairns dying.

I want better for me kids,

Good healthy living.

And this hard life no more.

I want better for me kids.

A fresh start for all.

N –

Settle down and live.

York is better for me kids.

A town of plenty.

No cold, death or need,

No worrying how we'll feed,

Better for me kids.

Michael McGlowan,

A man of Walmgate parish.

I ask for your help.

Conclusions

Led by the needs of a diverse group, as well as by the desires of the students themselves, this ten-week course moved out beyond the intimate "safe space" of the storytelling exchange to form links with archival researchers, visiting Japanese students, music technicians, city authorities and the general public. As Benjamin (1973) reminds us, such roving has always been a vital element of storytelling, a source of refreshment and cross-cultural interchange, yet strikingly, in all previous semesters of the Storytelling course we had remained within the circle of our classroom. The talent, resources and personal dedication which students brought to this semester's course caused me to challenge my own assumptions as what constituted the value of storytelling for Converge students. Despite believing that I was offering open-ended learning opportunities, I was perhaps constrained, by tacit associations with therapeutic practice, into opening up only certain aspects of the storyteller's role to students.

The organisation does not conduct mental health assessments of its students, beyond monitoring their active choice to continue learning, developing and progressing, and it is therefore difficult to make any specific claims for the course's "impact" on students. However it seems likely that any wellbeing benefits of this course were only minimally connected to the therapeutic potential of storymaking, and only partly derived from the sense of connection and community within the group. I would suggest that more significant were the affordances of the roving role of "sailor storyteller", which brought students into many different situations and configurations, laden with risk and personal challenge, and into contact with different aspects of themselves. A person is different in a mental health support group than she is in a music studio, a classroom, a public park, a wood-panelled archive. This reflection suggests a possible direction for future practice-based research into storytelling and health: investigating the recovery potential of other dimensions of the storyteller's role which are less frequently explored within health settings – such as activist, entertainer, or trickster.

The history of the concept of recovery illustrates that, despite best intentions, there exists a magnetic pull within mental healthcare towards a focus on the unwell individual – rather than the society around them - as the sole entity in need of remedy. The experience of this semester of the Converge Storytelling course suggested a means for storytellers and artists to provide a countervailing force to this pull, by placing the full creative palette of our artform at people's disposal and allowing our shared explorations to be structured by the artistic practice of our participants. Our roving approach to participatory practice did not just serve those participating; as in Kuppers' practice (2007), there was a reciprocal enrichment of the narratives of places we inhabit, and of those with whom we built bridges, echoing Crawford et al's (2013) conception of mutual recovery. Doing so taught us valuable lessons about the exclusions mentally unwell people face in their lives, both now in and in our city's

history, and highlighted the admittedly small, but important, ways in which arts practice can challenge these.

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[i] A recording of John Manson's poem can be heard at https://www.artsinhealth.wales/