

VOICING HULL

Poems by Kate Fox



We Are Hull by Zsolt Balogh, part of *Made in Hull*
Photo: © Patrick Mateer

Poetry

As part of the preliminary outcomes evaluation for the Hull UK City of Culture 2017 project, poet and academic Kate Fox was commissioned to produce a series of poems in response to the year. Kate conducted semi-structured interviews about perceptions of Hull 2017 with several groups of Hull residents, including staff and students from Ings Primary School, Hull 2017 volunteers, the HERIB social group (for blind and visually impaired people), a mixture of students and staff at the University of Hull, and a group of creative workers. Kate also conducted vox pops with shoppers in Bransholme and visitors to the University.

She then carried out a thematic analysis in order to identify common threads and recurring images, and used creative methods to generate further metaphors and similes directly from the respondents. She knitted these together into poems which otherwise use the words of respondents verbatim.

This ethnographic approach was underpinned by Kate Fox's work on several poetry projects and performances in Hull across 2017 and her PhD research on class, gender and Northerness. Poetic Inquiry is a method that can capture the actual voices, feelings and ideas of interviewees in a more evocative way than survey responses.

Excerpts from Kate Fox's poems are included in the March 2018 Preliminary Outcomes Evaluation Report, published by the Culture, Place and Policy Institute of the University of Hull. A copy of which is available to download on the University of Hull website.

As well as being beautiful works of art, these poems serve as an additional layer of evaluation evidence, conveying the spirit of numerous individual stories of the impact that UK City of Culture has had on Hull and its people.



Kate Fox

Opening

That opening ceremony was breathtaking.
My four year old son, open eyed,
eyes agog the whole time.

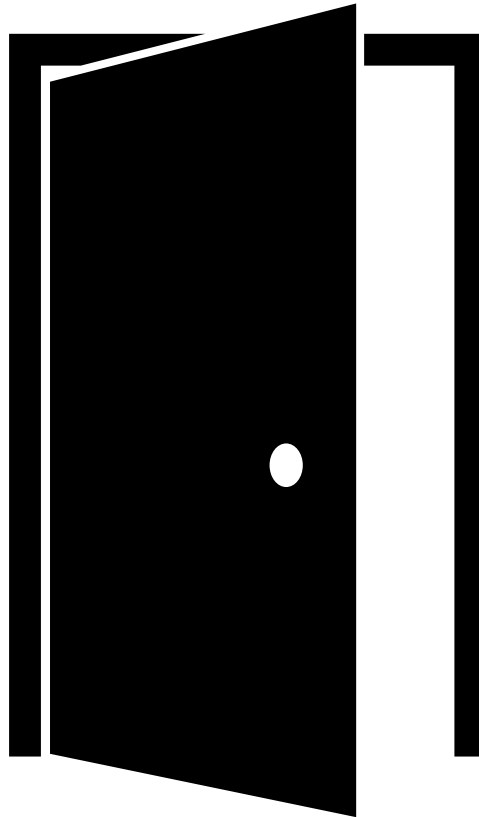
The thing that did it for me
was Made in Hull.
I think that answered the question;
“Can we do this thing?
Is this too big a task for us?”.
And people came.
They kept on coming.
It was like a snowball.

You're like “Wow”, if that's the start of it,
what will the rest of it be like?
I have to be a part of it.

It dawned on you;
“We can do this”.

It's opened more doors for me again.
I used to say “I want to write poetry
and I'm really into radio drama”
and they'd be like “Shut up,
it's not going to happen”
but now they're “Really?
Have you been to see this and that”.

It's like Hull has opened the door.



They'd say “I've seen more culture
in a yoghurt than in Hull”.
Not any more.

Hull's always been interesting
but now it's telling people about it.

They've always had Larkin's glasses
that he left behind at the eye hospital.
His gold rimmed glasses.
But nobody knew they were there.
They couldn't see for looking.

When I got glaucoma I joined HERIB
I've lived more these last two years,
I've done more than I've ever done.
I wouldn't have gone to City of Culture
events without a group.
I says “Oh I went to art gallery”
I was really impressed because I would never
have sat and looked at them pictures.
But when she was telling you
what it was about. You know, I thought
“Oh yeah, I can see that now”
and I'm telling my daughter
and she's saying “Yes mother, alright mother”.
I was 90 last April.
I've started to live!

I see loads of people from different backgrounds now,
which is a good thing.
Makes me feel a bit more comfortable.
Not like Bridlington, full of English people.
Hull's open.
Seeing people from all over.
If it's a bird, it's a dove now-
bringing people together.

The city has become more cultured
and you can see the culture a lot more now,
before Hull's always been very white
for want of a better word
now it is actually colourful.

There's much more to the city
and to culture than the kids ever realised.
It's opened their eyes
to what's possible.
A biggie for us was the Turner Prize.
This boy said "Mr Bell- I didn't really know art.
This is making me feel things I've never felt before...
I haven't got the words to express it...
I think I want to be an artist when I'm older".
We've had a lot like that.

I want to be a poet when I grow up:

a heavy metal musician

a music maker...

I've been writing a book,
do you want to take a look?

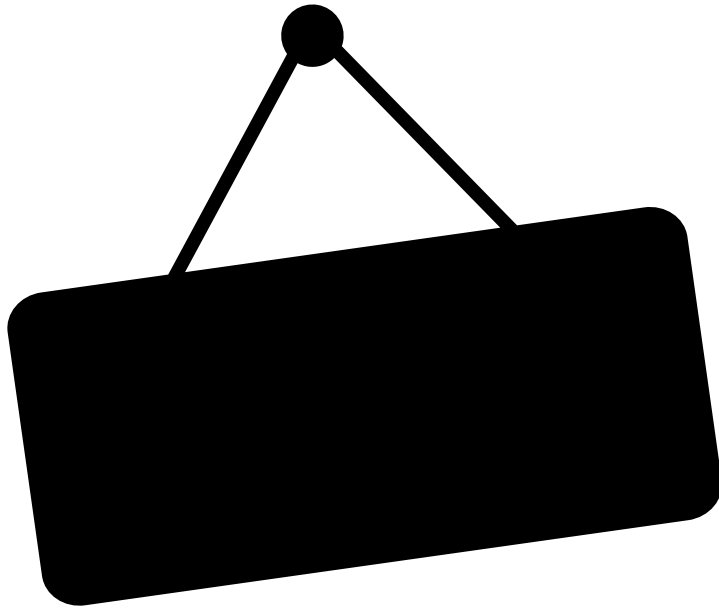
My Grandson's always liked playing the guitar
but now he takes it more seriously,
it's like music's become a possibility.

I think this year's made culture cool.

The thing that I've realised
is that anyone can find culture
and maybe I didn't think these kids could.
I was too narrow minded.
Their openness has surprised me.
Actually they can understand it,
they can handle it.

Now, I just hope our eyes
don't slam shut again.

Closed



Some business people's minds
have been as closed
as the shops that shut
during the light switch on,
because they thought nobody would come.

As shut down as the city centre
on a summer's afternoon
when I showed a tourist around.
The art gallery, the maritime museum
both shut by four.

There's nothing on a night in the centre
after 6 o'clock,
not like Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield,
you'd have thought they'd take advantage.

As slammed tight as the shutters
on Bob Carvers when you want to take your friends
for a patty.

As done for the day as the stalls on Trinity Market,
when the traders have all gone home
by half past two.

Shut in such a way
that they thought artists bringing the market to life
were too noisy.

The blinds down like a frowning mouth,
or a councillor's door before
when you wanted to try something new.

So most of all what we're hoping;
the city's businesses will recognise
how much we can all now capitalise
if we just
stay open.

Chatter Chatter Chatter

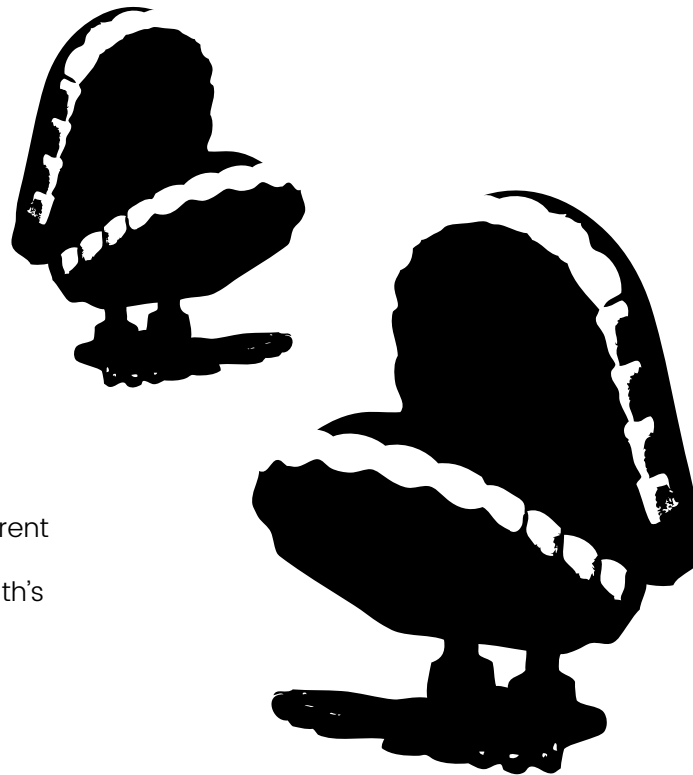
Have you noticed how people talk to each other more
on the bus,
in the greengrocers
at the hairdressers
at Marks and Sparks?

They just used to stand and queue -
now they talk about what they've done
and what they're going to do.

Chatter, chatter, chatter.
Not about what they had for tea
but what they've been to see
"Oh I'm doing this,
are you going to that,
what did you think of that?"

Everyone's got an opinion on the Blade,
everyone's got something to say.

I've always known there's been an undercurrent
of culture in Hull but it's never sold itself.
Almost shameful, you know like mental health's
swept under the carpet and ignored?
Now people who would have mocked me
for going to the theatre are like
"Been to that, saw that,
yes that show at Hull Truck was fantastic".



Hull's never been one to shout from the rooftops,
we just get on with it.
I think that's perfectly true
but now we're getting on with it
in a different way.
We're shouting about it
saying "Look what we're getting on with".

We're quite negative about the city
to ourselves, then fiercely proud of it to outsiders
but now we're getting to be proud of it
to each other.

Before, it was like Dead Bod.
That line on the back: "Not doing anything".

Now it's sending out signals;
we're here,
a lighthouse,
a laser show,
the Humber Bridge going from day time
to night when it's all lit up and sparkling.

SOMETHING YOU CAN TOUCH

I was so moved by **Blade**.
It just hit me.
The size of it,
its beauty.
And every time I walked past
I had to touch it.
Every time I came back to the square again,
it hit me how much it meant to the people of Hull,
of all ages,
and every time they came past
they had to touch it as well.



That ability to touch the Blade,
and stand next to the Blade,
and then bring their experiences back to school
and talk about it.
It made them realise something's going on in Hull.
It's real, it's tangible.

I did want to go somewhere else
when I grow up.
But now I've seen more things have happened
I want to stay.

The feathers were audio described
which was brilliant for those of us with visual impairments,
they came floating about everywhere
as soon as you moved you felt them everywhere
and you threw them at everybody
and everybody was throwing them back at you
and then I took some home and I threw them round the garden
you were part of it,
and you're throwing them at people you don't know
and you're like "I don't know you, but hello".



Before, you didn't feel big events
had anything to do with you,
they happened over there.

Ed Sheeran, Katy Perry,
the Queen. They've all been here.

We're getting the idea that Hull matters,
that Hull is an important city.

We're seeing old things in a new way.

I did want to go somewhere else
when I grow up.
But now I've seen more things have happened
I want to stay.

Discovery

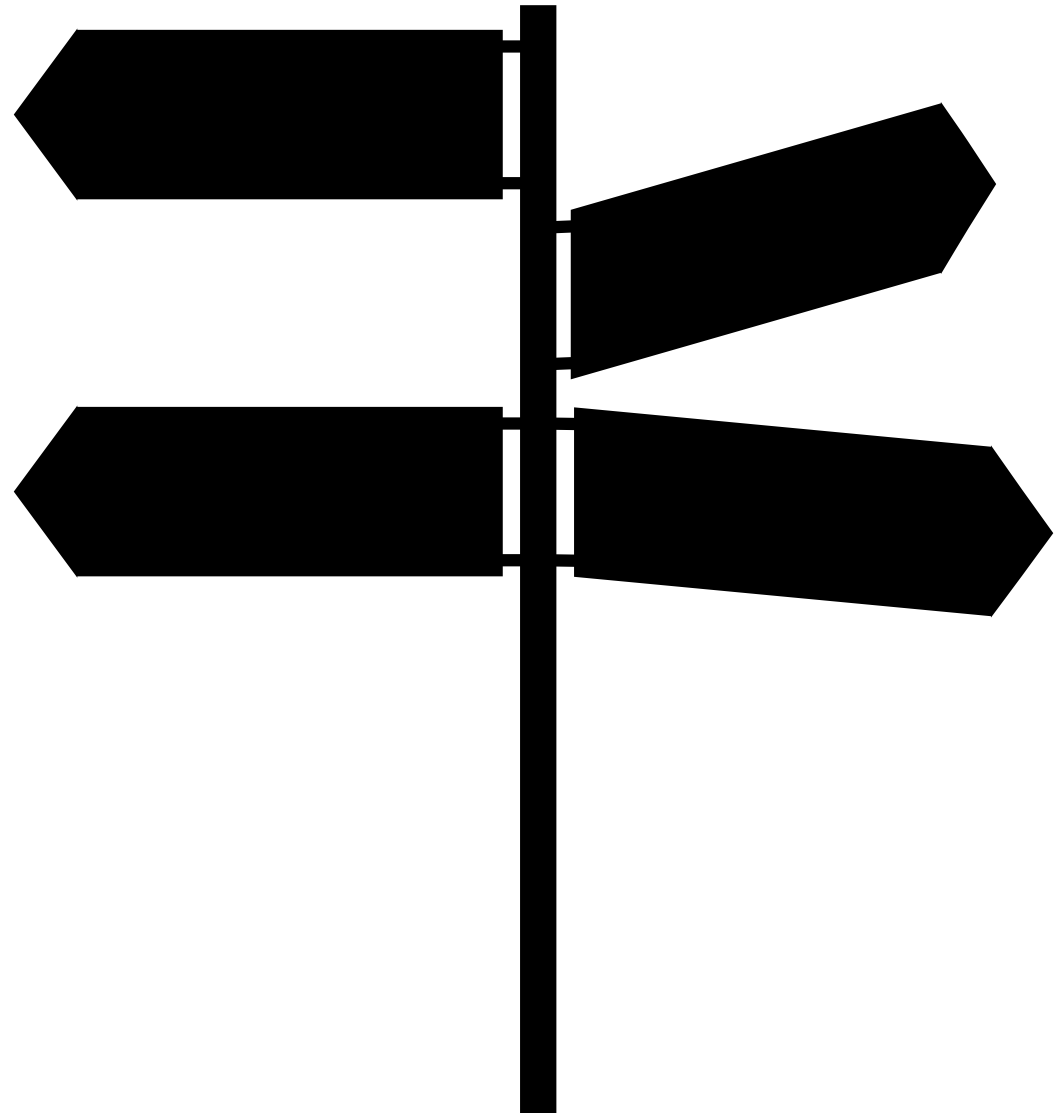
Did you know Joseph Rank started the flour mills in Hull
but he also started the Rank film company,
Odeon Cinemas, Pinewood Studios
and invented photocopying?
The kids were excited to discover these new things,
partly because I'm excited to discover these new things.

My ancestors were master mariners
and I'm proud of our fishing heritage
but I've found out so much more.
We used to be at the end of the line,
and get ignored.

All the passengers that get off
have these really good ideas
and they're spreading them around Hull.

Visitors say
"We love your beautiful city"
and are surprised exploring it
takes more than a day.

I've lived here forty seven years,
but I've started coming in to explore parts of it
I never knew.
They come in from Withernsea, Beverley,
Grimsby, Scunthorpe
and say they didn't realise all this was here.



Visitors say “Thank you for showing us your city”,
they’re surprised because they had
a preconceived idea.

It’s brought people from East Hull to West Hull
and vice versa, where before,
if you crossed the border, that was it.

We’re going out to Bransholme, East Park, Kingswood...

There’s a pull now,
to places you’d never have gone before.

The University
used to be a closed community,
now it’s reaching out saying “Come in”.

When my husband’s family visited from Cardiff
which is seen as quite a cultural city,
I’ve been torn between this need
which was inbuilt in us
to put the city down
and also show it off to them.
But now it’s somewhere I’m happy to go and visit.

People know where Hull is.

Now people from outside,
my relatives from Manchester,
they recognise it as more of a place.
It’s “Oh-Hull!” not “Oh. Hull”.

The kids are far more aware of their place
in the city.
People know where we are.

The buildings stand out more
you tend to look up
there’s like an upper version of Hull
rather than the grey pavements
and orange barriers.

Before City of Culture, Hull was a rusty old car,
but now it can do anything really;
it can swim,
it can climb,
it can fly,
just like Hull can.

Now you think about it,
maybe we didn’t need all the new things,
we just needed people to notice the old ones.



Hull Tigers

Before, we were stuck,
an apathetic sloth
boring and grey.

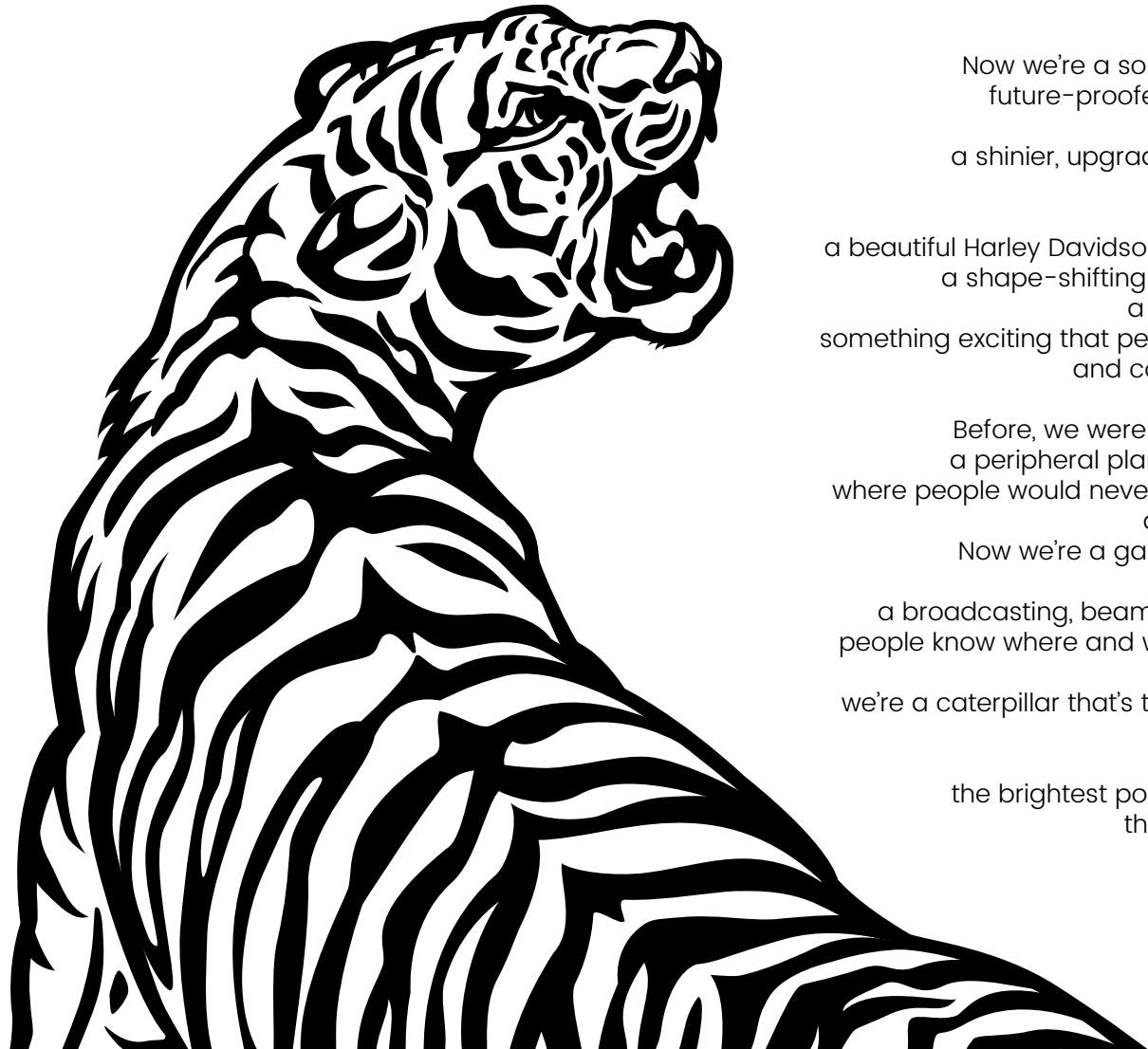
A curled up hedgehog,
a grumpy badger,
an earthworm,
stubborn and hiding away.

A reliable chicken
producing the occasional double-yolker,
an ugly duckling,
knowing we were beautiful on the inside
though nobody gave a second look
as we nurtured a complicated, spiky pride.

We were a rusty anchor,
a pattering trawler.

Now we're a whole fleet of ships,
we are tigers,
not just because of the football team,
proud and fierce, roaring,

we're like falcons,
spreading our wings and soaring.
Woodpeckers, digging for opportunities,
flamingos and proud peacocks showing off,
parrots who never stop talking.



Before we chugged,
clunked
plodded on,
a single gear, rusty cycle,
a Reliant Robin,
a Pacer train
a Volvo

Now we're a solar powered,
future-proofed velocette,
a shinier, upgraded Intercity,
a Limo,

a beautiful Harley Davidson motorbike,
a shape-shifting chameleon,
a boat-plane,
something exciting that people admire
and copy and like.

Before, we were space-junk,
a peripheral planet like Pluto
where people would never think to go,
a black hole.

Now we're a galaxy of stars,
pulsing light,
a broadcasting, beaming satellite,
people know where and what we are,

we're a caterpillar that's turned into a
butterfly

the brightest point in the sky
the North Star.

A Better Place

It's little things like the kids playing
in the fountains at the weekend,
that's been huge for my son.

The businesses on our street
have got flowerboxes,
the scouts tidied up the filthy railway bridge
that hadn't been touched for years.
I've never seen our community
look better than it does now.

It's pride.
Taking a bit more pride in how it looks.

It's prettier.

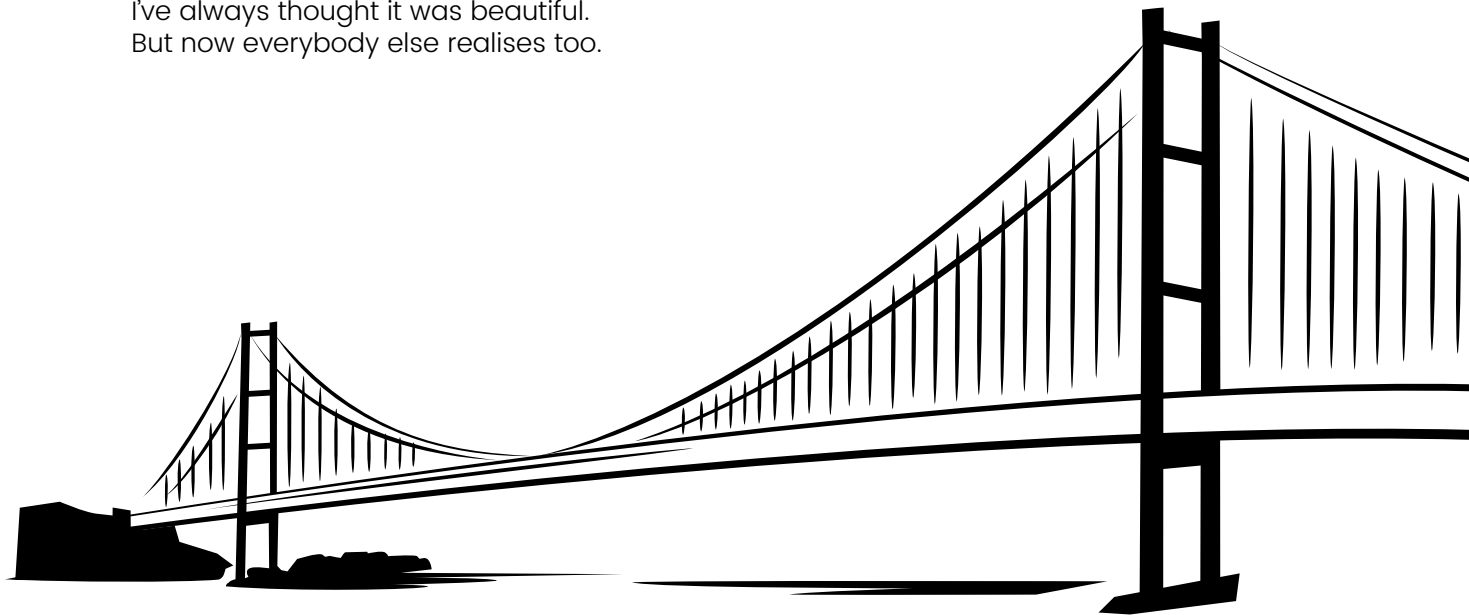
People are doing more things.
In my area there was an art walk.

There's loads of coffee shops springing up.
A lot of people are going to local shops and cafes now,
instead of the chains or the big shops and McDonalds.
Those Dead Bod plaques that got displayed
in the streets,
they'd have been taken at one time.
But they've stayed.

They're making a lot more care of the place.

It's actually inspired me to go to school more
because there's been loads more to do.

I've always thought it was beautiful.
But now everybody else realises too.



'WHOLE BODY GLOW' (VOLUNTEERS' VOICES)

Ears listening,
so many stories.
Ears listening
to hear what's going on next.

Hands reaching out,
to the lonely,
to visitors.
more hands-on.
Creating poems,
pictures,
plays.

Handshakes and hugs
of welcome and thanks.

On my shoulders,
my five year-old son
sharing culture with me.

Mouth open in awe at the new sights,
talking to visitors,
spreading the word about 'ull.

I've learned how to talk to people,
before I used to work in I.T.
I've become a more confident person.

I think people smile in the street more.



Eyes wide,
seeing a new community spirit,
seeing the next new spectacle.
Looking up.

Hearts opened,
by sharing.
Volunteering is a buzz,
the more you do, the more you want
to do.
I couldn't be bothered to go to things
on my own before,
now I know I'll meet someone in blue.

To be honest I became a volunteer
because I wanted to give to Hull,
but the more I give, the more I get
back.
So I keep on giving,
and I still keep getting more back.

This year's been like one big party,
and we've become one big family.

Mind buzzing.
Widened with new horizons.

Calmer, less anxious.
My mental health has improved,
my physical health has improved.
I'm less depressed.

I've realised I need
a better life-work balance in future,
before I was so stressed.

A sore bum from sitting on so many theatre seats!

Feet cold and not minding,
walking miles,
getting fitter.

Feet dancing for the first time at Pride,
a life changing love of performing,
I've got the bug.

People have started thanking us volunteers now
when we're walking down the street;
a man in a mobility scooter zoomed to a stop
at my feet
I thought "Oh God, what is it?"
but he pushed three Wispa Bars into my hands
and said "Thank you love, for everything you do".

It's like we're superheroes.
Surrounded by a big warm glow.

They clapped us in when the Queen came
and at the Chelsea game.

I walk taller,
I'll never be the same.



PRIMING THE PUMP

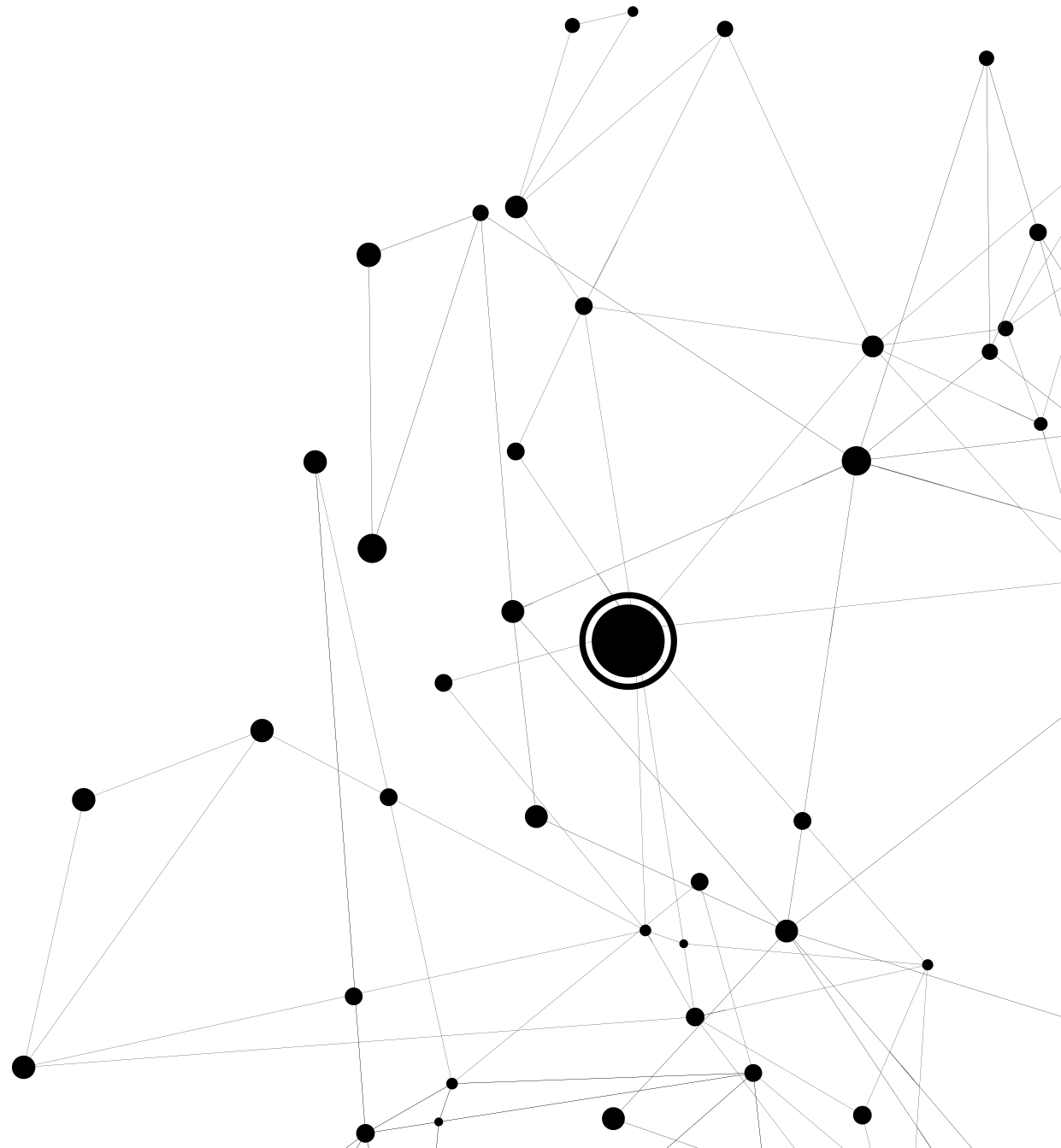
Now, this city's businesses
are veins pumping blood
into the city's heart

we've been given a kickstart.

The River Humber's part
of a huge network of veins and arteries.

2017's primed the pump.
Given money to kickstart projects
and then left them with an organisation
or institution to sustain or embed themselves
so that bit of a boost to get things going.

Once people get over themselves
that bit of money has been helpful
I think it has shown
those who've got the chip on their shoulders
about Hull was brilliant before
and we don't need any help from anybody
that there's so much benefit to collaboration.
I think things will definitely move on



If it's got people
who before city of culture didn't
engage with what's going on,
if they've been to just a few things
or seen just a few things
and they've thought "You know that was quite good that"
you know if they've been to see the Turner Prize
and it's the first time they've walked into Ferens,
or into any of the museums
they're going to go back,
they're going to go back hopefully to what's happening
when there's events on at Hull Minster
they're going to come to the University
and know that you don't get an intelligence test
as you come past the Venn Building.
Ordinary people you can come and look round the university
and go to the talks
and go to the art gallery
and be on campus and enjoy yourself.
If people haven't had water before
it's an amazing thing to have a pump
and you prime it
and all the water comes and it's absolutely glorious
and you've had it for a year or two years
and you think, ah there's a pump down the road
and then you take it for granted and you don't maintain it
and if you don't maintain it
it dries up or it clogs up
or whatever
so that's not the whole story
of course it isn't

more people will go to Ferens
and the Phil
and the theatre
that will happen
it's the smaller groups who I would
have wanted to have a bit more focus on
because spectacle gives you expectation and you know
we plod along in our group
and if you've been used to something spectacular
and it's not so spectacular,
not sure I'll go to that anymore,
that's just a worry
it's not a prediction.

I hope businesses change too
because they've done exceedingly well
the amount of publicity they have received
the marketing they could never pay for
so i hope they continue being angels to the city's artists
and its indigenous population because it is us
who are going to have to pick up the baton.

This city's businesses
are veins pumping blood
into the city's heart

we've been given a kickstart

The rest is up to us.
We know this new momentum won't last
forever so we'll have to keep on finding new ways
to work together.

D.I.Y?



One swallow doesn't make a summer

but you've got to start somewhere

I feel as though I've really pushed the last couple of years
and I've had lots of opportunities
but I'm really knackered.

It's the networking for me that I've got out of this year
to get into rooms I would never have been able to
and meet people I never would have thought
I still think that's a huge advantage going forward
that you've now got these contacts
and got these people
but it is a case of what can we do with it now.
We want to move forwards into the sunshine
but how?

I started an accommodation business this year
grabbed the opportunity,
theatre people artists stayed with us
it's been good for me.
I am concerned about next year
whether there'll be a downturn

Nobody's said "This is what you can do with it now"
you're left with that so try and work it out.
Doing too much work for free,
struggling with self doubt.

I did get to go to a PRS roadshow and see how that works
and meet some influential people
but I don't see how that's going to do me any good in the future
for what I want to do.

Mentoring would have been a great thing
even just buddied certain people up for a week or a month
just a bit of learning, shared knowledge.

It's like the archetypal glass ceiling in Hull
you get to a certain level with the press and councillors
but hopefully this attitude will change now.
One council boss said "If you want to do art, come and talk to us"
Wow! Never heard that before.

Cos of the experiences I've had this year
I feel like for next year, oh I could do anything now,
I could go self employed, I could do this,
I could do that
because of them experiences I've had
and the people that I've met.

I've been accused of this resentment
but it really isn't because I'll carry on doing it
long after the City of Culture
but all I've used it for is a piggy back

The only way any creative person can do it is
do it themselves
self funding
just starting from nothing and building it up
half of it is being a bit entrepreneurial
and the other half is actually
taking the mickey out of them,
what can we copy, what can we emulate?
and I think there should be more people trying to do that.

Volunteers absolutely did do good things
but there were so many roles that could have become paid jobs
and that's such a missed opportunity
to empower people
to move people on from where 2017 was
and where it will leave them.
You've had to find your own way
and advance yourself and 2017 haven't been that engineering thing
pushing us forward.

When they go they'll take the roadshow with em.

They'll take the roadshow
but they won't take the money.
I feel like I've been one of the luckier people this year
but I don't feel fully equipped to go next year to step into a career
where I know how to get paid as an artist like all these other people
who've come and gone through the city.
I've sat next to them and ate a meal with them
but I still don't know
how to do what they're doing
and that's a pity.

We'll carry on doing our own thing,
finding our own tunes to sing,
but we need money and space and support and backing,
peer mentoring, signposts.
People to keep on listening.

How Can a City Sell Itself and Its Culture?

Gather creatives and businesspeople,
men and women,
the suits and the grass roots
and they will agree
that Hull now has even more to shout about.

But they will disagree profoundly about how;
“The world might not have been looking before,
the light has been poured on now.
We can lead the way”.

One strand says
“Fight against the glossy
and the shiny, razzamatazz and the glamour”
don’t join in the corporate clamour.
Shouting about yourself is tough
“Being a good artist should be enough”.
“If you do say you’re amazing,
like people in London would
or Manchester and Liverpool,
Hull people will try and slap you down.

You think “What am I doing this for?”
“Why am I bothering?”
I’ll just carry on mocking myself then”

The “ironic eroticism” of the clown,
the pride and pain
of putting yourself down.
A secret language of self-irony and parody,
understood by those in the know.
A possible weakness,
a possible strength;
a way of tuning into people
on the same wavelength.
They acknowledge it is a risk,
walking a fine line;
“I think those influential people will go,
“If they can’t even see good things about themselves
it might be rubbish
and they don’t even give it a chance half the time”

Another view says that being direct
is the way to win respect
“I find it frustrating really.
I’m more from a corporate background
and I find that kind of attitude really frustrating
“You’ve got to be good at self marketing.
If you do believe that you do good stuff,
only then can good marketing follow”.

Another cannot see the reason
for the profusion of confusion
caused by saying you’re only “alright”
or “the fourth best band in Hull”.
They want people with something to sell
to be more clear;
“I’ve gone into schools this year
talked about self belief
talked about having ambition
and I think that is something
that Hull lacks in general”.

Another perspective says that none of this matters
without the infrastructure
to support up-and-coming creatives.
“Our art school will be no more by next year
how can we have a City of Culture
with no art school, come on?
and the library at Hull College will have no books-
what message is this telling the kids?”

Another view comes from those who have
moved here from elsewhere,
who are desperate to be part of things,
to be on the inside
but don’t get the mixed messages
of self-deprecation and pride.

“I don’t get it”
“Lots of people don’t,
even ones who grew up here don’t”.

Its hard not to conclude
there is a gulf in attitude.

So many different ways of saying you’re proud,
of trying to market yourself,
to drum up a crowd.

During 2017, so many different tongues
have been spoken,
so many Humber Bridges crossed,
in order to make sure momentum is not lost,
new connections are not broken,
there now needs to be a constant act
of listening,
of dialogue,
of ongoing translation.
Building on these productive paradoxes
to inspire ongoing innovation.

