

# 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.

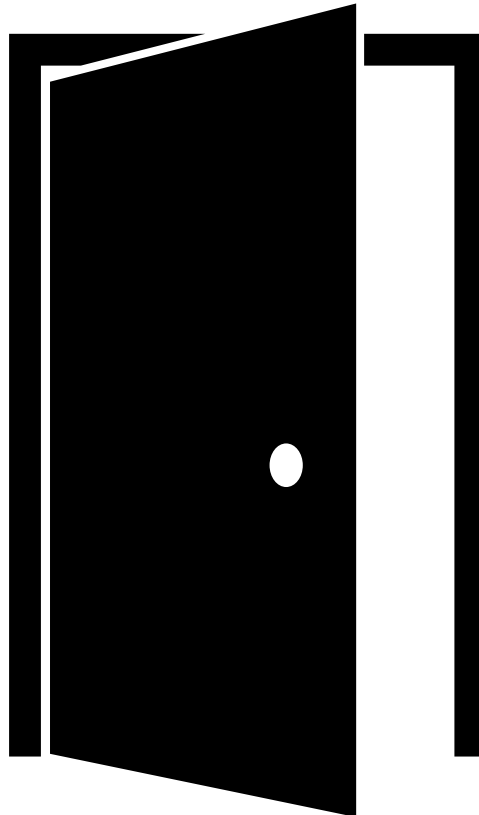
The thing that did it for me  
was Made in Hull.  
I think that answered the question;  
“Can we do this thing?  
Is this too big a task for us?”.  
And people came.  
They kept on coming.  
It was like a snowball.

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?

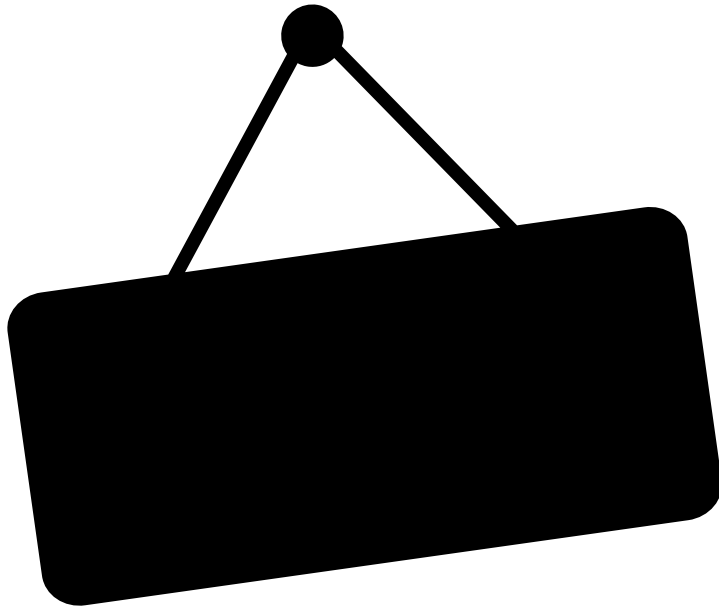
My Grandson's always liked playing the guitar  
but now he takes it more seriously,  
it's like music's become a possibility.

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

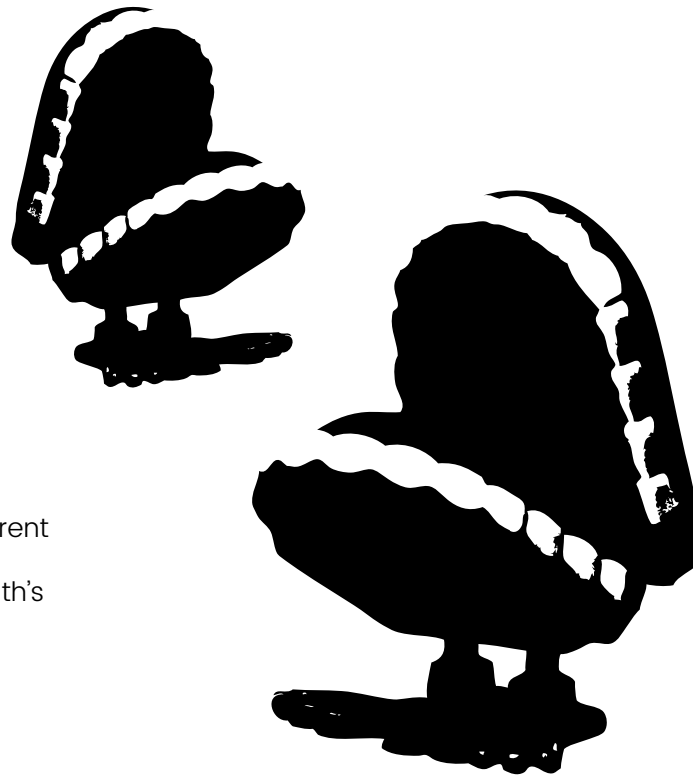
Have you noticed how people talk to each other more  
on the bus,  
in the greengrocers  
at the hairdressers  
at Marks and Sparks?

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

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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.



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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".

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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

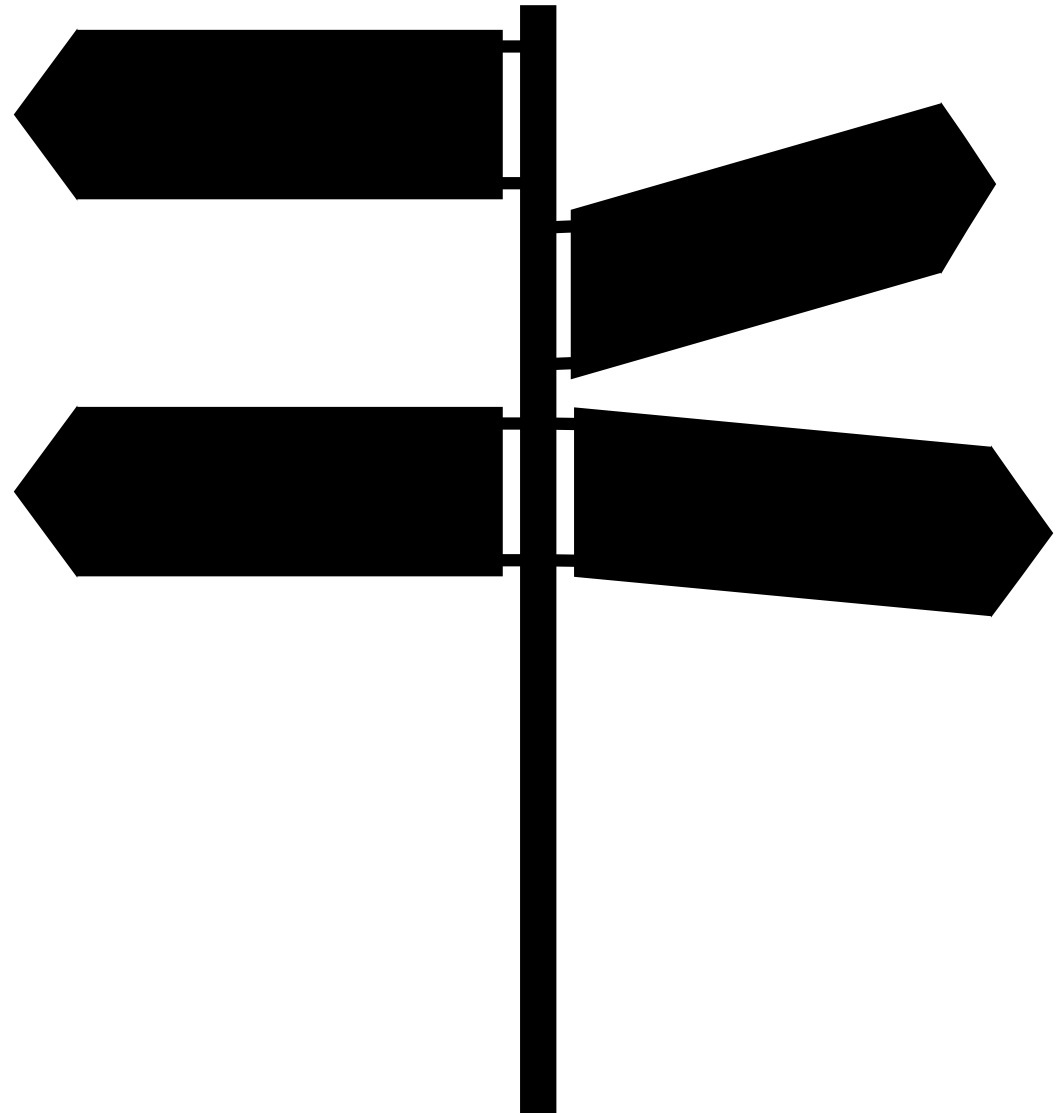
Did you know Joseph Rank started the flour mills in Hull  
but he also started the Rank film company,  
Odeon Cinemas, Pinewood Studios  
and invented photocopying?  
The kids were excited to discover these new things,  
partly because I'm excited to discover these new things.

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.

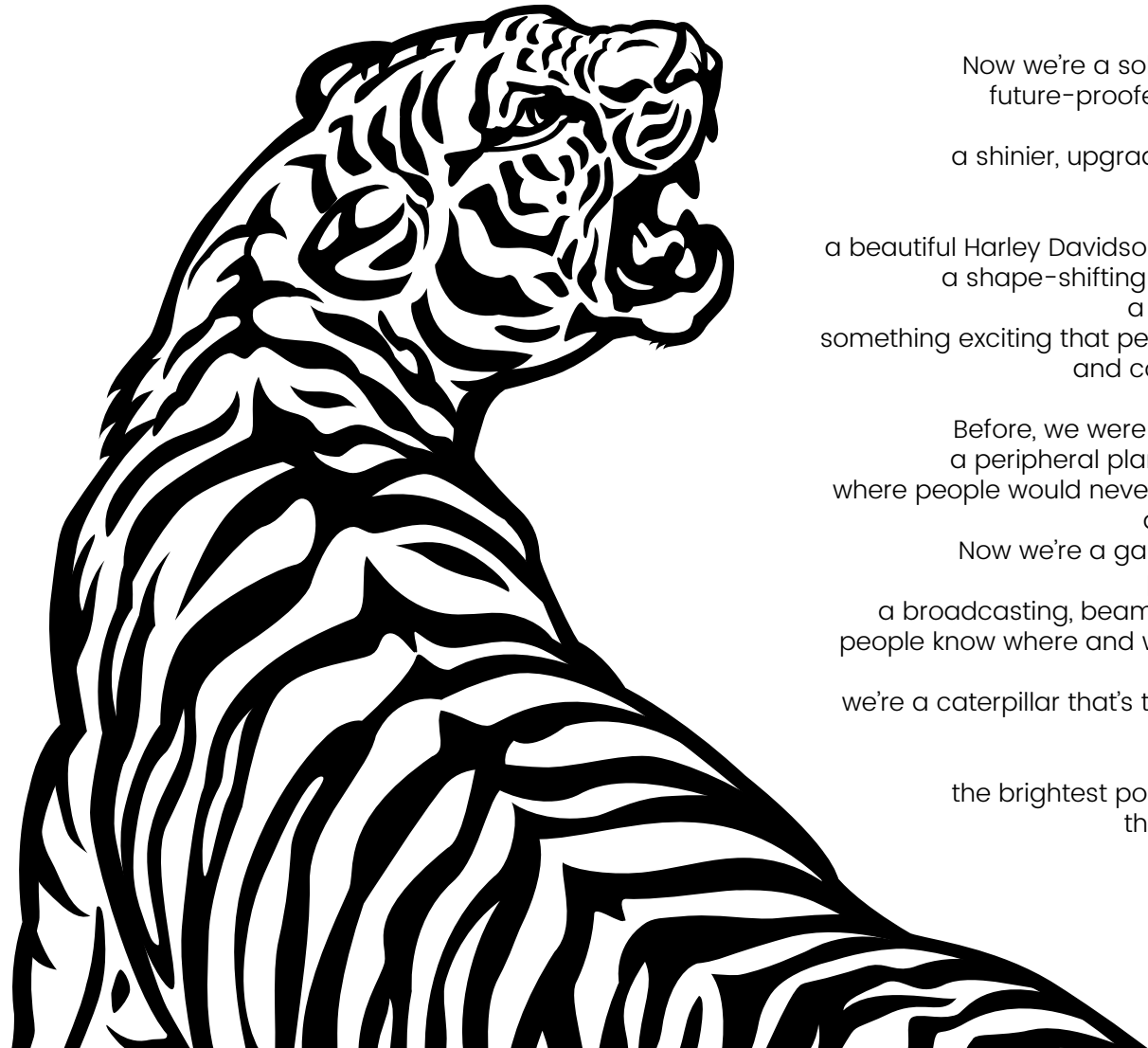
A curled up hedgehog,  
a grumpy badger,  
an earthworm,  
stubborn and hiding away.

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.

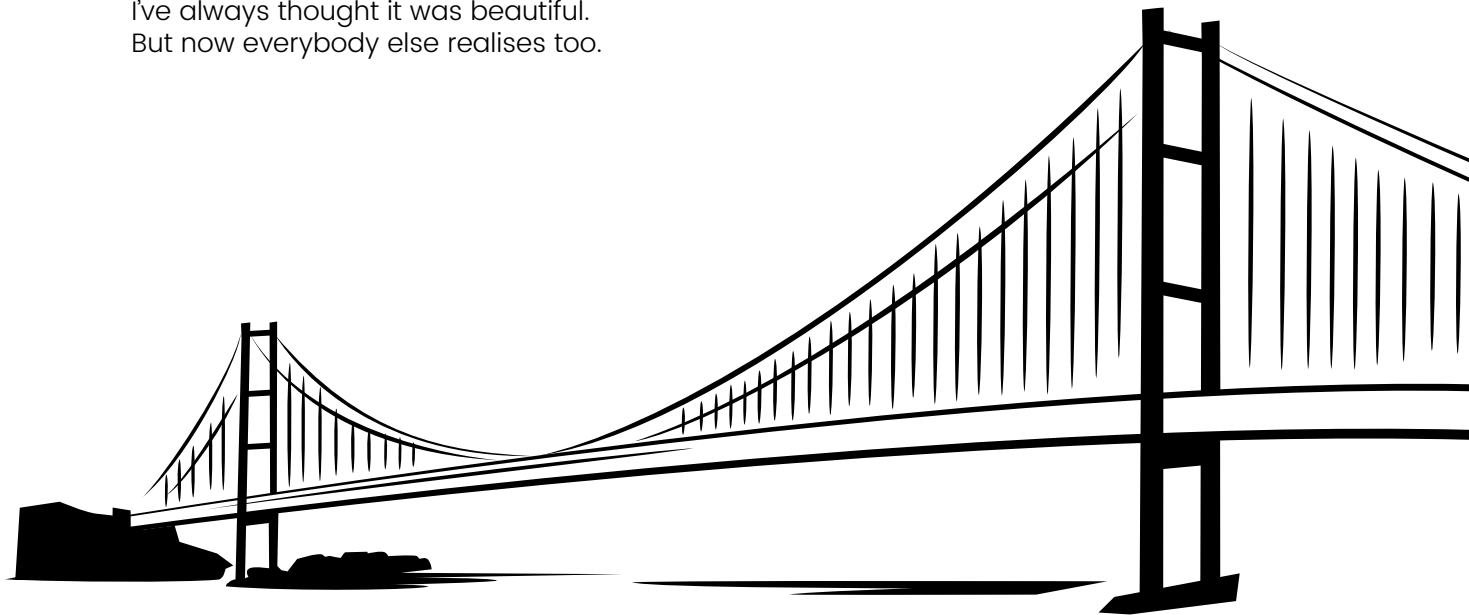
People are doing more things.  
In my area there was an art walk.

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

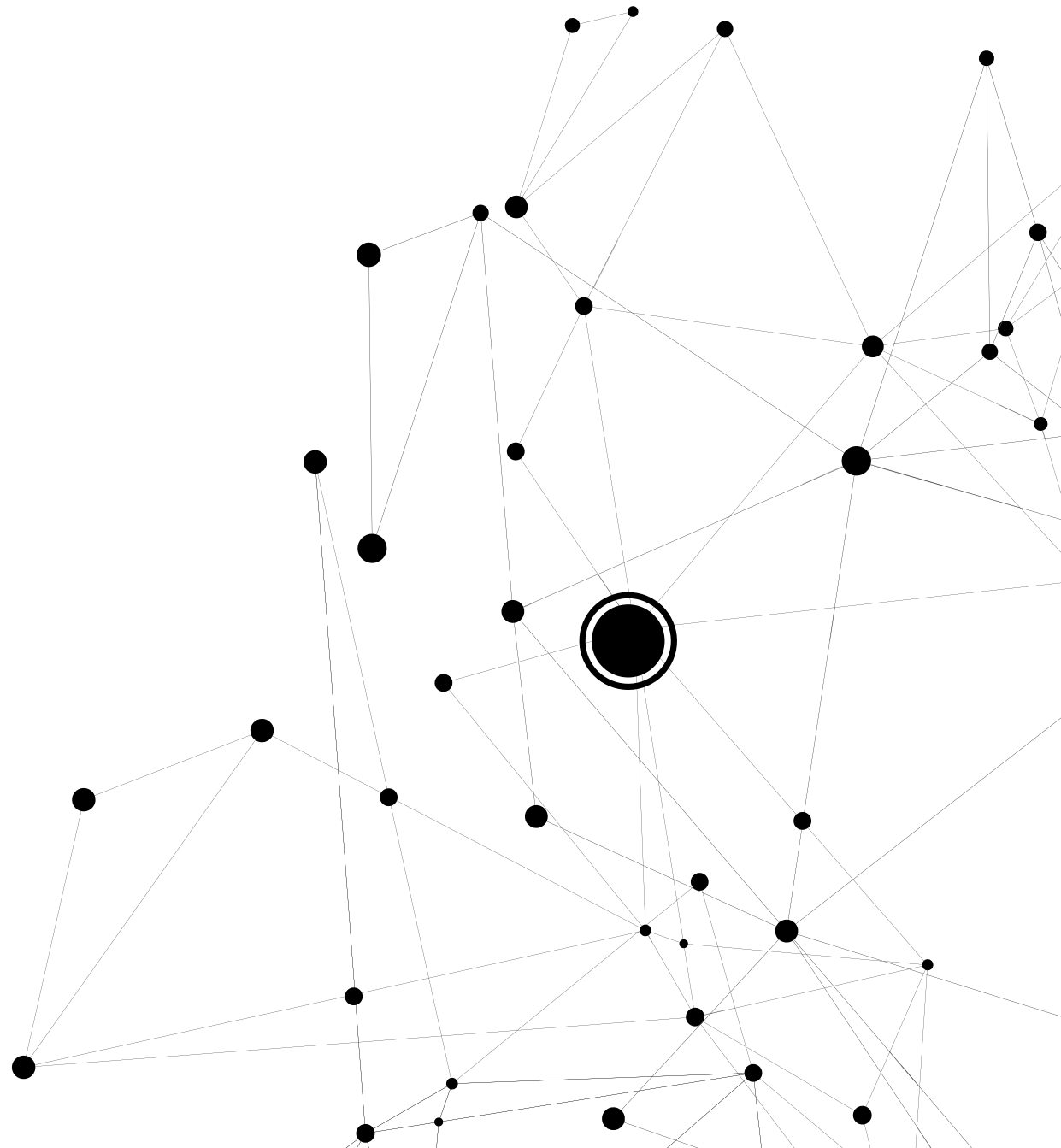
Now, this city's businesses  
are veins pumping blood  
into the city's heart

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.

