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Rhybudd o Hawlfraint

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Ac eithrio o dan delerau cyfreithiau hawlfraint, ni chaniateir copïo, storio na dosbarthu pellach (gan gynnwys negeseuon e-bost) heb ganiatâd deilydd yr hawlfraint.

Mae gan yr awdur (ac mae'r term hwn yn cynnwys artistiaid a chreawdwyr gweledol eraill) hawliau moesol yn y gwaith ac ni chaiff staff na myfyrwyr achosi, neu ganiatáu, afluniad, anffurfiad nac unrhyw addasiad arall i'r gwaith, nac unrhyw driniaeth niweidiol arall ohono, a fyddai'n rhagfarnu anrhydedd neu enw da'r awdur.

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CHAPTER 4

Petra Kuppers

Community arts practices

Improvising being-together

SOcial theory's renewed interest in issues of community coincides with a new visibility for community arts and participatory art-making as alternative to high modernist art practice and the romantic legacy of the individual artist. In this chapter, I want to bring these areas of social thought into contact with one another, by asking what is at stake in the definitions of 'community' at work in community art practice, and in what way these definitions refract and intersect with the turn-away from essentialized identities and 'the nation'.

At the heart of this chapter are two art projects: 'Earth Stories' and 'Sleeping Giants' – two digital videos that emerged out of a two-year-long workshop series with a group of survivors of the mental health system in Wales, in the United Kingdom. As a resident of a small Welsh village, and a fellow disabled person, I collaborated with people using the village's mental health self-help center, and we created communal poetry, dance, performance, traditional music and a video.¹ In the following, I use 'we' when I speak about our practices and intents, and I use it advisedly – there is of course a tension between our art work and my academic writing about it, claiming a communal voice that cannot be anything but my own single one. But, given both our experiences together and the theme of this chapter, I have chosen to stay with this precariously positioned 'we'.

We used local legends and myths to find new ways of affirming our presence in our environment. With this, we found concrete ways of intervening in the negative representation of disabled people, and in particular survivors of the mental health system, in our locality and beyond. Acts of storytelling allow me to discuss our work as a meditation on how to approach community art work that wants to speak from a

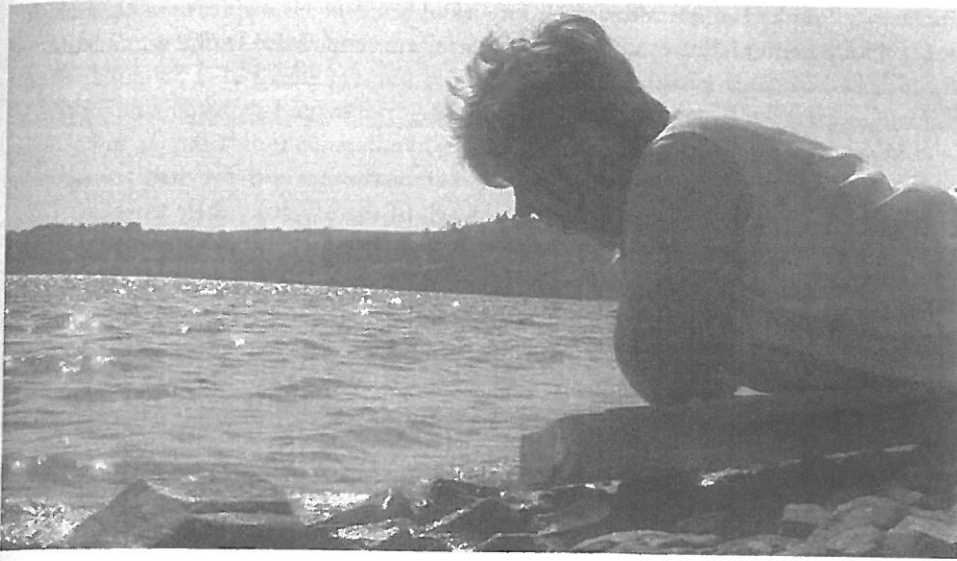


Figure 2 The Olimpias: 'Earth Stories' video still, remembering the 'Lady of the Lake', 2004.

Photo: Richard Rogers.

group, and from individuals, without canceling out experiences, showing the longing to 'belong' and yet the inability to completely merge with one another. As individuals, we exist *in relation* – we are neither fully separate, nor fully embraced within a group. So how can we both create and query 'community'?

Philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy provides theoretical tools to consider community beyond self/other relations. In *The Inoperative Community*, he configures community by thinking about the way that being-together can resist and deconstruct dominant power relations, which attempt to weld the process of being-together into a fixed state. Community exists in relationship and negotiation, and in an openness:

Community is what takes place always through others and for others. It is not the space for the *egos* – subjects and substances that are at bottom immortal – but of the *I's* who are always *others* (or else are nothing).

(Nancy, 1991: 15)

The Others of the I emerge because of the finite nature of the singular: for Nancy, singular beings lean towards others, searching 'contact of the skin (or the heart) of another singular being, . . . [another finite being] always *other*, always shared, always exposed' (1991: 28). This community is inoperative because the moment of sharedness, of an absolute connection, is sundered as it emerges: it is negated by the singularity of the I just as the I leans and cannot help but lean towards the other. There are no egos that claim immortality, only I's that know of their limit and seek others who share this limit, too.

Storytelling and myth-making are important parts of Nancy's articulation of the inoperative community, a community that becomes inoperative at the same moment at which it offers relation.

We know the scene: there is a gathering, and someone is telling a story . . . They were not assembled like this before the story; the recitation has gathered them together. . . . In the speech of the narrator, their language for the first time serves no other purpose than that of presenting the narrative and of keeping it going. It is no longer the language of their exchanges, but of their reunion – the sacred language of a foundation and an oath. The teller shares it with them and among them.

(1991: 43–4)

Storytelling, sharing language and myth-making are the offerings that allow the horizon of community to appear: 'That the work must be offered to communication means that it must in effect be *offered*, that is to say, presented, proposed, and abandoned on the common limit where [singularities] share one another' (1991: 73).

In storytelling (and Nancy uses the 'foundational scene' of a circle, and a male storyteller), singularities can experience the shared limit: foundational stories make community inoperative, as the distance between the story's ontological claim is thrown back onto the experience of the singularity's limit, and the possibility of the I's death. Wanting to listen, hear, and tell, we are abandoned to the distance between the story and our I's, but we lean in, move our heads into the circle, hovering in the space between the I and the communal story.

To me, Nancy's account of community speaks of continuous flows – of a leaning movement, of responsibility, of meanings. These I's who are others – singularities constantly in negotiation, touching their limit – are provisional, temporal. Life flows – no point of standing still, definition, or grounding of identity in ontology is possible in this conception of improvisational community. In this chapter, this emphasis on the I's who are others informs the discussion of art-making as improvisational flow.

In the two art projects, everyday performance was the ground on which we built our communal art work: being unconsciously and consciously in spaces that have histories, dominant narratives, dominant ways of being seen. Our disabilities meant exclusion from some of the spaces we were investigating. Our environment was a Welsh village, surrounded by the green hills of a national park: the Brecon Beacons. The exclusions we experienced worked on a variety of levels, from physical access to do with stairs, public transport or stamina, to imaginary access, to do with patterns of usage, ownership of a locale's imagination and the use it is put to. Through performance, and, importantly, through mediation of those performances in public environments, we inscribed our right of access to these spaces, we made our presences felt. The performance act became the performative act: a conscious inscription of difference into sedimented patterns of naturalized 'law'. With this, our work is not located within art therapy, changing ourselves, but within political labor, changing ourselves and our world.

Our communal practice refused to be singularly authored, and this anti-romantic tactic links our work back to everyday practices of story-telling. Community, this impossible goal, is tactically erected as a place to momentarily speak from.

With this chapter, I am offering a contemplation not (only) of a community of minds, but of co-habitation, embodiment and enworldedness as necessary aspects of a thinking towards a coming community.

Local stories

To speak about 'community', I find it important to establish the ecology of the specific example of an intervention into the formation and articulation of community as a process. 'Community' emerges as many things in the following: as an ideal, a marketing tool, an experience, a hope and a problem.

The village of Ystradgynlais, where all the activities I am discussing here took place, is situated on the edges of the Brecon Beacons, a national park in the middle of Wales. Ystradgynlais used to support itself through the mining industry, and the rolling hills surrounding it have been changed by Roman soldiers, Celtic inhabitants, sheep grazing, canals and now disused railway lines. The people supported by this land include a Welsh-speaking minority and a majority of English-speaking inhabitants. The language of Wales suffered under Great Britain's imperialist policy, and has been rooted out by various historical practices, such as forbidding the language to be spoken in schools or in public meetings. More recently, the language has been re-introduced into school curricula, and a culture war surrounds its problematic position in modern Wales. Against an image of Wales as a country of anti-imperialistic segregationist politics stands the image of Wales perpetuated in tourist brochures. This image is the rural idyll, with bucolic pastoral characters such as sheepdog owners, and craftspeople, who make things with their hands out of wood and reed.

All of these images, though, do not capture the reality for many of the people living in Ystradgynlais, and, in particular, the experiences of people hidden on the economic margin, unemployed or disabled. 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. This kind of mobilization of 'community' is deeply suspect to feminists and others who wish to consider social change in conjunction with collective action. Thus Iris Marion Young critiques 'community' ideals when they become a desire for social wholeness and identification – a form of politics that relies on sameness, and which in turn erects exclusionary zones and borders (1990). Benedict Anderson, in *The Imagined Community*, sees the problem of national community and its seductiveness in a different light: here, '[I]t is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship' (1991: 5–7). But how can a community politics that keeps openness, provisionality and respect for difference alive be mobilized?

In order to address this question, I collaborated with fellow disabled people in Wales. We realized that to create affective and effective arts for social change, we

needed to find points of entry into the representational canon, into the images and stories of Wales.

Many disabled people in Wales became so due to their labor in coal mines: white-finger vibration symptoms and lung diseases are common, as is arthritis. Depression and other mental health symptoms are also common in Wales, one of the poorest regions in Britain. Nationally and internationally, though, mental health issues in the countryside are marginalized – mental health has become increasingly focused upon as an urban problem, one associated with the rise of modernity's social arrangements and alienations. Studies (such as Torrey and Miller (2001)) bear out this trend: epidemiologically, mental health and in particular schizophrenia, tend to be associated with the city. The rise of the city and the rise and visibility of institutional practice around mental health technologies are linked in the cultural imagination.

Few of these realities of contemporary rural life find their way into the romanticized images of Wales. Television images of the Brecon Beacons, for many the main access to their local landscape, emphasize a place set apart from the everyday, a place of Sunday TV programming with English voices and tweed. Fishing, sheep husbandry and farming form the mainstream images – and the visible reality of these occupations tend to be male-dominated. Many of the participants of the mental health self-help group were female, and they found their voices marginalized not only by disability and class, but also by gender.

The answer to access is not to bring a bus onto the heath, but to find meaningful ways of structuring activity within the national park, and of finding connections between the park and the everyday. In the first meetings within the group, we agreed that one of our prime objectives for the creation of art works was to re-image ourselves, to speak for us and for others about our lived reality of mental health as people living where we did. Everybody in the group had had significant mental health experiences, and encounters with the mental health system. Life experiences included voice-hearing, the diagnosis of schizophrenia, manic depression, anxiety disorders, etc. Some had been hospitalized in the past, and knew at first hand the horror of some institutions. Many were on drug regimes. Some had prison experiences, others had been homeless. Among us were retired miners, factory workers, one teacher, and homemakers. For many of us, loneliness and the experience of the I as singular stood in tension with a way of life that romanticizes village life, communality and community. As we began our work together, we had to assert to each other again and again 'you cannot know . . . you know', that double bind of singular beings and community that Nancy offers.

In our initial meetings and discussions, over tea, we decided that we wanted to use the vocabulary that surrounded us in our media world, the vocabulary of land, myths and history, both personal and national. These were the important, foundational stories of our environment, and we wanted to approach ownership of them – even though we were aware of their problematic nature. Our lives were not apart from these images, and the desire to be seen mixed uneasily with the desire to use the images and narratives that shape the mediation of our world to ourselves.

The initial idea of working in the mental health self-help center was, then, to combine elements of disability politics and storytelling. We wanted to break the silence

surrounding mental health issues, in particular in rural areas, but we wanted to present our experiences in an ambivalent way, not merely to stress the negative experiences, but to retain our dignity and pride. Negotiating the tensions and opportunities between the individual voice and a communal myth-making became central elements of the poetics we built together.

Methods: the 'Lady of the Lake'

The focus of our first sets of workshops, in 2001, was the story of the 'Lady of the Lake'. This story is centered on a lake high up in the hills of the Brecon Beacons, in an area of moors and high fens. The story mirrors similar myths in various British and international locations: a female fairy steps out of the waters, leaves her kingdom, to marry a mortal, and not fit in, or to marry a mortal not worthy of her; and then to vanish again, having transformed aspects of human experience. A local fish-and-chip shop displays the following summary of the Brecon Beacon 'Lady of the Lake' story, painted as part of a mural and written in 'heritage' script on its walls:

In the midst of beautiful mountain scenery, about 16 miles from here, is the lovely lake of Llyn y fan fach. Here, legend has it that a beautiful woman appeared to a poor shepherd boy who was so taken by her that he asked for her hand in marriage. She agreed, but only on condition that he wouldn't strike her 3 times. However, he found cause to and she returned to the lake with her dowry of animals. Behind her were left 3 sons who became the famous doctors of Wales.

(Mural at the Bwyty West End Café, Llandovery)

In the imagination of local people, the story of the 'Lady of the Lake' has, naturally, many more facets, subsets, versions and events than the bare-bones story narrated on this local wall. In the self-help group, we found in particular that stories that emphasized the *reasons* for the violence of the husband on his fairy wife were of interest in many of the versions the women in the group knew and had selected to remember.

In the workshops that followed, we used performance tableaux, rituals, creative writing methods and spatial chorus work to create moments out of the legend's connection with our lives. Through this legend work, we accessed a realm of political practice similar to the kind of practices that de Certeau calls 'tactical', which undermine the 'strategic' – the central force, inscribing its laws legitimately. The strategic is forceful, dominant; it can lay down rules, generalize these and make them work. The tactical is the work of the minority, the non-dominant. 'A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance' (de Certeau, 1988: xix).

de Certeau offers the distinction between the strategy and the tactic as a way of understanding the nature of resistance within the field of discourse. Resistance is not conceptualized as fully there, conscious, strategic, an organized political practice. Instead, de Certeau sees everyday practices as tactical interventions: he likens walking

and talking to acts that momentarily, locally, impact on power structures. An embodied knowledge of the street allows a way of living that negotiates the dictates of street grids, and the vision of social planning, abstraction or metaphorization of life: by walking the street, the 'soulless' plan becomes a lived experience that could, potentially, open up a moment of difference. People get away with things:

(v)ictories of the 'weak' over the 'strong' (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order, etc.), clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, 'hunter's cunning', maneuvers, polymorphic situations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike.

(de Certeau, 1984: xix)

de Certeau's work on the politics and poetics of the everyday outlines how Foucault's resistances can function in practice. His work shows how life deals with rules and how these rules can only be bound by temporality given the force of life running through them, leavening their strength.

Legends and myths, the energies expended on 'storytelling' a location and thereby making it 'human', play an important part in this interaction between strategies and tactics. The absolute rule of 'history' as a monolithic discourse, one that has naturalized itself into truth, is put into question by the power of the minor story, the legend. de Certeau writes: '[W]hereas historiography recounts in the past tense the strategies of instituted powers, these 'fabulous' stories offer their audience a repertory of tactics for future use' (de Certeau, 1984: 23).

de Certeau sees hollow places in the everyday, moments of layering that become accessible in the activity of the everyday, that make the everyday habitable by creating 'depth' and 'space', spatial metaphors that create 'habitation' – a space where one *can* be, rather than having to be in one way only. 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 practices of the everyday. They help to create a phenomenological, lived experience of a location.

It is through the opportunity they offer to store rich silences and wordless stories, or rather through their capacity to create cellars and garrets everywhere, that local legends . . . permit exists, ways of going out and coming back in, and thus habitable spaces.

(de Certeau, 1984: 106)

Legends are seen here as 'exits': as *Spielraum*, room to play, offering the potential to not be caught in an endless, dominant signification. They allow for a place to be seen differently. This ability of legends to open up spaces for difference were used in the process of 'Earth Stories': using the make-believe of the legend allowed our group to make-believe about our own situation, and therefore to allow our imaginations to soar. Ultimately, this strategy allows us to see ourselves as not fixed in discourse,

but to *experience* discourse as a *Spielraum*. And yet this 'freedom' also highlighted again and again the distance between myth and the limited I, the inoperable nature of storytelling that haunts our gatherings.

de Certeau links this ability of stories and their historical, layered ghosting of a specific location to tactics, evading the fixed knowledges of Foucault's *Panopticon*:

There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can 'invoke' or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in – and this inverts the schema of the *Panopticon*.

(de Certeau, 1984: 108)

These local stories create forms of knowledge that are minor, local, momentarily evoked – in tension with the 'public'.

These links between knowledge and minor discourses, and between practice and transformatory repetition, became graspable in the workshops. Every time we joke about the woman's perception of the strikes her husband gives her, the perspective shifts momentarily from the 'inevitable' difference between human and fairy to gender issues: traditional tellings of the story use the point of view of the young man who wants to wed the lovely lady he saw in the lake while he was herding his sheep. Every time we transpose our local environment into the gothic genre, we see our world with different eyes, and the 'normal' loses its hold temporarily. Nancy's community of I's who are others, who journey together to see themselves shifting, becoming, and yet are part of a common place, emerges in this improvisatory play. Becoming other, stepping outside the rules of place and space, means being both more and more fully the I's we already are: our imaginations and ways of being allow for more than one facet of subject position, but are always bound back to the conditions of singularity, subjectivity, imagination and context that we live in. We can recognize the strangenesses and familiarities in each other, the moment where the story and the I are cast asunder, where the experience of the limit exiles us from full presence in the myth we make. But instead of retreating to disappointed selves, we can see otherness within ourselves, and we can begin to build community that is both located in specific conditions and yet open to difference. The tactical uses of holding open the multiplicity of the I are not without serious discomfort, though: no place of rest and certainty is available.

In our projects, all of us weld our identities in new provisional alignments: Welsh, English, German, farmer, miner, unemployed, academic, artist, writer, performer, family member, patient, victim, survivor, client and many more. When we work together, paying careful heed to the multiple identities means that we strive to hold open the unknown: a sense of difference within the known, within the warm atmosphere of our meetings. Listening to the poetry we write, many of these singularities as multiple, in new constellation, emerge as we trust ourselves to share. The sharing is the core part of this relation: not the content of what is shared, or the reception of the shared content and its understanding. The *act of leaning* anchors our circle. Nancy's leaning towards community allows me to think of these differences

and otherings, as well as those that swing among us unsaid, unwritten, and as yet unthought, as potentialities that feed our community, and question its boundaries and definitions.

de Certeau offers a phenomenology of resistance: of the embodiment of living within structures, opening up spaces for people to live in. The political hope I hold is that the accumulation of layers, distancing us from the 'dominant' story of our world and its relation, and from our story of our self, doesn't just alienate us, but opens up Nancy's I's as others. This offers up a reservoir of richness that binds us with different ties to one another and to our locality. I believe that a stronger grasp of the potential of group communication and a sense of pride in the 'deep' location surrounding us can awaken social processes and political consciousness. Art-making plays a significant part in this transformatory process: the workshops were process-based, but over a period of time, we shaped aspects of our work together into a product that could leave the circle of the self-help center and travel into the wider social world. Early on in one workshop, we created a short performance piece about the lady of the lake, consisting of a number of tableaux and transitions and a narrative recited as a choral, with individual voices taking on different 'characters'. The group showed great pride in their creation after a number of run-throughs, and the moving together, creating spaces and openings for one another set a new tone of intimacy and openness in the following workshops. As we talked about the experience it became clear that, while we felt a desire to show our work, we acknowledged a multitude of problems in bringing the performance 'live' to local events. And thus, our version of the 'Lady of the Lake' traveled to the outside as a video, combining spoken poetry and visuals, recording us in the countryside we were talking about. This provided a very useful vehicle for allowing our imaginations to soar, and our writing and our stories became wilder, as we all realized that a different set of rules (strategies) governs the universe of video-making when compared with live art.

Embodiment as a reservoir and repetition of knowledge played an interesting part in the way that memories became retrievable, and entered from the private into the social: when we were exploring the connection between our childhood memories and the story, most of us pointed to moments of outside physical activity as a pivotal point in our memories: walking in a group of schoolchildren, standing by a gate in the garden, playing in a field. Meditating on the myth brought many of the participants to recall the feeling of grass under their fingers, or their emotions as they sat amongst rocks. We discussed how video would allow us to show intimate perspectives, including the touch of hand on stone, in close-up.² Sensations usually characterized as 'minor' or 'private' took on a different charge as we gave ourselves permission to focus on *our* way of telling, and how it felt right to *us*. Soon our workshops moved outside, from the living room of the community center to the small garden. We collected sensations, feelings, stories, moments, images and scenes. I acted as a facilitator and scribe: recording with whatever means possible what we hoarded, moderating discussions that edited our collection of everyday practices and local retellings down to manageable size. Our poems were all communal: we agreed on a theme to write about, and then we all produced four lines, with sometimes only single words in each line. Then we read them out to each other. And finally read them communally: in a circle, everybody

reading their first line, then as the circle came round again the second one. In this way, a communal theme created a coherence in the poem, but one that was beyond the individual author. In these poetry rounds, the I's do not share their singularity, but we lean in, from our own singularities into a rhythm, a round.

Giant river boulders, round hollows ground into them, by the rushing
 river twirling into deep dark pools.
 Branches bent, fingers grip, fear flings me into the hole.
 Grass bends into the earth.
 In the craggy rocks, an opening to an underground tunnel.
 I am frightened of the darkness.
 The sense of not knowing where will it lead to, how long will it go on
 for.
 Suddenly there is light ahead – a cave in the mountainside.
 Deliver me from the fear of darkness, lady of the lake.
 The lady of the lake appears in the garden, and flies to the moon and the
 stars, and promises, good times will appear once more.
 (from 'Earth Stories' video-poem)

Anxieties: 'Sleeping Giants'

If 'Earth Stories' was our summer story, our celebration, and our engagement with mainstream aesthetics, the next video we created, 'Sleeping Giants', was our winter work. It is harsher, its production is even further removed from 'the professional' as we took the camera with us all the time, with different videographers amongst us capturing the shots.

The video-poem deals with another local story: as you move towards Ystradgynlais and through it, you can see a hill above the village. The outline of the hill is like a lying man – and the formation is called the 'Sleeping Giant'.

I wish I could lie still
 For a long long time like you do
 Is the sleeping giant going to wake up?
 Is the sleeping giant going to wake up?
 Head in the clouds
 Stone body
 tilting feet first
 down into the earth

(from 'Sleeping Giants' video-poem)

This 'mountain man' is not visible from any static point – the best views can only be gained by traveling in a car. The route follows the closed and disused line of the canal that used to transport coal from the Beacons and Ystradgynlais to the ironworks. And this connection between the giant and the coal, the hill and the mineworkings,

the cave, the weight of history, the lost grandeur of Welsh economic power, is the back-story of our second video-poem. In it, we search: our original idea was anchored in the detective genre, searching compulsively for the Giant. Compulsion disorders and anxiety is something many of us in the group share, and we saw here a way of again transforming individual mental habits into an artistic vision.

Find a deep cave to the heart of the giant
It is dark but my eyes adjust
Two small points of light in the darkness
I can see the light through the crevices of his fingers
Heart beating faster, I could feel the warmth and the need to get closer
to the giant's heart.
The giant's heart is a cave of stalagmites, an uncharted country.
(from 'Sleeping Giants' video-poem)

By reading de Certeau, I shored up my sense of the communal importance of our art-making. I can make sense of the empowerment, the euphoria of re-imagining ourselves. But, of course, the act of labor itself is always visible, the tactic remains momentary, minor, a forced insertion. Performance substitutes, cites, re-creates. However performance does not offer an easy substitute; it offers a labored one. To quote Joseph Roach: 'a stand-in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace' (1996: 3). This Sleeping Giant isn't mythical, ritualistic, always-already-there, outside history. In our practice, the Giant becomes discursive, historically contingent, an oratorical procedure. By recounting when we saw him, we historicize him, binding his presence to the time of our lives – bridging distances between I's and myths. With this, our Giant as myth, retold, offers us a process of community communication. By destabilizing the founding story, we fight for entry into the realm where new meaning can be founded at the same time as we continue to be suspicious of founding stories and their exclusionary effects. And it is our loss of certainty, our anxiety, that allows for new community to come into being, in being-together, and in joint exploration.

Here the mythic hero – and the heroic myth – interrupts his pose and his epic. He tells the truth: that he is not a hero, not even, or especially not, the hero of writing or literature, and that there is no hero, there is no figure who alone assumes and presents the heroism of the life and death of commonly singular beings. He tells the truth of the interruption of his myth, the truth of the interruption of all founding speeches, of all creative and poietic speech, of speech that schematizes a world and that fictions an origin and an end. He says, therefore, that foundation, poiesis and scheme are always offered, endlessly, to each and all, to the community, to the absence of communion through which we communicate and through which we communicate to each other not *the* meaning of community, but *an infinite reserve of common and singular meanings*.

(Jean-Luc Nancy, 1991: 79)

When we as a group engage our local myths, we do so with an agenda and a tactical sense. We substitute the dominant myth, but the act of substitution creates a new anxiety and liminality, new impossible desires for wholeness and plenitude: a traumatics of political art labor. The mythological fullness of mythology is not available to us. Our myth is a substitute myth, hewn out of dominant images as a response to them.

Conclusion: community art

In 'Earth Stories' and 'Sleeping Giants' we translate. We transpose perceptual or cognitive difference into sources of artistic endeavor. Our communal practice that refuses to be singularly authored binds our work back to everyday practices of storytelling. And, ultimately, our work also came back to the traditional places of storytelling. Eventually, both 'Earth Stories' and 'Sleeping Giants' had very successful exhibition records, traveling to the British National Film Theatre (as part of different years of the National Disability Film Festival), and to many other international film festivals, conferences, and disability culture meetings. But these circuits were quite far removed from the realities of the Welsh village, and the everyday funding and acceptance struggles of a mental health self-help organization in its own locality. More importantly, then, our videos played and continue to play locally. The mental health self-help center uses the video as part of its regular stand at the local markets, where the stand functions to raise awareness of the center and its function in the community. The videos have also helped the center to raise funds: they provide excellent marketing material, and give an insight into the abilities, depth and creativity of the people using the center. In all of these marketplaces, where information is exchanged and public visibility tested, our re-visions of ourselves tactically undermine stereotypes of disability. In the video interviews that accompany the video-poem about the 'Lady of the Lake', two participants say this about their experiences in the project:

When we began this project, I was very apprehensive about starting it. I've always written, but it was always personal, private to me. But I never ever dreamed that anything like this could have come out of it. Because people with a mental health problem, there is such a stigma attached to it. It is like people with a mental health problem are non-achievers, but that's not true to all. Because what we achieve in doing this project is more than I could ever dreamed of doing!

Being part of this project has been a revelation. I worked in a group, which wasn't something I was used to doing when I had my own mental distress, disability. I always had the feeling that something good could come out of something that at the time was so very bad and black and terrible. But I know that if we go really deep inside ourselves, we can reach a creative point and that is what working in this group has revealed to me.

(video transcript)

In the processes of the project, its products and in the use we make of these products in the locality, the impossible goal of community emerges as a provisional place from which to speak. Working and re-working the connections between the everyday, the artistic, the land and the people, the village and the mental health self-help group, images of mental health and conceptual or temporal difference, plenitude and desire, we again and again start to knit places to live in, and we do so in being-together. We lean, connecting I's and others, singular story and myth. The last words of this chapter, then, come from our group rather than from one single voice:

This is not a giant of despair,
this is a giant of hope
I saw him after the snowfall
silent and frozen in time
His cheek was wet

He lay there like a monster,
quiet and still
I thought if he yawned,
his arms would reach the sky

Notes

- 1 The work was initially funded by a MIND Millennium Award, a fund that allowed people to create work that strengthened their communities, without a salary or artist's fee component for the organizer. Later, additional funds from the University of Wales, Swansea, Adult Outreach Department and, most significantly, from the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, allowed us to extend our work. My academic appointments allow me to work in this collaborative and research-focused manner, without the expectation of 'peer-reviewed' outcomes or venues for 'my' art practice. It is important to stress, though, that while community arts are (relatively speaking) thriving in many countries, community artists often struggle to make a living.

In the case of the Olimpias projects in Wales, the fact that I do not necessarily get paid for projects I facilitate can be an important feature of building trust and working together. In other projects, and always dependent on funding structures, this issue is dealt with differently: in the Olimpias projects in Rhode Island, every participant gets paid for participation in every workshop, as a recognition of their creative labor, appropriate to the way that recognition is usually bestowed in the US.

- 2 Participants and collaborators in the Olimpias projects are aware that I am an academic, and (in some way) of the ways that value and recognition flow within the academy. But they also know that I do not write about projects immediately, or after only short contact, and that I carefully guard privacy and confidences. When I do write about projects, it is with permission, and usually after a long period of reflection. In the main, collaborators know me as a fellow disabled woman, with many stories and issues that I share with them, but are not for publication or public consumption,

just like their own. They know me as a disability culture activist, and they know that my writing is always in aid of a larger political project: the validation and celebration of disability culture and community arts.

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