

Magic at the margins: Towards a magical realist human geography

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to put forward the case for a magically realist human geography, drawing on geographical research into the lives and lifeworlds of people with long term and disabling mental health difficulties. In the paper, I move between extracts from my own ethnographic research with mental health service users and survivors and the equally unusual stories of the literary genre, magical realism, in which I find a framework for addressing what I understand as a narrative paucity in much of mainstream research writing about mental distress. The paper reflects upon the strange and sometimes magical qualities of illness and recovery in the context of individuals living with severe and enduring mental health problems, and how traditional constructions of ‘evidence’ variously exclude or overlook such experiences. The contributions of the paper are both to explore how ‘magic’ might encapsulate certain aspects of living with mental distress, and – developing ongoing discussions in the sub-discipline around geographies of enchantment, magic and spirituality – to consider how a magical realist framework for geographical research might do justice to the rich, marvellous and irreducible experiences of everyday life which are often excluded from conventional evidence bases.

Keywords

Evidence, enchantment, madness, magic, magical geography, mental distress, magical realism, politics of knowledge, pragmatism, recovery

Magic at the Margins: Towards a magical realist human geography

The universe is full of magical things, patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper.¹

In this article I reflect on how the fantastical literary genre magical realism, associated so strongly with the postcolonial Global South, has come to ‘enchant’ my own work with mental health service-users and survivors in the somewhat different geographical context of inner city North East England mental health rehabilitative facilities. In the article I explore how the politically and ontologically subversive strategies of magical realism offer innovative and humane ways of responding to the similarly subversive tales of those living with long term and serious mental health disorders. Joining a growing interest in the discipline in the magical and more-than-rational,² I offer a report from the field of what it is to practise as a ‘magically oriented’ geographer in a complex social and cultural context such as that of mental distress and mental health recovery. Culminating with what I present as a ‘magical manifesto’ for social research (and maybe for practice as well), I discuss how this magical realist framework might offer a serious response to demands for engagement and criticality within geography and beyond. The paper constitutes a coming together of several themes and agendas in contemporary cultural geography, geographies of mental health/madness³, the emerging arena of ‘geohumanities’, and what has been variously defined as the spectro-⁴ or extra-⁵ geographies of magic, enchantment, spirituality, and the occult – i.e., those forays into the spaces and experiences of everyday life that cannot be seen or mapped in literal or ordinarily explicable ways. More modestly, in bringing the (eminently geographical) writings of magical realism into the different geographical setting of mental health care and recovery, the piece offers a worked example of one more way in which cultural geography might engage with, and benefit from entanglements with literary and fantastical worlds.⁶

The arguments in this paper originate as a response to a particular kind of (pervasive and extensively accepted) manner of doing and thinking about research that I shall call here simply the ‘best evidence’ agenda. What kind of evidence is best and for what purpose, we recognise, will be a matter of context and purpose – compare, for example, the ‘best evidences’ invoked in evaluating whether *Much Ado About Nothing* was Shakespeare’s best comedy, deciding where in a city to position a new mental health in-patient facility, rejecting the null hypothesis, or coming to a prudent decision

about whether acquiring a cat will make for a happier household. By ‘best evidence’ I refer instead to the ways in which the ‘evidence based’ discourse (from its origins in evidence-based medicine to today’s broader array of professional practices that now seek the ‘evidence based’ prefix), has carved a distinctive and exclusive notion of what robust and reliable scholarly research must look like.

While scepticism towards the reaches of the evidence agenda (methodologically, epistemologically) has perhaps now become more of a starting than an end point for readers of *cultural geographies*, three decades since the first appearance of the term ‘evidence-based’ in the literature, the overarching direction in academic research more broadly nonetheless remains that of continued acceleration towards ‘best evidence’.⁷ The image to which I will return is the now canonical ‘evidence hierarchy’ – that rhetorical tool introduced to trainee medics and other aspiring evidence-based professionals as a means of ranking the relative authority of various types of research design. It is not my intention to explore further here either the claims or the critiques of evidence based research. Rather, in the argument that is presented in this paper, I start from a position of suggesting simply that the rhetoric of the evidence hierarchy has today become sometimes problematically powerful, and that with such power comes dangers to alternative modes of inquiry (and indeed spheres of human life) that fall short of ‘best evidence’ as defined by more mainstream and normalised evidence bases.

To come to the substantive core of this discussion then, in this paper I explore the provocative term ‘magic’ as a tool for capturing the rich and wonder-ful experiences of illness and recovery that escape elucidations of the world as recorded by ‘best evidence’ (including but not limited to the unusual world-building of psychotic and delusional experiences and the kind of magic that happens in properly therapeutic encounters). To speak of magic in a discussion of the evidence base is clearly to challenge ordinary codes of knowing that support ‘best evidence’. Like its literary ally magical realism, magic for me then is a disruptive tool, drawing to our attention to the politics of knowledge that unfurl between that which can be considered admissible evidence and that which is mere fantasy. Yet to talk of magic is also an aesthetic or textual gesture (a matter of talking and writing) – seeking to redress and reinvigorate what has been identified by myself and others as a narrative thinness in academic style that has become anaesthetised by the impassive language of the scientific report, far beyond the confines of the randomised controlled trial.⁸ In appropriating here the language not just of magic but magical *realism*, I seek to focus the position of this article into a

direct and explicit exchange with the competing and more dominant realism of the mainstream ‘evidence base’.

Magic is best demonstrated empirically and as such I illustrate this paper with various kinds of evidence from my own research in the field of mental health rehabilitation and psychiatric survivorship (2007-2013).⁹ It is my contention that magic is everywhere, but many of the stories I have selected here are from those in my research considered ‘hardest to help’: those with very long-standing histories of mental ill health, complex diagnoses, long-term disengagement from the labour market, concurrent problems with drug or alcohol misuse, contact with the criminal justice system – or simple inability to gain relief or cure from more mainstream psychiatric interventions. This forms part of the argument: that for people who appear most challenging to mainstream service-providers or policies, recovery might be particularly dependent on the right kind of magical touch.

Discovering Magic

How does an academic geographer enculturated in the social science traditions become interested in ‘magic’? I approach this question with a reflection upon my own journey as an ethnographer and magically oriented geographer, based upon ethnographic and narrative research projects to include doctoral and postdoctoral work, spanning (at the time of writing) an eight year period.

To tell a story then: for me, magic arrived on around and about the twenty-second month of my doctoral fieldwork, on a rainy afternoon in the final weeks before Christmas, at the therapeutic work programme I have called elsewhere the Plumtree Centre.¹⁰ Formally, the project was a qualitative study of the links between work, employment and mental (ill) health, comprising ethnographic and interview-based fieldwork at a range of therapeutic workshops and employment rehabilitation projects in the North East of England. At the time of commencing, this was a field consumed with the question of how best to get recipients of long-term sickness benefits back into the paid labour market. In any standard review of the evidence, the large scale quantitative study or systematic review of employment outcomes would form the archetypal research type.¹¹ As my own work progressed however, I became less interested in overarching *trends* in back to work journeys (the stuff of the conventional evidence base) and instead in the incredible and indeed awe-inspiring differences between individual experience – and in the variously strange, courageous, funny, upsetting

and inexplicable encounters that constituted so much of what I saw happening at the Centre and yet which were almost completely absent from more systematic and policy-facing research accounts.

We might say that these are the types of revelation that are experienced by every ethnographer. However, on that December day, watching as the work team became briefly diverted from their workshop activities to witness the season's first meagre snowflakes and someone saying something about there being 'some kind of magic' at Plumtree today (referring both to snowflakes and the whole way we'd all pulled together all afternoon), these ideas began crystallising as fast as the snow on the window. Yet arriving at any expanded understanding of what is 'real' (by which I mean what *matters*) required immediately a second expansion. I have written elsewhere¹² (and see too my introduction to Sam and David below) how the formally unreal experiences of delusion and psychosis assume physical, corporeal and linguistic presences in spaces like Plumtree. If the enchantment of watching snowflakes and 'feeling magical' (blessed, enchanted) warranted the formal status of reality, so too did the malign forces of our worries and cares. To believe in magic was not just an ethical or aesthetic disposition, but an ontological one.

I am not, of course, the only person to have found or sought magic in response to the mainstay of scholarly 'evidence'. The much loved texts by David Abram¹³ or Jane Bennett¹⁴, for example, or (in geography) the enchanted humanisms of Tara Woodyer and Hilary Geoghegan¹⁵ or occult globalisations of Steve Pile¹⁶, adopt similar vocabularies to explore how the everyday world seems rich with wonder and magic. (Of these pieces, Woodyer and Geoghegan offer the best introduction to geography's disciplinary engagement with enchantment and the more-than-rational).¹⁷ Andy Merrifield's *Magical Marxism* also offers encouragement, drawing upon the power of an 'unbridled imagination'¹⁸ as a critical source of political power and motivation for social change. In the specific context of mental (ill) health, Mick Smith et al's work on phobic lifeworlds¹⁹ draws explicitly upon a framework of magic in ways that are deeply complementary to my own (see also Mary Levens for a more psychologically-oriented account).²⁰ I have noted elsewhere²¹ my indebtedness to the late anthropologist Els van Dongen in her understanding of the storytelling of people living with unusual and psychotic mental states as creative forms of magic in a world in which 'the rhetoric of suffering has little meaning'.²²

Encouraged by this flurry of turns towards the more-than-rational and more-than-empirical then, in my new role as a magically-oriented researcher I positioned myself as a collector of stories

about that which seemed otherwise ‘beyond’ or ‘in excess of’²³ the regular empirical research report. The resulting research portfolio might to an extent be understood as a catalogue of everyday magic – of mystery illnesses and magical cures, of magical therapeutic happenings, and sometimes of the complex and problematic magic of despair and madness.

And so the people I introduce in my research – again, many of whom themselves articulated their stories through some reference to magic or enchantment – include the new mother who falls into a fairy-tale sleep for exactly two years (a real life sleeping beauty, or so her husband says)²⁴ or the respondent who, on the brink of suicide in the wake of an abusive marriage, finds herself in a halted train carriage in the midst of a power-cut when she discovers ‘as if by magic’, left behind in the seat beside her, a self-help book about surviving abuse in which pencilled into the inside cover is written her maiden name and furthermore a folded bookmark of a newspaper cutting which advertises an affordable housing scheme for people who are ‘just starting out alone’, where she will eventually end up living.²⁵ But also in the catalogue are the people who live with the dark and difficult magical burdens that unusual psychological experiences can bring.²⁶ I will talk later of David, a former employee of a local public transport provider, who must ‘check’ (tap lightly with his knuckles) the walls and floors of his surroundings at intervals directed by invisible voices in order to secure the timely running of the North East bus network and prevent the apocalypse; or Deborah, who (as she puts it) is ‘entirely normal’ apart from her fear of particular shades of green²⁷, and who thus lives almost entirely indoors in a green-free safe-house. An interesting facet of becoming a magically-orientated geographer is that the further I became interested in these kinds of story, the more I found them coming to me – both in the figurative sense of the imaginative impetus to recognise such moments within any particular research encounter, and also in a literal way – the research participant, for example, who would phone me up and say, ‘I have a friend here and I think you would be interested in her story’. I refer us again to the quotation from the writer and dramatist Eden Phillpotts with which I open this paper: ‘The universe is full of magical things, patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper’.

Finding magic in the evidence

An evidence base:

Lindsay is in her early twenties and has spent the last years between psychiatric hospitals, rehabilitation centres and prison. During this time, Lindsay has been provided with various mental health workers, probation officers, social workers, case workers – relationships which have appeared only rarely beneficial and on occasions actively damaging. Recently however, she has (as she puts it) been ‘doing really well’ with the support of Bev, a mentor from a third-sector women’s project, with whose help she has cut down her drinking, started a college course and moved from a friend’s sofa to stable accommodation. Bev, according to Lindsay, is ‘magical’ and ‘does magical things’: she (re-)ignites a desire in Lindsay to get her life on track; she negotiates a second chance for Lindsay at the college when she is threatened with expulsion; she mysteriously finds Lindsay a place in one of the project’s transition homes despite a long waiting list. Yet the relationship between Bev and Lindsay also appears magical. Lindsay can get along with Bev in a way that didn’t appear possible with her other appointed helpers; therapeutic outcomes (to speak the language of the evidence base) flow freely; significantly, it appears that Bev and Lindsay quite like one another. Bev is ‘good’ with Lindsay and ‘good things’ happen when they are together—yet the mechanics of this relationship or indeed even the words to describe its efficacy are difficult to find.²⁸

Pete, like others in my research, will be keen to tell you about his ‘Road to Damascus’. Pete has been suffering from depression since becoming ‘long-term unemployed’ after his factory was closed in the 1990s recession, and in 2003 was prosecuted for benefit fraud, an experience which had a profound and lasting effect on his self-confidence as well as his employability. The incident in question occurs six years after the conviction on the way to a day’s cash-in-hand labouring, when Pete steps out to cross a road but is knocked to the ground when a prisoner transport van pulls out from a side street and all but crashes into him. In Pete’s words, lying there on the pavement, ‘I had been feeling really shit that day but it just hit me – not because I could have died, but thinking about that van and the little blacked out windows and them inside not knowing where they’re going and I thought “well, at least I’m not in that—at least I’m not locked up somewhere”. It was a wake-up call. I never went to the building site [...] I went and got a coffee, I got myself a newspaper and I started looking for a proper job.’ Experiences such as Pete’s near-miss collision clearly cannot be replicated for the purposes of a randomised controlled trial – yet as Pete will tell you, being nearly hit by a prison van probably saved his life.

Kate has a therapeutic work placement at an animal shelter, where she is trained to groom the animals. Kate self-harms and self-neglects, her own hair often tangled and her skin scrubbed raw. Whilst it is something she finds difficult

to articulate, nurturing the creatures awakens something more self-nurturing in her own skin and bones. For Kate, animals are mixed into magical modes of thinking. At the shelter, the warden tells her that her second name, Gattrel, means cat's tail. Kate (Kitty) Gattrel is thus a kitty-cat, a double cat. Cats are Kate's favourite animals—she says that they are her totem (another idea she has gained from the warden). This magical belief is instrumentally fortuitous: cats are known for looking after themselves; acquiring a feline totem (an unexpected outcome from a work placement!) encourages Kate to do the same. It is not so much that Kate believes in magic because she is 'crazy'. Rather, there is something about the shelter and its volunteers, the animals, and the unexpected peace Kate finds in her work 'that take [her] to a magical place'. Whilst conventional notions of transcendentalism are not quite 'right' for understanding such experiences, nonetheless, some notion of the more-than-bodily or extra-psychic seems necessary.

Sam, a participant at the Plumtree Centre, is flying a secret new fighter-jet in the Royal Air Force. Her duty is to protect the nation. The mission is undercover, but we in the workshop are allowed to hear about it. In my first encounter with Sam at the day programme, she bursts into an in-progress focus group on mental health and employment which the Centre staff had arranged for me. 'I have a very important job', she says and pulls up a chair before proceeding to tell us about it. Sam's life is not without hardship. The electrifying wars of her delusions put her in frequent peril. When the magic starts to fade and the ordinary world of the daycentre returns to focus, she will be left tired and confused. Traditional approaches in psychiatric research have tended to downplay the contents of delusions to focus instead on the social and clinical consequences of living with psychosis. But what of the many ways in which the imaginary world of fighter planes and secret missions invades the very real spaces of the material world and secret missions transgress the binary between fantasy and the real?

If magic evades a positive description (in that, as a collection of occurrences beyond the conventional evidence base, a concept which is defined primarily through that-which-it-is-not), in each of the above examples, I try instead to capture just one aspect of this thing I call magic. And so, as candidates of magic we include: that moment of therapeutic awakening that emerges so surprisingly after years of therapeutic failure²⁹ (a kick in the gut for inductive theories of extrapolation, including those which make future treatment decisions about what support to offer an individual based on their previous therapeutic responsiveness – *as if the world was really that predictable!?*); the role of 'fate' and 'destiny', by which presumably we mean here the effects of coincidence and chance; the animating forces of spiritual, religious and superstitious world narratives in the lives of individual actors; the intimate and

often unforeseeable ways in which the landscapes of the unconscious or delusion can come to ‘matter’ in all kinds of ordinary, everyday ways.

While each of the above extracts represents a different relation to the evidence base, what draws such stories together is their difficulty in fitting with conventional research evidence – either because the nature of the experience itself could not be controlled or reproduced in the formats demanded by the methodologies of a robustly ‘evidenced-based’ research project or – perhaps more poignantly - because the subject matter itself was not of the kind deemed suitable for policy-facing academic engagement. In the longer version of this argument, I develop this last point with reference to a later strand of my research, which this time included conducting paired interviews with mental health service-users who had taken part in previous research projects and the researchers who had interviewed them, about the experience of telling and hearing mental health stories in academic contexts.³⁰ Echoing Sara Mackian’s comments about the strains of researching unconventionally evidenced phenomena³¹, what emerged in these discussions was how many of the marginal experiences I have here called magic were at each stage of the research process removed, adjusted or politely forgotten in the final research outputs. As Mackian reports of her own research into spiritual encounters³², the routes for such ‘silencing’ (or at the very least, omission) of magic from the evidence base were various – because such experiences weren’t disclosed by the participant to the researcher in the first place or else weren’t recognised as the sort of thing that constituted ‘proper’ data, or quite often, because they *were* expressed but were later dismissed (and again, for all kinds of reason – disbelief or lack of understanding about what the respondent had reported; concern about how a research piece containing such stories might be received; the lack of a common language to speak about magical occurrences; or simply the lack of space to tell stories in academic reports). It is interesting to note that such censorship emerged from respondents as well as researchers in these encounters (i.e., this is not a *straightforward* tale of the researcher-researched power inequality). To return to the woman from my own research with the book on the broken-down train, the interview ended: ‘I feel a bit weird saying all this in front of the tape recorder ... it doesn’t feel very *scientific* somehow’.³³

While magic might not always ‘feel’ the stuff of a scientific research encounter however, it is important to stress simultaneously that to believe in the everyday enchantments of the people I discuss in my research requires no formal departure from the metaphysics and epistemological

commitments of the regular evidence base, but rather only its rhetoric. To summarise the arguments I make about everyday magic and its relation to ‘best evidence’ then: (1) magic, as here phrased, is an ordinary part of the human world, particularly where concerning matters of breakdown and recovery (the ontological argument); (2) the evidence base, as it currently stands, is impoverished by the lack of a full appreciation of magic (the epistemological argument); (3) it follows that social inquiry should expect to encounter magic and should design itself where possible to see magic and the prosaic together (the methodological argument).

A magical realist perspective

For some readers no doubt, magic will remain an indulgent candidate for inclusion in a social science evidence base. Yet, reiterating the emphases of Pile and MacKian in their treatments of the spiritual or occult, what I highlight instead in the above research extracts is the unexpected compatibility of magic with wholly *realist* perspectives. In the remainder of this paper I want to develop these ideas by stepping into another genre of magical writing – that which has become known in the secondary literature as magical realism. I have alluded already in this paper to one particular application of a magical realist approach within Geography in the form of Merrifield’s *Magical Marxism*, which is illustrated with scenes from Gabriel García Márquez’s fantastical town Macondo as it appears in the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.³⁴ While Merrifield uses Macondo to animate his vision for an *alternative* future, my own emphasis in this paper has been to embrace what is already magical about the existing world, and to turn to magical realist literatures for clues upon how we might respond to it. In turning to literary magical realism, I present a mode of thinking and writing that I suggest can help us to integrate the magical experiences I have discussed in this paper into more mainstream evidence bases about illness and recovery – while simultaneously taking up the challenge of Woodyer and Geoghegan to find “‘new” ways of appreciating and capturing enchantment”³⁵ in human geographical research. Beyond the academy, however, through the unusual ontological strategies of magical realism, I also find potentials for practical and pragmatic ways of responding to the needs of people with unusual and magical experiences, for whom – as demonstrated in the stories above – ‘conventional’ professional wisdoms have often failed.

With origins traced as dispersedly as twentieth century Latin America and nineteenth century Russia, magical realism might be thought of as a broad collection of fantastic narrative and artistic forms (for examples beyond Márquez, see Salman Rushdie, Angela Carter, Alejo Carpentier, Isabel Allende, aspects of Gogol and Kafka) that variously transgress or problematise the conventional division between bourgeois scientific rationality and the fantastic or magical.³⁶ In magical realist stories, magic is part of the ordinary world – flying carpets wait alongside taxicabs in Mumbai traffic jams, circuses and carnivals have as many technologies as the medical clinic, and humans share agency with animals and spirits in quite undiscerning manners. Highly acclaimed in the academic literature, magical realist texts can be read as politicised fairy-tales embedded not in a land ‘far, far away’ but in the everyday landscapes of the contemporary world. Often originating from the Global South, magical realism now enjoys an established presence in postcolonial³⁷ and indigenous³⁸ studies. To consider how magical realism might inform the similarly peripheral identity politics of mental health research thus seems an interesting and pertinent line of inquiry. While there are differences between the canonical magical realist masterpieces and the approach to magic that I take, in what follows I offer just a few suggestions as to how social research in matters of illness and recovery might benefit from a magical realist perspective, and how a ‘belief in magic’ might offer one way of taking the call for a renewed criticality within social research very seriously indeed.

The first point I make about magical realism and its relevance to a critical study of mental distress is one of solidarity. Already, we have seen that magical realism is a genre where eccentrics (ex-centrics, perhaps) are centralised while traditional strongholds of knowledge and power are simultaneously decentred. As forms of narrative written ‘by and for people at the margins’,³⁹ mad and magical realist stories thus share common themes, committed similarly to the challenges of the liminal and marginal. Just as Azaru exists between the spirit world and the living in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road*⁴⁰, Sam, who I introduce above, lives between the magical worlds of fighter pilots and imaginary wars that appear to her in her psychoses and the more mundane spaces of the ‘back to work’ programme, both of which problematically demand her attention and time.

Like many of the narratives in my own research, magical realism similarly attunes us to the complex and problematic relations between personal distress and a wider politics of anxiety. In Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsor wakes one rainy morning to find he has been ‘transformed in his bed into a horrible vermin’⁴¹, apparently a result of his long working hours as a travelling salesman.

Similarly, in Gogol's *The Nose*⁴², the reader follows the story of Major Kovalev, whose nose falls off his face and runs away to lead a life without him – an experience which appears to be the result of the myriad frustrations of Russian bureaucracy. Many of the vignettes I include in my own evidence base reveal something of the tensions between the individualised narratives of 'illness' and broader socio-cultural-political distress (consider the case of Pete (p. CROSSREF), for instance, whose story seems as explicable through the combined lenses of labour market restructuring and retrenchments of the welfare state as it does from some clinical class of depression). Yet – breaking away from less fantastical literary traditions - the literal transfigurations that encumber the characters of Kafka or Gogol above also provide ways of talking about the intensity and vitalism with which individuals come to carry the tensions of an economic system in mind and body: consider Sally (another participant in my research), who has been working double shifts at a 24 hour supermarket, and who has become increasingly convinced that her body is part of the till, and that her hands transferring money from customer to cash draw are just part of the machinery (in fact, appropriately for a machine, she has actually lost feeling in both arms: indeed it was this symptom rather than feelings of mental ill-health that encouraged her to consult her doctor).

Beyond the critique of individualist accounts of mental distress, magical realist stories also offer prototypes for moving beyond the biases of institutional power that can reside 'between the lines' of traditional mental health research writing. The second strength I find in magical realism then is a mode of talking about intense or unusual emotional experiences without automatic deferral to the institutionalised authorities of psychology or medicine. The characters of magical realist texts are in various combinations suffering or disabled, or apparently 'mad' or haunted – however, and in a way that cannot be said for many literary forms dealing more explicitly with distress and unhappiness, in shying away from the expressly psychological, magical realism simultaneously remains assuredly non-reductive (by which I mean neither medicalised nor psychologised). In contrast to the literary genres from which the medical and social sciences have traditionally sought insight – patient testimonies and biographies (Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sylvia Plath), for example – magical realism speaks little of the emotional experience of sickness and recovery and less still of the world of therapists, doctors and treatments. In *The Nose*, Kovalev finds the disappearance of his extremity a matter for the police rather than the physician and Gogol provides little information as to how Kovalev might feel about such inconvenience; in *Metamorphosis*, Gregor's family sends the doctor

away when they realise what misfortune has befallen him. I reiterate here that this is a *de*-centred rather than a *re*-centred mode of approaching power and knowledge – and so it is not that medicine or the psychological are demonised in magical realism, but rather that they are simply not indispensable. Such achievement will be instructive to the kind of approach that critical approaches to researching mental distress find necessary too – that is, neither to take for granted any inherent authority of the psychological or medical professions, yet also to avoid some of the more dogmatic and universalistic objections of reactive anti-psychiatry either.

Third and more importantly in my defence for a magical realist geography is the impressive and compassionate approach to conceptualising difference that I find in magical realist literary genres⁴³, a feature we will find particularly instructive with regard to the requirements in mental health geographies and indeed geographical inquiry more broadly both to consider the radical differentiation of individual narratives and to speak collectively (socially and politically) about the conditions of distress. In terms of the ‘evidence base’, this is significant: in any endeavour which seeks to represent the experiences and views of those who have felt first-hand the effects of mental illness lies a question of who can speak for whom – especially in a group which demonstrates already such ‘wonderful’ differences⁴⁴. More prosaically however, regardless of our analytic or methodological preferences, the unescapable demands of writing – the tasks of *synthesising* an argument or empirical data (from Greek, *synthēnai*, ‘to combine’) – inevitably require the sacrifice of some minutia of individual variance in the name of the ‘bigger’ picture. To quote from a succinct and somewhat incidental passage from one of Márquez’s lesser-known works, the short story, *A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings*, in which the characters Pelayo and Elisenda have been caring for an angel since he crashed in their yard in the rain:

[On hearing about the arrival of the angel], the most unfortunate invalids on earth came in search of health: a poor woman who since childhood had been counting her heartbeats and had run out of numbers; a Portuguese man who couldn’t sleep because the noise of the stars disturbed him; a sleepwalker who got up at night to undo the things he had done while awake; and many others with less serious ailments.⁴⁵

In this list of unfortunates, we are told much about the nature of unhappiness: that the concerns of these individuals are to be taken seriously; that there are many others like them. Furthermore, in this extract, a wonderful sense of collective individualism is seen which I think epitomises magical realism. Despite the woeful atomism of their individual complaints, the invalids move both as a discrete subsection of society *and* as inhabitants of a common, shared world (the story opens with the assertion that ‘the world had been sad since Tuesday’). Illness is never reduced to the Other since death and madness are in Pelayo and Elisenda’s house from the start – the narrator tells us in the introduction to the story that the eponymous angel had been visiting to collect their child (although after the accident, the child is miraculously cured). And yet suffering is never reduced to the collective, either: these individuals – trapped as they are in the unique responsibilities of their magical illnesses – must be treated with the particularity that their concerns demand. The list – which is Márquez’ literary device – is thus another trope of magical realism which I find helpful, instructing the reader to see how condensing a number of individuals into a class or kind is both a necessary and a problematic strategy.⁴⁶

Yet the final, and most important, argument upon which I shall focus the remainder of this article concerns the realism of magical realism itself, although in conclusion I will take this argument *through* realism to pragmatism, which will be the final resting point of my case for magic. For many commentators, the most distinctive feature of magical realism is its ontological intervention: unsurprisingly, the introduction of magic to everyday settings and the refusal to allow a hierarchical approach to reality in which magic is subordinate to more ordinary metaphysical happenings. Certainly, this ‘ontological flattening’⁴⁷ is one strength of the genre and part of its helpfulness to our discussion: if magical realism simultaneously says, ‘everything is as real as everything else’ *and* ‘we cannot be sure what is real and so we shall treat all things equally’ then this offers a respectful and inclusive attitude towards the minority experiences and magical happenings that are often excluded from traditional evidence bases (a strategy which might already be apparent in responding to the magical stories in my own research).⁴⁸ In displaying what is metaphysically bizarre or unreal in textually realistic lights, magical realism as such opens a new ‘mythical and magical perspective on reality’⁴⁹ – often with the effect of revealing to the reader what is strange and incongruous about the status quo of the regular world. Beyond this, the alternative world evoked in magical realism and the non-stratified ontologies that produce it are themselves subversive—disrupting the hegemony of

modernist literature in which the magical and mysterious are marginalised in relation to rational logocentric narrative modalities⁵⁰ – and, for the case I seek to make here, blowing apart a stratified theory of knowledge and method, in which ‘hierarchies of evidence’ will be natural effects.

However, despite this talk of ontological assertion (of realistic narration, of magic-as-real), what impresses me more about magical realist literary forms and their potential for a magically informed social science is their simultaneous and paradoxical withdrawal from or agnosticism towards (lack of interest in, even) questions of ontology – for at the same time it is true that very rarely is ontology deeply questioned either by the characters themselves in magical realist stories or by their authors. In *A Very Old Man*, it is thus indicative that Pelayo and Elisenda are at first a little afraid of the angel who appears in their courtyard, but ‘very soon overcome their surprise’⁵¹ and ‘in the end find him familiar’⁵², in the same way that the villagers in Márquez’s story are able to respond to the unusual impairments of the travellers who come to visit the angel with non-judgemental and unfussing practicality. In magical realist fiction, this ontological reticence of characters and their authors provides an essential means for ‘the story to progress’, for people to get on with doing what they need, for a brief escape from the relentless obligation to explain, interpret and justify the things that one feels or experiences (a curse inflicted upon the mentally ill). It is thus this highly practical, pragmatic, quality of a withdrawal from questions of ontology that I suggest has potential in matters of severe and enduring mental distress, not just in the scholarly pursuit of building evidence bases, but in the on-the-ground matters of caring and responding too.⁵³

Having started out by working in philosophically realist dimensions it is finally then with a pragmatic position that I finalise the case for magical realism in social science’s treatments of mental distress. It is my opinion that social research and scholarly writing about mental distress have for too long concentrated on questions of ontology and causation (i.e. the status of unhappiness as an illness and its possible causes), i.e. what we can now see as the fussy process of establishing what is real. Both academic psychiatry and its critics fall into this trap in their keenness to persuade us either of the biogenetic bases of mental ill health or to disabuse us of such beliefs (we are left with the memory that mental illness may or may not be a myth,⁵⁴ but with less certainty about what this means for us). Freud too, in his almost exclusive interest in the psycho-origins of distress, seems guilty of not matching his commitment to establishing causation with care for whether such insight will be *helpful* to his patients. In contemporary and dominant forms of social science research (the focus of this

paper), the heavy emphasis on ‘best evidence’ might similarly be seen to overtake other valuable ways of thinking about and responding to people in distress and sickness – when research (like mine) can sit only on the bottom rung of those policy-facing evidence hierarchies – and when interventions like the Plumtree Centre struggle to justify their continued existence without being able to demonstrate that they are evidence-based.⁵⁵

Perhaps then a magical pragmatist approach offers one way of moving beyond this interpretive and evidence-fixated struggle. Magic happens and transforms people’s lives. Thankfully, we may feel, the current world has a little less of the transcendental magic seen in magical realism—yet interruptions from a magical world shape people’s lives alongside and along with the forces more ordinarily considered by social science research.

I return to the man I call David, the ex-bus driver who compulsively checks the walls and furniture around him at fixed times during the day. While we might spend much time thinking of *reasons* for David’s compulsive tapping behaviours, if we are going to keep up with David or help him integrate in a mainstream ‘non-tapping’ world, we (as researchers, policy-makers, mental health professionals, friends) must accept that David *does* tap walls and must cease being alarmed by every instance of tapping and checking that David displays. Similarly, we might think of Deborah, the participant on the back-to-work project, whose phobia of the colour green has kept her captive in her home for the last several years. If we were working with Deborah we might do well to remember that green is an historically unlucky colour⁵⁶ (‘And with a green and yellow melancholy, she sat like patience on a monument, smiling at grief’, *Twelfth Night*, II, ii) – her ‘madness’ here is not unintelligible. Likewise, we might be particularly sensitive to Deborah’s strict Catholic upbringing in a rural community, where the condemnation of lay superstitions as ‘deviances of religion’ was equalled by the incessant superstitions of the Catechism. Yet interpretation does little to capture the phenomenological greenness of green⁵⁷ or the particular powers which prevent Deborah from trespassing onto green vocabularies (Wednesday is a difficult day because Wednesday is unlucky in its own right [Wednesday’s child is full of woe] but also because Wednesday is recycling day and thus the day that the green bins come out). Whatever are the *reasons* for Deborah’s unusual disposition, for now, if we want to help Deborah find a work placement, we must simply accept that green is off limits (a particular component of the geography of Deborah’s home town then will mean anything involving the Newcastle light railway Green Line) and to do so without fuss or condescension. We

might feel that in the longer term it would be preferable to encourage Deborah and David beyond these magical worlds and the entrapment they bring, but in the meantime, we are going to have to work *with* and not against such magic.

Pragmatism may seem a strange stopping place for a paper which has drawn heavily on magical realism – especially where we see pragmatism as only an instrumentalist theory of knowledge into which magic doesn't fit easily – and especially where we see realism and pragmatism as irrevocably separated poles of philosophy.⁵⁸ Yet, in the analysis I have offered above – that the innovation in magical realism is less its experimental *engagement with* ontology than its *circumnavigation of or withdrawal from* ontological angst – it appears that pragmatism, especially of the 'neo' kind which has been associated most closely with Richard Rorty, is highly commensurate with the remarks I am making. To turn to Rorty directly:

[Pragmatism] says that truth is not the sort of thing one should expect to have a philosophically interesting theory about. For pragmatists, 'truth' is just the name of a property which all true statements share. It is what is common to 'Bacon did not write Shakespeare,' 'E equals mc²,' 'Love is better than hate'. They doubt this for the same reason they doubt there is much to be said about the common feature shared by such morally praiseworthy actions as Susan leaving her husband, America joining the war against the Nazis, Socrates not escaping from jail, Roger picking up litter from the trail, and the suicide of the Jews at Masada. [...] When they suggest that we do not ask questions about the nature of Truth and Goodness, they do not invoke a theory about the nature of reality or knowledge or man which says that 'there is no such thing' as Truth and Goodness. Nor do they have a 'relativistic' or 'subjectivist' theory of Truth or Goodness. They would simply like to change the subject.⁵⁹

As Rorty has it then, matters of truth, as of ethics, are less something that correspond in any representational sense to reality than simply ways of thinking that allow one to move or to act in particular ways that make sense at that time. In this way, pragmatism attempts exactly that which magical realism does—to do away with a stratified theory of knowledge in which particular kinds of truth or evidence are valued higher than others: the pyramids of evidence in which only the tightest

clinical trials make top ranks or the traditional division between scientific and magical or sane and mad affairs that organise ordinary discourse. It is this way in which Rorty sees pragmatism as overcoming traditional means of dividing the ‘assemblage of true statements’⁶⁰ into upper and lower divisions of knowledge (the old task of the Platonic traditions). It is in this same way that Pelayo and Elisenda are able to overcome their surprise at the angel who crashes in their garden in *A Very Old Man* – by setting aside the metaphysical questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’ and instead acting only at the level of ‘this is the case’.

To mirror my tripartite formulation earlier in this paper, advocating a pragmatic base from which to develop a magically-informed social science then is a way of (1) rejecting hierarchical theories of truth which limit the kinds of knowledge that are admissible as social science evidence, in order (2) to conceptualise the maximum number of dimensions of mental distress and recovery, so that (3) we can act in the world in a way which is meaningful to each of these contexts in equal regard.

Like most journeys into unfamiliar or magical territories, exploring magical realist (and magical pragmatist) textual forms is not without its dangers. Echoing concerns within literary critique of the genre’s postcolonial credentials,⁶¹ associating the experiences of madness and unhappiness with the magic of magical realism risks a romanticism or exoticism of mental difference that is counter to its desired subversive politics.⁶² More prosaically, contrary to the greater thrust of the ‘emotional turn’ in geography, the prevailing character of magical realist fictional writing is itself distinctly *un*affective – giving little space to the feel or texture of suffering or depression (or indeed any other element of internal sensation or experience, including that of wonder or enchantment itself).⁶³ I have argued that the strength of this stylistic form, which I have attempted to emulate here in the matter-of-fact narration of my own empirical casework, is to offer more pragmatic and non-judgemental ways of presenting mad experiences than those told through exclusively psycho(patho)logical perspectives. Yet it is apparent that this strategy cannot be sufficient alone. Simultaneously, we must also find space for forms of magical writing – like Smith *et al*’s descriptions of the magical distortions of phobias, perhaps – that explore distress and madness in ways that reveal too their phenomenological and affective depth and complexity.

Suggesting a way to learn from magical realism – or indeed magical pragmatism – then is not to offer some new competing method for the analysis of magical realist or other magical narratives, nor to deny value in approaches to academic research in geography and beyond whose interests are

to consider the reality-status of events and phenomena (for to suggest this would be to replicate the very kind of epistemological violence that has concerned me in the ‘best evidence’ agenda). Rather, it is just – as Rorty has it – to ‘change the conversation’, to move on from the question, to ‘work around’.

A manifesto in the making

Having suggested some ways in which the literary genre of magical realism might begin to offer some ways of incorporating the experiences I have called ‘magic’ into more mainstream evidence bases, it is my intention to end this paper with some thoughts of how this might play out in practice – for instance at the level of developing mental health policy or strategic direction in geographical research and beyond. The following is a prototype for academics, policy-makers, and organisations working with people in mental distress (although naturally such prototype would require development differently for each of these audiences). I have presented this as a manifesto as a reference both to ideologies of academic research which imagine speaking back to policy as the only way of ‘mattering’ in the academy; also as an allusion to that other older action philosophy that had magical ideas about how to change the world.⁶⁴ Admittedly, the manifesto is scant on detail in places (a common failing of manifestos...). Yet perhaps any move towards a more magical geography, like Merrifield’s cautious rendition of Macondo, will have to be one that allows space for both imagination and pragmatics to unfurl at the level of the local and particular.

A manifesto for a magically informed method in distress and madness

- i. Believe in magic and its possibilities, both positive and negative.
- ii. Take magical experiences seriously, be these magical moments of recovery or the (dark?) magic of madness and distress. Develop cultures of research and professional practice in which magical happenings are legitimate topics of conversation.

- iii. Challenge forms of governing professional practice and service delivery that prevent or prohibit magic. Examples include hyper-bureaucracy and micro-management that will discourage the kind of spontaneous therapeutic happenings described in this paper, or highly performative cultures in which formal measurements of outputs ignore and override magic when it arises (stopping to watch the snowflakes, no less).
- iv. Alert people to the possibilities of magic so that they are better placed to notice it and take advantage of it when it arrives. This might approach what Bennett⁶⁵ describes as cultivating an ‘aesthetic disposition of openness’ to the ‘disturbing-captivating elements in everyday experience’. Examples such as mindfulness meditation or gratitude training are currently modish practices that might encourage such magic sensitivity. Yet it is important to inspire individuals and organisations to find their own ways of embracing magic too.
- v. Open up scholarly research to include more magic. In empirical social science this will mean committing to research methods and cultures of writing that are capable of responding to magic – in which spaces for response and observation are open-ended and unstructured, or in which magic, wonder and the transcendental of everyday interactions form the backbone of question-setting and analysis.
- vi. In the medical school and the social work course, and in the training of our own future generation of academic geographers, reject the teaching of uncritical hierarchies of evidence that dismiss unusual, inexplicable and magical happenings; or more pertinently perhaps, provide practitioners not only with evidence hierarchies with which to evaluate the quality of research, but with philosophical tools – including an appreciation of magic – with which to evaluate the validity of evidence hierarchies and ‘best evidence’ metaphors themselves.
- vii. Be aware and unafraid of what is sometimes strange and unsettling about the mad and magical worlds of people living with enduring psychological distress. Embrace ethics of

research in which giving voice to people with mental health difficulties is not conditional upon their conformity to accepted recovery narratives, or in which stories can only be permissible evidence if experiences of magic are retold to match researchers', policy makers' or service providers' own explanations of what they are doing.

The magical manifesto and notes from the field with which I conclude this paper are consciously playful. However, if 'playing' with the ways in which we imagine the world and think and learn in the academy has long been the imagined purpose of cultural geography, then it must be seen that like the excursions into magic undertaken by others alongside me⁶⁶, that this is also a *critical* effort – in the case of my everyday catalogues of magic, reinvigorating and re-politicising the border between what we consider known and unknowable (and on whose authority we draw the boundaries) and gently moving away from that idea that magic only matters in a land far, far away. 'The universe is full of magical things, patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper'.

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Notes

¹ E. Phillpotts, *A Shadow Passes* (London: Macmillan, 1919), p. 173.

² For a review, see T. Woodyer and H Geoghegan '(Re)enchanted Geography? The Nature of Being Critical and the Character of Critique in Human Geography', *Progress in Human Geography*, 37(2), 2012, pp. 195-214.

³ Hester Parr's *Mental Health and Social Space* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008) and especially the concept of 'hopeful ontology' is a great starting point here.

⁴ J. Maddern and P. Adey, 'Spectro-geographies', *cultural geographies*, 15(3), 2008, pp. 291-5.

⁵ D. Dixon, 'A benevolent and sceptical inquiry: exploring "Fortean Geographies" with the Mothman', *cultural geographies*, 14(2), 2007, pp. 695-711.

⁶ See, for example, the Literary Geographies Blog of Sheila Hones and James Kneale (<https://literarygeographies.wordpress.com>), or A. Saunders, 'Literary Geography: Reforging the Connections', *Progress in Human Geography*, 34(4), 2010, p. 436.

⁷ For a selection of critiques: T. Greenhalgh and J. Russell, 'Evidence-Based Policymaking: A Critique', *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 52(2), 2009, pp. 304-318; G. Biesta, 'Why What Works Still Won't Work: From Evidence-Based Education to Value-Based Education', *Studies in the Philosophy of Education*, 29, 2010, pp. 491-503; N. Theodore and J. Peck, 'Searching for Best Practice in Welfare-to-Work: The means, the Method and the Message', *Policy & Politics*, 29(1), 2001, pp. 81-94.

⁸ H. Lorimer and H. Parr, 'Excursions: telling stories and journeys', *cultural geographies*, 21(4), 2014, pp. 543-547.

⁹ J.Laws, 'Reworking therapeutic landscapes: The spatiality of an "alternative" self-help group', *Social Science & Medicine*, 69(12), 2009, pp. 1827-33; J.Laws, 'Working through: An Inquiry into Work and Madness' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Durham University, Durham, 2012); J.Laws, "'Recovery Work" and "Magic" among Long-Term Mental Health Service-Users', *The Sociological Review*, 61(2), 2013, pp. 344-62; J.Laws, 'The Hollow Gardener: Reason and Relation in the Work Cure', in W.Ernst (ed.), *Work, Psychiatry and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 351-67.. Stories re-presented in this article have been selected both for the affective reasons that they have 'stuck' with me as I think through these issues, and because the specifics of the cases allow for demonstration of particular themes in the argument (i.e. purposive selection).

¹⁰ AUTHOR A, 2012.

¹¹ For example: C. Bamba, M. Whitehead and V. Hamilton, 'Does "welfare to work" work? A Systematic Review of the Effectiveness of the UK's Welfare to Work Programmes for People with a Disability or Chronic Illness', *Social Science & Medicine*, 60, 2005, pp. 1905-1918; J. Warren, C. Bamba, A. Kasim, K. Garthwaite, J. Mason, and M. Booth, 'Prospective Pilot Evaluation of the Effectiveness and Cost Utility of a 'Health First' Case Management Service for Long-term Incapacity Benefit Recipients', *Journal of Public Health* 36(1), 2014, pp. 117-125.

¹² Laws, 'Working through'.

¹³ D. Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

¹⁴ J. Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings and Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Woodyer and Geoghegan '(Re)enchanted Geography?'.

¹⁶ S. Pile, 'The Strange Case of Western Cities: Occult Globalisations and the Making of Urban Modernity', *Urban Studies* 43(2), 2006, pp. 305-318.

¹⁷ For Woodyer and Geoghegan, 'enchanted' academic writings emerge primarily as a response to forms of pessimistic and de-politicised critical thinking that through 'preoccupation with reason and destructive power' (p. 199) deprive the world of its inherent magic (although Woodyer and Geoghegan themselves seek to destabilise this view). My own target here is less with disenchanting *theory*, but rather the conventions and rhetorics of a certain kind of empirical research: namely the standardised and systematised model of 'evidence-based research' that dominate much of geography's policy-facing research cultures.

¹⁸ A. Merrifield, *Magical Marxism: Subversive Politics and the Imagination* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), p. 138.

¹⁹ Smith et al's use of magic is developed from Sartre's early work on the magic of emotions, to consider the affective, sensual and corporal intensities or excesses experienced in phobic responses. In my own interpretation of magic, I add to this phenomenological excess, the quality of such experiences as being *outside of or in excess of* dominant rational explanatory modes. (M. Smith, J. Davidson and V. Henderson 'Spiders, Sartre and "Magical Geographies": The Emotional Transformation of Space', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 37(1), 2012, pp. 60-74.)

²⁰ M. Levans, *Eating Disorders and Magical Control of the Body: Treatment Through Art Therapy* (London: Routledge, 1995).

²¹ Laws, 'Working through'.

²² Els van Dongen, *Walking Stories: An Oddnography of Mad People's Work with Culture*. (Amsterdam: Rozenburg, 2002), pp. 8-9.

²³ For a more detailed exploration of 'being in excess of' and the affect of everyday spaces, see: B. Anderson, 'Becoming and being hopeful: towards a theory of affect', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24(5), pp. 733 – 752.

²⁴ See Laws, "'Recovery Work" and "Magic" among Long-Term Mental Health Service-Users', for the full case study

²⁵ Laws, 'Working through'.

²⁶ This capacity of magic to encapsulate both wonder *and* despair and to effect changes both positive and undesired is a traditional part of how magic is conceptualised. As well as of course in magical realism, compare, for instance, the character of magic in the fairy tales of European folklore (e.g., the moral undeterminability of an enchanted forest), philosophical writings of the hermetic tradition (e.g., WB Yeats' *Ideas of Good and Evil*, 1865) or contemporary spiritual practices of the occult (for an empirical study, see Pile, *Occult Globalisations*).

²⁷ See Smith et al for a longer discussion of specific phobias.

²⁸ For a longer discussion, see AUTHOR A, 2015.

²⁹ Cp. the rich literature already existing in geography on therapeutic encounters, e.g. L. Bondi and J. Fewell, "'Unlocking the Cage Door": The Spatiality of Counselling', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 4(4), 2003, pp.527-547.

³⁰ Laws, 'Working through'.

³¹ S. MacKian, 'Crossing Spiritual Boundaries: Encountering, Articulating and Representing Otherworlds', *Methodological Innovations Online*, 2011, 6(3) pp. 61-73.

³² MacKian, 'Crossing Spiritual Boundaries', p. 63.

³³ This echoes MacKian's remarks about (the fear or experience of) *ridicule* when exchanging stories of magic and otherworlds in research encounters ('Crossing Spiritual Boundaries', p. 65).

³⁴ See also some recent and relevant clinical applications of the genre, especially: S. Bar-Am, 'Narratives of Psychosis, Stories of Magical Realism', *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, 2015, 34(1), pp. 16-32.

³⁵ Woodyer and Geoghegan, '(Re)enchanted Geography', p. 203.

³⁶ W. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004).

³⁷ E. Aldea, *Magical Realism and Deleuze: The Indiscernibility of Difference in Postcolonial Literature* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010).

³⁸ B. Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2012).

³⁹ T. D'haen, 'Magical Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centres', in L. Zamora and W. Faris (eds.) *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 194.

⁴⁰ Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (London: Vintage, 1992).

⁴¹ F. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* (Baltimore: Classix Press, trans. D. Wyllie, 2009), p. 7.

⁴² N. Gogol, *The Nose*. In: R. Peace (ed.) *Nikolai Gogol: Plays and Petersburg tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Trans. R. Peace.

⁴³ Aldea, *Magical Realism and Deleuze*.

⁴⁴ The phrase 'wonderful differences' is taken from the publicity materials of a recent symposium in mad studies and neurodiversity (17th June 2015, Lancaster University) in which context it referred to the wide spectrum of

views within the ‘mad’ community (a diversity to be celebrated, in this instance); elsewhere such diversity is experienced as more of a problem – e.g., matters of representation and representiveness in service-user research (for a review of the classic arguments, see P. Beresford and J. Campbell, ‘Disabled People, Service Users, User Involvement and Representation’, *Disability & Society* 9(3), 1994, pp. 315-325).

⁴⁵ G. Márquez, ‘A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings’, *Leaf Storm and Other Stories*. Trans. G. Rabassa. (London: Pan Books, 1979), p. 109.

⁴⁶ C.p., Foucault’s use of Borges’ ‘certain Chinese encyclopaedia’ in the Preface to *The Order of Things*: ‘those things which from a distance look like flies’... (M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books), p. xvii.

⁴⁷ Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, p. 140.

⁴⁸ The philosophical discussion of stratified and non-stratified ontologies is of course huge and deep and complex. For an excellent introduction, see M. Archer, R. Bhaskar, A. Collier, T., Lawson, T., & A. Norrie (eds.), *Critical Realism: Essential Readings* (London, Routledge, 2013). For a discussion of a flat ontology in Geography, see S. Marston, JP Jones III and K. Woodward, ‘Human Geography Without Scale’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 30, 2005, pp. 416-32.

⁴⁹ M. Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism: The New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 522.

⁵⁰ ...an effect which offers some way to speak back to what Spivak famously refers to in a different context as the powers of ‘worlding’ – that is, generating ways of framing and then dismissing world narratives and alternative rationalities that obfuscate the power relations ongoing in such representational act (G. Spivak, ‘Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism’, *Critical Inquiry*, 1985, pp. 243-261). More generally, there are rich and interesting synergies to be explored between readings of magical realist literary genres in postcolonial and indigenous research contexts and my case study here with madness.

⁵¹ Márquez, *A Very Old Man*.

⁵² Márquez, *A Very Old Man*.

⁵³ While the specific turn to pragmatism is my own, in their respective discussions of magic, Woodyer and Geoghagen speak extensively of *praxis* and Merrifield of the virtues of remaining ‘daringly practical’ (p. 134), supporting the idea that magic lends itself easily to theories of action and problem solving.

⁵⁴ The allusion is to Thomas Szasz’s *The Myth of Mental Illness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

⁵⁵ For a longer discussion, see AUTHOR A, 2015.

⁵⁶ J. Hutchings, ‘Folklore and Symbolism of Green’, *Folklore*, 108, 55–63.

⁵⁷ Cp. Smith et al, ‘Spiders’.

⁵⁸ N. Pleasants, ‘A Philosophy for the Social Sciences: Realism, Pragmatism, or Neither?’, *Foundations of Science* 8(1), 2003, pp. 69-87.

⁵⁹ R. Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), pp. xiii-xiv.

⁶⁰ Rorty, *Consequences*, p. xvi.

⁶¹ W. Faris, *The Question of the Other: Cultural Critiques of Magical Realism*. *Janus Head* 5.2 (2002), pp. 5-2.

⁶² This is akin to the objection that magical realism does little but ‘accept reductionist essentialisms, and to think that everyone here wears a sombrero and lives in trees’. (A. Fuguet and S. Gomez. *McOndo*. (Barcelona: Mondadori, 1996), p. 14)

⁶³ This does not make the genre easy to read at times. Merrifield’s confessions of dismissing initially *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as an ‘overwhelming array of characters all bearing more or less the same name’ (*Magical Marxism*, p. xvii) is the effect, in part, of Marquez’ limited investment in the unique inner-worlds of his creations; it is notable moreover that nowhere do Merrifield nor I say actively that we *like* magical realism, beyond those ways in which we find it helpful or interesting.

⁶⁴ Merrifield, *Magical Marxism*.

⁶⁵ Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*.

⁶⁶ For example, Woodyer and Geoghagen, ‘(Re)enchanting Geography’; Merrifield, *Magical Marxism*.