Geography, cancer and dragon boats: 
ethnographic explorations of breast cancer 
dragon boating in the Lake District, UK

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(Signature) ………………………………………………………………………………………………………
Abstract

This ethnographic thesis reports a research project undertaken with a group of breast cancer dragon boaters in the Lake District in the UK. First undertaken as part of a research project to understand the affect of exercise on people affected by breast cancer, the practice has developed and spread around the world. Using participatory and ethnographic sensibilities and methodologies, the thesis works through the experiences of the researcher with the group. Split into three sections, these deal in turn with methodological issues, the collaborative cultures of the group, and the healing rhythms with the group in terms of their collaborations with nature and other paddlers. In section one, it is suggested that any participatory research project can only be approached through an iterative understanding of the group of participants. Through this iterative approach, and although the study was approached with a broad perspective on academic literatures concerning participatory, and autoethnographic approaches, it was only through contact with the group that the particular projects within the research emerged.

In section two, the group and its practice are approached in three chapters which seek to highlight the ways in which collaborative groups that concern an illness experience can develop, not through the socially structured pre-group identities of breast cancer survivors, but through the collaborative practice of these individuals. In this case, the implicit collaborative geographies of Paddlers for Life are explored as ‘communities of practice’, as features that emanate from the practice of the group. The following two chapters continue to explore this analysis, examining the practices of the group to explore how paddling is seen as an experience at once separate from but also entwined with the lived experience of cancer.

In section three, I develop the experience of the group as it has developed after a cancer experience. By utilising, in particular, Lefebvre’s (2004) understanding of rhythm and Ingold’s (2007) theory of wayfaring, we are able to explore how the experience of breast cancer dragon boating is not seen as a journey with a fixed end, but is explored through the rhythms of lived interactions with the environment. In Chapter 8, these ideas are used to develop the notion of the therapeutic landscape (Gesler 1992), so that it is not particular places or spaces that are emphasised, but the results of rhythmic wayfaring that can be undertaken in the world.
Acknowledgements

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Any faults with the thesis remain mine, and mine alone.
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All pictures were taken by and belong to Matt Grace. All postcard images belong to Paddlers for Life, Windermere and their members