

**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

There have been too many people involved in the final production of this thesis for me to attempt to name here. If you are one of the multitudes, I imagine that I will have annoyed you enough that you are fully aware of your contribution. There are a few thanks that I need to give directly, however.

To my family, who have always been there, and always will be. I haven't always been the most attentive older brother, but you have always coped with this remarkably well.

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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

## Preface

This study is of a group who, I argue, have a particular view of exercise and cancer. Research is now starting to extol the benefits of exercise to people who have had a diagnosis of cancer, contradicting previous medical understandings. However, this research study focuses on the emphasis *in practice* of the cancer and exercise message. Often, cancer is seen to temper exercise. With a diagnosis of cancer, the emphasis is often on what individuals *cannot do* in terms of exercise; we are expected to temper our activities around the change in our situation. This research is about a group who are exploring what they *can do*, as a collaborative group. This thesis is reflective of this project, in that it is stylistically designed to speak not only of the research, but to reflect how the research came about. It is written to reflect the experiences of Paddlers for Life; yet it is styled to reflect my experiences with them: from a new PhD researcher, with a head full of ideas; to a member of the group, whose ideas are contextualised and complemented by the other members of the group who would become participants in the research. I entered the group seeking to explore geographic experiences of people who had been affected by cancer. I expected coping strategies, perhaps a healing element within the landscape. But by the time I had spent a paddling season with the group, I realised that they do not 'cope', in expectation of a return to 'normality'. Rather, they move together rhythmically through their practice, constantly moving along their worlds. Together.

## Section 1: Conceptualising research

*Since beginning my study of Geography as an undergraduate at the University of Exeter, I have always been interested in expanding the research process, to include not only those researchers who have traditionally been involved, but also those who have traditionally been researched. During my undergraduate degree, I decided to write my dissertation autoethnographically, seeking to understand the local church that had always been a feature of my life in a rural Devon village. It was about my rural church and me. I continued in geography as a postgraduate, remaining at Exeter to undertake the Critical Human Geographies master's course. Theory was key to the course, and it allowed me to think through my previous interests more clearly. I developed my dissertation around local smuggling histories of the South West, utilising archival work, on-site interviews and location-based re-enactment in order to capture the experience of local people to the historical geographies of law-breaking that went on in the landscape around them.*

*And then I continued straight on to studying for a doctorate at Exeter. Although the PhD began immediately after the masters concluded, it seemed like there was a break. Something happened, which was to affect the way that I thought and acted academically thereafter. The consequences of this event would be in the research that I would do, it was in the projects I would choose, it was in the methodologies I would use. It changed me as a person, and as a geographer. This might read here as an instantaneous revelation; a moment in time. It was not. There are two important points to be made here, which I hope will become clear by the end of this section. The first is that it is vital to enter the research setting with a background that is developed enough in the literature to be developed away from it. The second is that we are constantly developing in context with those who are a part of our research. Chapter 1 demonstrates the sort of preparation I undertook for the research; relevant, vital, but almost sterile, detached from those I intended to work with. But as I came to know the group and their contexts, I realised that research is not just to be read by researchers, or retrieved by policy makers; it can be interpreted and developed by the very people it concerns. This is reflected on in Chapter 2 as the qualitative experience of academic research. In Chapter 3, what I could do as a researcher, and what Paddlers for life could do with the research were contextualised and developed into a writing project undertaken with the group. These three chapters introduce the thesis, as a reflection of how I was introduced to the group.*

## Chapter 1: Approaching geography, cancer and breast cancer dragon boating

This thesis concerns a research project undertaken by myself and Paddlers for Life Windermere, a breast cancer dragon boating team based on the north east shore of Lake Windermere, in the Lake District in the North West of England. It has both a theoretical and epistemological focus, to explore the experiences of a breast cancer dragon boating team *with* Paddlers for Life. The aims of the research were:

- To explore the experiences of people affected by cancer who partake in exercise
- To explore creatively the relationship that people affected by cancer have with their environments
- To work with a participatory epistemology to provide collaboratively produced information of use to people affected by cancer
- To formulate the beginnings of a focus surrounding ‘the geography of cancer experience’

I want to state before we proceed any further that the individual is not a focus of this thesis. This is not to say that individuals are not key within it. Indeed, I formulated many relationships with individuals across the course of my time with the group. However, the individual has been oft dealt with in terms of the qualitative geographic illness literature. My aim is never to undermine the experience of the individual, but always to theorize the experience of the group, or the collaboration of individuals. The phenomenon at the centre of this thesis is not cancer, or even breast cancer dragon boating, but Paddlers for Life breast cancer dragon boating team.

This thesis, so I am told, does not work in the standard way that an academic thesis might usually be expected to. This is not to say that all the main elements are not there: indeed, I explicitly hope that, whilst creative, this thesis deals with methodologies, literatures, results, discussions and conclusions. However, I believe that this structure would, rather than exploring the creativity of the group, have served to individualise the results.

As much as it is able to be, I imagine this as a collaborative thesis, focusing on the collaboration of Paddlers for Life and myself, rather than 90,000 of individualistic report and theorization. Hence, rather than tackle these issues chapter by chapter, these areas are instead

woven together, to create a reflection, I hope, of the experiences of Paddlers for Life, as well as the period of my research with them. The three sections of this thesis deal with the practical application of research, the group as it is creatively practiced, and the geographic natures of this practice.

In particular, this approach is particularly influenced by an incredible lack in focus within the geographic academic community upon the experience of cancer as a particular *social* phenomenon. As this became apparent during the process of the research, I became certain that any beginnings to such a ‘geography of the cancer experience’ should revolve around the group that I was working with, rather than focus on the individuals who constituted it.

Whilst illness has been dealt with in great depth within human geography (see for example, MacKian 2000, Parr 2002, Moss and Dyck 1999), cancer has not been. I do not want to isolate cancer as an experience from other illnesses, but instead to emphasise the importance of understanding cancer as a phenomena with particular spatial and temporal specificities. The critical issue is not only in recognizing these, but in finding geographical ways to deal with them so that academics, medical practitioners, survivors and supporters might be able to better utilize, in theory and in practice, geography as a way to understand and indeed help the cancer experience. My theories on this will become particularly clear in section three of this thesis. This focus played a huge role in the way I went about conducting the research, as well as the formulation of this thesis.

In order to deal with the complex interaction of these questions in the requisite depth, this introductory chapter will be part of a triad, combining with chapters two and three to introduce in turn; the theoretical epistemologies and methodologies of the research project; the theoretical basis of the group; and the epistemological and methodological underpinnings of the contextualised project. In the remainder of this chapter, after a brief explanation of the ethnography at work here, I will introduce the concept of breast cancer dragon boating, from its conception to its present status in the world; I will then introduce literature important to its epistemological ideals and the main features of participatory research and autoethnography, before outlining methodological issues concerned with the ethnographic element of the research and, finally, outlining ethical considerations of the research.

I present this thesis as ethnography; as a written representation of culture from the product of method (van Maanen 2011). The work of the ethnographer is to use the methods at their disposal to understand better and represent the ‘culture’ of a group or community for those



outside of the community in question. As a result of the individualised nature of the approach, there can never be a pure representation of an extant culture (Crang and Cook 2007), only a representation that is true to the experience of the ethnographer. Indeed, writing on behalf of others is always difficult as a practice (Richardson 2000a). What methods to use and how best to represent a culture are then questions that must be at the heart of successful ethnography. More than twenty five years ago, Marcus and Fischer (1999) suggested that ethnography, along with many human sciences, was suffering a “crisis of representation”; generalising models of social order were found to no longer be applicable in a (western) world that felt itself increasingly less secure. This state of nations can be matched with the localised feelings of individuals. To appropriate Marcus and Fischer (1999), times of crisis precipitate a questioning not just of the answer, but also to the nature of the question itself: “[c]onsequently, the most interesting theoretical debates in a number of fields have shifted to the level of method, to problems of epistemology, interpretation, and discursive forms of representation themselves” (Marcus and Fischer 1999:9). If there is reason to question generalised theories of society, then we must look to new epistemologies and ways of knowing. This is reflected in the very ‘culture’ that this ethnography seeks to write; a challenge through practice of the medical community’s tentative attitude to exercise after a cancer diagnosis. This is a culture that has arisen from the experiences of those who have experienced that cancer diagnosis at first hand. And through that experience, a group has developed to question their medical experience through participating in breast cancer dragon boating. First, however, it is important to define what we mean by ‘culture’. Raymond Williams (1976) presents three current uses of the term ‘culture’, the second of which is relevant to ethnography: “a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general” (Williams 1976:90). The false step here, I think, would be to represent the culture of breast cancer dragon boating as one ‘particular’ way of life. Ways of life will necessarily act at all levels of breast cancer dragon boating, from the individual boat, to the international organisation. Understanding the particular geographical differences that influence these cultures will prove key to this thesis.

## **A brief history of breast cancer dragon boating**

A dragon boat is 40 feet long. It weighs several hundred kilograms, and can accommodate 20 paddlers, a drummer and a helm:



Figure 1: a fully loaded dragon boat – the helm won't fit in the picture!

Dragon boating is surrounded by myth and legend. It is said to have originated in China, as part of a festival to commemorate the death of the poet statesman Qu Yuan who, on the defeat of his province, walked into a river with a stone clutched to his breast (Chan and Humphries 2009). Upon learning of his actions, the local fishermen hauled out their dragon boats and raced to save the beloved statesman; dragon boat racing is said to commemorate the dragon boats racing to save Qu Yuan. Although unsuccessful, their actions helped to form the narrative that surrounds the modern day practices of the sport of dragon boat racing, which draws and develops on these myths.

The concept of dragon boating for breast cancer survivors first came about through the lived experience of Dr Don McKenzie, a medical doctor and kinesiology professor at the University of British Columbia, Canada. As a medical doctor, he encountered a patient to whom he prescribed light exercise (McKenzie, Pers. Comm.). Upon this prescription, the female patient told him that she wouldn't be able to do this, as she had had breast cancer, and had been advised against any weight bearing activity. Intrigued, McKenzie set about to test this conservative hypothesis, which pervaded medical understanding in Canada (McKenzie 1998), instigating the first breast cancer dragon boat in the world in 1995 (Kent 1996). A keen

canoeist, McKenzie chose dragon boating as a similar practice that allowed large numbers of women to be tested at the same time. This initial group, which came to identify themselves as 'Abreast in a Boat', are known internationally with the breast cancer dragon boating movement as the 'originals'. The effect of repetitive exercise in the form of dragon boating was not only found not to be harmful to breast cancer survivors, but in challenging the medically induced taboo, began to suggest positive physiological and psychosocial effects (McKenzie 1998).

Emerging from the initial Canadian group, and now boasting an international umbrella organisation, the International Breast Cancer Paddlers Commission (IBCPC), breast cancer dragon boating arrived in the UK through Pool of Life, a group based in Liverpool, in 2004. Other teams have developed around the world, including Canada, the USA, Australia, Italy and South Africa. Paddlers for Life came into being three years after Pool of Life, in 2007, based on Windermere in the Lake District. Initially founded by four members from Pool of Life, Paddlers for Life had over 60 members by the 2011 season, comprising both survivors and supporters. Based on the shore of the Lake, on land loaned to them free of charge by a local chain of hotels, Paddlers for Life have two boats; a pink 'survivors' boat named Artemis Diana, and a yellow 'supporters' boat named Lucy at Low Wood. The link with the hotel was created through an acquaintance of one of the Paddlers with the manager. An exploratory phone call was made and a meeting arranged. The hotel have been supporters of the group ever since. Both boats were provided by a charitable donation by a national charity, BOOST, which focuses on overlooked sporting talent. Paddlers for Life paddle on most Sundays between April and September each year. Outside of these times, paddling is rare on the lake; once the water temperature drops below ten degrees Celsius, it is considered too dangerous to paddle, due to the risk of hypothermia should the boat capsize. The boats are kept just metres from the shore of the lake, upside down on trestles. They are in a boat park that is part of the hotel, but separated from it by the main road from Windermere to Ambleside. In the boat park, there is nothing to signify the presence of the paddlers during the week, apart from the boats, tucked away in a corner. All the kit, including the heads and tails of the dragon boats, the life jackets and the paddles, are kept in a small stone shed a hundred metres away from the boats, which is also owned by the Hotel. On a weekend, the boats are launched from the jetties and proceed onto the lake.

Paddlers for Life are exceptional within the paddling community in that they are inclusive not only to survivors of other types of cancer, but also to friends and family, who are classified as 'supporters'. Supporters play a particularly active part in the group, often paddling in mixed

boats of supporters and survivors at Windermere, and travelling the country with the team. I approached the group via email in early 2010, but it was not until later that year that I managed to see them in person, travelling between Exeter in the South West, to Windermere in the North West of England. I met Ava, the group chair, at Preston train station and went to meet the group at their annual general meeting. It was to be the first of many journeys I made, and many hours I spent with the group, over the next year.

### **A brief autobiography**

At the time of submission, I am a 25 year old white British male from South Devon in the South West of England. The eldest of four children, all of my education has been within a forty-mile radius of the family home. My father was a bank manager, followed by a school bursar. My mother worked as a homemaker until the youngest of my three brothers and sisters left home. Since then, she has worked in primary schools as teaching support, and nurseries as an assistant. In 2005, after school and A Levels, I took up a place at the University of Exeter to study Geography. Seven years later, and the defence of this thesis will (hopefully) be my last act as a student at Exeter.

All of this ‘personal’ information, and more, is relevant to this thesis. As a participatory researcher and (auto)ethnographer, it is vital that my positionality is continuously explicated. My education and upbringing have played a central part to the ways in which this thesis has developed. As I have alluded to in the introduction to the section, however, I perceive one event to be key in changing my perception of, and the direction of, my research; my initial decision to undertake research with a cancer support group, was heavily influenced by the death of my own father from kidney cancer around a month before I began this PhD. However, as will hopefully become clear, this event itself does not construct the research, nor should it be read as a declaration of conflicting interest. I state this here at the beginning of the thesis, because I feel that it is information that could otherwise unduly taint what is to come, should it not be fully reflected upon. However, as I shall argue in Chapter 5, it is not my positionality outside of the context of my research that is important, but my positionality within the context of the research as it developed.

### **Participatory research**

Participatory research is a form of research that seeks to involve those traditionally “researched” in the research process (Pain 2004). There are many variations of participatory

research, such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (Binns et al. 1997), Participatory Action Research (Kindon et al. 2007) and Community-Based Participatory Research (Petersen et al. 2006). This introductory section will focus on ‘participatory research’ as a broad conceptualisation of the approach undertaken in this project. As Cornwall and Jewkes (1995:1671) make clear, participatory research “is more of an attitude than a series of techniques”; indeed it might even be seen as a political imperative (Reason 2005).

The origins of this epistemological enterprise are based in the work of Kurt Lewin in the United States, and Paulo Freire in Brazil, in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and their work in expanding the role of participants and questioning power relationships within research (Pain 2004). This often involves in-depth interaction with participants; “working collaboratively – sharing ideas, resources, networks and outcomes of the research” (Austin 2009:44). In terms of health research, Anglin (1997:1404) summarises the questioning of traditional understandings of expertise as within academic institutions thus: “[t]he personal is medical is political”. Lived experience cannot, any longer, be presented as inferior to other forms of expertise. Rather, expertise continuously leaks out from the contained ‘lay’ society where it has traditionally been disregarded within the academic tradition (Okely 1992).

The goal of participatory research remains today in the accessing of new ways of knowing, through the redistribution of power relationships within academic research. These goals have benefitted from many secondary influences, including shared agricultural initiatives, feminist research, applied anthropology and community psychology (Gray et al 2000), as well as social geography (see for example Kindon et al 2007, Pain 2004, mrs kinpaisby 2008). Participatory research is practically useful within any academic researcher/participant relationship; health and illness have generally been highlighted as areas where the equalisation of power relations is particularly critical (Koch and Kralik 2006) in order to critique and deconstruct the hegemony of ‘expert’ medical knowledge; accepting medical knowledge, yet refuting any claim it may have to absolute truth (Tang and Anderson 1999). Whilst this is a positive step, it can also highlight existing social relational understandings that conflate illness with a loss of power. Often, for example, people with disabilities or illness are looked upon as people ‘to be helped’, and are thus treated as receptacles of knowledge to be explored by researchers for their own benefit (Kitchin 2001), confirming the individual as powerless. Non-disabled researchers should join with disabled people in lobbying for change, but never argue on their behalf (Drake 1997).

Part of the purpose of participatory research must be to instil the confidence to question overriding statements about your own body (Tang and Anderson 1999). As Pain (2004) points out, the aim of participatory research is not to accede all power to lay participants in research. As such, it is not necessary for the participatory researcher to always be a member of the group in question; by approaching the research as a facilitator to the ways of knowing in the group, skills we possess as researchers may in fact be of benefit to the group (Dickson and Green 2001). Research becomes a collaborative act (Stoecker 1999), utilising all the knowledges of lived experience, rather than just a few. Indeed, the shifting of power itself is not a powerless act; “[h]ealthcare professionals need to be encouraged to stop wanting to do things *for* patients, but to also want to do things *with* patients and their family carers. Likewise, patients need to stop wanting things only to be done *to them*, but to also want to do things *with* healthcare professionals” (Hubbard et al 2007:29). This remains key to the patient debate. Successful participatory research is not based upon valuing one knowledge over another, but utilising all experiences, lay and academic, to the achievement of the collective goal (Petersen et al 2006) through mutual reciprocity and reflexivity (Polk and Knutson 2008). Whilst it would be foolish to argue that participatory research is *the* answer to health research, it can play an important part in some situations (Gibbon 2002). For example, the research context of the group is also important to take into account; previous research has been undertaken with the group to explore the physical and psychosocial benefits of breast cancer dragon boating by Helen Crank of Sheffield Hallam University. The present research provides, I believe, an alternative way to explore the creative features of the group. Meyer (2000) suggests that action research, a similar approach, which accentuates the need for social change through participation, can be more productive than quantitative methods in unique situations, for example novel concepts such as breast cancer dragon boating that are rare in their local and national contexts; Paddlers for Life is still one of only seven such teams in the UK.

Whilst participatory approaches are accessible at the individual level, they can be particularly well suited to work with pre-designated communities (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995), due to the interaction inherent at the heart of the approach. Whilst conceptually interesting, it is important that individual communities are considered and consulted before participatory approaches are suggested. Many communities that may be of interest to the academic researcher are likely to have been approached before, and might experience research fatigue (Austin 2009; Berg et al. 2007; Pratt et al. 2007); as researchers we are drawn to ‘originality’, and difference is often easier to recognise than similarity in all aspects of life (Milner and Kelly 2009). Indeed, the

very act of identifying potential research groups is an objectifying position of power and should be approached with care. Despite this, there can be benefit particularly in community based participatory approaches in working within existing groups, rather than creating new research-focused ones (Larkey et al. 2009). Information produced belongs to the community, and is more likely to spread outside of the research project (Banner et al. 1995).

Research fatigue can be both psychological and practical, affecting not just researcher and participants, but also family and friends of researchers and participants (Gibbon 2002). Whilst the idea of participatory research might be attractive in practice, uptake can remain low due to other commitments in the participants' lives (Kitchin 2001). Participatory research must fit around the lives of participants, particularly where the research in question is itself a large undertaking for many of the members of the team. The outcomes of academic research projects, whilst potentially important to the group (Gray et al 2000), should not be achieved to the detriment of less material social change through shared knowledge, solidarity and empowering action (Stoecker 1999) that existed within the community prior to the presence of the researcher. The nature of inclusion in the process must also mean that individuals are free to alter their involvement, or even remove it altogether, throughout the process of the research (Khanlou and Peter 2005, Austin 2009); I could not, and would not have wanted to have insisted upon absolute collaboration throughout the project, without severely hampering its participatory aims. Furthermore, participants in participatory research should not be seen as a reflection of any wider community opinion (McAulay et al 1999), but recognised and valued for their own individual skills, which could in turn benefit wider communities (Goodare and Lockwood 1999). Change should not only be aimed at the social elements of the group, but also the personal and individual (Cahill 2007). The decision over what issues are important to tackle in the research are considered socially within the group (Petersen et al 2006), but according to each individual's understanding of their potential input. By constantly moving in between the individual and the collective, we may begin to identify the ways in which both individuals and collectives can take action to challenge unequal power relations, rather than merely voice concern through the channels of the offending body (Wong and Chow 2006). The practical implications for this, i.e. developing complaints procedures, will be contextual to the group or situation.

Although participatory research is generally seen as an epistemology rather than a methodology, past research has suggested that there are particular methodological directives that are important to keep in mind. For instance, methods cannot be fully conceived, or

implemented, until the extent of group involvement is ascertained (Khanlou and Peter 2005); Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001) suggest that any planning should follow the ethos of fluid and flexible 'general principles' to be observed (Gibbon 2002), rather than a structured plan of action. Many methods, such as participatory video (Kindon 2007) or participatory photo mapping (Dennis et al 2009), will be new to most participants, and so formulating norms and practices within the research group is particularly important (Koch and Kralik 2006). A strong initial and developing cohesive element, as well as ethos, is vitally important within the group. Whilst collaboration and participation are worthwhile benefits of research, such an undertaking can also be painfully slow and laborious for all involved (see Stoecker 1999). It is important to strike a balance between the shifting of power and the need to act quickly and influentially for the benefit of the group. Depending on the group and its contextual settings, it may be more beneficial in certain situations to undertake research that is not participatory, but can be seen as critical ethnography (Cook 2005); seeking to empower, whilst retaining overall control of the research.

Despite the potential of this approach to research, it is important to raise a precautionary hand before idealism takes us beyond the limits of our own potential. Such an attitude may lead to interest waning on all sides, becoming another fad for academic research (Fuller and Askins 2007). To avoid this, I argue, requires a constant reflection that borders on pragmatism, based on the realities of practice. Participant researchers, it is commonly contended, should be involved all of the way through a project, from conception to analysis (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Kitchin 2001); a lack of participation in the final stages of a project may reflect a subconscious paternalism on the part of the participatory researcher (Gray et al. 2000). This attitude is a practical and constructive element of the epistemological vision, to protect communities from cut and dash researchers (Breitbart 2003) and research that speaks only of outsider concerns. Indeed, many of the articles utilising participatory approaches to address breast cancer dragon boating have professed to such an undertaking (see Parry 2008; Mitchell and Nielsen 2002; McNicholl et al. forthcoming). However, as Gray et al. (2000) go on to argue, there are serious pragmatic issues for researchers to grapple with, such as academic and financial support. All is not doom and gloom, of course, and we should not limit ourselves through an academic guilt. All academic participatory research must occur, to some extent, within an on-going dialogue between the ideological and what is practically achievable. Citing Beckwith (1996) in encouraging researchers to 'sin bravely!', Stoecker (1999:851) suggests that academics are "so concerned with doing the right thing, and so trained to evaluate



everything from every angle before we act, [we] often end up paralysed. If we have real respect for the communities we work with, we will understand that they will tell us when we screw up, and they will not let us lead them astray”. Likewise, limiting our expectations of either participatory research or participants (Milner and Kelly 2009), not only patronises both, but reinforces academic and social prejudices about the abilities of others in academic research. It is critical that researchers avoid the smug belief that we have in some way helped ‘others’ (Austin 2009) through our work. Participatory research in all its forms should not be concerned with providing opportunities to ‘others’, but in learning, as a collective and across traditional academic boundaries (Meyer 2000), the ways in which alternative approaches to research and understanding can be undertaken.

### **Autoethnography**

My perception of my own position within this research, as well as the meaning of the term ‘autoethnography’, has changed greatly since the research began. Perhaps naively, I first encountered the group as part of the community of cancer that I saw myself as a part of. Although I did not know them personally, I felt at the time that their experience of cancer was in some way similar to mine; that our experiences with regards to cancer presented a connection. Through my time with the group, I have come to realise that this was not enough; I did not feel a bond or connection from the experience of cancer. Although I moved away from this conception of autoethnography, this did not lead to a discarding of the concept, but to a realignment of my position within it.

My initial affinity with the term came from the definition proffered by the sociologist of gambling David Hayano (1979), who conceived of it as study within the researcher’s own community; “the criteria for auto-ethnography, then, must include some prior knowledge of the people, their culture and language, as well as the ability to be accepted to some degree, or to “pass” as a native member” (Hayano 1979:100). I had done previous research with my rural church community (Grace 2008). My indirect experience of cancer, I initially thought, gave me some level of understanding into the experience of these dragon boaters, supporters and survivors. Our cultures would coincide through this experience of rupture, despite all of the demographic and geographic differences in our experience. However, to reject the initial conceptualisation is not to reject the concept itself. Since Hayano’s original paper, autoethnography (the hyphen is used variably, and I will not use it here) has developed as it has been adopted by researchers in a variety of disciplines across the social sciences. I shall now

explore these developments as ‘emotional autoethnography’, and ‘subaltern autoethnography’, developments that demonstrate how such work has become of use to geographers and geographical research.

Emotional autoethnography often involves research based around an emotional turn within the life of the researcher; seeking to ascertain *how* you are here, doing this now (du Preez 2008). Although this is a broad category for a vast body of work, emotional autoethnography is often defined by the focus on the individual, rather than the community of which they are a part, and by the expression of a momentous life event, often linked to illness, life disruption or trauma. Telling the story of the disruption of illness can be an important academic endeavour (Ellis 1998), helping the researcher (and the reader) to understand better than objective distanced research (Ellingson 1998, Richards 2008) that experience can be understood in the relations between the individual and the social in times of crisis (Neville-Jan 2004). Because of their contextualised individuality, autoethnographies are often more focused upon creating, rather than testing theories (Duncan 2004) concerned with application to wider society. Particular examples of the emotive value of this work can be found in the work of academics such as Carolyn Ellis (1995, 1998, 1999), Ruth Behar (1996), Tami Spry (1997) and G. Thomas Couser (2005, 1997).

This approach to autoethnography has often been criticised as being self-aggrandising (Cloke 2004) on the part of the researcher. The lack of agreement as to what defines an autoethnography, and the seeming over-focus on the experience of the individual leads Delamont (2009:61) to claim that there is little if any analytic mileage in the approach, and that “[r]etreat into autoethnography is an abrogation of the honourable trade of the scholar.” Part of the distrust of the ‘honourable scholar’ can be traced back to the lack of rigour that is seen by some within the approach (Holt 2003). After all, its critics ask, how hard can writing about yourself be (Ellis 1999)?

The second development to autoethnography that I will detail here, subaltern autoethnography, is the one with which I have become most aligned during the course of this research. Following the work of geographers David Butz and Kathryn Besio (2004; 2009; Besio and Butz 2004), it focuses upon the deconstructionist practices of ‘subaltern’ individuals to challenge the western discourse of their particular experiences. “What we are advocating, in other words, is an autoethnographic sensibility – an attentiveness to the autoethnographic characteristics of things that are going on in our research settings” (Butz and Besio 2004:354). The aim of this work

then, is to explore the experiences as told by those who, for cultural, social, or economic factors, we (in the western world) may not otherwise hear from. *Playing with Fire*, the collaboration between the Sangtin Writers and Richa Nigar (2006) is a particularly salient example of this, as women from Uttar Pradesh, India, tell their previously hidden stories in their own ways. The task of this form of autoethnographic research is to learn not from the individuals as receptacles of data, but from the autoethnographic practices which individuals use to both tell, and live lives (Besio and Butz 2004); of researchers as well as participants (Fuller and Askins 2007).

Despite this ambition, this piece of writing is an academic thesis. It would be disingenuous to present it as anything else, written as it is by a sole author, for a sole reward. The project on which it is based, however could be thought of as a collaborative autoethnography (see also, for academic examples of this, Andrew and Caster 2008, Doloriert and Sambrook 2009, Kempster et al., 2008, Kostopulos Nackoney et al., 2007). This follows previous work in (and concerning) geography and subaltern identities (Pratt 1992; Cahill 2007). As Pratt states, autoethnography “refers to instances in which colonised subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the coloniser’s terms” (Pratt 1992:7 *original emphasis*). Of course, there are differences here between ‘colonised subjects’. Pratt refers to the East/West global relationship, whilst I refer to the ill/healthy; the medical community concerned with the health of their ill patients. Those defined as ill, I argue, are here involved in questioning their representation through many practices which take their place on a continuum of in/visibility. As part of the participatory approach of this project, the autoethnographic practice is in collaborative writing; in presenting the group’s experiences as a challenge to assumed understandings of the role of the body after cancer.

### **Collaborative writing**

Participatory approaches must be seen to fit to the specific nature of the group and the research. As the group itself was particularly important to the nature of the study, concerned in the practices of dragon boating, a methodology was required that allowed the collective rather than individual understandings of the group to be expressed. I was drawn to collaborative writing as an investigative method not only by the potential for collaborative knowledge creation, but also to utilise a method which is almost subliminally accepted within the academy (see Gossart and Ozman 2009), whilst less addressed within the research we do (Christensen and Atweh 1998). Whilst focus groups can be a particularly useful qualitative methodology in eliciting collective

group experience (see Munday 2006), focus groups had already been conducted with the group as part of an earlier, and completely separate research project run by Helen Crank. A collaborative writing project not only had the added benefit of running less of a risk of being conflated with the previous research, but also allowed for the participants to be more involved in the questions, providing a safeguard against producing overlapping or competing research. Christensen and Atweh (1998) also suggest that collaborative writing can emphasise well the social focus of participatory research. In particular, it quickly became apparent that the writing group would be dominated by a core of female writers. It was important to engage this fact, rather than seeing it as merely a feature of a female dominated group. Karach and Roach (1992) suggest that collaborative writing can be an important tool to begin to understand the ways in which women comprehend not just the fact of their subjugation in academic knowledge, but also providing the means to challenge this.

McQuiston et al. (2005) suggest that such participatory research and ethnography are a particularly good match to close the gap between academic and lay research process. However, such a match cannot be made without negotiation on both sides. Academics must be prepared to be flexible in formation of what they see as 'correct' research, and the ways that 'academic' skills are relayed (McQuiston et al. 2005). Hurtig (2008) found, in a community writing project with a group of previously inexperienced writers, that once they became confident in their writing ability, and their role in the research, the project was taken over by the participants, leaving her role as one of facilitator. Karach and Roach (1992) argue that collaborative writing can come to aid us, as researchers and writers, in consciousness raising of feminist concerns, through cooperation, rather than competition. The collaborative writing project detailed in chapter three is, I argue, a valuable form of collaborative autoethnography within a breast cancer dragon boating team.

### **Methodological underpinnings**

Ethnography requires an understanding developed from a period of fieldwork, utilising information from different sources, and hence methodologies, to explore a particular experience of a culture (Crang and Cook 2007). Although this thesis is an ethnography, the methods used do require some explication. Whilst I will dedicate chapter three to the nature of the project that we as a research group created together, this brief section will discuss the methodological issues concerned with interviewing and participant observation, as well as discussing practices of analysis, ethical consideration, and the written style of the thesis.

### *Facts and figures*

During the research period, from September 2010 to October 2011, I made twenty five trips to visit Paddlers for Life in Windermere and around the country. These visits, engaged in a number of practices with the group, from paddling to attending conferences, form the basis of my participant observation. The writing project ran from February to October 2011, and involved meetings, which occurred on a monthly basis. The details of this writing project are set up in more detail in chapter three. I also carried out sixteen interviews with members of Paddlers for Life, which were arranged and undertaken through the process of the writing project and participant observation.

### *Participant observation*

Participant observation began as a staple of the ethnographic methodology of anthropology, and has since emerged as an important research method within many social sciences including geography; allowing the researcher to spend large amounts of time not only observing the practices of a group, but also becoming involved with them and their practices. In the context of Paddlers for Life, it allowed me to become involved in the particular practices of the aims of Paddlers for Life. As with the other research methods here, there is an emphasis within ethnography upon creating a sensibility towards understanding as well as the adoption of specified methodologies. Participant observation allowed me, by partaking in the practice of paddling and the non-paddling experiences of the group, not only to experience paddling as a phenomenon, but also to be part of a crew with its own intrinsic tacit knowings. As in any qualitative research methodology is important for the fieldworker to retain always a list of critical questions with which their participant observation can be formulated. As a geographer, this needs to be at the forefront of our minds. Crang and Cook (2007:51-52) suggest the following list to be followed when doing ethnographic research, which informed my thinking during my visits to the group:

- Locating an ethnographic setting
- Describing the physical space of that setting
- Describing others interactions with that setting
- Describing your participation in interactions in that setting
- Reflecting on the research process
- Self-reflections

These are not encompassing, as should become clear through the ethnographic detail, but provide a useful starting point to the context of the research. My time with the group involved visiting them on twenty five occasions, the majority of which came during the course of 2011, ranging from one day to four days on extended trips. The nature of these visits ranged from purely paddling trips, to attending conferences where members of the group were speaking to the medical community. The multi-site nature of this fieldwork meant that following connections to discover meaning required both a geographic as well as demographic positioning (Marcus 1998). The nature of fieldwork *within* a group will also mean constant alterations are made in the level of visibility in the process of participant observation. This is often a messy exercise, a constant iterative practice with the participants. However, as Clifford (1997) states, the goal of ethnographic research is to work *with* entanglements, rather than transcend them. Whilst covert research, the deliberate masking of the researcher identity (see Holdaway 1982) is now rare and seen as ethically questionable, visibility *as* a researcher is not a simple categorisation, and can change from one moment to the next. For example, whilst it was always known that I was a researcher during my participation in the act of dragon boating, a pen and paper was not only impractical, but would have tempered my ability to paddle and be seen as a paddler. Other mobile methodologies, such as video cameras and global positioning systems (see Jones 2005) were deemed unsuitable for the same reason. Peters et al. (2001) have defended the position of assuming formal roles in the research setting, as opposed to the outsider perspective of ‘observer’; being a paddler no doubt aided my integration within the group. All my notes from paddling were taken as soon as possible upon leaving the water, and written up the same evening if possible (Cragg and Cook 2007). Although I believe that this was the best method for this context, distance in time and space will necessarily alter the nature of our notes; our tacit knowledges are sure to play an important role in what and how we write up our experiences (Wolfinger 2002). To this extent, there may always be an element of emotional recall (Ellis 1999) within evocative ethnographies; our writing dislodges memories which play a part in what we record of our experiences. It is also important to take into account that in extended ethnography, we are writing for ourselves within the group, as much as for our writing afterwards (Rapport 1991). Our daily interactions and our understandings of them are key to our position within the group.

A final methodological point to make is the fact of my temporal and geographical dislocation from the group. As the group is itself disparately located between Sunday meetings, the practicalities of me living within the field were considered too economically and temporally

demanding. Within ethnography from a distance, it is vitally important that a variety of methods are used (Vail 2001). Whilst I did not attend the group every week, and did not have pre-existing social roles within the group (Vail 2001), the fact that many of the group had no physical contact during the week lessened the sense of the ethnographer accessing and leaving the field at will. As will be explored throughout the thesis, communities can no longer be seen as a single, located, hegemonic whole (England 2011). My coming and leaving the (geographic) field was much more akin to the paddlers' experiences of paddling, and meeting, predominately only at weekends, than attempting to remain within the field for a shorter duration, whilst experiencing less time with Paddlers for Life.

### *Qualitative Interviews*

Interviews were undertaken with members of the group, to explore in more detail, the individual motivations towards collective action after an experience of breast cancer. As with the other methods, there was an understanding of a constructionist, rather than positivist epistemology. It is vital to see participants as meaning makers within the interview process (Warren 2002), meaning that understanding comes not from the interviewee, but from the interview process. Warren (2002) suggests that there is a separation between ethnography and qualitative interviewing; “[r]esearchers often choose qualitative interviews over ethnographic methods when their topics of interest do not center [sic] on particular settings, but their concern is with establishing common patterns or themes between particular types of respondents” (Warren 2002:86). However, I found that within the distinctive setting, interviews enabled me to develop my understanding of the background of individual members, for whom membership of the group has not extended more than four years, or before their illness experience. Ethnography has been undertaken from my interactions with the group, stemming from my meetings with the writers, paddling with the group, and interviews with certain members of the group.

Interviews were requested from the group as a whole via the email list that the group uses to communicate whilst not together. Whilst this elicited some responses, other members were approached during the research, due to their interesting position within the group. The aim was not to follow a representative sample of the group, but to understand the experiences of some group members. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken to allow the interviewee to structure the interview largely as they saw fit, rather than imposing generalising categories upon them (Longhurst 2003). This approach can be particularly useful in researching sensitive

topics, as qualitative interviews allow for high levels of interviewee control (Corbin and Morse 2003). Despite this, and to allow for all eventualities, I followed Warren's (2002) suggestion to go into interviews with three sets of questions; main questions, probes into their answers, and follow up questions. Interviews lasted between around 30 minutes and two and a half hours, over several meetings. This was necessary to allow the research to fit around the lives of the Paddlers, rather than the other way around. 16 interviews were undertaken with Paddlers, including 10 cancer survivors and 6 supporters of the group. Because of the nature of the research, concerning what was a traumatic event in many of the interviewees' lives, I made sure I was aware of counselling services to recommend, should interviewees become distressed (Valentine 2005). Although there are important lessons to be learned from previous research on sensitive topics (Corbin and Morse 2003), I believe that it is most important to have an attitude towards constant cooperation with the interviewee; respecting the potential for distress, whilst understanding the potential benefits of talking through difficult experiences (Corbin and Morse 2003). Likewise, I was always open to changing the parameters of my methodology to reflect the individual needs of participants. Although it was never taken up, on several occasions I gave participants the opportunity to be interviewed together to relieve interview stress (Morris 2001).

## **Analysis**

During the research, each interview and meeting was transcribed by me as soon as possible after the event, usually before the next meeting or interview. Interviews were then sent to the interviewee to check that the transcription still reflected their opinion. The necessity to transcribe quickly to send to participants allowed me to get an idea of the main themes that were coming out of the research whilst the research process was in motion. This is particularly important in collaborative and participatory work, as the researcher must be aware at all times not only of the explicit wishes of the participants, but also the unspoken themes; notes taken on the unspoken feel of interviews were also important at this stage.

Coding of the interviews, fieldwork diaries, meeting transcripts, and emails was undertaken as open coding, drawn from the research materials, allowing the multiple experiences of people affected by cancer to emerge (Landmark et al. 2002). This allowed me to identify key features in each individual text, before similar codes and subcodes were formed between the individual texts to produce coding maps of this wider understanding (Crang and Cook 2007). This was very much an iterative process with the research information, and often led to the revisiting and



reformulating of initial codes (Crang 2005), as they reintegrate with other codes in different ways. Undertaking this process by hand, rather than using electronic processes allowed for theories and understandings to develop throughout the process (Basit 2003), rather than at its conclusion. Linkages between codes came to form the basis of the main chapters of this thesis. This coding process meant that rather than identifying a small number of predefined or wide codes, I was able to identify main codes from the research materials and then explore them in depth to understand the sub-plots of their creation. This constant process of iterative thought allowed the representation of the group, as ethnography, to begin in formation early in the analytical process.

‘Writing up’ is a key part of ethnographic research. It is not simply that which is done after we leave the field, or even at the conclusion of our analysis (Crang and Cook 2007). Rather, writing can be seen as a way of knowing (Richardson 2000c). As any writer will know, making 80,000 words intelligible to a reader who has not been where you have been, not seen what you have seen and not felt what you have felt is not something that can be done on a whim. Indeed, writing is a vital part of the research process itself (Crang and Cook 2007). Taking my cue from Mike Pearson’s (2007) *In Comes I*, I use a style of writing in which research information is written as narrative montages (Vannini 2011). The goal of this writing style is "not meant to represent ideal types, but rather to create impressions and evoke affect" (Vannini 2011:354); seeking to explode the doings of practice rather than creating borders for human narratives. As Ives and Dunn (2010) suggest, evocative writing can be key to extending work into public domains; touching lives, as well as academic minds.

In writing in new ways in academia, we need to develop new ways of verifying truth and knowledge, in an academy, which is still obsessed with 'verification'. In this regard, Denzin (2000) suggests that ethnographic texts and their claims to truth and knowledge should be assessed on five criteria; the interrogation of existing stereotypes; the primacy of lived experience; the position of dialogue and an ethics of responsibility; a commitment to equality, and the implementation of an emancipatory agenda; an emphasis on community, collective action, solidarity, and group empowerment. I agree with all of these criteria, and have, indeed, tried to meet them within this thesis. I would, however, encourage one proviso. The agenda of this thesis has come from the group itself; its implementation would suggest a power that I simply do not have. The research group itself has engaged within me an emancipatory agenda, which is reflected, I hope, in this thesis.

There may be seen to be a distinction within this thesis, as well as within wider practice, between the style of writing, and writing as a research method. Indeed, there are particularly interesting debates about the use of fiction writing as research (see Wyatt 2007). This thesis is more interested in the feminist call for questioning the ways in which traditional research is written and presented; the way this thesis is written is as methodologically important as the writing project undertaken with the group (see Chapter Three of this thesis). Both are part of a questioning of masculinist understandings of writing style and method. Gillian Rose (1993) suggested almost twenty years ago that there was a disjuncture between not only ways of researching, but also ways of writing. Traditional ways of writing informs us, Rose argues, in a masculinist way, mobilising traditionally masculine attributes of logos and rationality as fixed in certainty without reflection (see Bleakley 2000). Gregory (1989:88) also called for descriptions of people and places “so vivid that they move our emotions”. Although both citations date back around twenty years, I believe the call is one which still cannot be taken for granted. Part of the goal of ethnographic writing seems to be concerned with underlining the fallacy of objective representation; collecting research into neatly packaged sections. Writing theory is not an excuse either, because even the abstract should embody ideas and strive for style (Bleakley 2000). The issue arises in how we get to this stage. Writing prose, argues Richardson (2000c), helps to critique the idea that standard scientific writing is, in fact, ‘true’ writing. New ways of writing research permit us new ways to judge research (Richardson 2000b). Some authors, such as Richardson herself, have experimented with poetic representation (see also Furman 2004, Poindexter 2002) of ethnographic material, analysing the information, and recreating it as poetry. The power in this style is not merely in the words used, but in the devices, the rhythms, silences, spaces that are used to represent experience. "Poetry is thus a *practical* and *powerful* method for analysing social worlds." (Richardson 2000c:933 *emphasis in original*). Whilst I agree with this statement, I would also argue the case of poetry as a participatory tool of representation, as well as an ethnographic representation of standard ethnographic materials. Poetry that was created within the writing group, will be represented later in the thesis as analysis of the Paddlers’ own lived worlds. I believe that representing the accessible, humanised and idiographic (Carless and Sparkes 2008) results of collective research outcomes will relay to the reader the ways in which "developing an understanding of the subjective nature of the benefits of physical activity is...essential if we are to appreciate its potential" (Carless and Sparkes 2008:193). We should always seek to nurture the creative and imaginative, rather than subduing it through our research practices (Bochner 2000). Part of this understanding must always originate within an ethical sensibility. It is hoped that this style will

help to represent the way in which ethnographic research is come by; through inter-subjective conversation rather than subject-object questioning. The aim is to elicit engagement from the reader, in the story as it is related to them (Ellis 2000). As Richardson (2000a) states, good pieces of ethnographic work are written many times by their authors, and many more by their readers. Let me end this section with a salient quote by the geographer Derek Gregory: “[t]here *is* a poetics of geography, for geography *is* a kind of writing – and writing, along with reading, is still the most difficult of all the skills we have to learn.” (Gregory 1989:91 *emphases in original*). This project and this thesis are a continuing development of this learning process.

### **Ethical considerations of the research**

It is key to point out that all research, no matter of its epistemological standing, must be approached in a controlled scientific, that is to say critically investigative, way (Seymour-Rolls and Hughes 2000) to guard against malpractice (Winter and Munn-Giddings 2001). I found the ethical process of research to be an attitude of continual interaction, rather than an organised set of criteria to be imposed onto the process (Elwood 2007); what Berg et al. (2007) refer to as constant relational ethics. Critical to this position is the post-modern understanding that “morality, and moral argument, is embedded and embodied in the *person*” (Ives and Dunn 2010:257 *emphasis in original*), reflecting the position that *all* knowledge-making is political (Askins 2008). Indeed, Dyer and Demeritt (2009) have suggested that whilst medical ethics have been almost directly applied to social science, this creates too narrow a course of review; by becoming seen as the positivist researcher through stipulated ethical procedures, important research opportunities may be closed off (Ellis 2007). There is a categorical difference between traditional academic ethics and participatory ethics within a research environment; not least the ongoing commitment to participants engendered in the latter (Austin 2009). Camaraderie and spontaneous practice can be heavily undermined by traditional academic ethics (Blake 2007) that exist upon the bracketing of researcher from participants, and participants from one another. It is vital that researchers do not hide behind the safety net of pre-enforced ethical statutes such as informed consent, a document detailing the intentions of the researcher and the rights of the participant, using such academic structures as self-reassurance of their own ethical nature; any such document guards only against identifying participants, rather than misrepresenting them (Blake 2007). This is critical as once a story is told, no matter who it is told by, it cannot be taken back (Doloriert and Sambrook 2009). It was vital to my research practices that I did not allow participation to cloud the potential for harm held in my position of trust with the paddlers.

Initial permission to work with the group was gained from the leaders of the group, including the chair and secretary at the time, and continuous dialogue led to a discourse in which it was agreed that ethical verification would be sought from the University of Exeter's ethical review panel. Austin (2009) requires us to question who we choose to speak on behalf of our wider participants. In this case, the choice was made easier due to the democratic positions that these individuals inhabited within the group. Rather than being a discourse between myself and the university (this itself being a patronising scenario (Elwood 2007)), the group itself were a part of this discourse, in order that further reassurance could be given to them not only of my intentions, but in the worst case scenario, of the body to which concerns could be voiced. Early in the research, the matter of informed consent was discussed within the writing group, each writer being given a written outline of my roles and responsibilities as a researcher. However, it was decided that they understood the parameters of the research, and did not feel the need to sign. As this part of the project was participatory, and the appropriation of traditional structures can damage the research ethic of participatory groups (Khanlou and Peter 2005) by inserting outside structures, I accepted this understanding, as part of the wider ethical discourse with the group. Informed consent was gained, however, from those paddlers who participated in interviews; due to their singular presence with myself as researcher, this allowed for each interviewee to know their individual rights concerning information that could possibly be private to the individual. On whatever scale we work, the process of ethics, rather than our response to the product is most critical (Connolly Carmalt and Faubion 2010). Grant (2010) suggests that within an 'ethics of praxis', we become freed from a positivist obsession with how we know, allowing us to focus instead on how we *do* know, and how we should live. The discourse with the paddlers concerning my ethical intentions allowed for an ethics of praxis to emerge early in the project, rather than an ethical safety net.

'Ethics', then, are not simple criteria in academic research, particularly participatory and critical research. A particular example would be in the seemingly simple task of assigning to pseudonyms as part of the process of anonymity. Everyone involved in the group, reflected upon here, has been given a pseudonym. Although there were conversations in the second meeting of the writing group about expressing ownership and pride in the work (see also Browne 2003), I decided that as the writing project represented only a small percentage of the wider group, whose members came and went intermittently but could be included in the thesis, all names would be replaced with pseudonyms; the wide and participatory nature of the group at this moment came above individual wishes. Interviewees were given the option to chose

their own pseudonym, but none took up the opportunity. However, whilst such efforts may disguise individuals from outsiders, it must be recognised that disguising intimate research groups from themselves will be near impossible. In summarising the ethical stance of this project, as an embodied ethos rather than a universal ethics (McEwan and Goodman 2010), I adopted the approach that arose in a discussion with paddlers; avoiding causing harm to the group and their relationships with others (Ellis 2007).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to introduce the epistemic and methodological sensibilities that were brought to the research project. It has also sought to make clear that an introduction to a participatory geographical project can only be written ‘after the fact’. None of what you have just read could have been written until well into the project. In particular I have wanted to emphasise the importance, within a participatory approach, of situating the values of the group at the heart of the project. This cannot come without what can be a lengthy and complex integration process with the group. For example, it was my time with the group that allowed me to explore a sense of autoethnography that was more akin to their experiences, than to mine. In this way, the geographical elements of the approach also came through my initial, and continuing, interaction with the group. Following many of the authors cited above, I suggest that participatory geography work must not only focus on the relationships between people and places, but also must emanate from the geographical contexts of the group themselves. Without my initial visits to the group, and lengthy discussions, the project would not have been able to proceed in the way it did. This should not be considered not as a methodological concern, but as part of the ethics of praxis that I have just outlined. In approaching the group through their ethos, we may, as I will next argue, be able to gain a much clearer vision of the historical, social, and geographical contexts of the group.

## **Chapter 2: From diagnosis to dragon boating: qualifying illness cultures**

This chapter seeks to put into context the theoretical basis of the group, from the recent shift in stance towards physical exercise after a cancer diagnosis, to the experience of Paddlers for Life as dragon boaters. As a relatively new concept in the UK, the origins of the phenomenon of breast cancer dragon boating, and the concurrent research into the benefits of exercise after a cancer diagnosis are still central to the actions of Paddlers for Life. As outlined in the introductory chapter, qualitative methods can be particularly useful in researching unique phenomena; yet the interaction between qualitative experiences of quantitative research must be further explored. I wish here to offer a review of the quantitative research, which has so far been dominant within research on the physiological and psychological benefits of partaking in exercise after a cancer diagnosis, in order to explore the linkages between quantitative research and qualitative experience in the formation of breast cancer dragon boating crews. This will be further contextually explored ethnographically through the medical and exercise experiences of members of Paddlers for Life. Whilst ethnography does not seek to compare one example with another, it is important to outline the literature which has given breast cancer dragon boating groups such as Paddlers for Life their mandate for action. With this focus, I will also look at the ways in which the geographies of health have made strides, often through the use of qualitative methodologies, to complement and augment pre-existing quantitative led medical geography and epidemiology on the spatial realities of health and disease. Through an understanding of physical and psychosocial approaches in a physical cancer exercise group, this research seeks to reflect the aims of the participants themselves in policy intervention work for other cancer survivors.

This chapter argues that focused case studies can help us to ground and expand our social understandings of the geographies of health and illness, particularly cancer. The basis of this understanding must always begin with a medical diagnosis of a specific disease:

“Cancer results from genetic change or damage to a chromosome within a cell. The altered gene sends the wrong message or a different message from the one it should give. A cell begins to grow rapidly. It multiplies again and again until it forms a lump that’s called a malignant tumour, or cancer” (Dollinger et al. 2008:3).

It is in the movement from this original biological occurrence that social science begins the study of its human affect. It is first important to point out that health and illness are intimately connected with the fabric of society (Shaw et al. 2002), and hence with how we experience the world. In the early years of medical geography, research and teaching tended to develop along the same thesis as epidemiology (see Cutchin 2007); the study of the distribution and determinants of health related issues, and ensuing policy responses (Szklo and Nieto 2007; Woodward 1999). Whilst Hippocrates was formulating modern epidemiology more than two millennia ago, a cancer specific epidemiology is relatively recent, becoming specifically organised in the second half of the 20th century (dos Santos Silva 1999). Since the early days of cancer epidemiology, the geographies of people and place have been key concerns in seeking to map the spread of disease and then formulate the best practices for treatment and prevention (Klassen and Platz 2006).

Community epidemiology may be particularly useful in helping to identify and broach groups, such as individuals affected by cancer, which exist outside of definable features (Salant and Gehlert 2008). By identifying groups within wider communities, through methods that are more often associated with qualitative means, epidemiological issues can be more clearly identified and understood. A lack of cooperation and misunderstanding between disciplines, however, has led to a significant and detrimental (if not terminal) split between medical and health geography (Kearns and Gesler 2002; Cutchin 2007).

From the early 1990's, along with a general epistemological turn within geography towards critical and qualitative approaches to social research, the geographies of health have focused on studying social meaning as embodied within people and places (Dyck 1999; Dyck and Kearns 1995; see also Phillips 1981); In particular, health geography is now more concerned with the analysis and processes of place, the utilisation of theory, and the processes of health disparities than medical geography (Cutchin 2007), the former reintroducing social relationships into the spatial mapping of medical geography (Kearns and Moon 2002); health inequalities cannot be divorced from the people they involve (Smyth 2008). Coming soon after the critical and feminist turns in human geography, this has led to more qualitatively based social geographies of health, but also debate into how these can be combined into new geographies of health (Rosenberg 1998).

“Social geographers can and should investigate the practices of “the medical” and “the alternative” not in isolation but in relation to each other, asking how certain practices may be

dominant in certain places and not others” (Del Casino Jr 2009:103). This reconnection between the structural understandings and practices of medicine has allowed social geographers to re-engage not just with groups of people for whom the practices of (ill) health are a critical social issue, but with *their particular concerns*. Parr (2003) reports that a recent focus within health geography has been upon calling for analyses that go beyond description of the politics of health care, and seek to implement agendas for their future use. I agree that this is necessary, and would go on to urge geographers to pay close attention to the ways that the groups we study are already engaged in agenda setting; as academic researchers, we might at times be most usefully engaged in representing and working with such groups rather than seeking to create agendas of our own. Whilst important, this iteration is not new; the progression of academic research to policy has been painfully slow. Over thirty years ago, Phillips (1981) told us that the reification of ‘expert’ medical knowledge over other health knowledges was beginning to be questioned. This was followed at regular intervals by similar calls for participatory and collaborative approaches (Dyck 1999; Kearns 1997) to improve the interaction between academics, policy setters, and affected communities (Wright et al. 2006). Reviewing the traditional structural processes of the practices of health cannot be approached from any singular position. As Crooks and Chouinard (2006) point out, we need to acknowledge the multiple struggles of people, and their abilities to contextualise in different places at different times, but also the ways in which hierarchical power relations may formulate as stigma and exclusion (Del Casino Jr. 2009), affecting both individual’s experiences, and the ways in which they can be understood.

### **The body and geography**

The body has over the past thirty years, and particularly since the feminist and critical turns in geography that occurred within the 80’s and 90’s, been a key area of interest to researchers within the discipline. Indeed, particularly at the end of the latter decade, and at the beginning of the next, Geographers began to place real focus on what the place of the body meant in terms of human geography. Whilst early focus on masculinity and femininity was welcome into contextual spaces and places, the body remained overlooked (Little and Leyshon 2003). This short review of the relevant literature referring to the developing relationship between the body and geography aims to explore a position for the body within geography, as well as a first step to later discussions within the thesis.



The focus on the body within geography has long progressed along the lines of essentialism (natural body differences engender social differences we see) versus constructionism (bodies as discursively created and practiced). With focus emanating from feminist and critical turns, much of the literature within geography seems to have come from the position of being dealt with discursively. One of the key early problems that geographers such as Longhurst (1995) tackled in her review on the body and geography was that of dualisms that existed (and probably still do) within geographic dealings of the body. Distinguishing between mind/body, for example, often leads to ways of thinking which link the mind to themes such as reason, consciousness *and masculinity* and the body to passion, passivity *and femininity* (Longhurst 1995). By questioning the dualism, Longhurst suggests, the dominant side's pre-dominance will necessarily be questioned.

In exploring the body as understood discursively, the ideas of Judith Butler on performativity have been important to many writers. For Butler, performativity is not a matter of acting, but as part of the relationship of living (see Little and Leyshon 2003). The body in context, or embodiment, is particularly important. The 'place' at the heart of this study is Windermere, Cumbria. It is an overridingly rural community. Little and Leyshon (2003) suggest in their review paper on rural embodiment, that rural sexuality and gender identities tend to be based on highly traditional assumptions about the body. In essence, the rural body is often constructed as able to cope with the wilds of nature, whether actively (masculinity) or passively (femininity). Little and Leyshon's argument suggests that the (variable and not homogenous) body must be seen as a more active part of the construction and performativity of rural identities, rather than an essential element inscribed upon.

Holliday and Hassard (2001) focus in their introduction to an edited edition on *Contested Bodies* on the need to focus on the materiality of the body. By focusing on the guts and goo of the body, (see also Longhurst 2000), we can begin to see the ways in which all bodies are out of control, rather than merely the popular constructions, which are linked to certain gender identities. As Holliday and Hassard (2001) argue, it is important to work from the position that all bodies ooze, rather than that certain formalized bodies don't.

In her study focusing on pregnancy and performativity, Longhurst (2000) suggests that pregnant bodies are sexed/sexual bodies. They are at the same time, gendered bodies. Neither fully essential, nor completely constructed. Developing these theories, Longhurst suggests that pregnancy is not aligned with a particular gendered femininity. Instead, what it means to be

pregnant shifts across space and time (Longhurst 2000), and the pregnant body will play a huge part in the performativity of the body itself, as well as the performativity of space, which is encountered by the individual. Not only are there acceptable places **for** the pregnant body, but acceptable places **of** the pregnant body: for instance the woman interviewed by Longhurst, who didn't mind her "body shape of the baby – it is my hips and thighs that I don't like the thought of looking at." Longhurst (2000:459). Longhurst (2000) suggests, I think, that performativity is not simply practiced *on* women and their bodies, or by women *with* their bodies, but that discourses are created *through* spatial and historical regulatory practices.

Of course, while it is important that the guts and goo, the materiality, of the body are focused upon, it is also important to do this in a way which can help us to understand how the body is practiced. A particularly important example is the ethnography of disease by Annmarie Mol (2002), a medical sociologist who produced an ethnographic representation of atherosclerosis, a thickening of the artery walls. For Mol, the body is not singular, but nor is it fragmented. The disease itself is studied as it is *enacted* within the body. Bodies are never divorced from the means by which they are explored. The microscope is part of the story of enactment. What I take from this, is that the body cannot be divorced from the tools of enactment; in this study's case, the dragon boat, the paddle, etc. But also that practicing or *doing* the body can often be exclusionary. Whilst both the medical community and breast cancer dragon boat teams work with (or against) the same disease, the medical treatment of the body affected by breast cancer, and the bodily practice of Breast Cancer Dragon Boating are *done* differently. To cite Mol, this is a "study into the coexistence of multiple entities that go by the same name." (Mol 2002: 151) In Mol's case, this means disease. In the case of this study, I mean Paddlers for Life breast cancer dragon boating team. This is a point that will be developed in section '7-8'.

This brief review demonstrates how the body cannot be seen as any particular, constrained, whole; neither entirely natural or entirely performed. It is not essential. It is not wholly constructed, but must be seen as contingent with space and time.

These arguments made here can, I believe, be developed so that it is not just individual bodies that leak and fart and are messy or are uncontained, but collaborative bodies; collaborative groups of rhythmic bodies. From Chapter 7, I suggest that focus on the body, as in the collaboration *of* bodies, might allow us to explore a geography for understanding the collaborative practices of bodies in particular spaces, enabling us to better understand the ways in which groups of individuals come together as *a body*, in order to deal with their

collaborative and individual experiences of illness. Whilst the leakiness of individual bodies was not the focus of this research, I believe that these ideas can play an important role in the experience of collaborative bodies.

### **Recounting medical diagnoses**

*In interviews, I always began by asking about how the Paddler came to know about and become involved in breast cancer dragon boating. But it seemed, often, that the question was within the individual's own narrative. It was a particular story, but there were other, vital features of the narrative of how they got to be there, that needed to be told.*

*For many of the Paddlers, diagnosis was something very different in their experience of their body. They didn't feel ill. Not until they found the lump, or it was found. After that, Sophie said, it changes you. From that time, you don't feel well anymore. From that diagnosis, you are legally disabled as well. It can be a time of fear, particularly if cancer has been seen in other close family and friends. Laura had been a nurse for many years and had seen many people with cancer over that time. But her own diagnosis had really hit her hard. She was ambitious before, had just handed in the thesis for her master's degree. For a while, after diagnosis, all that went out of the window. For Ava, it felt like her life was over. Not just the biological aspects, although that was threatened, but the social aspect. Diagnoses hit families and friends hard as well. It hit Thomas like a bullet, when his partner Lily was diagnosed. He had already lost his wife to cancer, and now Lily's illness was difficult to come to terms with. Like Daniel, there was unusually little he could do about the situation. Although perhaps understandable, the concern of family and friends and those around you can perhaps exacerbate the psychological difficulties of the individual. Isla decided that she would have to break contact with a close friend who she had known for many years. The friend's reaction seemed to be to Isla that her diagnosis was a death sentence. It was a reaction that wasn't helpful to Isla at that time. Such a sense wasn't just taken from friends and family, but also from medical staff. Laura said that she had felt the seriousness of her situation from the medical staff. Did they say that, I asked? No, she replied. They didn't need to. You picked it up from the way they acted, from the seriousness of the treatment.*

*After the diagnosis, all of the survivors underwent medical treatment for their cancer. This was a different experience again, for most. For breast cancer in particular, physical illness, illness that is experienced by the individual comes not with the cancer, but with the treatment. Treatment comes, often, not as a release, but as an assault on the body. The fact that your body*

*is poisoned in order to treat it seemed ironic to Ruby, as she gave a little laugh. This understanding seemed to have spread to the supporters. They had seen the suffering of treatment in their partners. Even for Samantha, who was not supporting a survivor in the group, being a patient had become associated with suffering. There was often a distinction between the experiences though, between the physical, and the social. Most paddlers were well looked after by the hospitals and staff. The staff were good at their jobs, even if the practicalities of their job were horrendous for the paddlers. Of course, there were problems. Chloe related her experience, in which she found her consultant to be particularly patronising. She had filed a complaint against her, she said. For Grace as well, her experience in hospital led her to want to make a change for others, to prevent the experience that she had reoccurring. She relayed this to me in a story about a mop. Given the extent and severity of the treatment Grace had, which included months in and out of hospital, and treatment which made her feel like her skin was burning, a story about a mop might seem to be whimsical, even trivial. I didn't know where the story was going. As I sat, I wondered where it could go. When she was in hospital, she had to be in isolation. She was in a room by herself. There was a separate bathroom. Her treatment was making her sweat terribly, which drenched all of the linen on her bed. It was not a nice room to be in. She knew that there were germs all around. Once a day, someone would come in to clean the bathroom. They would take out the mop, swish it over the floor, and place it back into the water in the bucket. The water wasn't changed for the time she was there, she said. During her stay, she also contracted MRSA, which lengthened her hospitalisation. When she left hospital, Grace knew that she wanted to change things, change certain practices. It was in hospital, as part of her treatment, that she suffered, and knew that she had. She was angry about that. But first, she had to convince them that she wasn't going to sue them. She knew that that's what they would be worried about. Eventually, a policy member from the hospital came out and talked to Grace. They talked for hours about her experiences in the hospital. It had gone towards a training programme for staff, Grace thought. She hoped that nobody else would have to go through that experience.*

*Whilst many of the other survivors found no fault with the medical staff, they felt that it was their bodies, rather than themselves, being treated. As individuals, Evie said, they lost control. Some were given the option of treatment pathways to take at the beginning. That was to be their pathway. But after that initial decision, they were again left bereft. The treatment that they had chosen was already planned. It is medical, complicated. But as she reached the end of her treatment, Ruby didn't feel better. Instead, she still felt shit. Although her cancer had been*

*treated to the best of the doctor's abilities, things for Ruby had not got immediately better. It had left her, as it had Sophie, feeling very tired a lot of the time. Isla experienced treatment differently. She didn't allow herself to see herself as ill, she said. She went back to work four days a week, whilst undergoing treatment. One day, there was a wait at the Doctors. She began talking to a couple of the ladies who were also waiting. I don't mind, she said, it's more time I don't have to be at work! Their reaction was shock, said Isla. That was Isla's way of dealing with it, it seemed. If she could, she was going to work. This illness wasn't going to stop her.*

*Hospitals are for treating illnesses. Illnesses effect bodies, not people. Once the cancer is treated, the support stops. After her treatment finished, Olivia asked her consultant if there was anything she could do to help her recovery. No, he said. Go away and forget you ever had it. It was a conveyor belt that had simply stopped. But you can't forget it, said Olivia. After all that, you just can't. Of course, practically they were not allowed to forget it. Something I was often told, by individuals, and as a group, was that patients were simply told what they couldn't do anymore. Don't go rock climbing, someone told Ava. Like I did that before, she thought. Talking to a physiotherapist at the networking conference at Lancaster in January, she told me that a lady who had cancer had once asked her to open the door for her. She had been told not to put any weight at all on that arm. You get worried, said Lily, about what you should be doing. Knowing what not to do doesn't really help. For some, after treatment ends, the path is clearer. Laura knew that she would need support after treatment finished, so she made sure to look for it.*

### **The physical benefits of exercise**

Treatment for cancer is an often invasive and difficult experience for the individual, and can bring about multiple side effects, such as fatigue, reduced muscle strength and impaired physical capacity (van Weert et al 2005). As Graham et al. (2008) suggest, the link between physical activity and the potential to alleviate psychological and physical conditions has long been recognised. Despite this recognition and practice by the medical community, however, similar links to cancer diagnosis and treatment have taken longer to be both researched and accepted. Much of the reticence to accept this research seems to come from a fear that physical exertion may precipitate a worsening in the physical condition of the patient. The accepted logic amongst the medical community was that treatment-induced fatigue should be prescribed with rest (Courneya 2009), whilst in breast cancer in particular, the fear that upper body exercise could facilitate or exacerbate lymphoedema, a common side effect of treatment for

breast cancer, acted as a disincentive amongst the medical community to suggest physical activity for survivors (Cooper 1995). Some side effects of a lack of activity are also strongly associated with certain treatments; weight gain is a common side effect of tamoxifen, often given to breast cancer survivors. Whitehead and Lavelle (2009) found that engaging in physical activity helped to negate the extremes of this side effect. Despite this however, findings that 71% of cancer survivors are overweight or clinically obese (Demark-Wahnefried and Jones 2008), and that most women do not return to pre-cancer activity levels (Littman et al 2010), suggest a general need to engage in some form of health-improving exercise. However, high levels of fatigue also affect many cancer survivors.

Although fatigue is often conceived of as a barrier to activity, it is in fact likely to reduce with regular exercise (Schwartz 2004; Courneya et al. 2004; Hayes et al. 2009). McKenzie's (1998) original testing with the Abreast in a Boat Crew in Canada suggested that for lymphoedema, a swelling of the lymph glands associated with treatment for breast cancer, exercise could indeed play a role in preventing it (Cooper 1995; McKenzie 1998). In other cancers as well, it has been suggested that exercise may help to reduce the bone mineral density loss experienced by men with prostate cancer undergoing androgen deprivation therapy (Torti and Matheson 2004). Exercise may not just curtail the side effects of treatment, but may play a role as a physical life-extending treatment (Hamer et al. 2009); as well as being a psychological boost (Unruh and Elvin 2004, McDonough et al. 2008). Whilst such findings appear positive and are increasing in number, confidence to prescribe exercise does not seem to have improved amongst the medical community (Durak et al. 1999). Jones et al (2005) report that whilst over 50% of Canadian oncologists questioned believed that exercise is beneficial, important and safe during treatment, only 12.5% considered that patients thought the same. The benefit of exercise for cancer survivors is then perhaps as much in the psychological models of the understandings of exercise, as in the physical benefits of the activity.

*There are physical limitations after treatment. There are things you can't do anymore, which you used to do without thinking. The Paddlers seemed to appreciate this, within the ethic of the team. The accepted logic, it was said, was the side that had undergone surgery went inside the boat. There were limitations to what an individual can do. Within the boat of survivors, most will have had different surgeries, subtleties that change the way the group operates. Surgery can limit movement for a survivor, affecting the range of movement that they possess in the boat. Many of the survivors professed to have a 'side'. This was the side on which they felt more comfortable paddling. Interestingly, it didn't work in quite the same way for supporters.*

*Like Joshua, most seemed to fit where they were needed. When asked, I would always say I could paddle on both sides. I realised, some months in, that this belied my own limitations. I was able to paddle on both sides. I had no corporeal limitations that meant that I was limited to one side. Yet, whilst I was able to paddle, I was not a capable paddler. I could not dream of attaining the rhythm, the technique of some of these women. It would take much more time for me to come close. The survivors had their side, and their talents. Some worked with the accepted logic, some against. But the practicalities of these limitations were important, in that they could define the experience of the paddler, governing on what side of the boat they would paddle, who they would sit with. Limitations aren't merely in paddling, but spread throughout the lived experience of Paddlers for Life; some limitations would be visible here, some wouldn't. Grace had some slight deafness as a direct cause of the treatment she had received. Olivia, on the other hand had been advised not to paddle at all anymore. She was, then, a drummer by limitations, but as a drummer she was without them. That was her place in the boat, yet it is conceivable that no one would realise why it is.*

*There seemed to be two particular moments for people in dragon boating after a cancer diagnosis. The first is that cancer provides an opportunity to change a life. The second is that cancer provides an opportunity to change a life after cancer. These are important differences. The former is summed up by Chloe and Ruby. Chloe found a treatable moment for her life, only after cancer treatment. It was a moment that she felt that she needed, irrespective of the diagnosis and treatment itself. To Chloe, it was more of an irony that it had taken cancer to achieve this. Similarly, Ruby didn't exercise much before her diagnosis. With cancer had come a new attitude, a thirst for exercise that led her to dragon boating. The latter example, of changing life after cancer, is demonstrated by Laura. Upon diagnosis, Laura knew that she would need support after treatment. She identified herself as the sort of person who didn't need motivation to exercise, she could do it herself, get herself out there. She predicted, if not the type of activity, its necessity. Laura was, and is, incredibly motivated within the group. She told me that she wanted breast cancer dragon boating to be the jewel in the crown of the cancer exercise movement. This was a specific action of the self within her experience of treatment. Like all the paddlers, within the notion of a post cancer collective of individuals, Laura is part of the support that she knew she would need. This is the same for those in the former category, as much as in the latter. She may have received support from other places, family, friends, traditional support groups, but Laura was part of her own support. Although these are two distinctions, they are not fixed or categorical. Many paddlers seemed to work between the two,*

*dealing with their experience of illness, but at the same time dealing with their lives. They are able to add skills which add to their paddling experience, but also go past it, in order to engender their lives beyond paddling, beyond breast cancer. As Thomas, a supporter, said, learning to helm is something which is not just about support, but is also interesting and important, outside of the cancer experience. Ava's experience of helming was also important within the group. This season, she tried helming for the first time. From her position in the boat, she had always seen it as easy, the easy side of the sport. But now, her view had changed. It was so difficult, she thought, dealing with everything that the helm must, social, environmental, always aiming to get the crew back safe. Not only had she learnt something practical, but she had also learnt an appreciation of the roles of others, including supporters, in the group.*

*I was surprised that some of the survivors told me that their cancer was over now, despite still belonging to a breast cancer group. For Evie, Lily and Laura, there seemed to be separation between the medical understandings of cancer, at which a patient without recurrence at five years post-diagnosis is given the all-clear, and the psychological need to remain. None seemed inclined to leave the group, despite their disaffiliation. For a while, you are disabled by your illness, Laura said. Yet, physically, despite certain limitations that might remain, she is recovered now. She has moved on, with the experiences she now has. Perhaps the group differentiates itself in this regard to the individual. There is a collective answer to the possible return of breast cancer; the possibility of recurrence that hangs over all breast cancer survivors. But in this moment, of recurrence, the individual and their experience is singular; the singular in Paddlers for Life is only in the recently diagnosed, as they are supported by the group. Many have been in such a position; all will empathise, together.*

### **Psychosocial cancer and exercise**

“The relationship between exercise and psychological well-being is widely recognised as a significant determinant of personal and public health with physical activity increasingly recommended as a means to address prevalent, debilitating, social and psychological problems such as depression.” (Graham et al. 2008:448)

Despite the increasing quality and quantity of study, the psychosocial benefits of exercise were not, until recently, seen as a worthy use of study time (Courneya 2009). Whilst the physiological functions of cancer care are what make people survivors, the psychosocial functions are what lets them live. As Saxton and Daley (2010) state, all too often the latter



comes as an afterthought, despite the fact that coping with cancer can be a lifelong occupation (Fawzy 1999), requiring courage, strength and hope (Ford 2009). A cancer diagnosis can lead individuals to question their 'past' identity (Kralik 2002); the loss of physical ability due to the illness and its treatment can lead to a perceived loss of identity (Graham et al 2008). With the increasing number of psychosocial studies, more detailed studies of particular experiences, such as exercise challenges for older people (Thewes et al. 2004; Whitehead and Lavelle 2009; Courneya et al. 2004), can be more easily explored. Dealing with a body that seemingly lets you down can be difficult, but using the upper body, as in dragon boating, the area of the cancer and the surgery, can be the ultimate self-motivational message (Mitchell et al. 2007).

Despite increased research outlining the benefits of exercise following cancer treatment, it is important to understand that no intervention can be without complications (Fawzy 1999). Sabiston et al. (2007) suggest that dragon boating may alleviate, but also introduce, unique stressors. Van Weert et al.'s (2005) exercise intervention study actually reports lower quality of life than in the control group of cancer survivors, whilst Lee et al. (2007) found no conclusive results for the effectiveness of tai chi among cancer survivors towards improving quality of life. Traditional discussion groups may also be found to be unhelpful in some circumstances (Carmack Taylor et al. 2007), although discussion of physical coping strategies has been found to be useful in exercise groups (Bell 2009). This suggests that whilst the transfer of experiences is beneficial to cancer survivors in dealing with their own treatment, a focus on cancer discussion may not be. Group interaction, rather than discussion, may be found to be particularly useful, in improving social relations (Bicego et al. 2009). There must be more to quality of life than the fact of one's illness, or the quest for health (Payne 2006).

The lack of psychosocial and quality of life information available on cancer, particularly in geography, is perhaps due to the fact that psychosocial aspects of illness are only studied after physical requirements emerge and are dealt with (Thewes et al. 2004). The situation is, however, beginning to change. Qualitative studies are being recognised as important in the field as they begin to explore "*how and why* things happen and how people make sense of their experiences as they interpret them" (Saxton and Daley 2010:10, *italics in original*). Focused work like that of Hennessey et al. (2005), utilising semi-structured interviews to explore the experience of cancer survivors running in Cancer Research UK's 'Race for Life' events brings detailed knowledge to particular aspects of the cancer experience at particular moments.

Much of the psychosocial research in the field of cancer and exercise has focused upon Breast Cancer (Courneya 2003; see also Burke and Sabiston 2010; Cooper 1995; McKenzie 1998; Culos-Reed et al. 2005; Emslie et al. 2007; Kolden et al. 2002; Littman et al. 2010; Milne et al. 2007), or women with cancer (see Adamsen et al. 2001). This might be in response to the high incidence of breast cancer, but also because of the high political capital that breast cancer holds (Cartwright 1998; King 2004). Of the 235,000 diagnoses of cancer per year in the UK, around 40,000 or one in six will be a diagnosis of breast cancer (see Mutrie et al. 2007; Whitehead and Lavelle 2009). Although studies in cancer and exercise have broadened from solely concerning kinesiology departments (Courneya 2009), and qualitative studies are increasing in frequency, there is still much to be added; from using different points of access, differing cancer types, and different approaches to psychosocial affect, in future studies. This is not least because a life disruption such as cancer diagnosis may be a particularly cogent time to assist people in changing their lifestyles (Demark-Wahnefried and Jones 2008, Mutrie et al. 2007); utilising the crisis of personal identity to affect difference. Exercise makes a positive impact on physical barriers such as fatigue and physical capacity (see van Weert et al. 2009; Demark-Wahnefried and Jones 2008), but also on psychosocial factors such as anxiety and depression. Research on breast cancer dragon boating, in particular, is increasing in the psychosocial literature. For a comprehensive overview of group reactions to exercise after breast cancer, see Floyd and Moyer (2010).

*After treatment, there is a moment for each paddler, when they learn of Paddlers for Life. For some it was through the radio, others through friends, online support groups, or traditional support groups. For most of the paddlers, that first experience in the boat was something very different. It was daunting, said Lily. For those who didn't start right at the beginning of the group, seeing women who had been paddling for six months or more seemed off-putting. She wasn't strong enough, surely, thought Olivia. Or moreover, as Sophie said, those women were so much stronger. But slowly, these feelings change. The collective becomes, for some, a source of inspiration and encouragement, in terms of the exercise and the medical experience you have had. After treatment Emily was terrified, she said, about developing lymphoedema. She had been told what might happen, and what she shouldn't do. Coming to paddling, worried her then. Of course, it was good to see all the other women who had been in her position there. But it was Gabrielle, with her compression sleeve on, that really reassured her. Here was someone who had lymphoedema, and was tackling it through dragon boating. Perhaps she could too. She didn't need to ask Gabrielle about it, her benefit was implicit. The exercise itself*

*produces a collaborative sensibility as well, of course. In the boat, paddling, you are always with another paddler, you see what the person next to you is doing, and you learn along with them. Dragon boating is an equalising sport. The technique is important, but each member can paddle at the level that their body allows them to. Physical limitations of a single individual paddler do not place limitations on any other member of the crew. Although the physical nature of paddling might be individualistic, it is only in coming together that the holistic affect may occur.*

The intervention element of exercise research is often key to the experience itself. In their longitudinal study, Littman et al (2010) suggest that the greatest reductions in activity post cancer treatment are amongst those who were likely to report the greatest activity prior to diagnosis. Self-referral exercise trials are likely to have a bias towards women with positive exercise attitudes (Emslie et al 2007). However, to accept this as bias is to simplify the process of exercise. Many of the women in Paddlers for Life come from many different exercise backgrounds; to conflate a background in swimming to a background in walking or dancing is to misunderstand the nature of exercise, and to limit the social and cultural contexts which are bound up within forms of exercise, and to reduce the exercise objective to its basic form; the minimalist machine in the sparse gym. Two of the women, whilst professing to be active, enjoying dancing and walking, were previously terrified of water. Their participation in dragon boating had more to say than merely their previous history of exercise. The demographic of cancer affect is also difficult to quantify, as cancer most often affects those after the age of 65 (Courneya et al 2004); this can cause confusion in the experience of the affect of treatment, as old age is already linked with physical and psychosocial decline. However, physical activity after cancer diagnosis can help motivate women to act against a perceived slowing down in others (Whitehead and Lavelle 2009). Coming to know your own body, rather than relying on generalisations of how you *should* feel are key to coming to terms with illness as an older person (Ettorre 2005).

Whilst quantitative psychosocial quality of life testing has been crucial to understanding many cancer experiences, there are practical, as well as epistemological issues with the approach. Whilst accepting that quantitative tools for generalisation can produce a good outcome for an individual's personal care, Carter et al (2004:612) also call for "an even broader approach to outcomes, based on new theoretical frameworks, [which] may help in identifying the goals of care that health professionals should aim for." This research project is partly based on a wish to

explore these ‘new theoretical frameworks’, in order to access and report new policy directions. Epistemologically, I feel that the use of set quantitative methods, such as quality of life surveys (e.g. Spitzer et al., 1981; Shepherd 2002), risk failing to pick up nuanced issues of lived experience, including interaction with medical professionals. Indeed, Shepherd (2002) expresses the belief that patients do not generally distinguish their health quality of life, from their social quality of life, making the application of quantitative surveys difficult to control. Furthermore, the seeming need for a control group (Floyd and Moyer 2010) for scientific research can lead to difficulties in the experience of affected individuals. Thus, not being ‘treated’ may be difficult for someone with a potentially life threatening disease to hear (Emslie et al. 2007). On occasion, this has led to the use of deception on the part of the researcher, to avoid despondence developing between different groups (Estabrooks and Carron 1999) and affecting research outcomes. Medical professionals have been associated with the increase of fear in patients (Leydon et al. 2003). What is referred to as ‘white coat effect’ can have a significant effect not only on the psychological, but also the physical health of the survivor (Costa et al. 2003). Despite reassurances, Wong and Chow (2006) found that patients avoided reporting misgivings of the medical experience on official documents for fear of negatively influencing their own care. Indeed, much of the academic aim in gaining ‘objective’ results rests on the actions of the researchers in managing participants in order to retain their ‘objective’ positionality; “The control condition received a basic fitness program. It should be noted that in all three conditions [exercise, control and placebo] the instructor was friendly, reassuring, and helpful with skill development and offered juice and biscuits at the end of each class” (Estabrooks and Carron 1999:583). This is not to critique quantitative cancer research as a whole; indeed, this research sets out to answer different questions and understand different aspects of the cancer experience. However, I do wish to draw attention to the argument that cancer research must be more than physical versus social understandings; all cancer and health researchers must emphasise the importance of questioning and reflecting upon the means by which research is undertaken, as well as the results found.

*There was a lot of previous sporting experience in the group, largely individualistic. It had begun long before, for most paddlers. Most of the Paddlers stated that they had been sporty or active before paddling, and in the case of survivors, before cancer diagnosis. Yet, exercise did not seemingly mean the same thing to all Paddlers. Whilst some had continuously been involved in organised competitive sport, Sophie had always been a dancer. She had always done that, she said. Others were keen climbers, walkers and swimmers. Many of the supporters*

*had also been involved in sport. Thomas had been a professional footballer, Joshua was a keen gym-goer, walker, swimmer and runner, and Daniel had kayaked regularly in the past, and Abby swam and cycled. Except for Joshua, however, exercise seemed to take a backwards step for supporters in the group. For survivors, like Joshua, the draw to the group was the exercise itself, the paddling. Not only for the medical benefits, thought Isla, but also for the interest of the group. Like any event, it needs to occur regularly to maintain the interest of participants. Because of the nature of the exercise, it could be argued that the social elements and exercise elements of the group are in fact inseparable. The evidence of the benefits of exercise to cancer survivors has proved to be the foundation stone of all the groups. However, the separation of international breast cancer dragon boating from the able-bodied sporting organisation shows that the social element of breast cancer dragon boating is inseparable either from the social, or the exercise elements of its practice; it comes to formulate its own position as a distinct form of social interaction.*

*In dragon boating, paddlers learn to deal with their bodies and their illnesses, but also with nature, the environment, water, hills, wind. Dragon boating cannot be separated from the environment. Hence, exercise is not merely the act of pulling the blade, but of interacting with the environment and its elements. Learning this seemed crucial to the exercise experience of the Paddlers. Laura told me, that it was about the senses. About being aware of them, and learning to interact with them, not merely have them act upon you. Perhaps it was the change from the medical experience that enacted these requirements in the Paddlers. For Laura, gyms were unattractive places. But more than that, they seemed actively unhealthy, like hospitals. The cleanliness and simplicity of the hospital, although crucial to the treatment of the body, did nothing for the individual. Gyms, thought Isla, were tedious places to be. The sensory elements of exercising outdoors produced a critical difference to that of the gym or the hospital. For Isla, this extra sensory awareness, which was both required and enabled lessened the perception of effort in the exercise itself. Even in the wind and the rain, although often not pleasant, the sensation of being within the environment is still a strong draw to Paddlers. Cohesion is not just with other survivors, but also with the environment itself.*

Whilst *returning* to physical activity, as well as coming to exercise for the first time, can be an important step in regaining control over one's life and body after a cancer experience (Milne et al 2007; Graham et al 2008), I argue that the social elements of exercise are crucial to our wider understanding and cannot be divorced from our understandings of exercise. Exercise groups can be a key aspect of people's lives (Carron and Brawley 2008) and so must be

understood in social and cultural, as well as physiological terms. Hennessy et al (2005) suggest that the collective social aspect of physical activity is a key encouragement and motivation to exercise (see also Culos-Reed et al. 2005; Christensen et al. 2006), whilst Stevinson and Fox (2006) suggest that participants might work harder in such sessions. Indeed, in terms of breast cancer dragon boating, Parry (2008) has suggested that friendships can emerge from the common experience of breast cancer, and their shared interest in dragon boating (see also Sabiston et al. 2007). May et al (2008) even suggest that increased cohesion can improve physical functioning. As cohesion develops, a collective identity may surface through the interaction of exercise together (Midtgaard et al (2006). In this development, the focus is not cancer, but the exercise and its cohesive element (McNicoll et al. Forthcoming); participants are then able to concentrate on the benefits of their present practice (Carron and Brawley 2000), whilst not forgetting the reason for their initial involvement.

Whilst group exercise can be important for cancer survivors, it cannot be viewed as a simple answer to exercise motivation for cancer survivors, as Christensen et al (2006) report that levels of loneliness were not dramatically improved, and bonds did not extend beyond the gym-based research group physical activity; Kolden et al (2002) also failed to find statistically significant increase in social well-being resulting from group exercise intervention. Indeed, the suggestion of Christensen et al (2006) that bonds do not extend past the temporal existence of the intervention group may suggest that researcher-created laboratory groups do not represent true, or 'naturally occurring' groups (Carron and Brawley 2008), with their inherent social processes. In particular, the fact that the 'goal' or aims of the group are defined by the researcher, rather than the group themselves (see Carron and Brawley 2008), may suggest that self-created goals are in fact key to the cohesiveness of the group. Neither exercise, nor cancer, occurs in a vacuum; all understandings must be held in the context of their social individualism. For example, whilst Adamsen et al. (2001:532) suggest that in contrast to all-female groups where the stigma of illness is tackled through collective (discursive) reflection, their all-male version of this was to focus instead on the exercise, and not to talk about the illness. This finding is heavily critiqued not only by much of the breast cancer dragon boating literature (see Unruh and Elvin 2004; McDonough et al 2008), but also in gym-based interventions (Emslie et al. 2007). Indeed, the nature of the group may have more to do with the practices of cohesion, rather than the objectivised nature of its makeup.

Group cohesion has been defined as "a dynamic process reflected by the tendency of a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the

satisfaction of member affective needs” (Carron et al., 1998:213 my emphases). However, the motivation for cohesion can be split into two; social motivators, which ask whether social motivations predate or come from the group; and task oriented motivators, which describe collective performance, goals and objectives, and whether these pre-exist or are developed within the group (Carron and Brawley 2000). Although there will be contextual differences between all groups, Estabrooks and Carron (1999) suggest that exercise groups are likely to develop along individual social motivations in the short term, before becoming focused around group based task oriented cohesion in the longer term. This suggests that even long-term group exercise interventions with research created groups may face serious problems in fully understanding group characteristics and affect. Emslie et al (2007) report that whilst women were still forming bonds within the intervention group, the intervention ended, leaving some with issues of abandonment. Cohesion is a dynamic process, which dynamically develops through the temporal interaction of the group (Carron and Brawley 2000). The (relatively) short period of most intervention groups suggests that the epistemological function of the ‘faux-group’ in academic intervention may play a significant role in studies of group exercise.

*Exercise brings realisations for the team, whether these are realisations in themselves, or in others. Hence, these effects are both social and physical in their formation. Exercise is taken very seriously in Paddlers for Life. It is the reason they are there. They know the research; they know the potential of what they may gain from their exercise. Chloe and Ruby agreed that they personally felt much fitter from the exercise. But there are other lessons to learn, both with others and within oneself. For Sophie, it also helped her psychologically, to enable her to move on; moving past the time of her treatment. More than the individual, however, it was also about the social exercise. Lily recounted to me how she was paddling with a survivor who had lymphoedema in her legs. She was surprised to learn that the paddling helped with this; she had thought it was about exercising the area that was affected. Grace already knew this. She was not a breast cancer survivor, and had had lymphoedema in her legs. The paddling had helped to clear it, to control it, she felt. For Sophie, goals existed in two parts, both in exercise and racing. These were common goals to exist, although not always in unison. Often one would precede the other. Yet, despite the collaborative nature of the dragon boating, these appeared always as individual, as well as collaborative goals. The aim to do well as part of a team; the aim to return to, or gain good health. However, it seemed that there was something else; something of the team, which could not be reduced from it to the individual experience. Exercise and sporting achievement sustained the team, but so did something that was created*

*in their collaboration; not to be reduced to its parts. Part of the benefits, it seemed, were not in the physical, or psychological relief that exercise could bring. It was also in the message that Paddlers for Life aimed to spread. The goals were not just on the water for exercise, or within the individual for health. The exercise within the group produces another goal, to raise awareness of these benefits. Raising awareness is not just a side effect of group exercise, but also a function of it. The collaboration of sporting and individual health goals interact into forming a hybrid of themselves. Paddling goals may go beyond the group, into other aspects of the paddlers' lives. The same can be said of the health benefits of exercise. But in the practice of dragon boating, the Paddlers are formulating their own solid foundations for the vitality of their group. They are inclusive of the individual, but go beyond the individualistic benefits of exercise after a diagnosis of breast cancer. Rather this goal, above all others, serves to solidify the principle not of the self in terms of exercise or sociality, but of Paddlers for Life, UK.*

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to serve as an introduction to the issues that surround the cancer and exercise literature, whilst also developing an empirical focus on the experiences of Paddlers for Life as a group of cancer survivors and their supporters. Many of the issues introduced here will be developed further throughout the thesis. In addition to this, I have attempted to argue that exercise and group goals need, in that particular literature, to be observed as intertwined, rather than separated. In studying group exercise in research-purpose groups, researchers create an end to the research programme that effects the provision of exercise after that point, but also the social processes of the group after, and crucially, during that time.

It is suggested that there needs to be more work achieved in understanding the qualitative dimensions of lay uptake of quantitative research as the chapter shows, the contextual (and in the case of this thesis, geographical) nature of the practice of paddling after being affected by cancer has been brought to the fore. Exercise, particularly in natural environments can never be even conceived of as objectively similar, and so the subjective, that is to say constantly evolving, nature of breast cancer dragon boating practice must be at the fore in considering exercise for breast cancer survivors. Whilst naturally interesting to qualitative researchers, it may also help quantitative researchers in understanding the parameters of their impact.



### Chapter 3: Collaborative writing in practice

In Chapter 1, I introduced the premise for this research as participatory research as a participatory epistemology; something more than *just* a methodology, or even a group of methodologies (Kindon et al. 2007). Indeed, although I introduced the concept there, and cited some of the work that has been achieved through geography and many other subjects, the approach needs to be dynamic, taking account of issues encountered, and hence to be reintroduced here in the context in which it was used. These problems can be approached through two interconnected issues. Firstly, through the period of the research, the hierarchical power relationships which participatory research seeks to deconstruct (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995), have in fact been constantly negotiated; sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker. For instance, when entering a group as a researcher, as I did, there is no way to avoid the existing power relations, which exist naturally within organised groups towards ‘outsiders’. Secondly, I tried throughout the research to emphasise to the participants that I wanted to do participatory research. Each time I tried to explain it to members of Paddlers for Life, it sounded more perverse; an academic way of engaging in practices which are often already in action amongst lay communities. Indeed, many of the ideas from the literature were already in practice in the group. ‘Participatory’ works in academic literature, I argue, purely because we as academics know that research outcomes in academic journals will *probably* not be read by those communities with whom we profess to work with (although there evidence that this is changing).

I fear that many participatory approaches have fallen into the trap of being a well meaning, but severely limited, fad. Publishing *on* participatory research in non-accessible journals is, at its heart, a deeply patronising and flawed response to an issue that requires dialogue *with* rather than *for* all parties involved. Rather than being a ‘different’ way to *do* research, as I and (I believe) others have used it in the past, it should be about the way we *are* as researchers; by ‘being’ rather than ‘doing’ participatory research, we will be able to reflect more practically on the ways in which, in the case of human geography, people interact with their multiple environments. For example, Sanderson et al. (2007) state that participatory action research has the desire to “create collaboratively, knowledge that reflects the knowledge and communication of all those participating and consequently, as a function of that participatory process, to see and communicate the world in a new way” (Sanderson et al. 2007:123). Perhaps

we need to be more direct in our intention. Although those involved in participatory geographies are doing fantastic work, I wonder if the nomenclature is explanative enough. If such a term is to be used, I would rather use the term “collaborative geographies”, following Gregory (2005), as I believe that this term, whilst espousing similar aims, expresses better the co-membership and practise of everyone in the group. The writing group, and its processes and products, was always a case of a blended but fractured ‘we’ (Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006). Like the writing project of the Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar (2006) in Uttar Pradesh, India, the primary intended readers of this writing project were not academics, but other women and men who had been affected by breast cancer. These were not dialogues of breast cancer survivors and supporters, but the sharing of practice with others not directly involved in the project.

This chapter explores the ways in which we, as a group, underwent a collaborative writing project. I will not pretend that I was not involved in its creation, process, and product, but will analyse the ways in which these factors came together to create, I believe, a project that utilised the experience and expertise of every member to create and express the experiences and aims of the wider group of Paddlers for Life.

### **A short history of collaborative writing**

Collaborative writing is a method of communication that has been in use for as long as writing itself, although its recognition has been less widely accepted. As historical geographers Withers and Keighren (2011) point out, authorship is always concerned with a ‘creative plurality’, influence combining from outside the individual, and multiplicity always playing a key role in the outcome of the text. Before the nineteenth century, the author was not a distinctive feature of the text. The text’s production did not require the specific identity of its producer within the ‘author function’ (Heller 2003). This author function serves as a classificatory function for a certain mode of discourse, which is seen as a product of specific individual actions rather than, as before, the process involved in these collaborative acts. Indeed, so ingrained is the concept of the individual author today, that the inherent collaboration of its creation is rarely considered in practice (Ede and Lunsford 2001).

This move towards the individual did not mean the eradication of collaborative writing, however, merely that it became increasingly hidden. In the late nineteenth century, concealed collaborative writing became a popular method of authorship. Two recent texts in particular, Ehnenn’s (2008) *Womens Literary Collaboration, Queerness, and Late Victorian Culture*, and

York's (2002) *Rethinking Womens Collaborative Writing*, explore the same sex writing partnerships of this period, working through the collaborative aspects of individual relationships, literary and (non)sexual, largely through the use of queer theory. In particular, these relationships seem to have emerged from a desire to work *against* the political male strangle-hold of the time, coming together to enact a new present for literature, as well as women in the everyday political arena (Ehenn 2008). This political context is important to collaborative writing, because it helps to underline that collaboration is itself dependent on the social and historical context of each individual (ibid.). Perhaps because of the time in which they wrote, the women Ehenn focuses on, such as Michael Field (a pseudonym used by Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper) and Martin Ross (a pseudonym used by Edith Somerville and Violet Martin), wrote not as individuals, but as co-authors. In such a political environment, writing against the social and political context of the suffragist movement of the time, it could be argued that both collaboration and pseudonyms created, as they do in much research today, safe places for thinking (York 2002:7).

### **Collaborative writing today**

Although collaborative writing is becoming a growing reality in a world of social networking platforms such as personal blogs and twitter, practical and theoretical questions still, I think, remain to be answered. How can two or more people write together? Do they hold the same pen? Do they write a word together? Do they have a particular political aim which configures who does what (The Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar, 2006)? As Kaplan and Cronon Rose (1993) suggest, collaborative writing is about rethinking the ways we write and the dominance of a singular author. This is not just to do with who writes, but at what stage collaboration is undertaken. Gebhardt (1980) argues that to fully appreciate the emotional side of collaborative writing, the process should become collaborative earlier than feedback of individual papers, becoming a partnership at the very start, just as it has historically been.

In fact, much of collaborative writing is discussion (Ede and Lunsford 1983, Christensen and Atweh 1998) before pen is put to paper, or fingers to keyboards. We talk together, and then write, sometimes in the same room, sometimes separately. Often, this practice is acknowledged only in academic or professional office settings; certainly this is the case in terms of research on the subject. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford (1983) discuss three primary ways in which "co-authorship" is undertaken in office and academic environments. Not claimed to be all-encompassing, they are as follows: firstly, two writers create one text together, physically,

through discussion, writing and editing. Secondly, two authors create sections separately, only bringing the text together later, and even revision may take place separately. Third, is the concept of group writing, where multiple authors contribute to a single text, with a core of writers coming together to edit the final text. Although this list was directed only at a limited (academic) setting, I feel that that all three can combine to form a methodology of collaborative writing that can be undertaken with a group of writers and non-writers who often find themselves separated by distance. Such methodologies will be explored later in the chapter.

Whilst flexible, there are issues underlying such an undefined discipline. Lowry et al (2002) argue that collaborative writing lacks both a clear taxonomy and decisive nomenclature for describing its processes, which leads to an impairment in productivity. Whilst I feel that, at times, Lowry et al. confuse nomenclature and taxonomy in their discussion, I feel that their basic point is sound. By dividing up the means of authorship into more structured examples, we can begin to use collaborative writing more effectively in research proposals. However, although epistemological aims will no doubt be aided by knowing exactly how a document is to be put together, I am concerned that the creativity involved in collaborative writing within research communities may be stifled by deciding beforehand, or constantly referring back to desired practices of authorship. Prescription indicates to me a movement away from group orientated epistemological approaches, towards more top-down hierarchical descriptors which are antithetical to the participatory opportunities I perceive within the concept.

As a process, collaborative writing can be seen as iterative: “discussing the meaning... in terms of the participant experiences, returning *back to the empirical materials*, and creating a shared *meaning as a collaborative group*” (Paulus et al. 2010:856 *emphasis in original*). Naturally, such an approach may be more time consuming and complex than positivist or even some qualitative techniques. In research arenas, collaborative writing might also be considered a difficult medium, in the way that voices meld together. In reporting their experiences of academic article writing, Paulus et al. (2010:858) reported how they “demonstrated *no individual ownership* of the written text, to the extent that we often could no longer tell who had written which portions of the manuscript”. It is, therefore, important to emphasise early in the thesis that in researching groups, I believe, “that collaborative work is, indeed, not easily divisible or parsable into its constituent parts” (York 2002:7); emphasis should be placed on understanding the ‘group with its individuals’, rather than the ‘group as its individuals’. However, this does not mean that individuality should be sidelined. Whilst Davies et al. (2001) appear to rejoice in leaving behind the individualist academic ego, Karach and Roach (1992)

argue that they felt that they lost their individual voices in their collaborative writing. This is something reflected upon by Gale et al. (2009), where it was strongly stated by their University that ‘who wrote what’ must be made clear throughout their collaboratively written PhD thesis (see also Leonardi and Pope 1994). Whilst this appears to be a question of assigning ownership (and hence responsibility), Karach and Roach (1992) posit a different argument: that through losing the individual voice in their writing, the reader would “be unable to see where we have disagreed and what compromises each of us has had to make in order for it to appear consistent and as though we both agree with everything said here” (Karach and Roach 1992:307). This brings another interpretation to York’s statement, above. In collaboration, it is expected that only the positive can be written; the agreement, the *entente cordiale*. Disagreement is a thing of the singular author, the individual self who can argue against another or collective, as long as they are defined as other. I feel that it is vital not to confine discussion and disagreement to an appendices, and this was something that was reflected in our work together as a group. Through reacting together, we begin to question the decisions we make apart. Peter Elbow (1999) reminds us that often, singular authors will write instinctively, with tacit knowledge. There is often no one in the vicinity to ask why we are starting with a certain point, or changing a certain phrase. From the discussion which follows collaboration, collaborative writers are forced to be able to articulate their decision making processes (ibid.).

Beyond discussion and writing, an important part of the writing experience, is the intended product. While it is vitally important not to prioritise the product over the process for fear of missing longer-term growth in writers (Dale 1994), prioritising process may, in itself, detract from the initial importance of writing *for* as well as *with* others. The potential audience must be a key consideration in this. “Writing does not occur in a vacuum; rather, it is shaped by the expectations and demands of its intended community of readers” (Hirvela 1999:8). In producing an output, writers will always need to consider who will read it.

Of course, as argued above, collaborative writing is not always a positive experience. But what does this mean in practice? Indeed, like any other writing, it may hold the potential to be damaging as well as positive. Theoretically, the arguments put forward can be seen as purely abstract. Heller (2003) argues that whilst in many articles on collaborative writing the negatives of individual scholarship are addressed, this often does not lead readily to a conclusive argument for the use of group or collaborative methods of authorship. For example, rather than breaking down the boundaries of the individual, some forms of collaborative writing could be seen as re-constituting and reconstructing borders to collectives, demanding

that we think geographically about our writing relationships: “this form of collaborative writing is about delimiting and connectivity but often in ways which are about the constitution of borders; ones which work to establish an homogenised, ring-fenced, collective ‘we’ located exclusively in common ground” (Gregson et al. 2003:13).

This is not to argue that a ‘we’ is negative, just as it is not to say that the ‘I’ is positive. What is problematic is the theory that either can exist at the expense of the other; fixed in places or people. Both ‘we’ and ‘I’ can be exclusionary; the individual of physical others and the collective of differing ideas and thoughts (Elbow 1999). Instead, “[t]his ‘we’ needs to be a collective ‘we’ which is located in movement; in the spaces of listening to and constituting each others’ situatedness but also in spaces of reflection which acknowledge how situated knowledges impinge on and depend on those of others” (Gregson et al. 2003:14). Reflexivity is key to implementing and working with a collaborative writing group. Collaborative work is not better or worse, but different (Leonardi and Pope 1994). Iain Maxey (1999) reflects on the issues of power, which become salient in the process of writing together. Not only in the academic product will uneven power relations be established (editing control, a name above the title), but pushing a document on people and seeking to involve others means that, to a certain extent, the researcher becomes the manipulator; not just of the individuals, but of the document itself. In applying pressure to the group, it may also be found that interest wanes at certain parts of the process (Lowry et al. 2002), particularly as the brainstorming and discussion arenas can be seen as the most useful parts for participants in an educational setting (Dale 1994, Ede and Lunsford 1983). For example, whilst interest remained fairly constant at 6-7 attendees for the in-person meetings, input became more sporadic when it came to later editing and writing processes which mainly occurred online and, especially in the last month, became particularly time consuming. In the beginning, however, the project needed to be sold to the group.

### **Pre-project**

*I emailed Paddlers for Life as a whole in November 2010, suggesting the project that I envisaged. To me the email was concise, and put across the main academic points that I wished to follow, with a short history of collaborative writing, and its epistemological role. Even before the email was sent to the group, issues were raised: “Although this will be a very interesting project, the introduction needs to be simplified in order to get people involved”, wrote Evie. I took this on board, I thought, adding “another section: Why am I interested in*

*collaborative writing? I hope this helps to make the whole thing less abstract, and gives my ideas some more definition”.*

*Initially the response was very positive. Emily emailed me. She had “always hoped that we would be able to produce some kind of Paddler’s narrative text”, she said. The ethos of the group was key to Emily, at this early stage. “We have a very strong ethos of the team being shared, democratic thing; and the idea of writing collaboratively fits extremely well with this”. This wasn’t the case for all those who responded of course. Olivia, Sophie and Lily thought that my initial document might be too ‘academic’ in putting across my ideas. “[W]hen I read the attachment I thought Oh! it is too academic for me as I have no formal qualifications and I am definitely no writer and wondered if it might of put others off replying as they feel the same but embaressed to say” said Sophie. There was an obvious difference here between those who had written before, and those who hadn’t. Emily had experiences as an author and poet, as well as with experience as a teacher who had participated many times in collaborative writing with her classes.*

*Although the writing element was a concern, the five women who responded initially were very keen to get involved, even though the group wasn’t used to talking about cancer. “[W]e don’t really know very much about the journeys of other women in the group. We haven’t shared out stories”, wrote Olivia. There was a desire to do this though, amongst these women; to share their journeys and thoughts that had brought them together. It emerged early though that this wasn’t going to be easy. Karen, as did many of the others, had very little time before Christmas to meet, and even then had moved house and was now paddling with another crew, so could only participate online. Meanwhile, the snow was interrupting all travel plans in the area. We decided to postpone the first meeting until after the Christmas holidays, February the 5<sup>th</sup>.*

As Kaiser et al (2007) argue in their article, following Deci (1975), there are two forms of benefit that we take as human beings: Intrinsic, that which benefits the self; and extrinsic, which is directed from the start towards others. To me, it seemed as if the group’s aim generally, and within the proposed project, was to draw out collective community stories (Pratt et al. 2007) in order to further their collective message of the importance of exercise after cancer treatment. As can be seen above, the introduction of a writing project from an academic perspective was problematic to some members; perhaps reminding them of the structured rules for writing emphasised in formal education in the UK (see also Schneider 2003). Within a participatory epistemology, there can be no set rule as to how research is undertaken, or the

ways in which it is undertaken; we must respect the underlying beliefs and talents of the group as subverting standard participatory techniques. Hence, participatory action research should alter and change our own perceptions (Sanderson et al. 2007), both of the role of the group, and of our role in the research. It is at this intersection that the idea of research as a performance becomes important (Sanderson et al. 2007) and research can become an important tool of the performance of the group. In working outside of ‘the academy’, performances can reach out to multiple communities (Pratt et al. 2007).

In the research project begun by Caitlin Cahill and the ‘Fed-up Honeys’, Cahill suggested that the study “was broadly defined at the outset in order that it would be open to, and follow the lead of, the young women involved.” (Cahill 2007:271, see also [www.fed-up-honeys.org](http://www.fed-up-honeys.org) (n.d)). As stated before, this was also the case in this research project. However, unlike our project, there was no self-definition at the start for members of the ‘fed-up honeys’ as they came to be known. The research and its questions were defined by those involved, and they were asked to participate for five hours a day, for four weeks. They were also paid a stipend for participation (Cahill 2007). Whilst this project is admirable, the paying of participants and the time commitments that the co-researchers are able to give are unusual. Such a rich depth of time and finance provision produces contexts, which will not be replicated in many projects with a community involvement focus. This is not to criticise the research, but to remind that alternative contexts always exist. For example, Pratt et al. (2007) found that in their second project together, some of the workers could not attend all the group sessions, and so interviews were used to examine their stories in more depth (Pratt et al. 2007).

Influence for such community-based approaches come from multiple diverse locations. Feminist and radical theories are often cited as bases for the participatory epistemologies that we see today (Monk et al. 2003, Sanchez, 2009). Although this is true, we must accept that participation comes from everywhere. To cite one influence is to negate the importance of the multiple ‘knowings’ from which participatory work benefits. Academics cite such work as ‘our’ influence, but it is the histories and contexts of our co-researchers and participants, which are often unlikely to emerge from a designated theoretical perspective, which are just as vital in the work ‘we’ do.

### **Meeting one, February 2011**

*After a false start, the first meeting went ahead on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, with the AGM afterwards. I arrived early, half an hour before, and Abby and Samantha were already there.*



*We chatted, and began to set up. The tables were also there for the AGM later, and so a top table was added, on which the trustees would sit. Before long, people began to drift in, five, then ten, then fifteen, with the final total at eighteen. Everybody chatted freely as the group that they already are, before I tried to get the attention of everyone, to make a start. I cleared my throat, to no avail. Olivia advised me to clap loudly. But I resorted to shouting over the group. I suppose now that this was rather a masculinist approach. Soon, chairs scraped as they moved to their seats, and settled quietly, as I introduced myself.*

*I should never have worried about ideas for projects for the group. They came, thick and fast, from all sides. Posters, calendars, recipe books, a collaborative book. And with these ideas, the reasons for them became apparent. The posters could go up at the end of season festival, the postcards to promote the group. The roles would come organically, from within the group of paddlers that already existed. And with the variety, Isabella wanted us to mix our methods, so that all areas of the group could be used. Accessing our different sources of creativity seemed vital to the group at this early stage. We would meet face to face, using the internet in between the main meetings. Two of the women didn't have access to the internet. Inclusion was vital to the project, the group thought. Everyone would always be welcome, whether they came once or to every meeting. However, when you came, you brought yourself. Like Paddlers for Life, Grace said, it was enough that you had it; you didn't have to talk about how you felt about it.*

As stated above, the nature of collaborative research demands the researcher to be flexible in the approach that she takes to research. When approaching the group, I had an idea of a collaboratively written book, but this was quickly dispelled by their ideas and thoughts. Immediately, postcards, books, calendars, a recipe book, all entered the fray. As in the work of the Peoples Guide to Los Angeles, Pulido and Barraclough (2008) attempt to uncover the ways in which people associated to different places, but also the ways in which these ideas are presented. Presentation of all of our work is important, but is also time consuming (which I shall address later in the chapter). Upon inquiry about where I could purchase a copy of the coffee-book outcome of Pulido and Barraclough's project, the first author informed me that the coffee book idea had been scrapped, but that a book was due for publication in early 2012 (Pulido, Pers. Comm.), four years after the article had been published. Coming afresh to collaboration takes time to establish the space in which collaborative writing can define itself for the benefit of the group (Speedy et al. 2010).

It was interesting that at this early stage postcards were chosen as the medium of representation within a writing project. Whilst the project remained concerned primarily with writing, as it progressed and neared its conclusion; the process of the postcards took up more time, and became more important. Whilst postcards will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 8, it is important to deal briefly with the importance in their production. Whilst focus on postcards as ethnographic knowledge (Pritchard and Morgan 2005, Kurti 2001) is growing, I believe that in creating the postcards, a process that involved much time and collaboration, the message that was created in the card became one which could question the dominant hegemony of representation in culture and nature. Rather than ethnography, in which researchers experience and represent culture, the postcards are a luminous example of the autoethnographic project in which Paddlers for Life were involved; challenging the dominant medical voice through alternative media. Producing postcards, as Mayes (2010) acknowledges, is a particularly involved discursive process. It became much more than a case of producing poems and adding them to visual images and captions (Kurti 2001), but one in which the visual and textual came together *as postcards*, to represent important narratives of the writing group, and Paddlers for Life.

### **Meeting two Skelsborough, March 2011**

*As we approached the hall, we climbed, the air cold, and snow still on the ground in places. The hall was on a hill, which Isabella had organised for us. They used to live out this way. Jessica was already there. Soon, the others arrived, until nine of us sat there all together. But although we were together, I felt absence. Michelle was there because Ava couldn't be, having just had her latest round of chemotherapy. She had let me know that she wouldn't be able to be there, even before the treatment began. This is her third diagnosis and treatment. She knows how to deal with it now, what to expect. Others who had been there before were away, hadn't been able to attend. But physical absence was only one part. Being there, together, was also countering the absence and isolation as Ruby told us later, that cancer can bring after treatment, and you are expected to forget it ever happened.*

*Of the nine of us, four were survivors of breast cancer, one of another type of cancer, and three supporters, as well as myself. Joshua and I were the only men. We spoke about anonymity, and how we wished to be known. Isabella was keen to be proud and honest about what they were doing. Although no one spoke up, I sensed hesitation from others. We agreed that we would come back to it closer to the time when publishing became an option.*

*Already, the forum that Joshua had created was playing a part. Joshua had suggested Haiku poem, a Japanese poem type that consists of only seventeen syllables, and describes the seasons in brevity that demands expression. Poems were already important to the group. Isabella added, nervously, that she had written an acrostic poem for their experiences in Peterborough. She didn't want to read it out at first. But she did.*

Writing has been used in the past as a form of expression, to allow for a sense of spontaneity and thought to develop in a way that interview questions might not allow. This is especially the case in the medium of health care. In their research, Morgan et al. (2008:197) encouraged participants attending a cancer clinic to “let go and explore your deepest thoughts and feelings about the issues that you feel are most important to you right now”. In many cases, writing on one's traumatic experiences can be seen as possessing strong therapeutic and cathartic properties (Robinson 2000).

Laurel Richardson has written much on using writing as research methods as well as work on the practical issues of qualitative research and design. Of particular interest to this research are her theories on the ways in which we can make the personal political through writing: ‘getting personal’. Richardson (2001) outlines ten initial points, but I pick up on four here. Firstly, that “no writing is untainted by human hands” (2001:34). There can, Richardson argues, be no separation between the subjective and objective, or as some like to put it, between the heart and the head. But, this “does not map onto the actual practices through production of knowledge, or knowledge about how knowledge is produced” (Richardson 2001:34). In other words, knowledge is not produced by the subjective or objective, but *between* the subjective *and* objective. Secondly, writing is a way of finding out about yourself and your world. It is through creating and reflecting that we come to understand ourselves as we are in times and places. Thirdly, writing is always done in specific contexts; “You're affected by the geography”, as Richardson (2001:35) puts it; and fourthly, that by rejecting overriding cultural scripts in our writing, we are writing instead collective-stories: “stories which both resist and alter the accepted norm” (2001:37).

All of the points that Richardson makes are important, and should be read in more detail (see Richardson 2001). The points picked out above, however, seek to show something a little different to Richardson's initial focus. Richardson (2003) has spoken elsewhere about collaborative writing, but she focuses here, within “*getting personal*” on the individual story. Even the collective-story appears to focus not on co-authorship, but on collective identity (see

Chapter 4 of this thesis), where the individual need not be linked in any discursive way to other members of the group. Collaborative writing is another form of this collective-story because the group is producing discursive stories, which both resist and alter the accepted norm (see Richardson 2003). Collaborative writing about situated experiences is about more than what individuals bring to the table (Brooke 2003); rather, it is about what they discover about themselves, and others, at the table and beyond it.

Often, collaborative writing is seen as a method of ‘learning’, with academic connotations: “[c]ollaborative writing for us is a process through which students can learn, communicate, and share skills and knowledge *with* students in similar, more equal positions to themselves, as opposed to learning in unequal, one to one relationships with reified others and academic texts” (Karach and Roach 1992:306). Indeed, outside of a purely academic learning environment, Hurtig (2008) reports that in a community writing project, participants began to organise the writing group themselves, and hence exclude her as the facilitator from the group itself, as the project developed over time.

There will of course be many ways of approaching this new problem. We chose poetry, because Joshua had used it before in his work as a teacher. There is, however, a history of using poetry as either a method of research, or in its presentation. Haiku requires an evocative quality (Rossiter 2004). Indeed, it has been suggested that the rhythm may help with the healing process from illness (Philipp and Robertson 1995) and can aid in treating anxiety, depression, dying and bereavement. The importance of poetry to health however, requires a way of production of poetry so that its meaning can be read by all.

It is also suggested that by engaging in practice, by creating and reading poetry, “some of the psycho-oncology we could read about in studies and reports is rendered human” (Mirriam-Goldberg 2004:106). Collaborative poetry is largely used in academia as a therapeutic tool. In the example employed by Gillispie (2005) it is argued that a major benefit of this practice is the open and honest discussions that go into the writing of poetry together. Although this thesis is not concerned with the therapeutic capacity of writing and poetry *per se*, it is important to acknowledge the large role that poetry therapy has to play (see in the particular the *Journal of Poetry Therapy*) for many individuals. In particular, Connolly Baker and Mazza (2004:144) suggest “that writing makes events and emotions more manageable when put into words”. In this way, it is possible that individuals may have taken from the project particular value. However, as I am not a trained counsellor, it was always vital when undertaking sensitive

research that I made it clear that I was *not* a trained counsellor and that I would not be able to work within this remit.

### **Meeting three, April 2011**

*On Monday, 11 April, 2011, 11:46 AM, Sophie wrote on the forum that she was worried that we needed to start writing, with the festival date getting ever closer. So on the Sunday, after paddling seven of us sat down by the lake to start writing and getting our ideas in order. The first idea came from Sophie, that she had seen the work of an artist at the recent conference, who sold her pictures in packs of twelve. They were beautiful cards, but quite expensive. A few minutes later, Emily suggested that the 12 cards should be seasonally based, around the months of the year, each with a picture that represented a Haiku poem. But where to start? Both Ruby and Emily had been thinking about dragons in different ways, which constructed the process later on. To Ruby, dragons were mythological, and could be in different forms, mountain dragons, water dragons... To Emily, her experience of paddling helped to form the idea of the poem, which she built on. It was her dragon, a paddling dragon that inhabited her; "one symbiotic, seamless whole"*

*Together, today was about forming expression: writing. It worried some more than others. "Oh dear, I don't know if I'm going to be able to do this spontaneously", said Jessica. I suggested we all take a card each, writing a month on the top, and passing it around, so that seven ideas of each month existed on one page. From this, ideas from the poems could germinate, as they were read out by a member in turn. All the while roles were emerging; Emily was becoming the writer of the group, who altered phrases, came up with examples, ideas. But ideas came from all around, sometimes seemingly out of nowhere, where the author had been sitting quietly. This was expressed when we were talking about images for the cards. Emily said that she was "a strong believer in, obviously some people can draw better than others, but that anyone can actually draw. If we're all taking photos, and we're all trying to find words, it might be quite fun to all drawing as well... and just see what we get."*

*When Jessica came up with a beautiful phrase, "Our space, our life, our season", we joked that she obviously couldn't do this! All the time we worked, it was together. It wasn't always easy, working together to form expressions of personal meaning, as Jessica expressed at the end. "It must be really hard to be an author, because it's almost like being pregnant, and then going through birth, and having to give it up."*

There are many different methods to collaborative writing that have been explored both within and without the academy. In particular with participatory research, it is important to remember that there is no one-way of *doing* collaborative writing (Christensen and Atweh 1998). Ian Cook *et al.* (2008-) suggest that there are differences between co-authorship, and collaborative writing. In regards to the latter, Cook and two post-graduate students, Heather Putnam and Kerry Burton took it in turns to write one word at a time on the geographies of collaborative collaboration, producing a messy text that said as much about the process of the collaboration, as the contents of the text. One person's contribution became indistinguishable from the next. This is crucial to collaborative writing; there is an emphasis on the processes of writing, and of storytelling not as individuals, but as one body. Richardson (2003) uses a method that focuses on melding individual voices into a collaborative piece. By writing apart, before reading each others' stories and forming a story together, the group can create a performance of any medium; be it drama, writing, poetry fiction or numerous other examples. However, there may be an issue here in what a person feels they are able to say. In writing for the group, individuals may temper their expression to allow for what they wish to be read or experienced by others when they come together. Hartill's (1998) method goes some way to addressing this issue. By allowing writing to be performed rather than read out straight away, the author has control over what is given to the group. This might be particularly useful in groups with personal stories to tell. Whilst they might appreciate the chance to put them in writing, the choice is still theirs as to whom they relate them to.

Other methods may relate to epistemological approaches to research, such as memory-work (Onyx and Small 2001), and its adaptations, such as collective biography (Davies et al 2001, Davies et al. 2004) and collaborative autobiographical writing (Lapadat 2009). Whilst memory-work is a form of collaborative writing like the previous two examples, memory-work appears to have an individualistic approach to the product of writing, group discussion of memory being written up and theorised by the individual (Onyx and Small 2001). Whatever the method, what is vital to remember is that in every group the individual takes responsibility in a different way (Davies et al. 2004).

#### **Meeting four, May 2011**

*This time we are meeting in the Phoenix Centre, a community centre in Windermere. The weather is bad, wet and windy. Too much of the latter and the paddlers can't go out. We are meeting before the paddling session, so that everyone can get to paddling afterwards. The*

*meeting starts at 9.30. The group has maintained its core, but Yvonne has joined us as well today. She is a midwife, and works on a rota so often can't get to paddling at all, let alone to the writing group. The group is not just in and of itself. We start by talking about funding opportunities for the group. Quickly we discover that it's not just about who we are, but where we are as well. To obtain some grants, we would have to meet in Lancashire; for some it is more accessible than Windermere, for others it is even less.*

*The poems are taking shape. But their presentation is just as important. Discussions started to take place about how the postcards would look, where the logo of Paddlers for Life would go, what the explanation would say. There's not a lot of space on a postcard, so the poem also played a role in presenting the group. "That's what Haikus do", said Emily, "they take an idea and condense it down into something really small." From big ideas to small presentations.*

*At the meeting before, by the lake, the writing seemed to flow from us. But here it was stilted. The room seemed oppressive, thought Olivia. Emily suggested that perhaps it was because before we had just paddled together and were invigorated. Perhaps it was because some paddlers left us half way through, to go paddling. To my surprise, some stayed. But the room remained a problem. It wasn't the right working environment, cold, sparsely decorated. In that room though, we developed in the meeting together. Slowly, but surely, we finished the poems together. For the final poem, December, two writers came up with, simultaneously, the final poem:*

*Light the magical flame*

*Set free our snowbound spirits*

*To celebrate life*

*It was to be the last writing meeting we had indoors. Coping with the weather became even more important.*

The space in which writing occurs can be vital to the productivity of the group. Geographers have experienced the importance of contextual place to enhancing creativity in the use of mobile interviewing techniques (Anderson 2004, Ricketts Hein et al. 2008). Indeed, "[p]laces...are not only a medium but also an outcome of action, producing and being produced through human practice." (Anderson 2004:255). The experience of the writers in the room highlighted the difficulties that were experienced in being divorced from the original source of

the creativity. Inside those whitewashed walls, the only source of immediacy that the group had were those original cards, now also separated from the outdoors in which they were created. Whilst Schneider (2003) suggests that writing groups should be held in comfortable surroundings where individuals are free to create their own writing environments (see also Speedy et al. 2010), the source of the creativity should be considered as vital to the practise of its representation.

The group was always open to anyone who wanted to come. That was something that we decided on at the first meeting in February. Normally, meetings involved six or seven individuals, but we always asked before meetings if there was anyone else who would like to come. This seems to differ from most qualitative research, even in a participatory format, where a set group of individuals are enlisted. In many cases, researchers are encouraged to over-recruit, to accommodate for the fact that some may not turn up (Conradson 2005a). In focus groups this is tempered by the debate over whether or not participants should know each other as this could alter the course of the session (Munday 2006). Collaborative writing seems to take a more organic approach to attendance. Rather than working from who cannot attend, groups form almost spontaneously on who can attend at a given time and date. This allows, I feel, for a more participatory ethic within large pre-formed groups. This does bring up ethical questions about the way in which groups are approached for their time and energy. Many participatory projects work within categorised groups of individual people for whom giving time may be socially and economically difficult. Examples include underprivileged women (Cahill 2007; Hurtig 2008), hospital employees (Sale 2006), transnational Latina youth (Sanchez 2009), south Asian women in London (Tolia-Kelly 2007), people affected by cancer (Wright et al. 2006; Donaldson et al. 2007; Gray et al. 2000), school children (Gallagher 2008) and people with disability (Kitchin 2001).

However, the field changes when researchers become involved with a pre-existing group. Routledge (2002) found that in his work with activists in Goa, India, his identity became a part of his work with the group. His 'whiteness' and linguistic difference was something that could be used by the group after he offered himself to their pre-existing aims. Access to these pre-existing groups may also be difficult. Geraldine Pratt et al. (2007) describe the potential research partners who were denied access to the group with which she has a long-standing collaboration. Often these rejections were based on the lack of collaboration with the participants that was proposed in the projects (Pratt et al. 2007). Although I didn't realise it at the time, my position with Paddlers for Life was also being scrutinised constantly by the group.



After initially making contact and meeting the group, I received an email from a researcher who had worked previously with the group, stating that she had been asked to act as my initial go-between with the group. Much later in the year, I spoke to Laura about a similar group of paddlers who seemed to have been set up as a research project, and whose chair was a health professional rather than a survivor. They did not want to end up in the same situation. All of this was part of a vetting process that groups, which work within sensitive situations, must adhere to in order not only to protect themselves from unscrupulous researchers, but also, inevitably, to protect the aims and members of the group. Researchers in pre-defined groups therefore, must come to terms with the fact that they become close to the individuals but also the missions of the groups they work with. But it is also important to separate the group from its aims. Whilst I may agree with the aims of the group, its make-up is not defined by its aims, and cannot preclude critique. When debating objectivity/subjectivity questions in our research, it is vital to separate not ourselves from the research, but to examine our positionalities with one another.

### **Photomapping, June 2011**

*The poems were going well. We were starting to think of pictures that might link to the poems, about the meanings that are behind them. I thought of the photomapping ideas that are spoken about within the participatory research literature, using pictures by the participants to help explain the personal meanings of their environments. Using this, we could begin to think through relating pictures to our experiences, and to words. I asked Paddlers to bring pictures of places that were important to them. We held the event away from Windermere, at a centre close to one of the Paddler's homes, on a weekday evening. Five people attended, with last minute apologies from a few more. It was a good number. I quickly learnt that photomapping allowed the participants to reflect on their lives as a whole, rather than just their paddling lives, or lives after cancer. Some pictures brought stories that moved, not to or from the cancer experience, but through it, to childhood and back again. Other stories told more direct cancer stories, particularly related to places visited, inspired by their diagnosis; Bali, Australia, Morecambe. There was laughter at the latter in Olivia's story, but each place represented an important journey that had been made to restore belief in survival. Especially closer to home, the group came together to describe to me some of these places, some of which they had known since childhood. I was told not individual stories of places, but stories from the collective representation of the paddlers.*

*Stories were not only told in conversation, but through practices on the map. I say 'map'. I said it then, as well. I wanted to bring some credence to the idea amongst the paddlers. Initially it was just a very long piece of lining paper, rescued from a paddler's loft. The lack of physical pre-representation gave us freedom; where to put things, how to represent spatially a landscape which involved journeys a handful of miles from Windermere, and others covering many thousands. Pictures tended to be placed first on the map, the linkages then created between them. More stories were developed from these linkages, as well as the pictures. Lily seemed surprised by just how much she had been attracted to water in her desire for healing after cancer diagnosis. Stories began individually, and developed together as connections were made with other paddler's pictures. Connections were made not just with those present, but with the expectation of other paddlers adding their experiences. At times, the group's identity seemed to show itself almost unconsciously, as when Sophie noticed that there was a lot of pink used to create the linkages! Largely, the map was spatial, as maps are generally understood to be. But there were differences that the group wished to make; for instance a section concerning the flower ceremony. Their experiences of place, it seemed became more experiential and thematic in relation to this key part of the group's identity. In the same way, a Paddlers for Life logo found its way onto the map. The map was becoming, it seemed to me, a representation not only of places, but the experience of these places, between the individual and the group. I was not just discovering what was physically 'there', but how this was experienced and represented by the paddlers; it was **their** geographies.*

*Focusing on these pictures together brought us to discuss the postcards again. The problem was that with them, we were thinking in the opposite way; not from the pictures to experience, but from experience to pictures. To find a picture, which said all that a poem could, even in only 17 syllables, seemed almost impossible. We began to discuss how we could find these pictures. How we could express the feelings that we had found.*



Figure 2: a snapshot of the photomap

Both photography and video have been suggested as useful ways to represent participatory projects, through allowing participants to document important aspects of their own lives (Prins 2010). In this way, the participant has more power in exploring their own relationship between place and identity (McIntyre 2003), engaging in the practice (Parr 2007) rather than placing the analytical power only in the hands of the researchers. By telling their own stories through their own representations of their lives, McIntyre (2003) argues that the participant, rather than the researcher, re-emerges as the author of their own life. However, as with all participatory approaches, photo-based methods cannot be seen as a flawless means of participant empowerment; the researcher-self is always a part of the project (Parr 2007), the latter becoming collaboration rather than commission. Nevertheless, such a project can be useful in that they can be at once part commission, part collaboration, and part research method; “the process of film-making has been at least as important as the product of this collaborative project” (Parr 2007:131). The project is vital, as it can greatly influence whether people become involved in the first place. However, it is the *process of the project* that can prove to be most interesting to researchers, and most beneficial to participants. Dennis et al. (2009) suggest that photography avoided issues of self-consciousness amongst participants compared to writing and drawing, which may be seen to rely on talent.

As with research methods, photographs are not a fool-proof representation of reality (Dennis et al 2009). Indeed, the instruction to photograph mitigates the everyday experience that the researcher seeks to find (Dodman 2003). Every participatory method is contextually different. The authors cited above have used many different techniques, including participatory photo mapping (Dennis et al 2009), photovoice (McIntyre 2003; Prins 2010), autophotography (Dodman 2003) and participatory video (Kindon 2003). I introduced the concept to the group as photomapping, yet it was developed within the practices of the group; participants bringing their own photographs of meaning, collaborative discussion, and collaborative representation. Indeed, I suggest that participants were not only involved in interpreting their own experiences, but were in fact complicit in reconceptualising the (Paddlers for Life) map.

But is this a map after all? Wood (1993) might suggest that what we produced is not a map at all, but a 'sketch map'. We did not aim to be neutrally detached, or to suggest that it is *the* story of Paddlers for Life. It is only ever a particular, contextualised story, evidenced by the desire of those present at its creation to leave space for other members to be included. Rather than a representation of power (Belyea 1996), we used this map to suggest that collaboratively power could be readjusted beyond the physical representation of its borders. Indeed, it is possible that the map might only be a map to those involved in its creation; a map is only a map once it is accepted as such (Wood 1993). The map is never the reality, but the creation of the map helps to create an accepted reality (Harley 1989). This collaborative photomapping, as I might call this incarnation of the phenomena, seeks to free the map from contained representations of knowledge; the collaborative photomap is a process of discovering new truths, rather than merely reinforcing them (Harley 1988). As Powell states; "[m]oving beyond the conventional use of maps as a means to mark geographic space and place mean that as an aesthetic device maps afford the opportunity for depicting multisensory, lived experiences of space, time, and place in non-linear ways." (Powell 2010:540) Whereas traditional cartographic practices and maps remove people (Harley 1988), we have sought to suggest that people and their experiences can be at the heart of the mapping process. By beginning the process with only a blank sheet of paper, we were able to work not within the accepted borders of the represented landscape, but of the paper itself. "All maps strive to frame their message in the context of an audience. All maps state an argument about the world and they are propositional in nature" (Harley 1989:11). We are not aiming to reinvent the map. Rather, we aim to deconstruct the nature of the map itself. Photomapping, as we developed it, allows us not only to see the importance of places in pictorial form, but also to disrupt the overriding assumptions that we

may make about maps. In the nature of our project, it served a two-fold purpose; firstly, to introduce me as an ‘outsider’ to Cumbria, Lancashire and other paddling places, and the ways in which paddler’s experienced them. And secondly, it allowed us to think collaboratively about the ways in which we wanted to represent these areas as the product of the project.

### **Meeting five, July 2011**

*We had just paddled before the meeting, and settled with our lunch by the boats. It had been a tiring session, and we were keen to get writing. After a few minutes, we found that we were in the way. Olivia remembered, suddenly, that there was a spot down by the shore where we could sit, overlooking the lake. Once we were there, the site brought up memories for the paddlers, of where they used to sit in their first year of paddling. All the members told stories about how Paddlers for Life was set up. This interlinked with the collaboratively written document, which a few days before, I had created from the transcripts of our meetings. They were for the paddlers, to demonstrate how much we had already ‘written’ through our discussions. We talked about them, and how important it was for them to appeal to a wider audience than just Paddlers for Life. It needed to reach potential paddlers, as well as the healthcare professionals who are a vital part of the journey for paddlers.*

*As part of the meeting, we reflected on what was written. The group critiqued the document, and how it sounded. Olivia suggested that there was a mistake in what I had written: “I think in that transcript, Matt, you’ve got, in two paragraphs, you’ve put down the word cancer... but I think I said, to me, the dragon’s benevolent”. The group also thought that the document, in this form as the verbatim conversations of paddlers in the group, was too wordy. We want to get to other people, Olivia said. She felt a little bit like they wouldn’t understand what it was all about. The perception and the message of the group were all important. At the end, we talked about how to get more Paddlers involved. The online forum didn’t seem to be working as well as was originally hoped. As Sophie said, “I think a lot of people look at things on the forum, but don’t say anything.” There was no pressure to do so within the cloak of anonymity and absence, and many didn’t.*

Memories are an important part of the identities that we weave, together; memory as part of our everyday experience (Pearson 2007). These ideas are also translucent in novels of Raymond Williams. In *Border Country* (Williams 2006), places and memories remain ingrained in the individual, covered by the minutiae of everyday life. It is in places that memories lay. As we returned to a place that they had visited before, but not for some time, memories and feelings

re-ignited, and memories flooded back, not just of that moment, but of that time and the things that had happened to them all, instigating a moment of collective memory and story-telling (Pearson 2007). These stories may not always be the same. Memories change and alter, but together, a narrative is formed. As the geographer Karen Till (2005:17) tells us, “[c]ultural practices of social memory take place and define a public space through which groups debate their understandings of the past and contemporary social relationships to that past”. We are in effect, no more or less than the memories that we have together.

### **The Collaboratively Written Document and meetings at a distance**

*From the first meeting, a collaboratively written book had been suggested as a long term goal of the group. Indeed, it had been a thought of Emily’s before I had arrived with the group. However, with the postcards as the main focus, it occupied the back burner for the first few months. But it rankled with me, a little. I wanted to do something with these transcripts for the group; not as something to produce for the research, but as an on-going project, something tangible, which could be extended after the project ended. I decided to bring together the transcripts of the meetings that we had had, presenting them as the written stories that Paddlers had been telling. There was a mixed reaction to this document. The set up and idea was good, Emily thought. But it was too chatty, said Olivia. Would it read like a story to others, outside of the group? To do so, the document needed to reflect all of the activities of the group; from medical experience to unspoken support, from poems to singing. Sometimes, the written conversation didn’t match the meaning that had been used at the time. Some details were inferred others had simply been omitted. In some way, voices need to be brought back into the document, for it to speak to others.*

*I had my own input into the document. Stylistically, voices became differentiated between italics and non-italics. Voices were not named, but the style reflected the conversational nature of the piece, we agreed. Likewise, the stories became woven in non-linear, thematic ways. There were different foci to each story, different voices from within the writing group and beyond. Part of the way we attempted to do this was to use the internet again, and Google Documents, a file sharing and collaborative writing program. However, when using this platform a very different type of conversation occurred.*

*The following is taken from a research diary I kept during the period of the research, particularly dealing with my thoughts away from site and personal interaction.*



**13.10.2011**

*At this very moment (6pm), I am watching the Google docs in action. I noticed that Olivia had just updated it, and logged on to see what she had done. I was greeted by the sight of her name darting across the screen as she adds to the document, in real time. It is like a live collaboration, watching her create words and meanings from a distance which form written words, something not often shared in.*

*What I am seeing is a green line moving across a screen, leaving a trace from an individual who is there but not present. She is writing about the experiences that they all had in Canada. Seeing this happen to a document live is what the collaborative writing was all about, seeing the movement of hands across the same page, and how it works. It might not be all the way that I first imagined it, but it is another way that the invisibility of the group and its workings are seen. They are visible in the moment, but not always in the future, and that is the way of the group, and many of the roles that are taken on. You can spot what someone does, but there is no permanence in their part, only in their products of their actions.*

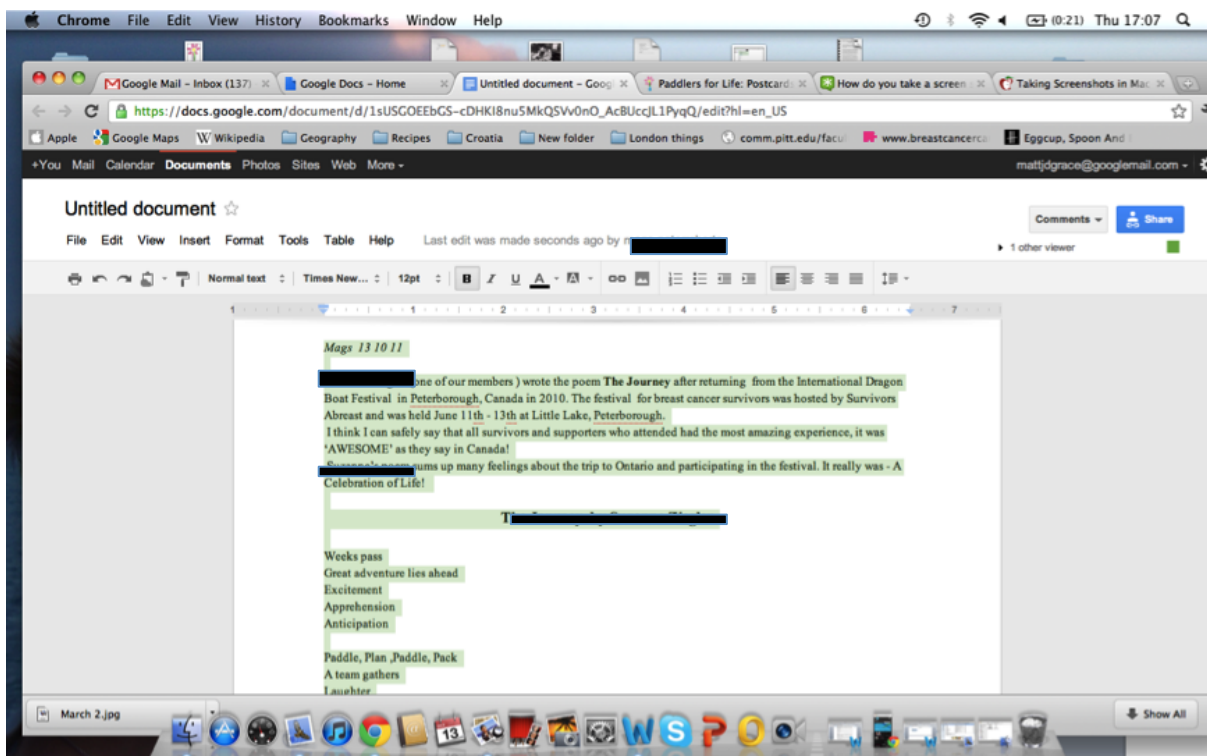


Figure 3: Google docs writing

*The text was coloured green in front of my eyes. I could sense Olivia, or a person using that address making a trace on the page, but in this instance, not a permanent one.*

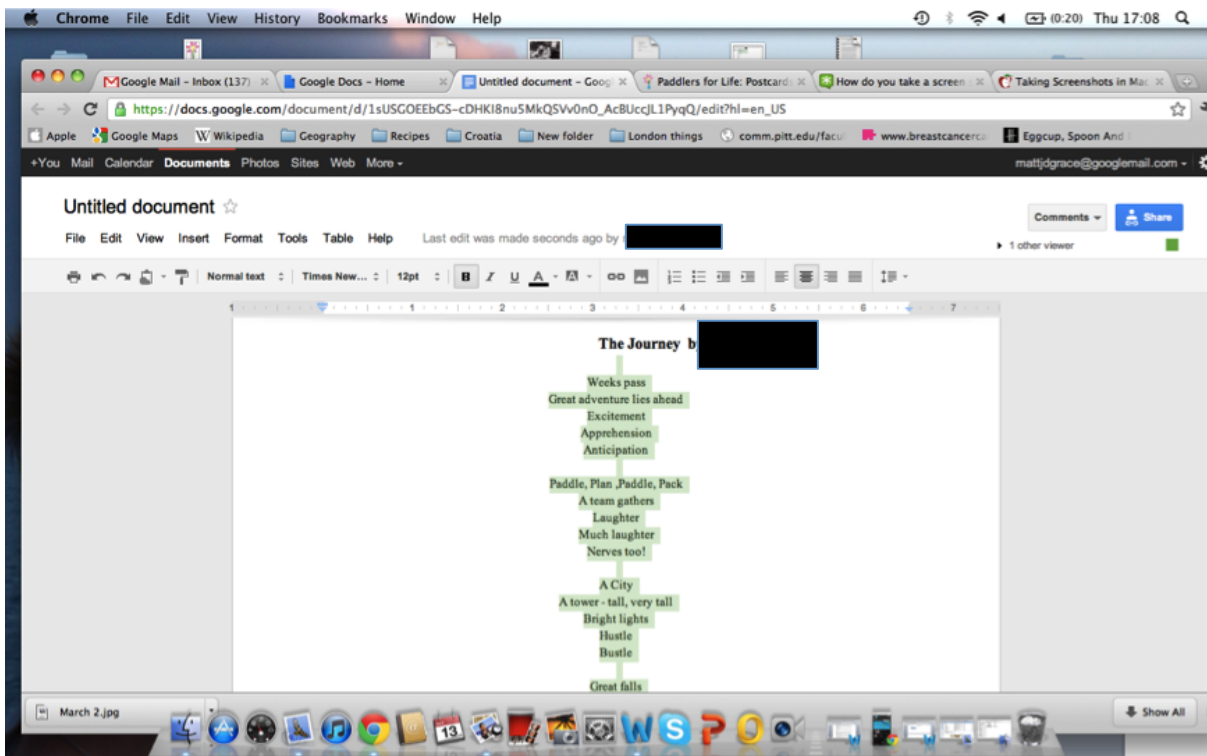


Figure 4: Google docs, the change

*And then the text was moved, it was moved, permanently, without trace to another position. It moved to the centre, not on its, or the authors accord, but on the trust of a member of the group, how she felt that it should be displayed to show it off best.*

### **Meeting six, September 2011**

*The group, although part of Paddlers for Life, has become separate from it in a way. Due to late trains, I arrived late to the General Meeting, and was told by Ava afterwards that I had missed my slot to talk about the writing group. It highlighted that I was still the 'face' of the project, that it was my job to update others, who might still be involved. We went outside, but despite the warm weather, we couldn't settle. The document still seemed, in that mellow afternoon warmth, to need 'ironing out'. After paddling and the AGM, people seemed shattered, and the men were keen to leave, after hanging around outside for so long. Instead, we talked about how to present the project to the rest of the group. Emily had the idea of presenting at the AGM, in November, splitting the Collaboratively Written Document into sections, and presenting everyone with a set of postcards.*

*Much of the session was spent discussing how to get people engaged in what was going on, online. We decided to set a deadline for commenting on the writing project, as that might*



entice people to get involved, if there was a set deadline. Was the document accessible enough, however? Or would the large number of pages put off individuals? Disagreement emerged within the group, between a member who thought it was accessible in its style, and another who thought that its volume may put people off. Evidence might have been found in the fact that the forum had still remained largely unused. To Ruby, this seemed to be an issue of everyone working together, contributing to the whole in order to provide interest to everybody. As Ruby said, “Well, it’s a spiral of decline, isn’t it? Because if there’s hardly ever anything new on it, why would people bother to log on and go and have a look at it?”

Due to the geographical spread of its members across the North of England, Paddlers for Life has always had a certain reliance on the internet for disseminating information, both to its members and to the wider public. To some, such as Evie who sent emails to the group, it was just another part of her job, working in IT. For others, however, it was difficult to obtain access to a computer. Joshua, who ran the website, reported that the member forums were not used that much; and when they were, it was by a select few.

The dislocation of the group also meant that during the collaborative writing project, the internet was used in a variety of ways; posting notes to members on the forum, using google docs as a collaborative writing forum. There was some concern before we started that there should be face to face interaction as well as online collaboration. You can’t always read tone in an email. Sometimes, of course, tone wasn’t the problem at all. Sometimes, the nature of the collaboration itself was fundamentally changed by technical issues encountered by members as they attempted to open documents. Ruby spent 30 minutes trying to change a spelling mistake, without success, whilst pictures sent to Olivia did not format themselves correctly. Questions were often sent into cyberspace without a timescale for an answer. All this added to the time taken up by the project, which was already significant within busy lives.

Much of the formation of the postcards was done online. A constant stream of emails. Everything about the representation of the postcards, and the group, was important; getting the right font (apple chancery), getting the borders right, the fear of one image detracting from another, putting the poem on a particular side. The word ‘journey’ was questioned on the description of the thirteenth card. It sounded too set, less about the process. Individuals would prefer one way, but go with the ‘concensus’. Later, I would find out from individuals that their consensus came in silence, not wanting to overload the email conversation. To others, I think this seemed like shirking responsibility, when people remained invisible. When it came to the

*photos, they had to be the right ones – no messy paddles! Potential photos could be added to another section of the website, where comments could also be added. The right photos, and in the best resolution too, so that they could be transferred clearly by the printers. When the printer had been decided upon, there were questions about the thickness of the cards. They couldn't be too flimsy, or they wouldn't survive the Royal Mail! It went on, but always for a purpose; the postcards needed to represent the group as faithfully as possible, but they couldn't do this as a disintegrating pile of mush. They needed to fulfil their purpose.*

All research involves taking risks, and sometimes making mistakes. The only necessity is to be honest about the mistakes that may be made (Schneider 2003) as new ways of researching and understood. As with all research methods, collaborative writing online is not merely 'done', with a definitive product at their conclusion. As Wheeler et al (2008:988) state, “[t]hrough the use of hypermedia, formalised education delivery mirrors the connective matrix of the human brain, assuming an infinite number of rhizomatic forms (Deleuze and Guattari 1987)”. Hence, collaborative scholarship must be seen as extending the possibilities of the human condition, rather than creating new opportunities in an increasingly inter-connected world. If we are then to take this stance as the starting point for work on collaboration, we must include human factors such as habit and error in our work.

Much of the research conducted on collaborative writing online concerns either education or computer studies. In particular, it appears to be used often as a way of connecting strangers in different sites, in order to contribute to a project together with the aim to share knowledge and ideas (see Boling et al. 2008). However, as with any knowledge sharing initiative, there are negatives and positives in the development of these still novel opportunities. As Ligorio et al. (2005) point out, when conducting joint story telling at a distance, it can become difficult accepting twists in the tale that weren't anticipated in the writing of your section. In such cases of invisible collaboration, issues may also arise in information being repeated without the knowledge of the other party. In office situations, where new technology is used in collaborative writing situations, problems may also be experienced in the application of the technology in already well-drilled offline systems of practice. For example, Tamaro et al. (1997) found that although many participants in the office sample of their study found that the collaborative writing software was useful, it did affect the previous everyday relationships between different members, and groups within, the office, to the extent that secretaries came to hate the system as it disrupted the tools that they had previously honed through practice.

The ability to add or detract to the work of people hundreds of miles away is an interesting facet of experience. Cliff Hodges (2002) points out that collaboration separated by hundreds of miles, may lead to repetition in the writing. As Ruby described above, interactive blogs may also be affected by the fear of writing without response (particularly when working for invisible/unknown collaborators), which may be particularly daunting (Sakellariadis et al 2008). But what happens if people do reply, and disagreements occur: how would people leaving the virtual/real life groups affect the stability of the project? (ibid).

Often, it seems that collaborative writing occurs within groups of people who know each other 'face to face', or at least have contact with some others involved. In Storch's (2005) study, the participants were members of a second language adult education class. However, the interesting thing here is the way in which collaboration was tested, often timed, and quantified. Likewise in Cerratto Pargman's (2003) study, analysis seems focused on the amount of time collaboration took, as well as the amount produced: the simple maxim quality not quantity springs to mind.

As Du and Wagner (2006) state, weblogs and 'bloggers' find it much more difficult to gain popularity than to lose it. Shim and Guo (2009) argue that good blogs and sites should be updated daily, in order to assure the best deal is had by those visiting and/or contributing to the blog. Contents were regularly updated on the Paddlers for Life site by the administrator, for the benefit of members and interested online visitors. I feel that particular subject sites such as this, although naturally attracting a specialised and perhaps localised audience, may help to fulfil the middle ground between face to face contact and structured online capabilities (see Oravec 2003; Shim and Guo 2009) during the week when paddling is not taking place. By utilising the already existing platforms of Paddlers for Life, the risk of the site becoming defunct once the collaborative writing project ended was limited (see Oravec 2003).

It is also important to address the issue of invisibility and trust with which online research is often undertaken. Without accessing IP addresses and keeping visual watch of individual's personal computers for time checks, knowing the 'true identity' of contributors is simply impossible. Indeed, this research did not even require, in one of its forms, participants to identify themselves. In the other, the Forum, entry was governed by the administrator, a Paddlers for Life supporter, to whom permission for access had to be sought, before a username and password were supplied. Even so, such a system is not fool-proof. As DeLorme et al. (2001) state, this may provide issues for some researchers, and may support claims

arguing for a ‘uniform code’ for online research. However, qualitative research must, I feel, be open to a wide variety of opinions, but also identities. The fact that some of those who chose to access the ‘Google Docs’ feature chose to remain ‘Anonymous’, perhaps says more about their right to participate in an activity that was open to the whole of Paddlers for Life (and was made available via their email list). The benefits of using a collaborative writing group as a research methodology must be judged, of course, not only in the worth of the product, but in the success of the process. In this respect, there must be seen to be a critical difference between those online projects which are created for the express purpose of *a particular project*, and research conducted on existing forums, which may risk being seen as “doing nothing more than passing off chatroom discussions as focus group interviews” (DeLorme et al. 2001:282). However, the risk of this becomes lessened as online research procedures become more structured and focused to the practices of individuals online, particularly in regards to health (see Parr 2002).

### **Meeting seven, September 2011: The final meeting**

*I am nervous as I approach the lake for the last meeting with the group. The water outside the Youth Hostel was flat. A little mist in the air, but otherwise perfect. As I walked, my phone came back to life, finding signal again for the first time since the night before. A message from a friend. Her dad had just died. I phoned her, but I couldn’t find the right words. I heard myself speaking clichés; sometimes clichés are also the right thing to say. She sounded strong, almost upbeat. I remembered that feeling. In a strange way, working with these people affected by cancer had dulled the association with death which I had previously had with cancer. I had forgotten what that association felt like.*

*The training out on the water really took it out of me that day. Everything hurt, and I was glad when it came to writing again. There were a few more writers for this final session. With all the postcards at the stage where they were so very nearly ready to go to the printers, we used the time to work on the collaboratively written document; something for the group to expand upon in the future. But it was important to get it into a state where we could present it to the group at the AGM in early November. We worked as we had before, passing the transcripts around. Editing, punctuated by a question here, a laugh there. At times the pieces were added to, sometimes they were cut. Once, we broke off to talk about my role within the group. We talked about my role as facilitator. But I also realised that my role in the group had changed over the months of our collaboration. Rather than me asking the questions of the group, Sophie had started to begin discussion, asking questions about the experience of the group. This was now*

*part of their own research, discovering how they felt and acted within the team. Paddlers for Life had always been about development, 'bringing people on' as Laura put it. This project seemed to have been brought on in the same way by the paddlers. They had interacted with the very notion of collaborative writing, and formed it into a particular way of thinking and doing; Paddlers for Life's Collaborative Writing. It was autoethnography at its most essential.*

### **Presentation of results, November 2011**

*A month flew past in a flurry of emails, phone calls, and organisation. The postcards arrived on Wednesday. On Friday, I joined Olivia and Sophie in preparing the postcards for presentation to the group. They were all to be wrapped in pink ribbon, with the Christmas cards wrapped in red. The Christmas cards had been a last minute addition, using the project to generate funds for the group, and the future of the writing group. It was important to Olivia and Sophie to complete them all, to advertise the group more. On the Saturday, I arrived early at the venue. It was a tiny village, in the middle of the moors. The sun peaked over the top of the mountain in front of me, through the mist. On arrival, it was all go. We spread the products of the writing group around the hall; the photomap, the collaboratively written document, the postcards, the Christmas cards. As people arrived, they came to see them. Jessica told me that they just looked fantastic. There was a tear in Laura's eye as she took it all in. She said to me later, whilst we were looking at the photomap, that she never thought it would come to this. I misunderstood her. I thought she meant the writing group. I said this, and she corrected me. It was the paddling group that they first conceived over four years ago, that they never thought would come to this.*



Figure 5: Presenting the postcards and Christmas cards – observe all the neatly tied bows!

*Throughout the day, I heard members of the writing group explaining the project to others in the group. I heard Sophie describing it as representing the paddling year. Abby laid out the pictures from her Windermere on the photomap. They lay there, above the map, a part of it on another time, part of the constant making of the map. During lunch, people collected their packs of postcards, searching for their name in the group. The Christmas cards were popular. All fifty packs were sold. As I left for the last time this year, I headed away from the group, over the hills on the way back to Lancaster. I had only been to Abbeystead a couple of times, but I didn't need to be leaving the place, it was the people that mattered.*

As mentioned before, importance in collaborative research lies not only in the process, but also in (the reception of) the product. Particularly in collaborative community work, it is important that those who have put effort into the project see that their work is being received by the intended audience, and for the intended purpose. How this is done, depends on what is produced. Gray and colleagues (Gray et al 2002; Gray 2003) and Mienczakowski (1996) worked within the medium of theatre to showcase their collaboratively produced research Simpson and Williams (2008) opened their 'dig' up to public display. In all work, which takes

as its central point long-term relationships with individuals, it is vital that the researcher is not seen to vanish at the end of the research, taking all of the co-created knowledge with them.

The presentation of the work is as important as a research process or aim. It is also important to make sure that the research is presented in ways that the group sees as integral to its participation. In this case, the group are keen that the world of academia and medical professionals come to better appreciate the worth of the exercise that they do after cancer treatment. Part of the aims of this research must therefore be to attempt publish in suitable journals where this audience might be targeted.

## **Conclusion**

Within this chapter, I have sought to explore how the products and processes of collaborative writing came about. It has become clear to me that working with any group involves critical negotiation at every point in the research. Whilst dominated by a collaborative writing context, this chapter seeks to show the ways in which ethnography is not limited to the ethnographic researcher, but is undertaken by each member of a community in an ethnographic project. In particular, it has been important to emphasise the processual nature of any participatory project, allowing both researchers and participants to explore the possibilities of their collaboration as they go. These processes and products should always be seen, within the context of this research at least, as possessions of the group involved in their creation. Focus on the participatory *research* in this project will now conclude for the following section, allowing for emphasis to be placed not on my involvement but, I hope, the collaborative cultures and participatory *emphasis* of the group itself.

## Section 2: Collaborative cultures

*When I came to the group, I came as a geographer. I wanted to understand the group and its practices geographically. The nature of the group, and my relationship within it, meant that, at first at least, geography became implicit rather than explicit. In coming to understand the geographies of Paddlers for Life, it was first important to understand the group itself, before drawing geography explicitly from them. Particularly as it was a participatory project, I felt that it was important to work with the implicit geographies of the dragon boaters, rather than foisting academic geographies upon them. This understanding is reflected in the nature of the three chapters of this section, grounding the thesis in the practices of the group, before these implicit geographies are explicitly attended to in section three.*

*I spent a lot of time with the group, after meeting Ava and her family for the first time at Preston rail station in September 2010. On the water, off the water, alone, together, surrounded by women, chatting with a male supporter. I spent times in Paddlers' homes, and with Laura as she spoke to a traditional support group of older breast cancer survivors. I paddled down the lake on the Summer Solstice with them, helped to decorate the dragons' heads. But, from the beginning, it was never an 'I'. I came to understand that very quickly, that if I was to be with the group, to study with them, it would have to be 'We'. Not researcher to paddlers, or supporters for survivors, or even paddlers of the dragon boat. It might be like that at some moments. But at the group's core, it is always collaborative. A group. A team.*



## Chapter 4: The collaborative practices of the breast cancer dragon boating team

In chapters two and three respectively, we have explored the beginnings of the breast cancer dragon boating movement and the formulation of particular research methods to suit the unique nature of this particular group. In this chapter, the aim is to understand the geographical situating of Paddlers for Life within the wider breast cancer dragon boating movement. In particular, Parry (2007) suggests that future areas for further research include different geographically situated breast cancer dragon boating crews, and the means by which knowledge of breast cancer dragon boating is transferred between international and transnational locations. For Paddlers for Life, as part of an international movement, and as a unique group of individuals, there must be constant dialogue to maintain any sense of equilibrium between the two. By exploring the experiences of Paddlers for Life, this chapter seeks to introduce a geographic sensibility to how we understand the nature of contextual groups: not as condensed versions of larger collectives, but as caught up, created and developed in the fact of their practice.

Towards the beginning of Chapter 3, I briefly pointed to the importance of what Derek Gregory (2005) refers to as “collaborative geographies”. This term has remained underdeveloped, despite further brief use with the work of participatory geographers (Hawkins et al. 2011, Parr 2007, Nagar 2003). However, I want to develop what I see as a brief association by Hester Parr (2007), between collaborative geographies and communities of practice. In this section, I want to build a picture of collaborative geographies at the heart of the process of breast cancer dragon boating, moving from participatory notions to engage the *practice*-based elements of these geographies. Breast cancer dragon boating is not a singular activity. It must fill the joint requirements of both a sport, and a collective body of people brought together by illness. It is my argument, however, that whilst many breast cancer groups are formed around cultural and physical markers, Paddlers for Life Windermere is, at present, defined by the practice in which its members are engaged, i.e. dragon boat paddling. Rather than immediately adopt a self-categorization based group identity theory such as Social Identity Theory, I instead explore the importance of the practise of practice to Paddlers for Life Windermere, through community of practice theory (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998). In developing this association between collaborative geographies and community of practice theory, I argue that we may find an

important link between the adoption of particular practices and the changing collaborative geographies of breast cancer survivors (see also Edmonston 2006).

This chapter will first examine the make-up of the group in terms of its place in the broader breast cancer dragon boating movement, before going on to address the synergetic features of the group itself. Finally, the conversation that is constantly enacted between the group's own synergy and the structures of the broader social movement of breast cancer dragon boating are considered as factors of its position as a 'community of practice'. Vitaly, this conceptualisation allows for the duplicity of breast cancer and dragon boating to combine in contextual, rather than normative, form.

### **Breast Cancer Dragon Boating as a Social Movement**

*There seemed to have been something about the experience of those who attended the breast cancer dragon boat festival in Peterborough, Canada in 2010. It seemed to epitomise what the breast cancer dragon boating movement was about. There was a shared experience, of breast cancer and womanhood, which affected all who attended, even supporters. For Abby, a supporter, it was particularly poignant. Two of her sisters paddled with breast cancer dragon boat teams in Canada, where Abby is originally from. One had died, whilst the other was less involved in paddling now. Abby joined Paddlers for Life as a form of support for them, for the cause. In Peterborough, she was almost torn between groups. She wanted to support her sisters' teams, but also Paddlers for Life. Then, as the final ceremony began, she found herself, quite by accident, between two groups; Paddler's for Life, and her deceased sister's old team. Whilst the international connection was important to her, she had also seen her group change after the experience at Peterborough. She thought that the breast cancer element was more important after Peterborough. Perhaps not just breast cancer, but having attended Peterborough, where breast cancer was the focus. Sophie thought that there was a difference between the people who had gone, and those who hadn't. There was a bond that had formed there. They didn't want to exclude, but at the same time, they couldn't adequately explain what had happened there. Samantha had also attended Peterborough, as a supporter, forming connections from all over the world, through collecting memorabilia from other crews. To her, the events in Peterborough were the tip of the iceberg. Of all the women who had breast cancer, only some would be represented here. Despite this, most paddlers seemed to identify themselves most strongly with the local group. However, two survivors, Chloe and Lily, saw themselves explicitly as identifying more with the international movement. To Chloe, it seemed*

*that she, and Paddlers for Life Windermere, were part of a larger whole; of women and breast cancer, beyond the bounds of the group. This was perhaps linked to the fact that Chloe was the only interviewee to state that she saw herself drawn more to competition than participation.*

*When the idea first came to have many groups under one banner, all over the country, the founder members of Paddlers for Life were paddling with another group. They imagined 'puddles', small groups everywhere that would come together to form a bigger body of water. Now, this idea is progressing under the banner of the new group, Paddlers for Life UK. The concept is much the same, however. They will have to abide by the same participatory ethos as Paddlers for Life, primarily as a breast cancer group. Already, there are teams springing up all of the country; from Scotland to Yeovil. It's about spreading awareness, throughout the country. Paddlers at Windermere seem intrigued by the differences between these locations; at the opportunity to meet with other paddlers and to paddle in different places. Grace in particular seemed concerned that all of the groups would be different. They would be made of different people, with different experiences, in different places.*

*Already, however, there have been some difficulties. One team seems to Paddlers for Life Windermere to be moving away from the participatory ethos. They have joined the British Dragonboating Association, a body that is seen as too racing-orientated by the founder members, as well as calling themselves a racing club and emphasising the local community, rather than breast cancer survivors within the group. Individuals in other crews seemed to have appropriated the ethos in different ways as well. Once, by the lake, I heard a story about a paddler at another Paddlers for Life crew who had gone so far to differentiate herself from the ethos as to cover the Paddlers for Life logo with gaffer tape. It was not the identification she wanted, it seemed, and this bemused the paddlers at Windermere. To Sophie, the distinction was more experiential. Whilst Paddlers for Life had begun as a paddling group, another group had begun as a traditional support group. From previous conversations, I knew that Sophie had had experiences with the concept of the traditional support group. It seemed that she could only escape being a patient, by being a paddler.*

The breast cancer movement, and its changing formations has been the subject of many feminist studies (see for example Klawiter 2004, Kolker 2004, Blackstone 2004). Whilst useful in understanding the broader field of breast cancer representation and action, the focus here is on understanding Paddler for Life's relationship within the breast cancer dragon boating movement. This requires an understanding of how social movements form, rather than how

specific examples interact. The major theory that is used for identifying groups and their motives comes from the social identity work of Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the field of social psychology, although the terms collective identity, social identity and group identity are often used interchangeably (Heere and James 2007). In social identity theory, “A group exists psychologically if three or more people construe and evaluate themselves in terms of shared attributes that distinguish them collectively from other people” (Hogg 2006:111). Groups, and their recognition, are nothing new. Calhoun (1994) suggests that the rise of collective identity came with the rise of democracy, and the newfound ability to debate on a grand scale. Social identity serves to protect individuals from the adverse effects of potential stressors (Haslam et al. 2005). A “[s]ense of shared identity is argued to be a basis for both giving and receiving social support” (Haslam et al. 2005: 357).

Vital to this theorisation, is the requirement that the identity of the group must be internalized within the individual; that is, they must self-categorize to the salient identity (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Although outside identification may be powerful over time, it must begin within internal properties and recognition (Tajfel and Turner 1979, Adarves-Yorno et al. 2006). There are three stages of conformity to group norms: self-categorization; the learning of social norms of the group; and the internalization and enactment of these social norms (Jetten et al. 2002). The third stage can be particularly important in reinforcing personal identification and action. High group identification has been shown to motivate the behaviour of the individual to group norms, even if the group norm is individualism; i.e. the individualistic character motivated by the group (Jetten et al. 2002). In outlining its background, the suggestion here is not that the social identity theory is not useful to understanding certain features of the breast cancer dragon boating movement. Rather, it is to suggest that in paying real attention to the practice of the group and the way it forms as ‘ways of knowing’ (Carden and Harris 2005) is best served by community of practice theory; the vital self-categorization not occurring prior to the group, but through the practice itself.

Sidney Tarrow (2011) defines social movements such as breast cancer dragon boating as “*collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities.*” (Tarrow 2011:9, *italics in original*). In this sense, I cannot refute that the breast cancer dragon boating international movement is a social movement, particularly as it was begun in the mid-1990’s as a collective challenge to perceived medical (authoritative) wisdom of the time (see McKenzie 1998, as well as Chapter 2 of this thesis). Indeed, many of the existing qualitative studies into breast cancer dragon boating have

focused on the social movement. This has often not been explicit, but has been implicit from the drawing of paddlers from different groups, rather than a single team (see for example Tocher 2002, Sabiston et al. 2007, Mitchell and Nielsen 2002, Parry 2008). I believe that the nuances of group interaction can be better understood by treating the group, rather than the social movement, as the primary level of influence (see also McNicoll et al. forthcoming). However, to do this, the implicit understandings of social movements must first be understood.

From the outside, social movements are seen as collectives of particular people; with common goals, experience and perhaps even looks (Tarrow 2011). These collectives are not seen as fabricated by the actions of the members, but by the common identities and characteristics that these individuals *have*. In short we, as outsiders, simplify these collectivised ‘others’ in certain contextual ways according to the joint characteristics we perceive. This is academically conceptualised as ‘frame theory’, which can be used to describe the ways in which social action is categorised and analysed (Kolker 2004). In framing certain issues of supposed importance, some factors are highlighted whilst others are ignored (Clarke and Everest 2006). Not only does this privilege certain types of knowledge on the ground, but it also leads to the exclusion of lay knowledge in favour of outside expertise, particularly in terms of (ill) health (Levealahti et al. 2007). In seeking general interpretations of movements, we risk, as Melucci (1995) argues, losing sight of collective action as a social process. For example, should I meet with another University of Exeter student, removed from the University of Exeter context, we may come to identify, and act, within the notion that we are part of a broader group of people, namely University of Exeter students. To make this connection, two processes are necessary: firstly we must recognise that to make such connections demands us to forget many more differences than we have similarities; and secondly, to ignore that this categorization may tell us little about the practices that inform(ed) such an identification (Hogg 2006):

“[F]or recent social movements, particularly those centred on cultural issues, collective identity is becoming the product of conscious action and the outcome of self-reflection more than a set of given or “structural” characteristics.” (Melucci 1995:50-51).

Whilst Melucci might be correct in suggesting that structural characteristics are becoming less important to the construction and continuation of social movements, I would argue that the frames of illness and female cancer experience are still critical to understanding the formation of the international breast cancer paddlers commission (often referred to as the IBCPC), and important to its growth. Whilst social identity theory works well on the international scale, it

does not fit so neatly for Paddlers for Life Windermere, as social identity theory relies on individuals with similar self-categorized identities coming together. This could be seen to be the case in traditional support groups, where the sustaining focus of cancer diagnosis is also the initial self-categorization. This does not, I feel, provide adequate explanation for a group of cancer survivors whose focus is not the initial categorization, but is rather the practice of dragon boat paddling. Emphasising practice does not amount to an absolute rebuttal of social identity theory in the long term, or in particular moments where individual groups come together in international festivals where all individuals are breast cancer dragon boaters. However, the development of *synergy* is practised by the group, rather than merely discovered within it, necessitating the community of practice.

### **The synergy of Paddlers for Life, Windermere**

*As the individual comes to the group, they come to something bigger than themselves. If they are survivors, they have often been through treatment, the action of which they must go through alone. The group provides something different, something bigger than themselves, into which each member becomes enmeshed, as part of a team. As Lily told me, it's about knowing, as much as you're with others, that you're not alone. That people are with you in your situation, both physically and in terms of the experiences you've had with your illness. As a group, these experiences can come together, and form more than the individual themselves experienced. These individual experiences are seen in the context of other similar contexts, rather than the context of the individual to which the illness is an intrusion, a disturbance. Survivorship, in the context of the group, becomes part of life. As such, laughter becomes a way that the members of the group interact. Sometimes it is black humour, about cancer. Sometimes it is the laughter of a group of friends, with one another. Survivorship is just another part of their life, because rather than a disturbance, it has become a feature.*

*The dragon boat requires synergy for its operation. Twenty paddlers in unison. It is this practice that helps to formulate the sense of the team. One of the paddling exercises is referred to as 'blind paddling'. Whilst paddling together, the paddlers close their eyes, using their other senses to stay in rhythm with one another. The group itself, rather than the landscape or the weather, comes to the fore. Paddling is the point of interest, the feature of the group, which maintains interest, Isla thought. Of course, the experiences are not always uniform. Laura is a right-sided paddler, but she will paddle on the left and overcome her discomfort if this means that she can paddle with a 'newbie', a new paddler. She recognises, that the boat itself is not a*

container of homogenous experiences, but that each paddler will play a part in the experience of the whole. Several of the paddlers expressed vastly different views in relation to stroking the boat; the first paddler, who sets the timing and rhythm for the rest. Whilst Evie saw being in the 'stroke' position as taking on too much responsibility, preferring to use paddling as a time to relax, Ava enjoyed the responsibility, the control. Chloe enjoyed stroking the boat as well, but the control seemed less important. For her, the vastness of the environment was integral to her experience. The more vast the uninterrupted landscape, the more relaxed she felt. Although paddling is an important part of this synergy, it does not constrain it. Particularly during the winter months, the group becomes involved in many other activities; singing workshops, walking groups, dragon head making, Céilidhs, fitness classes, climbing. There is no pressure to attend them all. Indeed, some paddlers seemed to pick and choose, enjoying some events, whilst avoiding others. The non-paddling social side of the group emanates from it. The group tries to facilitate the experiences that paddlers would like to participate in. Singing in particular becomes a way to express the spirit of the group, as both planned and unplanned. Many times when I was with the group, they would break into song, singing songs written for and with the group. At times it was planned, the group together, singing in harmony. At other times, a part of the boat would break into song, others joining in, or continuing with their own relaxation, paddling along. For some, such as Thomas, interaction in some of the activities is more a case of supporting his partner Lily in anything she might want to do, rather than a personal interest. However, there will always be an interaction between all members of the group. It cannot function without all of its parts, individuals and activities. As Daniel said, he likes the social, non-paddling aspect of the group as well, as it allows the paddlers to stay tight knit as a team throughout the year.

Of course, any group produces differences. Sometimes, these differences come from within the group. For Grace, there were times when the synergy broke down, when individuals couldn't be fabricated into a unit. The distance that many paddlers had to travel, along with their other commitments, didn't help. At times, the synergy involved only certain parts of the group. Thomas went to Canada as a supporter. There, he said, he found the synergy of all the breast cancer survivors together, from all around the world, very emotional. Rather than being from Paddlers for Life Windermere, this synergy was more about the collective group of breast cancer survivors in Peterborough, Canada at that time. In Paddlers for Life Windermere, the synergy changes again. Two supporters, Samantha and Abby, said that they recognised a bond within the survivors in the group; a bond that they seemed to have that came from their direct

*experience of cancer. Those survivors who were in Canada gelled together through this experience, came to have a synergy which wasn't directly from Paddlers for Life, but the breast cancer dragon boating movement. Paddlers for Life seemed to be more of a breast cancer oriented crew after Canada, one supporter suggested.*

*Differences pervade, but they do not deconstruct. Identities merge throughout the crew at different times, supporters and survivors coming together and drifting apart at different and salient times. Vitally, there was also the opportunity for the coming together. As Joshua said, the team was built more upon the constant lived experience of its members, rather than outside identities. The things that are achieved are a symptom of the whole, no matter their status of diagnosis. It is this collective synergy, which allows Olivia to remain a part of the paddling experience after she became no longer able to paddle as a result of her treatment. Now, she is the main drummer in the boat, a key part of the crew. The group can be more than one thing to any individual. It was to Samantha, who saw the spirit of the survivors as incredibly uplifting. The spirit may have been from the survivors, but it was not exclusionary. It was possible for her, as a supporter, to gain from this spirit, as she called it. It rubbed off on her, and so she became a part of it herself, and her excitement affected others. I'm not sure she even knew the power of the part she played; yet she played it none the less.*

### **Survivorship, support and the community of practice**

I know. I know people, things, facts, myself. Yet knowledge is not something that we intrinsically have, as human beings, or indeed something that can be parroted verbatim from one individual to another (Polanyi 1958). It is neither exact nor extant. Rather, it is in the co-operation of individuals' actions that knowledge is created, formed and shared. Naturally, this theory creates some problems for the traditionally positivist ways in which academia and lay society view 'good' knowledge. To critique this traditional conceptualisation, I argue that the coming together, and staying together, of the post-cancer diagnosis sporting group needs to be perceived through the concept of tacit knowing. Tacit knowing is a theory developed by the polymath Michael Polanyi, which helps us to understand the ways in which knowledge is always more than just speech: "we can know more than we can tell." (Polanyi 1967:4). According to Polanyi, knowledge is organised into two categories of knowing. These are most easily explained by the difference between the explicit (to 'know what') and the tacit (to 'know how'). Whilst the former refers to knowing that can be described and formalised, the latter refers to knowing which can only be understood through practice; both, argues Polanyi, are



part of ‘the art of knowing’ (Polanyi 1967). The oft-used example is the art of riding a bicycle. Whilst there is a physics-based description for riding a bike, it is not all a question of balance:

“Bicycle-riding proper has additional problems. These have to do with riding in traffic. Negotiating traffic is a problem that is *different in kind* to balancing a bike, because it includes understanding social conventions of traffic management. For example, it involves knowing how to make eye contact with drivers at busy junctions in just the way necessary to assure a safe passage and not to invite an unwanted response. And it involves understanding how differently these conventions will be executed in different locations. For example, bike-riding in Amsterdam is a different matter to bike-riding in London, or Rome, or New York, or Delhi, or Beijing.” (Collins 2007:259).

The practice of the act cannot be reduced to either of these forms of knowing. It is inherently geographical. We must know some of the physics of the art, along with the practices of remaining upright. Membership of a paddling group is much the same, I argue. We must know some of the formalised rules, as well as the practices by which those rules are understood within the group.

Before we further explore the tacit, there is a taxonomic clarification that needs to be made, which will become central to the geographic argument of this chapter. Whilst much academic critical literature takes the position of ‘tacit knowledge’, Polanyi (1967) did not. Rather, his focus was consistently upon ‘tacit knowing’. Dewey and Bentley (1945) made a call for clarifications between the two almost sixty years ago. Whilst such a distinction may seem pedantic, within their argument, knowledge is a loose term without direct reference, whilst the knowing or known is established through continuous search and research in the phenomenon itself (Dewey and Bentley 1945). Tacit knowing, as Polanyi (1967) uses the term, is referential of the continuous process of the creation of ‘knowledge’ through *knowings* and *knowns* (Dewey and Bentley 1945), rather than its reification and categorization into loose categorizations (ibid). The art, and practice of knowing is vital to that collective condition that can only ever be qualitatively tested, but is explicitly known by paddlers: trust.

*People supported one another in the group. Cancer wasn't the focus, but it wasn't ignored. It was part of the way the synergy developed, I suppose. But perhaps it was based more on what members of Paddlers for Life didn't have to do, rather than what the synergy of Paddlers for Life allowed them to do. At the start, was the understanding that you didn't have to talk about cancer. It seemed different, it was the group's draw. Sometimes it didn't translate, as when I*

went with Laura to speak to a talk-based support group for older breast cancer survivors. They didn't seem to understand the synergetic values. They saw it only as hard work. Maybe it was harder to see from the outside. As Samantha said, supporting was a way of life, it worked through all levels of the group. But it didn't need to be vocalised. It was the knowledge of a similar shared experience, which was experienced with this group of people who had, as Grace and Evie said, been thrown together. The shared experience allowed trust to form very quickly. And this meant that allowances could be made. It seems strange to write allowances, here. Out of the context of the group, it seems false, almost patronising. But within the group it is as much about sharing the experience of others as one who has also experienced. They know of the process that the individual must go through, if not all the details. In this sense, it was not just about direct experience, but also that of supporters as well. Abby knew, from her experiences with her sisters, the challenges that survivors must face. For survivors as well, it was important that supporters were also supported. Having others who understood lifted the pressure on family members, as well as the survivors, thought Olivia. Many family members and friends had been through all the experience with the survivors. Sometimes, emotions do flow. For Chloe, this was powerful. She didn't have to ask any questions, but she came to understand how everyone was affected by an illness that she had experienced. Sophie liked that, often in an unspoken sense, support extended to supporters as well. It may not often be expressed, but the fact other men and women have cared and supported in similar ways, was important. There was an unspoken understanding of support, thought William, which linked the partners and friends of survivors. All parties can learn from the close bonds and practices of breast cancer dragon boating, Ava thought. There's peace of mind that there is support for supporters. "I know what happened to them, but I don't know", said Grace. "I just know that the whole rounded ethos of what happened to them, happened to me. Our story's slightly different, but that's all I need to know".

Here, Grace dismisses not only the possibility, but also the utility of extant knowledge of other individuals in the group. By rejecting the desire objectively to obtain *knowledge* of the experience of others, she develops a trust with the group, based on a 'feeling' gathered about the other individuals involved (Bailey n.d.). Grace's connection with her fellow paddlers is not based upon a full knowledge of their experiences, but upon a synergy or co-operation with the articulations of their tacit *knowings*. By stating that she knows 'all she needs to know', Grace is articulating the superfluous nature of the speech act of trust; indeed its verbalisation may even be seen to pre-empt the breaking of trust (Baier 1995). The removal of the expectation of the

speech act means that although experiences can be shared, they can never be compared. The synergy of the paddlers, I suggest, must remain in the collective tacit knowing. To make the paddlers' relationships explicit, that is to say spoken, is to formalise their collective experiences, and remove the possibility of trust. The result of broken trust is not distrust, but demise; once trust is engaged we are made vulnerable to it being broken. The power of this relationship is part of the reason why it must be achieved in practice (Carden and Harris 2005). Knowledge of trust is beyond our ability of expression; trust can only be acknowledged in *knowing*.

By accepting the intricacies of collective tacit knowing, we can begin to understand the ways that such a knowing can be understood as practical application in terms of geography. As this knowing cannot be written or spoken, it can hence only be passed on through relationships of interaction; it is ever evolving in social interaction and is only acquired through social embedding in society (Collins 2007). It can never be known outside of the locational, contextual moment. This is the form of tacit knowing that, I believe, is located at the level of a paddling community of practice. It is only here, in frequent practice, that the minutiae of the ways of paddling as a group become understood. It is, therefore, impossible for this knowing to transfer as codified knowledge outside of itself, or directly to other communities of practice (Duguid 2005). The problematic to this idea is the notion that similar actions and practices can be found within seemingly disparate groups. It is true, that similar actions can be found across the breast cancer paddling groups. I argue that it is in such a way that groups become envisioned as merely a part of a wider collective, rather than at the formulation of their own tacit art of knowing. Trust is never fixed within the community; it must always be in *practise*.

### **Paddlers for Life, Windermere**

*Survivorship was always a term that intrigued me with the group. On the face of it, it was used as a fairly categorical distinction, between those who had had cancer, and those who supported them; survivors and supporters. However, a term can never live only in the experience of the group. It will always work inside and outside of it, as well. Mostly, though, survivorship seemed to be to do with fun, with Paddlers for Life. It was the lived experience of the group; enjoying life, laughing. Of course, there was context. The realisation that there is life after cancer, a negative experience, allowed the positivity of their current experience to explode out of the group. It was often about the context they found themselves in. For Chloe,*

*the opportunity this group of women in Windermere provided, in a place she loved anyway, was a huge positive after treatment. Even lows could be dealt with better as a group.*

*To some, particularly supporters, but also some survivors, 'survivor' distinguished the individual from being a sufferer, or someone stuck with the diagnosis. Not living in the problem, but after it. This was not to say that people who had been diagnosed with cancer had not suffered. Perhaps the distinction came from the association of suffering with medical diagnosis and treatment. Many had suffered, terribly, during their treatment. And afterwards, Laura had found nothing positive on the horizon. But that did not persist in her experience. These individuals had found Paddlers for Life, and together they had created a survivorship that was the process of all of their experiences. For Daniel, it was a state of mind. More than just getting on with life, but actively enjoying it. An attitude that has incorporated paddling as a positive part of their lives. It wasn't just for the survivors either. For Ava and Daniel, all of their family had been involved in the survivorship process after Ava was diagnosed. They had gone through the treatment, become involved in Paddlers for Life. Their inclusive model of participation meant that survivorship helped the whole family, not just Ava.*

*'Survivor' in the Paddlers for Life sense had possibly developed differently to its etymological derivative; to survive. It had come from this definition, but in the practice of Paddlers for Life, did not remain there. Nonetheless, this definition concerned many of the Paddlers, particularly those who had had cancer. It intoned bravery, thought Ruby, but this wasn't right. She had dealt with it, because she had to. Likewise, to Laura, it sounded like an achievement. The only real opposite to survival is death. If those who survived had achieved, did it mean that that those who had not had lost? This didn't seem right to Laura, or Olivia. Survivor could become a stereotype, a label that could be awarded to an individual who filled certain criteria. But this should never be the case. Survivorship was different to every individual, said Ava. It wasn't always fun, wasn't always positive. Perhaps this was what Sophie found difficult in the performance of survivorship that she saw in other groups, with sashes pronouncing their status. It was positive to be a paddler, but it wasn't about winning the race. Survivors, supporters and paddlers were all created in the practice of paddling.*

Unlike social identity theory, there is not a definitive criteria to *practice*. The 'community of practice' was first proposed by the educationalists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991), to explain how apprenticeships are integrated into patterns of learning through doing. Since then, the concept has been highly popular among the social sciences, now reaching the stage where

the call is made to think beyond its traditionally learning-based settings (Stehlik and Carden 2005). In going beyond, however, it is important to remain grounded within the group:

“The community of practice is where the rubber meets the road – it is where observable action and interaction do the work of producing, reproducing, and resisting the organization of power in society and in societal discourses of gender, age, race, and so on” (McConnell-Ginet 2011:102).

In a community of practice, the group and its processes must always be to the fore: “it becomes not sufficient to claim a particular identity; that identity has to be recognized by pre-existing group members, which in turn reflects back on one’s understanding of oneself” (Paechter 2003:74). What Paechter claims, therefore, is a process of constant reflexivity. It is not enough to see oneself with a particular identity, imprinted by society, but one must also be seen as a legitimate member of that community. If this approval is received, the individual will be able to play a role in the practice, which is at the heart of the community. However, this interaction may not be explicit. “Membership is voluntary, which is not the same as saying it is a conscious decision to become a member” (Carden 2005: 189). Hence, membership of the community of practice is different to social identity theory, where the individual seeks cohesion with others; the individual member of the community of practice may not always be aware of their membership of the group.

Within Paddlers for Life, being a ‘member of a community’ can be contextually thought of as ‘becoming a paddler’. There are nuances to the Paddlers for Life participatory attitude, which will be more fully explored in Chapters 5 and 6. Yet there are still issues to discuss concerning where ‘the rubber meets the road’ between theory and practice. Generally, potential members of a community of practice must serve an apprenticeship known as legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger 1998). This concept allows a community of practice to include those who are yet to be involved in the practice, yet exhibit an aptitude to it as apprentices, taught by masters. In this way, newcomers are permitted to be on the periphery of the group whilst learning the explicit and tacit practices of the group (Wenger 1998);

“Peripherality means that the newcomer has access to actual practices but with reduced risk and responsibility; legitimacy ensures that the newcomer is accepted enough to be on ‘an inbound trajectory’, that is, they will progress and learning is possible” (Carden and Harris 2005:260)

Legitimate peripheral participation, then, allows potential members to learn not through merely explicit tuition, but through tacit interaction with experienced members. The individual may indeed be involved in other communities of practice with similar cultural definitions; there are no bars to members of Paddlers for Life being involved in other groups surrounding breast cancer. Legitimate participant participation is not just a positive step towards membership, but implicates the apprentice in a long progression of potential process (Carden and Harris 2005). Although paddling must be at the centre of Paddlers for Life Windermere's community of practice, as we shall further explore, participation may at any time become 'illegitimate', separating the individual from their group. As Williams (1976) states, the term community can give an overriding sense of positivity. In this section, I wish to argue that a community of practice is an amalgamation of experiences, both positive and negative.

It is impossible to overstate the role that practice has in the community of practice. But this does not tell us *why* we do things. Paul Duguid (2005) suggests that there are two main differences that inscribe participation; epistemic entailments (the ability to do something) and ethical commitments (the will to do something). It is the specificities of these categories that lead to differences between communities that may appear to be engaged in a similar practice. If such differences enter *within* a community of practice, the group may become implausible. As Duguid (2005) states, ethical arguments are more common than their epistemological counterparts within community of practice theory. The focus is upon what people are willing to do, rather than the specificities of their ability to do it. Epistemic entailments often develop within the broader 'network of practice'; the wider demographic of individuals joined by their practice rather than the community of practice's direct social participation (Brown and Duguid 2002). The broader network of practice of breast cancer dragon boating is predominately involved in breast cancer, as opposed to being inclusive of other cancers. Within practice, therefore, very different knowings are created from ethical considerations of groups; for example, the difference between a legitimate peripheral participation model that accepts only breast cancer survivors, and one accepting of all cancers.

This, I argue, is where *power* needs to be configured into the experiences of paddlers. Power flows through life. It is still very much a part of the community of practice, for it "is the ability or capacity to achieve something, whether by influence, force, or control." (Roberts 2006:626). Hence, to *do* is to be within relations of power. Whilst there exists individual choice and freedom in ethical commitments and epistemic entailments (Duguid 2005), it is only epistemological *alterations* to the group through ethical resolution that may fundamentally

change the way in which knowledge is produced; such change may precipitate the exclusion of members from the group. The importance here is the *freedom* to act, within the group. A community of practice may change their ethical standpoint, and move from being a participatory, to a racing group, for example. Of course, certain individuals may not want to adopt these implications for ethical reasons yet, critically, they are *able* to do so. However, this is not the case within an epistemic change in a community of practice. An individual is not able, at will, to become a survivor of breast cancer. If the epistemic bent of the community of practice becomes exclusively structured by breast cancer survivorship, members without that particular illness will become (even if they have experience of another cancer) unable to play a part in the production of the community as survivors, and may even be deemed to be no longer legitimate participants of the community of practice.

*Paddling is at the core of the group. It is practical support for cancer, said Olivia, which doesn't require discussion. Most of the survivors told me that they didn't want to talk about their illness. As with the knowings they shared, they didn't need to know any more. Of course, they could ask if they needed to. Vocal support was there if it was needed. But it wasn't explicitly expressed in the individual. It was, Thomas and Grace told me, about living in the present, not the past. Within Paddlers for Life, support is a practice in itself. That is not to say that it is one thing. Rather, support migrates between the actions of individuals within the group, at the micro level between racing buddies, or at the relative macro scale of organising events for the whole group. Much of the support is informal, almost cursory; moving boats, fetching paddles. Practically, the group couldn't function without its supporters. Most of the supporters feel that they are there to support their partners, or the other survivors in some way. They, and their needs, come first. As Daniel said, it is a way for him to regain control of his own situation. From being in a position of power as a fireman, he found himself without control of the situation following Ava's diagnosis. Both he and William regularly helm the boats.*

*While I was with the group, Thomas also passed his helming course. He seemed very pleased that he was able to help out in another way. He had become able to aid the paddlers; to facilitate. These are skills that are learnt in order to support. Using skills that one already has also allows an individual to feel part of the group. All these skills, learnt through, and brought into the group, are vital. Without a helm, no boat can go out onto the water. Although helming was a popular way for men to offer practical support, it was not the only way, nor was it an*

obligation. Joshua was one of the few supporters to have no direct link to the group. He was the only man in this position. His wife had died of breast cancer, just before Paddlers for Life was formed. She had met Laura at a traditional support group meeting, and had been introduced to dragon boating at the previous dragon boating group. She only went a couple of times, but stayed in contact when her health deteriorated. When the group was being set up in Windermere, Laura asked Joshua to come along. Joshua has always been very active. Indeed, after his wife died, he felt he needed somewhere to expend the increased levels of energy that he felt. Dragon boating for Joshua is an exercise, more than for any of the other supporters. Perhaps this is why he hasn't been drawn to helming. Going there, he wants to paddle. But because he doesn't helm, it doesn't mean that his support of the paddlers is diminished. The group is for survivors, he told me, and he'll do things to support that. He's always been like that. If someone needs to sit in the boats in the rain whilst the boats are towed back up the lake after the Summer Solstice paddle, he'll do it. Through the group, other skills are learnt, added to helming. Both Abby and Samantha took their powerboat course the previous year. They can now take the safety boat out whilst there are paddlers out on the lake. It is not just for support, but also enjoyment. It is an experience they might not otherwise have had. They become useful in the practical support of the group, but also revel in this practicality. The practice also allows supporters to see the ability of the survivors. Thomas had his partner, Lily, wrapped in cotton wool, she said, until he was able to see the group in practice; to see for himself what was possible.

A supportive attitude was required within the group, not just to define when support was needed, but also when it wasn't. As Lily and Thomas said, it was about establishing what everyone could do for themselves, taking support away from its abstract understandings of 'help'. At the beginning of the season, a new trailer had been bought. Before this, the boats had always been stored upon trestles. It took a lot of work, and a lot of hands to get them on and off, and to manoeuvre them around to the water. Suddenly, the process was made much less cumbersome. Lucas would merely attach the trailer to a tractor, and tow them around to the slipway, from where they could be smoothly and effortlessly floated into the water. Only a few people were now needed for the whole process. Not everyone was happy, though. They were now reliant on Lucas to always be available when they needed him. The next time I went up, a month later, the boats were no longer on the trailer, but back on the trestles. Laura told me that the trailers themselves were not good for the empowerment of the group. In handling the boats together at the beginning and end of each session, the process of moving them was



*itself important, overcoming assumptions that cancer survivors would not be able to deal with the weight of the boat. The group coming together, acting in support of one another, proved their collective ability, rather than their individual inabilities. Of course, the trailer may have been easier. But it undermined the particular practices of support that had developed within, and proved an important part of, the group. An egalitarian approach to the group was preferable to control resting in the hands of a single individual.*

According to Fox (2000), the categorisation of power within the original theorisation of the community of practice is left largely undefined. To address this shortage, Fox appropriates Michel Foucault's theorisation of 'power', moving the relations of power from between the individuals, to their actions (Fox 2000). Power comes from everywhere, rather than a fixed point. Knowing occurs within the context of the individual's actions together (Fox 2000). According to Foucault, power relations can only ever exist in a context where power is exercised over subjects who are 'free': "By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behavior are available" (Foucault 2002:342). All paddlers, whether breast cancer survivors or otherwise must be thought of, I argue, as free. Such an argument is vital, in particular, to the lived experience of the paddler who has been directly affected by cancer. Each is free to be subjected to power relations within the group. But so is each free to react, and to resist. Vitality, in this context, this was not always the case in their experience of illness. In opposition to relationships of power, Foucault notes that there is a 'relationship of constraint' (which is also referred to as a relationship of violence – I utilise the former as the aim of the medical practitioner is not harm): "slavery is not a power relationship when the man is in chains" (Foucault 2002: 342). Like Foucault's analogy of the man in chains, the cancer *patient* as stipulated in Chapter 2 is constricted by the uncertainty, whatever assurances are received, of liberation. As patients of the medicalised system, most paddlers have been part of a 'relationship of constraint'; they have/had been given no option but to submit to the will of medicinal authority (Tang and Anderson 1999):

"What defines a *relationship of power* is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions... A *relationship of violence* acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks, it destroys, or it closes off all possibilities. Its opposite pole can only be passivity, and if it comes up against any resistance it has no other option but to try to break it down." (Foucault 2002:340 *my emphases*)

The ability to know cannot be reduced merely to the practice of the community. Communities of practice are constitutive of “the broader historical, social and institutional discourses and styles... to which we orient our practices in various ways” (Wenger 1998:141). As we explored previously in Chapter 2, the cancer specialist does not act upon the actions of the individual, but upon the body. The aim of treating cancer is to leave the cancer contained, broken, destroyed. Although an individual may not regret this relationship in light of the alternative they are presented with, it is not one to which they wish to return. They cannot forget it, as they were advised to do, but must live on with it (Dyck 1995). This does not mean that they wish to be defined by the ‘cancer’ label – a tangible identity such as ‘paddler’ can be a positive alternative to a medical definition (Reynolds and Prior 2006). Paddlers for Life Windermere’s community of practice is no longer a relationship of constraint. Whatever the situations that may be confronted within the community of practice and its organisation, there is always a choice for their actions, even if that choice is to leave the community of practice. However, collective epistemic decisions may leave no option for the individual but to leave. The challenge that is set by this theorisation is to continue to ask questions not only of the medical community and its relationship towards people affected by cancer, but also of the group itself, particularly in terms of the epistemic distinction between a paddling community of practice open to all cancer survivors and their supporters, and a breast cancer movement. This should not act as a warning against change, but rather as a caution that epistemic alterations cannot be made without *knowledge* production and processes within the group, including trust, altering irrevocably. In changing the frame in which knowledge is produced, we can never *know* in the same ways again.

This is crucial to the study of geography and, in particular, collaborative geographies that, I argue, are key to the geographical understanding of the community of practice. By altering the criteria by which individuals are able to become members of the group, the very practice of the group is altered. The key to understanding collaborative geographies must be that in collaborative practices, individuals bring their own ways of knowing which mix with others to form bespoke ways of knowing of the community of practice. In terms of Paddlers for Life, this has very real implications for their on-going geographical relationships, as we shall see in forthcoming chapters. Wenger (1998) suggests that there are two specific issues with ‘knowledge’ in the community of practice; that a community of practice is as much about what is not known, as much as what is; and that ‘knowledge’ compresses its field, limiting the areas from which understandings are taken. As geographers, I believe we should be particularly

concerned with this second problematic. By constraining the field, we may lose sight of what is intrinsic to the group. To raise an earlier point, codifying knowledge within a pre-existing group with its own collaborative geographies could lead to a breakdown in *trust*, and changes in physical and emotional identity (Carden and Harris 2005).

*Paddlers for Life is a positive experience to many. But to deny that there was difference of opinion would be to deny the creativity that is at the heart of the group. Sometimes the differences between what is required at the international level of the social movement disrupts the practice at the local level, for Paddlers for Life. Some regular members were not able to paddle in Canada, because they were not breast cancer survivors. They were survivors of other cancers, and were 'survivors' within Paddlers for Life, but not within breast cancer dragon boating. But their positionality only became known when they found themselves 'out of place'. Before they left, it was not even known who was a breast cancer survivor, or in some cases, if someone was a survivor or supporter. Paddlers for Life is for all survivors. To disrupt this is to question the very nature of the group. Until Canada, Grace had always been able to paddle with the pink boat, with the survivors. She had her place in the boat. She, and another non-breast cancer survivor were part of the crew, but not of the cause in this context. Rules and regulations had got in the way of her participation, her membership of her paddling community. Peterborough was only for breast cancer survivors. Grace was well aware of this before she went out, aware that she might not get a paddle at all, let alone with **her** crew. In telling me her story, she seemed unsure as to why it affected her as much as it did. Unlike the rest of her crew, she didn't receive a participation medal. Whilst she accepted that breast cancer leads the way for other cancers and awareness, her position was altered. Outside of its own context, her crew became redefined by the cultural frames of a wider, broader society; she became an anomaly. The community of practice alters outside of its own context. Defined from week to week as survivors and supporters, with the rules and regulations of the international movement, this becomes redefined from its dyadic normality to a triadic moment; survivors, supporters, anomalies. The real issue is that these members cannot be simply redefined from their practice as survivors, to supporters.*

*As a supporter, Joshua felt similarly in his definition. There was no one else in his position he felt, a supporter bereaved by breast cancer. He was unsure as to whether the group was really for him, whether or not he was out of place. But in a sense, it seemed that Joshua created his own place. He was the only man who seemingly avoided helming; rather, he practised his*

*support alongside his wish to paddle, and to exercise. He was seen by other members as a full participant. It was Joshua who perceived difference from previous experience.*

*There is structure within the group. There needs to be, to get forty paddlers safely out on the water every week. There is a board of trustees, a chair and patron, elected by members of Paddlers for Life. Because of the amount of time that goes into organising such a group, a bond develops between those at the organisational core. It has become their lives, what they think about, what they talk about at home. Sometimes the trustees would have their own meetings. At this point, there was a separation between the group as a whole and its organisation, but as far as I could tell, it never lasted for long. Meetings were needed to make decisions, but given the amount of members, it was sometimes difficult to get an individual position across. It was important to remember, and it was often reinforced through communication practices, that every role in the group had its responsibility and importance. A paddling group was not just about paddling. There were many skills to be honed, interests to be accommodated. Responsibility was restored by working 'responsibility' throughout the group. Most people had a role, which was accommodated to their own skills and restraints. The structuring of the group seemed more to ensure that everyone had a role to play, than to instruct and implement from above.*

*Paddlers for Life was begun to act for the needs of cancer survivors, by cancer survivors themselves. If there was to be structure to the group, then it needed to focus on the lived experience of cancer, not a view from the outside. It shouldn't matter if you've paddled once, or fifty times, said Ava. Everyone is together. Part of this togetherness was the ability to accept difference. People would join for different reasons. People had different stories, were at different stages in their lives. After all, the cancer identity wasn't one that was chosen. In the boat, it is important that people can be individuals, freed from their structural shackles. Although the ethos of Paddlers for Life Windermere was important to its members, particularly participation rather than racing, it was recognised that there would be differences in the 'puddles' that developed. These differences are not brought together by a rigid structure or collective code, but by a generative experience of coming together in the boat. The survivors have experienced a journey with no options before, in their medical treatment, and it is not one to which they wish to return. A crew in Wigan may look and feel very different to one in Windermere. But the group must be about these individual stories coming together within practice.*

To warn of such a reversion to outside societal structures is not to argue that social identity theory does not provide cogent answers for many of the members of Paddlers for Life. In some situations, the concept of *social creativity*; a marginalised group or individual partaking in activities that the dominant social group views positively (Krane et al. 2002), may help to explain the operative practice of the breast cancer dragon boating movement. However, I do not believe that such a theorisation highlights the importance of the practice of Paddlers for Life Windermere, as opposed to the representation of identity created by social frame. Krane et al (2002:39) end their paper with the conclusion; “the [Gay] Games employ social creativity to challenge the perceptions of LGBTs by the dominant culture.” By focusing on the perceptions from outside, there is a risk of focusing on the ideology or political aims, rather than the practices of the games themselves. As such, social practices risk being simplified as merely a conduit for political representation, rather than an important feature of the creation of knowledge in the group itself. The focus in social identity becomes not the paddling itself, but the unexpected contradiction of societal expectations of what it means to be a cancer survivor. This is not equality, but an association with the very frame constructed against the marginalised self.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to theorise, without abstracting from the group in focus. As such, I feel that the community of practice, as theory, continues the feminist epistemological aim of explanation and empowerment with which this thesis is concerned. More particularly, I have been concerned to set out the beginnings of what could be a useful way for geographers to understand communities to whom a practice is at their heart of their identity. In particular, the chapter has sought to highlight how groups within larger movements come to create themselves through practice in their own geographical settings. These settings are not akin to bounded place; indeed, knowledge cannot be thought to transfer between different locations (Parry 2008). Instead, ways of knowing flow between individuals and groups. The tacit knowings of Paddlers for Life, combined with explicit knowings from other groups, combine to create the knowledge, which can only be held within Paddlers for Life as part of their geographic practice. Collaborative geographies have the potential, I believe, to be incredibly useful to health geographers; there is much scope to understand how societal structures are undermined, and members of the community become entwined, in practice. By introducing the element of power to the initial conceptualisation, we are also able to see how the participatory element of

the group is vital to understanding how these societal, medical structures are undermined through the practice of collaborative geographies, and replaced by an understanding of the potential of each individual.

## Chapter 5: 'Doing' pink

Within a study of breast cancer dragon boating, an exploration of the concerns of geography and gender are likely to be expected. Entire theses have been written that concern the subject of gender and geography. To adequately cope with this complex issue within a single chapter, I will focus on a particular aspect of the international breast cancer activism movement; the use of pink as a stereotyping and feminizing tool of a masculine society. I will suggest that, in fact, the individual group can act to reclaim the colour as a facet of their collaborative experience as breast cancer dragon boaters. There is a difference here, I argue, between the performance of pink for the dragon boaters, and those outside of the lived experience of the disease. My point is that all the features of critical theory happen in the experience of the environment, not “on the head of a pin.” (Cresswell 1996:11). The point then is to critique the idea that any word can fully determine the way a potential distinguishing feature of a population is critiqued in particular ways. By developing ideas in the previous chapter on ‘tacit knowing’, we can develop our understandings of gender through (often unspoken) practice. Gender is not a category applicable to a group of individuals, but an attitude that emanates from the practice of their relationships.

### **Positionality**

As researchers, we have been encouraged to dwell on the positionality of who we are (Sidaway 2000). Of course, as in many academic geography departments across the United Kingdom, these researchers are often male, white and middle-class. In broad terms, I suppose that I fit this bill. Cook (2001) has reported being criticised for possessing a white, male, middle class view, whilst attempting to undermine these very hierarchies. Reflexivity should, however, go beyond making the researcher transparent, and blanking them out of the process.

This is a little strange to me now, as I come to the ‘write up’ at the end of the project. When the project began back in February 2011, I was acutely aware that I was not a woman, preparing to work with a group dominated by women. Moreover, I was a researcher, which polarised my identity away from the rest of the group (to me at least) even more. Although these were important fears to have, I see now that such monocular vision hid other, perhaps more important truths. Nagar and Gieger (2007) suggest that there is a difference between the often conflated issues of epistemology, ontology and ethics. As I referred to in Chapter 4, the

epistemological and the ethical are particularly important to the ways of knowing that Paddlers for Life can create. These are particularly important in terms of collaborative projects, as to conflate what we are able to do and what we wish to do risks creating the researcher as an object to be transparently deconstructed and understood (Rose 1997) in order to interpret the positionality of others. Hence, I suggest adhering to Nagar and Gieger's (2007) model of *speaking with* in positionality; the aim is not to explore the identity of the researcher divorced from their present context, but to uncover ourselves in the multitude contexts with which we work. I agree that this is vital in:

“producing new collaborative geographies; for exploring the ways in which these geographies are/can be simultaneously embedded in and speak to multiple sites and landscapes of struggle and survival; and for imagining the processes by which we might begin to re-evaluate and reclaim previously colonised and appropriated knowledges” (Nagar 2003:360).

Collaborative geographies demand that reflexivity should not just focus on ‘blinking’ the identities of the researcher. The fact that my dad died of cancer is irrelevant outside of the bounds of this research project – indeed, it would probably be deemed irrelevant should the project have been with a standard dragon boating crew. But in our collaboration, these positionalities are key to negotiating our understandings together. After Nagar (2003), I suggest that our positionalities need to be part of the *collaborations* in which we work. It is a false separation to think of ourselves as researchers only within fieldwork. In collaborative and participatory research, we are not researcher *or* collaborator, but both at once (see Moss 2001, in particular Saltmarsh 2001). By working *with* others in configuring *our* positionalities, we may see absences and fallibilities that are not of our own making, but are important to the practice of the group (Rose 1997). Although this is important, it is also vital to think practically about our pasts and how they inform our positionalities with participants. Much of my teenage years were spent on the water at my local rowing club. I was a competitive, if not particularly successful rower around the South West. According to Bryson (1987), such a grounding may lead male researchers to be reticent in giving competitive sport “too bad a press” (Bryson 1987:349). This is not to say that all knowledge must be bracketed off from the research process, or that I should divest myself of this experience in order to do ‘good’ research. Indeed, many of my actions on the water with Paddlers for Life, in terms of attention to the helm and water safety were first honed on the tidal waters of the River Dart, in South Devon. There is, then, a fine line to tread between researching *from* a position, which might be seen as bias, and



researching *with* a positionality, which reflects on the individual researcher themselves. I suggest that geography is by this stage well versed in understanding the difference, but needs to embrace the distinction more by working.

*Several of the paddlers who weren't breast cancer survivors seemed to have reservations about the colour pink. They had long been concerned that it was a feminizing medium, that it gave negative gender associations. I wondered at first whether it was something to do with not being breast cancer paddlers, with their not being fully entwined with the pervasive pink narrative. But all of these supporters had worked in the state education sector for many years as well. They were, as always, much more than paddlers. Their associations stretched far beyond paddling. With paddling, Abby and Ruby seemed to see this pink, the colour of Paddlers for Life as different, somehow. It was about strength and determination, a colour that had been chosen as paddlers, rather than inscribed upon them as women.*

*I have to say, I never really thought about the ideology of pink, when I was surrounded by Paddlers for Life. Perhaps it was the fact that it was in so many different shades, and so many forms. It was understated, like a team kit. In fact, I perhaps noticed it more in terms of that which wasn't pink. But the team kit wasn't just about pink. The supporters had had another t-shirt made in preparation for supporting the survivors at the breast cancer dragon boating festival in Peterborough, Canada. It was black, with the team logo on the left breast, and white writing on the back. The men in the group, in particular, seemed to identify with this shirt, more than the pink, or even the yellow, the 'supporter's' colour. It was their way of being with the group, in a way that felt comfortable to them. In fact, on the wear-it-pink day, Joshua did not wear any pink, adorning instead his black supporters t-shirt. In this simple action, he remained as a Paddler for Life, in a sea of breast cancer.*

*It was wear-it-pink day. It's a national day, organised by the Breast Cancer Campaign, a national charity. It's a simple concept; add pink to your daily choice of clothing, and make a donation to the charity. Like mufti-day at school, when for one day only, uniforms are cast aside in favour of more general attire. I was coming up from London on the day, and had to stop off in Kendal to pick up some postcard prints from the printer we were thinking of using. I hadn't brought anything pink with me. I was thinking about buying a pink cycling cap. That was acceptable pink, I thought, and I might even use it again. I hunted around the cycling shops in Kendal, but with no success. I was panicking. If I turned up without any pink, I would look like a prude. But I didn't want to go over the top, and seem like I wasn't taking the day*

*seriously. In my panic, I settled for a pink bike bell. It was a princess bell, with Cinderella and Snow White emblazoned on a sticker on the top. That would do, I thought, and quickly got on my way to the lakes.*

*As I pulled into the car park, as I usually did, there was a different feel. A group of people who I didn't recognise were there, dressed in all sorts of pink, men and women. I guessed that they must be the group from the nearby hotel, come to paddle against Paddlers for Life. It was the second year they had done it. The event had raised a substantial amount of money the year before. My back immediately went up. A few of them, especially the men, were wearing outrageous pink. Tights, tutus, a pink Elvis complete with pink guitar. It seemed more like theatre, a performance of mimicry than the pink that I was used to. Then I rounded the corner. The paddlers were at it as well, the corner by the boats packed with all different forms of pink clothing; boas, hats, scarves. Abby was bedecked in tutu, tights, pink Stetson; the works. A wig and a boa were immediately pressed onto me. It was time to perform. I felt strange. I don't mind dressing up. I've never been overly averse to pink. But I became very aware of my gender, the expectations that existed there, because of my sex. These expectations became augmented as a few of the male supporters drifted in. Some had made some concession to the day, like George wearing a light pink t-shirt. Daniel had highlighted his grey moustache with pink. Ava had knitted each survivor woman in the group a fluorescent pink headband to wear for the event. But the men seemed to hold back from too much of this 'pinking'. I felt that I gone too far in my position as a man in the group. I took off the pink wig, despite protestations. Instead I picked up a black top hat, and wrapped some pink ribbon around it. To me, it seemed like a more acceptable embodiment of pink, more permissible. My own position informed the practice I felt I could undertake. In a first draft of this chapter David Harvey, my supervisor, asked whether I was a bit prudish about pink. It is a fair assumption. In that I was concerned with the social structures which governed its use in terms of sex, I must admit that I was. However, as I shall go on to argue, this was not a reaction to the colour itself, but to a practice of the colour which contravened my previous experience with the group.*

## **Gender and Geography**

Neither feminism, nor the study of gender, have a particularly long history in geography, although it has been approached with vigour. Neither is it a stable one. Like social relations, it has already had several incarnations in its short time as an epistemology within the subject. As Rose (1993) argues, the feminist focus began with a focus on equality, before swiftly moving

to imagining what a feminist geography might look like aside from being matched to a (homogenised) masculinity. The Women and Geography Study Group of the IBG (1984) seem to reflect a little of this change in relations, arguing that women cannot simply be *added* to male analyses. However the retention of the Women *and* Geography moniker expresses the difficulty of the process. Indeed, it has long been recognised that an equalising of the relations *between* genders does not mean parity of one in relation to the other, but rather a shift of one (femininity) *to* the other (Laurie et al 1999).

Feminism is multiple things to each person, yet McDowell (1999) identifies two broad functions, both of which geography can help to address; it is at once a political movement, as well as a social theory. Each holds an important position behind the move within the discipline of geography, as the concern with gender seems to have shifted from studying inequalities, to explaining them (Bowlby et al. 1989). At around the time Bowlby et al were writing, distinctions were being reinforced by the literature as well, concerning the differences between sex and gender; gender as the social construction of the differences between biological sexes, described simplistically as male and female (McDowell 1999), which can then be inscribed onto particular places and spaces, making many representations of places ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ (Little 2002). As a result of this simplistic dualism, in which the focus was ‘difference’, gender studies became seen as little more than a synonym for ‘female’ (McDowell 1999). Such a position created problems of its own, as to formulate such a distinction is to imagine masculinity as somehow natural, or real, with femininity as ‘merely’ a social construct in its opposite.

### **Feminist sports studies**

As we saw above, the feminist project in which we are interested here has had multiple phases. Seen as a part of a broader social and cultural movement, sports studies should not be seen as overtly different. In the first incarnation of the relationship between the two in the 1970’s, the maxim adopted was a rather cogent metaphor for dragon boating, “*everyone is equal and everyone is sitting in the same boat*” (Kröner 2005:122 *emphasis in original*, see also Mitchell et al. 2007). As Kröner states, however, the meaning behind this quote was that women, as a collective, were oppressed victims in the world of sport. Whilst effective in fuelling the movement for change, this is a rather simplified version of social relations between a host of alternative causes of disempowerment. Not only are women portrayed as a homogenous collective, but they are seen as a homogenous collective compared with men (Hall 2002).

Gender is not then seen within sport, but as an appendage; sport represented as male, female participation as a subsidiary. Competitive sport itself can be seen as part of a homogenising masculinity (Bryson 1987). With its heavy emphasis on competition and often-violent play, sport seeks to fix and strengthen the differences between men and women; women are encouraged, socially, not to demonstrate anger or aggression (Hercus 1999). Hence, “the feminization of the fitness movement represents, not the liberation of women in sport, but their continued oppression through the sexualisation of physical activity” (Theberge 1987:389). The fitness movement is not an altered experience for women, but merely redressed to fit the requirements of a masculine hegemony. Despite Nancy Theberge writing 25 years ago, recent news stories such as the suggestion that female boxers at the Olympic Games could be forced by the amateur boxing governing body to wear skirts to help spectators distinguish them from their male counterparts (BBC Sport (2012) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/boxing/16608826>, accessed on 25/5/2012), demonstrate that the issue is still highly salient.

“For feminists there is the desire to reclaim, in some revamped form, sporting activities so that the enjoyment, sense of achievement, and physical benefits are maintained but in a manner that does not contribute to the oppression of non-dominant groups” (Bryson 1987:349).

The feminist argument then, might argue not for the dis-abandonment of groups of particular genders with regard to certain sports, but against the objective containment of their subjectivities.

*We started to get formed up to paddle. I watched the team from the hotel be instructed in the basics of paddling by Daniel. I still felt uneasy about their performance. Although I realised that I had earlier expressed my opinions according to outside structures. There was no real difference between us. I watched as a young guy in a vest top, his arms evidence of extensive gym work, messed around with his friends, refusing to wear any pink. In the end, Pink Elvis seemed to convince him to tie a pink ribbon to his life vest. Yet still, pink was not attached to his person; it was still divorced from him. Wear-it-pink seemed to associate with a different kind of pink than paddlers are used to. A national breast cancer charity I spoke to told me that it is often the men who initially decry the fact that pink is obligatory for a certain event, but then arrive bedecked in the tutu, head to toe in pink. Over the top if you will. This is not to say that the connection that Paddlers for Life holds rests only in the shade of the pink. Sophie related to me how when they were discussing a new kit, she advocated a top that was a bright*

*vivid pink. She quickly explained that the more vivid colour was a practical, rather than a purely aesthetic choice. The colour disguised lumps and bumps better than lighter shades. As well as catering for women of all shapes and sizes, the choice was aimed at women who had undergone operations and extensive surgery.*

*At the end of the wear-it-pink event, Abby had agreed to be interviewed. We had been trying to arrange a suitable time for months, each just missing the other, numerous times. This time, we succeeded. We moved from the group, into the coffee shop next door. Immediately, my notion of Abby's appearance changed. Whilst I had become used to it in the context of myriad others, now it seemed bizarre; strange. The women behind the counter giggled as they saw Abby walk in. Abby seemed indifferent, or not to notice their reaction to her. She was embracing this pink.*

What seems particularly interesting here in the case of Paddlers for Life Windermere, is the way in which traditional gender relations do play a formational position in the understanding of the practice itself. It must be stated, that I rarely saw Paddlers for Life practically in the larger context of their existence, as members of the international breast cancer dragon boating community. Rather I was interested in how Paddlers for Life operated within themselves, with the stories I was told creating the interest for me in the international movement. The group's formation comes from an experience where they were affiliated with a competitive able-bodied dragon boating crew. In this positionality, they found themselves ostracised from their own narrative, often utilised to form a part of different, racing narratives in able-bodied events. Cynthia Pelak's (2002) ethnographic example follows Nancy Theberge's (1987) early perceptions in the progression of feminist sport, from one of collective support, towards one of sex equality; moving from feminist value in sport to a gender-equality appreciation of value in sport, which meant adopting a masculinised version (Theberge 1987). Equality has been used as an argument before in the breast cancer movement, as calls were made to increase the level of research into female cancers in the 1970s and 1980's (Kolker 2004). However, 'equality' can never act as a finishing point at which identities will stabilise. In the example presented by Pelak (2002), as the female ice hockey players became more equal with the male players in terms of competition and varsity rating, the cohesion within the group was seen to wane. Instead, subsets emerged between different levels of the community, for example between novices and experienced players, with concurrent antagonisms between the two soon following. Paddlers for Life Windermere act vigorously against this. As Ava told me, it shouldn't matter if you've been once or fifty times, everyone is in the same position. 'Sisterhood' within the boat should not, I think, be conflated with homogeneity.

Women are often stereotyped as caring and communal. Men, on the other hand, are understood collectively as individualistic, competitive beings (Hall 2002 [1987]). As can be seen in Drummond's (2010) autoethnography, the masculinised body (and this is, importantly, qualitatively different from specifying the male body) is something to control, to work as a machine. Interestingly, it was only ever the body of people in the dragon boat that was referred to as a machine by the paddlers; by combining their efforts together, the body of dragon boaters moved as a machine; whilst the masculine body works within itself, it is the body of feminine practice which acts between its individuals. However, this is not to suggest that because a boat is comprised primarily of female bodies, the boat will act according to a particular feminine narrative. "Constructions of identity and subjectivity do not map neatly onto such polarized positions" (Longhurst 2001:646). Even once a team element is introduced, it cannot be assumed that the individualistic masculine narrative will be written out. Certain team sports can be suggested to have particularly distinctive overriding narratives. Pringle (2008) suggests that even within collective sports such as rugby, the individual is still at the heart of success and failure in relation to the group. However, the opposition to one's social identity remains collectivised. Competition in rugby has been suggested as being a particularly masculinised practice, traditional rugby songs mocking women and homosexuals (see Theberge 1987). Paddlers for Life have begun to move towards a deconstruction of masculine team sporting structure in and through practice (see Chapter 6 of this thesis).

*Traditional gender relations sometimes seem self-evident in the group. Women are seen to have increased commitments. There are gender commitments, which women are seen to fulfil, and which go on throughout life. Many are to do with family. Sophie told a story about a woman who was concerned at another group that they wouldn't be able to deal with childcare. Sophie saw the problem. She had seen it in their own group. But she told the woman, that these things always sort themselves out. There is normally someone on the shore to look after small children whose mothers are on the water. During a few of the writing group meetings, Emily's young daughter came along. She contributed to the group, and the way it worked, sometimes mischievous, sometimes sat quietly under the tables in the centre, but always playing a vital role in the writing group. There was a practical element that these gender roles played in the attempt to broaden awareness within the group. When we were talking about attracting attention to the writing group, Sophie suggested that we had to play to what we knew. It was likely that we were going to find more women doing the weekly shop at the local supermarket, and this is where we should look for them.*

*The paddlers I spoke to seemed to accept that pink was an international symbol of breast cancer. They knew about the political arguments for and against, but on the whole seemed to see it as a positive means of drawing awareness to the illness itself, as well as the strategies for dealing with it. That is not to say that pink, or its saturation, was the same everywhere. Sophie in particular seemed taken with how much pink was embedded in the experience of paddlers at Peterborough. Everything was pink, the porta-loos, the water in the fountain. To her, it was undoubtedly different, out of the ordinary. Sophie seemed to take from it not a sense of structured femininity, but of collective identity, togetherness. They were there, as Paddlers for Life, as part of a broader team. To Isla, it was a symbolic notion. She hadn't been to the event in Canada. But to her, the pink of breast cancer seemed to be directed more towards those outside of the experience of the illness. To those inside, who had experienced it, had lived it, it was more a sense of team identity, the collective sense of self. On a local scale, it wasn't needed. Individuals came together as paddlers, as survivors, as supporters. They knew what they had been through, each one. They connected as a crew. But as an international formation, despite all the differences from group to group, they could connect as breast cancer dragon boaters through pink.*

*A few of the women said that they had come back to pink through Paddlers for Life. Ruby and Lily had never seen it as a part of their lives, before cancer. Lily loved it now, she said. It was only her children that were stopping her from painting her house pink. It seemed that it was the association with an embodied pink, of paddling rather than just simply a feminized portrayal that was having this affect. This seemed most pertinent to Chloe. As we spoke, the conversation moved in different ways to how it did with other paddlers, even other survivors. We travelled back to her upbringing in Zimbabwe. She had always had a difficult relationship with the colour pink, she said. Her mother had wanted a boy as an oldest child. Chloe, as she grew, almost felt guilty for her sex. She became a tomboy, rejecting the colour and its associations of femininity. It was only after she started art therapy after her cancer treatment that she became re-associated with the colour. It changed her association, not only with the colour, but with her sense of femininity. She felt that she had been able to come out as a woman, becoming more comfortable with her femininity. It was ironic, she told me, that she had to lose a breast in order become comfortable with femininity. Yet it seemed to me that the loss was only one side of the cancer. At the same time, her practice had changed.*

## **Challenging the masculine portrayal**

Lois Bryson (1987) identifies four ways in which men maintain hegemonic masculinity of sport, although she admits that there are likely to be many more; definition, direct control, ignoring, and trivialization. By utilising these, masculine sport is able to maintain its dialectical opposition in discourse to women in sport. I suggest that there are certain practices which have been created within the body of the group, Paddlers for Life, which are designed to contradict these assumptions; context, female control, awareness and participation. Context is vital, because it sets the scene for competition. Competition is an active part of the Paddlers for Life group (see Chapter 6). However, by contextualising the competitive experience, the experience itself is formulated as between individuals in whom it is the self who is raced against, rather than a disembodied opponent. Women with breast cancer only race against other women with breast cancer. Given the past experience of the founder members of the group in terms of control of the group, creating the role of Chair in the constitution as only being available to a breast cancer survivor allows for decision making to remain with the group, and in particular, with the illness. For them, then, it seems that this insures a sense that the embodied experiences of the members are catered for, rather than controlled from outside of lived experience. Thirdly, the group is involved in raising awareness not just of the group, but of the underlying message; of exercise after cancer. Often this is at the medical and media level. Finally, the participatory element of the group, which is dealt with in detail in Chapter 6 allows for the trivialization of women's sport not just to be challenged, but fundamentally undermined and reworked. Feminist power is not about equality with men, if by that we mean an adoption of male values to sport. Rather feminism can push for a re-definition of power (Theberge 1987), which challenges masculinised portrayals.

## **Pink as feminisation**

Pink is a colour often associated not only with breast cancer, but for the cure for breast cancer. Many breast cancer charities across the world use pink as an identifying medium. To many of the paddlers, pink was indelibly linked with breast cancer. A representative of a breast cancer charity even wondered aloud why a non-breast cancer charity would use the colour, so strong is its association. However, it is in this mass understanding that 'pink' has become a problem for feminists. By this I do not mean to intone that feminists react to its international awareness of breast cancer, but to the way it has homogenised and commercialised 'the problem' (see Sulik 2011). It is in this relationship that the notions of traditional femininity become foisted, it is



argued, upon the female form. Ehrenreich (2001) argued that the culture surrounding breast cancer was infantilizing, and suggestive of aesthetic stereotypes of femininity. In particular, it is the aesthetic sexualisation of the female body, or rather the return to such a sense that is worrying for feminists (see Sulik 2011), as breast cancer is turned from a lived experience into a marketable product by large corporations (King 2004). In this sense, the concern seems to be a return to the breast cancer regimes up to the 1980's in which the cancer experience was objectivised; at once made homogeneous in medical approach and individual in support. Cartwright (1998) reports that from the early 1950's sentiments were adjusted towards looking normal *again*, both in attitude and in relation to physical senses, such as prosthesis and other masking agents of the self. The only acceptable body, it seemed, was the body restored (Cartwright 1998). Through my time with the group, I learnt that many of the women had undergone extensive surgery, including re-constructive surgery. However, these experiences tended to emerge in practice, rather than explicit telling. It is in disruption rather than conformity that the practises of dealing with cancer become clearer, whether the individual is male or female, survivor or supporter.

There are differences between the way that the colour pink is performed in differing situations. At the wear-it-pink day, the guest crew, as well as many of Paddlers for Life seemed to use pink as an appendage, as a statement of masculinised femininity. A man in a pink Elvis costume, and carrying a pink guitar is more, I argue, about the performance of the ego, rather than the collective of feminine values. It is this representation that King (2006) conceptualises as the 'tyranny of cheerfulness' within the breast cancer survivorship movement; surviving is celebrated by happy celebrations of a certain 'pink'. It is telling, I think that the most competitive that I felt in a boat coincided with this particular celebration of pink. As pink is equalised, it is no longer a vision of feminist power and the collective of the group, but is rather bound up within feminist stereotypes of infantilisation and expectancy (Pelak 2002). With this adoption of pink from the outside, Paddlers for Life Windermere became, if momentarily, part of a structure that defines the group as *merely* a part of the larger whole (see Cartwright 1998, Sulik 2011). However, it is vital that with the broadening of recognition for the group, the history of the group's feminist collective action as women, and men, is not written out of history (see Pelak 2002).

*Pink wasn't all porta-loos and fountains, of course. Sophie and Laura told me that it was about unashamedly expressing their womanhood. To them, it was an embodied, rather than a structured theme of themselves. It was practised not only in themselves, but in the group.*

*Artemis Diana was pink. There would always be a pink boat in the group, Laura and Ava said. The link to Artemis seemed to be more than pink, the colour. It seemed to be more about the collective spirit; sisterhood was the term used. As we were about to paddle down the lake for the solstice paddle, the names of the paddlers for each boat were read out. To my surprise, I was in Artemis Diana. The boats, organised by Laura and Ava, were not based on survivorship and supporter identity, but rather about getting down the lake. Still, when she was told that she was not in the pink boat, Emily seemed very upset. She said in a meeting, a few months later that that had been the case; she had felt left out by being separated from the pink boat.*

*Pink can have embedded meaning that develops from, if not transcends the original meanings of a thing. The pink carnations are such an object. They are so deeply associated with the flower ceremony, which most breast cancer dragon boat teams partake in, as to be as much process as product. The ceremony is to celebrate the life of paddlers who have died. One day, whilst sitting together in the writing group, Emily asked the other writers what they thought about pink flowers now. Since they had become associated to her with the flower ceremony, she said she wouldn't think of buying them for the house any more. Sophie agreed. They had taken on a different meaning for these paddlers. They were associated with the ceremony, and with loss. Their meaning had changed, perhaps, but it seemed associated with what they now meant, rather than what they did. This vision stayed with me. I was surprised when I saw pink carnations by the fireplace in Ava's house as I talked to her. Obviously, the flowers didn't have the same association to Ava that they did to Emily and Sophie. The group, it seemed, had different understandings of the flowers, in their own space.*

### **Considering pink**

Before going on, I need to explain why I am about to veer away from the previous academic notions of breast cancer politics and politics in sport. Rather than focusing on grand theories, I want to suggest that we can begin to understand better the nuances of our experiences through the geographies of the colour pink practiced by Paddlers for Life. By unpacking the generalisations involved, we can begin to see pink not as a marker of a particular illness, but the multifarious practices which make up of the experience of breast cancer dragon boating; doing more than undermining any negative experiences of the disease (King 2006). This is not to argue that all markers are negative, whilst all practices are positive. Indeed, the markers are, as I will seek to prove, practices in themselves. However, I consider that by seeing pink not as structure but as practice, we can begin to understand how all perceptions come to be.

In this section, I intend to make two arguments. Firstly, that whilst a colour might seem to be a dominant representation of an idea or ideology, it can only be one of many features to which a group appropriates itself. Secondly, the association with colour is never adopted as fixed, but is always 'in practice'. The main example in the section will concern the group as a whole. However, I will conclude the section by considering the ways other relations in the group are practised, as support, within the practices of *yellow*.

Whilst the previous chapter focused on the community of practice, this section will be more concerned with the practice itself in relation to the place of practice, and the practice of place. In Cresswell's (1996) treatise on 'place', or to be more precise, how 'place' is created and regulated, regulates and creates, Cresswell suggests that place can be seen as becoming dominated by one side over another; one side 'in place', another 'out of place'. These categories will always be in flux, and are often formed around ideological beliefs. "Ideological beliefs are important because they affect what people do. Ideologies are not simply sets of ideas. They are ideas that influence and guide actions. These actions are referred to as "practice." (Cresswell 1996:16). Cresswell goes on to state that the practices that are engendered go on to affect the ideas that then go on to affect us. All ideas then, have a basis in practice. As Anthony Giddens argues, "*social systems are not constituted of roles but of (reproduced) practices*" (Giddens 1979:117 *emphasis in original*). In thinking of pink in such a way, I believe that we can begin to see the difference, rather than simply the similarities between pink paddlers. As Ava said, everyone brings their own differences to the group. The key message is that these differences are not lost. Rather, their existence needs to be celebrated in a way that is not to the detriment of the whole, but rather strengthens it. When I was with Paddlers for Life, for example, whilst pink was worn by many of the survivors, it was not a uniform pink. It was a pink that was gathered by each survivor. Sometimes it came from a team event, when uniforms were created for the identity of the team, sometimes it was a hat which had been spotted in a shop by an individual. The histories changed, the shade changed, the meaning changed. At a distance, out on the lake perhaps, the pink was an ideology. But up close, it was an amalgamation of practices. These practices explain more succinctly than fixity, how changes can occur fluidly between those who are dominant, and those who are dominated. In the examples here, both gender and pink are practised at a particular scale. Ideas might filter in from what seems to be an overriding structure, but in fact these are merely the amalgamated ideas of other groups, which spread throughout the world. These ideas then guide the practice of the group. The performance of the group from week to week demonstrates that the practice

is not a homogeneous practice. To be 'pink', as to be a cancer survivor, is couched within a particular frame of perception. The aim must be, however, not just to perceive the idea, but to embody it.

I would like to draw comparisons, just for a moment, with the work of Ingrid Pollard (2004). Pollard uses her work to seek to question dominant conceptualisations of who is *in place* as opposed to *out of place* in certain landscapes. As a black photographer, the importance of Pollard's work is not just a questioning of structural understandings of space, but that the questioning occurs *in practice*, as she "wandered lonely as a Black face in a sea of white" (Pollard 2004:pp10-11) in the Lake District. Pollard's point, I think, is very similar, if dialectically opposite in experience to mine. Despite the practices that she may undertake which liken her to other hikers in the Lake District, Pollard is still seen as out of place according to the colour of her skin. Her practices are overlooked. For Paddlers for Life, the inability of structural roles in society to define at the micro scale creates the multitude of histories, stories, experiences within the boat as pink, and breast cancer, or more truthfully, as 'breast cancer pink'. As Samantha said, you don't see many dragon boats out on the lake. You also don't see boats comprised largely of women dressed in pink. For that reason, as with Ingrid Pollard's work, pink may be all that you see. The intricacies of each colour, of each woman in that boat is hidden by their out of place-ness in the landscape. If we begin to see place as a collaborative medium of practice, then we may be able to see past the perception of the colour itself. To 'think before you pink', (to cite a phrase of the watchgroup Breast Cancer Action) should not be a call to reject 'pink', but to reflect upon the nuances of its practices.

*The group itself, Paddlers for Life Windermere, was seen as a largely female space, I think. Of course, the majority of members were women, but the demographics were only one part of this. Men seemed not just to accept the feminizing of the space, but to add to it, both in deference to the structure of the group, but also in the way that they approached the group in its day to day organisation. In group meetings they remained, literally, on the outside. Sophie had noticed this as well. Whilst the survivors and female supporters sat around the square of tables that had been arranged in the middle of the hall, men were almost always found to be sat around the outside, on the benches on the wall. William told me that the men generally accepted that there had been problems in past with men taking control of the group. All the men I spoke to suggested that they were there to support their partners, or the will of the group. Sometimes men would take on particular duties as befitted their own experiences. George assumed the role of the person who guided the boat into the water, from the trolley. There was a pragmatic*

*argument to this, which I came to know through informal conversations. As a keen fisherman, and hence the owner of a pair of waders, it made sense that he might take this role. Of course, the fact that he is a fisherman comes with its own gendered base.*

Individuals develop their own practices, in enacting and embodying newly acquired health knowledges that critique and add to those of the medical expert (Parr 2002). As Dyck (2003) suggests, ‘doing’ gender is ‘doing’ health. Such practices as Sophie considers above according to shirt colour constitute a practical, if understated, coping strategy to the hidden geographies of pain and isolation (Parr 2002, Dyck 1995). These hidden geographies are not just the emphasis of society, but are also the practices for many people in myriad physical relations with others as well (Parr 2002); especially those close to you who you wish to avoid affecting (Dyck 1995, Hilton et al. 2009). Pink is not homogenising, but representative of difference. The hidden illness means that the individual must practice themselves in ways that are not always comfortable, or compatible, with other notions of the self (Ettorre 2005); as strategies are created for dealing with the illness, illness can become created as a site of resistance (Parr 2002).

As we focused on above, practices do not merely emit from the individual, but go onto affect the individual in various forms. After Hall (2000), we may suggest that the discourses of medicine have a very real effect on the bodies of women post-diagnosis. By being told not to exercise, or to be careful of their bodies post treatment, the survivor is not only socially constructed as less-able, but is embodied as such as well. Through a lack of exercise, the individual’s body may become less able to partake in exercise that they would have been able to before. The expectation that someone who has difficulty walking should use a wheelchair not only constructs them socially, but in fact affects their body in that the muscles one would use are not used, and they become physically less able to walk (Hall 2000). These practices can also be part of the structure suggested by the medical profession, i.e. a focus on getting someone *looking* normal again, at the expense of their *feeling* normal (Koch et al. 2002). Both of these sentiments also reflect a desire to be reconnected to places that individuals feel their experience has made more difficult to access. However, this is complicated by the fact that, whilst being out of place is largely defined by being ‘in place’ as Cresswell (1996, see also Wilson and Luker 2006) suggests, the experience of being out of place may come first; we do not realise what a place means until we experience what it is not.

The usefulness of this argument, I think, is in the suggestion that the lived experience of the body is not separated from the experience of the mind. In practical terms, this allows us to approach Paddlers for Life not necessarily by gender in its traditional societal formulations, but by the experience that each member has undergone. In a way, these practices, of gender and colour, are made important by being the most visible ones to wider society. However, I feel that they serve to mask and homogenise the invisible practices that cross such perceived divides.

### **The practices of yellow**

*Relations were reorganised for supporters as well. After treatment, Lily's partner Thomas had, in her words, wrapped her in cotton wool after her treatment. He had become protector, and combined with his own experiences of loss in the past, had sought to keep her safe. It was only in the interaction with the group, that Lily was able to demonstrate what she was able to do. For many of the men, their role seemed to have altered from protector, in a medical environment when that was the only role that they could play, to facilitator. Support can, in the moment, subvert traditional gender relations. Partners were both men and women, brought together to become supporters. At times, traditional roles were utilised, in bringing the boats on and off of the water. Many of the women had had treatment and surgery, which limited their ability to put excess strain on their bodies. But it became more complicated than gender roles as many practices became collaborative, through the use not just of strength, but numbers and cooperation. When another group of competitive non-breast cancer paddlers came to the lake, a man in the visiting boat asked Sophie to hold his umbrella. It was drizzling, and she said that that was very gentlemanly of him, to which he replied that he needed to get the boat in, and didn't want to put it down. Sophie then proceeded to explain to the surprised man that she couldn't in fact hold it for him, as she would also be getting the boat in. Rather than avoiding physical tasks, practical steps are taken, so that particular jobs are achievable, within the limitations of each individual as a group; as far as is possible, no individual is left out.*

*In general, men seemed to wear less pink than the women in the group, although Daniel said that he wears pink a lot more now! Perhaps they just didn't think it was for them. Supporters had their own colour; yellow. Both the supporter's boat, Lucy at Low Wood and the life jackets worn by supporters were normally yellow. The male supporters I spoke to seemed to have no real connection with the colour. Laura, one of the founders of the group had explained to me that yellow was chosen because it was a colour already associated with caring and support,*

*with the likes of Marie Curie Cancer Support. To many of the supporters though, it seemed that it was just a colour that wasn't pink. At least, that's what Daniel thought. To Abby, yellow was a fun colour that she always looked out for now, but her association didn't extend much further than that. Only Samantha, as a supporter, seemed to have a real connection with all the colours of Paddlers for Life. Samantha was one of the few members who had found the group purely through an interest in the sport. She didn't live far from the lake, and on hearing about dragon boating on the lake from a friend, had immediately wanted to give it a go. It was in sporting practice then, rather than a synergetic experience of cancer, that she had developed an attitude of support towards the survivors, which was embedded perhaps more deeply than other supporters in the group. She told me, excitedly, about the meanings behind the colours on the logo, and how to individuals outside the group, they didn't mean anything. To members, however, the different colours were embedded in their experience of the landscape and paddlers. Many of the survivors had bought pink paddles. They were a fixture of many international crews, and the group had bought quite a few. Samantha wanted one, but the colour was a concern. She was already thinking about ways to disguise the pink, to represent herself positively as a supporter.*

Whilst the group operates on a relative macro scale with practices of the colour pink, there are smaller subjections of this that need to be identified. Within Chapter 1, we dealt epistemologically with the notion of ethics in research, of which *care* is an important factor. Here however, in the context of Paddlers for Life Windermere, we will explore the practical applications of an ethics of praxis (Grant 2010) on the water. I suggest that rather than reflecting the notion of care inflected by the colour yellow as akin to Marie Curie Cancer Care, supporters within the group have formulated their own practice of 'care'. Academically, the needs of carers are an often neglected; a carer is often derisively taken to mean *just* being a family member (McIlfatrick et al. 2006, Morris and Thomas 2001). In fact, with the reduction of formal care provided by the state in many western countries (Williams 2002, Duncan and Reutter 2006), society is now relying more on the familial networks of caring (Milligan 2000) to support care institutions. Caring should not be confused with care, however, as I shall seek to show here. The argument in this final section of the chapter is twofold. Firstly, that whilst care should cater to both physical and emotional needs (Conradson 2003), I argue that care is a term too fixed within the practical applications of nursing, rather than the emotional aspects of caring to be of practical use. Hence, we should be drawn to an ethics of care (see Conradson 2003, Lawson 2007, Milligan et al. 2007) that allows for practice rather than structural roles to

guide our experience. Secondly, following the process developed through the ethics of praxis developed by Paddlers for Life, ‘supporter’ is a state that is practiced between groups, survivors and supporters, not just directed towards survivors.

The perception within Paddlers for Life is that they are somewhat distinct from other breast cancer paddling groups. The group make practical distinctions *within* the paddling practice between supporters and survivors. The act of paddling itself is not the distinction, as it might be with other groups. This is an important feature, I argue, because it reflects the position that partners and friends play, as supporters, within the illness experience of the individual. Much of the practice of care has previously been found to be within emotional support (Thomas et al. 2002, Toseland et al. 1995), with increased physical responsibilities of the carer being limited for much of the illness experience (Thomas et al. 2002). As a result many carers do not recognise their roles as such (McIlfatrick et al. 2006). A caring ethos may not always be visible, but it is always a result of the interaction between individuals (Morris and Thomas 2001). Unlike the individual who had become ill, there are few normative guidelines for the individual who has been placed in a position of support (Morris and Thomas 2001), or the support that they should give. Al-Janabi et al. (2008) suggest that care is not *bounded* within health concerns, but also infiltrates economic, political and social issues. Hence, it is critical that support must always be thought to be a reciprocal relationship between both parties (Thomas et al. 2002) through which both tacit and explicit interactions between those diagnosed as ill and those who offer support provide opportunities for understanding (Morris and Thomas 2001). This is reflected within the taxonomy given to those who would otherwise be seen as carers within Paddlers for Life. By identifying this group of individuals *without direct experience of cancer diagnosis* as ‘supporters’, a more nuanced space is created to reflect the discursive nature of support within the group (Morris and Thomas 2001). Rather than intoning a passive relationship, in which care is uncritically passed from one party to another, support allows for the actions of survivors to be facilitated by supporters

This is not to suggest that supporters have not been ‘carers’. Many had been carers through treatment. Now, however, they were supporters. This seemed a term to be inclusive to all those in the group who weren’t cancer survivors. Morris and Thomas (2001:89) broach the difficulties of the term often referring solely to close family by defining it as “Someone who shares the experience of cancer with the patient”. Indeed, Toseland et al. (1995) reports that psychological problems can be as serious for carers as for patients, although the former are normatively seen as providing support, rather than needing it (Richardson et al. 2007). Whilst I



argue that support exists for paddlers in the ways in which they care for one another, this should not be seen as *the* care ethics for individual paddlers. Milligan and Power (2010) also suggest, that 'support' is preferred to 'care' to describe an ethics of care through praxis amongst those in the 'disability' movement. However, Milligan and Power (2010) maintain that if it is utilised, support must be seen on a spectrum with care. Each paddler, supporter or survivor, will have their own relationships that extend to and from the home (Duncan and Reutter 2006), which are perhaps very different from those experienced within the social geographies of Paddlers for Life. This thesis cannot comment on such *care* practises, as it purposefully works from the level of the group, and hence, support. Through an understanding of communities of practice, we can see how they are not singular; many can exist within any particular group (Culver and Trudel 2008).

It is my contention that Paddlers for Life Windermere are in the midst of defining an ethics of care through practice that is formed not by structural understandings, but around their particular needs. It would pay as well to not only think about the cultures of alternative medicine, but also the cultures of alternative care (Parr 2003). Paddlers for Life have created geographies through their collaborative autoethnographies that not only question traditional medical power relations, but also differ from other breast cancer dragon boat groups with similar practises. Conveyor belts, an earlier analogy used to express the routine procedures of medical treatment, only produce homogenous results in the cultural understandings of their use. Alternative practices should not be read here as culturally divergent from more traditional (western) practices, but instead may be seen as a feature of the myriad practices of the group.

## **Conclusion**

'Pink' and gender are not homogenising structures, but can be practiced by both men and women in the creation of the individual group. There will at times be an interaction between what can be thought of as traditional and subversive approaches to gender relations. What is key is that these interactions are seen as occurring within the iterative practice of group, rather than as structured roles. They are in the collaborative geographies of dragon boaters. This is not to say that there will not be practices within the group that may be seen as traditionally practised with regards to the literature of femininity. However, I argue that these are not seen as either traditionally masculinised, or subversively feminised, but as a conversation between the two within the context of experiences of the group. By also examining the ways in which 'supporter' is created by 'doing', we can also see how the geographies of a group help to

fashion the relationships that are demonstrated by it. Neither gender, nor pink or yellow are parachuted into Paddlers for Life as existing understandings, but are worked through the practice of being a breast cancer dragon boating team in Windermere, from around the North of England. These are particularly vital, I argue in understanding the positionalities that are not only imbued in research, but also in the lived experience of groups of individuals brought together through the experience of cancer.

## Chapter 6: Imaginative geographies of the dragon boat

Cancer is a battle. Survivors go on a journey. Paddlers can defeat the dragon. Metaphor is endemic to the experience of cancer (Penson et al. 2004, Hodgkin 1985). I will here explore the ways in which imaginative geographies can be developed to better allow us to be imaginative in the present and future. Imagination here is appropriated not as a feature of organised structural power through metaphor and analogy, but through an embodied and grounded approach to the relationships that surround us. Through examining the ways in which the imaginative geographies of the dragon boat and its crew are appropriated differently through animacy and *communitas*, it will be argued that the imaginative geographies of individual groups play a key role in the ways that social movements develop and are not merely subjugated to structures from above. To do this, we must in part re-imagine our imaginative geographies in order that they rely on relationships in the present, rather than experiences of the past.

Throughout this chapter, it is important to keep in mind the I-Thou thesis suggested by the Israeli philosopher Martin Buber (1970). Buber posits that there are two ways in which we experience the world, both of which fashion us as ‘I’. The first is I-It, in which we experience objects and use them to make sense of the world. The second is I-Thou (a rather bizarre translation of “Ich-Du” which has nonetheless stuck – Kauffman (1970) suggests I-You as more appropriate, and I accept that), in which the I and the You form in relationship with one another; the It is not used by I, but I and You stand in relation to one another.

This chapter will suggest that this relation *with* the world as it is experienced, rather than with objects. The I-thou is not only key to the animacy of the dragon boat, but also helps to set up the *communitas* in which the group comes to define its participatory element. Whilst it remains an element in the experience of paddlers, metaphor is a feature of itself. Through their *communitas*, Paddlers for Life create for themselves a different space, of animacy and participation.

### Imagining metaphorical dragons

“Dragon boating is an analogy for slaying the dragon, and as such, produces great passion on survivor teams for the sport. Every race is a ritual battle with the dragon. As we live with the dragon, a subtle change takes place and the aggressive Western dragon is replaced by the

benevolent Eastern dragon that carries us on his back through the waters.” (See Nielsen, page 8, IBPC newsletter (2012) <http://www.ibwilliamc.com/documents/March%20final%20newsletter%20IBWILLIAMC.pdf>, accessed 13/4/2012)

The above is a quote by Eleanor Nielsen, a key figure in the breast cancer dragon boating community, in the newsletter of the International Breast Cancer Paddlers Commission (IBCPC). Paddlers for Life are a member of this commission, and have a representative on the board. The quote is a demonstration of the ways in which metaphors can be set up to become an all-encompassing imaginative geography (see Tocher 2002). Nielsen creates the dragon as a thing to be conquered and then made tame and benevolent by the individual paddler, through the use of stereotyped versions of mythological dragons of the ‘East’ and ‘West’. Within this first section, I wish to suggest that differences occur at the level of the individual collective, rather than at the level of the organisational group. In this contention, I argue for a distinction between the use of metaphor and analogy as associated to past experience, and animacy as indicative of the present and future, in the formulation of imaginative geographies of dragon/boating. Both have their place, but must always be seen in practice.

Both metaphor, the act of transferring literal meaning and animacy, bringing to life, are bound up within the constitution of imaginative geographies. Animacy will be dealt with in more detail later, but the specificities of the problem with metaphor in the context of imaginative geographies is important to dwell on here. Many writers, within and outside of academia have focused on the metaphor of cancer. One of the primary, and most important, texts is *Illness as Metaphor*, by the cultural theorist and cancer survivor Susan Sontag (1991). To Sontag, metaphors negatively shape the experience of cancer survivors. The (often negative) past experiences of other individuals who have undergone treatment for cancer are used to describe the experience even prior to the actuality of events for the individual. Even if there is some truth in the argument that metaphors such as war and battle emerged only from lived experience of the disease (Clow 2001), there can be little contention that generalizing metaphor and analogy are born from past experiences of cancer divorced from the present embodied participant. Some people will have directly experienced war and cancer; the similarities for them may be stark. Many cancer survivors, however, will have little or no direct link to war. Nor should we want to. “Fighting wars is usually an unpleasant, boring and masculine activity” (Hodgkin 1985:1820). Yet fighting and competitive sport have become incredibly strong metaphors during cancer treatment (Penson et al. 2004). Their use has grown and become popularised. The same can be said to be true of dragon metaphors within breast cancer dragon

boating narratives. Because of the necessity of metaphor to be literally divorced from its original inscription, any imaginative geography that uses metaphor as descriptors of experience will always be in the past, and divorced from the individual. The battle with the dragon presented above is a cogent metaphor, but only to those who have so experienced it. “[A]bstract representations are meaningless unless they can be made specific to the situation at hand” (Lave and Wenger 1991:33). Paddlers for Life become involved in creating their own meanings. The situation is not the cancer itself, but the full environment in which it is experienced.

*Laura didn't recognise the metaphor of defeating the dragon. That wasn't the way that she had experienced her treatment. She hadn't known about dragon boating then. But it hadn't played a role in her experience afterwards either. Instead, Laura's metaphor would see her getting on the bus. One of those open top sightseeing ones you get in London. Or in any big city, in fact. She would ride on the top deck, seeing the sights. Some days it would be fantastic, the sun was shining, she saw fantastic things from up there on the top deck. But there were also bad times, being exposed to the weather, the harshness of the environment. At certain times, she knew that she had to get off the bus. She had a ticket, which told her when she had to get off. And go for treatment. This remained preferable to fighting to Laura. Because for those who did die, did this mean they hadn't fought hard enough? Laura didn't want to think like that.*

The open-top sightseeing bus was the analogy that Laura used during her treatment. Metaphors and analogies are a context of the condition of their use, contexts which alter according to multiple specificities. As Kearns (1997:271) defines it, a metaphor is “the application of a word or idea to something which is imaginatively but not literally applicable”. This ‘application’ acts so that not only is ‘the word or idea’ *applied* to the ‘something’, but for the duration of the metaphor the thing *becomes* the idea or word, and vice versa (Punter 2007). The dragon, which has been developed through Paddlers for Life is not (usually) defined as cancer, but is instead related to the specificities of the boats as they are experienced. The metaphor itself is not the concern, but the way it is envisioned. “Problems arise not because these ways of thinking are not valid – at times all these metaphors are useful – but because their pervasiveness excludes other equally true ways of seeing health and illness” (Hodgkin 1985:1821). Dragon boating reflects the same metaphors that can be experienced within medical practice. Some metaphors will be utilised in a contextual fashion but, finding traction, their use is extended past their direct experience. Paddlers for Life, perhaps unconsciously, have begun developing such a notion for use *with* the medical community. “What you hope is that you find metaphors that

work for you and work for your patient. If there is a metaphor that actually comes to us from our patients, obviously those are the ones that are going to fit best.” (Penson et al. 2004:709). ‘Patients’ must imagine and explore the best way to represent their experiences. Paul Ricoeur (1978) suggests that metaphor is predicative, a declaration, rather than denominative, giving a name to something. Hence, Ricoeur argues, imagination and feeling are key to the individual who creates a new interpretation through their experience, rather than consign experience upon the “usual lexical values of our words” (Ricoeur 1978:146).

### **Imaginative geographies**

The term ‘imaginative geography’ did not begin life within the academic subject of geography at all, but as a conceptual argument within the theory of orientalism pronounced by the literary theorist Edward Said (1978). In his contention, an imaginative geography is a feature of the way in which perceptions become imprinted on ‘others’, both people and places. As with medical metaphors, pulling generalisation past their direct experience creates situations that are imagined *onto* present experience. Since then, the term has been variously tackled by human geographers who have modified it so as to remove the distinction between the real and the imagined that pervaded the original thesis (Massey 2005; Gregory 1995). In recent times, then, the concept has largely remained focused on the (reactions to the) imagination of power, often within the realms of (historical) travel writing (Gregory 1995; Tavares and Brosseau 2006; Brace 2003), consumption (May 1996), nationhood (Anderson 1991) and international conflict (Said 1978). These are all vital works in understanding imagination as a part of everyday life. However, it is my contention that without ignoring the importance of cultural representations, imaginative geographies that deal with everyday representations of selves and materials, rather than the other, can emerge. The imagined and real come together to create the practice with which Paddlers for Life identify themselves, to themselves, and to the outside world. The view suggested by Nielsen above, in analogy and metaphor, suggests dragons with vastly different characters, attributed not to their own beings, but to their supposed origins in the popularly theorised landscapes of the ‘other’ (Said 1978), rather than in our embodied understanding.

So what does all this mean for the imaginative geographies of dragon/boating? Firstly, that there is no geography, but always multiple geographies. Imaginative geographies are context driven, and the grouping of multiple individuals with multiple identities must always suggest that the group will be approached in different ways; there is unlikely ever to be an overriding consensus. To homogenise the subject of geography through singularity is to speak from the

position of power (Ingold 1994) that we attempt to degrade. This is not to say that the mysticism that surrounds the origins of dragon boating are not important to members of Paddlers for Life (see Mitchell et al. 2007). Rather, I argue that the ‘animatic bent’ of Paddlers for Life disrupts any homogenised understandings of metaphor or imaginative geographies, by considering dragons not as a representation of East or West, or of cancer to be defeated, but as a being attributable only to the experiences of individuals. Our imagination is not performed as a “residue of perception” (Ricoeur 1978:155), re-informing the past, but rather it is a catalyst to form relations in our present (Buber 1970). Meaning in imagination is not re-imbued from the past, but is recreated in our very present.

### **Animacy: imagining dragon boats**

Of course, encouraging the imagination may be one thing, but imagining objects as living may be quite another. The small child may form relation “in contact with a shaggy toy bear and eventually apprehend lovingly and unforgettable a complete body: in both cases not experience of an object but coming to grips with a living, active being that confronts us, if only in our “imagination”” (Buber 1970:78). If we are confronted by the objects themselves, Buber argues, then they are no longer objects. Objects cannot confront, but may only be confronted. Instead, I-You is relational; Imagination is constructive. This imagination “is the drive to turn everything into a You, the drive to pan-relation – and where it does not find a living, active being that confronts it but only an image or symbol of that, it supplies the living activity from its own fullness” (Buber 1970:78). With imagination, we not only question, but are in turn questioned by *things* we previously objectified. Both are animated. For Buber then, objects can become animated through relations.

*Two dragons reside upon Lake Windermere, in the North West of England. Artemis Diana, and Lucy at Low Wood. As boats, each is identical. Forty feet long, accommodating 20 paddlers, plus a drummer and helm. Each is made of carbon, with wooden gunnels and seats. One is pink, and one is yellow. As such, they are boats. As dragon boats, with their heads and tails attached, each becomes a living entity. Neither is ever taken out by the paddlers without the head and tail. It is important to the group that the dragon is ‘dressed’. They become tactile creatures, with their own personalities, “much more than just a boat”. On the lake, they stand out. As Samantha said, you may see a canoe or a kayak on Windermere, but it’s rare to see a dragon. Tourists watch them, interact with them. They wave, and as a paddler roars in jest with a dragon’s voice from the middle of the boat, they laugh and continue past, to another*

*landscape. On the front of the boat, I see Artemis Diana playing with the water lapping around her neck, droplets showering the gunnels and the wind whipping through her silver and blue hair. Far from the dragon of old, I think.*

*There was a discussion once, by the lake as part of the writing meetings. The women were discussing whether the dragon was positive or negative. Ruby had already presented her vision of the dragon, linked to the cancer experience. But whilst they could understand that representation, for most of the other members of the group, the dragon was positive. In fact, the dragons were their own, Artemis and Lucy, and their representation was figurative and literal; keeping the paddlers safe, kind and benevolent creatures. There was always an element of the paddlers together within their imagining of the boats though. An understanding that without these boats and their function, none of them would be here, doing this. They had the dragons to thank for that. “Because they’re fabulous, you know?” Abby said to me during an interview. “They’re an inanimate thing, but they’re not. They’re animate.”*

With this statement, Abby relays the imaginative reality of the animatic dragon. Whilst accepting that they are scientifically inanimate, she none-the-less presents them from her experience as animate, a figure of correspondence with the human condition. In fact, Tim Ingold suggests that animacy can only be experienced in relation with the present. “Animacy then, is not a property of persons imaginatively projected onto the things with which they perceive themselves to be surrounded.... The animacy of the lifeworld, in short, is not the result of an infusion of spirit into substance, or of agency into materiality, but is rather ontologically prior to their differentiation.” (Ingold 2011:68). It is vital that it is understood, after Ingold, that it is not the boats that are enlivened, but the dragon boats of Paddlers for Life.

It is vital for the concept of animacy that the interaction cannot be between individual and object, as there needs to be a two-way interaction of affect. Whilst the boat is not (any longer) a living thing, animacy is not infused onto the wood, plastic, carbon, glue, screws, rope, paint, and many other facets. Rather the dragon boat, as the *assemblage* of wood, plastic, carbon, glue, screws, rope, paint, *and paddlers*, may affect and be experienced as living by individual members. Those are the potentials of the materials. As Ingold has encountered, there is a danger of simplification in any discussion linked to animacy. The dragon boats of Paddlers for Life make places real, as much as the entwinings of humans do. However, I do not seek to argue that all members of Paddlers for Life believe that either boat is a living being, in the same way that you or I, or a non-human animal, or even perhaps a plant are living. Instead, I



would suggest that the *dragon boats* are actively and imaginatively animated through their interaction with members of Paddlers for Life. The use of the *verb* ‘to animate’ here is important. In the interrelation between dragon boat and paddlers, the dragon boat becomes more than a vehicle, or a means of transport, just as the paddlers become more than a sports team. This animation is not permanent, but occurs mainly at the moment of connection; inferring that the empty boat, or the dragon boat devoid of head or tail or paddlers, is viewed in a very different context to Paddlers.

*When I ask Isla about her experience of dragons, she says straight away that she finds this difficult to explain to people. It goes back to the first time that she went down to Windermere from her home in Edinburgh, to meet Laura. Laura’s daughter Nicole was there. The boats and the heads and tails are separate, the latter two kept safely in a storage shed, away from the brutalities of the local weather. Nicole took Artemis Diana’s head out of the storage shed, and brought it over to show her. Isla was taken by the way that she was holding it so tenderly. It moved her inside, she said, and straight away she had this feeling that this is much more than just a boat. By bringing the head and the boat into the same vicinity, the perception of the dragon boat had changed, for Isla. More than just a boat. This feeling had remained her experience of paddling the boats. There was a difference to Isla, between paddling with the heads and tails attached and unattached. She had paddled at Durham, with a non-breast cancer team who didn’t attach the heads and tails before they paddled. To her, that didn’t feel quite the same.*

*Ruby didn’t feel quite the same as other members of the group that I spoke to about dragons. She had only recently joined, earlier that year. Since she had joined, she had seen the dragon as something to be conquered, controlled, as a metaphor for the cancer. But she intoned herself that her experience was perhaps a little different to other members. Her experience of cancer was different to others in the boat, she seemed to think. She wasn’t a breast cancer survivor. Her cancer wasn’t curable. For her, she thought, it wasn’t just about living with the treatment and everything that went with that. It was also about living with the idea that her cancer, she has been told by doctors, is probably going to come back. Whilst others in the boat might pass the temporal point where they are deemed cured by their doctors, Ruby has no such reference. She must control the dragon for as long as she can. Her dragon, linked to the English myths of old, and dragons denoting unwelcoming lands, reflected her own experience.*

After speaking of assemblage, it is important to say something about the ways we experience materials. Whilst the dragon boat is an assemblage of things, so are many other things, which I haven't focused on here. They do not assume the same stature of the dragon boats within the group, although their importance may be no less. Buoyancy aids, radios and cars, for example, are all things that are critical to Paddlers for Life. The importance of dragon boats, however, is theorised well in a refocusing from matter as object, to the properties of materials (Ingold 2007a). The difference between this, and materiality, is well developed in a discussion of papers between Ingold and a group of archaeologists and anthropologists in *Archaeological Dialogues*. In his propositional paper, Ingold (2007a) asks whether we could learn more about the material composition of the inhabited world by (and I choose the most salient example) rowing a boat, rather than producing abstract analyses of things already made. Materials are, and have, potentials that are overcome by their formation into objects. Of course, there are rebuttals to Ingold's thesis. The people are missing (Knappett 2007), and there is little focus on why certain things become important to people (Tilley 2007). Of course, people are there; people are intrinsic, rowing the boat, chopping the log. But they are there as complex relations with other materials in the boat and the environment around them. And it is the de-objectification that is key to animacy. Because for something to be animatised, it must still possess its potentials. If materials are already fixed *in* objects, then they cannot be practiced, and hence cannot be animate. "To describe the properties of materials is to tell the stories of what happens to them as they flow, mix and mutate" (Ingold 2007a:14). Paddlers and dragon boats are never singular, but are 'complex bundles' continually constituted by their interactions with their environments (Ingold 2007b). It is here that we should return to the dragon metaphor that we saw above related by Eleanor Nielsen. Dragons are not slayed by Paddlers for Life, and as such cannot be a part of the experience of Paddlers for Life because to do so would be to imbue spirit onto the experience of Paddlers for Life – including their boats as objects. Metaphors and analogies come from elsewhere, and are only *applied* to things outside of their initial situations. But the Paddlers for Life dragon boats are not objects – they are materials with potentials, which emerge from the involvement of the dragon boats in their total surroundings (Ingold 2007a).

All this is crucial to our understandings of the (imaginative) geographies of Paddlers for Life. Imagination is personal, something that can only be experienced, not seen. What Isla saw, and which then affected her experience with the dragon boats, was feeling between Nicole and Artemis Diana. I don't think that Ingold's instruction that animation must be prior to

differentiation should be seen as the only possible interpretation of Paddlers for Life's relationship with its dragon boats. Feeling, like imagination, is constructive rather than denominative (Ricoeur 1978). It is a function that helps us to deconstruct the boundaries that are created between humans and objects, to animate the material properties of each. It allows us to affect the geography between us. "To *feel*... is to make *ours* what has been put at a distance by thought in its objectifying phase" (Ricoeur 1978:156). Not only is the object questioned, but feeling for something is made part of the process of thought. It is in feeling, too, that the metaphor of the dragon, of the cancer experience is fundamentally challenged by Paddlers for Life in their collective experience. "Feelings dwell in man, but man dwells in his love. This is no metaphor but actuality: love does not cling to an I, as if the You were merely its "content" or object; it is between I and You" (Buber 1970:66). Things mean things to people, to address Tilley's (2007) complaint, because both are laid bare with one another. As with the example of the shaggy toy bear earlier, there develops within the imagination a sense of feeling between paddlers and their dragon boats, which is always outside of any borders, and always within the properties of their materials.

However, it is vital to note that arguing for an understanding of animacy within a team does not amount to the argument that the collective as a whole must view the boats in the same way (see Penson et al. 2004). Indeed, to many members of Paddlers for Life, the dragon boat is a vehicle, or a metaphor, albeit one that plays a very real and important role in the continued running of the group. It is vital, without holding imaginative meaning, as they see it. For some paddlers, the boats were a part of the metaphor of the journey that was being undertaken with cancer; for others that very metaphor was rejected. Whilst the potential of animacy is accepted throughout the group, it is not always acknowledged by individual paddlers, even to those for whom their animation is strong. Momentary actions can immediately alter the relationship; the dragon boats can once more become objectivised.

*We are stood by the edge of the lake again. It's a little cloudy, a little cold. Sophie is telling me about their trip down to Brockhole the week before, where they took guests out on the boats, to give them a small understanding of what dragon boating on Windermere was all about. The narrative changed, however, from the normal one. There had been an accident. Three paddlers, including Sophie, had remained with Artemis at the jetty. It was a windy day, and the waves were up. It was best that someone was there. Unlike at Low Wood, however, there were no slats under the jetty at Brockhole, allowing the wind to sweep straight through. A gust blew Artemis away from the jetty, knocking one person into the water, and leaving Sophie stranded*

*between boat and jetty. Suddenly, the boat was no longer a benevolent aid, but a danger, interaction with the environment. An inanimate object that could hurt people. Sophie was left heavily bruised and concerned with how the boat needed to be controlled.*

For Sophie, the boat became no longer animate, or a place of security, but over two hundred kilograms of *thing* which could do damage to any who were unfortunate enough to be hit by it. The animatic is not a constant. It is a feature of some times in some spaces with some things (see Ingold 2011). As we see above, any change in the relationship between paddler and their environment risks altering the geographic relationship with that environment. In times of danger, the properties of materials (Ingold 2007b) will seem very solid indeed. These differences will alter and become exacerbated at different scales of the breast cancer dragon boating movement. The animatic relationship cannot remain a constant between paddlers and environment at the level of the boat, the group, the nation, and the international organization. Discrepancies may, and do, come to pass *within* Paddlers for Life. With an expanding network of paddling teams all over the country, there will be an interesting divide between local interpretations and the infrastructure of the board of the main group. What is vital to retain, I feel, is an attitude that provides a fertile ground for the imagination; the potential for dragons to come alive.

*Every Sunday, the same ritual takes place. The boats are taken from their resting place at the end of the car park, and manhandled onto the trolley. It's a big job. Many hands are needed, not just to move the boat, but to keep it in place once it has been loaded. It sits, on the trolley, ready to go. But first, there is something to do. It is almost ceremonial. As the boat is held in place, the head and the tail are added. It might take a couple of people at each end to lift the head or tail, to keep it in place whilst the hinge is fixed in place with the bolt. But it is almost always done there, before the boat is taken to the water, before it rounds the corner of the secluded area, to the slipway where it may be seen from the road, the hotel. The dragon is being prepared for the water, Sophie told us once. By adding the heads and tails, the boat is given another feature. To many, the dragon boat assumes meaning with the addition; they become an embodiment of safety, security. For some, like Joshua and Thomas, it is an interesting story, to add to the attraction of the practice. But to others, a deeper sense is created. A spirituality is created through the tactility of the dragons. The spirit of the dragons may come from within the team, but they also add to the spirit of the team.*

The differences in understanding are as important as the understandings themselves. The dragonboat is performed in numerous ways and for multiple reasons. Pragmatically, it is understood that it is a tool to promote the group. It is something different, especially on Lake Windermere. As Samantha told me, and as I observed, the boats are a big hit with the tourists and day-trippers who are so much a feature of the landscape of Windermere. But the animation of the dragon boats seems more than a show of difference, an ‘other’ in the landscape. It is ritualized within the traditions and actions of the group. The animacy is not in the dressing of the boats. Rather, this is merely the depiction of the relationships between paddlers, dragon boats, and landscape. These relationships are not, and cannot be solely within the individual. Rather, they are always in the particular spirit of the group; in *communitas*.



Figure 6: dressed dragon boat and paddlers ready

### **Communitas: on collaborative participation**

Although it is important not to separate the dragon boating from the breast cancer, it is necessary to explore sporting activity as an element of Paddlers for Life. Sports teams, are “a collective of two or more individuals who possess a common identity, have consensus on a shared purpose, share a common fate, exhibit structured patterns of interaction and communication, *hold common perceptions about group structure*, are personally and instrumentally interdependent, reciprocate interpersonal attraction, and consider themselves to be a group” (Carron and Brawley 2008:214-215 my emphasis). As we may see from the quote above, sports teams may not be defined solely by their competitive natures. Indeed, it is by their collective purposes, including the ‘common perceptions about group structure’, that we can begin to explore the moment of the group. As we have seen in Chapter 4, the concept of the community of practice might be seen to be of particular interest within this model. However, this section will focus primarily not on the practice of dragon boating, nor on the process of formulation itself. Rather, we are interested in the moment in which egalitarianism prevails (Kemp 1998), in a moment of magic; in ‘communitas’.

Communitas is the concept of community, which has been largely influenced by the work of the anthropologist Victor Turner (1969, 1974). Put simply, Turner imagines communitas as ‘anti-structure’; “the bonds of communitas are anti-structural in that they are undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct, nonrational (though not *irrational*), I-Thou or Essential We relationships, in Martin Buber’s sense” (Turner 1974:47). We interact with one another not as objects to be encountered, but as formulations of ourselves. Communitas occurs *through* the collaboration of individuals, and the experiences that they communally bring to the group. “Communitas is spontaneous, immediate, concrete – it is not shaped by norms, it is not institutionalized, it is not abstract” (Turner 1974:274). This phrase is important to the notion of communitas, and to liminality, a key component which will be dealt with in the next section. The very essence of I-Thou and communitas is immediacy and spontaneity (Turner 1974). Yet this must usually stem from a position in which a collective has the potential to form. Paddlers for Life presents, I argue, the context in which communitas can occur; providing fertile collective ground for understanding present and the future (cf. Kemp 1999), rather than as a nostalgia for the experiences of the past (cf. Wallace 2006). Communitas cannot be planned, and cannot be sustained within distinct borders (Lyons and Dionigi 2007). It occurs, magically, within a group through their practices.

What I seek to show here, is that, as suggested in the previous chapter, female sporting experience need not be defined by male sporting competition, but by something formed within the moment of feminist collaboration. However, this cannot merely be achieved through the mere collective presence of women; there must be process, which is not just in the paddlers, but in the collaboration of paddlers, their boats, and their environments. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore how competition has become redefined through the ‘body’ of Paddlers for Life, so that competition is not reduced, but is in fact redefined and removed from *within* the boat itself, in participation.

Participation is the practise of Paddlers for Life, but it is also their ethos. They are a participatory group, allowing everyone to paddle together as a team and where the goal and practice of winning is in antithesis to what they do. Winning, but not competition. Competition and winning are not interchangeable terms. The clarification of this position has been a key part in the relationship between feminism and sport, dealt with in more detail in Chapter 5. Indeed, as Birrell and Slatton (1981:4 cited in Theberge 1987) dispute, the feminist goal should not be about ignoring or replacing competition, but to take it back to its original definition, rather than the masculinised version many sports adopt today, focusing on “aggression, power and dominance”. Instead, Birrell and Slatton state that in its original formation, competition was defined as “to contest emulously”. If we take a modern dictionary definition, we see it defined as: “the striving of two or more for the same object” (**Competition:** Oxford English Dictionary accessed on 3/10/2012 [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)). ‘To win’ is not a part of the theoretical definition of competition. This is a particularly useful definition, because not only does it demonstrate that there is another way of *doing* competition in sport, but that this competition can only be a collective practice, whether the ‘another’ is a teammate or a forty foot long boat.

*Paddling was relaxing, many paddlers thought. It wasn't about being told off for mistakes, or for your particular paddling style (although Samantha did admit that she was always being told off for calling it an oar, and not a paddle!). The lake had a lot to do with the experience. It wasn't just ploughing up and down, there was so much to see as well! For some, the experience was tempered by where you sat in the boat. Evie thought that sometimes she liked to sit in the middle, because there was less responsibility there. To be relaxed wasn't the same as being casual, though. Many of the paddlers said that loved learning technique. Sometimes the whole crew would go to Durham, to get technique training from another group. But that was for each individual paddler, rather than a need of the collective. Goals were important, but not goals with end points.*

There is no denying that most breast cancer dragon boating crews will have important similarities. Most are breast cancer survivors, they are dragon boaters, they are largely female. In these aspects, Paddlers for Life largely correspond. However, it is the differences, rather than similarities of the structural whole that are of real interest to us here. For unlike many other breast cancer dragon boating crews, competition is not to the fore of the paddling experience of Paddlers for Life (cf. Unruh and Elvin 2004; Mitchell and Nielsen 2002). Or rather, its competition needs to be more intimately explored than occurs in these papers. Paddlers for Life are (self-)conceived as a participatory model of breast cancer dragon boating. This is not due to a lack of competitiveness, but through the contextual experiences of Paddlers for Life. The understanding here is that whilst they do race, they are not designed as a racing crew. There is no selection policy, no obligation to commit to train, no diet plans and no weigh-ins. Whether they win or lose, it does not matter. They have already won, just by being there (see also Mackenzie 1998). This theory of participation cannot be divorced from the performance of the dragon boat. They are one of the few crews who always paddle with the head and the tail attached to the dragon boat. This does not go unnoticed. On a visit to the group, which coincided with a visit to her sister in England, a board member of the IBCPC remarked in surprise that they only attach the heads and tails to their boats whilst racing. For Paddlers for Life, however, it is a statement of the performative nature of the group; the mark which they leave now and in the future within the landscape. This is the result of their practice.

*William seemed certain about his role in the group. He had not only been a member from the inception of the group, in Windermere, but he had heard enough to convince him that participation was the way to go. And that the role of men had been one of the factors behind the difficulties that had been experienced in Liverpool. With a man as the coach of the team, the competitive decisions that had been made to improve the racing capacity of the team had been gendered. Female members had thought it had been taken over by men, he thought. As a result, the role of chairperson within the group could only go to a woman with breast cancer. He won't be able to vote on the constitution of the group, as a supporter, either. I wondered how William felt about that? It wasn't a problem, he said. He knew why he was there. And he knew that it was the past experience of the group, before he was a member that meant that his role was pre-defined. On a different day, at a different time, Jessica told us a similar story. The male coach had been too competitive, she said, as the water lapped gently at the edge of the lake. Racing caused friction, was too insular. In the end, competition became about the*



*individual, rather than the collective. They had lost so many ladies at Liverpool, she thought, because it was too competitive.*

Visible as members of society, yet within parameters which render their embodied selves as invisible within their participation in that same society. Turner (1974) further describes such individuals as marginal; being simultaneously linked to two or more distinct groups. As members of the *communitas*, individuals are visible as cancer survivors often only within a close circle of collective experience, who by wish or necessity are required by their illness and society's perception of it, to be Janus-faced (Kemp 1999), at least one of their faces turned towards the structural infrastructure of the medical community. "What is interesting about such marginals is that they often look to their group of origin, the so-called inferior group, for *communitas*, and to the more prestigious group in which they mainly live and in which they aspire to higher status as their structural reference group." (Turner 1974:233). The danger for marginals, Turner continues, is that they may find themselves culturally betwixt the two groups, belonging fully to neither one, nor the other. It must be considered that this is a measured choice by some survivors. In the case of breast cancer survivors, as a collective, the transcendental goal will always be preferable as, in part, those goals set for survivors according to structured society may no longer so clearly distinguished as before.

This participation through practice is indicative of the thoughts of the anthropologist Victor W. Turner, on the existence of '*communitas*'. Spontaneous *communitas*, the initial experience of the collective *communitas* is most often a pleasurable experience. "Spontaneous *communitas* has something "magical" about it. Subjectively there is in it the feeling of endless power" (Turner 1969:139). As we saw with Foucault's rationalisation of power in Chapter 4, true power is not inflicted upon, but is practised between individuals with the potential of response. For Turner (1974), *communitas* is an example of anti-structure, of the ways in which individuals come together at temporal moments to counteract the structuralisation of society; to question the ways society becomes organised upon hierarchical action *upon*. Whilst the use of this preposition in anti-structure could be seen as linguistically negative, for Turner the *communitas* process is "only negative in its connotations when seen from the vantage point or perspective of "structure."" (Turner 1974:50). In fact, it is unwise to perceive *communitas* 'in opposition' to the structures of society (cf. Kemp 1998), as to do so re-formulates structure as a feature of the *communitas*, whereas in the embodiment of the practice, rather than the theoretical foundations of it, structure should remain unconsidered. *Communitas* becomes a transient state of being; individuals bonded by the spontaneous, immediate and concrete. This

is best demonstrated in the experience of structurally defined notions of being such as time (Lefebvre 2004). Within the *temporal* moment, time within *communitas* is not ignored, but is imagined from the position of the collective of individuals, rather than the interests of the organizations of everyday life (Wallace 2006).

*Competition was accepted within the group, but only ever in context. You could race the supporters boat. You could even race other breast cancer crews. The result didn't matter, but you could do it. Laura was one of the few paddlers in the crew who had participated in two dragon boating festivals, Singapore in 2007 and Peterborough, Canada in 2010. She was part of another crew for the former event. She had two sets of medals, including a silver and a couple of bronzes from Singapore. They competed, and did very well. There's no such thing from Canada, of course. Everyone who attended got a medal. It was commemoration, not competition. There is no weighing, no trialling in the boat that was seen in some other teams. Laura says that she is almost sorry that she got that silver now. She was proud of it then, but she didn't know any different. It was only after that she felt it, when she saw women in the same situation as her, leaving with nothing. That experience has played a huge role in the development of Paddlers for Life now. In the team, the goal is to act together, not within power. It pervades the group, not just the racing. Hence, training can be a relaxing experience, depending on what you wish to take from it. That's not to say that there isn't goal setting. In fact it's important that there are goals. But these are goals without borders. Laura explained it to me once. It was the difference between Paddlers for Life as a sporting charity, and charities that did sports for fundraising. In the latter, the goal is to finish the event, to hand over the money. Thomas told me that breast cancer dragon boating was often mistaken for corporate paddling, team building. Again, the goal in these events is complete. For Paddlers for Life, there is no finishing line. Together, they carry on with continuous goals. As Daniel said, the mistake was made when winning the race was more important than those involved in the race.*

As obvious as it may seem, the collective must come first if *communitas* is to occur; the individual must be sacrificed to the group (Arnould and Price 1993). This can occur in various ways, through actions, or semantic aesthetic similarities (Kemp 1999). Structure is stripped from the experience of paddling. The boat is dedicated to a collective effort, which cannot be reduced to any one feature. Within the boat, differences are made unclear. Technique may be different, but a paddler will always be part of a crew, rather than an individual.

Key to the essence of *communitas* is the sense of equalization. Whilst I believe that Turner (1974) is right to suggest that in the moment of *communitas*, there is no structure, and the moment is outside structure, the group in preparation may have come from a point of marginalisation, a point which Turner accepts. Being marginal works for Paddlers for Life at different levels at different times, usually within the context of the boat. Whereas *communitas* around participation is experienced within the boat from the marginalising experience of competition, we can also reflect back on the experience of paddlers expressed in Chapter 4, of participating in Canada with other breast cancer survivors. In the sense of Canada, the *communitas* is formed through outsiderhood, prescribed by society at the diagnosis of their illness. This is a much larger, and more visible group of marginals, than that which encompasses Paddlers for Life (Kemp 1998).

*It wasn't perhaps until I left the group, that I came to understand what the difference was between being competitive and racing. "We've already one, just by being here" was a phrase that I heard often, but never quite understood. Maybe it's because I've always considered myself as both competitive and a racer. But the group itself, in that boat were created as differently to how I was able to perceive. Watching teams race, or being involved in racing, I imagined them as competitive. But then I realised the subtle difference at the heart of each boat. Like in Liverpool, the boats raced, they competed. But unlike in Liverpool, the boat itself acted as a bracket for that competition. As I raced in Lucy, with a mixture of survivors and supporters, I saw only the other boat, Artemis; I only saw the race. What I missed was that this was the only competitive feature of the race, the **practice** of competition. In **practise**, we were defined only by our experience of cancer, and the gunnels of the boat. We had not competed between each other to be in that boat. I realised, suddenly, that this is perhaps what I had been struggling with, that which I had failed to grasp. Whereas I had seen a distinction between those who participated, and those who raced, I had failed to appreciate the *communitas* in the boat. When Ava said that they had already won, she meant, I think, that they had achieved. Grace thought the same. By experiencing cancer but also coming to paddling, by becoming paddlers, they had met the qualifying standard of Paddlers for Life. All the members had already succeeded. In the most basic sense, the boats are at their most equalitarian. They are at the summit of anti-structure. The paddlers have secured their success by their paddling.*

Becoming equalitarian does not mean that the geography of Paddlers for Life is flattened, seen above as linkages across space. This is no mill pond. In fact, the relationship between place and Paddlers for Life remains complicated, swelling, ever-changing. It is vital to equate

communitas not *just* with physical location, but as the interaction between paddlers and the geographical environment. As Gesler (1996) argues, whatever one's opinions on certain aspects of the ritualized landscape, it is within the social element of the group *in situ* that communitas is formed. One cannot be separated from the other. An alternative reading is presented by Wallace (2006), who appears to conflate the physical location with the communitas that occurs in the moment, at the landmark: "Grosmont [a site] acts as a kind of 'communitas' in which the pilgrims, volunteers and visitors appear and reappear on a regular basis, in between returning to the experiences of everyday life." (Wallace 2006:230). Communitas is not a feature of the setting alone, or the people within it, but the interaction of multiple features in the moment. The same group may meet in the same place, but not experience communitas. Therefore, to suggest as Wallace does that a place imbues communitas is to reflect the very structural processes which Turner suggests that communitas escapes. As Jessica suggested, coming to paddling at Windermere only a few miles from a home was a holiday every week. The key feature of this sentence is not Windermere, or Jessica, or her sense of holiday, but the combined interaction which produces the breeding ground of communitas. Grosmont may be a 'liminal' experience, but it is practice *with* place that means that allows for liminality of everyday structures to be developed.

### **Normative communitas and liminality: a continuing opportunity**

Communitas occurs in the moment, spontaneously. So how do we explain a communitas that persists, which seeks to extend in time and place from that spontaneous moment? For Turner (1969), this is achieved in normative communitas, "where, under the influence of time, the need to mobilize and organize resources, and the necessity for social control among the members of the group in pursuance of these goals, the existential communitas is organised into a perduring social system." (Turner 1969: 132). This initial qualification obviously raised questions about the return to a social structure for the communitas experience, the very processes which communitas seeks to escape. Four years later, Turner qualified his initial explanation with the following statement: normative communitas, he added, "is never quite the same as a structured group whose original *raison d'etre* was a utilitarian one, for normative communitas began with a nonutilitarian experience of brother-hood and fellowship the form of which the resulting group tried to preserve" (Turner 1973:194). The "organizational details of social existence" (Turner 1969:139) makes it difficult to be outside of regulated 'time' for long, however. As a result, communitas becomes time-stretched. The spirit remains, but cannot successfully ward off time's marching beat. In trying to preserve the spirit of communitas, the

group will preserve elements which they translate from that *communitas* experience into the normative world. This means that a “core of potential *communitas*” (Turner 1969:137) remains within the collective, within which “the *communitas* spirit is still latent in the norm and can be reanimated from time to time” (Turner 1973:194).

But perhaps I have jumped too far ahead of myself. For in describing *communitas*, I have yet to explicate one of the key ways in which *communitas* is achieved. For Turner, this is through ‘liminality’: “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.” (Turner 1969: 95). Liminality is the threshold. It is in liminality that time, as we saw above in *communitas*, first becomes stratified. It is experienced outside of the normal structures that pervade our daily lives. It occurs when experience stretches outside of the periods of agreed regulation: the time before or after official play (Shore 1994), or during dragon boating, when time becomes rhythm and is set from within (see Chapter 7). Quite simply, liminality is key to the antistructure of *communitas*. *Individuals* are removed from their everyday structures, and then become ambiguous to them (Kemp 1999). I highlight the individual in the previous sentence to make explicit the difference between liminality, which can occur at the level of the individual, and *communitas*, which requires a social model of liminal characteristics (Turner 1974). What is not approached, however, are the geographical elements of liminality, which contextualise people in space and place. Varley (2011) posits the space of sea kayaking as liminoid space, betwixt and between the daily grind. Dragon boating may be seen in the same way, the dragon boat on Windermere liminal to their daily experience, a fluid space of potential (Shields 2003). As we saw above, part of the ritual for the group may be seen as the ritualised ‘dressing’ of the dragon before every session. The head and tail are added to the boat in the car park, as most of the paddlers are physically holding the boat together. This event may serve to bracket the paddlers from their structural norms (Kemp 1999), a pre-liminoid event to mark the coming of the liminal (Vannini 2011), reaffirming the normative *communitas* of the group after a week away. The ritual does not create the ambiguity, the betwixt and between of the liminal, but helps to formulate the imaginative geographies of the experience.

*There was a sense of empowerment, of improved difference, in the opportunities given by Paddlers for Life. Opportunities that could not, or would not have been had without Paddlers for Life. For some, it was reflected in the opportunity to go abroad, to the dragon boating festivals in Singapore and Canada. For others, the other opportunities provided within the group, such as singing provided something completely different, like singing. The group not*

*only undertook singing workshops, but wrote their own songs, which were often sung out on the water. It was an achievement, it was said, to sing with others, and to make a sound that other people wanted to listen to! It also made the group unique, even in terms of other breast cancer dragon boat teams. It wasn't about whether or not other groups sang, but that only this group could sing the songs that they did, about Windermere and their experiences with it. Other skills still were about skills that could also help the group, like learning to helm, or driving the safety boat. Ava said to me that one of the best parts of the group was being able to facilitate other people's wonderful ideas. Opportunity did not remain static, or merely in the ethos of the group, but was a practical step taken to constantly evolve to meet the needs of its members. Individual goals, thought Ruby, could be supported and collectivised for the group. Sometimes they extended past it, as when the BBC came to film one Sunday. The group facilitated, but it was certainly not a one-way relationship. Jessica said, in a moment where I felt the power of the group for and of itself, that now she saw opportunities for new experiences everywhere, in natural and physical environments. The group produced in her not only a liminal experience, different from her daily routine, but a thirst for it.*

As we have discussed before, dragon boating differs from other examples of exercise therapy due to what might be termed its creative element, which allow the participant to escape the necessity to speak about cancer, which remains the focus in most support groups, which remain primarily verbal (Serlin et al. 2000). In such respects, it could be argued that there are multiple crossovers between the physical and the creative aspects of psychosocial interventions for cancer survivors. These have been developed in terms of art therapy (Reynolds and Prior 2006; Collie et al 2006; Radley and Bell 2007), music therapy (Daykin et al. 2006), adventure therapy (Stevens et al. 2004) tai chi (Lee et al. 2007), poetry (Connolly Baker and Mazza 2004), and dance therapy (Rizzo Vincent et al. 2007), to name a few. Although dance therapy and tai chi might also be considered as physical activity, dragon boating is alone in being considered a team sport. It is always already more than physical activity, however. Being outside of what might be considered to be the cultural norm in the West, dragon boating appears to be afforded greater opportunities to act outside of existing structural relationships.

*It was in a writing meeting, that Jessica first told us about how she became involved in Paddlers for Life. She had left a message with Laura, but hadn't heard anything back. She had organized herself around the possibility of dragon boating, telling work that she wouldn't be able to work on Sundays any more. Finally the call came. It was Laura. She was sorry that she hadn't been in contact, but they'd just got back from the world championships in Singapore.*

*Crikey, thought Jessica, I think I've got the wrong end of the stick here. She hadn't realized that it was competitive. She didn't know if she'd be able to do it. She was well into her sixties then. You shouldn't worry, Laura told her. It will just show other people what they can do.*

*Another day. We're sat in Ava's front room. She has just got in from work. The conversation swings to her own family. Can she see her own mother being as fit and active as she is at her age? Of course she can't. She's proud of what she has gained from dragon boating, but also recognises the opportunities it has afforded her.*

*For some paddlers, team sports hadn't been the norm before dragon boating. It was a new experience for them. So quite apart from learning to paddle, they had to learn to participate as well. There are twenty paddling seats in the boat. From the outside, they all look much the same, all heading in the same direction. But each has its different role. Paddlers are encouraged to move around the boat, even to switch sides. One side might be more comfortable, but it can limit, or at least define your experience as well. Laura is a 'rightie', drawing with her right, skimming the surface of the water, her left hand higher, higher than her head at times. But if there's a new paddler, she'll switch sides. She wants to be with them, to welcome them into the crew, more than she wants to be comfortable. It's good to switch around the boat, as well. It's a challenge, to leave your comfort zone, which staves off complacency and formulisation. It also allows for a sense of what every position holds, and the experiences of others from one's own seat. Little actions often seemed to be all it took to remove people from the structure paths their lives had seemed to follow. For Samantha, the remove was in helping out around the group, learning to power boat, getting to grips with financial matters. But it was also in the simple act of buying a buoyancy aid. She never thought that she would need to do that. The group permitted a change in her liminal experience.*

With all that is achieved within the group, it is perhaps easy to forget that it is not just the fact of cancer that is being tackled. One of the many structural hierarchies which are tackled in the liminality of Paddlers for Life is age (see Turner 1974). Paddlers for Life creates a liminal experience of age. Indeed, such was the success of this liminal state, that at no time in the research did I inquire about the ages of participants. At times they were spoken, or could be deduced, but as with Jessica, age became seen as a structural issue outside of the group (see Chapter 2). By not restricting participation in terms of age, Paddlers for Life sustain a liminal positionality that allows members of the crew to separate themselves not only from their everyday lives, but from discriminatory societal structures that are deeply embedded within

these lives (Turner 1974). Age, within Paddlers for Life becomes negated within the participatory element of *communitas*.

*There was understood to be a particular route in the experience of cancer. Things you should do, things that you shouldn't. It was proved, and evidenced by pain and suffering. Some people would die. There but for the grace of God go I, thought Laura. There was no doubt that at some stages, the ability to challenge the status quo was diminished. You did feel shit after treatment, you were disabled by it for a time. But there was also the opportunity to question what should be done after a cancer diagnosis. Some sought to question this understanding prior to paddling. Isla subverted her structural path by returning to work. It wasn't what was expected, by anyone. It wasn't the same for everyone. It wasn't supposed to be. Sometimes liminality was itself structured. There was a difference I was told, and observed, between those who had gone to Canada, and those who hadn't. The experience in Canada had been structured by the need to be a breast cancer survivor, and was not something that could be explained by someone who hadn't, or hadn't been able to attend. Back to Paddlers for Life itself, and Joshua needed the paddling. He didn't want to be a helm, particularly; he didn't get the same from it. The physical challenge to medical perception was always important, but the message wasn't only to professionals; it was also to the self. For this reason, there seemed an agreement that empowerment is not the same, within a group run by medical professionals. It can only be run from lived experience. Evie utilised paddling as a break from the structure that told her she couldn't do it; that she was going to fade away. Paddling questioned her fears, removed her from their position of power over her. Although it could all be approached individually, paddling provided an experience different from what most had ever experienced before, even in the sense of team sports. As Sophie said, some would never have come to this before treatment. She wouldn't have, herself. It separated Sophie not just from the experience of cancer, but from her life prior to cancer as well.*

*As we were sitting in her living room, in between us a beautiful tea set laid out next to the slightly less beautiful Dictaphone beside it, Sophie told me a story about her experience with other traditional cancer support groups. She brought it up at the meetings we held as well. It was important to her that she told this story. It meant a lot to her. And it told us others a lot about her experience. When she had finished treatment, she went to a local support group. It was in a church, and she had to drive to get there. When she had arrived and parked, she peered in through the window. And she couldn't go in. She got back in her car and drove away. Later, her breast cancer nurse tackled her about it. They had seen her drive in, and drive*



*straight back out. Why, she asked? To Sophie, it was simple. It seemed too much like work, all those women sitting round, talking together. It seemed to me, sitting there in that house that it wasn't so much the cancer that Sophie wanted to escape from, although she certainly didn't want to be talking about it the whole time. Rather, it was the sense of the ordinary that she wanted to escape from. She went back to work after her treatment. To those she worked with, it could have seemed that nothing had happened. But Sophie wanted something different. She wanted to notice change from her experience.*

Little et al (1998) have suggested that liminality exists within the experience of diagnosis and illness, a suspension of life previously lived. I have not extended this line of thought categorically, because of the potential for individualism, which the liminal creates. The interest of this chapter, and this thesis resides not in the survivor, or supporter, but in themselves as a part of the collaborative experience of Paddlers for Life. Whilst I imagine Little et al's (1998) thesis on the liminality of cancer to be useful, particularly as an enduring process and variable state, it persists with the same problem as other versions of liminal states: they end one experience, and return seemingly unaffected after the liminal experience, leaving a spatial vacuum of uncertainty: how is this liminal space experienced? And what are we to say of normative *communitas* that continues in its own context? How is it elongated, how does this feel? In a way, this confusion is to be expected; space and time away from what we are used to will necessarily be abstract to us. However, this does not help us as geographers. Shields (2003) suggests that the liminal is space that cannot be inhabited. We should not shy away, however, from a geographical understanding of how such a crucial time and space to the experience of paddlers and many others can be experienced. I shall suggest in the following chapter that the liminal can *only* be inhabited, as a part of the relationship of life and living. What I propose is an understanding of *rhythms*, to help explain the ways in which liminal spaces and times can be understood not as separate to the 'quotidian grind' (Varley 2011), but always working along with the world. In this way, I suggest, we may be able to better understand as geographers the ways that we continue to live along with the world around us, not in spite of, but because of extraordinary events in our lives.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to explore the ways in which imaginative geographies can be useful in the present moment of collaborative groups. It is through *communitas*, and the magic of separation from breast cancer, that the group may be imagined as a distinct community,

without all being of constant agreement, or viewing the group in the same way. Differences may occur between sections of the group. For example, none of the male supporters I spoke to seemed to see true animacy within the dragons, yet I think they saw and often *felt* *communitas*. Rather, the dragons were useful to their partners and to other survivor members of the paddling team. However, their respect for this difference within the framework of participation allows for different views to be held within the same concept of potential *communitas*. Context is vital within both the paddling and participation aspects of the group. As an element in both, racing is seen as an important element, *in context*. This is due to the context led formulation of the group, which is a feature of its experiential attitude of the past, as much as the experience in the presence of the group. The imaginative, therefore, cannot be divorced from any of the interactions with which the human individual is faced. *Communitas* might be seen as temporary (Turner 1974), yet it exists upon the interactions found within the experience of the individual, rather than the physical location of the group. As the paddlers said, they are here because they have had breast cancer, but that's not really why they're here. It is the spirit of the group in *communitas* that retains their interest, not the fact of their illness. Imagination, and imaginative geographies, must always be more than the past experience of others. They are essential to understanding the relations we have, not with objectivised others or experiences, such as the codified medical interpretation, but always with ourselves in interaction with the landscape.

### **Section 3: Healing rhythms**

*In this third and final section, we will develop from the formation of the group of paddlers, to the environments that are intrinsic to it. You will no doubt realise that this is not a simple transition. The previous chapters have not excluded the landscape, and those to come do not preclude the group's creation. The premise of this section is that Paddlers for Life are involved in formulating a distinct and nuanced relationship with the landscape that cannot be fixed to a particular site; even Windermere, which many paddlers are so fond of. It is a relationship that involves moving along the landscape, rather than from place to place. The experience of Paddlers for Life, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, is not one of destination and conclusion, but of always continuing interaction.*

## Chapter 7: Rhythms

Rhythm rests not in the feet of dancers or the fingers of musicians. In fact, rhythms are in and of everything that we see around us, and are a vital part of the ways we understand the world. This chapter will use empirical material and theory on rhythms to question the way that ‘journeys’ have been imagined and created as intentioned and destination-oriented artefacts, rather than as multiple rhythms that continue through thoughts, as well as actions. The journeys of Paddlers for Life are not merely made, and finished, on the water. They are medical and metaphorical, as well as physical. This chapter seeks to explore how all of these potential journeys interact to form a collaborative rhythm that deconstructs ‘the journey’ as it may previously have been conceived.

Firstly, I present a description of the journeys involved in Paddlers for Life that became clear from the research; medical journeys, spatial journeys, temporal journeys and research journeys. However, rather than separating them, they should be read here as one document; a small fragment of an exploration of a Paddlers for Life journey. After a critical exploration, this is followed by four vignettes of rhythm. These vignettes are presented differently to the journeys, as each is separated by theoretical discussion. This is a deliberate feature of the chapter, in order to explore the interweaving passages and continuances, which can be seen in rhythms, which are not traditionally viewed within journeys. Parr and Butler (1999) reported that place can be dismantled into component entities, to gain a better geographical understanding of illness. However, I seek to explore a geographical approach to illness that moves through, rather than deconstructing place. Thus, the aim of the chapter is to explore the connections between imaginative and physically-based journeys; so that they are not just seen from the outside moving *between places and modes of being*, but are experienced from the inside, moving *along with* (Ingold 2007c).

### Journeys

*Many of the women in the group are no longer being directly treated for breast cancer. To paddle in a dragon boat with Paddlers for Life UK, individuals must be three months post-treatment. Although Emily was so excited when she first saw the boats, she considered stretching the truth a little! It's an insurance condition, I think, as well as a safety one. This three months will not be experienced similarly for everyone, however. For some, time is*

*different, particularly if you have been told that there is a strong likelihood of recurrence for your type of cancer. As a consequence, Ruby has had to live in the moment. The five year all-clear which others in the boat may aim for isn't a concern for her. Journeys can vary, of course. And time is often a feature, as it was for Laura, who thought to herself upon diagnosis that fifty would be a good age to reach. She had been 'timed out' by her treatment. Of necessity, treatment becomes timed as well. Lily, along with others, told me that after the "conveyor belt" of medical treatment stopped, she was told to forget it had happened; to get on with her life. But to remember to come back in six months. Even as the medical journey ended, a point was created in time. The route of this journey was not the concern of the medical community. The sun had set on their involvement. But not on the journey forward that had begun for the individual after their diagnosis. For Sophie as well, the medical treatment was only a part of her journey to recovery. And when it stopped, her journey halted. She was stuck halfway down this road, not knowing where she was, but not able to move herself on. As time passed, so did attitudes to life. It was over a decade since Olivia had her treatment for breast cancer. Since then, her attitude had changed. She used to be organised, like her sister was, she told me, as we chatted by the boats. Now, she chose chaos! One thing at a time, she said. Then Simon came round and gave us a two minute call. "Oh dear, I need a **five** minute call," she said, and scuttled off to get prepared.*

*Paddlers for Life Windermere, as a collective, travel from all over the North of England to Paddle at Windermere on a Sunday. From Morecambe to Durham, Coventry to Carlisle, the journeys that are made, from Paddler's usual places are particularly important. No members of Paddlers for Life, during the time that I was with them, lived in Windermere itself. Features of the landscape are important to individuals in these journeys to paddling. To Olivia and Daniel, the journey to the lake indicated the meaning of what they were going to do when they arrived. By seeing or passing certain landmarks, like a dip in the road where a vista became visible, meaning was imbued onto the journey. Evie gave me a lift to the lake one day. She told me, as we passed Kendal to look out for a hill, where the road dropped away beneath it, and you could see the whole lake open up in front of you. When you reach a certain spot, you know that you are in the Lake District. There was a point in the journey from where Daniel became particularly engaged in the practice to come. Sometimes, the journeys are to unknown locations. Paddlers travel as a group, or as representatives of Paddlers for Life, in order to visit other groups in other parts of the country. Paddlers spoke to me with excitement about visiting new places and the opportunity to visit other countries. Journeys do not always cover*

long distances. One of the most important journeys that I experienced whilst paddling involved not a journey forwards, or even backwards, but down; about a foot or so. It was a capsized drill. We had paddled out onto the lake, into deep water. We knew why we were going, even if it didn't make particular sense to our general understanding of dragon boating. "It's strange", said the lady behind me, as we left the jetty, "to be paddling out to drown yourself." This prompted Thomas into hysterical laughter. I smiled. It steadied my nerves. When we reached the spot that the helm had chosen for us, with the safety boat circling, we began to bail water into the boat. This very action felt alien, as if we were questioning the agreed role of the boat. We didn't know what it might do, whether it would capsize, or glide gracefully beneath the surface. Luckily, to my mind at least, the boat sank; the buoyancy within it keeping just the head and tail visible. I had been worried about being thrown, suddenly, into the cold water. It was an experience; a rupture in the usual that it was important to experience.

Journeys for Paddlers take time. They also take place in time. Many paddlers live up to an hour away, depending on the traffic. Some live much further still. A journey to go paddling at Windermere can take someone away from their home for six or seven hours, depending on the length of time which is spent paddling. Evie only knew the distance in terms of duration. Decisions are made before travel about whether it is worth going, whether paddling will be on in certain conditions. Often, these decisions are made on an individual basis, as there is as yet no recognised system to announce when paddling has been called off. Sometimes, time slows during the practice itself. Abby told me that during family holidays as a child, time slowed down. It didn't seem to matter anymore. I experienced a slowing of time, as we paddled down the lake. As I tired, it felt as if time lost meaning. The space around us became my fixation, the only real guide I had to my journey. I stopped asking how long, and began asking, "where's that?"

My journey to the lake was always unique amongst the paddlers. Either I was coming from Exeter, or I was coming from London, but both took a long time. I learned to equate place with time. I knew, generally, where I would be at a certain time along the route. But not if the train was delayed. Then the relationship between time and place became more divorced than ever. The same was true when I travelled to a new place, nearly always by bike. By late September, I knew the part of my journey from Windermere train station to Low Wood, not by time or by space, but through a collapsing of the two. I moved through the landscape. I knew that I was going the right way not by the memory of place or the memory of time but of both combined. How long the bike ride felt not according just to my watch, but to my muscles, my lungs. Why

*did they hurt more today? I checked the map, made uncertain by my senses and their role in my travel. These senses were increased when I knowingly moved to somewhere I hadn't been before. I allowed myself more time, more space. My eye is drawn not to the road, but to signposts, markers in space that might help me along my journey.*

### **Journeys *in* time**

The word *journey* does not, as one might have expected, originate from the notion of humanistic travel. Etymologically, we are informed by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), it stems from the French word 'journée', meaning 'day'. Already, we are faced with a time-defined period of existence, before we become faced with a definition from the OED (**Journey**: Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) accessed on 4/10/2012 from [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)) :

"Journey, *n.* II. 3. A 'spell' or continued course of going or travelling, having its beginning and end in place or time, and thus viewed as a distinct whole."

A journey, then, ends. Etymologically inferred conclusions fix a journey's temporal possibilities before it has begun, before it has even been conceived. Of course we may be told in numerous clichés and maxims for living that the importance is *in* the journey, rather than the destination. However the issue, as I will seek to prove here, is not in the experience of the journey as a process, but in the very existence of a temporal or spatial destination. If our lived experience is interrupted by a diagnosis of serious illness, then the journey to a point of recovery, or wellness, becomes extremely difficult. Nonetheless, this terminology is often used by the medical community.

"I had to return the next day to Dr. Shuman for an additional procedure so he could get a better look. I didn't sleep at all that night needless to say. The next day I returned and had to be knocked out again with the full expectation that when I woke up, Dr. Shuman would be apologizing for giving me bad information the day before.... When I awoke, he confirmed his statements from the day before and *once again told me the journey would last a year. He gave me the name of a surgeon and the journey began.*" (Denton, 2010:4 my emphasis)

For Denton, the medical diagnosis pre-empted the social diagnosis that her journey, that is to say her treatment, would end after a year. A fixed journey was being implied, and was begun for her. This seems to have been accepted by Denton, the natural progression once diagnosis

had been confirmed. Within the journey, however, the temporal landscape can change very quickly.

*“[Y]ou never know if you’re going to be alive. And for me, the setting of the sun, and the sun rising the next morning was important, you know, I’m still here, you know, watching that happening.” - Sophie, map meeting*

For Sophie, a different process was starting, which metaphorically exploded the fear of medically prescribed time that had developed, and which Ruby had also experienced. She might have appointments, medical endpoints, but Sophie had discovered an understanding of her journey that went past the end of the day, and onto another. Infinite possibilities of extended time were created. Taking Denton’s (2010) story, and following it with Ruby and Sophie’s experiences, we see the safety of structured time first breaking, and then being reformulated in the experience of the illness and the environment. As Sophie told me, the medical journey was only a part of her journey to recovery. She discovered other facets to her experience after diagnosis, of which medical treatment was only a part. Yet this realisation often only occurs after a crisis of confidence, such as Ruby experienced. Part of this confusion, I feel, comes from the continual temporal variances that are made linguistically within the post-cancer diagnosis experience. Of particular importance is the word ‘survivor’, and its fluctuating meaning. Although we explored ‘survivorship’ as it occurs to the group in Chapter Four, the implications for cancer ‘journeys’ are worth exploring again here. ‘Survivorship’ is a fluid concept, and hence has been very popular academically in terms of the lived experience of the cancer survivor. However, as Feuerstein (2007) points out, its categorical definition has changed over the years, from immediately at diagnosis (Leigh et al. 1998), to five years post diagnosis, and at times including friends and family (Saxton And Daly 2010). This differentiation has led, I argue, to confusion over the role, and duration, of medical treatment. The first use of the term in relation to cancer was by Dr Fitzhugh Mullan (1985), a medical doctor and cancer survivor who wished to question the notion that an individual is cured, post-treatment. This seems to me, however, to have had the affect of reinforcing, rather than questioning the temporal understandings of the lived experience of cancer. For whilst Mullan (1985) conceived survivorship as ‘at diagnosis’, many medical practitioners have taken his term and merely conflated it with medical understandings (Breaden 1997); for instance, an individual becomes a survivor five years post-diagnosis when the risk of recurrence is greatly reduced (Pollack et al 2005; Leigh et al 1998), precipitating an end to the medical journey.



Whilst this might be the medical perception of time, Breaden (1997) suggests that the experience of the survivor becomes '*self time*', rather than the '*clock time*' used by the medical community. Just as Olivia now chose chaos rather than structure, survivors often move towards a spontaneous experience of time (Rasmussen and Elverdam 2007):

“A journey suggests movement along a path from A to B. It is a term that is perhaps reminiscent of the path of linear time, only ever moving in one direction. However, the shared journey that each woman in this study took was anything but linear... and it wasn't a journey that had to go anywhere in particular. There was no path *to* survival as this would imply an end to the journey. Each of the women were [sic] already surviving and would continue to do so for as long as each one of them lived. They did not have to wait for a specified end-point to be considered a survivor.” (Breaden 1997:982 *emphasis in original*)

Whilst Breaden (1997) and Rasmussen and Elverdam (2007) have addressed the issue of structured time in cancer survivorship, the latter authors have also called for further understanding of the ways in which survivors manage their time, in order to facilitate changes in nursing care. Whilst such methodological implications are important, I attempt here to provide theoretical context to time in the experience of cancer through the experience of breast cancer dragon boating. It is my argument that in combining a sense of *rhythm* with an inclination to *wayfaring*, the temporal and spatial dimensions of the journeys, which we *all* undertake can be experienced in process, not simply *towards* destinations (Ingold 2007c). In creating this possibility, we may be able to aid Geography and other social science disciplines, as well as care institutions in de-reifying the concept of time-space, in order to incorporate concepts such as movement, sensation, and rhythm into our understandings of being-with (Bissell 2010). Such de-reification is key to understanding the experience of the *extraordinary* that we saw in the previous chapter.

### **Rhythms and wayfaring**

The study of rhythms has come relatively recently to geographical study (Edensor 2010), emerging in any detail only in the last ten years. Movement and mobility, on the other hand, have been a constant feature of geography in the last decade (see for example edited volumes by Cresswell and Merriman (2011), Adey (2009), Vannini (2009) as well as publications by Urry (2007), and Cresswell (2006)). Before we move on to address issues of rhythmic

wayfaring, it is important for me to outline why I suggest a move from the focus on mobility, to one of rhythm, in what is a particularly mobile activity. Despite the increasing sum of publications within the mobilities paradigm, there appears to me to have been an over-focusing on the concepts of hypermobility, in which a culture of modernity has been at once praised and vilified for bringing places closer together, decentering people as well as space and time. My argument is that whilst many of these authors are doing great work in questioning the reification of auto-mobility in a modern world, the thesis of mobility is in fact a difficult paradigm to begin with; to reify mobility is in turn to fixate upon a sedentary opposite and to deny that mobility is a feature of all life, but is a social product (Cresswell 2006). It is my argument here that rhythms are more than an aptitude or a human potential, and offer an alternative means to envisioning the spatial and temporal issues of the lived illness experience. As will hopefully become clear throughout the chapter, rhythm provides a way to see and imagine mobility outside of the confines of human action, in thought as well as action.

Rhythm is often seen as something that a person objectively does or does not have; a skill or a talent. It is less often envisioned as a mode at the core of human existence. Of particular interest to us here is Henri Lefebvre's (2004) unfinished work, *rhythmanalysis*. As well as being a detailed study on the concept of rhythm, it is also an exploration about how it would be best to approach these rhythms methodologically. Too often, rhythm is constrained by the notion that a rhythm requires constant, consistent repetition. But as Tim Edensor (2010) notes, rhythm for Lefebvre is never constrained by repetition: "[A]bsolute repetition is only a fiction of logical and mathematical thought" (Lefebvre 2004:7). Rhythms are not overarching forces that automatically compel individuals to march to a given beat. Hence, as in the experience of cancer, disruption to rhythmic routines may lead not to the adoption of old, or former rhythms, but the creation of new ones (Edensor 2010). Repetition in rhythm is never assured in either the short, or the long term. As Mels (2004:6) argues, "rhythms are connected to particular discourses, geographical imaginations and modes of representation", making their exact replication almost impossible.

Although I would accept that any use of the term 'repetition' is difficult theoretically, I believe that Lefebvre is attempting to move past the theoretically abstract, endeavouring to analyse theoretically the ways in which rhythms are *experienced* rather than merely *observed* (see Lefebvre 2004, Jones 2010). I am reminded of the quote by Adrienne Rich, regarding theory: "theory can be a dew that rises from the earth and collects in the rain cloud and returns to earth over and over. But if it doesn't smell of the earth, it isn't good for the earth." (Rich 1987:213-

214). Any theory that invokes the rhythms of Paddlers for Life must serve a purpose for Paddlers for Life. As Lefebvre (2004:69) argues, rhythms are only of use in practice: “[t]hought strengthens itself only if it enters into practice; into use”. I suggest that a theory of rhythm may help, in illness, and academically as geographers, to lessen the moment of crisis after the ‘end’ of treatment that many of the survivors felt. The theory of Paddlers for Life should be extended methodologically, so that the possibilities do not follow *after medical treatment has finished*, but lead directly from the treatment itself.

In thinking rhythmically, thinking towards an endpoint becomes much more difficult; “[e]verywhere there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is **rhythm**” (Lefebvre 2004:15 emphasis in original). In rhythm, space and time are inseparable from one another. With the addition of energy, we are within rhythm. Of course, Lefebvre has played a trick on us here. Can you imagine a space and time without an expenditure of energy (particularly if we follow Jones (2010) and include ‘more-than-human’ energies)? We are always within rhythm. It exists always within us. Rhythm, however, is not an ‘equal’ with space and time, just as space and time are never experienced equitably in the lived experience. Rhythm is experienced in harmony with space and time; at times linearly, but more often within, outside, behind, in front, entwined with (see Breaden 1997, Mels 2004).

It is at this point that I wish to address the ideas of the anthropologist Tim Ingold. Of particular importance to this chapter is the understanding that we do not just experience journeys; we inhabit them. It is perhaps a little unconventional, but I will begin this argument with a critique by John Wylie, again relating to time, referring to earlier work published by Ingold (2000) on the topic of dwelling:

“Dwelling [as Tim Ingold defines it] is thus not only grounded within the ambit of a phenomenological, ‘social’ temporality, it is dependent upon such a temporality, and is accomplished through it. I would argue that such an understanding of dwelling, as conditional upon duration, significantly narrows the critical purchase and interpretative scope of the concept. Dwelling, as a form of phenomenological ontology, should, by contrast, be the *milieu* for material cultures and ways of being that are productive of multiple spatialities and temporalities, longstanding and momentary, rural and urban, fixed and mobile, coherent and fragmentary. In particular, it must enable the register of the transient and the fleeting as well as the enduring.” (Wylie 2003:145)

To cultural geographer Wylie, Ingold's dwelling perspective is too temporally sedentary. The same issues have also existed previously within rhythm: "[t]he perception of rhythm usually refers to the duration of an expectation (or anticipation) and its fulfilment of a pattern within an ordered recurrent movement or a series of events" (You 1994:362). For rhythm and dwelling to combine, dwelling needs to be in the *moment* as well as the extended *period*. My concern would continue that duration, whilst intoning long periods, is not limited to such, and Wylie still creates dwelling in foreshortened, constricted, time. Fortunately, Ingold's more recent work has addressed both of these concerns. In *Lines*, Ingold (2007c) suggests a conception of *inhabitation*, rather than dwelling, that links to the lived (that is, inherently mobile) experience of the world, rather than that of 'enduring' time. Of particular interest are the theories of 'wayfaring' and 'transport' that enact and counter-enact this 'being-in-the-world'. The wayfarer, argues Ingold, "is continually on the move. More strictly, he [sic] is his [sic] movement" (Ingold 2007c:75). He/she (for I do not feel that Ingold's thesis rests upon female preclusion) does not live on/at/by/in the world, but along with it and its processes. The transported individual, on the other hand, is destination-oriented. They travel across space, in time dictated by another, to reach the place which was the intention at their departure. This, Ingold argues, is not just a symptom of modernity, the popular villain of mobilities literature, but rather of being "a passenger, who does not himself move but is rather *moved* from place to place." (Ingold 2007c:78). Being transported does not mean, however, that one does not move in rhythm. As Mels (2004) states, social rhythms do not exclude linearity, yet should not allow them to dominate other, personal rhythms. In allowing for wayfaring rhythms as well as for linear ones, natural and social rhythms can be seen as co-existing together, rather than social linear rhythms dominating (Mels 2004). In moving *along* the world (Ingold 2007c), we are rhythm-makers as much as we are place-makers (Mels 2004). Paddlers for Life are as much in their rhythms as they are in the places they encounter. In this sense, it might be argued that healing for paddlers occurs as much in rhythm, as in place (see Chapter 8).

It is important to say here that I am not arguing for a sudden move away from physical places that hold import for an individual's experience; and neither is Ingold (2007c). Rather, it is argued that places can never be constrained, and following Lefebvre (2004), can never be without energy. However, I feel that there needs to be ways to think about physical artefacts, things that stand out, spatially and temporally: in other words, to argue too stringently for the de-reification of place risks creating confusion amongst paddlers, being seen as academically abstract and as a pointless neologism. Owain Jones (2010) also ponders this question in

reference to temporality, and proposes adding temporal notions of *moments* and *periods* to the spatial references commonly used, i.e. landmarks and objects. To Jones, these can become, rather than points of destination, “markers of the lived flow of time” (Jones 2010:197). As we wayfare, these markers do not necessarily provide us with points to return to (although they may become experienced as places by individuals), but allow us to recall for ourselves where we have been, and even where we may be heading. Journeys are not, I argue, going *to*, concerning a future point as yet unknown, but are always grounded in the moments and periods that are experienced along the way; imagined futures etched in the memory of the landscape (Ingold 2007c:76).

### **Paddling rhythms**

*It's the end of July. It's warm, but not calm; there are waves out on the lake. We have a new helm, practising. Because of this, the drummer, Olivia, becomes more involved than usual. The helm has asked her to give her opinion, to take a little bit more control. It's a while since I've paddled. I'm around the middle of the boat, not right at the back, but far from the front. As we paddle down the lake, fifty metres or so from the side, I realise that I'm leaning the wrong way. I'm contorting my body into the boat, rather than out from it. Perhaps as a result, I'm struggling to find the rhythm. I aim and miss at the water. The water laps, so that at the moment my paddle repeats its previous movement, it draws not water, but air. When we stop, the rhythm has been bad, apparently. We're caterpillaring all over the place, minute differences in timing, which continue down the boat, amounting to a Mexican wave. Later, I'm told what the rhythm can be like. When everyone is moving together, it's like one body, a machine, together. Time and space lose all importance; the progress of the boat is in the rhythm. Ava later tells me that she thinks that the rhythm is often lost in the middle of the boat, where it gets wider and bodies are no longer touching. Being in contact with another paddler allows the collaborative rhythm to flow more easily, she seemed to think.*

*We're half way down the lake now, just at Belle Isle. The wind is up, and our progress has slowed. I'm sitting behind a visitor, a big man, taller than me. He keeps annoying me though, resting too often. Stopping dead in the boat. He's not a survivor, as far as I'm aware. That's his wife. As a supporter, we're supposed to keep paddling, as far and as hard as we can. We don't have any reason to stop. I tell myself this as I get tired. I silently curse him, getting frustrated both at his lack of rhythm, and of the way in which he is flouting the rules that I have made for paddling.*

*Another day, and I'm paddling on the left again. Victoria is in front of me, paddling well. She's a strong paddler, with good technique. And then, suddenly, she stops paddling. She takes the blade from the water, and places it down by her feet, gripping it in both hands. The boat keeps moving, one less blade breaking the surface of the water. But whilst the paddle is missing, the rhythm remains. Victoria is rocking in time with the boat, moving in the same way as the other paddlers. I don't know why she stopped paddling. But by maintaining the rhythm, she remains as an active member of the crew, a facet of it; maintaining her rhythm and the body of the boat, despite the withdrawal of the paddle*

The team is participatory. They paddle as a collective. To dragon boating, rhythm is everything (Chan and Humphries 2009). To make the boat go faster, a successional repetitive rhythm must be achieved throughout the boat. Seconds can make all the difference during a race. But to Paddlers for Life, participation is more vital, more urgent. A participatory rhythm is one that is constantly in flux, and moves between the rhythmic and the arrhythmic (Lefebvre 2004); that which breaks the rhythm. At times, to accommodate all of its paddlers, the Paddlers for Life boat will have two or three paddles which don't flash in and out of the water, but rest with the paddler. This is what the group is for. Dennis Waskul (Waskul and Waskul 2009) details the movements that he makes in their canoe to compensate for his partners lack of power on one side due to cancer. But he does these innately, without consideration. It is unspoken understanding, formed together in their cohesion, not considered by Dennis Waskul as something that he has to do, but rather as something that he does without consideration. This also works in terms of social interactions. Bissell (2009) refers to the socialisation of space, and the practices therein, but to conceive space in such a fashion I feel confuses the collaborative practice element of dragon boating. As with Ingold's (2007a) argument on materiality, I find it strange to add the social to practices, rather than to see them innately within. Whilst Bissell offers some cogent thoughts on interaction, I find that rhythms and wayfaring provide the best solution for my experiences of the collaborative practices of Paddlers for Life.

Temporally, team sports are not prepared for the individualism that we see from Victoria and others, which is not directed towards the efficient completion of the race. As Bale (2011) observes, with the ability to measure time in the form of a stopwatch, temporal competition has reduced the experience of space merely to a canvas for time:

“Those who compete in such a contest, which is recorded to one-thousandth of a second, have no *time* to make mistakes, no *room* for laughter and no scope for play... This is the distinction between racing and running” (Bale 2000:149 *my emphases*)

This is an interesting quote from John Bale. As per my emphases, in competition time and space are controlled, made linear for the collective of participants. Scope, as in capacity for action, becomes limited. In competition we are not interested in the interaction *with* the landscape, or individual movements *along* it; we are only interested, on account of societal structures, in the time in which a certified distance of it is covered. In participatory paddling, rhythms are not simply manifested in the actions of paddlers as a homogenous collective. As Owain Jones (2010) tells us, multitude rhythms come together, natural and social (see also Mels 2004), in order to maintain the ways in which we live our lives. “[H]uman life is a temporal process, one lived narratively over time which has progression from birth to death, but contains all manner of ebbs and flows and rhythms” (Jones 2010:197).

As Victoria showed, the ability to stop paddling and to rest, is a key part of the attraction of the group. There is no pressure to push oneself for the good of the team. The recognition is that the group is constituted of differences, as individuals, and as people diagnosed with a disease that is always different. In Paddlers for Life, these different rhythms are experienced not through words, but through affect. Messages and rhythms are shared as “the energetic outcome of encounters between bodies” (Conradson and Latham, cited in Bissell 2010:272). Ava experienced this, in the physical contact between paddlers that allowed for the rhythm of the crew as a whole to develop. **But these messages are not created only between, or within bodies, but also in the inhabitation of the body with the environment.** The paddling body does not simply become tired of its own accord. Nor does it react to a temporal frame in which fatigue is organised as a result of exertion. Rather it is the ebbs, flows and rhythms of the environment, which become features of inhabitation. The rhythms of the landscape are such that they can only be read through their interaction. Hence, it is not until someone is ‘being-with’ the lake (Bissell 2010), that they can know the needs of their body. The rhythms of the boat and of the paddlers can never be placed upon the rhythms of the landscape, but are always aimed to interact with them (Edensor 2010, Mels 2004). This can play an important role in the experience of the paddling self, as well as the self affected by illness:

“The lived body disruption engendered by loss of mobility includes a change in the character of surrounding space, an alteration in one’s taken-for-granted awareness of

(and interaction with) objects, the disruption of corporeal identity, a disturbance in one's relations with others, and a change in the character of temporal experience” (Toombs 1995:9)

As Toombs alludes, the rhythms that we experience are not just social, but are bodily as well. They cannot be seen as separated from one another. This then, is a facet of the collective understanding of the participatory model within the Paddlers for Life Team. The lived experience of each member is collated in order to allow each paddler to act, not as dictated by a social expectation or interaction, but through a bodily interaction. The rhythm of Paddlers for Life itself is invisible out of context. The actions of stopping and rocking, or the importance of bodily contact in the boat, are not explicit but are implicit to the individual and collective. An individual taking a break whilst dragon boating with Paddlers for Life cannot, I argue, be explicitly positioned as a socially disabled individual, despite whatever rhythms and positionalities they may have outside of this context.

### **Rhythms of life, following cancer diagnosis**

*Rhythms aren't just formed in the boat. Many of the collaborative rhythms begin long before, in the hospitals where the women are treated. Some of them are difficult to hear. Grace told me about the rhythms that she formed in collective with the women on her hospital ward. You form bonds very quickly, she said, in those situations. Not just social bonds. At one point, lilies were brought onto the ward, and due to the combination of treatment and the fragrance of the lilies, the whole ward threw up en masse. Now, it's almost like she's a Russian sleeper, with lilies proving the trigger to an unconscious reaction; a constant reminder. Other rhythms are more positive. For Laura, the rhythms of camaraderie in the boat provide a sense of positivity after a diagnosis of cancer. For Grace, the rhythm of the boat allows her to go back in time, to a time that treatment took away; a rhythm of possibilities. On a Sunday, she can forget everything else, and become a paddler. Of course, it can't be the same for everyone, in a group which is open to survivors and supporters; people don't talk about the same things. Joshua spoke of bereavement of a partner due to breast cancer, the only member for whom this was primary to their membership. For him, rhythms were changed temporally, speeded up after bereavement. He felt that he was going faster than normal, which was no mean feat. He also felt alone in this experience.*

Whilst I was talking to Ava, she mentioned that her medical consultant had been very good at directing potential paddlers to them. ‘Signposting’, as she put it. Indeed, Evie was one of the



patients who had been signposted by Ava's consultant. Individuals who had undergone treatment were encouraged to come along to dragon boating, after their treatment had finished.

'Signpost' is a telling word to use as a metaphor. As both a verb and a noun, the signpost only exists at points where the way is no longer clear. They exist at cross roads, forks in the road. But it is a fallacy that signposts tell you the way to go. Instead, they suggest that your path so far has been clear. In the case of medicine, this may be because choice has been taken away from the individual; their path has been chosen for them. In short, a signpost is a symptom of a way of thinking that demands a point of destination. It is only of use to the passenger transported, rather than the wayfarer. Yet, for the patient who is being signposted, they are no longer a passenger of the medical journey. The medical journey is finished, as far as the medical profession is concerned; the body has been treated. Through the removal of control that the paddlers experienced in their experience of medical diagnosis, patients become stuck in between. They are wayfarers whose paths up to that point have revolved around their transportation. As Ruby told us, "*you get to the end of your treatment, and everything's shit!*". Patients, then, are stuck in limbo. They have no real control over their treatment, whilst conversely having little practical understanding of where they are being taken, and the rhythms that they will be able to create afterwards. It is not just rhythms that are structured, but also the individuals who may undertake those journeys. Just as Breaden (1997) referred to 'self time' predominating 'clock time' for cancer survivors, 'clock time' still exists in the medical experience of cancer, as it did for Ruby. Following You (1994), the focus of rhythm should not be on contained periods or frequency like the mechanical clock, but on 'lived time'.

In this vein, there has been suggestion that we would do well to change the word 'patient' itself, given its objectifying overtones (Neuberger 1999). Whilst I take issue with the patronising and paternalistic tone that Tallis (1999) employs in response to Neuberger, his argument that there is no need to change the word *patient* is a cogent one. To alter the terminology would be to deny that there are times when a patient will be a body acted upon. To aspire to a fully integrated medical system is not a concern of the present. However, where Tallis gets it wrong is when he underestimates the importance that hierarchical power relations hold in medical care. Carel (2008) writes that she learnt early on in her experience of illness that when a medical professional asks 'how you are?', they are referring to your body, rather than your person. It is only in recognising that (often necessary) unequal power relations exist that there is a potential to reconceive the journey of recovery as one through which an individual may embrace both transport and wayfaring, and utilise them in their new rhythms.

This is a distinction, which has already been begun in Paddlers for Life, and which demands highlighting from the usual narrative:

*“What is it that’s different about what we do, compared to... the [charity] bike rides, the walks? Because we really need to understand that... and I think, [in those events] there’s a beginning in that you’re training. There’s a middle in that you’re doing it, and there’s an end to it. Because there’s an end to that event. And what next? Paddling’s not like that, it continues, it continues, doesn’t it?” - Laura*

Although Laura is referring to different facets of the cancer exercise movement, the example is applicable to the medical journey of the individual. Paddling according to Paddlers for Life is not a treatment with a definitive endpoint; rather it is a continuation, like the lived experience it stems from. Life does not begin again, but continues, albeit with different rhythms. Paddling has escaped the contained periods of linear structure that bound charity fundraising; instead, they have harnessed the experience of their survivors (Breaden 1997), to continue in ‘lived time’ (You 1994).

### **Different groups, different rhythms**

*Differences move between the individual and the group. As Paddlers for Life expands, different groups will prove to be different in many aspects. I got the opportunity to paddle with a couple of new groups, in Edinburgh and Wigan. Wigan are a new group, in their first year. They are collectively different from Paddlers for Life Windermere. Their technique is different, they paddle on different water; their rhythms seem different. I paddled with them, down on their small lake, not far from the town centre. At Windermere, I learnt that the drummer does not set the rhythm. Instead, they follow the rhythm of the boat, set by the stroke. They are a conduit, rather than a controller of rhythm. At Wigan, that experience was lost. Whether by choice or misunderstanding, a small girl sat on the drum, looking around, beating her own rhythm. To me, it was a disruption, an unwelcome difference. But I was just a visitor, someone whose understanding had been formed in another group. My rhythm was different as well. After being out of the boat for a while, the rhythm I used was all over the place. I couldn’t pick up the sensory minutiae necessary to paddle. Paddling in Edinburgh was different again; different people, different experiences, different rhythms. Temporally, the collaborative rhythms of certain groups will always be different to those of paddlers in other areas, as they contend not just with one another, but their experiences of their environments as well.*

Collectives of individuals with an illness experience paddling together require us to think more critically about the ways in which individuals with differing abilities and limitations inhabit landscapes rhythmically. For Macpherson (2008), it is the interaction of blind people with an unfamiliar landscape, the Lake District, which means that rather than operating as individuals as they are used to, the participants must work in collaboration with another (sighted) individual. Their rhythms are, even in new locations, never mapped onto place, however, but an interaction through the individual and their environment (Edensor 2011). In the case of breast cancer dragon boating, some of the women will have had substantial surgery and treatment that, due to their strategies of living, are invisible to the observer. However, although invisible, these considerations are ever-present in the lived experience of the paddler. Dragon boating is necessarily collaborative, and hence, collaboratively rhythmic. There can be no hidden individual ‘strategies’ within a collective of twenty paddlers who are all supposed and required to be acting in the same way. The paddler is not then thinking only of the roughness of the landscapes they encounter, but about its impending interaction with the rough (rather than smooth, that is to say unproblematic) body. These considerations begin, often, before the paddler gets into the dragon boat, possibly even before they pick up a paddle. Most survivors in the crew have a ‘side’: they are a left or a right-sided paddler. The rhythm is then guided by a number of separate factors: who they *can* paddle with, where they paddle in the boat, if they are touching another paddler. The boat is full of bodily, as well as social rhythms (see Lefebvre 2004, Mels 2004).

At times, rhythms within Paddlers for Life, either within Paddlers for Life Windermere, or further afield to other affiliated groups may be seen as disturbances to the collaborative rhythm, or as Lefebvre (2004) terms it, arrhythmia. Disturbance does not mean difference. All rhythms need difference – a healthy body requires different rhythms working together in different ways, or in eurhythmia (Lefebvre 2004). For Lefebvre, arrhythmia occurs when rhythms break apart, like my experience in Wigan, when arrhythmia meant we ended up stuck on a mud bank. Usually, however, although different to Windermere, the rhythms of Wigan *will* work eurhythmically. To use a previous example from paddling rhythms, Victoria was still in eurhythmia whilst rocking with the boat; the visitor, however, stopped dead on his seat, created an arrhythmia for the crew. Vitaly, what might be seen as eurrhythmic within the crew, may be seen as arrhythmic from outside of it.

The distinction between the rhythmic and the arrhythmic, then, is a distinction confined to a contextual collective understanding of individual fluidity. Rhythms are generally understood in

certain, linear, ways. “[F]or there to be *change*, a social group, a class or a caste must intervene by imprinting a **rhythm** on an era, be it through force or in an insinuating manner” (Lefebvre 2004:14, original emphasis). According to Lefebvre, what *is* rhythmic is dependent on the complicity of the group. It is interesting here, that Lefebvre seeks not to alter the spatial properties of rhythm, but instead the temporal ones; an insinuation made clear by the use of the word ‘era’. By doing this, we may suggest that Lefebvre refers to a group that is not defined merely through physical location, but is a function of temporal interaction. The rhythmic participatory model of Paddlers for Life is only in the moment of its understanding of the group. Again, forgive me for deviating from the normal pattern:

*“You’re not there because you’ve got breast cancer, or you’ve got anal cancer, or you’ve got any cancer at all. It’s a cancer boat that brings you there, it’s not a cancer boat that transports you. What transports you is all those people in that boat, paddling in unison” - Grace*

Not that rhythms imprinted on eras forego other social, natural, bodily *and* temporal connections. One of the new teams is based around Edinburgh, Scotland, paddling on a firth, rather than a lake like Paddlers for Life Windermere. In fact it is, at present, the only Paddlers for Life team not to paddle on a static body of water. They are subject to different rhythms there, both of the environment, and of the social collective. It is not only the agents which intersect, but it is also the “interconnecting time characteristics (velocity, rhythm, momentum) of those entities/processes which will combine in relational hybrid rhythms of space-time rhythms” (Jones 2010:194). It is the circular rhythms, weeks, years, tides, which Lefebvre (2004) alludes to that play a role in reminding us of the temporal interplays that take place as we engage in more linear rhythms; the daily grind (Lefebvre 2004). For Paddlers for Life Windermere, temporalities of the environment are (or appear to be) fixed according to time. Paddling occurs at the same time every week, weather permitting. In a visit to Edinburgh, however, Paddlers were reminded of the temporal properties that at times appear to be fixed within the entities/processes with which they continually interact. The temporal became too great to ignore as we watched it inflict havoc on those unsure of the environment’s fluid temporalities; tides. To Paddlers for Life Scotland South East, however, these tidal rhythms will become inhabited as part of their own; their rhythms will become co-dependent.

### **Rhythms of the environment**

*I’m standing by the side of the firth. The tide’s high now, but by the time we’re finished, one of the boats by the side of the jetty will be marooned, resting precariously on its keel. While I’m*

*paddling, I don't notice the flow of the tide. Maybe I'm not looking for it. A few months later, and I'm speaking to Isla, the chairperson of the group, on the phone. She's telling me that when they get their new boat (the order has just gone in), they will have to be different from the other groups. For instance, they won't have a set time every week. They will be dependent on the tides, and importantly, their boatman's reading of them. Paddling rhythms will be different as well. It is unlikely that they will be able to venture outside of the enclosed harbour area unless the weather is very calm, for safety reasons. They will not have the run of the lake, according to the helm's discretion. And after they finish, because of the salty water, rhythms will change again. The boats will have to be washed off, to stop the salt from corroding the boat membrane. The salt does not only create more time-consuming rhythms, of course. Whilst paddling, I didn't feel a difference. For much of the time I was up on the drum and struggling to remain with the rhythm of the boat. But afterwards I was talking to Emily. The salt in the water made the boat more buoyant, she told me. It sat higher, was easier to paddle through it. It was imperceptible to me, but to the experienced paddler, it made a huge difference.*

*The environment is not just nature. It is other people as well. I discussed rhythm with Ava, with regards to paddling. She told me about how the rhythm changes within the boat. It is much easier to keep a rhythm if you are touching another person; if your bodies are in contact. It is in the middle of the boat, when the bodies diverge that rhythm is lost, that the boat can begin to caterpillar. Without that touch, a sense of the person next to you is lost, awareness loses one sense. Touch is a factor in other ways as well. One day, out on the water, Emily offered me some wax for my paddle. By applying it to the wooden paddle, my relationship with the paddle, and with the environment changed. Even as the water lapped at my hand as I buried the blade through its uneven surface, my hand remained stayed, without the readjustment that had previously been necessary.*

*Your body is just one of the senses that you constantly use in the boat. Sometimes, some senses come to the fore, at the expense of others. Whilst we were racing in the Solstice Paddle, and as I grew more tired, I felt myself feel and hear harder for the rhythm. The importance of the visual diminished as I tried to get that rhythm back, to ignore my screaming muscles, to give them something to concentrate on. By half way as well, we had really given up on catching other crews. There was a kayaker who was with us for a while, but that was about it! We took it easier, but I was still tired. There was a constant drained feeling in my arms. It didn't feel like I couldn't go on, but it was a constant. I tried to listen, and feel harder for the rhythm, as it*

*seemed like my eyes couldn't do it for themselves any longer. It isn't racing anymore, if it ever was; it was Paddlers for Life's rhythm.*

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that journeys, in their present form and understanding, are premature in their culmination. It has taken the medicalised journey as its preceding argument, and sought to expand from this the multiple other ways in which rhythms undermine the destination oriented journeys which are placed upon the lived experience of individuals diagnosed with cancer. In adopting the rhythmic approach to living following a cancer diagnosis, it is argued that paddlers and other survivors and supporters reduce the need for goals with a fixed point in time or space, and instead explore their new rhythms together as they unfold. Geographers can play a vital role in exploring how the particular lived experience of the world for people in different situations changes according to their varying situations. We should not necessarily imagine a diagnosis as a new beginning, or a situation to be rectified in a return to health, but explore the rhythmic implications for people affected by cancer. In particular, the chapter has argued that rather than being subservient to space and time, which have traditionally formed the backbone to the medical understanding of the illness journey, rhythm is at once within, outside, behind, in front, and entwined with these important previous concepts. What is required of geography is not an elevation of the importance of rhythm, but the de-reification of all concepts concerned with the containment of the world as it is inhabited.

## 7-8: Practicing body spaces

I insert this small section here, between chapters 7 and 8, as it seems to me to be the best fit for it. It is not a preface to chapter 8, nor is it a postscript to chapter 7. Rather, I hope that it may be seen much as the hyphen of '7-8' is seen: as much one as the other, and attributable solely to neither.

Much study of the cancer experience has referred to the use of narrative, the relational representation of illness. The sociologist of medicine, and cancer survivor, Arthur Frank has produced clear writings on the use of narrative in referring to illness. In this section, I will suggest that, following from work on the body that we briefly explored in chapter two, practice must be better understood in the experience of geography, cancer and exercise.

Frank's narrative illness types are threefold, (although these are not imagined to be the only three that exist (Frank 1997; 1998)): 'restitution', 'chaos', and 'quest'. The first, a 'restitution' narrative, represents *the urge for return*; becoming ill, going through treatment but later returning to health, and the life you had before. The remaining two narratives revolve around *change*. In 'chaos', things go wrong, illness takes over a life and prohibits the individual from moving back into the identity they possessed before. This might be crudely positioned as a "negative change". As Frank (1997: 97) states, "[c]haos is the opposite of restitution: its plot imagines life never getting better. Stories are chaotic in their absence of narrative order." In quest narratives, however, although illness is not seen as necessarily positive, its affect can be seen to have empowering force in the lives of those affected (Frank 1998).

These narrative forms are well versed in the cancer literature (See Thomas-Maclean 2004); However, I do not feel that the narrative format engaged here allows us to understand, either practically or theoretically the notion of practice that is utilized by Paddlers for Life. As I have said before within this thesis, Paddlers for Life are a group of practice, rather than speech, in the first instance. Therefore, a theory is required which allows the practice of the 'geography of the cancer experience' to be brought to the fore. This research, whilst practiced through the creation of group interpretations of the experience of breast cancer dragon boating, was at all times focused on the practice of breast cancer dragon boating through Paddlers for Life.

I would like, at this point, to suggest that a practical theory of rhythm may be a particularly good fit in allowing us to think, not through illness narrative, but through the practice of illness. This formulization is situated in the format of dragon boating, and I hope that

practitioners of other practices will make their own alterations as they see fit. However, I see the framework as sound for this purpose. Like Frank's narratives, it is in three parts: rhythm, arrhythmia and eurhythmia.

Rhythm, in the popular imagination at least, represents restitution. It is the idealized form, the attempt to return to the practical rhythms that one had before cancer, and indeed dragon boating. In this sense, it is individualistic in terms of practice. It precedes the group, in that the group becomes relevant after the individual is aware of their illness, yet the individual may not be aware of their rhythm until after experiencing cancer.

Arrhythmia is relative to chaos, in Frank's terms. Lefebvre (2004) often linked illness, or the pathological state, to illness. "Pathology, in a word illness, is always accompanied by a disruption of rhythms: arrhythmia that goes as far as morbid and then fatal de-synchronisation." (Lefebvre 2004:68). It is the point at which rhythms break apart. The practices that one had before they become lost in the event of illness such as cancer.

Eurhythmia is harmony. It is everything working as it should, within the group.

"The body. Our body. So neglected in philosophy that it ends up speaking its mind and kicking up a fuss. Left to physiology and medicine... The body consists of a bundle of rhythms, different but in tune. It is not only in music that one produces perfect harmonies. The body produces a garland of rhythms [...] What is certain is that harmony sometimes (often) exists: eurhythmia. The eu-rhythmic body, composed of diverse rhythms – each organ, each function, having its own – keeps them in metastable equilibrium." (Lefebvre 2004:20 emphases in original)

My argument, which develops from Lefebvre's focus on the body in rhythm is that the body of Paddlers for Life, in paddling, reflects eurhythmia. Each individual may be affected by cancer in a particular way, but together they work in harmony. As Frank (1998) states, when we seek the quest narrative, it means accepting the impossibility of restitution. That our lives will never return to the point and path that they had reached previously. From that point onwards, eurhythmia can develop, as it has within the group.

Sometimes an arrhythmia will affect an individual paddler. They will stop paddling. But they are held by something stronger within the group, a force that allows them always already to be in eurhythmia, through their collaborative understanding of what it means to be a part of a community of practice. They are always part of a larger collaborative body.



## **The rhythmic body of Paddlers for Life**

As I alluded to in chapter 2, there is much more to be said about the body in geography than merely as a casing for its multiple elements. Numerous geographers have, as we have seen, sought to understand the body within geography. This thesis is not, however, overtly fleshy, or leaky. At least, not at first sight. In fact, if you can bear to, I think that should you read the thesis again, you will see leaks everywhere. Not from individual bodies perhaps, but from the body of the group.

What I have sought to do here is understand numerous bodies together, or to utilize another form of the word, the “united or organized whole; an aggregate of individuals characterized by some common attribute; a collective mass.” (**Body** (IV. 12. a.): Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) accessed from [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com) on 18/5/2013). Much as the individual body has been rethought within human geography, I have tried to rethink the notion of the collaborative body of individuals, or the ‘collective mass’. This definition from the Oxford English Dictionary presents us with a particular view of the body – contained, regular, uniform. There is no distinction between the human, fleshy bodies of this ‘aggregate’.

What an understanding of groups such as Paddlers for Life allows for is the irregularity of this aggregate of individuals in collaborative understanding; of the fleshiness of aggregates. Body space is worked collaboratively, rhythmically, and through practice, in the collaborative body of the dragon boaters.

We have seen through much work over the past twenty years that individual bodies do not work with boundaries, and are not limited by their corporeal identities (see for example Longhurst 1995, Mol 2002). I feel that these interests can be extrapolated, in eurhythmia, to understand (individual) bodies who have experienced arrhythmia.

In effect my theory is thus: it is not only within individual human bodies that rhythms occur, can fail (arrhythmia) or excel (eurhythmia). It is also within groups of individuals who choose to come together to operate as one body, to create their own understandings of rhythmic practice. As I referred to within chapter 7, what may be seen as arrhythmia from *outside* of the boat (i.e. Victoria resting, stopping paddling) may actually be seen *within* the body of the group as exemplifying the eurhythmic practices of the group (i.e. Victoria resting, rocking with the boat).



Figure 7: The author's view of the rhythmic practice of dragon boating.

Please do not think, however, that these rhythms are in any way 'natural' or pre-defined. To return to the arguments put forth in chapter 4, the community of practice is, in fact, a key way in which these rhythmic practices of Paddlers for Life come to exist. A paddling rhythm cannot exist without the practice of dragon boat paddling being at its very core. The paddling practices of the boat allow for the individual body not to be confined by the medical practices of constraining or fixing it, but to be free to act within the understanding of the collaborative individuals.

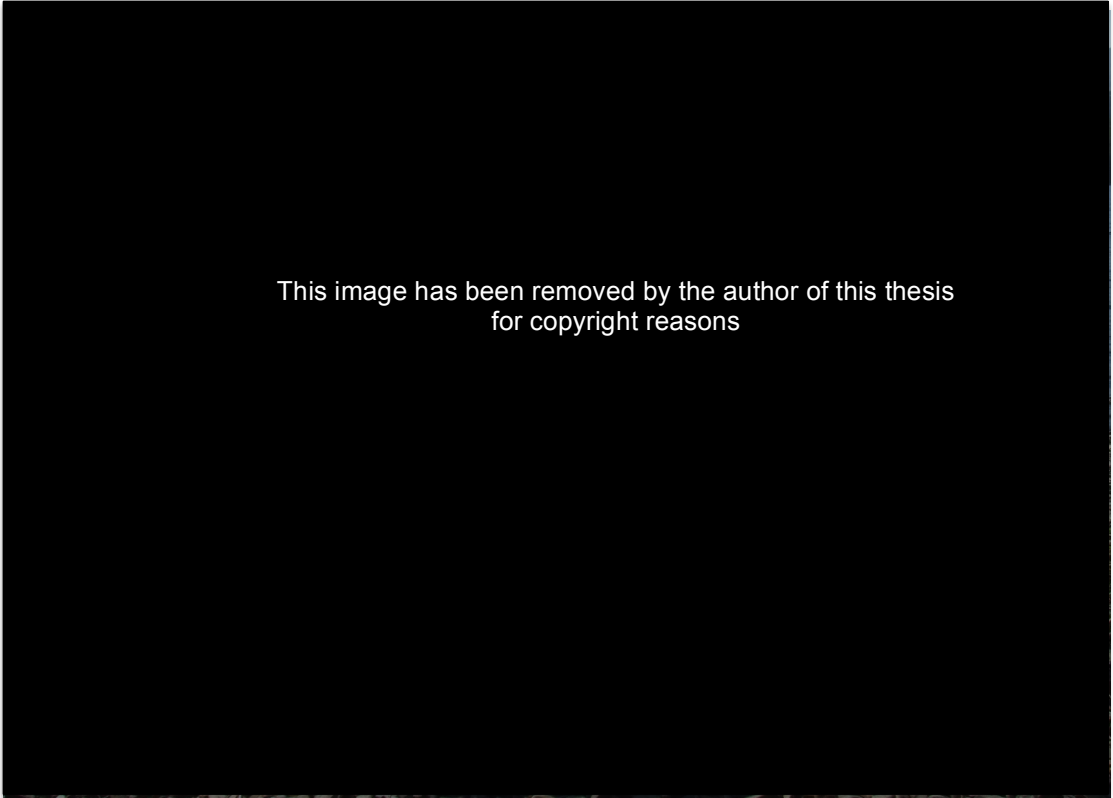
I believe that body space refers not just to the individual body, but also to bodies together, the eurhythmic. The body of Paddlers for Life allows for the practical rhythms of Paddlers for Life to be explored: not as singular, or fractured, but as Mol (2002) writes, as the body multiple. The geographic and natural elements of this body multiple will be explored in Chapter 8.

## Postcards


*These are the representations of the postcards we created. They are presented here in order to be seen with the next chapter. I suggest that you may want to come back to these during the chapter. Please be creative; feel free to cut them out, draw on them, whatever you wish.*

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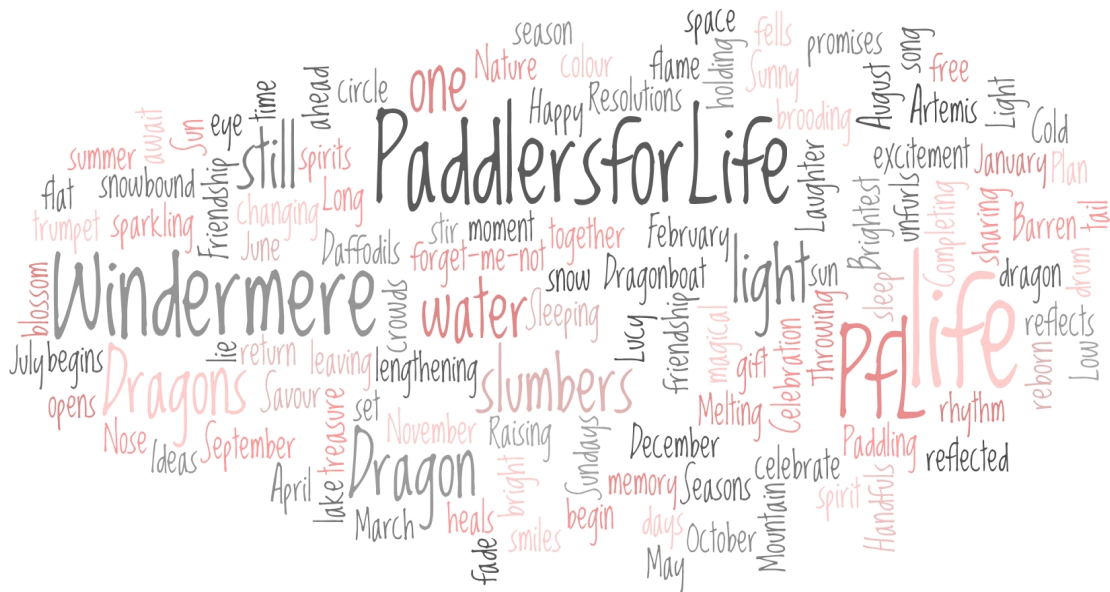
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## 13<sup>th</sup> Card



*'Paddlers for Life' is a U.K. Dragon Boat charity for cancer survivors. Our members are predominantly but not exclusively breast cancer survivors and their supporters. We are fortunate to paddle our dragon boats from the Low Wood Bay Marina on Windermere in the beautiful Lake District.*

*The idea for producing these postcards evolved from members taking part in a project involving 'Collaborative Writing' with Matt Grace, PhD candidate (Geography), College of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Exeter. The project highlighted the importance of 'place' and geography for members. Some locations were an integral part of the healing process for individual members. We wrote the verses, loosely based on the English form of Haiku, to illustrate how we perceived the 'paddling' year. The images submitted by members were selected to reflect the Haiku verses and the beauty of our surroundings. We wanted to share what paddling in such amazing surroundings means to us. We are interested in spreading the word about the fun, friendship and physical benefits of 'paddling' for cancer survivors.*

## **Chapter 8: Living the therapeutic exercise landscape**

Geographically, members of Paddlers for Life come from all over the North of England. From an hour north of London by train, to 15 minutes from the Scottish border by car, paddlers travel to reach Windermere most Sundays in the paddling season between April and October to paddle. Many have a direct experience of breast cancer. Many do not. In any case, there must be multiple inducements between themselves and this stretch of water in the heart of the Lake District. What is it that seduces paddlers to come weekly to Windermere, often just to spend two hours getting wet on a lake?

This chapter will formulate the concept of the therapeutic exercise landscape, theoretically and drawing on and reconceptualising the existing literature on ‘therapeutic landscapes’ (Gesler 1992) to develop my own empirical material. Whilst the original conceptualisation of therapeutic landscapes has been broadened from its original focus on contained sites of healing (see Gesler 1992, Williams 2002), to include the benefits of, for example, walking and using motorised wheelchairs in wooded environments (Conradson 2005b) as well as gardening (Milligan et al. 2004), it seems that this has often involved the restriction of exercise to the guise of recreation, or as simply a part of an interaction with nature. This has resulted in organised exercise not being approached as a part of the therapeutic landscape, but rather as a subsidiary, consequence or effect of it. I argue that such a restrictive formulation is not capable of dealing with the multiple social and cultural contexts that concern the therapeutic landscapes of Paddlers for Life. Rather, developing from the rhythmic focus of Chapter 7, I suggest that therapeutic exercise landscapes must be seen through the notion of continuous interaction with the environment, in order to suggest ways forward for geography in terms of health and well-being. Before exploring what a therapeutic exercise landscape might look (and feel) like, it is important that the original conceptualisations of the ‘therapeutic landscape’ are postulated.

### **Landscape geographies**

Many geographers have dealt with the specificities of landscape, and it would be futile for me to do more here than to direct readers towards the works of Cosgrove and Daniels (1988) and Wylie (2007) for detailed explications of the subject. However, it is important to highlight the de-objectification of landscape that has occurred within academic geography, a change that

remains unmatched with general English usage. As Cosgrove (2004) points out, common usage of the term 'landscape' is summed up by the OED definition as "[a] picture representing natural inland scenery" (**Landscape:** Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.), accessed on 4/10/2012, from [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)). The questioning of this objectification over the past thirty years has been in large part due to the cultural turn within human geography (Wylie 2007). This chapter, and indeed this thesis have attempted to explore the notion that landscape is not simply a representation of natural scenery, but the amalgamation of the processes of human-environment interactions. As Williams (2006) writes, a landscape becomes objectivised differently away from the way it is experienced in its lived practice. As Cosgrove (2004:69) suggests, the most interesting questions surrounding landscape today, are "how it gathers together nature, culture and imagination within a spatial manifold, reentering the material world as an active agent in its continuous reshaping." These questions sum up concisely the experience of this ethnography, and of this ethnographer. Through exploring the collective cultures, imaginations and natures of Paddlers for Life, the Paddlers for Life landscape has been explored as more than a pictorial representation of Windermere; it is the representation presented by a collective of individuals in their creative explorations of their environments, their practice, one another, and themselves.

### **Therapeutic landscapes**

There has long been an interest embedded within both academic and lay communities of the importance of natural environments to health and well-being. Water is, after all, an essential attribute to the human condition. It is, therefore, understandable that human beings have traditionally been drawn to areas where it is to be found in abundance (White et al. 2010), such as coasts and inlets. In more recent times, nature has been academically demonstrated to be a powerful tool within the existing structures of medicine (Ulrich 1984). It is only in more recent times that academia has recognised the benefit of natural landscapes as therapeutic environments, external to purely medical arenas.

The concept of the 'therapeutic landscape' first appeared twenty years ago, in the work of the mathematician-turned-health geographer Wilbert Gesler (1992). It was in this early work that Gesler first coined the term, to describe therapeutic benefits of certain landscapes (Gesler 1992). In these early days, it might be argued that by focusing on the particular properties of specific landscapes, such as Lourdes (1996), Bath (1998), and Epidauros (1993), Gesler was in fact presenting a vision of therapeutic landscapes which posited the places themselves as

unquestionably imbued with healing properties. However, it was made clear early on by Gesler that the cultural and social aspects of these landscapes were key to their formation (Kearns and Gesler 1998). Nonetheless, this assumption of contained properties has pervaded the literature. Perhaps as a result, Conradson (2005b) has reconceptualised the concept as one of therapeutic landscape experiences. It is in the way that Conradson develops the concept from the specificities of fixed therapeutic places, to the notion of therapeutic landscape experiences, that we can locate the benefit of the therapeutic landscape more within a notion of continued wellbeing, rather than of situated healing (Kearns and Andrews 2009).

Despite its infiltration within other social sciences, therapeutic landscapes have remained largely within the concept of human geography. Within the geographies of health (a concept that does not long predate therapeutic landscapes), it is argued that “‘landscape’ is a metaphor for the complex layerings of history, social structure and built environment that converge to enhance or corrode human wellbeing in particular places” (Kearns and Andrews 2009:311). As we have seen with previous treaties on metaphor, then, landscape is a term that we use to explain a multitude of occurrences that affect the individual. Vitally to this view, it may be said that landscape “involves as much what is excluded as what is included in view or perception” (Kearns and Gesler 1998:7). By suggesting that there is more than that contained within view and perception, and indeed with idyllisation, we can begin to explore the notion that therapeutic landscapes will not always (be able to) conform to positive conceptions of the natural environment (see Andrews 2004). Williams (2002) has suggested that in times of extreme need, therapeutic landscapes may arise not out of choice, but out of necessity; previously banal sites such as the home become places of acute care. Hence, I feel that it is vital that therapeutic landscapes are seen as more than the interaction between self and the environment, but also focus upon the importance of the rhythms of life, to include informal others (Williams 2002) in developing our understandings of the healing nature of our environments. Indeed, Williams’ argument suggests that much interaction with the concept by researchers has involved examining marginal and special populations (Williams 2007), rather than individuals and environments that might be deemed to be less exciting, or less ‘special’. This should not, I think, be interpreted as an argument against researching ‘special populations’. Rather, I think that special populations, of which I believe breast cancer dragon boaters might comply, require a nuanced reading that sets their experiences not apart from others, but within a world of distinct possibilities. In other words, illness does not create ‘special people’ but rather creates situations, which are seen as different from others previously

led within dominant structural frameworks. Indeed, I suggest, after English et al (2008), that a combination of everyday and extraordinary experiences can be located within communitarian therapeutic landscapes. By accepting this in the first instance, we can begin to break down the dualism between the everyday and the extraordinary, so that the therapeutic landscape is not contained in the ‘kingdom of the sick’ (Sontag 1991), but is seen as an ongoing function of wellbeing (Kearns and Andrews 2009). To achieve this end, this chapter will seek to understand the ways in which therapeutic exercise landscapes come to be, not just through ‘positive’ landscapes, but also through landscapes, which can be challenging and difficult as well.

### **The beginnings of (collaborative) therapeutic exercise landscapes**

Reconceptualising a concept is much more complex than renaming the concept; we cannot just parachute in an idea as we can a word! The reconceptualisation of therapeutic exercise landscapes, therefore, goes much deeper than exercise itself. Exercise has not been ignored within the mediums of geographies of health and therapeutic landscapes, although it has been underrepresented in the literature. Whilst Lea (2008) and Hoyez (2007) have focused on the practice of yoga, Andrews, Sudwell and Sparkes (2005) have produced interesting research on the ways in which exercise spaces, in their case gyms, are created within the imagination of their collective users. It is important that any (re)conceptualisation of therapeutic exercise landscapes uses such research as a starting point to build from, rather than dismissing it because of differences that might appear.

One of the most significant differences that has emerged from the *study* of therapeutic landscapes, is the distinction between everyday and extraordinary landscapes (see Williams 2002, Willis 2009), the ordinary denoting place and the latter space (Smyth 2005). Rather than focussing more on one than the other, I argue that there is no room for such distinctions within therapeutic exercise landscapes. Within a collaborative practice, such distinctions place too much focus upon separating out one life experience from another, rather than seeing the *rhythmic* connections between the two. Although the focus is on organised and focused exercise in this example, to differentiate between extraordinary and the everyday is to remove exercise from movement and to reify it out of the reach of individuals who have experienced limitations on their mobility.

This distinction pervades the paper by Alette Willis (2009). According to Willis, “[l]eaving the ordinary places where one dwells in order to spend a small amount of time in a place deemed

to be therapeutic is more likely to result in palliation than healing” (Willis 2009:87). There are two concerns with this assertion, the first etymological and the second theoretical. Firstly, using the term palliative creates for me only a medical image. Particularly within cancer narrative, palliative medicine means that there is no hope of recovery, and creates a distinction between well-being and the body that I do not believe is intended or warranted within Willis’ argument. Secondly, ‘leaving the ordinary places where one dwells’ suggests that dwelling is fixed in place, rather than part of the lived experience – an argument tackled in Chapter 7. Willis is not alone in this assumption: indeed, Hartig et al.’s (1991) work on the benefits of nature, suggest that being away from a place does not produce the same affects as access to wilderness. I do not argue that such a suggestion can simply be discarded. Rather, I suggest that there is a much more complex relationship between therapeutic exercise and landscape(s) than the process of dis/location might suggest. Calling on arguments formulated in Chapter 7, we might argue that to articulate a notion of ‘dwelling’ as a bounded unit that one can leave is to embed falsely the notion of the ‘everyday’ within a sense of containment and ‘normality’. To Ingold (2007c), this is to suggest that, as individuals, we are transported between places and aesthetic sensibilities, rather than deeply involved with the fabrication of both the therapeutic and the landscape. Therapeutic exercise landscapes are, hence, not a thing, but a ‘relational outcome’ (Conradson 2005b). It is not in the place, but “through a complex set of transactions between a person and their broader socio-environmental setting” (Conradson 2005b:338) that a therapeutic exercise landscape is experienced.

This is not to deny that “some of the more immediate influences and constraints, such as the demands of a home or work setting, will likely be subject to attenuation” (Conradson 2005b:341). Indeed, we have already seen in Chapter 6, and we will explore again below, how dragon boating might be seen as a liminal ‘escape’ or a holiday; a relational outcome of experience, rather than a notion attached to place. However, it is in this theorisation that we must remain clear of our direction, which began with the questioning of fixed space. The liminal experience is not just spatial, but also social. Staats and Hartig (2004) ask whether the beneficial experience of the landscape is tempered by the presence of another individual. Their study suggests that the restoration potential of rural environments is only enhanced by company when to be alone would be a safety concern. Whilst they do not limit analysis to such feelings, Williams and Guilmette (2001) also suggest that feelings of safety and security are key to the therapeutic landscape. These are interesting suggestions, as such a conclusion would require a reconceptualization of the potential of ‘synergy’ that I advanced in Chapter 4; an

experience that envelops the group as breast cancer dragon boaters, rather than as a group *only in* the boats, when risk is at its highest. This latter thesis is supported by Hoyez (2007), who suggests that a sense of collective identity can add to the personal and physical engagements experienced between space and place.

From the research with Paddlers for Life Windermere, four categories have emerged as themes of what I term ‘therapeutic exercise landscapes’; landscapes of home, landscapes of inhabitation, landscapes of freedom and landscapes of the outdoors. After a short introduction to the history of Windermere to provide some context to the physical elements of the area, each will be dealt with in turn.

### **An introduction to Windermere**

Windermere is two places, simultaneously. Traditionally the name referred only to the lake itself, being transposed upon the town by its edge only in the middle half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To differentiate between the two, the lake is often referred to as Lake Windermere (creating, as I oft discovered, a tautological tourist-trap, ‘mere’ being an Old English term meaning ‘lake’). There are two towns which border the lake; Bowness-on-Windermere and Waterhead. Neither Ambleside to the north, nor Windermere to the East, directly border the lake, although both have spread to touch the towns that do. Since local government reorganisation in 1974, both the lake and the town have been within the county of Cumbria (Windermere Online (n.d.) <http://www.windermereonline.co.uk/> accessed 26/4/2012).

The lake was formed over 15,000 years ago during the last ice-age; it is 219 feet at its deepest, and ten and a half miles long (Mitchell 1980). Whilst the town only arose with the arrival of the railway in 1847 (Mitchell 1980), the lake has long been popular amongst non-residents and tourists. So popular, in fact, that in 1844 a ‘William Wordsworth’ was one of the signatories against the extension of the railway into the Lake District (Smith, n.d.). The railway would bring, it was thought by Wordsworth and his fellows, too many of the common classes to the area, thereby lessening its particular picturesque values. The proponents for the expansion of the railway took a humanistic rather than naturalistic position; the railway, they argued, could succeed in “opening out to them [the urban workforce] the beauties of nature by which their minds would be enlarged and hearts expanded” (Cornelius Nicholson, quoted in Smith, n.d.:10). Although Wordsworth represents a literary tradition that proposes that landscape should be experienced by certain individuals through literature, rather than in-person, the Lake District could be argued to be at the forefront of a literary tradition which seeks to break down

the barriers between literature and direct experience, with authors such as Beatrix Potter, Arthur Ransome and Alfred Wainwright removing the abstract from the experience. Our writing, I would humbly suggest, requests to be part of this latter tradition

### **Landscapes of home: Paddlers for Life Windermere as a collaborative therapeutic exercise landscape**

*“I feel it’s part of me, and I’ve sat on it, I’ve been wet in it, I’ve sunk in it, I’ve swam in it. I think I’m part of that lake, yeah. And I think that is the added level” - Grace*

As we can see from the above quote, there is a sense of belonging to the lake amongst paddlers. It is not just a physical attribute of the landscape, over ten miles long and 200 feet deep. Rather, it belongs to the being of Grace, as part of Paddlers for Life.

*The paddlers have come to know the lake very differently from their initial encounters. Most only knew it as tourists before they became paddlers. Now, once a week, they inhabit the lake. It is theirs. When people come to visit them, as they invariably do, they enjoy taking them onto ‘their’ lake, showing them ‘their’ territory. It’s not always seen in the same way, of course. I was once party to a discussion concerning the sense of private ownership of the land surrounding the lake. We were sat on the shores, talking about the potential of collaborating with an artist in creating a piece of art. We were discussing where to put it. Jessica suggested that it could go where we were at that moment, from where the boats launched. But to Emily, this wasn’t just from where Paddlers for Life launched. It was private land, which was loaned free of charge to the group, by a local chain of hotels. Rather than marking their spot, to Emily it seemed that they were giving something to the hotel. Why should they have it? Why should it be theirs? To Chloe and Sophie, such arguments gave the landscape a political edge. So much of the lake was privately owned, should they ever be asked to move, it was unlikely that they would ever be able to find somewhere else where they could keep their boats free of charge. The landscape was created as private space, enjoyed by only a few. At the end of the day, they were two groups with very different aims and objectives. The hotel had to make money. But that isn’t what Paddlers for Life is about.*

I argued, before, that it is a false construct to distinguish between different types of places; ‘everyday’ and ‘extraordinary’. Distinct places, it has been argued, are a feature of the capitalist formation of the notion of ownership that pervades western culture (Rigsby 1999). Rather, if we conceive ourselves as *with* the landscape (Ingold 2007c), then we may be able to



negate the need to distinguish between the house and the home. However, as we see above, theory cannot nullify the practical experiences of individuals. It is not my or anyone else's theories of inhabitation which could, one day, cause Paddlers for Life to seek new land to boat from. Such concerns, whilst not romantic, must be seen to play a very real part in the inhabited experiences of Paddlers for Life. The structures of society are not going to fall overnight. It is only through understanding practices, rather than theorisations, that we can begin to understand this in practice.

My argument is that 'homes' are not just houses, but exist as constant dialogue between that which seems far, and that which seems close; in reality, both are very much part of *us*. Rather than being a site of particular occurrences, landscapes should be seen as *all* practices between the human and environment. These practices should then be seen as opening spaces out, rather than enclosing them in (Thrift 1999) within different notions of therapy, exercise, or landscape. Through particular narrative constructions, a place might be fashioned towards a particular brand of practices that appear as a collective, unifying whole; for example rural Britain becomes white (Pollard 2004). However, as Hoyez states (2007), the mythical 'Yogaville' in the United States is in fact made up of different groups of people practising, and participating with, the environment in different ways.

This is not a clarion call for individuals to divest themselves of any sense of identity formed around capitalist foundations. Rather, it is supposed that the collective identity of Paddlers for Life is formulated within all of the experiences of its members. The sense of a being-with the landscape of Windermere is within the collaborative rhythmic understanding of the group.

*Many paddlers were returning to the landscape from a time of childhood. Although for Ava it felt like a coming back, as she had always been surrounded by mountains and water, for many it was the first time they had been really entwined in this particular landscape since childhood. Ruby had often been here as a child, it brought back memories of childhood. Similarly for Lily, Windermere held memories of childhood holidays. For Joshua, however, the lake was landscape. He was a keen walker, and had always been excited by it. It wasn't the landscape of Windermere that he found therapeutic, but the landscape itself. It was the interaction itself, rather than the named place that was of most interest to him.*

*The lake will mean something different to everyone who experiences it. It might be 'home' for many people, for many different reasons. It was strange to Sophie and Samatha that few people from around the area knew anything about the group. Within the group, there was no lived*

*connection to the place, at least in terms of the lake. A couple of members, supporters, lived not far from the northern shore. Yet still, the sense that none of the paddlers had a deep individual connection to the place was an interesting one to them. Instead, the deep connection of Windermere as home is one related to the collectivity of the group. This didn't mean that the importance was just in the group, of course. There was a conversation between the group and the landscape. As Grace put it, the group could move around, paddle in different places, but Windermere would always be home. It was like a blanket, with rounder edges than other landscapes than might have meaning to groups. Is interacting with that landscape, thought Ava, feeling the water, sensing it?*

The concept of 'home', of deep *positive* attachment to place is key to the geographic experience. Moreover, it is generally key to the individual experience. Take for example the humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), and his rocking chair. To him is it *his* space, imbued with his values. But Paddlers for Life seem to have no real connection to Windermere outside of their group understanding of it. What I mean to suggest here is an approach to the therapeutic exercise landscape, which understands place attachment as a collaborative, rather than individual practice, which moves with the group in their practice.

There appears to be a difference between the sense of belonging that I am talking about here and the ways in which it is normally conceived. In the traditional sense, a collective belonging in place requires the individual to come to an understanding of place that conforms to that of the existing majority (see Fortier 1999). Individuals are drawn to a place because they are drawn by the imaginative geography held within. Because they are still a fairly new group, now in their fifth season at Windermere, it seems that the imaginative sense of the place has not yet been fully formed within the group; they are a group in Windermere, not of Windermere. By this, I mean to say that the imaginative sense of the group is not yet fully formed. Laura told me that her aim is to be the flagship project for cancer exercise initiatives; in other words, to be the imaginative centre to which others are drawn; to the group. There is an assumption in many therapeutic landscapes of the pre-imposed social construction of the importance of place to the meaning of belonging; coming to place. Indeed, Windermere is likely to have been imagined as a therapeutic landscape for many hundreds of years; Wordsworth's opposition to the railway is some evidence of that. However, the therapeutic exercise landscape can only be seen in context. The therapeutic landscape at the heart of this paper is not Windermere, but Paddlers for Life Windermere; therapy through practice.

Individuals are not to be disassociated from the collaborative therapeutic exercise landscape. Fortier (1999:48) suggests that “the shared performance of patterns of behaviour not only produces a communal appreciation of belonging, but it simultaneously produces particular kinds of subjects which cannot be dissociated from the collective project.” The difference for Paddlers for Life Windermere, of course, is that Fortier (1999) was able to rely on long instilled cultural values and knowledges as part of her research with an Italian catholic church in London - Fortier is a renounced French Canadian Catholic. Most of the women have never been part of an organised exercise collective as a result of their diagnosis of cancer. The question then emerges, how do we theorise this interaction that the dragon boaters experience every Sunday? Their interaction with the landscape, and the lake in particular, seems to fit within aboriginal conceptualisations of the meaning of land (Rigsby 1999). Mackenzie and Dalby (2003) suggest that as senses of place belonging emerge, it is common for the relationship *between* people and land to be foregrounded. Indeed, within this way of thinking, the dominant capitalist configuration of land ownership is reduced to the individual. Within the collaborative then, there will be different ways of thinking, at different times.

Like aboriginal conceptions, I would suggest that Paddlers for Life Windermere divorce themselves from the capitalist private ownership theory of land rights. However, it would be disingenuous to suggest that the cultural representations extend to the belief of belonging *to the* land (Irwin et al 1997). Rather, I suggest that this sense of possession comes from a belief not that they are born of, or belong to, the land but that they are as a part of the landscape through their practice with it. As Grace stated, they have been *as* all parts of the landscape, willingly or otherwise. Irwin et al. (1997) suggest that a sense of belonging operates along a continuum incorporating belonging to place, honouring the land, and inheriting a place. This interaction induces a sense of belonging, which is collaborative, rather than individualistic. Belonging can be seen as enlivened on three levels; the personal, the collective, and the other (Crang 1998). Whilst focussing on the collective sense of belonging, I believe we should challenge the sense of “shared identity often sustained through shared relationships *to* places” (Crang 1998:112, my emphasis). To view places as such is to see them not only as pre-formed, but their effect as identical to each member of the collective. This can never be the case. Senses of belonging and ‘home’ in therapeutic landscapes are an effect of the collaborative experience within them.

## **Landscapes of inhabitation: does therapy mean calming?**

*Windermere is not always an entirely positive landscape. For Ruby, it held a possibility of illness. She had been researching a leak of nuclear pollution which had affected the Lake District when she was a child. She had been on a school trip to the lakes. Apparently there was now a higher than average occurrence of cancer within schoolchildren who had visited the area at around the same time. It was a dangerous landscape that was hidden by a visual beauty. It was evident to her that the landscape didn't give a damn about anyone; it wasn't simply a categorical positive. For Laura, it was slightly different. The landscape was more of a metaphor for life. Sometimes there were still points, sometimes there were rapids. But this didn't change the way in which the landscape was. It was always changing, but even the challenges seemed to be therapeutic to many of the paddlers.*

*The lake itself can be vicious, Grace told me. Places that seem calm, can become dangerous in a moment. The water conditions are key to the experience which can be had by the paddler. Negative conditions out on the water, and it becomes a bad paddling experience. But not, I sensed, un-therapeutic. Rather, with the volatility of the landscape, the challenge comes to the fore. On a few occasions I swapped onto the drum after the first session. When the wind gets up, it's difficult to retain the rhythm of the crew and remain positioned on the drum, rather than in the water. The interaction is also different for me. As a tourist, one who visits comparatively rarely, and has little experience on the drum, it is a challenge, rather like a bucking bronco. I want to remain on the drum, to prove that I can do it. But to Olivia, perhaps the risk is greater than the reward. The raised eyes from under the eyebrows are message enough when we ask how the outing was for the drummer. Her inhabited experience of landscape, encapsulating the body, as well as the landscape around her is vital to begin to understand the therapeutic realities of paddling. Whilst I was **on the boat**, Olivia was **with the dragon boat** – her understanding was combined with it.*

Popular landscapes are a key aspect in understanding the relationships between places and people. Whilst, the natural beauty of an area is not to be confused with the supposed healing properties of that location, neither can it be divorced entirely from that relationship with a therapeutic reputation. The 'natural beauty' may be key in drawing individuals to the place in the first instance (Gesler 1998), before it becomes a part of the practised and contextual therapeutic landscape.

In challenging the fixed location of therapeutic landscapes, the cultural and social elements of the therapeutic landscapes become emphasised (Williams and Guilmette 2001). By doing so, we must come to understand that all the elements of cultural and social interaction, rather than just the positive ones, are in focus. By accepting the potential of ‘challenging’ therapeutic landscapes, they are transferred from seemingly passive environments for the individual, rather becoming a landscape of challenge; something that is outside of the previous lived experience of the paddlers, and so must be experienced in a different way. Similarly to Conradson (2005b), Foley discards the sense of a landscape with distinct properties, preferring instead what he refers to as a therapeutic assemblage (Foley 2011); the interaction between metaphor, material and inhabitation. If the metaphor and material are experienced as inhabited (Ingold 2007c), then it is clear that the therapeutic landscape need not be necessarily calming to be therapeutic.

A ‘sense of place’ is often seen as an attachment to place, indeed something we sometimes only recognise at the point of its erosion (Cresswell 2004). But what is a ‘sense of place’? Simply speaking, it is an attachment of humanistic value to place that emerged from much of the work by humanistic geographers. The term emerged from the distinction between space and place; “‘space’ is more abstract than ‘place’”. What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (Tuan 1977:6). In short, ‘sense of place’ is perhaps best explained as a dualism (Relph 1976). To lose a sense of a place then, with its landscape, people and culture, involves that which was once familiar becoming alien (Williams 2006). To represent ‘place’ purely as familiarity or positivity or even entirely knowable, however, is to grossly simplify experiences as experienced through inhabitation. Indeed, I am drawn towards Ingold’s (2009) argument that space is an empty abstraction, meaning that to leave ‘place’ is to enter ‘nothingness’. Rather than being attributes embedded in place, the ‘sense of place’ is crucial to the relationship that an individual then forms with an environment (Foley 2011). However, it is within a *collaborative* sense that therapy can be experienced in all of its facets, not simply positive ones. Let us examine the following quotation:

“[E]mbodied rhythms evolve to produce a collective sense of place grounded in the sharing of spatial and temporal co-presence.” (Edensor 2004:110)

Whilst I agree with the sentiment of Edensor (2004), I feel that there is a linguistic problem with the quote. I believe that embodied rhythms can never simply be co-present in the same

location – they must always collaborate, if they are to share space and time. To be purely collective, I suggest, creates a sense of place that is content with individuals merely being *in* the same space and time. This is not reflective of the experience that I had with Paddlers for Life. Indeed, such an argument returns us to ideas of social identity theory visited in Chapter 4. I argue, however, that it is in the rhythmic interaction of people and the environment that *collaborative* senses of place, with the intoned theme of *practice*, are formed; it is not in the presence of individuals, but in the practice with the environment that sense of place is formulated for the group. Underlining the geographic aspects of rhythm can be crucial to the ways our landscapes are understood. Within a paper by King and de Rond (2011) on the collective rhythms of ‘The Boat Race’, an annual rowing event held between the universities of Oxford and Cambridge on the River Thames, seemingly no distinction is made between collective and collaborative, after the latter is used by one of the rowers. Whilst this is unsurprising in the realm of sociology, I argue that the distinction made by Jake Cornelius is crucial through emphasising the particular action – a yell from one of the crew – that removed individuality and “made the process of rowing collaborative again” (Cornelius, quoted in King and de Rond 2011:569) there is an emphasis on the practice and practise of rowing. In that situation, I argue, the geographical elements of the social situation were key to the success of the team. “[L]ives are social, not because they are framed but because they are entwined” (Ingold 2010:302). The individuals couldn’t just be in rhythm together due to their co-presence; they needed to *row* in rhythm together – to *be* rowers – in practice with the environment that surrounded them. This, I believe is how rhythms are to be understood geographically, and understood as challenging in their therapeutic potential.

*The weather isn’t always positive. Dragon boating is not always a pleasant experience, Evie and Chloe told me, when it’s cold and wet. Evie particularly doesn’t like dragon boating in the cold. You have to be careful when the conditions are like that as well. It drizzled for most of the ten miles that we tackled the Summer Solstice paddle down Windermere. The wind got up as well. It didn’t just make the practice of paddling and rhythm difficult. It inhibited the body as well. A couple of paddlers got very cold, their bodies reacting with the environment without their control. By the time I had got back to Windermere on the boats, I was shivering as well, an uncontrollable reaction to the interaction with the landscape, much as I should have liked to have controlled it.*

Therapeutic landscapes are often seen as calming places. Conradson (2005b) both reports and utilises terminology such as ‘peace’, ‘calm’, ‘relaxation’ in his work on a residential centre in

Dorset. Indeed much of the literature concerning therapeutic landscapes seems to reflect such sentiments (See Williams 2010, Conradson 2007, Andrews 2004, Gesler 1992). However, Paddlers for Life Windermere is not seen as irrepressibly linked to calming sentiments. The lake can be rough, challenging, and even dangerous. In Chapter 6, we explored the changing sentiments of Sophie concerning the dragon/boat in different contexts. Paddling is not always pleasant. It is not always calming. So why are individuals still drawn to the therapeutic landscape of the group? It is perhaps too simplistic to suggest that the notion of exercise may change the experience of the landscape. Exercise is an experience of most environments, if we are to read exercise as movement. However, if we take the predominance of the specific exercise as primary to the identity of the group, then we may suggest, I think, that the notion of exercise changes the interaction that is experienced with the land. As will be suggested in the following sections, change is represented within the therapeutic exercise landscape of Paddlers for Life not just between landscapes, but also within them. Whereas Conradson's (2005b) participants may see the essence of change as being between their home and respite landscapes, the latter being calming and relaxing spaces as well as landscapes of increased opportunities, Paddlers for Life Windermere reflect an opportunity which is embedded within the self, so that empowerment through embodied challenge becomes a vital aspect of the therapeutic properties of the experienced landscape.

Lea (2008) suggests that there is a possibility that the therapeutic is not directly linked to positive experiences, using the example of a yoga retreat, where the relaxation experienced is also tempered by other experiences such as insect bites and the (too) hot Spanish sun. Vitality, these are not divorced from the therapeutic element, but are rather part of it. Therapy is not just healing. This has also been suggested in activity spaces. Eden and Barratt (2010) suggest that in certain sports such as fishing, "commercial ponds offer a traditionally outdoor environmental activity but in a space that modifies the vagaries, risks and discomfort of fishing on rivers by providing comforts traditionally associated with an indoor environment" (Eden and Barratt 2010:490). By taking a contained view of the world, environments are created which might look 'natural', but do not feel 'natural'. I have attempted here, to make clear how inhabitation is always collaborative, rather than collective; inhabited landscapes allow the environment to be challenging rather than merely aesthetically pleasing. For geographers, I believe that this allows an opportunity to explore how the collaborative nature of groups of people affected by illness allows therapeutic (exercise) landscapes to be practised, and created with their environments.

## **Landscapes of freedom**

It is the intricacies that seem to make a landscape. There may be generalisations, codes to which we categorise, but each individual will have a different interpretation of the landscape. Paddlers seemed to make a distinction between the immobility of the landscape, whilst at the same time praising its changing nature. These were not opposite views, however, but a note to the consistency of difference and the impossibility of passivity.

*The landscape could always be relied upon to be present. In this sense, the features of the landscape interplayed with one another. The hills would always be there, the water would always be there, no matter how they looked or swirled. The focus was on the presence of the object, rather than the variability of the processes that surrounded them. The mountains were always there as a reassuring presence, said Evie. No matter what else was going on, the landscape would always be there. For Laura, this compared to the ‘whirlwind of treatment’, which was all about the process of treatment. The process could not be seen, but only sensed in terms of the affect it had on the body, and of the role the medical community had on your body. To say that it was always there wasn’t to deny that it ever changed, however. The weather was a constant variable in the ways in which the landscape was experienced. It was vital, said Lily, it added to the challenge, it made the experience more interesting. At times when I was there, the other side of the lake could not be seen, so dense was the fog. It was only out on the water, within the fog, that the landscape reappeared.*

As we can see above, many of the dragon boaters commented on the feature of the weather in the way that their perception of dragon boating changed. More often than not, these perceptions were of extremes; strong winds or calm winds; white horses or a mill pond. This is a natural reaction. We, as humans, notice extremes more readily. As Joshua stated, his experience of freedom in the landscape, was not just of the landscape as an object on which he was released, but an interaction with the elements. After Ingold (2007d), we cannot experience *the* landscape, only be *in* landscape. If we are to live in the open, Ingold (2007d) argues, then we cannot experience objects:

“[T]here are no objects in the open world. To inhabit the open is not to be stranded in a closed surface but to be immersed in the fluxes of the medium, in the incessant movements of wind and weather. Life is borne on these fluxes which, felt rather than touched, permeate the inhabitant’s entire being.” (Ingold 2007d:34)



Although I accept Ingold's theses, a certain pragmatism is also required; if an individual conceives that they see an object, a fixed point, there is little to be gained in rejecting their thesis. However, as we have seen in the representation of the experience of paddlers, there is always a medium that blurs and renders indistinguishable the connection between the subject and object. For Ingold, the great animator is wind; the great animator in the experience of the self (Ingold 2007d). So is it for the helms in the group. They were normally supporters whilst I was with the group. The wind interrupts both their and the paddlers' experiences. It can affect their sense of freedom.

*Paddlers for Life is reflected and defined by its members. It is rare for supporters to be so involved with the day-to-day experience of a breast cancer dragon boating group. This is perhaps most clearly reflected in the individual experience of the (therapeutic) landscape. Experiences come from different individuals, from different times, from different lived experiences. For Joshua, the experience of landscape as a supporter seemed different from a survivor who had had their freedom personally tested by a cancer diagnosis. Joshua had always felt freedom in the landscape. As a child, they had a gate at the bottom of their garden, where they would disappear for hours at a time, returning covered in mud. Abby spoke similarly about her time as one of five children, who would disappear for hours at a time at their rural log cabin. It wasn't that survivors didn't have these stories of childhood experiences, but their immediate diagnosis seemed to focus their experience of the therapeutic properties of the landscape post treatment. For Chloe, her childhood in Zimbabwe was very important to her. She had missed the vast horizons that she had in her youth. It was only with paddling that she seemed to have been able to find them again, as a part of her life in the UK. Freedom was found out on the lake after treatment. For Chloe it became even more specific. Her landscape was situated around her preference for being a stroke at the front of the boat, when there really was no one else around her. For Emily, the sense of home water was strong again, in the stability that she felt there, in the landscape. But this was not some grand feature of the landscape. The patterns in the water that her paddle created every week were altered by her move to Scotland. The smallest differences in the fluid patterns of the interaction of blade in the water, a difference caused by the salt water density, meant that the stability experienced in the landscape – in her therapeutic landscape – was changed. Whether a hill, or a pattern in the water, stability is vital.*

*Windermere has changed for some individuals, as they became paddlers. Their interaction with the location has become more defined. As Olivia related to me; it's more than just a good place*

*to buy a cagoule now. The landscape has become re-defined as they move from being tourists, to escaping from tourists. The lake is theirs to be explored, away from the traditional tourist routes. Although they don't live there, and travel much the same routes to reach the lake, their interactions with the lake have differentiated them from the traditional view of the tourist. It is not a place they see linked to their own tourism anymore, but instead is linked to their own experiences of dragon boating.*

What is particularly important in understanding therapeutic landscapes, is not just in how the natural, cultural and imaginative properties of landscape (Cosgrove 2004) are experienced, but also how they are represented by those directly involved. As Chloe told me, she was particularly drawn to the vast landscapes of Windermere, which in turn lead her to relish the position of 'stroke', where the views of nature are at their most uninterrupted. Conradson (2007:104) suggests that *freedom* is akin to a feeling of "internal spaciousness", which comes through inhabiting the spaciousness of areas in different ways. Chloe has been able to identify those areas of nature and the landscape that are important to her, and continuously interpret them from the past, into the present. Thus, the restorative aspects of natural environments are not only in presence, but also continued in the imagination (Conradson 2007, Cosgrove 2004), extending the benefits of paddler's practice, and the experience of their freedom.

It was at this point, that the academic value of the postcards arose, and in particular the ways in which the therapeutic exercise landscape of Paddlers for Life is represented through spaciousness and other forms of freedom. The postcards that we created as a group can be read as holding their own secrets to a therapeutic landscape through their collaborative presentation. By this, I mean not just reading the text or image, but the postcard as a whole (Kurti 2001). One of the examples that emerges *from* the postcards, can be expressed through an interpretation of the use of 'light' within the postcards.

Light has long been associated with life and becoming; perhaps most prominently in the Christian western world in the Bible. More recently, White et al (2010) argue that there may be visual or environmental interactions that make certain places more or less restorative at certain times. In particular, White et al. (2010) use the example of patterns of light, drawing on the work of Fernandez and Wilkins (2008) on the negative attributes of the patterns of light. Whilst there has been some work on the importance of weather to the human interpretation of the environment (see Ingold 2007d), there seems yet to be any work within the therapeutic landscape literature, which addresses the importance of 'light' as a representation of well-

being. Most of the work in this field has been focused upon psychological conditions, such as Seasonal Affective Disorder (see Abas and Murphy 1987). In particular, it is argued that in many animals, the “seasonal rhythms are synchronised by environmental time cues” (Abas and Murphy 1987:1504), chief among them being the photoperiod, or length of daylight hours, although this has not been found to be conclusive. Further, Partonen et al (1998) also suggest that exercising in bright light could be linked to improving mood in all individuals, irrespective of any seasonal depressive tendencies. This is not to argue that there are not other symbols of the therapeutic landscape, such as the colours of the landscape or the constitution of the pictorial representation in terms of green and blue space (White et al. 2010), but rather to argue that light might also be taken seriously as part of the enacted therapeutic landscape (Dunkley 2009).

*The postcards were presented as a set, tied with pink ribbon. The descriptive ‘13<sup>th</sup> card’ rested on the top. Behind it, the twelve cards representing the twelve months of the western Gregorian calendar rested in order of succession. I was part of their creation. I was there when the words were chosen and formed; online when the pictures were chosen to accompany the texts; in the living room with Sophie and Olivia when the cards were ordered and tied. But it was only on my own that I began to feel the cards, and meanings from them spoke to me that hadn’t before. I don’t know if they spoke to the paddlers. Or if they were aware of the meanings I was seeing.*

*January*

*Barren fells brooding,  
The Dragon still slumbers.  
Ideas begin to stir*

*February*

*Melting snow,  
Low sun reflects on flat lake,  
Mountain dragon opens one eye*

*March*

*Sleeping Dragons await,  
Cold light, lengthening days,  
Nature unfurls, reborn*

*It's January. There is darkness before us, but sepia behind it. The metaphors are with the dragon and the fells, brooding, slumbering. There is no activity. At least, there are no people. February, and there is a glimpse of light, far off in the distance, reflected off the lake. Snow is melting, the metaphorical dragon begins to wake. March, and the dragons await. The days lengthen, nature is seen with its rhythmical pattern of new life. Light floods from the left of the picture, reflected in the lake, but also through the thin wings of the unfurling swan.*

*April*

*Daffodils trumpet excitement,  
Our space, our life, our season,  
Laughter heals again*

*May*

*Handfuls of blossom,  
Throwing the gift of Friendship,  
Over forget-me-not water*

*June*

*Celebration of life,  
Sun, song, rhythm of drum,  
Raising the spirit*

*April. Daffodils reflect with their bright yellow hue. Life begins, paddlers return. May. Shafts of light, reflected on the ripples of water, dispersing them, interacting with the paddlers and their paddles. Together. June. The paddlers are there in both boats. The sun joins them. Paddlers propel the boats, and the light catches the spray, which the dragon's head displaces as it glides forwards. Not only does the light reflect, but at the height of the season, so do the colours of the dragon's head, the boat and the paddlers, imbuing on the surface shades of pink and blue.*

*July*

*Happy crowds sharing,  
Brightest sparkling water and  
Sunny smiles reflected*

*August*

*Long summer Sundays*

*Paddling together as one  
As light begins to fade*

*September  
Dragons bright – changing  
Savour the moment, treasure the memory  
Seasons colour our life*

*July. The water sparkles. But not just the light. The paddlers are reflected in this light in the landscape, their sunny smiles becoming a part of the landscape. August. Already, the end of the paddling season approaches. It is a seasonal, natural cause. Light fades behind the hills that surround the lake. September. Nature is turning, the light is softer. No longer does it reflect of the water, or the paddlers. The lake is seen at a remove. The paddlers are preparing to no longer be a part of it, for another year.*

*October  
Not leaving; but holding  
Out promises of friendship  
Until we return*

*November  
Completing the circle  
Lucy and Artemis lie  
Nose to tail in sleep*

*December  
Light the magical flame,  
set free our snowbound spirits  
to celebrate life*

*October. The view is full of paddlers and dragon boats. The light is low, with long shadows on the water. The boats are connected across the water. November. The dragons are coming into shore, for the last time this season, but they look bright. Their colours contrast to the brown of the bed of the lake. December. Two groups of pink carnations float, easily, in the foreground. This side of the lakes seems dark. But in the distance, there is light, lighting up the snowbound peaks.*

It has taken some time to return to the postcards, after our initial foray in chapter three. Indeed, as stated then, postcards are unique amongst the products created *with* the writing group, as they were created for outside production; hence, they are the only *product* dealt with here in depth. The very nature of the postcard demands it to be sent; it has, essentially, no other purpose. Postcards have long been underestimated as a potential source of information by human geographers (Waite and Head 2002), or indeed within many of the social sciences (Tanner 2004). Although this is slowly changing (see Waite and Head 2002, Markwick 2001), the focus often remains on the postcard as representation as it is received through consumption. Whilst this is an important focus which can help us to understand how tourists interpret postcard images, there seems little focus on the process of postcard creation, and how such a process can serve, I argue, to deconstruct cultural stereotypes and seemingly fixed interpretations that are often focused upon in commercial postcards (Waite and Head 2002).

This is achieved through the interaction of mediums that Paddlers for Life chose to represent their experiences on the postcards. Although postcards often use captions to encourage the intended experiences of the recipient (Markwick 2001), the collaboration of poetry and pictures invites the recipient not to imagine themselves in the place, but to imagine the experience of dragon boaters themselves. It has previously been suggested that “[p]oetry has the power to be transformative, and this power emerges out of the choice of words, the rhythms, the patterns” (McIntosh 2008:76). I wish to suggest that the postcards have been utilised by the Paddlers to present the power of the group to others. It is in this *intention* that the postcard is removed from the popular conceptualisation of the photograph as “a true representation of the physical world and to involve no subjective intervention” (Waite and Head 2002:324). This represents the innate difference between the two. Whilst the photograph demonstrates, the postcard communicates, and hence collaborates; it is always more than the picture it imbibes. Jason Dittmer (2010), in reference to graphic novels discusses the frame and the gutter surrounding pictures as vital tools in understanding the narrative between scenes. The gutter, Dittmer argues, is the space in which the reader stitches together the scenes, creating their own story from the artist’s initial intentions: “there is no story to constitute in that space, no missing images, only a relationship to be formed in the reader’s mind” (Dittmer 2010:230). This relationship does not separate back from front, text from image (Kurti 2004). All are drawn together in the reception of the card. Whilst I cannot direct these theoretical positions directly onto the postcard, Dittmer’s argument allows us to suggest that the focus must be on more than the image. Neither the poetry on the front of the postcard, nor the description of the group on

the back should be thought of as a 'caption', or title of the illustration (Markwick 2001). Rather, the image *interacts* with all of the contextual details of the postcard to enhance the narrative that is intended. The postcard takes the photograph, "an immediately accessible vehicle for collective remembrance" (Hoelscher 2008:198), and translates its potential into more than its physical object (see Chapter 6, also Ingold 2007c). As Joshua often said, it was important not to have just another Windermere postcard. There is a long tradition of messages not merely being sent *on* the postcard, but in the postcard, from Christian missionary organisations producing their own postcards in the early twentieth century (Tanner 2004).

Robyn Mayes (2010) notes that even locally and home produced postcards tended to avoid mundane images, preferring to replicate the dominant cultural images of places, normally without human interaction, in their postcards. Whilst interesting, I believe that this says more about the final proposed outcome of the postcards than about the collaborative process of their production outside of mainstream postcard manufacture. Because of the lack of financial incentive for the Paddlers for Life postcards, the writing group were able to be more concerned with representing the group, rather than representing the group in a way which would ensure sales.

All postcards are political objects (Kurti 2004, Mayes 2010). There is no such thing as value free landscape; indeed, critiquing this notion was at the very heart of the project. The autoethnographic nature of the postcards was in fact aided by the fact that postcards of Windermere, and the Lake District in general are so numerous in circulation. Whilst in Mayes' (2010) study, the postcard makers were working from an area that had very few postcards already in existence, the proliferation that confronted the writing group produced the opportunity to deconstruct the general understandings of the landscape. There is no correct way in which to view a postcard (Pritchard and Morgan 2005), which means that the postcard must appeal to a variety of people. The analysis of these postcards, like the thesis is a whole, is epistemological as well as theoretical. Whilst we may read off geographical understandings from the postcards, which may tell us about the understandings of the meanings of dragon boating to breast cancer survivors, the real value of the postcard is in the representation of their landscape to those to whom it is sent.

## **Landscapes of the outdoors**

“There are those who consider it blindingly obvious that time spent by the sea is beneficial to health and wellbeing” (Depledge and Bird 2009:947)

It is sometimes those things that are closest to us that can be most important to us when we enter a state of crisis. Foley (2010) suggests that water and rivers have traditionally acted as metaphors for life, and are often represented as the homes of Gods in spiritual mythology. Water is a constant feature of our lived experiences. We drink it; we wash in it; we rely on it for food and nourishment; water is required for life. Nobody in the UK lives more than 70 miles away from the coast or large bodies of water (BBC News (2003) accessed from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/derbyshire/3090539.stm>, on 24/5/2012). It is therefore important to introduce two interesting projects to the conversation; green exercise (Barton et al. 2009) and blue gyms (White et al 2010; Depledge and Bird 2009). The concept of ‘green exercise’ was first coined by researchers in the biology department of the University of Essex; the green exercise research team. Their main proposition is that exercise in natural environments can be seen as more restorative than exercise indoors, particularly in terms of mental well-being (Barton et al. 2009). The blue gym, on the other hand, is a project developed by researchers from the Peninsula Medical School, based between Truro, Plymouth and Exeter. Their research aims to “understand the value of natural water environments in promoting human health and wellbeing” (Blue gym (2012) <http://www.bluegym.org.uk/our-aims>, accessed on 25/4/2012). Rather than promoting the exercise itself, then, the blue gym seems more focused on the promotion of the coast itself than its counterpart.

As such, both blue gyms and green exercise appear to promote their environments as improvers of mental health, whilst also acting as an encouragement for physical activity (see Depledge and Bird 2009). This would appear to be a natural setting to base the concept of a therapeutic exercise landscape. Although the concepts of both green exercise and the blue gym provide us with useful conceptions surrounding the perception of the exercise environment, neither seem, as yet, to have fully engaged with the interaction between organised exercise and the natural environment. It appears that whilst both are interested in pushing the notion of ‘outdoor’ exercise, neither have yet expanded to exploring the assemblages of these environments, rather seemingly accepting the ‘blue’ and the ‘green’ as pre-defined entities.



*I was cycling along the road from Kendal to the site on Windermere where the group paddles. I was in a bit of a rush. I had had to get my tyre changed in Kendal, when I was picking up the postcards. Apparently having the inner tube sticking out of the tyre is not a good sign! I had taken directions from the man in the shop. He had sent me along the more scenic route to the lake. Not just because it was nicer, but also because it was much safer. I had just passed half-way, moving back onto the main road into Windermere, when I saw 'the Goddess', a hill formation, on the far side of the lake, in the shape of a woman lying down. I felt myself lightening, a smile finding its way, unbidden, onto my face. There, in that moment, the Goddess acted as a beacon to me, letting me know that my goal was now within sight. It was only momentary, however. The road dipped, and the Goddess disappeared. Indeed the whole lake retreated from view. My attention returned to the road, a road I had never ridden before. It was an interaction of the familiar and the spontaneous. Without my interaction with the road, my aim would never have been achieved.*

The therapeutic landscape, as I imagine it, is a combination of experience and improvisation. Through experience, features of the landscape may be expected, imagined before they are reached within the landscape (see Wylie 2007). Indeed, as with the 'Goddess', the landscape may be seen from a distance, with the self located as the observer of the landscape (Rose 1993). This conceptualisation of the Goddess herself raises the issue of the self in the landscape. The objectification of the landscape cannot, I feel, be ignored. As we saw in the previous section, the postcards were carefully chosen so that individuals who had no experience of the therapeutic exercise landscape of Paddlers for Life Windermere, as well as those who did, could engage with the postcards, albeit in different ways. Landscape features are so because they speak not to the imagination of *the* viewer, but to multiple viewers, in multiple ways. They provide a draw to multiple selves, before coming to a collaborative understanding of their selves. As Wylie (2002) cogently argues, the mountain exists from a distance, in vision, and from the mountain itself, in experience. Neither can be divorced from the other. Therapeutic exercise landscapes, I argue, are a similar phenomenon. The objectification of the 'outdoors' is important, but so is the experience once we are engaged within 'it', at which point it disappears; our view of it disappears. For many in the group, being with water was a draw.

*Sophie and Olivia are sisters. They grew up in a city in the North West of England. Both often recounted to me how features of the landscape had played a role in their lives. Olivia had moved to Nottingham some years ago, before moving back to the area, but had never been able*

*to settle. She had always had to seek out areas around the coast to visit the sea, but even this appeared to be too flat. When they were young, they would climb to the top of a nearby hill, and look out over the flat land between themselves and the bay at Morecambe.*

*It was in the combination of water and hills that the sisters seemed to thrive. Sophie told us how she had realised just how important she found them. Every holiday snap she had seemed to include some element of water and hills. For some, the draw seemed more linked to a diagnosis of cancer. Many of the women told stories of a draw to water. Lily and Ruby had given themselves goals after their treatment, to do certain things. For Lily it was to visit Niagara Falls, whilst Ruby swam with dolphins in Portugal. It was a sort of therapy for Ruby, she thought, after the treatment. She wasn't quite sure why she was drawn, however. For Isla, the draw was more explicit. Although always drawn to water, after her treatment for cancer, she had gone to stay on a Greek island. The landlady had been very kind and generous, she said, but had been vociferous on one point; that she should spend two hours everyday in the sea. It was a physical therapy, which Isla found psychologically helpful. It was a similar story for Ava. Her two most therapeutic places were Hawaii and Windermere. Although distanced, both in terms of the imagination and physical location, they shared a space for Ava after her treatment. They were a form of therapy.*

It is also important that the seasons are seen to play a role in the exercised environment. Paddlers are limited in their interaction in the environment by the weather conditions found in the Lake District. If the water temperature goes below 10 degrees Celsius, it is deemed to be too dangerous to paddle. Likewise, wind speeds approaching gusts of over 20mph precipitate a withdrawal, at the judgment of the helm. The insipient risk involved in any water sport becomes too great. The temporalities of the therapeutic landscapes of Paddlers for Life then also gain great importance (Eden and Barratt 2010) in their experience.

Water has been found to be a preferred feature of the environment. It doesn't have to be interacted with to be of high preference; Depledge and Bird (2009) seem to imagine it primarily as a motivational tool. Indeed it has also been suggested that water itself might not be as therapeutically beneficial as landscapes, which include both green and aquatic environments (White et al 2010). This is an interesting finding, as it suggests that the natural environment cannot be dealt with as a reified whole. The particular landscapes themselves play a large part in the therapeutic potential; a seascape is not sufficient to enable the therapeutic potential that an individual might experience. Whilst White and colleague's (2010) study relied upon the

medium of observation, the participants regarding pictures of landscapes, observation can only be seen, I think, as one facet of interpretation. As the quote at the beginning of the section suggested, paddlers have been in the water, on it, even under it, rather than simply looking at it. Indeed, embodiment must be seen as both a physical and an imaginative interaction (Foley 2011), in the context in which it is experienced. Andrews (2004) suggests that ‘imagined places’ can be used as a central therapeutic tool of complementary and alternative medicine practitioners. Whilst patients often take themselves to quiet and calm places, part of the therapeutic potential can be in revisiting difficult and challenging landscapes (Andrews 2004). Part of the appeal of therapeutic exercise landscapes, I argue, is concerned with the embodiment of risk and challenge. As was articulated in Chapter 2, much of the articulation of treatment practices surrounding the experience of breast cancer involves the removal of risk; what ‘patients’ are told that they cannot do, or should avoid doing. In fact, Conradson (2005) suggests that by allowing for some form of (monitored) risk and independence within the therapeutic landscape, the potential benefits of therapeutic landscapes are opened up, rather than closed down.

*All of the sensory elements of the dragon boater converge in exercise in the landscape. Some had strong views about exercise indoors. For Laura, gyms were tedious places, which she associated with her experiences of hospitals. Their effect on her senses created them as almost unhealthy places. For most, whilst it was there, the reaction against gyms was not as strong. Rather, they identified in positive terms with the range of sensory opportunities that they could experience in paddling in the environment. The sense of movement, the sounds that surrounded you, the sense that there was always something different to look at. For Grace, it was a chance to return to an experience that she had pre-cancer, and couldn't have now. She used to ride horses, but couldn't now, on account of the surgery she had had to have. But in paddling in the wind and the rain, some of those sensations had returned. Ava said that she felt alive, out of doors. Samantha, a supporter felt that it was just nicer to be outside. Daniel felt that it gave you something to look at. For the survivors, however, it seemed like evidence that they had made it past the initial treatment. For two of the paddlers in particular, paddling has meant a new relationship with landscape. Sophie and Olivia have always been afraid of water. They loved it as a view, as a vision, but there was no chance that they were going to go near to being in it! Olivia's story about hearing that Sophie had gone dragon boating, and that she wanted her to come along always makes me chuckle. "I thought she'd gone mad", Olivia says.*

To both the sisters, the landscape has developed so that not only do they see it, but they have come to understand what it is to be a part of it. Although they had an understanding of the therapeutic landscape before, it has now been developed in the context of their experiences with the group, the location, the practice, themselves and their bodies. Therapeutic exercise landscapes cannot be seen merely as landscapes of healing or continued wellbeing. Rather, it is in their constitution that they may become seen as empowering to the individual as they are imbued with power, both within and outside of the terms of illness. By emphasising the ‘outdoors’ experience of nature, it is suggested that a feature of the experience of paddlers prior to and after an illness diagnosis is a questioning and exploring of previous experiences with, in this case, natural environments. Through exploring the rhythmic qualities of the outdoors, the benefits of exercising as a group in new – and old – environments can be forefronted within present geographies of health. The focus is not the environment, but the rhythms of the group within that environment.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the ways in which therapeutic landscapes may be broadened, to include the notion of exercise in their conceptualisation. Through this aim, it has also sought to explore the ways in which therapeutic exercise landscapes may be constructed through the deconstruction of the division between the calm and the challenging in the notion of the therapeutic. The rhythmic approach allows breast cancer dragon boaters to gain therapeutic benefits not only from places, but from the rhythms that they experience with their fellow paddlers as they move along the world. In this way, therapy is not sought out, but encountered in challenge, as well as calm. A wayfaring vision of the exercise landscape may help us to understand the relationship between the collaborative interaction of paddlers and the paddling environment. By extending the notion of the rhythmic into the therapeutic landscapes of Paddlers for Life, I suggest that collaborative ‘healing rhythms’ are produced that may be of great interest to academic (and particularly health) geographers, as well as policy makers in a range of disciplines.

## Chapter 9: Conclusions

There is a small, if pronounced, voice in my head that does not want to call this a conclusion. This is not just perfunctory performance; there are two particular reasons why this thesis cannot end. The first, and most important, is that conclusion does not fit with the ethos of Paddlers for Life. Concluding goals do not mesh with what they want to achieve, as Laura told me that day over coffee; their goals change and adapt, but they are never finished. The second reason is that I cannot begin to argue that I can here bring closure to the culture of Paddlers for Life. I hope that I have represented an understanding of their underlying ethos, but there are specificities to their experience, which can only remain with Paddlers for Life, or in the moment of our interaction. Part of this centres around my positionality, as a supporter and researcher and not a survivor, but perhaps more importantly it revolves around the constant changes which occur in a group of over sixty members. They will have already moved on since we ended our project, will already be involved in new and creative collective travels. The nature of the project, my distance from the group, and the time-limited nature of PhD research mean that there are elements of the group's culture that I never experienced. The fact that I never saw a flower ceremony, at which the lives of deceased paddlers are celebrated, during my time with the paddlers was a huge gap in my understanding of the cultures of Paddlers for Life. Unusually, in coming to understand a culture, I was glad that I did not see one during my time with the group. One happened during the time I was there, but I couldn't attend. Their rarity was a blessing, and I was, I imagine, in the same position as many of the new paddlers. I'm sorry to say that after the project ended, I did attend a flower ceremony. It was held on the same day that the torch relay came to Windermere, for Brendan Jameson, the leader of South Lakeland District Council, who had done so much to ensure that Cumbria, and Paddlers for Life, were involved in the Olympic torch relay, and benefitted from the Olympic legacy. It was a difficult and emotional day, but I think that it summed up my time with the paddlers; the rough and the smooth, the highs and the lows. For me, theirs is a story not just of breast cancer, or sporting achievement, but also of human interaction with their environment.

*As I got off the train at Windermere station at two o'clock, I sought out somewhere to spend a few hours. I had been invited, and jumped at the chance, to paddle with the group as they accompanied the Olympic torch on its journey from the North of the lake, Bowness-on-Windermere, on the lake's eastern bank. It was raining, and I suspected that there would be no*

one at the launch site until at least 4.30. So I went to find the local library. It is a big old stone building, which clearly wasn't designed to be a library, given the multitude of small inter-connecting rooms, but has been given that function. I asked the librarian if it was ok to sit and read for a few hours, and of course she said that it was. I moved into the non-fiction room, and found a book about the origins of the Olympics. On the left hand side as I entered the room, there was a shelf dedicated to the subject of cancer. Self-help books, information material, that sort of thing. I felt a strange tug, between my research and my own experience. Personally, I have always tried to avoid such things as books on how to deal with cancer. It is not something that I want to engage in. I know my dad became very interested in it. He used to annoy us with his recently purchased 'radioactivity tester', making us stand two metres away from the microwave. But it also struck me that this would be a really important place to have information about the dragon boaters, their experiences, and what they did, given that they are located so close to Windermere. I made a mental note to mention this to the Paddlers later. Whilst I was reading, the same librarian came in and began to comment on the weather. I replied that I hoped that it cleared up later, as I would be out on the lake with the paddlers. She seemed to be looking forward to it, although hadn't heard about the dragon boaters before. I have heard this from the group before that they are not well known in the vicinity, but it is still strange to me that I found evidence of it within a public library. They should be the pride of the community, but instead they are almost unknown.

It came round to 3.30pm and I decided to make a move down to the lake. It was four miles, and although it was drizzling, I decided that I may as well walk, as I didn't have much else to do. As I walked through Windermere, it occurred to me that this was probably the last time that I would be here before I handed in my thesis. I know that a lot of researchers 'go to' and 'come home from' the field, but in this case, because I have always travelled to and from, it has been particularly strange, I think. It has always given the group a lot of opportunities to use the joke 'so where's your bike then?!' I began to walk down the main road towards the Low Wood. I passed a sign for the Beatrix Potter museum, a sign I must have passed twenty or thirty times during the past year and a half. I remember going there before, both as a child, and as an adult with an old girlfriend. Although I'm not from these parts, I have memories, which always link me to parts of it.

I continued on my walk, through the rain and fallen leaves. I see a car pulled up in the distance. A woman jumps out of the passenger side and bends down, looking back. I do the same, and suddenly she's waving me onwards – obviously a paddler! I smile to myself as I start

*jogging towards them. There are four paddlers in the car, and they budge over to fit me in. They are all dressed for the occasion, and obviously all quite excited. We exchange greetings – it's a while since I've seen most of them. As we turn into the Low Wood, Maria butters up the security guard to get us in, a masterful tactic of disarming! I see Abby in the distance. Soon we are all out of the car, and starting to get everything that we need together. It is like the old days. I am instructed by fellow paddlers to go and help where I can, bringing back paddles and drums from the hut. They are setting up for the great North Swim in the car park, which is why it is all a bit manic! We get all the paddles out that we need, and then the heads, tails and drums. We're not sure which boats we are using, but it turns out that it is both the Artemis', Diana and the new boat Phyllis. With the heads resting on a set of rails, we admire them before they start getting the treatment, being covered in decorations. Phyllis has only just been painted. I don't think Sophie is that taken with it, it's mostly one colour, and needs definition of certain features. She is also an un-dotted dragon at the moment, which I don't think helps. She looks 'out of place', which in mythical terms, I suppose she is! As I looked at the dragon, I wondered what Sophie meant, exactly? She pointed out the fact that the lips were too dark. I wasn't really thinking as I said, "it looks like they've painted an object rather than a dragon". I turned to see Sophie staring at me, with a smile on her face. "you're getting it, aren't you?!", she said. To her, I think, I was finally understanding what the dragons meant to them. They weren't just objects, boats, but they were of the spirit of the team. Their decoration needed to fit with how they imagined their dragons, not just making the dragons colourful, or scary.*

*As we were decorating the boats, and putting the heads on, Abby was busy putting her own touches to the boats. She had made little banners with the torch rings on, which looked awesome. Of course there were practical issues of putting them on, and as the closest available tall person, I was roped in to help, cutting things, tying things. As we were putting the final carnations on the drums, Abby asked Olivia if she could have one to put on her sister's plaque. It was a personal moment of collective reflection for Abby. Using a group moment to honour the memory of her sister, who used to paddle with a breast cancer dragon boating crew in Canada. It struck me how much Abby is a part of the crew, how much she is needed, but also how much she draws from the movement, as well as Paddlers for Life.*

*There was then a little meeting, with Laura and Ava detailing how the evening would go, what we would need to do. In particular, they said that crews would be decided just before we went in. They said that the crews would be mixed between survivors and supporters. They would all be together. Someone asked if they wanted people to switch buoyancy aids, for continuity in the*

boats. Ava said no. The difference, the mingling of survivors and supporters was “who we are, what we do”. Everyone was included in it all. That was vital. After some food, we got the boats on the water. Always a team effort – many hands make light work. We then did the warm up, and after some photo calls, went down to where the boats were. I made sure that, even though crews were mixed, I was in the older boat, Diana. As it turned out, many survivors did go to Phyllis, whilst there were more supporters in the old boat. Although I doubt that it was planned, there seemed a subconscious decision to migrate to one rather than the other. Ava and Laura were at the front of Phyllis. They are the founders, but they are also strokes. It is sometimes difficult to separate the structural element and the fact that they just enjoy being strokes. It’s what they are.

I was sat next to Phil, Nicole’s boyfriend. He is a nice guy, and has obviously become very much involved in the group since he started going out with Nicole. We got into the boats, with Lucas on the helm, Nicole on the drum and Kat in the stroke seat. We started with a calm rhythm, as we had a lot of time before we got down to Belle Isle. Almost immediately, I felt my lack of paddling, both in my rhythm, and in my strength. My muscles screamed, my back ached, my paddle flashed in and out of the water at different times to the majority of the rest of the crew. It was a nightmare. I tried to relax, but the distance to where we were going seemed to work against me. I didn’t have a clue how long it would take us, and time seemed too slow, perhaps because of the aches and pains. I began listening to those around me. Julia and Emily were having a conversation about how exercise had helped their lymphedema. It was unbidden, but the sort of knowledge sharing which was not about the cancer, but about sport and its effects. I only picked up snippets above the splashing, but it was good to hear.

It was also now that I focused on things, anything to take my thoughts off of the pain. I noticed all the different clothes that were being worn through out the boat. I have seen this before, but I noticed it again during the evening. Julia had a bright pink coat. Many of the paddlers wore varying styles and shades of pink cycling gloves. Of course some of the paddlers wore the official t-shirts, which they had for paddling on the Thames. But as it was cold and wet, they also had jackets and coats, hats on as well. It changed the flow of the crew; changed how they appeared. There was not one shade of things to see, not one identifier, apart from the presence of these people in this crew. That was what seemed important at this moment. I kept smiling as I found myself in the Lakes again. It was amazing to be here again. It was, once again, like the paddlers owned the water. We waited for a while at Belle isle for the Tern, the boat transporting the torch, to get to us. We saw a wall of boats coming towards us; small and big,



*leisure and private. And then there were the police on the water, telling all of the rest of the flotilla to turn away and go around the dragon boats. It was, once again, like the dragon boats owned the water; that this is what they were here to do; they were escorting the flame across their lake. The Tern arrived, and we kept up the pace, having to paddle hard to keep in front of the faster boat. As we neared the shore, we saw all of the flash bulbs going off. The shoreline was packed with people, all having come to see the flame. People were clapping and cheering, the kids on the boat were singing 'row, row, row your boat'! Eventually, we came in, veering off, and coming around to get to the dock again to moor up. Flapjacks and sweets were handed around as we waited for the torch to come off the boat. Attention was, apart from a small group of family and friends, on the flame itself. That's where focus was in the boats as well, until the flower ceremony began.*

*Daniel told us that we would be doing the ceremony now, just off the pier. I was nervous. I had never seen one before. I knew what generally happened, but the details were a mystery to me. Daniel said that there would be a sing, followed by the ceremony and a quiet moment of reflection. The ceremony was for the former chairman of the South Lakeland District Council, who had done so much to get the torch there today, but had not lived to see it. He had spoken at a conference the year before for Paddlers, and had seemed extremely supportive of what they were doing. Gabrielle took charge of the singing. She stood up in the boat, and told the crews that they would sing 'num aye yay' – or that is how it always sounded to me. It is a simple song that goes in rounds. I didn't know the words, didn't know what they meant, but that didn't seem to matter. What mattered was that all of the crew was involved. To me, as an outsider, the meaning of the song was not in the words, but in the way it was performed, between all of the members of the crews. It was vital for them to all be in it together. Before the song, we had all been handed a pink carnation. This is the flower that is always used for flower ceremonies in breast cancer dragon boating crews. It happens this way all around the world, I think. At the end of the song, it happened so suddenly that it almost took me by surprise. Ava threw her flowers into the water. Then we were all doing the same. I threw mine, and then watched as they all came together. There was a moment's silence. I thought about dad, and about all those who hadn't made it. It was, perhaps, the only moment that I have felt that my sadness was in its place. To consider those who weren't there. I was sad for the subject of the ceremony, but the power of the ceremony itself was for me in all of the people I knew who were suffering. The flowers were thrown to them. The group respected this, there was silence, apart from on the bank, where clapping had started, I suspect for the song that had just been sung.*



*Figure 7: the flower ceremony*

*Straight after the ceremony, we started on the long paddle back. I wasn't looking forward to it at all. It was starting to darken, and the rain was starting to get heavier. I wasn't thinking about the experience of the ceremony now, I was thinking about getting wet. The weather took on more importance, and the fact that I was getting wet and cold was more important than the landscape. In fact, the landscape, including the weather, was challenging me, making it more*

*difficult for my body to function properly. There was one moment when the landscape itself seemed about to threaten not just my body, but the body of the boat. The safety boat was travelling with us, keeping us safe. Richard, and another were on it. Richard said that they were going to go in front of us, to take some more pictures from there I think. The driver took the boat up on our right side, and in front of the dragon boat. As he went, I saw a great wave from the wash headed towards us. As it hit us, I thought that we were going over. We rocked, and the water came over the gunwales. There was a lurch in the boat. It felt like a boat again. I forgot, for a moment, that it was a dragon boat, the stories of all the people in the boat. I forgot who they were. All I saw in my mind's eye was 20 people in the water, quite a distance from either bank as darkness set in, on a cold and damp evening. In that moment, there, the moment of distinction between message and physical practice hit me. Most of the paddlers on the right side of the boat stopped paddling, seemingly in preparation for going in. Lucas told us to go on, and downplayed it. Perhaps it looked different from his position. Later, everyone was saying how close it felt to going in.*

*After this event, everyone seemed even keener than they had been to get back to the boat park quickly. The rate went up, and a few times Julia and Emily would ask for it to be taken down. I think that Emily was struggling with some injury, but I don't know what it was, or what it was related to. Again and again, the rate would creep up. In the other boat, I noticed that they were resting paddlers two at a time. Initially, Lucas rejected this. Resting is for wimps, he said. I think Lucas has a robust attitude to the paddlers; they are 'can do', and need to be treated such. I think he is right that they are, but they are also 20 individuals. By using this terminology, I suspect that he possibly made it more difficult for those involved, or those who needed to rest, to do it in a way that was acceptable for the team. Eventually, he asked Nicole to organise rests down the boat. This was taken gratefully, I think, by the paddlers. Each time it came for a pair to rest, the more experienced paddlers would rock with the boat, playing a role in it, still being active members of the crew. Still playing their part in getting home.*

*Finally, we made it back to the shore. Everyone played a role in getting the boats off the water, and onto the trailers. They needed to be stored because of the Great North Swim. It was quite a job, and again, everyone was roped into it. Yet at the same time, everyone wanted to play a role. After the boats were away, slowly people moved away, wishing Ava luck for the following day. Having been recommended by Sophie, she would be carrying the Olympic torch. She said she was nervous, and that she hoped it didn't go out! I had asked if I could get a lift from Sophie and George, and they kindly agreed. As we walked over to the car, Sophie asked if I had*

*enjoyed it, and if Charlie, my girlfriend and I had a good time at the High Commission in Canada. I said that we had, and that Charlie had learnt a lot about why they do it. As we walked, Sophie showed me something else. She said she had bought the cycling gloves that she had on, but that also she had cycling sleeves on. They were good because they came straight off if it was hot, but they also had compression within them. Athletes use them all the time, as we discussed. Now, it wasn't just about being a breast cancer survivor with compression sleeves, but about being an athlete. They were improving circulation, but they weren't just a medical appendage; they were a sporting statement.*

I hope that within this retelling, the experience has been concluded to an extent in its own practice. It concludes the thesis as I was able to after the Olympic torch relay. But please allow me a moment to make some further conclusions. This thesis has attempted to discuss how breast cancer dragon boating is experienced geographically. In doing this, it has brought together a range of narratives. They do not all fit theoretically, or even thematically, but they seek to represent the diversity and similarity that is inherent in the experience of breast cancer, but also the experience of groups, sport and landscape. I sometimes doubted the participatory element of the writing project. Mostly, however, I feel that this was a problem of nomenclature, rather than practice. Many academics have had problems in defining their participatory relationships with research groups, as evidenced by the multitude of terms and methods that we saw in Chapter 1. Rather, this research has taught me that the only real basis for participatory research can be an ethics of care (see also Chapter 5 for the ethics of care within the group) that allows for multiple differences to occur within a collaborative project. The results have been shown within this project. They have not sought to define the thesis, but probably did define the relationship that was had with members of Paddlers for Life. This is an intended outcome. Whilst I have covered the details of the writing project and group in some detail in the initial section, I was always wary of writing a thesis that dwelled too heavily on academic issues of research methodologies, rather than the cultures of the group itself.

In section two, the relationships that I formed, and experienced within the group were able to come to the fore. Although much has been covered within these three chapters, these points can be summarised as underlining the importance of Paddlers for Life Windermere as a starting point, for the experiences that are had within the group. Being a community of practice means that breast cancer is not the focus of the group, allowing it to be picked up by individual members, but not by the collective. Rather, the collective focus of Paddlers for Life will always be dragon boating. In Chapter 5, we explored a little deeper how a particularly gendered

societal notion, the colour pink, has been developed through practice by Paddlers for Life to be a signifier of the collective experience of the paddlers. Pink is not a homogenising force in this understanding, but a representation of the collaborative identity of individuals who have been affected by cancer. We also explored how other micro-groups can form their own ways of practice through their interaction with the breast cancer dragon boating. In this case, supporters emerge within the nuances of Paddlers for Life. Their identity as supporters cannot be experienced from outside of the particular experiences that Paddlers for Life provides, and is separated from their experiences as individual supporters, or carers. In Chapter 6, some of the feminist thinking in Chapter 5 is put into paddling practice, to help to explain the participatory element of Paddlers for Life. This is also seen within the notion of *communitas*, which emerges partly through the rituals of animacy that pervade the group through the presence not just of paddlers, but also their dragon boats. Here we see how moments of ‘magic’ in the experience of the group become extended.

The third and final section of this thesis seeks to take the collaborative elements of the group, and reintroduce the importance of their relationships with the environment. In Chapter 7, the experience of Paddlers from medical journeys through to research journeys are reimaged, not as journeys with temporal and spatial endpoints, but as rhythms that move along the world; informed by the last step, but not dictated or structured by it. Chapter 8 is perhaps the most theoretically led (rather than informed) chapter of this thesis. In critiquing and developing the notion of the therapeutic landscape (Gesler 1992), we were able to see the ways in which such theories are developed ‘on the water’, incorporating exercise within its theoretical position. In approaching the relationship to the paddling landscape, the postcards in particular were able to provide us with a sense of the representation of the landscape for Paddlers for Life. Landscapes are not generically imbued with healing properties; their importance waxes and wains within the context of collective interaction with them. Therapy is not in the landscape, or the paddling collective, but exists as part of an experience involving all the contexts of the group in their collaboration.

In seeking to fill these aims, my goal has been, like those of the paddlers, to continuously build a picture of Paddlers for Life and their *ongoing* experience of cancer and dragon boating. This has allowed me to explore the experiences of people affected by cancer with exercise and their environments, and to work *with* participants in this goal in creative ways. I feel that this ‘living experience’, following a life threatening illness, which challenges it, can be particularly helpful to geographers in understanding how groups can flow with an experience, rather than from it,

as in the case of cancer. The practice of dragon boating helps to draw out the geographic features of a community that has been affected by cancer, but situates itself by its practice. By acting together, the group can redirect their experiences from those, which are directed by contained time and space, to experiences imagining places and time along the route of their wayfaring. Members of Paddlers for Life are not transported any more in time and space by the medical community, but are able to find their own ways of interacting with their environment, in order to focus not on a future that is threatened by a limit of time, but flows always in the moment of practice. The implicit and explicit collaborative geographies of breast cancer dragon boating can help us as geographers, I argue, to better understand the *living* experience of the world following a cancer diagnosis; both for supporters, and survivors, negotiating the world as they move through it.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, it has been important in the conclusion to bring together the epistemological and the theoretical elements of the research approach. Sections two and three have focused on the culture of the paddling group itself, more than on of the participatory approaches, which were involved in the writing project. I have taken this position, in order to leave overall possession of the products of the writing project in the hands of the paddlers themselves. If I am able to facilitate their future use of these materials, then I will do all I can to help. But, as with the cultures of the group, it is important that the control of these productions, and the processes that made them, remains in the hands of Paddlers for Life, in their attempts to raise the importance of exercise after a diagnosis of cancer to all those affected by cancer. The products are a part of their collaborative autoethnography, and they are theirs to share.

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