Towards mindful geographies

Volume 1 of 1

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

Abstract

The research in this thesis draws on autoethnographic, ethnographic, and participatory experiences from varied therapeutic encounters with mindfulness. The first was an 8-week course based on Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) undertaken in an adult learning programme in a local College during April and May 2018, and the second was a participatory 8-week course co-produced by a group of participants and myself that ran from October to December 2018. After this, I took part in several meditation retreats during spring 2019 at three retreat centres in South Devon: Sharpham House, Sharpham Barn, and Gaia House. In summer 2019 I hosted follow-up interviews with the participants from the 8-week mindfulness courses.

This thesis makes three main contributions. The first is to the dialogue between geography and mindfulness originally initiated by Whitehead et al.'s (2016) publication. I seek to further this conversation by offering a broader and nuanced understanding of mindfulness as sati, a definition that is routed in Buddhist historical and cultural context. The second contribution is to the intersections between cultural geography and health geography. I will explore the (therapeutic) geographies of mindfulness, and in doing so I aim to expand health geographies and geographical conceptualisations of mindfulness.

The third contribution is to the interdisciplinary work on mindfulness. Mindfulness-based interventions (e.g. Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy, MBCT, and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, MBSR) have received major criticism under the label of 'McMindfulness' (Purser 2019), which casts mindfulness as commodified, individualised, and rationalised therapeutic technology of late capitalism. In this thesis I challenge the arguments of

McMindfulness by offering a collective and engaged understanding of the practice. I demonstrate the ways in which mindfulness-based interventions can have transformative effects both individually and collectively. I also offer pathways for geographical research on transformative, social, and decolonial forms of mindfulness.

Welcome to the thesis

…. every breath is an arrival ….

…. breathe in with me ….

…. and out ….

…. and continue ….

Here's a model of engagement based on the elements:

Air (mind) – be worry-free Make sure you're reading the thesis in a way that works for you. Do you need to print it out? Is reading it on a screen ok for your eyes?	**Fire (spirit) – be fully present and engaged** Turn off distractions like your phone, alerts on the computer. Close all programmes so you don't get tempted to multi-task Grab something to fiddle with or colour with or doodle with whilst reading to help you stay alert Make sure you can look at nature (e.g. the sky through the window or put flowers/plants on the desk near you)
Earth (body) – be physically ready Before you start reading, do you have any physical needs that need attending to? Make sure you have water so that you're hydrated, and maybe some snacks for energy Make sure you are reading this in a chair/desk/table that is comfortable and relaxing	**Water (heart) – feel emotionally secure** Make sure you find a space to read this in that is comfortable and feels safe

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This thesis could have not been completed without the support and care from a number of different people. Completing a PhD might feel like an individual project, but my PhD has been hugely influenced by my communities and the people around me. Numerous people have shaped my PhD experience, and I am so grateful to you all!

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List of abbreviations

CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
MBCT	Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy
MBS	Mindfulness-Based Supervision
MBSR	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
NRT	Non-representational theory

1. Introduction

1.1. Introducing Lucy

Figure 1: Cover of Time Magazine, February 3rd 2014, retrieved (18/2/2020): http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20140203,00.html

Look at the image on the TIME magazine cover, what do you see?

What I see is the blissful image of a 30-something-millenial, white, woman, who for the sake of this argument we'll call Lucy. We can't be sure of Lucy's class or profession, but for the sake of argument I'm going to imagine her as a middle-to-upper-class professional, probably University educated, and probably living and working in London. Lucy is burnt out by the stresses of her work and of modern life, her rent is expensive, she eats lots of avocado toast, and over an oat mylk flat white she complains to her friend that she can't afford to buy a house in the city. She probably uses Headspace, a mindfulness app, on her iPhone, and has been to a couple of mindfulness retreats. She zealously encourages all her friends to come to her meditation class. Lucy might even also practice yoga, starting her day with 'Namaste' and saluting the sun. She might also use acupuncture, or reiki. She's definitely into horoscopes (she's a Cancer – which explains her affinity to different energies) and loves her succulent collection. Oh, and she's posting all of this on Instagram as I write but after this post she's *definitely* going on that #digitaldetox.

Is Lucy living her #bestlife as the typical female neoliberal spiritual subject? She's certainly someone has the privilege to cherry pick therapies, belief systems, and aesthetics – discarding what is redundant and incorporating what feels right. Shome (2014) discusses the bordelessness of white femininity that is 'organized around a discourse of spirituality, well-being, and healing, and frequently incorporates the ethos of non-Anglo and Asian-inflected therapeutic practices of inner wellness, planetary connectivity, and 'finding yourself'' (ibid, 178). Although Lucy is clearly a caricature of these processes, we are living in a culture that legitimises and rewards these forms of white borderlessness. These

practices have been tailored to allow Lucy to cherry-pick in this fashion, because 'who we are as individuals is a reflection or refractions of the *Zeitgeist'* (Simandan 2018, 12). And this is done so in a way that does not require her to 'speak out for the very cultures and their struggles' and allows her 'to mis-appropriate cultural practices of inner healing and empowerment', which have historically functioned as a way to form collectives of resistance during colonialism (Shome 2014, 182), turning political resistance into neoliberal resilience.

Lucy has bought into the popular notion that mindfulness is a fix to the perceived problems that are ubiquitous in a disenchanted modern society: automatic pilot; lives lived habitually; ruminating on the past and future; an overload of information and technology; and mental ill-health, including anxiety, stress, and depression. Mindfulness offers a step back from an existence on automatic pilot, in order to really '*live* our lives' (Kabat-Zinn 2004, 7, original emphasis). It provides a connection back to the 'real' world, as a way to escape the fast-paced anxiety ridden nature of modern urban life – to re-enchant, to slow down, and to live more fully. A narrative that successfully and profitably taps into a white, middle-class, 'stressed-out' professional sensibility, exemplified through titles of popular self-help guides: 'Mindfulness: A practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world' (M. Williams and Penman 2012), 'Full Catastrophe Living' (Kabat-Zinn 2004), and 'A Mindfulness Guide for the Frazzled' (Wax 2016).

This thesis is located in the intersection between health geography and cultural geography, and in so being, explores the geographies of mindfulness and aims to expand health geographies through engagement with mindfulness practices

(which in turn furthers geographical conceptualisations and explorations of mindfulness). In this chapter I will provide context to the research. Firstly, I explore the discourses surrounding mindfulness, and the ways that the mindfulness movement has been shaped by processes of secularisation, psychologization, and neoliberalism. This is often understood through the lens of ‘McMindfulness’. Secondly, I offer some definitions of mindfulness, beginning with medicalised mindfulness (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy). I explore how these definitions are insufficient as they obscure and erase the ethical Buddhist historical and cultural underpinnings of the term. Thus, from here, I offer a conceptualisation of mindfulness as sati, (re)locating the practice within the context of Buddhism. These arguments are pertinent to the following section where I unpack geographical engagement with mindfulness. This section pivots around Whitehead et al.’s (2016) dialogue between geography and mindfulness. Here, I offer a gentle critique of this work, demonstrating that the conceptual engagement with mindfulness is limited. Finally, the chapter offers a consideration of the approaches to the research.

1.2. Contextualising mindfulness

The discourses surrounding mindfulness are highly attractive and lucrative, and along with research from psychology, neuroscience and behavioural science (or ‘psy’ disciplines (N. Rose 1998)) that supports clinical uses of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, and Burney 1985), it has been enrolled in government policy, big business, and national institutions. A report authored by the Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group, Mindful Nation UK (The Mindfulness Initiative 2015), looks to introduce mindfulness into four key institutions: hospitals, prisons, schools, and workplaces. The report

recommends using mindfulness as a therapeutic tool within the National Health Service and the Criminal Justice System to reduce rates of recurrent depression. In education, mindfulness is to be pioneered as a teaching method, and trialled in workplaces as a wellbeing scheme. A form of mindfulness is also used in the military as a mind fitness training (Shannon 2010). Beyond the realms of policy, mindfulness holds a great deal of cultural capital and is a big industry – enrolled into the umbrella of the trillion dollar wellness industry (Blei 2017). An array of mindful consumer goods and experiences are available, from smart phone applications (e.g. Headspace, Insight Timer, Calm), to colouring books (e.g. 'The Mindfulness Colouring Book' (Farrarons 2015)), to breakfast bars (e.g. 'Mindful Bites').

Wilson (2014, 9) identifies the mindfulness movement as 'the widespread and growing collection of people who practice (and, especially, those who actively promote) techniques of awareness derived originally from the Buddhist cultures of Asia, which are typically grouped under the label of "mindfulness"'. His book 'Mindful America' charts the mystification, medicalisation, mainstreaming, marketisation, and moralisation of mindfulness. Although its historical roots can be traced back to Buddhism (Bodhi 2011; Gethin 2011; Sun 2014; Wilson 2014), these are often obscured or simplified. This process of secularisation has been used as a means to disseminate mindfulness to the masses, making it accessible for the mainstream as a form of medical intervention (Kabat-Zinn 2011). The recent ubiquity of mindfulness in the Global North has prompted dialogues between Buddhist practitioners and scholars about its traditional meanings and applications. Until recently, mindfulness was a marginal practice in Western Buddhism (Wilson 2014). However, due to the mainstreaming of

mindfulness, it has been reoriented as an important focus for Western Buddhism (Cohen 2010).

These processes sit in a broader context of neoliberal capitalism, and the psychologisation and secularisation of western culture (Carrette and King 2005). As Brown (2015, 21) writes, ‘neoliberalism is a distinctive mode of reason, of the production of subjects, a "conduct of conduct," and a scheme of valuation’. Here, neoliberalism is understood as a political rationality that has emerged as a mode of governmentality, one that is ‘encompassing but not limited to the state, and one which produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behaviour, and a new organisation of the social’ (Brown 2003, n.p.). Another important mode of governmentality is the psychologization of human subjectivity (N. Rose 1998), one that has strong links with neoliberalism. Psychologisation refers to the processes ‘in which human experience is understood in terms of the institutions and powers of a diverse range of ‘psy’ disciplines and knowledges that claim authority over previous models of being human’ (Carrette and King, 2005, 58). This modern discipline of the self is understood as a political apparatus that develops and sustains consumers, one that is a mechanism of the wider ideology of neoliberalism through privatisation and individualisation (ibid). Carrette and King (2005) argue that psychology sustains the capitalist and consumerist ideology of individualism, one that allows private spiritualities to proliferate. These spiritualities are increasingly secularised through the post-Enlightenment erosion of religion with the rise of ‘scientific rationalism, humanism and modern, liberal democratic models of the nation-state’ (ibid, 13). These complex and broad processes have shaped the ways that the mindfulness movement operates in our contemporary society.

Here, white western psychological capitalist values take precedence over other world views, allowing for a western ontological hegemony. Through the mainstreaming and medicalisation of mindfulness, Buddhist thought and practice was transformed from religion into a secular philosophy, psychology, and medicine (Cohen 2010). Here, mindfulness was stripped of religious, cultural, ethical, and historical context:

> 'Mindfulness is transformed from a cultivation practice that leads to full awakening, in the original Buddhist sense, into yet another coping mechanism for dealing with the stresses of modern life.' (ibid, 111).

The decontextualization of mindfulness allowed for its vast commodification, where the term 'mindful' has come to be a form of cultural capital (Wilson 2014) commodified through the growing wellness industry:

> 'Corporate business interests are served by utilising the 'cultural capital' of the religious traditions – building upon their authority base and, in the case of Asian religions, cashing in on their 'exotic image' at the same time as distancing themselves from the traditions. Ancient cultural traditions and systems of thought become commodities like everything else in this brave new world.' (Carrette and King 2005, 25).

These arguments situate mindfulness practices within a broader landscape of neoliberalism, secularisation, and psychologization, where mindfulness might be understood as 'McMindfulness' (Purser 2019). Purser (2019) argues for a neoliberal mindfulness, in which neoliberalism has entered every corner of life – hijacking public discourse. Here, mindfulness becomes the key skill to be cultivated and put to use. The mindful subject is to remain resilient, present-

centred and non-judgmental to cope with the conditions of late capitalism. Purser draws on Zizek and Foucault in his arguments, citing governmentality and the techniques of domination and of the self as the means which neoliberal subjectivities are produced. He contends that science and psy- disciplines are the technologies of domination which give credibility to mindfulness as a therapeutic resource, and encourages individuals to self-responsibilise, self-manage and self-regulate through practicing such a technology of the self. This enables the subject to turn inwards, retreating to the private self. The promise of mindfulness is positioned as 'cruel optimism' (Berlant 2011) - the ways mindfulness offers a vision of the good life, something that is crumbling under neoliberalism. He argues that mindfulness entices us to accept things as they are, whilst enduring the vampirism of capitalism.

Given these critiques it is also important to mention that the mindfulness movement is a broad phenomenon, encompassing a range of social, economic, political, and cultural activities, and as so there is little agreement in what mindfulness actually is, or even does. It is an 'umbrella' term (Van Dam et al. 2017) for a wide range of practices, characteristics, and concepts. It is simultaneously understood as a way of being, form of attention, medication practice, therapeutic intervention, state of consciousness and so on. This vagueness means that it is a multi-faceted and complex phenomenon; its varying uses promote divergent forms of mindfulness that are practice specific, enacting different definitions and qualities dependent on the context in which it is used.

Thus, the debates regarding the secularisation, medicalisation (and so on) of the practice might be too totalising as they do not take into account the

heterogeneity of the term. This argument is furthered by Drage (2018; and elsewhere, Arat 2017) who claims that the secularisation of mindfulness has not yet been achieved. This allows us to understand how these processes are not totalising, and in the case of secularisation, that it is dependent both 'on the routinising movements of biomedicine *and* on a vision of hidden but vital enchantments' (original emphasis, 112), mediated by carefully selected representatives – so that recursive flows of authority, knowledge, and truth claims made by mindfulness advocates have forcefully propelled it into the arena of a contemporary zeitgeist.

It is important to acknowledge that other forms of mindfulness, including social (M.-J. Barker 2014), queer (Walsh 2018), transformative (Schmid and Taylor Aiken 2020), and decolonial (Yellow Bird 2013) mindfulness practices (see chapter 3 for a contextualisation of these practices), exist alongside and before these medicalised interventions, and that secular medical interventions themselves might have the capacity to produce new forms of selfhood (Cook 2016) and a critical engagement with power relations (Lea et al. 2015). Clearly there is more to mindfulness than McMindfulness, and the chapter now moves on to explore this.

1.3. Defining mindfulness: from MBSR to sati

1.3.1. MBSR and MBCT

Jon Kabat-Zinn, the 'Master of Mindfulness' (Booth 2017), brought the practice to the mainstream, founding the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in 1979. His teachings and work have become a common reference point for both meditation

and mindfulness within medicine and beyond. His definition of mindfulness is one of the most widely cited (Gethin 2011):

> ‘Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgementally’ (Kabat-Zinn 2016, 4).

Put another way, mindfulness is the present-focused awareness of the body, thoughts, moods, emotions that is non-judgemental, accepting, and with an attitude of kindness. In MBSR, mindfulness is a technique or method that is most commonly cultivated through seated and lying meditation (formal practice) and everyday (informal) practice (such as mindful walking, movement, and eating) (Blacker et al. 2015). The most common mechanisation of MBSR is an 8-week programme that is split up thematically, considering topics such as ‘automatic pilot’, ‘perception and creative responding’, ‘the pleasure and power of being in the present’, and ‘how conditioning and perception shape our experience’ (ibid). Classes are held in a small group, and involve a mixture of individual exercises (such as meditation) and group discussion on the themes or experiences during the meditation and home practice.

Developed in behavioural medicine, MBSR intended to help alleviate general symptoms of chronic pain, stress-related illness, and a variety of other conditions (Baer 2003; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, and Burney 1985). Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) was pioneered by Mark Williams, Zindel Segal, and John Teasdale. Largely based on MBSR, it combined mindfulness meditation with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to specifically treat depressive relapse (Segal, Williams, and Teasdale 2002).

MBCT has been thoroughly integrated into the National Health Service's mental health provision. The National Institute for Health Care Excellent (NICE) guidelines recommend the use of MBCT to prevent depressive relapse in 'people who are currently well but have experienced three or more previous episodes of depression' (NICE 2009). This can be understood as part of 'third wave' CBT which supports the use of new models and approaches, MBCT being one of these innovations (Hayes and Hofmann 2017). From personal experience with CBT, mindfulness is a core component of the syllabus, particularly referenced in terms of the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' which include: connect, be active, learn new skills, give to others, and take notice (Aked et al. 2008). Taking notice is the dimension that actively encourages the practice of mindfulness, both mindful being (meditative practices), and mindful doing (for instance, mindful eating and mindful walking).

In this context, mindfulness is understood as:

> 'the awareness that emerges when we pay attention to experience in a particular way: on purpose (the attention is deliberately placed on particular aspects of experience); in the present moment (when the mind slips into the past or future we bring it back to the present); and non-judgementally (the process that is infused with a spirit of acceptance of whatever arises)' (adapted from Kabat-Zinn, 1994 by Crane 2009, 4).

Mindfulness teaching in MBCT contains three broad elements (Crane 2009):

1. Development of awareness through formal and informal mindfulness practices.

2. Attitudinal framework that is characterised by kindness, curiosity, and a willingness to be present.
3. Embodied understanding of human vulnerability that recognises suffering as an inherent part of our experience, and helps us to understand our patterns of behaviour that collaborate to perpetuate, add, and deepen our suffering. Here, mindfulness trains us to turn towards whatever arises in our experience, rather than to ignore it.

Like MBSR, the curriculum in MBCT is based on an 8-week programme that introduces participants to a systematic and intensive training in mindfulness using meditation techniques and hatha yoga (Blacker et al. 2015), in order to cultivate a understanding of these three specific elements (Crane 2009).

MBSR and MBCT have developed since their initial conception. To gain acceptance in the medical community first generation mindfulness-based interventions were recontextualised away from Buddhist practice and taught in a group-based, secular programme (Crane 2009). Recent developments have seen an establishment of second-generation interventions that align themselves more closely with Buddhist practice and ethics (Shonin and Van Gordon 2015). Here, mindfulness is defined as 'the process of engaging a full, direct and active awareness of experienced phenomena that is spiritual in aspect and that is maintained from one moment to the next.' (Shonin, Gordon, and Griffiths 2014, 389). Mindful awareness is understood here as both active and spiritual, requiring the practitioner to 'actively engage in the moment' in order to assess what might be the most skilful and compassionate response in a situation (Shonin and Van Gordon 2015, 900).

The (re)narration of mindfulness as 'scientific' and 'therapeutic' is an effort to rationalise and legitimise the practice as something that is not 'other', 'mystic' or foreign, tying into post-Enlightenment thought that stereotypes Buddhism as non-rational and otherworldly (King 2013, 33). This can be seen in Kabat-Zinn's writing:

> 'I bent over backward to structure it and find ways to speak about it that avoided as much as possible the risk of it being seen as Buddhist, 'New Age', 'Eastern Mysticism' or just plain 'flakey.'' (Kabat-Zinn 2011, 282).

In this view, mysticism is a marginal social phenomenon that is antisocial, navel-gazing and quiet – existing within private, individual spheres of spiritual belief. With these connotations in mind, Kabat-Zinn erased them in order to make mindfulness relevant to a public sphere and a mainstream audience. In this version of mindfulness, there is an unsettling silence over the location and history of knowledge that enacts Kabat-Zinn's version of mindfulness 'as universal, the only body of knowledge that matters' (Sundberg 2014, 36), rejecting other worlds and ontologies. Here, the 'proper' knowledge about mindfulness comes from key medical, often white, stakeholders (Wilson 2014). The simplification and erasure of Buddhist understandings of mindfulness can be connected to ongoing colonial epistemic violence (Purser 2019).

I find these process of cultural erasure and colonisation problematic, and although some may argue that the secular use of mindfulness to treat anxiety and distress is commendable and ethical (Bodhi 2011) and that MBSR is

implicitly infused with the Dharma[1] (Kabat-Zinn 2011), I believe that, along with Maex (2011) and Peacock (2014), that closing the door to the Dharma will lose 'the vast richness of that context full of valuable insights and practices' (Maex 2011, 166). For me, it is important that we (re)connect with and are respectful of the rich and diverse history of thought that came before, and runs alongside, MBSR. But in doing so it must be acknowledged that what we (scholars in the Global North) know as Buddhism, or Buddhist Studies, is itself an object of Anglo-Western and colonial knowledge (Lopez 1995b):

> 'Throughout the course of the 18th century three interconnected factors were gestating that would help give birth to what we know as 'Buddhism'. These were the emergence of the rationalist Enlightenment, the decline of religious authority and the consolidation of colonialism' (Batchelor 1994, 231).

This colonial conquest and textual authority means that Buddhism as we know it in the Global North has little to no resemblance to how it is understood by 'indigenous' Buddhists (Lopez 1995a). Thus, we must speak of many *Buddhisms* in order to evoke its plurality, diversity, and multiplicity, and to acknowledge other worlds. In the next section I will deliberate on how mindfulness is practiced and conceptualised as *sati* in a Buddhist context. Here, I take conceptualisations of mindfulness from Anglo-European scholars and practitioners trained in Theravada Buddhism (who have no doubt benefitted

[1] **Dharma/Dhamma:** the underlying law of reality; the teaching of the Buddha (Gethin, 1998, pp. 319–322; Rahula, 1959, pp. 142–147).

from a colonial scholarly ancestry and textual authority), and use the word Buddhism to refer to this particular system of thought.

1.3.2. Buddhist mindfulness: sati

Sati is the Pali[2] for mindfulness, translated by colonial Buddhist scholars Rhys Davids, Robert Spence Hardy, and Daniel John Gogerly. Davids (1881) translated the Pali term sati into mindfulness, but not without difficulty:

> 'This definition is in keeping with the etymological meaning of the word sati, which is 'memory'. It is one of the most difficult words (in its secondary, ethical, and more usual meaning) in the whole Buddhist system of ethical psychology to translate.' (T. W. R. Davids 1890, 58).

A translation of sati to 'memory' was found to be an inadequate representation of the complex Buddhist connotations associated with the word (Sun 2014). Although there were some disagreements around the translation, some rendering it 'conscience' (Hardy 1860), and others 'meditation' (Gogerly 1845), mindfulness became seen as the most appropriate term, and became the established translation (Gethin 1998; Sun 2014). However, it still connotes other meanings and is an umbrella term that encapsulates: memory, recollection, calling-to-mind, being-aware-of (Bodhi 2011), and awareness (Stanley 2012a).

For Peacock (2014, 6) sati is rendered as 'present moment recollection'.Or put another way, 'Sati "recollects" or "remembers" what activity one is engaged in, in the present moment.' Stanley (2013a, 65, original emphasis) defines sati 'as

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1. Pali is the language of the texts of Theravada Buddhism, and is the product of the homogenization of dialects in which the teachings of the Buddha were orally recorded and shared (Keown 2004).

an *embodied and ethically sensitive practice of present moment recollection.*' It is not a technique or a method, but an '*ongoing cultivation of a sensibility*, a way of attending to every aspect of experience within a framework of ethical values.' (Batchelor, 2014, 38, original emphasis). This ethical dimension is absent in first-generation MBSR and MBCT, and yet it is integral to the practice itself (Peacock 2014). Ethical practice is needed to realise the Dharma, or the ultimate truth of our experience, which is found in the unity (dhamma-vinaya) between the doctrine, 'the way things are' (the Four Noble Truths), and the discipline: the Noble Eightfold Path (Bodhi 2010).

The first truth is the existence of dukkha, or suffering, which is 'the nature of life' (Rahula 1959, 50). Within this there are three types of suffering: as pain, as change, and as conditions (Gethin 1998). If it is the case that 'everything in the world, everything we experience, is changing moment by moment' (ibid, 61), then we need to accept and live with this reality to avoid suffering: 'our function is to understand it as a fact, clearly and completely' (Rahula, 1959, 50). This leads us to the second truth which the arising or origin of dukkha. If we hold onto the perception of a fixed, unchanging world, this will cause us suffering as the world is never still, it is always influx. It is not enough to just understand this fact, 'our function is to discard it, to eliminate, to destroy and eradicate it' (ibid, 50). The third truth is the cessation of dukkha, here we come to the realisation that there is freedom to suffering and this path to freedom is found in Nirvana. The final truth is the path to this liberation. This path is found through the middle way or the Noble Eightfold Path.

Along with 7 other qualities (right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right concentration) to cultivate in the pathway, is

‘right mindfulness’ – a form of mental discipline. The denotation of mindfulness as ‘right’ is through the promoting of ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom (Rahula 1959). The method to foster right mindfulness is found in the Satipatthana Sutta. It is a process, a way of establishing (upatthana) mindfulness (sati) (Bhikku 2002):

> ‘These four foundations are the four areas of life to which mindful awareness needs to be applied: body, feelings, mind and objects of mind. In other words, the totality of experience.’ (Batchelor 1994, 342).

Here, the process is split into four meditation practices: contemplation of the body, feelings, states of mind, and phenomena or mental objects (Bodhi 2010). These practices are part of a meditation culture called Vipassana, or insight, (a term that has become associated with traditional forms of meditation in North America e.g. Insight Meditation Society (Batchelor 1994)) that is used to cultivate mindful sensibility that is attuned to and has a clear awareness of reality, or the facts of existence (Gunaratana 2011). This training in mindful awareness is in accordance with ethical values and goals (Batchelor 1994). For example, emotional states are evaluated for their potential to increase or decrease suffering: hatred and envy are judged to be destructive, whereas kindness and compassion are ameliorative. Mindful awareness seeks to free us from delusion and craving, something that is understood to be at the heart of human suffering.

Bodhi (2011) uses ‘lucid awareness’ when defining mindfulness. This conceptualisation connotes a particular way of being that illuminates phenomena, such as memory or bodily processes. Lucid awareness of the phenomenal field is the first stage of mindfulness, and through strengthening

this quality, we can begin to ‘clearly comprehend’. This suggests a more complex cognitive element, a development of awareness. Here, the practitioner observes phenomena but also interprets and reflects on it, allowing a cultivation of direct insight or wisdom. Through this refinement, one begins to realise the Dharma: the ultimate truth of things and our own experience (Bodhi 2010). Here, mindfulness is a way of being that brings this experience into focus. The definition of mindfulness as lucid is awareness is important as it includes the ethical process of insight and wisdom that can be cultivated by the practice.

These conceptualisations offer a definition of mindfulness that goes beyond the psychologization or medicalisation of Buddhism. In attending to mindfulness through sati and notions of ‘right mindfulness’, we can instead view it through a socially engaged lens – seeing ‘Buddha as a social reformer or political activist’ (Stanley 2012b, 637). Notions of mindfulness from the perspective of ‘bare attention’ allow for its neoliberal co-option by corporations, institutions, and the military (where mindfulness is used as a technique to improve operational efficiency) (Stanley 2012a). (Re)locating mindfulness within its Buddhist frameworks as sati allows me to explore the socially engaged roots of the practice (see chapter 3 for further consideration of this).

1.4. A geography of mindfulness?

1.4.1. Habit

Only a few publications and projects have explicitly interrogated the phenomenon. With an interest in the geographies of habit, Lea et al. (2015) interrogated the ways in which mindfulness and meditation (MBSR and MBCT) alter and reorganise embodied habitual experiences, demonstrating ‘that intimate bodily experiences are invariably situated within wider space-time

routines and contexts, which variously support the development of new habits or make existing habits more robust.' (ibid, 61). Their work explores habitual self-reflexivity, arguing that mindfulness transforms the relationship to the self 'as it is', wherein selfhood is something to be explored. Furthermore, the authors demonstrate the ways mindfulness practices supported and exposed habitual geographies and space-time routines, offering an opportunity for participants to cultivate a different relationship to these habits. This is echoed in Wigley's (2017) work on subjective spiritual geographies, where participants used habitual routines of waiting for the bus, driving, and cycling as opportunities to cultivate mindfulness and metta (loving-kindness), and practice meditation. These seemingly mundane and everyday journeys and habitual geographies were transformed into moments that allowed the participants to develop their spiritual practices, as 'different forms of meditation, secular and spiritual dimensions become fused and mutually supportive of each other' (ibid, 13). Rather than being 'wasted time' the journeys formed an integral part of daily and spiritual life.

1.4.2. Political geographies of mindfulness

Under the umbrella of geographies of behaviour, Pykett et al. (2016) designed and implemented an 8-week mindfulness programme to enable civil servants to learn about behavioural insights and decision making within the workplace. From the same project, Whitehead et al. (2016) propose that mindfulness could make more visible 'political and commercial exploitation of the collective unconscious' (ibid, 569). This is drawn from their experiences on an 8-week mindfulness course with civil servants, where discussions revolved around the conditions of their working life and the broader systematic and structural conditions that influence these. This is echoed in Lea et al.'s (2015, 61) work

where mindfulness meditation enabled participants to make ‘visible and challenge problematic power relations (which might otherwise be hidden within the habitual structures of everyday life)’ by offering a space in which to reflect and intervene in cultural norms.

Geographers have also been interested in transformative and Buddhist uses of mindfulness in activist communities (Schmid and Taylor Aiken 2020), where a ‘*transformative mindfulness* integrates mind-body practices with a political agenda that challenges current societal trajectories of injustice and unsustainability’ (ibid, 3, original emphasis). Here, mindfulness is understood to make activism more useful and effective by supporting the running of activist meetings and the wellbeing of activists. Furthermore, mindfulness offered a way to sustain longer lasting collective shifts in attitudes and beliefs. Mindfulness was also an integral part of the transformative process, where ‘mind-body practices are a vehicle to becoming ‘prefigurative’, that is, engendering the necessary subjectivities to live out future political possibilities’ (ibid, 7). Their work draws on Buddhist understandings of mindfulness and ‘interbeing’, calling for a deeper appreciation of the links between spiritual practices and social movements.

Importantly, the article unpacks the relationship between Nancy’s being-in-common and Buddhist conceptualisations of interbeing. Where, being-in-common acknowledges difference and plurality, interbeing totalises community – removing any difference and thus shutting down the political. The authors question whether interbeing through mindfulness is apolitical, as a practice based on non-judgement and non-conceptual awareness would lend itself to being incompatible with politics. Thus, a mindfulness that is ignorant of social

relations is figured as a 'post-political tool' (ibid, 11), garnering the image of 'McMindfulness' (Purser 2019) in which mindfulness is appropriated as a neoliberal governmental technology of the self. Rather than opposing being-in-common and interbeing, the authors posit these as different moments in transformative mindfulness. Whilst being-in-common 'accords ontological primacy to co-existence, repoliticising togetherness' (Schmid and Taylor Aiken 2020, 11), mindfulness is the practical basis that supports the cultivation of a post-individualistic ethics. One that aims to alleviate suffering. The authors propose '*interbeing-in-common'* (ibid, 12, original emphasis), offering a step to theorising mindful politics and the complex geographies that this transformation would entail.

1.4.3. Mindful ways of being

Speaking of transformative mind-body practices, Carvalho (2017) explores the potential of mindfulness and meditation to 'enact non-modern, decentred and ecological forms of affect' (ibid, 207). This offers an understanding of mindfulness that might cultivate alternative ways of inhabiting the world, ways that are more sensitive and collaborative to the more-than-human – challenging the reification of the autonomous modern self in work on mindfulness. This is echoed in Philo et al.'s (2015) work on 'new energy geographies', where a concern for 'other energies' and affect is found in non-representational, post-phenomenological, vitalist and emotional geographies. They suggest future pathways of encounter with a geography of mental energy, one that is interested in mindful attention that focuses on 'the countless micro-spaces of the body, self and world, particularly in facilitated by the creation of stillness'. (ibid, 43). Furthermore, their work interrogates the link between energy and health geography, or the turn to affect in health geography (a turn that is

explored in chapter 2 of this thesis). Within the therapeutic landscape literature, Conradson (2013, 2007) explored the experiential economy of stillness on meditation retreats in Britain, paying attention to the embodied rhythmic activity and atmospheres found in these spaces and their capacity to slow retreatants down.

1.4.4. Mindful geographical methods

Perhaps the most relevant is Whitehead et al.'s (2016) article that argued the merits of using mindfulness within geographical epistemology, pedagogy, and methodology (Whitehead et al. 2016). This paper put mindfulness and geography into conversation, making substantial claims regarding the utility of mindfulness practices to geographical knowledge and methodology. The authors praised the ability of the practice to capture 'the ephemeral and insidious contours of existence' (ibid, 561), suggesting that mindfulness could act as a practical way to support analyses of affect, emotion, and the more-than-rational in geography. In this context, mindfulness is seen as a practical way to support the study of phenomenological and emotional processes, arguing that mindfulness can 'deliberatively sensitise people to both the affective push of the social and material worlds they inhabit' … 'and the embodied forces of feelings and emotions' (ibid, 561).

Methodologically, Whitehead et al. (2016) argued that mindfulness could expose the habitualised and automatic ways in which we conduct ourselves during research. In this way, they claim that the practice provides methodological training and a intersubjective and intra-psychic research space, one that is more attentive to the more-than-rational, 'often-unacknowledged aspects of emotional life for those being researched and those carrying out

research' (ibid, 565). Their analysis focus on the merits of 'bare awareness' and non-judgement in exposing the automatic and reactive nature of knowledge production, as it 'enables us to be more aware of how we are reacting and how it may be possible to imagine reacting in different ways' (ibid, 563). Here, it is thought that bare attention offers an analytical space between conceptual explanation and interpretive response. Practically, the authors used mindfulness in their interviews with participants of the mindfulness programme in order to cultivate bare attention in the interview itself.

This section has explored the breadth of work on mindfulness in human geography. A substantial proportion of this work focuses on mindfulness-based interventions such as MBSR and MBCT (Lea et al. 2015; Whitehead et al. 2016; Pykett, Howell, et al. 2016; Pykett, Lilley, et al. 2016). In the context of this thesis, Whitehead et al.'s (2016) work is pivotal in several ways as it opens up an opportunity to interrogate the relationship between geography and mindfulness. The use of mindfulness as a methodology is troubled, unpacked, and queried later on in this thesis (see chapter 4). In this chapter, I have unpacked Buddhist understandings of mindfulness through sati. Along with Buddhist scholars, I argue that bare awareness does not attend to the ethical dimensions of mindfulness that are inherent in a Buddhist understanding of 'right mindfulness'. I push for an understanding of mindfulness that attends to sati to relocate the ethical and spiritual in the practice. This work has begun in geography (most notably in work by Schmid and Taylor Aiken 2020; Carvalho 2017; Wigley 2017), but is extended in this thesis.

Although Whitehead et al. (2016) offer an initial and interesting provocation for the encounter between geography and mindfulness based on their experiential

encounters with the practice, I would be *careful* about the use of mindfulness in geography. Their work buys into the hype surrounding mindfulness, and seemingly heralds mindfulness as a methodological and epistemological panacea. Yet, I would prefer to consider the ways that mindfulness might 'inflect' (Buckingham 2017) our practice as geographers. In the conclusion of the thesis I offer a reflection on this through literature on gentle (Pottinger 2020), kind (Dorling 2019), and humble (Saville 2021) geographies. In the next section, I unpack the approach to the research, and demonstrate the ways that mindfulness informed my practice as a researcher and shaped my approach to my participants and the writing of the thesis.

1.5. Mindfulness and me: approaches to the research

A mindful approach to geographical research has shaped this thesis as a whole. I immersed myself into a number of spaces. The (auto)ethnographic research in this thesis derives from encounters and engagements with a variety of different forms of mindfulness. The starting point for the research was autoethnographic engagement with an 8-week mindfulness course that took a largely MBCT and MBSR approach, meaning that it was secular in orientation. Following from this course, the group organised a co-produced 8-week mindfulness course, one that sought to challenge the de-Buddhitised approach taken in MBSR and MBCT. This offered a collective space to share experiences with mindfulness practices and investigate new practices with the support of a mindfulness teacher. I then performed follow-up interviews with the participants of the two groups at a later stage.

I also engaged in several retreats in South Devon, performing autoethnographic fieldwork. These retreats varied in their approaches to mindfulness. The first

retreat at Sharpham House was a secular retreat, its structure was based on an 8-week course and offered an introduction to mindfulness. Gaia House was the location of the second retreat, a Buddhist Vipassana retreat centre, offering an understanding of mindfulness and meditation from a Buddhist perspective. The final retreat at Sharpham Barn was a community-led retreat, offering Buddhist mindfulness practices and an emphasis on collective practice and living.

In these research spaces, I cultivated new forms of awareness and began to inhabit my body differently. I was learning a care-ful and gentle approach to the way I attended to bodily knowledges – bringing compassion and non-judgment to my lived experience. This process was not easy (and is not finished), it involved me confronting elements of myself that I had been ignoring and not attending to.

Initially, my encounter with mindfulness was a struggle – I found meditations difficult and unsettling. However, deeper immersion into the practice through a series of retreats cultivated a form of awareness that shaped my approach to mindfulness in this thesis. Overall, my journey with mindfulness has been one of *acceptance*. For me, mindfulness became a way to non-judgementally accept myself. Part of this journey of (self)acceptance was coming out as queer (I now use pronouns she/her and they/them). Mindfulness is important to me because I was using the pedagogical concepts and practices of acceptance and compassion to come to my own experience in a gentle, kind, and accepting way.

In terms of my relationships with the participants, mindfulness shaped our interactions and offered a level of integrity, trust, and reciprocity which supported the research process. I worked with my participants in a processual

and careful way, as we supported each other in our journeys with mindfulness. To provide further support, I underwent mindfulness supervision with a mindfulness-based supervisor. My work with the supervisor provided a space of reflection, insight, dialogue, and kind interrogation which supported my own mindfulness practice. It is essential that mindful geographies are not practiced alone – it is a communal practice which must be sustained with the support of others. These experiences of mindfulness-based supervision are further explored later in the thesis (see chapter 6).

Mindfulness has also shaped the way I have written this thesis – the chapters that follow have been written through processes of autoethnographic insight and inquiry. They are lines of thought that traced and emerged through meditative practices. Autoethnographic writing became an insight practice through which I was continually questioning my relationship to myself, my body, and others around me. Writing in this way was emotionally difficult and a highly vulnerable undertaking. It required me to open up myself intimately to others and to you, the reader. This process was challenging and exposing. I could have chosen not to delve so deep into my own experience for this thesis, but I felt compelled to write intimately – it felt important to include those elements of myself and show the ways that mindfulness is a complex, relational, and deeply connective practice. In the following section, I will provide a guide to the reader in order to give context to the structure and writing style of the thesis.

1.5.1. A guide for the reader

I wrote this thesis together, since I am several, 'there was already quite a crowd' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 3). But, this thesis was also written with others: academics, friends, colleagues, strangers, participants, family, pets, non-human

others. It is an assemblage, a collage, a montage, a pastiche of (academic) material, thoughts, embodiments, meditations, dreams, other-worldly experiences. A multiplicity is both what I am, and what this thesis is, there is no beginning, there is no end, it aspires to provoke new connections, tangents, divergencies, and lines of flight. It is not written straight, nor is it written neurotypically. Rather, it is queer, or even, a process of *becoming* queer (signalling both the writing style and the formation of my-self through writing). It is neurodiverse[3]. Taking inspiration from Deleuze, I wrote this thesis through thinking with the rhizome. This rhizomatic thinking means that there is no one main entryway or starting point, but rather there are *multiple* (Adkins 2015). Thus, this thesis 'takes place' through geographical and interdisciplinary literature and conversations which are not necessarily located in a 'literature review chapter' but across the whole PhD in 12 chapters.

The rhizome describes 'the connections that occur between the most disparate and the most similar of objects, places and people' (Colman 2010, 232). This conceptualisation comes from the biological term of rhizome as a form of plant that can extend itself through is underground horizontal tuber-like root system and develop new plants (ibid). Deleuze posits that the 'root-book' or 'arborescent thought' brings to mind the imagery of a tree-like[4] structure that orders epistemologies and forms historical canons of knowledge, an act identified as 'tracing' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004). In opposition to this, rhizomatic writing is about map making, in that it implies fostering "connections between fields", it "is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is

[3] "My inability to think straight implies that Mad Studies has queering and queerness within it, at least I hope it does" (Ingram 2016, 4)

[4] There is some literature that works to reforest the rhizome through contemporary scientific accounts of mycorrhizal networks (e.g. Hand 2020). This deserves further consideration, but is something I don't have the space for here.

detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification." (ibid, 12). Thus, this thesis weaves together interdisciplinary literature, academic material, and (auto)ethnographic insights, and in so doing, is open to new connections, contradictions, and dimensions.

Moreover, a map takes multiple forms: "it can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a *meditation"* (ibid, 12, emphasis added). In thinking about mapping as mediation, I posit that my style of academic thinking/doing/being/becoming has germinated out of my geographical epistemological, methodological, and ontological encounters with mindfulness as a mediative spatial practice. Combining *embodied* meditative experience with *cognitive* academic thinking[5] has produced knowledge that has been grown through me, as one of those shoots from a rhizomatic root. By this I mean that knowledges took seed, and germinated in the lower half of my body, growing up to my heart-centre where I experienced ethnography through compassion and empathy (see chapter 10, section 5 for a discussion of crying and tears in ethnographic encounters). Then in the last few months, and during my viva, it rose up to my head, allowing leaves to unfurl (I'm thinking here of a monstera plant when new leaves slowly uncurl), and new knowledges and ways of seeing/being/understanding.

In this way, writing, reading, and 'being in the field' were not distinct embodied-academic practices, nor were they linear, but rather the very messy, mixed, entangled methodology I used in cultivating this thesis. I am saying all of this in

[5] But by saying this, I also acknowledge the embodied, messy, and porous nature of academic work. Here, I am more thinking of the intellectual and cognitive project of literature reviews and reading philosophy. But again, even this intellectual work had an emotional and embodied impact on me, enhanced by meditative inquiry. I will subsequently refer to this as embodied-academic practices.

order to provide some insight and context for you, the reader, and to make you comfortable with what follows (that is, after all, my prerogative). Maybe it is a warning (that is, if you hate this type of work!), maybe it is a welcome signal or signposting. I welcome you to read this thesis in a way that works for you. I recommend reading the first six chapters chronologically (as my argument builds on itself), and then the rest can be dipped in and out of. The conclusion is more like a manifesto for geography as a discipline, and can be read at the end if you wish. But if you do not wish to wade through the depths of my thinking in order to get to the clarity and insight at the end, feel free to jump there now. Although I would implore you to take a rest-stop at chapter 4 just to provide you with some context. I wish you well on your journey through this thesis, and invite that you practice care for yourself and others whilst you read this[6].

1.5.2. Research questions and provocations

This thesis is written in an explorative fashion – I offer lines of thought and connection across geography as a discipline. The research began with discrete research questions:

> *What is the relationship between mindfulness and non-representational geographical methodologies? And what are the problems and limitations with this?*
>
> *How might we use breath-based mindfulness practices to access new ways of being together and different forms of selfhood?*

[6] Take regular screen/page breaks, have a glass of water beside you, have a snack, go for a walk, put the words through a software that allows you to listen to the thesis like an audiobook, have a stretch, hug someone you care about, dance, and maybe even, don't bother reading this thesis at all. Email, tweet, chat to me instead!

What are the therapeutic experiences of mindfulness? And what kinds of geographies are involved in here?

What does mindfulness bring to conceptualisations of recovery, healing and health? How might mindfulness become a mechanism of care for the self as an 'art of living', or 'way of being'?

How do mindfulness practices illuminate different ways of being in the world? And how do these contribute to a therapeutic experience?

But as I sat and wrote I realised connections and links beyond the original scope of the project. Originally, the thesis was firmly based in health geography with a focus on the therapeutic geographies of mindfulness. However, as the research project progressed I witnessed the relational nature of mindfulness and the ways it connects to diverse debates within geography. Thus, this thesis is a conversation between geography as a discipline and mindfulness as a mediative practice, mind-body pedagogy, methodological innovation, epistemology, and a breathful ontology. It hopes to extend and nuance the dialogue that Whitehead et al. (2016) began in their work on mindfulness.

There was also a sense of wanting to *do* and *say* something important. I had sat, isolated, in my garden shed writing for two years whilst the world around me had shifted, transformed, and changed. I questioned: how could my work contribute to this "new normal"? What does this thesis *do*? Who is this thesis for? These answers came from a long period of interruption. I realised that ultimately, the thesis is for me. It is my project and my narrative. I am the one coming out with a doctorate at the end. It benefits me. Knowing this, I decided I wanted the work to do something, to say something larger than myself. Thus,

the research questions, although inform my discussion throughout the work, are not directly referred to again. Instead, this thesis takes you, the reader, on a journey which ends with a manifesto for geography as a practice and discipline. I begin to offer a vision of mindful geographies.

Another red thread that runs through the work is in response to the criticisms of mindfulness as McMindfulness. Initially, I bought into these ideas and became quite critical of Kabat-Zinn's version of mindfulness. Yet, I began to witness, through the lived experiences of my participants, how even the medicalised, secular practice of mindfulness can be transformative in the lives of the people practicing it. Furthermore, I became critical of the way (mc)mindfulness was written about as a individualistic, internal practice. My embodied experiences of breath and compassion meditations did not feel internal or individualistic, nor did group-based mindfulness practices both on retreat and on 8-week courses. They were always a relational interplay or enfolding between the inside and outside of my body and world, and between self and other. In the next section I offer a roadmap for the thesis which sketches out the chapters to come.

1.6. A roadmap for the thesis

Health geography and non-representational theory. This chapter explores the integration of non-representational theory in health geography. Here, I focus on the ways that the conceptualisation of health has been re-thought with the integration of NRT in the sub-discipline. I offer a critique of this approach through decolonial posthuman scholarship and link the argument to debates in the literature on mindfulness. The chapter sets up the initial theoretical and conceptual basis for the thesis and charts the development of my theoretical approach.

Approaches to mindfulness. In this chapter I investigate the interdisciplinary literature on mindfulness. I start with work from the ‘psy’ disciplines on MBSR and MBCT. Next, I critically unpack the arguments of ‘McMindfulness’, and offer more hopeful pathways for mindfulness using work from radical, transformative, and queer literature bases. The chapter acknowledges McMindfulness as a point of tension for the thesis, and in doing so hopes to offer a nuanced critique of that approach through ethnographic work that highlights the limits of neoliberal subjectification. In doing so, I seek to go beyond arguments of McMindfulness by offering scope for geographers to engage with other forms of mindfulness beyond the models of MBSR and MBCT.

Mindful geographical research. Here, I offer reflections on the ways in which mindfulness has been presented as a potential research methodology. This chapter picks up from Whitehead et al.’s (2016) initial provocations and troubles the use of mindfulness as a methodology in non-representational work. I argue that geographers need to be careful about the use of mindfulness as a methodology and would prefer to think of the ways that mindfulness might inflect our research practice. This is a point that I return to in the conclusion of the thesis.

Research journeys. This chapter explains the research process and methodological approach. Here, I explore the structure and form of the two 8-week mindfulness programmes and three mindfulness retreats that I took part in. One of the 8-week mindfulness courses was a participatory course that I co-produced with a group of participants, I will explain the rational for the course and its development. The output from this work, ‘a little book of wisdom’, can be found later in the thesis.

Weaving together mindfulness and research. I move on to discuss my entanglement with mindfulness and research. In this section I write intimately, autoethnographically, and vulnerably to demonstrate the feedback between mindfulness, research, and my multiple positionalities. I demonstrate the ways that mindfulness affected my research practice and relationships to my participants. In the chapter I show the ways that mindfulness can be used to support the challenges of participatory and participant-led fieldwork through an engagement with mindfulness-based supervision. Through this discussion, I begin to develop the notion of mindful geographies: the ways in which we might bring mindfulness into our geographical research practices.

Part 1: autoethnographic approaches

Clearing the air: mindfulness of the breath. This chapter is conceptual and thinks with the vitalism of the breath through breath-based mindfulness practices to offer a critique of the conceptualisation of subjectivity in the arguments of McMindfulness. In doing so, I position mindfulness as a potentially transformative and radical practice that goes against the logics of neoliberal capitalism. By thinking with Deleuze’s notion of the fold, I demonstrate how McMindfulness reifies the separation of a distinct interior and exterior life, and trouble this through an engagement with the breath as a ‘swinging door’ that enfolds the two. This critique of McMindfulness allows me to offer a consideration of mindfulness as a critical form of care for the self that might offer new forms of subjectivity and selfhood. This chapter is pivotal for the thesis as it demonstrates the development of my thinking, and enables an appreciation of the critical side of mindfulness beyond the strictures of McMindfulness.

Therapeutic corporeogeographies of the breath: refrains, habits, dwelling. In this chapter I am interested in ways in which breath-based mindfulness practices cultivate an embodied therapeutic experience. I focus on the ways that this therapeutic experience is structured through the refrain and rhythm of the breath. Firstly, I turn to how the bare refrain of the breath provides an 'anchor' that calms feelings of anxiety and stress. Following from this, I explore how the rhythm of the breath can afford us bodily capacities. I concentrate on two ways. First, I investigate the ways in which rhythm can provide a means to explore habitual thought patterns. Second, I turn to the process of *dwelling with* the body to explore the ways that the breath provides us with a self-reflexive realisation of our corporeogeography – how we come to terms with our embodied dwelling, limits, and proximities.

Breath of life: enchantment and mindful engaged awareness. In this chapter I focus on my autoethnographic experiences on a retreat at Gaia House in Newton Abbot, South Devon, and subsequent spiritual developments at other retreats and with participants. To begin with, I unpack the terms enchantment and encounter to offer an exploration of mindfulness as a practice that re-orientates and forces us to think otherwise. Then secondly, I demonstrate that mindfulness provokes a re-orientation that manoeuvres bodies towards a 'quiet engaged awareness' through an engagement with spiritual activism and engaged Buddhism. This chapter allows me to develop the ways that mindfulness might offer new forms of subjectivity and selfhood that go beyond neoliberal and modern notions of the self.

Part 2: ethnographic and participatory approaches

New ways of breathing together. Here I explore the collective dynamics of mindfulness through the formation of the participatory mindfulness group. This chapter is a substantial interrogation of the participatory fieldwork process. Initially, the chapter explores my research approach and offers a reflection on the reasoning for the fieldwork methodology. Through demonstrating the collective dynamics of the practice, I unpack the affective and atmospheric dimensions of the sharing circle through horizontal and vertical structures of inquiry. I also offer a reflection of relations of care and reciprocity through the embodied experience of crying and tears. Towards the end of the chapter, I consider the ways mindfulness became embedded into the participants lives through the refracted enchantment of mindful mementos. This allows me to begin to consider the ways that mindfulness became part of the everyday lives of the participants, something I return to in the following chapter.

Zine: a little book of wisdom. This zine is an output from the participatory 8-week mindfulness course.

Participant stories: journeys with mindfulness. This chapter explores, in depth, five participant journeys with mindfulness. These journeys demonstrate the ways in which mindfulness became embedded into the participant's lives and how the practice is used to help them deal with difficulties and challenges in their lives. The stories demonstrate the transformative and relational journeys that the participants underwent with mindfulness. This chapter is important as it demonstrates the slow creep of embodying mindfulness and provides a processual and relational account of health, recovery, and healing, one that is an assemblage of diverse affects, objects, encounters, and relationships.

Zine: Journeys with mindfulness. This zine explores the journeys in the previous chapter in a shorter accessible format. I worked with an artist, Isabel Mae, to illustrate the zine. This was funded by my RTSG top-up.

Conclusion: towards mindful geographies. This chapter concludes the thesis. In doing so, I offer a reflection on the research process, demonstrating how my thinking has developed from the beginning of the project. I then offer my three main conclusions. The first being a rendering of health as an engaged, relational, interdependent, affective, and transformative process that I understand as healing. Here, healing encompasses our personal or inner wellbeing and health, but also entails an awareness of the ways that outer structural and systematic dimensions and factors influence our ability to become well. An integral part to the process of healing is the collective and interdependent concern for flourishing-in-common. In this way, I contend that healing must be an engaged practice that attends to the ways we are affected by, but also complicit in, harmful structures and processes. Secondly, I attend to the debates regarding McMindfulness. I offer a viewpoint that recognises both the merits and limitations of the argument. I draw on my ethnographic findings to argue that mindfulness has the potential to be a collective, relational, and affective experience that can produce new ways of being or alternative forms of selfhood. In the final section of the conclusion I offer an explanation of mindful geographies: the ways in which we might bring mindfulness into our geographical research practices. This work is prompted by personal experiences in the academy, and seeks to promote a gentle, kind, and humble approach to academic knowledge and practice.

2. Health geography and non-representational theory

2.1. Introduction

This chapter seeks to locate my work within the remit of cultural health geography, and lays out the theoretical framing and inspiration for the thesis: the encounter between health geography and non-representational theory. The thesis starts with this dialogue in order to locate the work in the initial conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of the research. Additionally, it reflects my positionality of straddling the two sub-disciplines of cultural and health geography. The inclusion of post-human and non-representational theories into health geography has been an important development, provoking a reconceptualisation of health, place, and the relationships between the two. This chapter explores these developments in health geography, and pays particular attention to the affective qualities of health and place, ‘all within a broader objective to think about how health emerges and *takes place*’ (Crooks et al. 2018, 3, original emphasis).

Health geography has developed considerably since its initial conception as medical geography (Crooks et al. 2018). The early part of the decade saw an evolutionary shift from ‘medical geography’ to ‘health geography’ (Kearns and Moon 2002; Smyth 2005). This was characterised by a movement away from disease and medical models, to ‘an increased interest in well-being and broader social models of health and health care’ (Kearns and Moon 2002, 606). Furthermore, it re-centred the focus of medical geography on place, exemplified through Kearns and Gesler's (1998) monograph ‘Putting Health into Place’. The reinvention sought to fuse medical geography with broader theoretical concerns, involving the incorporation of social and cultural geography – as a

recognition that ‘culture matters’ to medical geography (Gesler 1991, 4). This involved a humanist perspective that rejected a positivistic medical ontology; instead orientating itself towards subjective and place-based experiences of health and wellbeing (ibid). This enabled a recognition that health is not simply an absence of disease, but rather something that is lived, experienced, and made (Sothern and Reid 2018).

More recently, non-representational and posthuman theories and perspectives have been incorporated into the sub-discipline (Andrews 2018c). Health geography is understood as a ‘magpie discipline’ (Kearns and Moon 2002, 612) – borrowing and reshaping theory for specific application to research in the subdiscipline. The ontological turn signalled by posthumanist theories has challenged fundamental understandings of space, place, time, and the subject, and in doing so, also challenges the core conceptualisation of health in the sub-discipline (Asker and Andrews 2020). Here, health is thought of as a process, in the positive, and as the line of becoming well that is dependent on the assemblage of events, affects, and relations that increase or diminish bodily capacities.

Importantly, this reconceptualisation is political as it allows for a rendering of health that is open, plural, differentiated, and diverse; acknowledging that there is not one standard of health that is achievable for all bodies (S. R. Taylor 2018), nor is there one ‘right’ way of becoming well. This is in contrast with earlier understandings in which health was thought of as the absence of disease, and was defined as a normative injunction or moral imperative to be well (Duff 2014). Its plural nature allows for otherworldly dispositions and embodiments to be included, meaning that possibilities for wellbeing or lines of

flight are not foreclosed. Broadly, health has been reworked through the relational ontologies of affect, whereas place is conceived as an assemblage (Crooks et al. 2018). This is in contrast with earlier humanist conceptualisations of place that endorsed the separation of subjects from place-based contexts. Rather, through posthuman theories, health becomes ‘less an attribute of individual bodies and more a function of encounters immanent to a specific assemblage’ (Duff 2018, 140).

Overall, in this thesis I aim to understand the geographies of mindfulness, and in doing so, theoretically expand health geography using insights from mindfulness practices. This was suggested by Whitehead et al. (2016, 559) who contended that ‘mindfulness techniques could provide a practical basis for developing a more radically oriented therapeutic geography, and a less cerebral engagement with the geographical fields of affect’. Furthermore, Philo et al.’s (2015) work on ‘new energy geographies’ opens up a space in health geography to consider the other energies and affects that play apart in the constitution of health and therapeutic space. This work has guided my approach to non-representational health geographies.

In this chapter I first attend to the dialogue between non-representational theories and health geography, a move that has been spearheaded by notable academics in the field. I focus on this encounter as my pedagogical work with mindfulness has had significantly shaped by approach to this dialogue. Next I unpack the ways that non-representational and posthuman theories in health geography have allowed a rethinking of the core concept of health through the Deleuzian and Spinozian theory of affect. I flesh out how this reconceptualisation has provoked an (re)thinking of ill-health and recovery. This

allows me to explore the ways that the more-than-therapeutic has been incorporated into our analyses of recovery and health. Finally, I comment on the location and production of knowledge in the subdiscipline, acknowledging the critiques of posthumanist geographies from decolonial perspectives.

2.2. The 'event' of non-representational theory

The 'event'[7] of non-representational theory (Anderson and Harrison 2010) in health geography has invited health geographers to think and act differently. It is a turn that can be contextualised within a wider concern with practice and performativity in social sciences (Colls 2012), with a broad impact across human geography (Hall and Wilton 2017). Non-representational health geographies are influenced by a confluence of thought at the Bristol School of Geography and the work of Nigel Thrift in the 1990s, which laid the groundwork for this approach (Lea 2018). Yet, it is worth noting that non-representational theory's philosophical heritage can be traced back much further than Thrift, and relies heavily on the continental philosophy tradition, including (but not limited to) Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze (Cadman 2009). Cadman (2009) outlines three philosophical approaches that have influenced NRT approaches: phenomenology, neovitalism, and post-structuralism. Neovitalist approaches have strong links with posthuman and more-than-human geographies, and rely

[7] Anderson and Harrison (2010) use the term 'event' to signal the emergence of non-representational theories in the discipline. The event of NRT can be attributed to a range of factors including (but not limited to): the impact of post-structuralism in the discipline; the translation of the work of Deleuze and Latour; a concern for everyday life and embodied practice; desires of finding new ways of conceptualising space, place, landscape, the social, the cultural and the political; a confluence of research energies at the University of Bristol; and the work of Nigel Thrift in gathering together these research tendencies. I use the term event to highlight the cultivation of non-representational approaches in health geography to signal the ways that events are 'composed across but irreducible to a multiplicity of sites, desires, fears, contingencies and tendencies' (ibid, 3).

heavily on the work of Deleuze and Guattari. This leaning is most prominent in the conversation between health geography and non-representational theories.

Non-representational theory (NRT) has a 'practical and processual basis for its accounts of the social, the subject and the world, one focused on the 'backgrounds', bodies and their performances' (Anderson and Harrison 2010, 2). It attends to life and thought as practiced, open-ended and in-process (Cadman 2009), with attention to embodied and affective dispositions of subjects and related embodied practices and experiences. NRT characterises a shift from epistemological emphasis on meaning and identity towards an ontological concern with bodies and material doings (Hall and Wilton 2017), and in doing so 'aims to overturn the very constitution of geographical knowledge production' (Cadman 2009, 456). Here, social life is conceived through the 'relational connections between heterogenous bodies, objects and environments' (ibid, 3). Furthermore, non-representational theory emphasises the incomplete and distributed process of human becoming, allowing for a decentred subject that is contingent on, emerges from, and exceeds relations, encounters, and events (Simpson 2015; Hall and Wilton 2017).

Although non-representational theory is understood as an approach or style of thought that values practice and process (Simpson 2020) and is not unified or cohesive (Anderson and Harrison 2010; Colls 2012), work in health geography has largely been 'written with a Deleuzian ontological idiom of force, vitality, materiality and relationality' (Wylie 2010, 104). In cultural geography, there has been debate over the prefix of non-, some preferring *more-than-*representational *theories* (better to think NRT in the plural as NRTs) (H. Lorimer 2005; Robertson 2017; Simpson 2020). Yet, within health geography it has

largely been referred to as non-representational theory (see Andrews 2018a). This has allowed for a particular understanding of NRT in health geography that relies on the work of a few posthumanist scholars.

2.3. Non-representational geographies of health

NRT's emergence into health geography was developing organically in the intersection between cultural and health geography (e.g. Doel and Segrott 2003; D. P. McCormack 2003), until a series of reviews and discussions pushed research agendas to non-representational and posthuman theories. Andrews et al. (2014) boldly argued for a change of course in health geography: away from the constructivist, discoursed-based, and metaphorical approaches, and towards an incorporation of non-representational theories as a 'style' of scholarship, a 'particular way of going about research to animate and reverberate health's happening' (Andrews 2014, 166). This manifesto for change is hopeful (Andrews 2018b), and seeks to enliven the thinking and doing of health geography (Andrews 2018c). This has redirected inquiry towards the 'sensory, atmospheric and affective qualities of health and place' with an broader aim to consider how health is assembled and emerges in a specific assemblage (Crooks et al. 2018, 3).

Previous work in health geography commonly understood health in the negative, in terms of absence of disease, or the failure to observe a set of ailments or conditions (Duff 2014). This focus on illness implicitly provokes a normative and moral judgement of health, as something to which all bodies should strive to, whilst defining the parameters of the healthy subject. Here, there is an imperative to be well or to live in a certain way as to attain healthiness (ibid), an understanding of health that is detached from

socioeconomic and political structures that might cause ill-health in the first place. The inclusion of posthuman and non-representational theories in the sub-discipline has provoked a profound rethinking of health and illness through the relational and pre-personal ontologies of affect (Duff 2018).

Affect is a contested term across geography and the social sciences (Anderson 2006), and has become a central theory in the non-representational geographies of health (Andrews 2018a). It is a 'transpersonal capacity which a body has to be affected (through an affection) and to affect (as the result of modifications)' (Anderson 2006, 735). An affective understanding means that health has come to be understood as a 'mode of existence' rather than as an ontologically prior state. Here then, attention is paid to the events, affects and relations that might sustain, moderate, or even threaten health in encounters between bodies (Duff 2014). Health becomes 'precisely contingent on the capacity for a body to affect and be affected' (Bissell 2011, 2659), 'to form new relations, and thus resist forces of territorialisation that limit these capacities' (Fox 2011, 369). These new relations produce and close down bodily capacities, where bodily capacities signal an individual's power to act based on the transformations of 'an individual's affective orientations' (Duff 2011, 153)

While these transformations might be enhancing or diminutive, work in health geographies has tended to prioritise experiences of health and wellbeing are over experiences of ill-health and disease, exemplifying the broader turn to health in health geographies (e.g. turns towards wellbeing (Fleuret and Atkinson 2007), flourishing, care (Conradson 2003), and hope (Power et al. 2018; Andrews 2018b)). This tendency towards wellbeing sits alongside and is maybe influenced by contemporary discourses of the 'happiness turn' (Ahmed 2010),

positive psychology, and the wellness industry (Cederstrom and Spicer 2015). The father of the contemporary wellness industry, Halbert L. Dunn, proposed the idea of 'high level wellness' (Dunn 1959):

> 'High-Level wellness for the individual is defined as an integrated method of functioning which is orientated towards maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable. It requires that the individual maintain a continuum of balance and purposeful direction within the environment where he is functioning' (Dunn 1971, 5).

Here, within this definition Dunn qualifies his use of specific words. 'Maximizing' 'means maintaining completeness from day to day' (ibid, 5), in that wellness is a never ending process of becoming. 'Potential' means the bodily capacity of what one is able to do, within our physical and mental limitations. Importantly, Dunn does not prescribe an optimum level of wellness, but rather that wellness 'is a *direction of progress* toward an ever-higher potential of functioning' (ibid, 6, original emphasis). Thus, there is no end point or goal within wellness, it is a constant process of becoming-well. One that is tied to individual uniqueness and capacity. Dunn understands health as the absence of illness, whereas wellness is conceptualised as an active, ongoing pursuit that is subjective and tied to the uniqueness of the individual. Rather than focusing on disease, disability and death, Dunn preferred to think about positive wellness – as something that 'calls for *zest* in life' (ibid, 4, original emphasis). These ideas have shaped the global wellness industry that we know today (Blei 2017).

This notion of high-level wellness is intertwined with the broader landscape of Western neoliberal capitalist culture where individual responsibility and self-expression are valued. The open-ended nature of wellness, as a direction of

progress rather than a goal or ending point, allows for its endless commodification as there is always more wellness that you can achieve. Cederstrom and Spicer (2015) argue that the wellness industry has created a 'wellness syndrome', where wellness has become a moral imperative or biomorality. Here, the individual subject is autonomous, self-managing, and endlessly striving to improve oneself. Wellness becomes a demand – something we must do in order to live truthfully and righteously, and it reconfigures the way we live our lives.

Arguably, these definitions and discourses around health, wellbeing, and wellness cannot be separated from the cultural, institutional and socio-economic context in which they are created. This is also true for non-representational geographical articulations of health. I see similarities between Dunn's conceptualisation of wellness and the non-representational rendering of health that is premised on notions of bodily capacities, becomings, and lines of flight. Both have a sense of direction and positivity about them that calls attention to flourishing and becoming-well[8]. Wellness, however, is tied to individual notions of capacity and responsibility – something that affectual approaches seek to counter. Non-representational conceptualisations emphasise the relational and decentred nature of subjectivity – allowing for posthuman and post-phenomenological renderings of the self. Here, non-representational theories see the emergence of self as something constituted through the composition of human and non-human things (objects, people, technologies, discourses etc.) that perpetually encounter and shape one another (Simpson 2020). Thus, it is

[8] Although within non-representational geographies becoming is not necessarily a singular directionality or progression (we can also think about the ways that bodily capacities are reduced or diminished), work in health geography has largely focused on becoming as a positive direction or potentiality.

less about individuals, and more about the processes of individualisation (ibid). Wherein the focus shifts from specific practicing bodies towards the broader event of health. Thus, wellness might be one of these practices of individualisation.

This similarity between Dunn's (and consequently the wellness industry's) conceptualisation of wellness and non-representational accounts of health and wellbeing has an implication on the type of empirical work carried out. This is something that is evident throughout *Non-representational Theory and Health* (Andrews 2018a), as examples concentrate heavily on the 'wellness' industry: each chapter contains examples of holistic, complementary medicine (Andrews, Evans, and McAlister 2013), such as yoga and meditation (Philo et al. 2015), as well as, movement activities of jogging (Lorimer 2012) and cycling (Spinney 2009). As Philo (2016) argues, the turn towards health (rather than medical) geography in the millennium brought a lively challenging of biomedical hegemony, which distanced itself from disease and instead directed itself towards lived experiences of wellbeing, health, and health-care (Kearns and Moon 2002), and complementary and alternative forms of health-care. It must also be acknowledged that this direction of academic work towards complementary and alternative modes of health and medicine greatly influenced the conception of this thesis.

The focus on wellbeing in light of these contemporary wellness movements influences the theoretical project of non-representational health geographies. For example, the focus on flow and onflow draws heavy comparison to the work by positive psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Flow 'describes the experience of an individual engaged with the world, or involved with the world,

where the world is not encountered as alien, as an obstacle or resistance' (Ahmed 2010, 11). For example, a paper by Hannah Pitt uses Csikszentmihalyi's notion of flow to investigate therapeutic gardening practices (Pitt 2014). Notions of flow and onflow have been thoroughly integrated into non-representational geographies of health and wellbeing (Andrews 2020), and are understood as part of a 'new capitalism' – where wellbeing has become 'essential' to the workings of capitalism both as an input/component of it and an output/consequence of it (Andrews and Duff 2020).

Yet, following from Ahmed, we can consider the phenomenology of happiness through the notion of flow – it is not a neutral theoretical device. We need to consider the ways in which some bodies are housed more than others and 'how it feels to be stressed by the very forms of life that enable some bodies to flow into space' (Ahmed 2010, 12). In her book, she traces the alternative history of happiness, by drawing on the 'unhappy archives' that emerge from feminist, queer, and antiracist histories.

Non-representational health geographies cannot be understood as separate from the neoliberal capitalist (and institutional) context in which they are produced. The focus on experiences of onflow, flow, speed, momentum, rhythm (Andrews 2020) within the non-representational geographies of health/wellness/wellbeing are themselves the affectivity of late capitalism. These non-representational geographies are exciting and enticing:

> 'These new geographies – these new ways of casting light upon the vibrating, gyrating, dancing geographies of the world, or many worlds – are enchanting, bewitching, seductive, chock-full of hope, optimism, of new politics and new ethics for new times.' (Philo 2017, 5).

Yet, wellness is embodied and experienced as a range of temporal feelings and, intensities, and is ‘perhaps one way in which contemporary liberal-capitalism is felt and lived with’ (Coleman 2020, 2). Non-representational geographies of health and wellbeing fit into and serve a neoliberal academic agenda, where speed, joy, and vitalism is valued over slowness, stillness, and passiveness. The pervasive academic mood in health geography towards joy, positivity, and enchantment means that the ‘negative’ affects of exhaustion, anger, and unhappiness (to name a few) caused by capitalist realism are left unaccounted for. Exceptions include the work of Harrison, who demonstrates in his reflections on bodily passivity and susceptibility that focus on corporeal vulnerability rather than the body-in-action (Harrison 2008). Furthermore, Philo (2017, 5) calls for more attention to the less-than-human geographies, asking ‘what subtracts from the human in the picture, what disenchants, repels, repulses’. In a recent publication, Bissell et al. (2021) consider negative geographies, countering the tendency towards joy and teeming potentiality in contemporary geography. An affective state that seems ‘curiously disconnected from the reality of our time’ (ibid, 2).

The next section seeks to develop an account that makes space for such corporeal vulnerabilities, differences and instabilities in the emergence of health. In doing this, I hope to make room, and offer a different inflection between the encounter between non-representational theory and geography. While this might seem like killing the joy of NRT health geographies, as Ahmed (2010, 20) argues, to kill joy is ‘to open life, to make room for life, to make room for possibility, for chance’.

2.3.1. Ill-health, vulnerability, and recovery

An affective approach recasts a focus on the individual body as a source of ill-health into a concern for the affects, atmospheres, and forces that open up or close down possibilities for health (Duff 2016; Fox 2002). Here, then, illness can be understood as the diminution in the body's capacities, in which 'a body's affective sensitivities' are limited (ibid, 153). The attentiveness to how diverse encounters, affects, and relations affect bodies *differently* avoids the prescription of a universal set of rules or principles for healthy encounters. This has given rise to some accounts which radically recast what counts as un/healthy activities. Traditionally 'unhealthy' activities such as smoking can be understood as enabling particular forms of wellbeing, such as feelings of sociality and inclusion, and the production of sensorial and affective experiences (Tan 2013). This understanding of health goes beyond normative and moralistic dynamics of 'good' or 'bad' health and the strictures of the healthy subject (Lea 2018; Duff 2014).

With this rendering of health, notions of recovery and the therapeutic can be thought in terms of process, struggle, and endurance:

> 'The notion of recovery completely dismisses the logic of health or illness, of affliction and cure, in describing a process whereby an individual struggles to maintain some measure of wellbeing in the face of enduring illness. It is not the case that one is either sick or well; it is a matter of traversing the line in between, a line of becoming well that seizes on the affects, events and relations of a body's health in vitality' (Duff 2014, 154).

Here, recovery is the '*practice of health and its maintenance'* (ibid, original emphasis). It is the 'line of becoming well' wherein there is no single subject of

recovery. But rather it is dependent on the assemblage of bodies, forces, spaces, and objects in which the 'real experience' of recovery advances and retreats (Duff 2016).

Two things are important there. The first is the argument that the line of becoming well is not straight, but rather as something that twists, turns, undulates, and maybe even loops back on itself. We have to create space for experiences of health and recovery that do not move in straight lines, that loose balance. This is underpinned by an 'ethics of sensibility or ethos' that 'demands an openness to the uncertain potentiality of the eventful encounter' from which 'new ways of going on in the world might emerge' (D. P. McCormack 2003, 503), and gives rise to an openness that acknowledges the instability, intensity, and emergence in the 'event' of health.

> 'health/ ill-health is considered a fragile continuum that is always-already contained within bodily relations, where deterioration, abrasion, de-composure and emergence are intrinsically part and parcel of staying alive.' (I. K. Allen 2020, 81).

Secondly, the corporeal vulnerability and susceptibility in being/becoming affected on the line of becoming well, as 'incapacity, inaccessibility, and finitude are conditions of corporeal existence' (Bissell et al. 2021, 19), is important. Here, the body is exposed to what arrives beyond it, and is vulnerable to the unchosen and unforeseen (Harrison 2008). Corporeal vulnerability offers a porous and susceptible body that is open to the process of transformation that is at the heart of experiences of recovery. I emphasise this vulnerable rendering of corporeal existence in order to offer a different inflection to the perspective of relational ontologies that are commonplace in health geographies. Here,

relational ontologies understand living beings as ‘infinitely creative and capable’, yet in doing so ‘we also have to acknowledge how they are infinitely vulnerable’ (Bissell et al. 2021, 19). Thus, the relations of exchange are not always equal – bodies are open to the world that affects them in a manner in which they cannot necessarily affect back (ibid).

The open and plural rendering of health, recovery, wellbeing and therapeutic has provoked greater attention to the diversity of events, encounters, affects and relations in the becoming and retreating of health. In doing so, it has opened up the possibility of exploring the more-than-therapeutic relationships between bodies and spaces, particularly for those spaces that are traditionally thought of as therapeutic. For Emmerson (2019, 587), ‘the “therapeutic” has become too central to our analyses of these kinds of spaces, meaning that we risk missing out on what else is important – what else matters – for those who inhabit them’. In his work on nursing care homes, he explores the more-than-therapeutic relations in caring spaces including practices of homemaking, friendships and rivalries, and political events. Thus, his work casts the ‘analytic net’ wider, to consider the everyday and the ordinary in spaces of care (ibid). Here, health is not something extra-ordinary, but rather the process of becoming well sits alongside and is embedded in everyday spaces, activities, and lives.

2.4. Knowledges

The turn towards an affectual conceptualisation of health and associated terms has provided critical and ethical pathway for health geographers, and is paralleled by an associated expansion of what counts as valid knowledge in health geography’s accounts of the world. It has enabled an expansion of ‘what

counts' in health geography towards consideration of the more-than-therapeutic (Emmerson 2019), alongside the everyday processual nature of recovery and wellbeing (Duff 2016). Furthermore, the affectual and emotional turn in health geography has enabled a consideration of the 'other energies', affects, and events that are central to the journey of recovery for some bodies. For instance, Philo et al. (2015) consider 'new energy geographies' to hold implications of discussions of health and wellbeing:

> 'These would be alternative health studies for whom animate energy is central; studies prepared to risk taking seriously yogic and meditative spaces (to give just one example) as the gathering and distribution points for 'other energies'' (ibid, 43).

This is an avenue that takes seriously 'other energies' and 'other knowledges' in a pluriversal world, and which involves spiritual and otherworldly experiences and affectations as part of the process of becoming well. Spiritual experiences of wellbeing were originally included in Gesler's therapeutic landscape concept (Gesler 1992; Bell et al. 2017), and more recently, work has attended to the ways that landscape, affect, and embodiment constitute spiritual experiences in therapeutic space (A. Williams 2015). Here, the spiritual is something that 'forms a significant part of the move beyond rationality and the possibility of other-worldly dispositions' (Dewsbury and Cloke 2009, 696) and is part of everyday life. This is shown clearly in Sara MacKian's (2012) work on everyday spiritualities where experiences of spirit were closely tied to feelings and discourses of recovery, healing, and health. For her participants, spirituality was part of the ongoing work to cope with illness, as an attempt to cultivate the 'energies of spirit' in their everyday spaces and interactions to enhance felt

experiences of wellbeing. These spiritual and energic dimensions of health are further explored in chapter 9 of this thesis.

2.4.1. Notes on knowledge production and location in health geography

However, taking seriously ‘other energies’ and ‘other knowledges’ would need to be careful about the location of that knowledge (Haraway 2016; Z. Todd 2016), in order not to overstate claims about its ‘discovery’ of other energies and modes of spirituality and subjectivity by (white) Anglo-European scholars. In saying this, it is important to acknowledge that the majority of posthuman and non-representational work being done in health geography is by white, often male, academics in the Global North. This is attested to in Crooks et al. (2018) writing where they acknowledge the sub-discipline’s overwhelming research focus on the Global North.

In other parts of the discipline (notably cultural geography), posthumanist work has been challenged for its reliance on Eurocentric scholarship (Sundberg 2014; Z. Todd 2016). This is a reliance that silences other ontologies through universalising claims to knowledge (particularly around the ‘foundational’ split between nature and culture) (Sundberg 2014), which allows for epistemological ignorance (Dorries and Ruddick 2018). Here, Eurocentric scholarship becomes the only frame of reference and the only legitimate source of knowledge – silencing other voices and ontologies[9]. For posthumanist work, this further enacts colonialist projects of knowledge production as the much of the “posthumanist turn” is indebted to Indigenous thinking, a fact that is largely unacknowledged, obscured, or even erased (Z. Todd 2016).

[9] I have levelled a similar argument at the ways mindfulness has been mainstreamed, secularised and medicalised through powerful cultural forces and stakeholders.

Because of the location of knowledge production in health geography (mainly white male academics), these arguments and debates have not been present in the sub-discipline's engagement with posthuman theories (exceptions are notable, Asker and Andrews (2020) and Lovell et al. (2021)). This is an astounding absence, made particularly present to me by those settler academics teaching, writing, and living on colonialised land, and perpetuated due to the dominant white frameworks, or 'white background' (Johnson 2020), in the sub-discipline. Johnson (2020, 91) argues that 'normative whiteness is entwined with the work done within Geography', highlighting the colonial and imperialist legacies of knowledge production in the discipline. There is a stark absence of these issues in the conversation between health geography and non-representational theory, allowing for a situation where 'whiteness can remain a neutralised and privileged racial positioning' in the subdiscipline (Johnson 2018, 18). Thus, dialogues around race and whiteness are largely not taken up by health geographers, but as Kiely's (2021) work shows, this is an urgent and timely task for us too. Johnson (2018, 23) offers a way forward:

> 'For white academics, this would include exploring how one's whiteness produces a positioning of privilege and comfort within this institution (although this varies depending on which white body is occupying this role). However, this needs to be addressed as a structural and ongoing violence rather than an issue to do with 'reflexivity' or 'identity politics'.'

Later in the thesis I pick up this thread and examine white supremacy and epistemic violence located in particular renderings of mindfulness as a 'universal sensibility', and this opens up an avenue in which to critique my own privileged positioning and complicity within systems that legitimise the

borderlessness of white spiritual femininity (as discussed in the introduction with reference to Lucy) that have allowed me to write a PhD on mindfulness. The initial positioning of the research within the dialogues between non-representational theories and health geography could attest to the comfort I found in intellectual spaces of whiteness within the sub-discipline. Yet, encounters with decolonial work (e.g. Sundberg 2014; Z. Todd 2016) and an Overseas Institutional Visit to McMaster in Canada transformed my relationship with the sub-discipline – particularly in reference to the critiques surrounding posthumanism. I grew critical of the initial comfort I had found in the dialogues between health geography and non-representational theories, that seem to centre whiteness and Eurocentric knowledges.

This collided with a concern for the ways that mindfulness had been repackaged and decontextualised away from its historical roots through Kabat-Zinn's MBSR. A move that legitimised particular forms of knowledge (medical, secular, Anglo-European) in regard to the practice, and obscured or erased other forms of mindfulness and related knowledges. As we will see in chapter 4, this 'legitimate' form of mindfulness is seen to offer a promising methodological innovation for non-representational geographical methodologies, particularly in the realms of affect (Whitehead et al. 2016). I would be careful about the use of mindfulness in geography, and prefer to think about the ways that the practice can gently *inflect* our practice as geographers – allowing us to critically engage with structural and epistemic violence posed by particular practices of knowledge production in the academy.

As an initial attempt and dialogue, this thesis incorporates more-than-health geography literatures and concerns into the conversation – allowing me to bring

in issues regarding whiteness, epistemic violence, racial embodied politics of the breath and health, queer phenomenology, and spiritual activism. But, I acknowledge that my own whiteness has most likely allowed for epistemological ignorance in my work. This journey of (re)learning is ongoing, and this thesis has been the initial phase of this education – supported and cultivated through an engagement with critical mindfulness practices. It is a commitment to citation as 'feminist memory', where 'citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way' (Ahmed 2017, 15-16).

2.5. Conclusions

This chapter has offered an explanation and reflection on the dialogue between non-representational theories and health geography. I have shown the ways that the category of health has been reconceptualised and extended through non-representational and posthuman theories of affect. This chapter has provided the theoretical framing for the thesis and a contextualisation of the developments in health geography over the recent years. In chapter 8 these ideas will be drawn upon through the consideration of therapeutic rhythms, refrains, and affects of mindfulness of the breath and their role in the constitution of new habits and new forms of bodily dwelling. Furthermore, in chapter 10 I will explore the constitution of atmospheres and affects of mindfulness through group dynamics of inquiry and dialogue in the sharing circle. Experiences of recovery and healing (the line of becoming well) are explored in chapter 11 where I unpack the participants' journeys with mindfulness.

Thus, overall, the thesis will explore and make a contribution to conversations between non-representational theory, health geography, and mind-body

practices such as mindfulness, initially inspired by Whitehead et al.'s (2016) provocations on the encounter between geography and mindfulness. I use (and am critical of) a non-representational style of thinking and doing, with a focus on embodiment (or corporeogeographies), affect, atmosphere, and subjectification. In doing so, I aim to understand the (therapeutic) geographies of mindfulness, and in doing so extend conceptualisations of health through a broad conversation between mindfulness and geographical concerns; this is a dialogue that aims to nuance and extend understandings of mindfulness and its relationship to geography. The next chapter reviews the broad base of interdisciplinary literature on mindfulness with a focus on the debates surrounding McMindfulness and modes of subjectification.

3. Approaches to mindfulness

3.1. Introduction

Interest in mindfulness as a therapeutic practice has grown exponentially since the millennium. With this large body of interest in mindfulness across the cultural, political, economic and social spheres, a sizeable literature on mindfulness exists across the social sciences. Mindfulness has variously been understood as a: state of consciousness, metacognitive decentering, a technique of attentional control, dispositional trait, practice of meditation or outcome of meditative practice (Stanley 2012b). As outlined in the introduction, within geography, literature on mindfulness and related therapeutic practices has developed. Here, mindfulness has been largely been explored under the umbrella of geographies of behaviour, which includes: habitual geographies (Lea et al. 2015) behaviour change (Jones et al. 2013; Pykett, Lilley, et al. 2016), affective governance (Pykett, Howell, et al. 2016), and brain cultures (Pykett and Enright 2016). Other geographical work has understood mindfulness and meditation practices through the lens of energy (Philo et al. 2015), spirituality (Wigley 2017), and affect (Carvalho 2017). In a wider context, Whitehead et al. (2016) explore mindfulness' contribution to geographical pedagogy, epistemology, and methodology.

In this chapter, I broadly gather together interdisciplinary research on mindfulness that has weighed on, influenced, and informed my thinking and practice. First, I briefly focus on research regarding mindfulness-based interventions, namely MBSR and MBCT. Then, I look to the literature on McMindfulness that provides a substantial, unwavering, and hegemonic critique

of these interventions. To offer hopeful pathways for this thesis as a whole, I begin to unpick the totalising arguments of McMindfulness using critical ethnographic studies. Finally, I turn to queer and transformative mindfulness, to offer a 'more critically and civically oriented discourse [and practice] of mindfulness' (Ng 2016, 149). Here, I offer some examples of mindfulness that aim to (re)orientate the practice towards collective healing and justice.

3.2. Mindfulness-based interventions: MBSR and MBCT

First generation mindfulness-based interventions have become common-place, a sizable body of literature has been authored to measure its clinical and therapeutic utility. This work is largely based in what Rose (1998) terms the 'psy' disciplines: psychology, psychiatry, medicine and neuroscience. Meta-analyses and systematic reviews undertaken show that the 'science of mindfulness and health is still in its infancy' (Creswell and Lindsay 2014, 405). Although many agree that mindfulness-based initiatives have therapeutic outcomes for a wide range of diseases and mental health conditions, some of which include depression, HIV, psoriasis, and drug relapse (Bowen et al. 2014; Creswell et al. 2009; Kabat-Zinn et al. 1998; Teasdale et al. 2000), the literature is lamented for limitations in its methodological rigour (e.g. lack of control groups, small sample sizes, clinical significance unaddressed, see Baer (2003)). Many systematic reviews conclude with the need for more 'rigorous' design and models that investigate specific effects and mechanisms of mindfulness training (Goyal et al. 2014; Hofmann et al. 2010; Piet and Hougaard 2011). However, as Baer (2003) argues, operationalising and empirically evaluating mindfulness in this way risks limiting it to measurable

concepts. Essential mindful tenets such as awareness, insight, and wisdom would be lost due to them being difficult to evaluate quantitatively (Baer 2003).

Along the same lines, Creswell and Lindsay (2014) allude to the value of participant experiences in understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying mindfulness. Psy qualitative work on mindfulness is fairly substantial (Malpass et al. 2012), and is often done alongside randomised control trials (e.g. M. Allen et al. (2009) and Kuyken et al. (2008)). These approaches aim to capture people's lived experience of mindfulness and meditation in order to develop broader, theoretical understandings of psychological mechanisms underpinning mindfulness-based initiatives (M. Allen et al. 2009). The 'psy' lens means that the literature focuses exclusively on 8-week programmes based on MBSR/MBCT. Furthermore, much of the literature is limited by a focus on individual experiences, rather than understanding how mindfulness might be co-cultivated *with* others (McCown et al. 2010).

3.3. McMindfulness and beyond

An attempt to 'move beyond strictly positivist measures of mindfulness practice' (Arat, 2017, 168–9), along with the boom in popular interest surrounding mindfulness, has provoked critical interdisciplinary work from Buddhist scholars (Bodhi 2011; Sun 2014), sociology (Arat 2017; 2016; K. K. Barker 2014), critical psychology (Stanley 2012b), management (Purser 2019), religious studies (Wilson 2014), and geography (Pykett, Howell, et al. 2016). Broadly speaking, this work makes several contributions. First, efforts have been made to unpack the historiography of 'first generation' (Crane 2009) mindfulness-based interventions. In doing so, much of this literature critiques the ways that the Buddhist aspects of mindfulness have been obscured and simplified in first-

generation mindfulness-based programmes in order to secularise and commodify the practice (Sun 2014; McCown et al. 2010). Through ‘cultural pessimistic’ (MacKian 2012) approaches they identify a gradual disenchantment (Drage 2018) in mindfulness, towards a secular, medicalised, mainstream and rationalised version of the Buddhist practice. Wilson’s (2014) monograph ‘Mindful America’ is one the most substantial analysis of the emergence of the ‘mindfulness movement’ in this vein. It seeks to investigate how mindfulness has been incorporated into American culture and society and rendered appropriate for the mainstream, through processes of mystification, medicalisation, mainstreaming, marketing, and moralising.

Mystifying mindfulness is identified as the ways that the contemporary mindfulness movement has sought to ‘de-Buddhicitise’ (Sun 2014) the practice, in order to further a secular version that is exploitable and accessible for the mainstream, as well as for medical, scientific, and therapeutic realms (Wilson 2014). This is a process largely understood to be pioneered by Jon Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR which sought to gloss over the Buddhist connotations in order for it to be consumed by a mainstream audience (Kabat-Zinn 2011; Sun 2014).

For critical Buddhist studies, however, the critique has been more substantial, wherein its original purity has been disenchanted, a process that reflects Western modernity and the desire for a ‘redemptive oriental Other’ (Drage 2018, 111). Yet, some authors critique the idea that mindfulness operates in isolation from the religious or spiritual. Arat’s (2017) work on the subject demonstrates the ways that value systems in mindfulness espouse a religious framework or experience – as a ‘post-secular hack’. Here, this means that on the surface mindfulness is isolated from the religious and transcendent, but on a deeper

level it evokes religious experience (ibid): ‘no matter how much effort is expended to remove the religious nature of mindfulness, it still continues to have the capacity to operate in a religious manner’ (Wilson 2014, 24).

Second, work has used Foucauldian critical theory to understand the ways that mindfulness is producing particular regimes of neoliberal selfhood. This body of literature seeks to demonstrate how the emergence of mindfulness cannot be understood separately from ‘the growth of a close-knit matrix of professional expertise, measurement, metricisation, institutional discipline and surveillance, which, tied to an ethic of personal responsibility’ (Drage 2018, 111). In doing so, it is concerned with the cultural, political, and social significance of mindfulness as a movement (Goto-Jones 2013). Some of this work is pessimistic in tone, enclosing mindfulness to a therapeutic ethos that is narcissistic, self-centred, and ineffectual, one that promotes individualism and deflects political critique. For Slavoj Žižek (2001, n.p.):

> ‘The "Western Buddhist" meditative stance is arguably the most efficient way for us to fully participate in capitalist dynamics while retaining the appearance of mental sanity. If Max Weber were alive today, he would definitely write a second, supplementary, volume to his Protestant Ethic, entitled The Taoist Ethic and the Spirit of Global Capitalism.’

The most substantial work in this vein is under the rubric of ‘McMindfulness’. The term ‘McMindfulness’, coined by Neale (2011) and furthered by Purser and Loy (2013) and Purser (2019), describes the contemporary mindfulness zeitgeist, in which mindfulness is packaged and sold as a cure to the ‘noxious influences of capitalism’ (Purser 2019, 19) which produce stress, anxiety, and depression. But instead of helping individuals manage these conditions, it is

argued that the promises that mindfulness makes are all but a form of 'cruel optimism' (Berlant 2011). In these arguments, mindfulness is positioned as a neoliberal governmentality that encourages individuals to self-manage and self-regulate by employing a therapeutic technology of the self (Barker, 2014; Hyland, 2017; Ng, 2016; Purser, 2019; Shannon, 2010).

Technologies of the self are the one means by which the modern regime of the self emerges (N. Rose 1998), and are those procedures 'suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge' (Foucault 1997, 87). Although there is an ethical and critical function found in Foucault's theorisation of technologies of the self (Lea 2009b; Murray 2007; Duff 2016), much critical work has gone into unpacking the ways in which selfhood is (re)constituted through neoliberal governmentality and its related technologies of the self (Scharff 2016), producing 'subjects, forms of citizenship and behaviour and a new organisation of the social' (W. Brown 2003, 37).

Similarly, geographical engagements have positioned mindfulness workplace programmes as a technique of 'neuroliberalism'. This is understood as the 'ways in which neoliberal society attempts to sustain itself through neurological means', drawing 'on the collective insights of psychology, behavioural economics, cognitive design, and neuroscience in order both to understand the failure of human beings to live up to the rationality assumption, and to correct the behaviours that appear to threaten the future of a market-orientated society' (Jones et al. 2013, 50). This work acknowledges that these workplace interventions have the power to shape the worker into a 'neurocitizen' – an

individual skilled in the government of the self, committed to self-optimisation and self-responsibility (Pykett and Enright 2016). There is a risk that the personal and intimate lives and bodies of neurocitizens are made governable by these mindful interventions – brought into line with organisational values and neoliberal interests.

These renderings of mindfulness describe the ways in which neoliberal society has outsourced the maintenance of and responsibility for wellbeing to the individual (Walsh 2018). Here, self-care and the imperative to know oneself become a biopolitical morality and responsibility (De La Bella Casa 2017):

> 'For an actor in a neoliberal society, mindfulness is a skill to be cultivated, or a resource to be put to use. When mastered, it helps you to navigate the capitalist ocean's tricky currents, keeping your attention "present-centered and non-judgemental" to deal with the inevitable stress and anxiety from competition. Mindfulness helps you maximise your personal wellbeing.' (Purser 2019, 28).

By individualising the practice, and asking individuals to *turn inwards* through mindfulness practices, it is argued that mindfulness functions as a form of biopower and as a technology of neoliberal selfhood. Here, subjects are rendered as self-managing, resilient, entrepreneurial, and de-politicised. Mindfulness in this context is touted as a stress management technique, one that can cure the 'thinking disease' that laments contemporary societies so that 'the crisis is in the heads of individual people, not in the structures and institutions of society' (Goto-Jones 2013, 4). In this way mindfulness functions as another regulatory technology that acts 'as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action' (Fisher 2009, 16). Consequently, critics have

spoken out against the individualising nature of the practice and the ways in which it 'deflects attention away from systematic or structural conditions that are inducing stress in the first place' (Shannon 2010, 10). By pathologizing (everyday) experiences of stress, it is argued that these conditions have become privatised. Consequently, stress or anxiety, for example, are understood to be caused by an individual's lifestyle, background, or neurology, thus obscuring any question of wider social systematic causation (Fisher 2009).

The McMindfulness argument is one of the most prominent and forceful critiques of the contemporary mindfulness movement. However, the McMindful narrative is totalising, depicting mindfulness 'as [a] coherent and unified entity producing similar effects regardless of time and place' (Salmenniemi et al. 2019, 2). The McMindfulness argument certainly propels a particular unified and coherent image of contemporary mindfulness practices. Furthermore, the McMindfulness literature has a tendency to seek out a determinative relationship between mindfulness and neoliberalism, in that mindfulness is a response to neoliberalism or that neoliberalism has in fact manufactured mindfulness (Coleman 2020). In doing so, it does not reflect socially engaged and conscious forms of mindfulness practices that already exist, or the potential for 'McMindful' practices to be reconfigured and translated towards social concerns beyond the individual (Walsh 2018). Going beyond Purser's work on McMindfulness, there have been nuanced ethnographic studies of the use of mindfulness in habitual geographies (Lea et al. 2015), everyday digital lives (Coleman 2020), and in institutions such as the civil service and national government (Cook 2016). These studies *critically* address the entanglement mindfulness has with neoliberal governmentality (Walsh 2018) and destabilise the assumption of an autonomous modern self.

Lea et al. (2015) explore habitual bodily experiences through a consideration of 'new energy geographies' (Philo et al. 2015). The authors think through participants' experiences of mindfulness and meditation to show that mindfulness cultivates a self-reflexive stance towards agency and habit. Importantly, they understand mindfulness as an expansive sense of awareness that is non-judgmental, accepting and non-striving. Here, acceptance is the *transformation* of our relationship to ourselves, to accept ourselves as we are. The authors argue that a mindful self-reflexivity does not rely on finite end-points, or dominant norms of what mind-bodies should be, and that these self-reflexive practices are always already spatialised and situated. Their work demonstrates that mindfulness reworks and reorganises habitual geographies of space-time routines, as individuals work to find time to meditate or be mindful within their daily life. Yet their work troubles the limits of the transformative nature of mindfulness showing that the practice changes relationships to existing life structures rather than altering the structures themselves.

Cook's (2016) ethnographies on the use of Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Westminster demonstrate that subjectification practices are never totalising and that socio-political concerns remain central in self-governance. She argues that the arguments for total neoliberal self-responsibilisation are not the whole picture, and that by working with neoliberalism as a totalising form of subjectification we miss the everyday practical interventions that provide and improve wellbeing, whilst recognising and being cognisant of the collective and structural causes of suffering. Cook argues for new definitions of responsibilisation that recognise the 'multiple effects of reflexive self-governance' (ibid, 151) that go beyond the limitations of a neoliberal framework, and asks us to be sensitive to the multiplicity of mindfulness and its meanings.

She recognises the ways that mindfulness can enclose subjects into a project of self-governance and entrepreneurialism, but in doing so, she questions the limits of this framework of subjectification.

Recently, Coleman's (2020, 2) work on mindfulness and temporality explores how mindfulness might be 'one way in which contemporary liberal-capitalism is felt and lived with'. Her work employs theories of affect, atmosphere, and 'structures of feeling' (R. Williams 1977) to unpack the affective relations between neoliberalism and mindfulness. Through a focus on the temporalities of mindfulness and the time of neoliberalism, mindfulness is understood as an affective response to an individual's encounter with the world, one that unfolds through embodied sensibilities and dispositions of 'cadences', 'rhythms', and 'gestures' that change the ways that people live and feel (ibid, 16).

These studies demonstrate critical approaches to the therapeutic cultures of mindfulness. In the next section, I turn to the alternative pathways for mindfulness, those interventions that deviate from current norms in the McMindfulness movement to provide space for a practice that is ethically sensitive and engaged. Here, mindfulness is understood through the Pali word *sati* as a practice of embodied 'collective recollection', to signal the ways in which the present is socially and historically mediated (Walsh 2018, 117; Stanley 2012b).

3.4. Queer and transformative mindfulness

Many have turned to offering alternative pathways to liberate mindfulness from neoliberal strictures, one of which is to re-galvanise a sense of the collective and the political in mindfulness practice, to put 'our lives back together,

collectively' (Purser 2019, 23). Furthermore, as Lea et al. (2015, 61) write, mindfulness may actually make visible and challenge 'problematic power relations (which might otherwise be hidden within habitual structures of everyday life)'. Broadly, these interventions seek to reorientate mindfulness to socially engaged roots, either through Buddhism (e.g. Grossman 2015), social justice movements (e.g. Rowe 2016), critical theory (Stanley 2012b), or Black feminist thought (Wyatt and Ampadu 2021). In this vein, Ng (2016) offers a hopeful manifesto in favour of the idea that mindfulness practices that can disrupt or defuse normative operations of neoliberal structures. Here, a collective search for a civically and critically orientated mindfulness *is* possible. His work thinks through the creative and experimental potential of care of self that could cultivate new and different ways of becoming and capabilities for relations and freedoms.

Ethnographic work has emphasised the collective nature of meditation, for example, sociologist and ethnographer, Michal Pagis (2010) undoes the inner/outer divide in these discussions by showing that meditation is both an individual and collective practice. It is a 'fragile balance' that is 'generated through the production of intersubjectivity in silence' (ibid, 323), or a silent intersubjectivity. She explores the ways that meditators react to the movements and gestures of others in meditation. Rather than turning inwards to explore a private, inner experience that negates the collective, meditation is experienced with and through silent interaction with others.

From a different perspective, Stanley (2012a) locates the tendency to consider mindfulness to be about 'introspection' and 'inner experience' as a particular language game based on an ocular and observational metaphor of the mind in

psychology. These metaphors are powerful and work to create divisions between bodies, and produce dynamics of the observer and observed. Stanley (2012a, 204) critiques the assumption that we are able to explore the contents of consciousness as if they were ‘immediately and transparently available to a person who simply chooses to ‘look inward’’. Instead, he advocates the careful, intersubjective, and continued cultivation of mindfulness. He uses the definitional guide of mindfulness as ‘an embodied style of experiential inquiry’. An orientation that takes seriously affective and embodied experiences with mindfulness, and understands the ‘slow creep’ of the practice in provoking corporeal transformations.

Walsh (2018) builds on this work by using Ahmed’s (2006) understanding of orientation in *Queer Phenomenology*. Here, mindfulness is reoriented ‘around a non-normative, situational ethic of response-ability’, in that the practice holds the potential to reorient people ‘to accept and support lives that deviate from the norm’ (ibid, 116). In his work:

> ‘Queer phenomenology is therefore a provocation, asking what our response toward deviation will be, rather than demanding that we make something queer or become queer ourselves. It challenges people to reorient themselves so that they do not bracket out histories and peoples from their awareness.’ (ibid, 117).

Queering the orientation of mindfulness brings Stanley’s definition of sati (the Pali word for mindfulness) to mind. Defined as an ‘embodied and ethically sensitive practice of present moment recollection’ (2013, 65), mindfulness in this context is relational and stresses the ethical rootedness of the practice from the beginning. Rather than inferring that an ethical disposition will follow the

practice, this conceptualisation allows for an ethical ‘response-ability’, one that demands ‘collective knowing and doing’ (Haraway 2016, 34) from the very beginning. For Walsh (2018), collective recollection is a significant doing as it asks meditators to remember ‘neglected histories of systemic violence, which inform the continuing legacies of social and ecological injustice’ which privilege in the mindfulness movement has allowed us to forget. Thus, a queer mindfulness accounts for the ways that the practice of mindfulness is socially shared and contingent. Furthermore, this conception of remembrance and recollection attends to the ways that mindfulness is always already political, and has been shaped by the forces of neoliberal capitalism. In acknowledging this, Walsh asks for McMindful advocates and proponents to account for the consequences of corporate and individualised mindfulness practices.

A queer mindfulness therefore moves beyond the cultivation of normative ideals such as happiness, but instead probes the affective conditions in which these feelings arise. In doing so, negative, discomforting, or difficult experiences are not bracketed off, but rather are attended to, felt, and sat with, as an ongoing acknowledgment of forgotten histories, suffering and people. It is a flourishing in communion and in difference, one that provides communities and cultures of wellbeing, because ‘if we are all obsessed with being well individually, we will not be well together’ (ibid, 119). As Shannon (2010) writes:

> ‘while a therapeutic approach to meditation is well suited to modern consumer capitalism, it does not necessarily contribute to addressing broader social problems that affect psychological and physical health or access to medical care. For that we need to think systematically about

the dynamics of race, gender and class – and their effects in our political system' (Shannon 2010, 178).

Here, reorientating mindfulness demands a response-ability to engage, and attend to systematic conditions of ill-health and suffering. This line of direction is similar for Schmid and Taylor Aiken's (2020) work on mindfulness practices in activist spaces, in which a '*transformative mindfulness* integrates mind-body practices with a political agenda that challenges current societal trajectories of injustice and unsustainability' (ibid, 3). Their research in community-led activist spaces interrogates the instrumental (resilience and supporting personal self) and integral (non-dualistic) ways that mindfulness practices supports communities in their activism.

Within non-representational geographies, attention has been paid to transformative mind-body practices that invoke an affective sense of response-ability, and in doing so, offer transformative embodied experiences that change ways of being in the world. This work arises from an interest in those spaces that are 'emergent through the enactment of practices that explicitly attempt to facilitate a kind of transformation in awareness, thinking, feeling and relating' (D. P. McCormack 2003, 490-491). Overlapping with, and related to, non-representational geographies of health, affect is central to this. Here, the work of understanding how transformative spaces are produced is to 'think plurally about the capacities for affecting and being affected, and for this theorization to engage with the notion that various individual capacities are differently forged, restrained, trained and embodied' (Tolia-Kelly 2006, 216) through the enactment of ethical aesthetic practices. Here ethics are conceived of as 'a creative, experimental and always provisional *praxis*', that involve an ongoing

experiment in and with life to find those relations that increase bodily capacities to act (Duff 2014, 158). This is ethics as an 'ethos' (Popke 2006) or 'style of life' that is 'about producing modes of subjectification and expression' and one that 'is concerned with inventing possibilities of life' (Harrison 2000, 513). Here, 'ethics coincides with the awareness of one's condition of interaction with others, that is to say, one's capacity to affect and to be affected' (Braidotti 2012, 306).

With this line of flight, Carvalho's (2017) work traces how vipassana and mindfulness meditation might enact non-modern, decentred, and ecological forms of affect. Through participant observation on meditation retreats, he demonstrates the ways that somatic and affective practices offer new modes of 'ethical and aesthetic inhabitation' that might cultivate a vulnerability 'to the sensate, the other, and the more-than-human' (ibid, 212). His work disrupts Foucauldian and historical renderings of technologies of the self, showing that 'the autonomous modern self is not a historical formation of subjectivity but a way of being in the world which can be disrupted by geographies of meditation' (ibid, 219). These meditative geographies offer affective reconfigurations through cultivating new ways of relating to bodily experiences of pain and mind wandering, bringing forth vital forms of affect that attune bodies to sensuous energies: tingling, pins and needles, static electricity. Here, meditative affect is understood as ecological – offering a decentring of self-hood, which translates to a deepened sense of connection with, and the felt experience of being moved by, humans and nonhumans. In sum, these affordances might help us to 'imagine a different way of being in the world' (ibid, 219). Thus, mindfulness practices might have the potential to disrupt the autonomous modern self and the individualising and alienating forces of neoliberalism, in order to cultivate

and develop ‘new microprocesses and practices, ethical/aesthetic practices and practices of the Self’ (Buckingham 2017, 153).

Overall, these debates seek to go beyond the therapeutic uses of mindfulness and the remit of mindfulness-based interventions such as MBCT and MBSR, to investigate how mindfulness practices might be used for social justice goals. Here, and as Carvalho (2017) argues, mindfulness might be a form of radical corporeogeography, one that develops new ways of being/becoming both individually and collectively. These debates have paved the way to conceptualising and theorising mindfulness beyond the strictures of McMindfulness – offering an ethical and response-able view of mindfulness. In terms of practical or practice-based interventions, practitioners and mindfulness advocates have been working to (re)shape the practice towards social justice goals, and the structural and systemic causes of ill-health and suffering.

Meg-John Barker’s zine ‘Social Mindfulness’ offers a version of the practice which takes seriously ‘the non-dualistic approach within which Buddhist understandings [of mindfulness] are embedded’ (M.-J. Barker 2014, 81), and is critical of the ways that ill-health, suffering, and stress are individualised through mindfulness-based interventions. They re-orientate the practice to the ways that suffering is highly social – as the result of inequalities and cultural messages (M.-J. Barker n.d.). Their work uses mindfulness to cultivate kindness in order to investigate the ways we affect and are affected by experiences, interpersonal dynamics, institutional systems, and societal structures. A mindful approach is employed in order to help unpack the social side to our distress, rather than locating it back solely within individualised frameworks.

Elsewhere, mindfulness is used as a practice for racial justice. Magee's (2019) work on mindfulness and 'ColorInsight' seeks to destabilise 'the grip of race and racism on our sense of ourselves and one another' (ibid, 24). ColorInsight has several dimensions, the first being the act of turning *towards* issues regarding race and racism in our lives (rather than turning away from them), and secondly, to develop a deeper and nuanced capacity to understand how race and racism operate in our lives and the lives of others. Thirdly, ColorInsight offers a way to listen without judgement and with compassion – to work with others towards mutually healing transformation. This follows to the last intention which is finding ways to act in favour of collective and systematic liberation (ibid). Mindfulness is offered as the practice to help develop ColorInsight through the development of foundational attitudes including: non-judgement, lovingkindness, compassion, patience, "don't know" mind, steadfastness, and the courage to seek and act for justice (ibid, 31-33).

Practically, Magee provides a framework for gaining insight into racial dynamics through the acronym RAIN: Recognise, Accept, Investigate, and Non-Identify (ibid, 104). *Recognising* is the act of pausing to observe the situation from all angles in order to deepen our perception to more effectively see and understand suffering that we seek to address in the world. *Accepting* is not passive resignation, but rather it is the prelude to action – it allows us to pause long enough in order to gain insight into the situation. *Investigating* allows for a gentle and compassionate approach to self-awareness and growth. Part of this is asking ourselves what is causing the physical sensations, emotions or thought, and what underlies this. This is a process of leaning into our reactive sensations. Magee acknowledges that investigating is a potentially difficult and unsettling process, she introduces the idea of 'window of tolerance' which

describes ‘the internal zone of support inside ourselves wherein we may tolerate a comfortable level of discomfort’ (ibid, 105). She encourages practitioners to practice self-care whilst undergoing the act of investigating in order not to move beyond one’s window of tolerance. Finally, *Non-Identification* is about learning to let go of the tendencies to identify with the thoughts and emotions that we uncover in the RAIN process through idea of non-attachment and non-judgement (ibid). This practice of RAIN is a useful one in relation to difficult and discomforting conversations about race, racism, and decolonisation.

> ‘A colonized mind revolves around the busyness and noise of the everyday. A colonized mind focuses on continuous production and requires a split from the holism of relationality and connection towards fragmentation and disconnection. The first step towards freedom from inner colonization thus comes from decolonizing ways of being.’ (Clarke and Yellow Bird 2020, 144).

Similarly, Yellow Bird (2013) orientates mindfulness practices towards the work of ‘neurodecolonisation’ for Indigenous communities, a approach ‘which is concerned with how the human mind and brain operate in a colonial context’ (Clarke and Yellow Bird 2020, 145). Through harnessing the neuroplasticity of the brain, neurodecolonisation can challenge harmful thoughts, feelings, emotions and behaviours associated with historical trauma and contemporary oppression. He uses mindfulness-based approaches, or ‘mindful decolonisation’, to support the work of neurodecolonisation and to address systemic racism (ibid). Mindfulness practices are understood to alter the ways that colonialism has shaped mind and brain functioning, helping to heal the traumas of settler colonialism and addresses structural and social injustice and

oppression. The practice is thought to help decolonise different aspects of experience, including the mind (away from a colonial mindset), ways of knowing, thinking and speaking (away from colonial language, words and sounds), and ways of acting (connecting to rituals and ancestors). Neurodecolonisation is also extended out to settlers in order to engage and build allyship with Indigenous Peoples.

These examples demonstrate some of the ways that mindfulness is used critically and socially in order to address systematic, societal, and cultural injustices and issues. The authors of the interventions all acknowledge the limits of McMindfulness, and seek to (re)orientate the practice towards collective healing and resistance. More research needs to be done to understand these practices of mindfulness and the ways that they are 'used to further prefigurative aims of social and movements for change' (Schmid and Taylor Aiken 2020, 12).

3.5. Conclusion

The starting point for the research was an initial interest with MBSR and MBCT guided by geographical literature on the subject, namely Whitehead et al.'s (2016) work on the intersections between geography and mindfulness. Their work engaged with mindfulness from the MBSR and MBCT perspective, a view that I quickly became critical of as I began my own research into mindfulness. This literature review traces my journey of (un)learning and offers the different ways in which mindfulness can be understood: from a neoliberal technology of the self, to a technique that could open subjects up to new forms of knowledge, to an embodied practice that could be a considered as an ethical form of care

for the self. One that disrupts the production of an autonomous modern self, and offers new ways of being that are spiritual, collective, and relational.

Broadly, this thesis challenges conceptualisations of mindfulness as McMindfulness. I offer an understanding of subjectification through mindfulness of the breath in chapter 7. Furthermore, I demonstrate the ways mindfulness can open up practitioners to new embodied knowledges and spiritual experiences in chapters 8 and 9. In chapter 10 I show the ways that mindfulness is an affectual, relational and communal practice through group practices of inquiry and dialogue. I aim to nuance and extend research on mindfulness beyond the sticking point of McMindfulness, whilst simultaneously acknowledging it as a point of tension for the thesis.

As I have already mentioned, Whitehead et al.'s work on mindfulness and geography is pivotal for this thesis. This literature review hopes to extend geographical engagements with mindfulness by offering an overview of the different approaches and directions in the interdisciplinary literature on the subject. The next chapter will problematise the proposed relationship between mindfulness and geographical non-representational methodologies.

4. Mindful geographical research

4.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the notion of mindfulness as a research methodology. Firstly, I unpack the ways in which mindfulness has been used and written about as an embodied research methodology. Secondly, I trouble some of the claims made by those using mindfulness as a research method.

4.2. Mindfulness as methodology

> ‘The methodological challenge is using methods that clearly and habitually situate the human at the center, and adapt them so they allow access to the inhuman forces that are the subject of post-phenomenological geographies.’ (Lea 2009a, 377).

Non-representational, post-phenomenological, and posthuman work in geography has provoked debate about how we undertake research that evokes the corporeality and sensuousness of our more-than-human lifeworlds that are imbued with forces, affects, and vibrations. Fundamentally, the body is a site and focus of research (Dewsbury 2010; Vannini 2015), or as an ‘instrument of research’ (Longhurst et al. 2008). Here, we attend to the researching body, and the self, as incomplete, indeterminate, leaky, and unstable (Nast and Pile, 2005), subject to forces that pass through and inhabit bodies and spaces that define what the body can do (Abrahamsson and Simpson 2011; Colls 2012; Grosz 2005; D. P. McCormack 2008). Thus, the body is not bounded and is always relational, imbricated, and becoming with other bodies and things (Woodyer 2008). This conceptualisation destabilises the authority of the self that researches, writes, and knows themselves as an individualised and

autonomous subject (Gannon 2006). Geographers have grappled with the consequence of these theories and what they mean for how we might engage with geographical research (Lea 2018). Work has suggested that we need embodied research methodologies that do not prioritise or privilege human senses over non-human others (Ash and Gallacher 2015), nor that evoke a universal, fixed notion of the self.

Vibrant and multi-sensory methodologies seek to provide a diversity in our encounters, methodologies and understandings (Dowling et al. 2017) through multiple ways of doing. I will touch on two which seek to develop a particular sensitivity to the world. The first is the use of diverse vocabularies and ways of writing to evoke an embodied (Hawkins 2010), sensuous more-than-human ontology and geography. Ash and Gallacher (2015) use the language of sound (attunement, vibration, and tone) to account for the multiple relations between bodies, things, objects, skills, and states of being – similar to Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) concept of the refrain. Attunement is a 'fundamental mood' (Ash and Gallacher 2015, 71) that evokes the collectivist and shared nature of communication between bodies that is often non-verbal, affording us 'the capacity to sense, amplify and attend to difference' (ibid, 73). The authors describe two modes of attunement: vibration and tone. Vibration is the basic unit that allows us to understand and attune to difference, without privileging a fixed human body and instead attending to the thresholds that constitute and separate things. Tone 'is a way of thinking about how vibrations are organised with particular sensory effects in mind' (ibid, 79). These melodic methodologies encourage us to focus on our sense experience and relations between the body and the world, through 'sensitizing our bodies to pay attention and focus on difference' (ibid, 83).

Second, Vannini (2015) mentions the use of skilled practices to actively cultivate our or other's senses and bodies to become more aware of our sensory lifeworlds. Although he does not elaborate on what he means by this, one way of approaching this is through the use of somatic techniques that train bodies in certain ways. Somaesthetics is a way this idea is mobilised. Coined by Richard Shusterman (2008, 2006, 1999), somaesthetics is 'concerned with the critical study and ameliorative cultivation of how we experience and use the living body (soma) as a site of sensory appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning' (Shusterman 2008, 1). Shusterman argues that through developing and training our awareness of the body and the senses we can be philosophically and ethically enlightened, as 'knowledge of the world is improved not by denying our bodily senses but by perfecting them' (ibid, 302). Somatic philosophical traditions, particularly 'Asian' techniques (such as meditation and yoga) that 'aim at instilling proper body-mind harmony, proper demeanour, and superior skill for appropriate action' (Shusterman 2012, 8), are seen as useful ways of cultivating our bodies to be more receptive to sensory and wisdom worlds.

This is echoed by Dowling et al. (2017) who argue that moving beyond Western conceptualisations of the body and the senses would be a useful way of evoking the diverse, insensible, intuitive ways of knowing, thus, allowing for a diversity of knowledges, worlds, and practices that are more-than-rational and more-than-Eurocentric. Although in this work examples of what this might mean are not explained. However, there is a small body of interdisciplinary work that seeks to integrate (Buddhist) mindfulness practice and philosophies into social science methodologies and epistemologies. Methodologically, mindfulness meditation practice is being used as a way to cultivate particular modes of

attention that heighten an embodied awareness (Stanley et al. 2015; Whitehead et al. 2016). Epistemologically, terminologies of mindfulness are employed to evoke a careful and ethical doing of scholarship, as a mindful way of being (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998; González-López, 2011). These will be discussed in turn.

Here, I draw on two examples of mindfulness meditation being employed as a methodology. First, Stanley et al. (2015) use mindfulness as an embodied methodological practice to understand psychosocial flows. Practically, researchers stopped and stood still in a busy area, during the daytime, in a public place, for 10 minutes. During the period of stillness, they used a 'beginners mind'[10] to understand what was happening in the present. For this research, mindfulness allowed a suspension of expectation and analysis, bringing an intimacy of encounter with life lived in the moment. And second, through their use of mindful interviewing techniques, Whitehead et al. (2016, 561) provisionally explore mindfulness as a geographical method. Mindfulness is positioned as a way of cultivating an individual's sensitivity to the 'affective push of the social and material worlds they inhabit', as well as, 'the embodied forces of feelings and emotions'. Techniques such as body scans 'reveal the multitude of embodied vibrations, feelings, and fluctuations that we routinely ignore' (ibid, 562). For the authors, mindfulness is an important training technique that cultivates awareness of: intersubjectivity between participants and researchers, embodied and non-rational knowledge, moods, and affects. In

[10] Beginners mind is a starting point to mindfulness, in which we are open-minded and present to the world – allowing for unexpected possibilities and happenings (Stanley et al. 2015; Suzuki 1970)

a sense, they argue that mindfulness heightens a particular attunement with the world, one that is more receptive to sensory vibrations and tone.

Epistemologically, mindfulness is seen to have great significance to geography, through exposing automatic and habitual ways in which we do scholarship and opening us up to non-rational knowledge (Whitehead et al. 2016). Stepping out of the habitual and becoming more receptive to affectual and sensory worlds evokes sensibilities of wonder and enchantment that are attuned to the magic in the world. Andrews (2018a, 142) describes the ways mindfulness as sensibility might cultivate this sense of wonderment:

> '… whereby a person might experience brief moments of self-transcendence in observing, touching and listening to their immediate environment. Whereby a person might experience the world, and their place in it, physically in the purest of forms, as free from preconceptions and judgements as possible; free from the constant stream of the mind's never ending self-narrative'

Closely related to this is Jennifer Laws' (2017) work on magical realism. Here, magic and enchantment are used as synonyms for each other, although the choice of the term magical realism is for explicit political and ontological reasons. Laws positions enchantment as an ontological intervention that flattens a hierarchical approach to reality in which magic is subordinate to rational happenings (ibid, 12). With a theoretical history that originates in the Global South, a magical realist perspective is argued to provide a flattened space for subversive and magical narratives of those living with mental health conditions. Laws presents a pragmatic magical way of working, offering a manifesto for enchanted engagement in mental illness. An element of this is

alerting others to the opportunities for magic, as an 'aesthetic disposition of openness' (Bennett 2001; Laws 2017), a methodology exampled is mindfulness meditation as a 'modish' practice that 'might encourage such magic sensitivity' (Laws, 2017, 15).

Elsewhere, mindfulness as a form of ethics or ethical embodiment is propelled by concerns with 'mindful inquiry' (Bentz and Shapiro 1998). As a of doing research that seeks to be explicit and careful about scholarly epistemologies and ethics, it links together philosophical traditions of phenomenology (from Husserl), hermeneutics (from Heidegger), critical social science, and Buddhism. Through integrating a Buddhist perspective mindful inquiry wishes to overcome the bias of Western social science. Buddhist-inspired principles of mindful inquiry are as follows (ibid, 39):

1. the importance of mindful thought itself;
2. tolerance and the ability to inhabit multiple perspectives;
3. the intention to alleviate suffering;
4. the notion of the clearing, or openness, underlying awareness.

Through the use of Buddhist principles, mindful inquiry is, first, a way to keep us 'focused and grounded in the [research] process' (ibid, 161) in a world where media and technology are provoking an information-overload and an epistemological crisis in the validity of social science research (Bentz and Shapiro 1998). Second, the mindful inquirer has an ethical obligation to respect the lives and orientations of others. Instead of the normal obligation of doing no harm in research, mindful inquirers have the intention to actively alleviate suffering. This notion of mindful ethics has been elaborated on by González-López (2011). Here, mindful ethics is an ethical consciousness, that keeps

researchers aware of the taken-for-granted, and maybe mundane, contexts and circumstances that shape participants lives (ibid, 449). It is present focused, and self-decentred – going beyond the social realities that exist in our lives and aware of multiple other perspectives that exist beyond traditional, rational, mainstream academia.

As we have seen, mindfulness could offer a fruitful methodology, particularly within non-representational geographies of embodiment and affect (Whitehead et al. 2016), and as an ethical orientation. Yet, I think we need to be careful why and how mindfulness is used methodologically. Mindfulness is not a methodological panacea, nor is it simply a neutral means of accessing particular forms of experience to render elements of affect and embodiment visible so that they can be easily translated into representational forms of writing. It is a form of intervention in the world, it in itself is a form of worlding and is not a means of experiencing a pre-existing world 'out there'. I further this argument through three inter-related points.

4.2.1. Enchanting potential of mindfulness

First, the use of mindfulness is often tied into a particular trope that sees 'non-Western' practices as a way to train a Western academic sensibility to become more aware of the non-rational, pre-cognitive, affectual, sensuous, or even enchanted or magical. Examples of this are apparent in Shusterman's (2008, 1999) and Bentz and Shapiro's (1998) work. For Shusterman (2008), achieving bodily consciousness and attentive somatic awareness is 'threatened' by the sensationalism and informational overload of a frantic modern, technological, life in which individuation and socialisation causes us to lose a sense of richness about the world. This disenchanting notion of the modern world is

believed to be rectified by returning to a ‘sensory-rich world of wonder and enchantment’, ‘the world we have lost when children’ (Pocock 1993, 11), one that can be realised through ‘Asian’ somatic traditions, such as mindfulness (Shusterman 2008). For the mindful inquirer, a similar tale of disenchantment is told. Here, academia is being damaged by an epistemological crisis where a society over-loaded with information and technology is challenging scholarly claims to validity. A return to a ‘traditional’ and non-Western knowledge system such as Buddhism is seen to re-enchant academic inquiry.

This framing of mindfulness reinforces dualisms between Anglo-European academic knowledge as modern, disenchanted, and rational, and traditional ‘non-Western’ or Indigenous vernacular or spiritual knowledge as non-rational and enchanted. This aligns with Latour's (1993) argument in which the modern practice of dividing nature and culture is a way of separating ‘us’ from ‘them’, moderns from primitives. Insights from Jane Turner on embodiment in Balinese dance are helpful in rectifying this divide:

> ‘The task here is not to demystify and rationalize Balinese dance drama and spiritual embodiment, or to exoticize Balinese culture as a site of enchantment and spiritual embodiment, but to acknowledge that embodiment takes many different forms, from sur-face imitation, to an in-depth level of experience that alters an individual’s sense of being in the world.’ (Turner 2015, 66).

Put another way, we need a reframing that acknowledges that enchantment is always already present in academic knowledge (Woodyer and Geoghegan 2013), and also that different forms and knowledges of embodiment already exist in a ‘pluriversal world’, ‘a world in which many worlds fit’ (Sundberg 2014,

34). It is important that we work with other ontologies, other than those within an Eurocentric context, but that we do so in a way that acknowledges difference and the incommensurabilities of knowledges (Dorries and Ruddick 2018). Furthermore, working in a pluriversal world means that being explicit about the location of these knowledges is important (Sundberg 2014). For example, the vague 'Asian' (almost as a synonym for orientalised 'otherness') aesthetic traditions Shusterman cites are not used in tandem with Indigenous knowledges, he speaks for and about them. They are not intellectuals in their own right, but instead 'disembodied representatives' 'that serves European intellectual or political purposes' (Z. Todd 2016, 7).

4.2.2. Is mindfulness a universal sensibility?

> 'Science has been about a search for translation, convertibility, mobility of meanings, and universality – which I call reductionism' (Haraway 1988, 580).

Secondly, and in connection with the last point, mindfulness is propositioned to provide an access to 'the illusive fields of embodiment and affect' (Whitehead et al. 2016, 570). To do this a methodology would need to work '*against* a universalist sensibility' (Tolia-Kelly, 2006, 214, original emphasis), aware of the different affective capacities of bodies and how these are 'signified unequally within social spaces of being and feeling'. I am unsure of whether drawing on contemporary mindfulness practices under the rubric of first-wave MBSR, MBCT and 'bare attention' would be useful in this project (as done so by Whitehead and colleagues). The semantics of contemporary mindfulness practices are figured around accessing 'a universal state of being' (Arat 2017, 173) and tied to the notion of a 'foundational [human] capacity' (Nixon and

Bristow 2018) – as an inherent quality of the human condition. This assumes that these practices are universal, transcending historical and cultural context (Shannon 2010). And that each meditator accesses a universal and perennial experiential realm (Drage 2018).

The insistence on its universality allows it to be transmitted across contexts, cultures and institutions – a possible reason for the burgeoning methodological interest in mindfulness. Moreover, the idea that it unlocks a universal human condition is a particular way of thinking about meditation and mindfulness practices. Common forms of mindfulness meditation practiced in contemporary life are particular synthesises or bricolages of different knowledges, discourses, and meditative practices:

> 'What many Americans and Europeans often understand by the term "Buddhism," however, is actually a modern hybrid tradition with roots in the European Enlightenment no less than the Buddha's enlightenment, in Romanticism and transcendentalism as much as the Pali canon, and in the clash of Asian cultures and colonial powers as much as in mindfulness and meditation.' (McMahan 2009, 5).

Thus, mindfulness is not a neutral practice that can access a universal sensibility, and the belief that it can is a particular trope of the mindfulness zeitgeist. This universalism points to the 'whiteness' of the mindfulness movement (Ng and Purser 2015), both in terms of the popularity of the practice (Burke et al. (2017) found that meditation use was most prevalent among non-Hispanic White in the North American context) and in the performance of the movement itself. Whiteness studies have revealed the ways in which whiteness is take-for-granted and normative (Bonds and Inwood 2016), allowing 'whites to

view themselves as universal humans who can represent all of human experience' (DiAngelo 2018, 59).

The supposed secularisation of mindfulness, discussed in the introduction to the thesis, has attempted to extract mindfulness from unwanted elements of 'cultural baggage' (whilst keeping and preserving what is deemed appropriate by the White gaze) and colonialist connotations of the non-rational, mystical other:

> 'Initially, I thought mindfulness meant sitting erect on a hillock, your legs in a knot, humming a mantra that was probably the phone book sung backwards. But I was still prepared to give it a whirl.' (Wax 2016, 7).
>
> 'When we speak of meditation, it is important for you to know that this is not some weird cryptic activity, as our popular culture might have it. It does not involve becoming some kind of zombie, vegetable, self-absorbed narcissist, navel gazer, "space cadet", cultist, devotee, mystic, or Eastern philosopher.' (Kabat-Zinn 2016, xiv).

By unbounding the practice from 'Asian cultural constraints' (Goldstein 2002, 2), mindfulness becomes a universal and neutral practice with white gatekeepers.

> 'We cannot separate the will of so many white comrades to journey in search of spiritual nourishment to the "third world" from the history of cultural imperialism and colonialism that has created a context where such journeying is seen as appropriate, acceptable, an expression of freedom and right.' (hooks 1994, n.p.).

Many have argued that Buddhism, and mindfulness practices broadly, are situated within a 'framework of white racial power and white supremacy' (Hsu 2016a, 372). Whilst these authors are often referring to the context in America, and based on my ethnographies of mindfulness practices in England, I would contend that there is a similar story in the UK.

Furthermore, some would argue that the current mindfulness movement is reifying these forces of white supremacy and fragility (Ng and Purser 2015). Later on in this thesis I will elaborate on the ways that mindfulness both undoes certain habits and becomes constituted as one by becoming infolded into the corporeal schema. This folding is political when thinking about its implications for white supremacy. Sara Ahmed (2007) uses Franz Fanon's work to explore the phenomenology of whiteness, showing the ways that it 'shapes what it is that bodies 'can do'' (ibid, 150). She demonstrates the racial and historical dimensions that shape the corporeal schema, that are on the surface of the body and shape how bodies surface (ibid, 154). If forms of mindfulness we practice today are complicit with colonialism and whiteness, then mindfulness is yet another extension of this – making the 'world 'ready' for certain kinds of bodies, as a world that puts certain objects within their reach' (ibid, 153-4). Here, whiteness becomes the point from which the world unfolds and is continually reproduced.

hooks (1994, n.p.) has written that: 'often white people share the assumption that simply following a spiritual path means that they have let go of racism'. Here, spiritual journeying becomes a form of spiritual bypassing, where white progressives feel that they have already arrived at the point of renouncing all personal ties with racism (DiAngelo 2018). This means that it becomes a

challenging process for people of colour to engage in Buddhist practice and that the majority of people of colour remain 'silent about racism for fear of being dismissed, for fear of bringing in issues that are not really important' (hooks, 1994, n.p.). For Angela Black, her blackness and embodied identity became an issue in the spaces of mindfulness:

> 'while trying to make room to "pay attention with intention" to my breath, I just kept feeling like something about my presence, my very embodiment of Blackness, was both triggering and intoxicating for White folks there.' (Black 2017, n.p.)

Currently, the mindfulness movement reproduces whiteness. In the grand hopes that mindfulness will contribute to a 'flourishing society' (Nixon and Bristow 2018), this vision is potentially damaging. Here, it must be acknowledged that this thesis is grounded in whiteness: I am white, my participants are white, the academic community where I study and have studied is and has been predominantly white. As a white femme mindfulness speaks to me and it seems an appropriate choice of study. I have the privilege and freedom to choose and I am able to de-historicise and de-contextualise mindfulness in my everyday life without serious repercussions. To the academic communities I primarily speak to I could probably write this thesis without mentioning whiteness. It might go unnoticed. Whiteness produces a position of privilege and comfort within the institution; whiteness is neutral (Johnson 2018).

Furthermore, communities of colour, including Asian and Black folks, have historically largely been left out of the conversation on mindfulness (see Hsu 2016; Black n.d.; hooks 1994). Magee (2016, 225) reflects on the lack of diversity in mindfulness settings:

> 'in over 10 years of experience within a variety of communities focused on practicing and teaching mindfulness, I have more often than not been one of the few, if not the only Black woman in the room. Within and across a variety of mainstream, Western mindfulness communities, people of color across the spectrum remain significantly under-represented'

Of course there are exceptions, Thich Nhat Hanh being one, but in recent times dominant cultural representations of Buddhists have been white. This context allowed *The Lion's Roar*, a Buddhist publication, to proclaim a mix of Black, Asian and White Buddhists of a mix of genders as 'The New Face of Buddhism'. Many argued that this is certainly not the 'new' face of Buddhism, as Buddhism has 'already always been defined by diverse groups' (Hsu 2016b, n.p.).

With proliferation of the Black Lives Movement (BLM) in May 2020, however, conversations relating to the interconnections between mindfulness, racial justice, whiteness, and Black inclusion are slowly taking place. For example, the Just Breathe Project, an online platform and 'mindful media network', hosted a series of events on their Instagram page to break the silence on these issues, and to re-centre the experiences of Black practitioners within the wellness industry.

Anti-racist pedagogies are incorporating mindfulness and mindful techniques. For Black people and people of colour, mindfulness provides a form of protection and strength:

> 'Mindfulness is a superpower. For people of color—particularly Black people—the practice of mindfulness becomes a protective factor. When

> microaggressions come at me, mindfulness offers me protection. I don’t have to be caught up and reactive. I can have self-compassion, and that self-compassion builds my courage.’ (Jenee Johnson in Dawson, 2019, n.p.).

As a form of response to these lines of secularisation, the reproduction of white supremacy, and the exclusion of communities of colour from conversations on mindfulness, critical mindfulness framework might help us decentre whiteness from mindfulness. This framework is one that can provide a space for people of colour to breathe freely, as ‘racism is a visceral experience, that […] dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth’ (Coates 2015, 10), to re-centre the emancipatory and politically engaged practices of mindfulness. Of course, these thoughts are not new, there are examples of critical, social, queer and transformative mindfulness practices among others, that are working to re-centre the ethico-political dimensions of the practice.

Moreover, mindfulness can be a way for white people to explore and unpack their complicity in white supremacy and lean into the discomfort of white fragility (Black, 2017; Dawson, 2019; Magee, 2019). For example, Wong (2004) uses a mindfulness pedagogy to engage Social Work students in difficult and discomforting conversations around identity and diversity, which involved students staying with the sensations that arose in their bodies through mindfulness-based breathing exercises. Wong encouraged them to lean into and befriend racial discomfort through an embodied breathful pedagogy. The breath is central to chapter 7 and 8 in the thesis. In mindfulness, breath-based practices are used as ‘anchors’ to explore discomforting and difficult topics and

concepts. While the breath has been assumed by some to be a universal experience, the thesis takes steps to think through breath as a common experience that can bridge difference whilst also respecting it, following the writing of Luce Irigaray (2004, 146):

> 'By cultivating our breathing, we can gain an access to our autonomy, open a way for a new becoming and for sharing with other traditions. The breath exists before and beyond all representations, words, forms, all kinds of specific figurations or even idols, all sorts of rituals or dogmas, and thus allows a communication between cultures, sexes and generations. Breathing can create bridges between different peoples or cultures, respecting their diversities.'

4.2.3. Mindfulness, trauma, and ethics of care

Thirdly, we need to be careful about our ethical relations and relations of care when we use mindfulness meditation as a methodology. Part of the pedagogical orientation of mindfulness meditation is turning towards suffering and embodied vulnerability (Crane 2009). In the context of research, this orientation could open up participants or the researcher to latent trauma or vulnerabilities otherwise unacknowledged or unforeseen:

> 'when we ask someone with trauma to pay close, sustained attention to their internal experience, we invite them into contact with traumatic stimuli – thoughts, images, memories, and physical sensations that may relate to a traumatic experience' … 'this can aggravate and intensify symptoms of traumatic stress, in some cases even lead to retraumatisation' (Treleaven 2018, 6).

The experience of (re)inhabiting the body through mindfulness meditation can re-orientate the participant towards difficult experiences, memories, histories or relations, which can be a painful and challenging process. In the book 'Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness', David Treleaven elaborates on the unintended consequences of mindfulness practices: the (re)surfacing of trauma. His work unites mindfulness practices with an understanding of trauma, in order to minimise distress for those practicing mindfulness and to inform those living with traumatic stress the risks they face when meditating. Trauma informed mindfulness would *realise* the impact of trauma, *recognise* the symptoms, *respond* to them skilfully – all to prevent *retraumatisation* (ibid).

If employed methodologically, mindfulness needs to be trauma sensitive to maintain ethical robustness and to avoid any potential harm to participants. This is true of all participants, not just ones that are deemed 'vulnerable' by ethics committees, as trauma is embodied and sticky – often failing to leave the body and embedded in the everyday (Adams-Hutcheson 2017). We often do not know the past histories and memories of participants (even those deemed not vulnerable) that could resurface during meditation, haunting the present and playing out across the body. Here, we can also question the capacity of geographers to employ mindfulness as a methodology – many of us are not adequately trained to offer pastoral support in the university context, let alone support a participant deal with the effects of trauma.

4.3. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the use of mindfulness as a methodology, and has cautioned against the use of a particular version of mindfulness in non-representational geographical methodological endeavours, namely first wave

MBSR and MBCT techniques, by problematising current geographical usage of mindfulness as method, exploring the claim that mindfulness is a universal sensibility, and offering a reflection on the pedagogical tenants of mindfulness and the ways that these could open participants up to experiences of trauma and vulnerability. The key argument is that care needs to be taken when using mindfulness methodologically, and I (as a geographer who is not trained in mindfulness or trauma sensitive pedagogies) cannot offer solutions to the issues I have presented here – they instead require further thought and reflection by those intending to use mindfulness in their research design. Future research needs to attend to these questions in order to develop the encounter between geography, geographical methods, and mindfulness.

In terms of a ways forward, I do see merits in carefully *beginning* to use critical and social mindfulness practices (M.-J. Barker, 2014) to support researchers in their relational and ethical research practices and as a self-care mechanism to support them with pushing back against the structural conditions of the neoliberal academy. This thought is inspired by Buckingham's (2017) work on yoga as a micropolitical practice. Importantly, she does not offer yoga as a research methodology. But rather as a lens through which a researcher can use to understand how different ethical practices might *inflect* their professional work. Here, I end the chapter with a call for a greater appreciation of the ways that mindfulness might be used as an ethical embodied practice and technique of self-care in the neoliberal institution. This is something that will be elaborated on in the conclusion of the thesis, where I attend to mindful geographies – as the ways in which we might bring mindfulness to our geographical practices and pedagogies.

5. Research journey with mindfulness

5.1. Introduction

My research was a process of embodying mindfulness through different practices, in different locations, and with different communities. To give methodological context to the thesis, in this chapter I describe the research journey and process from initial encounters with mindfulness on an 8-week course at a College, to retreats, and follow-up interviews with participants. In the last section of this chapter I discuss my approach to coding and analysing the 'data'. The research journey is shown on the next page.

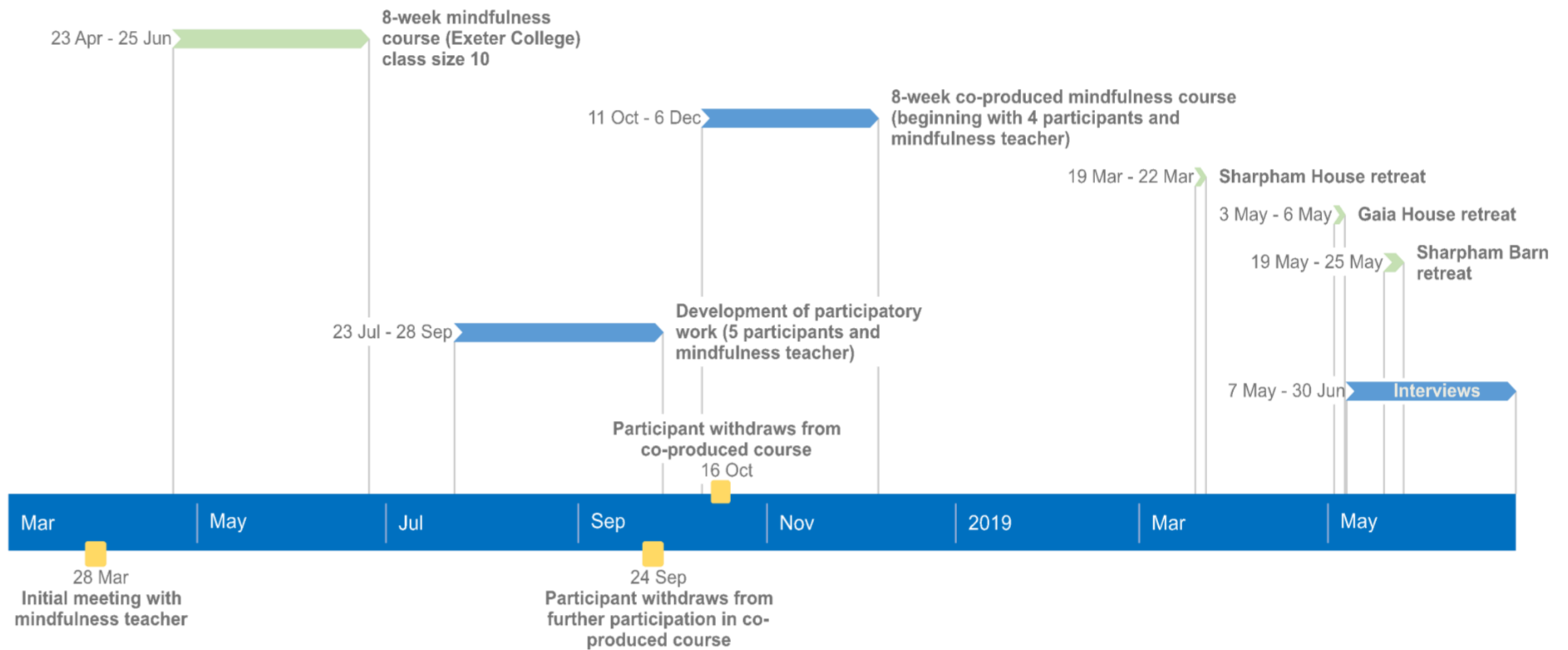


Figure 2: Research timeline (2018-2019)

5.2. 8-week mindfulness course

The starting point for the fieldwork was an 8-week mindfulness course at a local College that ran from the 23rd April to 25th June 2018. The course is a standard part of the College's adult learning provision running twice a year taught by a mindfulness-based practitioner. It is provided at a rate of (at the time of fieldwork) £75 for the 8-weeks, and a discounted fare is available for those on lower-incomes. This price is significantly lower than other mindfulness-based 8-week courses, often charging between £100-300. As such, and according to the programme teacher, this course is often recommended to patients by local General Practitioners to help them deal with stress, anxiety, and mild depression.

The class size was around 10 people plus the mindfulness teacher. This fluctuated throughout the weeks and some participants withdrew altogether from the class for personal reasons. All the participants were white British and ranging in age from 25-70. Most had come to the class for specific intentions based on a wish to alleviate or manage stress or stresses in their lives. Some had been referred to the class through their GP, others had heard about the class through informal networks of support.

The course itself followed an approach based on (but not identical to) Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (Kabat-Zinn 2004) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (Segal, Williams, and Teasdale 2002). The schedule for the 8-weeks can be found below:

Table 1: 8-week mindfulness course programme at the local college

Session	Theme	Programme
1	Automatic Pilot	• Orientation to the course • Ice breaker • Mindful stretching • Definition of Mindfulness • Taking care of yourself/ground rules • Introductions • Raisin exercise • Feedback and discussion • Mindfulness of breath and body • Commitment and home practice • Questions; mindful community building
2	Relationship to Practice	• Breath and body meditation • Mindful movement • Home practice review • Thinking outside the box • Perception shapes our responses
3	Thread of Continuity	• Loving kindness practice • Breath and body meditation • Body scan • Mindful movement • Home practice review • Inquiry: "what is your direct experience?' • Pleasure in being in the present
4	Staying Present	• Sitting meditation • Breathing space • Relationship to experience • Home practice review • Mindful movement practice • Unpleasant event diary

5	Responding instead of reacting	• Sitting meditation with focus on body, breath, sounds, thoughts and feelings • Links between perception and behaviour • Responding vs. reacting • Course and home practice review • Mindful movement practice • Unpleasant event diary
6	Thoughts, patterns and tendencies, interpersonal mindfulness	• Sitting practice – thoughts • Inquiry into relationship of mood, thoughts and alternative viewpoints • Awareness of habitual thinking patterns • Loving kindness meditation • Home practice review • Reflections on difficult communication and embodied communication • Exploration of assumptions and observations
7	Mindfulness is the art of conscious living	• Mindful movement • Sitting meditation with focus on feeling • Review breathing space • Practice review • Ways of being – lifestyle choices • External and internal stressors
8	Weaving the Parachute	• Mountain meditation • Review course • Pathways and ending

Activities in the class ranged from formal seated and lying meditation, informal and formal mindful movement (walking, stretching, and movement exercises based on variations of yoga and Qi Gong), and group discussions and activities. Meditation activities were often followed by discussion through processes of 'inquiry and dialogue'. The group would come together, seated in a circle, to share experiences and relate meditative experience to lived experience. Here, emphasis was placed on speaking from direct personal experience of mindfulness, rather than trying to comment on or articulate another's experience. For a further discussion of these dialogic processes, see chapter 10 of this thesis.

During the 8-week course I practiced reflexive autoethnographic fieldwork. Autoethnography is a 'blurred genre' (Butz, 2010, 139) and an 'epistemological orientation' (ibid, 139) that is interested in reflexive, personal, direct experience and narrative (Ellis et al. 2010; Shaw 2013), and the relationships between experience, knowledge, and representation (Butz 2010). It is a sensibility that I brought to the research, as well as a way of doing, that reframes me as a participant in which the research/world is co-existent and co-constituting. Thus, the research 'data' or 'findings' are not found, but are made through experience (Hawkins 2010, 328).

Through using autoethnography, I endeavoured to understand mindfulness from a deeper, intimate, embodied, and experiential perspective, alongside understanding how mindfulness is connected to personal experiences of health, wellbeing, and the therapeutic more broadly. I was interested in fostering a relationship with a mindfulness practitioner and a community of peers, in the hope that future interviews and workshops could be organised. During the

sessions I attended as a participant, joining in with the class activities, discussions, and practices. I also completed homework set and tried to maintain regular practice throughout the week as instructed. I used a fieldwork diary in the form of a journal, as well as the written homework or worksheets to reflect on my mindfulness practice in class and at home.

5.3. 8-week participatory, co-produced mindfulness course

5.3.1. Development

One of my aims during the 8-week course at the local College was to develop an ongoing relationship with the teacher and group of class attendees with the hope that they would be interested in continuing contact and developing a longer term research relationship. As the course drew to a close there was a palpable sense that something would be lost. Many had found the 8-weeks intensely supportive and nourishing and were eager for it to continue in some shape or form. In the final session of the College 8-week course I introduced an idea of a follow-on set of workshops, to which I was met with much enthusiasm.

During July, August, and September of 2018 the group met regularly to discuss the idea of continuing the 8-weeks in the form of workshops, our mindfulness practices and experiences, and our personal lives. At this point there were 6 participants, all identifying as white, British, and female. However, as the development of the workshops became more certain, one participant decided to withdraw as her intentions for her mindfulness practice were different (she intended to join a weekly meditation group with her partner). Alongside meeting regularly with the participants, I liaised with the mindfulness teacher to help convene the workshops. I applied for funding to provide the workshops for free

and to compensate the teacher for her mindfulness support and emotional labour.

To fund the workshops I applied for and was awarded an ‘Impact Fund’ grant of £500 through the Economic and Social Research Council’s (ESRC) South West Doctoral Training Partnership (SWDTP). The fund ‘provides students with the opportunity to engage in impact and knowledge-exchange projects with non-academic partners. The scheme aims to allow students to bring their research to a wider audience and new user groups.’ (SWDTP n.d.). This funding helped (it was 50/50 match funded with my Research and Training Grant) pay for the mindfulness-based teacher’s time and expertise, workshop space at a St. David’s community centre in central Exeter, and workshop supplies for the group (including stationery and costs of printing).

Although the fund gives space for emergent, creative, and novel impact activities, it is limited by a focus on a research-write-disseminate-impact timeline, driven by a ‘donor-recipient’ model of impact where a single knowledge producer impacts on an economy or society in a linear fashion:

> ‘to enable them to take advantage of unexpected or emerging opportunities for impact with non-academic partners and to take their research expertise and knowledge to new audiences and user groups where it can deliver or lead to benefits and “make a difference”’ (SWDTP 2018, 1)

The Impact Fund conceptualises impact as an *outcome* of research, in which academics have prior ‘expertise and knowledge’ that they are sharing to ‘new audiences’, so that it can ‘make a difference’. Here, education and knowledge

dissemination becomes an act of depositing, where ‘knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing’ (Freire 2000, 72). It then follows that there is little consideration of the knowledge, experiences, and expertise these audiences might already have and could produce through working together.

My orientation to impact was formulated through discussions in participatory action research literatures and geographical reflections on impact (Pain 2015; Pain et al. 2016; Turner 2015). For me, research in this vein is collaborative and impactful from the very beginning – ‘as a collaborative process of critical reflection on reality in order to transform it’ (Pain et al., 2016, 5). Here, co-production, as ‘research which is conducted together by a community organisation or group with academic researchers’ (ibid, 4), needs an alternative understanding of impact. Rather than it being the final stage, or outcome, of research, impact is built into and intertwined with research, so that it becomes indistinguishable. Although I considered my approach to be different to the intentions of the Impact Fund, and after some deliberation with SWDTP representatives and staff, I secured the funding and was able to proceed with the project.

5.3.2. Initial intentions

My intentions for the workshops were: (1) to provide a space to further explore people’s connections to mindfulness and mindful pedagogies; (2) to develop a programme that goes beyond the format of MBSR and MBCT courses; (3) to support participants with their journey with mindfulness; (4) to provide a reaction to the academic critiques of MBSR/MBCT that view them through the lens of

McMindfulness; and (5) to produce an output from the workshops that would be valuable to the participants.

To meet my first three intentions I felt workshops inspired by a participatory-action framework (PAR) was suitable. PAR 'is an umbrella term covering a variety of participatory approaches to action-orientated research. Defined most simply, PAR involves researchers and participants working together to examine a problematic situation or action to change it for the better' (Kindon et al. 2007, 1). The epistemological orientation and goal of PAR is to break down barriers between researcher and researched (Kindon et al. 2009; Wynne-Jones et al. 2015) and to enable spaces for collaboration, negotiation, and co-construction of knowledges. In this way, PAR is methodologically open and diverse, as an 'orientation to inquiry', demanding methodological innovation to adapt & respond to needs of specific contexts and relationships (Kindon et al. 2007). Moreover, I also felt that working with a participatory framework would enable us to co-create an output that would be useful and valuable to us. This was framed by a booklet style zine that acted as a participant information sheet and consent form (see appendix A). I aimed to provide an engaging and creative form, containing spaces for notes and little openings for the sessions.

To capture the events and dialogue in the sessions I recorded them and transcribed the recordings. After each session I also made reflective notes on the workshops, and my own mindfulness practices in the workshops and at home. I encouraged the participants to do the same, providing them with notebooks and pens to reflect on the sessions and their uses of mindfulness throughout the week. This work was primarily for their benefit and some found the process very useful.

For one participant, Beatrice, the process of writing and reflecting in her journal was intensely useful for her and gave her space to reflect on her mindfulness practice. Consequently, journaling became part of her mindful meditations. This is echoed by Ebru Ustundag (2017, 186) who found that working through various emotions in her fieldwork journal provided ‘spaces of vulnerability, resistance and healing’, thus for her, the research became a process of healing. On handing out the journals I asked the participants to reflect on whether they would want me to read or discuss their journals with them. And when the workshops came to a close, one participant (Flora) handed over her journal for me to read. Others either had not found the process useful or did not want to share it with me.

My fourth intention shaped my approach to the workshops, and informed the participatory framework. For me, the workshops were partly a reaction to the critiques of mindfulness framed under the term ‘McMindfulness’ (Purser, 2019). Many have argued that mindfulness courses and pedagogy have become ‘McDonalised’ (Hyland, 2017): commodified, standardised, homogenised, structured, and de-ethicised. I wanted to *do* something that would begin to challenge these critiques of mindfulness-based programmes (MBPs).

Hyland expresses anxieties over the commodification of mindfulness and how this has enabled the ‘misuse’ of mindfulness – removing, for her, Buddhist ethics and values essential to a socially engaged Buddhist path. By thinking through Ritzer's (2013) McDonaldization thesis, she demonstrates how the MBSR curriculum has been subject to the processes of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control through non-human technology. As a consequence, some feel that MBSR has developed into an individualistic style of training,

lacking a sense of community or co-creation (Shannon, 2010). As McCown, et al. (2010, 28) put it: 'this individual, implicit approach is effective and logical, particularly given the dominance of manualised models. However it can be seen as having a restrictive effect on development of both the individual teacher and larger community'. Located in 'evidence-based, scientific, quantitative, free-market individualist assumptions' allows mindfulness-based programmes to be devoid of 'qualitative, collaborative and collective approaches' (ibid, 61).

Yet, from a different perspective, McCown et al. (2010, 142) describe MBSR as an 'empty curriculum', in which it is 'a potential space in which contingent content can be co-created – teacher, participants, and class are free to respond to the impulse and intention of the present moment'. They see this co-creation as the 'heart of the pedagogy of mindfulness' (ibid, 115). An orientation to mindfulness that invokes a participatory and collective practice which is 'sustained and matured by communities of friendships' (Batchelor, 1998, 42). Additionally, there is the development of 'second generation' MBPs, which make Buddhist context and lineage more explicit (Crane 2017), as well as, socially engaged forms of mindfulness-based programmes and initiatives, based on social justice e.g. 'Mindfulness for the People' (Black n.d.) and Indigenous Mindfulness (Yellow Bird 2013).

At the time of organising the workshops, I felt distinctly disenchanted with medicalised and standardised MBSR and MBCT programmes and I endeavoured to *do* something different. Using a participatory framework and working with participants we created an 8-week programme based on our personal experiences and intentions. The group dynamic became highly significant in this work as we developed both our collective mindfulness practice

but also strengthened our interpersonal relationships. These dynamics will be further discussed in chapter 10.

5.3.3. What happened: challenges and triumphs

The workshops started on 11th October 2018 lasting until 6th December 2018 for 8 weeks (with one week break). Initially it was a struggle to get going. At the beginning there were 5 participants involved, however after the first two weeks one participant decided to withdraw from the workshops due to transportation issues and work commitments. This change and absence affected the group greatly. Moreover, coming from a highly structured course to one with an initially unstructured and fluid one proved challenging, and at some moments it seemed like it might not work. Positionalities were shifting and intentions for the workshops were initially a little mis-matched. Some wanted a like-for-like continuation of the 8-week course and others wanted flexibility and more space to reflect on their personal lives and practice.

However, half way through the group, we began to feel more confident with silent mindfulness practices and with the running of the sessions. We had explored Buddhist ethics, Buddhist practices, and creative forms of mindfulness such as Mindfulness-Based Art Therapy (MBAT, Rappaport 2013), as well as beginning to develop our formal practice to silent, unguided meditations. Then, we planned the subsequent workshops around themes that seemed pertinent to people's lives at the time: acceptance, gratitude, compassion to name a few. The table below shows the themes and content of each session.

Table 2: structure and content of the participatory workshops

Session	Theme	Programme
1	Organisation/planning	• Opening meditation / arrival meditation • Rules for the group • Intentions for the group • Mindful movement • Workshop planning • Ideas for home practice Home practice: silent meditation for 10 minutes
2	What is Buddhism?	• Mindful arrival: breath and silence • Outlook/organisation/ideas • Buddha and Buddhist teaching • Discussion • Body scan with flavour • Reflection and planning • Ending meditation Home practice: silent meditation for 10 minutes with focus on sounds
3	Alternative mindfulness practices	• Guided meditation: mindfulness of emotions practice • Mindfulness-Based Art Therapy: feeling vocab of the body • Discussion • Silent meditation • Discussion, planning and home practice Home practice: silent meditation for 10 minutes and reading 5 mindfulness trainings
4	Buddhist ethics and mindfulness	• Silent meditation with intention/question

		Do you see mindfulness as a way of life or a method? What does this mean for you? • Discussion of article: Five Mindfulness trainings • Silent meditation • Discussion of zine or scrapbook • Quiet reflection Home practice: silent meditation and reflecting on pleasant and frustrating experiences with mindfulness
5	Acceptance	• Sitting in silence • Open space: needs, wishes, left-overs • Practices: explorations, acceptance • Presentation: acceptance • Mindful movement/expressions of acceptance • Quiet practice: acceptance Feedback/reflections/group finish
6	Perception	• Mindful silent practice • Home practice reflection • Interactive perception practice • Reflection • Movement • Your resources • Next week: mindful endings
7	Compassion Collation of the zine/booklet/scrapbook	• Meditation • Leftovers • Inspirational words, individual resources • Movement – tapping • ‘Soften, soothe, allow’ - Guided practice • Feeling compassion – guided practice

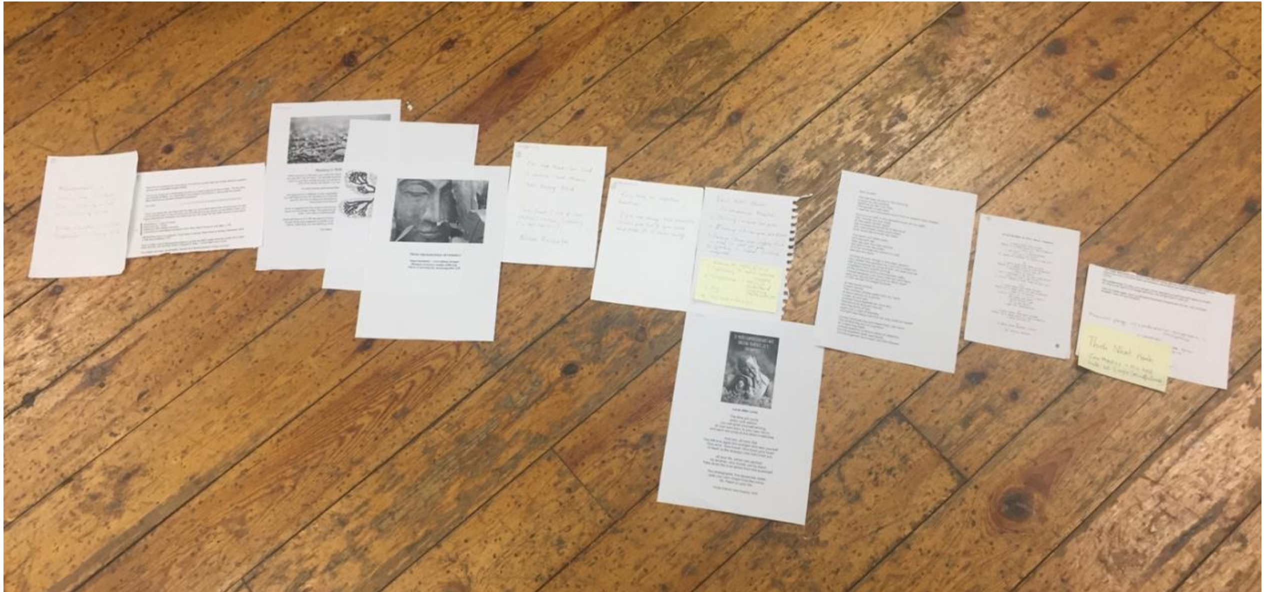
		• Handout, Q&A, discuss • Ending – silence, plan session 8
8	Alternative practices and endings Gratitude	• Silence – savouring stillness and movement of the mind • Looking back, moving forward • Exploring gratitude • Group ending

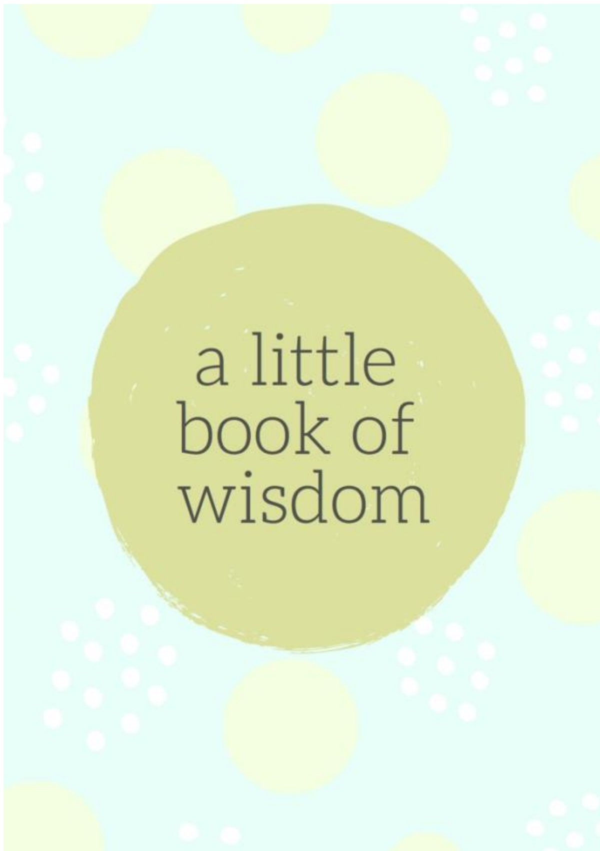
During the second half of the sessions we began to put together ideas for an output. One of the members of the group had been coming across 'little bits of wisdom', as she put it: quotes, poems, and messages from books, YouTube videos, and podcasts. We decided to collectively collate these resources together – providing a reminder of the work we had done together. This process was mindful in is fruition, as the etymology of mindful is to remember, to take care. And through this process of documentation we were reminding ourselves of our practice and the importance of care, both for ourselves and the people around us

The booklet/zine contained material (poems, quotes and images) that each of us had collected throughout our time together. It was a process inspired by Jen Bagelman's work on the use of zines for critical-creative participatory methodologies. Here, zines were used both as an engaged teaching tool to politicise everyday spaces and explore potential futures (Bagelman and Bagelman 2016) and as a creative-political PAR resource to engage seasonal agricultural worker communities around shared issues relating to working and living conditions (Bagelman et al. 2017).

Zines are ‘cheaply made printed forms of expression on any subject’ (M. Todd and Watson 2006, 12) and are bolstered as the ‘ultimate expression of the do-it-yourself ethic’ (Brent and Biel 2014, 15). Zines are open and diverse in their format, structure, and content. The DIY philosophy at the heart of zines means that they are ‘inherently democratic’ (Bagelman & Bagelman, 2016, 366). You do not necessarily need specific resources or artistic competencies. Furthermore, the ability to self-publish means that there are few barriers to production.

The zine format provided a way for us to produce and self-publish a booklet that would act as a reminder and memento of the workshops and the journey we had undertaken together. During the penultimate session, we collated and organised the zine together: laying out the materials on the floor, arranging them thematically, and ordering them to be formatted into the book. Making the zine was emotional and visceral, provoking reflection and meditation on relationships both past and present. After the last workshop, I took away the paper copy, typed it up and completed the design of the zine in Canva, a free online formatting software. The booklets were distributed to participants in January 2019. A re-print of the full zine can be found in this thesis, after chapter 10.





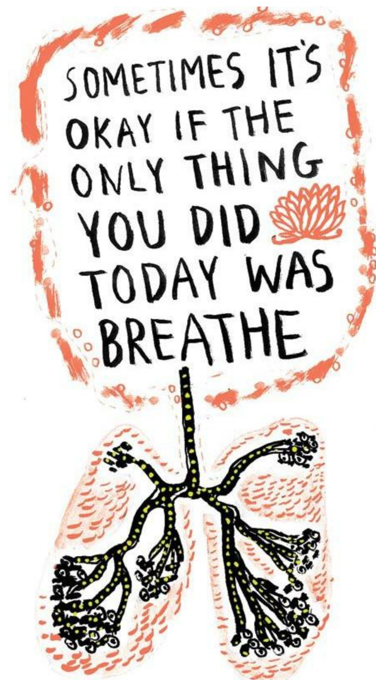


Figure 3: The process of collating the zine (images: author's own)

5.3.4. Follow-up interviews with participants

After the workshops had ended we decided to continue to meet regularly, around once a month, at local cafes or restaurants in Exeter. During these meetings we would discuss many topics, but mainly our continuing (or not) relationships with mindfulness practices. It was clear that many had, in their words, 'transformational' journeys with mindfulness. Interviewing is a primary way in 'which ethnographic researchers have attempted to get to grips with the contexts of different people's everyday social, cultural, political and economic lives.' (Crang and Cook 2007, 35). For me, it was important that these experiences were captured fully through a narrative interview, in order for the research to do justice to their lived experiences of mindfulness practices.

During June 2019 I met with 6 participants for interviews. They were informal, semi-to-un-structured and each lasted around an hour to an hour and a half. All the interviews were carried out in locations that were convenient for the participants, either at their home or in a café. With the participant's consent I recorded the interviews using a digital recorder, I then transcribed the interviews.

The interviews primarily focused on their (and subsequently our) journeys with mindfulness: what brought them to the practice and course initially, what they have learnt from mindfulness, how they integrate it into their everyday life, and what arises for them during their regular practice. We also reflected on the first 8-week course, the subsequent co-produced project, and the 'a little book of wisdom'. I used four guiding questions for the interviews (more detailed structure of the interviews can be found in appendix B):

1. Can you describe and explain your journey with mindfulness?

2. Could you speak about your experience on the course where we met (the 8-week mindfulness course at the adult learning college)?
3. What happened for you on the co-produced 8-week mindfulness course?
4. Could you explain your mindfulness practice to me now?

5.4. Mindfulness retreats at retreat centres in South Devon

During March and May 2019, I attended and took part in three mindfulness retreats at three prominent retreat centres, Sharpham House and Barn and Gaia House, in Totnes and Newton Abbot in South Devon, UK. This area of Devon is widely known and recognised for the concentration of alternative and spiritual lifestyles and practices (Andrews, 2003). Stephen Batchelor, a prominent Buddhist scholar and practitioner, recounts the 'small migration of Western Buddhists to Devon, many of whom had been drawn to the Totnes area by the presence of Gaia House' (Batchelor 2010, 130). South Devon became a hub for Buddhism in Britain supported by a mixture of activities in local heritage centres including Dartington Hall Trust and Sharpham Trust, which encouraged a burgeoning community of English Buddhists in the early 1980s (Queen 2000). The geographical clustering of Buddhist activities in this area and the proximity to the University of Exeter was a reason for selecting the retreat centres I attended.

Through performing autoethnography on the retreats I wanted to understand and continue my embodied development of mindfulness, as well as extending my experiential understanding of the various forms and formats of mindfulness-based interventions. These retreats formed an important part of my mindfulness practice – allowing me to go deeper into the practice in a focused and supportive environment. Throughout the retreats I immersed myself fully into the

schedule, routines and guidelines of the centres. In the scheduled free time I wrote notes and reflected on my experiences of the structure of retreats, my interactions with others, and my in/formal mindfulness practice in a field-diary.

5.4.1. 'Introduction to Mindfulness', Sharpham House retreat

The first was a 3-night retreat at Sharpham House based on the Sharpham Estate in Totnes, South Devon. Sharpham House is a Grade-1 listed Georgian House that sits on the west bank of the River Dart near Ashprington and two-miles south-east of Totnes, in a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The house was the family home of Maurice and Ruth Ash, who founded the Sharpham Trust as a charity in the early 1980s. Maurice Ash was influenced by Buddhist and Wittgenstein philosophies that drew on a vision of rural life that favoured simplicity and meditation (Batchelor, 2010), and this was the basis for the foundation of the Trust (The Sharpham Trust 2019).

Figure 4: Sharpham House (author's own, 20/3/2019)

The retreat theme was 'Introduction to Mindfulness' and took the form of a condensed 8-week MBSR or MBCT course across 4 days, taught by two mindfulness teachers. This meant that the retreat was based on a secular model of mindfulness, which meant that Buddhist mindfulness practices and ethics were mentioned in passing as contextual information but were not elaborated on in any detail. The retreat is provided to those who have never explored mindfulness and meditation or for those who would like to re-start a practice that has previously lapsed.

Around 20 participants took part, and each had their own single-occupancy room which varied in size according to price, which ranged from £335-395 for the 3 nights, including meals. The schedule contained in/formal mindfulness practices, periods of silence, personal time, communal meal-times, chores and

tasks around the house (such as washing up and food preparation). In the first meeting we had the opportunity to hand over our digital devices (we were encouraged to refrain from outside communication or distraction). The full schedule for the retreat is shown below:

Table 3: Sharpham House retreat schedule

Time	Arrival Day	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
7am		Wake up bell Silence until 9.50am	Wake up bell Silence until 2.30pm	Wake up bell. Silence until 10.30am
7.30am		Mindful yoga	Mindful yoga	Mindful yoga
8am		Meditation	Meditation	Meditation
8.30am		Breakfast/tasks	Breakfast/tasks	Breakfast/tasks
9.50am		Meeting	Personal time	Personal time and packing
10.30am		Estate group walk 1 hr	Silent group walk 1hr 45 mins	Meeting Closing circle
12.30am		Meditation	Meditation	Departures by 11.45am
1pm		Lunch/tasks	Lunch/tasks	
2.30pm		Personal time	Sharing meeting End of silence	
4-5pm	Arrivals		Personal time	

5.15pm	Welcome and group meeting			
5.30pm		Meditation	Meditation	
6pm	Supper/tasks	Supper/tasks	Supper/tasks	
7.45pm	Posture for meditation	Teaching	Teaching + Q&A	
8.15pm	Guided meditation		Mindfulness in daily life	
8.45pm	Deep relaxation	Deep relaxation	Deep relaxation	
9pm	Silence until 9.50am the next day	Silence until 2.30am the next day	Silence until 10.30am the next day	

5.4.2. ‘Abiding with a Heart Imbued with Love’, Gaia House retreat

In May 2019 I took part in a silent 3-night retreat at a Buddhist Insight Meditation centre, Gaia House. Gaia House is an Elizabethan building located a mile from Newton Abbot and set in rural Devon, close to Dartmoor National Park. Previously a hospital and then a vicarage, the house was sold to the Gaia House Trust in 1996 (Fraiser 2013). It is one of the largest residential meditation centres in Europe and is part of an network of Insight Meditation centres in the Theravada schools of Buddhism, including Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts and Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, California. The retreat centre attracts influential teachers from the Buddhist community and

mindfulness movement (e.g. Stephen and Martine Batchelor, Christina Feldman, Jon Peacock, and Jon Kabat-Zinn, among others).

The centre offers year-around programme of personal, work and group retreats. Personal retreats are for experienced retreatants (those who have taken part in at least two weeks teacher-led Insight or Zen meditation retreats in silence and have an established meditation practice), and range from 2 days to 3 months or longer. They are responsible for their own practice within the routine of the house and are supported by weekly meetings. Work retreats are also for experienced retreatants and combine five hours of physical work that contributes to ‘the well-being of the Gaia House community’ and at least four meditation sessions a day. These last for a minimum of 2 weeks, to a maximum of three months. Finally, group retreats are offered as a programme of events and are teacher-led. They are open to both experienced and beginner meditators, depending on the programme of the retreat. Group retreats range from two to ten nights. After a group retreat, retreatants are welcome to continue their stay as a personal retreat at the centre.

The group retreat I took part in was based on theme: ‘Abiding with a Heart Imbued with Love’, which sought to explore loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity in order to ‘cultivate a quality of conscious presence that embraces our heart, mind and body. As we learn to abide, we can recognise both what impedes these natural attributes of the heart and what supports love to emerge’ (Gaia House 2018). The retreat was guided by two Buddhist practitioners: Catherine McGee and Jaya Karen Rudgard.

Figure 5: Gaia House retreat centre and surrounding grounds (author's own, May 2019)

Group retreats have a participant base of around 50 retreatants. This retreat, like all retreats at Gaia, was entirely silent and the teachers recommended that we also refrain from writing and reading, alongside switching off digital communication devices. The schedule of the retreat was highly structured and there was more emphasis placed on chores and tasks. At Gaia House retreatants took part in essential chores around the centre such as cleaning bathrooms and hoovering. Also, retreatants share dormitory style rooms. This meant that the cost of the retreat was significantly lower than Sharpham House, around £190 for the three nights. The schedule of the retreat contained varied in/formal mindfulness practices, Dharma teachings, and a space for reflection. The full programme is shown below.

Table 4: Gaia House retreat schedule

Day	Time	Activity	Day	Time	Activity
Friday	2-5	Arrival time	**Sunday (cont)**	10:30	Group meeting (A, library)
	5:30	Tea		11:15	Sitting
	6:45	Tour		11:45	Walking
	7:30-9:15	Evening practice and reflections		12:15	Gather in meditation hall
Saturday	6:30	Wake up		12:30	Lunch
	7:00	Group sitting		1:15	Wash up
	7:30	Breakfast		3:00	Guided meditation
	8:15	Work / walking		3:45	Walking
	9:30	Meditation		4:30	Sitting

	10:30	Walking		5:00	Group standing (outside)
	11:00	Sitting		5:30	Tea
	11:30	Walking		7-7:20	Sitting
	12:00	Sitting and reflection		7:30-9:15	Evening practice and reflections
	12:30	Lunch			
	1:15	Wash up	**Monday**	6:15	Wake up
	3:00	Guided meditation		6:45	Group sitting
	3:45	Walking		7:30	Breakfast
	4:15	Sitting		8:15	Work / room cleaning
	4:45	Walking		9:30	Sitting
	5:30	Tea		10:20	Walking
	7-7:20	Sitting		12:00	Sitting
	7:30-9:15	Evening practice and reflections		12:10	Dana talk and talk from co-ordinators
Sunday	6:15	Wake up		12:40	Lunch
	6:45	Group sitting		1:15	Wash up
	7:30	Breakfast		1:30	Room Cleaning
	8:15	Work / walking		2:15	Abiding Heart Closing talk
	9:30	Meditation		3:30	Retreat end

5.4.3. Sharpham Barn retreat

The final retreat was a 6-night retreat at Sharpham Barn. Sharpham Barn is also based on the Sharpham Estate under the care of the Trust. It is located near the River Dart at the top of a steep hill and is just under 4 miles from the centre of Totnes. The Barn is surrounded by farmland and has its own garden where food for the kitchen is grown. It is closely located to Sharpham Estate's Burial Ground where some contemplations and meditations during the retreats take place.

The Barn offers retreats with an explicit Insight Meditation and Buddhist influence. The centre is run by residential co-ordinators who volunteer for the Barn on a yearly basis, organising the retreats, house, office, and garden as well as supporting the retreatants. Retreats at The Barn are a week long and community based with a group of around 10 participants. Living in community means that meals and household chores are performed by retreatants and at the beginning of the retreat a rota is written to divide up the tasks between the group. Due to the community-based format of the retreat, costs are lower than Sharpham House. At the Barn, retreats cost around £295-350 for the week-long stay.

The retreat schedule contained a range of in/formal mindfulness practices (including three 40 minute meditations a day), periods of silence, Dharma talks by local Buddhist practitioners, sharing circles, working in the garden, and personal time.

Table 5: The Barn retreat schedule

Time	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6.20am		Wake up	Wake up	Wake up	Wake up	Wake up	Wake up
6.50am		Movement and meditation	Movement and meditation	Movement and meditation	Movement and meditation	Movement and meditation	Movement and meditation
7.30am		Tasks	Tasks	Tasks	Tasks	Tasks	Tasks
8.00am		Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast Gardening	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
9.00am		Morning meeting Gardening time	Morning meeting Gardening time		Morning meeting Gardening time	Morning meeting Household tasks	Packing and leaving
12.20pm		Guided mindfulness of breathing	Burial ground walk and contemplation	Silent meditation	Meditation (walking or sitting)	Further Q&A (optional) Walking meditation	
1pm		Lunch Personal time	Lunch Personal time	Lunch Personal time	Lunch Personal time	Lunch Personal time	
5pm	Meeting Tour Meditation Dinner	Teaching Supper (DIY)	Teaching Supper (DIY)	Meditation	Teaching Supper (DIY)	Lovingkindness guided meditation Sharing space with offerings Supper Optional bonfire	
7.50pm		Meditation (silent)	Meditation (silent)		Meditation (silent)		
8.30pm	House goes into silence	Silence until Tuesday's morning meeting	Silence until Thursday morning meeting		Silence until Friday's morning meeting	Silence until Saturday's breakfast	

Figure 6: Sharpham Barn and the surrounding area (author's own)

5.5. Coding, organising and analysing the 'data'

Much of the transcription and collation of notes was done alongside fieldwork. Writing up alongside the doing of fieldwork allowed me to retain memories of gestures, hesitations, silences, and interruptions, and include these in the transcripts. By listening back to the audio I was momentarily transported elsewhere: enchanted by the moments of laughter and struck by goose-bumps when personal emotions were revealed. The transcripts of the interviews were sent back to the participants for them to have the opportunity to revisit and review their content (all of which were sent back with no amendments). I also handed back any journals they had authored and provided each participant with a copy of 'the little book of wisdom'.

Coding was a process of making new connections (Cope 2010) between the different and messy assemblage of places, human and non-human bodies, affects, emotions, and encounters that had been generated through the research. It was not a method of trying to find the hidden 'truth' behind the data, but a way of bringing things into connection, rather an 'experiment with order and disorder, in which provisional and partial taxonomies are formed, but are always subject to change and metamorphosis, as new connections spark among words, bodies, objects and ideas' (MacLure 2013, 181). I took an open and unrestricted approach to coding, in order 'to produce concepts that seem to fit the data' (Strauss, 1987, in Cope, 2010, 445-6).

In the beginning, my method was distinctly a messy and fluid one. I started out with paper, post-its, and highlighters, coding by hand. I leafed through transcripts and hand-written fieldnotes. After the final retreat the volume of data became too high to continue coding manually. Thus, I switched to N-Vivo in

order to organise them more coherently. This software package allowed me to include photos, diagrams, and pdf documents alongside word documents containing transcriptions and typed-up fieldnotes – a process that became more efficient, allowing me to code images as well as text. Once in N-Vivo I continued to code, transferring the coding I had done by hand into the software. The codes I had used in the first round of analysing began to shift as I used NVivo, and again as I started to write and form new connections. Here, coding was a tentative, fluid, and intuitive process. It involved a constant process of going back and forth between my experiences and the experiences of the participants. Yet, due to the highly autoethnographic nature of the research, the analytical approach was distinctly embodied and grounded. I analysed through my positionality and lived experiences. Coding was certainly a process of 'feeling my way' and making connections between my experiences and the experiences in the 'data'.

Coding affected me in many ways. Whilst analysing and coding I reconnected with the lives of my participants and my experiences; a process that was filled with wonder (MacLure, 2013). But, I also felt a haunting feeling or weight pressing onto me – making me shiver and well up as I re-lived past emotions and experiences. Much of the feminist methodological and geographical literature highlights the ways research is intensely emotional (Gilbert 2000) through feelings of joy (Kern et al. 2014), vulnerability (emerald and Carpenter 2015), insecurity (Bondi 2014), and shame (Probyn 2005), yet it does not reflect on the ways that the process of data collation and coding can be intensely emotional and personal. Some have elaborated on their experiences of vicarious trauma through listening back to fieldwork recordings and reading

through data (Sikes and Hall 2019). But emotions can be felt and experiences re-lived whilst coding data.

MacLure (2013, 167) discusses the ‘offences of coding’ that conflict with the key tenets of post-structuralist research approaches. She sees coding as undermining the ethics of responsibility as it protects the researcher, preserving their privacy and intactness, whilst undoing and unpacking the lives of others. Whilst this is certainly true for research that focuses explicitly on the experiences of others, the process of coding autoethnographic work is a little different as your personal and often intimate experiences, thoughts, and reflections become part of the research data. Whilst I scrutinised the fragments of a vulnerable self I had written in the pages of my research journal, I was making a particular version of myself open to this ‘panoptic’ gaze of the researcher. This induced a mixture of shame, joy, and sadness.

Here, I was undoing the notion that: ‘researchers code; others get coded’ (MacLure, 2013, 168). My lived experiences, histories, vulnerabilities, bodily sensations, and thoughts were part of the research ‘data’. Thus, coding and analysing was a distinctly emotional process for me. Making connections between my experiences with those of my participants and re-living difficult personal meditations and bodily sensations through the coding process was challenging. Yet, as I began to write with the coded data – shaping it into vignettes and extracting interview excerpts to be included in empirical chapters – I began gaining new insights. The coding process was never finished or complete. The analytical process, and the ad-hoc style of coding, extended beyond the ‘coding phase’ in my timeline as I began to forge new connections alongside writing.

5.6. Conclusions: insight and the journey of research

This chapter has described my approach to fieldwork, research, coding and analysis. The fieldwork and research is an 'ongoing event' (H. Lorimer 2003, 302) and 'journey' (Kvale 2008), one that deeply affected me beyond the discrete timeline of the research and it was embedded into my everyday life and life course. Here, 'the journey may not only lead to new knowledge; the traveller might change as well. The journey might instigate a process of reflection that leads the traveller to new ways of self-understanding' (Kvale, 2008, 20). For me, new ways of self-understanding refers to the insights and awareness gained from the complex and entangled combination of practicing and researching mindfulness with multiple positionalities or selves.

There is a deep interconnection between my (auto)ethnographic life and my self, and very often this was difficult and impossible to untangle. Being affected by the research, the participants and the analysis of the data, was a process of disassembly and reassembly, of becoming undone. In the following chapter I explore this further. Through intimate and vulnerable writing I will show the ways that researching mindfulness using (auto)ethnography involved a thorough disassembly and reassembly of the ways I inhabited the world. Through mindfulness and the research, I was encountering vulnerability, suffering, and difficulty. Mindfulness required that I turned towards it, to breathe with it. After initial difficulty, discomfort, and challenge, insight and awareness grew from this repeated practice. When I began to struggle with the weight and brevity of these insights, I re-integrated mindfulness in new and supportive ways to aid my journey.

6. Weaving together mindfulness and research

6.1. Introduction

> ‘We are made through our research as much as we make our own knowledge, and that this process is complex, uncertain and incomplete’ (G. Rose, 1997, 316).

> ‘Autoethnography is like stripping back the insulation of shame and fear and extending a bareish wire so that anyone can make a splice, can feel a current of connection, can imagine themselves into a particular body and place and time. This may seem risky, but it’s less draining than maintaining the illusion of safety through distance. It’s not about full disclosure – I don’t know myself that well. It’s about making a space that we can project ourselves into, a mash-up of micro and macro, inside-out and outside-in, where what is, was, or will be might become a little slippery. It’s a method of attention, of calling myself to account as a practice of care and making-do and thinking-with some kind of community.’ (Tamas 2017, 112).

This chapter will think through my experiences with autoethnography through the embodied sensation of anxiety (inspired by Askins' (2017) intimate and embodied writing) by presenting research vignettes. Throughout the fieldwork I attempted to practice an ‘autoethnographic sensibility’, which is a ‘sensitivity to the autoethnographic characteristics of what we learn from research participants as well as to our situatedness in relation to the people and worlds we are studying’ (Butz 2010, 140). This critical reflexivity means that the work we do as autoethnographers is always open-ended, relational, collaborative,

and sensitive. It is never done in isolation and so we need to be aware of the ethical responsibilities associated with co-creating and representing knowledges.

Our practice of ethics must also be thought relationally, as Ellis (2007, 4) argues: ‘relational ethics recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work.’ It is an approach to research that acknowledges interpersonal bonds with others and concentrates on how these relationships with participants and intimate others change over time. This is important as research is often made through the social networks we form and are a part of and by gatekeepers who we need to forge a relationship with in order to gain access to certain spaces and places. Thus, research is always bound up with networks of power and knowledge, which for Crang and Cook (2007, 18), is inherently political.

Relational ethics invokes ethics of care (Gilligan 2003; Noddings 1984), and a politics of care (Askins and Blazek 2017), which take seriously ‘interdependency as necessary to the embodied production of subjectivities and calls for recognition of relations and practices of care as an integral part of everyday ethics’ (ibid, 1089). This political caring-with seeks to work towards equitable relationships within research, across the academy and wider society. Here, emotion is central – intimately connected to embodied academic work and research and is a process of ‘consciously ‘grappl[ing]’ with our ‘feelings’, to reflexively consider their part in underpinning our work as political’ (ibid, 1090). This mode of critical reflexivity, through an ethic of caring-with, is highly important to an autoethnographic sensibility.

Critical reflexivity also means that we encounter autoethnography as a self-conscious representation of experience, that we are fully situated within the production of knowledge in a mediated world (Butz 2010). Yet, we need to interrogate what is meant by experience, as often ‘autoethnographic research seems to presume that the subjects can speak (for) themselves’, but post-phenomenological theories ‘disrupt this presumption and stress the (im)possibilities of writing the self from a fractured and fragmented subject position.’ (Gannon 2006, 475). Knowledges we construct through (auto)ethnographic work are incomplete, partial, plural, and contingent embodied lived experience. Thus, the authority of the self, as a person who writes and knows as discrete and autonomous subject, is destabilised. Embodied and experimental writing is a way of doing that evokes the multiplicity of self and the discontinuous fragments formed by memory, the body and things, that displace the individualised speaking self (ibid).

In this chapter, I attempt to write intimately (Moss and Donovan 2017) in order to ‘access and present how anxiety and vulnerability collide with the ways by which we locate ourselves in the research process’ (Sotoudehnia 2017, 38–39). Intimate writing allows us to acknowledge the incoherency of the self and how we are never fully knowable. It can be a deeply uncomfortable experience to write in this way – forcing us to expose elements of ourselves to our audiences. An act that could induce feelings of shame (emerald and Carpenter 2015; Probyn 2005), but one that acknowledges the ways in which research intersects with the personal and is deeply imbricated in the life course.

Acknowledging and reflecting on the intersections of the academic and the personal has been a long serving interest within the geographies of disability

(Worth 2008). Yet, for health geographers this has not always been so overt, even though many geographers interested in (mental) health are often personally affected by the issues that they research (Martin 2019), and motivated to do the research because of their lived experience. But as Sarah McGarrol (2017) reflects, research on experiences of health requires a great deal of emotional labour and can greatly affect the researcher – leaving her drained, sad, lonely, powerless, and exhausted.

Thus, my writing in this chapter is an attempt to re-centre the personal and intimate in health geography. Yet, the narrative I present could be the form of anxiety-induced depression that is particular to the affective life of academia, in which you 'fear that you have nothing to say, or that you can't say what you want to say, or that you have something to say but it's not important enough or smart enough.' (Cvetkovich 2012, 18). And so, the lived experiences in the following pages reflect an amount of privilege: I am a young, white, university-educated, middle-class woman. I am also in a position where I can access mental health support at my academic institution and with the National Health Service. But what is clear is that I am not alone in these feelings. Many publications in geography and beyond speak to the mental and emotional effects of working in the neoliberal academy (Berg et al., 2016; England, 2016; Loveday, 2018; Mullings et al., 2016; Parizeau et al., 2016, to name a few). Like Ann Cvetkovich (2012) I 'take seriously the forms of unhappiness and hopelessness produced even by these relatively privileged and specialised projects and ambitions'. And as I write, I notice that….

6.2. …my chest feels tight, restricted. My head creases up. My jaw clenches…

Research is emotional and embodied and for me it was a process of coming to terms and acknowledging what I had tried to ignore when I embarked on the PhD. I came to the project expecting and wanting to find the therapeutic experience of mindfulness: bliss, peace with the world and myself. Although from the outset this research was intensely personal for me, I managed to convince myself that it wouldn't get too close. That I could construct a coherent researcher identity that could just erase any previous experiences of mental distress. Particularly as when I started the research I had just come off anti-depressants, so wasn't I 'cured'?

But by regularly practicing mindfulness meditation in group 8-week courses, alone in my living room, and on group retreats (alongside informal moments of mindfulness on trains, buses and during the walk to the office) I kept returning to the same sensations: of a tight chest, jaw, and aching head. Mindfulness, as this thesis will inevitably show, is an embodied pedagogy and practice. Through regular practice I was (re)inhabiting my body and becoming aware of the relationships I had with it through encounters with ruminative and habitual thought patterns:

With these thoughts running around in my mind, I found it difficult to stay in meditation. I wanted to get up move around, avoid being with them. The encounter is difficult, painful almost. (Meditation at home, research diary, 5/12/2018)

It was a painful process. I came to notice the embodied sensation of anxiety – one that had both pre-existed and was being produced by the research. It was

something I could no longer ignore. The effects that my mental health had on my body were ever present in meditations: the tension in my jaw and chest, racing heartbeat, furrowed brow.

Lying on my back, my legs bent and feet flat on the floor, my hands resting on my chest. I breathe in and out, counting the breaths. The numbers run through my head, coinciding with my inhale and exhale. Inhaling on odd numbers, exhaling on even. For moments, I am my breath, the rise and fall of the chest, the sensation of the air passing in and out of the nostrils. Then I loose attention and focus. I'm elsewhere, thoughts and memories pass in and out, dwelling on troubling, anxious thoughts. I find my breath again, realising it was always there, and continue counting. Then my thoughts turn to anxiety and I explore this further – seeing where it arises in my body: tension and heat in my chest, head, and back…..

By paying attention to the embodied resonances and sensations of anxiety, I came to confront the ruminative and self-critical thought patterns that spiralled in my mind, depleting my energy and contributing to the embodied traces of stress.

….Delving deeper into the depth of the word, I see how it resonates, how thoughts arise that are motivated by this emotion. And how self-doubt comes into play through thoughts of 'you can't do this', 'you're not doing it right', 'you're not clever enough to be here', 'what am I actually doing?'. Before the timer goes, I come back to my breath. And feeling the light shine into my eyelids, I open my eyes to a bright blue sky visible through the window (Silent meditation at home, research diary, 21/11/2018).

It was the discomfort of dwelling with the body, of coming from ‘doing mode’ to inhabiting a ‘being mode’. From the cerebral to the embodied. From concepts to experience.

I assumed that I could produce and maintain a coherent, professional, confident, put-together researcher identity – that would be separate from my personal, messy self. One that could both deal with difficulties I and my participants might face throughout the research. Yet, this façade that I attempted to maintain was ruptured by mindfulness practices, revealing my vulnerabilities and the embodied effects of feeling anxious, overwhelmed, and out of my depth.

Moreover, through mindfulness it was inevitably impossible to separate the research from the personal. The awareness and mindfulness practices I learnt during ‘research time’ began to inform and invade my ‘personal time’ and modes of subjectivity. Particularly as the practice encourages the cultivation of mindfulness as a way of life, bringing informal moments of mindfulness (such as mindful walking, eating, and noticing the breath) throughout the days that I was not formally performing research. Notably, I would bring mindful awareness and compassion to family debates and arguments, using the practice to shape and inform how I responded in these moments.

Through this I soon came to accept, acknowledge and reflect on the fact that my positionality had never been static and was always performed and made through the research (G. Rose 1997). Darling (2014) reflects on his changing positionality and emotional entanglements during ethnographic research with asylum seekers and refugees. Becoming proximate to his participants entailed

becoming entangled in their lives and emotions and through this proximity his researcher positionality shifted. And as a participant speaks….

6.3. ….my eyes begin to well up, tears trickling down my face

Through shared experience and emotion, I developed ongoing relationships with the participants over the course of a year. Initially meeting in the first mindfulness course (see Figure 2), we developed a group friendship and supportive community based on shared experiences of mindfulness. As Tillmann-Healy (2003, 732) acknowledges: ‘friendship and fieldwork are similar endeavors. Both involve being in the world with others’. Friendship as method involves a ‘stance of hope, caring, justice, even love’, and it is neither a ‘program nor a guise strategically aimed at gaining further access. It is a level of investment in participants’ lives that puts fieldwork relationships on par with the project.’ (ibid, 735). ‘Radical reciprocity’ is central to this method, working to study the group as a collective rather than the researcher studying ‘them’.

Over the course of spring 2018 to summer 2019, we completed two 8-week mindfulness courses, met monthly for social catch-ups, and finally got together for follow-up interviews. During this time, our friendship grew as we began to share more of our personal lives with each other. My use of friendship as method was initially fairly unintentional and evolved as the fieldwork went on. To begin with I worked to gain access in a strategic way. But during initial conversations with the mindfulness teacher, she articulated that relationships, friendships, and group formation were central to mindfulness pedagogy. This sentiment is reiterated by Stephen Batchelor (1998, 50):

> ‘In terms of dharma practice, a true friend is more than just someone with whom we share common values and who accepts us for what we are.

> Such a friend is someone whom we can trust to refine our understanding of what it means to live, who can guide us when we're lost and help us find the way along a path, who can assuage our anguish through the reassurance of his or her presence.'

Friendship is integrated into mindfulness pedagogy (McCown et al. 2010). It acknowledges an open-ended process of 'meeting people "where they are"', coming to the encounter without a goal or agenda. Indeed, even the mindfulness teacher has 'no choice' but to disclose and 'is exposed completely in each moment of being' (ibid, 99). In gaining access to the initial mindfulness course the teacher had concerns about whether my presence as researcher would impede the efficacy of group formation. The common notion of researcher (and undoubtably the teacher's viewpoint) as a detached observer was at odds with the collaborative and co-creative ethos of mindfulness pedagogy, in which every participant contributes (including the teacher) from their own direct experience (ibid). If at the time of gaining access I had been more aware of the pedagogical intentions of mindfulness, I may have been able to negotiate this more effectively.

Yet, it was clear that my presence as a researcher did not impede the ability of the group to become proximate. In the beginning it was a clear ice-breaker – inciting conversations as many of the individuals in the group were interested in the work I was doing. Yet as the weeks went on, many of the participants forgot that I was a researcher at all, instead seeing me as a member of the group and a friend. Darling (2014) also reflects on this and acknowledges that the forgetting of the researcher identity is part of the research process itself,

wherein clear lines around positionalities of researcher/participant become blurred throughout the research.

However, this act of forgetting made me uneasy. The development of friendship meant that participants began to feel more at ease to roam into emotionally charged territories or to openly explore difficulty as a group, as well as in the interviews. Thus, I made consent an ongoing process. Each stage of the research I applied for ethical reviews and provided the participants with information sheets and consent forms. These acted as formal reminders of where their words and stories would end up. Yet, many of the participants did not seem very concerned with these formal processes. But I continued to involve them – sending back transcripts for them to review and encouraging them to set boundaries around what they shared if they felt that they were necessary.

Working in friendship allowed a strong group dynamic, that was supported by and supported the development of mindfulness practices. By sharing emotional, spiritual and lived experiences through mindfulness workshops, but also in cafes, pubs, and restaurants, these shared emotions became the 'the 'surfaces' and 'boundaries' that enable the individual to identify as a group member' (Ahmed, 2004, 10 in Geoghegan, 2012, 41). This act of reciprocity and emotional entanglement contributed to shifting positionalities. I was simultaneously a researcher, friend, counsellor, and 'expert'. And the labour of negotiating these different identities was challenging.

As the fieldwork went along, maintaining the fragile façade of the unemotional, 'professional' researcher was not an option. I was unable to 'hold it together', experiencing frequent upwellings of emotion during meditation:

Angelika directs us to focus our attention where it is needed, by placing a hand on the affected area. My right hand goes to my forehead and I place 3 fingers there, sending warmth, light, tenderness, and healing. As I send these intentions forth, I feel a wave of sadness wash over me, it flows through my body, making me feel intensely warm, vital and tingly. The sensation pauses, and my eyes well up: leaking quiet tears. I stay with this sensation, breathing into it, dwelling in it, and it seeps and trickles away. My attention is drawn back to the sensation of the contact between my hand and my forehead. (Notes from research diary, 22/11/2018).

But I was also affected by the group: crying with and for participants, laughing in moments of relief, and shivering with empathy and compassion. As positionalities were negotiated, I realised that this façade could never be maintained.

I found getting upset in the session difficult. Any resemblance of the researcher as 'rational' or 'objective' was dissolving. Separating my personal life from my research life was unavailable in this moment. They were intimately intertwined. I was opening up to others who I barely knew, they were gaining insights into my life and this provoked a feeling of vulnerability. Opening up in this way is something I rarely do to strangers – I tend to ask more questions of others, so this was a strange role reversal. (Notes from research diary, 11/6/2018)

This also led me to question how much to disclose to my participants about my lived experience with mental health. This question connected to entangled relations and responsibilities of care between myself and my participants.

I put in a considerable amount of emotional labour to be present and attentive to the needs of the participants during the research. For Hochschild (1983, 7) this 'labour requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others – in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place'. It is the 'management of feeling' to produce a publicly available 'facial and bodily display'. I attempted to meet each participant with an openness and responsiveness to their worlds, listening to their stories, experiences, and reflections. This conveniently fitted with an identity I was used to performing, one of attentive listener. Through creating an emotionally sensitive disposition which was inevitably heightened by mindfulness practices, I was increasingly emotionally affected by the others in the group during the research. But friendship means that support and care could not be strictly bounded by research 'time' and during monthly social meetings we supported each other beyond the confines of research. One hot summer evening, we sat in a pub garden and provided resources and emotional support to a participant who was seeking support during a difficult period in her domestic life.

The relations of reciprocity produced through friendship as method made me uneasy about when care and emotional labour went the other way: when the participants cared for me. I disclosed information about my life and my experience as our relationship developed, but I was always wary and concerned with not taking up too much space. But I came to realise that the group wanted to support me. They *wanted* to reciprocate. This came to light through a social catch-up one evening in February:

Conversation turned to how everyone was doing. We each caught each other up on developments that were happening in our lives. I had not been able to attend the last one due to illness (a panic attack that had caused me to pass out – an event that had shaken me). They seemed concerned about me and inquired about how I was doing. I told them that starting the new year had been difficult for me….

… I told them most of what had happened (accessing CBT, frequent trips to my parent's, the sensation of spiralling downwards), and they listened. They reassured me that it would all sort itself out, that I could do it. That I possessed energy and strength. I felt grateful to be heard, non-judgementally. I had to rush off early and I felt guilty for leaving them – not having had the time to reciprocate for their emotional lives. (Research diary, 6/2/2019)

In order to do no harm to my participants I had attempted to not disclose elements of myself to them. But as our friendship developed this became increasingly challenging and it was clear that they wanted to reciprocate and provide me with emotional support and attention. Something I was incredibly grateful for, but also uneasy with. And breathing in and out….

6.4. ….I stay with the discomfort. Locating it, becoming aware of it, breathing into it, and accommodating it.

Discomfort and difficulty was found in negotiating the stresses of research, the emotional labour of caring for participants, and the effects that mindfulness had on me. Sensations of anxiety (re)presented themselves throughout the research, they were already there, but also emerged through the research as a product of it. Mindfulness practice was encouraging me to confront my vulnerability, notice anxious thought patterns and their embodied effects. It

became too close and I was struggling. I needed supportive techniques to learn through these discomforting feelings in order to care for myself during the research process, to 'learn by how we are affected by what comes near, which means achieving a different relationship to all our wanted and unwanted feelings as a political as well as a life resource' (Ahmed 2010, 216), and to 'lean into the discomfort of uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure' (B. Brown 2013, 55).

Identification and acknowledgement of the emotional tensions and stresses of research is important. Bondi (2005, 240) writes about the mixed feelings she experienced during her doctoral research, and how she left her feelings of shame unacknowledged:

> 'Unacknowledged shame and my more general sense of inadequacy would have needed to come into my awareness for such acceptance to be possible. Only with such acceptance could I possibly have begun to reflect on what my feelings of guilt might mean in relation to the substance of my research'

For her, becoming aware of these feelings would have been vital to the research process itself, to suspend normative judgements about what one feels and instead experience and reflect on the emotions that exist in their fullness, difficulty and complexity. Such is the process of mindfulness, wherein the practices teaches the process of turning towards discomfort and difficulty non-judgementally to accept (but not be resigned to) whatever arises (Crane 2009), such as Magee's RAIN meditation (see chapter 3), and Wong's use of mindfulness in relation to identity and diversity (also chapter 3).

Yet, I think that this work cannot, and should not, be done alone. Community (or sangha) is a vital part of Buddhist practice and supports the development of mindfulness (Hanh 2008). It is also important to acknowledge the wider context wherein many research projects are done in isolation and where the neoliberal university is increasingly creating individualistic and competitive modes of working that are materialised in the spatial orderings of institutions (through the disappearance of common room areas and the degradation of communal lunch and coffee breaks). Although there is a burgeoning acknowledgement of mental health in the academy and the effects of research on mental health (England 2016; Martin 2019; Mullings, Peake, and Parizeau 2016; Parizeau et al. 2016), there is still a long way to go to provide adequate support mechanisms, funding, and safe spaces for researchers in the social sciences in order to work through the challenges of (sensitive) research (Sikes and Hall 2019).

Support work in the academy is most commonly carried out by researchers in already precarious positions; early-career, junior and female academics take on a significant proportion of the emotional labour of this work. Moreover, training is inadequate for those on the front-line providing this support (as evidenced by a recent conversation at the RGS-IBG 2019 on mental health in the academy). Alongside creating a culture of mental wellness in the academy, this also needs to be negotiated individually, for example, writing support mechanisms into funding and grant proposals (Peake and Mullings 2016; Sikes and Hall 2019). Luckily with the flexibility of the ESRC's Research and Training Grant (RTSG) I was able to access a mindfulness-based supervisor to provide extra support for my mental and emotional health in the context of my mindfulness practice.

Mindfulness-based supervision (MBS) was developed in the context of mindfulness teacher training and has been integrated into best practice guidelines for the training of teachers (UK Network of Mindfulness-Based Teacher Training Organisations 2011). MBS offers teachers an opportunity to reflect on their personal practice, and provides them with regular feedback on their teaching. A framework was developed by Evans et al. (2015) that combines supervisory processes used in other contexts with aspects of MBSR and MBCT pedagogy.

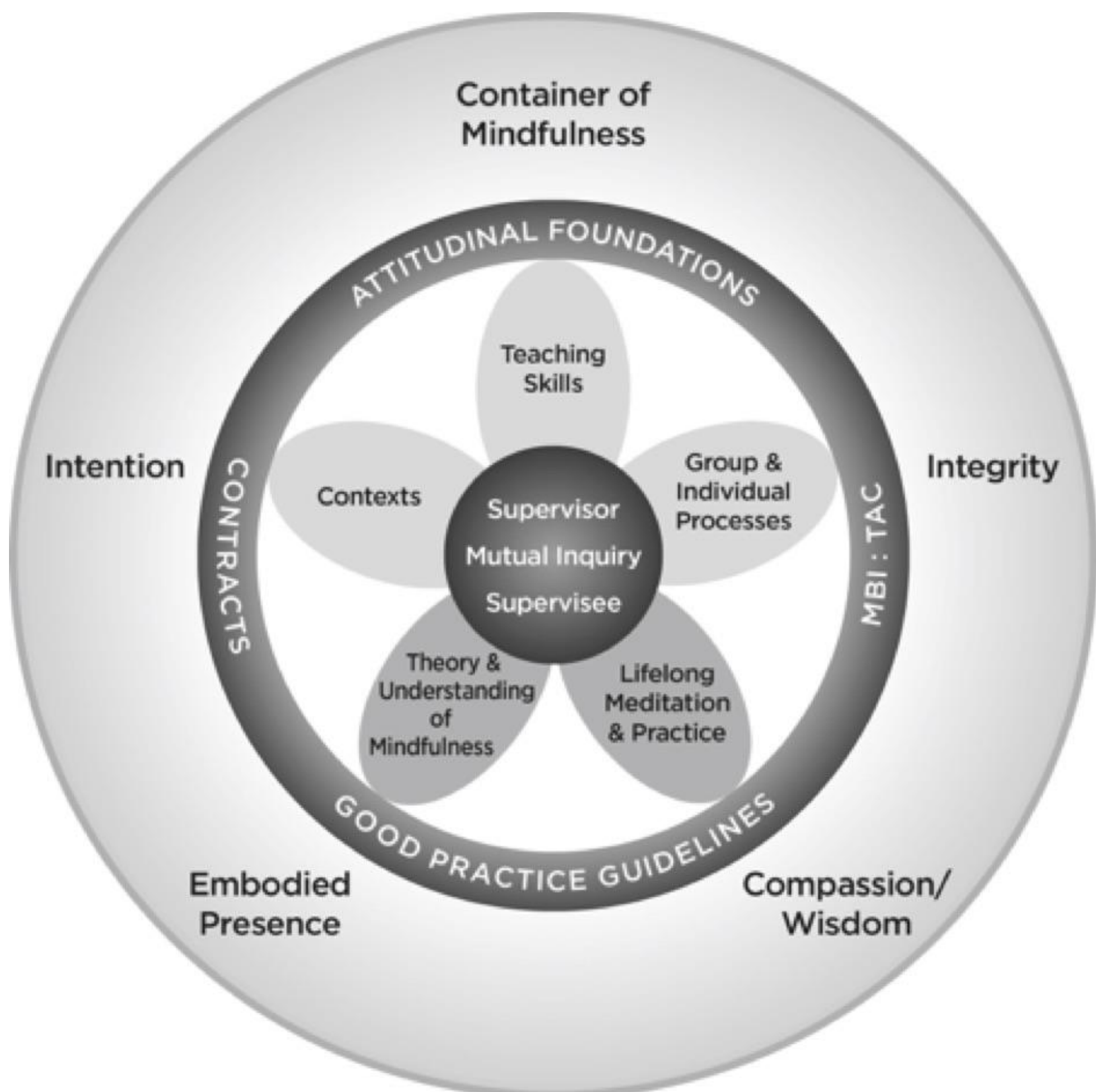


Figure 7: Mindfulness-based supervision model (Cooper et al. 2015)

Although I am not training to be a mindfulness teacher, MBS provided a supportive mechanism through which to explore my practice further. Working with a mindfulness-based teacher we drew on elements of the framework that were the most suitable for my needs. Beginning with intentions, we set out aims and expectations for the supervision process, which were as follows:

1. To establish a mindfulness practice for myself that exists independently from my research in order to support my wellbeing and the integrity of my practice.
2. To provide a space in which to acknowledge any difficulties arising in my (auto)ethnographic fieldwork that effect my personal practice and wellbeing.
3. To develop mindfulness in a way that supports my academic life through allowing myself to take pauses and combatting self-judgement or 'shoulds'.

These intentions aimed to develop embodied presence, integrity, maintain personal practice, and understanding, as well as support me with the demands of research. Each session would begin with 5 to 10 minutes of practice which would then provide further conversational exploration. Coming to practice together allowed me to explore 'difficult places which, without the counter balance of compassion, may trigger reactive patterns of avoidance, fixing, judging and blaming.' (Evans et al. 2015, 575). Conversations mainly took place around the third intention, helping me to work with anxiety, imposter syndrome, and self-critical thoughts. The teacher also encouraged me to continue my mindfulness practice beyond the confines of research. I had grown concerned

with the ways mindfulness had become associated with the research – contributing to intense and difficult practices where I sat with ruminative thoughts that worried about and ruminated on the outcomes of the fieldwork. Consequently, I began narrating experience as if I was note-taking, rather than being with what arose. Developing a practice beyond research allowed me to come back to practices in a research context with greater strength and integrity.

The sessions allowed me to experiment with mindful ways of doing research that allowed me to approach fieldwork in a balanced way. I had been struggling with the anxious sensation that note-taking during autoethnographic research provoked. I had an intense urge to note down *everything* during personal time in the first retreat, in case I forgot or missed anything during the meditations and mindful activities. A simple solution was offered: I set a time during the day or the retreat that I sit, practice a breathing space meditation, to see what arises and then write notes. Turning note writing into a meditation was incredibly supportive, allowing me to build trust and gain confidence in my ability to do the research. It also changed my thought patterns and approach to formal mindfulness practices – I was no longer confronting intense ruminating thought patterns. Instead, I began to develop a compassionate relationship to the practice and to my fieldwork.

The lack of note taking also changed the way I approached meditation. Often in the previous retreats, and in my personal everyday meditations, I will think 'oh I must write this down!' or narrate the experience in a writers voice rather than being totally and deeply with the practice. The researcher mode interrupts and disrupts this flow. It is a doing mode. But on this retreat I found myself feeling more like a participant, a retreatant. I felt more at ease with meditations, not

needing to cling onto events in order to recount them later. But instead letting them come and go. This means that these notes might be a little haphazard and fragmented – as a frantic attempt to try to recall what happened. But, maybe it can be a slower process in which as things emerge I can note them down. (Reflections after the Gaia House retreat, 6/5/2019).

This was a process that involved trust and allowed me to form a different relationship to the fieldwork – one that was embodied and made space for things to germinate. Thich Nhat Hanh talks about this in relation to the thought process of problem solving. He speaks of right thinking, in which we give space to our 'store consciousness' to work through the problem (rather than relying on ruminative, circular thinking), so that 'one, two, or a few days later, a solution sprouts up' (2016, 76). This is a form of embodied research that welcomes sensory ways of knowing and makes space for body-centred reflection and contemplation in which relationships and connections will emerge. It is a way of working that Shahjahan (2015) suggests would undo the 'mind supremacy' that is ingrained into the structures of the academy.

Trusting this process was important to the later development of the research and the writing stage. Although writing can be a difficult and tormenting process, it was also part of my journey with mindfulness itself. For me, writing is a process of inquiry and dialogue, wherein new insights emerge from the very act of reflecting, planning, writing, and typing. It is a way to work through the difficult emotions in research, and a way to unpack the shame that emerges in being a vulnerable human and researcher.

6.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered an autoethnographic, intimate, and embodied reflection of my entangled and complex relationship and journey with mindfulness, fieldwork, and the relations of care between myself and the participants. This chapter contributes to conversations on the ways that research can intersect with our personal lives, or 'when research gets personal'[11]. It is worth noting that I have benefitted from doing a PhD in mindfulness and the opportunity to develop a mindful approach to research might rest on institutional privileges that others simply do not have. However, I encourage future discussion on the ways that we might bring mindfulness and other techniques of self-care into our research practices (building on the previous work of Jones and Whittle 2021; O'Dwyer et al. 2018; Mountz et al. 2015).

This chapter has allowed me to explore the ways in which we might bring mindfulness into our geographical research practices, something I term mindful geographies (see chapter 12 for more on this). Bringing mindfulness into our research offers an opportunity to reflect on our fieldwork practices and offers a mode of self-care that is attentive to our vulnerabilities, challenges, and anxieties as researchers. This is particularly impactful if developed with others through supervision or community-based practice.

[11] In 2019 the Geographies of Health and Wellbeing Research Group of the RGS-IBG held a 'Hack Day' where the intersections of research and personal lives was explored. It was entitled 'when research gets personal'.

Part 1: autoethnographic approaches

7. Clearing the air: mindfulness of the breath

7.1. Introduction

This PhD was researched, written, and lived during a time of intersecting crises. Intersecting through their shared relationships with the air and breath:

> ‘We all share the air
>
> Feel our togetherness as we breathe
>
> That we’re actually here in unity
>
> In the great loving expression of unity, compassion, wisdom, truth and care’
>
> (Transcription of a YouTube video uploaded by ‘Campfire Convention’, 2018)

The first was the mass rebellions organised by Extinction Rebellion that brought central London to a stand-still. There was a moment when the protestors, during their occupation of Westminster Bridge, joined together for a collective moment of contemplation, reflection, and meditation. They were guided through a meditation that explored the collective ‘togetherness’ of the breath that unites us, investigated through the qualities of compassion and care. The breath, as we will see shortly, is political, and here it is politicised – connecting our seemingly individual, bounded bodies to the Earth and its changes and rhythms. As Thich Nhat Hanh (2015) describes, in his statement to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), ‘breathing with mindfulness and contemplating your body, you realise that you are the Earth.

You realise that your consciousness is also the consciousness of the Earth. Look around you–what you see is not your environment, it is you.’

> ‘COVID-19 is a new illness that can affect your lungs and airways. It's caused by a virus called coronavirus.’

The second was the outbreak of COVID-19. An outbreak that quickly spread to a world-wide pandemic. It is a virus that affects your lungs and airways, with severe symptoms including breathlessness and difficulty breathing. The disease has suffocated and surrounded us. Establishing a ‘new normal’ with social distancing and phases of quarantine and lockdown.

> ‘I can’t breathe’

The third was the murder of George Floyd. In his final moments, whilst gasping for breath, he hollered the words: “I can’t breathe”. A rallying cry for the Black Lives Matter movement and one that echoes so many other lives lost to acts of police brutality. A cry and subsequent death that sparked mass protests and rallies around the world. The largest civil unrest since the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr in 1968.

These moments have deeply affected the writing and researching of this thesis. They have destabilised my thinking, doing and being in the world; throwing into relief how entangled breath-bodies and worlds are. This chapter explores the practice of mindfulness of the breath in order to offer a critique of McMindfulness and in doing so I offer new alternative ways of conceptualising a mindful subjectivity. Starting the empirical sections with the breath is an attempt to ground the thesis in a respiratory ontology, in order to privilege and remember the role of the breath. In this way, breathing and thinking become

one and as a consequence these words are used interchangeably. As we will see, breathing can be understood as spirit or life, and thus, a life has been lived through these words – they have not been written by a neutral, objective, detached mind. But, instead, by a fleshy, emotional, tearful, anxious body that emerges with the breath and world. Knowledge is grown through movement (Ingold 2010), in this case, the rhythm of the conscious breath. Breathing is a way of thinking and knowing. These words are breath.

This chapter is prompted by autoethnographic engagements with mindfulness, namely the practice of mindful breath-based meditations. I offer an intervention that hopes to link mindfulness-based breathing practices to wider political and social justice issues. This is important as it overcomes the individualism and depoliticisation of McMindful arguments. Thus, from the beginning of this thesis, I situate my arguments in broader conversations and debates within and beyond (health) geography. In terms of structure, firstly, I offer some initial thoughts around breath and its current use in cultural and health geography and surrounding disciplines. Here, I begin to think with the airy poetics (Engelmann 2015) and politics of breath. Secondly, as a guide for the thesis, I explain and attempt to define mindfulness of the breath by drawing on Buddhist authors, thinkers and practitioners. Next, I breathe with the McMindfulness thesis, arguing that the argument of McMindfulness is premised on a particular notion of subjectivity in which the exteriority and interiority of the subject is separate, and how the very materiality of the body and breath is forgotten. Instead, I think with Deleuze's (2006) reading of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, to understand how mindfulness is a fold or practice of folding. Here, I meditate on the ways that this form of folding can be experienced as transformative.

7.2. What can the breath do?

The breath is both expiration and inspiration; life begins with an inhalation and ends with an exhalation. It is biological (physical bodily act of inhalation and exhalation), cosmic (wind and atmosphere), communal (a foundation of life), and spiritual (Skof and Holmes 2013). There are also differences in breath: rhythms and pace; lung and respiratory capacities; and cyborgian technologies and respiratory aids which aid and alter the way of breathing (Gorska 2018). Spiritual meanings of breathing have been recognised across eras and civilisations (Edwards 2005). Etymologically, breath derives from the Latin *spiritus* (or spirit, see James (1904)) which when linked to *pneuma* means 'breath of life' (Marmasse 2009). The breath cannot be reduced to air or vital energy – as for the Ancient Greeks it was also a metaphysical question (Nieuwenhuis 2018). For them, breathing was that which constituted the living, separated from the non-living or dead/dying, and 'it was in breathing that humans find their specific subjectivity' (ibid, 201). Following this initial provocation, Nieuwenhuis explores the (bio)politics of breathing throughout history, demonstrating the ways in which *pneuma* became secularised through the Cartesian thought of Descartes subordinating it to the concept of the mind. Consequently, respiration was 'relegated to a lesser ontological order' (ibid, 202), whilst air was materialised through science and scientific measurement.

The separation of the mind and body, or above the breath from the mind, by Cartesian thought and the privileging of mind over body are discourses that have historically pervaded the discipline of geography[12] (Longhurst 1997;

[12] However, it is important to note here that whilst this narrative may be true for the white, Western discipline of geography that was founded on colonial knowledge and the exploitation and violence of indigenous peoples. Yet, this is not necessarily a universal vision of geographical knowledge about the body (for more, see Sundberg (2014)).

2001). Yet, Robyn Longhurst has troubled this separation and also the masculinist, ableist, clean, and coherent visions of the body. She argues for more attention to the 'corporeogeographies' – the messiness, fluidity, and porousness of fleshy corporeality. Corporeogeographies describe how the body emerges through its relationships with the world: the 'processual folding, or intertwining, of levels from which our sensibilities arise' (Anderson and Wylie 2009, 33). For some time geographers have been interrogating the limits and boundaries of the body to unsettle dualisms between mind and body. As Abrahamsson and Simpson (2011, 332) describe:

> 'for geographers, the body becomes a matter of concern because of the ways in which it is relationally coupled with space and time: it is what constantly changes and still endures; it is part of what we have and part of what we are; it is worked upon from an outside and worked with from an inside; it is done in scientific and everyday practices; it is constituted by socio-cultural inscriptions and by evolutionary-neuronal forces'

In this account, it is important to highlight how corporeogeographies helps us configure the differentiated body through multiple categories of gender, age, race, and dis/ability. It is a bodily philosophy that signals a nomadic subject that is both differentiated and situated (Colls 2012; Braidotti 1994).

Longhurst's (2001) work on corporeogeographies focuses on the messy, turbulent, leaky, and porous elements of the body: farting, bleeding, urinating, vomiting, and so on. However, in her work the banal and mundane examples of the porous body are forgotten, namely, and for the sake of this chapter, the breath. Here, we are no longer considering what the breath is, but rather what the breath *does*. Breath by its very nature disrupts the Cartesian idea of bodily

boundaries and the separation of the mind/body: it is ‘a force that challenges conventional boundaries and opens up possibilities of reimagining what it means to be an embodied *posthumanist* subject who is not *in* the world but is [..] *of* the world’ (Gorska 2018, 250, original emphasis).

Breath is an essential vital rhythm and background to life, yet as Skof and Berndtson (2018) and Irigaray (1999) argue, it has been *forgotten* in much Anglo-European philosophy. But, it is ‘not enough to think, but also one must breathe’ (Elias Canetti in Skof and Berndtson 2018, x). Western philosophical tradition has forgotten the breath, making the dualism and abstraction of the self from the world possible. To (re)unite the body and mind we need respiratory philosophies, or breathful philosophies (ibid).

In (cultural and health) geography the breath is partially forgotten – which may speak to the continued dualism of the mind/body in the discipline and the anxious attempt to bridge this divide. This omission of the breath in health geography is a curious one. Breath has long been associated with health and life more broadly. It is a core physiological need, but this vitality is often forgotten. For example, deep breathing is connected to prevention of illness and promotion of health through the alleviation of physical and mental stress (Edwards 2005). It can affect the chemico-biological rhythms of the body: slowing and deepening the pulse, balancing blood pressure, oxygenating blood, to name a few.

Yet, respiratory rhythms in health geography are only remembered or made conscious in moments of discomfort or lack of breath whilst experiencing breathlessness or ‘over breathing’ due to physical exertion through accounts of walking along the South-West coastal path (Wylie 2005), swimming laps (Ward

2017), cycling up mountains (Spinney 2011), running on uneven terrain (Lorimer 2012), or even as a physiological response to fear (Andrews 2007). Yet, contrastingly, Kern (2012) draws on the yogic use of asana breath in her investigation of the gentrification of Toronto through embodied, emotional practices. Elsewhere, Hodgson and Hitchings (2018) consider the perception of air pollution for recreational runners in London. Although running is understood as a healthy activity, the environments and physical atmospheres in which people run may not be conducive to health. In their study, the authors show that getting 'fresh air' and learning to control breathing through techniques were important to the runners. Yet, the runners did not question how 'fresh' the air was.

Moreover, there is a small amount of geographical work that thinks with the breath. For instance, Sasha Engelmann (2015, 432) effectively demonstrates the possibilities of an airy poetics as 'a mode of reflection and attention to the affective materiality of being-in-air'. Her work signals the dissolution of bodily-worldly boundaries towards the conception of a posthuman subject through the discussion of *Breathe*, a collaboratory art-science project based on the effects of air pollution on infant respiratory health in the Tower Hamlets. Furthermore, Cockayne *et al.* (2019) begin to consider the topologies of the encounter through the breath – alluding to the ways in which the breath complicates notions of the interior and exterior, and the formation of subjectivity.

Elsewhere, the lived experience of breath, breathing, and breathlessness has been taken seriously through an inter/transdisciplinary and collaborative Wellcome Trust funded project, 'The Life of Breath' (Malpass et al. 2019). Connected to this project are edited volumes that explore the possibilities for a

respiratory philosophy (Skof and Berndtson 2018) and the re-working of the breath-full thought of Luce Irigrary (Skof and Holmes 2013). Notably, in anthropology, Tim Ingold (2010) explores the constitution of the material body through its relationship and emergence with the air. The body walks, feels, breathes and knows through the air – knowledge is grown through our interaction with air and weather.

Turning back to Cockayne *et al.* (2019), we are aware that thinking with the breath, and breathing into thought, is a post-phenomenological and posthuman achievement; as: 'it is as though the atomic unity of the subject were exposed outside by breathing, by divesting its ultimate substance even to the mucous membrane of the lungs, continually splitting up.' (Levinas 1989, 97). This breath-full thought, and airy poetics, 'is not to turn away from the questions of the social and political' (Engelmann 2015, 431). But is instead, an embodied politics and poetics. One that can disrupt systems of thought that aided and abetted colonialism and the dispossession of peoples and lands, structures that have been ingrained into our institutions and ways of life (Shahjahan 2015). And can open us out to the ways we are intrinsically imbricated with other human and nonhuman others – particularly in the phase of a 'mass extinction' (Extinction Rebellion n.d.), or 'biological annihilation' (Ceballos et al. 2017).

Turning towards the breath becomes vital in an era of environmental destruction. In which the very air and oxygen we depend on to breathe is being threatened by the rapid decline of coral populations by acidification, dredging and pollution of the oceans (Loria 2018). Consequently, the right to breathe clean, safe, non-polluted air is in jeopardy – particularly amongst minority communities and people of colour. For instance, Pearce *et al.'s* (2006) study

shows that pollution in Christchurch, New Zealand, is significantly higher among disadvantaged communities and those producing the higher proportion of pollution in the city are not the ones who are exposed to high levels. Moreover, in *Noxious New York*, Sze (2006) charts the environmental justice movement in New York City that has been driven by the high rates of asthma in minority communities, which has been equated to environmental racism. Cleary breathing is not equal. The access to safe air to breathe is a contemporary political and ethical trouble.

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Pause, check, how does your body feel as you read this? And then…

'Breathe in. Did you realize that in our time, there are more harmful pollutants in the air than ever before – chemical, biological pollutants, things that cause allergic reactions, poisons? Breathe out.' (Tchudi, 1993, n.p.)

—

There is also a political and hopeful aspiration to have the space to breathe amongst everyday violent conditions that these forces perpetuate. The phrase 'I can't breathe' was uttered by both George Floyd and Eric Garner in their last moments. These moments became pivotal for the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States. On 17th July 2014 Garner was violently arrested, officers choked him to death, pressing his head down into the pavement. Again, on 25th May 2020, George Floyd was murdered by four policemen in Minneapolis. Their final cry was a literal description of their in-ability to breathe due to the pressure exerted on their throats by police officers. But the words 'I can't breathe' also ignited something more, speaking in a metaphorical sense to the challenges

and violences Black people face in a hostile environment where their very ability to breathe freely is being prevented by the denial of their civil rights (Aymer 2016). Garner's 'world got smaller and smaller every single day' with so much pressure coming at him from 'all sides in his last days, until finally he was literally crushed under the weight of it all' (Taibbi 2018, 118). And so to be able to breathe freely in this sense is the ability to endure:

> 'I think the struggle for a bearable life is the struggle for queers to have space to breathe. Having space to breathe, or being able to breathe freely […] is an aspiration. With breath comes imagination. With breath comes possibility. If queer politics is about freedom, it might simply mean the freedom to breathe.' (Ahmed 2010, 120).

But, along with the enclosing danger of the climate emergency that is disproportionately affecting communities of colour, along with the disproportionate effects that COVID-19 has had on Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups in the UK[13], the ability to breathe safely is also threatened by the very polluted air that is in/exhaled (Tremblay 2019). In this context, 'I can't breathe' is thus an issue of white supremacy, structural racism, and environmental destruction.

> '…between covid19 and the gut wrenching experience of fighting for our lives, black people can't seem to catch a breath. So in protest I inhaled and exhaled my way through the last 48 hours. Determined to catch air to be able to continue in this fight. We are not backing down, we are not letting the system exhaust us into submission. We show up again & with

[13] A report from Public Health England in June 2020 reported that 'death rates from COVID-19 were higher for Black and Asian ethnic groups when compared to White ethnic groups'. (Public Health England 2020)

strength. For ourselves and each other' (Cargle, R. @rachel.cargle (2020) "I rested up" [Instagram photograph]. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/CA8pFWPH-I4/?igshid=kfehpbjoctwv)

However, I argue that by consciously turning towards the breath we can realise an ethical potential or opening. One that widens witnessing beyond the human (Engelmann 2015) linking ourselves to the environment; and as the cultivation of a specific force or energy that is a political act, or 'perpetual choice' (Skof and Berndtson 2018). Retreating to the breath can be a radical refusal of the forces of neoliberal governmentality and white supremacy that ingrain a Protestant work ethic and 24/7 culture (Crary 2014). To catch a breath is to find space, to rest, to restore. For some, coming to stillness and slowness through the breath is a form of embodied politics that works to disrupt the 'cult of speed' (Honore 2010, 3) – the very pace that capitalism demands. As ultimately, all you *have* to do is breathe.

Having the freedom to breathe might involve cultivating consciousness of respiration through embodied breathful pedagogies. Shahjahan (2015, 499) argues that critical embodied pedagogies, such as mindfulness, can be used to decolonise the corporeal schema by slowing down 'to access alternative sources of knowledge, including embodied ways of knowing'. Furthermore, this is particularly salient for marginalised communities, in particular Black women, who bear the weight of racism, imperialism, capitalism, and white supremacy (Caldera 2020). Wyatt and Ampadu (2021) offer mindfulness as part of a self-care toolkit for Black wellness. There is a long history of radical self-care practices in Black feminist thought (Caldera 2020, Nayak 2020), particularly inspired by Audre Lorde's (1988) writings. Mindfulness is being used in various

engaged ways to lean into racial discomfort (Wong 2004; Black 2017), as a skill for racial justice (Magee 2019), and as emotional self-management for activists (C. Barker et al. 2008).

Although I foreground these critical uses of mindfulness and breath-ful pedagogies, mindfulness is a controversial topic. The current 'mindfulness movement' has been thoroughly critiqued, and variously treated as 'McMindfulness' by the social sciences and humanities (Purser 2019). These arguments thoroughly shaped my initial encounter with the practice. They left me feeling hopeless and disenchanted. But as the research developed I became angry with these critiques. I witnessed the ways that mindfulness is a transformative practice, both in the lives of my participants and in my own. Here, mindfulness might be a way of cultivating the space and ability to breathe freely.

Mindfulness, however, is a complex and contested term, one that holds a variety of meanings. There is no commonly agreed upon way of approaching mindfulness – it is not stable or coherent. The multiplicity of mindfulness means that it is challenging to grasp. For my research, the meaning of mindfulness developed and was fluid. Initially, I understood it as a meditation practice and one that I greatly struggled with. But as the research developed, mindfulness for me and my participants became understood as a way of living. One that greatly informed their everyday lives. In the next section, I explore mindfulness of the breath.

7.2.1. Exploring mindfulness of the breath

> ‘And how does a monk live contemplating the body in the body? Herein, monks, a monk having gone down to the forest, to the foot of a tree or to an empty place, sits down, with his legs crossed, keeps his body erect and his mindfulness alert. Ever mindful he breathes in, and mindful he breathes out.’ (Hanh 1991, 112).

The excerpt above is the beginning lines of the ‘mindfulness of the breathing’ meditation translated from the Satipatthana Sutta by Thich Nhat Hanh. In this section I will further explain the practice of mindfulness of the breath, drawing writings and translations from Buddhist monks including Thich Nhat Hanh, Bhikku Anālayo, and Bhante Guaratana. I seek to cite beyond Jon Kabat-Zinn’s work on this matter, as it has been variously (and at times over-) employed across the social sciences, including geography (see Whitehead et al. (2016)). Moreover, I do not seek to limit mindfulness, or the practice of mindfulness of the breath through my writing, but inevitably I will – here is a working definition[14] based on the literature I have encountered on my journey with the practice

The Satipatthana Sutta means attending with mindfulness (Anālayo 2003, 29), and it is the four presences[15] of mindfulness as set out by Buddhist scripture, which is traditionally considered to have delivered by the Buddha or one of his disciples to an audience of bhikkhus and bhikkunis (Gunaratana 2012). Yet, as Hanh (1997) and Gunaratana (2012) argue, the four presences should not be

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[14] For more on working definitions of mindfulness, see McCown, Reibel, and Micozzi (2010)
[15] Presences is used here, but it is often translated as foundations. But as Anālayo (2003) explains that the use of the word ‘foundation’ in this context connotes there being a cause or goal, moving the emphasis from the activity itself to the object or goal of that activity. But the use of the language of ‘presence’ and ‘attending’ gives voice to the processual nature of the practice. Yet, here I use them interchangeably.

limited to the use of monks and nuns, they advocate for the use of the practice by laypeople and that the ancient practice is applicable in the contemporary world. Mindfulness as *sati* is understood as a form of awareness, or remembering, in order to pay 'direct, non-verbal attention to what is happening from moment to the next' (Guaranta 2012, 3), it is an '*embodied and ethically sensitive practice of present moment recollection*' (Stanley 2013a, 65, original emphasis). In which we 'look deeply in order to see the essence of things', to gain great 'insight and understanding' to realise 'liberation, peace, and joy' (Hanh 1997, 37).

The four presences, or foundations include:

1. Mindfulness of the body
2. Mindfulness of feelings
3. Mindfulness of the mind
4. Mindfulness of Dharma/Dhamma

The first foundation is mindfulness of the body, which includes mindfulness of the breath, postures, and movements, via analyses of the body in its anatomical parts and elements, to contemplating a corpse in decay (Anālayo 2003, 17). Thich Nhat Hanh (1997) offers four breath exercises contained in this foundation: conscious breathing; following the breath; oneness of body and mind; and calming.

Conscious breathing is the first practice to bring the breath into awareness. It is used as a way to ground bodily consciousness and bring us into the present in order to carry out the subsequent exercises. Breathing is not something we habitually notice – unless we lack breath by physical exertion or physical and

mental aliments causing us to become out of breath, or breathless – for many it is an automatic, unconscious rhythm. But mindfulness of the breath asks us to make the unconscious conscious: 'When we breathe in, we know that we are breathing in. When we breathe out, we know that we are breathing out' (ibid).

To have the breath in our awareness, to be mindful of the breath, is to come back to our body to realise the body-mind connection and to bring us into the present moment. And as such, and through the exercises of 'following the breath' and 'oneness of body and mind', we can begin to explore how the rhythm of the breath are connected to and connects our body, mind, emotions, moods, and energies. Breath can also be used as a calming technique to cultivate feelings of peace and joy. By consciously inhaling and exhaling in a regular, smooth, and light way, the body responds: 'When we breathe in, we can feel the breath entering our body and calming all the cells of our body. When we breathe out, we feel the exhalation taking with it all our tiredness, irritation, and anxiety' (ibid, 46). In this way mindfulness is not a private, inner state of mind (as some might argue), but both an inner and outer practice – so that it unifies the body and mind, rather than creating divides between them (Stanley 2013a). 'The meditator is advised to explore the process of [their] own breathing as a vehicle for realising our inherent connectedness with the rest of life' (Gunaratana 2011, 36).

This form of awareness has a distinctly ethical function, as it 'allows us to see whether our actions spring from beneficial or harmful impulses' (Guarantana 2012, 2). It is a mode of embodied ethics that can enable reflexivity and reflection. In Buddhism, the practice of 'right mindfulness' is the seventh factor of enlightenment on Buddha's Eightfold Path. Right mindfulness is a practice of

contemplation, to 'closely observe' in a repeated way (Anālayo 2003). Here, there are set of particular mental qualities to cultivate, including becoming: diligent, clearly knowing, mindful, and free from desires and discontent (ibid, from figure 2.1, 34). Thus, it is used as a way to explore the relationship between the mind and body, as a form of a folding or reflexivity (Pagis 2009). Cultivating this form of reflexivity is foundational to the continued development of mindfulness. For example, the breath as an ever present faculty can be used as a calming 'anchor' into which one can use to ground into the body to explore different sensations, including discomfort, difficulty or even trauma (see Brach (2003) for a further discussion and guided meditations). Moreover, the breath can be used as a way to dissolve attachments to a particular idea of subjectivity, or sense of self (Malpass et al. 2019).

In this section, I have acknowledged the role and practice of mindfulness of the breath, arguing that it is a foundational practice that allows meditators to inhabit the body-mind. It is understood as a form of self-reflexivity, in which the individual consciously turns towards themselves through a process of self-knowledge and self-monitoring (Pagis 2009, 266). However, this turning is not an orientation inwards, but rather one that bridges the mind and body through the breath. The breath is the hinge that bridges worlds.

7.3. Forgetting of the breath in McMindfulness

> 'Mindfulness is the latest iteration of capitalist spirituality whose lineage dates back to the privatisation of religion in Western societies' (Purser 2019, 18).

As we have seen in the previous chapters, across the critical social sciences and humanities, mindfulness has been interrogated and analysed as one of the central practices that exist in the neoliberal therapeutic cultures of late modernity. Although the McMindfulness thesis is an important one that addresses the use of mindfulness across institutions and lives, it is not geographically located or differentiated and primarily relies on discourse analysis to come to its conclusions. It assumes that there is one stable and coherent form of mindfulness. It is an argument infused with disenchantment. Yet, through the literature review I have shown that McMindfulness is not the whole story. Similarly, although there has been a lot of work in the mindfulness movement to standardise and McDonaldize the practice making it efficient, calculable, predictable, controllable and capitalizable (Hyland 2017) to fit within a rational scientific ontology, it is *not* one thing, but a constellation of forms dependent on the assembly of bodies (both human and nonhuman).

Moreover, the McMindfulness argument is premised on a particular mode of selfhood that assumes a distinct and separable inside and outside, both of which can be completely captured and produced through neoliberal regimes. And although elements of McMindfulness argument can be found throughout the contemporary mindfulness zeitgeist (such as the whiteness of the movement), I think the totality of the neoliberal argument obscures the myriad of other forms of mindfulness, lines of flight, and possibilities for alternate modes of subjectivity. I have hope that there is more to mindfulness than McMindfulness. To further this argument, I move to the notion of the 'fold' found in Deleuze's (2006) reading of Foucault's *History of Sexuality:*

> ‘the concept of the fold or pleat suggests a way in which we might think of an internality being brought into existence in the human being without postulating and prior interiority, and thus without binding ourselves to a particular version of the law of this interiority whose history we are seeking to diagnose and disturb’ (N. Rose 1998, 37).

The concept of the fold allows us to trouble existing accounts of subjectivity offered by the McMindfulness argument that assume a simple exteriority and interiority (O’Sullivan 2010). In this way, ‘folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside *of* the outside.’ (Deleuze 2006, 96–97). The subject is always double, as it is never simply a ‘projection of the interior’, but an ‘interiorization of the outside’ (ibid, 98). Thus, the fold is the relationship that one has to oneself as a form of self-mastery, and through the process of folding and doubling a relation emerges. As O’Sullivan explains there are various modalities of folds, in which subjectivity comes to be understood as a topology of different folds (2010, 107). Yet, these folds ‘incorporate *without totalizing*, internalize without unifying, collect together discontinuously in the form of pleats making surfaces, spaces, flows, and relations’ (N. Rose 1998, 37). We become aware of our subjectification and biography precisely through the momentary stabilisation of infolding (ibid).

One of these folds is memory, it ‘is the real name of the relation to oneself, or the affect of the self by the self’ (Deleuze 2006, 107). Going back to the etymology of mindfulness as memory or remembering, we can see that mindfulness constitutes as a kind of fold, or folding through the process of remembering. It is a form of relationship to the self which does not pre-suppose

any distinct interiority or exteriority, but instead folds the two. Moreover, the fold is a way of interrogating the production of subjectivity in a creative fashion – thinking about the production of more-than-human modes of subjectification (O'Sullivan 2010). The breath is an example of the creative potential of folding. It troubles the very notion of exteriority and interiority (Cockayne et al. 2019), whilst providing a living 'hinge' (Leder 2018) that holds together the double: the conscious and unconscious body, the voluntary and involuntary, and of course, the interiority and exteriority of subjects.

Berndtson (2018) explores the Zen breathing practice of Zazen through the work of Shunryu Suzuki – which could be viewed as a creative form of subjectification. Through mindful awareness, or Zazen, we can come to a new point of view. This realisation is produced through coming into contact with the infolding and folding, the 'limitless world, or 'swinging door' of the breath, where 'air comes in and goes out like someone passing through a swinging door' (Suzuki n.d.). In this process, the very notion of the self is dissolved, and all that remains is a 'limitless world of aerial exchange' (Berndtson 2018, 30). There is no longer 'I breathe', only the movement of the breath as it passes through living beings:

> 'What we call "I" is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale. It just moves; that is all. When your mind is pure and calm enough to follow this movement, there is nothing: no "I," no world, no mind nor body; just a swinging door.' (Suzuki n.d.).

For me, it is clear that previous investigations and critiques of mindfulness have simply forgotten the breath. For with an argument that is underpinned by a non-dualistic breathful ontology or philosophy, it would be a challenge to reify the

separation of the exterior and interior. Moreover, the McMindfulness thesis has overemphasised and made rigid a particular form of mindfulness (of which there are many) and also the dominance of neoliberal modes of subjectification – as folding can 'incorporate without *totalising*' (N. Rose 1996, 37).

Deleuze also questions the current modes of subjectification and queries the potentiality of 'the slow emergence of a new Self as a centre of resistance' (2006, p.115). Although he was referring to the new kinds of personhoods emerging in the 1960s based on experiments in ways of living, drug use, and emergence of new technologies (O'Sullivan 2010), radical mindfulness advocates argue there is potential and a need for different forms of subjectivity and politics (for more see Gilbert 2017; London Radical Mindfulness n.d.). Similarly, Rosi Braidotti (1994, 25) proposes a 'nomadic consciousness' which is 'a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self'. There is a political precedent here, that seeks to re-think the unity of the subject, to link body and mind 'in a new set of intensive and often intransitive transitions' (ibid, 31). It is a subject as a network of inter-related points, one that is both situated and differentiated (Colls 2012; Braidotti 1994). The nomadic subject is not 'devoid of unity', but is through 'cohesion engendered by repetitions, cyclical moves, rhythmical displacement' (Braidotti 1994, 22). As Rachel Colls (2012, 434) writes, Braidotti's 'commitment to the emergence of different knowledges […] are productive […] new ways of thinking about the world.' In the next section, I think through the production of alternative forms of subjecthood through considering Foucault's care for the self alongside feminist writings on the subject.

7.4. Care of the self

For Carrette and King (2005, 28), spirituality is ‘being appropriated by business culture to serve the interests of corporate capitalism and worship at the altar of neoliberal ideology’. Part of this is the association between spirituality and individualism, in which spirituality emphasises the interior life of the individual. Here, the individual becomes enclosed as independent, autonomous and self-contained, which establishes the ‘the impermeable boundaries of the modern, individual self’ and in doing so, undermines ‘an awareness of interdependence and erodes our sense of solidarity with others’ (ibid, 41). These arguments about spirituality have also been used in relation to mindfulness (Purser 2019).

Acts of spirituality and the associated processes of healing, or self-care, have been relegated to a culture of narcissism and individualism in late capitalism by cultural pessimists. Foucault (1997, 284) acknowledges the contemporary suspicion of practices of ‘care for the self’; he writes that ‘being concerned with oneself was readily denounced as a form of self-love, a form of selfishness or self-interest in contradiction with the interest to be shown in others or the self sacrifice required’. However, as MacKian (2012) argues, in reference to spirituality, subjects are more than narcissistic consumers of ‘spirituality lite’. Her work takes seriously lived experiences with spirituality and spiritual practices. In this thesis I would like to do the same with mindfulness.

‘Care for the self’ derives from Foucault's (1997) lectures on ‘Hermeneutic of the Subject’ and refers to ‘ancient practices which aim for self for self-improvement in relation to an ethical way of life’ (Vintges 2010, 102).

> ‘He focused on Greek and Roman techniques of the self and their intersection with early Christian processes of self-cultivation. These were disciplinary practices by means of which individuals attempted to transform themselves in order to attain particular states of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality’ (Spargo 1999, 24)

It is the relationship to the self where one ‘takes pains’, ‘strives’ and ‘works to make oneself better, creatively’ (Murray 2007, 8). Care of the self is not a principle but a constant practice; it is ‘therefore not just a momentary preparation for living; it is a form of living’ (Foucault 1997, 96). This lived ethics involves bodily elements, acts and behaviour – it is not about moral codes and rules, but rather ‘practices of freedom’ that are used for creative ethical self-fashioning (Vintges 2010). Importantly, these practices of freedom are ‘not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group.’ (Foucault 1997, 291). Care of the self was both a duty and a technique – a basic obligation and a set of carefully worked-out procedures (ibid, 95).

Care for the self has three functions. The first is a ‘critical function’ which pertains to undoing or unlearning bad habits, false or unhelpful opinions (Foucault 1997, 97). The second is the ‘function of struggle’. Here, care for the self is likened to an ongoing and ‘permanent battle’ of self-cultivation. Finally, the third function is ‘curative and therapeutic’ (ibid). This function is about how to broadly ‘live better’ – it is not a final truth or ending point, but rather the journey of life (Lea 2009). Care for the self is ethical – rather than closing down bodily possibilities and lines of flight, it opens them up as a process of

experimental self-cultivation wherein relations and knowledge can always be expanded. It is the question of how to live.

Moreover, care for the self ‘implies complex relationships with others insofar as this ethos of freedom is also a way of caring for others’ (Foucault 1997, 287). Attending to oneself is a means in which to attend to others. Here, care is not instrumental – it does not go in one direction. Rather, it is already ‘implicated in its return-to-self’ (Murray 2007, 9). This means that the self’s relation with itself is chiasmatic, it never coincides with itself. If it did coincide it would be a ‘technical’ care, one that followed ‘best practices’ (ibid). But rather, care for the self is creative and open, it ‘inaugurates a self that strives to open up a plurality of relations, a multiplicity of possibilities within which that self might relate caringly not only to itself, but to those others in its care’ (ibid, 15).

In Foucault’s later work, spirituality became understood as a form of care for the self – as ‘the subject’s attainment of a certain mode of being and the transformations that the subject must carry out on itself to attain this mode of being’ (1997, 294). Foucault develops the notion of political spirituality, as a ‘free ethical self-transformation’ (Vintges 2010, 106) – it is an ‘exit’, ‘a critical alternative to the “normal” Western subject formations of the rational autonomous individual and the deep self’. Thus, spirituality or care for the self is more complicated than a simple folding inwards to interiority. It is instead the ethical relationship and reversibility between interiority and exteriority, the two are double and infold each other. Care for the self is intrinsically imbricated with care for others. But, care for others does not precede care for the self.

7.4.1. Faithfulness to oneself

However, in *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz (1994) unpacks the ways in which Foucault closes off the possibility for care for the self for women:

> 'It was an ethics for men: an ethics thought, written and taught by men and addressed to men - to free men, obviously' (Foucault in Grosz, 1994, 158).

She responds by saying:

> 'Foucault himself closes off this possibility, however, by implying that there was not a corresponding ethics of women's self-production during the classical age: he claims that women had to wait until the advent of "ethics of material relations" in the Middle Ages, as if questions of moral self-regulation were not relevant to women up to this period. His work has not left a space for the inclusion of women's accounts and representations of the various histories of their bodies that could be written' (Grosz, 1994, 58-9).

> 'these metaphors must be refigured, their history in and complicity with the patriarchy effacement of women made clear, if there is to remain something of insight or strategic value in these texts' (ibid, 159).

It is not just about refiguring metaphors for women, there is a need for an *intersectional* ethics of care for the self. This might be found in Braidotti's (2012, 306) *Nomad Ethics* where the term 'faithfulness to oneself' is introduced, or through Black feminist thought on self-care (Wyatt and Ampadu 2021; Caldera 2020). Faithfulness to oneself is not predicated on a 'mark of authenticity self that is a clearinghouse for narcissism and paranoia'. But rather it is:

> ‘the faithfulness of mutual sets of interdependence and interconnections, that is to say, sets of relations and encounters. It is a play of complexity that encompasses all levels of one’s multilayered subjectivity, binding the cognitive to the emotional, the intellectual to the affective, and connecting them all to a socially embedded ethics of sustainability. Thus the faithfulness that is at stake in nomadic ethics coincides with the awareness of one’s condition of interaction with others, that is to say, one’s capacity to affect and to be affected. Translated into a temporal scale, this is the faithfulness of duration, the expression of one’s continuing attachment to certain dynamic spatio-temporal coordinates (Braidotti 2012, 306-7).

This feminist geography of affectation runs along latitudinal and longitudinal lines:

> ‘The latitudinal and longitudinal forces that structure the subject have limits of sustainability. By latitudinal forces Deleuze means the affects a subject is capable of, following the degrees of intensity or potency: how intensely they run. By longitude is meant the span of extension: how far they can go. Sustainability is about how much of it a subject can take.
>
> In other words, sustainable subjectivity reinscribes the singularity of the self, while challenging the anthropocentrism of Western philosophy’s understanding of the subject and of the attributes usually reserved for “agency.” This sense of limits is extremely important to ensure productive synchronizations and prevent nihilistic self-destruction. To be active, intensive, or nomadic does not mean that one is limitless.’ (ibid, 307).

Bradoitti's faithfulness to oneself offers a sustainable ecology of the self. One that is careful and attentive to limits and boundaries. There is only so much we can give to the world. Faithfulness to oneself is not about turning away from bad feeling. But rather learning how we are affected by what comes near. Affectation in this sense is about orientation, turning points, position, and location. Yet, it is not to say that affectation must *always* be about turning towards bad or negative feeling. As Braidotti (2012) notes, the 'emphasis on "existence" implies a commitment to duration and a rejection of self-destruction.' Here, 'positivity is built into this programme though the idea of thresholds of sustainability' (ibid, 308). Affects of joy, enchantment, and magic are needed in order to sustain a nomad ethics or ethical thinking/doing/being/becoming:

> 'an ethically empowering option increases one's potential and creates joyful energy in the process. The conditions that can encourage such a quest are not only historical; they all concern processes of self-transformation or self-fashioning in the direction of affirming positivity.' (ibid, 308).

However, happiness and positivity are cruel objects or cravings of attachment or desire. They are vampiric, sucking us dry as we crave for (hetero)normative happiness and maintain this through acts of (toxic) positivity. This links with Buddhist understandings of suffering, where our tendency to cling or crave positive experiences and avoid negative ones is where suffering lies (M.-J. Barker and Lantaffi 2019). Barker and Lantaffi (2019) offer embracing uncertainty and non-binary thinking as the middle-way through the dualism of positive/negative experiences.

As Lauren Berlant writes of a cruel optimism and Sara Ahmed speaks of a desire of heteronormative happiness: ‘we need to think about unhappiness as more than a feeling that should be overcome.’ (Ahmed 2010, 217). Furthermore, following Ahmed, unhappiness should not be turned away from, rather, that it might open out us to possibilities of becoming *differently*. Here we might attend to idea of the killjoy or the unhappy queer.

> ‘When I think of what makes happiness “happy” I think of moments. Moments of happiness create texture, shared impressions: a sense of lightness in possibility. Just think of those moments where you are brought to life by the absurdity of being reminded of something, where a sideways glance can be enough to create a feeling that ripples through you. Two people burst out with laughter by the recollection of an event. Just a word can prompt such recollection, a gesture, anything.’ (Ahmed, 2010, 219)

Although I agree with Ahmed, I would rather use the word joy or joyful (she even begins to recuperate the word silly!). Joy provides us with a sense of enchanting possibility. It opens something up from the mundane. Here I think of the Buddhist Steven Batchelor whose work touches on the mindful notion of the ‘everyday sublime’ (Batchelor 2014). This concept asks us to dismantle our static and mono-versal world view, but in doing so to also ‘embrace suffering and conflict, rather than to shy away from them.’ (ibid, 38). In order to do this we must embrace the four tasks (or dukkha):

1) An openhearted embrace of the totality of one’s existential situation, or fully knowing suffering
2) A willingness to let go of the habitual patterns of craving

3) Experiencing the stopping of craving
4) A commitment to a way of living that emerges from meditation and encompasses every aspect of your humanity: your vision, thoughts, words, deeds, work, application, mindfulness and concentration (ibid, 38)

What emerges from this is mindfulness as an '*ongoing cultivation of a sensibility,* a way of attending to every aspect of experience within a framework of ethical values*'* (ibid, 38, original emphasis). Here, Batchelor makes it clear that the cultivation of a mindful sensibility begins with the *recollection* of the breath and expands into awareness of whatever is occurring in one's body, mind and environment. To follow on from this, Magee (2019) offers a definition of mindfulness that includes the notion of 'steadfastness', or the 'capacity to stay in the struggle' (ibid, 33). Rather than turning away from difficult experiences and dialogues, mindfulness offers a way to turn towards the difficult and uncertain, to live with both discomfort and joy. Thus, in this thesis I contend that mindfulness is an affective practice that offers a way to practically develop and sustain a nomadic consciousness or faithfulness to oneself. Mindfulness allows us to investigate how we affect and are affected by others.

7.5. Conclusion

This chapter has attended to and critiqued the notion of McMindfulness through attention to the breath. I focused on the ways that McMindfulness offers a notion of subjectivity that separates the inner and outer. Through thinking with the breath I complicate this notion and offer an understanding of subjectification through Deleuze's concept of the fold. This allows me to argue that mindfulness might offer an ethical practice of faithfulness to oneself or care for the self, one that offers new forms of subjecthood. Through the breath, we become attentive

to both our inner and outer worlds, extending beyond our corporeal boundaries to the feelings and mental states of others, both human and non-human.

As we have seen, McMindful interventions have sought to strip the practice of its religious and Buddhist contexts, technologizing meditative practice (Batchelor 2014). However, mindfulness cannot be properly understood unless connected to the vast knowledge and insight of Buddhist practice and the dharma. Thus, in this chapter I brought in a Buddhist understanding of mindfulness of the breath to demonstrate how the practice enfolds the inner and outer (rather than separating the two). Furthermore, bringing Buddhist understandings of mindfulness into my discussion allows me to investigate the ethical functions of the practice. This is particularly salient when considering mindfulness as a form of faithfulness to oneself or an ethical practice of care for the self. The next chapter explores the therapeutic experience of mindfulness through continued focus on the breath and mindfulness-based breathing practices.

8. Therapeutic corporeogeographies of the breath: refrains, habits, dwelling

8.1. Introduction

> ‘The natural world also flows through us. We take in air, water, food, sounds and sights from the outside world. We also return parts of ourselves to the world. We sweat, breathe out and communicate. This means that not only are we made of natural elements, but that nature is also constantly flowing through us. Our skin connects us to the outside world, rather than separates from us from it […] Being mindful of our breathing is a simple experience of how we are connected to the natural world. We take in air, we give back air, and we share this air with all other living beings.’ (Thompson 2013, 25).

We emerge through breathing-with the world. The breath is the bridge that links the mind and body. Realisation of this connection is vital to the process of healing. Here, the therapeutic, health, and wellbeing are understood to mean more than the absence of disease, or ill-health. They could also be understood as those enchanting moments of wellbeing that occur in daily life, to the healing of historical trauma, or the peeling back layers of embodied-subjectivity to understand the ways in which capitalism and white supremacy have deeply affected us. This is a political intervention that does not comply with a form of capitalist realism that allows mental health conditions to be subordinated to chemico-biological factors (Fisher 2009) without considering their social formation. But instead, we can look to the ways in which feelings and affects are produced by social forces and structures (Cvetkovich 2012). And in so doing,

understands racial capitalism as a health system, as the ‘drastically unequal distribution of bodily vulnerabilities’ (Ahmed 2017, 238) which means that:

> ‘Being poor, being black, being of color puts your life at risk. Your health is compromised when you do not have the external resources to support a life in all of its contingencies. And then of course, you are deemed responsible for your own ill health, for your own failure to look after yourself better. When you refer to structures, to systems, to power relations, to walls, you are assumed to be making others responsible for the situation you have failed to get yourself out of. “You should have tried harder.” Oh, the violence and the smugness of this sentence, this sentencing.’ (ibid).

Moreover, it does not assume health to be a form of biopolitical morality; as:

> ‘Health is not a state we owe the world. We are not less valuable, worthy, or loveable because we are not healthy. Lastly, there is no standard of health that is achievable for all bodies’ (S. R. Taylor 2018, 21).

In this chapter, I am interested in ways in which breath-based mindfulness practices cultivate an embodied therapeutic experience. I focus on the ways that this therapeutic experience is structured through the refrain and rhythm of the breath. By paying attention to the breath, and cultivating the conscious breath, we come to realise the relationship between the mind and body. This relational experience can be felt as simultaneously therapeutic, difficult, and at times, overwhelming. I use the term therapeutic corporoeogeographies to signal the ways that the body emerges through its relationships with the world, and how awareness of this emergence through mindfulness is an affective

experience. Furthermore, corporeogeographies emphasises the emergent, leaky, differentiated, and vulnerable nature of corporeal existence.

In this chapter, bodily experience is explored by turning towards the breath. In the next section, I turn to how the bare refrain of the breath provides an 'anchor' that calms feelings of anxiety and stress. Following from this, I explore how the rhythm of the breath can afford us bodily capacities. I concentrate on two ways. First, I investigate the ways in which rhythm can provide a means to explore habitual thought patterns. Second, I turn to the process of *dwelling with* the body to explore the ways that the breath provides us with a self-reflexive realisation of our corporeogeography – how we come to terms with our embodied dwelling, limits, and proximities. Here, I call attention to the ways that affects and refrains affect us differently and in so doing, I breathe into discomfort, difficulty, and pain – to show that mindfulness practices never affect the body in straightforward ways.

8.2. Breath-full rhythms and refrains

8.2.1. Rhythms in health geography

> 'The rhythmanalyst calls on all her senses. She draws on her breathing, the circulation of her blood, the beatings of her heart and the delivery of her speech as landmarks. Without privileging any one of these sensations, raised by her in the perception of rhythms, to the detriment of any other. She thinks with her body, not in the abstract, but in lived temporality.' (gender modified, Lefebvre 2004, 21).

For some time, vital rhythms have been investigated in geography under the rubric of non-representational theories, including Tim Ingold's (2000; 2010)

writing on craft and landscape (e.g. Patchett 2016), Henri Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis (e.g. Spinney 2006), and geographical work that thinks with Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) concept of the refrain (e.g. Emmerson 2017; D. P. McCormack 2002). As we saw in chapter 2, over the past decade there has been fervent work to incorporate a non-representational style of thought and doing into health geography, to provide a 'practical and processual basis for its accounts of the social, the subject and the world', one that is interested in 'backgrounds, bodies and their performances' (Anderson and Harrison, 2010, 2).

As noted in chapter 2, there is currently an energetic discourse relating to rhythm in health geography, with a focus on speed, movement, activity, and imminence (Andrews 2018a). In addition to these 'speedy' rhythms, seasonal and 'natural' rhythms and their effect on health have also been investigated: the body's relationship to nature through yoga retreats (Lea, 2008), and the perception of nature by people with visual impairment (Bell 2021). These are often slower, and examples include therapeutic massage (Lea 2016), yoga (Hoyez, 2007; Lea, 2008), stillness and silence on retreat (Conradson 2013), and through self-landscape encounter (Conradson 2005).

This chapter thinks with the slower, meditative rhythms of the conscious breath. In the following section, the vital rhythm of the breath will be considered, and how 'turning towards' the refrain of the breath through mindfulness can produce new bodily capacities. In my discussion, I refer to extracts from interviews, autoethnographic fieldnotes, and transcripts of recordings from the participatory work I undertook.

8.2.2. Therapeutic rhythms of the breath

The breath is a bodily and worldly refrain. Bodies both consist of, and produce, rhythms (Lefebvre 2004). Lefebvre describes the 'eu-rhythmic' body 'composed of diverse rhythms – each organ, each function, having its own – keeps them in metastable equilibrium', and illness as a condition of 'arrhythmia' in which the rhythmic equilibrium is disturbed (2004, 20). Ingold (2000) demonstrates how rhythm produces form and structure by thinking-with the weaving of a basket. Weaving creates the topology of the surface, one that does not have an inside or outside, but, is instead a result of the play of forces both internal and external to the material that makes it up. In this way, the form of the basket emerges through a pattern of skilled movement – it is the rhythmic repetition of that movement that gives rise to the regularity of form. Consequently, it is through the refrain that a fragile structure is provided amongst a world of chaos (Emmerson 2017; D. P. McCormack 2014).

The refrain of the breath is experienced as therapeutic precisely because it provides a structure and a rhythm for the breather to keep in embodied awareness. Refrains have a 'territorialising function'; they generate 'a certain expressive consistency through the repetition of practices, techniques, and habits' (D. P. McCormack 2014, 7). It is the activity of folding, or remembering, which produces a mindful subject that becomes aware of the refrain of the breath. And although the refrain is 'radically impersonal' (ibid, 8), it is through this folding that the breath becomes (re)incorporated into the body, and as such, bodily boundaries are (re)traced. This awareness reshapes bodily capacities, and in doing so, gathers together affective relations that are felt as therapeutic, grounding, and calming during moments of anxiety and stress:

Flora: Does the breathing help you? Sort of the rhythm of it?

Clare: Yes, yeah, so I went to the dentist today and there was a half hour wait and I tried to focus on my breath 'cos I was getting more, and you know when you go to the dentist, and you don't want to go in you just want to go home, and there was a problem with a chair and they had to have an engineer in to fix this chair [laughter], so I was trying hard just to breathe in and out and in and out without getting too anxious about.. Going in…

Flora: Are you..? do you get anxious about the dentist?

Clare: Yeah I'd rather not wait!

Flora: Yeah, it makes it worse!

Clare: It's like when you're waiting at the doctors and everything is going through your head, isn't it? But I did breathe and that did help…

(25/10/2018, transcription of a discussion during the participatory 8-week course)

The exchange between the two participants, Flora and Clare, demonstrate the ways that the conscious rhythmic inhalation and exhalation of air is used to calm oneself in a situation that one finds stressful, in this case the dentist. By focusing on the bare rhythms of the breath Clare is able to connect to a feeling of calm to ease her anxiety about her appointment – an embodied affective encounter that augmented her bodily capacities to cope with the dentist encounter. The use of the breath in this way is described as an embodied 'anchor':

Chloe: So the breath for you is the fundamental..? It's what you use every day?

Gemma: Yeah, I like to describe it, because it's been described as like an anchor and I really like that phrase. I think that for me that's definitely what it's all about, the breathing is the anchor, erm, and if you keep going back to that then I find that really helpful.

Chloe: And what is it anchoring for you?

Gemma: Erm so it's a sense of being in the moment, rather than getting carried away with the thinking which could go… it could go back a few weeks, or it could go ahead a few months rather than doing that just trying to be in the moment. Erm it's, it's a lot easier said than done of course. But in general that's how I would see it.

(26/6/2019, transcription of interview with Gemma)

For these participants, the breath was a rhythm that they could always orientate towards or return to in moments of disorientation. The refrain of the breath is an affective experience, one that enhances bodily capacities through providing a momentary structure or line of direction when all else seems overwhelming and chaotic. As Bissell (2011, 2653) writes, 'habit is the comfort of recognition that permits the body to inhabit, communicate, and make its way in the world relatively easily'. By turning towards her anchor, Gemma's bodily capacities were affected, allowing her to feel more at ease with the world when previously there was a sense of disorientation. In this way, breath meditation is understood to have a 'peaceful character' which 'leads to the stability of both posture and mind' (Anālayo 2003, 121). Mental stability is understood to quiet ruminative

thinking habits; something that will be discussed in the next section. It is clear that in stilling their experience through turning towards the refrain of the breath, affective, energetic, and atmospheric relations are drawn together producing felt sensations of stillness, slowness, and calm. As to focus on rhythms is also to ‘explore their potential to participate in the active engineering of affective atmospheres’ (D. P. McCormack 2014, 8).

The thesis has already outlined the way that affect disrupts normative ideas of health in order to takes seriously the process of health in its dynamic and relational constitution (Gorman 2017), and how versions of healthfulness have come to be privileged in health geographies. In contrast to that here, I want to emphasise the corporeal vulnerability and susceptibility in being/becoming affected and to consider a ‘passive affection’ – requirement for a kind of passivity in order to be affected (Bissell 2011). The body is open to that which arrives beyond it (Butler 2004), and the ‘inherent and continuous susceptibility of corporeal life to the unchosen and unforeseen – its inherent openness to what exceeds its abilities to contain and absorb’ (Harrison 2008, 427). Thus, it is a corporeal vulnerability that opens us out to transformation. In addition, the effects of this transformation can never be known in advance and the ways affects affect bodies are never homogenous.

The breath is part of this bodily susceptibility – a folding of the exterior and interior, highlighting the interdependency of life so that the body ‘exists in its exposure and proximity to others, to external force’ (Butler 2016, 61). The breath exemplifies both the ‘*indeterminacy* of bodily boundaries’ (Gabrielson and Parady 2010, 385, original emphasis) and the vulnerability and exposure of the body and the breath. As Butler (2016, 33) argues:

> ‘In its surface and depth, the body is a social phenomenon: it is exposed to others, vulnerable by definition. It’s very persistence depends upon social conditions and institutions, which mean that in order to ‘be’, in the sense of ‘persist’, it must rely on what is outside itself’.

Mindfulness recognises this intrinsic bodily exposure and vulnerability, framed as the ‘universal vulnerability’ of human life (J. M. Williams, 2008). Rebecca Crane (2009, 3) describes mindfulness as that which ‘enables us to see and work with the universal vulnerabilities and challenges that are an inherent part of being human’. Through mindfulness practice we can come to terms with the universality of suffering to recognise and step out of the patterns that habitually perpetuate and deepen it (ibid, 4-5). The notion of suffering in this context comes from Buddhism and the Pali word, *dukkha*. Dukkha is fundamental to Buddhist teaching, being the first of the Four Noble Truths (Keown 2004). The concept of dukkha has three aspects: the first is ‘ordinary suffering’ which refers to everyday suffering such as illness or death; the second is dukkha produced by change – suffering that results from impermanence; and third is the dukkha of conditioned states.

The third aspect of dukkha is particularly important as it relates to how Buddhism understands subjectivity and the individual under the teaching of anatman or no-self (Keown 2004). Here, Buddhism understands the body to be made up of skandha, or the five aggregates, including physical form, feelings, perception, volitional factors, consciousness (ibid). It is understood that these aggregates can be deconstructed without a remainder – leading to the notion of no-self. In some ways this is similar to Deleuze and Guattari’s Body without Organs (BwO). The body being ‘an open-ended assemblage channeling

intensive flows out of which sense of subjectivity emerges as a point of accumulation' (Simpson, 2015, 71). Thus, the notion of an individual subject is part of our conditioning and the craving for this sense of self is part of dukkha. Since everything is impermanent there cannot be a unified and coherent sense of self and the desire and craving of this illusionary permanence leads to suffering (ibid).

This may paint a bleak picture, but it is argued that suffering is not nihilistic; and it is our current conditioning that allows it to be seen as such[16] (Gunaratana 2011). Instead, it is through a process of recognising and changing our relationship to universal vulnerability that we can learn to relate differently to suffering and help us to achieve enlightenment. In this context we are not trying to achieve happiness as the outcome. Happiness is an impermanent desired state which striving towards would fold us back into the cycle of dukkha – as a form of cruel optimism (Berlant 2011). Instead, it is the realisation of this cycle and of no-self that is the emancipatory aspect of this teaching. In this way, mindfulness of the breath is a method that allows us to fold differently.

By turning towards the refrain of the breath, the examples above showed that the felt intensity of the process of anchoring was a therapeutic one – affording the body capacities to act through (re)orientating the body towards different ways of relating. However, we cannot know in advance what the outcome of this practice will be – we are always precarious and made vulnerable to the

[16] Here caution is needed. Suffering can be framed under neoliberalism as an individual problem, so that you are the problem and you need to solve your problem (Cederstrom and Spicer 2015). Thus, Buddhist practice becomes enrolled into neoliberal agendas. But, in my work I seek a different meaning, one that understands the social and political causes of suffering. Here, I attend to right mindfulness that accounts for justice, both social and epistemic (Walsh 2018).

unforeseen. At times, the encounter can diminish capacities through an experience of overwhelm or discomfort, a point I will return to later.

For now, I will focus on bodily (re)orientations and new ways of relating through the encounter with the refrain of the breath, which open up possibilities for thinking otherwise (D. P. McCormack 2014). When I use the word ‘orientation’ I am drawing on, either explicitly or implicitly, the work of Sara Ahmed. For her, ‘orientations are about how we begin; how we proceed from “here”, which affect how what is “there” appears, how it presents itself. In other words, we encounter “things” as coming from different sides, as well as having different sides.’ (Ahmed 2006, 8). Fundamentally, orientations are about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places.

The previous examples show the ways that the participants used the rhythm of the breath as an anchor in everyday life. Next, I use autoethnographic accounts of formal meditations, where I am cultivating mindfulness of the breath through repeated meditation practice (both on retreats and through daily practice). By turning towards the refrain of the breath, and cultivating the ‘conscious breath’, we gain awareness of our orientation towards our bodily sensations, feelings, and thoughts. It is a process of accepting and coming to terms with our corporeal vulnerability – to understand the ways we affect and are affected and to understand how we can never separate mind and body.

Firstly, I show how, through the breath, we cultivate a different relationship to our habitual thought patterns. Here, I draw on the (post-)phenomenology of Crossley (2001), Bissell (2011), and Lea et al.'s (2015) work on habits in mindfulness meditation. Secondly, I show how cultivating the conscious breath transforms our relationship to our corporeality – to (re)inhabit the body.

Inhabiting the body here means making the body a home – a starting point for our orientation to the world. It is a double process. First, it allows us to come into contact with the relationship between feelings/thoughts and bodily sensations. Second, we can become aware of the histories of thought and feeling that have marked our body in particular ways and our relationship to elements of our fleshy corporeality. This process is both double in terms of effects – bringing both therapeutic, but also discomforting and painful experiences.

….Pause….

How are you doing?

What is present for you now?

8.3. Becoming aware of thinking habits

> ‘The thing is, everyone has habits of thinking: I tend to think of things as sets of lines to be unravelled but also to be made to intersect’ (Deleuze, 1995 in D. P. McCormack 2002, 483).

It has been argued that in a world that encourages flow, pausing is discouraged (Bissell 2011). We are overwhelmed:

> ‘In this media-drenched, data-rich, channel-surfing, computer-gaming age, we have lost the art of doing nothing, of shutting out the background noise and distractions, of slowing down and simply being alone with our thoughts […] When did you last see someone just gazing out the window on a train? Everyone is too busy reading the paper, playing video games, listening to iPods, working on the laptop, yammering into mobile phones’ (Honore, 2010, 11).

Although written a decade ago, this overwhelmed discourse is still pervasive. Yet, amongst this cult(ure) of speed, spaces have been carved out for reflection, contemplation, and meditation, including the retreat centre and the monastery. Religious and spiritual communities have long used the retreat as a process of self-interrogation to cultivate self-knowledge and awareness. Foucault (1997) describes this ancient process of retreat in relation to Plato’s Alcibiades and the notion of epimeleisthai, to take pains with oneself. The retreat is commonly understood both as a physical act of removing oneself from daily routines and habits and a mental act of turning inwards into reflection and meditation. Reflection and retreat is not solely a preserve of Ancient worlds, as retreating for self-reflection is a activity common across religions and

spiritualities (W. L. Johnson 1982; Prochnik 2010). In the contemporary context, Conradson (2007) describes the experiential economy of stillness, shedding light on the ways that these forms of reflection are enrolled in the neoliberal therapeutic cultures of late modernity.

The mindfulness movement criticises the need to constantly be caught up in the chaos of modern life. The very titles of Kabat-Zinn's bestselling books convey this sense of 'Full Catastrophe Living' and using mindfulness as a process of 'Coming to our senses'. This is a discourse of modern disenchantment, where the remedy is the enchantment of mindfulness. Yet, for the current movement, it is not just the retreat centre where we can pause to reflect and cultivate stillness. Mindfulness encourages us to perform every day informal moments of awareness whilst washing the dishes or eating an orange for example (Hanh 1991b). With neoliberal capitalism, there is now limitless potential to commodify the everyday moments of mindfulness through technology; so that smartphone applications (such as Headspace) encourage us to purchase meditations for our journeys on the train and our Apple Watch vibrates to remind us to consciously breathe.

Bissell argues that amongst a world of flow there is an imperative to still thought by being caught up in habit; a 'dampening of susceptibility to be affected by thought' (2011, 2653). But, through the mindfulness movement, specifically Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), there is also a contemporary volition to both cultivate an awareness of habits, whilst engaging directly in the present moment (Crane 2009). Of interest here is the witnessing of thinking habits including, thought patterns – the ruminative mental chatter of future planning, past worries, and anxieties to come – and the feedback between the

body and thoughts. Thus, mindfulness allows us to understand the ways in which habits are embodied into our very constitution, into our corporeal schema (Crossley 2001).

Mindfulness does not liberate ourselves from habit, but it does cultivate a particular mode of awareness towards 'negative' habits. Negative not in terms of moralistic ideals of correct or incorrect thinking, but instead in terms of those thinking habits that diminish bodily capacities to act. Ruminative forms of thinking are understood as habits that foreclose bodily possibilities to affect and be affected – and 'often align precisely with the figure of a body that is detained and carried away by habit' (Bissell 2011, 2660). As defined by Crane (2009, 11), rumination 'is a particular style of self-critical, self-focused, repetitive, negative thinking', which combined with lowered mood, experiential avoidance, and the physical sensations of fatigue and heaviness is said to constitute the experience of depression. This 'depressive world-view' shrinks worlds, diminishes capacities for social connection, so that life feels slow and numb (Hitchen and Shaw 2019). In this context, MBCT works to shift an individual's relationship to their thoughts and experience to provide a de-centred relationship, that allows the person to step out of the entanglement of ruminative thinking and low mood cycles that typify depression (Crane 2009, 12).

By folding onto ruminative thoughts and observing them through reflexive awareness, mindfulness becomes infolded into the body as part the corporeal schema so that witnessing and reflexivity become a habit in itself. Here, experiential learning is thought to provide us with metacognitive insight which involves '*directly experiencing* thoughts as events in the field of awareness',

and is contrasted against metacognitive knowledge that is '*knowing* that thoughts are not always accurate' (Crane 2009, 152; Teasdale 1999, 146). Here MBCT makes a distinction between cognitive knowledge and embodied insight. As Crossley (2001, 128) argues, we learn not by thinking about things but by *doing* and learning is the 'absorption of new competencies and understandings into the corporeal schema which, in turn, transform one's way of perceiving and acting in the world'.

Through breath-full mindful awareness we can cultivate a particular relationship with our habitual thoughts – one of witnessing and acceptance[17]. Here, acceptance should not be relegated to mere compliance, or a form of resignation (S. R. Taylor 2018).

> The meditation was loosely guided around the breath. Counting the breaths, on the in and out breath. And also naming them as the in and out breaths as we breathed. Again, I felt at ease with this meditation. My body was fairly comfortable – a feeling that corresponded with my mind as it remained fairly still. Occasionally wandering off to thoughts about future plans and lunch. But each time I was able to bring my awareness back to the breath and the movement in the body – the rise and fall of the belly and the sensations of air entering and leaving the nostrils. Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out. (20/5/2019, Barn Retreat)

By practicing conscious breathing it is understood that we are building a bridge or gateway between our mind and body – connecting the thoughts to the body.

[17] Lea et al. show that this mode of awareness is different to Crossley's understanding of reflexivity. For Crossley self-reflexivity is more of an analytic and problem-solving stance.

Of course this mode of awareness is not absolute. It is a skill to be embodied, a process of corporeal learning that means that we experience mind wandering, and old habitual patterns of thinking that ebb and fade throughout meditation. This is commonly experienced as a failure: in the beginning of our journeys with mindfulness, myself and my participants would get annoyed when our mind wandered during meditations because we felt we were not being mindful 'enough'. But, we came to understand that 'the simple act of registering that the mind has wandered, noticing where it has gone, and returning to the breath involves a sort of metacognitive motoring – seeing the thoughts as thoughts' (Segal, Williams, and Teasdale 2002, 163).

But this kind of awareness is challenging. Lea et al. (2015) explore the habitual geographies of mindfulness and show that habits are not so neatly changed or rearranged. They acknowledge the extent to which every day routines exert a resistance to change and how an individual's capacity can mean that their ability to alter habits varies. Certainly, habits endure and it can be a challenging process. For me, meditation practice was a constant process of surfacing and submerging, between mindful awareness of the body, breath, and thought patterns and getting lost with a particularly sticky thought or sensation. But, it ultimately was all about the small 'wins' or 'gains', in that re-surfacing back to the breath and body was the process of being mindful in itself.

> Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in.
>
> Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out.
>
> Breathing in and breathing out.

> Awareness of the breath and slight feeling of my heart beat. I move my shoulders around so they are supported. Hands resting palm facing down on my stomach, legs lying straight out and feet resting on the side of the heel, facing outwards. My hands can feel the rhythm of the in and out breath. Awareness of my breath as I turn my attention to the noises outside, the tension in my forehead. And then somewhere I get lost, almost in a dream. When I resurface I realised that I'd missed a lot of the guided meditation and wonder how long I wasn't practicing for. I bring my attention back to the breath and just as my thoughts wander off again the bell goes, abruptly. (22/10/2018, home practice at St Luke's Meditation Circle)

However, the everyday effort and 'discipline' required by the 8-week mindfulness programme was challenging. To incorporate formal mindfulness practice into daily life meant a negotiation of routines and schedules. Coming to the practice could be hard; the thought of stillness was paradoxically both unappealing and appealing. Craving a blissful sense of peace was instead met with troublesome thought patterns and noticing the physical manifestation of anxiety and tension in the body as I breathed. Sometimes the breath would allow these sensations to ebb-and-flow. But often they remained sticky, I felt stuck in them. At times I had a difficult relationship to formal practice itself – anxiety manifesting about what things I might come into contact with during meditation. Certainly, it's easier to still the mind through habit and unconscious breathing than it is to come into contact with it in stillness through the conscious breath.

> Then my attention slips and I'm somewhere else: (re)living out hypothetical worries and anxieties that have no material meanings, but in those moments are real. And then I find my breath again and come back to the body, scanning up to the head, and again I slip. A judgemental thought comes into my head: 'you haven't written anything, you can't do this', and my thoughts are rerouted to a different scenario filled with anxiety, judgment, and fear.
>
> I find my breath again and I understand that these thoughts are not facts, I am not these thoughts. They are just thoughts. And my attention dwells in my forehead: in the space between my eyebrows as the timer sounds. I feel agitated and irritated – I had only just got back to being mindful and the time ended. I wait until the sound ends and sit up, ready to put my shoes on and get out of the house. (8/11/2018, Body scan practice at home)

It is precisely this meta-cognitive refrain or intensity: 'thoughts aren't facts, they are just thoughts, they are not me', that provides a form of habitual de-centring and reorientation. In the vignette above, there is a gradual process of re-orientating the way I related to thoughts. Instead of, identifying them as reality, or folding through them as forms of subjectivity, I began to de-centre my sense of self from them. For example, the thought: 'I can't do this, I'm rubbish at writing'; might enact a form of subjectification and identification in which I believe that: 'I am a rubbish writer who can't write, and will never finish this thesis'. If this is/becomes a ruminative thought that circulates through the body, this then might manifest further through forms of imposter syndrome and anxiety. But instead, through mindful awareness we can relate to them

differently – to see them as just thoughts, not part of one's self or subjectivity. This affords us with capacities to act – stepping outside of negative thought cycles can be a breath of fresh air. We can get on with writing the thesis, and not be plagued by doubt or criticism that before crippled our ability to type or think.

It is a process of learning how we are affected. By returning to the breath as a hinge we can understand how the inside is made up of the outside, how affects are political and how 'feelings are produced by social forces' (Cvetkovich 2012, 14). It might be the neoliberal structures of the academy, particular regimes of discipline throughout my education, class driven expectations of educational achievement, and gendered notions of intellectual capacity that have rendered my body and thoughts as anxious and depressed. However, of course, 'saying that capitalism (or colonialism or racism) is the problem does not help me get out of bed in the morning' (ibid, 15). So instead I understand that I have the capacity to turn towards these bad feelings and change my relationship to them. To afford myself capacities to act with and through difficulty and suffering.

Elsewhere, Stanley (2012a) speaks of this orientation using the notion of 'intimate distances'. As he argues (ibid, 205), 'mindfulness involves firstly coming into closer contact with our experience, becoming more intimately aware of our experience, before secondly not identifying with that experience as a self (i.e. as 'I', 'me' or 'mine'). Experientially, one becomes intimate with experience but also distanced from the attachment of a notion of a self (i.e. an 'observer' with an inherent, independent existence) who owns that experience'. This paradoxical process of becoming intimately distant is something that I journeyed through and grappled with.

However, the discipline that was required to come to regular formal practice made me think about the possibilities of exclusion for certain people. Some of the mindfulness literature overlooks the experience of mental health conditions and the effects that these can have on everyday capacities to shower, eat, let alone meditate:

> 'Most people are inwardly disciplined already to a certain extent. Getting dinner on the table every night requires discipline. Getting up in the morning and going to work requires discipline.' (Jon Kabat-Zinn 2004, 43).

What about those that lack the 'discipline' to get dinner on the table every night? What about those who don't have the 'discipline' to go to work? Discipline here becomes a word that signals the ableist modes of rationality, responsibility, and productivity engrained in neoliberal therapeutic technologies of the self; and thus evoking McMindfulness forms of subjectification. As R. Williams (2011, 619) questions: 'what about the working class woman who, rather than spending time in meditation, must work several jobs to make ends meet?'. Sometimes to harness these bad feelings into capacities for action is simply too much if you are struggling to feed yourself/a family, get out of bed, or breathe. I argue that mindfulness is a practice to be engaged with carefully – what privileges have afforded you which means you have the capacity to meditate daily?

As many have warned: a non-critical adoption of mindfulness risks misapplication and over-inflated and simplified expectations for those on the receiving end (Hanley et al. 2016). Mindfulness is not necessarily a practice filled with bliss, peace, and contentment. It can be challenging, unsettling, and

overwhelming. Yet, representations of the practice (e.g. the TIME magazine cover) promise this sense of zen-full bliss. Consequently, and from my experience, people come to the practice *craving* particular feeling states (something I certainly experienced), which may further contribute to the cycle of suffering or dukkha. This craving can bring frustration with the practice and means that the ‘quick-fix’ that some were looking for does not come to light, resulting in an abandonment of the practice.

In the next section, I turn towards the ways that the rhythm of the breath provokes an awareness of the ways that we inhabit the fleshy, material body. Here, I speak of the journey of (re)inhabiting the body and how this awareness forced me to encounter embodied difficulty and discomfort.

8.4. Grounding: dwelling with the body

> T'hinking through the body, and not in a flight from it, means confronting boundaries and limitations and living with and through pain' (Braidotti 2012, 317).

The refrain of the breath affords us vital bodily capacities. Breath is a fundamental bodily function; without it, life ceases. Life begins with an inhalation and ends with an exhalation. Turning towards the conscious breath through mindfulness meditation, breath (re)orientates bodies in particular ways – making us aware of our relationship with our corporeality which provokes a folding. The rhythm of the breath provides us with a perspective: 'the body is 'here' as a point to begin with, from which the world unfolds' (Ahmed 2006, 8).

The body emerges with the breath and the world and is therefore in a process of becoming that is orientated, but this is a vulnerable disposition. Being open to capacities and affordances means we are always susceptible to that which comes from the unforeseen. Bodies are 'affected and shape their surroundings: the skin that seems to contain the body is also where the atmosphere creates an impression; just think of goose bumps, textures on the skin surface, as body traces of the coldness of the air' (ibid, 9). Central to this vulnerable body is a breath-full refrain. Refrains give a sense indeterminacy, provoking the idea of 'sometimes' (Emmerson 2017). They sometimes afford bodies with capacities through drawing them together, but can also reduce capacities (ibid). The capacities afforded through a respiratory refrain are not something that can be determined in advance.

In the previous section, we saw how mindfulness can afford an awareness of our habitual thought patterns and the relationship we have to ourselves through those thoughts. We come into a spatial relation of intimate distance. In this section, I focus on the ways that mindfulness of the breath offers an awareness of how we relate to the fleshy, material body, and its boundaries through the process of dwelling with the body. This relationship is social and political (S. R. Taylor 2018). We come to realise boundaries and the spatiality of the body through breathing through it. The breath, as a hinge or fold, offers a link, or bridge, between the mind and body. Through the breath we become self-reflexively aware of the body. Boundaries are realised and unpacked through this awareness. We become intuitively aware of our spatiality through contact, grounding, postures, and proximity to other bodies.

Firstly, this section will explore the process of (re)inhabiting the body. A process that is both about exploring bodily limits through the breath and understanding how we affect and are affected – how we relate to the body. Whilst also (re)tracing bodily boundaries in order to feel at home, or to dwell with the body to begin to cultivate a compassionate, kind relationship with the body. I explore how this journey is difficult and challenging. Secondly. I will explore the process of (re)inhabiting the body through movement and posture; namely, walking, posture and rhythms of movement. I draw on reflections and extracts of meditations from my autoethnographic research notes on various retreats.

8.4.1. (re)inhabiting: journeying through aversion and tolerance

Through breathing with the conscious breath, I began on a journey of inhabiting, or dwelling with the body. But it is not to say that we, or I, ever existed ontologically prior to the body. We have always emerged with the body and

world. However, for me, this knowledge had been unexplored or de-prioritised so that my corporeal understanding has been that my body is separate from my mind (but I *knew* that they were never separate – but knowing is certainly different from experiencing).

> ‘We often have the impression that we already totally in touch with the body, but we are wrong. Between us and our body there can be a large separation, and our body remains a stranger to us. Sometimes we hate our body.’ (Hanh 1997, 53).

The ‘body scan’ meditation was one of the first formal meditations that I was introduced to that began this process. This meditation is derived from a practice in the Satipatthana Sutta to cultivate an awareness of parts of the body (Hanh 1997). The Buddhist practice directs meditators towards the leaky corporeogeographies, including: bile, phlegm, pus, blood and so on (ibid). Interestingly, in my experience, these factors are not often considered in contemporary or secular versions of the practice[18]. The body scan meditation is practiced lying down on a mat on the floor but, if participants find lying uncomfortable, sitting on a chair is an alternative. The process is to explore the different regions of the body – either beginning from the top of the head, or toes, and drawing awareness in a scanning motion from one region to the next (Crane 2009). Breath is an important part of this practice, conscious breath allows us to dwell in mindfulness more easily to sustain our awareness (Hanh 1997). It can also be used as a compassionate, or kind energy that we use to guide us to different regions of the body. In doing so, the breath allows us to

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[18] I don’t have the ability to unpack this further here, but I believe this might speak to the histories of thought that have affected the ways that Western Buddhism or Buddhist modernism has emerged to impact contemporary mindfulness practices.

explore and constitute bodily limits. Whilst breathing into the body, we realise points of contact and become curious about sensations.

However, many people I spoke to during my time in mindful spaces experienced the body scan as a difficult practice. For some, there was a difficulty in feeling anything in the body, as sensations were dull or unnoticeable. For others, pain was present which made the process difficult and unsettling. As:

> 'Meditation is tough in some respects, requiring a long discipline and sometimes painful process of practice' … 'You will get discouraged, give up, and swear that no such changes could ever occur'. But 'patience is essential for any profound change'. (Gunaratana 2011, 22).

At the beginning of my journey, body scans were the main practice that I was introduced to that allowed me to begin to dwell with the body. Dwell from the verb 'to build', *bauen*, connotes the manner in which we live on the earth (Ingold 2000). Dwelling is cultivating and building, but it is also breathing. I use the word dwell in this way to signal this intertwined corporeal process of cultivating, breathing and becoming with the world.

I began to have awareness of qualities of aversion and judgement during meditation as I came home to my body and realised the ways it was affected, and the ways I inhabited:

> We collected mats and blankets from the table at the front of the room, put the chairs on the tables and rolled mats out to lie on. The space was a little small, so some people had to lie outside of the main area, and the ones in the centre of the room were a little higgledy-piggledy. Blinds were closed as we arranged ourselves and began to lie down, blocking out the

setting sun. I, along with others, took my shoes off. I lay down, feet falling away from each other, arms falling away from the body, wriggling my shoulders to make my upper-back more comfortable.

The teacher started the guided meditation from the right foot and toes, drawing our attention up the right leg and then across to the left foot and up the left leg. My feet were very restless, and kept twitching. My left ankle began to become sore lying on the floor, I moved my foot and placed it flat on the floor with my knee bent, my lower back repositioned onto the floor – I felt more supported. As the teacher guided our attention up the pelvis, stomach, chest, back, neck and head, I lifted my right leg up as well so both knees were bent. During this scanning of the upper body, my awareness drifted in and out: irritated by the ticking clock in the room; wondering what was going to happen next; feeling tension in my upper back, shoulders and neck; trying to find the right position for my arms which felt like useless branches sticking out of my body.

The exercise came to an end focusing on the breath as an anchor for the body. We were instructed to open our eyes and stretch. I wriggled around on the mat, raising my arms above my head and stretching out long. We then moved up slowly, mindfully, noticing how we were sitting up. I drew my legs into my body, placed my hands underneath and pushed up so I as in a side-seated position. I then slowly gathered my shoes and came up onto all fours to roll up the yoga mat and tie the elastic around it. Then I slowly stood up and returned the mat to its desk. (8-week course, 30/4/2018)

This practice forced me to become aware of the way that I took up space, the bodily contact points, and the sensations in the body. Discomfort, aversion, ambivalence, and pain were sensations I met repeatedly, through feelings of uselessness and restlessness. Bringing a compassionate and kind awareness to my body was a challenging process as my habitual relationship was one of judgment, dislike, and frustration. Becoming proximate and exploring the boundaries and topologies of the body was a challenging one for me – I was met with sensations of discomfort and pain. There were feelings of unease with this connection.

In his book, *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*, Christopher Germer (2009) discusses the stages of acceptance: (1) aversion: mental entanglement or rumination; (2) curiosity: questioning e.g. “what is this feeling?”, “what does it mean?”; (3) tolerance: enduring emotional pain, but resisting it and wishing it would go; (4) allowing: allowing feelings to come and go; (5) friendship: seeing hidden value in our predicament and gaining insight. On reflection, these stages certainly followed me throughout the research and were present during meditations and informal mindfulness practices. In the vignette above, there are clear examples of my feeling states switching between aversion (arms as ‘useless branches’, mental rumination as my attention drifts in and out) and tolerance (with the experience of sore ankles).

Dwelling with the body is a process of becoming orientated towards bodily vulnerability and susceptibility. Through exploring bodily boundaries, we are learning how we are affected, and thus realise the ways in which we are made vulnerable. Yet, awareness of vulnerability is an unsettling process, and particularly so when vulnerability has often been taught as a state to try to avoid

– as a form of weakness or failure (B. Brown 2013; Shildrick 2002). Commonly, vulnerability is understood ‘as feminising and subsequently as negative, scary, shameful and, above all, something to be avoided and protected against’ (Dahl 2017, 41). As Dhal (2017, 42) writes, ‘we might live in fear of being vulnerable and shield ourselves against it’. The challenges and difficulty I faced when coming in contact with vulnerability were inextricably linked with gendered notions of femme-capacities.

Part of learning how we are affected, is also about realising the ways that we relate to our body – the thoughts, images or wisdoms that arise when we focus on particular areas. Our aversion to encountering the body, for instance, might be due to the particularly negative and ruminative thoughts that arise when one focuses on a part of the body they have difficult associations with. For those who have experienced a form of embodied trauma (e.g. forms of violence, sexual or otherwise), there may be difficult sensations experienced when one focuses on particular areas of the body. For me, there was a difficulty focusing on bodily areas I have a uncomfortable relationship to – particularly my stomach. When body scans directed us towards that area, or guided meditations asked us to rub the belly or touch it some way, this action was intensely uncomfortable and brought feelings of aversion. I felt too big.

On her work on fat bodies, Rachel Colls (2006, 532) argues for a corporoeogeography of ‘bigness’ – of ‘big bodies that grow and shrink and fold and wobble’. She uses Shildrick's (2002) notion of ‘monstrosity’ to evoke the multiple, emotional, and embodied experiences of being fat – as bodies of size have been neglected in non-representational and corporoeogeographical research. Monstrosity is a way of understanding all bodies, such that any/body

can be normal and monstrous all at once, signalling difference, openness and fluidity (ibid, 533). Colls discusses the vulnerability in experiencing the instability of bodily boundaries through the monstrous body. For me, this was an embodied experience of feeling too big.

Grounding and softening into the areas of the body that I felt aversion towards was a difficult process. Sometimes I simply ignored those elements in body scan meditations; I skipped over them. My relationship with my body, and this tendency towards aversion, was made acutely present in a movement meditation where we tracked the energies around the body. It was an exercise that played with spatial proximity and intuitive energetic feeling:

> The practice turned to bodily energies. We traced the topology or shadow of energy around the body - the field of energy that encircled the body. The idea was to sense where that field of energy began, to pay attention to where it was closer to our skin and where it was further away. I held my hands and let them trace this field around my head and face, down my chest, and stomach, up my back and along each arm. My hands drew closer to my face, and further away from areas of my body that I feel less comfortable with: my belly and upper arms. I wasn't sure if I was doing it 'right' or if what I was tracing was in fact energy but instead just an imaginary force-field around my body. Yet, it was guided by my hands. I played around with the proximity and distance of my hands from my face and arms, some distances felt more comfortable than others and some had a distinct feeling to them. (Gaia House, 4/5/2019)

Female bodies are 'sites of multiple struggles' and in the 'production of unexpected and unpredictable events' (Grosz, 1994 in Colls, 2012, 435). This

meditation allowed me to come to an awareness of my relationship to the gendered/sexed body. Clearly, there were feelings of ambivalence that arose during the practice, as I questioned my ability to feel or sense those particular energies. But, it was an awareness that allowed me to spatially explore my relationship with my body by tracing energetic boundaries. After this experience, I began to reflect further on the ways that my body is shaped by the forces of 'body terrorism' (S. R. Taylor 2018) – those patriarchal, heterosexual forces that constitute this relationship. In exploring this, I am drawing attention to the 'possibility of differentiated affective forces produced through, between and within 'sexed' bodies' (Colls 2012, 436). I cannot deny the ways that my body is shaped by gendered and sexed forces. In the process of dwelling with my body, these forces were thrown into relief.

…Pause…

Where’s your breath?

Over the course of the fieldwork, this relationship began to change and body scans gradually became a practice of friendly curiosity and awareness:

> The meditation focused on each part of our body. Starting with the feet and then rising upwards. Ending with the head. I felt almost immediately settled. My body came alive to my awareness. I could vividly feel the points of contact as well as the sensations running through my body: a tingling, vital feeling like I could feel the energy or blood flow. There were sensations of weightiness as I grounded down – giving my weight up to the floor - and pleasant warmth. (Barn retreat, 19/5/2019)

It was both a process of exploring and extending bodily limits through contact points, breath, and sensations, whilst also (re)tracing compassionate boundaries in coming home to and with the body. 'With the act of breathing in mindfully you go inside. Your body is breathing; your body is your home. In each breath, you can come home to yourself' (Hanh, 2016, 126). It is a process of finding our way home; of orientating ourselves towards something (seemingly) familiar. But then realising how unfamiliar and uncontained the body is:

> 'The work of inhabiting involves orientation devices; ways of extending bodies into space that creates new folds, or new contours of what we would call liveable or habitual space. If orientation is about making the strange familiar through extension of bodies into space, then disorientation occurs when that extension fails.' (Ahmed, 2006, 11).

Conscious breath and body scan meditations are orientation devices. They are orientating us home, through a process of corporeal dwelling. Ingold (2000,

188) speaks of the house as an organism, in that we do not begin building with a pre-formed plan, but, instead ‘it is in the very process of dwelling that we build’. Our house is our body, and in these practices we are undertaking a process of dwelling with the body, the journey of inhabiting:

> The retreat leaders elaborated on the meaning of ‘abiding’ (in the title of the retreat: ‘abiding with a heart imbued with love’). Abide comes from abode, finding a home, a resting place. Our abode or home is our body. Their invitation was for us to feel the materiality and weightiness of our body on this earth, the “oomph” as we sit, or ground down. (Gaia House, 3/5/2019)

Coming home was found through a rootedness and metaphysical stability, through the imagery and imaginative geography of roots, radicals, and trees. We explored our connectedness with the environment through the feeling of rooting down, and also the proximity to nature at the retreat centre. As I will show in the next chapter of this thesis, this orientation enabled a transformation in thinking and feeling about our bodies and their relationships with the earth.

Bodily boundaries were (re)tracing through these meditations. The retreat leaders encouraged us to practice drawing up energy from the earth through our inhalation and exhaling it back down into the earth. In this way, we were expanding the energetic boundaries of the body. But, also redrawing those boundaries through cultivating a sense of stability, groundedness, and compassion to cultivate a friendly relationship with our body to feel at home with it:

> The starting point was to find a home in the body, to begin to connect somatically. In this meditation we begin to focus on drawing the breath up from the floor and earth to draw up the energy from the earth. Taking deep breaths in from the belly, I sensed the breath moving up in my body. Half imagining it but also feeling the sensation of the breath rise from the ground up into my body. (Gaia House, 4/5/2019)

Furthermore, (re)inhabiting is not limited to formal, lying, or sitting body scan meditations. Coming home with the body was something to be cultivated during both informal and formal meditations, as well as, everyday life. Mindfulness of the four postures, including sitting, standing, walking and lying down, is understood to deepen our awareness (Guanaratana 2012). As, 'one can become aware of how a particular state of mind expresses itself through one's bodily posture, or how the condition, position, and motion of the body affects the mind' (Anālayo, 2003, 133). For this reason, the position of the body in formal meditation was important. A stable and upright seated posture was understood to convey the right intention for practice:

> I chose a seat and sat on the mat, instantly feeling the warmth rise up from the heated floor. When everyone had taken their seat, the teacher began the session on posture. Having the right posture conveys the right intention to practice, enabling alertness and stability. It was important to sit in a way that provides the greatest surface area to support the up-right body. We arranged the two cushions, one on top of the other, and the top one coming off and sloping down a little on the cushion underneath. We were given seating options: either seated cross-legged, or kneeling with the buttocks lowered onto the cushion, or using a meditation stool,

> or sitting in one of the straight-backed chairs that lined the outer edges of the room (Sharpham house, 19/3/2019)

Postures were not just important in formal meditative practice, there was also an emphasis to be with postures during everyday activities, instead of being carried away by thoughts we were to be 'anchored in the body'. So that 'the most mundane activities can be turned into occasions for mental development' (Anālayo, 2003, 132).

The purpose of all of these practices is to have an awareness of the ways we inhabit the body and how particular postures or movements affect the body. For me, walking meditations were another important element in this process. The formal practice of walking meditation is to slow the pace down, so that each movement is deliberate and unhurried. A useful guide is to breathe in time with the movement of the feet: inhaling whilst lifting one foot, and exhaling when placing it down. The practice is intended to fill your awareness with bodily sensations and movement (Guanaratana 2012):

> Awareness of the moment of the feet walking slowly one way, bell rings, stop and feel the weight and gravity of standing. The weight of the body, the connection with the earth. Then turning and moving in the opposite direction. I found it challenging to stay with *just* the feet and their movement. My mind wandered off to thinking and planning. I'm noticing and labelling the types of thoughts I typically have now. I also realised that at points I was thinking about the feet instead of simply being aware of them. Judgements of too slow, too quick came into my mind. And what other people were doing at times was the main focus if I lifted my gaze and saw others. When my mind wandered off, I drew attention first to the

> breath to settle it, and then down into my feet. But with my general awareness still loosely hanging around the breath.
>
> At the half-way point, the activity changed to walking in our own direction – setting our own mindful path. I went to the grass and began walking in between two flowers: a daisy and a daffodil. A few moments into the practice I saw another retreatant had decided to take off their shoes. Curiosity swelled in my body: what did that feel like? Was the ground cold? Would it be squelchy? I decided to explore these sensations and removed my boots and socks. Placing my foot on the cold, damp and soft ground.
>
> Being barefoot gave allowed my sense of the ground to heighten: the squelchy earth and damp grass. The surface underfoot was so cold my feet started to burn unpleasantly. My thoughts immediately turned to: 'when is this going to finish' 'how much longer'. The sliminess of the mud and the sharp scratch of a twig. As well as avoiding small slugs and worms amongst the blades of grass. But as moments past, my feet acclimatised to the cold, and I began to enjoy the squelchy contact between the soles of my feet and the muddy, grass. (Sharpham House, 20/3/2019)

It was a process of becoming knowledgeable, 'that we come to know what we do' by walking along (Ingold 2010a). This knowledge is a corporeal one, and is a process of dwelling with the body – understanding how we affect and are affected by sensations, thoughts, and encounters. Coming into contact with the vitality and activity of the earthy ground gives away to bodily sensations and thought, as the feet impress on the ground. Knowledge is weaved and

cultivated from the bodily contact between feet and ground in motion, in correspondence with the rhythmic refrain of the breath. Here, ‘moving is knowing’, as we proceed on our way, ‘life unfolds’ (Ingold 2010a, 134). The wayfarer, that Ingold speaks of, is an inhabitant that moves through the world, cultivating an intuitive, embodied form of knowledge. The mindful walker is similar, tracing and threading a path to dwell with the body – to come home, to inhabit.

…Pause….

Is there any tension present for you?

I invite you to stop, sit back, stretch out and release any tension from reading this over a desk or in a chair.

In this section, I have explored how dwelling with the body is a challenging process. This process of reorientation towards new habits of relating, folding and inhabiting was difficult, as 'when 'we are no longer on autopilot, we are forced to deal with the discomfort of new action' (S. R. Taylor, 2018, 63). To conclude this chapter, I will briefly breathe into the ways that we can soften into discomfort and befriend vulnerability, as a form of affirmative ethics that harnesses vulnerability.

8.5. Conclusions: accepting vulnerability

> 'The goal is to depathologize negative feelings so that they can be seen as a possible resource for political action rather than as its antithesis' (Cvetkovich, 2012, 2).

> 'Power, like affect, is a thing of the senses, irreducible to ideology, structure, or any other concretely defined concept. Recognizing this and keeping one's senses in a state of affective attentiveness is an excellent (and thoroughly ethical) way of remaining attuned to its minute, moment to moment functioning without which the totalized systems that often become isolated objects of analysis could not exist. It is also a mode of sensing openings, moments of difference that involve us in change.' (Cichosz, 2014, 58).

The previous section has shown how mindfulness of the breath and body allows us to explore and extend corporeal boundaries to have an awareness of our vulnerability and susceptibility with the world. This is a double process that also asks us to compassionately (re)trace those boundaries. (Re)tracing is not about turning away from bad feelings, but instead requires us to orientate ourselves

towards them, to soften into them with qualities of kindness, acceptance and compassion. It is a process of befriending and accepting vulnerability.

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy encourages us to cultivate the qualities of ‘allowing’ or ‘letting be’ (Segal, Williams, and Teasdale 2002). Instead of turning away from bad feelings or depressive moods, MBCT asks us to bring gentle awareness to aspects of difficulty and to be curious about how those sensations manifest in the body. This is part of the process of acceptance. Acceptance is a practice of reorientation. For Ahmed (2006, 20):

> ‘Becoming re-orientated, which involves a disorientation of encountering the world differently, made me wonder about orientation and how much “feeling at home”, or knowing which way we are facing, is about the making of worlds.’

Here, ‘space becomes a question of “turning”, of directions taken, which not only allow things to appear, but also enable us to find our way through the world by situating ourselves in relation to such things’ (ibid, 6). If our familiar orientation is to turn away from difficulty, pain or discomfort – to block vulnerability – then that becomes our fragile, depressive world view. I would contend that this orientation is unsustainable, vulnerability finds ways of surfacing, which in this fragile orientation leaves one unequipped to cope in a shrinking world. Yet, through acceptance, we can reorient and turn towards vulnerability. There is disorientation in encountering the world differently, but, through this process of orientating otherwise we produce new worlds. Moreover, it is not to ‘get rid of’ or remove those bad feelings from our orientation, but instead become aware of the ways we affect and are affected by our orientation with and to the world.

> ‘We might feel that somehow we should try to eradicate these feelings of pleasure and pain, loss and gain, praise and blame, fame and disgrace. A more practical approach would be to get to know them, see how they hook us, see how they color our perception of reality, see how they aren’t all that solid.’ (Chödrön 2005, 61).

These ideas link with Buddhist understandings of suffering and uncertainty, where leaning into discomfort, pain, embarrassment, resentment, jealousy, fear and so on is encouraged as part of the path to spiritual awakening. Here, ‘the point is still to lean toward the discomfort of life and see it clearly rather than to protect ourselves from it’ (Chödrön 2005, 25). Furthermore, the goal here is not to cling onto pleasure and let go of pain. But rather to hold both together. Thus, mindfulness is about being open to whatever arises without grasping or repressing – accepting our experience nonjudgmentally.

My journey with mindfulness which has not been limited to fieldwork ‘out there’ but is also about writing this thesis and my life beyond this work, has been exactly this form of re-orientation. Writing, like breathing, renders me vulnerable. Susceptible to critique, to analysis, to misunderstanding, to ambivalence, to disappointment, to hurt feelings. For a long time I battled with the shame that that produced, because to ‘care intensely about what you are writing places the body within the ambit of the shameful: sheer disappointment in the self amplifies to a painful level’ (Probyn, 2005, 131). Yet, I intentionally turn towards vulnerability and difficulty in my work. I turn towards this shame, and harness it as an affordance, or a capacity to act/write, so that it no longer renders as shame. The act of writing is a process of acceptance in which I am

befriending, or coming into friendship, with my experience. It is a mindful doing, of realisation and of insight.

> ‘Ethics is about freedom from the weight of negativity, freedom through the understanding of our bondage. A certain amount of pain, the knowledge about vulnerability and pain, is actually useful. It forces one to think about the actual material conditions of being interconnected and thus being in the world. It frees one from the stupidity of perfect health and the full- blown sense of existential entitlement that comes with it.’ (Braidotti 2012, 316-7).

Reorientating in this way is a form and critique of affirmative ethics. In *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed (2010, 213) offers an critique of the affirmative turn that has a commitment to positive feelings as a site of potentiality or becoming, here, joy is a desirable mode. Yet, Ahmed offers a line of thought in which we cannot predict, or know in advance the ways affects will affect us. Sadness rather than joy may be felt as an affect of an encounter. Throughout the book, she argues that the will to turn away from or overcome suffering is a limited desire. Instead, she argues for us to ‘attend to bad feelings not in order to overcome them but *to learn by how we are affected by what comes near*’ (ibid, 216, original emphasis). Here, in affirmative ethics, is an underestimation of the difficulty of giving attention to certain forms of suffering. Instead, there is the will to move beyond, to reconcile. But, this calls forth privilege. The will to move beyond pain towards good feelings, could impose ‘new forms of suffering on those who do not or cannot move this way’ (ibid). Orientating ourselves towards bad feelings, to soften into them, compassionately, can be capacity for action. Mindfulness can offer us this.

> ‘we can use every day of our lives to take a different attitude toward suffering. Instead of pushing it away, we can breathe it in with the wish that everyone could stop hurting, with the wish that people everywhere could experience contentment in their hearts. We could transform pain into joy’ (Chödrön, 2005, 162).

With this line of thought, Chödrön (2005) offers the practice of ‘tonglen’, which uses ‘poison as medicine’ (ibid, 158). Here, Buddhism understands there to be three poisons: passion (including craving or addiction), aggression, and ignorance (including denial or shutting down). Thus, the practice of tonglen teaches us that when something difficult arises, instead of trying to get rid of it, we lean into it by breathing it in. We breathe in our experiences of pain and suffering, along with the same pain of others. It is a collective practice that recognises the ‘kinship with all living things’, so that ‘instead of pushing [suffering] away or running from it, we breathe in and connect with it fully’ (ibid, 158). The practice then asks us to breathe out, and in doing so, send out a sense of spaciousness, of ventilation, or freshness.

Finally, I want to speak to the current will in heath geography towards joy, the energetic, and the vital. The non-representational, posthuman turn in health geography has aligned itself with affirmative turn, in that joy and good feeling is prioritised in the line of becoming well (see Andrews, 2018a, 2018c; Duff, 2014). Take into account the ‘weight of negativity’

> ‘It evolves affectivity and joy, as in the capacity for being affected by these forces, to the point of pain or extreme pleasure, which come to the same; it means putting up with hardship and physical pain. This sort of turning of the tide of negativity is the transformative process of achieving

> freedom of understanding through the awareness of our limits, of our bondage.' (Bradotti 2012, 315).

Yet, it is important that the 'less-than-human' (Philo 2017) geographies are not glossed over, or moved beyond. We need space to write the monstrous, the traumatic, and suffering. Both in the experiences of ill/health and for researchers working with these topics, as unsettling and difficult as they may be.

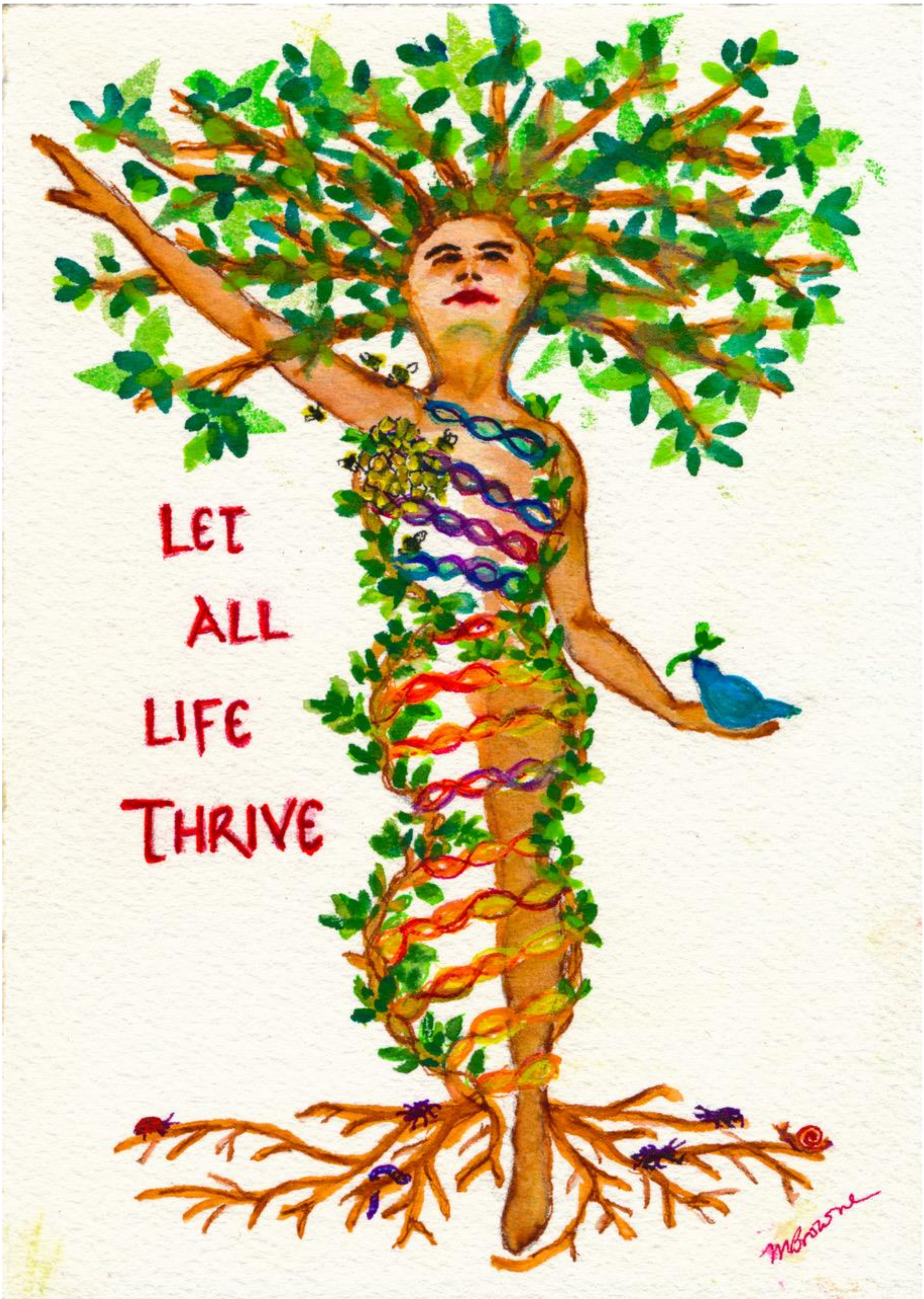

Figure 8: 'Let all life thrive' by Michelle Browne, 2019

9. Breath of life: enchantment and quiet engaged awareness

‘First there was nothing. Then there was everything.

Then, in a park above a western city after dusk, the air is raining messages.

A woman sits on the ground, leaning against a pine. Its bark presses hard against her back, as hard as life. Its needles scent the air and a force hums in the heart of the wood. Her ears tune down to the lowest frequencies. The tree is saying things, in words before words.’ (Powers 2019, 3).

…

‘Attention to the air one breathes, to the smell of mud and the sound of waves bursting against the coastline are not signs of conservative nostalgia but are symbols, affects and experiences informing radical ecological critiques against capital’s turbulent violence. They form the affects through which we connect to the very place that we call our world’ (Nieuwenhuis 2016, 314).

…

‘The origin of life and the origin of language and the origin of poetry are all there, in the first breath, each breath as if it were our first, the anima, the spirit, what we inspire, what we expire, what separates us from extinction, minute after minute, what keeps us alive as we inhale and exhale the universe’ (Dorfman in Butler 2016, 60).

9.1. Introduction

Breath is a vital force and essence of life and health, one that has multiple meanings and embodied experiences (Oxley and Russell 2020). Oxley and Russell give an insight into the cross-cultural understandings of the phrase 'breath of life', demonstrating the interwoven relationship between breath, spirit, soul and wind. For example, the word pneuma for Ancient Greek Stoics meant both wind and spirit, in which the breath of god pervaded the whole material world (ibid). Furthermore, they touch on the magical and enchanting powers of the breath in cross-cultural ethnographies of shamanism, magic, and the taboo. In these studies the active cultivation and manipulation of the breath holds importance for the performance of spells, rituals and ceremony, and communication. Yet, as Skof and Berndtson (2018) argue, the idea of breath as a key epistemological foundation of biological and spiritual life has been abandoned. Breath has instead become an immaterial and disembodied substance.

Breath based mindfulness practices orientate us towards the ways that 'each one of us comes into being and is constructed […] through the causal and conditioning influences of the air we breathe, the Earth we stand upon' (King 2009, 19). It is understood that the Buddha's awakening took place based on the practice of mindfulness of the breath (Anālayo 2003). There is, therefore, a deep relationship between the cultivation of breath and experiences of spiritual insight. In this chapter, I explore the relationship between engaged mindfulness practices and experiences of enchantment and spirituality. Here, I focus on my autoethnographic experiences on a retreat at Gaia House in Newton Abbot, South Devon, and subsequent spiritual developments at other retreats and with participants. In terms of structure, first, I unpack the terms enchantment and

encounter to offer an exploration of mindfulness as a practice that re-orientates and forces us to think otherwise. Second, I demonstrate that mindfulness provokes a re-orientation that manoeuvres bodies towards a 'quiet engaged awareness'.

9.2. The enchanting mindful encounter

Enchantment has been understood as a sensibility, way of working, or conceptual framework that is post-phenomenological and posthuman in orientation. Embracing and embodying the work of Jane Bennett, efforts to recuperate an enchanting geography are underway (Geoghegan and Woodyer 2014; Woodyer and Geoghegan 2013). This orientation rejects the Weberian metanarrative of a disenchanted modernity, one that is disposed to rationalism and scepticism, propelled by science and religion (Bennett 2001). Authors argue that the disenchanted narrative is a fallacy; magic always already exists in the world (McEwan 2008; Woodyer and Geoghegan 2013), it 'is part of our normal condition' (Schneider 1993, x) and everyday life (Laws 2017). For Jane Bennett,

> '*Enchantment* entails a state of wonder, and one of the distinctions of this state is the temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement. To be enchanted, then, is to participate in a momentarily immobilizing encounter; it is to be transfixed, spellbound.' (2001, 5, original emphasis).

Mark Schneider defines it in a similar way:

> 'We become enchanted, it can be argued, when we are confronted by circumstances or occurrences so peculiar and so beyond our present

understanding as to leave us convinced that, were they to be understood our image of how the world operates would be radically transformed.' (1993, 3).

Both authors acknowledge that enchantment is 'at the same time uncanny, weird, mysterious, or awesome' (Schneider 1993, 3) – it haunts and charms us, produces delight and unease. This affectual register is embodied, transfixing us in wonder 'and transported by sense, to both be caught up and carried away' (Bennett 2001, 5). Enchantment is an acute sensory engagement with the world, or a particular attunement (Ash and Gallacher 2015) that notices its excessiveness of 'every blade of grass, every ray of sun, every falling leaf' (Batchelor 2015, 232), as well as those vibrations that extend trans-humanly, extended and de-centred from the human body (Ash and Gallacher 2015; Lea 2009). Figuring enchantment as post-phenomenological does away with an intentional, fixed subject. Magical happenings take us by surprise and are circumstantial, irreducible to human-centred forms of experience (D. P. McCormack 2017).

An enchanted ontology is also 'an ability to think differently, to imagine a world in which we can be enchanted by the small and seemingly inconsequential – the beauty of bird flight, the smoothness of a leaf' (Geoghegan and Woodyer 2014, 220). It is an orientation towards the spectacular of the seemingly banal, which can surprise and nourish us (ibid). Bhatti et al. (2009) use Bachelardian phenomenology to evoke the poetics of the garden: those enchanting encounters that reverberate in the reverie, or in-between, of pottering around flower beds. The authors seek to highlight the ameliorating everyday encounters with domestic garden spaces, emphasising the enchanting multi-

sensory and tactile engagements with soil, foliage and non-human creatures. With these everyday sensuous and miniscule engagements, enchantment opens up particular ‘materialities and sensibilities with and according to which we see’ (Wylie 2006, 520) or a ‘peripatetic dwelling’ (Bhatti et al. 2009, 64) where the body is receptive to magical encounters in the flow of quotidian life.

In the geographies of spirituality, MacKian (2012) argues for closer attention and consideration of *everyday* spiritualities. Her book *Everyday Spirituality* goes beyond the pit-falls of cultural pessimism that invoke a negative image of ‘spirituality lite’ consumed by neoliberal ideals. Instead, she foregrounds her participants lived experiences with nourishing and supportive spiritual exchanges and relationships. Here, spirituality is ‘something which sits alongside and informs the everyday lifeworlds of individuals who practise it’ (ibid, 71). Although these experiences are part of the everyday life worlds of practitioners, they still ‘have a distinct air of enchantment about them’ (ibid, 2). Her work holds together the juxtaposition of enchantment and the everyday.

On a similar line of thought, the idea of an ‘immobilizing encounter’ in Bennett’s description of enchantment has been critiqued as overly dramatic and romantic, and equating to ‘totalising vitalism’ (Woodyer and Geoghegan 2013, 204). Through encounters with the habitual spaces of tourist souvenirs, Ramsay (2009) argues for a ‘refracted enchantment’ that frames Bennett’s enchantment as ‘too dramatic to explore the complexity of relations *between* people and things’ (ibid, 198). Instead, she develops ‘an imagination of enchanted materiality as always unfolding through other affective objects, subjects and contexts’, as well as simultaneously being ‘enlivened and mundane, processual and yet in stasis, proximal and yet distant’ (ibid). Refracted, illusive

enchantments and displacement are highlighted in Wylie's (2009) post-phenomenological account of landscape and memorial benches (Woodyer and Geoghegan 2013). Here, enchantments are posited as an illusion, as ‘something always takes their place, displaces and alienates them’ but rather ‘something is always already displacing the moment from both without and within’ (Wylie 2009, 276). Wylie’s discussion of a spectral looking-with incorporated by the benches: ‘shapes and frames that embodied eyes anew’ (ibid, 277) and the ‘untethered’ ‘free-floating’ quality of the benches give a sense of a haunting enchantment of love and present absence (Woodyer and Geoghegan 2013).

Spectro-geographies (Maddern and Adey 2008) are further explored in McEwan's (2008) exploration of the role of ghost stories in the cultural politics of postcolonial contemporary life. Enchantment has a political purchase and ethical orientation, as ‘the project of cultivating a stance of presumptive generosity’ (Bennett 2001, 156) and feeling ‘connected in an affirmative way to existence’ (ibid, 156). This enchanted stance hopes to produce a relational connection to material others, in order to minimise harm and suffering. McEwan’s work sheds light on the utility of spectral narratives in transitional and uncertain times, particularly in relation to a ‘post-colonial moment’ in South Africa. Here, enchanting ghost stories told by domestic cleaners form a tacit resistance embedded in everyday life, allowing marginalised groups to express otherwise untold feelings about working conditions.

Elsewhere, efforts have gone into exploring the intersections of enchanting practices, spirituality, and contemporary conditions and projects. Gregory's (2012) work on tarot card reading examines the ways in which spiritual

practices and objects support individuals in navigating the precarious conditions of neoliberalism, as well as producing ‘new affective assemblages’ that ‘plug’ the individual into new ‘energies’ that ‘compel and legitimise a leap into productive, public, and ideally profitable work’ (ibid, 268). She explores how the individualisation of life under neoliberal logic has inverted the ‘outline of the social’, highlighting how spiritual practices open up the possibility of feeling connected despite the economic, social and political backdrop of precarity.

In chapter 4 of this thesis, I have taken trouble with the use of mindfulness as a geographical and enchanting methodology. But, here, I am interested in the enchanting mindful encounter as an experience that has the potential to provoke bodies and selves to become otherwise (Wilson 2016). Mindfulness as an enchanting encounter resonates with Stephen Batchelor’s notion of the ‘everyday sublime’ in his writing on Secular Buddhism (Batchelor 2015; 2014). Here, everyday mindfulness practices ask us to stop and pay attention to that which normally goes unnoticed: water droplets on a leaf, dust particles illuminated by a ray of sunshine. They are things that exceed us and cannot be adequately put into words; they ‘overreach us, spilling beyond the boundaries of thought’ (Batchelor 2014, 37). This orientation to the world involves a particular understanding of selfhood:

> ‘To experience the everyday sublime one needs to dismantle piece by piece the perceptual conditioning that insists on seeing oneself and the world as essentially comfortable, permanent, solid, and mine.’ (Batchelor 2014, 38).

Here, Buddhism sees the embodied self as a process of conditioning (with no internal selfhood to return to), and mindfulness as ‘*the ongoing cultivation of a*

sensibility' (ibid, 38). Breath meditation is at the heart of this embodied process of realisation – the breath acts as the living hinge or swinging door that offers the bridge between mind and body, outer and inner. It is the embodied praxis of non-duality. Chapter 10 will speak to this Buddhist sense of non-duality through holding together themes of present absence and intimate distance. Buddhism's nondualistic philosophy fosters a sense of connection to all things. Thich Nhat Hanh (1991b) names this 'interbeing', as 'we have to inter-be with every other thing' – it is the understanding that nothing exists independently of another thing.

These ideas will be further explored later in the chapter through literature on engaged Buddhism. For now, I return to geographical literature on encounter. The word encounter means meeting, but a meeting that involves surprise and conflict (Ahmed 2013). We are affected by the encounter because we are always already vulnerable and susceptible and open to what arrives from the outside (Butler 2004; Harrison 2008), which is illustrated through the folding of the breath. Encounters involve a corporeogeography in that they force us to re-think the limits of the body, its capacities and thresholds; it is through the encounter that boundaries are formed. Further, 'encounters are mediated, affective, emotive and sensuous, they are about animation, joy and fear, and both the opening up and closing down of affective capacity' (Wilson 2016, 15). Helen Wilson (2016) uses Sara Ahmed's (2014) work to begin to think through the 'ethics of attunement'. Here, 'attunement might be taken to be our openness to perceive and deal with what we encounter – an openness to the unknown' (Wilson 2016, 15). It might also be about the non-attunement, as 'we can close off our bodies as well as ears to what is not in tune' (Ahmed 2014b, 18).

Through mindfulness we can cultivate a particular attunement to receive certain encounters. These encounters might be those that affect us in a particular way, maybe gathering calming affects that produce a momentary therapeutic experience or feeling:

> It is quite mindful to go and sit in sort of cool air and have the window open – I can hear the birds and everything and there is a real sort of calmness. (28/5/2019, transcription of interview with Flora)

Or those that ignite a feeling of magical curiosity when encountering the supposed 'wildness' and externality of non-human animals:

> During the walking meditation I came close to a rabbit. For a moment, we stood there watching each other. As I moved on, it stayed in its position – unfazed. It was incredible to get so close to it – I'd never been able to get that close to a wild rabbit before. (6/3/2019, Gaia house)

And conversely, there is a production of a particular mode of awareness or attunement through the mindful encounter. It is double; both the formation of bodily, worldly boundaries, and the realisation of those boundaries. We can begin to be aware of our imbrication and relationality with others both human and nonhuman. It is the awareness of the habitually unthought. This could be similar to the process of affirmative ethics (Ahmed 2010), in which we learn how we are affected by what comes near (something I explored in the conclusion of the previous chapter). I reiterate:

> 'We might need to attend to bad feelings not in order to overcome them, but to learn by how we are affected by what comes near, which means

> achieving a different relationship to all our wanted and unwanted feelings as a political as well as life resource.' (Ahmed 2010, 216).

This act of becoming conscious, or learning how we are affected, is a political resource and struggle (ibid). I have witnessed a form of political, but also spiritual, struggle during my encounters with mindfulness. By cultivating 'right mindfulness' we come into contact with a form of critical, spiritual, and self-reflexive folding, and 'care of the self' that allows us to act otherwise. Through my (auto)ethnographic work, I witnessed forms of political and spiritual struggle that were ignited by mindfulness. These then became embodied and interwoven into daily lives through forms of quiet activism. Here, mindfulness becomes an embodied, political, and spiritual resource.

Through the (auto)ethnographies what emerged was a mindful 'quiet engaged awareness', one that, like quiet activism, 'gains its strength from its subversive nature, embodied quietness and commitment to practical action' (Pottinger 2017, 215). It is these modest, intimate, bodily, and spiritual engagements that 'entail processes of production or creativity, and which can be either implicitly or explicitly political in nature' (ibid, 216). Here, I take guidance from literature on quiet activism (Pottinger 2017), engaged Buddhism (hooks 2018), and spiritual activism (Keating 2016).

For Gloria Anzaldúa, a feminist theorist and Chicana lesbian activist, spirituality and activism are combined and held together in contradiction. She understands spiritual activism as an 'experientially based epistemology and ethics', it is 'spirituality for social change, spirituality that posits a relational worldview and uses this holistic worldview to transform one's self and one's worlds' (Keating 2008, 54). Anzaldúa's spiritual activism encourages transformation by focusing

on both self-change and outward social activism (ibid). Here, she intertwines the inner and the outer/public, and this holding together is at the heart of her praxis. Although the work of spiritual activism begins at the individual level, it does move outwards as these individuals 'expose, challenge, and work to transform unjust social structures' (ibid, 57). Importantly, spiritual activism is distinguished from 'New Age' movements and organised religion (Keating 2006). New Age movements are understood to focus on personal changes and challenges rather than wider socio-material worlds, but as MacKian (2012) shows in her work on everyday spirituality, these spiritualities enable individuals to develop a broader awareness beyond themselves that challenges the material world of disenchantment (Fois 2017). In the following section, I show how mindfulness begins the process of individuals (myself and others on retreat) becoming aware of their connections with other beings, and that provides the impetus to engage in political actions with the material world (Fois 2017).

Furthermore, this section relies on a politics of spirit that, like Anzaldúa's work, 'can empower social actors to transform themselves and their worlds' (Keating 2016, 242). Too often spiritual and embodied experiences are denied from academic work and thought, instead relying on rational, logical thought, and empirical demonstrations (ibid). In contributing to the decolonisation of imagined geographies of witchcraft, Murrey (2017) discusses the absence of sustained attention to sorcery, the occult, and witchcraft in the discipline of geography more broadly, but specifically in developmental geographies. Her paper demonstrates the powerful imagined geographies of witchcraft within the academy, the hesitancy and lack of engagement with these topics from scholars, and the need for alternative/divergent modes of communication that express decolonial pluriversals. Of particular interest to me going forwards in

this chapter is the way in which Murrey de-privileges whiteness and herself as '*the* interpreter/knower', allowing unsteadiness and uncertainty to be at the forefront of her reflexivity. It is a poetic embodied scholarship that positions herself within the landscape, to be 'visible in vulnerability' (ibid, 172).

Writing about my compassionate, insightful, and spiritual experiences during the retreat feels like a vulnerable undertaking. Many have expressed their own personal hesitancies in addressing issues surrounding magic, the occult, and spiritual experiences in academic writing in and beyond human geography (Murrey 2017). For me, the initial hesitancy was how to talk and write about the unquantifiable, non-material, embodied, and inarticulable experiences on retreat. This hesitancy has multiple dimensions. The first was the communicability of my experiences, as the written vignettes and abstracts from the diary entries can only convey so much. It is challenging to pay testimony to the ways that these experiences had a profound impact on how I now understand the world around me. Furthermore, the spiritual, fleshy and compassionate experiences felt a lot vaguer, and less 'robust' than the cultural pessimistic arguments of McMindfulness, which deny these sort of transformative, worldly, and embodied experiences. Finally, at times and particularly in academic settings, trying to articulate these experiences felt shameful. Deep spiritual and compassionate experiences felt too personal for conference presentations or journal articles. Initially, I felt as if I should try to keep them hidden in a private, inner world. But, on reflection and through spending time with my field diary, I realised that these spiritual experiences were shared and were, in fact, the *very connective tissue* of the retreat. Moreover, they shaped my subsequent encounters with mindfulness.

Engaged Buddhism takes a multiplicity of forms and does not have a clear origin (Queen 2004; Edelglass 2009). Some believe it is a historical and traditional practice that goes back to the time of the Buddha, others believe that it is a modern invention that ‘reflects the globalisation and hybridization of Asian, European, and American values’ (Queen 2004, 249). The term itself is credited to have been coined by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh in the 1960s (Queen 2000). Queen describes the three characteristics of socially engaged Buddhism as awareness, identification, and action. Awareness is sati, or mindfulness, which is both the ‘penetrating awareness of breathing and other bodily and mental states’, as well as, the act of remembering of previous conditions, lives and the state of interrelatedness of all beings (ibid, 6). Identification is the awareness of self and the world, the sense of oneness, nondualism, interdependence and empathy for all beings. It is a deep compassion for the suffering of others. Here, the relationship is non-dualistic in that the suffering of others is significant to the self because self and other are interdependent (Edelglass 2009), meaning that we come into being through our relationships and connections with everything around us (King 2009). Finally, engaged Buddhism has the imperative of action at its heart. Cultivating non-dualistic compassion through mindfulness and identification is seen to initiate action. Here, identifying with others’ suffering as “my suffering” is understood to inevitably lead to action (Queen 2000). Thich Nhat Hanh understands meditation as action:

> ‘Meditation is a point of contact. Sometimes you do not have to go to the place of suffering. You just sit quietly on your cushion, and you can see everything. You can actualize everything, and you can be aware of what is going on in the world. Out of that kind of awareness, compassion and

understanding arise naturally, and you can stay right in your own country and perform social action.' (Hanh 1991, 126).

Additionally, spirituality is integral to the praxis of engaged Buddhism through mindfulness and meditation (King 2009). It is understood that the spiritual meditative work to cultivate inner peace is the platform for social activism. Here, I see similarities between the spiritual dimension of engaged Buddhism and Anzaldúa's spiritual activism. For both movements, spirituality is about going beyond the self to engage in spiritual practices that help to develop a relational and non-dualistic collective consciousness or awareness.

In the next section, I present extracts from my reflective research diary alongside Engaged Buddhist-informed pedagogy, and geographical literature on quiet activism. I use the term 'quiet engaged awareness' to signal the modest, embodied, silent, and spiritual, nature of activism in mindfulness. The retreat at Gaia House was structured around a mindful approach that first asked us to look compassionately inwards in order to fold back out to wider social issues and injustices. During the retreat, spiritual and compassionate connections and energies were made across scales: our breath-bodies and selves (micro), trees and nonhuman animals at the retreat centre (local), and planetary health (macro). Furthermore, personal spiritual experiences developed in my meditations as I began to connect more deeply and compassionately with myself and my surroundings on the retreat. I was affected and re-figured through enchanting mindful encounters that produced a 'quiet engaged awareness'.

9.3. On quiet engaged awareness

Breathing in, I see trees

> Breathing out, I wish them well
>
> Breathing in, I see a bee pollinating a flower
>
> Breathing out, I smile
>
> (23/5/2019, The Barn retreat)

Through many enchanting mindful encounters with non-human others (like the one I had with the rabbit), the seeds for a form of mindful quiet engaged awareness were sown, and began to germinate for both myself and for the participants I worked with. These encounters forced us otherwise. They were simultaneously uncanny, troubling, spellbinding, and felicitous. We are both assembled and disassembled through these encounters, and through this process we cultivated something more. Serendipitous encounters, springing from unforeseen encounters or mindful moments of awareness forced an awareness of environmental entanglement – the resources and capacities we receive from nonhuman others. For me, trees were important in this process:

> I took a walk around the grounds. I discovered a little shrine with bunting, and a hut at the top of the Garden that overlooked the rolling fields. The gardens were beautiful: full of blue bells, wild flowers and garlic, and trees. There were small pathways that wove around trees and to different points in the garden. This was the kind of garden I liked best – trees hanging, covering, providing protection, and a feeling of being sheltered by them. (4/5/2019, Gaia House)

Other encounters were more intentionally cultivated through compassion meditations:

> When the bell rang, the teachers instructed us to connect with nature compassionately during our mindful walking. To stop and wish trees, plants and animals well, and to connect with their innate vulnerability and fragility: ‘I wish you well, I see your vulnerability’. Moving outside, I take off my shoes and socks and walk carefully to the largest tree on the lawn. It is beautiful, a huge gnarly tree with branches twisting haphazardly out from its thick trunk. One branch undulated low to the ground, I stretched out my hand to touch and stroke it. I found it surprisingly smooth to the touch, and as I investigated the underside, I found that it was rougher, like sandpaper. For this tree and others, I acknowledged their presence and wished them well – taking in their beauty. (5/3/2019, Gaia House)

For me, this corresponded to a spiritual sense of becoming-tree through accessing particular sensory and wisdom worlds. Since ‘much of our time is spent absorbed in feelings and thoughts we can never fully share’ (Batchelor 1998, 49), plant and tree-ness were enveloped through the breath as a way to relate compassionately.

> We began the seated morning meditation in silence. Closing my eyes, an image of myself as a tree came to me. My body became the trunk and my head became the branches and leaves. Inside my trunk was an opening, a little room in side for those elements of myself that needed protecting. They huddled in there while the winds of critics and judgment swirled around outside, and the critical parts of myself banged on the door, wanting to get in. This imagery was intensely helpful, I felt safe and secure and surprised that it had come to me during this meditation – it was unforeseen and unexpected. But maybe it was induced by all the

> talk of both compassion, abiding, and trees. The imagery had come together to produce this in my mind. (Gaia House, 6/5/2019)

These seeds were sown in my 'store consciousness' (Hanh 2016) during the Gaia House retreat, and on the subsequent retreat at The Barn they began to germinate and flourish:

> The image of a blossoming flower came to me as I breathed. Breathing in, it grew taller and flourished; drawing life from my exhaled air. The flower needed cultivation, energy and compassion to grow stronger. I tended to it. From a flower, came an oak tree. My oak trunk of a body was rooted in the ground. Rooted, feeling the weightiness of the contact between my legs, bum and the floor and cushion. I rose out of the ground, posture straight and tall – nourished by the energy that flowed up from the earth. The trunk contained my 'inner child'. I wished her well as the branches sprouted out from my shoulders and head. (22/5/2019, Barn retreat)

Compassion and acceptance are important qualities to mindfulness pedagogy and praxis. Acceptance is the acknowledgement of pain or discomfort, and understanding ways that habits affect us. Compassion is suffering-*with*, the acceptance of the body in pain (Germer 2009). Suffering-with is breathing-with, as we come to recognise our inter-being. Compassion is a political resource. It asks us to encounter another's world – to put ourselves inside their skin, or shoes, in order to understand how it feels from the other side. But compassion cannot be shallow, it must be embodied and have integrity and depth – we must literally suffer *with* the other (Hanh 1991).

Here we fold onto the exteriority of another in an attempt to see and suffer with them. This is a form of ‘care of the self’ that Murray (2007) speaks of. By thinking with Merleau-Ponty’s contemplation of the double of vision and Socrates Alcibiades, Murray shows that ‘there is a reciprocity or reversibility that cannot be comprehended by instrumental or technical reason alone’ (ibid, 9), so that ‘a self will know itself only if it knows another self, and knows the best part of that self, the part by which it knows, the part that it is wise’ (ibid). This knowledge can only be understood through love and care. Yet, Murray notes here that this is a rhetorical device as the soul or self is dynamic and without substance – ‘it is neither cognitive nor conceptual’ (ibid, 9).

This rhetorical device is useful here. Mindfulness can be understood as an ethically sensitive practice of the care of the self in the way that Murray speaks of. Through the compassionate folding of the breath we can cultivate a mindful relationship to ourselves through the other. For Engaged Buddhists this relationship leads to political action - mindfulness being at the heart of that action. Here, mindfulness is not a feeling state, but rather the *very call to action*.

> ‘Meditation is to look deeply into things and to see how we can change ourselves and how we can transform our situation. To transform our situation is also to transform our minds. To transform our minds is also to transform our situation, because the situation is mind, and mind is situation’ (Hanh 1991, 112).

Momentary, intimate, and bodily connections and encounters with non-humans, mainly trees and animals, provoked awareness of collective issues. The aforementioned compassion meditation at Gaia House that asked us to suffer with trees, to recognise their vulnerability, was the practice of the care of the

self, in which we gain insight and wisdom through the recognition of our relations with nonhumans. After a similar compassion meditation, we had a period of reflection in groups. Personally, I was struggling with the retreat before the compassion meditation – I felt disconnected and I was finding the process of *compassionately* dwelling with the body challenging. I was experiencing a deluge of ruminative and judgemental thoughts that were amplified in the silent meditation room. Yet, after the group circle I passed through an experiential threshold, and I began to feel more at ease. A sense of overwhelm was shared by many of the other retreatants, particularly around environmental issues:

> We went around the circle to reflect on how the retreat was for each of us. The first person to speak burst into tears. She was terrified of the environmental devastation that was occurring and our/her role in this process. In her compassion meditation she had practiced sending compassion to the Earth and the trees. (5/3/2019, Gaia House)

By seeing the vulnerability and beauty in the Earth, the retreatant was forced to reflect on the climate crisis. This was a form of eco-anxiety (Clayton et al. 2017) and it was a feeling state that was palpable throughout the retreat. During the previous meditations we were asked to root and ground down, connecting to the solid ground. This entailed a process of giving up our weight to floor – to be held compassionately by the earth through breathing into the contact points between the body and the ground and releasing muscular tension on the exhale. This embodied encounter with forms of entanglement and rootedness began to dissolve the sense of bodily limits, as we became-earth or became-tree, which in turn, produced a compassionate awareness of environmental issues.

> The teachers spoke about the boundaries of the body, that our body does not have finite boundaries. They talked about the symbolism of rootedness, to imagine ourselves rooted like a tree. And the roots of a tree are as wide and vast as the tree itself. Imagine yourself as rooted, spreading out underneath the earth. (5/3/2019, Gaia House).

We were able to suffer *with* the Earth. Our suffering corresponded to the Earth's and vice-versa. Thus, the body walks, breathes, feels and knows in air, 'knowledge is formed along the paths of movement in the weather-world' (Ingold 2010, 136). An awareness that for the tearful retreatant produced a sense of emotional overwhelm and grief. For me, it was not explicitly a form of grief, but a quiet embodiment of tree-ness – a feeling of spiritual compassionate connection with Earth.

This sense of grounding in connection with the Earth was aided through the encounter with different material topologies, surfaces, and slopes. At Gaia House, formal meditations took place in the meditation hall – a large rectangular room in the West Wing of the building. This structure was an infrastructure, built on top of a foundation or surface in which the building extended from. Grounding here was into the hard-surfaced world. Yet, out in the gardens we routinely practiced mindful walking where the ground was perceived kinaesthetically – in movement (Ingold 2010). The topology of the ground here was the very formations of the surface, and its contours, substances, colouration, and texture were felt through bodily movement. The routine of the retreat meant a constant back and forth between these different forms of ground, these embodied connections were deliberate: allowing us to explore

and encounter the active qualities of the ground and the Earth, and our role within it.

Throughout the Gaia House retreat sentiments of emotional grief, overwhelm, and hope continually bubbled to the surface. At the end of the retreat they fully erupted, and the reflection period was full of hopeful chatter and dialogue for political action and mobilisation.

> At the end of the session we all sat around in a group and shared our experience of the retreat. People thanked each other and the teachers for creating a wonderful space. Others talked about environmental activism and the urgency for change.
>
> There was a sense of real joy and an intensity of emotion in the air. It was clear that we had all been affected by the retreat in one way or another. The atmosphere of care, compassion, kindness, trust and respect was thick. There was a sense of ending, of it coming to a close and that we had created something special here in the four days of silence. A kind of connectedness around a shared concern for the environment, but also care and compassion in a difficult world (6/3/2019, Gaia House)

Seemingly, the retreat had attuned us and laid the foundations for forms of quiet and spiritual activisms. Throughout the retreat leaders guided our attention to both personal/inner and collective/outer concerns through compassion and grounding meditations. Our awareness had been shaped to help us realise how intimately interrelated and interwoven the two are; each depending on, influencing and shaping the other (Keating 2008).

This section has shown the engaged and transformative praxis of mindful awareness, and the ways that it expands our awareness. Yet, my research cannot fully account for the explicit ways that these retreats mobilised (political) *action*, or even what happened in the everyday lives of the retreatants after it had ended. I can only speak to the ways that I was affected and how understood other retreatants to be affected during our time on retreat. Also, I do not want to posit an opposition between loud and quiet, active and still, rooted and mobile forms of activism (Pottinger 2017). Rather, these mindful practices were active and quiet embodiments and spiritual engagements with the ground, environment, and trees, which were used to connect to wider environmental and social issues.

At other points in my research enchanting mindful encounters had cultivated a sense of attunement for participants. The integration of everyday mindfulness practices into Beatrice's life had guided her to slow down and take notice of the environment around her. Her new found awareness or attunement to her everyday surroundings had provoked a sense of interconnectedness with other beings. In her lunch breaks, Beatrice took mindful walks around the city, during these walks she became more aware of the environment around her. As she told me about her mindful walking practice, two things stuck out for her: litter and dying bees. She recounted a story of saving a bee one lunch break:

Chloe: Yep, the birds and the things? A lot of people talk about birds and noticing that.

Beatrice: And bees. You notice bees a lot more. Or like when they're on the floor. Like, I was late to a client meeting when I was working in Exeter because erm there was a bee on the floor! And I was

> worried it was going to die so I had to pick it up with a leaf and like, everyone's like, "Beatrice we have work to do", and I was like "Lisa give me some sugar water, quick!" [laughs]

(Transcription of interview, edited for clarity, 26/6/2019)

For her, this awareness led to an everyday, quiet form of action that involved picking up litter and saving bees. There was some anxiousness over how she was perceived during these moments: "Yeah bees and picking up litter… People think that's really weird!" (Beatrice, 26/6/2019). But, never-the-less there was pride in her new found awareness: "[I've] become a proper eco warrior now!" (Beatrice, 26/6/2019). These quiet acts were means of Beatrice playfully making a difference in an embodied, tangible, and localised way.

In the next section I offer some further thoughts on the limits of a mindful quiet engaged awareness. I unpack the ontological privileging of rootedness over rootlessness, or of radicals over rhizomes in the aforementioned mindfulness practices. The orientation of compassion, and where it is directed. And the politics of disconnection – what happens if suffering-with is unwanted?

9.4. Conclusions: limits of a mindful quiet engaged awareness

Experiences of embodied grounding and rootedness could be seen as somewhat privileged in the forms of mindfulness that I discussed in the previous discussion. Something that arose for me during and after these practices was the question of whether an 'authentic' mindful experience is seen to come from a sense of embodied rootedness, and this made me reflect on the ways that a sedentarist metaphysics could be embodied through mindfulness practices. This way of thinking historically has had a powerful influence on the ways that

human life is framed, understood, and managed (Cresswell 2006). In this logic, rootedness connotes sense of authenticity and belonging, whereas mobility and flow are associated with unauthenticity and rootlessness. The framing of rooting down through the imagery of the tree could bring these senses to mind. Nieuwenhuis (2016, 309) discusses the material geographies of 'emergence' in Heidegger's metaphysics, where the soil and Being became associated with rootedness, autochthony, and groundedness. Here the politics of geo-thinking mean that:

> 'The earth becomes associated with authority (a grounded truth), a claim to truth and is thus instilled with a force which without disruptions or interferences temporally pushes things forward towards a predetermined destiny (Geschick). The emergent thing consequently grows, and blossoms (enstehen) as if homogenous, natural, stable and pure, akin to the idea of a flower, plant or tree rooted in a native soil.' (ibid, 310).

There is danger that if uncritically adopted, or adopted in supremacist frameworks, this notion of authenticity and rootedness through arborescent imagery becomes a question of who and what belongs or does not in certain spaces and at certain times[19].

However, alternatively, a preference for thinking with the rhizome (and away from the root and tree) can be found in Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) *A Thousand Plateaus*, as a privileging of nomadic philosophy; along with Braidotti's (1994) 'nomadic consciousness'. In thinking with the 'root-book', Deleuze and Guattari argue that the 'tree is already the image of the world' as

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[19] For me, this brings to mind sub-cultures of eco-fascism that proposes racial genocidal solutions to the climate crisis (Wilson, 2019).

the ‘book imitates the world’ – it is the ‘law of reflection’ one that creates divides between book and world, nature, and art (ibid,14). Following this argument, the embodied practice of rooting like a tree offers an image of the world so that rather than changing power structures, it simply mirrors or reflects the forces of neoliberal capitalism and white supremacy. Furthermore, they write: ‘We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics.’ (ibid, 15). Rhizomes grow underground and side-ways, playing against the linear structure of trees, and is thus expressed as a non-phallogocentric way of thinking – ‘opposed to the visible, vertical ramifications of Western trees of knowledge’ (Braidotti 1994, 23).

Yet, understanding the aforementioned mindfulness practices in exclusively sedentarist or nomadic terms obscures or misses the importance of non-duality in Buddhism, wherein we are actively *holding together* the radical and the rhizome, and sensations of rootedness and rootlessness in our mindfulness practices. Practices of grounding and rooting down offer a plane of stability, or of inner peace (King 2009), in which to explore the instability, vulnerability, interdependence, and flux of experience and existence. With this line of flight, Moore (2018, xiii) offers an ‘intraspecies mindfulness’, a practice that situates ‘ourselves in a mesh instead of a hierarchy, allows for a natural empathy to unfold between humans and nonhuman animals (and the greater environment).’ Moreover, a rhizomatic and intraspecies mindfulness could produce a ‘nomadic consciousness’ (Braidotti, 1994) wherein a human body becomes a rhizomatic organism, or cyborg (Braidotti 1994), or ‘rhyzorg’: ‘entities making elemental linkages, affinities and connecting lines of flight through symbiosis, seduction, alliance and contagion’ (Macauley 2005, 307). A nomadic consciousness that

offers the political density to confront violence in all forms – including ecological violence. As Braidotti (1994, 25) argues, 'the nomad's relationship to the earth is one of transitory attachment and cyclical frequentation', the nomad does not exploit but instead 'gathers, reaps, and exchanges'.

Secondly, if compassion is suffering-with, what happens if we are only suffering-with particular objects that we are orientated towards? If 'the starting point for orientation is the point from which the fold unfolds', then inevitably our compassion is 'directed towards some objects and not others' (Ahmed 2007, 151). If our world is a white world and we are orientated in particular way (without critical reflection on the ways we are orientated) then our compassion will inevitability only go so far. This line of thought is echoed in debates over whiteness in environmental politics and Extinction Rebellion's activism, which has negated the histories of structural violence towards indigenous, working class, black, queer, trans or disabled people (Wretched of the Earth 2019).

Thirdly, through this forgetting of historical context and background, our suffering-with might be unwanted or mis-orientated. We must historically locate our compassion, as emotions are political. Within the context of climate activism, a white suffering-with may be unwanted if uncritically employed, in that it misses and obscures the colonial histories of domination and environmental exploitation. As:

> 'For many of us, the house has been on fire for a long time: whenever the tide of ecological violence rises, our communities, especially in the Global South are always first hit. We are the first to face poor air quality, hunger, public health crises, drought, floods and displacement.' (Wretched of the Earth, 2019, n.p.).

When we breathe, we breathe unequally (Simmons 2017) and this must be engaged with for our mindfulness to be right.

Part 2: ethnographic and participatory approaches

10. New ways of breathing together

10.1. Introduction

> ‘Breathing does not establish territory or fix the relation between self and other, and yet breathing is that which allows one and the other to live in co-inhabitance that is not premised on the commonality of a bond, but on the intangibility of air.’ (Ahmed 2013, 140).

In this chapter, I think through collective mindful spaces as ‘contact zones’ (Askins and Pain 2011) that produce ‘new ways of breathing together’[20] through encounters in the sharing circle and practices of inquiry and dialogue. During my research, I experienced two ‘formal’ types of collective mindful spaces, including the retreat centre and the 8-week course. In this chapter, I will be primarily thinking with my experiences on two 8-week mindfulness courses. The first, was a course run by a local College’s Adult Learning Centre that ran during Spring and Summer of 2018. The second, was an 8-week series of workshops that I co-designed and produced with a small group of participants (more information about the logistical set up and funding of the project can be found in chapter 5 of this thesis). In these workshops we created a zine entitled ‘a little book of wisdom’ that can be found at the end of this chapter.

One of the intentions for the co-produced workshops was to develop a programme, and space, that went beyond the standardised format of MBSR and MBCT. I wanted to provide a reaction to the academic critiques of 8-week courses that view them through the lens of McMindfulness. To do so, the workshops were designed with a participatory-action framework (PAR) in mind.

[20] From Conradson’s ‘new ways of being together’. As well as speaking to the research, this phrase signals the new ways of living and being together that COVID-19 has produced. This chapter was written during the first lockdown phase of the pandemic.

The orientation of PAR is to break down barriers between researcher and researched, and to enable spaces for collaboration, negotiation, and the co-construction of knowledges (Kindon et al. 2009; Wynne-Jones et al. 2015). It is an engagement that is methodologically open and diverse; one that is adaptive in its response.

The collaborative, participatory nature of the workshops emphasised the collective, intersubjective, and atmospheric dimensions of mindfulness. This is an element of mindfulness that has been underexplored in literature on McMindfulness, which sees the practice as all but another neoliberal technology of the self; one that encourages individuals to pursue private freedoms and inner experience. However, the collective and social nature of mindfulness is not solely limited to participatory-based workshops. Inter-subjective encounters and collective experiences were found throughout my research on 8-week courses and retreats. As we have seen elsewhere in this thesis, mindfulness is not about resolutely turning inwards, to inner experience, but instead, it is an interplay between the inner and outer. In doing so, we cultivate new ways of being and breathing with ourselves and we develop new ways of being and breathing with others (S. R. Taylor 2018). Breathing is a way of encountering the other that does not grasp the other, or turn the other into a theme or thing (Levinas in Ahmed, 2013). It is to widen our gaze to compassionately encounter the other through the relation of intimate distance. Mindfulness as an 'embodied style of experiential inquiry' has been characterised by its relation of intimate distance (Stanley 2012a). This notion of intimate distance has been explored in chapter 8, but I reiterate it here:

> 'mindfulness involves firstly coming into closer contact with our experience, becoming more intimately aware of our experience, before secondly not identifying with that experience as a self (i.e. as 'I', 'me' or 'mine'). Experientially, one becomes intimate with experience but also distanced from the attachment of a notion of a self (i.e. an 'observer' with an inherent, independent existence) who owns that experience. Hence, it is a paradoxical orientation of *intimate distance*.' (ibid, 205).

I would contend that this form of experience shapes encounters in mindful spaces. In that we become intimate with others through intersubjective encounters. But through this we begin to recognise the process of perpetually unfolding modes of subjectification in that selves are produced and emerge through and between bodily encounters (Simpson 2015). Moreover, we recognise the relationship between the interior and exterior, self and other. Importantly, the breath is at this boundary (Stanley 2012a), and constitutes this infolding. But the spatiality of experience is not symmetrical. The asymmetry of the self and other is also about intimate distance. As 'ethical communication is about a certain way of holding proximity and distance together: one gets close enough to be touched by that which cannot be simply got across' (Ahmed 2013, 157).

The chapter recounts the journey of the participatory work to explore the formation of the mindfulness-based group. I will provide vignettes and insights from my research to think with some of these mindful encounters, and in doing so, I hold together tensions between: individual/collective, presence/absence, and intimacy/distance. The research is explained through a collage of vignettes,

memories, and quotes from interview and workshop transcripts, alongside theoretical and conceptual exploration.

I will start at the beginning of my research to reflect on the initial experiences and encounters on the 8-week course through feelings of aversion, ambivalence, and non-attunement. Next, present absences and precarious feelings will be explored through the withdrawal of a participant. From here, in reference to a research vignette, the dynamics of the sharing circle and practices of structure and inquiry will be discussed to highlight the collective and atmospheric structure of mindfulness. The ethics of communication in the sharing circle will be discussed in relation to embodied forms of communication through tears and crying with participants. Finally, I will close the chapter with exploring the ways mindfulness became embedded into the participant's lives through the refracted enchantment of the souvenirs of mindfulness.

10.2. Beginnings: aversion, ambivalence, and non-attunement

I felt nervous and anxious. I was unsure of what to expect.

I had found it challenging to get to this point, the point of sitting in a chair in a circle in a classroom on the 5th floor of the College's Adult Learning Centre. There had been a mixture of reactions from the mindfulness teacher about my proposed involvement in her 8-week course: suspicion, intrigue, ambivalence, annoyance. Her reactions increased my feelings of imposter syndrome and self-doubt. I was worried about how others would see me. Whether my involvement in the course would hinder group formation, breaking feelings of trust and safety. I felt like a potential threat to group safety and coherence. I didn't want to take up too much space. I was in fact told not to take up too much space. I was reminded that the course was not about my research – that it was for the

benefit of the group. The teacher was uneasy with me doing participant observation. Participants and course members had not joined onto the course with the awareness that there would be a researcher there. They had not consented to join onto a mindfulness course for research. This meant that I was to focus on my own experiences, and not those of others. I quickly found out that this was always already impossible. To focus on my experience, and mine alone, was a challenge because through the very nature of the course, and processes of inquiry and dialogue, I learnt that experience was inter-subjective and collective. I was continually affecting and affected by others.

On entering the room I initially felt uncomfortable. It was as if I was hiding a secret that was about to be outed. I was about to come out as 'researcher'. However, the teacher decided not to introduce my positionality until half way through the session (we had agreed that she would introduce me). A decision that I ruminated on throughout the first hour of the class. This tension bubbled up as I spoke with other members of the course. We were split into pairs to chat about our intentions for the course. I was paired with someone who, in some surprising depth, spoke about her experiences with depression, and the hope that mindfulness would provide some relief for her. I was initially taken aback at her honesty and openness with her experiences. I could not ignore the affect that this encounter had on me. It made me reciprocate, and I shared some of my personal experiences with anxiety and depression. I surprised myself. I was being open with a stranger, more open than I had been in the past with close friends, family, and peers. There was something about the atmosphere of the room that created a safe environment of people with similar lived experiences. All of whom had come to this course for similar reasons: for support, for space, for relief.

Initially the classes were awkward and draining. Being a researcher on the course was challenging – I was unsure of my personal boundaries and how much to share with the group. How much was too much? How much would have a negative impact on them? But, I also needed to share, because others were doing so and I needed to reciprocate. Others in the group *wanted* to know more about me, my research, and my feeling states.

We sat in pairs and practiced mindful listening. One person would speak, and the other would give them undivided attention, actively listening to what they were saying. This was powerful. I wanted to feel heard, supported, and safe. Free to express whatever I needed to. But, I was always aware of how that might not be appropriate. One of the weeks, this activity took me by surprise. I leant into a difficult and emotional conversation that was on my mind that day, and was overcome with sadness and frustration. I was wrestling with my ability to feel in these sessions and be vulnerable. Because as a researcher, aren't we meant to care for our participants? But they weren't participants, I wasn't supposed to be researching them. So could I just let myself be vulnerable with them?

My feelings of aversion and ambivalence meant that I was finding it difficult to connect fully with the teaching in the class. In meditation, I found it hard to connect with my feeling states. Due to my personal conflict over how much I should, or should not, feel – I shut them down. When the teacher asked 'what feeling arises for you now?' during meditation, I couldn't grasp anything. I felt like a blank page.

I felt unattuned to the structure of feeling in the room. Geographers have commented on the calm and still atmosphere that is created through meditative

practices (Conradson 2013; Edensor 2012). But, initially I felt unattuned and uncomfortable with the slow pace and stillness. As Sara Ahmed (2014, 18) says, 'we can close off our bodies as well as our ears to what is not in tune. An experience of non-attunement might then refer to how we can be in a world with others where we are not in a responsive relation'. There was an atmosphere of calm, slowness, reciprocity, and compassion. I did not feel orientated towards it. I felt like an 'affect alien' and a 'killjoy' – frustrated with what I felt were 'feeling rules' (Hochschild 1983) that set mindful 'affective expectations and norms' (Boler and Davis 2018). Some have critiqued mindfulness interventions for imposing 'a Puritan obsession with controlling emotions, especially anger' (Purser 2019, 111). Where outward emotional states like anger are denied in mindful spaces because they do not align with the atmospheres of calm and compassion. I'm not sure if the structure of feeling went so far in that it completely obscured people's emotional states, but, initially, there were mixed feelings:

> The teacher, Angelika, asked us to go around and contribute a word to how we felt about the course so far. People said: frustrated, curious, overwhelmed, hopeful, and someone just shrugged. (14/5/2018, extract from research diary, 8-week mindfulness course)

In *McMindfulness: How mindfulness became the new capitalist spirituality*, Purser (2019) recounts his experiences of an 8-week mindfulness course. He describes the awkward and guarded atmosphere of the introductory session, of the participants who came to the course hoping to find their 'saving grace'. He felt ambivalence and unease, seeing their hopes as misguided and buying into a form of cruel optimism. At the end of the session, Ron 'drifted off into a

pleasant nap' whilst nobody 'seemed to care' (ibid, 114). His experience of a mindfulness 8-week course was completely alienating and individualised.

For me, the first session was fraught and filled with tension and insecurity due to the conflict of multiple positionalities and responsibilities of care. Moreover, an experience in other parts of my academic life had brought a bearing on how I approached the first 8-week course. Prior to my participation in the course, I had been working on a wellbeing group in the department at the university. My efforts intended to create a form of community based on creative, practical, and somatic activities and to give a space where PhD students and early career researchers could meet to chat and share experiences whilst engaging in craft and other activities in a communal space. The group was inspired by both my interest in participatory feminist praxis and the poetics of (self)care in the academy (O'Dwyer et al. 2018). One week after the UCU pension strike in March 2018 a workshop I had organised was publicly and heavily slammed by a vocal member of the postgraduate community. At the time, I was unaware of the contested nature of wellbeing initiatives at the University. I had only just started to explore academic and activist literature and perspectives on McMindful initiatives and wellbeing interventions. The email containing advertisement of my wellbeing workshop from the Doctoral College was ill-timed and mis-advertised (they failed to mention that it was a student-led activity) and thus it became a perfect example of a neoliberalised wellbeing initiative.

This 'hot-take' deeply affected me – I took it to heart, and because I never properly acknowledged how much it hurt, it chipped away at my confidence. Of course, the original Tweeter was not intending to hurt me personally – they were critiquing the structural mechanisms of the university that legitimise and

pursue these types of individualised interventions. But of course, if you work hard on something, having that thing critiqued is going to hurt. And also, it hurt maybe because I had fallen for cruel optimism.

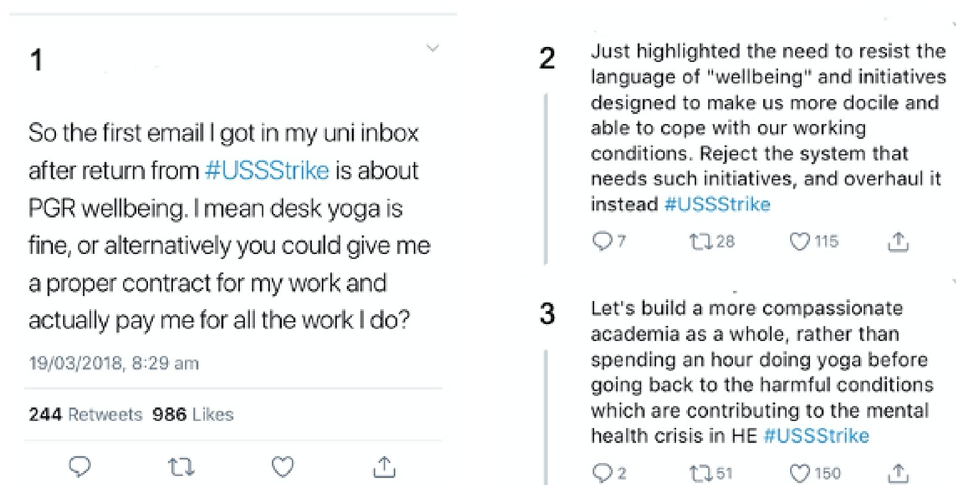


Figure 8: screenshots of a twitter thread (taken 20/03/2018)

Yet, at times, during that first mindfulness session on the 8-week course, it did feel supportive. An atmosphere of hope and safety was created in which there was an underlying acknowledgement that some of our lived experiences were shared. The teacher made it quite clear that we would be creating a community with a commitment to practice, and that some kind of group dynamic and relationship would be forged throughout our time together. Initially, I was surprised by this statement – literature pertaining to McMindfulness had argued that mindfulness is an individualistic practice focused on inner experience (Purser and Loy 2013). Yet, this communal intention was realised and manifested throughout our time together; leading onto a second 8-week participatory course, and an ongoing ‘mindfulness group’ Whatsapp conversation.

> “But [in] the second lesson I felt pain until the very end and then I started to think that I was not alone. Because people then started talking about their problems and then suddenly there’s, there started a unity in the class.” (interview with Harriet, 29/5/2019)

The last session of the 8-week course at the College was filled with gratitude, sadness, and hope. Angelika provided space for us to reflect on the group and to acknowledge the supportive and non-judgemental space that was produced by the group during the course. For me, it was an important moment of feedback. I thanked them for their support and ease with my positionality as researcher. I shared my initial experiences of discomfort and nervousness during the first couple of weeks. Before we left the class we said goodbye to one another – acknowledging the journey we had together.

Through shared experience, sharing feeling states, and breathing together, a community or sangha was formed:

> ‘Dharma practice is not just a question of cultivating resolve and integrity in the privacy of our hearts. It is embodied in friendships. Our practice is nourished, sustained, and challenged through ongoing contact with friends and mentors who seek to realize the dharma in their own lives’ (Batchelor 1998, 49).

The importance of the mindfulness-based group is well documented by Buddhist teachings and commentaries on sangha. Sangha is one of the three jewels of Buddhism (the others being buddha and dharma), and is a community of practice based on the cultivation of awareness (Hanh 2017; Franz 2019). In

this context, mindfulness is a collective practice, and produces communities from engagement in and cultivation of shared practices.

10.3. Present absences

Participants trickled into the room as I was setting up for the second week (18/10/2018) of the participatory workshops that I had organised. We greeted each other, pleased to see one another. I was nervous, but less so than last week. Harriet hurried in a little late looking agitated and uneasy. Her journey to get here had been difficult. She spoke about the traffic, making exasperated noises about other drivers.

She had wound herself up during the journey. She was running late and knowing she was going to arrive late had frustrated her (she likes to be early). She sat in the chair, slumped back with exhaustion, whilst we recounted stories of the day. When it was her turn, Harriet told us that she had been kicked by one of her horses not long before she had left. This jarring and painful event had knock on effects for her journey. We rallied around her, offering comfort and reassurance.

“it’s okay that you’re a couple of minutes late”

“are *you* okay?”

“that must have hurt!”

She reassured us she was fine and Angelika closed the conversation to begin the workshop.

The next morning I received an email:

Hi Chloe,

Would you please give my apologies to the group and tell them that I won't be coming to the group anymore. The distance is too far and both times I have left Exeter there have been road works making my journey even longer. I love the sessions and meeting everybody has been wonderful. I appreciate the work and dedication you have put in and I am sure you will have great success with your project. Give my love to everyone and my phone no if anyone wants a chat.

Best wishes

Harriet

I feel a stab of anxiety in my chest as I read this. Multiple thoughts came to me:

"I hope she's okay"

"is there something more to this?"

"how will the group react?"

"will this be a trigger for people?"

"can the group survive this?"

"does she want to withdraw from the research?"

"what's going to happen now?"

Later that day, I responded to her, asking whether she could email the group mailing list (to which she responded saying she doesn't have that technical

ability, and asked me to email the group on her behalf), and whether she'd like to withdraw from the research (here she responded saying she wishes to still be included in the data).

This event left me feeling uneasy and unsure. Worried about the future of the research and of the workshops. It felt like a pivotal moment.

The size of the group had reduced significantly with her going. Her presence was highly valued to the group and made a big impact. Harriet had brought an embodiment of energy, enthusiasm, and had offered a sizable contribution to group discussions and dialogue.

At the back of my head, I worried whether there was something more to this – whether there were problems at home. We were aware of a precarious domestic situation. But, unavoidably, I also felt a little deflated. And maybe these feelings came from a blurring of lines between participant and friend. The withdrawal felt like a loss.

For most of the next session we discussed her absence, and expressed concern and worry over the precarious predicament that she was living in. We were worried that other factors were influencing her decision not to attend anymore. For many of us, her decision to withdraw had greatly affected us and were present in meditations and ruminative thought patterns:

> "it was just that, every meditation my mind has wandered back, to this, it was the way she said 'to my husband" (Flora, week 3 of the participatory mindfulness course, 25/10/2018).

This event had a significant effect on the group. We all felt a collective sense of loss. This had a knock on effect when other members of the group were unable to attend future sessions. During the fifth week, Beatrice was unable to attend the workshop. We sat uncomfortably waiting – making small talk, watching the empty chair, listening to sounds of movement in the building: the creaking of floorboards, footsteps on the stairs. Usually participants would inform me prior to the session if they were unable to attend, and I would let the group know. However, this week there was no prior warning from Beatrice about her inability to attend. Her absence weighed heavily on the group, and was present for me during the introductory meditation.

"where is she?"

"is she okay?"

"I hope she still wants to attend these sessions…"

After the meditation, we sat in the circle and reflected back on our experiences of the practice. Flora was first to articulate her feelings of sadness over Beatrice's absence. Angelika widened the conversation to the rest of the group. After an introductory meditation, we explored the absence and withdrawal of group members and how that was affecting our experience.

Angelika: so anything, anything, you want to bring into this space here, any sort of leftovers from last session, or sessions, or anything that is present for you right now and feels, wants to be expressed, articulated?

Flora: a little bit of sadness that Beatrice is not here

[…]

Angelika: okay, okay, so the group feels different?

Flora: yeah

Clare: it keeps changing doesn't it? Harriet went and that was a *big* change

(transcription of the workshop, 8/11/2018)

During the reflection it was clear that the absence and withdrawal of group members had hit the rest of the group hard. Many of the core and regular participants found the group to be a vital form of support, and for some it was just being together that mattered.

> "I just think it's nice being together!" (Clare, 25/10/18)

Harriet withdrawing her presence in the group was significant – it was a loss of a core participant, someone who had engaged in reciprocal acts of care: providing support to others whilst also receiving care as well. Through this experience the omnipresent nature of care was realised in that even in its absence (De La Bella Casa 2017), we felt the lack and the traces of what had been.

Her withdrawal from the group was a threshold. Through using her absence as a point of inquiry and dialogue around previous experiences with loss and change, the group was reconciled over this shared experience. Here, even 'in their absence, *which here is constitutive of the entire experience*, you nonetheless see them and see with them' (Wylie 2009, 282). By seeing with the

experience of Harriet's withdrawal, the group explored the feelings of loss and suffering. It was acknowledged, discussed, and felt. Rather than pushing it away, we orientated towards and *leant into* the experience of her withdrawal. This allowed each of us to accept change and precarity in the group's formation. Without this process, the threshold may have broken the unity that remained, and thus, 'precarity, in this regard, is a demand for personal affective reorganization in order to take a next step' (Gregory 2012, 266).

These processes of acknowledgement, inquiry, and dialogue were undertaken in the sharing circle, an important dynamic central to mindfulness pedagogy. The dynamics of which will be discussed in the next section.

10.4. The sharing circle

> Angelika directs us to focus our attention where it is needed, by placing a hand on the affected area. My right hand goes to my forehead and I place three fingers there, sending warmth, light, tenderness, and healing. As I send these intentions forth, I feel a wave of sadness wash over me, it flows through my body, making me feel intensely warm, vital and tingly. The sensation pauses, and my eyes well up: leaking quiet tears. I stay with this sensation, breathing into it, dwelling in it, and it seeps and trickles away. My attention is drawn back to the sensation of the contact between my hand and my forehead.
>
> Then, just before the practice comes to a close, the sensation of sadness comes back, rippling through me. I feel fragile, breakable, and vulnerable. Angelika signals the end of the practice, I open my eyes and wipe away the moisture that has collected there. We pause to stretch and re-hydrate, before Angelika opens up the sharing circle.

> I discuss what just happened – the welling up and down of sadness. Flora gives an example of when that has happened to her in meditation: tears streaming down her face, without a clear reason for this. We acknowledge this collective emotion. Angelika says 'it's okay, it's okay, it's okay to feel this', this causes another wave to crash over me, I can feel my composure break a little bit – I feel wobbly. She asks me how I am now, I respond saying 'I feel fragile'. Others in the group look on with concern – I feel able to express this clearly here. There is a strong atmosphere of compassion, non-judgement, and acceptance in the air. I feel heard, validated, and witnessed. (Notes from research diary, 22/11/2018).

The vignette recounts my experiences of a compassion meditation in one of the workshops in the final weeks of the 8-week participatory course. After the meditation, we sat as a group to share our experiences of the practice, in a 'sharing circle'. Sharing experiences of meditation is unique to mindfulness-based interventions, and marks them as distinct from vipassana-style meditation. With vipassana meditative practice, silence is upheld and speech or sharing 'inner experience' is refrained (Pagis 2010). Thus, this act of inquiry and dialogue is understood as quite unusual to traditional Buddhist practice. But, with current mindfulness pedagogy in MBSR and MBCT, inquiry and dialogue is seen to 'lie at the heart of good dharma teaching' (McCown et al. 2010, xiv). As Crane et al. (2015, 1105) explains:

> 'Following the meditation practice, the teacher begins a conversation by asking participants what they noticed during the practice. They do this to encourage reflection and exploration on their experience; work together

> through dialogue about these observations to find out what is being discovered; and link these observations and discoveries to the learning themes of the program.'

These acts of inquiry became pivotal moments and encounters for the mindfulness-based group, and shaped the way the group became an object of orientation. In this section, I want to think through the spatiality of inquiry in the sharing circle, and how practices of inquiry, dialogue, and stewardship from the teacher create atmospheres of belonging and group cohesion. Here, I attend to the teacher's 'affective labour' (Hardt 1999) to unpack the ways that sharing circles produce collective atmospheres of belonging and resonance.

Inquiry and dialogue are commonly undertaken in a sharing circle with the group of class participants. The use of a circle is important to the practice of inquiry, and denotes a certain mindful symbolism in which the circle acts as 'a symbol of completion, fullness and perfection' (McCown et al. 2010, 106). Alongside this, the circle acts as a form of enclosure – separating the group from the world. In doing so it sets a boundary:

> 'It creates order within from chaos. It divides outside and inside. It excludes and includes. It can alienate and ignore or hold and nurture. And so, we ask participants to 'come into' a circle, a phrase and action that emphasizes inclusion, holding, and nurturing, as well as the symbolism of fulfilment.' (ibid, 107).

Being in the circle, as part of the mindful group, is seen to hold nurturing qualities and contribute to the therapeutic experience of mindfulness. Becoming encircled asks us to re-orientate, to become round in that: 'images of full

roundness help us to collect ourselves, permit us to confer an initial constitution on ourselves, and to confirm our being intimately inside. For when it is experienced from the inside, devoid of all exterior features, being cannot be otherwise than round' (Bachelard 1994, 249).

The symbolism of circles and cycles is important to Buddhist and mindfulness pedagogies, and has been historically and traditionally used for healing purposes across cultures. For example, Indigenous healing through restorative justice uses a circle process, where an object or talking piece is passed around the circle giving the person holding it permission to speak (Gailey 2015). In orientalist thought, mandalas were used by Carl G. Jung as a therapeutic tool to 'project his own mental complexes upon the cosmic grid of the Mandala' so that the 'patient can exorcise his mind, and liberate himself from his various mental obsessions' (Argüelles and Argüelles 1972, 15). By drawing mandalas every day, Jung saw the goal to be the 'psychic development of the self', to which he found that 'everything points towards the centre'. This insight gave him stability, and gradually his 'inner peace returned' (Jung 1963, 196–7). Mandalas have long been used to self-orientate, and to project and locate oneself at the centre of the circle (Argüelles and Argüelles 1972).

The Buddhist teaching of *samsara* as the cycle or wheel of life, and dukkha as the satisfactoriness of life, have had important influences on current models of mindfulness. For example, King and Badham (2018) propose a ‘wheel of mindfulness’ model, which seeks to reconcile uncertainty and debate around second-generation mindfulness-based interventions, and the multi-dimensional nature of the term. The use of a wheel metaphor is significant to the authors, who use it to evoke the cycles of suffering inherent in Buddhist teachings about the nature of life.

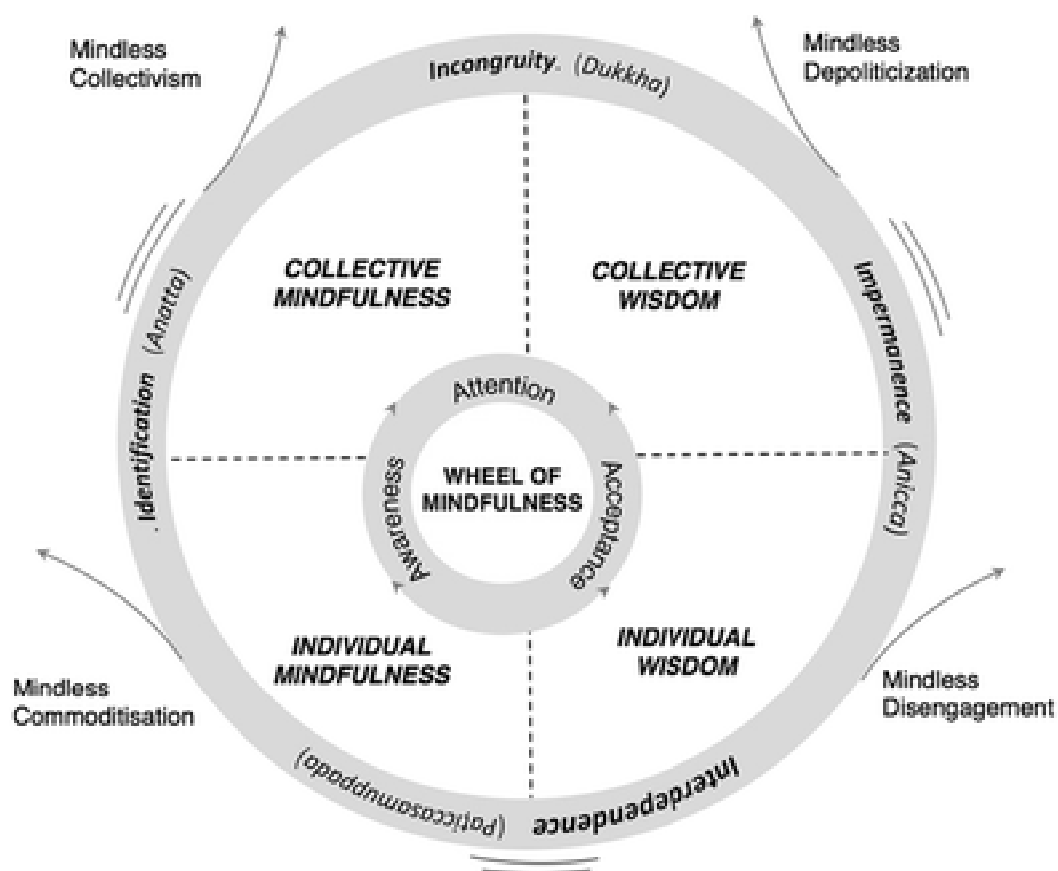


Figure 9: The wheel of mindfulness (copied from King and Badham, 2018)

The spatiality of inquiry, as the positioning of bodies in a circle, is significant in that it creates a mindful space for the group. Here, relations of care are produced and calm atmospheres are maintained through the securing of boundaries during practices of mindfulness and inquiry. The group is co-created in the circle through sharing, dialogue, and practice, and the teacher plays a pivotal role in stewarding the group (McCown et al. 2010). Importantly, inquiry is

not seen as separate from mindful meditative practice. It is an extension of that practice, and is in itself a part of mindfulness. In mindfulness pedagogy, there is no clear separation between meditative and inquiry experiences.

Part of the teacher's stewardship is attending to the atmospheres of the group. Here, atmospheres are both the meteorological and affective: the airy atmospheres of the breath and the collective atmospheres that affect feeling states and bodily resonances. It is a form of affective labour (Hardt 1999) in which the teacher carefully responds to, and works to shape, individual and

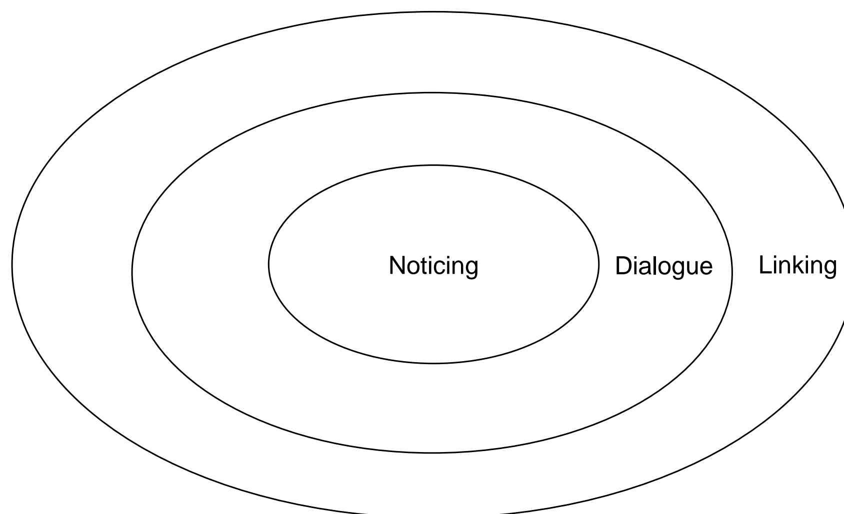


Figure 10: Layers in the inquiry process (copied and redesigned from Crane, 2009, figure 2, 145)

collective feeling states within the group. It is the subtle and careful 'production and manipulation of affects', requiring 'human contact and proximity' (Hardt 1999, 97–98). Crane et al (2015) explore the teacher's performance of 'disciplined improvisation', in which they respond to the flux and flow of dialogue during inquiry in order to develop the group's attitudinal qualities of mindfulness. The instability and indefinite nature of atmospheres in their state of sur-rounding and enveloping bodies whilst perpetually forming and deforming (Anderson 2014), requires attentiveness from the teacher towards the ways that collective atmospheres and individual feeling states correspond and blur. The process of

inquiry is carefully managed by the teacher. A skilful teacher is able to hold space and develop dialogue through three layers: 1) noticing direct experience during practice to reflect on and explore this experience; 2) dialogue as an exploration of direct experience, in order to relate to personal learning; 3) linking these observations to overall aims of the programme (Crane 2009, 143–44).

During this process of inquiry, the teacher is expected to embody mindful presence. Rather than relying on a specific pedagogy, the teacher's relationship to mindfulness informs her teaching practice. In doing so, she holds the attitudinal foundations of mindfulness and these are brought into engagements with participants in order to support them in their development of the attitudinal qualities (Crane 2009). These attitudinal qualities include: nonjudgment, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go. Through these acts of group dialogue and inquiry, the teacher develops a relation of care with her participants, and a subtle moment-to-moment shaping of their experience in order to shape feeling. This is guided by her role as steward in developing the mindfulness-based group's three 'treasures' or characteristics (McCown et al. 2010, 104–5). These include:

1) Freedom. This treasure is similar to acceptance and non-judgement in that it gives permission to the participant to surrender to the moment, so that they develop an expression of authenticity and friendship.
2) Belonging. This is the opportunity for the participant to understand their role and influence in the group, and wider group dynamics and relations of care and restraint. The teacher regulates the tensions of belonging in the group, and equips individuals with freedom and belonging in themselves for individual self-regulation.

3) Resonance. 'This is the co-created inter-subjective resonance of the group from moment to moment' (ibid, 105). The teacher shapes interactions between participants and intervenes in ways that generate rifts and repairs to deepen resonance.

These characteristics are understood as interdependent and shape the ways that the group is stewarded by the teacher. This is played out in the vignette above. When given *freedom* to express my feeling state to the other participants, the teacher encourages *resonance* between my experience and the experiences of others in the group (firstly Flora, but later the others join and acknowledge the shared emotions) in order to produce a shared experience, and *belonging*.

Furthermore, the specific discursive practices by the teacher are crucial during dialogue to shape participant experience and learning. One of these speech practices is talk that reinforces intersubjective affiliation and connection (Crane et al. 2015, 1107). During dialogue, there is a constant back and forth between individual experience and collective, group experience. Structurally, this feedback alternates between horizontal and vertical inquiry (Heads 2017). Horizontal inquiry widens dialogue to include the whole group in order to demonstrate shared experience. The teacher might invite the whole group to respond to a question, or to share snippets of direct experience during practice. This demonstrates that shared experiences are common among the group, and allows the participants to understand how their experience is shared and collective. Thus, horizontal inquiry is used as a form of mindfulness-based group building to produce a 'cohesive unit' (ibid, 54). Vertical inquiry is the one-to-one interaction between teacher and participant. This is clearly seen in the

vignette at the beginning of the section, where the teacher responded to my tears, at first, using vertical inquiry. My tearful experience was then extrapolated out to the whole group, to extend the inquiry horizontally. Flora responded to the collective feeling with an anecdote of her own, and after this the feeling is witnessed, acknowledged, and accepted non-judgementally. My experience of Angelika's stewarding of the group and the interplay between vertical and horizontal inquiry was powerful – I felt heard, witnessed and held by the group in the acknowledgement of a collective emotion.

This demonstrates that mindful experiences are not individualistic, but are instead an interplay between the individual and collective through these structures of inquiry. Rather than using the circle orientate towards a central self (like Jung's use of the mandala), the circle is used as a space in which to find a relation of intimate distance with one's own experience and the experience of others. Instead of investing in experience founded on a concrete notion of the self, the circle provides a safe space and boundary in which the group can experience this process of inquiry, and the destabilising process of unfolding and of de-centring one's experience from a central notion of 'I' or 'me'. As a process of back and forth between perceived inner, outer, and the experience in-between the two. The affective labour of the teacher works to structure experience in this way and cultivate attentiveness towards these particular 'folds in the soul'.

These careful modes of vertical and horizontal inquiry and the interplay between them produce collective feeling states, and shape the way group interactions take place. It is through this proximity with others in the circle through mindful inquiry and dialogue that allow the individual to identify as a member of the group (Geoghegan 2012). In that, 'emotions are not 'in' either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that

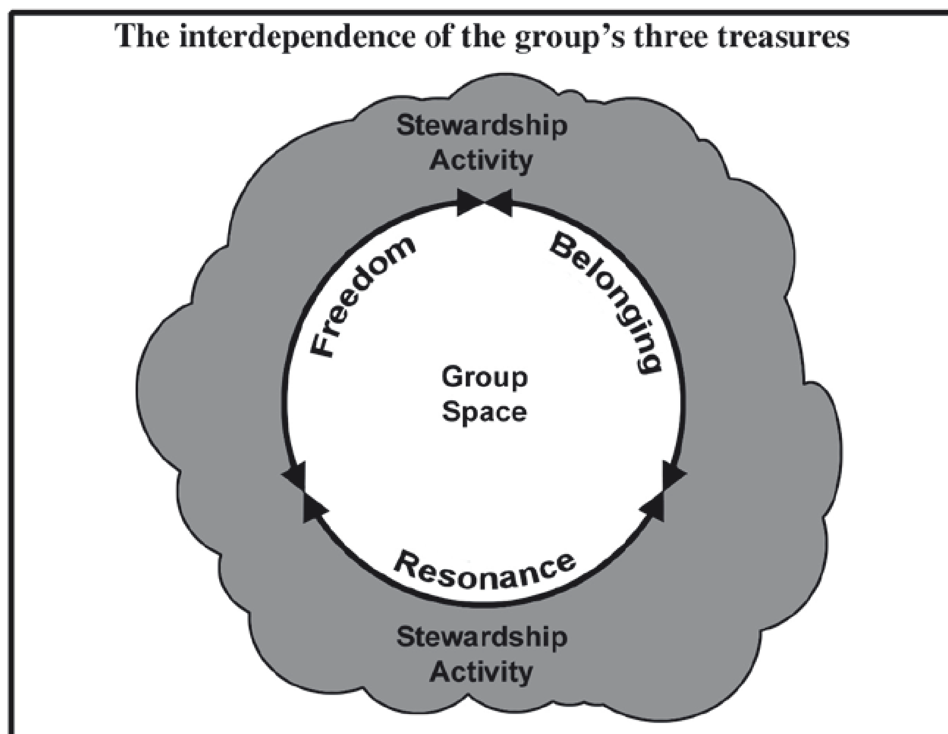


Figure 11: The interdependence of the group's three treasures (copied from McCown et al. 2010, 106)

allow the individual and the social to become delineated as objects' (Ahmed 2014, 10). The embodied and atmospheric labour of the teacher works to shape these interactions and encounters in ways that carefully manage these feelings and atmospheres of group membership and cohesion. This is demonstrated in figure 11, where the stewardship activity, or the affective labour of the teacher, is shown pictorially by a cloud or bubble outside of the group space. Here, their labour is shaping the moment-to-moment experience and development of the group, whilst protecting the boundary of the group.

This section has shown how practices of inquiry and dialogue extend from meditative practices and shape group development, formation, and atmospheres of belonging. The stewardship of the group by the teacher is crucial in this development, allowing individuals to experience moments of freedom, belonging, and resonance in the circle. Moreover, the teacher's stewardship of the group is a form of immaterial and affective labour, producing intangible products: feelings of belonging, ease, calm, and a sense of resonance and belonging. Ultimately, it is the felt experience of being encircled by mindful affective and airy atmospheres. Stewardship of the group is underpinned by care and caring labour that is 'entirely immersed in the corporeal, the somatic, but the affects it produces are nonetheless immaterial. What affective labour produces are social networks, forms of community' (Hardt 1999, 96). This form and formation of mindfulness-based group or community involves relations of care, in that participants recognise the 'inevitable interdependency essential to the existence of reliant and vulnerable beings' (De La Bella Casa 2017, 70).

Relations of care and proximity to participants through being affected, or emotionally touched by them, will be further discussed in the next section. Here, I draw out ways that crying and tears can communicate the uncommunicable relations of care and resonance between myself and my participants. Tears also spoke to a folding of the inner and outer: I was affected by my participants precisely because something about their lived experience resonated with me.

10.5. Tears and crying

The previous section explored the affective labour of the teacher in producing a boundary and group space through the practice of dialogue and inquiry, within

which participants are given the freedom to open up. These dynamics and pedagogical processes produced strong feelings of solidarity amongst the group I worked with. During the initial 8-week course we began developing inter-personal ties and relationships of support. We would frequently bump into each other around the city, or before and after sessions, and pick up conversations and offer support to one another. In a way, we extended dialogue & inquiry beyond the sharing circle. During the participatory workshops, the group relationship continued to develop and became a friendship.

Part of this friendship was a sense of authenticity. We reflected on our group dynamic, and how we were being very 'honest' with each other.

Flora: here we've, we've all been incredibly honest about…

Clare: [nods] …we have…

Flora: …aspects of our lives and it's an incredibly special thing that you don't-, it's, it's not always the case.

(6/12/2018, transcript from 8-week participatory course)

The use of the word 'honest' signals the importance of authenticity and the production of authentic experiences in mindfulness pedagogy. The mindfulness-based group is stewarded and shaped through the teacher's embodiment of authenticity (McCown et al. 2010). Mindfulness pedagogy encourages teachers to embody the altitudinal qualities of mindfulness in their teaching practice. In doing so, they are orientated towards a position of vulnerability, as their situated lived experience of practice becomes the starting point for their personal pedagogy. Here, '*authenticity* is where the faith arises, the faith that knows that

everyone can turn towards whatever is arising — good, bad, or ugly — and discover something within himself/herself' (ibid, 92). In another way, authenticity is the precarious, vulnerable, and vaguely spiritual position of 'trusting the process' of acceptance and insight.

This authentic embodiment strongly resonated in the ways that the group interacted – we were honest and vulnerable with each other. For, 'transformation and healing demand that we open ourselves up to others' (S. R. Taylor 2018, 73). The group developed into a sangha, and after the workshops had ended we met monthly in early 2019. But, this development was not without tensions and absences. I had mixed feelings about my positionality and the dynamics of care in the group, particularly due to my role as researcher and the ways that conflicted with feeling authentic. Care in my fieldwork was a dispositional and embodied practice, which was enhanced and nuanced by the pedagogical engagements with mindfulness.

For my research, it was a process of light touch, of 'feeling my way' (Askins and Blazek 2017), and of staying with the trouble that the fluidity and dynamism of the relations of care posed during my fieldwork. It was a precarious position, filled with feelings of insecurity, vulnerability, and doubt. I was bearing witness to the participants' trauma and previously unspoken histories as part of their embodied process of acceptance and insight. My positionality in this has also been explored in greater detail in chapter 6 of this thesis. However, it is worth re-noting that I am not trained therapeutically, I do not have professional psychotherapeutic ways of being and knowing in which I can take the role of knowledgeable witness and enabler of trauma testimony. Instead, I acted

‘tentatively, inexpertly and haphazardly to take on the responsibility for listening’ to their unspoken histories and experiences (D. McCormack 2014, 2–3).

Thus, I was not an ‘ideal’ listener who was fully equipped with full knowledge, or in control and confident in my task. Instead, listening and witnessing was a tentative and unsure process – of feeling my way. One that was guided with my breath-body, recognising affectation through bodily sensations. Part of this process was paying attention to the ways that relations of care and witnessing manifested in our bodies through tears. In *Queer Postcolonial Narratives and the Ethics of Witnessing*, Donna McCormack (2014, 19) argues that bearing witness to trauma ‘need not only be defined as oral articulation or an adopting of the narrative form’, as it can take multiple forms that may engage the body in unexpected forms of communication. Although she cites the more violent acts of cutting and burning the body, in this section I engage with the corporoeogeographies of crying and tears as a way of bearing witness and testimony to traumas.

Yet, in this section, I do not want to prioritise crying as a ‘good’ or ‘right’ mode of research encounter. We must be attentive to the diverse ways that crying can function, as it is not merely a symptom or sign of sadness or other emotions; crying is complex and mysterious (Vingerhoets 2013).

The significance and meaning of tears is diverse: they are culturally, socially, religiously, and historically situated. For example, tears can express sadness, frustration or anger, but they can also be used as forms of manipulation: ‘crocodile tears’ or ‘white tears’ (DiAngelo 2018). Moreover, crying affects bodies differently. Some are unable to cry. Yet, this is a state that is often regarded with suspicion. And others are taught not to cry: think of the phrase

‘boys don’t cry’. Here, crying is viewed negatively as a form of weakness and passivity. A form of vulnerability that is more closely associated with a femme capacity to cry. Crying is sometimes considered the basis of an ‘authentic’ experience of an emotional state such as sadness, care, or grief. Sometimes there is value judgements based on crying – it can become a demonstration or proof of the very act of care. Fundamentally, crying is complex and laden with emotional and cultural meaning. However, in this section, I want to focus on the ways that crying became a form of embodied communication around relations of resonance and care. Here, crying conveys that something is at stake.

During my experiences of research[21], tears became a way of non-verbally expressing collective relations of care, and resonance – of being emotionally touched by participants. Moments of resonance through crying with participants taught me something about embodied and situated acts of care:

> ‘There are worlds of collective feeling, relational processes that are far from being always pleasant or liveable but *have something specific and situated to teach us*. The question of how we learn to live with others, being in the world – to be touched as much as to actively touch, is an opening to ‘becoming-with’ (De La Bella Casa 2017, 116, emphasis added).

Touch and being touched augments proximity. It ‘intensifies proximity with gradualness and care, attention to detail in encounters, reciprocal exposure, and vulnerability’ (ibid, 116). Resonating with participants, feeling touched by their stories and tears, crying with them, were forms of embodied care that

[21] Crying was present throughout my research, and particularly so during retreats.

augmented feelings of proximity. But, it was a paradoxical relation of distant proximity. Crying with participants was a bodily response to when oral communication fails: 'The point is that crying commonly emerges when people recognise limitations on the expressive possibilities of language' (Katz 1999, 193).

Before the penultimate workshop, I had encouraged participants to bring sources of inspiration to the session in order to start putting together the 'a little book of wisdom' zine. Flora had brought with her quotes relating to love, these symbolised something important to her – her love for her children. She read out the 'four elements of true love' mantra she had found poignant whilst searching for material for the session:

> 'Darling, I'm here for you
>
> Darling, I know you're there
>
> Darling, I know you suffer, that is why I'm here for you
>
> Darling, I suffer. Please help me.'
>
> (transcript of Thich Nhat Hanh, from Niem Hy 2013, n.p.)

As she read, there was an upwelling of sadness, tears rolled down her cheeks, her voice trembled and she brushed the tears aside. The poem was for her estranged daughter. And as she read the last lines, her voice trembled and cracked. Tears overwhelmed her and she collapsed into sobs.

We sat around in the circle, witnessing her pain. I felt its resonance in my own body – a wave of sadness and compassion ran through me. My eyes began to

well up, and a tear trickled down my face as she recounted the message that she had sent to her daughter after she had discovered this mantra. In that moment, my body responded to the shared emotion. I felt affected by the traces of her pain.

In this vignette, tears were an ethical embodied response that recognised the asymmetry of care. It was an embodied form of caring-with that recognised the limits of discourse and spoken communication. Crying is a way of seeing the other that recognises the lack and the lag in communication. In particular, the inability of words to convey the ways we are affected by others and the nuances of resonance. Crying relays the relation of intimate/proximate distance. In *Strange encounters: embodied others in post-coloniality,* Sara Ahmed (2013) thinks about particular forms of hearing and touch as communicative ethics. For her, communication, even in its asymmetry, goes beyond face-to-face encounters, in that 'there are always other encounters, other speech acts, scars and traumas, that remain unspoken, unvoiced, or not fully spoken or voiced' (ibid, 156). Ahmed attends to an ethics of communication through holding together proximity and distance, in that 'one gets close enough to others to be touched by that which cannot be simply got across' (ibid, 157). That which affects me might also affect you but it will affect you differently precisely because of the time lag or interval that is at the heart of communication. There are always the myriad other things that are not communicated, not seen, not heard. And the recognition of this is at the centre of an ethics of communication.

Ethics of communication can also be about 'raw openness':

> 'Each individual I encounter has a specific, highly intricate history, an upbringing and life experiences that I cannot fully know. I don't know all

> the forces that shaped you and, at best, I can only partially ascertain your intentions and desires. Our understanding is always somewhat inadequate and incomplete.' (Keating 2016, 250).

Raw openness is a difficult position, one that embraces the uncertainty, contradictions, and doubts in communication. It acknowledges the vulnerability and risk of being affected, affecting others, becoming undone, and misunderstanding. This uncertainty at the heart of raw openness can be frightening, it renders bodies vulnerable. The risk of miscommunication or not being heard can repeat the violence of the original trauma (D. McCormack 2014, 37).

Tears illustrate an ethics of communication, and of vision, in that they speak 'to the other in "words" that oral language may not contain or allow, and as a way of responding, of hearing and answering, which is [..] both extra-linguistic and an other form of speech' (C. Taylor 2006, n.p.). Chloe Taylor puts Levinas and Derrida in conversation to think through ethical vision through the capacity of the human eye to shed tears:

> 'We see while in tears, and see others in tears, and cry because of what we see. Vision is not blinded by tears, but rather may respond in tears, tears which blur without fully obscuring, veil with transparent matter. Seeing in tears is thus an example of the way in which sight may be confused, unknowing, and thus not always an imposition of knowledge on the object of the gaze. Because we cry at what we see, and cry involuntarily, crying is an instance of sight which is passive, a response to the object of the gaze acting upon the eyes, an example of another

> way of seeing other than that which has dominated Western metaphysics.' (ibid, n.p.).

Here, Taylor is arguing for an ethics of vision based on the power of tears to veil, partly obscure, and confuse vision so that it is not rendered complete or objective. Yet, this argument assumes that we cry in response to what we see. Rather, my argument is that witnessing through tears is a form of *embodied* ethics that does not privilege sight as the reason for tears. Instead, tears were an embodied response to the ways that my body was affected by the act of listening to and witnessing the trauma of my participants.

In the vignette above, crying with participants in the sharing circle is an acknowledgement of both proximity: resonance, compassion and shared experience; but also distance: untold histories and traumas, embodied knowledges, and conveying something that cannot be said. Crying with participants was a form of witnessing their pain, and in doing so, acknowledging that there were traces of shared experience that lingered in my body. Experiences that I could not convey, did not want to convey, or felt unable to translate through dialogue. Crying communicated the tensions that were present for me concerning my entanglement with multiple positionalities, participants, and mindfulness. It was a form of involuntary embodied care that surfaced in moments where feelings and experiences were unrenderable through dialogue. When I witnessed and heard these stories they reverberated and transformed me in irrevocable and painful ways (D. McCormack 2014, 38).

But, in addition to this, it also formed a part of group development and cohesion. The shared experience of crying demonstrated the ways our bodies were affected by one another. Cultural performances of 'ritual weeping' are

studied by anthropologists to understand the ways that crying expresses feelings of social bonding and solidarity between individuals (Vingerhoets 2013). The tears shed amongst the group were ‘real’, in the sense they showed the affectation of our bodies from intense feelings (rather than ‘pseudo’ or fake tears), but they also worked to demonstrate relationships of care and belonging in the sharing circle. To cry with others was also about having an ‘authentic’ group experience – in that we were demonstrating vulnerability and susceptibility to being affected. It was a process of allowing and accepting feeling states – rather than pushing them away. For the group, this meant weeping in acknowledgment of difficultly and suffering:

> “It’s that acceptance of sadness, acceptance of your body reacting in a way to something is a very… erm… and being very unjudgmental with what’s going on in your head and how you’re reacting and how you’re responding.”
>
> “[And] sometimes your feelings are very unconscious, and you don’t know why you’re feeling the way you feel, and you can’t really put a label on it and give a reason.”
>
> (excerpts from transcription of interview with Flora, 28/5/2019)

Here, Flora is describing the ways her body was affected by, and affected, the activities of the group. Although she named the sensation as sadness, there was no judgement in this labelling – rather, it was about staying with, or leaning into, the embodied sensations of sadness. This may have been noticing the ways that the tears rolled down her cheeks and the shivers of feeling resonating in her body. Here, the relation of intimate distance plays out in the recognition of

the ways that the body is intimately affected. But rather identifying with the experience, and integrating it as part of one's subjectivity or identity: 'I am a sad person who cries a lot', the experience is non-judgementally accepted as a response to the fact we are opening ourselves up to one another.

Through the communicative ethics of crying, it is clear that bodies 'speak' beyond oral testimony. In this way, embodiment feels simultaneously individual and collective, private and social (D. McCormack 2014, 36). This section has explored the complicated ways that crying manifested as a relation of care in the mindfulness-based group. It is a form of communication that encapsulates intimate distance. It at once conveys an personal experience that is incommunicable through language (distance), whilst also showing bodily resonance and affectation with and by others (proximity). This form of intimate distance has an ethical potential and is a form of ethical responsibility:

> 'Bodies are coming undone and we must respond and let ourselves and our epistemologies become undone if we are to learn anew. It is through the intimacy of being with others that we may sense and resense impossible embodiments, desires and modes of belonging.' (D. McCormack 2014, 194).

In the final section of this chapter, I dwell on the ways that mindfulness was integrated into the participants lives. Here, I draw on the refracted enchantment of object-souvenirs and mementos to explore the collective journey with mindfulness.

10.6. Mementos of mindfulness

In this section I explore the ways that, after the workshops and formal research finished, participants integrated mindfulness into their everyday life. Here, mindfulness is no longer a discrete practice, but rather a way of living – a mode of constant awareness that is carried with them, allowing the practice to spill out into the broader fabric of everyday life. Here, I think of Sarah MacKian's (2012) work on 'everyday spirituality' where spirituality is 'something which sits alongside and informs the everyday lifeworlds of individuals who practise it' (ibid, 71). For her participants, there was 'a spirituality *of*, and *in*, everyday life.' (ibid, 3). A spirituality that was 'seen as a constant awareness' of 'something more' that helped them 'work through mundane and everyday issues and encounters' (ibid, 12).

This rendering of spirituality mirrors my participant's journeys with mindfulness (something that will be explored further in the following chapter). For one participant in particular, the word spirituality is used in reference to her mindfulness practice and way of living. But for others, spirituality is not explicitly mentioned. However, the way that mindfulness has been incorporated into their lives resonates with the description and definition of everyday spirituality that MacKian provides. Thus, everyday spirituality is used as a way to talk about experiences of everyday mindfulness.

I will be concentrating on how the group parted ways through two mementos of mindfulness. The refracted enchantment of these objects allows me to talk about the ways that the participants incorporated mindfulness into their everyday lives. Here, mindfulness is a practice that informs the way that the participants navigate everyday experiences, challenges, and encounters.

> So, this is coming to an end now, maybe you can just take a moment to appreciate without each other there wouldn't have been a group and without your honesty it would have been probably quite meaningless. So to appreciate your contributions, so what you have created here. And the beautiful interactions. (transcript of the final workshop, Angelika speaking, 6/12/2018)

Although the mindfulness workshops formally ended, the group stayed in contact virtually on a WhatsApp conversation, over email, and with regular social monthly meet-ups from the beginning of 2019. Traces of our time together lingered after the sessions ended. There were two substantial objects or souvenirs of the mindfulness group: a 'mindful mug' gifted to the group by a participant, and the zine 'a little book of wisdom'. The significance of these objects to the group will be discussed through the notion of 'refracted enchantment' (Ramsay 2009). Their ambivalent status as both enchanting and mundane allows me to think through the ways that mindfulness has been incorporated into the participants' lives. Through thinking with these mementos I highlight the shift my participants experienced in their mindfulness practice from mindfulness as a discrete, formal practice to mindfulness as a 'way of living'. Here, I consider this to be a form of 'everyday mindfulness'.

In the last session of the workshops, Flora gifted us each a 'mindful mug':

Flora: I need to explain it, it's not a Christmas present. What it is, erm, we all have the same, they're mugs but they're pretty mugs and they are your 'mindful mugs', and they're-, because we all have the same, so if you have a-

Clare: cup of tea

Flora: [nods to Clare] time, when things are just a bit difficult and everything, I want you to have a cup of whatever you have, and just remember our mind-, all our sort of things we've talked about and have been so helpful, and just have your cup of tea. As I say I've got one too! So…

(transcript of a group conversation during the last workshop, 6/12/2018)

Mementos or souvenirs of mindfulness felt important to the continuation of practice after formal sessions conclude. They acted as a mindful reminder, or 'bell of mindfulness' (Hanh 2016, 101): 'the sound of [the] bell [is] a reminder to breathe, to quiet your mind, to come home to your body, and to take care of yourself'. Although, during formal collective mindfulness practice bells are used to remind us to turn to our conscious breath. The souvenirs of mindfulness act as 'bells' in our everyday lives – reminding us to pause, and turn to practice.

Chloe: And what about the erm, do you remember we made that little book, 'the little book of wisdom'? And then you also gave out a mindfulness mug to us all at the end?

Flora: Yes, yeah! Do you use yours? I use mine, and I don't use it for drinking normal cups of tea, I use to for if I'm having my turmeric tea in the afternoon and I'm sort of and err and I'm really glad I did that because I think about you all, nearly every time I sort of take it down from the shelf, erm. But that was err, again doing things and I'd done, when, if things, especially if things like they were over the weekend and I felt unsettled and I knew I had to get in touch

> with myself again. I'd done things in the morning I'll sometimes just sit with the doors open and just sit looking at the garden and eat my muesli mindfully.

(transcript of interview with Flora, 28/5/2019)

Furthermore, Stanley (2013b) elaborates on the meaning of the word sati, the Pali for mindfulness, which has a close relationship to memory. The verb 'sarati' means 'to remember', thus sati is 'both for the functioning of remembering and recall. If we are not aware, we cannot remember' (ibid, 155). Turning to the zine, this sense of mindfulness as 'remembering' was written and performed through this work. We discussed this meaning of mindfulness during the formation of the zine:

> "Anything which inspires you just to really bring it in and it would be probably good to have a list of things, er, which is meaningful to you and also maybe bear in mind that mindfulness often is translated as awareness, bringing awareness into your internal and external. But there is also the strict translation is actually remind, reminding, so and often to be mindful we need to remind ourselves in the first place and things like little quotes which maybe also display somewhere, office desk, anything. For example, the Thich Nhat Hanh quote I found really beautiful. You need the reminder otherwise you just forget." (Angelika leading a discussion during a workshop, 15/11/2018)

The booklet provided this sense of memory and remembering through its very materiality. During the last two workshops we complied and thematised the material, which I then took away and formatted via an online free publishing

software, ‘Canva’. Once printed and bound, I handed the booklets back to the participants, and was met with gasps of surprise and excited awe. During the follow-up interviews we discussed the booklet, many of them using it as a process of coming back and collecting themselves if they found themselves in a stressful situation. Beatrice described how she kept the zine in her drawer at work to help her calm down after difficult workplace encounters – she used it as a way to come back to herself, and cool down after particularly difficult interactions with clients and colleagues.

Throughout my research, these mementos were apparent, from the mindfulness mug given by Flora, to our ‘a little book of wisdom zine’[22]. These tokens of mindfulness were enchanting, but in a refracted way. These objects ‘bear an excessive charge, such that their meaning is never fully fixed or defined but is always subject to refraction creating complex relations between various pasts and potential futures’ (Ramsay 2009, 212). Nissa Ramsay shows that, in her work on souvenir-objects, ‘materiality is both enlivened and mundane; enchanting and enchanted; processual and yet remaining in stasis as a residual affective trace’ (ibid). For many of the participants, these tokens of mindfulness were simultaneously enlivening and mundane. The objects signified a personal and important journey they had undertaken, whilst at the same time, becoming part of the mundane fabric of their daily lives.

For Clare, her mindfulness mug had become integrated into her daily routine:

[22] And in retreat centres I came across hand written notes from ex-retreatants posted on notice boards and left in bedrooms – some of which I took pictures of, or kept, as souvenirs of the retreat.

Chloe: And do you still have the little mindfulness mug that Flora handed out? Do you often?

Clare: I used to use it erm when I was feeling a bit low. But now I just use it all the time! [laughs] Cos I sometimes say [to my partner]: "here you are you can have my mindfulness cup tonight!"

Chloe: A special treat!

Clare: Yes! [laughs]

Chloe: So would you intentionally use it then if you were feeling a little bit low and you wanted a cup of tea?

Clare: No because I've been up and down with different things, I would just probably grab it most days … 'cos life is like that and I think that we have challenges every day and something happens every day and things change and things you didn't expect to happen, and I think just to use it occasionally would be a bit unfortunate.

(transcript of interview with Clare, 5/6/2019)

This refracted nature of the mug spoke to the ways in which mindfulness as a practice has been embedded into daily lives. Many of the participants I spoke to in concluding interviews were no longer practising formal seated meditations, but rather had integrated informal 'breathing space' and 'checking in' practices into their daily lives. The mundane rhythms of the day became points for meditation and breathing practices, and signalled a wider integration of mindfulness into their lives.

10.7. Conclusions

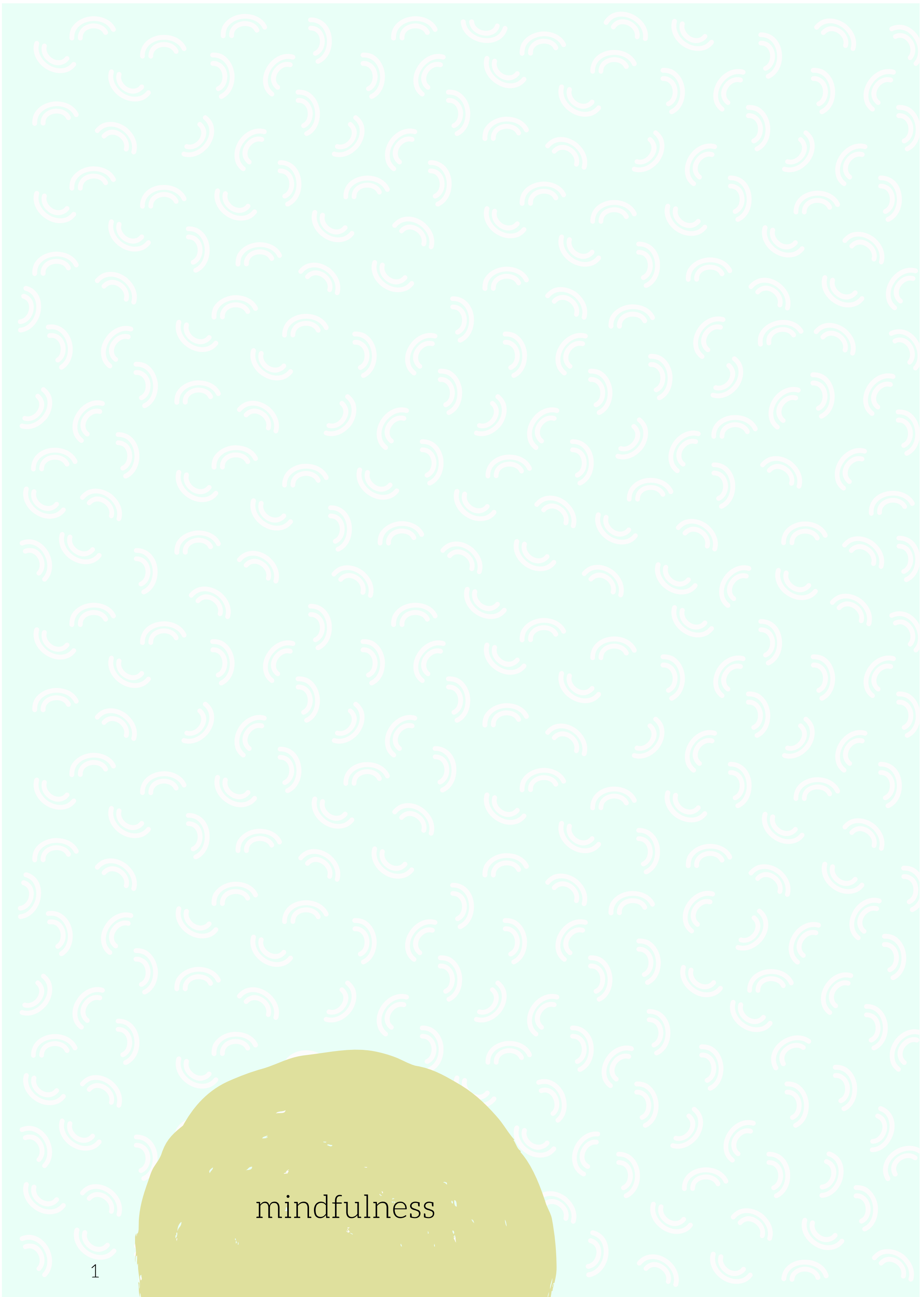
This chapter traced the ways in which mindfulness is both a collective and shared practice through unpacking the dynamics of the mindfulness group that formed the participatory phase of the research. The first section of the chapter explored how the withdrawal of a participant had a collective impact on the dynamics of the mindfulness group. The second section of the chapter unpacked the dynamics of the 'sharing circle', I showed how the practice encircles bodies through the production and circulation of affective atmospheres. Here, I paid attention to the processes of acknowledgement, inquiry and dialogue that were integral to the sharing circle and mindfulness pedagogy. I showed how mindfulness is a collective practice through horizontal and vertical structures of inquiry that highlight the shared nature of experience in the sharing circle. An important part of this experience is the affective labour of the mindfulness teacher in producing a safe and bounded space in which to explore the destabilising process of unfolding and de-centring from a central notion of I or me.

In the next section of the chapter, I drew out the ways that crying and tears communicated the relations of care and resonance between the participants and myself. The processes of inquiry and dialogue produced a strong group dynamic, one that allowed participants (and myself) to 'let our guard down', to be vulnerable and open with one another. Part of this process was a mode of authenticity that was about attending to the emotional resonance of the group. Tears and crying are focused on here as a way of bearing witness and testimony to traumas of the participants. Here, I focused on the ways in which crying became a form of embodied communication around relations of resonance and care – of being touched by participants.

The final section of the chapter used two mementos of mindfulness, a mug and the ‘a little book of wisdom’, to speak about the ways mindfulness became incorporated into the everyday lives of the participants. Rather being a discrete and formal practice, the participants integrated mindful practice into their daily lives through these mementos or souvenirs of mindfulness. This section opens up a thread that will be drawn out in the next chapter.

Zine: a little book of wisdom

1 mindfulness
4 breath
7 stillness
9 suffering
11 acceptance
13 love
17 presence
20 realisation and choice
22 gratitude sunshine
23 MBAT
25 resources


mindfulness
1

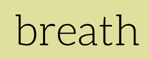
Mindfulness is shifting
the mindset from
‘thinking mind’ to
‘observing mind’

-Noah Rasheta, Secular Buddhism

Three characteristics of existence

Impermanence – everything changes
Human existence entails suffering
There is no inherent, unchangeable self

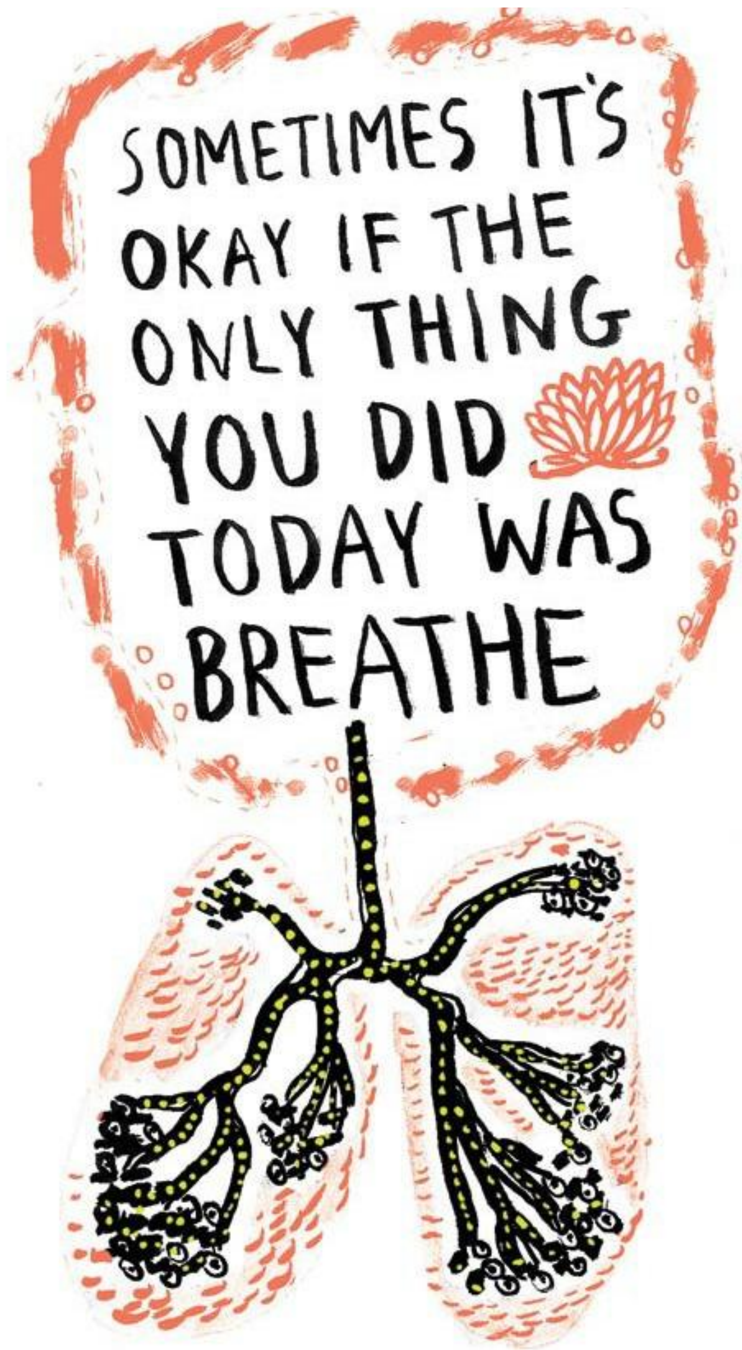
3



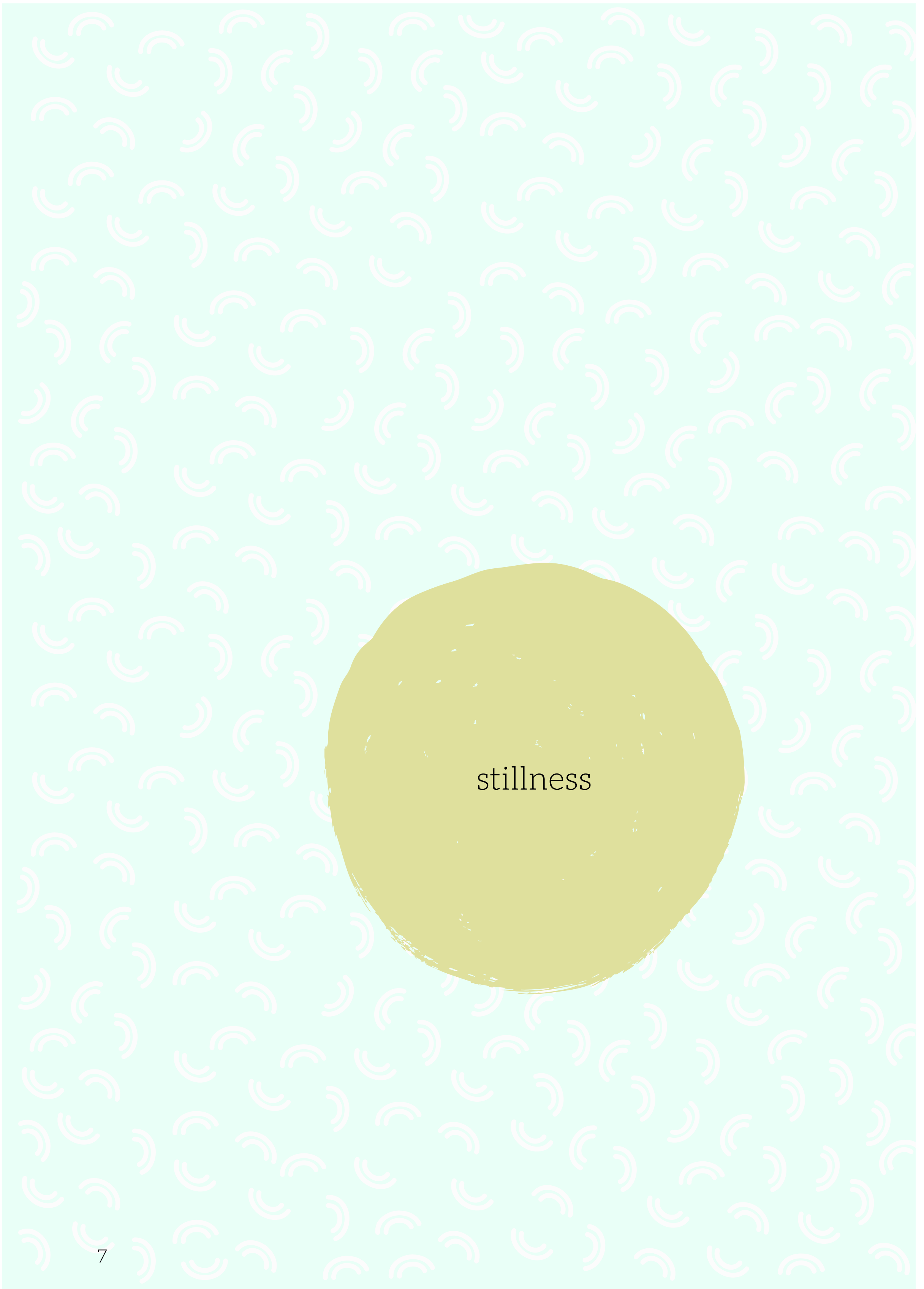
4

Breathing in, I calm my body.
Breathing out, I smile.
Dwelling in the present moment,
I know this is a wonderful
moment!

-Thich Nhat Hanh, Peace Is Every Step



-Yumi Sakugawa


stillness
7

Resting in Stillness

When you rest in stillness, you notice the momentum of your habits and urges, but you don't act on them. You actually experience the moment – the feel of the wind on your skin, subtle sounds you never noticed before. You can tell what your body wants and needs. You are here, alive, receptive.

It's both ordinary and extraordinary at the same time.

The exploration of stillness is also meditation. All it takes is a few minutes, and you will begin to see the benefits and potential. Simply sit down, close your eyes, and be. Don't try to stop your thoughts or change anything. Just be the awareness that everything arises in.

Even to suggest that you notice is too strong. Expend no effort at all. Simply be aware and let things unfold. Thoughts and physical sensations appear, feelings arise…just allow everything without getting in the way.

That's all there is to it. Be this period of non-doing for a few minutes or longer. Be it even when what appears is painful or challenging. Relaxing into stillness is caring, softening; you are letting go of the need to do, to resist, to control.

You simply be.

-Dr Gail Brenner

suffering
9

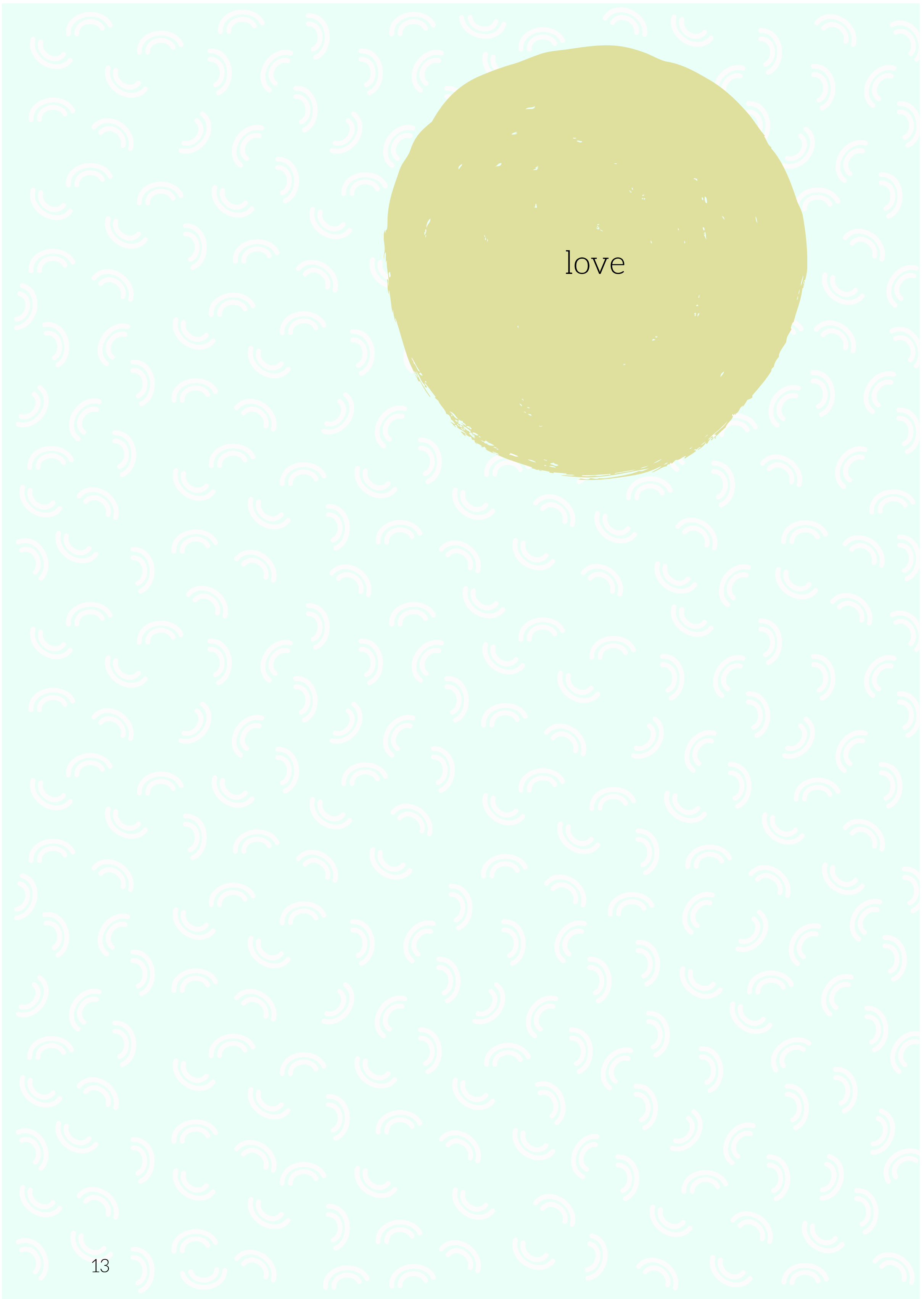
I am sad that I’m sad is
more sad than just being
sad

-Noah Rasheta

acceptance

If you run away, the monster chases you but if you turn and face it, it runs away

-Ruby Wax


love
13

Relationship Mantras

1. Darling, I'm here for you.
2. Darling, I know you're there.
3. Darling, I know you suffer, that is why I'm here for you.
4. Darling, I suffer. Please help me.

-Thich Nhat Hanh

Four elements of true love

1. Loving-kindness
2. Compassion
3. Joy
4. Equanimity

-Thich Nhat Hanh

Love after Love

The time will come
when, with elation,
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror,
and each will smile at the other's welcome.

And say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was
yourself.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

-Derek Walcott, See Grapes, 1976

16

presence
17

Non-Duality

The bell tolls at four in the morning.
I stand by the window,
barefoot on the cool floor.
The garden is still dark.
I wait for the mountains and rivers to reclaim their shapes.

There is no light in the deepest hours of the night.
Yet, I know you are there
in the depth of the night,
the immeasurable world of the mind.
You, the known, have been there
ever since the knower has been.

The dawn will come soon,
and you will see
that you and the rosy horizon
are within my two eyes.
It is for me that the horizon is rosy
and the sky blue.

Looking at your image in the clear stream,
you answer the question by your very presence.
Life is humming the song of the non-dual marvel.
I suddenly find myself smiling
in the presence of this immaculate night.
I know because I am here that you are there,
and your being has returned to show itself
in the wonder of tonight's smile.

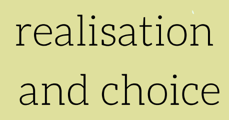
In the quiet stream,
I swim gently.
The murmur of the water lulls my heart.
A wave serves as a pillow
I look up and see
a white cloud against the blue sky,
the sound of Autumn leaves,
the fragrance of hay-
each one a sign of eternity.
A bright star helps me find my way back to myself.

I know because you are there that I am here.
The stretching arm of cognition
in a lightning flash,
joining together a million eons of distance,
joining together birth and death,
joining together the known and the knower.

In the depth of the night,
as in the immeasurable realm of consciousness,
the garden of life and I
remain each other's objects.
The flower of being is singing the song of emptiness.

The night is still immaculate,
but sounds and images from you
have returned and fill the pure night.
I feel their presence.
By the window, with my bare feet on the cool floor,
I know I am here
for you to be.

-Thich Nhat Hanh, 'Call Me By My True Names'


realisation
and choice

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters

I.
I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk
I fall in.
I am lost ... I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes me forever to find a way out.

II.
I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place
but, it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

III.
I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in ... it's a habit.
my eyes are open
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

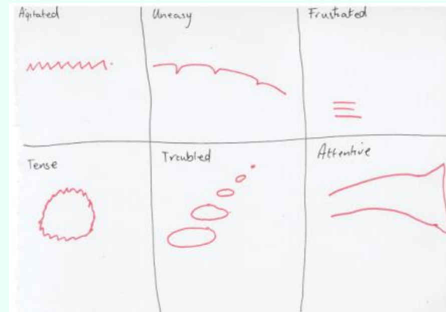
IV.
I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

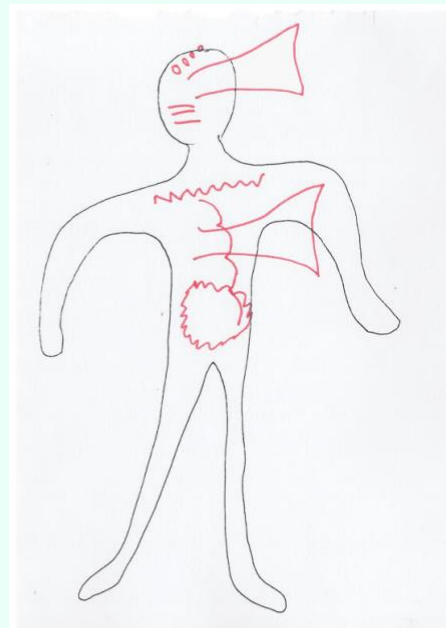
V.
I walk down another street.

-Portia Nelson

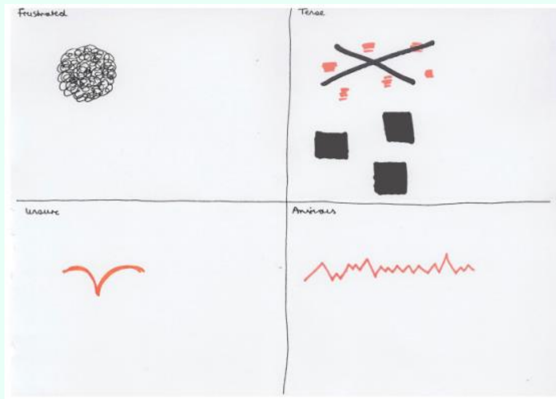
gratitude
sunshine

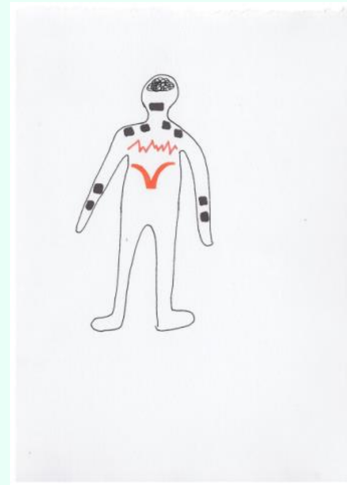
22

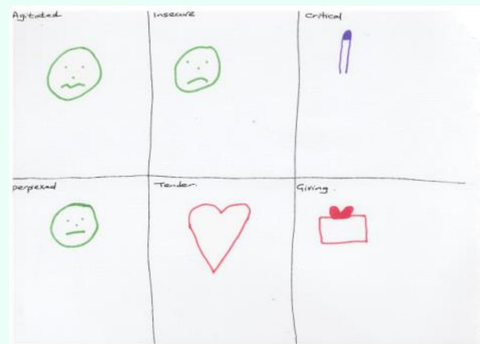


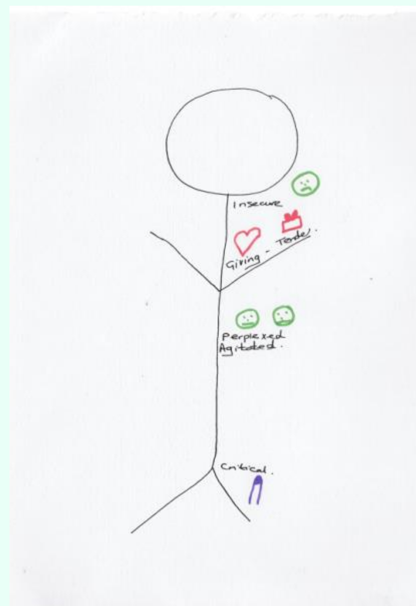


mindfulness-based
art therapy









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resources

podcasts

Resignation vs. acceptance: https://secularbuddhism.com/acceptance-vs-resignation/

YouTube

Vidyamala Burch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X64ZMndWseA
Thich Nhat Hanh at Google: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGWY1W1PDI8

websites

https://orderofinterbeing.org/
https://plumvillage.org/
https://secularbuddhism.com/

books

Ruby Wax, How to Be Human: The Manual
Thich Nhat Hanh, The Miracle of Mindfulness
Thich Nhat Hanh, Peace is every step
Thich Nhat Hanh, The Art of Communicating
Jon Kabat-Zinn, Full Catastrophe Living

a little book of wisdom

compiled in winter 2018

this book has been compiled by a group of participants on an 8-week participatory mindfulness course in Exeter. The work was a form of research impact, funded and supported by the University of Exeter and South West Doctoral Training Partnership of the Economic and Social Research Council.

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11. Participant stories: journeys with mindfulness

11.1 Introduction

> ‘Telling stories is communicating, but more than that, it is acknowledging your own truth. It is taking something that could feel like a shameful or isolating experience and turning it into an unapologetic declaration of truth. When things are in our heads, they can feel unreal, sometimes almost unintelligible and confusing. Putting pen to paper and words to voice sometimes can reveal things we, ourselves, did not know to be true. It is illuminating on an individual level as well as collectively.’ (Salter and Newkirk 2019, 123).

Storytelling is ‘a way of redrawing maps and finding new destinations’ (Frank 1995, 53), in that stories offer a way to reflect and come to terms with new ways of seeing ourselves and our lives (Salter and Newkirk 2019). The final interviews I held in May and June 2019 offered a space for the participants to reflect on their journeys with mindfulness. For the participants, the act of recounting and reflecting during the interview provoked insights and realisations on their growth and experiences of healing and recovery. As Frank (1995, 56) writes, ‘the self-story is told both to others and to one’s self; each telling is enfolded within the other. The act of telling is a dual reaffirmation. Relationships with others are reaffirmed, and the self is reaffirmed’. In this chapter I explore five individual journeys with mindfulness. Here, I pay attention to the ways that mindfulness is an ethical practice, one that is fundamentally about our relationships with ourselves and others. As Braidotti (2012, 307) writes, ‘nomadic ethics coincides with the awareness of one’s condition of interaction

with others, one's capacity to affect and be affected'. This kind of ethical practice might be a form of 'faithfulness to oneself'. Here, health or the therapeutic is regarded not as physiological conditions, but rather as a 'mode of existence' that asks what bodies can do in their encounters with one another (Duff 2014). Thus, care for the self is ethical – rather than closing down bodily possibilities and lines of flight, it opens them up as a process of experimental self-cultivation wherein relations and knowledge can always be expanded. It is the question of how to live and is a way of being in the world (Carvalho 2017).

Mindfulness offers an awareness of the ways in which we affect and are affected by the other people in our lives. Here, ethics is the 'hands-on, ongoing process of re-creation of "as well as possible"' (De La Bella Casa 2017, 6). Rather than a detachment, denial, or escape from 'worldly worries' (MacKian 2012, 178), mindfulness offers a way to keep on, to maintain, and to re-ground. Everyday mindfulness is a practice that expands mindful awareness into the flows and rhythms of daily life and into encounters and communication with others. Essentially, it began to structure and inform how the participants lived their lives. This chapter explores five journeys with mindfulness using interview extracts alongside reflections and narration.

11.2 Flora

The interview with Flora was a sprawling discussion from her worries and anxieties about her children and ex-partner, to her plans and hopes for the future, to feelings of loneliness and isolation that she was experiencing whilst going through numerous surgeries after her breast cancer diagnosis. Her dog weaved in and out of our legs under the kitchen table as we shared stories of our time together during the research. She asked me about my fieldwork, and

listened attentively as I described my experiences of recent mindfulness retreats and how these had shaped my ongoing practice. The interview turned into a free-flowing conversation and a reunion of sorts. At times, she jumped up to retrieve photos of loved ones that adorned her fridge door, discussing the ways that mindfulness has shaped her relationships with them. She explained how her mother started to notice the ways that mindfulness was affecting her approach to relationships:

Flora: And I think the, I think, when my mother said to me, which I might have said in one of our sessions, she said to me all this stuff you're doing Flora, your mindfulness, I think you react in a totally different way now to situations. […] She observed that, that really interested me that she noticed that.

Chloe: Because having that external voice telling you that you've changed that much…

Flora: Yes especially when it's from your mother, your mother who's from the north of England, a Yorkshire woman! To sort of say that I was, that was really interesting and really good!

Chloe: How did that make you feel?

Flora: It made me feel that I erm… sort of pleased with myself because for her to have noticed that, so she would have been talking about dealing with difficult situations with my daughter and all that sort of stuff, so that was really good.[23]

[23] Interview extracts throughout this section have been edited for clarity and are dated from the original interview which took place on 28/5/2019 at Flora's house.

Mindfulness had allowed her to cultivate strength and resilience to cope with challenging relationships and situations, and provided a new found awareness of the way she navigated them. She described her practice as protective, as a form of self-care that was inextricably linked to her ability to care for both herself but also others:

> "Mindfulness erm I think means me having the ability to take care of myself, erm and awareness of lots of things that before I wasn't really aware of. And erm mindfulness, I think that the, the thing that really resonates with me in just about everything that goes on in my life is with mindfulness is having the ability to err respond and not react in situations. Umm and it, I just find it incredibly *protective of me*, and when I say me and in turn the other people I'm close to and I care about because I know that I'm better equipped to err be there for them, and to react and to respond to them in a better way. So um you know it's funny isn't it because lots of people say its life changing and this that and the other but it, *it is* in a sense."

Although she had stopped formal meditation practices (such as seated and lying meditations), mindfulness had become a guide. She animatedly described its presence in her daily life, and the way she had started to carve out space in the day to reflect and consider her approach to relationships.

> "I still [feel that] my mindfulness is sort of all around me. […] I'm not moving away from it in that I'm… [but] it's so much a part of how I approach things now."

Mindfulness, through the act of taking care, had become a core technique to help her manage stress, anxiety, and worry in her life. Awareness of the ways that work, life, and relationships affected her was part of her daily practice – an ongoing form of observation that allowed her to cope with the everyday demands of her life whilst undergoing treatment for breast cancer.

> "But I also have learnt to also take care of myself and that's part of mindfulness" […] "I know now, I know when, when things like that observation, erm I will look after myself erm in the lead up to [a stressful event] so I could deal with it better. And part of that is looking after myself physically: what I'm eating, all that sort of thing, and how much I'm exercising and how much I'm sleeping, and part of it is sort of calming my head down a bit with things that worry me."

Her journey with the practice had begun during a period of upheaval. She had been diagnosed with cancer and was frequently in and out of hospital having major operations. Her relationships with her partner and daughter began to feel strained. Due to her diagnosis, normal life was stilted and she was forced to slow down. The period of treatment meant confronting things that she could no longer ignore. A slower pace of life meant that there was no way that she could hide from herself or push feelings away. She was forced to confront them. But this process was overwhelming and destabilising.

> "It's all really, really crowding in on my head and it was just awful, [and my daughter] was in a really bad place at the time and it was all too much"

During the interview she reflected on that period of her life, identifying how overwhelmed she had felt, and how difficult things had been. Hannah, a close friend and mindfulness teacher, was a lifeline during this time and their regular walks was a vital form of support. Hannah had acted as an initial guide, and their conversations had become pivotal moments in Flora's journey with the practice:

> "I suddenly realised that was exactly what I was doing [to myself]. And from that point on Hannah would just give me sort of pointers and say, you know you have to be kind to yourself and don't judge yourself. […] And I just realised of all the things, that was helping me more than anything because it was also not, it was also understanding that I was stuck in a toxic relationship and I was desperately trying to get out, and it is that compassionate understanding of… you know how difficult it is, and unlike other people who were saying "well you've just got to get on with it! Stop doing this! Get on with it! Move on!"

> "Hannah kept saying to me, you know, 'when it's really bad just concentrate on the breath', and I had funny conversations with her, and I said 'you often say that to me Hannah but I can't actually concentrate on my breath because I start hyperventilating! [laughs] and it just has the opposite effect!' And I used to think it was funny! But what I can concentrate on is the river flowing past and I could also concentrate on clouds. But at that time I needed to go on the course to really understand 'The Breath' thing, so I had coming up ahead of me.. the erm.. my major operation that was going to have me off work for a, a while…."

Initial moments of practice with Hannah led her to finding the course at the college. This coincided with a major operation, and the first few weeks she struggled with the movement and stretching activities. She described the difficultly she had with accepting her perceived bodily limitations at that time; triggering judgmental feelings of inadequacy and inability. Yet, as she began to feel comfortable with the activities in the classes, she started to deeply immerse herself into guided meditations and mindfulness YouTube videos. Prominent mindfulness teachers became her guides as she carefully absorbed their teachings during her cancer recovery.

> "So, and around doing the practice and everything, I spent so much time listening to that you know Thich Nhat Hanh and Mark Williams and Kabat Zinn"

Other people were intrinsic to this process. The mindfulness group was an extremely important part of her journey.

> "I made sure I went to both of them and this, this sense of a sangha is, is really important. And when you hear sort of Thich Nhat Hanh and people talk about how valuable it is to meditate *together*. It is. And, but at the same time, as well, I enjoyed developing my practice, erm, and finding my way and when I was going to do this and, and being able to sort of move form sort of doing, getting past the 'I'm too busy, no got to do this', making it sort of happen."

The mindfulness group and the regular sessions provided the structure for Flora to commit to regular practice. As relationships with others in the mindfulness class strengthened, so did her confidence with the practice. She began regular

‘checking in’ practices during the work day in order to take notice of how her body feels during the day. This became an important way of coping with returning to work whilst recovering from reconstructive surgeries:

> “it registers with me if I feel really balanced, and really good. So erm… that I suppose is… is something that, that, that comes and goes throughout the day. I could be sitting in a lesson and somebody is doing something and I’m about to sort of anticipate or deal with something but I’ll sit in my lesson and just sort of go from top to bottom, and think about how I’m feeling, and in the same way I think *with* the body”

Regular mindfulness practice had afforded her with a new awareness of the ways her body was affected by daily routines and stressful situations at work. This strength and protection has guided her in reconciling her relationship with her daughter. Mindfulness has given her an approach to the relationship that is more calm, compassionate, and accepting. Rather than rushing around in ‘doing mode’, mindfulness has helped her carve out spaces to pause and reflect on her approach to their relationship.

> “I think when there’s a lot of chaos around you, you’re not able to think about how you could approach something. But by stepping back and giving myself space, I have been able to reflect on it”

11.3 Clare

As we took our seats on the sofas in her living room, I could sense that Clare was nervous. I balanced a steaming cup of tea on a cushion and retrieved my audio recorder, notepad, and a pen. After reviewing the information sheet and filling out the consent form together, I switched on the recorder and began the

interview. Curiously, she started the conversation apologising that she didn't have much to say about mindfulness. She confessed that she hadn't been practicing formal meditations regularly, and didn't know what she could contribute to the project. But as we began speaking, and the conversation developed, I sensed a shift in her – she began to realise the significance of her journey and how the practice had affected her. When we reached the end of the interview, we reflected on her initial anxieties:

Chloe: One last thing really, I sensed that you were quite hesitant to have this conversation?

Clare: Because I didn't think-

Chloe: But you've had so much to say!

Clare: I know, I said to [my partner] "oh Chloe's coming to see me, but I don't think I'm going to be much of a project, to write about! I'm not that interesting, because I haven't done anything else, any of the things!" But actually it's been a revelation for me to talk to you cos I [laughs}….

Chloe: And I'm really glad of that!

Clare: Yeah, so it's another blessing really that you've come, and I've been able to find inside me the things that mindfulness has done for me that I didn't know.[24]

[24] Interview extracts throughout this section have been edited for clarity, and are dated from the original interview which took place on 5/6/2019 at Clare's home.

I realised that the interview itself was a pivotal part of Clare's journey, it had allowed her space to reflect on her relationship with mindfulness: the ways it had shaped her life and relationships with others and herself. Although she had greatly struggled with some of the formal meditative practices, and was no longer practicing seated or lying meditations, she had started to cultivate a sense of mindful awareness in her life. An integration that had become deeply intertwined with her Christian faith.

However, during the interview, Clare reflected that she was initially unsure about how mindfulness could help her. Although her GP had recommended that she attend a mindfulness course, she struggled greatly at the beginning with the slowness and stillness of practices, particularly the body scan and silent meditations.

Clare: But sitting still I feel that's really irritating in a way, it agitates me the actual sitting. […] I don't think I'm a very still person. I think some people just need to-, it's like children with fiddly toys isn't it? Some people need to fiddle with something.

Chloe: So did you find it quite uncomfortable then at the beginning?

Clare: Yeah. Yes. yeah and there was one we did where we laid flat and my back was really, around my neck. And it felt really uncomfortable even though we had the mats, it wasn't a nice feeling. I'd rather sit than lie.

Despite this, she kept attending the 8-week course and started to find points of connection between her Christian faith and mindfulness. As Clare's experience

with mindfulness developed, silent meditations became a way for her to pray, reflect, and connect with God.

> "A lot of the time when I was there I did pray. So on our times when we were quiet you know I did sense that God was there. And it was fine, in fact it gave me time with Him…"

> "God speaks to you anyway and I think just being quiet and people around, and listening to stories that people talk about. Just gives you a connection and I think it's a spiritual connection that you get with other people in the group and it feels very real."

Practicing mindfulness alongside meeting the other members of the group was all part of her spiritual journey that had connected mindfulness with her faith.

> "But I really just felt God was with me. And I think he introduces, he puts people in our lives and I think that it was meant to be that I was there with those people at that time. And erm I've met new friends and I think that's a miracle really. And I think there's small miracles every day that we need to notice because we... You know you sort of go along and don't think: 'oh that's really special today'."

After the sessions had finished, she began to integrate moments of mindfulness into her everyday life and spirituality. She began to notice and appreciate the small moments, or 'miracles', that patterned the fabric of her daily life. For her, listening and connecting to sounds around her was part of her daily practice. She began to notice the bird song and the buses going past her house:

> "So before I wasn't really aware of sounds, I didn't stop and listen, I was too busy moving and doing. So now I'm aware of just sounds around me and that can be quite soothing which I didn't, which I haven't experienced before."

During the interview, there was a clear sense of ongoing work and struggle with her journey with the practice. Clare spoke about the ways that she had gained significant new knowledges through her relationship with mindfulness. This made her feel more connected and whole:

> "I have a knowledge I didn't have. That I can use at any time of any day, that's it really. And that works. Because it's made me more aware, and I think I'm more of complete person and maybe it's filled a bit of the gaps, you know like it's connected me to different things that would have been missing. And that's something to be really grateful for. I think."

Part of this was a development of an awareness of the relationship she has with herself, namely her self-judgemental habitual tendencies. These new knowledges and state of awareness allowed her to come to difficult emotions with compassion and kindness:

> "I think being kind to myself. But that's hard because I think when you start having feelings and thoughts that you feel you shouldn't have you can punish yourself, but I've got better and when I'm really upset I can actually say to myself: it's okay."

Now that she has the awareness of her habitual responses to feelings of suffering and vulnerability, she feels able to accept sensations of sadness rather than adding to them or pushing them away. Here, for Clare, an important

step is ‘going back’ in order to move forwards. Going back was a process of accepting what had come before. Rather than pushing away and trying to forget, mindfulness taught Clare to (re)orientate towards difficult memories and experiences. Here, reorientation asks us to turn towards, in order not to forget histories, events, and encounters in our awareness:

> “…but I think there’s a need to have some kind of acceptance about stuff that’s happened. So it’s alright to go back. Because we’ve all got things we deal with and it just doesn’t go away”

Part of this struggle was the process of going back, remembering, and having awareness of the ways that her embodied habits, histories, trauma, and memories re-surface and play out in her relationships with herself and others. This process had deeply affected her. She reflected on a conversation she had with her daughter Nicola one night after a mindfulness session.

Clare: She thinks it made me worse for a while but I do think that was said in the course, sometimes things can get slightly more emotional for you during or, during it. So she said, “Mum I don’t like that mindfulness stuff, I don’t think it does you any good”.

Chloe: Did you feel a lot worse?

Clare: I think maybe going to the sessions maybe I was a bit low the next day? Because stuff had come up and we had talked about really…

Chloe: …difficult things!

Clare: Yeah, whereas sometimes in your normal week, like I’m going for a run tonight come home have my tea, watch TV, and go to bed.

> Tomorrow my mood might not be as it was after a mindfulness class. So maybe Nicola did notice that I wasn't quite as jolly, possibly the next day?

The mindfulness courses posed an emotional struggle for Clare. The classes and associated practices were not necessarily always 'easy' or therapeutic in a straight forward sense. Rather, some weeks the sessions were a challenge, and provoked a sense of dis-ease and disorientation. Some have suggested that adverse or challenging events in mindfulness 'are either initial barriers or difficulties that are ultimately beneficial for personal growth' (Farias et al. 2020, 15). This sense of struggle with the practice and oneself might have been threshold points to ongoing growth and awareness.

Furthermore, Clare is aware that mindfulness is not a 'quick fix'. Rather it is a form of embodied awareness that requires time to cultivate.

> "…yeah I still struggle with that bit. I think it's a life long journey really, it's not something that, you know, it's patterns of behaviour that have developed over many years! And I think you can notice them which is the first step. And I mean anything else is bonus isn't it, if you can do anything about them. But it certainly won't change myself, like I won't become somebody else. I just have to work with it!"

She acknowledges that this knowledge and awareness is something to be cultivated throughout her life – it can't provoke a sudden change, nor can she rid herself completely of 'bad' habits or past experiences. Rather the process is slow and embodied, it is something that she will work on throughout her life.

11.4 Harriet

> "Well it's been a life saver for me. Truly."[25]

Harriet signed up to the 8-week mindfulness course during a tumultuous period in her life. During our interview at a coffee shop in a motorway service station[26], she reflected on the severity of her situation at the time:

> "The first lesson [of the 8-week course] I thought, all I could feel was pain really [..] And thinking it's a waste of time, I'm feeling miserable you know and I'm going to stay feeling miserable. But I thought I'm going to keep coming because I've paid and I need to find out more, I couldn't just leave it."

But as the session progressed and as other members of the class began to open up, she started to feel less isolated.

> "You're meeting like-minded people […] But the second lesson I felt pain until the very end and then I started to think that I was not alone. Because people then started talking about their problems and then suddenly there's, there started a unity in the class. So, which was lovely."

The 8-week mindfulness course at the college came at the right time for Harriet. For her, the encounter with mindfulness was a spiritual sign or signal from the universe – a force larger than herself that had guided her to the practice and the

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[25] Interview extracts throughout this section have been edited for clarity, and are dated from the original interview on 29/5/2019.

[26] This was a location that was convenient for Harriet at the time of the interview. I chose a quiet spot in the café where we would not be disturbed and made sure she was comfortable once the interview began.

group. During the interview, she reflected on another difficult period of her life when she had found solace through mindful practice:

> "I had another period of my life where I was in despair and I just said to the universe: please help, I need help here. And the next day somebody put a leaflet in my hand about a mindfulness centre in Axminster, yeah it was the next day. And I went from there and that was obviously really helpful…"

> "Yeah it was, so this is the second time that I've erm, I've been in the place, the right place and just thought need a bit of help here, and you know..."

The time on the course gave her the strength she needed to leave a toxic and abusive relationship. Conversations amongst the group combined with the regular mindfulness practices allowed her to gain perspective. She began to realise how controlling and abusive the relationship was. She reflected on how the course had been a vital lifeline – she finally felt like people cared about her.

> "Yeah, because people were talking to me like I was a human being! [laughs]"

During the summer after the course, the relationship broke down and she found herself in a precarious and vulnerable position, isolated from her family and friends. The mindfulness group became a huge line of support – we began meeting every month in a local pub garden. We rallied around her, offering support and contact details for Citizen's Advice and domestic violence hotlines.

> “Thankyou so much for your input last night. […] Having a sympathetic ear is the best therapy, but I will persevere!”[27]

As we chatted, she reflected on those moments of support from the group that had provided much needed perspective on her situation.

> “Because that was when I had some physical abuse. And I remember… Ha! Because, all the time... So this where the perspective issue is useful because I was told I *deserved* it. I have created that, so he was just punishing me because I was acting out of order. And I remember, I can laugh at it now, but it *wasn’t* funny, I remember sitting around the table with you guys and saying what had happened and I remember looking round at everybody’s face and you were all just like ‘ehhhh?!’ [she mimics our reactions by hanging her mouth open, aghast, and then laughs at my reaction]. And I thought, oh, oh, you know, this wasn’t a good thing because if you’re with, you know I lived in an isolated place, you know, if you live with somebody who tells you, you know how brain washing works… […] it’s just that he was so controlling and so pushy from morning till night telling me what to do and getting angry if I didn’t do it or if I got upset…”

It was a long and difficult process but when the relationship finally ended, and she was able to move away, she settled into a new house in a town 40 minutes from Exeter. This life change combined with a regular mindfulness practice allowed her to find a sense of self-worth and appreciation. Her perspective fundamentally shifted.

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[27] Edited extract from an email conversation, 24/7/2018

> "Self-appreciation […] Yeah, seeing the value of yourself. Erm, and not, and not just thinking, when you make a mistake just thinking okay, you know. Not berat[ing] yourself just think well you know just keep on trying and, erm… and also compassion for others. You know I'm far less judgemental than I used to be […] Yeah, because we're all the same, none of us are perfect. We're all struggling, and you know…"

She began to integrate a mindful approach into everything and every activity. It has become her life guide. She meditates whilst walking, swimming, and driving. She even meditates whilst cleaning out her horses.

> "It isn't just going and doing a course and thinking I'll do a 10 minute meditation today and you know, it is a lifestyle. It really is a *lifestyle*. And I would never had believed it at the beginning of my mindfulness class just how much it would change me. […] Because the whole point, the whole point is *living*. And if you meditate and you feel okay for a while but then something upsets you and you get-, and you struggle to-. Then there's no point. The point is to live a fulfilling life, and, and fulfilment being happiness, whatever. And so you know mindfulness has got to be part of your-, I mean obviously there are times when it isn't, but I think when you start to put things in boxes like "I meditate for so many hours", I think that's great if that's what you need because that's you. But for *me*, mindfulness has been how to live better."

She now feels able to take on the world; bringing a new, revitalised energy to conversations and relationships. Whilst we're talking I sense this transformation – she comes across in a generous, kind, and compassionate way. She now embodies a kind of strength.

Chloe: Listening to you speak is quite amazing really!

Harriet: Is it really?

Chloe: Yeah it is, it really is!

Harriet: Why?

Chloe: Because you've been, you've been through a lot! And you're, I don't know, you're radiating a really positive energy which is lovely to come and see. And I definitely felt that last time we met as well.

Harriet: Yeah, yeah everybody said didn't they? How much I'd changed and everything, yeah…

Chloe : And you're feeling that too?

Harriet: Yeah, yeah!

Although she still struggles with intrusive, negative thoughts she is now able to see them for what they really are: just thoughts. Clear and non-judgmental awareness of her thoughts has been a fundamental part of her journey. But, she recognises that these habitual thought patterns and negative self-beliefs are something that she will continue to address, with the awareness that things can't change overnight, and that it has been "years and years of this pattern of negativity". Yet, she finds strength in how far she has come already. The interview provided a space to reflect on her journey so far and she is now aware that:

> "I have changed in everything, in my whole mental attitude. And I know that's affecting my life completely."

11.5 Beatrice

Work was taking over Beatrice's life. She felt rushed off her feet and constantly overloaded. However much she tried, she couldn't turn off work mode.

> "The main reason why I had to do the mindfulness bit was work was starting to all consume me. And I am actually quite chilled out but then because of work stressing me out so much people were just like you're no fun to be around anymore, whereas actually, you know, calming down and almost putting it in a box and being like it's not that bigger deal Bee. It's just you thinking it is and that bit really helped"

> "What happened to start with was I had got into a car accident because I was driving around all the time and the doctor signed me off for a week to calm me down and then after that erm I still wasn't really calming down 'cos I just wanted to get back to work. I was just like I haven't got time to have a week off!"[28]

Her job was affecting her relationships with her family and friends – they saw how stressed and overwhelmed she was. A car accident meant that she had to take time off work. Alongside all of this, she had been struggling with depression for a couple of years. Her GP suggested she start yoga or mindfulness. She came across the mindfulness course and decided to go for it.

> "And that's when the doctor recommended doing I think it was yoga or something and I was like well actually it's my mind not really my body

[28] Interview extracts throughout this section have been edited for clarity, and are dated from the original interview which took place 26/6/2019 at a local café.

> that needs to, to be honest, it's my mind. So that's when I found the 8-week course. But it was really strange because some of-, like I didn't really see a difference, but actually other people noticed it before I did."

She was drawn to mindfulness with the hopes that it could help her deal with intrusive thoughts, and the cycle of worry that consumed her working day. She described the way that mindfulness allowed her to shut down the constant tabs and pop-ups that whizzed around her mind:

> "So I couldn't really think if that makes sense. It's like having a million tabs open on your computer and the mindfulness is when you like, well I found anyway, you sit there, and you breathe a bit and actually the tabs start to close, and you can focus a bit more."

She had committed to the first 8-week course and attended all the sessions, eager to learn more and develop her relationships with other members of the group. Initially, she struggled with the regular practice, finding it difficult to get into the right 'headspace' or 'zone'. Sometimes it made her feel even worse as she became more and more frustrated with herself and her perceived inability to calm down.

> "Sometimes I've found it really difficult cos you're so; I was always so wound up from work so actually you just sit there and you're like I'm not in the right head space for it. and I think it was about a week where I just couldn't, even if I sat there and I was breathing, it was just like this is not going to happen, like. That I found really difficult because you can feel yourself getting more and more wound up, but you can't do the thing that you know will calm you down!"

Silence during meditation posed a real challenge and initially she found the experience unsettling and overwhelming.

> "At first it scared me because I was like you've got to admit that you've actually got to… you've got nowhere to hide from if that makes sense? Nothing to distract you, whereas now I'm like actually, I like silence. Like, it's rare to find now."

However, journaling became an important way to manage difficult experiences during meditation. She found the reflective process helpful to unpack her judgmental habitual tendencies and her feelings of frustration and discomfort with silent meditations.

> "I actually found [journaling] was quite helpful when I was more and more when you're having the blockages. That I might actually not be able to sit there and do it but if you write down I'm really wound up and you're like, you can go well why am I wound up? And you're like cos this happened and then you go why did that happen? And then actually you might not understand it that day but once you've done it a couple of days you can suddenly see the pattern and understand it, if that makes sense."

She began to cultivate a different relationship to the practice – rather than forcing herself to commit to intense regular meditations that only intensified feelings of judgment about her perceived ability to be mindful, she found an easier, less judgemental relationship to the practice and ultimately herself:

> "But then once I started, not forcing myself, but really like making sure I *consciously* did it I found I got a lot more of a benefit from it. So rather than forcing yourself you actually *want* to do it. I think that's the main bit."

As the second course came around work began to get in the way of regular practice. She was unable to attend the weekly sessions with the group.

> “I couldn’t come to many of the sessions but it was the fact that work was impeding so much on me coming to them that actually, do you know what? This isn’t fun anymore like.... So some of it was actually yeah the fact that I couldn’t come to the 8-weeks. I think I only came to three maybe? Or four in the end?”

She experienced a strong sense of loss each time she was unable to attend the weekly sessions. She noticed a small change in herself after every session she had attended and was eager to continue her journey. Alongside this, the group had become extremely important to her and provided her with a safe space to discuss challenges in confidence and reflect on life. The sense of community and mutual understanding was vital to her recovery.

> “One of the things I quite liked about the group was that you could talk about anything knowing that the second that we left no one was going to say anything to anyone. And you kind of almost go back to [our lives] […] it’s kind of like you’ve got that kind of almost like a counsellor relationship? If that makes sense? I think that’s the only way to describe it in that kind of way that you felt perfectly comfortable explaining something to someone knowing that it would just go back to normal everyday lives and it’s not like you were going to tell anyone. […] It was that kind of bit where they were like “oh no I’ve been through that too recently and this is how I dealt with it”.”

She reflected on the collective journey of the mindfulness group – noticing that there had been a profound shift for each individual.

> “I also think it was quite nice that some people had come for one particular reason and actually you could see the journey of certain people as well, going from like a low space to suddenly excelling. Which was really nice.”

Mindfulness offered a way for her to reflect on her life, and allowed her to realise that her job wasn’t serving her. Over the summer she took the brave decision to change companies and move cities.

> “But mindfulness was actually part of the reason why I got the new job so cos it was the fact that I was becoming, like when you’re thinking all the time and I just thought I’m not enjoying, I’m not enjoying working here. So it was like I need a change. And erm I got to the stage where I thought I’m either going to change careers or move away. So I thought about being a florist! […] I looked it all up, I’d done a business plan and everything and then this job came up in Bristol and I thought oh sod it, I’ll do the interview and see what happens. So yeah mindfulness properly got me there and I wasn’t even stressed about it and I was like yeah it’ll be fine. And it all worked out, it’ll all be good!”

She recognises that the decision she made was not an easy one, but that mindfulness had helped her develop a sense of strength and resilience. One that aided her in making the decision to leave her job.

> “I definitely feel stronger, it sounds really weird, I feel stronger mentally. If that makes sense? My resilience is much better and you’re not…

> [laughs] The day I resigned people thought I was joking! They thought was winding them up!"

Although fitting formal mindfulness practices into her working day seemed like too much of a chore, she took up walking in her lunch break at her new job – turning it into a time for mindfulness practice. She takes time to notice the world around her and starts to see things that would normally pass her by.

> "But other than that I do it in drips and drabs now. So there might be like a point where I do it but there's other times where I it might just be like mindful walking. So when you walk somewhere like walking the dog or whatever and you're suddenly like 'oh the birds are tweeting' and it's little bits like that. […] So I am taking more time, like rather than just like power walking to get somewhere, actually *enjoying* it."

> "It only takes like 10 or 15 minutes and like I feel anyway a lot better about life, especially if you do it in your lunch break and take like a 10 minute whizz around the block and suddenly you're like actually that's better than taking an hour sitting somewhere."

> "I think it makes me appreciate life a little bit more, if that makes sense. It is nice just walking around and realising that like nature is amazing! And the world is awesome!"

Alongside feeling more settled in her personal life, mindful awareness began to help her with challenging encounters at work. She gained a form of perspective that allowed her to step back and put herself in someone else's shoes. This form of awareness allowed her to come to difficult situations non-judgmentally.

She felt less irritated and stressed out by the ‘minor’ events that pattern her working day.

> “I don’t get stressed out as much. And irritated either. You’re kind of a bit more… And the other one I remember erm Angelika teaching us when someone, when you think someone might be shirty with you but actually they might have other things going on and that’s one of the main bits is you’re not sitting there thinking: oh I’ve done something wrong and panicking. Actually you’re just like, you know, it is what it is and… […] Yeah, but also they might have been snappy with me but actually it’s anything I’ve done per say, if that makes any sense? I think that’s the main one because then you start to panic and think, what have I done wrong when actually you haven’t done anything wrong it’s just the wrong end of the stick or whatever! [laughs]”

Rather than leaning into her inclination to react quickly and angrily to workplace situations, she has started to take a step back in order to respond in a more careful way.

> “Yeah it’s a lot more taking a step back, like you do something and you’re like woah! Close the draft! [laughs]. Not, not because you’re just reacting but you’re suddenly kind of take a step back a bit and you’re like do you know what? We’ll proof read this in an hour, just, just to be safe and then I think that’s the main bit. Rather than kind of being a bit more gung-ho, not that you’re more cautious but I think you’re more just like checking the tone of things I think, like making sure that people, not perceive, but it’s just making sure that you’re more conscious of everything.”

By taking these pauses in her working day, she feels able to evaluate the way that she navigates challenging situations.

> “Yeah I came on [the mindfulness course] to sort myself out, but actually it made me, not like a better person, but I think it helps allow me to notice things a lot more”

During the interview, she referred to a cartoon she had found on Google that had resonated with this sense of awareness or taking notice

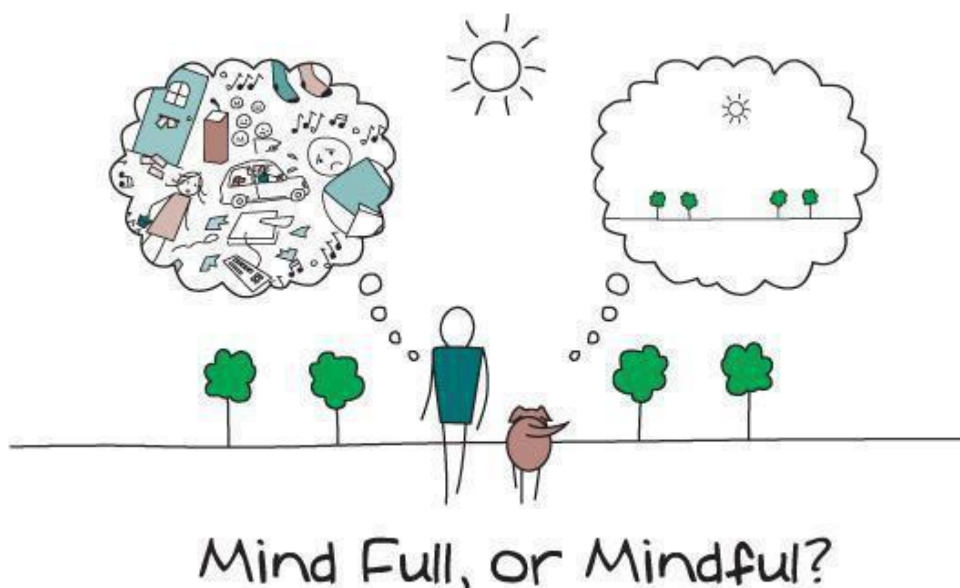

Figure 12: Mindfull or mindful? (source: https://redrockcrossing.wordpress.com/2015/09/29/from-mindless-to-mindful/)

> “There was a brilliant cartoon drawing and it was mind-full, and it was like a man walking a dog and this thought bubble was just filled with stuff or it was mindful, and it was him actually looking at where he was walking with the dog. And I think that’s the main bit I think of, is that it is just that. It is you just being aware a little bit more.”

The fundamental lesson that mindfulness taught her was this form of care-ful awareness that she now tries to embody. By pausing and taking a little bit more

time on tasks or activities, she finds that she is being both more careful towards herself and to the people around her.

11.6 Gemma

Gemma's husband, John, had shown her how useful mindfulness could be. After a period of illness, his doctor had recommended mindfulness as a way to manage the anxiety he was experiencing after a stroke.

> "When my husband actually became poorly […] they recommended mindfulness for him and off the back of him doing that and me recognising how effective it had been, erm, it lead me to basically wanting to start a course for myself, and he kept on saying to me come and join the group, come and join the group!"[29]

Around a year and a half earlier, her GP had recommended mindfulness during a period of work-related stress. However, at that time she wasn't ready to investigate it further. She was skeptical that it could help her, she had never practiced meditation before and was unsure about trying something new. But, as her husband began the 8-week course and subsequently began attending regular mindfulness classes at a local community centre, she noticed the impact it was having on him:

> "Knowing the impact it was having on Jack and him saying like "I really think this would be so good for you" type of thing. And I was like oh yeah I'll get around to it [laughs]."

[29] Interview extracts have been edited for clarity. The interview took place in Gemma's house on 26/6/2019.

Eventually she felt ready to sign up to the mindfulness course at the college and straight away found an affinity with the practice. Although, initially, seated meditations caused her physical discomfort, she quickly learned to adapt the posture to her body by using a back rest. But, unlike other members of the class, she experienced very little initial discomfort with the silence and slowness of meditations and mindfulness practices.

> "I've never experienced like a feeling like I don't like it or anything. I've not really experienced that. I know of people who have found like the moments of silence really difficult but actually I really like that myself."

She puts this down to her religious upbringing. Like Clare, Gemma's Christian faith has become closely intertwined with her mindfulness practice. In times of discomfort or struggle during her meditation practice, a prayer word becomes the 'anchor' that brings her back to the present moment. She experiments with both prayer words and the breath as her anchors. Both her and her husband have adapted guided meditations to make them applicable to their faith and beliefs – rather than struggling with a practice that doesn't support them, they have adapted the frameworks to suit their needs. In doing so, they both feel a stronger relationship with God, something that has been incredibly nourishing and supportive for them during difficult periods.

After the mindfulness course had ended and the group began to plan the subsequent course together, Gemma decided that she needed to take a different turning on her journey. Her initial intention for beginning mindfulness was to cultivate an ongoing practice with her husband. This intention guided her decision not to attend the follow-up course. One summer afternoon, we met up

at a café to discuss her decision not to continue with the research and involvement with the group at that point.

> "I was hoping to join you all this evening but unfortunately won't be able to make it - I have met with Chloe separately to explain that I have decided not to join you for your new 8-week course. I hope that it all goes well."

This interview was the first time that we had spoken at length since her decision not to continue with the group. Despite this, the nurturing nature of the group had been integral to her journey:

> "Everyone was just really honest and, and you could tell that it was really appreciated if you like by the rest of the group erm, so it allowed for it to happen really. It was, it was nurturing if you like, nurturing kind of environment which is just what I needed."

When the interview concluded, Gemma thanked me for the way that I had handled her decision to withdraw from the group at that point.

> "I really appreciated when we met up to talk about my decision not to go with the second group. I really appreciated your response which was very laid back in terms of saying totally respect my choice but also you offered it to me as an option still. So I just wanted to say I really appreciated that because, because I'm more used to people giving me pressure! [laughs] whereas that was like totally the opposite, it was really refreshing, it was like oh that's really nice, that's really nicely done! I really appreciate that! […] I think the way you're doing it is very reflective

> and erm considered, that's the word I was looking for, considered. I like that word, considered. And considerate!"

During the period of time when Gemma had taken a different direction to the group, she began regularly attending a mindfulness group at a local community centre with her husband. The regular practice together strengthened their relationship and provided a mutual understanding. They encouraged each other to continue to regularly meditate, providing a space to reflect on their practice and find new techniques or anchors that could support them in developing a deeper understanding of mindfulness.

> "I think it supports definitely my relationship with my husband Jack because he also does practice mindfulness and erm he's found that really beneficial erm for a number of reasons and so that has definitely helped because we both have a greater understanding of perhaps how we're feeling about things and then how to like work through something if you like. So we have better kind of communication and things like that."

> "I must admit that it's really helpful that it's something that Jack and I share because again he can understand, I think it's like anything if the person you're closest to hasn't experienced it themselves then they can't really fully appreciate it. Whereas actually we both know how beneficial the mindfulness is so then we can kind of encourage each other as well."

Regular meditation practice allowed her to begin to cultivate a different relationship to herself and her approach to life as a whole. Although formal practice is vital to her journey with the practice, she has awareness of the ways that formal practice seeps into a 'general way of being'.

> "For me it means a better way of living I think. A better way of erm living to stay sort of calm and erm approach things in, in a more effective way. Erm so… so yeah I think it's a way of living and that's important. Erm I don't see it as like a one off thing or a… a thing to do that's nice if you can. But having said that I don't do it as regularly as I would like to erm but definitely I think it's, it's a particular way of trying to be if you like."

A way of being that has become integral for her self-care journey. The practice has helped her understand the ways that she relates to herself, and allowed her to develop a kinder, more compassionate relationship to herself.

> "Basically, you can be your own worst enemy I guess is probably the best way of describing it. And once you learn, I mean we probably all know that really but once you really kind of look into that erm again I can see the importance of looking, trying to look at it in a different way and so therefore it definitely does have an impact on me, because then I'm able to try and see things differently. Erm again, that's all a bit of a journey and so I'm still sort of working through that if you like. But erm, but yeah I have definitely recognised that what your head tells you isn't necessarily true. And so trying to unpack that and think where did I get that from? But again that's where doing it alongside counselling is really helpful because then those are the opportunities to talk through that. Erm so yeah for me that's really helpful combination if you like."

She recognises the importance of her regular mindfulness practice and the ways that it has evolved for her over time.

> "I do genuinely get really tetchy if we have to miss one because then it will be two months until the next one and [laughs] it has a big impact, you know, at the end the person who runs it says you know the effect of what you've done today you won't necessarily notice it but other people might notice it or you'll notice it over time. And I really like that idea that actually you're kind of working on something which actually is a long term benefit and it won't just be for me it will be for people around me because they'll be more equipped to kind of generally get stuff done in a more effective way. So I really like that idea."

Mindfulness became a way for her to step back and understand her boundaries and capacities. She now recognises when she needs to stop and not take on more responsibilities in her personal life.

> "[I] kind of recognise that I really need my own space and erm my own time, and trying to make sure the commitments thing is more about what would support or nourish me, rather than thinking like I must do this, or I must do that. So that's the biggest thing that I've learnt and that definitely connects to self-care because if I'm looking after myself I'll be more effective for whatever else I do."

> "So the whole thing around self-care has enabled me to speak up for myself with, particularly relates to work but it would also relate to you know commitments at Church or something. I would just be open about saying, like it happened the other day someone said, "oh no that's a shame you can't do the singing at this thing", and I said, "oh I've got an appointment in town and you know I'd be late". And they said, "oh it doesn't matter that you're late, just come along!". And I was like, I said,

> “no that wouldn’t be right for me, you know I’ll be really tired at the end of the day, I’d just need to come home.” Whereas I wouldn’t have said that before, I would have been like oh must make it because they want me to go and sing and it’s really important. But actually it helps you to get the perspective on it and think: hang on a minute, that’s not going to work for me.”

Like with the other participants, she has experienced mindfulness as transformative. She feels as if she has fully embraced the practice and actively encourages others to do the same.

> “I think for me, I would describe it as life changing because I think, because I think erm I definitely knew that having done that course that I couldn’t ignore the impact of mindfulness and so for me I’d heard about people who’ve done it and including from my husband’s group who’ve done it and like never done it again. So like they’ve done the course and they don’t use it. But for me that isn’t, I don’t see that as an option because I think once you know the benefits of it like you can’t turn away from it almost. I think it’s really important to embrace it. But what I do know for myself that you know I do appreciate that I’m, that it’s not as embedded into my daily life as it could be and ideally I’d like to practice it every single day. So I know that I’ve got room to manoeuvre but I think that course definitely taught me that it’s really important to continue it. Erm and I would definitely recommend it for other people as well.”

11.7 Reflections: weaving the journeys together

In their accounts, mindfulness has offered a means to 'live better'. For some, this was obvious from the outset of the interview and they expressed it clearly in these terms. For others, it was a slower process of reflection and insight during the interview, as they processed and were given space to voice their relationship with the practice and the one that had developed with themselves. Of course, this may not be the experience for all types of mindfulness in all spaces at all times – there are certainly examples of mindfulness that would not be 'right' nor ethical (e.g. mindfulness in the military and forms of workplace mindfulness programmes). Yet, for these participants, it was felt and embodied as transformative.

At times during the discussion I have used the idea of 'journey' to unpack this process. MacKain (2012) critically reflects on the use of the metaphor of journeying in her work on contemporary spirituality, wherein this conceptual framework has been based on predominately a white male individualised experience of self-realisation and 'finding oneself'. Yet, as she argues for her participant's experiences, 'these journeys consist both of the inward interior self, and the placement of those selves and journeys in the wider social and spatial worlds they inhabit' (ibid, 178). For most of these participants, their journeys with mindfulness were not an individualised endeavour. Often the reason they began a mindfulness practice was to connect to or improve their relationship with friends, family and work colleagues.

Furthermore, the notion of journey has been individualised in discourse around mental health recovery. As Morrow (2013, 329) writes:

> ‘the concept of recovery is poised to be taken up as an individual journey requiring the “manpower” of the individual to create a healing environment, and his or her family and social network to provide the engine of hope, devoid of any analysis of the social context in which mental distress occurs and is managed’

However, what this chapter does is to describe the ‘real experience’ of recovery for these participants, and the ways in which ‘recovery advances and retreats in the experience of bodies living with mental illness’ (Duff, 2014, 109). For these participants, mindfulness played a huge role in their experiences of recovery, so much so, that these processes were felt as transformative. All of the participants critically engaged with mindfulness as a practice, and were experimental with integrating it into their lives. They found ways of making the practice work best for them.

Finally, although framed as individual journeys, their experiences of recovery with mindfulness are the ongoing processes of ‘becoming well’. Journeys that are not simply a turn inwards but include social, material, and affective dimensions in the assemblage of health (Duff, 2014). Thus there is no ‘singular subject of recovery’, it is an ‘assemblage of bodies, forces, spaces and objects in which recovery advances and retreats’. (Duff 2016, 63).

Zine: journeys with mindfulness

12 Conclusion: towards mindful geographies

12.1. Introduction

This thesis has offered an exploration of the (therapeutic) geographies of mindfulness, and in doing so has aimed to expand health geographies and geographical conceptualisations of mindfulness. I have shown the value of connecting health geographies with the more-than-therapeutic, where 'the "more-than" here simply serves as a device through which we might consider what else happens within spaces of health and care' (Emmerson 2019, 596). In the first section of the chapter, I offer a reflection on the research process and the development of my practice and thinking as a conclusion to this thesis. This allows me to explore my research journey and the ways it has intersected with my personal life and identities, thus here, I offer a reflection on what happens when research gets personal.

In the following sections, I offer my main conclusions. These conclusions are the accumulation of my thinking, or in other words, they are realisations and insights that I have gained through the process of research. Each conclusion builds on the (auto)ethnographic work that I have unpacked in the body of this thesis. The first conclusion concerns the conceptualisation of health. Here, I take an approach that is directed towards the processual, relational, and interdependent nature of *healing.* This is inspired by my engagements with forms of engaged Buddhism, spiritual activism, and Black feminist thought. The thinking in this section is highly motivated by my own experiences with healing and recovery during a period of mental ill-health which prompted me to take leave from the PhD. Secondly, I offer reflections on McMindfulness, demonstrating both the merits and limitations of that approach. I draw on

conclusions from my ethnographic research to highlight that there is more to mindfulness than McMindfulness. In this section, I argue that mindfulness has the potential to be a collective, relational, and affective experience that can produce new ways of being together and non-modern forms of selfhood.

Finally, I offer a pathway for mindful geographies. In this thesis, mindful geographies emerge in four main ways in this thesis: 1) mindfulness as a spatial and geographical practice; 2) the geographical analysis of mindfulness; 3) exploration of the implications that mindfulness has for geographies of research practice; 4) the mindful and exploratory approach to research practice which means that the research questions are not explicitly answered but are implicit to my approach throughout the work, but rather a manifesto is offered in this conclusion.

This section of the conclusion will meditate on point 3, by considering the ways that mindfulness might inflect our practice as geographers. Here, I draw on literature on gentle (Pottinger 2020), kind (Dorling 2019), and humble (Saville 2021) geographies. This section is attentive to the ways that we produce geographical knowledge and advocates for a slow, gentle, and humble approach. This section marks the accumulation of my thinking regarding the relationship between geography and mindfulness. Following from Whitehead et al.'s (2016) work, I offer a different inflection for the encounter between the two (the introduction of this thesis began this work through an exploration of the geographies of mindfulness). This section also highlights and synthesises the approach that I took to the research, an approach that I came to realise and experimented with during the process – particularly in moments when I struggled with the research (this relates to chapter 6 where I explored the use of

mindfulness-based supervision). I hope to offer a gentle manifesto for geographical engagement with mindfulness.

12.2. Reflections on the research process

Researching and writing this thesis has been a journey of exploration, and has shaped my life in fundamental ways. My thinking has developed considerably from the beginning of the project. Initially the research explored the therapeutic geographies of mindfulness, inspired by the encounter between non-representational theory and health geography. Whitehead et al.'s (2016) work was pivotal for this research interest, and was largely my starting point for the research. Therefore, initially, my understanding of mindfulness was within the frameworks of MBSR and MBCT, and at the beginning my methodological approach was to complete an 8-week mindfulness course based on these approaches. However, as the research progressed I began to become exposed to and encountered other forms of mindfulness that existed before and alongside medicalised interventions. I grew aware of the critiques of mindfulness as McMindfulness, and this shaped my thinking and process of research and understanding of the world. The first section of this thesis offered a critique of mindfulness-based approaches, and demonstrated the ways that the historical and cultural background of medicalised mindfulness has been obscured in order to make it palatable for a white, secular audience.

Several of these concerns can be centred on the practices of knowledge production in medicalised mindfulness interventions (particularly as mindfulness as a 'universal sensibility' – something that points to the whiteness of the mindfulness movement). For me, this sits uncomfortably against the ways that non-representational theory and posthumanist thought is mobilised in health

geography. In these literature bases, whiteness is normative and normalised, and the cannon is thoroughly Eurocentric, relying on the work of a few vitalist philosophers. There exists a particular frame of reference and reliance on the work of certain academics in the field. Thus, the indebtedness of posthumanism to Indigenous thought is unacknowledged. This is a particularly salient point for those academics employing posthumanist thought in work written on colonised land (this is explored in chapter 2). This process of obscuring and erasing is similar to the ways that mindfulness (in the context of MBSR and MBCT) was stripped of its Buddhist context to make it suitable for a largely white, medical, secular audience.

Yet, I was also wary of the critiques of mindfulness as McMindfulness, and felt that they were too totalising. I had hope that there was more to mindfulness than McMindfulness. Thus, I sought out other forms of mindfulness that were orientated towards individual and collective wellbeing and liberation (as explored in chapter 3). These interventions recognise and work with the limits of medicalised mindfulness, seeking to liberate the practice from the strictures of neoliberal technologies of the self. Encountering these practices corresponded with an understanding of health and wellbeing that was tied to a collective, holistic, and structural approach. Rather than locating ill-health and suffering at the individual (as done so in medicalised mindfulness interventions), social mindfulness practices offer an understanding of the structural inequalities and systematic causes of ill-health and suffering. Attention to these is vital to our critical mindfulness practices.

Alongside this conceptual and theoretical journey, was an embodied and emotional one supported by the integration of mindfulness practices into my life.

Doing autoethnographic fieldwork allowed me to develop my own mindfulness practice which was strengthened and guided by the retreats and 8-week courses that I took part in. This was further supported by a stint of Mindfulness-Based Supervision (see chapter 6 for a further explanation of my use and relationship with MBS) that allowed me to reflect on both my mindfulness and research practice. Paying close attention to bodily knowledges, thoughts, and emotions had a substantial effect on my life. Using the practice of mindfulness to come to my experience in a non-judgemental, kind, and accepting way allowed me to explore parts of myself that I had been unable or unwilling to before. It allowed me to take up space and take time for myself. Part of this journey of (self)acceptance was coming out as queer (I now use pronouns she/her and they/them). Mindfulness had been so important to me because I was using the pedagogical concepts and practices of acceptance and compassion to come to my own experience in a gentle, kind, and accepting way. This process was highly entangled with the writing of the thesis and analysis of my autoethnographic data and fieldnotes. I was slowly and gently coming out through writing – a kind of queer autoethnography (Adams and Holman Jones 2008).

On reflection and considering the ways that the research is entangled with my personal life, the development of my research practice in this thesis could be considered as queer autoethnography; where autoethnography seeks to 'disrupt traditional and dominant ideas about research, particularly what research is and how it should be done' (Adams and Holman Jones 2011, 110), and queer theory attempts to disrupt normative ideas in a variety of contexts (ibid). Thus, queering writing challenges hegemonic and normative ways of writing to unsettle the reader and writer into thinking differently (Weatherall

2019). Here, I see my autoethnographic practice as one that allowed me to come out or realise my queerness. This was something that I had tried to ignore, burying my head in the sand so to speak, but through the nature of mindfulness practice (in turning towards difficulty, suffering, and vulnerability) it was something that I could no longer hide from. Therefore, the thesis has been a considerable journey of self-exploration and insight largely guided by my autoethnographic involvement with mindfulness. In particular, chapter 8 unpacks the ways that mindfulness offered me a form of embodied self-awareness, and a method through which to explore my relationship with my corporeality. This led to a personal reflection on the ways I identified – particularly in relation to my pronouns.

Autoethnographic writing became a queer insight practice through which I was continually questioning my relationship to myself, my body, and others around me. Writing in this way was emotionally difficult and a highly vulnerable undertaking. It required me to open up myself intimately to others and to you, the reader. This process was challenging and exposing. I could have chosen not to delve so deep into my own experience for this thesis, but I felt compelled to write intimately – it felt important to include those elements of myself and show the ways that mindfulness is a complex, relational, and deeply connective practice.

The third journey was one of witnessing. Through the participatory work and follow up interviews, I witnessed the participants' journeys with mindfulness, and the ways that they integrated mindfulness into their lives. Their experiences with the practice were equally as transformative, shaping their lives in unexpected but wholesome ways. Watching the ways the participants flourished

through their practice of mindfulness, shaped my approach to writing the thesis. From their experiences, I was convinced that McMindfulness wasn't the whole story and that even in medicalised mindfulness settings the practice could be affective, relational, and communal. The next section offers a rendering of health as healing through feminist work on self-care, spiritual activism, and engaged Buddhism.

12.3. Beyond health: towards holistic healing

This thesis aimed to explore the conceptualisation of health through mindfulness practices. Here I draw on my embodied, cognitive, and spiritual learning from mindfulness to offer a holistic, relational, and processual vision of health as healing. In chapter 2, I drew on an affectual conceptualisation of health, where health is the bodily capacity to affect or be affected. Here, health is thought of as a 'mode of existence' that does not limit or foreclose the possibilities of particular events, relations, and affects in enhancing bodily capacities. Instead, it is attentive to the ways in which diverse encounters, affects, and relations affect bodies differently. In chapter 8, I used the term therapeutic corporeogeographies to signal the ways that the body emerges through its relationships with the world, and how awareness of this emergence through mindfulness is an affective experience. Corporeogeographies emphasises the emergent, leaky, differentiated, monstrous, and vulnerable nature of corporeal existence. In this thesis I have explored the ways that mindfulness increases or enhances the bodily capacity to affect and be affected. Therefore mindfulness is an affective practice that entails mind-body transformations, which generate new modes of being and modes of existence that involve non-modern and alternative forms of selfhood. This was explored in chapter 7 where I thought with the breath as a way to understand mindfulness

as a form of faithfulness to oneself, or critical practice of care for the self, that offers new ways of becoming. Through the non-dual practice of mindfulness of the breath, I understood subjectivity as a swinging door or process of folding that enfolds the interiority and exteriority of subjects (this was to counter the reification of a separate interior and exterior as offered by the arguments of McMindfulness).

In the chapter 'journeys with mindfulness', I explored the journey of recovery or healing for five participants. Broadly, their journeys consisted of developing a mindfulness practice that became an art of living or way of being. Rather than focusing on formal meditation practices, their mindfulness practice became embedded into their daily rhythms and everyday lives. For some, mindfulness became intertwined and interlaced into their spirituality, the two supporting each other. Here, healing, health and recovery is thought holistically to include otherworldly, spiritual and more-than-therapeutic experiences. Integrating mindfulness into their daily lives provided an opportunity to gain awareness and insight into their relationships with themselves, others and the world around them. For some, it provoked fundamental shifts in, and supported, their relationships with others.

For all of the participants, mindfulness had become a mode of awareness that they carried around with them. Many had learnt the value of pausing, reflecting, and taking time for themselves and for others around them. These experiences had provoked transformative changes in their relationships with themselves – allowing for a more compassionate, careful, and kind relationship. All of the participants critically engaged with mindfulness as a practice and were experimental with integrating it into their lives. They found ways of making the

practice work best for them. This integration played a huge role in each participant's recovery, allowing them to experience a transformative shift in their lives.

In this thesis, I have explored the ways that mindfulness transforms our relationship to our 'inner' geographies: our subjecthood (chapter 7), corporeality (chapter 8), and cognitive thinking habits (chapter 8). But I have also explored how we can gain awareness of the ways we affect and are affected by others, societal messages, and systematic structures. I have also demonstrated the relational and processual journey of mindfulness in chapter 11. In this way, I would argue that mindfulness can be a radical and an ethical form of care of the self, faithfulness to oneself, or mode of self-care. For myself and my participants, mindfulness is a practice that is intertwined with the processual journey of healing. In my understanding of healing I am guided by Audre Lorde's principles of self-care (this will be explained in this chapter), Gloria Anzaldua's spiritual activism (see chapter 9 for more on this), Sonya Renee Taylor's radical self-love (this guides my discussion in chapter 8), and Thich Nhat Hanh's engaged Buddhism (see chapter 9), as well as, my own embodied experiences of recovery from mental and emotional ill-health. Here, I understand healing as a radical journey or experience that foregrounds self-care, self-preservation, and self-compassion, next, I turn to the practice of self-care.

12.3.1. Self-care

Self-care can be usefully broken down into 5 meanings: (1) meeting our basic needs; (2) cutting down on self-cruelty; (3) kind self-care; (4) just being; and (5) reflecting self-care (Barker n.d., 7). Meg-John's work offers a practical way to

mindfully practice self-care in the academy. Firstly, meeting our basic needs would be the practical mind-body foundational needs such as sleeping, eating, feeling well, washing, and moving our bodies. 'Cutting down on self-cruelty' fits into Barker's work on social mindfulness which asks us to turn self-cruelty into kindness (Barker n.d.). Their work recognises the wider societal structures, institutional and community systems, interpersonal dynamics, and intrapsychic conversations that play apart our tendency to self-criticise. The zine, Social Mindfulness (Barker n.d.), takes the reader through each of the aforementioned levels to notice how they are affected by them, and to explore whether kindness can be cultivated towards our experiences of these dynamics, structures, and systems. Kind self-care involves putting social mindfulness into practice, and practicing kindness towards ourselves and others on a daily basis. Meg-John offers the example of planning a small kind and nourishing activity each day. This ties into the next dimension, which is 'just being' – something that might also be referred to as mindfulness, or being fully present in the moment. This might involve a breathing practice, a mindful walk or yoga. Finally, reflecting self-care allows us to take time to 'know ourselves more deeply and intimately' (Barker and Lantaffi 2019, 216) through journaling, therapy or a practice of reflection.

Meg-John Barker's work offers a clear pathway for self-care practices. Yet, these are not intended to be yet another chore to add to your to-do list, or something to measure yourself against (where not doing self-care could be read as a form of failure). Rather they are intended to help support and nourish your existing academic practice. Importantly, self-care practices need to attend to the structural conditions of the academy that cause suffering, stress, and self-criticism in the first place. Here, social mindfulness works by exploring or

leaning into the ways we are affected by these structures, which might give us opportunities to push back (see Jones and Whittle (2021) for more on this). Certainly, there is an amount of privilege in the ability to undertake a practice of self-care in the institution, and we need to be attentive to the ways that these conditions preclude certain people from engaging in self-care.

Yet, this notion of self-care is particularly salient for marginalised communities who bear the brunt of racism, colonialism, and patriarchy, and is an idea and practice that has been pioneered by Black feminist thought. Importantly it is not capitalist exploitation, nor is it elitist, rather 'it is the right of all Black women' (Caldera 2020, 714). Audre Lorde's three principles of self-care for Black women are instructive here (Nayak 2020). The first being a consideration of where to put your energy. This is a practice that investigates the common shared positioning of women of colour, encouraging dialogue, interdependency, and a shared understanding of the ways that institutional racism affects Black women. Here, effective energy is the activity of 'defining and redefining ourselves' (ibid, 10), rather than educating white people (the oppressors) on their racism and mistakes. The second principle is breaking silence as the transformation of silence into language and action. Here, the need for communal conversation is vital, particularly in a context where 'intersectional racism (re)produces and relies on fear, contempt, censure, judgement, annihilation, manipulation of visibility and denial of self-revelation' (ibid, 10). Collective dialogue can inform a process of self-determination, self-definition and agency. Lastly, the final principle is learning to love the power of your feelings and use that power for good. This principle asks us not to turn away from bad feeling or difficult emotion. But instead, we can turn towards challenging emotions such as anger, and use that force for something

productive. Thus, rather than feeling like bad emotions aren't meant to exist, we utilise their power.

12.3.2. Towards healing

In this section I hope to offer a vision of healing guided by my (auto)ethnographic research insights as well as personal experiences with recovery and self-care. This notion of healing can be applied to the context of the academic institution – allowing us to integrate self-care and mind-body practices into our research process, as done so by Buckingham (2017) who uses yoga as an academic practice. But, this conceptualisation of healing could also speak to wider audiences, and takes guidance from Magee (2019) and S. R. Taylor's (2018) interventions that unite healing with attention to the structural and societal causes of ill-health and suffering (including racism, patriarchy, colonialism etc.). Thus, healing is an engaged, transformative, ethical and affective process. It begins with self-awareness and self-care through mind-body practices, in the case of this thesis, mindfulness. As we develop awareness and insight into different dimensions of our inner selves, and awareness of the ways we affect and are affected by outer dimensions: others, institutions, messages, systematic structures, we begin to define ourselves as a larger whole and feel compelled to act. That is why it is essential that our mindfulness practices are collective, engaged, social, and critical in order to facilitate this change.

Healing is a vulnerable experience that entails transformations, and is a process that enfolds the inner and outer. Inner dimensions of healing might include the: physical, emotional, spiritual, embodied, and cognitive. These dimensions can be worked on using a range of different techniques, medical interventions, and

mind-body practices, one of these being mindfulness. As we heal internally, we gain space and capacity to attend to the outer dimensions. Here, this might be a process of understanding the ways we affect & are affected by our relationships with others, institutions, cultural and societal messages, systematic processes (capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity). This is not a one way process, but instead they enfold each other. Our awareness of the outer dimensions will ultimately affect our inner ones, and vice versa.

> ‘self and other are irrevocably, utterly, intimately interrelated, what affects you (no matter how distant, how separate, how different [from me] you seem to be) affects me as well.’ (Keating 2016, 245).

Furthermore, as offered by the quotation above, healing is a collective and interdependent process. Like spiritual activism (as discussed in chapter 9), healing begins with the individual but then moves out to challenge and transform wider structures. It combines self-growth and self-reflection with outward-directed, compassionate acts to bring about material change. This is supported by an awareness of our interconnectedness or interbeing (an awareness that can be cultivated through mindful practices), that provides us with the ways that our wellbeing and health is bound up together both on a micro, macro, and planetary scale. I argue that a fundamental part of healing is to become aware of our complicity in structures that do harm to others, and enable us to act/think/do in different ways that prevents further harm to others. It is a flourishing-in-difference.

Here, I think of a much loved quote from an Australian Aboriginal rights group, made famous by the artist Lilla Watson (1985):

> ‘If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.’

This inspired my thinking and points to the need for an interdependent and relational notion of healing, where we become well together. For instance, the healing of people of colour can only be achieved if white people are willing to put in the emotional, spiritual, and cognitive work of unpacking their white fragility and complicity in white supremacy. Particularly since institutional and structural racism, white supremacy, and capitalist patriarchy ‘demands and destroys Black and Brown women’s bodies’ (Caldera 2020, 715). The burden of racial justice cannot be placed on the shoulders of women of colour, the white community need to do the inner cognitive, spiritual, and emotional work in order to make change. We cannot heal if we do not heal together.

In the next section, I offer my conclusions regarding the sticking point for the thesis: McMindfulness. I recognise both the merits and limitations of McMindfulness and demonstrate the ways my ethnographic work pushes back against the totalising nature of the argument.

12.4. McMindfulness and beyond

McMindfulness has been a huge point of tension for the research and writing of the thesis. Due to the diversity and variety of mindfulness practices, I have argued that the McMindfulness thesis is too totalising. However, I do agree with, and further, Purser’s (2019) arguments surrounding the ways mindfulness has been contextualised to various audiences through particular processes of knowledge production. Yet, from an embodied, ethnographic, and practice-

orientated approach, I recognise the limits of the argument. I will further unpack these two dimensions in this section.

From a perspective that focuses on the discourses surrounding the contextualisation of mindfulness I see the merits of a critique like McMindfulness. At the beginning of this thesis I offered a critique of the discourses surrounding medicalised interventions of mindfulness. I demonstrated the ways that these interventions perpetuated epistemic violence through the erasure of Buddhist terminology and thought. In the introduction of the thesis I offered a definition of mindfulness as sati in order to (re)locate the practice in its historical and cultural routes. This is particularly salient for work in geography that has largely taken an approach to mindfulness through the mindfulness-based interventions of MBSR and MBCT. This entailed a critique of Whitehead et al.'s (2016) approach to the encounter between geography and mindfulness, one that relies on medicalised and largely decontextualised understandings of mindfulness.

Furthermore, I problematised the proposed relationship between mindfulness and non-representational geographical methodologies. I concentrated on three problems. Firstly, I took issue with the assumption that mindfulness could re-enchant academic knowledge. Here I emphasise that enchantment is always already present in academic knowledge, particularly within a pluriversal world. Yet, we must be careful about the production of knowledge, and be attentive to the location of knowledge. Secondly, I concentrated on the universalisation of mindfulness as a particular sensibility. I linked this with the ways that whiteness has become normalised and taken-for-granted within the mindfulness movement. Here I concentrated on the ways that mindfulness has been

secularised and ‘purified’ of its ‘cultural baggage’. Finally, I offer concern over the ethics of using mindfulness practices as a methodology. Some mindfulness practices ask us to turn towards our experience in a vulnerable and exposing way. This may bring up difficult, uncomfortable or even traumatic emotions and experiences. I question whether it is suitable for geographers to employ mindfulness as a methodology, taking into account ethics of care and our role as researchers. Yet, I have accounted for the ways mindfulness might be used as a style of, or approach to, research within geography. Later in the conclusion I will offer a pathway for mindful geographies inspired by work on gentle, modest, humble and kind geographies. In sum, mindful geographies might provide an alternative way of approaching scholarship. This line of thought is inspired and guided by my relationship to mindfulness practices and also through my experiences of mindfulness-based supervision which I explored earlier on in the thesis.

In terms of embodied practice and following from my (auto)ethnographic experiences, the McMindfulness argument begins to fall short and is too totalising. In chapter 7, I concentrated on the ways that the breath might offer different forms of selfhood. Here, I focus on the ways that mindfulness constitutes as a kind of fold, or practice of folding through the act of remembering. Here, mindfulness troubles the very notion of interiority and exteriority, instead holding together the two in a non-dual relationship. I used the imagery of a swinging door to explore the ways that mindfulness can dissolve the notion of the self. In this chapter, I seek to challenge the ways mindfulness is approached by McMindfulness by paying attention to the breath and focusing on alternative and non-modern forms of selfhood such as Foucault’s care for the self, Deleuze’s fold, and Bradoitti’s faithfulness to

oneself. My focus on the breath was a way of understanding the folding of the self through mindfulness practices. It also offered a way of critiquing the simplistic notion of the inner and outer self in the arguments of McMindfulness. The breath challenges the reification of a distinct inner and outer self by offering a living hinge that bridges the mind and body.

Chapter 10 focused on the creation, dynamics, and maintenance of a mindfulness-based group during a participatory 8-week course. Here I explored the dynamics of the sharing circle, showing how mindfulness is both a collective and shared practice. One that is maintained through the processes of acknowledgement, inquiry, and dialogue that are integral to the group practice of mindfulness. The chapter suggests that mindfulness offers new ways of being together through the production and circulation of mindful affective atmospheres which are maintained by the affective labour of the mindfulness teacher. I also drew attention to the ways that the sharing circle is an emotional, vulnerable and affective space by drawing on experiences of crying. Here I showed the ways that relations of care and reciprocity can be communicated non-verbally, offering a way to bear witness and testimony to traumas and stories that the participants shared.

In chapter 9, I attended to the ways that mindfulness can illuminate different ways of being in the world. I focused on how mindfulness practices cultivate a sensibility, or way of being, that I termed 'quiet engaged awareness'. Here, I united literature on quiet activism, engaged Buddhism and spiritual activism to demonstrate the ways that mindfulness practices are active and quiet engagements with the ground, environment and trees, which were used to connect to wider environmental and social issues. In this chapter I focused on a

number of scales of quiet engaged awareness from the micro scale of our breath-bodies and selves; to the local scale of trees, nonhuman animals; and finally, connecting these threads to the macro scale of plantary health. I drew on autoethnographic experiences of retreats where I was cultivating a new way of being in the world, one that was more compassionately engaged with myself and my surroundings. I was affected and re-figured through these engagements.

Overall, McMindfulness has offered a provocation for me to think with, it has challenged me intellectually and the ways that I have engaged with mindfulness. I certainly think the ways in which mindfulness is mobilised in many institutional and societal contexts could be accused of McMindfulness – particularly so in the context of the ongoing pandemic. Mindfulness has been offered as a method to sooth our coronavirus anxiety: ‘How to use mindfulness in a pandemic’ (Samuel 2020). Furthermore, on an institutional email sent by the University of Exeter’s Doctoral College, a free mindfulness podcast was offered to help us manage stress in these ‘challenging circumstances’ (Doctoral College 2020). Predictably and frustratingly, overarching structural support had yet to be offered when this email was sent (this was later rectified through the introduction of COVID extensions).

Mindfulness Sessions and Podcasts

To help manage the challenging circumstances created by the Coronavirus pandemic, the Oxford Mindfulness Centre (OMC) is offering weekly online mindfulness sessions, open to those who feel they would benefit.

These sessions are completely free and open to the general public, meaning you do not need prior mindfulness experience or practice to take part. Each session will also be available as a free podcast shortly after for anyone who missed the live session or wishes to practice again.

Full details can be found on the **OMC website**.

Figure 13: A screenshot of Doctoral College email sent on 26/3/2020

Initially on reading this email, I thought: "McMindfulness". The Doctoral College were employing a common McMindful approach in which an individualised (and cheap) solution to a collective crisis is proposed. Of course, this is not to disregard the need for self-care and self-preservation, particularly during a pandemic. But these acts should not obscure or overlook the structural and collective factors that cause stress, ill-health, and dis-ease in the first place. Rather they need to be mindful of them in order for real healing to take place. Finally, this thesis sees both merits and limitations in the McMindfulness argument, and hopes to provide examples of mindfulness that offer ways of being beyond neoliberal subjectification. In the next section I think with critical and engaged mindfulness practices to consider the ways that mindfulness might inflect our research practice as geographers.

12.5. Towards mindful geographies

> A collective search for a civically and critically oriented mindfulness is a way to probe the limits of the present: a task for ongoing experimentations with the care of self, and for the cultivation of different

> ways of becoming and new capacities for social action, relations, and freedoms. (Ng 2016, 150)

> Truly revolutionary mindfulness is non-dual: its transformative strength is undivided, owned by no one. By harnessing it together, we can seek the liberation of all sentient beings (Purser 2019, 262)

This thesis offers a different *inflection* for the encounter between geography and mindfulness. In doing so, I question how we might do academic research through the lens of gentle and slow academic geographies. Here, mindful research is an 'embodied orientation' (Pottinger 2020, 5) towards ourselves, participants and materials during the research process. A mindful approach is contra to the ANYTHING-BUT-GENTLE (Horton 2020) neoliberal academy. Although mindfulness might be seen as synonymous with the neoliberal institution in the arguments of 'McMindfulness', this section offers a different pathway for *mindful geographies*. By attending to feminist ethics of care, self-care, slowness, and 'gentle geographies', mindfulness might offer a care-full and attentive approach to geographical research. This approach is explained here as it is an accumulation of my thinking and practice throughout the thesis, and has emerged from the process of writing and reflecting on the research.

With this line of thought, I understand mindfulness as sati or '*as an embodied and ethically sensitive practice of present moment recollection*' (Stanley 2013a, 65). Yet, this definition could arguably fetishize the present moment (Purser 2019), a move that is favoured by a neoliberal political ideology that celebrates the present – ignoring the ways that the present is historically, culturally and socially mediated (Walsh 2018). With this line of thought, Walsh (2018, 117) queers mindfulness and argues for a definition of sati 'as a practice of collective

recollection'. Here sati is a socially and historically responsive practice, one that asks us to recollect 'neglected histories of systemic violence, which inform the continuing legacies of social and ecological injustice; and they can reorient themselves around collective well-being by forming new habits and conditions that support the excluded and marginalized, not only as victims of ongoing violence, but as subjects whose well-being is constitutive of their own' (ibid).

This definition of mindfulness might be a radical corporeogeography; those practices of the body that create transformation beyond the individual towards social justice goals. As Purser (2019, 262) writes, 'although [mindfulness] is sometimes a solitary process, it isn't a retreat from the outside world. Instead, it can deepen our sense of connection'. In his book he offers a vision for a liberated, social, and revolutionary mindfulness. One that goes beyond individualised notions of happiness towards a communal anti-capitalist approach that hopes to 'envision the emergence of a new commons' (ibid, 260). Here, social mindfulness seeks to focus collective attention on the structural causes of suffering. Furthermore, it aims to go beyond the 'cognitive turn' in mindfulness-based interventions, to include a more holistic approach that links mediative techniques with social, cultural and historical context (Barker 2014). . Purser rewrites the rules, pushing back against a neoliberal version of mindfulness, he supports the use of mindfulness in combination with critical pedagogies in order to explore the social nature of suffering and oppression. Yet, his work does not shed light on how this might be done, instead it offers a manifesto for 'revolutionary mindfulness'. In chapter 3 I offered some examples of how we might bring mindfulness into our critical pedagogies, and the ways that mindful inquiry might support our work as critical cultural geographers.

Radical, social, and queer mindfulness might offer geographers a critical and experimental practice and care for the self, or faithfulness to oneself, that is desperately needed in the neoliberal academy. Here, we might use 'mindfulness *as* research rather than using mindfulness *in* social research' (Stanley, 2013a, 76, original emphasis). I believe that is too early to propose a full mindful methodology for geography, as the encounter between the discipline and mindfulness is still in its infancy. Furthermore, 'this subtle practice needs careful training over a long period' (ibid, 76), meaning that mindfulness requires time, commitment and practice. Thus, in some ways, mindfulness demands a whole host of privileges that many academics, particularly Early Career Researchers (ECRs), simply do not have.

Yet, with that aside, I still believe that forms of mindfulness can be used as an 'art of living', and experimentations with the care of the self, through long-term commitments to the practice (through retreats, daily meditation practice and so on). Mindfulness as an embodied meditative practice is thought to provide levels of self-awareness and insight into our emotional, cognitive, physical and spiritual state that can enhance self-care behaviours (Wyatt and Ampadu 2021). Importantly, it is not a 'modish' practice that can be picked up and dropped at a whim – it invites a sensibility of slowness and care, one that radically goes against the logics of time at the neoliberal academy (Shahjahan 2015). Understanding mindfulness in this way orients us towards work in geography that prioritise feminist ethics of care and slowness. As Mountz et al (2015, 1253) write:

> Slowing down involves resisting neoliberal regimes of harried time by working with care while also caring for ourselves and others. A feminist

mode of slow scholarship works for deep reflexive thought, engaged research, joy in writing and working with concepts and ideas driven by our passions.

Slow scholarship highlights the importance of self-care[30] in the neoliberal institution as ‘we must take care of ourselves before we can take care of others. But we must take care of others’ (ibid, 1251). Using this lens, self-care is collaborative resistance that is embodied, intellectual, and emotional. It is a reflective practice, allowing for greater self-awareness and providing us with renewed energy and enthusiasm to care and work with others (O’Dwyer et al. 2018). As Audre Lorde taught us, and as Sarah Ahmed reminds us, caring for one self can be ‘an act of political warfare’ as a form of self-preservation not self-indulgence (Ahmed 2014b). This is particularly salient for Black scholars in the academy who bear the brunt of racism, white supremacy, and capitalist patriarchy (Caldera 2020). Furthermore, in the book, *Life Isn’t Binary*, Barker and Lantaffi (2019) introduce the idea of interdependent care, as ‘talking about self-care locates the responsibility for change and caring practices within the individual, yet we live in a dominant culture in which systematic forces make it hard to care for ourselves’ (ibid, 213). Speaking through interdependent care allows us to recognise a collective need for an ethics of care and community in the academy. For example, Shahjahan (2015) offers a mindful approach to colonial time in the neoliberal university, in which slowing down and focusing on the present moment allows us to re-inhabit our bodies more consciously. This is

[30] I recognise the historical and cultural roots of radical self-care in Black feminist thought – something that should not be confused with individualist and capitalist practices of ‘treating yourself’ (Caldera 2020; Nayak 2020).

an invitation to work intimately and from the body through the use of multi-sensory learning.

Moreover, Jones and Whittle (2020) explore self-care practices as an act of resistance in the neoliberal institution. Their work uses the mindfulness pedagogy of 'leaning in' to offer a 'broader picture of "what matters"' (ibid, 4). Here, leaning in might mean incorporating the more-than-academic parts of ourselves to foster vulnerability that might offer connection and mutual transformation. Leaning in might be used as part of a range of a self-care strategies to collectively resist the demands of neoliberal academia. Here, mindfulness might offer us a deeper understanding of the ways the neoliberal academy affects us and the structures of academic work or the 'feelings of structure' – 'how structures get under our skin' (Ahmed 2014a). A radical mindfulness does not turn away from bad feeling or difficult subjects, instead it attends to the structural causes of suffering that produce unhappiness and dis-ease in the first place and concentrates on 'radical honesty and fearlessness' (Walsh, 2018, 118), as a way to probe the conditions of happiness and unhappiness and lean into discomfort. As Purser argues, 'we have to go further than the smiley face rhetoric of commoditized mindfulness' (2019, 261).

> 'By reorienting oneself around solidarity with others – human and non-human – one can disrupt the constant looping effects of suffering's systemic causes and conditions. Thus conceived, mindfulness practice does not follow a neoliberal political ontology of atomized individuals competing for safety and well-being; instead, it follows a process ontology of subjects in relation, or as Thomas Berry said a *communion of*

subjects, mutually supportive of flourishing-in-difference.' (Walsh, 2019, 119).

To continue, a mindful geography would invoke a modesty and gentleness towards the production of knowledge, favouring embodied and slower forms of academic work. It would not stake great claims to the production of knowledge, but instead invoke a careful and attentive approach. Mindfulness is not a practice to be fetishized as 'other' to known, tamed, controlled and colonised (Askins 2017). Nor should it be used to obscure the structural conditions of suffering in the neoliberal academy. Mindful geographies are an orientation to research and practice that seeks to take care and to attend. It is similar to gentle geographies wherein gentleness is 'understood as an embodied relation to the self and others, one that is often associated with slowness, quietness, and tenderness' (Pottinger 2020, 2). Mindful research asks us to take care of both ourselves and others throughout the research process. Like gentleness, mindfulness is also an embodied relation to ourselves and others during research, but it is also the *awareness* of that relation.

In taking care of ourselves we recognise the inherent vulnerability of ourselves as the researcher, and in doing so we take seriously our emotional and mental health throughout the process. It starts with writing institutional ethics forms. We can ask questions like: how will we be affected by this research? What trauma or vulnerabilities might be exposed by this research? Furthermore, it might include writing support mechanisms into funding and ethics applications. We might need extra supervision with a counsellor or trained professional to work through some sticky emotions. We might need to put in place support systems that remind us to talk to a colleague or friend if things get too difficult, too close.

Part of this is planning for the unexpected, and understanding that what may affect us may be the unforeseen; the surprise encounter that we didn't think would resonate but does and does so in ways that expose us. It might even be that we ask ourselves the trickiest question: are we okay to do this research right now? Do we have the capacity to care for ourselves whilst undertaking this work? These questions probe our limits and boundaries. Mindful awareness can aid us with making choices that fit with our capacities.

Mindful research also asks us to attend carefully to our connections with participants, materials, and others. It invokes a humble epistemology, one that is 'open to being affected by objects and beings, and to different limitations, knowledges, relations and identities that openness can bring' (Saville 2021, 102). A humble epistemology shares similarities with the attitudes and commitments found in mindfulness pedagogy, namely a "don't know" mindset (Magee 2019). This refers to 'our ability to accept our ongoing need to learn, and to live with inevitable uncertainty' and ambiguity (ibid, 33). Cultivating this mindset through mindfulness might help us develop an awareness of and openness to new and diverse encounters and knowledges in the research process. In doing so, it might bring to the fore undervalued and unnoticed qualities in academic research.

Extracting mindfulness from the strictures of capitalist realism might open up a space for a queer mindfulness to be used as a critical pedagogy for cultural geography. One that has the potential to contribute to the efforts to decolonise pedagogy in higher education. Broadly speaking, decolonising has two key referents (Bhambra et al. 2018). The first is 'a way of thinking about the world' (ibid, 2), one that re-situates colonialism, empire and racism as key objects of

study, in a context where they have historically and systematically been forgotten. Secondly, decolonising offers ‘alternative ways of thinking about the world and alternative forms of political practice’ (ibid, 2). Part of this is the ‘ongoing process of ‘seeing ourselves clearly’; emerging out of a state of either blindness or dizziness’ …. ‘We are called upon to see ourselves clearly in relation to ourselves and to other selves with whom we share the universe. And the term ‘other selves’ is open ended enough to include, in this Age of the Anthropocene, all sorts of living species and objects’ (Mbembe 2016, 34–35). I have argued throughout this thesis that mindfulness might offer an alternative, embodied way of knowing the world, and that mindful awareness might offer us this kind of clear (in)sight.

More broadly, scholars are working to decolonise using mindfulness practices and pedagogies. Yellow Bird’s work on neurodecolonisation incorporates mindfulness practices in order to liberate ‘the mind and brain from oppressive thoughts, emotions and actions’ (Yellow Bird 2013, 294), and so it can be argued that a mindful approach might offer sustained wakefulness in order to gain greater awareness and insight into one’s life and reality. For Indigenous Peoples, Yellow Bird demonstrates the ways that mindfulness can be used to minimize ‘the negative sequelae of trauma related to colonization and enhance psychological and community well-being’ (ibid). Similarly, as we have seen in chapter 3, Magee’s (2019) work uses mindfulness as a practice for racial justice through the idea of ColourInsight. Thus, in this thesis, I have explored the ways in which mindfulness might be used as a critical pedagogy, one that might have the potential to support decolonial and anti-racist work.

Overall, I recognise that the current prevailing model of mindfulness through MBSR and MBCT is limited in its capacity 'to address the broader systematic and structural generative conditions of stress or anxiety' (Ng 2016, 149). This thesis opens up an avenue in geography to explore more radical, social, and queer forms of mindfulness that might offer collective transformation and healing. I have offered a vision of mindful geographies that is careful and attentive to the production of knowledge and to the structural conditions of the academy. I emphasise that mindful geographies are not a modish practice to be picked up and dropped at a whim, but one that invites sustained and careful attention. But I also acknowledge that this requires a level of privilege (time, funding, and so on) that many scholars may not have under the current university system, and I am aware that I have benefitted from the privilege of doing a PhD on mindfulness. Maybe frustratingly, I do not offer a direction or roadmap for your journey with the practice, or even a full methodology (for a mindful approach to self-care, for example, I suggest reading Meg-John Barker's zine 'Hell Yeah Self Care' or 'Social Mindfulness'). Instead I invite speculation on the ways in which mindfulness might support geography in its efforts to be more gentle (Pottinger 2020), kind (Dorling 2019), and humble (Saville 2021) as a discipline.

12.6. Reflections and directions for future research

Overall, this thesis makes several contributions. The first is to the conversation between geography and mindfulness. I have followed on from Whitehead et al.'s (2016) initial provocations, and have developed geography's understanding of mindfulness through Buddhist literature. I have also problematised the encounter between mindfulness and non-representational methodologies, instead in this chapter I offered a different inflection for the encounter that I term

mindful geographies. This has shaped my approach to academia and the writing of this thesis. Further research could investigate the practical steps needed to cultivate mindful academic work and an ethic of care in the academy (this work has started in the Royal Geographical Society through a recognition of the challenges to mental health in the academy).

The second contribution is to the geographies of health and wellbeing. I have furthered the research agenda that seeks to unite health geography with non-representational theory, but in doing so, I also have problematised this encounter for its universalising tendencies and the normative whiteness of the sub-discipline. Furthermore, I have offered a conceptualisation of health that attends to the corporeal vulnerability and susceptibility in affecting and being affected. This has allowed me in this chapter to think through health as a processual, relational experience that I have termed healing. This understanding seeks to recognise the collective and interdependent nature of wellbeing by attending to issues such as racial justice in the experience of healing. Future research and attention is needed in health geography to unpack the sub-discipline’s whiteness and reliance on Eurocentric scholarship. Furthermore, the universalisation of experience in the dialogue between health geography and non-representational theories merits further attention.

The third contribution is to the interdisciplinary literature on mindfulness. I have unpacked the argument of McMindfulness, demonstrating its merits and limitations. Through an engagement with ethnographic fieldwork I have demonstrated how mindfulness practices can produce collective and relational experiences and alternative forms of selfhood. I have also shown the ways that mindfulness was cultivated in the lives of the participants and how the practice

supported their healing and recovery. Future research on mindfulness in geography should go beyond MBSR and MBCT and concentrate on transformative, engaged, social and decolonial forms of mindfulness, and the roles that they play in social movements. Furthermore, the burgeoning use of mindfulness applications such as Headspace, Calm, and Insight Timer (to name a few) merits further attention by digital and cultural geographers. This is particularly salient in the context of the pandemic as the successive lockdowns saw a rise in the uptake of mindfulness applications (Lerman 2020).

Finally, the research process has fundamentally shaped and altered my life. It has been a period of disassembly and reassembly, of being affected and learning how I am affected. As Donna McCormack (2014, 185) writes, 'becoming undone, unlearning the self and the self 's relationality to others, and uninhabiting the familiar are all risky, scary and sometimes painful undertakings'. And although this thesis and your/my journey with it is coming to an end, my journey and my participants journeys (and maybe even your journey) with mindfulness will continue beyond the confines of the written text. To acknowledge the end of this thesis and your journey with mindfulness, join me for a breath-based ending meditation (Ostaseski 2019, n.p.)…

1. **Let the belly be soft; let the shoulders relax.** Bring your attention to the breath, to the direct experience of breathing in and breathing out.
2. **Be aware of the sensations in the body**: the large, gross sensations and the subtler sensations of tingling or pulsing. Just let yourself settle into the rhythm of the breath however it is. There's no need to control it or shape it in any way.

3. **See if you can become aware of the very beginning of the inhale, the middle, and the end of the inhale**. Do the same with the exhale: note the very beginning, the middle, and end of each exhale.
4. **See if you can become aware of that moment of transformation when the inhale becomes the exhale, when the exhale becomes the inhale.** Relax. Let the breath breathe itself. Then you might notice that little gap, that pause, at the end of the exhale—maybe it's just a nanosecond. Bring your attention fully and completely there. What happens in the gap? Were there physical sensations? Is there an emotional response? Do you find yourself anxious or feeling a sigh of relief? What happens in the mind? Is there a tendency to want to control the breath, to micromanage it in some way?
5. **Just let yourself rest in the gap. Rest in the pause.** This pause: it's a moment of faith or fear. Do you trust that the next breath will emerge? Can you relax with things just as they are? Breath is a microcosm of our whole life: coming and going, appearing and disappearing.
6. **As we settle, we begin to feel like the breath is breathing us.** Relinquish your control of the breath and let it breathe you. Settle back into the constant change—the coming and going, the beginning and ending of all experience.

Appendices

Appendix A: zine consent forms for participatory research

Contents

1 'why do you use mindfulness?' mind-mapping

2 rules for the group

3 intentions for the group

4 workshop planning

5 'ideas for home practice' mind-mapping

6 poem

7 further support

8 information sheet

12 notes pages

15 consent form

WHY DO YOU USE MINDFULNESS?

RULES FOR THE GROUP

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2

3

4

①

②

INTENTIONS FOR THE GROUP

1

2

3

③

WORKSHOPS

WEEK 1: Planning

Week 2

Week 3

WEEK 4

week 5

Week 6

Week 7

Week 8

④

IDEAS FOR HOME PRACTICE

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters

I.
I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk
I fall in.
I am lost ... I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes me forever to find a way out.

II.
I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place
but, it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

III.
I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in ... it's a habit.
my eyes are open
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

IV.
I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

V.
I walk down another street.

By: Portia Nelson

FURTHER SUPPORT

Local GP

NHS Choices service finder
web: nhs.uk/service-search
Search facility which allows you to look for a health service, including GP, in your area.

NHS Direct
tel: 111
Non-emergency advice in England.

Samaritans
24-hour helpline: 08457 90 90 90
email: jo@samaritans.org
web: samaritans.org
24-hour emotional support.

Mind
web: mind.org.uk
tel Mind Infoline: 0300 123 3393
Details of local Minds and other local services

Elefriends
web: elefriends.org.uk
Elefriends is a friendly, supportive, online community for people experiencing mental health conditions.

Anxiety UK
web: anxietyuk.org.uk
Offers support subscription with free access to Headspace, reduced cost of therapy and magazine subscription.

INFORMATION SHEET

Study title: Mindful geographies? Towards the therapeutic geographies of mindfulness

Researcher: Chloe Asker, ca409@exeter.ac.uk

What is the research about?
This research is part of a larger PhD project that looks to understand experiences of mindfulness and meditation, and how these are connected to perceptions of mental and emotional health and wellbeing. This stage of the project follows on from the 8-week Mindfulness course at Exeter College, where there was a collective wish to continue exploring mindfulness as a group. The research is participatory which means that is co-designed *with you*, we will be working together to design and participate on an 8-week mindfulness course.

What does taking part involve?
Taking part in the workshops will involve:
- 8 weeks, 2 hour workshops on a weekday evening.
- Documenting and reflecting on the process and home practice in journals.
- Creating an output from the workshops together, this might be a creative scrapbook/zine that collates reflections, experiences, and resources from the 8 weeks.

When is the research taking place?
The research will take place at Exeter St David's Community Centre beginning the week of 8th October for 8 weeks, ending 28th November.

How will I protect your personal data?
I will treat all your personal data as strictly confidential. Personal details will be kept separate from interview data and in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act. Personal data will be destroyed when no longer needed for the purposes and dissemination of the study, and within 5 years at the latest. I will never share your personal data (e.g. your name or contact details) with anyone, unless you give permission for me to do so.

How will I protect your research data?
The University of Exeter processes personal data for the purposes of carrying out research in the public interest. The University

will endeavour to be transparent about its processing of your personal data and this information sheet should provide a clear explanation of this. If you do have any queries about the University's processing of your personal data that cannot be resolved by the research team, further information may be obtained from the University's Data Protection Officer by emailing dataprotection@exeter.ac.uk or at www.exeter.ac.uk/dataprotection.

Data will be collected through my written notes on the workshops and discussions, your reflections in journals, and the zine/scrapbook we will create together. If you give consent, I will record the conversations of the group on a digital recorder. All the data will be transcribed and stored in encrypted folders on password-protected servers within the University, with a secure offsite backup. Any information printed will be stored in a locked cupboard. I will anonymise all transcripts, by removing sensitive information on people and places. You are welcome to have a copy of your transcript, and to add any further comments that are helpful to clarify your points.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Geography Ethics Committee.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the workshops?
Participation is voluntary and I am extremely grateful for your time and energy. If you wish to end your participation in the research you can stop at any time without giving a reason. Any personal or research data will be destroyed. Please contact me as soon as possible if you wish to withdraw from the research on ca409@exeter.ac.uk.

What will happen to the data from this study?
This data will be used to inform my PhD project, and will appear in future written and published work. Quotes from the workshops, journals and co-produced project might appear in reports, presentations, blogs, publications, and the final thesis.

The resource output we create will be disseminated widely through mindfulness networks and online. If you agree to this, please fill out the relevant box on the consent form.

If you would like to be informed of the outcomes and published work from the project or about future research please fill out the relevant box on the consent form. This information is confidential and will be stored separately from any research data. I will never share your personal data (e.g. your name or contact details) with anyone.

Research data will be made available in a responsible repository within 3 months of the PhD studentship ending.

Who is funding the research?
The South West Doctoral Partnership (SWDTP) as part of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) are funding this research as part of a three year PhD studentship.

Further information and contact details
Before you decide to take part in the workshops, please read the information provided and let me know if you have any questions about the research. Please contact me if you require further information:

Chloe Asker, PhD Researcher, Department of Geography
ca409@exeter.ac.uk

If you are unhappy with any part of the project and wish to complain, please contact:

Dr Jennifer Lea, Lecturer in Human Geography, Department of Geography
J.Lea@exeter.ac.uk, 01392 724071

Gail Seymour, Research Ethics and Governance Manager
g.m.seymour@exeter.ac.uk, 01392 726621

Thank you for reading this information and for agreeing to take part.

Chloe Asker
PhD researcher, Department of Geography, University of Exeter
ca409@exeter.ac.uk

NOTES

10 [2]

2 blank pages
for notes

CONSENT FORM

Please tick the boxes if you agree with the statement(s):

- [ ] I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- [ ] I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study.
- [ ] I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw anytime without giving any reason, and without my legal rights being affected.
- [ ] I agree that my contact details can be kept securely and used by the researcher to contact me about the outcomes of this project and future research projects.
- [ ] I agree for the output of this research (e.g. booklet/scrapbook/zine) to be shared and disseminated widely (e.g. to other mindfulness practitioners, mindfulness networks, and online).
- [ ] Data Protection
  I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

10 [5]

Your name (please print) ....

Your signature ....

Researcher name ....

Researcher signature ....

Date ....

Your confidentiality is important, and your data will be anonymised using pseudonyms. If you want to choose a name for yourself, write it here. But make sure you use a name that people won't be able to identify you with:

....

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Appendix B: Interview guide

I used this guide during the interview. It acted as a base for my semi-structured interviews. To allow for flexibility, they were adapted to individual interviews.

1. Opening guided mindfulness practice (5-10 minutes)

https://soundcloud.com/hachetteaudiouk/meditation-eight-the-three-minute-breathing-space

   a) Open discussion of that practice: what arose for you (body, breath, mind, emotions) in that practice?

2. Can you describe and explain your journey with mindfulness?

   Guiding questions

   a) What has mindfulness made present for you?
   b) What does mindfulness mean to you?
   c) What relationship do you have with your body, breath, emotions etc. since you have encountered mindfulness?
   d) Experiences of discomfort or vulnerability?

3. Could you speak about your experience on the course where we met, the 8-week mindfulness course at Exeter College?

   Guiding questions

   a) What brought you to the course?
   b) What did you learn from or get out of that course?
   c) Did your relationship to yourself change through doing that course?
   d) What did you learn about your body, breath, emotions and mind during that course?
   e) What happened for you after the course?

4. What happened for you on the co-produced 8-week mindfulness course?

   Guiding questions

   a) What did those workshops mean for you?
   b) What did you learn from or get out of that course?
   c) How/did your mindfulness practice develop through that course?
   d) What are your feelings towards our ‘little book of wisdom’, what does that booklet mean for you?
   e) And the mindfulness mug?

5. Could you explain your mindfulness practice to me now?

    Guiding questions

    a) Do you consider yourself to have a regular mindfulness practice? Why or why not?
    b) How does mindfulness and self-care intersect for you?

Appendix C: Abuse in academia – a note on an academic's work in my thesis

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Trigger warning: Sexual abuse and misconduct

What follows was written on 14/01/2022, edited in February, and included in the appendix after the viva had taken place. This piece of writing is based on the information that was available at the original time of writing.

In the final stages of my doctoral research, I began to scope out potential mentors for the ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship. One of the academics I was interested in working with had disappeared from his University's website. Curious about this omission I began to scroll through google looking to see if he had changed institutions or had left academia. I stumbled across a Twitter thread from a #MeToo account detailing allegations of sexual misconduct and grooming of students, accusing the academic[31] that I had googled. I was shocked and upset, the Twitter thread contained quite graphic details of his alleged sexual misconduct. I then found news articles from the Student Tab and WalesOnline that reported a lecturer had been suspended over allegations of sexual encounters with students. Although the academic was not named in these articles, the Twitter thread that I had come across was mentioned – the dots connected themselves. I then came across a press release from the University referring to the Wales Online article. I am unable to find any more up-to-date information on the issue.

[31] I have decided not to name the academic in question due to the lack of concrete evidence.

This revelation was and is of course upsetting and startling. I feel deeply for the unnamed students and victims of his sexual misconduct. Unfortunately, this is all set against a backdrop within human geography where the sexual abuse of students and Early Career Researchers by a lecturer has been exposed through the podcast series 'Degrees of Abuse'.

For me, the effects are both academic and personal. Throughout my doctoral research I had leaned on and drew from the academic's work, particularly his conceptualisations and critiques of mindfulness. I highly valued his seemingly ethical approach to research that demonstrated care and rigour. I remember excitedly attending a conference in London where he presented some of his work. Alongside this, he had been very kind and helpful towards me during a mental health episode, which subsequently led him to suggest that he'd be a good PhD examiner and was eager to read my work. Thus, learning about these accusations was unsettling and put many of his academic arguments and our previous encounters into question.

Coming across these allegations at this stage in my doctoral journey presents a challenge. I have used his work to explore themes and debates in my own writing. I discussed the issue with PhD colleagues. A friend suggested going down the same route as Azeezat Johnson's (2020a) commentary on feminist geography where her article refers to but does not cite a white feminist geographer's paper. A decision she made in order not to centre whiteness in her own work. This could be an approach to take in my thesis. Personally, citation is an important feminist practice, it is a relational practice, of putting work and ideas into conversation – it is acknowledging our debt to those who came before (Ahmed 2017). As Ahmed (2017) writes, we become theorists through the citation of other theorists, and the citational chain is created through

this practice. Throughout my thesis I endeavoured to cite beyond big (white) names in the mindfulness arena, in order to account for Buddhist historical and cultural knowledges. I also critiqued the ways in which particular institutional[32] citational chains have been created and continually reproduced in health geography. As Ahmed (2017, 16) writes:

> 'Citations can be feminist bricks: they are the materials through which, from which, we create our dwellings. My citation policy has affected the kind of house I have built.'

My academic house built through my citation archive began to feel vulnerable to collapse. Did I need to knock down and rebuild? Could I remove the foundations whilst still keeping the dwelling intact?

Furthermore, I could not find any official press-releases from the University on the situation. Something that spoke to the silencing of sexual abuse cases in the institution. I feel like my knowledge on the situation is based on conjecture and hunches, adding to the dis-ease. The fact that the academic had disappeared from the University's website (and his research project website no longer exists) presented some stark evidence that he was in fact suspended. After sifting through google, I questioned whether I should remove his work from my thesis based on the limited evidence I had? What would that mean for my thesis if I did remove his work? And what would it mean for my thesis if I didn't remove his work?

I had used his conceptualisations of mindfulness to work through the encounter between mindfulness pedagogy and geographical knowledge production.

[32] Here, following from Ahmed (2017), I refer to the institution of white men in the academy. In this piece of writing, institution comes to mean whiteness and patriarchy, namely white cis men.

Defining mindfulness through his work had allowed me to contest unhelpful conceptualisations of mindfulness alongside advocating for a particular approach to knowledge production in geography. Could I still claim a mindful, careful, gentle, kind approach to geographical research and practice whilst simultaneously citing someone accused of sexual misconduct?

Yet, completely removing his work from mine would require a substantial rewrite of particular chapters and sections, something I had little time and capacity for. I was coming to the point of submitting my thesis and was unsure whether I had the ability to make these fundamental changes at this stage. But I was also concerned with the location and foundation of the knowledge surrounding mindfulness that I had constructed in my doctoral research.

> ‘If we believe in the theoretical principles that guide critical geography, we need to be attendant to abuses of power and reproductions of inequalities that touch our own relational realities’ (Cardwell and Hitchen 2022, n.p.)

Considering myself as a critical cultural and health geographer, I was abundantly aware that citational practices matter, the location of knowledge matters, and my relational realities matter. There is no easy answer to the issue of whether to cite the academic’s work or not. Even if I choose not to cite his work directly, it has deeply impacted me and the research that I have produced. He would be there implicitly. Erasing all traces of him from my thesis and thought process would impact my work: meaning and depth would be lost. Maybe this signals a weakness in my work, a weakness in my citational practices. Although I have endeavoured to be critical of the very institutions and literature bases in which I reside, I might not have gone far enough. I might

have not pushed myself enough in that regard. Maybe I felt safe in certain intellectual houses, and was fearful of 'feminist straw' of 'being in the wind; being blown about' (Ahmed, 2017, 16).

Coming across the allegations of sexual abuse has shaken me up. I feel deeply for the victims and stand in solidarity with them – I acknowledge the harm that the actions of this academic have caused.

The situation left me feeling angry. Angry at an institution that condones the performativity of neoliberal academia. Where certain academics can produce reams of articles critiquing capitalist-patriarchy (and in this case neoliberal therapeutic cultures) in high impact journals in order to excel in their career, whilst simultaneously abusing students and ECRs. They can play the neoliberal game where what they write is separate from their everyday embodied existence and ethics. Because it is separate for them, their writing doesn't get close to the skin. In Ahmed's (2017) work she describes the activity of building feminist worlds, the process of finding her intellectual home. In the second year of her PhD, she came across texts by black feminists and feminists of colour including Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Gloria Andzaldua. She recounts how the work 'shook' her up:

> 'Here was writing in which an embodied experience of power provides the basis of knowledge. Here was writing animated by the everyday: the detail of an encounter, an incident, a happening, flashing like insight. Reading black feminist and feminist of color scholarship was life changing; I began to appreciate that theory can do more the closer it gets to the skin.' (2017, 10)

I have always appreciated work that gets close to the skin. It has a different quality to it. It feels different[33]. I have always been suspicious of academic work that doesn't 'feel' right[34]. Yet, I felt duped because I had considered this academic to be different, his work felt embodied, 'authentic' almost.

Practically, what is to be done? My future publications and academic work will not cite his work and when I have more time, energy, capacity, and importantly, funding, I can't wait to rebuild my academic house. To implement a strict citational policy. To stand out in the wind. To construct my shelter with feminist straw.

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[33] Here, I acknowledge that the work I am referring is written from a particular standpoint. Black feminism emerges from the particular positionality of Black women. This work has a unique perspective due to the intersecting layers of marginalisation that Black women face.

[34] For a while, I have been suspicious of work that doesn't feel embodied. The posthuman turn in (health) geography is an example of this. A turn that is indebted to Indigenous writers, thinkers and academics, a fact that goes unacknowledged (Sundberg 2014; Todd 2016) in this literature base. I argue that the whiteness of critical geography (Johnson 2020b; 2018) means that histories of radical theory and practice have been repackaged into (or obscured by) neat acronyms (like NRT or non-representational theory) to make it REF-able and palatable for a white academic audience to serve neoliberal regimes of the university. As one academic told me, the approach to NRT by one of its lead proponents was to 'colonise' geography with it. The histories and legacies of colonialism and patriarchy live on in our geographical knowledge production practices neatly disguised with new regimes of power like REF, TEF, Twitter hot takes, promotion procedures, and lack of investment in Black and Indigenous scholars (to name a few).

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