Thesis submitted for the award of PhD in Health Research at Lancaster University

A Post-Phenomenological Study of ‘Therapeutic Landscape’ Experiences

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Declaration:

This thesis is all my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for a higher degree elsewhere. This thesis was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

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My mother always said I'd be a park ranger or a hippie. This thesis is a testament to the wisdom of mothers.

Abstract

This thesis makes a contribution to the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature within social, cultural, and, health geography. It represents an effort to deepen understanding of the complexities of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences and 'therapeutic' outcomes; to explore how 'therapeutic landscape' experiences vary between people and over time; and to consider the processes of emergence, to consider how 'therapeutic landscape' experiences and 'therapeutic' outcomes, come to be. Central to realising these aims are the theoretical position and methodological approach. Theoretically, this thesis is driven by an understanding of subjectivity developed through a bringing together of post-phenomenological, feminist, and queer theories; an understanding of the body-subject as susceptible to the external world, as continually emerging through its interactions, but also as a locus of embodied history, with what comes before affecting and informing future possibilities. This theoretical position, as well as the concern to explore complexities, necessitated a methodological approach targeted at unfolding individual experience, and that could enable a discussion of experience beyond the specificities of a single type of 'therapeutic landscape'. As such, data-collection took place across the three 'therapeutic landscapes' of conservation volunteering, walking groups, and meditation retreats. In the context of these three 'therapeutic landscapes', a two-phased approach to data-collection inspired by Moustakas' (1990) 'Heuristic Research'

framework for phenomenological data-collection, was adopted. In the first instance, I participated in the 'therapeutic landscapes' of conservation volunteering, group walking, and meditation retreats, and kept a diary of these experiences. Following this, I interviewed others (n=20) I met during my participation about their experiences. From analysis of the data, three distinct but overlapping components of participation emerged across the three 'therapeutic landscapes' of study, those of: the origins of participation; becoming removed from daily lives; and arrival or immersion in the 'therapeutic landscape'; and it is these components that form the structure of the empirical chapters. Throughout the discussion, I explore the complexities and particularities of each of these components in light of the understanding of subjectivity outlined, and present a case for 'therapeutic landscape' experiences to be understood as individually specific and continually emergent as a consequence of bodily susceptibilities; and, moreover, as neither consistently nor universally 'therapeutic'.

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Foreword

I first became interested in 'therapeutic landscapes' and in exploring the complexity of experiences within 'therapeutic landscapes' during my master's degree at the University of Exeter. The stress of the course led me to begin attending meditation groups on campus, and eventually to go on residential retreats. My experiences of meditation were not straightforward, I was often physically uncomfortable, and my mind was difficult to control. These experiences helped me to understand the post-structural and post-phenomenological ideas that we were introduced to in the course; ideas such as susceptibility and continual emergence that I had found difficult to grasp. Meditation demonstrated to me that experience was not just about the overarching 'thing' I thought I was doing, but about the bits and bobs that come together under the surface, and it provided insight into just how chaotic and complicated my own experiences were. Whilst this chaos and complexity became apparent in the context of meditation, the knowledge of this, and the way of looking that meditation encourages, helped me to notice it in my everyday life. As an avid walker, especially during stressful times, I also began to think about the complexity of these experiences, and through writing an initial PhD proposal with my current supervisors, and working with Jen Lea at Exeter, began to bring my ideas together with the literature on 'therapeutic landscapes'. It seemed to me that if my own experiences were so

complicated then it was likely that those of others would be too, and moreover, that there is scope to expand understanding of this in relation to ‘therapeutic landscapes’.

Chapter one: Introduction

1.1 Context

'Mental health' and 'wellbeing' are prominent contemporary concepts; concepts that both define and direct individual experiences, as well as wider social and cultural life in the United Kingdom (UK). Data suggests that around 17% of the UK adult population has a common mental disorder (CMD) at any given time, and that nearly half of people believe they have suffered from a diagnosable mental health condition at some point in their lifetime (Stansfeld et al., 2016).[1][2] Overall, mental ill-health is reported to be the largest cause of disability in the UK, "contributing up to 22.8% of the total burden, compared to 15.9% for cancer and 16.2% for cardiovascular disease" (Department of Health, 2011, p. 3). In addition to being evident in statistics, poor mental health is also receiving considerable media attention. Stories of struggling National Health Service (NHS) mental health services are common in the UK national press (Campbell, 2019; Kelly, 2019; Triggle, 2019a, 2019b); and television programmes, such as those featured in the BBC Mental Health Season, a number of which were headed by national celebrities including Nadiya Hussain (Great British Bake Off), have provided insight into what it is like to live with a mental health condition (BBC, 2019). Also of particular note

[1] Figure based on a survey conducted in 2014 (Stansfeld et al., 2016).
[2] "Common mental disorders (CMDs) comprise different types of depression and anxiety". They are disorders that "cause marked emotional distress and interfere with daily function, although they do not usually affect insight or cognition" (Nettleton, 2015).

in recent years is the Heads Together campaign spearheaded by Kensington Palace which is targeted at de-stigmatising mental ill-health and encouraging people to talk to their friends and families about their feelings (Heads Together, 2019). As part of this work, Princes William and Harry, have themselves talked openly about their experiences of poor mental health (BBC News, 2019a; Furness, 2017).

Alongside a recognition of the existence and prevalence of mental illness, it seems at the moment that we are inundated with messages about what is 'good for us' in popular culture. The shelves of bookshops, pages of newspapers, screens of televisions, and apps on our phones, are awash with a seemingly infinite range of activities, that are framed as either tools through which to recover from diagnosable mental illnesses, or to improve 'wellbeing', where wellbeing is framed as a proxy for mental health, and for resilience to mental illness (Atkinson, 2011). Such activities include, but are not limited to: mindfulness meditation (Dredge, 2016; Norman and Pokorny, 2017; Puddicombe, 2011; Wax, 2016), gardening (BBC Two, 2019), walking (Lewis, 2019), wild-swimming (Day, 2019; Deacon and Allan, 2019), running (Carter, 2018; Mackie, 2018), arts and crafts (Rowe, 2017), and singing (BBC News, 2019b; Wyper, 2017).

The idea that mental health and wellbeing can be improved by taking-up new activities, has also made its way into health and social policy. Two important examples of this are the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (Defra) 25 Year

Plan to Improve the Environment (Defra, 2018), and the overlapping NHS social prescribing agenda (NHS England, 2019a; The Kings Fund, 2019). In the 25 Year Plan, there is a whole chapter on "connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing", within which it is suggested that:

> Spending time in the natural environment – as a resident or a visitor – improves our mental health and feelings of wellbeing. It can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression. It can help boost immune systems, encourage physical activity and may reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as asthma. It can combat loneliness and bind communities together (Defra, 2018, p.71).

It is this framing of the 'natural' environment as universally beneficial that underpins Defra's ambition "for more people, from all backgrounds, to engage with and spend time in green and blue spaces in their everyday lives" (Defra, 2018, p.72). Given particular attention in the 25 Year Plan is the potential for an advancement in 'green prescribing', a form of 'social prescribing' where "nature-based interventions" such as "gardening, conservation, care farms, and green gyms", are used to improve health, and in particular, mental health and wellbeing (Defra, 2018, p. 72).[3] [4]

[3] The NHS describes mindfulness as "Paying more attention to the present moment – to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you" (Defra, 2018, p. 73). Other understandings of mindfulness are considered in chapter three. MBCT is a therapeutic intervention that brings together Buddhist understandings of mindfulness with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) (Gilpin, 2008).
[4] "This work will build on the pioneering work of South West Yorkshire Trust and the Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Trust, working in partnership with Voluntary Action Rotherham, who have developed social prescribing alongside traditional mental health services. The Rotherham project was recently shortlisted for a Health Service Journal award" (Stansfeld et al., 2016)

The interest in 'green prescribing' reflects a broader engagement with 'social prescribing' by the NHS. Social prescribing encompasses the referral of patients to community led activities including "volunteering, arts activities, group learning, gardening, befriending, cookery, healthy eating advice and a range of sports" in order to improve health and wellbeing (The Kings Fund, 2019). In April 2019, the NHS released information on the new role of 'Social prescribing link worker' (with additional funding made for recruitment), a non-clinical member of General Practice (GP) staff, to "assess how far a patient's health and wellbeing needs can be met by services and other opportunities available in the community" and to refer patients on to appropriate activities (NHS England, 2019b, p. 22).

In addition to the activities mentioned here, mindfulness (albeit in a distinct form) has made its way from Buddhist philosophy to secular books and apps and health and social care policies. Mindfulness, in the form of Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is, for example, offered as a treatment for depression and anxiety by the NHS (NHS, 2018).[5] More broadly, NHS and Public Health England (PHE) materials on wellbeing frequently reference the practice of mindfulness as a way to improve wellbeing. Practicing mindfulness is, for instance, included in the NHS and PHE's '6 Top

[5] The NHS describes mindfulness as "Paying more attention to the present moment – to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you" (Defra, 2018, p. 73). Other understandings of mindfulness are considered in chapter three. MBCT is a therapeutic intervention that brings together Buddhist understandings of mindfulness with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) (Gilpin, 2008).

tips to improve your wellbeing' as part of the Every Mind Matters campaign (NHS, 2019a), and as one of the NHS' '5 steps to wellbeing' (NHS, 2019b). Whilst there is nothing intrinsically wrong with any of the activities and practices referred to here, the prevalence of messages around what is 'good for us', and these messages filtering through into government policy, does require critical engagement (Bell et al., 2018b).

Within human geography, academics have explored experiences of participating in many of the activities and practices mentioned above, including, but not limited to, walking (Doughty, 2013; Macpherson, 2008), gardening (Milligan et al., 2004; Pitt, 2014), and meditation (Conradson, 2011), in the context of the 'therapeutic landscapes' concept. At the heart of this concept is a belief that components can come together in particular contexts to produce 'therapeutic' or healing outcomes. Many of those contributing to the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature have, however, sought to interrogate the complexity of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences, to challenge the presentation of any one landscape or activity as consistently or universally 'therapeutic', and it is to this critical work that I contribute.

1.2 Approaching complexity

In this thesis I provide insight into the complexity of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences through the methodology I adopt, and through the theoretical position I outline. I move away from the tendency of those working within the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature to focus solely on a single form of 'therapeutic landscape', and I

look instead at experiences across three different 'therapeutic landscapes'; walking groups, conservation volunteering groups, and meditation retreats. Additionally, I target complexity through the adoption of a two-phased approach to data-collection; an approach that draws upon the 'Heuristic Research' framework for conducting phenomenological inquiry developed by Clark Moustakas (1990). More specifically, this approach brings together both my own participation in in the activities of group walking, conservation volunteering, and retreating (and diary-keeping throughout), with the experiences of others captured through semi-structured interviews. Bringing together experiences in this way represents an effort to increase the accessibility of detailed phenomenological information, of the embodied, emotional, and affectual, registers of experience, and in turn to provide insight into the complexity of experiences.

This methodological approach is supported by a post-phenomenological theoretical position that is attentive to embodied history and embodied difference, outlined with reference to work from post-phenomenology, feminism, and queer theory (including, but not limited to, Ahmed, 2006; Wylie, 2006); a position within which the body-subject is understood to be susceptible, continually emergent, and also a locus of history, with each new interaction affected and informed by what came before. The interrogation of data in relation to this theoretical position focuses attention on how experiences emerge, on the contingencies and fragilities of 'therapeutic' outcomes,

and in turn, I suggest, provides a means through which to move beyond individual 'therapeutic landscapes', and to consider instead, the processes that might underlie 'therapeutic landscape' experience.

The aims of this thesis are as follows:

- To contribute to understanding of the complexity of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences:
    - To explore how 'therapeutic landscape' experiences vary between people and over time;
    - To consider the processes of emergence and to advance understanding into how 'therapeutic landscape' experiences and any 'therapeutic' outcomes, come to be.
- To capture detailed phenomenological information on experiences of participation in different 'therapeutic landscapes'.
- To contribute to the development of post-phenomenological theory through an engagement with feminist and queer theory.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

Following this introduction, this thesis is divided into seven subsequent chapters.

In chapter two, I introduce the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature. I consider the origins of the 'therapeutic landscapes' concept and look specifically at the early work of Wil Gesler (1998, 1996, 1993, 1992). Following this, I look at some of the literature that has attended to the specific 'therapeutic landscapes' of interest within this thesis, those of: outdoor 'natural' spaces, and spaces of retreat. Finally, I consider some of the ways in which academics contributing to the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature have sought to explore the complexity of experiences, and position this thesis in the context of this.

In chapter three, I bring together insights from post-phenomenology, and from feminism and queer theory. In so doing I outline a theoretical position within which the body-subject is understood to be susceptible, continually emergent, and a locus of history; a position through which I attend to the complexity of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences.

In chapter four, I discuss the methodological implications of this theoretical position and outline the methodological approach taken in this research; a two-phased phenomenological approach influenced by Moustakas' (1990) Heuristic Inquiry. Following this, I discuss the research logistics, including: research site selection,

methods design and application, ethical considerations, and data-analysis. Throughout this chapter I demonstrate the applicability of the approach taken to the collection of detailed phenomenological information.

In chapter five, the first of the empirical chapters, I consider why participants decided to join walking or conservation volunteering groups, or to go on retreat; a discussion that is necessitated by the theoretical position underpinning this thesis, by the understanding of the experiencing body-subject as susceptible, continually emergent, and a locus of history. On these grounds, a discussion of emergent 'therapeutic landscape' experiences requires an understanding of routes to participation. I explore the motivations for engagement in the 'therapeutic landscapes', and the relationship between these and disruptive experiences in the life-course. I also address the potential influence of prior interest in, or exposure to, particular 'therapeutic landscapes'. Throughout, I explore the individual specificity of these routes to participation.

In chapter six, I move away from routes to participation and consider experiences within 'therapeutic landscapes'. More specifically, I attend to the relationship between everyday life and emergent 'therapeutic landscape' experiences. I consider how experiences can, at different times, and for different people, be associated with feelings of removal or disconnection, or be directly and perceivably affected by the everyday. Whilst the relationship between the everyday and 'therapeutic landscapes'

varies between people and fluctuates over time; a fluctuation that I suggest is bound up with the intensity with which we are aware of other components of experiences; underlying this variation and fluctuation is a continual connection to the everyday in less obvious ways, since bodies do not begin anew when they enter a 'therapeutic landscape'.

In chapter seven I explore 'therapeutic landscape' experiences beyond the everyday in more detail; that is, experiences when participants are not intensely aware of their everyday lives, when they have, temporarily at least, 'arrived' in the 'therapeutic landscapes'; recognising that these experiences emerge within the context of a continual connection between past, present, and future. Throughout this chapter, I consider sensory experiences, and experiences of activity performance, and demonstrate that the emergence of experience, and in turn of 'therapeutic' outcomes, is neither consistent nor universal, and is a consequence of bodily susceptibilities and shifting intensities of awareness.

In chapter eight I draw together the empirical, theoretical, and methodological findings of this thesis, and discuss the contributions and implications of these for the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature, post-phenomenological theory, and qualitative research more broadly. Finally, I outline the implications for policy makers in light of social prescribing agenda.

Chapter two: Literature review

In this literature review I consider work that has addressed the 'therapeutic' potential of engagements in particular landscapes, where landscape is understood in terms of a coming-together of different elements, including: the physical environment, the activities undertaken, and social and personal histories (Bell et al., 2018b; Gesler, 1992). In the first instance, I consider the concept of the 'therapeutic landscape', as developed by Wil Gesler (1998, 1996, 1993, 1992); a consideration that reflects the primacy of Gesler's (1998, 1996, 1993, 1992) work to subsequent literature concerned with the 'therapeutic' or 'healing' potential of landscape engagements within human geography. Following this, I briefly outline work that has considered the 'therapeutic' potential of: outdoor 'natural' landscapes; and landscapes of religious retreat; landscapes within which, and about which, this research was conducted. In this section, I draw upon contributions to the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature within human geography, as well as from a broader interdisciplinary body of research including: tourism research, religious studies, and psychology; with the inclusion of the latter a consequence of the limited research on religious retreats within the 'therapeutic landscapes' context. In the final section of the chapter, I explore some of the ways in which Gesler's (1998, 1996, 1993, 1992) original 'therapeutic landscape' concept has been developed, and consider contributions that have advanced understanding of the complexity of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences in relation to:

the potential for 'therapeutic' outcomes to be highly specific; the importance of context, and the relational emergence of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences; bodily interactions with the physical environments of 'therapeutic landscapes'; and, interactions with others (both human and non-human) within 'therapeutic landscapes'. In this final section I draw primarily upon literature that is explicitly aligned to, or references, Gesler's original conceptualisation of the 'therapeutic landscape', but where relevant also discuss sources that help to advance understandings of 'therapeutic landscapes' in the absence of this.

2.1 'Therapeutic landscapes'

2.1.1 Introducing 'therapeutic landscapes'

The term 'therapeutic landscapes' refers to landscapes associated with the provision of physical, mental, or spiritual healing, and first appeared in human geography in the work of Gesler (1993, 1992), with the term itself proposed by an anonymous reviewer (Gesler, 2017). Gesler (1993, 1992) claimed that when healing takes place in a given location, it is an outcome of different physical, social, and symbolic elements coming-together to produce a 'therapeutic landscape'. In the first instance, Gesler (1993) suggests that feeling removed from everyday life, and in turn from everyday stresses, is important if a landscape is to emerge as 'therapeutic'; and moreover, that environments removed and distinct from everyday life may be particularly conducive to such feelings.

Relatedly, he presents particular qualities within an environment as more likely to promote healing than others, and suggests that 'natural' environments, or built-environments that include elements of the 'natural' (features such as trees, grass, water-bodies etc.), are a key component of 'therapeutic landscapes'.[6] As well as these physical characteristics, Gesler (1993) argues that the emergence of a 'therapeutic landscape' is also contingent upon feelings of belonging, of being part of a community; feelings that may stem from shared beliefs (for example religious/spiritual, beliefs about the value of the environment), and shared circumstances (for example health problems), and may be enhanced through shared performances within the location (for example participation in rituals, receiving the same treatment). In discussion of his third component, the symbolic, Gesler (1993) reflects upon the importance of perception, and suggests that for a 'therapeutic landscape' to emerge, the environment and its associated activities/performances, need to be believed to be therapeutic', they need to symbolise healing; symbolic value that Gesler (1993) claims is bound up with social and cultural history.

[6] The term 'natural' has been problematised within human geography, and in particular in work on landscape. In The Perception of the Environment, Ingold (2000) suggests that the term is problematic not least because it is implies that the environment exists external to humanity and to history, "…as though the natural world provide[s] an enduring backdrop to the conduct of human affairs" (p.20). Rather, Ingold (2000) suggests, environments emerge through interactions with humans, interactions through which we also emerge. When referring to the 'natural' in this thesis, I recognise this complexity, and do so understanding that features of the physical environment and how they are encountered is bound up with human history.

Gesler tested his 'therapeutic landscapes' framework by considering how his assumptions regarding the combination of particular physical, social, and symbolic qualities, were reflected in sites historically associated with healing. Gesler considered, for instance: the ancient Greek healing site of Epidauros (1993); the Catholic pilgrimage of Lourdes in France (1996); and the spa town of Bath in England (1998), and concluded that for these sites, his assumptions seemed to hold. In relation to Epidauros for example, Gesler (1993) suggested that:

> The physical environment combined natural beauty, solitude, and stunning architecture. Within the complex there were strong, meaningful interactions among patients, physicians, and Asclepius, as well as a busy social calendar that included daily rituals and periodic festivals. The symbolic nature of myths about Asclepius, who bridged the human and the divine, the close interweaving of religious and medical beliefs, and the dream healings themselves were obvious (p.6).

Since Gesler's (1998, 1996, 1993, 1992) development of the concept, academics from human geography, and in related fields, have contributed to the discussion of 'therapeutic landscapes', and have looked across a range of contemporary landscapes including: health and social care facilities; religious and spiritual sites, retreats, and pilgrimages; and outdoor spaces and activities (for an overview see Bell et al., 2018a). In the rest of this section I look in more detail at how the landscapes of focus in this

thesis (outdoor 'natural' landscapes, and landscapes of retreat) have been considered both within the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature specifically, and more broadly.

2.1.2 Outdoor 'natural' landscapes and landscapes of retreat

Many of those contributing to the literature on 'therapeutic landscapes' have built upon the emphasis Gesler (1998, 1996, 1993, 1992) places on the physical environment, by considering how outdoor 'natural' spaces can be 'therapeutic landscapes' in their own right. Some of this literature has, following from Gesler's (1998, 1996, 1993, 1992) suggestion that removal and distinction from everyday life is important, focused on exceptional landscapes, such as wilderness in Denali National Park (Palka, 1999), and in the Alps (Williams, 2007), and have addressed the restorative potential of being in, observing, and engaging with, these landscapes.

Other contributions have looked at less-exceptional spaces, spaces that are more easily accessible, and may be more frequently visited, including (but not limited to): National Parks that are not wilderness (Doughty, 2013; Macpherson, 2008; Muirhead, 2012); woodlands (Milligan and Bingley, 2007); beaches and the sea (Collins and Kearns, 2007; Couper, 2017; Foley and Kistemann, 2015); farms (Gorman, 2016; Kaley et al., 2019a); canals and rivers (Pitt, 2018, 2014; Völker and Kistemann, 2013); and, allotments and gardens (Milligan et al., 2004; Pitt, 2014). This work has demonstrated the 'therapeutic' potential of these more everyday 'natural' spaces, and has advanced the understanding of how 'therapeutic' outcomes can emerge. Some of this literature

has, for instance, indicated that feelings of removal or disconnection are not unique to the exceptional, physically removed, and physically distinct sites considered by Gesler (1998, 1996, 1993, 1992), and in the wilderness-centred literature (Palka, 1999; Williams, 2007). Rather, they suggest that feelings of removal and disconnection from everyday life and everyday stresses can emerge in spite of being in spaces closer to home and that may be more frequently visited (Doughty, 2013; Muirhead, 2012; Pitt, 2018). Moreover, they argue that these feelings can themselves be conducive to a sense of calm and of respite (Doughty, 2013; Muirhead, 2012; Pitt, 2018). Others have highlighted that feelings of removal do not always emerge in 'natural' spaces when these are visited regularly, but that these are not necessary for 'therapeutic' outcomes. Gorman (2016), for example, suggests that regular attendance and familiarity can promote a sense of belonging and purpose, in his work looking at community supported agriculture programmes (CSA).[7]

These insights into the relationship between outdoor 'natural' 'therapeutic landscapes', feelings of removal or disconnection, and 'therapeutic' outcomes, emerged in the context of a focus on the activities that take place within particular

[7] Where CSA is defined as "a system of food production and distribution aiming to involve local communities and the growing and rearing of their food" (Gorman, 2016, p.8). The farms explored by Gorman (2016) were differently targeted at groups including, for instance: "young people with learning disabilities and mental health problems"; "people at risk of substance abuse, people within the criminal justice system, people at risk of homelessness and disengaged young people" (p.30).

landscapes; a focus that reframes the 'natural' of 'therapeutic landscapes' from a container, or as an object of observation, to something that is actively interacted with. Rather than centring their work explicitly on the physical environment then, academics have considered activities including: walking, (Doughty, 2013; Macpherson, 2008), conservation volunteering (Muirhead, 2012), gardening and farming (Gorman, 2016; Kaley et al., 2019a; Milligan et al., 2004; Pitt, 2014), playing in woodlands (Milligan and Bingley, 2007), sunbathing, sailing, and swimming (Collins and Kearns, 2007; Couper, 2017; Foley, 2015); and have discussed the embodied, sensory, and haptic complexity of these experiences. In so doing they have presented 'therapeutic' outcomes (including feelings of removal or disconnection and a sense of calm) as not simply emerging as a consequence of being in a 'natural' environment, but rather as a consequence of interacting with the environment in particular ways. A range of 'therapeutic' outcomes have been identified as emerging through the performance of activities in 'natural' spaces, and these are discussed in more detail in 2.1.3.

Contributions to this literature have also advanced understanding of the potential for 'natural' landscapes to be encountered differently by different people. Milligan and Bingley (2007) for instance, demonstrated that woodland spaces are not always encountered positively, and can be associated with distress rather than promoting 'therapeutic' outcomes. Others contributing to this work unpicking diversity have explored some of the ways in which 'natural' environments are encountered by

particular populations, including Macpherson's (2009, 2008) work with people with visual impairments or blindness, and Gorman (2016) and Kaley et al.'s (2019b) work with people who have mental health problems and intellectual disabilities (Gorman, 2016; Kaley et al., 2019a). This work, like that of Milligan and Bingley (2007) highlights the individual specificity of engagements in 'natural' environments, and in turn of the emergence of 'therapeutic' outcomes, something I explore in detail in 2.1.3.

In addition to outdoor 'natural' spaces, other landscapes that have received some, albeit limited, attention within the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature, are retreat spaces (Conradson, 2011; Lea, 2008). Lea (2008) and Conradson (2011) have, for example, explored yoga and religious retreats, with reference to the 'therapeutic landscapes' concept. These contributions, like those discussed above in relation to outdoor 'natural' spaces, represent, to some degree at least, an effort to expand understanding of 'therapeutic landscapes' to spaces beyond the exceptional, to spaces that are of contemporary relevance and that are relatively more accessible (building upon, and in relation to, the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature on pilgrimage and on ancient healing sites Gesler, 1998, 1996, 1993, 1992; Williams, 2010). In their work, Lea (2008) and Conradson (2011) similarly consider the activities undertaken on retreat, notably yoga and meditation, and explore the relationship between experiences of these and the emergence of 'therapeutic' outcomes. In so doing, like those exploring activities within 'natural' landscapes, they help to advance the framing

of ‘therapeutic landscapes’ as not intrinsically ‘therapeutic’ but as sites within which ‘therapeutic’ outcomes may emerge as a consequence of, for instance, the performance of activities (in 2.1.3 I discuss the performance of activities in more detail alongside other factors that contribute to experiences within ‘therapeutic landscapes’).

Whilst religious retreats have received little attention within the ‘therapeutic landscapes’ literature, the ‘therapeutic’ potential of retreats has been discussed in other disciplines, notably in tourism research, religious studies, and psychology. Those discussing retreats in these fields have emphasised the value of being removed from daily life, and of participating in retreat communities and activities (Ouellette et al., 2005; Rodrigues and McIntosh, 2014; Schutte and Dreyer, 2006; Voigt et al., 2010). These researchers have noted the potential for participation in retreats to bring about benefits such as: reflection and personal development (Rodrigues and McIntosh, 2014; Schutte and Dreyer, 2006), renewal and feelings of calm (Voigt et al., 2010), and restoration (Ouellette et al., 2005); have considered the influence of atmosphere on the benefits that might be realised (Schutte and Dreyer, 2006); and, have suggested that a retreat can be encountered differently by different people, dependent upon an individual’s prior experience (Ouellette et al., 2005). It should be acknowledged that all of these studies are focused on Christian retreat centres; and, there is, according to Norman and Pokorny (2017), little research on retreats aligned to other religions, at

least research that considers the 'therapeutic' potential of retreat attendance. Norman and Pokorny (2017) make a call for research to consider experiences of Buddhist retreats in particular; a call that they connect to the growing popularity of Buddhist meditation practices in the West, the association between these practices and wellbeing, and the centrality of retreats to Western Buddhist organisations.

2.1.3 Complexities of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences

In this section I consider literature that has explored the complexities of 'therapeutic landscapes' experiences, and in so doing has challenged an implication inherent (if not intended) in Gesler's (1998, 1996, 1993) work that there are intrinsically, universally, and consistently, 'therapeutic landscapes' to study. In exploring complexity, the literature I consider here has engaged with individual accounts of experiences within 'therapeutic landscapes', and has attended to the embodied, emotional, and affectual, components of participation. In so doing this literature has contributed to understanding in a number of areas, including: the potential for 'therapeutic' outcomes to be highly specific; the importance of context, and the relational emergence of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences; bodily interactions with the physical environments of 'therapeutic landscapes'; and, interactions with others (both human and non-human) within 'therapeutic landscapes'; areas that I now consider in turn.

2.1.3a Individually specific 'therapeutic' outcomes

One of the ways in which those contributing to the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature have demonstrated the complexity of experiences, is by bringing to the fore some of the individually specific ways in which 'therapeutic landscapes' can be 'therapeutic' (Andrews and Holmes, 2007; Wood et al., 2013). In their work on gay bath houses, for instance, Andrews and Holmes (2007) suggest that whilst these sites possess "a therapeutic name, long heritage, and [host] many facilities within them traditionally recognised as therapeutic", such as saunas and massage tables, these elements are not necessarily the 'therapeutic' ones (p.221). The setting of the bath house, Andrews and Holmes (2007) suggest, offers users "a safe social space", within which it is possible to feel a level acceptance and belonging that they may not often experience in the outside world (p.230). In this context, the bath house is 'therapeutic' not simply because it is a bath house, but for reasons related to "sub-culture and sexuality" (p.221). Not only is it important to recognise the role of context in determining the 'therapeutic' experience here, but it is also important to acknowledge that in the gay bath houses Andrew and Holmes (2007) researched, 'therapeutic' outcomes were coupled with, and in spite of, potential risks to physical health, and more specifically, with the risks associated with unprotected sex, which was a feature of participation. These observations suggest that when considering 'therapeutic landscapes' it is necessary to be open to complexity, to move beyond any universalising assumptions regarding what makes a 'therapeutic landscape' 'therapeutic', and similarly to

recognise that ‘therapeutic’ outcomes may be coupled with, or emerge in spite of, less positive outcomes.

The importance of these factors is also emphasised by Wood et al. (2013) in relation to the psychiatric hospital as a ‘therapeutic landscape’. More specifically, Wood et al. (2013) highlight the ‘therapeutic’ role that smoking plays for patients, alongside the psychological therapies that are associated with healing in this context, and in spite of the risks to physical health. Smoking, they suggest, provides patients with an opportunity for empowerment, and a chance to appropriate space, to carve out spaces in which they are free from the constraints associated with an otherwise highly controlled environment (Wood et al., 2013). Further, Wood et al. (2013) argue that the value smokers place on their freedom to smoke, and to appropriate space through smoking, suggests that strategies to empower patients might be additionally valuable, and more broadly, that feelings of empowerment might be an important component of ‘therapeutic landscapes’.

The value of empowerment is demonstrated elsewhere in the ‘therapeutic landscapes’ literature, for instance in Conradson’s (2005) study of a respite care facility for people with physical impairment. Conradson (2005) suggests that whilst the physical environment around the centre, and in particular, the “extensive and scenically attractive natural setting” (p.346) of the gardens, is one that might commonly be associated with ‘healing’, this alone did not to lead to ‘therapeutic’ outcomes. More

important was the accessibility of the centre, that it was designed to provide visitors the freedom to choose how to spend their time, and how to interact with the space. The freedom to choose, Conradson (2005) argues, was for many visitors, experienced in contrast to a daily life characterised by physical inaccessibility, by a reliance upon friends and family, and by feelings of being a burden (Conradson, 2005).

Underlying each of the examples discussed here is a demonstration that experiences of 'therapeutic landscapes' are, to some degree at least, bound up with everyday life. Whilst in the initial framework Gesler (1998, 1996, 1993, 1992) presents 'therapeutic landscapes', and in turn any 'therapeutic' outcome, as bounded, the work discussed here presents 'therapeutic landscape' experiences and 'therapeutic' outcomes as relational constructs and in turn as individually specific.

2.1.3b Context - 'therapeutic landscape' experiences as relational constructs

That experiences within 'therapeutic landscapes' are contingent upon the wider context of an individual's life, that they are inherently relational, is apparent in a broader body of 'therapeutic landscapes' literature (Bell et al., 2014; Conradson, 2011, 2005; Foley, 2015; Kaley et al., 2019; Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Nettleton, 2015). Building upon his earlier work on respite centres, Conradson (2011) for instance, suggests that experiences of retreats are affected and informed by everyday life, and more specifically by the act of being removed from the everyday:

> …the initial practice of relocation afforded some distance from home environments and associated responsibilities. Childcare and other duties were no longer so immediate or pressing. The expectation of a quick response to issues was also generally diminished. Mobile telephone reception was less than good at both places of retreat, and this further contributed to a sense of being separated from routine communications and responsibilities (p.81).

Central to Conradson's (2011) argument is that experiences of retreat are associated with feelings of respite or calm, because they are experienced in contrast to demanding daily lives. If an individual is to find a retreat 'therapeutic', at least in terms of the provision of respite, then they need to have something that they require respite from (Conradson, 2011).

Others discussing the relationality of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences have considered what it means if engagement in particular 'therapeutic landscapes' is not a one-off event, but a regular or frequent occurrence (Foley, 2005; Nettleton, 2015). In relation to wild-swimming and fell-running for example, whilst there may be 'therapeutic' benefits associated with single engagements, Foley (2015) and Nettleton (2015) suggest that it is normal for people to participate on multiple occasions, and often over many years. For these people, Foley (2015) and Nettleton (2015) argue, 'therapeutic' outcomes are bound up with past-engagements; with the development over years, of comfort in, and appreciation for, the particular forms of bodily movements and interactions with the environment that each activity requires and

enables (Foley, 2015; Nettleton, 2015). When exploring 'therapeutic landscape' experiences then, we need to account for context in the form of histories of engagement, to recognise that experiences can be bound up with past participation, as well as with everyday life.

The importance of understanding the relationality of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences is also demonstrated in discussions exploring the variable nature of these experiences, of their potential to be neither universally nor consistently 'therapeutic' (Conradson, 2011; Gorman, 2016; Milligan and Bingley, 2007). In his work exploring meditation retreats, Conradson (2011) for instance, demonstrates both the uncertainty, and highly individual nature, of 'therapeutic' outcomes. When reflecting upon his own experiences of performing meditation on retreat, Conradson (2011) describes how this was often dominated by physical discomfort and mental frustration, experiences that left him wondering "whether it was possible to be an 'unsuccessful retreatant' – an individual who somehow was not able to perform the attitudes, demeanour or physical positions invited or perhaps expected" (p.80). Whilst Conradson (2011) acknowledges that he cannot infer how the other retreatants found the meditation practice, and whether they experienced the same difficulties that he did, he nevertheless suggests that his own experiences were a result of his lack of prior meditation experience, of being "largely uninitiated" and "less accustomed" (p.80).

In relation to young people's experiences of woodland, Milligan and Bingley (2007) also suggest that experiences of participation, and in turn, the receipt of 'therapeutic' outcomes, can vary between people, and that this variation is affected and informed by prior experience. More specifically, Milligan and Bingley (2007) suggest that young people whose parents were positive about woodlands, and had encouraged them to play in woodlands as children, felt more comfortable (and less fearful) in the environment, than those whose parents were cautious and had limited their exposure. Moreover, levels of comfort had consequences for how the young people physically engaged with it. Feeling fearful, for instance, reduced an individual's ability to touch the 'natural', to play, and to take physical risks, the performance of which were associated with 'therapeutic' outcomes such as becoming more confident (Milligan and Bingley, 2007).

By demonstrating the potential for experiences of 'therapeutic landscapes', and the receipt of 'therapeutic' outcomes, to vary between people dependent upon prior engagement, Milligan and Bingley (2007) also contribute to the understanding of how and why individuals come to participate in 'therapeutic landscapes'. If 'positive' experience is partly contingent upon having prior (also 'positive') experiences, then it is unsurprising that others have demonstrated a link between childhood exposure and engagement in 'therapeutic landscapes' as an adult (Ward-Thompson, 2002; Ward-Thompson et al., 2008, 2005). This link is not, however, uniform, and Bell et al. (2014)

suggest that the decision to participate in a 'therapeutic landscape' is also affected by adult life. Disruptive events such as: retirement, divorce, or relocation; may, for example, influence the decision to participate in green spaces because they may "enhance or compromise personal priorities or capacity to seek out different green space experiences for wellbeing" (Bell et al, 2014., p.289). The potential for disruptive events to encourage participation in green spaces was observed by Doughty (2013) who concluded that for all of her walking group participants, the decision to join was partly motivated by a desire to tackle loneliness, loneliness that:

> …was often stemming from a range of more or less traumatic experiences, such as relocation from another part of the country for work or study; relationship breakup; the death of a partner; or feelings of depression less easily attributed to a specific event (p.142).

Similarly, O'Brien et al. (2010) suggested that the conservation volunteers they interviewed were partly motivated by a desire to spend time with other people following a disruptive life event such as retirement or leaving the workforce; an event that had reduced their opportunities for social interactions. It is important to note here, however, that in these contributions it is assumed that individuals decide freely whether to participate in the 'therapeutic landscapes', a freedom not experienced by all of those engaged in 'therapeutic landscapes' (Bell et al., 2014; Pitt, 2014). The decision to attend a 'therapeutic landscape', may for instance, be influenced by 'responsible'-others, by teachers, GPs, or local authorities, suggesting that an activity

may be of benefit, or by referring an individual to a particular 'therapeutic landscape' as an act of social prescribing (Bell et al., 2018b, 2014). In these cases, the emergent experience of the 'therapeutic landscape' may be affected by the route to participation, by the absence of choice (Bell et al., 2014). Equally, the decision to attend is likely also affected by practicalities, by the accessibility of 'therapeutic landscapes', and by having time and money to spare.

2.1.3c Bodily interactions with the physical environments of 'therapeutic landscapes'

Another way in which academics contributing to the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature have explored complexity, is by considering the role of the body in the emergence of experience. Given the focus of much of the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature (and of most relevance to this thesis, of the literature on 'natural' 'therapeutic landscapes' and retreat spaces) on the activities that take place within these settings, concern with the role of the body, has, for the most part, been manifest in an interest in experiences of activity performance. More specifically, academics have considered how bodies interact with the physical environment through the performance of activities, including: swimming, (Foley, 2015), running (Nettleton, 2015), meditating (Conradson, 2011), gardening (Milligan et al., 2004; Pitt, 2014), conservation work (Muirhead, 2012), and woodland play (Milligan and Bingley, 2007); and have explored the relationship between these activities and the emergence of 'therapeutic' outcomes.

Milligan et al. (2004) for example, who looked at older people's experiences of gardening, describe these as fundamentally embodied, as associated with a unique and personal engagement with nature, with "the sights, sounds and smells generated within the garden environment" (p.1783). Moreover, they suggest that it is from this engagement, from interacting with the environment through the act of gardening, that 'therapeutic' outcomes might emerge (Milligan et al,. 2004).

In the context of wild-swimming and fell-running, Foley (2015) and Nettleton (2015) similarly emphasise the relationship between the performance of these activities and 'therapeutic' outcomes. Through wild-swimming and fell-running, bodies are, they suggest, affected by the ebb and flow of the physical environment, by the water and the land. Foley (2015), for instance, describes open water as:

> …a space that is mobile and fluid, is governed by its own processes and in turn re-acts on the people who immerse themselves in it (p.224).

Such spaces require the body to move in particular ways, and as such, act upon the body in unexpected ways; shifting and re-focusing attention:

> You just go into this lovely rhythm. I suppose it's a bit like meditating. You just go into this calm state and you listen to your breathing and you visualise your body and what it's doing with each stroke. And if there's a slight wave you just become aware sort of, of your arm falling at a different ... falling into the water you know ... (p.223).

Similarly, Nettleton (2015) suggests that fell-running-bodies are in a continual process of "becoming, altering and working with" (p.770) the physical environment; affected by the "wind, stone [and] rain". Moreover, this interaction of body and world directs attention, such that experiences of fell-running are characterised by a presence in the moment to the "pervasive unifying quality" of the experience (Dewey, 1958, p.145 quoted in, Nettleton, 2015, p.769). Others contributing to the discussion on activities and the interaction between body and world, have explored the potential for different activities within a 'therapeutic landscape' to be differently encountered (Muirhead, 2012; Pitt, 2014). In the context of conservation volunteering, Muirhead (2012), for instance, discusses the differing experiences of physically demanding, and repetitive, tasks, and suggests that not only did these tasks result in different 'therapeutic' outcomes, but that these outcomes varied between people. For some of the volunteers, physically demanding tasks, such as clearing invasive species, were associated with feelings of instant gratification or achievement (Muirhead, 2012). In contrast, for others, these same tasks led to feelings of exclusion and redundancy; a difference Muirhead (2012) presents as a consequence of physical (or perceived) capability. More repetitive (and less physically demanding) tasks such as tree-planting, were, Muirhead (2012) claims, for different people, and at different times, associated with reflective thoughts, with a sense of being part of something bigger, or a with a state of mental calm or stillness. The differences between conservation volunteers,

further demonstrate the highly individual nature of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences, and suggest that this individuality is fundamentally embodied.

The experience of performing activities, is not, however, Pitt (2014) suggests in her work on allotment gardening, only affected by the body. Whilst Pitt (2014) observed that repetitive gardening tasks, such as weeding and digging, were more conducive than others to the emergence of *flow*, a term developed by Csikszentmihalyi (2002) that refers to a state of mental calm and focus, experiences also varied between people dependent upon the allotment within which they were participating. Pitt (2014) suggests that within two of the allotments, gardeners found it easier to experience *flow*, to become absorbed in their activities, because these provided a more relaxing environment and afforded participants control over how and what they did. These components, Pitt (2014) claims, are necessary for people to feel removed from their everyday life and to feel calm enough to experience *flow*, a suggestion that reinforces observations discussed earlier in relation to the specificity of 'therapeutic' outcomes (Andrews and Holmes, 2007; Conradson, 2005; Wood et al., 2013).

Another way in which academics have advanced understanding of 'therapeutic landscape' activities is by demonstrating their fluidity (Milligan and Bingley, 2007). In their study exploring young people's encounters with woodlands, Milligan and Bingley (2007) observed, for instance, that experiences could shift from fear and discomfort,

to more contented engagement; an engagement from which 'therapeutic' outcomes may emerge:

> A number of participants also commented that whilst walking in the woods they were initially wary of touching fallen leaves, twigs or vegetation due to concerns about dirt and uncleanliness. This anxiety, however, appeared to diminish as they became engrossed in the woodcraft activity and later, during the artwork sessions, where they worked happily with clay, oblivious to earlier concerns about engaging with dirt (p.807).

The potential for experiences to fluctuate within 'therapeutic landscapes', has received little attention beyond Milligan and Bingley (2007), and represents an important component to consider in order to further understand the complexity of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences.

2.1.3d Interactions with others both human and non-human

A final way in which academics contributing to the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature have explored the complexity of experiences, is by attending to interactions that take place within 'therapeutic landscapes', both with human and non-human others. More specifically, academics have considered how participation can prompt particular forms of interaction, and how these may be bound up with 'therapeutic' outcomes (Doughty, 2013; Gorman, 2016; Macpherson, 2008; Smith, 2019).

In the context of group walking, Doughty (2013), for example, highlights the influence of the physical environment, and the act of traversing it, on the nature of interactions between walkers:

> The landscape…at times offers natural pauses in the conversation and limits interaction to one or two other walkers at a time…In other ways the landscape encourages interaction between walkers as low-hanging branches are held aside, warnings passed on about a hole in the path/stinging nettles/a puddle/mud/slippery rocks or a whispers are sent back about a deer/rare bird up ahead or some- thing else of note or interest being pointed out (p.143).

The specificities of the environment, Doughty (2013) suggests, can both limit and encourage interactions; an observation that is consistent with Smith's (2019) findings in relation to a community joinery workshop. In this context, Smith (2019) observed communication between participants to be influenced by the activities being undertaken, and more specifically, for conversation to be episodic in nature as a consequence of the level of focus required to complete the work. The activities of walking and joinery work not only affected the interactions between participants, but did so in ways that Doughty (2013) and Smith (2019) suggest are bound up with the 'therapeutic-ness' of these landscapes:

> For those who found social interaction troublesome or suffered from shyness, the ability to have pockets of silence or times unattached to others without feeling socially awkward as a result was very important (Doughty, 2013, p.142).

> The advantage of having a skilled or demanding task to focus on as you work alongside others became clear, with no-one obligated to engage in conversation and no-one judged for not partaking, so long as they are busy with their respective task (Smith, 2019, p.13).

In the first instance, engagement in the walking groups, and in the community workshop, offered a social setting within which there was an absence of pressure to speak; the absence of which, Doughty (2013) and Smith (2019) claimed, enabled people who may otherwise avoid social interactions to participate, and to feel comfortable doing so. This is not to say, however, that individuals who participated in group walking, and in the community workshop, did not have conversations with each other. Indeed, both Doughty (2013) and Smith (2019) suggested that a perceived absence of pressure to speak, as well as reductions in eye contact, may have led to participants talking in more depth than may otherwise have been the case:

> In this case, the social interaction that takes place whilst walking is experienced as low in emotional intensity because walkers make less eye-contact. Arguably, this may help to facilitate more emotional depth in conversations between walkers…(Doughty, 2013, p.143).

> Such reflection sometimes occurred through conversation amongst participants; for example, when the workshop adopted the feel of something akin to a support circle. With life challenges more easily broached than in everyday settings, discussion of often very personal challenges, from

> experiences of childhood bullying to ongoing battles with addiction, is more easily broached in the workshop, without judgement (Smith, 2019, p.12).

Doughty (2013) and Smith (2019) also note that the interactions between participants often involved discussions about everyday life, and the difficulties that people faced; discussions that they suggest, may themselves be of 'therapeutic' value by offering people a chance to share their difficulties without being judged. The emergence of these discussions also demonstrates the inseparability of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences from the everyday, despite the physical removal; an inseparability that has featured across the literature considered in this section.

Macpherson (2008) similarly considers the relationship between the act of walking, and the nature of participant interactions, in her work on walking groups for people with blindness or visual impairment. Macpherson (2008) describes these groups as characterised by cheerfulness, humour, and laughter, qualities that she suggests emerged partly from the specific challenges posed by hill-walking for people with blindness and visual impairment, and also through the sharing of experiences of daily life:

> Belly laughs, titters, giggles, anxious exhalations, and guffaws would reverberate through the country air on days out walking, creating a transient sonic element of the landscapes we passed through. This laughter would occur in response to embarrassment, the slapstick, the incongruous, and the

> paradoxical, at the subversion of stereotypes, trips and slips, at self-mocking tales, in-jokes and laughable laughter (p.1081).

Whilst Macpherson (2008) suggests "that laughter, cheerfulness, and humour were useful psychological coping strategies for walkers with blindness, enabling [them] to challenge certain stereotypes, dispel fears and anxieties, and orientate themselves to the task at hand" (p.1092), she also highlights some of the complexities underlying a cheerful disposition. Being cheerful and having a "jolly time when out walking" was, Macpherson (2008, p.1085) argues, both socially expected and enforced, and consequently, accounts of cheerfulness may mask less positive experiences. Moreover, the physically-challenging landscapes and the need for sighted-guides:

> …meant that it was sometimes a hard space in which to challenge certain other stereotypes of the blind as passive, cheerful, submissive, or needy. The laughter and `good humour' of participants often betrayed this subtly awkward position that blind walkers found themselves in (Macpherson, 2008, p.1093).

Through this work, Macpherson (2008) provides insight into the potential for social interactions to emerge as a consequence of activity performance, and moreover for this emergence to be affected by embodied histories and embodied difference. In so doing, Macpherson (2008), like Doughty (2013) and Smith (2019), also demonstrates the relationship between everyday life and experiences within 'therapeutic landscapes'. Additionally, however, Macpherson (2008) shows that interactions within a 'therapeutic landscape' are also affected and informed by social pressures, and may

have negative as well as positive outcomes. In his work on CSA farm programmes, Gorman (2016) expands discussion of the interaction between bodies within 'therapeutic landscapes', to include interaction with non-human animals. In this work, Gorman (2016) not only notes the presence of non-human animals in the farming environments, but also acknowledges the role these animals play in emergent experiences. In particular, Gorman (2016) highlights the emotionally affective potential of being with non-human animals; a farm visitor may, for instance, be emotionally moved by their interactions, by having "something to nurture, something spontaneous to react to and interact with" (p.324). Moreover, through the invitation to, and subsequent performance of, care to non-human animals, Gorman (2016) suggests that visitors might experience feelings of empowerment, of improvements to self-esteem, or a sense of environmental stewardship and belonging. Feelings of belonging might also be enhanced, Gorman (2016) argues, by the triggering of memories through being with non-human animals, for instance memories of pets, or past interactions with farm animals. These memories might, as well as the behaviour of the animals in situ, act as a discussion starter, enabling people to share stories about animals (Gorman, 2016). In keeping with the turn to complexity, and the movement away from the presentation of the universally and intrinsically therapeutic space, Gorman (2016) also highlights the potential for a diverse range of experiences. For some human visitors to care farms, Gorman (2016) suggests, the presence of certain non-human animals may prompt fear and discomfort, and visitors may favour certain

interactions with non-human animals over others, they may prefer, for instance, to look rather than touch. Gorman's (2016) contribution to the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature encourages a recognition of the affective role played by non-human others, and of their contribution to the emergence of experience, be it 'therapeutic' or otherwise. Whilst this role is especially clear in the context of care farms, Gorman's (2016) work also opens up a space for consideration of non-human others in 'therapeutic landscapes' research more broadly.

2.1.4 Concluding remarks

The literature reviewed here presents 'therapeutic landscape' experiences and in turn 'therapeutic' outcomes as deeply complex and individually specific; as bound up with embodied history and embodied difference (Andrews and Holmes, 2007; Bell et al., 2014; Conradson, 2011, 2005; Foley, 2015; Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Nettleton, 2015; O'Brien et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2013); and as emerging through interactions with the physical environment (Conradson, 2011; Foley, 2015; Milligan et al., 2004; Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Muirhead, 2012; Nettleton, 2015; Pitt, 2014), and with human and non-human others (Doughty, 2013; Gorman, 2016; Macpherson, 2008; Smith, 2019). Moreover, it demonstrates that 'therapeutic landscapes' are neither universally (Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Muirhead, 2012; Pitt, 2014) nor consistently (Milligan and Bingley, 2007) 'therapeutic'.

Moving forward, I suggest this literature review presents a case for looking more broadly at the complexity of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences, for considering how the different factors outlined interact, how they affect and inform each other; and, building upon Milligan and Bingley (2007), for considering the fluctuation of experience over time. Additionally, by showcasing the consistency of factors across different 'therapeutic landscapes', it demonstrates a potential value in looking across landscapes within a single research project. Taking these suggestions forward, in the first instance I consider their implications through the development of a theoretical position on the emergence of experience. Following this, I build a methodological approach that enables an engagement with the complexity of experience, and that allows me to look across different 'therapeutic landscapes'.

Chapter three: Theoretical framework

In this chapter I outline a theoretical position that accounts for the presentation of 'therapeutic landscape' experience as individual, embodied, and fluctuating. This framing of experience is understood to be inseparable from the experiencing body-subject; a term I use throughout this thesis to recognise the embodied nature of subjectivity. Within this chapter I draw upon post-phenomenological, feminist, and queer theories, and explore some of the ways in which these different literatures approach the ontology of subjectivity, and in turn, the ontology of experience. I consider how body-subjects and experiences continually emerge in order to conceptualise potentially fluctuating 'therapeutic landscape' experiences; explore how embodied history and embodied difference can be accounted for within an understanding of subjectivity that emphasises continual emergence; and finally, address the potential for experiences to emerge beyond intentionality.

3.1 The susceptibility of the body-subject and fluctuating experience

One way in which the potential for experiences to vary over time has been conceptualised is by framing experiencing body-subjects themselves as continually and differently emergent; with this process of continual-emergence understood to affect and inform the experiential possibilities (Ash and Simpson, 2015; Lea, 2009). Such a conceptualisation of subjectivity is central to the post-phenomenological literature within human geography; a body of work that is concerned with the detail

and complexity of embodied-experience, and is primarily influenced by post-structural and phenomenological thinking (Ash and Simpson, 2015; Lea, 2009). In developing a case for the continually emergent subject, post-phenomenological contributions cohere around a presentation of body-subjects as susceptible or porous rather than bounded. Body-subjects are understood to emerge through and with that which is external; through the meeting of body-subject and world, and body-subject and others (Bissell, 2009, 2008; Harrison, 2008; Lea, 2008; McCormack, 2002; Paterson, 2005; Spinney, 2015, 2011; Wylie, 2005, 2002).[8] Many of those contributing to the post-phenomenological literature, and in turn, to the understanding of the body-subject as susceptible and continually emergent, have focused their research on the empirical, and more specifically, on performances of highly intense activities such as: walking (Wylie, 2005, 2002); dancing (McCormack, 2002); cycling (Spinney, 2015, 2011); yoga (Lea, 2008); and reiki (Paterson, 2007, 2005); activities that, through their intensity, serve to magnify the meeting of body-subject and world (Bissell, 2009, 2008), and in turn into the susceptibility and continual emergence of the body-subject.

[8] It should be noted that such a framing of the body-subject is not limited to those who declare themselves to be working post-phenomenologically, see for instance Budgeon (2003), Colls (2011), and Couper (2017), and in this chapter I draw upon a broader body of work where relevant .

This magnification of the meeting of body-subject and world is apparent in Lea's (2008) account of becoming increasingly and differently aware of her body whilst performing yoga on retreat:

> My attention was drawn to my back, and the way that it lay, supported in parts, but also 'stuck into' by the rocks that made up the floor... In drawing my focus to the back of my body, it also contrasted with my everyday patterns of awareness, located mostly in the sensory organs at the front of my body…In this way my attention was focused in quite a different manner upon the different surfaces and depths of my body, and upon the ways in which they were connecting and disconnecting with the world (p.94).

An account that also suggests Lea's (2008) experience was not that of a bounded body-subject, but of one susceptible or porous to the physical terrain; built through, and of, the environment with which she interacted. There are some similarities between this and Wylie's (2002) discussion of the emergence of the body-subject whilst walking up Glastonbury Tor:

> Those ascending the Tor do not perceive with a vision uniquely theirs the landscape unfolding around them. The landscape which sustains the Tor also sustains the climber. Or in other words it makes one a climber…The heaviness one feels in chest and legs is balanced by a growing lightness, a sense of anchorage being slipped, a feeling of occupying an airy volume of depth and of being lightly supported and elevated by the landscape (p.451).

Wylie's (2002) account of walking, like Lea's (2008) of yoga, highlights the susceptibility, or porosity of the body-subject, and suggests that embodied experiences emerge through the interaction of body and the physical environment. Distinct from Lea (2008), however, and inconsistent with the emphasis placed on individual specificity within the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature, Wylie (2002) implies a universality of experience; using his individual account of ascending Glastonbury Tor to speak of 'the climber'. Another point of difference between Wylie (2002) and Lea (2008) is the discussion of the longer-term consequences of the co-emergence of body-subject and world. Whilst both present a case for emergent subjectivity in terms of 'in-the-moment' experience, Lea (2008) also considers the potential for these shifts to bring about longer term changes; a consideration that reflected the aim of the retreat she attended: to provide an opportunity to "reconnect with the quietness and stillness within" in order to produce a calmer mode of being that could be carried into the everyday (p.95). The emergence of this new mode of being was presented as a possibility emerging not from mere presence in the landscape, but as something that could be realised through the particular forms of embodied interaction that were encouraged; through being with and of the environment. With this in mind, Lea (2008) suggests that:

> Place, in conjunction with different embodied and bodily practices, can have purchase in inventing different possibilities of living, since micro-scale engagements between epidermal surfaces and rocks, or foot and floor, might

> precipitate particular processes of subject formation and therapeutic landscape experiences (p.96).

Similarly, McCormack (2002) reflects upon the potential for bodily performances during a '5Rhythms' dance class to enable the emergence of particular states of being. Throughout the paper, McCormack (2002) describes his experience of dancing; noting for instance, how he moved his body, and how he adapted to the movements of others. Perhaps most relevant here, is his description of becoming 'caught-up', of moving without thinking, and finally reaching a state of stillness:

> Sounds, and gestures that begin to wind down while allowing other lines of movement to come into play, lines emerging through the flow of sweat, the rhythm of a re-emergent pulse. Lines still caught up in the after-affects of movement the kinesthetics of desire, resonating, reverberating, more gently perhaps, though no less intense. Lines that are always moving, even when movement is imperceptible, when movement becomes stillness, when movement approaches pure breath (p.484).

Although McCormack (2002) is primarily concerned with experience 'in-the-moment' and does not speak in terms of shifts in subjectivity, the organisers of the class he attended did describe participation in this way, and suggested, for instance, that the state of stillness reached through dancing could be carried into everyday life, enabling individuals to live more calmly.

Whilst the potential for particular forms of embodied interaction to have positive 'therapeutic' outcomes, is of course relevant to this thesis, most important theoretically, is the implication that individuals are affected by, and emerge through, their embodied-interactions in lasting ways, rather than simply 'in-the-moment'. If body-subjects emerge through their interactions, and each body-subject is engaged in different interactions throughout their lives, then experiences of 'therapeutic landscapes' cannot be universal, since they are encountered by bodies already laden with history. This implication, I suggest, is central to understanding the individual specificity of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences observed in the literature.

3.2 Susceptibility and embodied history

In a movement away from the universal picture of experience inherent in some of his earlier work (as is discussed above, Wylie, 2002), Wylie (2006) presents a theoretical case for an understanding of subjectivity within which the body-subject is understood as susceptible or porous, as emerging through embodied interactions, but also as a locus of history. Wylie (2006) argues that such a framing of subjectivity is compatible with, and can be understood through, the thinking of Deleuze (1992, cited by Wylie, 2006) and Merleau-Ponty (1964, cited by Wylie, 2006). Whilst Deleuze is commonly associated with deconstruction, with embracing the event (or 'in-the-moment' experience) as the smallest ontological unit, rather than the subject, Wylie (2006) suggests that this interpretation represents only a partial reading. More specifically,

Wylie (2006) notes that whilst Deleuze is concerned with the event, or the *fold,* the 'in-the-moment' coherence, affection, and dissipation of things, he also describes these *folds* as connected through a perpetual process of *folding*, in that "every fold originates in a fold" (Deleuze, 1992, p.10, quoted in Wylie, 2006, p.529). In the notion of perpetual *folding,* Wylie (2006) argues, Deleuze accounts for the accumulation of embodied history, with each experience understood to be a consequence of the last. Wylie (2006) draws comparison between Deleuze's (1992) *folding* and Merleau-Ponty's (1968) earlier concept of the *flesh*. Wylie (2006) suggests that whilst, in contrast to Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty is associated with a bounded conceptualisation of subjectivity, with an understanding of the subject as independent from the external world, in the *flesh* he accounts for bodily susceptibility and the accumulation of embodied history. The *flesh*, Wylie (2006) claims, is a universal source from which body and world emerge; moreover, this emergence is understood to take place through an "ongoing process – an intertwining" (p.525); such that the *flesh* of the world is the *flesh* of the body and vice versa.

Contributions to feminist and queer phenomenology (Ahmed, 2006; Simonsen, 2012) have also drawn upon Merleau-Pontian ideas to support an understanding of the body-subject as susceptible, continually emergent, and also a locus of history. In *Queer Phenomenology,* Ahmed (2006), for example, describes phenomenology as a tool through which "to explore how bodies are shaped by histories which they perform in

their comportment, and their gestures" (p.56), a claim that she makes with reference to Merleau-Ponty's description of "bodily horizons as 'sedimented histories'" (p.56). Simonsen (2012) similarly picks up on Merleau-Ponty's concept of sedimented histories, and suggests that through this concept, Merleau-Ponty frames subjectivity as emerging from the intersubjective, from past interactions, and from embodied interactions that prompt learning and dissemination "as memories and habits of the flesh" (p.18).

Taken together these contributions demonstrate the theoretical compatibility of susceptibility and continual emergence, with embodied history. In so doing, they also highlight the empirical importance of not only accounting for the fluid emergence of body-subject and experience, of the 'in-the-moment' meeting of body and world, and body and other (as was considered earlier in the context of Lea, 2008; McCormack, 2002; Wylie, 2002), but also of exploring how these interactions are bound up with embodied history. More specifically, the contributions considered here suggest that embodied interactions can both affect and inform the continual emergence of subjectivity (the potential for which was suggested by Lea, 2008; McCormack, 2002), and can themselves be affected and informed by embodied history. The importance of recognising the influence of embodied history was also observed by Simpson (2017), who encourages post-structurally-aligned researchers not to "forget…that events have a complicated temporality to them; they are not devoid of context" (p.7).

Although some of those contributing to the post-phenomenological literature have not considered the influence of embodied history at all (for example, McCormack, 2002; Wylie, 2002), this is not characteristic of the literature as a whole. Lea (2008), Couper (2017), and Wylie (2005), for example, suggest, albeit fleetingly, that their experiences of yoga on retreat, sailing, and, walking respectively, were affected and informed by their everyday lives:

> The unevenness of the stone floor necessitated bodily explorations of balance not usually encountered on the smooth floor of a yoga studio at home: the proprioceptively challenging environment thus set our bodies in motion in particular ways (Lea, 2008, p.93).

> My desire to 'get out of the city' reflects a milieu of influences: a mostly rural childhood and early adulthood; social context, working among colleagues who value outdoor experience (Couper, 2017, p.289).

> But there was also a less conscious, more-than-cog-nitive dimension to this lifeworld, and it was this that was the most profoundly different, in the sense of challenging the norms of my terrestrial urban dwelling (Couper, 2017, p.288).

> The truth is I was never fit enough to walk fully-laden over steep, broken ground for nearly 200 miles. The afternoons emerged as footsore, doleful spaces of self-pity. Bruised shoulders, aching hip-joints, kneecaps and, above all, heels and toes (Wylie, 2005, p.244).

Similarly, Bissell's (2009) discussion of pain management (considered in 3.4) is indebted to his own pained body:

> And yet through these prepersonal fields of force that descended is folded a personal narrative, since this pain happened to my body. It interrupted my life as I woke on the morning of 3 June 1996, crushing down on the vertex of my head and has yet to withdraw. It is my chronic headache and demands my attention (p.911).

It is important to note, however, that the work referred to here, draws only upon the experiences of the researcher (characteristic of post-phenomenology more generally as is discussed in chapter four), and I suggest that a consideration of the influence of embodied history may offer more insight when the experiences of a number of participants are considered. In the 'therapeutic landscape' context specifically, accounting for embodied history offers a means through which to interrogate the individual specificity and fluctuation of experiences.

3.3 Accounting for embodied difference

Whilst contributions to post-phenomenological geographies have engaged with embodied history both theoretically and empirically (albeit to a limited degree), little attention appears to have been given to the relationship between embodied difference and the emergence of body-subjects and experiences; to how the body you have can affect and inform your susceptibilities to the world and to others, and in turn

the accumulation of embodied history. The potential for embodied difference to affect and inform the emergence of body-subject and experience is suggested by Ahmed (2006) in *Queer Phenomenology.* It is, Ahmed (2006) suggests, from our specific embodied-orientation that we encounter the spaces, objects, and human and non-human others, through and with which, we move in our daily lives, and through and with which we emerge; spaces, objects, and human and non-human others that are themselves oriented. Moreover, orientation itself is continually emergent from these interactions, from our engagements with spaces, objects, and human and non-human others (Ahmed, 2006). Orientation is then, both a driver and outcome of perpetual co-emergence:

> If space is oriented, then what appears depends on one's point of view…Space acquires "direction" through how bodies inhabit it, just as bodies acquire direction in this inhabitance (Ahmed, 2006, p.48).

Distinct from the discussions of embodied history considered in 3.2, however, Ahmed (2006) suggests that not all bodies have equal access to possibilities, and that, since orientation is co-emergent, the orientation of some bodies can inhibit the possibilities of others through both interpersonal interactions and as a consequence of orienting space and objects (Ahmed, 2006). Where bodies move into coherences or space-times to which they are not oriented, and within which their possibilities are restricted, Ahmed (2006) suggests that they experience *disorientatio*n; an experience described

in Simonsen's (2012) reading of Ahmed (2006), as associated with feelings of insecurity, and with a shattering of "one's sense of confidence in the ground of one's existence" (Simonsen, 2012, p.20). Simonsen (2012) suggests, that disorientation can also be productive, with the search for "new hopes and new directions" leading individuals to "reach out for support or search for a place to reground and re-orientate their relation to the world" (p.20).

Whilst in Queer Phenomenology (Ahmed, 2006), orientation is a means to understand and conceptualise the emergence of queer subjectivities and experiences, it has since been applied in other ways. Indeed, Ahmed (2007) herself applies orientation to explore the phenomenology of whiteness, an approach taken forward by Chandler (2019) to examine the vulnerability of white men to poor mental health and to suicide. Through the application of orientation, Chandler (2019) suggests that the experiences of white men are "inextricably bound-to the complexity of social identity, class and history" (p.14), to the expectations that they and others have for their lives as a consequence of being white men. Vulnerabilities to poor mental health and to suicide are then, Chandler (2019) claims, bound up with these expectations; expectations that orientate white men to themselves, to the world, and to others.

Taking orientation forward in this thesis, I suggest that it can also usefully be employed to understand emergent experience beyond fixed subject categories, and provides a tool through which to account for the influence of embodied history and embodied

difference more broadly. With this in mind, I adopt a position of openness to the influence of embodied history and embodied difference on experiences within 'therapeutic landscapes'; a position of openness that reflects the bodily heterogeneity of walking and conservation groups and of meditation retreats; and the multiplicity of forms that bodies and their orientations can take. In applying orientation in this way, I also build upon Rachel Colls' (2012) call for a movement away from fixed subject categories; in Colls' case, from the presentation of gender as "a flexible container for difference" (Bondi and Davidson, 2001, p.336 cited in Colls, 2012, p.437). Subject categories, Colls (2012) suggests, imply that the body "is a neutral and passive backdrop, or container, onto and into which [an]…identity can be projected" (p.437), and ignores the complexities of embodied human experience. Instead, Colls (2012) encourages feminist geographers, those working with post-structural theories, and non-representational geographers, to consider how different bodies emerge through the movement of forces. In this thesis then, I do not consider how experiences vary between particular 'kinds' of body, but rather how subjectivities emerge through experiences; through the interactions between bodies and world and bodies and others. Through this approach I hope to contribute to understanding of how and why 'therapeutic landscape' experiences might vary between people, building upon the work of others (Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Muirhead, 2012; Pitt, 2014), and moreover, to contribute to the development of post-phenomenological thinking through an attendance to embodied difference.

3.4 Beyond intentionality and presence

Implicit within the above discussion of orientation, is an understanding that body-subjects and experiences can emerge beyond intentionality, in ways that are neither sought nor welcome. The potential for emergence beyond intentionality has also been addressed more directly in post-phenomenological and phenomenological literatures (Ahmed, 2004; Bissell, 2009, 2008; Harrison, 2008; Leder, 1990; McCormack, 2002; Wylie, 2009), and these discussions provide additional tools through which to conceptualise and explore the complexities of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences, and more specifically the potential for 'therapeutic landscape' experiences to be neither consistently nor universally 'therapeutic' (Conradson, 2011; Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Muirhead, 2012; Pitt, 2014).

Contributions to post-phenomenological and phenomenological literatures that have considered body-subject emergence beyond intentionality, include that of Wylie (2009). Wylie (2009) suggests that phenomenological and post-phenomenological studies of landscape, and in particular, work that has focused on the performance of highly intense activities (such as cycling, walking, and running), has emphasised the interaction and co-presence of body-subject and world, and has neglected experiences of non-coincidence; experiences where body and world do not meet, as a consequence of the "constitutive aspects of absence, dislocation and distancing, notions of authentic dwelling-in-the-world, of 'proper' placing and belonging" (p.287).

In these contexts, Wylie (2009) suggests, body-subjects do not emerge from intentional performance, performance that aims to make a body present in the world and vice versa, but rather from the forces that prevent this meeting. The potential for body-subjects to emerge in this way, beyond intentionality, and through non-coincidence, through body and world not meeting, was also reflected upon by McCormack (2002), who noted how, during a dance class, it was not always possible to reach the free-flowing movement that the class encouraged, despite his best efforts:

> But this takes time. And sometimes it does not work, and then everything falls flat on its face in a bundle of self-consciousness tied loosely together with the question—what am I doing here? (p.478).

Others contributing to the post-phenomenological literature have sought to demonstrate the potential for body-subjects to be moved beyond intentionality, to be affected by the "unchosen and unforeseen" (Harrison, 2008, p.427). Harrison (2008) for instance, cites the need to sleep as demonstrating bodily susceptibility to that which it cannot control, and refers to sleep as the opposite of intentional action, the closing down of possibilities:

> The suggestion is that as sleep is to waking life the blind flight of fatigue is to action and will: its necessary un-working, its dissolute condition (p.434).

Similarly, in his work on sitting, Bissell (2009) describes how it is not only the body, through shifting postures, that enables a comfortable seating position to emerge, but also the object upon which the body sits; comfort is then, beyond intentionality, it is an "affective relationality between bodies and objects" (p.1705). To exemplify this, Bissell (2008) reflects upon the chairs and benches available whilst travelling, and examines how different degrees of comfort are engineered through these objects:

> The larger chairs in first class often have armrests and headrests and are made out of more luxurious materials that effectively enclose the body. They hug and reassure the body and are designed to induce a particular set of affective relations, chiefly a sense of relaxation. In stark contrast, other seats in the travelling environment, such as benches at stations, foster and are designed to induce a range of very different affective resonances that are far from comfortable (p.1705).

Ahmed (2006) offers further insight into the complexities of sitting in her suggestion that chairs fit some bodies better than others, that they are designed with particular bodily forms in mind. The experience of comfort is not only a consequence of the chair, but of the bodies that the chair was designed for, and in turn of the designers themselves. More broadly then, body-subject and experiences, and in turn 'therapeutic landscape' experiences, can be understood to emerge not only through susceptibilities, and in this case, through susceptibilities beyond intention, but to also

be affected and informed by external factors such as designers, organisations, and markets.

In demonstrating the inherent corporeal susceptibility to that which is beyond intentional action, the work considered here also demonstrates the contingency of emergent body-subjects and experiences. Bissell (2008) explores this contingency further and discusses the role that sitting comfortably plays in enabling other bodily performances, such as writing, typing, and reading. Sitting comfortably, is, Bissell (2008) argues, "the condition of possibility for the conduct and continuation of these tasks" (p.1706), since experience is composed of varying intensities; and our awareness of particular intensities is relative to the force of others. Through its low-intensity, Bissell (2008) suggests that comfort is an affective state that does not demand attention, and in turn, enables the mind to be focused outward to external and intentional engagements (Bissell, 2008). Bissell's (2008) insight into comfort helps to understand the experiences of discomfort within a 'therapeutic landscape' that I noted in the literature review chapter (Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Pitt, 2014).

A concern with the susceptibility of the body-subject to that which is beyond intention is also present in literature on pain (Ahmed, 2004; Bissell, 2008; Leder, 1990). Whilst pain has featured in phenomenological and post-phenomenological accounts of activities more broadly, for instance in Wylie's (2005) study of a long-distance walk,

and Nettleton's (2015) discussion of fell-running, in these contexts, pain has been discussed as an inevitable or expected outcome of an intentional action:

> For more hours than I can remember, a storm has been screaming around me. For more hours than I can remember, I have been running – or trying to run – in the mountains. Now I am lost, utterly. Every muscle in my body is shaking, both feet are blistered raw, every joint aches, and my last reserves of warmth and strength are gushing away like steam (Askwith, 2004, p.1, quoted in Nettleton, 2015, p.765).

In their, albeit diverse, accounts, Leder (1990), Ahmed (2004), and Bissell (2008), have looked at pain in detail and have considered both its origins and impacts. Central to their accounts is an understanding that experiences of pain (even those which emerge in the course of intentional performance), like experiences of comfort, are outcomes of individually specific bodily susceptibilities. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* Ahmed (2004) describes experiences of pain as experiences of negation, of something external pressing upon the surface, and as violation, of "the transgression of the border between inside and outside" against our will (p.27). Moreover, pain is framed as never neutral, but rather, as something that affects and informs subsequent experience in ways that are beyond the intentional and expected, through the shifting of awareness to the body itself. Leder (1990) frames this shift in attention in terms of absence and presence, suggesting that the body is absent from conscious attention when 'functioning' well, with the mind instead embroiled in a multitude of external

engagements. It is, Leder (1990), argues, only at times of dysfunction, when we become aware of, or present to, our body. This recalling to the surfaces of the body is discussed as a turning-inwards; a closing down of possibilities that stands in stark contrast to experiences of comfort or pleasure (ideas discussed in Bissell's 2008 work on sitting comfortably). Departing from Leder, Ahmed (2004) moves the discussion away from notions of bodily absence and presence, on the grounds that bodies cannot simply appear or disappear. Instead, Ahmed (2006) suggests that experiences are characterised by differing intensities of awareness, and more specifically, that "one is more or less aware of bodily surfaces depending on the range and intensities of [other] bodily experiences" (Ahmed, 2006, p.27). In his auto-biographical account of chronic pain, Bissell (2009) expands upon Ahmed's (2006, 2002) work to highlight the role of time in experiences of pain, and in particular, the consequences that having a chronically-pained body can have on an individual's life. Whilst transient pain and its consequences are episodic in nature, limited by space and time, the influence of chronic pain extends into everyday life, affecting and informing how an individual can live:

> For the chronically pained body, the relationship to time is renegotiated: future long-term expectations contracted. Similarly, the relationship to others is diminished: the pained body is reluctant to socialise, talk, less able to enjoy life. The intensity and longevity of chronic pain therefore dampen other more

> enjoyable and pleasurable intensities and serve to stifle creativity (Bissell, 2009, p.920).

Whilst this thesis is not explicitly about comfort or pain, the work of Ahmed (2004), Bissell (2009, 2008), Harrison (2009), and Leder (1990) considering these experiences, offers broader insight into how body-subject and experience can emerge beyond intentionality as a consequence of susceptibility; the potential for which has not been widely acknowledged or considered in depth within the broader (non-pain centred) post-phenomenological literature (exceptions include McCormack, 2002; Wylie, 2009). In addition to demonstrating the potential for body-subjects to emerge beyond intentionality through the discussion of presence, absence, and awareness, this work also offers an interesting tool through which to consider the process of continual emergence. Taking direction from Ahmed (2004), in this thesis I suggest that continual emergence is dependent upon shifting intensities of awareness, intensities of awareness that are affected by individually specific and fluctuating susceptibilities and networks of interaction.

3.5 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have developed an understanding of subjectivity that draws primarily from post-phenomenology, feminism, and queer theory. The position I propose, is, in the broadest terms, a form of post-phenomenology that is attentive to embodied history and embodied difference. This position hinges on the inseparability of the

body-subject and experience (Ash and Simpson, 2015; Lea, 2009), and on the inherent susceptibility of the body-subject to the world and to others, in ways that are individually specific and fluctuating (Ahmed, 2006; Bissell, 2009, 2008; Harrison, 2008; Lea, 2008; McCormack, 2002; Paterson, 2005; Spinney, 2015, 2011; Wylie, 2002, 2005). From this position, subjectivity is understood to be in a continual state of emergence, produced through competing susceptibilities, fluctuating networks of interaction, and shifting intensities of awareness. Although continually emergent, the body-subject is also a locus of history, with each interaction affected and informed by the last (Ahmed, 2006; Simonsen, 2012; Wylie, 2006). Body-subjects do not only emerge from intentional performances, but also beyond intentionality, in ways that may be unsought or unwelcome (Ahmed, 2004; Bissell, 2009, 2008; Leder, 1990; McCormack, 2002; Wylie, 2009). In the rest of this thesis, I explore the potential of this theoretical position to help understand the complexities of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences.

Chapter four: Methodology and methods

In this chapter, I firstly consider the methodological implications of the theoretical position I outlined in the previous chapter; a form of post-phenomenology attentive to bodily susceptibility, embodied history, and embodied difference. Following this, I discuss the approach taken to data-collection, an approach influenced by Moustakas' (1990) Heuristic Research framework for phenomenological inquiry, within which I bring together my own participation in 'therapeutic landscapes' and semi-structured interviews with others. I then move on to discuss the research sites; outlining how I decided upon the 'therapeutic landscapes' of conservation volunteering, group walking, and meditation retreats; and why I chose the specific groups and retreat centres. Following this, I discuss the application of the methods (including participant recruitment), the ethical considerations, and finally, the approaches taken to data-handling and analysis.

4.1 Post-phenomenological epistemologies and methodological consequences

Whilst up until this point of the thesis I have discussed post-phenomenology only in terms of theory, like phenomenology, it is also inherently methodological (Allen-Collinson, 2013, 2011a; Finlay, 2011; Lea, 2009). In her reading of Schwartz (2002), Allen-Collinson (2011a) suggests that that, "we construe phenomenology as epistemological theory only, at the risk of grave misunderstanding" (p.49).

Phenomenology is, at its heart, a theory about experience, about what we mean when we talk of experience. The conceptualisation of experience, however, has consequences. Like any epistemology, phenomenological, or post-phenomenological epistemologies affect and inform the research that can be undertaken. What we believe experience to be affects and informs how we access it.

In this thesis, beliefs about what experience is, about where it lies, are central. The post-phenomenological position I outlined in the previous chapter, within which experience is understood to be a continually emergent outcome of susceptibilities and embodied interactions, and to be bound up with embodied history and embodied difference, necessitates an approach to research that is open to individual unfolding experience. More specifically, the understanding of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences through this lens, as continually emergent, individually specific, and produced through interactions with and through space, and with and through others, encourages an approach to research that can capture the complexity and particularity of experiences, and in turn, the complexity and particularity of any 'therapeutic' outcome. It was in light of these theoretical implications, as well as the observations of complexity within the existing 'therapeutic landscapes' literature, that I designed the methodological approach outlined below.

4.2 Research methods

In designing the approach to data-collection in this thesis I drew upon 'Heuristic Research', a framework for conducting phenomenological inquiry developed by Clark Moustakas (1990). Central to this framework is the division of data-collection into two phases, firstly, researcher immersion, and secondly, engagement with the experiences of others, with a different method of data-collection applied during each phase. Moustakas (1990) suggests that by dividing data-collection in this way, it is possible to capture highly detailed phenomenological information, and in turn to develop a deep understanding of the phenomena of interest in all of its complexity. In this thesis I applied the phased approach to data-collection as follows:

Research phase	**Method**
Phase one - Researcher immersion	My own engagement in particular 'therapeutic landscapes' and the recording of these experiences in research diaries.
Phase two - Engagement with the experiences of others	Semi-structured interviews with others who participated in the same 'therapeutic landscapes' and who I met through this participation.

Table 1 - Research Phases

Moustakas (1990) argued that the researcher should begin by immersing themselves in the phenomena of interest in order to gain a deep understanding of their own relationship to, or experiences of, this phenomena; a depth of understanding that he suggested would likely exceed what can be gained from collecting the experiences of

others alone. For Moustakas (1990) immersion was envisaged to be a mental pursuit; a pursuit characterised by the researcher committing themselves to thinking about, and reflecting upon, their past experiences of the phenomena for instance, or to reading widely about the phenomena. Such an approach is, however, inconsistent with the more embodied understanding of experience that directs this thesis, and I decided instead to participate in 'therapeutic landscapes' myself, and to record and reflect upon my experiences of participation. Whilst doing so I attended to phenomenological registers of experience, to the embodied, the emotional, and the affectual. This approach is similar to that taken by Bassett et al. (2018), who attended a silent retreat in order to understand her own relationship to silence, as part of a wider 'Heuristic Research' project.

This method, a form of auto-phenomenology, is not new to cultural geographies, and has been adopted by many of those contributing to post-phenomenological research (see for instance Lea, 2008, on yoga; McCormack, 2002, on dancing; Paterson, 2005, on reiki; and Wylie, 2005, 2002, on walking). Reflecting Moustakas' (1990) claim that the depth of understanding that can be gained through researcher immersion is greater than that which can be gained by documenting others' experiences, Spinney (2015) suggests that those contributing to post-phenomenological cultural geographies may have chosen to participate themselves because it is easier to access your own 'in-the-moment' phenomenological experiences, and to gain a deep

understanding of these, than it is to access the experiences of others. Along the same lines, Lea (2009) suggests that a concern with accessing the phenomenological, is manifest in the types of phenomena that have been considered, with many of the contributions to the post-phenomenological cultural geographies literature, looking at the performance of highly intense activities; activities through which bodily experiences and interactions are amplified.

In addition to participating in 'therapeutic landscapes' myself, for phase two of the research I conducted semi-structured interviews with others I met through my participation during phase one. Whilst I did not expect to access the experiences of others in the same level of detail as I could my own, my participation did offer a means through which to increase the accessibility of phenomenological detail for others, as a consequence of influencing the questions I asked, the prompts I gave, and the stories I shared (Moustakas, 1990). The value of prompts for phenomenological recall was reflected upon in a post-phenomenological context by Spinney (2015), who used video recordings of participants cycling as "a sensual prompt to recollection" (p.236), a tool to help participants to access the phenomenological detail of their experiences. The approach taken in this thesis builds upon that of Spinney (2015) and represents an additional means through which to make the phenomenological detail of experiences accessible. Making phenomenological detail accessible is not only an aim in itself for this thesis, but also a necessity in order to contribute to empirical understanding of

the complexity of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences; to consider how these fluctuate between people and over time, and to explore the process through which they emerge.

4.3 Conducting the research

The empirical research for this thesis took place between December 2016 and September 2017 using the methods outlined below:

4.3.1 Research sites: which 'therapeutic landscapes'?

In this research data-collection was carried out across three 'therapeutic landscapes'; the green space activities of group walking and conservation volunteering, and Buddhist meditation retreats. The decision to look across different landscapes was made in light of the consistency of factors observed within the literature to influence the emergence of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences, across a range of different landscapes. This consistency, I suggest, demonstrates the potential value in looking across landscapes within a single research project, as a means through which to move beyond the individual specificities of landscapes, and to begin to understand the underlying processes through which 'therapeutic landscape' experiences, and 'therapeutic' outcomes, emerge.

The specific 'therapeutic landscapes' selected were chosen party because they have already been considered, and suggested to have 'therapeutic' potential (at least some

of the time and for some people), by others contributing to the 'therapeutic landscapes' (and related) literature(s) (see for instance, Conradson, 2011; Doughty, 2013; Muirhead, 2012). My reason for using landscapes with already identified 'therapeutic' potential, stems from my interest in exploring the complexities of experiences within such spaces, rather than assessing whether or not spaces should be considered 'therapeutic'. An additional factor influencing my selection of 'therapeutic landscapes', was a belief that I would be better able to conduct phase one of the research if I had prior experience of the spaces and activities in which I participated. Garfinkel (2002) suggested, that, if a researcher has prior experience of the phenomena of interest then they are more able to engage with it in a 'normal' way, avoiding being distracted by the novelty of the experience. The value of prior experience seems not to have been lost on others using their own participation as a method of phenomenological data-collection. In their work on pilgrimage for instance, both Scriven (2018) and Williams (2010), discuss their prior involvements with the relevant branches of Christianity. Similarly, Lorimer (2012), and Allen-Collinson (2016), present their work on running as emerging from long histories of running as a leisure practice (see also, Lea's, 2008, work on yoga performance). Before conducting this research I had been practicing meditation for two years and had attended three residential retreats. I had also been involved in conservation work during my undergraduate degree, and had been a regular hill-walker for more than a decade.

4.3.2 Research sites: deciding which groups/centres

When deciding which green space groups to participate in, I considered the following factors.

1. Environment – reputation as a 'therapeutic landscape':
    - Opted for groups based in UK National Parks[9] (see Doughty, 2013; Muirhead, 2012, for a discussion of these as 'therapeutic landscapes')
2. Ease of access
3. Timing and frequency of group meetings

With these factors in mind, I decided upon the following group walking and conservation volunteering groups:

[9] The UK has 15 National Parks; areas protected by UK law, and locally administered "because of their beautiful countryside, wildlife and cultural heritage" (UK National Parks, 2019).

Research sites	Overview	Periods of engagement
Walking		
Group 1	A fell-walking group in the Lake District aimed at people in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. Offers walks of varying levels of difficulty, but during my time most of the walks available were at the more difficult end of the spectrum.	2017 7 days
Conservation volunteering		
Group 2	A conservation group that works across the Lake District. Tasks vary in accordance with need, but common projects during my time included: removal of invasive or non-native species; path-building, and dry-stone walling.	2017 8 days
Group 3	A conservation group that works across the Peak District. Tasks vary in accordance with need, but common projects during my time included: tree-planting and care of saplings; removal of invasive or non-native species; and dry-stone walling.	2017 7 days

Table 2 - Green space groups

I chose to participate in meditation retreats aligned to branches of Buddhist meditation practice of which I had prior experience. With this decision made, my options were substantially reduced owing to the limited number of potential sites (circa 10 including 4 permanent retreat centres and adhoc retreats at alternative venues). I decided which of these retreats to attend based upon practical concerns including: the date, duration, and cost; as well as a desire to experience a range of different retreat formats, retreats that differed in terms of daily structure, in the range

of activities beyond 'formal' meditation on offer, and in whether or not they were silent. With these factors in mind I chose to participate in the following meditation retreats. For an introduction to these retreats see table 3, and for detail of daily retreat life see table 4:

Research sites	**Overview**	**Periods of engagement**
Meditation retreats		
Retreat one	A Buddhist retreat centre closely aligned with the Insight Meditation tradition. Offers group retreats for around 60 people at a time, of varying lengths and forms. Physically-remote location, a rural setting, and a distinctive building.	2016 4 days
Retreat two	A Buddhist retreat centre broadly aligned with the Insight Meditation tradition. The standard retreats here (one of which I attended) are a week long and are community centred, there are only 10 retreatants on each retreat. Physically-remote location, a rural setting, purpose-built distinctive building.	2017 7 days
Retreat three	A very large retreat for around 200 people that took place at a boarding school, surrounded by playing fields. Arranged by a Buddhist order aligned with Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings, and led by Monastics. Retreatants included families and meditation groups, as well as individuals.	2017 6 days

Table 3 - Meditation retreats

Meditation retreats	
Retreat 1	On the retreat I attended the daily schedule was dominated by a cycle of sitting and walking meditations, and 'dharma' talks (each around an hour long). Retreatants carried out some assigned 'housework' each day and also had some free time for activities of their choice. This retreat was completely silent, with the exception of two small group discussions or 'sharing sessions'. Reading and writing were discouraged. Retreatants at this centre generally share rooms (though other options are available). During my stay I was in a room of six 'young' women (all under 30).
Retreat 2	This centre places a great emphasis on community living. On the standard retreat offered (which I attended) retreatants work collectively in the centre's organic gardens for a couple of hours a day, and also prepare meals for each other throughout the week. In addition, retreatants participate in meditation practice, both sitting and walking, three times a day (for 45 minutes), and attend 'dharma' talks delivered by external speakers three times a week. Retreatants have a lot of free time for activities including walking and reading. At this centre all retreatants have their own single room.
Retreat 3	Daily schedule included sitting meditation (30 minutes), walking meditations, 'dharma' talks, 'deep relaxation', 'mindful exercises', and 'dharma sharing'. Retreatants were put into smaller 'dharma groups' of around 10 for sharing sessions. Retreat had a 'playful' feel and retreatants were encouraged to sing Buddhist songs. Dharma groups each prepared a musical/theatrical offering to present at the farewell ceremony. Little spare time or opportunities for walking etc. Periods of silence throughout (for instance during meal times and 9pm-9am but these were not always adhered to. Many retreatants shared rooms; I was in a room of five other 'young' women (all under 30).

Table 4 - Meditation retreats daily life

4.3.4 Phase one of data-collection

I began phase one of the data-collection in 2016 with attendance at a retreat, and attended two others in 2017, timings that were a consequence of when appropriate retreats were scheduled, and the compatibility of attendance with the other parts of

the data-collection. It was in early 2017 when I began my engagements with the green space groups, and I participated in my last activities and walks in July of the same year. I sought to attend a range of the conservation activities on offer, and to go on walks of varying difficulty (though they were generally quite difficult); attending 15 conservation days, and seven walks in total over the seven month period, and writing a diary entry about my experience after each (see 4.3.4c). With the exception of one of the conservation groups, each ordinarily offered one activity or walk per week, and I attempted to participate at least every other week. As a consequence of my desire to experience a range of activities, however, as well as there being a number of weeks where nothing was scheduled (for instance because of public holidays, staff availability, and severe weather), it was not always possible for me to attend as regularly as every two weeks. Towards the end of the research process, whether or not I participated in an activity was also influenced by my body, and the need to navigate an injury I had picked up over the course of my fieldwork (as is discussed later in this section).

The question of 'how much' data I needed, of how long I needed to participate in the activities of interest, was not an easy one to answer when planning this research. In the case of the green space groups, whilst I set a target of attending a minimum of six activity days with each group, in reality the decision to stop was made through a more reflective process; when, through discussions with my supervisors and colleagues it

became clear that I had participated fully, that I had experienced what it meant for me to be a member of the walking and conservation groups. Although it was possible to engage in a reflective process to establish when 'enough was enough' in the context of green space data-collection, this was not possible for retreats; each retreat is, after all, a bounded thing with a beginning and an end, and it was logistically impossible for me to attend more than one of each of the retreats given their locations and the cost of attending. My inability to engage in a reflective process to decide when 'enough was enough' in the context of retreats, is, however, consistent with other auto-(post)phenomenological contributions to cultural geography, which have tended to also focus on experiences of bounded activities, on, for instance, dance classes (McCormack, 2002), yoga retreats (Lea, 2008), and individual walks (Wylie, 2002; 2005). Whilst I did have a choice over the number of retreats I attended, this was much more a consequence of the search for diverse retreat experiences, than a commitment to attending a particular number. I attended retreats that would provide me with diverse experiences, within the traditions I had experience of, and that were taking place within the period of time I was conducting the research.

4.3.4a Participating 'normally'

A particular challenge of phase one was the need to participate in engagements in as 'normal' a way as was possible, in order to acquire a deep understanding of my own unfolding experience. This challenge presented itself in a number of ways. In the first

instance, my participation 'normally' was challenged by the need for me to introduce myself as a 'researcher' to others participating in the groups and retreats. Just the thought of having to do this was a daunting prospect for me. I was nervous about finding the right time and words to introduce myself in this way, and was not comfortable with the attention this would draw. Whilst I had designed and printed an A5 flyer about the research (see appendix a.1) (approved as part of my ethics application) to assist me with this, it was not always practical or appropriate to give this out, or to introduce myself as a researcher at all, during first interactions; for instance when these first interactions took place in torrential rain, or when they were in the context of a 'sharing circle' beginning with a silent meditation and holding hands. In these situations I was often distracted and anxious, waiting for the right moment (in line with the requirements of my ethical approval I discussed the research and offered flyers to individuals as soon as possible when appropriate). Although the need to introduce myself in this way certainly prevented me from participating 'normally' at the beginning of engagements, the people I met in walking and conservation groups, and on retreats, were incredibly accommodating. There were, perhaps inevitably, follow up questions, and people were generally keen to offer their thoughts on why their specific activities were 'therapeutic', but these interactions were short lived.

Of course, the requirement for me to participate 'normally' was important not only for my own experiences, but also to ensure that any potential effect of my presence as a 'researcher' on other walkers, conservation volunteers, and retreatants, was as small as possible. Indeed, part of my anxiety about introducing myself, was that others would consider my presence there as an intrusion, that they would fear I was watching them, and that in turn, my presence could bring about the "embarrassment, unease, stress and alarm in the community of participants" that Gobo (2008) describes as likely at the beginning of overt observation (p.123). Williams (2010) described experiencing similar concerns when beginning her research on the pilgrimage of Saint Anne of Beaupre; concerns that led her to change her research strategy. Whilst Williams (2010) had planned to conduct a participant observation of her experience, as well as to invite people to take part in interviews during the pilgrimage, she chose instead not to announce herself as a researcher, to forgo the invitations to interview, and to reflect only upon her individual experience. Such a shift in research strategy would not have been possible in this project due to the specificities of my ethics application and my agreements with the organisations, but neither would it have been necessary. The approach I took in this research was designed in light of an abundant 'therapeutic landscapes' literature that has engaged in forms of ethnography/participant observation, and within which references to the researcher's presence causing distress have been extremely limited (including but not limited to, Doughty, 2013; Macpherson, 2016, 2008; Muirhead, 2012; Pitt, 2014; Scriven, 2018). Moreover, I was

not conducting participant observation. In practice, only one person (a retreatant) expressed any concern, and I was able to remedy this by having a chat with them, re-iterating my intention to participate as 'normal', and by providing a flyer with additional information and contact details. I acted here, in line with suggestions from the literature on ethnographic research methods, and in particular, the emphasis placed on the importance of the behaviour and attitude of the researcher in order to abate concerns (Gobo, 2008; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019; Jones et al., 2016).

4.3.4b Experiences of participation

Aside from the exceptions discussed above, and the requirement for me to keep a diary of my experiences (which I discuss in the subsequent section), I found that I quickly settled into my engagements and was able to participate as normally as is possible for someone wearing the two hats of researcher and participant. I became a member of the groups, I built friendships and dry-stone walls, I walked, I cut-down trees, and planted new ones, I meditated and sang about meditation. I became very settled in these experiences and I quickly lost anxieties I previously had about collecting the 'right data'. Whilst I felt like a 'normal' walker, volunteer, and retreatant, and I believe that the approach enabled me to build up a very deep understanding of my experiences, gaining this understanding did not come without personal cost.

The most obvious cost of carrying out this research was the physical pain that I endured throughout the process. When designing the research, I deliberately selected

activities that I had experience of, that I knew I could do. I did not, however, account for the nature of these past engagements. I did not consider that this research represented a radical shift in intensity, that just as Wylie (2006, p.234) was not "fit enough to walk fully-laden over steep, broken ground for nearly 200 miles" for his phenomenological study of walking, I was not fit enough to be walking and doing conservation work so frequently. Whilst in my 'normal' life I would have weeks to recover between walks for example, as a consequence of scheduling, research activities were often bunched together, and I frequently found myself working and walking multiple times per week.

Given this shift in intensity, it seems unsurprising that I picked up an injury, straining the iliotibial band on my left leg, a tendon that connects the pelvis to the knee. This strain caused a couple of walks, and in particular the descents, to be consumed by pain. Although in my case this injury was likely exacerbated by the intensity of the challenge I had set myself, being 'injured' was not unique to me. Other walkers and conservation volunteers reflected both anecdotally, and in interviews, that they had developed similar injuries. Indeed, in the walking group there was a self-titled 'Bad Knee Club' who walked together (slowly) at the back on descents. Perhaps it could have been avoided had I opted to conduct my research in a less 'intense' way, but to do so would have made my involvements with each group less frequent, and those I was walking and working with, tended to participate very frequently, and often

continued to do so through injuries. I should note though that I did take a break from participation in activities after my knee first became painful, and visited a physiotherapist for advice before beginning again. Following the onset of the pain I carefully considered which activities would be safe for me to go on (avoiding steep descents and longer walks), tried to ensure that activities were spread out sufficiently, and performed the exercises suggested by the physiotherapist.

Although my walking changed after I became injured, I nonetheless continued to walk. Walking injured seemed to be a part of the experience of group walking for many people, an experience that I believed my own continued participation could offer me a deeper understanding of. I felt that by understanding my own experience of pain, I would be better able to interview others about theirs. By continuing the research whilst injured, I was reflecting a wider body of phenomenologically-aligned research, where researchers have described acquiring injuries, or experiencing pain, as a consequence of performing the activities that they are studying (see for instance Allen-Collinson, 2011b, on running; Conradson, 2011, on meditation; and, Wylie, 2006, on walking). A broader point to note here, is that by discussing my pain, and by accounting for the effect it had on my unfolding experience, I am able to showcase the vulnerability, or "common humanity" of the researcher; to demonstrate that a researcher's 'knowledge' is bound up with their bodily susceptibility, with forces beyond their control (Ellingson, 2016, p.307).

Another physical issue that I had not anticipated, and could not have planned for, was that one day, just before I was about to begin fieldwork, I experienced for the first time, a pain in my neck and shoulder that would go on to become, and remains, chronic (albeit intermittent). This was not caused by the fieldwork, and luckily it seemed not to interfere with my experiences of walking and conservation work. Whilst I was not in pain during the activities, however (this pain tends not to emerge when I am doing something, but when I stop doing it), it is triggered by activity. As a consequence, driving home from walking and conservation days, as well as the evenings that followed, were, on a number of occasions, dominated by extreme pain. If this pain was isolated to the research, it would of course have been sensible to stop, but it has come to be a major feature of my life. That I might be in pain is something I am always thinking about, and is also something I regularly ignore. I roll the dice every time I decide to cycle to work, every time I hold my dog, or my friend's baby, every time I go on a walk at the weekend, or potter in the garden. Potential pain is something I ignore because I have to.

A final 'cost' of doing this research, of walking, working, and retreating, was the deep sense of loss I experienced when the fieldwork was over. This fieldwork consumed my life, my weeks revolved what I was doing and when, and I built friendships with those I walked, worked, and retreated with. In her paper on bringing an ethnography with families to a close, Sarah Hall (2014) discusses the value of engaging in a staged process

of ‘disengagement’, of weaning herself off spending time with the families. In my case, such a process was unfortunately not really possible. Retreats are by definition time-limited, and my walking and conservation work came to an end rather abruptly because of the pain I was experiencing. I always intended to go out ‘one last time’, but returning to normal life, to spending my weekends with the friends and family I had neglected, to working full-time in the office, and my house flooding, seemed to get in the way of this. Although I did not make it out again after the data-collection had come to an end, I did keep in contact with some of the other walkers (who because of our similar ages had become particularly good friends) for a little while via messages and a couple of pub trips. To do otherwise would have been impossible for me; it would have felt unnecessarily cruel to myself and to the others. I did not feel a need to officially disengage from those I had become friends with, an approach adopted by Hall (2014), and instead allowed this to happen naturally over time. Whilst Hall (2014) suggests that disengagement was important for her, both personally and professionally, to gain distance from data and the field, due to the nature of my friendships, and that they emerged through the course of shared activities, rather than, in Hall’s (2014) case from research on everyday lives, I believe that letting them naturally come to an end was appropriate and sufficient.

4.3.4c Diary keeping

In order to record my participation in the activities I was researching I kept a research diary of my experiences, reflecting the approach taken by others conducting auto-ethnographic and auto-phenomenological research within human geography (Couper, 2017; Lea, 2006; Scriven, 2018), and in order not to be reliant upon my memory when writing up the research. I wrote my diary entries a soon as possible after each engagement in the case of walking and conservation volunteering, and at least once a day when on retreat (but generally much more than this), timings that I thought were important in order to help recall, and are consistent with Couper (2017) who described writing her entries on sailing "as soon after events as was practicable" (p.288). Within these diaries I tried to write down as much information as I could remember about the experiences, from broader things relating to the structure of the days and the weather, to my own internal registers of experience, the emotional, affectual, and embodied.

Although in general the process of diary-keeping went well, I did encounter a couple of problems. On retreats for instance, there was not always much free time to write, and I often had to scratch down notes and prompts to follow up later, an inevitability of diary-keeping discussed by Gorman (2017) and Walford (2009) in relation to ethnographic and auto-ethnographic research. Perhaps an unsurprising consequence of going on retreat, but not ideal for my position as a researcher, was that sometimes I was also so caught up in the experience, so content and 'there', that I did not have

the compulsion to write, and struggled to feel that getting things down quickly was important. Diary-keeping after walking and volunteering was similarly not always straightforward. After a long, physically demanding day, I was often so exhausted that writing could be a bit of a chore, especially as the research was coming to an end. Despite these issues, however, I was able to produce highly detailed diaries of my experiences which have formed a substantial portion of my empirical material (over 25,000 words).

4.3.5 Phase two of data-collection

For phase two of this research, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with other walkers (six interviews), conservation volunteers (eight interviews), and retreatants (six interviews). Both the overall number of interviews, and the number of interviews with participants in each activity were in-line with my plans for the research, with an overall target of between 18 and 25, and a target of between five and eight for each activity. A list of interview participants can be seen below (table 5):

Participants	Pseudonym	Length of involvement
Walking group	Mel	1 year+
	Maddy	6 months
	Ben	1 year+
	Peter	1 year+
	Elizabeth	10 years+
	Louise	1 year+
Conservation groups		
	Robert	10 years+
	Lucy	1 month
	Stephen	3 months
	John	10 years+
	Mark	5 years+
	June	5 years+
	Tom	1 month
	Joanne	1 month
Retreat 1	Kate	4 days (1st retreat they had attended)
Retreat 2	Paulo	7 days (1st retreat they had attended
	Mary	7 days (1st retreat they had attended)
	Lara	7 days (3rd retreat they had attended)
Retreat 3	Irene	6 days (1st retreat they had attended)
	James	6 days (2nd retreat they had attended)

Table 5 - Participant information

Interviews were face-to-face with the exception of one which was conducted via Skype (with a participant who lived overseas). The preference for face-to-face interviewing reflects the highly detailed and personal nature of the research, and the opportunity to pick up on social cues that this offers relative to telephone interviewing, and to a lesser degree interviewing via Skype (Hay, 2016; Opdenakker, 2006). Additionally, as participants were recruited from the groups and retreats that I attended, they were people I had walked, worked, and retreated with, physically 'showing-up' felt personally important (an approach that was approved by those running the groups and retreats before I began phase one). All of the interviews took place after I had completed phase one of the research, and had engaged in a period of reflection and immersion in the (diary) data, in-line with my commitment to acquiring a deep understanding of the experiences before beginning to interview others and with the division of data-collection proposed by Moustakas (1990). When phase one was completed varied considerably between the green space groups and the retreats, and in turn, so too did the timing of interviews. For green space groups phase one lasted for around seven months, and interviews were conducted in the two months following my last engagement, with the first two weeks reserved for my own reflection. In contrast, each retreat was considered a stand-alone 'phase one' experience, as sufficiently immersive to enable me to move on to phase two. In light of this, and out of a concern not to have a big time-lag between the retreat and interview (many green space interviewees participated very regularly, and also after my last engagement, whilst retreatants would be drawing on just this experience of retreat), interviews with retreatants were conducted within three weeks following the end of each retreat,

but not within the first week, in order to give me time to reflect upon my own experience.

4.3.5a Conducting the interviews

As was noted earlier, the interviews were semi-structured in form, a decision I made in light of Moustakas' (1990) framework, and because this form of interviewing allowed me to have an overarching guide (appendix a.2) whilst maintaining flexibility (Hay, 2016). The semi-structured approach enabled me to be responsive to participants, to prompt and to share stories, and left space for participants to re-direct interviews in-line with their personal experiences (Hay, 2016). As a consequence of this flexibility, participants were able to discuss their experiences in detail, reflecting one of the potential benefits of the two-phased approach suggested by Moustakas (1990). Indeed, all of the interviews were incredibly rich in data, and generally lasted between one and two and half hours. The Skype interview was conducted over two sessions and lasted for over four hours, but this length was partly a consequence of language difficulties and the need for ongoing translation. Having anticipated that language might be an issue I provided this participant with the interview guide (see appendix a.2) in advance, which I believe did make the process much easier.

Although interviews were about the activities of walking, conservation volunteering, and meditation retreats, individual experiences of these activities were bound up with discussions of illness and pain, divorce, re-location, loneliness, pre-existing mental

illness and mental rumination during activities, feelings of rejection and of not fitting in; and in the course of these discussions a number of participants did become upset. Whilst I had a protocol for managing the situation if a participant became particularly distressed during an interview (see appendix a.3), it was never necessary for me to enact this, as the participants were eager to continue and recovered quickly, and in this context I considered the de-brief sheets as sufficient (see appendix a.4).

4.3.6 Ethical considerations

This research was approved by the Lancaster University, Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee (FHMREC) in November 2016 (See appendix, a.3 and a.6).

4.3.6a Phase one - Gaining consent from green space groups and retreats

Before beginning to conduct the research, I approached the leaders or managers of the groups and retreats via an email with an attached information sheet (see appendix, a.5), and followed this up with a phone call where necessary. Communication with the leaders or managers of groups and retreats (through both the information sheet and follow-up phone calls) included discussion of: the aims of the research; the nature of my involvement in their group/retreat; how I would introduce myself as a researcher to others; writing-up and publication of findings; anonymity and the limits of this.

4.3.6b Phase two - Recruitment, consent, and interview-logistics

Although I had discussed my research, as well as the opportunity to become involved at a later date, with many of those I met over the course of phase one, it was only when my experiences were coming to an end that I began the process of recruitment for phase two. The decision to leave recruitment until the end of my participation was made to ensure that I had the freedom to participate fully, and to have as 'normal' an experience as possible. It was only on my final walks and conservation days, and during the conversations at the end of retreats, that I invited participants to interview. This verbal invitation was supplemented with a participant information sheet and a flyer (if individuals had not already received these). I requested contact details if individuals were interested in participating, and sent follow-up emails within a week, but no sooner than 24 hours, after an expression of interest. This delay in emailing was encouraged by FHMREC as a means to ensure that participants had chance to reflect on their expression of interest and to help mitigate against feelings of obligation. Whilst I do not believe people participated in this research because they felt obligated to do so, some likely did participate as a favour to me. I had spent many hours with all of the people I went on to interview, we had worked, walked, and retreated together, and with many I had become great friends. Although participating as a favour is not necessarily problematic, I did want to reduce the chance that someone might take part in an interview for me, and at their own expense, and consequently took the time to emphasise that both I, and the research, would be fine if they decided not to.

Once individuals had got in touch with me following my email, we discussed the logistics of the interview, and arranged a time, date, and (for the majority) location, that was suitable for both of us. Although one of these interviews was conducted via Skype out of necessity, the others were conducted face-to-face, and the locations in which we met included: homes, meeting rooms in libraries, community centres, offices, and on one occasion a café (albeit a quiet one).

At the beginning of the interview I talked participants through the research again and discussed the broad topics that would be covered in the interview. I went through the participant information sheet and the consent form (see appendix a.7 and a.8) with each participant, discussing each item in turn. I discussed the approach I would take to ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, but also highlighted the limits to this. For instance, I explained that whilst I would use pseudonyms in all subsequent research material, and would not name the research sites, it may still be possible for close family and friends, as well as those also engaged in the research sites to identify them. I also stressed that I had a duty of care, and if safeguarding concerns emerged out of the interviews, I had a responsibility to notify the relevant authorities (in line with the permitted exemptions to the Data Protection Act (DPA) (1998) and subsequently to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (2018).

After discussing the participant information sheet and consent form (see appendix a.7 and a.8) I reiterated that participants should not feel obliged to participate, and also

emphasised that they had a right to bring the interview to a close at any time. Following the completion of the consent form (which participants were asked to check again at the end of the interview), the interviews began. All of the interviews were audio-recorded following participant approval for this on the consent form. Participants, were, however, also made aware that consenting to audio-recording was not a pre-requisite for their participation. These audio-recordings were uploaded to an encrypted folder as soon as possible after the interview, and the original recordings were deleted. After the interviews came to a close, participants were each provided with a de-brief sheet which thanked them for their participation, and provided with details of support services in case they experienced any emotional distress, as well as my own contact details, and those of members of academic staff to whom complaints could be directed (see appendix a.4).

4.3.7 Research diary, transcription, and data-analysis

As was discussed earlier, I kept a research diary during phase one of this research. Where diary entries were hand-written (on-retreats), these were typed-up as soon as possible after I returned. Audio-recorded interviews were similarly transcribed as soon as possible after interviews were conducted. These transcriptions, alongside the audio-recordings, were stored on an encrypted computer in an anonymised form.

I analysed the data collected in this thesis through a multi-staged thematic approach; an approach targeted at exploring and developing “an understanding of patterned

meaning across the dataset" (Braun et al., 2019, p.6). In this case, this approach involved looking across different experiences of 'therapeutic landscapes', and exploring the emerging themes, in-line with the aims of the research (see 1.2). Analysis took place through a number of (overlapping) stages:

- Immersion in data
- Open descriptive coding
- Analytical coding

4.3.7a Immersion in diary data

As is discussed earlier (see 4.3.4c) after I had completed phase one of the data-collection I immersed myself in my diary entries, reading through these in order to familiarise myself with, and to reflect upon, my own experiences of participation, before beginning phase two. This immersion was the first stage of data-analysis, with the understanding I gained helping me to conduct the interviews (Moustakas, 1990). I engaged in a second period of immersion following the completion of phase two, reading through my diary entries again, as well as the interview transcripts. During this period I highlighted sections of text that I thought might be important, and made notes on the key messages emerging from the data. In adopting this approach I drew upon Braun et al.'s (2019) suggestion that an immersive stage is about "being engaged, but also relaxed; making casual notes, but being thoughtful and curious about what you are reading" (p.10). The value of an engagement in immersion, Braun et al. (2019)

argue, is that it can provide a "solid foundation of interrogating and thus "knowing" your data", a foundation that makes the subsequent stages of analysis easier (p.10).

4.3.7b Open descriptive coding

Following the immersive stage of analysis, and with the foundational understanding that this provided, I began to code the data using NVivo. I drew up a list of descriptive codes based upon the notes that I had made during the immersive stage, and applied these to the data, supplementing and amending as necessary throughout the process. The approach that I took to descriptively coding the data, followed that suggested by Hay (2005), who referred to descriptive codes as 'category labels' which "reflect themes or patterns that are obvious on the surface, or are stated directly by research subjects" (p.244). I coded the data descriptively a further two times, reducing the number of codes each time by merging categories, and removing codes that no longer seemed important.

4.3.7c Analytical coding

My final stage of data-analysis was analytical coding; a process of reviewing the descriptively coded data alongside the theoretical framing, in order to establish the key themes and central messages, and to assess the validity of the framework itself (Hay, 2005). Although the coding had been 'completed' before beginning to write the empirical chapters, in reality, the process of analysis continued into the writing process, as new ideas emerged and were tested, and as data was re-read (and coded)

through new lenses. The overarching analytical codes that emerged centred around a conceptualisation of 'therapeutic landscape' experience as contingent upon different, and overlapping, components of engagement, including: the origins of participation; becoming removed from daily lives; and arrival or immersion in the 'therapeutic landscape'; and it is these components that form the structure of the empirical chapters.

4.4 Limitations and challenges of research design and data-collection

The research design and approach to data collection were effective in enabling me to address the aims and objectives of the study. There are, however, inevitably limitations and challenges associated with any methodological framework and the decisions made about research design. One potential limitation lies in the optics of site selection. As I wanted to explore how 'therapeutic landscape' experiences emerge, rather than to establish whether or not particular spaces could be considered 'therapeutic' I chose to situate this research in spaces with strong reputations for being 'therapeutic', spaces that had been considered within the existing 'therapeutic landscapes' literature. This approach enabled me to gain insight into how experiences and in turn any 'therapeutic' outcomes emerge; insight that can be taken forward to explore a wider range of experiences as a part of a broadening of the conceptualisation of the 'therapeutic landscape'. The selection of these sites does, however, somewhat paradoxically, risk re-enforcing the idea that they are intrinsically 'therapeutic'. Whilst

I am confident that I make clear that this thesis is grounded in an understanding of spaces and activities as neither universally nor consistently 'therapeutic'; an understanding that draws upon and advances other contributions to the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature (Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Muirhead, 2012; Pitt, 2014); I recognise that this position may not be apparent from first glance.

As with all research, the research design will also have shaped the data that was collected, or more specifically in this case, the experiences that were documented, in unintended ways. It is, for instance, possible that social and cultural histories and narratives surrounding the spaces and activities selected, may have affected and informed the experiences and reflections of participants, and will have done so in ways that they were perhaps not consciously aware of, and that were not the focus of this research. Whilst wider social and cultural conditions were not considered, the individual variation in experience revealed through this research, suggests that at most they provide only a backdrop, though further work in this area would be beneficial.

Another factor that may have influenced the data that was collected beyond intention, was my own involvement as a researcher-participant. Whilst being personally immersed in the experiences I was researching brought with it benefits in terms of understanding these experiences, and in turn, making me better able to interview others, it is important to acknowledge that by affecting and informing interview discussions, my participation likely affected the experiences of others that were

captured. More specifically, whilst I left space for participants to direct the discussion, the starting points emerged from my own experiences, from what I had recorded in my diaries. As a consequence of this, the accounts and interpretations of experiences that make up the empirical chapters may, in different ways, and for different people, overemphasise, underemphasise, and even miss, aspects of experiences. That the experiences captured were affected by my own positionality, by my status as a partial insider, is not, however, unique to the approach I took to data-collection. Indeed, that knowledge is co-produced during qualitative interviewing, is well acknowledged within the methodological literature, with Boyle (2009) for instance, describing interviews as "generative—co-authoring memories—rather than performing as a ventilator—neutrally bringing preexisting memories to the surface" (p.32). Moreover, whilst I gained my experience as part of the research process, the subjectivity of the researcher more broadly, is acknowledged to affect and inform the production of knowledge (Hay, 2005; Simandan, 2019). With this in mind, I suggest that my status as a researcher-participant had no greater positive or negative impact on the data-collection and analysis than my overall subjectivity would have in any other research where I may have been a partial 'insider'.

A final and related challenge lies in the nature of data that was collected. My own participation and diary-keeping emerged within the context of my knowledge of the research, and of a concern to capture highly detailed phenomenological information.

Although I did not keep diaries 'in-the-moment', and tried hard not to hold experiences or particular components of experiences in my memory, the data I collected about my own experiences is invariably different to that collected from others during interviews. Participants could not reasonably have been expected to remember their experiences, weeks after their last walk/volunteer day/ retreat, in the same level of 'in-the-moment' detail apparent in my accounts produced very quickly after they had taken place, and consequently the interviews were more reflective in nature. Whilst I had considered inviting participants to produce diaries of their experiences, or to record these in other ways, for instance through the production of art or poetry, an approach that is encouraged by Moustakas (1990), this proved practically difficult given the diversity of the spaces within which the research was conducted. It did not, for instance, seem appropriate to ask retreatants to record their experiences of retreat 'in-the-moment' given the infrequency of retreat events (and in turn the greater significance of individual retreats relative to a walk or volunteer day), and the incompatibility of diary-keeping with the expectations of one of the retreat centres. It should be noted though, that although I did not request participants keep diaries or take photographs, for a number of participants this was a regular part of their engagement (including retreatants), and many brought these along to the interviews and used them to help frame their discussion. Whilst the data collected differs in form, in its degree of removal from the 'in-the-moment', having a deep understanding of my own experiences of participation did enable me to better prompt

others, and in turn, to help make accessible more of the phenomenological detail of experiences than I suggest, reflecting the thinking of Moustakas (1990), may otherwise have been possible.

4.5 Concluding remarks

Reaching the analytical codes reflected an observation that whilst the post-phenomenological understanding of subjectivity and experience that I outlined held firm, the process of continual emergence within 'therapeutic landscapes' could be contextualised in these three overlapping components of engagement. The observation of these components of engagement is reflective of the broader 'therapeutic landscapes' literature, and the attention that has been paid to: routes to participation and the relationality of 'therapeutic' outcomes (Bell et al., 2014, 2018a; Conradson, 2011, 2005; Doughty, 2013; Foley, 2015; Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Nettleton, 2015; O'Brien et al., 2003); feelings of disconnection or removal from everyday life (Conradson, 2011; Doughty, 2013; Gesler, 1998, 1996, 1993, 1992); and, interactions between body and world and body and others (Conradson, 2011; Doughty, 2013; Foley, 2015; Gorman, 2016; Macpherson, 2008; Milligan et al., 2004; Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Muirhead, 2012; Nettleton, 2015; Pitt, 2014; Smith, 2019). The detailed phenomenological data produced through this research, as a result of bringing together my own experiences of participation, and interviews with others, as well as the cross-landscape approach, offers a means through which to contribute to

understanding of the complexity of these factors; providing insight into how they interact and vary between people and over time; and it is this understanding that I develop throughout the discussion chapters.

Discussion

Chapter five: Why did participants join walking and volunteering groups or go on retreat?

In this chapter I consider why participants decided to join their walking and volunteering groups, or to go on retreat. Such a consideration is necessitated by the theoretical position outlined in chapter three; by the understanding of body-subjects as susceptible, continually emergent, and as a locus of history, with each new interaction affected and informed by that which came before. On these grounds, experiences of 'therapeutic landscapes' are understood as indebted to, and emergent from, that which came before, and in turn to the origins of participation. In exploring the origins of participation I build upon existing 'therapeutic landscapes' literature that has demonstrated the importance of context to emergent experience (Bell et al., 2018a, 2014; Conradson, 2011, 2005; Doughty, 2013; Foley, 2015; Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Nettleton, 2015; O'Brien et al., 2003), but advance this by attending to the specificities of routes to participation, which has, to date, received limited attention within the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature according to Bell et al. (2014). By exploring the routes to participation in retreat, group walking, and conservation volunteering, through discussions of: motivations for participation; and, the influence of prior exposure; this chapter is a starting point from which I explore how these activities are encountered by participants in chapter six and chapter seven.

5.1 Motivations for participation

In this first section I explore why participants chose to attend a retreat or to join walking or conservation volunteering groups, and consider some of the key motivating factors for attendance, including: social interactions, making the most of free time, and recovery from mental ill-health. Through this discussion I account for both trends and individual specificities.

5.1.1 Social interactions

Reflecting observations within previous research (Doughty, 2013; O'Brien et al., 2010) one of the factors prompting participants to join conservation volunteering and walking groups was a desire for social interaction. For some green space participants, this desire followed disruptive experiences in the life-course, including: divorce, migration, retirement, and starting a new job; experiences that Bell et al. (2014) proposed might "enhance or compromise personal priorities or capacity to seek out different green space", as a consequence of the various shifts in social relationships that are associated with them (p.289) (see 2.1.3b).

Conservation volunteers John and Robert, for instance, described how they participated in order to spend time with other people, and related this desire to their separation from their wives, and to living alone:

> **John:** [deciding to begin conservation volunteering was] … a rather personal thing because [my ex-wife] and I, before we split up, [she] was into conservation work, I'd never done any and she, we split up and I thought "I'll give it a go" and I found that I enjoyed it so much…my first conservation task was in the [forest]…I can't remember who it was with, but…we had some steps to build and we talked it through and they were nice people, of course one of the attractions of this game is you meet some really lovely people you know.
>
> **John:** My wife and I split up many years ago, I do this game because I enjoy being with people, otherwise you'd spend your time alone which is not good, psychologically it's disastrous.
>
> **Robert:** Volunteering, it's therapeutic for me, yes it is a health thing, living alone it's nice to come and meet people you know, you're only lonely when you don't like the person you're alone with, so I know lots and lots of lonely people and I do suffer from it from time to time because but I think the therapy of coming out and meeting people who want to come out and do something as well, and you tend to meet people for years.

Conservation volunteering was then, an important opportunity for social interaction, and a tool through which to mitigate feelings of loneliness following disruption, a finding that supports Bell et al.'s (2014) proposal. This finding is also consistent with O'Brien et al.'s (2010) observation that conservation volunteers in particular, can be motivated to attend by a desire to meet and spend time with others following a disruptive experience, and a subsequent reduction in the opportunities for social interaction. More broadly, the potential for disruption to prompt engagement in 'therapeutic landscapes' is supported by Anderson's (2016) work on the origins and productive capacity of hope. Anderson (2016) suggests that it is from suffering, from "within specific encounters that diminish or destroy" (p.748), that hope emerges.

Hope, he argues, is not a neutral state of being, but one that creates conditions of possibility and enlivens bodies. Being hopeful is "a dynamic imperative to action", it enables bodies to make changes, to live differently (Anderson, 2016, p.743). I suggest that disruption too (which is not necessarily but may be associated with suffering) can bring about hopefulness, new possibilities, and an "imperative to action" (Anderson, 2016, p.753), and that this is apparent in John and Robert's experiences.

Participants from the walking group also discussed their decision to join, and to continue to participate, as prompted by the opportunity for social interaction that the group offered them. Moreover, they related the desire for such an opportunity to their own experiences of disruption; reinforcing the framing of disruption as productive of hopefulness, and in turn, of new possibilities for action (Anderson, 2016). Ben, for instance, described his participation as partly a result of his relocation to a new area, and of his subsequent experiences of loneliness and boredom:

> **Ben:** [Why did I join the walking group?] If I'm being completely honest like loneliness (laughing). I joined the [walking group] because I liked walking but I did it all on my own and it was a bit antisocial and I didn't know that many people in the Lakes because I'd just moved the year before, so I thought it might be a nice chance to meet new people, like friends and that, and also I stuck to a very confined area of the Lakes, that I knew, that were close to home, so it was a chance to meet new people, like-minded people, and to explore more of the lake district in general, and sort of do that sort of thing.
>
> **Ben:** I was like sick of walking on my own I needed to do something so I just googled walking groups in the takes and was trying to avoid all the OAPs and I found this one and thought "ooh says strenuous oh probably shouldn't do that,

> probably shouldn't do that" and eventually I was like "no excuses that one is easy and it's nearby I have to do that" so and I think a lot of people do that and they say "ah I was part of the group on Facebook for like six months", a think for a lot of people, especially if you come on your own, it can be quite daunting, 'cos you have that whole thing like "ooh what if there are only like two people there, what if there are some weird people there, what if it's a proper in-group of people so I feel like an outsider".

Whilst Ben joined the walking group partly in order to spend time with others following his move to the area, reflecting Doughty's (2013) observation that loneliness "…stemming from a range of more or less traumatic experiences, such as relocation from another part of the country for work or study…" (p.142), can prompt engagement in walking groups; his experience also reveals complexities to this process, to the relationship between disruption, social motivation, and engagement. Ben's participation was not, for instance, driven by a desire for *any* social interaction, but rather, to meet explicitly with "like-minded" people, and people of a similar age. Additionally, Ben did not decide to attend the group immediately after his relocation, it was a decision he reached a year after moving, and after following the walking group on Facebook for months. Whilst disruption can create the conditions of possibility for engagement in 'therapeutic landscapes' then, it is important to recognise that these conditions of possibility are complicated and individual. This picture of complexity, and of individual specificity, is also supported by Elizabeth and Louise's accounts of how they came to join the walking group after re-locating to the area:

Elizabeth: I thought I'd join the group and socialise with people my own age because it's the only activity I do with people my own age, given that my other hobbies are singing in a choir and pottery, and now I'm getting older (laughing) and I thought it would be a good way of seeing different bits of the Lakes which I didn't otherwise do and I've achieved both of those ambitions, I also thought I'd meet a nice man and that's failed miserably.

Elizabeth: I met someone [at the group] and we dated and I fell out of going out of the group because we tended to do stuff as a couple, so I had a couple of years of not really going with a group at all 'cos we wanted at the weekend to see each other and then I dumped him and then it was a huge kind of "I'm going back to the group!" deal and I went back to the group.

Louise: [I joined the walking group] because I wanted friends, that is a genuine answer. I joined so I could gain friends after I moved here, also cos I love walking, but mainly so I could gain friends.

Louise: …like most of the walkers I don't see them as seeing me as potential dating, whereas, people my age, most of my friends here, my climbing friends, and outdoor education people I know and hang out with all the time, they see me as potential dating, like "oop she's a girl, she's younger than me, she loves what I love, I'm gonna date her" and I'm like "wow no, I just want a friend", so that's what I like about the [walking group] I don't feel preyed upon. I feel like I can be there, and they just take the piss out of me, and I'm ok with that because I'm like ten years younger.

Notably for Elizabeth and Louise, whilst their participation in the walking group was partly driven by a concern to meet specific kinds of people following re-location (as was the case for Ben), neither spoke of feeling lonely or of lacking opportunities for social interaction after their move. For both, participation was framed as an opportunity to diversify their social networks, to build upon networks they had established since moving. This finding expands upon those of Doughty (2013) and

O'Brien et al. (2010) by demonstrating that there are other ways in which social interaction is important for motivation, in addition to feelings of loneliness. Moreover, the specific ways in which Elizabeth and Louise sought to diversify their social networks, for example Elizabeth's concern to meet people her own age, and potentially a partner, and Louise's concern to form less complicated friendships (friendships without unwanted advances), additionally indicate that routes to participation are individually specific.

Social opportunities did not, however, always prompt participants to join walking and conservation volunteering groups, irrespective of the disruptions that participants had experienced (and the association of these with social consequences, see Bell et al., 2014; Doughty, 2013; O'Brien et al., 2010). Whilst some participants did not discuss the social components of engagement in relation to motivation at all, others, including Mel and Maddy, suggested that they influenced motivation, and in turn, participation, in a different way:

> **Mel:** I didn't really join the walking group for the people…but it just happened to happen that people were really nice and it was quite nice talking to people.
>
> **Mel:** [On my first walk] I realised it was just sort of quite nice to talk to random people and share experience about what they're doing and like nice to chat to the new people and over time make friends….There's no commitment to turn up so yeah sometimes you think "oh that person might be there" and you look forward to it, that's part of why I go now, to see friends and meet new people.

> **Maddy:** The people weren't why I started but I think meeting people is part of why it's so good, it's part of why I have carried on with the group, being out with likeminded people, people that enjoy the same sort of things that you do, easy going people, I think in the walking community, people that are into walking seriously you don't, there's not that many idiots, they're all decent people. I like speaking to people who have got different backgrounds as well, different kind of jobs, you know that have done different travelling and that kind of stuff….so you just meet quite a broad range of people who all come together because they have got a common interest, it's interesting people, you don't tend to find that there's that many people that are just like boring, most people have got something to say.

Whilst the social opportunities of participation did not prompt Mel and Maddy to participate in the walking group (who joined after a relocation and separation respectively), these did, however, influence their continued engagement. Moreover, social interactions were, reflecting Gesler's (1998, 1996, 1993, 1992) initial conceptualisation of 'therapeutic landscapes' as outcomes of particular physical, social, and symbolic components coming together, an important part of their experience as a whole. Mel and Maddy's accounts further demonstrate the complexity and individual specificity of engagement in 'therapeutic landscapes', and indicate that initial motivations, and motivations for ongoing participation may be different; an indication that expands upon how motivation is discussed within the literature (Bell et al., 2014; Doughty, 2013; O'Brien et al., 2010).

Opportunities for social interaction were also a driver of participation in retreats for some of those contributing to this research. Irene, for instance, suggested that her

decision to attend a retreat was influenced by a need to discuss her feelings with others:

> **Irene:** Before the retreat like…there was a moment when I thought should I really go for this one…there was a hesitant moment, I thought like maybe, probably I'm so scared of like meeting other new people and [opening up] and [talking about] how I feel, and I was so scared of it, but I knew I needed to. I could never really talk to my friends or family.

Irene's decision to attend a retreat three was indebted to a history of poor mental health, and a recent episode of depression; a disruptive experience that was associated with suffering (discussed in more detail in 5.1.3). For Irene, attendance was a deliberate act of hopefulness, an act to realise a better future that was bound up with her embodied history. Part of this act of hopefulness related to a belief in the potential value of being able to share her experiences with others.

Whilst Mary, who attended retreat two, was also partly influenced by the social opportunities that attendance presented (opportunities that were coupled with a feeling that going on retreat was overdue) her specific motivation was very different to Irene's:

> **Mary:** [why did I go on retreat?]…there's a million reasons really, but I guess one of the main things in terms just of the retreat, meditation and things, 'cos I've been doing it [meditation] for so long on and off, so I end up being with other people who do meditation, do retreats, and they would go "oh you've gotta go on retreat it's wonderful", and then quite a few of them went on like five day silent ones and I was like, "that sounds horrible" and they're like "no no it's wonderful it's wonderful", and I'm like "well I don't think it's for me"

> and that's been going on for like five years, and it just became more and more people and I don't think I've ever met anyone who said it was horrible but maybe they never spoke up (laughing), so I thought maybe it is wonderful then. It got to the point where I thought I've got to try it for myself and I was looking 'round the ones that weren't five days silence and this seemed the most lenient. I quite like, I've been doing lots of things with community living at the moment, I quite like that aspect of it, so I wanted to try more community living 'cos it's something I want to know more about I quite liked the fact that I could do that as well, I could tick the retreat box, and another feel of community living, so I guess that's why I went, and to find out if it's as wonderful as everybody said it was.

Unlike all of the other retreatants I spoke with, Mary did not frame the retreat as part of the process of managing her mental health (see 5.1.3). Whilst for Irene the decision to go on retreat was a social one, only in that she wanted to meet and talk with other people in order to help her overcome the difficulties she was facing, for Mary the social opportunities were intrinsically motivational, reflecting her interest in community living.[10] The contrasting social motivations of Irene and Mary then, demonstrate further, the complexity and individual specificity of routes to participation in 'therapeutic landscapes'; showcasing that even when the overarching motivation is the same, what underlies this can vary considerably.

[10] It is worth re-iterating here that retreat two was presented as a community retreat, and an emphasis was placed on living, working, cooking, eating, and practising meditation, together.

5.1.2 Making the most of free time, finding things to do

Reflecting suggestions within the literature (Finlay et al., 2015; O'Brien et al., 2010), as well as my reading of Anderson (2016), that disruption like suffering can provide an "imperative to action" (Anderson, 2016, p.743); a concern to fill time, to do interesting and worthwhile things following a disruptive experience, was also an important motivating factor for 'therapeutic landscape' engagement, as is apparent in the accounts of conservation volunteers June and Mark:

> **June:** I started volunteering when I finished, when I escaped the NHS, well, to the extent that I'm doing now, I mean I'd always volunteered for different things, but the restriction was on the time, having a job that did shifts and weekends and nights, so you're a bit restricted, so when I escaped the, decided to escape the NHS, that then of course makes you think what am I gonna do, and one of things was to move to Cumbria 'cos I'd always wanted to, I'd always looked for jobs in Cumbria but there weren't any (laughing), so this was the chance to get on with it, and one of things I wanted to do was to do more outdoor stuff, stuff meaning anything that was going that suited me.
>
> **June:** So that's why I started volunteering, initially with our group, but then after that it developed into different organisations as well; but I only do basically what I'm interested in, what suits me, and what I've never had enough time to do when I was working more than full time…you did your hours, your whatever week, but you always had extra hours of on-call, or nights or weekends, or sitting at home waiting to be called, second "five o'clock on a Friday that's it until Monday morning", you never had a weekend off, so this was a chance to do something, without saying the usual "for yourself" but something you were interested but never had the time to do enough of.
>
> **Mark:** I sort of packed up full time work when I was 52-53 and I think I was sort of looking round for other things to do. I think, I'd lived here for four or five years by then, I did a few other volunteering things as well, one thing in

> particular I went on the training for, I did that for a while but I didn't find that quite as satisfying, cleaning drains on the paths and things like that. I like dry stone walling because it's got a bit of skill, a bit of content, so I probably honed in on that. I have done some other bits and pieces, but it's just not quite as satisfying. I also gave [the organisation we volunteered with] a bit of support on their website, tried a few office type things, but I wanted to be outdoors. I have done some of the dry stone walling training courses, showing you how to cut stone, things like that, so there is a bit of skill involved, and if you keep on doing it you want to maintain that level, a bit.

Although June and Mark decided to begin volunteering in order 'do something' following their retirement and re-location, it is important to acknowledge that they did not decide to participate out of desperation or need, as is suggested within the literature (Finlay et al., 2015; O'Brien et al., 2010). Finlay et al. (2015), for example, who look at older people's engagements in green and blue 'therapeutic landscapes', suggest that the absence of routine employment prompts people to seek out "activities [in green and blue spaces] to 'fill the day' and reasons to leave the home" (p.100). Similarly, O'Brien et al. (2010) suggest that conservation volunteers in particular may be motivated by a "need to find activities and occupations that allows them to meet others and carry out meaningful activities that can contribute to feelings of worth and status that might previously have been gained through employment" (p.539). June and Mark's experiences suggest that participation in green spaces following retirement can also be a much more positive act, an act of empowerment. Their participation was driven by free-time and opportunity, by an ability to choose how to spend their time that they had not had when working, rather than a need to

fill their time (though participation was conducive to feelings of pride, of worth and status, see 7.2.1b). Drawing upon Anderson (2016), I suggest that disruption had, for June and Mark, opened up possibilities to live differently, possibilities that were indebted to that which came before, to an absence of choice. Moreover, not only was the decision to volunteer an act of choice and empowerment, but so too were their decisions to participate in specific activities and groups. Both June and Mark expressed individual preferences for conservation work, and described having tried out, and moved away from, other activities and groups.

Walkers interviewed in this research also indicated that their participation was motivated by a concern to do something new or different following a disruptive experience; that disruption, like suffering, can open up possibilities to live differently (Anderson, 2016):

> **Maddy:** Up until October last year I, my boyfriend was really keen into hiking, so I did all my hiking with him and then we broke up and I had three choices, go out on my own which I didn't feel confident enough to do, not go at all, or go in a group, so I decided to join a walking group.
>
> **Mel:** [After university and when I moved back to the area] I sort of floundered around for a bit, not physically obviously, it was less than a year and I just thought "I haven't got a purpose anymore, I just come nice to five, clock in, clock out, that's all I do there's no purpose that drives me" whereas before it was like "dissertation gotta get this done in this set amount of time" erm whereas yeah I don't have any goals anymore, that's really sad, but that's exactly what it was, and I only lasted less than a year without a goal, and I hated it, 'cos it was really miserable…so I was just like "oh I need to get out and

> actually do something" 'cos a lot of my friends at the time didn't really go walking, now they do 'cos they're copying me.
>
> **Ben:** I moved here from [another area] and there's not a lot to do here other than walking and then my dad was really into it and I was like I can't, it's the whole thing I don't wanna disappoint my parents, so I was like I have to get into it, and when he moved me here he gave me the mountain map and he said "look I got you this" basically just a map of my local area, so I was like "right ok so I'm doing this then".

That Maddy, Mel, and Ben's decisions to join the walking group were influenced by a concern to 'do something' following the disruptive experiences of: separating from a partner, finishing university, and relocation; advances the literature referred to here, by demonstrating that such an effect is not limited to older people and the experience of retirement (Finlay et al., 2015; O'Brien et al., 2010). Moreover, Mel's account is consistent with the suggestion within this literature that disruption may work in this way as a consequence of creating a need to find purpose. In so doing, Mel's experience indicates that the emergence of such a need does not only follow retirement (albeit not for those participating to this research). Ben, Maddy, and Mel's accounts also further contribute to the understanding of routes to participation in 'therapeutic landscapes' as individually specific, and as bound up with embodied history. It was not, for instance, just the fact of her separation that prompted Maddy to join the walking group, but rather the consequences this had for her ability to walk, and in turn to her history of walking in the first instance. Similarly, Ben's decision to join was not only a response to his relocation, but was also influenced by his relationship with his parents.

In short then, whilst people might participate in a 'therapeutic landscape' as a consequence of wanting to 'do something' following a disruptive experience, how and why disruption might work to do this likely varies considerably between people; a testament to the understanding of the body-subject as susceptible, continually emergent, and a locus of history, with each new interaction affected and informed by what came before (see for instance, Ahmed, 2006; Wylie, 2006).

5.1.3 Recovery from mental ill-health

Another important prompt for participants to begin their engagements was a belief or hope that doing so would help them to recover from mental ill-health; that doing so, would, drawing upon Kaley et al.'s (2019a) conceptualisation of 'therapeutic' outcomes, be 'transformative' rather than 'ameliorating'; a prompt that was specific to retreatants. Although walkers and conservation volunteers reflected upon the psychological benefits of participation, they did not discuss this as a motivating factor (beyond loneliness as explained earlier in the chapter). For retreatants, the motivating effect of poor mental health, seems, in the first instance, to have led to their interest and participation in Buddhist thinking and meditation practices, as was discussed by Irene and Kate:

> **Irene:** I have had depressions a lot, I went back to Vietnam in my second year because I was depressed. In my placement [this year] I came to a very downward stage and I came across like Thich Nhat Hanh's [Buddhist meditation teacher] teachings, and even though like he's from Vietnam as well,

I never really like kind of dig into his teachings and other stuff before (laughing)…

Irene: Most of my friends from uni, they go to church, and during the dharma sharing (sharing circle on retreat) I told [you all] about my room-mate, she was like holding my hand and praying for me, and at that moment there is something like blinking on my head, like if I followed a certain path, or if there were some guidelines for me then I may have not been lost at that time, then there might have been something to keep me moving forward, so like I know, how can I say, because I wasn't born in a religious family and then my parents like, not very into teachings, we always they think that science is the way and they don't really believe in it, but I realise I need something out there to hold my hand when I'm lost, and motivate me to not giving up on certain things.

Kate: I think, sometimes you have to have that sort of like mental break. Like I went missing, I went off and thought I was gonna kill myself and like, it was horrible, and to have got to that point where I was like, I was sat there just thinking about not being alive anymore, to have got to that point, I don't even wanna do this anymore, like I've got nothing, is shit, is really shit, but then you get to that point and then you say like "no ok this isn't what I want, I don't wanna die, there has to be another way", then you start this search, and it's, but it's not even a search because I feel like this all just came to me naturally in its own way, like as soon as I allowed it to happen, it happened, I didn't have to keep searching for things, they just presented themselves, and I never, I think I've been so caught up in like "I'm depressed, and I've got this life and it's busy and I'm doing all these things and I don't understand any of it blah blah blah", and that saying, like doing the same things and expecting to get different results, like I don't know how I did that, and the moment where I was like "right I'm open to change" I'm not necessarily, cos this is not what I would have sought out, necessarily, at the start, but as soon as I allowed myself to be open to it, it came to me by itself, it's like, everything I needed to be here was always here, I just wasn't aware of it.

> **Kate**: I started dating this guy and he was into meditation and was like "you should try it" and I thought "d'you know what - you seem alright" and we were really similar in the stuff that we'd been through and I thought "you seem pretty well-rounded so..I'm gonna start looking into it" and I think, more than the meditation it's the spirituality that appeals to me.

The route to engagement in Buddhist thinking and meditation described by Irene and Kate, is consistent with Pepping et al.'s (2016) finding that people who practise meditation often begin to do so in order "to reduce negative emotional experiences, to manage their emotions more effectively, and to feel calmer…. [as well as] to enhance well-being, including happiness, self-awareness, alertness, and concentration" (p.545). This adds to my suggestion, drawn from my reading of Anderson (2016), that disruption, like suffering, can prompt hopefulness and open up new ways of living.

Somewhat distinctly, Paulo, who attended retreat three, came to Buddhism through studying philosophy at university, and subsequently became personally interested as a consequence of feeling depressed:

> **Paulo**: I was in love with philosophy, I am in love with philosophy, it's true that in this moment I felt that I had found my way, you know, and I began to study philosophy, and it was cool, it was warm, but when I was finishing the university I felt that, I felt lost 'cos I didn't know what to do…I felt depressed because this is the price of knowledge no, to know some things that can for example lose the faith in humanity and Buddhism was for me like first my own solution and then I felt that it would be a world solution when I finished the university, I felt I wanted to do something practical that Buddhism teaches.

It was his desire to do “something practical that Buddhism teaches”, to advance his meditation practice, that prompted his decision to attend a retreat; a motivation that was shared by Irene:

> **Paulo:** I thought it could be a good idea to have some experience, more practical, you know, ‘cos I had read books about Buddhism and I had practiced meditation but I felt that I needed an experience more close to a Buddhist life so when my godmother told me about this centre...I er, I decided to go. I wanted to learn, to get better at the meditation, and to calm.
>
> **Irene:** I tried to meditate at home by myself, like go to YouTube, or go to website to see how they guide us, but I couldn’t really focus on my breathing in and breathing out, and like my mind is like everywhere…It’s like, for me during the retreat I thought, it’s a week for me to like improve [my meditation practice], so I tried to make the most out of it, so I tried to really train myself to get used to being focused, I’ve been losing my focus for a while now, and I’m paying for this one (the retreat) I have to take something out of it, so I’m trying because I think it’s the time for me, I feel like I can’t be in that loop for anymore, and I want to like improve, and work on my, make myself better…

Whilst the participants discussed here became interested in Buddhist ideas and meditation practices, and subsequently attended a retreat, partly as a response to poor mental health, experiences of poor mental health alone did not facilitate participation. For each of the participants, the decision to respond to poor mental health in this way was influenced by their embodied history more broadly (that is beyond mental health). Irene, for instance, observed her religious friends and felt that having guiding principles like they did would be beneficial. Similarly, Kate had dated someone with whom she talked about meditation and spirituality, and Paulo had

studied philosophy in general, and Buddhism more specifically whilst at university, and also had a godmother who had recommended the retreat centre. The importance of these factors in enabling participation further demonstrates the individual specificity of routes to engagement in 'therapeutic landscapes', and also supports the understanding of the body-subject as susceptible and continually emergent; as emerging through and with interactions with the world and with others in lasting ways that affect and inform future interactions (see for instance, Ahmed, 2006; Wylie, 2006). A final point to note is that, as was mentioned earlier (5.1.1), not all retreatants were motivated to engage with Buddhist thinking and meditation practices as a consequence of poor mental health, as is apparent in Mary's account:

> **Mary:** I get bored quite quickly, I like to have, yes I'm doing my spreadsheet, yes I can answer the phone and do that and that, I quite like busyness, and I get drawn into it, and I'm not very good at just being, so the whole meditation thing is to try and help with that.

This diversity in routes to engagement in meditation practice and retreat provides a parting challenge to the influence of disruption that has been considered throughout this chapter. Whilst disruption was central to the engagement of the other participants discussed, Mary's account of beginning meditation demonstrates that this is not universal, and in Mary's case, rather than disruption, it was the monotony of everyday life that motivated her involvement.

5.2 The influence of prior exposure – green spaces

Moving on, in this section I consider some of the ways in which the decision to participate in the 'therapeutic landscapes' of group walking and of conservation volunteering, was influenced by longer term embodied history, by prior experience of, and interest in, spending time in green spaces. Within this section I consider reflections on: childhood exposure to green spaces; and, being 'outdoorsy'; and explore these reflections in relation to the understanding of the body-subject as susceptible, continually emergent, and a locus of history (see for instance Ahmed, 2006; Wylie, 2006), drawing particularly upon Ahmed's (2006) concept of orientation.

5.2.1 Childhood exposure to green space

Another way in which participants explained their engagement in conservation volunteering and group walking was by referring to their childhood. When discussing why she had begun to volunteer, June, for instance, reflected upon the amount of time she spent outside as a child and the influence of her family life:

> **June:** Well I've always been outside if you like, apart from working time, because when we were little we were always, we were, I suppose, it was the way we were brought up initially, because we were like a cycling family so from being tiny-tiny, we were in like a, the old fashioned side-car thing attached to a push-bike in those days, and when we were little we were in there, and as we got bigger we went on the back of dad's bike in a chair, and then we progressed to back of a tandem, peddling, and then we progressed to our own bikes, and then we started walking as a family, and while we didn't have many holidays because they were building a house, we generally came up to the Lakes for a week and it wasn't every year, but we'd always be outside you see.

> **June:** I think if when you're little if it's [spending time outside] ingrained in your brain isn't it, and maybe when you're little you don't think "I've got to go out" but maybe it comes back to you when you can't go out as much because you're working, when you think "oooh I need to get out" I dunno, maybe that's it, maybe it isn't.

Whilst June was motivated to begin conservation volunteering by a concern to fill time following her retirement and re-location, she framed this decision as contingent upon her past experience, upon her childhood spent outside. Similarly, Robert and Mel, who described joining their groups (conservation volunteering and walking respectively) in order to meet new people and to find things to do following disruptive experiences, also presented their decisions as related to an appreciation for being outside in green spaces developed through childhood exposure:

> **Robert:** I've always enjoyed the great outdoors, my dad gave me a love of that many years ago, because he used to, coming from Sale, he and his brothers used to have holidays in the Peak District, the Lake District, North Wales, camping that sort of stuff, at a very early age I had a school holiday up to Scotland and we climbed Ben Nevis, and it was mum and dad's treat for me to go and my dad has always inculcated 'out there' because 'out there' is free, and you're free.

> **Mel:** I'm not really sure how it started, I always went walking with my dad when I was a kid, until really recently actually, and then he's like got a bit older, I've got a bit faster than him walking in the Lake District so it's that sort of the thing like, he was holding me back, that sounds really awful, that's a really horrible thing to say, but erm I didn't really go walking for a year or two and I thought "I haven't really been walking for ages".

The connection between childhood exposure to green spaces and engagement in these spaces during adulthood has also been made within the literature (Adevi and

Grahn, 2013; Cleary et al, 2018). In their study exploring landscape preferences in Sweden (coast, forest, rolling hills and lakes, and agricultural plains), Adevi and Grahn (2012) for instance, observed that not only did people have a preference for landscapes similar to those they had grown up in, but they often sought these out to live and spend time in as adults. Similarly, Cleary et al. (2018), who investigated the feelings of nature connectedness held by urban residents of Australia, found that childhood exposure to nature was a predictor for feelings of connection to, and of engagement in, nature during adulthood. The relationship between childhood exposure to green spaces and engagement in them during adulthood can also be understood theoretically, through the conceptualisation of subjectivity outlined in chapter three; and in particular, through the understanding of the body-subject as continually emergent and a locus of history, with each new interaction affected and informed by what came before. Of particular relevance here, is Ahmed's (2006) work on orientation. As is discussed in chapter three, Ahmed (2006) suggests that through the process of emergence, body-subjects acquire orientations that affect and inform their future interactions. I suggest that as a consequence of spending time in green spaces as children, people may acquire orientations from which engagement during adulthood, and consequently participation in the activities of conservation volunteering and walking, appear as desirable or possible.

In addition to discussing the influence of childhood exposure to green spaces on their decision to participate in their conservation volunteering and walking groups in broad terms, participants including June, also reflected more specifically upon the nature of this influence:

> **June:** I suppose we were brought up never to worry about if it was it raining because we just went and did whatever we were doing (laughing) and we got dried off when we got home, so that's nurture isn't it I suppose…I think people who do like to be outside doing stuff, whatever the stuff is, they're not little delicate flowers, they're people who just think "oh well it's raining" and when we get home we'll dry off, because they just wouldn't turn up, they wouldn't turn up if they felt like that. It's like the people who, if you say, you've got to go outside one day a week, and there's no loo, and you might be wet-through and you might have a quick sandwich if you're lucky, in a gale, for some people it would give them a nervous breakdown to think they've got to do that, whereas for some people it would give them a nervous breakdown if they thought they hadn't got one day a week where they could do the, get out, so I think that gives you, if you're one of those people who wants to get out, no matter how bad the day is, you always feel better when you go home, well I certainly do anyway.

In this passage, June makes a connection between her childhood experiences, and her ability to cope with some of the more negative aspects of spending time outside, and in so doing, infers her own orientation. The potential for childhood experiences of being outside to influence both the possibility and nature of engagements during adulthood, is also discussed by Milligan and Bingley (2007). In their work looking at young people's experiences of being in woodland, Milligan and Bingley (2007) suggest that whether or not young people feel comfortable in woodland spaces, and in turn

how they engage in these spaces, is partly a consequence of their earlier childhood experiences. For young people who had not spent time in woodlands as children, and had parents who were cautious about these spaces, engagements were, initially at least, characterised by fear and discomfort. These experiences, I suggest, reflect a state of disorientation; a state that in her reading of Ahmed (2006), Simonsen (2012) describes as characterised by, a shattering of "one's sense of confidence in the ground of one's existence" and an inability to act (Simonsen, 2012, p.20). My suggestion here then, is that a lack of childhood engagement in green spaces, and in turn a lack of orientation to being in these spaces, may close down possibilities for engagement as an adult, making them unappealing and inaccessible. Important to note, however, is that Milligan and Bingley (2007) also demonstrate that, for young people at least, it is possible to bring about a change in how woodland spaces are encountered, to foster positive feelings towards the spaces, and in turn for new orientations to emerge.

Mel and Robert similarly discussed the specificities of their childhood experience of green space and the influence of this on the decision to participate in group walking and conservation volunteering respectively:

> **Mel:** So I like nature and stuff, my dad, he likes nature, so sometimes like birds and things like that, it sounds a bit silly, but he always tried to teach me which birds are which, but obviously I never know (laughing) I try, I try to remember, I do always look at the landscape…I'm always really zoned-in because of my dad. I go so I can look around and listen and take it in, I just really love it.

> **Robert:** For me it's just the enjoyment of being out there and helping to be a custodian of the planet, that comes from my dad….I'll tell you a story about my dad and gardening, I walked over to him and asked "Dad what do you see in gardening?" "Come with me Son" and we went into the greenhouse and he said "You see those little seedlings there" "What are seedlings?" "Well those little things with two leaves on, well do you see the ones next them with four leaves on?" By the time we'd wandered 'round the greenhouse we came to standard Fuscia's 6ft high with a trunk on, and he said "I'm just being part of nature Son, part of creation" and I thought "Spot on Dad", from that seedling in the ground we got to 6ft Fuscia's, and he was cultivating. A very profound statement, very simple, it hit the nail on the head, and I thought yeah brilliant.

In these passages Mel and Robert present their participation in walking and conservation volunteering as influenced not only by a broad desire to spend time outside, but also by a concern to engage in particular activities when outside as a consequence of their childhood experiences; a concern to: observe nature, and to be a custodian, respectively. Additionally, Mel and Robert present these activities as important and valuable components of their experiences, and in so doing, demonstrate the contingency of both the initial decision to participate, and the potential for participation to be encountered positively (which in turn affects the desire to participate), upon prior experience, and existing orientation.

5.2.2 Being 'outdoorsy'

For many of the green space participants, engagement in walking and conservation volunteering groups was presented as part of a broader 'outdoorsy' lifestyle. June,

Louise, and Elizabeth, for instance, all referred to their participation in other outdoor activities, and Louise also mentioned her work as an outdoor education instructor:

> **June:** When I do [lead] park walks, I know the National Park like to have lots of people, but I quite like it if I've got ten or less because you can gel a group better.
>
> **June:** Sometimes I do [walk alone] if I've got to do, if I'm leading a park walk and I've got to check the route, which you perhaps do at the beginning of the season to check if it's changed over the winter or if I'm checking a route 'cos I've put a walk on for our little walking club.
>
> **Louise:** On an evening I'll go climbing with mates.
>
> **Louise:** On walks in [the group] I can switch off and kind of just, concentrate on chatting or concentrate on the walk, but with the kids, I always have to keep an eye on, 'cos obviously I'm leading it, I'm in control, wen not fully in control of these kids, but the instructor isn't expecting me to just be dawdling at the back not really paying attention.
>
> **Elizabeth:** I don't get as inspired on a walk as I do biking, if I want to think 'cos I'm writing an article and I need inspiration or something I'll go on my bike that seems to work better 'cos there's less, it's more automatic pilot I think.

Whilst June, Elizabeth, and Louise, had specific motivations for joining their groups (concerns to make the most of free time and to increase social opportunities following disruptive experiences), it is worth noting that these motivations could have led them to participate in any number of different activities. Their decisions to join conservation volunteering and walking groups should be understood in the context of their broader 'outdoorsy' lifestyles; and in turn, as a consequence of embodied history and

orientation, of a preference for spending time in green spaces (for an exception to this see Ben's experience discussed later in this section).

Conservation volunteers Stephen, and John, similarly presented their engagement in volunteering as part of a wider 'outdoorsy' lifestyle:

> **Stephen:** [Why did I volunteer?] two reasons, one to be outside more, and two because I've always wanted to volunteer and I thought "what can I do?", but it's gotta be something that I'm interested in and it's gotta be something that makes a difference, so working in a shop, like a charity shop, that's fine but you know who cares, it's not very interesting and anyone can do it, whereas, working outside it's good innit, it's enjoyable to be working outside, and I wanted to make a difference to something that I would enjoy, or people like me would enjoy so walking etc., I spend a lot of time walking so I appreciate the work that we're doing that's why.
>
> **John:** I like walking, and the last two walks I've done they're so short, maybe four miles they're things I wouldn't have considered to have been walks in the past, they were strolls in the past, but now I take all day to do a walk, and I went…all on conventional tracks, nothing difficult, but it all becomes a struggle…We [Volunteers] want to give something back for the enjoyment we get from nature and the countryside…because most of us are walkers you know.

Not only was conservation volunteering part of a broader 'outdoorsy' lifestyle for Stephen and John, but the decision to volunteer emerged, partly at least, as a direct consequence of these other engagements; from a desire to give back for the enjoyment they got from walking in green spaces, and more specifically in the area within which they had walked most extensively. The potential for prior engagement in specific landscapes to influence the decision to volunteer has been observed

elsewhere in the literature (Halpenny and Caissie, 2015). In their paper looking at conservation volunteering in Canada, Halpenny and Caissie (2015), for instance, suggest that, for some of their participants, the decision to volunteer was influenced by a desire "…to provide care for a particular area that they were drawn to because of its biological or aesthetic significance or because of its familiarity" (p.29). In making this claim they reflect upon the experience of Robert who "selected a site based on its attractiveness and familiarity", because he had been there before and fallen in love with it (p.29).

Whilst the accounts of participation considered so far in this section reinforce the importance of embodied history and orientation, on the decision to join conservation volunteering and walking groups, this does not appear to be universally important. Ben, for instance was relatively new to walking when he joined the group, and as has been discussed, his initial decision to begin walking was based upon a belief that there was little else to do in the area, and a fear that he might disappoint his father if he did not start. Ben described his appreciation for walking as emerging, not from his childhood, but from his first walk in the mountainous area he moved to as an adult:

> **Ben:** On my first walk it was snow and bright sunshine and I was like "right this is amazing" and these are proper hills, and I didn't really know, I'd been here before but I wasn't quite appreciative of like how mountainous it is, so I did that and you're like "right ok I'm stood on top of a hill, in the wind in snow, looking at all these mountains, this is awesome" and then that was kind of it really. The first year I was here, that was when I was doing it on my own and I

> was like “it’s fun at times but it’s not really enjoyable and this that and the other” but then yeah it kind of snowballed from there, to be doing it kind of three times a week.

Ben’s experience of beginning to walk in remote green spaces as an adult, and without prior experience, is consistent with Milligan and Bingley’s (2007) finding that it is possible to become comfortable in green spaces in spite of not having childhood exposure, and, in turn, with the understanding of subjectivity and orientation as in continual state of emergence. Important to note, however, is that there are caveats to continual emergence, with the orientation of some bodies and spaces inhibiting some people’s possibilities (Ahmed, 2006), and this is something that I pick up on in chapters six and seven. Ben’s experiences should, therefore, be understood as emerging in the absence of any barriers to his participation.

5.3 Concluding remarks

The decision to participate in a ‘therapeutic landscape’ is bound up with individual embodied history. At the broadest level, participation can be prompted by disruptive life experiences such as divorce, migration, retirement, and starting a new job (Bell et al., 2014; Doughty, 2013; O’Brien et al., 2010), but how these experiences are encountered, and how they might work to prompt engagement in ‘therapeutic landscapes’, varies between people; affected and informed by other elements of their embodied histories. These disruptive experiences are associated with a range of different motivations, such as a desire to meet people, and to ‘do something’ new or

different. Moreover, the specific form these motivations take varies considerably. Social motivations may, for instance, be indebted to loneliness, or alternatively, to a desire to diversify social networks, to meet and spend time with different kinds of people. Similarly, participation motivated by a concern to 'do something', can be prompted by feelings of boredom, or by a desire to realise opportunities. The different origins of motivation are themselves indebted to embodied histories, to the specificities of everyday life. Moreover, the landscapes in which people choose to participate are similarly no accident, with these decisions influenced, for example, by prior exposure, and by a belief in the inherent value of participation, by being oriented towards these landscapes (Ahmed, 2006). These findings offer some insight into the complexity of the routes taken to participation in 'therapeutic landscapes', and to the role that can be played by disruption, contributing to the work of Bell et al., (2014), Doughty (2013), and O'Brien et al. (2010). Moreover, they reinforce the understanding of subjectivity as susceptible, continually emergent and as a locus of history (see for instance, Ahmed, 2006; Wylie, 2006). It is with this understanding in mind, that I move on to consider experiences within 'therapeutic landscapes'; experiences that emerge within the context of these individually specific routes to participation.

Chapter six: Everyday life and emergent 'therapeutic landscape' experience

In this chapter I move away from motivations for participation, and consider experiences of participation itself. More specifically, I consider the relationship between everyday life and unfolding 'therapeutic landscape' experience (beyond initial motivation), and in so doing, contribute to literature that has discussed the potential for 'therapeutic landscapes' to be conducive of feelings of disconnection or removal (Conradson, 2011; Doughty, 2013; Gesler, 1998, 1996, 1993, 1992). I explore how, for different people, and at different times, 'therapeutic landscape' experiences can be both: associated with feelings of removal from the everyday; and directly and perceivably affected by the everyday. Underpinning this discussion is the theoretical position outlined in chapter three; the understanding of the body-subject as susceptible, continually emergent, and a locus of history (see for instance, Ahmed, 2006; Wylie, 2006).

6.1 Removal from everyday life?

One way in which participants reflected upon the relationship between their everyday lives and their experiences of group walking, conservation volunteering, and retreat, was by noting feelings of removal or disconnection. Indeed, this was something that Kate, Mary, and I, noted in our accounts of retreat:

Kate: It took a little while to calm, but…I was so disconnected by the end of the weekend, I didn't, I wasn't thinking about money or anything…By the end of the retreat I wasn't thinking about what was going on outside of the retreat. There were points where I was like "I've got so much to do when I get home". But when I got there, my mind was busy with all this stuff of like "this is going on and this is going on, blah blah blah blahhh" as your mind tends to do, but because you're so cut off, because you don't have a phone…the situation is so far removed from reality, that when you go back to reality it's almost like they exist separately from each other.

Mary: I felt really disconnected, but then it was a retreat, I suppose you're supposed to, really strongly disconnected really, and I've got a major thing at work that was dropped on me a few days before I went, and I kind of thought this is going to take up the whole of my retreat now, I'm just going to constantly go over and over it, and not gonna have chance to talk to my work colleagues about what's happening, and I'll be wondering about what's happening…it did come up a few times but I was able to look at it a bit more objectively, so it [the retreat] kind of came up at quite a good time for me really, 'cos I was able to stand back from it and not get bogged down with what all my colleagues were thinking about it, what the union were saying, and I thought about it a lot less than I thought I would have done, a lot less….I came home [from the retreat] on the Saturday, and that Sunday I was going to be sacked, not for a personal reason just 'cos they were going to sack everybody, and we only knew four days before I was going on the trip, so we just had this email saying "no more discussions, no more anything, we're just going to sack you all".

Retreat one diary: Experience was otherworldly. I felt separated from reality, completely disconnected. The outside world was an irrelevance. No thoughts about my family or friends, or worries about the things going on. Only once the retreat drew to a close did I start to really think about work, about recruiting potential interviewees. Although I did have occasional niggles about writing, or rather, about the lack of time for writing, these lessened… I was mostly just there.

For each of us, feeling disconnected or removed from our everyday lives was experienced as a shift in our thinking patterns, and recognised through the absence

of, or reduction in, thoughts about the external world, and about our personal difficulties, for instance, Kate's worries about money, Mary's fear of redundancy, and my concerns about this thesis. That we experienced retreat in such a way, as a site of removal or disconnection from our everyday lives, is in-line with how 'therapeutic landscapes' have been understood within some of the literature (Conradson, 2011, 2005; Gesler, 1998, 1996, 1993, 1992). Indeed, in his initial conceptualisation of 'therapeutic landscapes', Gesler (1998, 1996, 1993, 1992) suggested that part of what causes a 'therapeutic landscape' to be 'therapeutic', is the creation of distance from everyday life. Similarly, Conradson (2011) described how participation in a retreat space could be associated with feelings of disconnection or removal from everyday life, and suggested that these feelings are essential if a retreatant is to reach a state of stillness. For Conradson (2011), stillness is understood as a state of being where the mind is calm and completely focussed on the present moment, on the scale of the body, and on the surrounding environment. It is in stillness, Conradson (2011) suggests, that the 'therapeutic-ness' of 'therapeutic landscapes' lies. Both Gesler (1998, 1996, 1993, 1992) and Conradson (2011, 2005) present feelings of removal or disconnection as an outcome of a material shift away from the spaces and people of everyday life, and a relocation to a space that is physically and socially distinct.

Kate, Mary, and I, did not refer to a direct connection between the sense of removal we experienced, and the physical and social distinction of the retreat centres, nor did

we actually describe the retreat centres as physically and socially distinct from the spaces of our everyday lives. I did not, however, ask Kate and Mary these questions (or any other retreatants), and the retreats certainly took place in spaces distinct from those I ordinarily spend my time in. This distinction was, for instance, manifest in: the remote rural locations (retreat one and retreat two respectively); the specially adapted and purpose built retreat centres (retreat one and retreat two respectively); the meditation rooms with arrangements of cushions, candles and flowers and statues; the Buddhist books, artwork, and artefacts (such as bells); the communal dining rooms and kitchens; the single beds and dormitories (at retreat one); and the people, none of whom I had met before (retreat two did not allow friends or family members to attend together, retreat one did, but the retreat was largely conducted in silence and friends and family did not participate in the same discussion groups or share rooms). For myself at least, retreats one and two provided a setting and context for emergent experience, akin to those discussed by Conradson (2011, 2005) and Gesler (1998, 1996, 1993, 1992); namely a setting that was physically and socially removed and distinct from the spaces of my everyday life, and the same may also have been the case for Mary and Kate, neither of whom had attended a retreat before.

The idea that retreatants might feel disconnected or removed from their everyday lives, and more specifically, from the stresses and responsibilities associated with the everyday, may seem unsurprising; after all, the word ‘retreat’ refers to a withdrawal.

Mary suggested that although the degree of distance she experienced was a surprise, she nonetheless expected to feel removed, and exclaimed: “it was a retreat, I suppose you’re supposed to!”. Feelings of removal were not, however, limited to retreatants, and were also reflected upon by walkers including Mel and Louise:

> **Mel:** I don’t think I’m one of them people who can just sit and think about things too much. If I wasn’t walking I’d be sat at home stressing out, or I’d be watching TV and getting stressed out about it in the back of my head, that I wasn’t doing the work I should be doing, or saving enough money or something stupid like that. I definitely think it’s helped quite a lot just like prioritising things, obviously my life at the minute is a bit manic but I’m happier than I was maybe a year ago.
>
> **Louise:** It’s social, it gets me not sitting in my room dwelling about life and all the bad bits, it gets me out on the hill just thinking “get up this walk, chat to these people, they’re all your friends life is good”, and you can kind of forget the stresses of life…I do actually suffer from mental health issues, so for me walking does actually really help to make me feel better, and I know sometimes when I’m in a really horrific mood… like on Sunday I wasn’t in the best of moods but I knew if I went to the walk I would cheer myself up and I would be ok by the end of it, and it worked, surprising, because I know that.

Mel and Louise suggested that going on walks offered them a break from everyday life, and in particular, a break from rumination, from thinking about their particular stresses and difficulties. In her paper exploring the walking group as a mobile ‘therapeutic landscape’, Doughty (2013) similarly observed that experiences of group walking can be partly characterised by a sense of removal from the everyday, a removal that her participants Margaret and Marianne, described as “a breathing space” and “a form of escapism” (p.144). The potential for participation in a walking

group to offer a feeling of disconnection or removal from everyday life is in spite of participation being relatively routine, and in turn, less physically and socially distinctive than Gesler's (1998, 1996, 1993) exceptional landscapes (Epidauros, Lourdes, and Bath) or spaces of retreat (Conradson, 2011, 2005). Mel and Louise both participated regularly, and did so alongside a core group of members. On top of this, both had prior experience of upland environments, experience that influenced their decision to join the walking group in the first instance. The suggestion here, that feelings of disconnection or removal from everyday life can emerge from more routine engagements, contributes to a wider body of 'therapeutic landscapes' literature that has considered the 'therapeutic' potential of spaces that may be more easily or frequently accessed (see for instance, Brewster, 2014; Collins and Kearns, 2007; Couper, 2017; Foley, 2015; Gorman, 2016; Kaley et al., 2019; Milligan et al., 2004; Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Muirhead, 2012; Pitt, 2014, 2018) and is further demonstrated in the accounts of conservation volunteers including Stephen and John:

> **Stephen:** [When I'm volunteering] I'm not stressed at all, I'm completely chilled out. It's rare because I'm busy constantly, so I'm constantly thinking about what am I doing next, what am I doing next, like at work today I've got a load of people to call, and then I've got to go home quickly, I've got to go here or there. In fact it's quite interesting actually because I'd say I'm completely calm when I'm volunteering and I'd say I only feel that calm if I'm on holiday, 'cos it's, there's no pressure, I've not got a quota to reach, I'm just doing it…I like spending time outside and just away from technology and everything, it helps me to get away from everything.

> **John:** You can forget all the things that are winding you up [when you're volunteering], you're interested in the job, you want to do the job well, erm the weather's lovely, the people you're with are lovely, I mean the feeling of wellbeing, the psychological, besides the physical, the psychological benefit of conservation work I think is great.

As was the case for the walkers, Stephen and John described volunteering as associated with feelings of removal or disconnection, with an absence or reduction in rumination about everyday stresses. Moreover, for both, this was similarly in the context of regular participation (in Stephen's case for a few months, and in John's for more than 10 years), as well as prior experience of National Parks that had influenced their decision to volunteer. Whilst the frequency of participation in conservation volunteering, and the prior experience of National Parks, likely lessened the degree of physical and social distinction offered by participation, participation nonetheless seemed to provide a measure of change sufficient enough to prompt feelings of removal or disconnection. The potential for participation in conservation volunteering to promote such feelings was also considered by Muirhead (2012), who suggested that a commitment to, or motivation for, the work being undertaken, could be conducive to feelings of removal or disconnection, irrespective of the physical and social distinction; a suggestion that is consistent with the routes to participation taken by some of the conservation volunteers including Stephen and John (the implications of this are considered in more detail in chapter seven).

Whilst participants described feeling removed or disconnected from their everyday lives, and Conradson (2011, 2005) and Gesler (1998, 1996, 1993, 1992) emphasised the relationship between such feelings, 'therapeutic landscape' experience, and the potential for 'therapeutic' outcomes; if the body-subject is understood to be susceptible, continually emergent and a locus of history (see for instance, Ahmed, 2006; Wylie, 2006), then feelings of removal can only ever be partial. Feeling removed or disconnected from everyday life exists within the context of a continual connection between past, present, and future. Participants, myself included, who felt removed or disconnected from their everyday lives when on retreat, or whist participating in group walking or conservation volunteering, did not become anew as a consequence of relocation. How we experienced the new setting was affected and informed by our individual embodied history, and by our routes to participation. Moreover, the feeling of removal or disconnection, is, itself, contingent upon having something to become disconnected from, for instance, my concerns about this thesis or Kate's money worries. Finally, feelings of removal or disconnection were not universally or consistently experienced; a partiality I explore in 6.2.

6.2 The everyday directly affecting 'therapeutic landscape' experiences

The suggestion that feelings of removal or disconnection were not universal or consistent, is supported by participant accounts that emphasise a direct and perceivable connection between everyday lives and 'therapeutic landscape'

experiences. More specifically, these accounts highlight the potential for the everyday to affect emergent 'therapeutic landscape' experiences in unintended ways, and to also be intentionally brought into 'therapeutic landscapes'; potentialities that have consequences for where we consider the 'therapeutic' to lie.

6.2.1 The everyday affecting 'therapeutic landscape' experiences in unintended ways

For many of the participants, including walkers Louise and Elizabeth, experiences of 'therapeutic landscapes' were directly and perceivably affected by their everyday lives as a consequence of worrying about these whilst participating in a 'therapeutic landscape':

> **Louise:** So some [group] walks I have had the issues that are going on in my life with work or with my flatmate whirling round my head 'cos I've been trying to work out what the hell it means…there are some times that I've been thinking about other people's conversations in my life on a [group] walk and been totally zoned off to the world, 'till like Rob has come over and been like "Louise are you ok?" "yeahhh I'm just thinking." No idea where we are, haven't noticed the views, haven't talked to anyone. I can't stop it, that's just how my mind works. But sometimes like last week everything was out of my head.
>
> **Elizabeth:** I suppose, I define, my work is something I think about a lot, I do do overtime, evenings and weekends, because my clients are people I see around town or interact with or sometimes are friends, it does feel, it's part of what I'm looking for in this new job being further away than this. My current job being like, I'm in the paper quite often, people do know who I am so I do always feel there's kind of an element of being on show, and it's something that's at the forefront of my mind most of the time and yes, so I don't really have that switch between home and work, it is just something that I will wake up at three in the morning and go "I've not thought about that or that, or I've missed x, y

> or z on that" so it is something I think about a lot, so I can't imagine what it would be like to go home and not, or go on the walk and not think about work, it'd be lovely…

That Elizabeth and Louise worried whilst walking was in spite of their movement away from the everyday, and of their relocation to physically and socially distinct settings (albeit a physical and social distinction that was likely affected by the frequency of their attendance); a movement that has been associated with feelings of removal or disconnection both within literature (Conradson, 2011, 2005; Gesler, 1998, 1996, 1993), and for participants within this thesis. Indeed, Louise's experiences of worrying whilst participating in the walking group were in spite of a broader feeling that participation offered her an opportunity to experience a sense of removal or disconnection, an opportunity that she valued highly. In showcasing the potential for 'therapeutic landscape' engagements to be bound up with everyday life through worrying, and for the experience of worrying to fluctuate at an individual level, Louise and Elizabeth's experiences contribute to the broader understanding of 'therapeutic landscape' engagements as not necessarily or consistently 'therapeutic' (Conradson, 2005; Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Kaley et al, 2018). This contribution is advanced through their presentation of worrying as personally inevitable; as reflecting their underlying tendencies to think and worry about work and life. That Louise and Elizabeth worried whilst participating in the walking group was, in other words, not just a fluke, but rather something they were oriented towards (with orientation emerging through previous interactions Ahmed, 2006). Everyday life or embodied

history, can then, not only feature in 'therapeutic landscape' experiences in the content of worries, but it can also influence the act of worrying itself. That Louise and Elizabeth worried about external engagements, about interactions with others, and about their working lives, and did so in spite of a wish for their experiences to be different, also suggests that the individual specificity of experience is contingent upon "wider networks of material and social relations" (Kaley et al., 2019, p.9), and upon a susceptibility to being moved beyond intentionality (Ahmed, 2004; Bissell, 2008; Harrison, 2008). Louise and Elizabeth's experiences of worrying did not emerge from intentional actions, but rather, from a susceptibility to the people and situations about whom, and about which, they worried. Moreover, the act of worrying necessitates a susceptibility to the mind itself, to being moved by the mind in unintended ways; a susceptibility that is reflective of, and can be understood in relation to, the susceptibility of the body to sleep:

> The suggestion is that as sleep is to waking life the blind flight of fatigue is to action and will: its necessary un-working, its dissolute condition (Harrison, 2008, p.434).

Underpinning the discussion of findings so far in this chapter, is a suggestion that whilst feelings of removal or disconnection from everyday life may emerge within a 'therapeutic landscape' context, as has been noted by others (Conradson, 2011, 2005; Gesler, 1998, 1996, 1993, 1992), these feelings can only ever be partial. Where feelings

of removal are experienced, I suggest, drawing upon Ahmed (2004), this reflects shifting intensities of awareness; and more specifically, the lessening of forces that might otherwise demand attention as a consequence of the body's inherent susceptibility.

For some participants, these shifting intensities were very directly affected by their bodily materialities, for instance by having a menstruating body:

> **Diary:** [On the last walk] I was in a bit of pain, on my period. Felt particularly anaemic light-headed and weak. Spent a lot of time waiting for the group to slow down a little so I could go and find a rock to hide behind, doesn't help that I'm one of the slower walkers. Didn't seem appropriate to shout "hey guys slow down so I can whip out a tampon…". During the time spent waiting, trying to find my moment, and my rock, I was completely detached from the walk, and from the group, entirely focused on my body and full of worry. Trying to work out where to store a used tampon in my hiking bag was also a wonderful experience…
>
> **Elizabeth:** [On the last walk] I think the only trouble was I got to the top and it's the wrong time of the month and I was thinking "oh it's a long way down until there's proper bathrooms", I wondered about mentioning that and then I thought I'll be honest with you because actually for a huge part of the, once we'd reached the top that was all I was thinking about because you're just thinking "there's lots of people around it's the wrong time of the month" and the boys don't have this to think about and actually you can spend quite a bit of time thinking about how you're going to manage that situation and it is very vexing.
>
> **Kate:** [On retreat] I mean (laughing) just the fact that we couldn't talk to one another was quite funny, some of the obstacles that you face when you can't say things to people, like you know when I had to ask you for painkillers, the amount of time that I spent thinking about how I was going to sign painkillers

> to you (laughing) it's like this isn't going to happen is it, signing like my womb hurts, back hurts, need a painkiller, you didn't get me. I'd been in pain all day.

Across these accounts of menstruation whilst participating in group walking and when on retreat is a framing of the experience as demanding attention. The experience of menstruation shifted our thoughts, it focused our minds on pained-bodies; it caused us to worry; it required us to act to manage the situation in order to alleviate our physical discomfort; it affected our interactions indirectly as our experience became more internal, and directly by requiring us to seek help, or to hide the fact of our menstruation. Our experiences were affected and informed by our susceptibility to our own bodily functions, to a subsequent shift in our intensities of awareness, as was suggested by Ahmed (2006). Our own bodily-susceptibilities were, however, compounded by our susceptibility to context: to the physical and social spaces of the walking group, and to the association of menstruation and bodily fluids with feelings of shame and embarrassment, feelings that are themselves socially produced (Falconer, 2012; Leder, 1990; Longhurst, 2000, 1997). That our experiences of participation were affected and informed by our menstruation then, by the normal functioning of our bodies, was not just a consequence of this functioning, but of the context within which we menstruated; a finding that reflects observations made by Emily Falconer (2012) in her thesis exploring the embodied and emotional experiences of women travellers. Falconer (2012) describes how women sought to conceal their

menstruation whilst travelling, and how this desire for concealment was bound up with feelings of anxiety as a consequence of the social context.

The experiences of menstruation discussed here demonstrate the importance of attending to embodied difference when considering 'therapeutic landscape' experience, and more specifically, of considering how embodied difference emerges over the course of engagements in 'therapeutic landscapes'. That embodied difference does not exist in the form of *a priori* categories was suggested by Colls (2012), who argued that sexual difference is created through the movement of forces, and also by Ahmed (2006), who highlighted the potential for interactions with others and spaces to affect body-subject emergence or orientation; with the orientations of some bodies and spaces limiting the possibilities of others (Ahmed, 2006).

Other bodily materialities also seemed to affect the shifting intensities of awareness when participating in the 'therapeutic landscapes', and in turn, the experience of connection or disconnection from everyday life, as is apparent in the reflections of conservation volunteer John and in my own diary extracts from retreat:

> **John:** With the condition I get a lot of back pain and neck pain and other things…I'm afraid more and more now it is getting me, even doing the tasks, but until recently I could work much of the day and there would be no problem, I'd take painkillers with me but I would never take them, erm it's only in the evenings I would start, maybe in the next couple of days, a day or two later I would pay the price.

John: I'm not sure why it helped, it may well be that you're distracted, you're doing other things, you're concentrating on other things, I don't know the, not being a biologist or a medic, I don't know the psychological or the…whether the body generates it's natural painkillers…it may be the activity is doing that, the body is generating a natural painkiller, you feel good about yourself, you get on with it…Without it [volunteering] I think on the occasions where I'm stuck at home I'm more likely to have pain during the day, as I say unfortunately it's now getting to the stage where I'm, like on Saturday, I have to sit down an awful lot more than I used to, because I can't get my legs to move like they used to and I fall over if I'm not careful, and there is more pain but you know, I'm 66 PAH, how much is the condition and how much is age?

John: I have a problem these days, my legs are much weaker, in the last six months my weight has decreased, well my weight has transferred from muscle to fat, over time I've seen it happening, but it's no, my leg muscles are very weak, so getting up the side of a hill like at the weekend is desperately difficult, and the [condition] affects my balance so I'm struggling all the time, add to that the fact that I have to be constantly running into the bush to pee which is one of the other things this thing does to you, I could tell you, but peeing is the least of it, won't go into it, but it all contributes to it. If you're staggering around, and trying to get somewhere with some privacy to have a pee, and I'm tripping over the brambles and getting really angry about it, it makes things very much more difficult and I get tired a lot, so it has become much more of a struggle than it was but this is what I do, and you keep doing it as long as you can.

Retreat one diary: Pain in my lower back, pain tracing out my shoulder injury, pain in my swollen ankle, pain towards the centre of my spine working its way up the column.

Retreat one diary: I was intermittently drawn to the shoulder. Usually this pain only arises when I'm putting my shoulder under serious strain. When sitting I felt I could count the points of strain, I visualised red dots along my collar bone and along my shoulder. I also experienced pain along the left-side of my spine, and felt it move down to my lower back.

Retreat two diary: Others lay down at different points during the week, more often than not I sat on the cushion, and if pain became unbearable or keeping posture too difficult, admitted defeat and lay down.

Retreat two diary: Pain radiating from my shoulder consuming my upper back. I give up and lie down, I lose focus and drift in and out of sleep, occasionally remembering that I should be focussing on my breath.

Retreat two diary: Pain across my chest, around my left shoulder, all consuming, pulsating. Felt like I could feel my heart beat through my shoulder. I could see it move across my shoulder and down my arm. Electricity flowing, burning, searing. A train speeding over tracks, sparks flying.

Retreat three diary: Meditation was painful – with my various injuries I couldn't find a comfortable position, in fact my shoulder was absolute agony. I tried to watch this pain, to soothe it, but this was incredibly difficult, similarly it was too painful to actually perform the meditation as instructed.

In these passages John and I present our experiences of participating in conservation volunteering and meditation as affected and informed by our bodies, by the physical difficulties associated with John's health condition, by: mobility issues, pain, discomfort, frequent urination, and fatigue; and by his emotional responses to these difficulties; and by my chronic shoulder and neck pain. Our experiences can be understood through conceptual work on pain by Ahmed (2004) and Bissel (2008) in which they explore the capacity of being in pain to affect experiences as a consequence of the intensity of feeling. Our experiences were altered because of our increased awareness of our bodies; and because, not only does chronic pain demand attention, but it is also serves to "dampen other more enjoyable and pleasurable intensities" (Bissell, 2009, p.920), since comfort is a "condition of possibility for the

conduct and continuation of…tasks" (Bissel, 2008, p.1706). Moreover, mine and John's experiences of pain and discomfort, like those of menstruation for myself, Kate, and Elizabeth, were affected by a susceptibility to our own bodily materialities, to being moved beyond intention by our bodies (Ahmed, 2004; Bissell, 2008). Our bodies were, I suggest, also affected by a susceptibility to context, to landscapes incompatible with our bodies, and through which our bodily difference emerged. In making this claim I draw upon Ahmed's (2006) concept of orientation, and the related socio-material model of disability (Hall and Wilton, 2017), central to which is an understanding that "all bodies become dis/abled in and through their everyday geographies and …such becomings might be made otherwise" (p.729). Thus, our experiences of pain and discomfort can be understood as emerging as a result of the combination of our bodies and environments that were not oriented towards supporting us.

Throughout this section I presented examples showing the inseparability of everyday lives from experiences of participation in 'therapeutic landscapes'. More specifically, I highlighted the potential for the everyday to directly affect and inform experiences, and to do so in ways that are beyond intentionality; ways that are neither wanted nor encountered positively. 'Therapeutic' outcomes then, sometimes emerge not through removal from the everyday, but in spite of the presence of everyday experiences (see chapter seven), in spite of worrying about everyday life, and in spite of physical discomfort.

6.2.2 Intentionally bringing the everyday into 'therapeutic landscapes'

In addition to the everyday directly affecting 'therapeutic landscape' experiences in the ways discussed above, as neither sought nor welcomed, there were also cases where participants intentionally brought their everyday lives into their engagements. One example of this is the practice of self-reflection when on retreat:

> **Kate:** For me, [the retreat] was about looking inwards, and going "why are all these things happening, what is the problem, because it's probably me, like really, it's not everyone else that's causing these problems, it's me, and I, want to understand my behaviour", so obviously the [retreat]…was about recognising bad habits and patterns, and learning how you are basically your biggest enemy, that you are standing in the way of your freedom, and your wisdom, and your ability to love, which is me, that's where I was. It's like, I booked it on a whim, and then I read the description, and I was like "oh my god someone wrote this for me"…I think, weekends like that are really good opportunities for a lot of self-reflection and looking inwards because you can't talk to anyone.

For Kate for instance, who attended a retreat partly in response to poor mental health, participation was seen as an opportunity for self-reflection, a chance to examine the difficulties she was facing in order to improve her life. Her desire to remain connected to everyday life, and to actively engage with it, echoes Conradson's (2011) suggestion that retreatants arrive "with baggage, complexities and things to think about" (p.84) that they are differently able or willing to put aside. For Kate, and also Irene, a commitment to self-reflection remained throughout their retreats, and affected and informed their experiences:

Kate: Sometimes when we had the teachings…they'll say something and you'll go 'ahhh that relates to blah blah blah" so in my mind, I kept doing this thing where I was like "you need to remember this you need to remember this", because obviously when I went to get the pen and paper and they said that I couldn't write stuff down I was like "how am I going to remember all this stuff because there's some really valuable things that I want to remember, and you're telling me that I have to remember the experience as it is, but like I came here to learn things" so erm, in the end I did write stuff down on the last day but yeah there was loads of stuff.

Kate: Sometimes I'd just go up there [a bench in the garden], or like, just go and sit in the room, and just have a moment to sort of, put my mind…back together. Because, as much as I think it would be lovely to go to a meditation retreat and just (emphasis) meditate, and not think about anything, I don't know if that was necessarily what I needed from, the experience, because I was, not looking for answers, but I just wanted to put it all together in my head while it was still fresh.

Irene: I reflected on every single thing they (the monks and nuns) were sharing, I feel like I can relate to my experience, or my stories, or what I've been struggling, or what I have resentment of, and yeah, and each little thing, like even during the dharma sharing, and also during the meditation, and even when I had the shower in the evening I always reflect on, the whole day.

Irene: I reflect[ed] a lot and I feel very emotional inside…every single thing I just reflect[ed] on what happened to me and I feel sad…but then I feel like, like happy in general. It was good to share and to learn, it made me feel less alone.

In these accounts Kate and Irene describe finding particular self-reflective resource in the dharma talks and group sharing sessions, but also note how the act of self-reflection extended beyond these and carried into their retreat experiences more generally. Whilst both considered self-reflection an important part of their journey, this was not encouraged by the retreats, and it stands in opposition to the underlying

principles of mindfulness meditation (Lea et al., 2014; Thich, 1995). The incompatibility of intentional self-reflection with the principles of mindfulness meditation is clear from the following description of the practice by Thich Nhat Hanh; a Buddhist Monk influential in the introduction of mindfulness meditation to the West:

> While we practice conscious breathing, our thinking will slow down, and we can give ourselves a real rest. Most of the time, we think too much, and mindful breathing helps us to be calm, relaxed, and peaceful. It helps us stop thinking so much and stop being possessed by sorrows of the past and worries about the future. It enables us to be in touch with life, which is wonderful in the present moment (Thich, 1995, p.35).

The incompatibility of intentional self-reflection with the underlying principles of mindfulness meditation proved problematic for Kate who attended retreat one (the 'strictest' of the retreats considered in this thesis) where self-reflection was strongly discouraged; a discouragement enforced in Kate's case by the denial of a pen and paper to write with. Whilst Kate wanted to relate the talks to her own life, retreat one framed these as a further opportunity for the cultivation of awareness through mindfulness meditation in the form of Deep Listening, a practice where people are encouraged to be present with the words being spoken as they were spoken, and to suspend judgement and commentary (Thich, 2013).

Whilst it may be assumed that people would value feeling removed from their everyday lives when on retreat, and in spite of the association between removal and

'therapeutic' outcomes within some of the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature (Conradson, 2011, 2005; Gesler, 1998, 1996, 1993, 1992), and the degree of separation encouraged by mindfulness meditation (Lea et al., 2014; Thich, 1995), it is notable that Irene and Kate nevertheless referred to self-reflection as a therapeutic endeavour. That they perceived self-reflection in such a way, contributes to the understanding of 'therapeutic landscape' engagements, and 'therapeutic' outcomes, as individuallyspecific, and as potentially unexpected (as being 'therapeutic' in ways that are not traditionally associated with the landscapes), building upon the findings of research by Andrew and Holmes (2007) and Wood et al. (2013); who highlighted the 'therapeutic' potential of participation in gay bathhouses, and of smoking whilst a hospital patient, respectively, in spite of the risks to physical health. Central to the 'therapeutic-ness' of these engagements, Andrew and Holmes (2007), and Wood et al. (2013) suggest, are feelings of comfort, belonging, and empowerment. The value of feeling empowered was also observed by Conradson (2005) in the context of a respite care facility for people with physical impairment, and seems relevant in understanding Kate and Irene's experiences too. Both were prompted to begin meditation, and subsequently to attend a retreat, in order to improve their mental health. They were prompted by a hopefulness that a better future was possible, a hopefulness that was imbued with empowerment, with a belief that they could change their lives, and self-reflection was a part of this, a part of them taking control of their mental health.

In spite of her engagement in self-reflection, and in turn, of intentionally bringing her everyday life into the retreat space, however, Kate nonetheless described feeling disconnected, and I return here to a quote considered in 6.1:

> **Kate:** It took a little while to calm, but…I was so disconnected by the end of the weekend, I didn't, I wasn't thinking about money or anything…By the end of the retreat I wasn't thinking about what was going on outside of the retreat. There were points where I was like 'I've got so much to do when I get home'. But when I got there, my mind was busy with all this stuff of like 'this is going on and this is going on, blah blah blah blahhh' as your mind tends to do, but because you're so cut off, because you don't have a phone…the situation is so far removed from reality, that when you go back to reality it's almost like they exist separately from each other.

That Kate could both intentionally bring her everyday life into the retreat space, and also experience feelings of disconnection, supports the argument built throughout this chapter, that 'therapeutic landscape' experiences emerge through, and may be characterised by, shifting intensities of awareness, rather than by a complete state of 'removal' (Ahmed, 2004). Whilst the process of becoming immersed or still is explored in more detail in chapter seven, it is worth reflecting here upon the presentation of removal and immersion as binary by Conradson (2011); and more specifically, upon the suggestion that to experience stillness as a consequence of immersion, one must first become fully removed. By way of a reminder, Conradson (2011) refers to stillness as an affective state where the mind is calm and completely focussed on the present moment, on the scale of the body, and on the surrounding environment; an affective

state that he conceptualised with reference to mindfulness or mindful awareness. Referring again to the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, mindfulness itself is described as:

> … a kind of *energy* that we generate when we bring our mind back to our body and get in touch with what is going on in the present moment, within us and around us. We become aware of our breathing and come home to our body, fully present for ourselves and whatever we are doing. Mindfulness is not hard work. It's very pleasant and relaxing, and we don't need extra time to do it. There's an art to finding creative ways to generate the energy of mindfulness, peace, and happiness in everyday life (Plum Village, 2020).

Implicit within this description is that mindfulness is reached through active and intentional performance, and whilst reaching a point where this characterises existence is the ultimate goal of mindfulness practice, to do so is to reach Nirvana, it is the end point of the Path to Enlightenment (Thich, 2008). Although the retreats sought to offer participants a chance to cultivate a state of mindful awareness, a state which they suggested may carry beyond intentional performances, these were understood to be partial, and at each retreat those leading us spoke about the practice as a journey, and reassured us that moving in and out of states of mindful awareness was normal. Further to this, it should be recognised that being mindfully aware includes an awareness of thoughts and feelings, and an ability to bring attention back to the object of concentration; thoughts and feelings that invariably emerge from everyday lives. Where mindfulness practice differs from self-reflection is that

participants are encouraged to observe these thoughts non-judgementally, and to let them move in and out of consciousness without engagement.

In addition to self-reflection, participants also brought their everyday lives into their 'therapeutic landscape' experiences through sharing with others, as is apparent in Paulo and Irene's accounts of retreat:

> **Paulo:** The moments in meetings sharing with each of you the emotions and the things, really beautiful, I really liked it, and yes of course, one moment I save with so much love, it was the last meeting we done where you and me were crying, I think they were liberation [tears]. I think it was a liberation of things I had inside of me and er, despite I have here [at home] many good friends, I never, have never, opened myself with them in the way I have done it with you, and I think it was that, I had some emotions inside of me, that I have never shared with my friends, and I don't know why but [at the retreat] I felt that I wanted to, to share it with you.
>
> **Irene:** I think for more than two months I feel very empty and very down, and even I try hanging out with my friends, went to the Peak District, went cycling, just trying to do different things, trying to like cover up, and like talk to my friends, and always avoiding to talk about my problems, but then on the retreat I think I can talk about myself a little bit, and start to face it, I feel happy actually. I feel like very satisfied…of like being with you all…there were some moments where it was difficult to talk to people but then I think that that's ok.
>
> **Irene:** Before the retreat I felt like "I'm the most miserable person on earth" but then from the retreat I can feel everyone is suffering in a way, they have their sadness too… When I started to talk about that (mental health issues), and you also started to talk about that, so I feel safe talking to people who've been through and who knows. I was very impressed when you say "it's ok it's ok". It keeps reminding on my head "it's ok it's ok" so I feel safe…

Paulo and Irene's descriptions of sharing their feelings and difficulties with others whilst on retreat, and the suggestion that they found this easier than talking to their friends and family, reflect observations in other studies of 'therapeutic landscapes' (Doughty, 2013; Macpherson, 2008; Smith, 2019). In her paper on walking groups as mobile 'therapeutic landscapes', Doughty (2013) for instance, suggested that conversations were at times characterised by "emotional depth…between walkers" (p.143). Similarly, Smith (2019) described the community joinery workshop he attended as adopting "the feel of something akin to a support group. With life challenges…from experiences of childhood bullying to ongoing battles with addiction...more easily broached…without judgement" (p.12). Doughty (2013) and Smith (2019) suggested that discussion of feelings and of difficulties in everyday life flowed partly because participants were doing other things at the same time; they were walking, or doing joinery work. These other engagements, and the limited potential for eye contact, Doughty (2013) and Smith (2019) claim, reduced the pressure participants felt and enabled them to share more deeply. The circumstances identified by Doughty (2013) and Smith (2019), do not, however, appear to be the only ones that might prompt participants in 'therapeutic landscapes' to share their experiences with others. Indeed, Paulo and Irene described sharing with others during timetabled 'sharing sessions' where retreatants sat or kneeled in circles facing one another, and were invited to reflect upon their feelings, or upon how they were finding the retreat or meditation practice. Fellow retreatants remained silent whilst others

spoke, and were encouraged not to respond, and to focus instead on being completely present. Although we were not directly encouraged to talk about our everyday lives, often this emerged from our feelings, as was the case for Paulo and Irene; an emergence that supports the understanding of the body-subject as a locus of history, and in turn the argument that removal from the everyday, or embodied history, is an impossibility. Paulo and Irene present their ability to share in this context, as influenced by the supportive environments provided by the retreat centres, by the community of other retreatants, and by an atmosphere of shared vulnerability built from similar lived-experience; a presentation that reflects Macpherson's (2008) observations in relation to the discussions that took place in the walking groups she attended. More specifically, Macpherson (2008) suggested that the content and nature of discussion that took place between walkers was informed by their shared experiences of blindness or sight-loss; with the group serving as a space to discuss these experiences and consequently where "emotions and sentiments were played out between group members" (p.1085).

In addition to sharing difficult experiences and emotions, participants including walkers Louise and Elizabeth also described complaining or ranting about their everyday lives during their engagements:

> **Louise:** You can rant about whatever, I've ranted about my colleague so many times to Peter and he's just like, he accepts it now, he knows that I will come and rant a bit about him 'cos that's my way of letting steam off about him,

same with work in general actually, if I've had a bad few days, which I often have.

Elizabeth: I must have driven everyone mad with my work bitches over the last sort of couple of years, I've been very angry, very frustrated and quite a few people have had like, I did remember on one walk someone like saying "you're really loud just stop" because I'd just had a massive rant and actually I was so humiliated I haven't forgotten that, 'cos actually you lose self-awareness in a rant and I'd completely lost self-awareness I was massively pissed off and I'd just gone [rawrrr] and completely lost self-awareness and actually I can't remember who did it now and it was a bit cruel and a bit embarrassing but I'm glad that they did 'cos I just needed that slap across the face to say 'just stop now'.

Neither Elizabeth nor Louise found it possible not to think or worry about their everyday lives whilst walking, despite suggesting that they would value, or valued, feelings of removal or disconnection. Moreover, both here suggest that they also actively brought their everyday lives into the 'therapeutic landscape' through ranting about work and colleagues; further demonstrating the inseparability of everyday life or embodied history from 'therapeutic landscape' experiences. Whilst Louise valued the opportunity to rant, 'to let off steam' whilst walking, and presented her experiences of ranting as positive ones, Elizabeth seemed to have had more negative experiences. Although Elizabeth does not describe ranting about her everyday life as negatively affecting her experience independently (reflecting her suggestion that thinking and worrying about work was just something she did, see 6.2.1), she does note that her ranting had not always been received positively by fellow walkers, who's responses had sometimes upset her. That others were unhappy with Elizabeth

bringing her everyday life into the walking space in such a way, highlights the individual specificity of 'therapeutic landscape' experience. People do not all want or expect the same things from their participation in 'therapeutic landscapes', and they can in turn, have different attitudes to the bringing in of external problems.

6.3 Concluding remarks

The 'therapeutic landscape' engagements I considered in this thesis, although distinct from participants' everyday spaces, are nevertheless bound up with the everyday. At the most fundamental level, if, as I suggest in this thesis, body-subjects are continually emergent, produced through susceptibilities, and also a locus of history, with each new interaction emerging from that which came before; then experiences of 'therapeutic landscapes' are too, inseparable from embodied histories. This is not to say, however, that people always feel connected to their everyday lives, and indeed, some participants reflected upon feeling a sense of removal or disconnection; the emergence of which is consistent with suggestions from wider 'therapeutic landscape' literature (Bell et al., 2014; Conradson, 2011; Doughty, 2013; Gesler, 1996, 1993, 1992; Kearns and Gesler, 1998). These feelings should be recognised though, as emerging within, and indebted to, the continual connection of past, present, and future. It is not, on these theoretical terms at least, possible to be removed or disconnected from everyday life, and such feelings are themselves a testament to connection. To feel disconnected is necessarily to be connected. Moreover, and reflecting the

understanding of the body-subject as continually emergent, experiences of removal or disconnection are fundamentally temporary; fluctuating alongside other elements of experience (Ahmed, 2004).

In other ways 'therapeutic landscape' engagements were more clearly and consciously related to everyday lives. Not everyone described feeling removed or disconnected, and for some these feelings existed alongside experiences of the everyday; experiences dominated by embodied histories. Sometimes the everyday was welcomed. Sometimes it was 'therapeutic' in its own right. Thinking and talking about problems, for instance, as has been noted by others, sometimes helped people to work through problems they were facing (Doughty, 2013; Macpherson, 2008; Smith, 2019). Moreover, bringing the everyday into 'therapeutic landscapes' in these ways, can be beneficial even when such engagements are inconsistent with the intentions or expectations of the specific 'therapeutic landscapes'; an observation that contributes to our understanding of the potential for 'therapeutic landscapes' to be 'therapeutic' in unexpected ways (Adrews and Holmes, 2007; Wood et al., 2013). Experiences of 'therapeutic landscapes' were not always positively affected by everyday life though, and for some people the influence of the everyday was manifest in discomfort or distress. The potential for the everyday to negatively affect experiences of 'therapeutic landscapes' has been acknowledged elsewhere in the literature, notably by Milligan and Bingley (2007) in their work exploring young people's experiences of

woodlands. Milligan and Bingley (2007) suggest that the nature and extent of prior woodland experiences can affect and inform subsequent experiences; that a lack of positive prior engagements for instance, may lead to experiences characterised by fear and discomfort. The findings of this thesis make a further contribution in this area by demonstrating that the everyday can negatively affect and inform 'therapeutic landscape' experiences even when participants have prior interest in, or exposure to, the landscapes in which they participate.

'Therapeutic landscape' experiences are then, bound up with the everyday, inseparable from embodied histories. The everyday affects and informs 'therapeutic landscape' experiences, but it does so differently between people and over time. The influence of the everyday exists within the context of susceptibilities, and fluctuates alongside other components that demand attention. Moreover, how 'therapeutic landscape' experiences are affected and informed by other components, is in turn related to the influence of the everyday, and it is these other components to which I now move.

Chapter seven: 'Therapeutic landscape' experiences beyond the everyday

In this chapter I consider 'therapeutic landscape' experiences when participants are not intensely aware of their everyday lives; when they have, temporarily at least, 'arrived' in the 'therapeutic landscapes' (recognising that these experiences emerge in the context of a continual connection between past, present, and future and of shifting intensities of awareness). Throughout this chapter, I explore accounts of participation; attending to embodied, emotional, and affectual components; in order to provide insight into the complexities of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences, and the contingencies and fragilities of 'therapeutic' outcomes. This discussion is divided into overlapping sections on two of the central components of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences: sensory experiences, and, activity performances (namely, walking, working, meditation and other retreat activities).

7.1 Sensory experiences

In this first section I consider some of the sensory experiences described by participants; some of the ways in which participants interacted with the environment through their senses whilst walking, working, or on retreat. The accounts I consider are grouped into two broad categories: experiences of sensing, and experiences of affective-emotional exchange, of shifts in feelings and moods.

7.1.1 Sensing the physical environment

Reflecting on sensing, on noticing elements of the physical environment, was one way in which participants, and in particular walkers, discussed their experiences of participation, as is apparent in the following accounts from Mel and Maddy:

> **Mel:** [When I'm walking] I'm definitely like in the zone, I definitely try and look…I think my attention is focused on everything that's around, the landscape and the wildlife, but I zone out of conversations quite a bit I think that's really, the main thing is getting out and about that's why I do walking, I'm a bit of a daydreamer I think that's what I do, just daydream and look around me, but I do notice things a lot of times like voles and things like that, badgers dead or alive (laughing) caterpillars as well a few times (laughing), dragonflies, all the exciting wildlife….I've a really bad habit of just saying "yeah, aha" when I'm talking to people and not really actually paying attention I'm just watching something else, it's really awful (laughing) so I like nature and stuff, my dad, he likes nature, so sometimes like birds and things like that, it sounds a bit silly, but he's always tried to teach me which birds are which, but obviously I never know (laughing) I try, I try to remember. Maybe that's why I've not made many friends walking.
>
> **Maddy:** When I'm out on a walk I wanna take in the surroundings, I want to enjoy it, like live the moments really….In my opinion it takes a lot to beat the landscape of the Lake District, the Lakes is just something else, ok I know Scotland's very impressive and so's Wales but the Lake District, there's just something very special about it, it's magnificent the Lake District.
>
> **Maddy:** I'll probably take between 50 and 100 pictures per walk, depends on obviously on how good the weather is, if the weather is beautiful and the scenery is amazing, I'll just take picture after picture after picture. Sometimes people get annoyed but I mean whatever.

Mel and Maddy present themselves as not simply noticing the world around them, but as engaging deeply with it; as for instance, looking at, identifying, and photographing,

the physical landscape, and the wildlife. Moreover, they present these engagements as an important part of their involvement in group walking, as something they are committed to, and that they value highly; as bound up with their motivation for participation. Such deep forms of engagement have been considered elsewhere in the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature, with Phillips et al. (2015), for example, discussing the potential for curiosity to prompt sensory exploration and absorption; and it is curiosity, I suggest, that underpins Mel and Maddy's experiences. It is worth noting here that Mel also described her walking experiences as associated with feelings of calm, and of removal from her everyday life; feelings that Conradson (2005), in relation to birdwatching, suggested might be promoted by curiosity and deep-observation (p.346). More broadly, an association between particular activities, intense 'in-the-moment' awareness, and feelings of calm has been well acknowledged, and has been discussed within the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature (as has been discussed in chapter six), and I consider this potential in detail later in the chapter.

In addition to observation 'in-the-moment' Maddy's accounts also demonstrate the potential for sensory engagements to extend beyond the space-times of participation:

> **Maddy:** When I'm feeling down and, everybody hits like times in their life that are traumatic or they feel down, maybe you're slightly depressed or they're unsure about where they're going or you know lots of reasons why you might not be in a great place. For me looking back on the things that I've done and the things I've achieved and the places that I've been to and the things that I've seen helps to turn my focus and my thoughts around, so if I'm in a bit of a place

> where I'm not feeling myself, I tend to look back through my pictures and go "that was an amazing day, really enjoyed that, had some great conversations, met some great people".
>
> **Maddy:** Also photos are great for talking to people, so yeah today I was checking out of my accommodation and I just mentioned to them about the walks that I've done this week so I showed them the sunset on top of Blencathra and then I said about us walking Scafell in March and I showed them one of the pictures from the top 'cos it looked so dramatic, so yeah when I'm trying to explain to somebody how amazing something was, how, I'll show them a picture. I love that, talking to people about what I've done, and showing them (for my own photographs from this walk see figures 1 and 2).

Explicit within these accounts, is that just as Maddy's 'in-the-moment' sensory interactions were not simply an act of noticing, neither were her subsequent engagements with the photographs she had taken; rather, these were intentional and specific. Maddy looked at her photographs to remind herself of her achievements, such as climbing Scafell Pike (for my photos of this walk see figures 1 and 2), and to discuss her experiences with others; engagements that were positive in their own right. Maddy's use of photographs in this way, advances understanding of how 'therapeutic landscape' experiences can affect everyday life, and adds a 'third way' to Kaley et al.'s (2019a) conceptualisation of 'therapeutic landscapes' as 'ameliorating' or 'transformative', in their work looking at the potential 'therapeutic' outcomes emerging from engagement in care farms. Maddy does not describe her participation in the walking group as transformative, nor really does she present it as ameliorating.

Rather, her experience highlights the potential for 'therapeutic' value to exist, partially at least, in the everyday, in hindsight, in reflection, and in sharing.

Whilst Mel and Maddy both present the environment as a central part of their experiences of walking in the group, it should be acknowledged that this is in spite of some potentially negative outcomes. Mel, for instance, suggested that she tended to zone out of conversations because she was looking around; a tendency she thought may have affected her ability to make friends in the walking group; and in turn, I suggest, to realise some of the social opportunities associated with group walking (Doughty, 2013; Macpherson, 2008; Smith, 2019). Similarly, Maddy presents her commitment to observing the environment as at odds with the others she walked with, and this incompatibility causing both her and others to feel annoyed. These experiences of annoyance demonstrate the potential for social disharmony or disengagement to exist within 'therapeutic landscapes', for interactions between people to not always be positive or desirable; a potential that has been acknowledged elsewhere in the literature (Conradson, 2011; Smith, 2019). Conradson (2011) for example, suggested that "the sociality of retreat was not always comfortable", and described how feelings of annoyance emerged between retreatants as a consequence of differing religious views (p.82); and Smith (2019) described incidents of socially unacceptable behaviour within a community workshop setting that left people feeling uncomfortable and anxious.

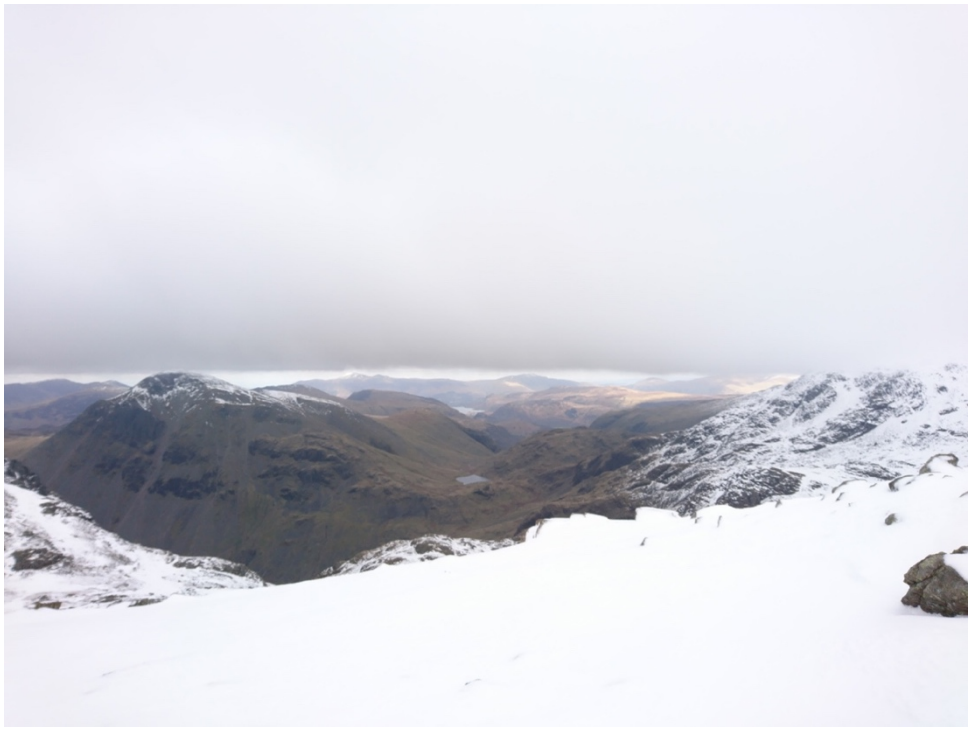

Figure 1 - View from Scafell Pike

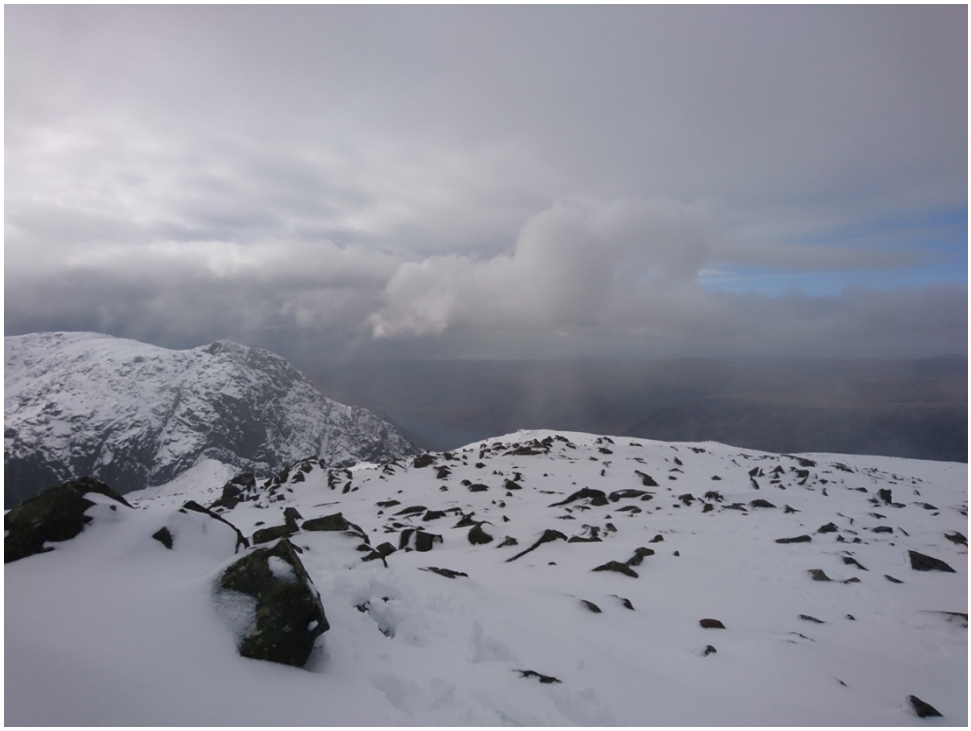

Figure 2 - Clouds at the top of Scafell Pike

More broadly, the accounts of 'zoning-out' of conversations, and of annoyance, indicate that the behaviour of others within a 'therapeutic landscape' can affect and inform emergent experience; that the experiences of those speaking to Mel would be different as a consequence of her lack of attention; and that both Maddy and those she was with, walked feeling annoyed at times because of her desire to take photographs. These accounts illuminate the inter-corporeal emergence of 'therapeutic landscape' experience; that, as Doughty (2013) suggests, experiences are produced through "dynamic and relational processes", unfolding "within and through interactions with the environment (including other humans as well as non-humans)" (p.141). Advancing this, I argue that such a process is contingent upon bodily susceptibility, upon the openness of the body to the world and to others; to being affected by, and emerging through, interactions.

The inter-corporeality of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences is also apparent in my own accounts of sensing the environment whilst walking, as well as in those of Louise and Elizabeth:

> **Diary:** As conversation quietened, so too did the landscape, whilst at times of relative ease the landscape seemed to scream for attention, for observation, at times of strain and challenge experience became internalised. Occasionally at times like these I would remind myself to look around. Sometimes though I was just too busy chatting to notice anything.
>
> **Louise:** On walks there's a bit of views, because you're chatting so much you're not thinking about going up and then you get to the top it's like a pleasant

surprise and you're like "oh we're there and it didn't feel too hard and the views are amazing", or they're rubbish because of the weather.

Elizabeth: When I was thinking back about the walk at the weekend I was actually surprised how little the landscape really featured in it, there was so much chat, I talked far too much last Sunday I must have driven everybody mad, 'cos I was leading I was on edge and then I talk more and it was interesting how little, there were three or four bits where you actually looked at the view on that walk and then the rest really was just nattering to people, and looking where your feet were going, and breathing, and more nattering.

Elizabeth: When I do look at the surroundings one of the things I do look for is I like to orientate myself so I like to see, I like to see other hills that I've walked on and see how they're linked together, I like the orientation, we looked over and I could see where I'd walked before and we all talked about different walks we'd done there and the different walks and I like that sense of pulling together different experiences into the patchwork of where you've walked in the Lakes until eventually you'll have walked all of it, it's quite, so that's sort of what I'm looking for in the landscape.

Across these passages our awareness is presented as fleeting or absent, as bound up with other intensities of awareness; with the physical strain of walking, and with chatting; and in turn, with our inherent bodily susceptibility. Phenomenological studies have noted the potential for experience to turn inwards as the body performs activities such as yoga, running, sailing, and walking (Couper, 2017; Lea, 2008; Nettleton, 2015; Wylie, 2002); with Nettleton (2015) for instance, suggesting that for fell-runners the world is "aesthetically experienced as atmospheric rather than scenic" (p.773). Less account, however, has been made of the potential for conversation to affect sensory interactions with the environment (although the presence of conversation has been acknowledged Doughty, 2013; Macpherson, 2008; Smith,

2019), and the experiences of Elizabeth, Louise, and myself, advance understanding in this area.

An additional point to raise here is that invariably, Mel and Maddy were also not constantly aware of the environment, and their experiences too fluctuated between sensing, conversation, and internalisation (as is discussed later in the chapter). These fluctuations, were, however, within the context of their intentional engagement with the environment. How we approached and valued awareness of the environment varied considerably; a difference that demonstrates the individual specificity of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences. Despite us all deciding to join the walking group, and all doing so partly because of an appreciation for the environment, there was no one way in which we encountered and engaged with it.

7.1.2 Affective-emotional exchange

Another way in which participants discussed their interactions with the environment, was by describing experiences of affective-emotional exchange, as is apparent the following accounts from myself and Stephen:

> **Diary:** Sitting on the ground, leaning against a moss-covered tree, in the middle of a woodland whilst eating lunch was a wonderful experience. It stimulated the senses, I was drawn to the colours of the woodland, the different shades of green and brown, to how the light fell in between the trees, to the rustling of leaves on the ground and when they were caught by wind

> **Diary:** At the end of the day I sat on the floor against a bank as we waited for the fire to die down, at periods I closed my eyes and indulged in the warmth and sense of calm, at other periods the group, myself included, was jovial and animated (see figure 3).
>
> **Stephen:** Every time I stop for a second [during a conservation day] I can't help but look at the landscape, and it's amazing, I love it, that's part of the reason I love it actually to be honest, just the landscape. The first time I went and we were sat eating lunch and just looking at the landscape I thought how can you, there's no complaints here, there's nothing to be miserable about, it's like yeah it's just great (see figure 4).

We present ourselves as drawn to, and moved by, the environment (see figures 3 and 4); as feeling wonder, calm, and amazement, as a consequence of our interactions; and in turn, as susceptible, and continually emergent. Discussion of sensory susceptibilities and of the role of the environment in prompting feelings such as wonder, calm, and amazement, has received relatively little attention within the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature. A notable exception is Phillips et al. (2015), who, in their study exploring the relationship between curiosity, place, and wellbeing, describe the potential for the environment to not only attract attention, but for the objects of interest to "become extraordinary, even enchanting" (p.2346); for instance, for the "'magic' of a germinating seed" to bring about "a momentary sense of wonder" (p.2351). Substantial attention has, however, been paid to the influence of physical environment on experiences of performing activities (Conradson, 2005; Couper, 2017; Foley, 2015; Gorman, 2016; Lea, 2008; Milligan et al., 2004; Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Muirhead, 2012; Nettleton, 2015; Pitt, 2014; Wylie, 2002), and in some cases, the

potential for particular feelings to emerge from the interaction of body and world through activity performances (Foley, 2015; Lea, 2008; Nettleton, 2015). Just as subjects, experiences, and feelings, might emerge through movement on, in, or through, physical environments (as is expanded upon in 7.2), for instance whilst wild swimming (see below quote from Foley, 2015), so too, I suggest, might they through sensory awareness, through being in and being with, as is suggested by mine and Stephen's experiences:

> You just go into this lovely rhythm. I suppose it's a bit like meditating. You just go into this calm state and you listen to your breathing and you visualise your body and what it's doing with each stroke. And if there's a slight wave you just become aware sort of, of your arm falling at a different ... falling into the water you know ... (Foley, 2015, p.223)

Whilst sensory susceptibility has received little attention in the 'therapeutic landscapes' context, it has received rather more in other literatures, perhaps most notably in relation to 'affective atmospheres' (Anderson, 2009; Bissell, 2010; Edensor, 2012; McCormack, 2008). An affective atmosphere, Edensor (2012) drawing on Böhme (2002) suggests, is:

> …a certain mental or emotive tone permeating a particular environment but also "the atmosphere spreading spatially around me, in which I participate through my mood". A space thus "attunes my mood, but at the same time it is the extendedness of my mood itself" (Böhme, 2002, page 5), and in suggesting a thorough imbrication of the affective and emotional, he contends that one must experience atmospheres "in terms of one's own emotional state", for he

argues, “without the sentient subject, they are nothing (Böhme, 2008, page 2) (p.1106).

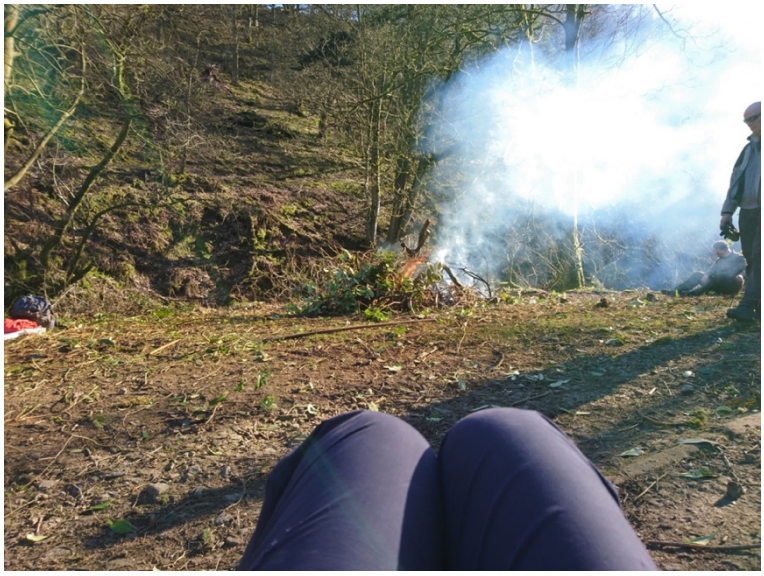

Figure 3 - Warming my legs by the fire

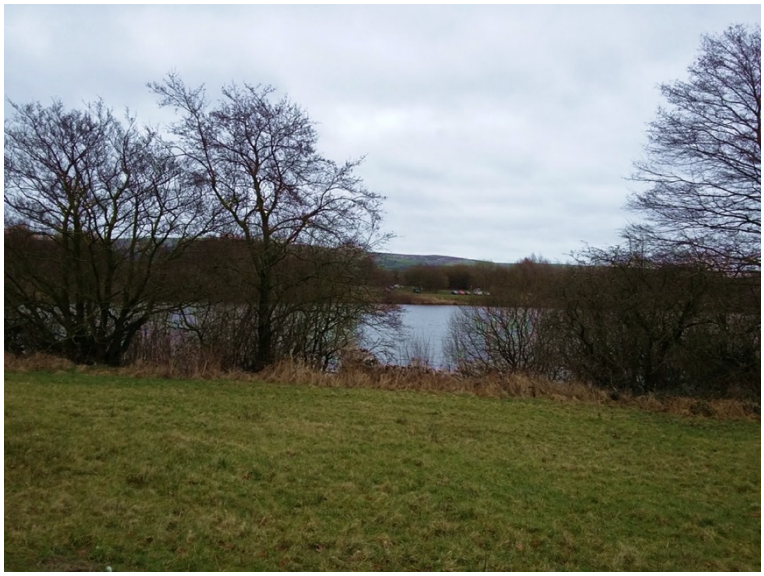

Figure 4 - Stephen's view at lunch

Central to this understanding, is the role of individual bodies in affecting and informing atmospheres; atmospheres do not, it is argued, exist without bodies; they emerge through, and are experienced by, individual bodies (Böhme, 2002; Edensor, 2012); an understanding that is consistent with the broader theoretical position outlined throughout this thesis; with the body-subject that is susceptible, continually emergent, and a locus of history. On these terms then, it is important to note the individual specificity of mine and Stephen's experiences of being affected, of being drawn to, or moved by the environment; and to acknowledge that these experiences were likely affected and informed by our embodied histories, by our existing orientation to spending time in green space.

Before considering the experiences of retreatants, it should be acknowledged that whilst it was only Stephen and I who discuss being affected by our awareness of the environment, the absence of explicit mention by others does not mean they did not experience it. Of course this is true for each area of discussion in this thesis, but it seems especially important to recognise here given the level of detail required to discuss affective interactions; a level of detail that I did not expect from participants. My own ability to recall these interactions is a consequence of the methodology, of my knowledge of affect, and perhaps also of my meditation practice. Similarly, whilst Stephen was able to recall an affective interaction, he was drawing from just a couple of volunteering days, and many of the other volunteers had years of experience, and

it seems plausible that this enabled him to be more specific. Moreover, whilst other volunteers did not discuss affective interactions with the environment in the context of their volunteering practice, some did nevertheless present themselves as highly attuned to the environment, an attunement that likely also affected their volunteering:

> **Robert:** If I'm looking at something like that [a dry-stone wall or hedge-laying] then I'm completely focused on it, there might be something obviously if you see a buzzard, down in Oxfordshire it's red kites they're all over the place, and they're just a beautiful bird aren't they, so yes your mind just gets away with that.
>
> **Robert:** If I wanted to go solo I could do that easily, years ago I was camping at North Lees and I thought I'm going for a walk… rucksack on boots on, and I went up to Stanage Edge, down to Snake Pass, up over Dove Stones towards Blackshaw, and I walked off footpaths, I got my compass out and I walked to the top of Marjorey Hill and you could see people down there, but on the way I'd seen Goshawk and I got to top of Marjorey Hill and I thought, fabulous walk, fabulous, so if I want to go and do that I can do that because I know how to so if I'm looking at something and other people are around I'll probably point it out to them because I'm interested you know, I've pointed Kingfisher out to school children before, so yeah , I can be alone, I can be with people, it's different to volunteering.
>
> **Robert:** I remember a couple of years ago I'd just finished [working] and I heard a cricket, and there was a girl outside, and we found it in the gutter and she said "how did you hear that" and I said "because my ears are tuned to".

Retreatants too described experiencing affective interactions with the environment, and in particular, with the green spaces surrounding retreat centres[11]:

> **Paulo:** [the environment] was really helpful to the experience of [the retreat] 'cos the peaceful environment, I love nature, but I live in a city, and I really enjoy it on retreat, something that helped me too much were the different benches that were built in memory of people and it's something I really love and then the views, something too important to me 'cos, it was like to relax myself, it was so, so, so important, it was like all days I had, I wanted to go to these places and be contemplative, to contemplate the views, in these places I tried to be concentrated and enjoy the moment, enjoy the views, enjoy the river, I tried to be conscious about all the things that were happening around me, for example cow sounds and the only thing I thought about in these moments was what are they saying to them, between them, what are they speaking about, but I tried to be concentrated you know for example the sensation of the ground that supports me, or for example, the sound of the wind, or the wind touching my body, or how when I breathed, I take a part of this wind and then I let it go…I think it is the time when I felt most connected with nature.
>
> **Mary:** I love the park and everything but maybe it was a slightly more intense experience the whole closing your eyes and thinking about, the spiritual stuff, the whole earth, wind, fire thing that he did, if I read that I'd be like "oh god give me a break", but then in that environment and then thinking about it and shutting your eyes and opening them it just took it to a slightly different level and that felt quite like "oh wow", and I love nature and I kind of loved it a little bit more after that. That act of having closed your eyes to something for a bit

[11] Whilst retreatants invariably also spent time in built structures, experiences of affective interactions with these spaces were not picked up in this research. Although it is possible that fellow retreatants did not experience these interactions, it should be acknowledged that I did not directly askparticipants about the built environment, beyond an overarching sense of atmosphere. The absence of this is an unintended consequence of the content of my own diaries, and of my own tendency to speak about the activities that took place within the built environment rather than interactions with the built environment itself.

> and then opening them again with that mindset was just "oh wow, isn't everything amazing" and feeling part of it, not just an observer but somehow feeling part of it, that we've got that in us and it's in nature, and I've kind of always had that sense a little bit but it just heightened it, it heightened it, so yeah I really liked that.
>
> **Retreat two diary:** Standing at the burial ground called to think of the elements and to see ourselves as part of, as dependent upon the world and everything in it. Tremendous affective power, felt complete calm and connected standing there, felt supported by the earth. When I opened my eyes, the view seemed to appear from nowhere, I had forgotten where I was, which felt incredulous, impossible, but it hit me like I was seeing it for the first time, and seeing it with a new sense of majesty when meditating I have found myself swaying, whilst standing at the burial ground this was particularly pronounced, I felt like I was moving naturally, like a plant in the wind.

Across these accounts of our retreat experiences, Paulo, Mary, and I, describe noticing and being affected by the environment. We describe experiencing a sense of connection to nature and feeling calmed and in awe. These experiences, like those of Stephen and I whilst volunteering, do not only reveal bodily susceptibility and continual emergence, but also the influence of embodied history; with both Paulo and Mary suggesting that their experiences of affective observation were bound up with their broader appreciation for green spaces and nature. There is, however, a notable point of distinction between the experiences of affective observation in the context of conservation volunteering and retreat. Whilst in the case of the former these experiences emerged naturally during pauses in the day, the retreat experiences seem to also be related to the specific goals of the retreat, and the instruction we were given. Paulo's account for instance demonstrates a commitment to noticing that is

central to mindfulness meditation, he seems to have used his time sat on the benches as an opportunity for further meditation practice. Similarly, mine and Mary's experiences of affective encounter emerged during a particular meditative activity; an "Earth, Air, Water, and Fire" meditation that took place at the top of a hill overlooking a valley. During this meditation we were encouraged to feel appreciation for nature through each of the four elements, and to reflect on our connectivity, following which we opened our eyes to take in the view. Our experiences were then, not just affected by our orientation to green spaces, but also, and perhaps more importantly, by the intentional performance of meditation (a caveat here is that becoming a regular meditator and engaging with Buddhist philosophy for a number of years, as was the case for Paulo and Mary, could affect life, and in turn interactions with the environment, more broadly as is discussed in chapter six).

7.2 Activity performances

Walking, working, and meditating (as well as the other activities that take place on retreat) were experienced in a range of ways by participants to this study, and accounts of activity performance provide a final platform from which to explore the complexities of 'therapeutic landscape' experience. In the first instance, I consider how performing activities might have resulted in positive or 'therapeutic' outcomes, and following this, explore the potential for these activities to also be associated with more negative experiences.

7.2.1 Positive or 'therapeutic' outcomes of activity performances

In this discussion of the potential for positive or 'therapeutic' outcomes to emerge from the performance of activities within 'therapeutic landscapes', I consider the emergence of: concentration, focus, awareness, or presence; and of challenges and opportunities.

7.2.1a Concentration, focus, awareness, or presence

One of the ways in which participants reflected upon their experiences of participation, and more specifically of activity performance, was by describing the emergence of concentration, focus, awareness, or presence; of being completely engaged in the activities they were performing, and of appreciating these experiences. It was in these terms that Mary and I described some of our experiences of gardening on retreat:

> **Mary:** I know they did actually advertise it as mindful gardening but I don't think I set out saying "right I'm going to do this mindfully" I just kind of quite got into it because you had to make sure each one was, I don't know if you made friends with the beetroot seedlings at any point but they're quite matted together, so I had to quite delicately tease out just one and then it's this tiny little delicate thing which you're shoving into this really harsh ground, so I'm getting a little water and a little bit of manure and I'm trying to make it nice for it, and it was quite, it was quite intricate, you did have to put some thought into it but it was quite routine then as well but yeah I did it quite mindfully, I was very nice and calm. I really cared about my beetroot seedlings.
>
> **Mary:** For probably an hour at a time sometimes I would just be there on my own just planting them quite happy, didn't feel like I had to check my phone or

do anything (laughing) it was, an hour would have passed and I was like “oh I’ve just spent an hour planting stuff”.

Retreat two diary: When gardening I wished my courgette plants well and topped them off with compost, as if tucking a child into bed. I knelt carefully and treated them gently. Completely there, completely calm.

Retreat two diary: Removing weeds from beds – aware of the physicality of the task - hand trowel – wriggling, twisting, putting pressure on, pulling, stretching and snapping roots. Kneeling and squatting, balancing with one arm. Completely present, at one with the experience.

In these accounts, Mary and I present ourselves as intensely aware of our gardening tasks, of how we interacted with the earth and plants, and of how this interaction affected us physically and emotionally; an awareness that we suggest was bound up with feelings of calm. Whilst we were both on retreat, and had been encouraged to use gardening as an opportunity for mindfulness meditation, we present our experiences as emerging naturally from the activity itself; from the interaction of body and world. The potential for different activities to promote greater ‘in-the-moment’ awareness, and to be associated with feelings of calm, has been discussed elsewhere in the ‘therapeutic landscapes’ literature (Milligan et al., 2004; Muirhead, 2012; Pitt, 2014). Muirhead (2012), and Pitt (2014) for example, observed that repetitive gardening activities, such as those described by myself and Mary, were particularly conducive to a state of awareness and to feelings of calm. Whilst the activities were repetitive, however, it is important to note that they were not mindless. Both Mary and I present ourselves as caring for the plants we were working with, and indicate

that this care affected and informed how we performed the tasks. In making this suggestion I draw upon Gorman's (2016) multi-species ethnography, within which he claims that, in the context of care farms, human experiences are affected and informed by the act of caring for non-human others, and more specifically, by a need to be aware of, and responsive to, the needs of non-human others. On these terms, our experiences of awareness and calm should be understood as emerging not only from repetition but from our susceptibility to the needs of the plants; a susceptibility likely affected by our own embodied histories, by our engagement in meditation practice, by prior interest and engagement in green spaces.

It should also be acknowledged that these experiences were not universal; that we moved in and out of states of awareness and calm:

> **Mary:** There was one day when I was up there with [another retreatant], he was a lovely guy and I did get chatting to him and then you were there, so that day I was talking a bit more perhaps more distracting, it was lovely, but different.
>
> **Retreat two diary:** When gardening I found myself watching others at work. Drawn to moments of humour. Anna being hosed down by Bridget. Jack having his hat hosed.

Our experiences of gardening, like those of sensory observation, and feelings of removal from everyday life, existed in a state of flux; produced through shifting intensities of awareness, through our susceptibilities to the different components within our networks of interaction, and in these examples, our susceptibility to the

others with whom we were retreating. The potential for experiences of activities to vary in such a way, for participant experiences of activities to sometimes be associated with a state of awareness and calm, and at others, to be characterised by interactions with others, was not accounted for by Pitt (2014) and Muirhead (2007), who present experiences as varying between people rather than for an individual over time. Moreover, Pitt (2014) also assumes a relationship between awareness, or flow, and the 'therapeutic-ness' of 'therapeutic landscapes', an assumption implicit in the following:

> It is important to recognise how the environment and other people determine the potential for activities to be therapeutic: flow must be put in place (p.88).

I suggest that this does not account for the positive experiences Mary and I had when we were not intensely aware of the activities we were undertaking; a suggestion that reflects and builds upon the earlier discussion of the potential value of bringing the everyday into a 'therapeutic landscape', and of not necessarily or consistently being aware of the environment. Although we did not discuss social interactions in relation to particular 'therapeutic' outcomes, at the very least they seem to have been enjoyable; and interactions with others were, for both Mary and I, an important part of our overall experiences, reflecting the importance placed on social interactions in Gesler's initial 'therapeutic landscape' framework (1998, 1996, 1993, 1992):

AE: What was the best part of your retreat?

Mary:…the people and people watching, and watching other people react and reacting with people and yeah that's still the most probably enjoyable part of it, and the gardening, don't do gardening, liked the gardening.

Retreat two diary: [sometimes the meditation room] was associated with an immense sense of connectedness with the others in the room and with the world as a whole.

I had no overwhelming sense of healing power in Lourdes as others have reported. However, I can honestly say that I was psychologically and spiritually renewed. I believe this was mainly due to the spirit of communitas which I felt and the Turners (Turner and Turner, 1978) report as well. For five days I was totally caught up among a group of 'good' people. They accepted me, did not wear their religion on their sleeves, answered all my questions about Lourdes and their faith honestly, and were alternatively fun-loving and quietly pious as the occasion demanded. They cared for and counselled each other. One part of my mind objects to the mumbo-jumbo of the ritual and the utter vulgarity of the commercialism. On the other hand, walking along with thousands of like-minded people in colourful processions or sitting in absolute silence at midnight near the grotto were moving experiences for me. (Gesler, 1996; p.104)

That experiences of activity performance in 'therapeutic landscapes' can be associated with an intense 'in-the-moment' awareness and feelings of calm, and moreover that these exist in a state of flux, is also apparent in the following accounts from conservation volunteers June and Robert:

June: Walling is probably my perfect occupation because you can be completely absorbed in it away from everything else, well I can, but for somebody who doesn't like walling, that wouldn't be the case for them would it, people might get the same feeling just gardening or looking at other outdoor things to do, but I think walling, because it concentrates your mind away from all the rubbish and that that's around you, apart from listening to all the jokes and things, subconsciously listening to the jokes, unless you're one of these men who turn up and know it all but don't, you're actually trying to get this, I know there's no such thing as the perfect stone but you're trying to get, as best you can, and it's like concentrated isn't it, and you're almost like clearing your mind of everything else, and when you've done it you think "oh yeah I can switch on again now".

June: So for me, because I like walling, I do find it, people say "well it must be hard work" and I say "no because I find the process so relaxing and switched off that the actual lifting, the physical lifting I don't notice".

June: I get frustrated some days, even now, and we always say "oh your stones are better on your side" we always joke don't we, but that's part of the banter of it, some days I can't get going properly 'till lunch time and some days you can go in and go straight away, and I don't know why because the stones are the stones whatever time of day it is, it must be something that's not clicked in that morning, that you would like to click in every time you approach a wall.

Robert: When I'm walling or hedge-laying I'm working out the jigsaw, if I'm looking at something like that then I'm completely focused on it, there might be something obviously if you see a buzzard, down in Oxfordshire it's red kites they're all over the place, and they're just a beautiful bird aren't they, so yes your mind just gets away with that, but I try to think about the project at hand, what's the best way to do this, it's got to last a long time!

In these descriptions, June and Robert present their experiences of dry-stone walling and hedge-laying as not only characterised by an intense 'in-the-moment' awareness, but also by a susceptibility to the environment and people in and with which they

worked, reflecting previous examples considered in this chapter. Their experiences of intense awareness (resulting from activity performance) existed alongside looking at nature and listening to others; interactions that do not seem to have detracted from their overall experience. Further to this, June's accounts also demonstrate that reaching a state of awareness during dry-stone walling is not guaranteed, that, as is discussed in the post-phenomenological literature (Ahmed, 2004; Bissell, 2009, 2008; Harrison, 2008; Leder, 1990; McCormack, 2002; Wylie, 2009), body and world may not necessarily meet completely, as a consequence of the "constitutive aspects of absence, dislocation and distancing, notions of authentic dwelling-in-the-world, of 'proper' placing and belonging" (Wylie, 2009, p.287).

Whilst an intense 'in-the-moment' awareness has so far been discussed as emerging naturally from performances and body-world interactions, the accounts of retreatants offer additional insight into experiences of intentionally trying to cultivate such a state:

> **Paulo:** I find it [the experience of gardening] really different 'cos the fact that you must be concentrated in this task so when I was weeding sometimes the thoughts of my mind attacks me but I said to myself that I must be concentrated in this task, so it was great to improve my mind concentration to not be distracted with the thoughts and I really like it, I think I haven't done all the work on the garden, but it's like, if you put all your concentration in this work it doesn't take too much time so yes, great amazing.
>
> **Paulo:** I spoke with Max about the problem of concentrating in the moment and don't be distracted by the thoughts of the mind, and he told me that it's something hard and that there are some people that have big experience in sitting and they still have problems in some moments to be with all the

concentration in the present moment, so that is something that calmed me, 'cos it's like I want to have a good level in meditation and it's like keep calm no and you can have 30 years of experience in sitting and you can still have a, usually will have problems, 'cos to control the mind it's something really, really hard, so difficult.

Paulo: I've never done three times a day, and about 40 minutes, it was like *scared facial expression*, so I thought that I would fall asleep, I did struggle with the concentration.

Irene: I think the was the first time I could actually meditate was during the walking meditation when [the brother] was talking about, at the beginning of the walking meditation he was talking about like the dog like…when we meditate we have so many thoughts in our mind but that's ok, and when I was meditating before, when I was trying to do that, I had so many thoughts, they kept coming to my mind, and I felt very frustrated about that because I couldn't concentrate, but after when he was like guiding us how to deal when the thoughts keep coming up…I know that it's ok, that everyone has so many thoughts coming to them when they try to do meditation but that's ok, I feel ok accepting them, but also like facing the thoughts when they're coming to me, and I tell myself to go back to the breathing.

Kate: Every time I was meditating and my mind drifted, every single time I would bring it back, and would keep focusing on meditating.

These accounts of meditation practice, like those related to other activities, highlight the complexities and contingencies of becoming intensely aware; and demonstrate, for instance, that experiences of intense awareness arising from meditation practice, similarly exist in a state of flux, affected and informed by bodily susceptibilities. Indeed, Paulo, Irene, and Kate, present meditation as characterised by an ongoing effort to re-focus their wandering minds, a presentation that is consistent with the

expectations for meditation practice described in the following passage by Amaro (2011):

> The mind can be very agitated or quite peaceful; the mind can calm down quite quickly or resist calming down. One cannot control these things, and there's no hard and fast rule about how meditation will work at any given time. People vary, situations vary, and moods vary. However, as a general rule, the more one trains the attention to settle with the breath, the easier it becomes to do. Making the effort to develop this skill with application and persistence, with constant repetition, leads to the practice slowly sinking in, and one begins to train the heart to be more clearly attentive to the natural flow of the breath. After practising for some time, the attention can stay with the breath without wandering off into thought or distraction too much. One is able to stay focused with the attention resting on the breathing (p.10).

In this passage Amaro (2011) also presents meditation as not only fluctuating, but also as a learned practice, as something that likely improves over time; a claim that suggests the experiences described by Paulo, Irene, and Kate, are bound to their own embodied histories, to their previous engagements with meditation practice. The connection between embodied history and experiences of meditation practice on retreat is explicit in the words of Paulo, who relates the difficulties he experienced meditating on retreat, to differences between his home practice and practice on retreat. In addition to this explicit example, embodied histories may have also affected and informed Paulo, Irene, and Kate's experiences of meditation on retreat by

influencing their expectations. Their prior experiences of meditation, and their motivation to attend the retreat partly in order to improve their practice, likely affected how they encountered meditation; and more specifically, how they felt about and managed difficult experiences (such as loss of focus). Their embodied histories indicate that they were aware, to some degree at least, that meditation is (as described by Amaro, 2011) not always associated with a still mind, or with feelings of calm, and that it is often quite a difficult and involved process of continually re-focussing the mind. Whilst Conradson (2011) suggests that his own meditation practice was associated with physical discomfort and with "distraction rather than settled tranquillity" (p.80), as a consequence of his lack of prior experience, of being "largely uninitiated" and "less accustomed" to meditation practice (p.80), these experiences are common even for the initiated and the accustomed. Moreover, whilst these difficult experiences left Conradson (2011) feeling like "an unsuccessful retreatant" (p.80), Paulo, Irene, and Kate did not describe feeling like this (for a discussion on difficult experiences of meditation see 7.2.2a).

In addition to demonstrating the complexities of performing meditation, of seeking intense 'in-the-moment' awareness, Paulo, Irene, and Kate's, accounts of meditation, also offer insight into the complexities of 'therapeutic' outcomes arising from activities. More specifically, whilst in the descriptions of intense 'in-the-moment' awareness that arose naturally from activity performances, there is an association

between this state of being and feelings of calm, meditation was not discussed by Paulo, Irene, and Kate in these terms. The absence of such reflections does not, however, indicate that meditation was not 'therapeutic' for them; rather, it highlights how they approached meditation and retreat as a whole. Paulo, Irene, and Kate, consistent with Amaro (2011), saw their meditation practice as a long-term endeavour; with their skill developing over time, and potentially helping them to realise longer-term goals, and in particular, improvements to their mental health (discussed in chapter five). They did not, in other words, attend the retreat or practice meditation in order to receive 'in-the-moment' 'therapeutic' outcomes, but rather to change their lives; they were, drawing upon Kaley et al.'s (2019) framing of 'therapeutic' outcomes, intended to be 'transformative' rather than 'ameliorating'.

7.2.1b Challenges and opportunities

Performing the activities of conservation volunteering and group walking, as well as those associated with retreat (sitting meditation and gardening etc.), was not only discussed in relation to the cultivation of intense 'in-the-moment' awareness. Indeed, many participants reflected upon their performance of activities by discussing experiences of challenges and opportunities. Reflection in these terms is apparent in the following words from walkers, Ben, Mel, Elizabeth and myself:

> **Ben:** [the strain] helps you with sense of achievement, 'cos yeah you can, you can get "yeah I've actually walked to the top of this mountain" and that's been a physical struggle and I managed it, but at the same time if you get a view

from the top that's even better 'cos you're like, that's totally worth it, it's just that one step.

Ben: If I get like muscular aches and things like that through exertion rather than just exacerbating injury I'd say that increases the sense of satisfaction, if you do a walk and you're like "yeah thighs don't really hurt, calves don't hurt that much, and you're like "wellll". I'm not saying it's been a bad walk but at the same time I kind of like to feel a little bit of pain, enough to make me know I'm sort of, I mean I do it for fitness as well so you're like "I wanna feel like I'm getting somewhere".

Mel: yeah I think sometimes if it's like, a couple of times where it's been miserable weather "ah I really don't feel great, I'm soggy and I just want a drink" erm but yeah, Scafell Pike I was like "wow highest point in England that's quite an achievement".

Mel: I think, yeah on top of the hill, that's probably the point where you reassess; "ah ok there's a sense of achievement in getting this view", or just in making it to the top if there's no view. It's good though, if you can get to the top and look back down where you've come from…Was it Newlands Horseshoe? That was quite good, 'cos it was a nice, you look back 'round and think "I've done all that today that's quite good" I think there is.

Elizabeth: Yeah you do need the hills 'cos there's that achievement to the hill, the walk that I got injured and limped the last two miles I was in a grump anyway because actually there wasn't a hill or a point, you do need, I think for me you need to.

Diary: The strain of the climb and the overheating weren't particularly 'pleasant' experiences. The difficult phases were, however, followed by feelings of achievement, of relief, and by opportunities to re-observe the landscape with the benefit of height.

Across these accounts, Elizabeth, Mel, and I, describe experiencing walks as physically challenging, as associated with, for instance: physical struggle or exhaustion, muscular pains, and with discomfort from being hot, cold, and wet. These descriptions of

challenge, like those of intense 'in-the-moment' awareness, demonstrate the emergence of experience from our interaction with the environment; from our susceptibility to the external world. That our experiences of embodied activities emerged in this way, as a consequence of being open to and affected by the external world, reflects the suggestions of others contributing to the 'therapeutic landscapes' and related literatures (Foley, 2015; Lea, 2008; Nettleton, 2015; Wylie, 2002). Whilst these contributions are differently aligned, they each present experiences, and in turn, experiencing body-subjects, as emerging through the relationship between the body and the external world as a consequence of embodied interactions and susceptibility. It is in these terms that Nettleton (2015) for example, discusses the performance of fell-running, and suggests that running-bodies are in a continual process of "becoming, altering and working with" the physical environment, affected by the "wind, stone [and] rain" (p.770); and that Lea (2008) describes becoming increasingly and differently aware of her body whilst performing yoga, as a consequence of the environment in which she performed.

In addition to discussing the ways in which our bodies were affected through their interactions, how they were challenged and moved, for instance, into states of physical discomfort; we also suggest that these experiences of challenge were related to feelings of pride and achievement. More specifically, we present feelings of pride and achievement as both mitigating some of the negative aspects of challenge, and as

emerging from these. The relationship between challenging experiences, and feelings of pride and achievement, has been observed elsewhere in the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature (Macpherson, 2017; Muirhead, 2012). For instance, in his work looking at experiences of conservation volunteering in Scotland, Muirhead (2012) draws a direct connection between "physical effort and exertion" and "feelings of satisfaction and achievement" (p.151). Similarly, Macpherson (2017) in relation to experiences of group walking, suggests that "reaching summits and sites of collective national significance" was particularly conducive to feelings of achievement, and that the emergence of these feelings was bound up with a sense of meeting personal, and socially significant challenges (p.254).

In her discussion of socially significant challenges, Macpherson (2017) alludes to the emergence of experience not only through bodily susceptibility, through the physical interaction of bodies and worlds, but also through a mental susceptibility, a susceptibility to ideas around how and why experiences are valuable, how and why they are challenging and worthy of feelings of achievement; a susceptibility that is apparent in Ben and Mel's accounts:

> **Ben:** As I say, if you do like Skiddaw, which is like 900m, it's one of the top 10 tallest it's just something else, and like Scafell Pike, I'm the tallest, I'm the highest person in England right now. That's quite something to say, even that's kind of cool.
>
> **Mel:** yeah I think sometimes if it's like, a couple of times where it's been miserable weather "ah I really don't feel great, I'm soggy and I just want a

drink" erm but yeah, Scafell Pike I was like "wow highest point in England that's quite an achievement".

The association between ascending Scafell and Skiddaw and feelings of achievement within these passages, indicates that notions of challenge, and in turn of achievement, can be ascribed *a priori* to endeavours, for instance to ascending particular fells, by virtue of their size and stature. Ascending Scafell or Skiddaw is to reach the top of England, and to do so implies a challenge worthy of feelings of pride or achievement. It is important to note though, that the value ascribed to sites and to particular achievements is likely also individually specific. Walkers were not alone in discussing their experiences of participation as associated with challenges. Indeed, conservation volunteers, including myself and Stephen, also reflected upon conservation work in this way:

> **Diary:** Sawing/lopping and dragging the plants was empowering, it made me feel strong and capable. It was also a puzzle, the older plants had complex networks of trailing branches that wrapped around each other and the trunk. In order to fell these I had to saw the trunks from multiple points, as well as cut through a lot of branches. Often, even once the trunk had been sawed through, the Rhodi would remain in the same position, and would only fall after a particular branch, or combination of branches, had been cut. At times this was incredibly frustrating, even overwhelming, and exhausting. When particularly difficult plants had been felled I felt a sense of relief, maybe even joy (see figures 7 and 8 for photographs of this work).
>
> **Stephen:** There's people who do it who can't lift particular things like the older people for example, like Paul for example, he's never going to lift a wheelbarrow like I can so, so [physical strength] matters in terms of getting the job done I think, like hauling all those wheelbarrows up the hills, no disrespect

but a lot of people would struggle doing that over and over and over, so it's yeah, it matters in that respect, but not in terms of just enjoying being outside, and enjoying being part of the volunteering group.

AE: You feel like you have an important role then?

Stephen: Honestly yeah because the first time when me and Jack did it and we were hauling all that stuff I thought "How long would this take if we weren't here" you know there would have been a few of you that would have been tired after a few, compared to me and Jack. That made me feel pretty useful and kind of proud, although that's weird to say… At the same time it's almost a burden because I think "oh I could…I'd like to do some of the other stuff but I'm needed to do the heavy lifting" because who else is gonna do it. When we were doing it last time I thought "who else" last time, all the guys were doing it a bit up the hill, but there's no doubt I went up the hill more times than anyone else. So yeah it's almost a burden cos I think "oh I'd like to shovel some stuff into a wheel barrow" but then if I say "can I stop and shovel stuff into a wheel barrow you'd think "are you kidding? who's going to push them up the hill". It's quite interesting actually 'cos I like doing it, and being vain I like being needed.

In these accounts, Stephen and I describe experiences of conservation work that were characterised by physical strain and endurance; experiences that were partially made through our individual susceptibility to the external world (Foley, 2015; Lea, 2008; Nettleton, 2015; Wylie, 2002); to the Rhododendron with its complex networks of roots and branches, and to the physical terrain and weight of the wheel-barrow. Moreover, these challenging experiences were, as was the case in the accounts of walking, associated with feelings of pride and achievement, an association also observed by Muirhead (2012) who suggested that that "the physical effort and exertion of many of the active [conservation] tasks…contributed towards feelings of

satisfaction and achievement" (p.151). In addition to highlighting the potential for the performance of tasks to be associated with pride and achievement, Muirhead (2012) also noted that experiencing activities in this way was not universal, and suggested that experiences were affected and informed by bodily difference; and more specifically, by the compatibility of bodies with the work. For people whose bodies were less compatible, as a consequence of, for instance, levels of physical strength, Muirhead (2012) claimed that the "physicality of the work [was] an element that potentially excluded them or made them feel like an outsider" (p.148). Reflecting the understanding of subjectivity and experience as continually emergent through susceptibilities and shifting intensities of awareness, however, mine and Ben's accounts of activity performance, suggest that not only do these experiences vary between people as is suggested by Muirhead (2012) but also for individuals over time; that experiences are (as has been stated throughout) neither universal nor consistent.

My own feelings of pride for instance, emerged in the context of my broader experiences of conservation work, and the tendency for these to be associated with considerable difficulties, with pain and frustration (discussed later in the chapter). That I felt proud reflected not only what I had managed to do, for instance felling the Rhododendron (see figures 5 and 6), but also this history of misalignment, of struggling to perform the tasks. Distinct from my experiences, Stephen's feelings of achievement and pride were partly a consequence of believing that he offered something to the

group that no one else did, in light of his youth and physical strength. These bodily qualities, however, also sometimes negatively affected Stephen's experience, and resulted in him feeling unable to choose to perform tasks that were less labour intensive, but that he might have enjoyed more; feelings that reflect the social pressures associated with being a young man; and, moreover, the potential for these pressures to affect and inform emergent experiences as a consequence of embodied-orientation (Ahmed, 2006; Limmer, 2010).

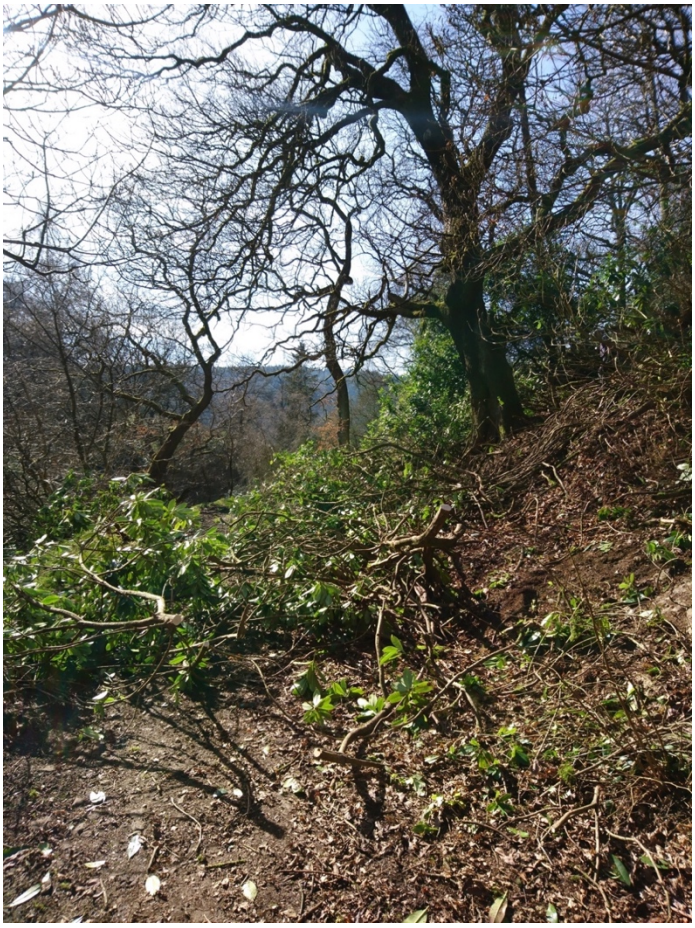

Figure 5 - Felled Rhododendron

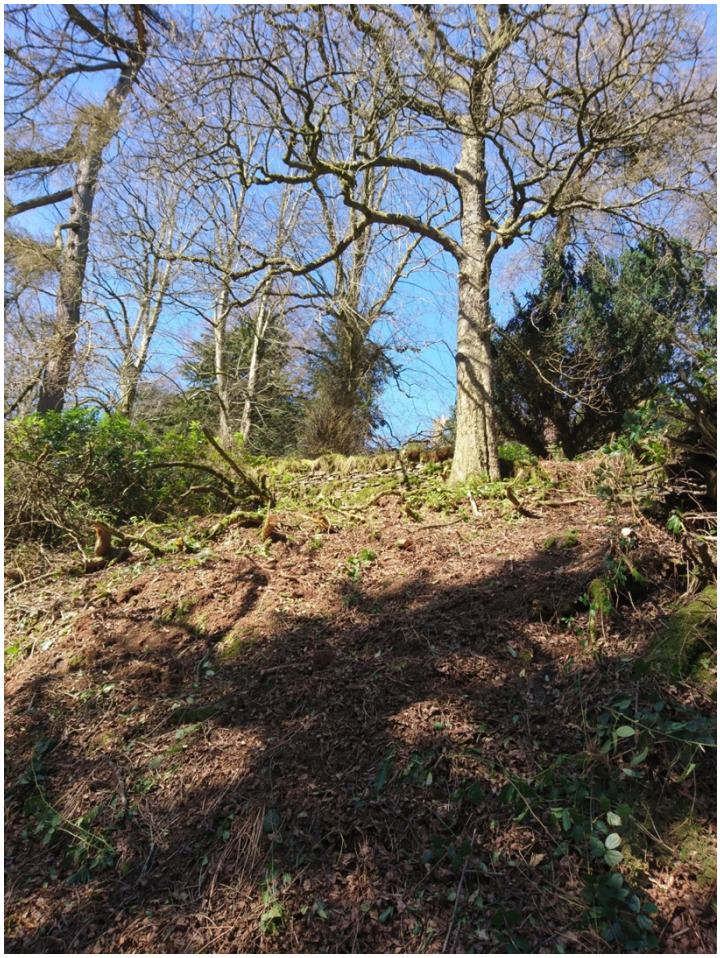

Figure 6 - Cleared bank

A final way in which participants, and in particular, retreatants (in relation to their experiences of gardening), and conservation volunteers, reflected upon their performance of activities, was by discussing experiences of bringing about material change, of making a mark:

Diary: With each cut I let more light in, receiving this with gratitude and pleasure – taking a moment to look at the new view and to be warmed by the spring sun – seeing progress like this made me feel powerful.

Stephen: After volunteering I'm satisfied to put it in word, it's good, I'm in a good mood for the next two days, three days, 'cos you feel like you've done something. With what I do day to day a lot of it is very long term so I don't leave work at the end of the day and think "right that's been accomplished" 'cos it might be six months before I see the fruits of my labour, so with volunteering I can step back at the end and think that we've done that, that's good, I get immense satisfaction from it to be honest, I love it, I love doing it. I were just thinking if we were doing the same thing every time we went, so if I was hauling the wheel barrows every time I went would I still get the satisfaction from it, or would I be a bit bored from it, but I think I probably would because you've still done something, you've still contributed to it, seeing a path progress, how finished it is, is good, especially seeing people walk on it, afterwards or during, and thank you, yeah yeah yeah that was a weird thing, people rarely thank me in day jobs but yeah that was strange when they were saying "oh you've done a good job", right I'll move this twice as fast now, it boosted me for like an hour.

June: I'm no good at jigsaws, well I can do jigsaws but I don't do them because I can't sit still long enough to do jigsaws and then I think "when you've done it, what do I do with it, put it back in the box" when you've done a wall the wall is not only something you like doing, if you like doing it, it absorbs you while you're doing it, it obviously needed doing, and then you've got something that's gonna stand hopefully for at least fifty odd years and it's of some use when you've finished it, and, with a bit of luck, it looks quite good and it fits in with the landscape, so what's not to like about it…

John: At the end of the day, when you leave the task, you want to think "well you know I did a good job there" I get a real buzz out of working with these people, working here, doing this job, and doing something useful…it means that I can actually make a difference, slight, irrelevant almost, but we all need to feel that.

> **John:** With walling, well there is something of a buzz about creating something that looks good, I should think pottery, or anything, same sort of thing, it's wonderful to make something that looks good in the landscape.

Whilst in 5.1.2 I highlighted how conservation volunteers who participated in this research were not motivated by a "need to find activities and occupations that allows them to meet others and carry out meaningful activities that can contribute to feelings of worth and status" (O'Brien et al., 2010, p.539), the accounts of participation presented here suggest that such feelings, as well as a sense of satisfaction, did emerge through the performance of conservation work. Moreover, these accounts indicate that such feelings were a consequence of being able to bring about a material change. Stephen suggested that for him the value of bringing about material change, lay, partially at least, in the lack of opportunities to "see the fruits of [his] labour" in his everyday, and this claim can be understood in relation to a wider body of 'therapeutic landscapes' literature that has demonstrated the importance of context to the emergence of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences and 'therapeutic' outcomes (Andrews and Holmes, 2007; Conradson, 2005; Wood et al., 2013), and through the understanding of subjectivity outlined within this thesis. If the body-subject is continually emergent and a locus of history, then 'therapeutic landscape' experiences (as has been argued throughout) are inseparable from the everyday, and, are in turn, individually specific. It is also worth noting that Stephen and John also began volunteering in order to give something back for their enjoyment of nature (5.2.2) and

the feelings they describe here may be bound up with this motivation, a connection that Muirhead (2012) also draws:

> The motivations that individuals expressed were often centralised in the ethics that supported the volunteer work. There was a sense of stewardship and responsibility for the environment, again providing a temporal link through the past, present and future. This feeling was not only for future generations of people but for the future of the environment, with the individual volunteer achieving a certain goal or contributing towards a specific ecological aim. These practical goals may be related to the upkeep of an urban park, or they may be related to planting a certain amount of trees (p.149).

Whilst retreatants Mary and Kate did not attend a retreat in order to 'give back' to the environment, each describes their experiences of gardening, and of making a material change, in these terms:

> **Mary:** I quite liked the fact that I was going to plant it and it was going to grow, I was up there every night watering them (laughing) "oh I'll go and water them I'll go and water them" it was partly for something to do but it was I wanted to nurture it, because it was so hot and they were so *does sad drooping plant impression*, and having invested quite a bit of time, you know 2 hours a day planting all these blinking beetroot seedlings, and I was like well they're not dying on my watch, while I'm here they're going to be looked after so there's a slight goal, success thing there I guess. But yeah I felt quite, not proud of them, I just wanted them to thrive I guess. It was very satisfying.

> **Kate:** I don't think I get enough of an opportunity to be outside, I really enjoy gardening, I really enjoy getting my hands dirty, erm and I think that knowing that…I saw it before and I got see the actual change that we, that I'd made and that everyone else had made in the garden. And more than, perhaps, the other chores that were stuff that only affected the people that were on the retreat, like washing up, doing the laundry, chopping the vegetables and stuff, I knew that doing the garden would be beneficial to people that came on retreat after

> I'd left…it was sort of like I was leaving my mark on [the centre], even though it's not permanent that change, whatever I was doing, wasn't just for the benefit of the people who were there, it's for the benefit of everyone who goes to visit the house.

Whilst they were not motivated to attend a retreat in order to 'give back', however, their experiences should be understood within the context of their prior interest in, and appreciation for, being outdoors (expressed explicitly by Kate here and by Mary in 7.2.1a), and perhaps also for Kate, as bound up with the retreat context.

The activities of group walking and conservation volunteering, as well as those that take place on retreat, such as meditation and gardening, can then, in some instances, be associated with the emergence of positive or 'therapeutic' outcomes, such as: greater focus that may promote feelings of calm; and providing a challenge or an opportunity to make a mark, that may promote feelings of pride, satisfaction, or worth. The emergence of these outcomes is, however, complicated, bound up with embodied history and embodied difference, and with susceptibilities and shifting intensities of awareness, and in turn, neither a consistent nor universal feature of 'therapeutic landscape' engagements. Moreover, just as activities can be associated with positive or 'therapeutic' outcomes, so too can they with more negative experiences, and it is to these I now turn.

7.2.2 It's not all good

Throughout this thesis I have emphasised the fluidity of experience, and have, in so doing, presented a case for 'therapeutic landscape' experiences to be understood as complex, as individually specific, and as continually emergent. Throughout I have also noted that experiences within 'therapeutic landscape' are not always positive ones, and here, to bring this final empirical chapter to a close, I look explicitly at some of the difficult experiences participants had whilst walking and performing conservation work, as well as during retreat activities; experiences that broadly fit int the categories of: difficulties performing the tasks, and physical discomfort.

7.2.2a Difficulties performing the activities

One important way in which retreatants, and notably myself and Mary, reflected upon our experiences of meditation was by describing the difficulties we had performing the practice; as is apparent in the following diary extracts and in passages from Mary's interview:

> **Retreat one diary:** The meditation was first characterised by a state of bliss, of complete calm and contentment. Soon I became distracted, by thoughts of the people I met and had briefly spoken to, I was following these thoughts, concocting stories.
>
> **Retreat one diary:** Drawn to narrative – to thinking about people here and, albeit less frequently, those at home and in other places.
>
> **Retreat three diary:** Revealed the chaos of my mind, its need for distraction, its need to think. Thoughts were random, sporadic, and consuming. Revealed

also, in the early sessions, my exhaustion, my inability to control my mind, to focus my mind, coming from a position of fatigue.

Mary: There was one where there was a bell at 20 minutes and one at the end and the first 20 minutes had been absolutely fine but that's probably what I do myself, 20 minute ones, I tend to not do long ones, so after 20 minutes I was like "I probably could do another 20 minutes" and it went on forever. So sometimes it was just longer than I sit normally, and there's probably a reason I don't do longer ones, because I find it difficult, but then I kind of went there on purpose knowing I would have to do it, I thought it might, if I did it more regularly it might become easier, I thought it might get easier through the week, it didn't.

Mary: Sometimes I'd be like following the breath, and then it'd be like planning, thinking, judging how long have I got to do this, judging myself for not being good enough at it, then doing it ok again.

Mary: I thought they'd be more guided, most of the meditations I do are guided, I'm still not really not that up on doing them in silence, so I guess I wasn't as practiced as other people might have been at that bit, so I'd have liked more guided, but most probably wouldn't have.

Whilst the potential for meditation to be difficult has already been discussed; in the experiences previously considered, participants reflected upon managing the difficulties they faced during their practice, and on understanding that these were an inevitable part of meditation. In mine and Mary's description of meditation practice here, however, we present our experiences as much more negative and suggest that we were sometimes unable to direct our attention; and moreover, that these difficulties were coupled with judgement about, and frustration with, our abilities. The experiences we describe here are reflective of those of Conradson (2011), who claimed that his meditation practice on retreat was characterised by "distraction

rather than settled tranquillity" (p.80), and that he was left feeling like "an unsuccessful retreatant" (p.80). I suggested earlier (7.2.1a) that Conradson's (2011) experiences of meditation, and how he perceived these, did not indicate an inability to meditate, that they were not a measure of success, but rather suggest a lack of awareness of just how chaotic meditation can be; a lack of awareness that his experiences were perfectly normal. Mine and Mary's accounts show that even after years of practicing meditation, experiences can still be chaotic, and that sometimes it may be impossible to direct attention. As Amaro (2011) explains:

> The mind can be very agitated or quite peaceful; the mind can calm down quite quickly or resist calming down. One cannot control these things, and there's no hard and fast rule about how meditation will work at any given time. People vary, situations vary, and moods vary… (p.10)

As such, our experiences emerged beyond our intention, affected and informed by our susceptibilities to other people and places, and to the wandering of our minds. Even after years of experience we still found this unpleasant and judged ourselves for it. It should be noted that Mary, like Paulo and Conradson (2011) also made a connection between her experiences of meditation and her embodied history, and suggests that she may have found meditation on retreat particularly difficult because of the difference in length and style of the sessions relative to her home practice.

Difficulties performing activities was also a central feature of my experiences of conservation volunteering as I suggested earlier when discussing the emergence of feelings of pride, and these difficulties are clear in the following diary extracts:

> **Diary:** This work was physically demanding and also skilled…I found using the saw tricky, getting the angle correct proved difficult, and I found myself getting the blade stuck quite frequently…according to the man I was working with the problems I encountered were a consequence of my inability to saw in a straight line. Once the trunk had been sawn it was often necessary to manoeuvre the tree to untangle branches, and also to saw the felled tree into smaller pieces before moving them to the piles of deadwood (created to form habitat).

> **Diary:** [The work was at times] challenging and frustrating. The wider branched tops of trees, whilst light, were awkward to move; movements had to be negotiated in relation to the other trees and obstacles in the way. On a few occasions I found myself wondering if others were watching me and thinking I was incompetent. I actually had those fears whilst sawing as well. Like moving the trees, sawing evoked concerns that my incompetence would be noted and commented on. Sawing was also frustrating at times, when despite my efforts nothing seemed to be happening very quickly. On the larger trees I got sick of the time it was taking and increased the effort I put in; effort that I felt in both the sawing and steadying arms and in my heart rate and patterns of breathing.

> **Diary:** This teaching kept me present - although sometimes I drifted, I'd been told it before but it hadn't made me a better Waller… I found these stones much more difficult to work with, I found it tricky to work out where to place stones, and I seemed to spend a lot of time staring at the piles on the ground. There was also a lot of standing around holding stones not knowing what to do with them. I lacked confidence at first and regularly asked June if a stone worked where I had placed it (it rarely did). It did become easier over the course of the day though, as I got used to the task, and as we got nearer to the top of the wall (and so were using smaller stones).

> **Diary:** I was also occasionally annoyed, thoughts flittered through my mind about not being good enough, when for instance I missed the barrow and my rocks fell to the ground, when I lost balance and nearly fell into the pile… or maybe even off it, and when my shovel was consistently half-full when compared with those of others.

Whilst at other times, and for other people, conservation volunteering was associated with meeting challenges, and with subsequent feelings of pride and achievement. My own experiences of conservation volunteering were often associated with a misalignment, with being unable to perform the tasks, unable to use the tools, to lay stones for a wall, or to carry the weights expected; experiences I found very difficult. Sometimes I felt out of place and out of my depth. My embodied history did not prepare me well for this work.

The difficulties I encountered, and more specifically how I felt about these, were not, however, only a consequence my abilities and my lack of experience, but also of my susceptibility to others, something I alluded to in the above passages, and also discussed in interviews with Stephen and June:

> **Me:** you feel like you have an important role then?
>
> **Stephen:** Honestly yeah because the first time when me and Jack did it and we were hauling all that stuff I thought "How long would this take if we weren't here" you know there would have been a few of you that would have been tired after a few, compared to me and Jack…
>
> **Me:** Yeah I can't lift as much and sometimes I feel like I wish I could, for instance when we were shovelling stones and stuff and the guys are joking to me that nothing's on my spade, I'm bloody trying here.

> **June:** I think, you get new people, and I think it's nice if new people can come and think at the end of the day "oh I'd like come again", but then of course, you get people who, as you know, as you've experienced, and I think I've got to the stage of thinking "oh well it's just how you are" people who haven't been before, and John says to them "have you walled before" and they say "oh yes", and then when they set off it's blatantly obvious that they haven't got a clue, and without being sexist, I think it's a man thing, and I have known ladies, females, who have been put off by that attitude, basically on the walling side, and they just haven't come again, and I've said "oh we've not seen you" and they say "well I just can't…" and I say "well that was a particularly bad day but whoever it was, was being really smarty" and basically "don't let them beat you".
>
> **Me:** I've had it where people have been a bit sexist in assuming that I'm going to lopper things rather than dig things…and I feel that because of that I try to be really strong and out-do myself. So we were chopping down Rhodi, like massive ones, and I was dragging them and I shouldn't have been…
>
> **June:** I know. Power to weight. I know I know. I'll show you, I can do it… yeah [on the tree planting days] well we can only carry so many [bags of stuff – including saplings, posts, and tools], we can only carry a few, and then it's a long way back to get another few, but I, I don't let it bother me, most of the men who come with us, the regulars, are nice, and others I just ignore.

I compared myself to others, and judged myself against what others could do. Moreover, whilst June seems to have not been so affected by being a woman in an environment often dominated by a particular form of hyper-masculinity, my own experiences were very clearly affected and informed by this, and I altered how I behaved in order to seem capable and not like a 'weak woman'. In addition to demonstrating my susceptibility to others, that I and my experiences emerged through my openness to others, the experiences I describe here also demonstrate the

influences of orientations (Ahmed, 2006); and more specifically, the potential for some oriented-bodies and spaces, to inhibit the possibilities of others, both directly, and indirectly through internalisation. Performing conservation work was, I suggest, at least some of the time, associated with a state of *disorientation*; a state that Ahmed (2006) suggests emerges when bodies move into coherences or space-times to which they are not oriented, and within which their possibilities are restricted. In her reading of Ahmed (2006), Simonsen (2012) describes *disorientation* as associated with feelings of insecurity, and with a shattering of "one's sense of confidence in the ground of one's existence" (p.20), experiences I suggest are apparent in my accounts of performing conservation work, of changing my behaviour, and worrying about my abilities.

7.2.2.b Physical discomfort

A final way in which participants reflected upon their experiences of performing the activities of walking and conservation work, and of the activities associated with retreat, was by describing how these performances sometimes led to physical discomfort:

> **Diary:** Physical pain – sat down and my back was searing, feared I might not be able to get myself up. I definitely carried too much, bent over too much, maybe I'm not meant to be a Waller.
>
> **Diary:** Walk to site was much longer than I had expected and I found the strain on my arms from carrying the wooden stakes unbearable. Although I kept

> changing the carrying position, to try and use my muscles differently, this lessened the pain only briefly. I found myself actively having to breathe through it. Coupled with this, the plastic bag of trees I was carrying seemed to be cutting off circulation to my hands…Near to the site I dropped half of the stakes to the ground and carried on without them.
>
> **Diary:** During the initial sawing and lopping there was also a battle with the bracken which covered the woodland floor and was wrapped around the Rhodi. The gloves I was using were a 'large' and proved completely useless, I spent a lot of time in pain and pulling out splinters.

As well as sometimes struggling with the performance of conservation work, with directing my bodily movements in the required ways, in these diary extracts I suggest that I also experienced physical discomfort. The potential for pain to emerge through activity performance has been observed by others contributing to the post-phenomenological literature (Nettleton, 2015; Wylie, 2005), with Wylie (2005) for instance, discussing his experiences of pain on a long-distance walk:

> The truth is I was never fit enough to walk fully-laden over steep, broken ground for nearly 200 miles. The afternoons emerged as footsore, doleful spaces of self-pity. Bruised shoulders, aching hip-joints, kneecaps and, above all, heels and toes (Wylie, 2005).

Whilst Wylie (2005) suggests that his experiences of discomfort were a testament to his own bodily form and capabilities, taking direction from Leder (1990), Ahmed (2004), and Bissell (2008), I argue that they were also affected and informed by bodily susceptibility (with susceptibility varying between people and over time), by an openness to the external world with which he interacted, and it is in this way that I

reflect upon my own experiences. My discomfort was affected and informed by a susceptibility to the tools I used, to the splintering wood, to the weight of that which I carried, and to the handles of the plastic bag. I experienced physical discomfort not simply because of my body, but because I used it in particular ways. Moreover, my experiences of discomfort were also affected and informed by the context; by the absence of small gloves, which made me more susceptible than I might otherwise have been to the materials I was working with. The potential for context to affect and inform experiences in this way has been considered by others including Ahmed (2006), in her work on orientation. Not only, Ahmed (2006) suggests, do different bodies have different capacities to affect and to be affected as a consequence of their orientation, but the orientations of some bodies, spaces, and objects, can in turn, also inhibit what is possible for others. It is in these terms that Ahmed (2006) reflects upon experiences of sitting comfortably, and suggests that chairs fit some bodies better than others; that they are designed with particular bodily forms, in mind. Whether a person experiences comfort or discomfort when interacting with an object, be it a chair or a pair of gloves, is affected and informed by the bodies that were in mind when the object was designed, and in turn by the designers themselves. Bodies are differently susceptible to objects because of the specificity of design (Ahmed, 2006). Further to this, and building upon an argument made throughout this thesis regarding shifting intensities of awareness, these experiences of discomfort likely also affected and informed my wider experience of participation as a consequence of drawing attention away from

other components of experience (Ahmed, 2004, Bissell, 2008); away from, for instance, the others I was working with and from the landscape, and by preventing other experiences, such as feelings calm or achievement, from emerging. This is not to say, however, that experiences of discomfort such as those described here, dominated my engagements; rather, these existed alongside other components.

Walkers Louise and Mel, and retreatants Mary and Kate, also described experiencing temporary physical discomfort whilst walking and meditating; with their discomfort similarly existing alongside other components of experience:

> **Louise:** I have ridiculously tight calves, so when you go up hill you're meant to keep your feet on the floor but I physically can't do that, so I'm walking on my tip-toes the whole way up which is so painful on my legs, 'cos obviously you're not designed to be on your tip-toes all the time, so it gets super painful.
>
> **Mel:** I think on the first few walks I did try and pretend that I could breathe, and that's why I ended up in the situation up Blencathra like "no I really have to stop like now".
>
> **Mel:** I still get really out of breath, I think it's my right lung I'm not really (laughing) both it's never properly, I don't think it ever properly formed, it's like asthma as well I do get quite short of breath on that side, I've never really investigated it but my ribs are a bit weird on that side.
>
> **Mel:** Looking back now, there were a couple of walks where I was like "oh god I'm really holding up the group" I was like red in the face, and really embarrassed, I think it was up Blencathra I think it was, and I was like really far behind and like some guy was like "did you just join, is this your first walk" and I was like "nope I've done it for a few months" (laughing).

> **Elizabeth:** yeah because the anxiety for me will always be can I keep up, is my back, I have a slightly dodgy back, slightly dodgy hip, and slightly dodgy foot and I'm always worried if one or the other will give me grief.
>
> **Mary:** Meditation was long and painful in those chairs, physically and mentally.
>
> **Kate:** It took me a day and a half to get the right posture, I've got a problem with my ankles so I can't do the cross-legged thing, that was frustrating.

In these reflections Louise, Mel, Elizabeth, and Kate suggest that existing injuries or ailments were exacerbated by the performance of walking and meditation. Whilst these experiences too then, were partly a testament of individual bodies, as was suggested by Wylie (2005), they were also affected and by the external world; an external world that their injuries made them susceptible to in specific ways.

In addition to experiencing discomfort that fluctuated over the course of my engagements, I also experienced pain that totally consumed my experience of walking, after picking up an injury along the way:

> **Diary:** Pain in my knee completely consumed the descent. I couldn't talk, didn't see anything. All of my focus was on the knee, to making each step. I anticipated the pain of each movement, I knew what was coming with each step.
>
> **Diary:** Pain there again. Annoying twinge on the way up, but Christ the way down was atrocious. Every step was absolute agony. Borrowed some poles off a fellow walker. At least these provided a bit of security, but nonetheless I didn't think I'd make it down. Visions of Mountain Rescue being called and getting stretchered off the fell. Pain was all I could think about.
>
> **Diary:** Pain – can't remember the conversation, wasn't really engaged in it, apart from about the pain.

Being injured was not a gradual state, but something that happened all of a sudden when I was beginning the descent of a fell; and something that completely internalised my experience; something that brought all of my attention to my knee, left little room for anything else, and did so relentlessly. This pain was so severe, so intense, that my attention did not shift; nothing else could override it; nothing else demanded more attention. Intense pain closed off my experience, it prevented me from being otherwise affected and from intentionally affecting. In this way, my experience reflected Bissell's (2009) description of intense pain:

> Far from intense intensity-extending relations, the overwhelming intensity and longevity of crushing pain breaks down relations and results in the folding in of the body on itself: a deadening of affective charge (Bissell, 2009, p.920).

Whilst, as was the case for the other forms of physical discomfort discussed, my experience of becoming injured emerged, in-the-moment, from the physical landscape, from the steepness of the descent, and from my own body, becoming injured also had a longer trajectory. My injury emerged through my previous walks, through the relentlessness of the fieldwork, and the stark contrast of this to my 'ordinary' life (see chapter three). The potential for bodies to be built through histories of engagement, rather than simply 'in-the-moment' is discussed by (Nettleton, 2015) in relation to fell-running:

> The dry stone wall, made of fellside rock, is mobile. It is sculptured by, and sculpts, the landscape. Constructed not on the landscape, *Wall is* the landscape; constantly ebbing and eroding in conjunction with fells, becks, valleys, wind, rain and people with which it dwells. Fell runners – certainly older established runners who are the empirical focus of the paper and who traverse these same environments – share much in common with the wall. They are mobile, they are sculptured by, and sculpt, the landscape. They *are* the living landscape, and have a particular aesthetic (p.760).

Bodies that run and walk then, do not meet the physical landscape afresh each time, but rather are made through and of the physical landscape; emerging from previous engagements, from previous encounters of body and world, and it is in this context that my experiences of knee pain emerged.

7.3 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I contribute to 'therapeutic landscapes' literature that has demonstrated the complexity of 'in-the-moment' 'therapeutic landscape' experiences; literature that has showcased the potential for how 'therapeutic landscapes' are encountered to vary both between people and for an individual over time (see for instance, Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Phillips et al., 2015; Pitt, 2014). By drawing upon accounts of sensory experiences, and activity performances, I demonstrate that there are a multitude of ways in which people engage in 'therapeutic landscapes', and how and if these are associated with 'positive' or 'therapeutic'

outcomes such as; feelings of wonder, calm, and amazement; experiences of concentration, presence, awareness, or focus; or a sense of pride or achievement; varies considerably between people, and for an individual over time. Experiences, though, are not always positive, and can at other times, be associated with discomfort and distress.

In addition to accounting for some of the different ways in which 'therapeutic landscapes' might be encountered, and contributing to understanding of the potential for these to vary, I also contribute to understanding of how these experiences emerge. More specifically, I built upon existing work within the post-phenomenological and 'therapeutic landscapes' literatures that has considered how people, and in turn experiences, emerge through interactions with the external world; with for instance, the physical landscape, objects, and others (both human and non-human) (Foley, 2015; Lea, 2008; Nettleton, 2015; Wylie, 2002). Underpinning this work is an understanding that the body-subject is susceptible, that it is open to, and affected by, that which is external, and that it can be moved beyond intentionality. Through a consideration of susceptibility, I present 'therapeutic landscape' experiences as emerging, partially at least, from interactions; from being affected by the sensory components of 'therapeutic landscapes', and from the performance of activities that require or promote particular forms of body-world-other interaction. 'Therapeutic landscape' experiences, are not though, either universal or consistent, and by

engaging with work concerned with embodied difference (Ahmed, 2006; Bissell, 2009, 2008; Lea, 2008), I suggest that susceptibility to different components within 'therapeutic landscapes', is itself affected and informed by embodied histories, and in turn varies between people. Moreover, by drawing upon Ahmed (2004), and in particular, her argument that experience emerges alongside shifting intensities of awareness, with different elements of an experience demanding more or less attention at different times, I suggest that susceptibilities also fluctuate. There is no one external world to which we are susceptible; rather, we are differently susceptible to different things, and these susceptibilities exist in relation to each other.

Chapter eight: Conclusions

'Mental health' and 'wellbeing' are prominent terms in UK culture, media, and policy, and one of the central ways in which they are discussed is through narratives of improvement. A seemingly infinite range of activities including: mindfulness meditation (Dredge, 2016; Puddicombe, 2011; Wax, 2016), gardening (BBC Two, 2019), and walking (Lewis, 2019), are heralded as 'good for us', with the latter culminating in the development of the social prescribing agenda (Defra, 2018; NHS England, 2019a; The Kings Fund, 2019). Whilst in the context of media and policy the narratives surrounding these activities, and the spaces within which they take place, tend to present them as intrinsically 'therapeutic', more critical reflection is apparent in the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature. Contributions to the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature have, for instance, advanced understanding into: the individual specificity of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences, of the relationship between experiences, embodied history, and embodied difference (Andrews and Holmes, 2007; Bell et al., 2014; Conradson, 2011, 2005; Foley, 2015; Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Nettleton, 2015; O'Brien et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2013); the potential for 'therapeutic landscape' experiences to emerge through interactions with the physical environment (Conradson, 2011; Foley, 2015; Milligan et al., 2004; Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Muirhead, 2012; Nettleton, 2015; Pitt, 2014), and with human and non-human others (Doughty, 2013; Gorman, 2016; Macpherson, 2008; Smith, 2019); and moreover, have

demonstrated that 'therapeutic landscapes' are neither universally (Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Muirhead, 2012; Pitt, 2014) nor consistently (Milligan and Bingley, 2007) 'therapeutic'. In this thesis I have contributed to the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature in a number of important ways, as well as to the development of post-phenomenological theory, phenomenological methodologies, and to qualitative research more broadly. Here, I consider these contributions and discuss their implications for future research.

8.1 Contributions and implications of this thesis

8.1.1 Understanding of 'therapeutic landscapes'

In the first instance I have gained considerable insight into the routes taken to participation in 'therapeutic landscapes'. Existing literature has noted the potential for participation to be prompted by disruptive events such as divorce, relocation, or retirement, and has connected these events to a need for social interaction, or for something to do, due to loneliness or boredom (Bell et al, 2014; Doughty, 2013; O'Brien et al, 2010). By capturing detailed accounts on the decision to participate, however, I have found that whilst disruptive events may be a common prompt for participation, how they are encountered varies considerably between people. For some participants, a desire to meet people was, for example, about diversifying social networks rather than a consequence of loneliness. Similarly, whilst some participants expressed a need to do something new or different because they were bored following

a disruptive experience (such as relocation), for others (particularly those who had retired) the disruption was seen as providing an opportunity to pursue new activities. Further to this, I found that disruptive experiences did not prompt participants to engage in *any* 'therapeutic landscape', but rather, to participate in landscapes that they had a prior interest in or exposure to. This expands understandings of the complexity and individually specific nature of participation in 'therapeutic landscapes'. By considering routes to participation in light of Anderson's (2016) work on hope, I have suggested that choosing to engage in a 'therapeutic landscape' following a disruptive experience, should be understood as an act of hopefulness, an act that represents an exercise of power likely not accessible to all. Those contributing to the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature could, in light of these findings, be mindful to engage with the individual stories of participation, and be aware that participation is not equally accessible.

As well as gaining insight into the complexity of routes to participation in 'therapeutic landscapes', I have also contributed to understanding of the relationship between everyday life or embodied history, and emergent experience. Whilst previous 'therapeutic landscapes' work has highlighted the relationship between everyday life and 'therapeutic landscape' experiences, for instance through: discussing the individually specific ways of relating to particular spaces and activities (Andrews and Holmes, 2007; Conradson, 2005; Wood et al., 2013); and the influence of embodied

history on interactions with others and with the physical environment (Bell et al., 2014; Conradson, 2011, 2005; Doughty, 2013; Foley, 2015; Kaley et al., 2019; Macpherson, 2008; Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Nettleton, 2015; Smith, 2019); in this thesis I have demonstrated the consistent and all-encompassing nature of the influence of embodied history on individual experience. More specifically, I have shown that embodied history provides the framework through which all interactions within a 'therapeutic landscape' emerge. With this in mind, those contributing to future 'therapeutic landscapes' literature could seek to engage more fully with the influence of embodied history, and indeed, with the decision to participate in the first instance, on emergent experience. Accounting for the influence of embodied history on emergent experiences may be particularly important for contributions exploring experiences of socially prescribed activities; activities where participation may have been influenced by a health or social care worker, and may not represent the exercise of power observed for participants to this research.

In addition to demonstrating that the everyday provides the framework through which 'therapeutic landscapes' are experienced, I have also provided insight into some of the ways it can be directly brought into 'therapeutic landscapes', for instance by thinking about and sharing difficulties. Whilst the potential for people to think through and share difficulties whilst in a 'therapeutic landscape', and for this to be beneficial, has been highlighted within existing literature (Doughty, 2013; Macpherson, 2008; Smith,

2019), in this thesis I have advanced understanding of this. More specifically, I have demonstrated that rather than being beneficial, for some participants the thinking through and sharing of problems was associated with anxiety or social discomfort; insight that contributes not only to understanding of the relationship between 'therapeutic landscape' experiences and the everyday, but also to the complexity of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences, and the potential for these to be neither universally nor consistently 'therapeutic'.

Another area of insight into 'therapeutic landscapes' gained through this thesis, relates to the inherent fluidity of experiences. Although existing literature has outlined some of the different mechanisms through which experience emerges, for instance through engagement with human and non-human others (Doughty, 2013; Gorman, 2016; Macpherson, 2008; Smith, 2019), and with the physical environment (Conradson, 2005; Foley, 2015; Milligan et al., 2004; Muirhead, 2013; Nettleton, 2015; Pitt, 2014), and has also noted that experiences vary between people, it has, with the notable exception of Milligan and Bingley (2007) presented these experiences as relatively static. In this thesis I have demonstrated that 'therapeutic landscape' experiences are in a continual state of flux, and moreover, that so too is whether or not they are 'therapeutic'; with positive experiences such as pride and mental calm, existing alongside less positive experiences such as frustration and pain, and this fluidity emerging in individually specific ways, bound up with embodied history.

Moving forward, those contributing to the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature could acknowledge the inherently fluid nature of experiences, and where possible, could seek to capture some of this fluidity.

Underlying insight into the fluidity of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences, is an understanding of how experiences emerge as a whole. Through the interrogation of experiences in light of the proposed understanding of subjectivity, I present these to be a continually emergent outcome of the interactions between a susceptible body-subject, the external world, and others. On these terms, 'therapeutic landscape' experiences can be understood not only as existing in flux, but also as spatially-unbound, a consequence of the interactions facilitated by particular spaces and activities, rather than inherent to the spaces themselves. Whilst contributions to the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature have demonstrated that 'therapeutic landscape' experiences emerge through the interactions of body and world (Conradson, 2005; Foley, 2015; Milligan et al., 2004; Muirhead, 2013; Nettleton, 2015; Pitt, 2014), and body and other (Doughty, 2013; Gorman, 2016; Macpherson, 2008; Smith, 2019), by providing insight into the continually emergent nature of experience as a whole, into how interactions affect and inform each other, and by demonstrating the applicability of this conceptualisation across different landscapes, this thesis offers a substantial advancement to understanding of the 'therapeutic landscape' as spatially-unbound. This advancement in understanding demonstrates the need for future contributions

to the 'therapeutic landscapes' literature to consider how 'therapeutic landscape' experiences might emerge outside of the context of particular spaces and activities with a reputation for being 'therapeutic', for instance in more accessible settings and in the home.

8.1.2 Post-phenomenological theory and phenomenological methodologies

From a theoretical perspective, in this thesis I have demonstrated not only the compatibility of embodied history and embodied difference with the post-phenomenological framing of the subject as susceptible and continually emergent, but also their inseparability. In so doing, I have built upon the work of others including Simpson (2017), who called for post-structurally aligned researchers to account for context, and Colls (2011) and Ahmed (2006), who suggest that bodily difference both emerges through, and affects the emergence of, embodied experiences. Whilst existing post-phenomenological literature has, to some degree at least, sought to theoretically account for embodied history and difference (see for instance Lea, 2008; Wylie, 2006), it has been limited empirically by a reliance on the experiences of the researcher. The exclusive use of the researcher's own experiences of a phenomena within post-phenomenological work reflects a broader trend within phenomenological contributions to cultural geography; a trend that Spinney (2015) and Lea (2009) suggest is a consequence of the relative difficulty of accessing the detailed phenomenological experiences of others. Through the adoption of the two-phased

approach to data-collection in this thesis, I have demonstrated a tool through which to make accessible these detailed experiences, a tool that offers an alternative to the use of video-recording and replay, to serve as a prompt for phenomenological detail, proposed by Spinney (2015). Moving forward, others contributing to the development of post-phenomenological theory that is attentive to embodied history and difference, may be encouraged to recognise the inseparability of theory and methods, and explore ways through which to capture a diversity of experiences. As has been noted, the approach taken in this thesis provides one tool through which to achieve this.

The importance of the body, that experiences emerge through embodied interactions, also has empirical implications for both 'therapeutic landscapes' research and qualitative research more broadly. I suggest that accounting for the body, perhaps through the adoption of a post-phenomenological or phenomenological approach, could offer researchers a means through which to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena that they are studying. In the context of 'therapeutic landscapes' research, a focus on the body could, for example, offer further empirical insight into the complexity of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences (as is apparent in phenomenological and post-phenomenological work such as: Lea, 2008; Nettleton, 2015; and, Wylie, 2005). It could help to illuminate some of the different ways in which 'therapeutic landscapes' are both positively, and negatively encountered; with the

latter still comparatively under-researched (though for some exceptions see: Conradson, 2011; Milligan and Bingley, 2007; Muirhead, 2012; Pitt, 2014).

8.2 Implications for policy

In this thesis, I have presented a case for caution to be applied when designing policies that involve the promotion of activities as 'good for us', as tools through which to improve mental health and wellbeing. By exploring the complexity of 'therapeutic landscape' experiences, I have demonstrated that there is nothing universally, or consistently 'therapeutic' about them. Whether an experience is 'therapeutic' is contingent upon embodied history and exists in flux, with the 'therapeutic' often coupled with discomfort and distress. This is not to say, however, that participation in activities such as those considered in this thesis, cannot be 'therapeutic'; indeed, the insight gained through this thesis suggests that there are a number of things policy makers and those working in social care, for instance in the design and delivery of social prescribing, could do to potentially improve experiences . The first of these is to consider how engagement in activities can be individually targeted and can provide people with opportunities to exercise power, since within this thesis experience of spaces and activities, and in turn whether or not they are 'therapeutic', have been shown to be bound up with embodied history and the routes taken to participation.. One way to achieve this might be to ensure that people are presented with a wide range of options from which they can freely choose. Policy makers and social care

workers could also be careful to avoid universalising narratives that suggest activities are good all of the time and for all people. These narratives risk placing blame on an individual if their experience is anything other than good, and also set unrealistic expectations. This is not to say that participation might not be good for some people some of the time; indeed, participants to this research all had positive experiences, and many had participated regularly for years; rather, it is to signal that experiences are individually specific and fluid; that participation is not a panacea for improving mental health and wellbeing.

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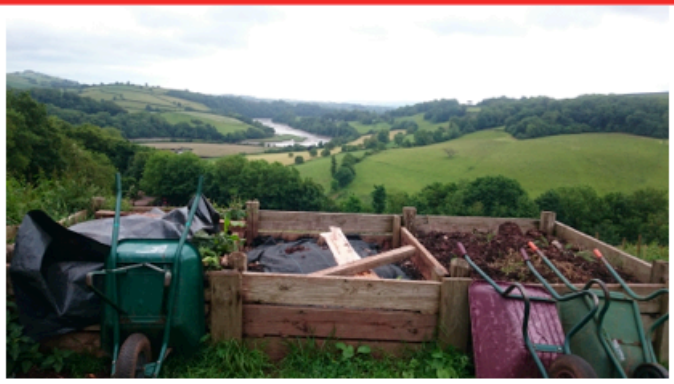
Appendix

A.1 Research flyer

Therapeutic Experiences: Research Project



My name is Annabelle Edwards. I am a PhD student at Lancaster University in the Division of Health Research.

My PhD is all about providing insight into life 'inside' therapeutic spaces; spaces that are generally seen as positive for individual wellbeing. I want to help understand what happens in these spaces to make them positive, and also to explore how they may not make people feel good all of the time.

For the first phase of my research, I will be joining outdoor groups, such as walking and volunteering groups, and will be attending meditation retreats. I will capture my own experiences of participating in these spaces and activities; reflecting on my feelings, and of how these feelings change over time.

I will not be writing about others I meet, and intend to participate like anyone else would.

For phase two of the research, I will be inviting others I meet through my engagements to contribute to the research through interviews. If you would like to know more, please get in touch.

Annabelle Edwards
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Health & Medicine | Lancaster University

A.2 Interview guide

This interview guide was intended as only a framework for the interview discussions, and discussion points were modified in-line with each activity.

- Why did you begin participating in this activity?
    - Why have continued participating in this activity (if this is not your first experience)?
- How is/was your mind during the activity?
- Is/was it concentrated on the activity or somewhere else?
    - Does/did this vary?
- How is /was your body during the activity?
    - Are/were you aware of it?
    - Did/do you experience pain or discomfort?
    - Does/did this vary?
- How do/did you feel during the activity?
    - Do/did your feelings change over the course of the activity?
    - What causes/caused your feelings to change?
- Do you believe this experience is/ was good for your health - spiritual, mental, or physical, can you explain this?

A.3 Ethics application form

Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee (FHMREC)
Lancaster University

Application for Ethical Approval for Research

Title of Project: Moving beyond therapeutic spaces

Name of applicant/researcher: Annabelle Edwards

ACP ID number (if applicable)*: **Funding source (if applicable)**
ESRC +3

Grant code (if applicable):

***If your project has *not* been costed on ACP, you will also need to complete the Governance Checklist [link].**

Type of study
Involves existing documents/data only, or the evaluation of an existing project with no direct contact with human participants. **Complete sections one, *two* and four of this form**
Includes *direct* involvement by human subjects. **Complete sections one, *three* and four of this form**

SECTION ONE
1. Appointment/position held by applicant and Division within FHM PhD Student

2. Contact information for applicant:
E-mail: a.edwards1@lancaster.ac.uk **Telephone**: 07588410168
(please give a number on which you can be contacted at short notice)

Address: 31 Milton Crescent, Talke, Stoke-on-Trent, ST71PF

3. **Names and appointments of all members of the research team (including degree where applicable)**

N/A

3. If this is a student project, please indicate what type of project by marking the relevant box/deleting as appropriate: (please note that UG and taught masters projects should complete **FHMREC form UG-tPG**, following the procedures set out on the FHMREC website

PG Diploma Masters by research **PhD Thesis** PhD Pall. Care

PhD Pub. Health PhD Org. Health & Well Being PhD Mental Health MD

DClinPsy SRP [if SRP Service Evaluation, please also indicate here:] DClinPsy Thesis

4. Project supervisor(s), if different from applicant: Dr Amanda Bingley and Dr Bethan Evans

5. **Appointment held by supervisor(s) and institution(s) where based (if applicable)**: Dr Amanda Bingley - Lecturer FHM Lancaster University

Dr Bethan Evans – Senior Lecturer Geography -– University of Liverpool

SECTION TWO
Complete this section if your project involves existing documents/data only, or the evaluation of an existing project with no direct contact with human participants

1. Anticipated project dates (month and year)
Start date: End date:

2. Please state the aims and objectives of the project (no more than 150 words, in lay-person's language):

Data Management
For additional guidance on data management, please go to Research Data Management *webpage, or email the RDM support email:* rdm@lancaster.ac.uk
3. Please describe briefly the data or records to be studied, or the evaluation to be undertaken.

4a. How will any data or records be obtained?

4b. Will you be gathering data from websites, discussion forums and on-line 'chat-rooms'
4c. If yes, where relevant has permission / agreement been secured from the website moderator?
4d. If you are only using those sites that are open access and do not require registration, have you made your intentions clear to other site users?

4e. If no, please give your reasons

5. What plans are in place for the storage, back-up, security and documentation of data (electronic, digital, paper, etc.)? Please ensure that your plans comply with the Data Protection Act 1998.

6a. Is the secondary data you will be using in the public domain?
6b. If NO, please indicate the original purpose for which the data was collected, and comment on whether consent was gathered for additional later use of the data.

Please answer the following question *only* if you have not completed a Data Management Plan for an external funder
7a. How will you share and preserve the data underpinning your publications for at least 10 years e.g. PURE?

7b. Are there any restrictions on sharing your data?

8. Confidentiality and Anonymity
a. Will you take the necessary steps to assure the anonymity of subjects, including in subsequent publications?
b. How will the confidentiality and anonymity of participants who provided the original data be maintained?
9. What are the plans for dissemination of findings from the research?

10. What other ethical considerations (if any), not previously noted on this application, do you think there are in the proposed study? How will these issues be addressed?

SECTION THREE
Complete this section if your project includes *direct* involvement by human subjects

1. Summary of research protocol in lay terms (indicative maximum length 150 words):

This is a two-phased qualitative research project that aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of therapeutic landscapes. It seeks to contribute to the therapeutic landscapes literature by suggesting a shift of focus from the fixed and unchanging notion of the intrinsically therapeutic, to a consideration of the experiential; or more specifically, the continually emergent and complex nature of therapeutic experience. This project will consider meditation retreats and green space activity settings (walking groups and outdoor volunteering); sites selected because of their dominance within the therapeutic landscapes literature to date, and the consistent acknowledgment that they can, at least some of the time, provide therapeutic experiences.

This research will be divided into two phases: self-reflection, and engagement with others. In phase one I will conduct auto-ethnographic/phenomenological work within the context of my participation with, and in, meditation retreats, and green space activity groups. For phase two, I will invite individuals (20-25) with whom I engaged in the retreats and green space groups to take part in narrative interviews.

2. **Anticipated project dates (month and year only**)

Start date: 10/16 End date: 08/18

Data Collection and Management
For additional guidance on data management, please go to Research Data Management *webpage, or email the RDM support email:* rdm@lancaster.ac.uk

3. Please describe the sample of participants to be studied (including maximum & **minimum number**, age, gender):

In phase one of this project I will be the sole participant. I will engage with, and in, meditation retreats and green space activity groups, and reflect on my individual experience of participation.

In phase two I will invite individuals (mixed gender aged >18 years old) from the retreats and groups I attend to participate; with the aim of recruiting between 20 and 25 participants, and with a minimum expected number of 15.

4. How will participants be recruited and from where? Be as specific as possible.

Participants will be recruited from the retreats and green space groups I attend. Possible research sites include:
Potential retreats:
The Barn Retreat - South Devon
Gaia House - South Devon
Plum Village - France

Potential green space groups:
The Ramblers Association
The Conservation Volunteers
Friends of the Lake District

The recruitment of participants will, therefore, be governed by gaining access to research sites (such as those listed above). To this end, I will approach the leaders of the meditation centres and green space activity groups and request that they allow me to attend, engage as an 'ordinary' participant, and reflect on my experience for the purpose of this PhD. Further to this, I will tell green space and meditation centre leaders that I request permission to invite people I meet through my engagements with their group to participate in phase 2 of the research.

Phase 2

Recruitment at phase 2 will be conducted through a purposive sampling approach; specifically, in the first instance I intend to recruit from within the groups and retreats I attend for phase 1. Such an approach has been selected as I wish to explore experiences in depth and I believe the best way to deliver this is through focusing on experiences that I have also encountered, and with people with whom I have shared these experiences. This approach reflects my underlying methodology.

Recruitment will begin with information flyers being presented during phase 1. These flyers have a dual purpose of introducing what I am doing during phase 1 as a courtesy and to allay fears, and to introduce the potential for involvement during phase 2.

As my involvement during phase 1 draws to a close I will offer individuals information sheets to look through as well as an expression of interest form. I will phone or email those who expressed an interest
within a week**, but no sooner than 24 hours after,** r the end of my engagement and the issuing of information sheets, to see if individuals would like to participate, and to arrange an interview

I will not discuss the potential for involvement during phase 1 as such discussion would disrupt my own experience. Moreover, I have a commitment to not disrupting the experience of others in these spaces.

Where possible interviews will be face-to-face, but if necessary I may opt for a Skype or telephone interview in which case I would stress the insecurity of these platforms, especially Skype, which may compromise anonymity.

In the event that I do not recruit sufficient numbers of participants from the retreats and groups that I attend for phase one, I may also recruit participants for phase two by contacting a range of green space groups and meditation centres and requesting that they forward an appeal amongst their contact lists.

5. Briefly describe your data collection and analysis methods, and the rationale for their use.

Data Collection

Phase one
Phase one of this research is concerned with the production of a self-reflective auto-ethnographic/ phenomenological account of the experience of participation in retreats and with green space groups.
Retreats
I will attend between 2 and 4 weeks of retreats across a number of retreat centres, for instance:
The Barn Retreat - South Devon
Gaia House - South Devon
Plum Village – France

Green spaces
Outdoor volunteering
- Attendance at volunteer days over a ten-month period. Minimum of 6 days attended.
Walking groups

- Attendance at organised walks over a ten-month period. Minimum of 6 walks attended.

To enable a detailed account of these experiences to be generated, I will keep a field journal throughout my participation. The rationale behind this approach is a desire to obtain an intimate personal understanding of what it is like to participate in these spaces from which to contextualise the experiences of others.

Phase two

For phase two of the research, concerned with collecting the experiences of others, a two pronged research strategy will be employed, composed of:

1) Reflective journals produced by participants
2) Narrative interviews with participants

Journal keeping will enable participants to collect their thoughts in advance of their interview. I anticipate that this will be both practically useful and empowering for participants, as it may result in them feeling more confident and comfortable in their interviews.

It is hoped that by adopting a free flowing, narrative approach to interviews, the detail of individual experiences will emerge naturally, with limited interference or direction from myself as a researcher. These interviews will be recorded where participants deem it acceptable, note-taking in the field where not. It is anticipated that interviews will last between one and two hours (although it is possible that interviews will be longer or shorter than this). This is an estimation provided on the basis of suggestions made by Moustakas (1992) – the architect of the heuristic inquiry method; and reflects the nature of interviews as explorative, and the commitment of the researcher not to limit the narrative provided

Analysis

Qualitative coding will be conducted both manually, and using software (such as Atlas ti or NVivo), to enable data analysis across research sites/ interviews/ and themes. I will personally transcribe interviews. .

6. What plan is in place for the storage, back-up, security and documentation of data (electronic, digital, paper, etc.)? Please ensure that your plans comply with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Short term

Anonymised field notes and consent forms will be kept on my person or in a locked suitcase/bag where appropriate. Notes will be transferred on to the university server

and an encrypted and password protected computer as soon as possible. Original handwritten notes nd consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Reflective journals will also be stored in a locked filing cabinet; where digital copies are made, these will be stored on the university server and on an encrypted and password protected computer.
Interviews will firstly be recorded using a dictaphone and these recordings will be transferred at the earliest opportunity to an encrypted password protected computer, after which the original recordings will be deleted. Interview transcriptions will be stored on a password protected and encrypted computer. Where participants would prefer interviews not to be recorded, hand-written (and anonymised) notes will be made. These will be digitised as soon as possible and these will be stored on the university server and on an encrypted and password protected computer. Paper copies will be stored in a secure filing cabinet.
Identifying information – names, email addresses, and phone numbers in this case – will be stored in an excel spreadsheet which will be saved on my personal H: drive on the university server.

Long term
Anonymised data will be stored for up to 10 years on an encrypted and password protected computer and a copy on the university server. Data in paper form will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and will destroyed after ten years . My PhD supervisor at Lancaster University will be responsible for arranging the deletion of the university copy of my data after 10 years. Hard copies of consent forms will be kept until the final submission of this thesis (post-corrections). I will make digital copies of these consent forms, which will be stored separately form anonymized data (on the university server and on my own encrypted and password protected computer) and deleted after 10 years. This continued personal storage is suggested as I would like to have copies of consent forms after I have left Lancaster to protect myself from challenges when I publish from my thesis.
Identifying information (names, phone numbers, email addresses) will be deleted on submission final submission of the thesis (post-corrections). This storage is suggested so that I will be able to clarify any points up until my thesis is submitted. Moreover, it is possible that contributors to the research may request that they receive a final version of the thesis, and I would like to be open to fulfil any such request.

Supervision
Where supervisors are sent data to consider during the course of this thesis, they will agree to maintain the above framework for storage. Supervisors will destroy any copies of transcripts at the completion and assessment of the thesis.

7. Will audio or video recording take place? Only **audio** recording

a. Please confirm that portable devices (laptop, USB drive etc.) will be encrypted where they are used for identifiable data. If it is not possible to encrypt your portable devices, please comment on the steps you will take to protect the data. Laptop will be encrypted.

b What arrangements have been made for audio/video data storage? At what point in the research will tapes/digital recordings/files be destroyed?

It is not envisaged that I will be able to use an encrypted dictaphone due the prohibitive cost; in the event that it is not possible I will be extra vigilant with the physical storage of the dictaphone and will ensure that recordings are transferred to the university server as soon as possible. In the long term audio recordings will be kept on the university server and on my own encrypted and password protected computer for up to ten years after the submission of the thesis. As with anonymised transcripts, I will keep recordings on my own encrypted computer as I do not know where I will be working, and may need access to enable the writing of subsequent publications.

Please answer the following questions *only* if you have not completed a Data Management Plan for an external funder

8a. How will you share and preserve the data underpinning your publications for at least 10 years e.g. PURE?

The data will not be stored on PURE as it would be inappropriate to share the data with others as a consequence of the small scale of the study and the intimate nature of the research. Further to this, the study is funded by the ESRC who state that it is not compulsory for the data to be deposited.

“Whilst not compulsory, ESRC-funded students are strongly encouraged to offer copies of data created or repurposed during their PhD for deposit at the UK Data Service as it is considered good research practice.”

http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-grant-holders/research-data-policy/

Due to the intimacy and small-scale of the research I will not deposit the research in the UK Data Service.

8b. Are there any restrictions on sharing your data?
See above.

9. Consent
a. Will you take all necessary steps to obtain the voluntary and informed consent of the prospective participant(s) or, in the case of individual(s) not capable of giving informed consent, the permission of a legally authorised representative in accordance with applicable law?

I will take all necessary steps to obtain the voluntary and informed consent of the prospective participants.

b. Detail the procedure you will use for obtaining consent?
Phase one (participation and self-reflection):

Organisations and groups
As my self-reflection will be taking place within the context of retreats and green space activities, it seems appropriate to first ask organisation and group leaders themselves for consent to undertake this self-reflection at their sites. Seeking consent in this instance is, therefore, primarily a courtesy. In addition to this courtesy, however, I will also be asking their permission, that if they agree to let me carry out phase 1 with them, that I will invite individuals I meet through these engagements to participate in phase 2; this strategy is an essentmethodology. Finallyodology.Finally, by seeking consent at the organisation and group level I will also ensure that their choices and my responsibilities regarding anonymity are understood. Specifically, that leaders are free to choose whether or not the organisation or group is named in the research, and that where names are not provided there are limits to potential anonymity at this level; notably because for those who know organisations and groups, a name may not be needed to for them to be identified. In the event that participants at phase 2 express concern that the organisation/group will be named these will be anonymised.

Organisation and group leaders will be approached either via email or by telephone call and email combined. Through these methods they will be introduced to the project, provided with information sheets and invited to participate and give permission for the research to be conducted with their group

Phase one
For phase one, the auto-ethnographic and phenomenological (self-reflective) phase, I will be informing fellow users of the retreat and green spaces of the self-reflective work I will be undertaking. Rather than ‘consent’, this will be an act of courtesy, with the hope of allaying concerns about the research, and in particular any fears about being ‘watched’ or studied. To fulfil this act of courtesy I will produce a flyer to be

distributed amongst fellow users of the spaces where appropriate and if requested (it is anticipated that in some retreat settings distributing a flyer may not be deemed acceptable by organisers), I will also verbally discuss the project with others and stress that it is concerned with my own experience of participation, rather than observing and reporting on the experiences of others.

Phase two

For phase two, which is concerned with capturing the experiences of others through reflective journals and narrative interviews, a more standard approach to gaining consent will be employed.

Interested individuals will be provided with information sheets and consent forms to consider in advance of their participation. I will stress to individuals that they are under no obligation to participate.

I will also go through the information sheets and consent forms in person with participants when we meet for their interview to ensure that they fully understand and provide their consent. Once again I will stress that they are not obliged to participate, and highlight that they are free to bring the interview to a close at any point.

10. What discomfort (including psychological e.g. distressing or sensitive topics), inconvenience or danger could be caused by participation in the project? Please indicate plans to address these potential risks. State the timescales within which participants may withdraw from the study, noting your reasons.

There are a number of potential issues in regards to participant distress across both phase 1 and phase 2 of the research project and the different research sites:

Phase 1

In phase 1 of the research it is possible that the presence of a researcher (even one engaged in self-enquiry) may be seen as intrusive or potentially damaging to the individual experience of fellow users of the spaces. This may be particularly poignant in the context of retreats, where attendance is driven by a desire for personal, psychological, and spiritual, healing and nourishment.

From past experience of engaging in these spaces as a researcher, working lives and motivation for attendance often come up in discussion. In my case, such discussion will invariably lead to my thesis, and in turn to 'research'. I will, therefore, need to be open about my work. It will 'come out' that I am not an 'ordinary' participant. It is possible that some fellow users of these spaces may be concerned by this, so I will need to engage openly, and have produced an information flyer that can be provided if any individual wants to know more about what I am doing in addition to verbal discussion.

Phase 2
In phase 2 there is a possibility that discomfort will arise during the interview process. To mitigate against such discomfort I will:

- Highlight the freedom of the participant to direct discussion, to move on from particular topics, to refrain from answering any question I pose, or to bring the interview to an end.
- Bring the interview to an end myself if necessary.
- Provide information for relevant support services (see appendix for support/debrief sheet).

Participants will be made aware that they are free to remove their data from the study for up to a month after their interview. After this time, whilst every effort will be made to remove data, it may not be possible. Following submission of the thesis, it will not be possible to remove data.

11. What potential risks may exist for the researcher(s)? Please indicate plans to address such risks (for example, noting the support available to you; counselling considerations arising from the sensitive or distressing nature of the research/topic; details of the lone worker plan you will follow, and the steps you will take).

There are a number of potential risks for myself as a researcher. In the first instance it is possible that by engaging in these supposedly therapeutic spaces, and in particular through the performance of meditation, I will experience difficult emotions, just as any other individual would. Although I consider it possible that I will find parts of my experiences troubling, I have no reason to believe that my response will be more heightened than those of a 'normal' participant. If I were to have a troubling experience I would use the services available to me if at a retreat centre. I would speak to my supervisors upon my return, and if necessary contact the university counselling service.

It is of course also possible that I will find my engagements with others emotionally distressing during interviews. In this instance I would bring the interview to a close if required and would speak to my supervisors, and if necessary the university counselling service.

Lone working:

This research will require me to be outside of the university context and working 'alone' for substantial periods of time, although I will not be alone as such. I have assessed the risk of this project using Lancaster University's guidance, and have therefore deemed it appropriate. In order to mitigate against any risks associated with working alone, however, I propose the following measures (devised from the guidance provided by the Social Research Association):

- I will provide my supervisors and a family member with information regarding where I will be, when I intend to arrive, and when I expect to return.
- I will take a fully charged mobile phone with me on each research outing (although this will be turned off when it is not needed to prevent distraction).
- I will provide my supervisors with my phone number and will ensure that I have appropriate numbers saved in my phone (supervisors, the university, family members, breakdown service).
- Where possible I will opt to hold interviews in public buildings – for instance, private rooms in libraries or community centres. Where this is not possible I will conduct interviews in people's homes, and will attend departmental lone worker training to prepare me for this.
- When carrying out manual tasks in green spaces or during meditation retreats I will ensure that I do not use tools and equipment without adequate supervision and training, and without feeling confident in my abilities. Further to this I will ensure that I follow all safety guidelines provided.

12. Whilst we do not generally expect direct benefits to participants as a result of this research, please state here any that result from completion of the study.

There is unlikely to be any direct benefit for participants in this study.

13. Details of any incentives/payments (including out-of-pocket expenses) made to participants:
Where participants need to travel small distances for their interview, I will use my ESRC Research Support Grant to cover travel costs.

14. Confidentiality and Anonymity
a. Will you take the necessary steps to assure the anonymity of subjects, including in subsequent publications?
Please include details of how the confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be ensured, and the limits to confidentiality.

Organisations and groups
Organisation and group leaders will be made aware that the default position is for the organisations and groups to remain anonymous. The limits of anonymity will also be stressed. Do to the highly specific nature to the research, it would be very easy for someone 'in the know', for instance a walker in the NW of England, or an individual who has attended Buddhist retreat centres, to identify the sites/groups from the wider experiential discussion.

Participants
For this research, the anonymity of subjects will be delivered through the use of pseudonyms in all research material, in the final thesis, and in subsequent publications. Anonymity will be further ensured though the adoption of a careful approach to writing up; every effort will be made to conceal identity by not revealing wider identifying information.

The limits of anonymity and confidentiality will also be made clear to participants, both verbally and through information sheets. In the first instance, although I will try to ensure participants are not identifiable, it is possible that their words alone will be enough for friends, family, and others who were engaged in the research sites, to recognise them. Ensuring confidentiality is also problematic. At the broadest level it is not possible for me to offer confidentiality as I will go on to write a thesis and subsequent publications. Similarly, whilst I will not tell others who decided to participate in the research, and in turn what they said, both of these things may be discernible.
Most seriously, both confidentiality and anonymity may be broken in exceptional circumstances, if participants breach the exceptions of the Data Protection Act 1998 – for instance if they confess to a crime, or appear to be a danger to themselves or others. In such cases I would speak with my supervisors and the relevant authorities would be contacted. Participants will be made aware that under these circumstances confidentiality may be breached.

15. If relevant, describe the involvement of your target participant group in the *design and conduct* of your research.
N/A

16. What are the plans for dissemination of findings from the research? If you are a student, include here your thesis.
Production of a thesis. A general anonymised summary of findings for different user groups – retreat centres, green space groups, policy makers.
Submission for publications in journals such as: Health and Place, Social and Cultural Geography, Cultural Geographies, or grey literature such as The Conversation; presentation of findings at conferences and seminars

17. What particular ethical considerations, not previously noted on this application, do you think there are in the proposed study? Are there any matters about which you wish to seek guidance from the FHMREC?
N/A

SECTION FOUR: signature

Applicant electronic signature: A EDWARDS
Date 28/09/16
Student applicants: please tick to confirm that you have discussed this application with your supervisor, and that they are happy for the application to proceed to ethical review
Project Supervisor name (if applicable): Dr Amanda Bingley Date: 28/09/16

You must submit this application from your Lancaster University email address, and copy your supervisor in to the email in which you submit this application

Submission Guidance
Submit the following materials for your study if relevant:
Your full research proposal (background, literature review, methodology/methods, ethical considerations).
Advertising materials (posters, e-mails)
Letters/emails of invitation to participate
Participant information sheets
Consent forms
Questionnaires, surveys, demographic sheets
Interview schedules, interview question guides, focus group scripts
Debriefing sheets, resource lists

Please note that you DO NOT need to submit pre-existing handbooks or measures which support your work, but which cannot be amended following ethical review. These should simply be referred to in your application form.

Submit the FHMREC form and any relevant materials listed above by email to Diane Hopkins d.hopkins@lancaster.ac.uk. The submission should be as a **SINGLE** attachment in **PDF** format. **Before converting to PDF ensure all comments are hidden by going into 'Review' in the menu above then choosing *show markup>balloons>show all revisions in line.***

Submission deadlines:

Projects including direct involvement of human subjects. The *electronic* version of your application should be submitted to Diane Hopkins **by the committee deadline date.** Committee meeting dates and application submission dates are listed on the FHMREC website. Prior to the FHMREC meeting you may be contacted by the lead reviewer for further clarification of your application. Please ensure you are available to attend the committee meeting (either in person or via telephone) on the day that your application is considered, if required to do so.

The following projects will normally be dealt with via chair's action, and may be submitted at any time. Those involving:

existing documents/data only;

the evaluation of an existing project with no direct contact with human participants;

service evaluations.

A.4 Research de-brief

Research de-brief – Exploring experiences in 'therapeutic' spaces

Firstly, thank you very much for participating in this research. Your input is greatly appreciated and it will be invaluable in helping to demonstrate, and unpick, the complexity of experiences within therapeutic spaces.

Hopefully you have found the research an enjoyable and insightful exercise. If for any reason participating has left you experiencing difficult emotions, please consider contacting one of the following:

Your GP

The Samaritans

www.samaritans.org

Tel: 116 123

Mind

www.mind.org.uk

For queries about the research please feel free to contact me.

Annabelle Edwards

PhD Student – Health Research

Lancaster University

LA1 4YG

a.edwards1@lancaster.ac.uk

01524 592187

Complaints can be directed to:

Dr Nancy Preston

Director of Health Research PhD Programme

Lancaster University

Lancaster

LA1 4YG

n.j.preston@lancaster.ac.uk

01524 592802

A.5 Organisation information sheet

Exploring experiences in 'therapeutic' spaces: Organisation/group information sheet
My name is Annabelle Edwards. I'm an ESRC funded (Economic and Social Research Council) PhD student at Lancaster University in the Department of Health Research.

You are receiving this because I would very much like to include your organisation/group in a research project I am undertaking as part of an ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) funded doctoral programme.

Project description:

This project will offer insight into 'therapeutic' spaces; spaces that are commonly associated with physical, mental, and spiritual 'wellness'. In particular, this project is concerned with gaining a detailed understanding of life 'inside' these spaces, highlighting the complexity and individual nature of experiences. In the interests of focus, this project will look specifically at meditation retreats and green space groups.

What will this research include?

My engagement with your organisation/group will be limited to my own participation in activities as a 'normal' participant. My experience of participation will then be reflected on and discussed in my thesis and subsequent publications.

Will my presence affect the experience of others?

This research is intended to be non-intrusive. It is concerned with my own experience and general observations, rather than the observation of others. It should not, therefore, have a detrimental effect on the experience of others. I want to participate like a 'normal' participant.

Anonymity of the organisation/group

All efforts will be made to ensure that your organisation/group remains anonymous in this study. It should be noted, however, that there are limits to anonymity. It may be possible for someone with knowledge of the organisation/group to identify it through my reflections without the need for a name or location.

If you'd like more information about the project, please contact me at:

Annabelle Edwards

PhD Student – Health Research

Lancaster University

LA1 4YG

a.edwards1@lancaster.ac.uk

01524 59218

This study has been reviewed by the Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee, and approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at Lancaster University

A.6 Ethics approval letter

Applicant: Annabelle Edwards
Supervisor: Amanda Bingley
Department: Health Research
FHMREC Reference: FHMREC16009

28 November 2016

Dear Annie

Re: Moving beyond therapeutic spaces

Thank you for submitting your research ethics application for the above project for review by the **Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee (FHMREC)**. The application was recommended for approval by FHMREC, and on behalf of the Chair of the Committee, I can confirm that approval has been granted for this research project.

As principal investigator your responsibilities include:

- ensuring that (where applicable) all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met, and the necessary licenses and approvals have been obtained;
- reporting any ethics-related issues that occur during the course of the research or arising from the research to the Research Ethics Officer at the email address below (e.g. unforeseen ethical issues, complaints about the conduct of the research, adverse reactions such as extreme distress);
- submitting details of proposed substantive amendments to the protocol to the Research Ethics Officer for approval.

Please contact me if you have any queries or require further information.

Tel:- 01542 592838
Email:- fhmresearchsupport@lancaster.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

Dr Diane Hopkins
Research Integrity and Governance Officer, Secretary to FHMREC.

A.7 Participant information sheet

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Participant Information Sheet – Exploring experiences in 'therapeutic' spaces

My name is Annabelle Edwards. I am an ESRC funded (Economic and Social Research Council) PhD student at Lancaster University in the Department of Health Research.

What is the study about?
I am conducting a research study through which I hope to provide insight into 'therapeutic' spaces; spaces associated with physical, mental, and spiritual 'wellness'. In particular, the study is concerned with gaining a detailed understanding of life 'inside' these spaces, highlighting the complexity and individual nature of experience.

Why have I been approached?
You have been approached because you have participated in a group (or retreat) that I am interested in, and I would love to hear about your experience.

Do I have to take part?
No. There is absolutely no obligation for you to participate.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?
If you are interested in the study you will be invited to participate in an informal interview with myself. This interview will be focused on your experiences of the space (meditation retreat/green space) and will be arranged for a date and location convenient for you. Although there is no set limit for the length of interview, it is expected that they will take around 1-2 hours. Interviews will be audio recorded. If you would prefer not to be recorded, let me know and I can take notes instead. You may be asked if you could provide a reflective account of your experience beforehand (written or pictoral), and bring this along with you to the interview. I will explain how you might like to approach this.

After the interview...

If you'd like a summary of findings following the completion of this thesis, please let me know and I'll happily send one to you.

Will my data be identifiable?
The information you provide will anonymous but not confidential, as I may use anonymised quotes from your interview in my thesis and subsequent publications.

The data collected for this study will be stored securely and only the researchers conducting this study will have access to this data:

- Audio recordings will be deleted following the final submission of the thesis and any subsequent publications
- The files on the computer will be encrypted (that is no-one other than the researcher will be able to access them) and the computer itself password protected.
- The typed version of your interview will be made anonymous by removing any identifying information including your name. Anonymised direct quotations from your interview may be used in the reports or publications from the study, so your name will not be attached to them.

- All your personal data will be confidential and will be kept separately from your interview responses.
- Any hard copies of identifying information will be stored in locked filling cabinets.
- Identifying information will be deleted after the final submission of this thesis and any subsequent publications.
- Anonymised transcripts will be kept for ten years after the completion of the study

Limits to confidentiality
There are some limits to confidentiality: if what is said in the interview makes me think that you, or someone else, is at significant risk of harm, I will have to break confidentiality and speak to a member of staff about this. If possible, I will tell you if I have to do this.

Are there any risks?
There are no risks anticipated with participating in this study. However, if you experience any distress following participation you are encouraged to inform the researcher and, if necessary, contact one of the organisations listed on the de-brief sheet within this participant pack.

Are there any benefits to taking part?
Although you may find participating interesting, there are no direct benefits in taking part.

Who has reviewed the project?
This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee (FHMREC) at Lancaster University.

If you'd like more information about the study, please contact me at:

Annabelle Edwards

PhD student– Health Research
Lancaster University
LA1 4YG
a.edwards1@lancaster.ac.uk
01524 592187

Complaints

If you wish to make a complaint or raise concerns about any aspect of this study and do not want to speak to the researcher, you can contact:

Dr Nancy Preston

Director of Health Research PhD Programme
Lancaster University
Lancaster
LA1 4YG
n.j.preston@lancaster.ac.uk
01524 592802

If you wish to speak to someone outside of the division of Health Research you may also contact:

Professor Roger Pickup

Chair of FHMREC
Faculty of Health and Medicine
Lancaster University
Lancaster
LA1 4YG
r.pickup@lancaster.ac.uk
01524 593746

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

A.8 Consent form

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Participant Information Sheet – Exploring experiences in 'therapeutic' spaces

Study Title:

Before you consent to participating in the study we ask that you read the participant information sheet and mark each box below with your initials if you agree. If you have any questions or queries before signing the consent form please speak to the principal investigator.

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet and fully understand what is expected of me within this study
2. I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask any questions and to have them answered.
3. I understand that my interview will be audio recorded and then made into an anonymised written transcript.
4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.
5. I understand that once my data have been anonymised and incorporated into themes it might not be possible for it to be withdrawn, though every attempt will be made to extract my data, up to the point of publication.
6. I understand that the information from my interview will be pooled with other participants' responses, anonymised and may be published.
7. I consent to information and quotations from my interview being used in reports, conferences and training events.
8. I understand that the researcher will discuss data with their supervisors as needed.
9. I understand that whilst all reasonable efforts will be made to preserve my confidentiality and anonymity, there are some limits and exceptions to this.
10. I consent to Lancaster University keeping written transcriptions of the interview for 10 years after the study has finished.
11. I consent to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant_____

Signature_____ **Date** _____

Name of Researcher _____

Signature _____**Date** _____